

Notes of a community meeting held on 1st December 2018 between Willingham residents, police and elected representatives (the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Lucy Fraser MP QC, District and County Councillors).

1. Hosted by Willingham Parish Council, 147 members of the public attended. Phil King, Chair of the Parish Council, chaired the meeting.
2. Bill Handley (District Councillor, South Cambridgeshire District Council) set the scene for the meeting. He noted that there had been a developing problem of violent crime, low risk criminality and anti-social behaviour (ASB) in Willingham and that villagers were frustrated by an apparent lack of a timely and appropriate police response to episodes of perceived brazen behaviour and disregard for the well-being of others. Whilst there had been a visible scaling up of police activity it was felt that criminality continued, albeit at a lower level. He acknowledged that the police operated in difficult professional circumstances due to funding constraints but indicated a need for the police to have the tools and resources needed to make timely responses to village concerns.
3. Sergeant P Priestley (Support Sergeant, South Cambridgeshire Neighbourhoods Team) reported on the outcomes of police activity since September 2018. Firstly, he congratulated the village on the current 'fantastic level of engagement' with the police. Secondly, he responded to the five specific priorities identified at the community meeting held in September:
 - *Are some villagers policed to separate standards than others? Should a more robust response be actioned?* Sergeant Priestley noted that the individual named in this allegation was recently convicted of burglary and was now serving a custodial sentence.
 - *Have reports to the police of ASB reduced? Are ASB reports dealt with better?* Sergeant Priestley suggested that a reduction in ASB reports, by 44%, from one every 3 days to one every 5 days should be acknowledged. This was due to the provision of additional resource in the village. Further plans to address this issue will involve co-ordinated activity with specialist teams.
 - *Have Road Safety concerns been addressed?* It was reported that the Roads Policing Unit had seized seven vehicles as a result of reports of vehicle related ASB. There had been no recent reports of this activity.
 - *Was victim and witness updating improving?* Sergeant Priestley congratulated two village residents for their use of social media to raise awareness and attempts to revive the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. These had contributed to the successes of Operations Hawksbury and Redford. The former had involved the arrest and conviction of 10 offenders who had committed an estimated 200 'ram raid' crimes, valued at over £2 million, in the region. The latter had involved building intelligence to secure warrants for action at Black Pit Drove. The warrant execution involved liaison with the RSCPCA and resulted in the seizure of 102 dogs, the recovery of stolen property and five arrests. Sergeant Priestley had been disheartened by some negative comment on social media with respect to the ongoing welfare of the seized dogs which he wished to rebut.
 - *Were local elected officials visible?* It was pointed out that the Cambridgeshire Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) and local MP were in attendance.

Sergeant Priestley concluded by noting that the recent police activity represented a 'down payment' on re-invigorating the police relationship with Willingham residents. As outcomes improved a 'tapered' withdrawal of resources might be anticipated during 2019.

4. Jason Ablewhite (PCC) provided a strategic context. He noted that despite budgetary constraints there had been no cuts in frontline policing in the County. Increased demand on police resource was being created by the county's growing population, the changing emphasis of criminality, the development of cyber related crime and a default responsibility for community mental health. A balanced budget had been secured, partly through regional inter-constabulary liaison. He wanted villagers to work with the police by reporting incidents and feeling confident that these reports would not be ignored.
5. Lucy Frazer noted that no community should live in fear and thanked Willingham for its collaborative approach. The police should be congratulated on their professionalism and it should be recognised that crime prevention is as important as its resolution. Resource will inevitably be focused on national priorities such as knife crime and terrorism. In the national context she was liaising with the PCC to secure as positive an outcome as possible from the new Spending Review.
6. Questions from the audience followed:
 - The Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinator reported on a developing commitment to re-introduce this into Willingham. The PCC suggested that he should contact the police county volunteer co-ordinator for ongoing support in this initiative and that resources were also available to support the introduction of Speedwatch.
 - In response to a query about aspects of rural farm based crime and the evidence requirements needed for a prosecution it was noted that the activities of the Rural Crime Action Team were well received by representatives of the farming community. Opportunities for further collaboration remained. It was also pointed out that the Crown Prosecution Service had to apply an evidential threshold in bring forward prosecutions.
 - Would there be further action taken at Black Pit Drove? It was pointed out that action to close this illegal encampment was a civil matter and the police would only intervene in cases of criminality, as had happened during Operation Redford. It
 - A Saxon Way resident reported that she had received no satisfactory feedback following the chase of a car, presumed stolen, by the police from Long Lane, past the medical practice and across a communal green into Saxon Way. Her daughter had narrowly escaped injury. An apology was offered by the police if expectations had not been met and she was asked to receive further feedback at the end of the meeting.
 - An Over resident was concerned that the increased resource given to Willingham had resulted in increased crime in Over. In her experience she had made five 999 calls since July 2018 and that the police had attended on only one occasion. It was noted that existing police resource had to be shared.
 - A resident proposed the need to develop a dialogue with law abiding members of the traveller community resident in Willingham. Otherwise there was the risk of creating unnecessary division within the village.
 - A question was asked about the planned response to policing Northstowe. The PCC noted that this was another example of the demands generated by population growth in the county. He reported that the Parkside Station would be re-sited to a new site on the north Cambridge boundary to allow improved responses to criminal activity. Current infrastructure such as the unused Fire Control Centre in Waterbeach were not big enough and did not allow for prompt response times.

- A resident asked whether a crime incident number was automatically issued following a report. It was confirmed that this was the case. Sergeant Priestley asked that this resident's additional concerns about criminal activity, which had resulted in her 'not feeling safe' in her house, be discussed after the meeting.
 - A relative lack of emphasis on deterrence, through a greater police presence, with a preference for prevention was suggested. The lack of police presence had resulted in the loss of one of the village's cash machines. Sergeant Priestley reiterated that whilst a visible presence works further reductions in ASB reports would be needed before an acceptable level was achieved. The PCC noted that organised criminality would not be prevented by a police presence and that large increases in the policing element of the community charge would be required to fund an increased police presence in the county's rural areas.
 - A final question asked for clarification of how individual villagers could assist. Volunteering for Neighbourhood Watch was suggested.
7. In summing up the PCC urged the need to work together and please report criminality. Lucy Fraser re-iterated that funding uplifts are happening nationally and that she was always happy to help with local concerns and support the fantastic efforts of the police.
 8. The meeting closed at 6.00 p.m.

Ray Croucher 02/December/2018
