

Prudhoe Town Council: Neighbourhood Policing Issues

Report of meeting, 18 January 2017, held at the Spetchells Centre, starting at 3.00pm

Present: Prudhoe Town Council – Cllrs Mrs J McGee (Chair); Cllr G Price; Cllr A Gill; Cllr G McCreedy; Cllr B Futers (left 3.55pm); R Whinney (Clerk)

Northumbria Police – Inspector Pam Bridges (Tynedale Neighbourhood Policing Team); Sergeant Gary Simpson (Neighbourhood Policing Team, Prudhoe); Sergeant Sam Maughan (Neighbourhood Policing Team, Hexham / Prudhoe)

Northumberland County Council: Simon Packham, Community Safety Officer

The Chairman welcomed Inspector Bridges and the other invitees to the meeting, and introductions were made. Matters were discussed as outlined below.

Inspector Bridges stated that she was pleased to be working in Tynedale, and made specific reference to Prudhoe and Hexham, saying that she was grateful for the work of staff and for the strong support that the police received from local communities.

- Areas being focused on were burglary dwelling – violence against the person, including sexual violence – burglary other than dwelling. Regarding burglary, officers were working to monitor / target the individuals carrying out the crimes, as well as ensuring that all residents, especially those in remote outlying areas, were protected. Criminals came from within and outside the area. An arrest had been made following recent burglaries in Wylam.
- Recent press releases had focused on the need for residents / property owners to lock doors etc, and keep their property safe. SelectaDNA [<https://www.selectadna.co.uk/dna-asset-marking>] property-marking support was available to a limited extent.
- Anyone seeing or hearing anything suspicious was encouraged to call the '101' number. The Inspector stated that she examined and followed up on all reports made, including any concerns raised regarding anti-social behaviour.

Sergeant Simpson stated that he been serving as the Neighbourhood Sergeant for Prudhoe for the last 18 months, and he responded further to the communications he had had with the Clerk:

- There had been 70 reports of anti-social behaviour between October and December, including 11 reports of youth disorder.
- There had been 5 youth-related crimes: these had included car-scratching, and an arson incident at Prudhoe Community High School.
- The report regarding the damage to the Christmas Lights following the switch-on had been investigated, and individuals had been spoken to.
- A number of instances reported to the police by the Clerk (for instance, graffiti on the Spetchells Centre), when looked into, were found not to be previously reported to the police.
- A gathering of around 20 young people at Waterworld, had been spoken to by Sergeant Simpson and the duty beat officer, and a number of anti-social behaviour (ASB) letters had been issued to parents after initial warnings had not been heeded.
- It was stressed that the police could only react to reports they received, and the Clerk undertook to pass Sergeant Simpson's email to councillors to facilitate reporting.
- Inspector Bridges stated that the police were seeking to work with the High School, in order to target individuals who were a cause for concern. She noted that crime and disorder had an impact on the community, and that there was a need to engage with the individuals causing trouble, while diverting the 'also-rans'.

Neighbourhood Policing establishment – Prudhoe

- There are two neighbourhood constables (PCs 1452 Sharon Walton and 105 Ruth Coll) in the town, while two 24/7 officers started their shifts in Prudhoe. It was stated that 24/7 policing had previously been shifted to Hexham in its entirety, but this policy was now reversed.

The Glade

- Cllr G McCreedy noted (i) the lights on the Christmas tree had been damaged (as previously discussed), (ii) a seat had had its laths removed, and one of the handrails at the steps had been damaged (iii) an elderly gentleman (now deceased) had been verbally abused by young people. He stressed that most young people in the town were of good character, and that the numbers involved in anti-social behaviour were small.
- In response, the police agreed that the problems were down to a small number of 'bad apples'. The police were prepared to 'up the ante' and work to deal with these individuals, starting with ASB letters; they stated that they were linking with staff at the East Centre, and noted that the Centre was 'well-located'. The police were also working with the manager at the Co-operative store in the town centre. The Glade was a popular place for young people to gather as it was an open space: the Community Support Officer was tasked with patrolling there, at Waterworld, Oaklands car park, and at the West Wylam Shopping Centre. The public were encouraged to call the 101 number to report concerns: call handlers there were trained to deal with incidents, which would be followed up.
- Concerns were expressed regarding the police response to reports made at the police station. The police emphasised that where an officer was not immediately available, the station staff should be ensuring that visitors were advised that an officer would get in contact.

Crime statistics

- Statistics showed that the number of reported crimes had increased: the police stated that this reflected an increase in confidence in the reporting of crimes. Also, following the instruction of central Government, the police now had to log every incident reported to them as a crime, whereas in the past they had possessed a discretion not to record reported incidents (for instance, where they had good reason to believe that a crime had not in fact been committed).

CCTV

- The police acknowledged that the current system was old and antiquated. The functioning of the system was discussed, and Mr Packham noted that NCC could offer temporary location of CCTV equipment at locations where reports / complaints to the police suggested that such a presence was required. This equipment would be in place for between 4 to 8 weeks depending on need. Consideration had recently been given to installing it at Biverfield Road. At the moment the £250 cost of installation was funded by NCC Fire & Rescue Service (Community Safety was now part of this department). Mr Packham noted that the equipment had been installed at Wentworth car park in Hexham to deal with an outbreak of 'boy racers'. Cllr Gill stated that the current CCTV equipment had been installed in February 1993 at a cost of £66,000. The police advised that CCTV monitoring was carried out at Prudhoe and Hexham, while the recordings were at held at Gateshead.
- The locations of the CCTV cameras were discussed in relation to the movements of groups / 'gangs' of young people. In relation to the young people, it was advised that there was close working linking referrals by the youth service, home visits, and the local schools.

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- The police noted that public CCTV provision was supplemented by private (for instance shop-based) recordings. It was also noted that the types of crimes that might be recorded had changed over the years (for example, there were fewer car chases nowadays).

Social Media

- The police were getting into schools to advise young people how to stay safe when using social media, and they were also working to advise parents. The police approached the issue from the perspective of victims but also with a view to monitoring / tackling offending

Drugs

- The police confirmed that they were not looking for any 'Mr Big' in the area, and stated that they did not think that this area had more of a problem than others, though it was acknowledged that the youth service reported concerns with the use of cannabis and that of former 'legal' highs. This was why a camera had been considered / installed at Biverfield Road, but in this case the cause of the trouble had moved to Newcastle, taking their 'business' with them. The police noted that drugs operations could take time, but stated that public concerns were taken seriously, and the police would investigate reports made to them.

Engagement with the public

- The police stated that they were keen to attend more meetings and engage with the public and with local councils
- The police stated that the high recent local staff turnover meant that they were keen for new staff members to engage with the public
- The value of walkabouts was mentioned by NCC Community Safety, the police, and council representatives. In respect of a member of the public who was not a representative of the council, it was noted that the police were prepared to meet with members of the public who requested this
- The police were ready to receive referrals from local councils or from councillors, and suggested that interaction worked best when it was 'problem-led'
- In respect of holding 'found' property, the police stated that they were no longer able to take this in as before: property had to be shown to be stolen before it could be held by the police
- A crime prevention adviser had been tasked with auditing past experience and exploring future options in respect of crime prevention: DNA marking kits were increasingly being used to mark property.

Police accommodation in Prudhoe

- The police representatives undertook to seek an update on the future accommodation of the police presence in the town, and advise the Council.

The meeting concluded at around 4.45pm.

RW 01/2017