

LISBURN AND CASTLEREAGH CITY COUNCIL

Minutes of the Public Meeting of the Policing and Community Safety Partnership held in Ballinderry Church of Ireland Hall on 21 March 2017 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT:

Alderman M Henderson MBE (Chairman)
Councillor John Palmer
Mr M Busch
Mrs Y Craig
Mr P Dean
Mrs D Hancock
Mrs P Leeson
Mrs R Orr

OTHER MEMBERS:

Alderman W Leathem
Councillor A Redpath
Councillor R T Beckett

IN ATTENDANCE:

Head of Central Support Services
PCSP Officer (JB)
Members' Services Officer
Administration Officer

Ulster Farmer's Union
Mr James O'Brien

Designated Organisations
Chief Inspector L Dobson, Police Service of Northern Ireland
Ms M Meehan, S E Trust

Commencement of the Meeting

At the commencement of the meeting, the Chairman, Alderman M Henderson, welcomed those present to the meeting and introductions were made. He thanked Ballinderry Church of Ireland for the use of their hall and Councillor A Redpath for suggesting the location as a suitable venue for a meeting in public.

1. Apologies

It was agreed to accept an apology for non-attendance at the meeting on behalf of Councillor S Carson, Councillor M Tolerton, Councillor A McIntyre, Councillor U Mackin, Mrs D Guy, Mr A Hannaway (NIHE), Mr P Thompson (PBNI).

2. Declarations of Interest

The Chairman invited Declarations of Interest from members of the PCSP - no declarations were made.

3. PSNI Update on Rural Crime

Chief Inspector L Dobson gave a presentation on rural crime including an update on Farm Watch and Neighbourhood Watch.

She outlined that:

- Crime had reduced by 3% on the previous year.
- Calls for service had increased by 8% on the previous year (i.e. missing persons, concerns for safety etc.).
- Burglary was a significant area of concern, however domestic burglary had reduced by almost 25% and she said she considered this was due to the joint approach in addressing these issues.
- Only 11% of burglaries had resulted in anyone being apprehended however this was higher than in other districts. She emphasised that prevention was better than cure and went on to describe how forensically aware perpetrators were.
- Neighbourhood Watch schemes could help protect people as did other rural schemes and general good neighbour awareness she then provided some specific examples to illustrate this and urged residents to report any suspicious activity they became aware of. She said that simple actions such as switching a light on or calling out can deter burglars in the act.
- Anti-social behaviour had reduced by 5% and in this particular area was generally sporadic in nature.
- The overall outcome rate was c.34% in this area and 28% in other areas so she was happy to report that the community in Lisburn & Castlereagh was getting a better service.

The Chairman then invited the PCSP Officer to provide some information on Neighbourhood Watch schemes and Farm Watch.

The PCSP Officer outlined the number of schemes in the area stating that there were currently 71 schemes plus 3 others pending, he advised how a group of residents could go about setting up a scheme in their area and provided information on the accreditation process stating that anyone wishing to set up a scheme should contact him to take the process forward.

He also provided information on Farm Watch, which was a similar scheme aimed specifically at farmers. He provided information on the objectives of that scheme highlighting what it could offer participants. He also advised those attending that the PCSP had, for the past three years, carried out a rural crime survey in the Council area to help inform their Action Plans.

The PCSP Officer then provided information on a text alert scheme which was due to be launched in the near future stating that he would be the point of contact for anyone wishing to be included in the scheme.

He then stated that the PCSP still had a number of TrueCall devices which were call-blockers and which would prevent the receipt of scamming phone calls. He said that he or the police were the points of contact for anyone wishing to receive such a device.

5. To receive a presentation from the Ulster Farmers' Union on rural crime

The Chairman, Alderman M Henderson welcomed Mr James O'Brien from the Ulster Farmers' Union advising that he was in attendance to deliver a presentation on rural crime.

Mr O'Brien thanked the Chairman for the Partnership's kind invitation to address the meeting and he then provided the following information on rural crime:

- There was a perception that this was a victimless crime due to insurances being in place, however, the loss of machinery and vehicles had far reaching implications. Insurance does not always cover the full cost and excess amounts on policies can be very high and claims also result in increased premiums.
- The inconvenience of being without the machine or vehicle will affect the farm's activity and profit.
- Loss of live-stock will also significantly impact on current profitability and potential profitability due to the loss of future offspring.
- Perpetrators also bring disease onto farms and transfer diseases as they move from farm to farm.
- Crime impacts on the health and well-being of farmers, there is a psychological impact with feelings of violation and lack of security being experiences. Financial loss can add to the impact of these feelings.

At the culmination of the presentation, the Chairman, Alderman M Henderson, thanked all three speakers for their input and invited questions which were asked and responded to as follows:

5.1 Burglary breakdown and education in respect of burglary
Councillor A Redpath

Councillor A Redpath thanked the partnership for convening the meeting in Ballinderry and asked whether police had a breakdown between rural and urban burglary and between opportunist and planned burglary. He also asked whether she considered that education could help reduce instances.

Chief Inspector L Dobson advised that around one third of burglaries were opportunist in nature and there were opportunities to educate the community on how to prevent these. She said that she did not have rural/urban breakdown figures to hand. She said it was unfortunate that a lot of older rural dwellers continued to live as they had done in the past by leaving their doors and windows open. She urged people to spread the word re burglary prevention and offered the services of the Crime Prevention Officer or the Four Tier Scheme.

5.2 Text Alert Scheme and True-call devices
Mrs Denise Clements

Mrs Clements asked for some information on the scope of the Text Alert Scheme.

The PCSP Officer responded that it would include the main organisations who currently engaged with the PCSP i.e. Neighbourhood Watch Groups, CPLCs, clergy, businesses and Farm Watch participants, this should greatly assist with the dissemination of relevant information throughout the community. In response to a further question from Mrs Clements he confirmed that the software could be tailored to specific areas so that information would be localised and relevant.

Mrs Clements advised that she had been in receipt of anecdotal reports highlighting the effectiveness of the TrueCall devices.

Chief Inspector L Dobson said that she was pleased to hear this and said that it was hoped that the text alert system should build on past experience and that whilst current information was disseminated through Facebook, not everyone uses this platform and she hoped that this scheme would be an additional resource to reach more people.

5.3 Praise for the Police. Issues with dog fouling
Mr Gordon Fletcher

Mr Fletcher wanted to record praise for the police, in particular Chief Inspector L Dobson, regarding the manner in which she responded to the issues he had raised at the meeting in public held at Glenavy. He also said that he was pleased to see that the issue of vehicles blocking pavements was being addressed.

He said that he had received a response from the Council's Enforcement Officer in response to the information he had sought at the meeting in public held at Cairnshill when he had asked how many fixed penalty notices had been issued in connection with dog-fouling. He stated that he had been disappointed to learn that there had only been 13 fixed penalty notices issued by the new Council's 4 dog-wardens to date and he appealed to those Councillors who were present to do something to improve this.

The Chairman, Councillor M Henderson outlined that there were 4 dog wardens who covered the entire Council area and that they relied on reporting from the community so that their patrols could be targeted. He advised that the dog-warden had to actually witness a dog fouling offence before any fixed penalty notice could be issued.

He undertook to advise the relevant Council department of these concerns.

Mr Fletcher said that he had, in the past, reported suspicions but had been asked a myriad of questions at the time of reporting the answers to which he would not have known.

5.4 Dog Warden working patterns
Mr Philip Dean

Mr Dean asked what the working hours were for the dog-wardens and did they only work office hours, i.e. 9.00 am – 5.00 pm.

The Chairman, Councillor M Henderson responded that, as far as he was aware, dog-warden working hours were staggered and they operated an 'on-call' service.

5.5 Pilot Scheme to address drive-offs from petrol filling stations
Councillor John Palmer

Councillor J Palmer said that he understood that police were going to pilot a scheme in the Lisburn & Castlereagh Council area which would help to address petrol filling station 'drive-offs without paying'.

Chief Inspector L Dobson confirmed that this was the case and that she was hopeful that it would free up some police time. She outlined that it would appear to be mainly customers who, for one reason or another, genuinely overlooked payment who drove-off without paying. The new scheme would put in place a process to recover payment.

5.6 Crime Prevention Advice
Mr Paul Nelson

Mr Nelson said that he had installed CCTV at his premises and had marked his trailers and vehicles and he wanted to know if there was anything else he could do to improve security on his farm.

Mr J O'Brien said that he felt all bases had been covered.

Mr Nelson then asked if there was anything he could do if he considered his cattle were at risk of theft?

Chief Inspector L Dobson suggested that fitting tracking devices might be an option worth considering and that, given the cost of the vehicles concerned, it might be worth the additional expenditure.

Regarding the risk of cattle being stolen, she said that this was not particularly common in the area. She said that anyone planning to steal cattle would have to check the farm out in advance and carefully plan the operation and therefore the reporting of any suspicious activity around a farm would be important i.e. monitoring CCTV footage, reporting any unknown vehicles or persons in the vicinity.

At this stage the PCSP Officer highlighted that the benefits of the Farm Watch initiative and suggested that the Text Alert scheme might be of assistance.

Mr Nelson asked whether Inspector Dobson considered that a long access lane to a farm would act as a deterrent.

Chief Inspector Dobson responded that thieves usually wanted an easy getaway so a long lane would probably act as a form of deterrent. She said that police would be happy to visit the farm and provide crime prevention advice.

5.7 Tracking Devices
Councillor J Palmer

Councillor Palmer said that insurance companies usually reduced premiums if tracking devices were fitted to vehicles and this would off-set some of the cost of their installation.

5.8 Reporting of suspicious activity
Mrs D Clements

Mrs Clements advised of an incident where the reporting of suspicious activity using the 101 number had resulted in the satisfactory prevention of a potential crime.

Chief Inspector L Dobson responded that she was pleased to hear about this outcome.

5.9 Police Cars
A Member of the Public

A member of the public asked how many cars were in the area at any one time?

Chief Inspector L Dobson responded that these were now centralised and the number would vary but it would generally be between 5 and 7, sometimes there would be more if there was a specific operation ongoing.

She advised that officers were delegated tasks to complete in their downtime.

5.10 Advice to householders if they disturb a burglar
Mr Stuart Brown

Mr Brown asked what would happen if someone disturbed a burglar who was carrying a knife and asked how best they could attempt to defend themselves and where would they stand legally if they did?

Chief Inspector L Dobson responded that most burglars took off if they were disturbed and thankfully most were not armed however she went to outline the concept of 'reasonable force' and provided some examples to illustrate this.

She advised that if anyone came across an intruder in their home, her advice would be to make a lot of noise and call 999. She also said that, in her own home, she kept valuables (handbag, phone etc) out of sight but did not take them upstairs with her.

Mr Brown then asked if there was any information sharing to make the public aware of scamming and how to minimise risk?

The PCSP Officer outlined recent awareness raising events held by the PCSP to increase scamming awareness and provide advice, and stated that such events were targeted to address current issues within communities. He further advised that it was concerns within communities which helped formulate PCSP Action Plans.

The Chairman, Alderman M Henderson, provided some information on a series of drama productions held in schools which were organised by the PCSP and which provided information to pupils on internet safety.

Inspector L Dobson said that outside these events, the PSNI can attend an event at any time to provide information to groups and she would welcome this.

5.11 Road Safety Issue
Mr Gordon Fletcher

Mr G Fletcher highlighted a road safety issue at the Ballinderry Road and Knockmore Road junction.

Chief Inspector L Dobson said that she would have this looked at by police officers.

At the culmination of the discussion, the Chairman, Alderman M Henderson, said that if anyone had any questions for PCSP Members, Elected Members or Police Officers, they were very welcome to remain after the meeting to speak with the appropriate people.

Conclusion of the Meeting

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Chairman, Alderman M Henderson, thanked those present for attending. He extended particular thanks to Ballinderry Church of Ireland for allowing the premises to be used for the meeting and to Mr O'Brien for attending and giving his presentation.

There being no further business, the meeting was terminated at 8.10 pm.

Chairman