

**COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP
COMMUNITY SAFETY CONSULTATIVE GROUP**

**The Social Hall, Drove People's Campus
28th January 2009 7.30pm**

Panel

Councillor Rod Bluh, Leader, Swindon Borough Council (Chair)
Caroline Fowles, Chief Executive, Swindon Primary Care Trust
Chris Sivers, Director of Community, Swindon Borough Council
Chief Superintendent Paul Howlett, BCU Commander Swindon, Wiltshire Police
John Popowicz, Borough Commander, Wiltshire Fire & Rescue Service
Kieran Kilgallon, Chief Executive, Wiltshire Police Authority
Richard Palusinski, Head of Community Safety, Community Safety Partnership
Apologies from Diana Fulbrook, Chief Executive of National Probation who is unwell.

1. Welcome and Introduction – Councillor Rod Bluh, Leader of Swindon Borough Council

In excess of 30 people were welcomed to the meeting by the Chair, Cllr Rod Bluh, who opened with a brief overview of the way the evening would run and some of the successes of the Partnership over the last twelve months.

We have established and agreed an Anti Social Behaviour protocol amongst the partners, describing how we will work together to tackle ASB, and multi agency working was used effectively to tackle ASB problems in Eldene.

An Alcohol Strategy was produced, the first to be kite marked nationally by Alcohol Concern, and a steering group established to drive its implementation. Waiting times for alcohol abuse treatment have been eradicated, and for drug treatment reduced from up to eighteen months, to an average of three weeks. In the past six months there has been an 11% increase in the number of drug users in effective treatment and we have an improved outreach service to engage more crack users into treatment.

We also gained secure Home Office funding to run a three-year pilot Alcohol Arrest Referral Scheme in the Swindon Custody Suite at Gablecross Police Station.

Tackling Domestic Violence (DV) is high on our list of priorities and SBC have match - funded contributions from the Police to provide DV outreach workers in Swindon from April. We worked with our Wiltshire counterparts to set up and run a regional Domestic Violence conference for practitioners, which was highly successful.

Last October we launched our Street Safe bus, which was used to go out into communities as part of the 'Not In My Neighbourhood Week', during which we spoke with over two hundred people about concerns in their neighbourhoods. The bus was also used over the festive period on Friday and Saturday nights, Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve in the town centre, staffed by Paramedics from the Ambulance Service, Street Pastors and supported by a St John Ambulance and its crew. They handled forty-eight casualties and thirty-nine of those were treated and discharged without having to go to hospital.

We have worked in partnership with Trading Standards and introduced "No Cold Calling" zones in some communities to protect older people from cowboy traders and distraction burglaries.

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2. Community Safety Partnership - Richard Palusinski, Head of Community Safety

A look back at 2008 and what have we done since the 2008 meeting

In order to make the most of these meetings we must ensure that we address the problems raised. The appropriate person was then asked to respond to the main queries from last year:

Speed of response to the non-emergency police number is slow, discouraging people from reporting incidents.

The 0845 408 7000 picked up 95% of all calls made, 93% within thirty seconds. The Crime Recording Team responded to 92% of calls, 76% within thirty seconds. The 999 emergency number captured 98% of calls, 93% within ten seconds. This represents a significant improvement.

Loss of Neighbourhood Policing Team(NPT) officers to the town centre leaving the communities with reduced cover.

The work between the Partnership and Licensees in the town centre has ensured that communities are not being regularly denuded in this manner.

Staff turnover amongst Community Beat personnel is high making it difficult to build trust

We cannot, and would not want to, stop successful people from progressing, however there is an expectation that NPT personnel will stay in post for a minimum of two years.

Domestic violence is a significant issue in Swindon. What initiatives are being undertaken to tackle this?

We have set ourselves a target with the Local Area Agreement (LAA) to reduce repeat attacks of DV and, as mentioned earlier, co-funded two outreach workers who will make contact and work with victims, commencing April.

Vacant Council properties in Swindon (including Moredon Primary School) attract problems. Can they be demolished quickly to stop this?

Moredon Primary School has been demolished. There is a strategy to fill vacant properties as soon as possible, but those earmarked for demolition do provide a challenge. The Partnership is proactive and acts as quickly as possible to remove graffiti and deal with fire damage etc but the process can take some time, especially where private landlords are involved.

Neighbourhood Teams, Police and other partners need to work together.

There has been close Partnership working this year, with hard work by all members to ensure there is no duplication or ignorance of crossover points. The multi-agency response to Broadgreen demonstrates a coherent, joined up partnership.

Partnership Plan for 2008-09 (see attached Strategic Assessment)

To direct activities for the year we produce an Annual Strategic Assessment, which tell us what areas need to be focussed upon. What we need now is for you to tell us how this feels to you; does it address your issues?

Reducing Anti Social Behaviour - ASB increases the fear of crime, which is totally disproportionate to the actuality, Swindon is really a safe place and we want to make it a place that people want to live and work in, it is a rapidly expanding town with a diverse population and needs a cohesive community.

Drug and Alcohol Treatment Services are now meeting the need, helping us to reduce drug misuse.

Any incidence of domestic violence is one too many and we are working to reduce figures, especially repeat incidents.

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One example of criminal damage that we have been able to tackle very successfully is vandalism of bus shelters. A trial of perforated steel that looks like smoked glass was used in the shelters in Queens Drive, and to date there has been no damage since this was fitted.

The threat of terrorism and organised crime groups are always on the radar and must not be forgotten.

Priority and prolific offenders are a small number of people who are responsible for a large number of crimes. This year we are looking to put into place actions to stop the repeat cycle.

3. Wiltshire Police Authority Budgets and Plans for 2009/10 – Councillor Brian Ford, Vice Chair, Wiltshire Police Authority (presentation attached)

Brian Ford, vice chair of the Police Authority and Chair of the Resources Committee presented the Wiltshire Police Authority budget figures for 2008/9 and the proposed budget for 2009/10. The rates will be fixed at a Police Authority meeting on 5th February at Police HQ in Devizes, to which everyone is welcome. Only Devon and Cornwall have a lower budget than Swindon, Band D being £142, whilst Gloucester is £188 and Dorset £164.

Year on year changes for 2009/10 show unavoidable increases including a pay rise of 2.6%, fuel costs and the forensic medical contract for a Dr. to go into the cells. Growth includes the cost of technology to move with the times. There has been a loss of interest on the capital reserves due to the fall in interest rates.

The proposed Band D of £152.59 represents a rise of only 14p per week.

Questions or comments on the proposed figures were called for.

Q. You said Government gives two thirds and Council tax provides one third, but figures do not agree.

A. This is because of something called ‘gearing’, which is difficult to explain, but simply means that if the Government doesn’t give the full two thirds then we have to make up the difference.

Q. In these times of economic crisis where people are losing jobs, and everyone has to tighten their belts, shouldn’t the police be the same and not get a pay rise?

A. Police pay rises are nationally set and normally paid in September. Last year there was a huge political debate and the pay rise was not agreed until April, and then, for the first time ever, not backdated. Police have no right to strike and the two-year pay agreement is below inflation. Police do their utmost to provide value for money, and the increase of only 14p per week bears this out.

Q. The main driver in the increase appears to be the national pay rise. Do we benchmark? Are there any comparisons again places such as Warrington, Wigan or Preston?

A. There are families of forces and Basic Command Units (BCUs) of similar size depending on the particular criteria, and there are many differing criteria. We are near the top, and certainly no lower than half way down, on any of these comparators. We are one of the lowest precepted forces in the country, so you do get value for money.

Q. It appears the problem is brought about by lack of funding from Government – a document issued by the Government two years ago said they were providing

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additional funding for Police services throughout the country. They now admit that crime is likely to rise because of the economic situation.

A. Unfortunately, with inflation and national pay increases to meet, the Government is not providing enough funding and the taxpayer is left to find the balance. If the local authority is to provide better services across the board and meet its priorities then we have to put in the resources. It is the responsibility of all of us to work together creatively, which this partnership is doing, and we need the support of all to move our initiatives along.

Q. The total of £105m – is it possible to break this down by population and crime figures? How much of this is for Swindon?

A. There are (BCUs), Melksham that deals with Wiltshire and Swindon but all services are maintained from HQ in Devizes. The website is available and that could give a better indication but a ballpark figure for Swindon is around £20m. Included in the HQ budget are the Police dogs, armed response unit and the helicopter. The public said they were very worried about the recent possibility of losing the helicopter, the Police listened and a five-year contract has been negotiated for a new one with improved capability.

Q. You are holding £14m in reserves – why is this not being spent?

A. The budget is strictly divided into Capital and Revenue. It is illegal to use capital funding on revenue items, however the interest from invested capital can be used to purchase revenue items. The interest rates have now dropped dramatically, which is why the use of reserves is shown as a decrease on the current year. Capital is being built up and spent continuously on ongoing projects, it is not just the same money all the time, and the more we hold in capital the more interest is raised.

4. Open Forum

Q. People, especially women, feel unsafe in the town centre. Lots of things like broken windows, graffiti, chewing gum and general rubbish could be fixed overnight – why isn't this happening?

A. Everyone needs a sense of responsibility for where we are heading. There is a lot of talk of doom and gloom at the moment, and one report says that half the high streets will be boarded up in two years. There are more empty properties every day and vandalism and graffiti are big issues. 2008 saw a 50-60% reduction in graffiti over 2007 after 13 individuals were caught, but new taggers are always starting. It is not acceptable and we will deal with it.

Q. Friday and Saturday nights Police are busy at the bottom of town dealing with issues because of the drinking establishments. Do they have to pay anything towards this police presence and facilities used?

A. They pay business rates, which are set by the Government and that includes a contribution towards Police activities. The perception that there are a lot of problems in the town on Friday and Saturday night is incorrect, crime has been greatly reduced in the town centre, and there is a good working relationship between the Partnership, Police and the licensed trades. Pubwatch recently assisted with the identification of a number of prolific street drinkers who were placed on Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and banned from the town centre.

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- Q. The number of shops with broken or boarded up windows is on the increase. Is anyone being charged with this damage, or because shops have insurance are they just paying?
- A. After two or three claims insurance companies will not cover small retailers and their profit margin is so low that they cannot afford this. Again, this is a perception issue, crime is down, including breaking of shop windows. There are prosecutions, the detection rate is around 12% as it is usually a random act of spontaneous hooliganism. We want to see this stopped.
- Q. Woolworths has at least three broken windows and looks awful. This is what visitors to Swindon see. It needs more CCTV and security,
- A. The Partnership meets every two weeks to look at where there is damage and what we can do about it. Repairs and graffiti removal are tackled as soon as possible through Council services. We know the perception is disproportionate to reality, there are good things happening in the business sector and the town centre and we must present Swindon in the best possible light, especially in this economic climate. The College site was due to be demolished in February 2008 and has now been deferred from February to June of this year but the Council are meeting with the developers to move this along quicker. The old Market is also still to be demolished. Regent Street regeneration is on track but we have to keep on top of it to make it happen.
- Q. There was a lot of ASB in Wroughton, which after work with Police and Councillors resulted in the employment of a youth worker last June on a twelve-month contract. This has had a tremendous result, and needs to be turned into a permanent position. The local budget of £2m is now £900k.
- A. Councillor Bluh said that he would look into it the possibility of a permanent position and get back to Wroughton Parish Council.
- Q. Speeding in Swindon is getting to be a big issue and there isn't much of a Police presence. Drove Road is one area where speed cameras are always flashing.
- Q. Are there any plans for road safety? Humps and chikanes don't work; motorcyclists and vans just go straight through the middle.
- A. The issue is accident reduction, 6% of accidents are caused by speed and 94% by bad driving, road conditions etc. The Transport Research Authority came up with 37 recommendations and only one of these was speed related. We need to spend the money effectively, not 100% of budget on speed cameras. Signs, which flash your speed or 'slow down', can be more effective, and the Partnership is working proactively on a Strategic Accident Plan. There is a place for cameras where speed is known to be a cause of injury or death, and the Police will work to keep the roads and people in Swindon safe.
- Wiltshire Fire and Rescue Service delivers a very strong presentation to young people at the cinema of what the Police, Fire and Ambulance services do at traffic accidents, including emotional messages from the mother of a twenty year old who died, and a twenty-nine year old motor cyclist who is now paralysed and in a wheelchair.
- Q. Cars delivering children to school and parking on bus stops in Marlborough and Windsor Road have been causing tremendous problems for the past seven years. The Council has been approached to increase the area of white lines and Police

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have been asked to book cars which park on pavements and private lawns. The bus has to go on the wrong side of the road to get through, and on a double bend it is very intimidating to be approached by a bus on your side of the road. The responses are that this happens outside every school, but this is on a main road, on a bus route and on a double bend.

Q, Churchfields School in Upham Road has been suffering from similar problems for the past three to four years, with SBC staff parking in the turning bays. This has been raised with the school and the NeST. They also suffer from football supporters parking there in Saturdays.

A. Councillor Bluh said that he would take the details and look into both these problems.

Q. Paul Howlett went to the Broadgreen area to see how the Police could assist the local community with problems and there had been a phenomenal response. They just want to say a big thank you.

A. This was a multi-agency response, including residents, drug workers and others and the operation will continue. This is a 'Not In My Neighbourhood' approach.

There were reports from two families in the audience of the Council failing to support them when they had suffered ASB and subsequently gone to court on behalf of the Council. Both couples said they had encountered negligence from the Police and were desperate to ensure no one else suffered as they had. *

Members of the panel said they would talk to those involved after the meeting to resolve these serious issues.

5. Close

Councillor Bluh brought the evening to a close by thanking everyone for attending, saying that his door was always open, communication was important. The challenges are great but the Partnership, working together with the community, will get results.

If there were any other points anyone wanted to raise they could speak to a member of the panel before they left.

Meeting closed 9.10pm

Notes from tonight, together with copies of presentations will shortly be on the CSP web site at www.Swindon-csp.org.uk

*** Amendment (23/02/09)**

One of the couples has asked for this point to be clarified. They said that in their case they could not praise their local Neighbourhood Policing Team enough, adding that they went above and beyond the call of duty. The problem in this case was with the Council and other agencies.