

Public Forum, Nailsea – 4th December 2018
Question and Answers Summary

Q. What is the Force policy on Specials? PCSOs have limited powers but the Chief Constable has discretion to increase their powers will this be considered or will the Force consider swapping PCSOs for Police Officers?

A. Avon and Somerset Special Constabulary currently has 350 specials but the ambition is to recruit more. It costs over £2,000 to equip each Special Constable so the Constabulary are looking to recruit people who plan to spend a good amount of time in the role.

PCSOs have been a revolution. They are a visible presence in the community not subject to the same hidden demands as Police Officers. If they had increased powers they would be seen as an enforcement figure and may find it more difficult to engage in the same way with the Community. The PCC commented that a survey was done and the results showed that overall PCSOs do not want more powers. Young people feel more confident to engage with PCSOs as they do not have the power of arrest and this is a key part of prevention work. Avon and Somerset PCSOs are fantastic professionals who have a fundamental role to play in local policing and Avon and Somerset continue to invest in them due to the success of their work.

Q. Member of the public is a Community Speed Watch volunteer. If the PCC is proposing to put the Council Tax Precept up by £12 per annum on a Band D property will that be enough? The Constabulary could tackle more of the serious crime if it was more than this? Member of the public is happy to pay more.

A. The PCC thanked the Community Speed Watch in the area as their visibility has been very effective.

The Council Tax precept was increased in 2017/18 by £12 per annum on a Band D property as the Government allowed PCCs to increase it by this much. The police funding settlement is yet to be announced for 2018/19 by the Government and it may be that they allow PCCs to increase it by more than the amount allowed in 2017/18. If PCCs are allowed to increase it by more than £12 the PCC is very conscious that she has to balance the increase with what people can afford to pay keeping in mind that many families are already struggling to pay their bills. The PCC has been consulting the public and results show that over 80% of people consulted are happy to pay the extra £12 but the percentage of people prepared to pay more would be less. Members of the public were asked to read the Tipping Point report published by the PCC and Chief Constable last year which discusses the consequences of the continued reduction on police budgets.

The PCC explained that there is also a gap in the pensions bill and she is concerned that if the Government allow PCCs to increase the Council Tax precept by more than they did in 2017/18 it may just be to pay for this gap rather than for local policing. The Chief Constable wanted to be very clear that there should not be a discussion about the amount of pension payable to officers – a significant percentage of their wages are deducted for their pension (much more so than other organisations) and their wages are not high, some struggling to make ends meet, they are also now expected to serve for 40 years.

Q. Member of the public is a victim of her son being killed in a road traffic collision 30 years ago. 30 years ago the families of those killed or injured in a road traffic collision were not treated as victims so it is a positive step forward that this has now changed. Member of the public is working with others in the area on Road Danger Reduction. Why did Tri-Force collaboration not work out and what sort of effect will this have on Avon and Somerset Constabulary's ability to carry out those functions?

A. The number of fatal collisions has consistently fallen but the Constabulary do not underestimate the impact this has on the families of those killed or injured in road collisions. The Chief Constable said how sorry he was for the loss of the lady's son and thanked her for all the work she has done over the last 30 years on Road Danger Reduction. The Constabulary are running their annual Drink Drive Campaign but acknowledge that this is something that should be a focus all year around. The Chief Constable mentioned work with partners on predictive analytics tools.

Tri-Force (Avon and Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire) started in 2014. All the reports say that it was effective but not efficient due to a number of issues such as three different HR and Finance systems – it was only working effectively due to the commitment of the officers finding work arounds to the issues. Avon and Somerset put forward a Host Force model (Avon and Somerset did not need to be the Host Force) to make Tri-Force work efficiently. Gloucestershire said that they would be taking Roads Policing back and then Wiltshire followed. The PCC and Chief Constable are very keen on collaboration but assured the member of the public that not being part of Tri-Force would not damage the Roads Policing Service in the Avon and Somerset area as officers from this area have been providing significant cover in the other two police force areas.

Q. Member of the public said thank you for the public forum. Road conditions are changing. Standards of driving are reducing, particularly on the motorway with middle lane drivers etc. There do not seem to be any Traffic Police on the motorway.

A. The Constabulary work closely with Highways England. Road Safety is the subject that is most commonly raised with the PCC by the public. The Constabulary and PCC have worked closely with Local Authorities to switch speed cameras back on - £35 of speeding fines goes towards education. There is also a Road Safety Grant available for education around Road Safety and the Constabulary is working with the Institute of Advanced Motorists regarding education. Need to work with partners to find ways of tackling the issue of older motorists driving the wrong way along the motorway i.e. altering road lay outs to make sure it is not possible to join the motorway on the wrong side.

The Constabulary has limited options when the motorway is blocked/ closed. There is lots of working with partners and issues are performance managed very carefully. The Constabulary is using social media and working with local radio to make sure that motorists are informed when there are issues on roads. It is unavoidable that roads are closed when there has been a loss of life or the road becomes unsafe to use.

Q. Member of the public thanked the local police. Is officer safety equipment being sacrificed e.g. stab vests, for the mobile technology which has been issued?

A. The technology is great and allows officers to work anywhere but this has not come at the cost of safety equipment. The Constabulary will not take risks with

officers safety. Training is refreshed on an annual basis and at this point all stab vests are examined to ensure that there are no defects in them. Assaults on police officers are increasing and there is a comprehensive plan in place to ensure staff are supported. In addition the Chief Constable writes or calls every officer who has been assaulted and works closely with the CPS to stress the importance of bringing the perpetrators to justice.

Q. There has been national media coverage of the public taking on patrolling their local areas in one part of the country – could this happen in Avon and Somerset?

A. People who are unqualified and don't have the professional knowledge need to be careful about taking the law into their own hands. It is hoped that it does not get to that stage in Avon and Somerset. The operational independence of the police is very important – the police are professionally trained, transparent and accountable in a way that private security organisations are not. The PCC mentioned the Martock area where a security officer is employed by the local area to drive around on a Friday and Saturday night but this has not made a difference to the ASB in that area or to anyone being charged. Some Parish Councils are considering funding extra PCSO hours. The Chief Constable has a national role in coordinating UK assistance and highlighted the excellent international reputation of UK policing.

Q. Road users do not leave the required gap between cars – is there a way of measuring this and fining people in the same way as is done for speeding? The money could then be invested in policing.

A. The Chief Constable stated that the police should not be seen as “milking the public” as this can cause a loss of trust and confidence in the police. The future of motoring was discussed and driverless cars would have the function to measure the driving distance between cars.

Q. Member of the public called the police in the Summer regarding an ASB issue and was told that the police no longer deal with ASB and that it is dealt with by the Local Authority?

A. It was confirmed that the police do still deal with ASB and that advice should not have been given. ASB is an issue that the police have to work in partnership with other relevant agencies to deal with. The Local Authority have powers to issue notices in relation to ASB in open spaces. Where there is an ASB issue the most suitable agency to lead will be identified depending on what the particular issues are so the leading agency could be the police, Local Authority, Housing or Health. Discussed peak ASB demand in a particular area of Nailsea in summer 2017 – police worked with partners in advance of summer 2018 and ASB demand was reduced. Need to engage and divert young people in the community away from ASB. The dedication of local officers to deal with the ASB demand during summer 2018 was highlighted, they all changed shifts in order to meet the challenge which sometimes meant sacrificing personal commitments.

Q. Bad publicity in the Evening Post last year regarding motorbike theft – will Avon and Somerset consider knocking them off in the same way as the Met?

A. The situation in London is different with criminals stealing Mopeds to commit crimes, this is not the same as the problem experienced in Avon and Somerset. The issue last year was an epidemic of motorbike theft which has fallen 50% from the peak of the problem. Avon and Somerset Police would not be making plans to knock

criminals off motorbikes (tactical contact) due to the risk of death following police contact.