Epping Public Meeting

Sept 19 2023, 7-8pm

**Panel**:

Roger Hirst - PFCC

Insp Leanne Archer

T/Insp Lauren Sharland

Caroline Wiggins EFDC CSP

Ian Somerfield ECFRS

**RH** – introduction. Expansion of 905 extra officers this year - to 3750 I hope to sustain. Biggest the force has ever been. Doubled size of CPT, more resources than before. Lot of recruitment over 2000 always losing 200-250 per year through retirement or other ways. Currently lots of training, a lot of demand being placed on more experience officers to mentor/guide etc. Something we have to deal with. We have about 600 out of 900 that are in training. Not all are out on the front line at the moment. We have Town Centre teams in Loughton/Brentwood – would like to see them expanded further. Focused on hotspot policing – ASB hotspot in Debden / Waltham Abbey. Done our statistics but need to hear from you. Strong commitment to ECFRS here – we have a fire station in Ongar – Despite rumours that we were going to close. We are NOT going to close Ongar f/station.

**LA:** explanation of the make-up of Epping teams. 5 sergeants and 55 officers responding to 999 and force control room calls. CPT team – 2 sergeants, 10 constables and 8 PCSOs – there for ASB, hate crime and will respond to data they receive. Additional 1 sergeant and 5 constables make up Town Centre Team. In each area there are assigned beat officers. We are aware of social media posts throughout the community, but we need the information to come in via reporting. Highlights – data stats, increase in crimes – burglary because we compare year on year we are still catching up from Covid. Theft of cars is on the increase, keyless esp. We are working with industry re keyless technology. TCentre team are doing lots of activity in plain clothes to tackle shoplifting, ASB, theft from person etc.

**RH** – vehicle theft. Please do not use the comfort opening option Range Rover/Land Rover. Not worth it – very easy for thieves to override.

**Questions from audience:**

**Q:** Congratulations for extra officers. How did we get to the situation of having to increase by 30%

What happened?

**RH** – Government spending was 25% higher than production…. We ended up with situation where previously sustained high of 3600 was only in place for a month or so. I made a commitment to re-expand the service when I joined in 2016. Campaigned govt and raised council tax and all of that money has gone to front line. About 450 have come from central govt, 300 from local council tax, 150 from savings (police numbers)

**Q:** Firstly, I am really pleased increase in police personnel. We seem to have lost our police station in Epping and where are you going to put all the extra officers? Loughton has sign on the door – no public admitted. We are paying for these police stations why can’t we visit them and have more police stations. We are not getting the public engagement on the street.

**RH** – closed Brentwood station and moved to Town Hall – works well. Police officers should be more visible and should be doing home visits. We used to have only a handful of the public going into the police station a week. Waste of police officers to have a front desk. They should be out there serving the public.

**Q:** We would appreciate face to face police officers’ engagement.

**LA**: There are various public events. Loughton police station has a phone outside to call the back office. We have ‘coffee with cops’, etc. We want to make policing more accessible that’s why we use different ways to engage.

**Q**: How many police officers are on duty at night? One? Speeding of cars we can hear every night between 11 and 1 am a lot over weekends along Epping New Road. **(FOLLOW UP)**

**LA:** that’s the info I need to send it in and then roads policing who are on 24/7 will pick it up. I will put forward a case and then Roads Policing will report back. We will deal with all we can and roads policing will come and assist us.

**Q**: To the fire service. I am an ex-officer and lots of discrimination to retained staff used to occur and according to the Retained Union it is still going on and I understand there is a crisis in the on-call service in ECFRS.

**IS**: The part of your point about discrimination between wholetime and on-call I don’t see at that level. I think there are a lot of things that we do a great deal better across wholetime and on-call for various reasons. I certainly haven’t heard the word “crisis” and it doesn’t come across that way.

**Q**: You are asking people to do 120 hours on call and they can’t do it. The process of training; it doesn’t work because you have wholetime in charge of on-call.

**RH**: There are more people who commute and don’t do physical work. We launched a single service policy which means we are allowing crews to be a mix of whole and on-call. We have on-call liaison officers to make sure we have the right on-call crews out there. 120 hours is a lot, we need to look at how people live their lives these days and there are people available who can only commit to 50-60 a week. The nights can be covered via on-call from home. Looking hard to restructure and we are working hard to address it.

**RH** – suggest further discussion after meeting.

**Q:** In last 5 or 6 years, we have lost houses in Ongar. Fire service attended from neighbouring stations. Why is it in Kent and Suffolk allow on-call to be 50 hours a week, Herts is 40hours a week and in Essex its 90 hrs a week. Is there any scope that you could reduce the minimum on-call requirement to allow for more on-call officers.

**RH:** explained sign up for retained officers /on-call is training, full time and we need to move from that as it’s not working for recruitment. We are looking at it.

**Q:** Ongar based.

1. I know that reporting is essential and goes on the database. People are not reporting. Town Council created posters for all public to report everything. Social media always states that no one will report it. How can you as a police force get that information out to people about reporting – either online / after event / or email. The police force generally has to have some sort of engagement with people saying “yes you won’t have a response if its not an emergency, but you will get to it. Reporting generally and making public much more aware.

2. We have a lack of police presence in Ongar. Ongar is always at the bottom of the pile for everything isn’t it? Including the closure of the police station. Previous inspectors had good engagement. I think Warren has only had 2 or 3 ‘coffee with cops’ – people work so engagement times should be evenings/flexible. We feel neglected.

**RH: T**hank you. It really is important about reporting. **ACTION**- I will speak to CC re better engagement and publicity of how to report and provide intelligence. We do need to get that message across. Response policing is not very effective. Planned policing based on information (intelligence) is very effective and does get results.

**LA:** I take on board re meeting times, and the different forms of engagement. Please do help us, contact us and report. Our stats are required to deploy officers based on priority and if the stats show there is more crime in Epping but not Ongar then we will deploy accordingly. Please email. If its an emergency, life threatening always call 999. Use online reporting if not urgent.

**Q:** This must be DeJa’Vu – we are not moving forward very fast. Of the officers you mention, how many have been deployed in Ongar. We do not have any police presence in Ongar. ASB is rife, nothing happens. I put in an online report at beginning of July, lengthy form. I was told on 6th July I would be contacted, and I am still waiting.

**RH**: so you reported a crime and you have not heard anything?

**Q**: I was given a crime number and reported, and someone would be in touch – Nothing. I have traced it since then and updated the report and again I have asked if someone would be in touch and still – nothing. The police have no presence here whatsoever. You need to get the presence to ensure people get the confidence to talk to them.

**RH:** I don’t know policing numbers in Ongar – its 38 in Epping Forest District. We need to again, work out the visibility. (**ACTION** – Leanne will take a reference point and take away to look into)

**Q:** Could you make more use to Speed Bots? The Speed Bot allows you to follow a mobile phone signal to see how fast people are going.

**RH**: Not sure we are allowed to use them.

**LA:** We are not allowed

**Q**: It could be used as information for intelligence rather than responding to it.

**RH:**I will take it away, I have learnt something

**Q:** what about AI to answer calls to automatically screen call and be rerouted to another particular area?

**RH**: I know that is being trialled in a couple of places including Greater Manchester. The Government is quite keen to promote this.

**Q:** Collaboration between Fire and Police. Could unmanned station be used by police and fire together to utilise. Collaboration could open up the accessibility and visibility for people to come in and use the facilities.

**RH**: We do exactly that in other areas of Essex. Could we do it here? **(Action to progress)**

**IS**: It has to be done in the correct fashion and the right support. People come into on-call fire stations unmanned and see it as a point of contact for police and there is no one there. Or may come into fire station with a police operational issue we could not deal with it. We collaborate with ambulance, and this is something we could look into.

**Q**: I am a mother of a teenage daughter and I am worried about the drugs in Ongar amongst young people and the ease of children getting hold of it. We have the large gas cannisters (boxes and boxes) dumped over the field with drug dealing going on.

**RH**: Government are banning gas cannisters now. It is harmful. We have an extensive programme for dealing with the drugs problems: Three-pronged attack - stop and search, taking drugs off street, V&V team to focus on at-risk people. In the last 5 years we have reduced the number of drug/knife homicides by 70% in the county. We do go into schools, and we tend to target the schools that have the biggest problem and Ongar do not seem to have a problem.

**CW**: There is Community Safety Partnership work going on in all the new schools and we will be delivering the work at local schools and working with Essex Youth Services about working with the youth clubs, and including “trendy” ways – podcasts, social media etc. That is going to start within the next few months. There is going to be some more deliveries within the YS. CSP is really focusing on the younger people of the district.

**LA:** We have Children and Young Persons Officers (CYP) officers and they have had clear objectives about the next year within the schools – visibility will be increased in schools / after schools. 1 day a month for police officer at school will be advertised to discuss any concerns with police / students. Also dropping in ad-hoc and then looking to see the capacity to move into primary schools too with the engagement with younger children to give them confidence to report / engage with police.

**Q:** I am a volunteer at Budworth Hall, Ongar. We have ASB problems, we have reported, had incidents (windows broken, thefts etc) with videos sent in to police but no response. We would be delighted to host any engagement events in the Budworth Hall for police and the community.

**LA**: If they have been identified then we have done something, but I admit our feedback is not good. I am happy to look up reference number if you have and provide you with further information.

**Q**: We did report the above, information was that only those that hire the building have to report the incident. But we have heard nothing further. We were not allowed to report or enquire about anything as a committee - we were told it had to come from the person/s hiring the building at the time of the incident.

**LA**: The victim of crime needs to report. But we should be speaking/engaging with others better.

It will also build intelligence and when we have names of ASB youths there is a lot more we can do and procedures we can put in place to prevent further incidents.

**LA**: We would 100% like to use Budworth Hall as a Drop-In and will get a meeting set up. (Action)

**Q:** Seems that burglaries and robberies have low conviction rates. What can PFCC do?

**RH** – In terms of solved rates it varies a lot. Our homicide solve rate is 100%. There are crimes that we are not good at. Rape and serious sex assault is only 3%. Far too little cases go to court. All residential home burglaries will be attended. We don’t achieve that all the time – its usually 85% are attended. We are trying to get that higher. Burglary figures understate the success rate. Spates of 8 or 13 in a road and an arrest of 2/3 offenders is made, and it all stops - those 2/3 offenders may well have been responsible for 13 burglaries.

**General:**  Longfield Neighbourhood Watch. Please come and join as I can confirm it works. There are 130 properties with 100 residents and members on Facebook. When we have had burglaries / car theft we have been able to help CID really quickly. I ask residents to check CCTV footage and it REALLY DOES WORK. WE have given a lot of video footage and intel to CID and local police and prosecutions have happened and crime has been solved. Please join.

**General**: Community Speed Watch - we also need this in Ongar High Street. People do speed and park on pavements.

**RH:** I really do think Neighbourhood Watch is a hugely successful intervention and works well with the police. Road safety – dangerous driving kills more people in Essex than any other crime. CSW does make a difference.Anything we can do to support NW and CSW we will do.

**FINISH**