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Essex Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner

Epping Forest District Public meeting

Monday 9th December 2024

Thornwood Village Hall, North Weald Bassett, Thornwood, Epping CM16 6NB

**Panel Members**

PFCC Roger Hirst

Ch/Insp Terry Fisher Essex Police

Mark Eaglestone, Group Manager ECRES

Caroline Wiggins Directorate Specialist – Technical Services, EFDC

Melissa Faux Epping Forest District CSP

**Questions from the audience**

Q – Cherry McCreedie Epping Town Mayor - speeding is a huge issue in Epping. Had spoken to RH about getting something done and thought it was time to start looking at what could be implemented collaboratively with partners.

RH – This was being progressed as had met with individual the previous week and was looking to get a meeting in the diary with local councillors to discuss what measures could be implemented.

Q – A while back there was a charity event when fire engine went down the high street. Is there a chance we can do that again?

ME – yes happy to speak to the person after the meeting and look at how the fire service can support charities locally.

Q – A resident received a weekly newsletter via email from Essex Police and PFCC which they found useful and informative. Noted that there was drug dealing happening in the area and that violence and sexual offences were quite high and was concerned as to why.

RH –agreed violence and sexual offences were an issue. A lot was being done to tackle ASB and the Safer Streets fund overseen by the PFCC had been putting in a lot of funding by working with council and police and partners and offences were coming down. Vehicle theft was soaring post Covid as criminal gangs worked out how to steal cars to order, particularly Range Rovers and Ford Fiestas. Working with manufacturers and police and can see it starting to come down. Rape and serious sexual assault posed a different challenge as it is more difficult work out how to stop than other types of crime. There were perpetrator programmes in place which helps break the cycle of sexual violence and abuse and a lot was being done in the nighttime economy to make people safer but more needed to be done.

TF –dealing is an issue, there are county lines operating in our areas. We have a zero-tolerance approach and will deal with drug dealers, so important that the public keep reporting. Can report to Essex Police or Crimestoppers if want to be anonymous. Violence and sexual offences can look alarming but the increase in figures is partially down to the work we have done around VAWG, misogyny, predatory behaviour etc. In the past these types of crime were not recorded but they rightly are now.

It was noted that it was important to use Commonplace which is an online tool where residents can identify hotspots and places where they don’t feel safe. <https://essexcommsafety.commonplace.is/en-GB/map/share-your-views-map>

Q – A resident was shocked to read in the paper about the government funding cuts that will have to be made to police. What is the PFCC doing about it?

RH – was not sure this was what the new government want. The Home Sec was clear about having more police, but the government have provided a statement about the budget which is below what is required to fund police, and which also had to account for the police pay increase. Both services were making efficiency savings but have already had to call a halt to improvements such as shared fleet workshop. The proposed Precept increase for 2025/26 will only cover pay increase. Had written again to the Home Secretary outlining the budget pressure. Other PCCs are doing the same thing. Thinks the government have got the figures wrong and need to go away and look at them again. Where things stood crime is coming down, fires are coming down and if we cut numbers again, we will reverse this trend.

Q – Reporting of sexual harassment – how do you get someone who is frightened and afraid of repercussions to come and report?

TF – police and partner agencies work hard to increase confidence and attend 1000s of incidents each year. Sadly, people can have a negative experience and where police get it wrong, we must be honest and look at where we went wrong and how we can act better. Need to be held to account. Message is, please report it. Can go through other agencies if you don’t want to report to police such as Compass <https://www.essexcompass.org.uk/>

RH – PFCC funds independent Sexual Violence councillors who are independent of police and who victims can report to but there is always more to be done to encourage confidence and was always looking at ways to improve.

Q - the state of pavements in Thornwood Common is dangerous. Pavement driving is an issue where cars are going up the pavements and in places like Upland Road where cars ignore speed traffic calming measures and pull into path of oncoming figures. Paths are narrow and traffic speed is so high, pedestrians will get hurt. Is it possible to have a road safety summit?

TF there is some grounds for police, council and highways to link in and see how we can improve the infrastructure as by the photos supplied it was difficult to see where the pavement is. Would like to take it away and look at what can be done. Urged public to keep reporting issues so resources can be allocated.

Q – Put in a freedom of information request to the fire and rescue service but had not received an acknowledgement. Would be nice to get one.

Q – a resident and former fire and rescue employee asked for thanks to be passed on to James Durrant at ECFRS on the help he has given around pensions.

RH – appreciate the feedback and would be very happy to pass feedback to James.

ME – will ask corporate comms why got nothing back

Q - The on-call station Waltham Abbey had been off the run. Is it a problem with recruiting? Would be nice to see availability of other stations in the area.

A – ME there is an issue with firefighters who are on sick leave which is an issue, but retention is good at the moment. We use dynamic deployment to look at where we will have a dip, and we draft in other appliances to cover that area.

Q – could there be a campaign around visibility for pedestrians and cyclists as the area is very dark

Could the police give any figures about the numbers of people injured by hitting bollards as there is nothing to show the bollard is there as has no reflectors and no signs or lights.

TF – not aware of the area being a place of concern. It’s more mobile phones and speeding. Could make an FOI and find out to get that information.

Q – Shoplifting in Epping increased by 37%. What is being done? Not just big traders there are small traders being affected.

TF – Police were using a very targeted approach as retail crime is an issue in Epping. One of the biggest problems was getting retailers to report so police could understand the extent of the issue. All reports led to intelligence building and to extra resources. This allowed for the targeting of repeat offenders, crime gangs by using local intel and hotspots.

Q – Deterioration in street furniture is an issue. Most signage didn’t have a light on or were so faded they weren’t visible. Highways don’t do anything. Roundabouts and signage are very poor and only a matter of time before there were accidents.

RH – take that on board and will raise it with Highways. Clearly an issue in this area. Will pass that on to appropriate authorities.

Q – The Police Dispatch newsletters often have spelling errors.

GO – will pass that on to Essex Police media team

Q – going back to shoplifting, it is an issue, and the business owner had been in touch with Sgt Christian Denning from Essex Police Business Crime Team, who is coming to Epping to talk about shop lifting.

TF -asked if she could pass on the time and date so can make sure sergeant also goes along.

Q- Getting complaints along Centre Drive that people are speeding. Any plans to implement 20mph? Was supposed to be brought in back in 2020 but think it may have been ditched.

CW – Will double check and come back as not sure.

Q – What is the procedure for reporting lost property?

TF - Can use police stations or some councils will help

Q – Cottis Lane car park still an issue is it time we change our approach to this as people are not reporting crime anymore. Should police be going after the operators of carpark as they are not managing it correctly.

TF – Many residents are fed up with the ongoing issues of ASB. Community policing team have carried out several patrols – 48 targeted patrols since June. Recently had 2 individuals appear in court an have 7 with the CPS. Are working with council and landowners to get some measures put in place to dissuade people from gathering and causing ASB and anti-social driving.

Q – The ASB is unacceptable. 80 year old lady had her window smashed recently and was very shaken.

TF – asked to speak to audience member after the meeting.

Q – Small crimes are just not being reported by victims as they don’t think police will do anything. What can be done to get people to report?

RH - Part is around communication as if we tell people that perpetrators are being arrested and charged then it may encourage victims to come forward. Do need to do more to build that confidence by getting the message out. We care about the small stuff as often it’s done by repeat offenders. Arrested 1500 shoplifters this year which is a big increase.

TF – Need to know about these crimes but can appreciate they can find the reporting a bit laborious. Policing must evolve with the crimes. More likely to be a victim of crime online than in the high street but agree that visibility is important so people can feel more confident in reporting. Cops must be deployed where the crimes are reporting.

Q – Do we have an issue with immigrants in Essex?

A – There is a large asylum camp in Wethersfield but in terms of affecting local neighbourhood, no, overall, there isn’t an issue. Essex Police have put a lot into building relationships with ethnic communities in the county and believes that is why there wasn’t any riots over the summer.

Q – can police put out some good news items to community magazines, as have some good figures so let Epping people know what’s happening and include crime prevention advice.

TF - would have officer look at how we can share good news stories.