

## **CONSULTATIVE MEETING ON POLICING IN SHEFFIELD 10**

### **CROOKES SOCIAL CLUB**

**27/03/19**

(Note: This follows a first local meeting, in Crosspool on 15/01/19)

#### **Present:**

Representing Sheffield Council: Cnclr Anne Murphy [Chair]

Representing the Central and North-West Neighbourhood Policing Group: Acting Insp. Adam Wood; PCSO Pam Thompson; PCSO Phil Whittaker

Representing the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme: Roger Hart (Dore, Totley and Bradway)

Around 20 members of the public from Broomhill, Crookes, Crosspool, Ecclesall, Endcliffe, Fulwood, Lodge Moor, Nether Green and the city centre.

#### **Introduction**

Cnclr Murphy explained that this meeting was one of a number aimed at encouraging people to express their concerns about current increases in local crime and to make direct contact with community police officers.

Given the recent reduction in police numbers, it is important for individuals to co-operate to prevent neighbourhood crime, for example by keeping an eye out for neighbours exposing their properties to crime by leaving windows open. In such cases, and for general security, neighbours should exchange contact details.

She further advised that it is possible to get Neighbourhood Watch ambassadors to vet the security of premises.

She then invited questions and observations from the floor.

#### **Questions from the floor/Responses from representatives**

It was clear that a large number of speakers had, directly or indirectly, been badly affected by crime. The points raised were:

(Note: in the following, questions and responses have been consolidated according to issue.)

- 1) **(Two questioners)** The validity of the popular perception of a significant rise in crime. *Is this over-blown, in particular by social media?*

**Act. Insp. Wood** replied that, though the picture is obscured by frequent changes in the recording of crime, these changes have improved accuracy and there is an authentic increase in recorded crime. However, media and social media can increase the fear and perception of crime, while data show that crime levels are still lower than those of 20-30 years ago. All media should encourage people to care for each other, not panic them.

**PCSO Whittaker** added that another problem with social media is that they allow people to comment on incidents without knowing all relevant facts. This leads to a proliferation of pure rumour.

**From the floor:** Yes, indeed; and that this behaviour may have two negative consequences: that the identification and vilification of suspected offenders leads to judicial dismissal of any case against them; or that people become used to such criminal acts and dismiss them as trivial or simply juvenile. News of the arrest of offenders is heartening, but could perhaps be suppressed until after conviction.

**Act. Insp. Wood** observed that crime differs from area to area. In Sheffield, Crookes and Crosspool are hotspots for burglary, in particular opportunistic, 'sneak-in', burglary, and vehicle crime. It is known that a few individuals commit many crimes.

'Sneak-in' burglary in Crookes is encouraged by a high student-population. Student properties are targeted because of their multiple-occupancy and concentration of high-value goods.

Although the Neighbourhood Policy Group has other targets, for example organised drug-based crime in Broomhall and Upperthorpe, it is tackling burglary within a general (pan-Sheffield) operation: 'Operation Furnace', which is currently enjoying notable success.

With regard to police use of social media, though there are strict guidelines these keep changing, and there are indeed dangers in the potential identification of offenders. As far as public use of social media is concerned, this is a good way of 'venting' concerns and information to the police, and is to be encouraged.

**Cnclr Murphy** made the point that students are characteristically lax about security, especially at the beginning and the end of the academic year as they move in and out of rented accommodation. This causes annual spikes in 'sneak-in' crime.

**Act. Insp. Wood** added that the police have identified a developing problem from summer onwards as students move their belongings into properties and then leave Sheffield for the rest of the vacation. They are therefore now giving students crime prevention advice before September.

**Act. Insp. Wood** and **PCSO Thompson** pointed out that the police and the two Sheffield universities are establishing schemes for special police advisors to talk to students about security in Freshers' Week, and to deal with the problem of vacation-theft.

**PCSO Thompson** added that she and her colleagues regularly monitor student-streets and properties for weaknesses in security, and do their best to secure these weaknesses and to chat to students about them.

**A floor speaker** and **Cnclr Murphy** expressed approval of such monitoring.

2. **(Three questioners)** The need to be frank about local crime, to make communities more aware. *Shouldn't the police concede that not all burglary is opportunist and that there is, in fact, a significant level of organised, potentially dangerous – because it targets vulnerable people -- theft in the area?* One questioner referred to a specific case in Lodge Moor, and also observed a spike in other violent crime, such as ram-raiding, in this general area. Another proposed that in some areas burglary by 'lock-snapping', i.e. by breaking Eurolocks, is more prevalent than that by 'sneak-in', and that appropriate advice and preventative action could solve this quickly and cheaply.

**Act. Insp. Wood** replied that lock-snapping is not really prevalent in the area. The main local problem remains 'sneak-in' theft, especially in Crookes as a result of its large student population. Although there are targeted break-ins, they are much fewer in number. There is organised crime, the targeting of which is a police priority, but they are tackling burglary by co-ordinating local officers, response-teams, and detective-teams in 'Operation Furnace', already mentioned, and Operation 'K-Hello'; and they give general advice on crime-prevention. Again, public co-operation in the prevention of local crime, encouraged by meetings such as this, is vital.

He agreed that in the past there had been deficiencies in the way the police communicated with the public, and emphasised that these are currently being addressed.

**Cnclr Murphy** strongly agreed with the need for such co-operation given cuts in police numbers, the consequent thin spreading of officers, and the likelihood of the few available being diverted to combat other offences in other areas, for example to fight knife-crime.

3. Whether the cuts in police numbers are entirely to blame. *Doesn't such behaviour as the ignoring of burglar-alarms indicate that people are also now less likely to help each other?*

**Cnclr Murphy** agreed and emphasised the need for greater co-operation.

4. **(Two questioners)** That a hugely important issue is one of public confidence. Students come and go and seem to care little about crime, even when they are directly affected. Personal experience of burglary can shatter a family's self-confidence and lead to a home becoming a prison. *Shouldn't the police's paramount aim simply be to ensure that local residents feel safe in their own homes?*

**Act. Insp. Wood** expressed regret and sympathy for such misfortune and conceded that previous police reaction and advice may have been misguided. Despite the cuts, the police are taking a different and hopefully better course.

With regard to security-measures, CCTV is not essential but is likely to provide the best deterrence/means of identifying and punishing offenders. Even a fake camera helps.

**Cnclr Murphy** also expressed sympathy, and emphasised that this showed the need for communities to work together. She suggested that permanent residents make an effort to get to know transitory students and arrange mutual security.

5. **(Three questioners)** *Why not deter crime by simply increasing the visible police presence, or through police help in the bulk-buying of CCTV? What is the current position about the erection of CCTV in the Crosspool shopping-precinct. Could members of the public volunteer as police auxiliaries?*

**Act. Insp. Wood** said that increasing random, untargeted foot patrols in any area is not the best use of the reduced resources at his disposal. Study shows that although random patrolling may reduce the opportunities for crime, it does not significantly increase the public's feeling of security since most people will not actually see the officers involved. It is better to use his small force (max. 5 PCs and 12 PCSOs) to target identified crime [hot-spots](#).

The provision of CCTV is a community, not a police, matter.

**Cnclr Murphy** added that the Crosspool scheme is currently progressing on the understanding that: i) though the apparatus will be a local cost, purchase through the Council exempt it from remove VAT; ii) Amey will erect and operate it.

**Act. Insp. Wood** and **PCSO Thompson** explained that there were no volunteer-places as such in the police service, though members of the public could apply to be special constables.

#### **Further action: communication**

After questions and responses, **Cnclr Murphy** and **PCSO Thompson** drew attention to councillors' surgeries and police 'meet and greet' sessions as a way for people to raise their concerns about policing. **Act. Insp. Wood** encouraged communication through email and Facebook.

## **Neighbourhood Watch**

After a general expression of appreciation to the police officers present for their work and attendance at the meeting, **Roger Hart** encouraged people to join the Neighbourhood Watch scheme

He outlined the need for the scheme, and gave instances of how local knowledge, alertness and observation can both prevent crime and help the police to bring offenders to justice.

He explained the scheme's current street, and how residents can set up their own local organisation.

The main requirement is people. The Sheffield lead police officer is **Superintendent Neil Thomas**. The acting ward co-ordinator is **Cnclr Murphy**, to whom enquiries should be made, though he, too, is also very willing to take questions.

He also offered specific tips on security, in particular the need for people to ensure that they have good – non-Euro – locks. and to consider fitting strong 'composite' doors. Residents should also take care as to who knows that they will be away from their properties at any particular time.

**END**

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