

Notes from Police Forum Meetings

18th October 2022

Cllr Plim (BoSTC); Cllr Drayson (BoSTC/RDC/PCC panel); Police Inspector Olivia Carroll (Sussex Police); Police District Commander Jay Mendes (Sussex Police); Merv Dadd (Police Crime Commissioner Office); Cllr Brailsford (BoSTC); Mandy Jameson (Police Crime Commissioner Office); John Jennings (Royal British Legion); Trevor Leggo (Sussex Associations of Local Councils); Teresa Stanbridge (Resident); Cllr Oliver (RDC)

Summary of issues raised at morning session

West Bexhill

Summary of Issues currently impacting quality of life in West Bexhill

- Recreational drugs and perceived knock-on effects. Cannabis is smelt in the town regularly and gives impression of crime in the area.
- Vaping equipment is being used for drugs
- Polegrove Sports Ground vandalism, youths gathering on weekend evenings. There have been videos of vandalism taking place posted on Facebook. What actions are being taken to stop this?
- Graffiti in the town, especially along the sea front. The promenade glass panel has been continually smashed and has now not been replaced – this is giving in to the vandals.
- Anglo-Continental Street market – episodes of youths in gangs causing problems for market holders. Was told by Police that the CCTV is not very clear and doesn't work properly.
- Vandalism is one of the top concerns of members from Little Common. Crime rate in Bexhill is lower than Hastings and Brighton, it either has minor or major problems...we don't get the everyday problems that other large towns do.
- Bus shelter by Cooden Beach station shattered recently and this is out of the ordinary.
- The 'Rec' at Green Lane is a target for vandalism.
- Standard of driving on link road is a concern and the road is made dangerous by reckless overtaking.
- Change in demographic in Bexhill, more families. Is the relationship to crime coinciding with the end of lockdown/school holidays/different times of the year?
- People are more mobile now; we live in Bexhill but go out into surrounding areas for socialising or work. Nightlife in Bexhill is not a thriving industry, West Bexhill is predominantly residential.
- Herbrand Walk has more rural issues. Perception of crime is our biggest fear. The fear of what might happen. Need ownership of areas by the people themselves. Need to hear good news stories of policing to reassure. Give residents the feeling of safety.
- By signing up to Sussex Alerts and this will give you details of what is happening in your area. [Home Page - Sussex Alerts](#)

Police responses:

- Bexhill is a safe place to live, criminal damage is an issue but it's easier to wear a mask or hide identity on CCTV so it can be difficult to identify offenders.
- Sussex Police promote good news stories on its website and social media. We support Speedwatch in Bexhill and have done two operations recently and this was publicised. 60 cars had been stopped on Cooden Drive recently, is this known? If that message isn't getting across, we need to address this. We changed our times for traffic enforcement to meet residents' requests, to stop 60 vehicles is good. We are doing good work, but it sounds like it's not reaching communities.
- In Sussex, we only have one engagement officer and would have to consider using newspaper reporting for all the districts. Might not be possible with current resources.

Town Council Powers

- The town council has the power by statute to deliver road safety initiatives if the statistics justify it.
- The town council is organising highways meetings with East Sussex County Council and can install safety measures if ESCC do not have the budget to do this.

Speeding Traffic

- Speedwatch is back up and running and we have received good feedback from the coordinator. Officers to take a more robust approach to any abuse towards Speedwatch volunteers.
- Speedwatch offenders are dealt with on the spot with fines if Police are in attendance. If the Police are not in attendance a letter is sent, when a second letter is received the offender is prosecuted. Road policing unit will work more actively with Speedwatch. There isn't a high rate of collision/injury on Cooden Drive,
- Chief Constable is national lead for speed and road safety. We patrol and base out of Bexhill, so Bexhill gets a very good coverage from roads policing.
- High number of people killed and seriously injured on the roads...if we had that number of people murdered or shot, we'd be outraged. People are being reckless, taking drugs, it's not just speeding. Need a community approach, not just for the Police. Safer Sussex Road Partnership website has a lot of data and response is driven by the data.

Visible Policing

- There is an increased level of visible policing
- Almost every day we see Police. We don't just want them passing, we need Police officers on their feet. People want Police on the ground
- Unless they are travelling to or from somewhere, officers must be on foot in areas they are covering. This is a vast number of roads in some areas. The Police

document engagement statistics, in last two months for the whole of Rother officers have been to every single ward and parish.

- For Bexhill, Police have undertaken 154 patrols averaged out at 45 mins per session.
- PCSOs and PCs are spending 45 minutes at a time in the ward area. 67% of wards in Bexhill have had some patrol activity in the last week. We are there.
- Police use technology and put staff where the demand is, communities must tell the Police where these issues are. Issues must be reported.
- People don't report as they think there's no point.
- Difficult to get message to everyone. Communications always gets criticism because you can never reach everyone. Need some equivalents to big splash bad news. Reporting to 101 needs to be improved.
- On Twitter, Essex road policing publishes daily updates of vehicles stopped – could we do something like this?
- PCSOs and PCs locally will post directly onto Twitter more so than Facebook. District engagement officer role is to encourage staff to highlight good news.
- Some crime takes some time to solve, intelligent gathering and officers do have a good understanding of the issues and the Police are aware of all the issues that have been raised.

CCTV

- CCTV is either a hit or a miss. Offenders know how to cover faces and cover lenses.
- It's only one tactic, it does help sometimes.
- Images are circulated to officers; this is good for recognising offenders.
- When requested images it isn't always quick from RDC.

Drugs

- There's a drug problem nationally, Police's biggest concern is county lines dealing, crack and heroin, class A drugs.
- Bexhill has had county lines issue before, but they stand out so much that it can be addressed immediately.
- Very little info about crack and heroin in Bexhill, mainly in Hastings.
- On street dealing is practically nil in Bexhill. It's not an attractive area for drug dealing.
- A lot of people smoke cannabis and we do have a local drug problem around Sidley and St Stephens, Police are working on it.
- Generalised smell of cannabis is a problem, nationally it's been allowed, its entrenched in a social aspect, Police are aware of it but can only deal with so much.
- Can't stop and search on smell alone. Society has changed, it's more acceptable to smoke cannabis.
- People are either tolerant or anti. It's still illegal but it's impossible to go around policing the smell of it.

Working with young people

- Police do have a cadet force, but due to demand they couldn't manage it and are trying to get it up and running again.
- Police are moving back into community policing and engaging with schools and colleges.
- Over next six months will get back into a better position with youth cadet force, need the staff available to do it.
- Must be administered by the Police as the officers have to go through another step of vetting and training.
- We have had non-serving officers be volunteers, but the core lead should be a Police staff member.
- An example of a youth being identified on CCTV and a young person who knew the youth and wouldn't identify them because of the fear of reprisal. How do you persuade teenagers that it's safe?
- Where Police get clips of CCTV that's where they step in and use neighbourhood youth officers.
- Safeguarding leads in schools identify these youths.
- PCSOs are going back into primary schools to build up engagement and rapport.
- Crimestoppers is anonymous.
- Schools are much better places now, very few cases of violence or harm in schools no compared to previous generations. The Police Crime Commissioner will hold some group conversations with youth. Used to have a youth commission, PCC wants to do that again.

Reporting Crimes and General

- People not reporting crime is an issue. The PCC and Police have been advertising and trying to show people it is worth it. 101 turnaround last report was 8 minutes.
- Perception is that too much paperwork to arrest suspects.
- Groups of young people are intimidating users of the parks, what role does the parents play in this.
- Electric Scooters are a problem.
- Expectation is that they are being seized and being dealt with.
- We can't control parenting; Police can't enforce parents but can manage the risks around that child. We had had success in this field in joint agency working.
- The Police need more time to fight crime. Mental health is one of the biggest factors that affects policing.
- One Touch Reporting trial has worked with Co-Op – reducing the reporting time per incident for shoplifting and abuse on staff – part of the improvements and the Police will share this data soon.

Central and East Bexhill

2pm

Cllr Plim (BoSTC); Police Inspector Olivia Carroll (Sussex Police); Police District Commander Jay Mendes (Sussex Police); Merv Dadd (Police Crime Commissioner Office); Cllr Baldry (BoSTC); Mandy Jameson (Police Crime Commissioner Office); Simon Allen (Bexhill Heritage); Hazel Timpe (RDC); Carole Cook (Wave Arts); Christine Bayliss (RDC); John Nee (Bexhill Senior Citizens Club); Trevor Leggo (Sussex Associations of Local Councils); Linda Seddon (Heart of Sidley)

Summary of Issues currently impacting quality of life in East Bexhill

- Fear of damage to the work that Bexhill Heritage do. People are so pleased to see the bandstand being brought back to life, 80% of the way through the project but fearful that the work will be damaged.
- Shelter No3 has already been damaged with tools and graffiti. Probably no more than 10 young people causing issues, in gangs. Cautions and youth offending teams could be the answer – to find out why they are doing this rather than prosecutions.
- If the Police know who they are, how do we engage with them? Rarely catch them in the act but want to prevent it happening. If they had a relationship with the people doing the work, they might not cause the damage. They might have problems and need support.
- Fellowship of St Nicholas runs a youth club at Polegrove to address those issues. The group no longer meets there.
- 13–15-year-olds seems to be a problem across the county.
- A lot of mindless vandalism. Seeing that everywhere, not just Bexhill or Rother. Answer not necessarily about prosecutions. Missing a group that aren't prolific offenders that aren't violent.
- Local perception is that nothing happens. Makes young people a little more inclined to step out of line. The opinions 'it won't happen to me'. Locals less willing to report as they think it won't be acted on. Rumour is that if you ring at 11.30pm nothing will happen. Local reassurance that something will happen for both reporters and young people would help. Need greater awareness that their schools or parents will be told.
- If there a pattern of times this is happening the Police could probably run an operation to address, it.
- Perception - what is happening? PCSOs will stop and engage with young people. They aren't necessarily doing anything wrong.
- They are breaking a bylaw in the park.
- When the officer is there, they aren't committing the crime, it's challenging to pre-empt or prevent something happening. There is a lot of coverage at Egerton Park, much further beyond where we were years ago. What does that positive messaging look like?
- What's difference between community policing team or response team? – is it them doing the patrol in the park?

- The response teamwork out of Hastings and that is where the demand is and respond to 999 calls. At Battle 3 sergeants, 6 PCs and 14-15 PCSOs cover the whole of Rother.
- Egerton Park is patrolled every day.
- It's about using our officers where the demand is. The response teams are focused on threat, risk, and harm. Driven by the call operators grading dependent on threat. PCSOs purely around community policing. Special Constables must work 16 hours per month, and we only have 4 spread to response teams.

Community Engagement

- Lack of provision for younger age group. Is there something in Bexhill that we can work together to provide a provision for that age group.
- Improve engagement with the Neighbourhood watch groups.
- Community Safety Partnerships meetings should have regular slots for Neighbourhood Watch to come along.
- The PCC can share a list of NW groups.

Drugs

- Drug and alcohol misuse following lockdown – large cohort of young people that have been de-socialised that will need help.
- Bexhill College has a correlation between poor attendance and the group that are causing issues.
- Work is led by demand and the data – if it's not reported the Police can't react.
- Not everything that is reported can be dealt with quickly, intelligence gathering is often required.
- There is a contact panel to encourage reporting and making the right contact. The myth about 101 answering times needs to be addressed...it is down to 6 minutes.
- PCC wants to encourage people to report issues, they are looking for imaginative partnership groups.
- Preventative measures are the answer – how do we create something that has commitment from both sides. There won't be any more Police resources. All need to work together creating something to benefit.

Engaging with young people

- Military partnership in East Sussex uniformed youth organisations can't recruit – it's not 'cool'; How do we turn it into a cool activity.
- Started project in Hastings prior to Covid about targeting younger children, around giving them one on one time in a music studio, produce etc. What is Wave Arts - we don't know if you could help us.
- Wavearts have gone into schools, talked about graffiti – looked at as cool – try and change the culture of that. Changing perceptions will be a long term, there's normally something else going on.
- Skatepark – all the tables and benches have been graffitied.

- It's gangs that are tagging, tags get bigger and its more obvious. Trying to get in with the gangs to understand why and give them opportunities. Change the culture. It got worse in Covid because no one was out. Age group not just children, some are adults.
- One of the biggest success stories is Sidley Skate Park. Council said it would be all knives and drugs...overall it's been a massive success story and the community are using it. Feedback is they want the lights on longer.
- Police are doing that in Rye; we have the Tilling Green estate – socially deprived area – done leaflet drops and no response. Over half term we are holding a fun day with Optivo, RNLI, and local businesses to engage with the residents on the estate and build up intelligence and trust and understanding. If this could be replicated – could do that through CSP. The fire service is coming to give out advice during a difficult winter. Banks are coming to talk about support for families. Rye Town Council is supporting
- There was a day organised for this year, but it was cancelled. Can work with the
- If you give people opportunities to talk.
- To get the confidence of people, we've got to tell the good news story. On the PCC website you can put your postcode in and there's a list of everything that's going on in your area.
- It's about people's expectations, for that person going through an incident it's a major thing but for the Police it may be minor. Police are as frustrated as residents are, but they must go on the basis of threat, risk, and harm. All down to interaction when you report it. You must add the human element to it, you may have a controller that isn't fully supportive. It's about being listened to and being cared for.
- The Police have a meeting every week about violence against women and girls and move our resourcing to deal with that. Figures reported could be historic reports, that could be domestic abuse, we are fully aware of these, and our dashboard gives you a heat map of timings of crimes.
- Every day we have a meeting to discuss all incidents of note. So, if we saw a trend, we would resource it and start analysing it. We pick up crime trends quickly. It's quite rare that we would miss anything
- There are no issues being raised here that we weren't aware of. Working in partnership with housing associations etc is key. Some things we can't share. Trying to resolve the bigger picture.

What has changed?

- Not as many gangs of kids this year. Reports of issues have reduced.
- PCSOs are seen and are speaking to people.
- More kids drinking on the street. Underage drinking in town and going into park.
- We've seen an increase in patrols in Egerton Park. It needs to be consistent. The number of ASB incidents have improved.
- How you report intelligence hasn't improved...issues on website when try and report intelligence.
- If the groups can be referred to Wave Arts, we can try and find out what the underlying issues are.

- Importance of the town council as a lobbying body and engagement for the Police. A parish office creates an intermediary. The new town council shop will be key.
- Perception is that policing is emasculated. We have seen an improvement in the nuisance issues created by youngsters.
- Galley Hill has improved. Greatest problem is noisy exhaust pipes. Nitrous Oxide tubes. Have seen Police stopping people up there.
- Regulations may change on selling of nitrous oxide, the law will change. Four forces trialling acoustic cameras.
- Senior citizens said lack of visible of policing – want more bobby on the beat and feeling unsafe in the evenings. Kids hanging out at Iceland, bus rank. Car keying incidents.
- Still have the fear of crime. The Police are criticised for all PR...putting something positive about the complaints happening and say what they are doing about it might help.
- The PCSO talk at the Senior Citizens club was successful, but priorities are determined by the community, so Police can't promise talks in patrol plan but to provide reassurance they will look at doing this.
- District Engagement Officer – can they be more active in the community? They are responsible to working to media and comms department. Photos as being encouraged and the messaging behind it.
- The Police are trying to bring all comms together, but that needs to be managed by the comms department.

ACTIONS:

- 1) Town council to set up quarterly parish engagement meetings with Sussex Police.
- 2) Town council interested in assisting with cadet force
- 3) ESLAC can provide more links and information to the town council regarding improving and installing CCTV.
- 4) The town council could work with youth groups to improve engagement.
- 5) Town council to consider organising community fun day at Skate Park.