

Minehead Public Forum – 25th September 2019

Question and Answer Summary

Q. Drivers are ignoring the Pelican Crossing in Minehead Town Centre and there have been near misses. People have been driving the wrong way through a one way street. What is being done to educate road users?

A. Prior to this question being submitted local police were not aware of these issues – as this question was submitted in advance a response will be discussed with the member of the public after the meeting. The Local Area Commander urged the community to come forward with any local issues. Issues can be reported online, at a police station or by speaking to a PCSO. PCSOs are more visible in the community following the launch of the new Neighbourhood Policing model and therefore accessible for the public to approach. By reporting issues they can be added to priorities and resources allocated as appropriate and the police can work with relevant partners where relevant.

Q. Police Officers are working single crewed in such a large area and this is a concern not only for the officers but for individuals calling for help.

A. The Chief Constable thanked the member of the public for raising this issue. Duty of care to officers and the public is a concern but there are not enough resources to double crew officers 24 hours a day 7 days a week – the Chief Constable assured the members of the public that officers are never single crewed on a night shift. The Chief Constable explained that when he checked this morning there were 600 logs not yet allocated which demonstrates the level of demand for service and if the Constabulary were to insist on double crew at all times the risk to the public would be too great. The Constabulary has to look at other ways to address officer safety. The Constabulary will be discussing this week what proportion of officers carry Tasers. The Chief Constable also thanked Special Constables.

Q. The Minehead Neighbourhood Police Constable was not mentioned in the structure as part of the presentation?

A. He responds to demand as required and is part of the hub. PSCOs are responsible for the Beat and the hubs are responsible for the Beat Management. The new model is designed to restore time for problem solving work.

Q. The PCC raised the issue of protecting vulnerable people in her presentation, in particular vulnerable young people, what work is being done with schools?

A. Avon and Somerset Police fought hard for a share of the £100m announced by the Government to tackle knife crime. With a share of this money there are now 15 additional PCSOs dedicated to working in schools on a range of issues affecting vulnerable young people (serious violence, knife crime and Child Sexual Exploitation). Avon and Somerset police made the decision to protect Neighbourhood Policing, even during austerity, to engage with the community. Partnership working and early intervention is the best way forward in ensuring the protection of vulnerable people.

Q. The courts and magistrates already engage with schools. Could the police involve the courts and magistrates in their work with schools on the education regarding protecting vulnerable young people?

A. The PCC, as an ex magistrate, agrees with this idea and will work with the Magistrates Association to explore the possibilities.

Q. Could there be CCTV in key places in Minehead where there are issues with drug and alcohol abuse, fly tipping and issues related to adult weekends in the local area? Is there CCTV in the Blenheim Gardens area, where there are issues with drug and alcohol abuse, and the Coop car park?

A. There is CCTV in operation in the local area but it is under review. The Somerset West and Taunton (SWaT) council is the lead operative. There are not currently enough volunteers to view the footage. There is not currently CCTV in the Blenheim Gardens area but there is in the Coop. Blenheim Gardens is a priority in the local area and is subject to increased patrols as a result. The findings of the CCTV review will be reported back to SWaT Council soon.

Q. Fraud accounts for over a third of all crime now and is upper most in the minds of the community. Reporting is currently through Action Fraud which have come under recent criticism for their performance. Chances of reporting a crime to them and having it investigated is low.

A. The City of London Commander was invited to a recent regional meeting of Chief Constables and PCCs where this was discussed. Everyone acknowledges the volume of fraud crimes. Action Fraud has to get better and the Home Office are currently looking at the provider (Consentrix). Major internet providers and businesses also need to take responsibility and look at designing fraud out. There are educational steps that people can take to protect themselves. The public can request that an officer from the Senior Citizen Liaison Team comes out to give an educational talk on how to protect themselves from fraud.

Q. Partnership agencies all put money into a CCTV system in Watchet but this is not currently operational. When will this be back in working order?

A. The issues are recognised and are part of the full review SWaT are leading on regarding the CCTV in the local area. CCTV will be functional in Watchet and it is hoped that CCTV in the area will become a best example. The review should be complete by the end of the year.

Q. Representative from the Town Council. The Crime and Disorder Partnership put the money into the CCTV in Watchet but there have been no partnership meetings since the system failed. Partners want the system working.

A. The Leader of SWaT Council is in attendance and was asked to liaise with the Town Council. Consultation has taken place and there is a commitment to getting the system working. The Local Area Commander will attend a Town Council Meeting to discuss.

Q. The member of the public lives in the middle of Exmoor. Rural thefts and poaching are the main concerns. Police came when called about a yard being raided. When reporting poaching of Deer (guns being used in the middle of the night) very little is done. What proactive work could be done?

A. There is a Wildlife Crime Officer in attendance and will discuss specific issues with the member of the public following the meeting to make sure they are understood. The police do have limited resources and wildlife crime is a challenge in this area – working hard in rural areas to understand issues. The Police also meet regularly with the NFU and Hunt Groups. Rural communities need to be aware of safety concerns e.g. don't leave keys in vehicles or doors. Keeping a watchful eye on the Neighbourhood and reporting suspicious activities is helpful. The Chief Constable stated that the police have regular meetings with key stakeholders in rural communities and if an organised crime group is identified every effort is made to disrupt them. The Chief Constable urged rural communities to work with the Farm Watch Scheme, keep faith and report issues – also called for people from rural communities to come forward and volunteer for the special constabulary.

Q. Wildlife and rural crime such as sheep theft and poaching. What happens if the police are called – Is one unarmed officer sent to attend?

A. When reporting a crime where a gun is involved an Armed Response Vehicle is always sent and these are always double crewed. Around 360 armed incidents per year.

Q. Chair of Watchet Town Council. How are resources balanced between proactive and reactive work and prioritised?

A. Work on Peelian principles. Want to catch criminals but also focus on prevention. Ringfenced Neighbourhood Team (almost 700 officers and PCSOs) – with the new Neighbourhood Policing model they now have 20% fewer allocations enabling them to engage with the community and problem solving. Also much partnership working is happening to identify and engage with individuals – investment in interventions takes time to evidence improvements. Financial Planning difficulties with the Home Office setting a year on year budget rather than longer term – this makes it difficult to plan and a 3 year funding settlement would be better in order to plan in a sustainable and effective way (it take around 3 years to recruit and train a police officer). Allocation of resources is based on Threat, Harm and Risk (threat to life and public safety). Also the police have to look at solvability – there are not enough resources and so they have to be put resources into cases which can achieve a positive outcome.

Q. The member of the public was the Lead Volunteer for the Dream Scheme Community Group in Minehead (working with local agencies). The Scheme worked with 30-40 children but stopped a few years ago due to lack of support and number of volunteers. Community groups working with children is effective is there anything the police can do to help?

A. The PCC thanked the volunteers for the work they did. The Commissioners Community Action Fund (CCAF) gives grants of up to £3,000 to community initiatives – grants can be applied for through the Police Community Trust but it was noted that the CCAF is currently closed pending the PCC election in 2020. The PCC is very supportive of community initiatives recognising that it is those

people living and working in communities who are best placed to know what will work in their local area. The Local Area Commander highlighted that there is a Dream Scheme working well in the Sedgemoor area and suggested speaking with the member of the public to understand the issues experienced with the Minehead scheme and what the police can do to help.

Q. When will Minehead and Williton police stations close as they are a waste of money?

A. The PCC is passionate about not running expensive and large buildings which are not fit for purpose. The police are close to being able to make an announcement regarding Williton and are still looking for a suitable alternative site in Minehead which is smaller. The police need to ensure that the site still provides an active and visible police presence in Minehead – the police belong to the community and it is important to be visible. The Chief Constable asked the Community to come forward with any ideas for alternative sites. The Chief Constable, PCC and Local Area Commander all have to agree on estates issues.

Q. The member of the public has experienced issues with reporting crime due to living close to the Avon & Somerset and Devon & Cornwall border which causes confusion over who should deal. Reported use of firearms and not had an immediate response?

A. The Chief Constable urged those living in rural communities to download the what3words app on their smart phones as this is what the control room use to pinpoint a location. An agreement was made with Devon and Cornwall last week on data sharing – they just bought Niche and four forces will now work together.

Q. Is ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) in place in Somerset West and does it help with rural crime and county lines?

A. There is a mobile digital solution on officer's laptops. There are integrated ANPR sites. It's a brilliant system with 2.5 million hits per day. Avon and Somerset is the only force to merge ANPR with crime intelligence and incidents. A review has been commissioned to ensure that ANPR sites in the area right.

Q. Failure to stop is a serious offence. When the member of the public tried to report an incident online, at a police station and on the phone he was told he could not report it to the police only to his insurance company?

A. The Chief Constable confirmed that Failure to Stop collisions can be reported to the police, however investigation of these types of incidents can come secondary to other threats.