

MINUTES of the Extraordinary Meeting of the HARWICH TOWN COUNCIL
 held at
The Guildhall, Church Street, Harwich
 on **Wednesday 23rd September 2015 at 7.00pm**

Present:	Councillors Ashley, B Brown, Calver, Carr, Fay, Fowler, I Henderson, J Henderson, Powell and Smith
In the Chair:	Councillor McLeod
Clerk:	Ms Lucy Ballard
Also present:	2 members of the public, 1 member of the press, PCC Nick Alston and District Commander Russ Cole

The Chairman agreed to considered a request from the Indoor Bowls club as an emergency item due to the timeframes involved.

075/15	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u> Cllrs J Brown, Erskine, Morrison and Todd
076/15	<u>DECLARATIONS OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS</u> None
077/15	<u>HARWICH INDOOR BOWLS CLUB</u> Members considered a request from the local indoor bowls club for an endorsement by way of a letter of support from the Council, to accompany a grant funding application the club is making to enable them to replace the lighting on their premises, which is now not complaint with current regulations. RESOLVED: To send a letter of support to the Indoor Bowls Club.
078/15	<u>POLICE CRIME COMMISSIONER BRIEFING</u> Mr Nick Alston, Police and Crime Commissioner thanked members for engaging with him over the last 3 years and explained how he welcomed the Council's concerns to which he gives great consideration. He said liaising with the MP helps him to keep on top of current issues of concern. He outlined his 8 priority areas including 1. Local matters, 2. victims of crime, 3. domestic violence/hidden harms (online crime, child grooming/exploitation etc.), which he felt that Essex police didn't quite have a grip on how to handle this and with 18 cases throughout Essex every day, he's confident it's now being tackled well. 4. Re-offenders and reducing youth offending, 5. Mental health issues. 20% of police time is spent dealing with individuals facing mental health issues and 9 people go missing every day, some of which are high risk (i.e. suicidal), 6. Crime prevention, 7. Road Safety, with 740 people killed or seriously injured on our roads last year, and 8. Smart policing. He confirmed £55m has been cut from the police budget over last couple of years with another £60m in the next three years needed. The volume of crime has fallen across the county but the reason

is unknown. He asked that everyone reports crimes and anti-social behaviour because the Police can't plan their resources if they don't know what's going on. He feels crime has changed and that society is safer than ever. Violent crime has increased and serious sexual offences, or at least the reporting of. This includes domestic violence and assaults, and charges have increased. He felt this was due to people being ok with stating they've been assaulted rather than keeping it secret. Police are also more confident and have the skills to deal with Serious Sexual Offences. Fraud isn't featured in the figures but the reality is it's significant (internet fraud or doorstep fraudsters). This is a huge crime type with 6500 recorded fraud offences over a period.

In Harwich, Ramsey and Parkeston for the period ending August 2015, all crime has fallen by 20% (what has been recorded). House burglaries down 50%, criminal damage down 26%, theft from cars down 58% and Anti-Social Behaviour down 7%. There were 1338 recorded offenses of Violence and serious sexual offences as opposed to 1684 the year previous.

Mr Alston talked about the current challenges facing him which is the major reconfiguration of the police estate. He is responsible for 80 buildings but only 30 are believed to be needed. Outline plans will be announced on 6th Oct. Every front counter lost would make 4 staff redundant. £1m equals 20 police officers over 4 years. There is likely to be significantly fewer PCSOs and police officers but Police staff may reduce only slightly. More jobs have been civilianised (e.g. forensics staff). He felt a strong policing presence should remain in Harwich but the reality is that few members of the public use the front counter with the preferred method of contacting the police being by phone. Some buildings are unfit for purpose but he felt we do need a building in Harwich. He further confirmed that there are more police officers working out of Harwich than there has been in a long time.

He discussed the Policing precept, explaining that police funding comes from two sources - 2/3 from central government grant, which is reducing by 5%-6% per year, and 1/3 comes from the Policing precept, which he has increased it as much as he's been allowed to.

Cllr Carr referred to re-offenders and said in the last Inspector of Prisons report, no prisons got outstanding except 1 (in Colchester), the MCTC. He said the high staff/prisoner ratio means they get better one-to-one attention and most people are adequately rehabilitated upon release. He felt people make the difference not money. Mr Alston said reducing re-offending is a priority and rates continue to fall, even youth offending, and programmes are being funded so he can work with rehabilitating offenders. Short term offenders are being supported for 6 months after their sentence ends. He thinks they need to work further with the Crown Prosecution Service and prisons.

Cllr Smith questioned the crime statistics previously stated. Referring to Part Night Street Lighting (PNSL) he quoted 2015 reported crimes for the period Mar13-Feb14, prior to the introduction of PNSL, compared to 2183 reported crimes for the period Mar14-Feb15, after the introduction of the scheme. Mr Alston felt the statistics were being under reported by up to 20% and crime reporting is a priority. Cllr Smith then read an extract from Bernard Jenkin's newsletter where he had Chaired a committee that led an inquiry into the under recording of crime statistics by up to 20% by the Police. This was further supported by HMIC (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies). Mr Alston quoted that Essex had 91.5% accurate reporting figures with only one force higher (at 92%). Regarding PNSL . he said there's not much crime at night, it's usually between 11am and 3pm. University of London has conducted studies over the last 14 years looking at data on PNSL and the data shows there's no correlation between the lights going out and crime figures. In particular, ASB

has reduced with PNSL. Cllr Smith read an extract from the College of Policing and asked how front line officers are affected. Russ Cole said his officers aren't that affected and that PNSL isn't having a detrimental effect. He confirmed he can get certain lights switched on a short notice should this be needed in a critical incident or in a problem hotspot. Cllr Smith referred to a previous incident when it took 25 mins for an officer to attend an incident, when it took 2 hours for the lights to go on and they stayed on for a week afterwards, only. He feels the public are losing faith and referred to a previous machete incident which was handled poorly. Russ Cole said that reducing knife crime was a priority of his within the district.

Cllr I Henderson referred to the study regarding the lights, and stated that since Harwich's were switched off in 2013, we haven't had sufficient time to ascertain how it's affected the figures. He referred to a report from the PCC which suggests policing is hampered. He agrees with the PCC on trying to increase the police precept as freezing it will make it harder for people to accept a future increase. Cllr Henderson referred to the fear of crime, which is on the increase in Essex. Referring to the Public Accounts Committee results, he said that crime levels are a limited measure as they don't include all types of crime. He raised concern that cost shunting will see these crimes fall off the radar with no-one taking responsibility for them. He feels crime numbers are down but only because they're not being reported, not because they're not happening. He's heard of private security firms offering to police streets for an additional charge. If fear of crime is on the increase, some people may fall victim to some unscrupulous companies posing to be legitimate security companies. Mr Alston maintains the data from the study is accurate but believes police numbers being lost may be greater than 250, with possibly between 300 and 500 over the next 5 years. PCSOs will reduce to around 250. He feels that despite officers saying it's more difficult to police in the dark, the material affects are non-existent. He said that the falling crimes are those of a serious nature and which are unlikely not to be reported (e.g. burglaries), but agreed that cost shunting is a real issue, and partnership has to be part of the solution. Referring to private security firms, he said that much of the security industry is well regulated but he agrees there are risks to this approach.

Cllr Powell referred to the PCC's statement of the effect of on-the-beat policing. Mr Alston said the reality is that there's no evidence to suggest that there's an impact on crime with fewer on-the-beat police. Police officers used to be on the beat because there was none of the modern communications there is now (radios) and that targets are still being met. Mobile police are needed who can be deployed in the appropriate places.

Cllr Powell referred to police needing to come from Clacton. Russ Cole confirmed that criminals don't tend to travel far and move around the area. Crime has been reduced by 20% in Harwich and intelligence is key to this.

Cllr Carr referred to foreigners committing crime. Russ Cole said he wants to understand immigration crime. He needs to understand the needs of emerging communities and look at opportunities to stop incidences before they occur.

Cllr Ashley referred to the perception of crime, and mentioned the recent vandalising of Bobbitts Hole, which seemed to have had a disproportionate effect on the public. Russ said he was aware of the coverage in the press about this incident and confirmed it has been assigned to an officer and there were increased patrols and some strong leads. Their relationship with the school may also help in case anything appears on social media.

Cllr J Henderson felt there was no action in built up areas from people speeding. There are cameras on the A120/A12 but there's nothing much locally. Mr Alston confirmed that Essex Police are issuing a higher than 20% increase in speeding

	<p>tickets, with all funds raised being ploughed back into road safety. There are fewer road traffic officers but they are focused entirely on road safety. Adam Pipe could provide more accurate data and details. Russ Cole said there is a hotspot on the A120 and there has been a reduction with the new cameras but there is a repeat trend around people failing to adhere to traffic signals, as well as those with sight problems. He backs the Local Community SpeedWatch groups, which Sergeant Paul Gale deals with this. There also covert ANPR vehicles in the locality. Cllr Henderson feels the visual presence may help to reduce road offences.</p> <p>Cllr Calver mentioned the future of Harwich Police Station and asked Mr Alston to expand on his belief that there should be a continued base in Harwich. Mr Alston said he felt the importance of Harwich, for various reasons, meant there should be a continued base. There are also a change in shift patterns which mean there are more people on duty at any one time. Although he doesn't think the actual premises is fit for purpose.</p> <p>Cllr Calver then referred to the use of control rooms and assuming the front desk capability is taken away, and more reporting is via phone, he referred to a recent incident where an individual was kept waiting on the phone for 15 mins before giving up. They did re-dial and waited another 20 minutes before their call was dealt with. He stated that this service needs to improve as it was a potential unreported crime. Mr Alston confirmed that the biggest complaint is about 101. The call is answered swiftly but then what happens after that is not great. 1m people each year dial 101 with 200,000 unsatisfied callers.</p> <p>Cllr Calver finally referred to the need to increase partnership working with Councils. HTC has recently paid for the upgrade to some CCTV provision in Harwich and asked Russ Cole if it is useful. Russ Cole felt it was.</p> <p>Cllr Henderson said councillors are in touch with the community and that the change in policing provision isn't driven by demand but always by funding. He also referred to PNSL and said it is reported that areas of high value remain lit, but said that people's properties and cars area also high value, not just banks and jewellers.</p> <p>Cllr Ashley referred to the speeding issue and that cameras are viewed as cash cows, and the car and hand held cameras are purely for revenue as opposed to safety, quoting a few examples of poor locations for the siting of cameras. He feels that many accidents aren't due to speeding but poor driving and if public confidence is to increase then the police must look to catch those who are making a real difference to road safety (targeted) rather than a general catch all. Mr Alston agreed that improving driving standards was paramount, and there are still incidences of drunk and, increasingly, drug driving and use of mobile phones and he welcomed the use of incentivised technologies that monitor driving.</p> <p>Cllr Smith read aloud some correspondence from the MP that suggested crime has increased following the introduction of PNSL. Mr Alston said we need to look at the bigger picture and the trends that have arisen over a longer period of time.</p>
079/15	<p><u>PUBLIC QUESTIONS</u></p> <p>A member of the public thought many valid points were raised but he wasn't too convinced that Council were completely happy with the answers received. He thinks with fewer police and less money it is bad news and isn't confident that the consequences are being adequately addressed.</p>

The Chairman thanked Mr Alston and Russ Cole for attending and closed the meeting at 9pm.

CHAIRMAN

DATE