

OCC Public Meeting Notes

13th June 2017

Moot Hall

The Stow, Harlow

Panel Members

PCC Roger Hirst

DPCC Jane Gardner

Harlow Ch/Insp Matt Cornish

Questions raised by the audience

Q - Did the PCC have control over how the extra money raised from the precept is being spent? Furthermore did the PCC have the ability to meet ECC and ask for what was required to resource the police?

A - The PCC advised it was not just ECC but also the unitary authorities of Southend and Thurrock that he sat down with to discuss resourcing. Essex is the most tightly funded force in the country, with the third lowest precept and central grant and with the least per capita spending on policing in England and Wales. Much had been done to improve efficiency, and the Police were now starting to recruit for more officers. Essex Police needs more officers and the PCC was in dialogue regularly with both councils and Whitehall and there is a recognition that the current police funding formula had to change. The new formula follows demand for where police services are likely to be needed.

Q – Will Harlow have local policing?

A – There is a community policing team in Harlow and officers are deployed in a variety of ways within the community. There was also ‘coffee with cops’ initiative where residents can meet with officers in a local coffee shop and discuss local issues. It would also be possible to exchange email addresses and other contact details with officers in order to foster closer community relations.

Q – What are the established numbers of police at the current time?

A – In April 2016 numbers were 2860 as of May 2017 it was 2850. The PCC wants the numbers to rise and a recruitment drive is underway. He also wanted to double the Special constabulary.

Q – What are the corresponding numbers for Harlow?

A - In Harlow in 2016 there were 66 officers 10 sergeants now there was 36 officers and 6 sergeants.

Q – Harlow has had a recent murder and is recorded as the highest for murder rates in the country – how are Essex Police dealing with that?

A – *Essex Police has initiated Operation Raptor which targets drugs and crime gangs who were responsible for a significant number of the crimes committed and there had been successes in bringing perpetrators to justice.*

*There was also a Juno team which is now looking at taking on all Domestic Violence incidents rather than just the high risk. In the past there had been DV cases where signals were being missed and that was not acceptable*.

Q – A resident had witnessed a high number of legal highs being taken by youths on the estate where she lived and asked what police were doing about it*. Details were taken of the incidents by officers present so it could be addressed. It was stressed that residents must report incidents so the police can build up intelligence.*

Q – A resident phoned 999 to report a vehicle being vandalised and spent a majority of the call being asked personal details, as well as clarification on where the crime was taking place as the call handler had no idea about the area geography. Would it be possible to reintroduce local call handlers.

A – *CI Cornish offered to speak with the resident after the meeting to collate details and look into how the call was handled. He acknowledged that calls were no longer dealt with at local police stations but added this would not change.*

Q – Is the PCC’s Police and Crime Plan deliverable on Domestic Violence and ASB?

A – *The PCC believes it is deliverable. Firstly there was no problem motivating officers as the enthusiasm for the job is extraordinary. The main issues are about making sure resources are in the right places and negotiating extra money to fund the force. Other ways that resources can be financed is through the selling of police stations to free the capital so that it can be invested in tech that enables police to fight crime. It can also enable the upgrade of Police software that links names and intelligence on crimes so reports can be automatically cross referenced.*

*The Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner also commissions services. In Harlow it had part funded a youth action plan that helps young people devise projects that are important to them.*

Q – The Police and Crime Plan is very ambitious – what impact will this have on police wellbeing as they are put under more stress?

A – *The PCC acknowledged that the plan was ambitious but added that Essex Police was investing a lot into the mental health of staff, running workshops and campaigns and educating staff to recognise and help the symptoms of stress in colleagues. £40k was spent on new gym equipment and there was more being done around occupational health. The biggest cause of sickness is stress and it is vital to invest in staff welfare.*

Q – Harlow used to have more youth involvement with police but this has now stopped – will it be reinstated.

A – *Local police are still engaging with local youths who have been in trouble and are making some progress through the PCC’s Restorative Mediation Service. They are also looking at the creation of the youth forum and strategic youth council and with more resourcing being invested in the police they are hoping to engage more in the furture.*

Q – Since Harlow lost its PCSOs there is no-one residents can talk to on a local level.

A – *With more officers coming to Harlow more community engagement is planned, but currently the tightness around resourcing means police are concentrating resources on answering emergency calls.*

Q – When will Harlow have more officers?

A – *There will be five more officers in July and more would be coming in September.*

Q – How many specials are we getting?

A – *This dependent on local recruitment.*

Q – The magistrates court has gone from Harlow – what impact has this had?

A – this does not come under the remit of the PCC

Q – What is the cost if the force helicopter as it was hovering over allotments recently and didn’t appear to be doing anything

A – *The helicopter does not belong to Essex Police. It is under the jurisdiction of NPAS and due to the expense it will not lift unless there are police on the ground to assist and only then if actioned by Chief Inspector level and above. The helicopter will often hover and direct ground operatives to where a perpetrator is. The Police are now using drones which are far cheaper and they have had great success in looking for missing persons, perpetrators and examining scenes of crime.*

Q – What is being done about ASB that is taking place in some estates?

A – *Since events in the Stow last August, Essex Police have implemented a 12 week plan and work with agencies to target a specific area. Success has been seen in both the Stow and Staple Tye. Following the police’s plan, Harlow Council and CSP continue with the progress made.*

Q – While it sounds like a good idea to zone in on problem areas, this could mean criminality is drawn to areas not being policed?

A – *It was possible that a curfew order could be put in place, as had already been done on problem youths in Harlow. Also, just because Police are not in a particular area does not mean they would not act on reports and intel so it was vital residents reported crimes happening in their neighbourhood*.

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Q – A resident who is a special constable had applied to join the police and had passed all the tests but had been told because she was incrementally over her BMI she could not be accepted.

A – *The PCC agreed he would look into as he wanted dedicated officers to join.*

Q – There is a hate crime going on social media – what can we do?

A – *This is an area where the Government are trying to get the social media companies to act in a responsible manor to remove them, and this is something the PCC strongly advocates and is taking back to Whitehall.*

Q – Some police on call outs are uncertain where to go. Perhaps they should get out of the car more to speak to residents.

A – *Harlow police have very good response times and sometimes if they are not certain of an address it’s often because the person reporting the incident can be vague on specific location so police rely on being flagged down when they arrive on scene. However, it was noted that police could get out of their cars more often.*

Q – Are the specials replacing police officers?

A – *This is absolutely not the case – the PCC is looking to supplement the force and the benefit of specials is that they are local and they know their community.*