

Harlow Public Meeting Minutes

Panel Members

Jane Gardner, Deputy Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

Ch/Insp Paul Austin Harlow District Commander, EP

Terry Povey North-West Manager, ECFRS

Cllr Joel Charles, Harlow Council.

DPFCC Jane Gardner began by welcoming everyone to the meeting. She said that while enforcement work is still important, with more investment we are pushing for a strategic change to prevention. Essex Police will soon be the biggest it has ever been officer wise and that is thanks to the public for the precept that they agreed to fund.

The extra money raised has been invested back into the force and includes neighbourhood policing, specialist teams such as the Domestic Abuse Problem Solving Team and growing existing teams such as the Town Centre Teams and the Business Crime Team and the Rural Engagement Team. Few people realise that 75% of Essex is rural and there are different issues in different parts of the county.

Domestic Abuse accounts for over a third of all violent crime so there has been investment in more officers and partner services including The Change Project and getting on board more IDVAS. The Essex Violence and Vulnerability Unit has done great work around preventing and helping young people get out of gangs and the PFCC has helped attract significant funding to commission services.

During the pandemic we were successful in attracting significant pots of money into Essex, and we have been successful in getting the money invested into services and reaching a lot of young people.

We also have an excellent brand in the Fire and Rescue Service. They do brilliant prevention work and really stepped up in the pandemic and drove ambulances and helped hospitals with logistics.

Ch/Insp Paul Ballard – crime in Harlow is up. The biggest challenge is violence and ASB and drugs in town centres. Priorities are around violence in and around public spaces and this is where police will be concentrating as this causes the most harm and affects shoppers, residents and businesses alike. Also concentrating on Domestic Abuse in the district, where police attend around 200 instances each month.

Cllr Joel Charles – Public Space Protection Orders (PSPOs) have been in place for a number of years in Harlow but are due to run out on 5th August 2022. However, the council are looking to extend them and have currently been consulting with the

public. The aim is to stop drinking in town centres and also cycling in some places, and by having PSPOs in place this can help police carry out their role and make it safer for people to use public spaces. Plans are also underway to improve CCTV provision in Town Underpasses, to prevent VAWG and now have 8 in place with more still to be installed. Also need CCTV in the town centre and PFCC came down and visited and agreed it was needed. Council about to publish its community safety strategy (announce in summer) and will cover aspects such as ASB, nuisance tenants, impact of crime on business. Will also have a consultation with public about where they would like the focus to be.

ECFRS NW Manager Terry Povey – instances of call outs are back to pre-pandemic numbers. There was a significant house fire in the town a couple of weeks previously but the Service regularly goes out to do fire prevention and protection activities making sure businesses are complying with legislation as well as going into the home talking about fire precautions and escape routes as well as covering other elements such as keeping safe from fraud etc. ECFRS also try and engage with young people who have challenging behaviour where they spend a week training as fire fighters. It not only teaches them the role of firefighter, it also teaches them about risk and consequences.

Questions from the public

Q - E-scooters – what's going to be done about people who ride e-scooters illegally and anti-socially and put other pedestrians at risk

A – Ch/Insp Austin – We are waiting for Government to legislate on them following trials around the country. Where they are being ridden anti-socially and illegally, Harlow police have an operation in place where officers get out on bikes around cycle paths and underpasses and the town centre. The team have been working hard to identify and seize the scooters where possible.

Q – How do police deal with children on e-scooters?

A – Ch/Insp Ballard advised it depended on the circumstances. A lot of work had been done about educating parents and schools that the scooters are illegal for children to ride and that in order to ride one you must have insurance and a driving licence.

Q - Commons Road is being used as a racetrack and that includes motorbikes, scooters and pedal bikes, which also overtake on the path. Only a matter of time before someone gets seriously hurt.

A – Ch/Insp Ballard advised tools are limited in dealing with them as police have to be there at the right time to catch them in the act. That's why regular reporting that includes time and days is so crucial. Police also run a summer operation each year where they proactively go out and patrol in hot spot areas.

Cllr Charles stated this was big issue and there has been no change in the last 10 years in the council crime strategy. People get fed up reporting ASB but then hearing nothing back, so it was important to be more transparent with what is being done. The PSPO give us advanced powers to enforce around alcohol consumption

for instance and hopefully the new strategy will give people the confidence to report now that something is being done.

Q – How will you let residents know about the council crime strategy?

A – Cllr Charles advised they will be having forums and maximising engagement, digital engagement, print version in areas where there has been acute ASB. Trying to be a lot smarter with how we engage with people. Will endeavour to make everyone aware as much as possible

Jane Gardner – also really important to communicate successes as well as challenges. People need to be reassured that they are being listened to. It is so important to keep reporting as that will go towards building a picture of crime and getting resources allocated. Need to find the right channels to get the message out to residents and businesses.

Q – Fernhill Lane – what are the emergency services and police and council doing about it?

A – Ch/Insp Ballard - Fernhill Lane is an Essex County Council site for travellers and there has been countless issues over the years with fly tipping, theft, fires and anti-social behaviour. There are lots of enforcement meetings taking place with services that meet every six weeks and we are constantly looking and pushing ECC for a long-term solution, such as providing more investment or deciding the future of the site. The pitches are only at 50% as the other pitches are unusable due to the state of the site. The district council is pushing ECC for a long-term issue and completely understand frustration.

Q – ECC has spent so much money on doing the site up, yet it returns to a dump soon after. What's the point in throwing more money at it?

A - Cllr Charles – The police have been doing a lot of multi-agency approach to the issues. Complexities of site are well known but Harlow council are clear what has to take precedence are the residents who border the site. There will be decisions made on the future of Fernhill soon.

Terry Povey– if it's life risk fire the crews go straight in. If not then we wait as there have been a number of instances where firefighters and police have been injured when called to attend the site, so have a plan in place with police to go in and support.

Q – There are a lot of drug issues in Rushesmead – as dealers are operating at the back of their house but each time residents report it nothing is done and the drug dealing continues

A – Police Ch/Insp asked to speak to resident afterwards and get details.

Q – Windows were smashed in Freshwaters recently - what's being done?

A – Police were not aware of the issues but committed to do some actions around the area. They encouraged reporting so they know where to deploy.

Q What can we do around cannabis that is being smoked in neighbouring houses and flats, stinking out the place.

A – Report to police and to the council

