

NOTES OF THE MEETING OF THE TASK AND FINISH GROUP (COMMUNITY SAFETY) AT WITHAM TOWN COUNCIL HELD 12TH JULY 2017 AT 7:00PM IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER.

PRESENT:- Councillors T.A Pleasance (Chairman), J.C Bayford (Vice-Chairman) M.C.M Lager, W.J Rose.

K. Davies - Humber Road Residents Association
A. Waight - Witham Tree Group
PC Murray - Essex Police
PSCO J Thorn - Essex Police
S. Anslow - Head of Special Constabulary (Essex Police)
A. Wilding - New Rickstones Academy

Staff: J. Sheehy - Deputy Town Clerk

20. APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors W.J Rose and J.C Goodman due to previous engagements.

21. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

22. COMMUNITY SAFETY

The Chairman welcomed new members of the Task & Finish Group and stated that he was encouraged by the representation of both the community and Essex Police. The purpose of the group was explained and it was stated that a community based solution to the recruitment of special constables, reinvention of the Neighbourhood Watch scheme and proactivity in raising awareness in crime prevention would form the foundation of the group's work.

It was stated that a recent walk of the Humber Road Estate conducted by the Residents Association in conjunction with Essex Police had discovered over eighty vehicles left unlocked which reinforced the need for great awareness in crime prevention. It was stated that Essex Police generally no longer responded to low level anti-social behaviour and that a great emphasis had been placed on working with Braintree District Council by Essex Police, who held similar powers to tackle low level anti-social crime and disorder.

A. Waight spoke on behalf of the Witham Tree Group, drawing attention to overwhelming levels of vandalism that the group had experienced when planting new trees around Witham including recent plantations carried out at Highfields Road and Whetmead Nature Reserve. It was thought that the reduction in local visible policing was a direct contributor to the increase in such acts of vandalism by giving greater confidence to criminals that their crimes would go unpunished. It was noted that PSCO numbers had been reduced over a number of years and that the Braintree & Uttlesford policing area which includes Witham was approximately the size of Bedfordshire, making it very difficult for Essex Police to retain a visible police presence in all areas.

It was stated that local councils can, and have invested in new PSCO's for their areas, and that two such PSCO's had been funded by Uttlesford District Council. S. Anslow, Head of Special Constabulary stated that a new Human Resources manager was still yet to be employed and that due to the lengthy nature of the police recruitment process, a previous candidate had withdrawn leaving the post still vacant.

Members noted that Essex Police had been working towards establishing a new recruitment drive and emphasis for Special Constables and that there were a number of areas where local councils could contribute and support the force. Local councils could provide support through their social media channels, websites and parish newsletters. It was stated that Essex Police had been engaging with targeted advertising through social media to attract applications for special constables in specific areas, targeting specific age groups and income ranges to ensure a good level of quality when receiving applications. It was stated that a recent recruitment drive by using this method had yielded approximately 1500 applications of varying quality, but that overall the recruitment advertising had been very successful.

Local councils could offer to invest in the new scheme to provide such targeted advertising for their own area to recruit and retain Special Constables that would operate almost exclusively within a single parish. It was noted that as such Special Constables remain under the jurisdiction of Essex Police that there may be occasions such as major incidents that they would be required to perform work in other parishes, but that a mechanism to ensure there was no cost to the local council when this occurs. Additional advertising methods were being considered by the force including a recruit-a-friend/referral scheme as historically, most applications for new Special Constables had been a result of an existing constables recommending the post to somebody they knew. Other methods such as door to door leafleting were also used but it was agreed that such methods required continued application to ensure their effectiveness, and it was harder to quantify the return of such advertising when compared to social media. It was noted that over half of all applicants for Special Constables had applied directly online.

Members discussed the particulars of Special Constables for Witham and noted that the minimum age for a Special Constables was 18 years old. It was thought that Special Constables would be accommodated in the Witham Fire Station, and that the recent joint governance of the Police and Fire services had aided this. There was a requirement for Special Constables to have a base to operate from with secure storage for equipment, and it was stated that an agreement to operate from Witham Fire Station had now been peripherally agreed, subject to some additional points of clarification.

Members discussed the associated costs with Special Constables, and it was stated that duty allowances and mileage would be paid for by local councils, which averaged around £1,000 per year on a 500 hour working year per constable. It was stated that the new recruited Special Constables could patrol areas of concern to the Council and would be able to attend meetings to provide updates. It was thought additional promotion could be carried out with aid from New Rickstones Academy newsletter and the Humber Road Resident's Association social media page, and that larger organisations could be approached in a joint effort from Essex Police and the Town Council. Timescales were discussed, and it was noted that the Volunteer Police Cadets had only been operating for around 12 months, but that they could attend a stall being hosted by the Town Mayor on 19th August 2017. It was **AGREED** that S. Anslow would be provided details to attend if possible.

It was noted that an outline business case for the recruitment of Special Constables would be created by the Town Council in readiness for the annual budgeting process in order to approve funding for new recruitment. It was stated that the overall time involved in the recruitment process from the point of an application being made to a Special Constable being deployed on the street was a range of 18 to 24 months, once funding had been offered by the Town Council.

23. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There were no additional items of business.

There being no further business, the Chairman closed the meeting at 8:15PM.