**PFCC Braintree Public Meeting**

**22nd November 2023**

**Braintree Town Hall**

**7pm to 8.00pm**

**Panel Members**

PFCC Roger Hirst

Ch/Insp Martin Richards, Essex Police

Group Manager Steve Wintrip, Essex County Fire and Rescue Service

Cllr Mary Cunningham, Chair of Braintree Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

**Introduction from PFCC Roger Hirst**

It has been a tough few years on many fronts, but now more than ever we are grateful for the public support to the emergency services and as you are aware we rely on funding from the public through the precept, and from central government. We have 905 extra police officers bringing the current total to 3,755, making Essex Police bigger and stronger than ever before in its 184 year history.

Crime was rising rapidly 5/6 years ago but we now see all crime is reduced in the last year by 6.5% largely thanks to targeted patrols, investment, and prevention activities. We are reversing the tide of domestic abuse which is reduced by 17% in the last year, and rape and sexual assault is also reduced by 12%. We have reduced burglary by 45%, homicide by 40%, and reduced ASB by 70% in the last 5 years. However, as much as this progress is important, percentages do not matter when you are personally affected by crime, and we want to remain here to support those affected.

There is a lot of media and national attention on the actions of the Met Police, and it is important to highlight Essex is a different force while observing learnings from the Met. We want to ensure professionalism is high within Essex and the public have confidence in the police service, of which we are seeing in our SMSR results which demonstrate 70% public confidence.

With Essex County Fire and Rescue Service we are investing in prevention and response has consistently been good. As such, we have a realistic target to have zero people being killed annually by house fires in the county. We need fewer fires, fewer collisions, and more prevention activity. We have steeped up our prevention activities, and safe and well visits. House fires reduced last year in the county by 8%. Things are going in the right direction but there is a lot more to do particularly with road safety. Too many people are killed by road safety related deaths, and we have a lot to do to reduce speeding, and to stop drink or drug driving.

We also have a lot to do around rape and sexual assault to make sure women and girls feel supported and able to report. We are also working on tackling drug crime and have a programme of work through or Violence and Vulnerability Unit to reduce drug related violence and we are seeing the reduction in practice. The number of people being killed by drug related homicides is 60% less and we will continue to work towards this.

**Questions from the audience**

**Q – Community Speed Watch (CSW) groups within the districts stated there is a reluctance to send out letters to speeding drivers of lease vehicles and there is a concern this will impact the delivery of Vision Zero. CSW groups also take care to look up the registration online and submit additional details to police not only of speeding but of MOT and tax state of the vehicle, and this can also indicate the insurance too as if insurance is held it is not valid without an MOT or tax.**

**However CSW head that Essex Police are not interested in this and not something they will tackle, which undermines CSW work. Often see as a result we are not supported, and repeat offenders are seen up to 25 times by us. This has been heard of in other CSW groups and we would like to understand how you will investigate and solve this.**

RH – Unfortunately the answer of lease vehicles is a complex one and not one we have been able to solve already. However, we are grateful to the work you are doing and the core principle of speed watch works. With CSW they are ultimately an education activity and not an enforcement activity which is where the problem lies with cost and prosecution of lease vehicles. As it is not legally enforceable when captured by CSW there is a high administration cost to obtain the driver details of the vehicle and if companies do comply, they pass that cost back to Essex Police. We have to evaluate the cost effectiveness in the public interest. However, what we should be doing is making the owner of the vehicle aware that their vehicle is being driven recklessly.

MR – Unfortunately with lease vehicles and people renting cars the decision to pursue comes down to a cost element. If a constable uses a camera or takes a photograph, we can get back the drivers details by law and go through court. The CSW element, it is up to us to get the drivers details which is not a piece implemented by law, and therefore it incurs an admin cost for the business. And the cost is then passed back to Essex Police. We have to decide to incur the cost and then send them a letter which is not enforceable. Based on this we have to ask what we can do alternatively and is in the public interest.

With regards to insurance, tax, and MOT status we are often told about this by members of the public. If it is a member of the public reporting it vs an officer all we can do is use it as intelligence on our systems. We have to ask then; do we gain something from that and is it worth the effort vs output, or can we tackle this in a different way. We are supportive of CSW groups, and we need to emphasise that road safety is everyone’s problem. If we want to deal with a problem, we need to deal with it in partnership with police, fire, CSPs and the community together. The CSW are part of a layer effect. Most people speeding are from the community. Therefore, we need to get the community on board.

Details are feedback but having said that we want to emphasise you are always welcome to feedback to local PCSOs and they will work with you to tackle repeat offenders or local issues you identify. Additionally, if you ever receive abuse for carrying out the role please do let us know and we will address this.

**Q – We are happy to see you at Witham Town Council and we have offered to partly fund a TruCam. We are trying to implement a policy to establish 20mph zones in one way housing estates but this is not supported by the county council. We would like more support from the council, particularly in housing estates where there is only one way in and out. Our specials, our PCSOs were stopped by previous CC, we make good use of our specials – they undertake a lot of speed surveys and are good at collecting intelligence. They have awareness of drug dealing in our towns, we have increased reports from residents about increased ASB in the last 9 months. If this is any scope for us to get a police officer through safer streets, we would like that – and it’s something our communities would value. We would like to know if TruCam is coming.**

RH - We are awaiting the new generation from the Home Office of TruCam, but we do hope we will be hearing about this soon as we hoped it would be by Christmas. As you are aware there is a new home secretary and things have recently changed, but we will chase for an answer on this. We would also encourage you to reapply for funding with community safety partners so now may be a good time for this. We really value the feedback on the relationship our Specials have in Witham with the community, and we are grateful to hear they are tackling issues as they start to arise.

MR – Hearing what the Specials deliver to you is great, and we want to replicate that further across the district. With regards to PCSOs we received a contract through recently where we are in negotiations for PCSOs for Witham. TruCam photographs the driver at speed and has an automatic function to record it, and they can be used by PCSOs. Uttlesford had a TruCam. We are using it to good effect in Uttlesford. I would like to get on board better with Witham, but Witham has expressed desire to get on board with Halstead, and as they are not cheap there is a need to demonstrate money is well spent as Witham and Halstead are to jointly fund it. We would like for the new financial year to hopefully fund a new TruCam.

**Q – A query for fire - are you are engaged with assessing certain domestic situations for people who may have access issues or are disabled when getting out of a property in a fire? How much clout do you have to say that a property needs to be upgraded for safety in case of a fire for disabled users? How much influence do you have to make properties comply with fire regs?**

SW - all our firefighters undertake fire home safety visits and we have specialist experts also. We have our Prevention Team who conduct Safe and Well visits. You can arrange a visit based on the leaflets handed out tonight or visit our ECFRS website to do this. This will also allow you to receive support from partner agencies to work to keep occupants safe. We also have the ability to put a tag on specific addresses so in the event of a fire, crews know they have someone disabled / with mobility issues at the address.

**Q – What if it is as simple as just needing a new front door that will keep the person safe?**

SW – We carry out a whole risk assessment and look at all options and risk, and we will work with people in the premises and partnerships to make sure that person is safe and explore needs and options. We work with local authorities and partners to make sure that residents are safe, and we sign post people to the right providers. We would encourage that if you do have any concerns firstly you schedule one of our safe and well visits where the teams are best placed to assess and support you in collaboration with local partners.

RH – I’d like to state that ECFRS work well with local council housing departments, and we do flag people to the right areas.

**Q – Many of you know town councillors and parish councillors are consultees for groups of flats. We have recently seen a block of flats that has two entrances / exits but one of these is concerning as it is designed with an e-bike store right by the exit. Is this a fire risk and what are your thoughts on it?**

SW – We are seeing an emerging risk for e-batteries, especially as electronic scooters and bikes are becoming more popular. Ideally we don’t want any means of escape blocked but without knowing the exact building I can’t comment for sure on the circumstances. However, it should have gone through an assessment process to make the design safe and up to standards. We are learning some lithium batteries are not safe and there are a lot of imitation ones that are in the market that are also not safe.

RH - There is a lot of learning on batteries now, the damage caused, how they can reignite and how we deal with them. We are learning as we go and building the learning into our skillset.

**Q – With regards to council budgets and how they are going to be protected into the future, what account is taken for the small local villages in the area, and I’m wondering how much input you would want or expect from these areas, what the proposals are for these areas, and how can we consult on these. We used to get village visits from local policing to give our views on funding local policing, and to speak about local issues. We used to get community feedback, how are you going to maintain that? Especially without email – we want physical contact on the ground, so people feel in contact, and they are not overlooked. Our village bobby has gone, there are no PCSOs unless you are lucky and we rely on specials.**

RH – There are meetings with your parish council to ensure they have a channel to have a voice. I attend the EALC AGM to talk and hear questions from them, and to ensure all parish councils are represented and we rely on parish councils taking the time to feedback. Our engagement with the public works at different levels now and we do things like public meetings, engagement online, Facebook live, presence from police officers when they can. Policing has progressed a long way from the village bobby as it has evolved due to crime evolving. Crime is a fraction of what it was when we had reactive patrol and response and we now have proactive action and prevention built into policing. We now work to understand where our hotspots our, where are vulnerable people are and respond and as such, crime is down.

**Q - We don’t seem to get that across to the public or through the parish council that crime is down.**

RH – unfortunately the press isn’t interested in good news stories, and we see that bad news travels far quicker than good news. There is also a lot of fabricated stories we see too that are just not true which strikes fear into people through misinformation. It is hard work, but we are trying to provide better and increased communications to get the message out. We are trying to make it more local too, so local areas get local news and feedback. If you have a local issue, we need to get on top of that too.

MR – As District Commander I have 107 parishes and wards to look after, and it is challenging knowing I need to deliver the strategic intent of the Chief Constable alongside what I want to deliver locally around road safety, anti-social behaviour, and violence in all it’s forms. As such, I have recognised we are doing more work in our larger demographic areas, and not so much in the smaller areas meaning smaller parishes such as yours may feel left behind. To combat this, I have started an initiative that the smaller areas do get some sort of footprint for community policing. It is more of a challenge and there are more rural areas in this particular district than others. We have become more responsive to how crime has evolved; crime is not occurring in the street any more with a heavy presence occurring online and therefore the need for police officers to be patrolling is not the same. I am trying to get PCSOs to speak to more parish and town councils, to hear your voice and to understand what we are trying to deliver and to share messaging. We need to make sure we are doing more of that and open up a channel that you are feeding back what the issues are.

The demographic of my more rural areas are ages 55-59 and 60-65 for most of my communities. I recognise that they are not as active on social media and some ways of communication may be lost. Therefore, my engagement strategy has been limited to in person and has to change. The coffee with cops in your parish is due once a month or two months due to the size of our teams and demand but it does occur. We are publishing a Dispatch document for the community to register to, which publishes dates of these and encourage communities to sign up to this.

At the moment we have 476 signed up to Dispatch out of approximately 100,000 in the district. We need to get this into parish magazines, on to village notice boards, into doctors’ surgeries. I need buy in from those and I intend to get 1% buy in from my communities this year, and 10% by the end of next year through my engagement strategy. One of my community PCs in this room does email parish clerks with crime figures every Monday and we will ensure you are sighted on this. Please also do inform us of any community events you hold as we have PCSOs who are willing to go to these events and make contacts within the community.

RH – I will make sure you get the copy of dispatch to you.