

SMALL HEATH FORUM MEETING – ACTION NOTES RECORDING TEMPLATE

| | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| WARD: Small Heath | DATE: Thursday 6 th July 2023 |
| VENUE: Bethel United Church, 759 Coventry Road, Small Heath | START/FINISH TIMES: 5.00pm – 6.30pm |
| COUNCILLOR/S: Shabina Bano Mary Locke, Deputy Whip, Labour Group (Observer) | NOs OF ATTENDEES: Approx 70 |
| OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Beverly Edmead – Community Governance Team Apologies for Absence: Cllr Saqib Khan – illness Small Heath, South Yardley and Bordesley Police Teams | VISITING SPEAKER(S): Mr Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands |

| |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CURRENT WARD ACTION PLAN PRIORITIES: |
| 1. Street Cleaning /Fly-tipping/Rubbish 2. Crime/Anti-Social Behaviour/Beggars and Street Begging 3. Community Safety/Road Safety Issues – including potholes, pavements, speeding 4. Healthy Lifestyle/Use of Green Spaces |
| MATTERS DISCUSSED AT THE MEETING INCLUDING LOCAL CONCERNS: |
| 1. Welcome and Introductions Following introductions, Cllr Bano welcomed everyone to the meeting, and a special welcome was given to Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands. |
| 2. Notice of Recording Residents were advised that members of the press and/or public may record and/or take photographs of the meeting. |

3. Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands

Mr Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for the West Midlands briefly advised his role as an Elected Individual to the post was to ensure that West Midlands Police Force was run effectively and focussed on reducing crime. Mr Foster advised that:-

- Police and Crime Commissioners were elected for the first time in 2012.
- The PCC acted as a voice for all local residents/communities across the West Midlands and to hold West Midlands Police Force to account and to ensure that they were answerable to the communities they served. The role was a very complex one and democratic accountability was essential.
- The PCC did not run the police force at an operational level; however, they had a responsibility to ensure that those in charge were held accountable. The PCC also had the power to hire and fire the Chief Constable as appropriate.
- The PCC decided what the Force should be focussing on and the crimes it should prioritise – details of which could be found in the Police and Crime Plan. The PCC also sets the budget – a portion of the local Council Tax goes towards West Midlands Police.
- The PCC must also bring together Community Safety and Criminal Justice Partners to make sure organisations worked together to fight crime and help victims.

Mr Foster further advised of the statutory duty of the role of the PCC to prepare a Police and Crime Plan – the key priorities within this Plan were:-

- Rebuilding community policing
- Combating violence against women and girls
- Tackling and reducing knife crime

Full details of the Plan could be found on the PCC website and that partnership working across the board was key to delivering the plan, along with rebuilding the trust and confidence in the police service within local communities and victims of crime. An additional 1200 officers had been recruited across the WMP Force, however, this was still significantly below the number of officers that had been reduced by Central Government, and in some cases much lower than areas of the country where crime statistics were also much lower and not comparable to cities/inner city areas and the issues/challenges they presented.

Neighbourhood/Community Policing remained a key priority for West Midlands Police and the implementation of the new policing operating model by the Chief Constable from 3 April 2023 should see a return to the increase presence of officers on the streets and

reconnecting with local neighbourhoods and communities.

Combating all types of violence against women and girls was another key priority as previously mentioned; domestic violence remained one of the highest recorded statistics in the city. A dedicated Victims Support Commissioner had been appointed specifically to tackle this issue, and changing the attitude and behaviours of men was key to tackling and reducing the number of offences/crimes against women and girls of all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and communities.

Referring to the third key priority of violent crime, Mr Foster gave details of ongoing initiatives to tackle this – these included dedicated patrols in known hot-spot areas; Youth Workers assigned to police custody suites and 6 Accident & Emergency Hospital departments across the West Midlands, and Outreach Workers with a particular focus on County Lines issues and the deliberate targeting/grooming of individuals by gangs. Partnership working with the Faith Alliance and Steps Together Project being rolled out across approx. 600 school routes in the West Midlands – effectively chaperoning young people on their journey to/from school.

Taking weapons off the street was also essential – 25 weapon surrender bins were in place across the West Midland – to date approx. 2000 dangerous weapons had been removed from the streets.

Concluding his presentation, Mr Foster further advised that vehicle crime, tackling Domestic Violence and Offender Management remained key priorities for Neighbourhood Police Teams, and acknowledged that face to face/visible presence of police officers on the streets was currently wholly inadequate and had to be improved. In addition, last June only 50% of 999 calls were answered which was way below the Service Level Agreement (SLA) – this had improved to 90%; non-emergency calls to 101 was previously 20% and had since improved to 60%, however more improvement was still needed, and that working with and listening to local people/communities was essential to building trust and confidence.

The following comments/concerns were made by residents:-

- Locally, what were the key priorities for Small Heath Ward and what resources were in place to tackle the issues and restore residents' trust and confidence
- Small Heath Ward was served by three local Neighbourhood Teams, however there were no officers at the meeting, which was very disappointing and showed a total disregard to residents of Small Heath.
- The voices and concerns of local people were not being heard by the local police teams; calls and reported incidents had gone unanswered, not acknowledged, or responded to and visible policing on the streets was non-existent.
- Residents had lost complete faith and trust in the police teams responding to their calls or actively policing the streets; there was little or

no community engagement, and an unwillingness to connect with residents and community leaders – yet neighbouring wards were also covered by the same police teams and did not appear to have any of the policing issues experienced by Small Heath residents.

- Speeding, dangerous and obstructive driving; open drug use/selling of drugs; acts of all forms of criminality and inappropriate activities, including prostitution were carried out openly during the day without any fear of arrest or intervention. The increase in the use of nitrous oxide canisters – both large and small was a huge concern, with evidence of its excessive use in the numbers of empty canisters discarded on the streets and green open spaces every day.
- The increase in the number of supported/exempt housing accommodation in the ward and the ongoing problems/acts of criminality from occupants of these types of property contributed to many of the issues, however incidents reported to the police daily were not responded to/remained unanswered.
- Young people in particular had little or no respect and trust in the police, and that the feeling of tension and aggression could spill over into a complete breakdown, leading to even more acts of aggression and anarchy on the streets, particularly where drugs use and acts of criminality were involved.
- Several StreetWatch teams had been set up and were actively involved in the ward, yet the local police teams did not seem interested in working with or supporting them or share the same interests and aims as they do in other wards/areas of the city. In neighbouring Tyseley & Hay Mills ward, the same police team that covered Small Heath Ward was very proactive and involved with StreetWatch and SpeedWatch initiatives. Officer retention and interest appeared to be a huge problem but affected some areas of the city more than others, and Small Heath was one of the areas that residents felt was most affected.
- Details on the PCC and WMP website referred to the recruitment of an additional 1200 officers, but where were they deployed
- The local police teams received fantastic and detailed intelligence from the community regarding acts of criminality, but this was largely ignored/not acted on or followed up.
- Shoplifting in Asda supermarket seems to be given greater priority and urgency by the police than community issues and concerns.
- Several voluntary/community groups had taken to patrolling the streets themselves due to the lack of police presence, intervention and interest in the ward, and that without resources and active input from the police and partner agencies including the City Council, the situation would continue to disintegrate. Tackling issues that affected residents/communities the most, like drug dealing, prostitution, excessive speeding and dangerous drivers should be the focus and priority – not the issue of parking tickets on double yellow lines.
- Several members of the Friends of Digby Park shared details of harassment, intimidation, and inappropriate behaviours towards them. The membership of the Group was mainly women, but more volunteers were needed from the community – both men and women, and misogynistic and inappropriate behaviours needed to be addressed and challenged by everyone if a change in behaviours and progression was to be made in the wider community.

Responding to the comments made, Mr Foster advised the Police and Crime Plan applied to/was as relevant to Small Heath as it was to the rest of the West Midlands. Rebuilding confidence and trust between the community and police was vital to successful community policing, and that he was extremely saddened to hear the concerns and frustration of residents, and like residents, very disappointed that none of the local police teams had sent officers to the meeting despite being invited.

Mr Foster further advised that whilst he was not in charge of the day to day running and operation of police teams, he would continue to apply pressure on the Inspectors to encourage their local officers to attend Ward Forum Meetings or set up Police Ward Tasking Meetings and to re-engage and rebuild trust with the community in Small Heath as police teams had done/been willing to do in other wards in the city. This would also be re-emphasised to the Chief Constable as this was one of the key aims of the new policing model for Neighbourhood Policing. He added that the extra 1200 police officers recruited were for the whole of the West Midlands.

In the meantime, residents must continue to report incidents and concerns to the police so that they were logged/recorded on the system – all calls were risk assessed by call handlers and prioritised in order of urgency. Changes to callouts to mental health related issues from August should also help free up more police time to respond to residents' issues.

Cllr Bano added that she was hoping to set up a drop in/informal 'Cuppa with a Copper' session on a monthly basis, which happened in neighbouring wards. Mr Foster agreed to help encourage the local police teams to support the initiative and to look into the comments and concerns raised by the StreetWatch Groups as both StreetWatch and SpeedWatch Groups were police initiatives and should be actively supported by local police teams and would advise Cllr Bano of the outcome of the discussions accordingly.

Mr Foster also commended the ongoing work and commitment of StreetWatch and other voluntary groups in Small Heath in helping to provide reassurance and support to the community.

Cllr Mary Locke, (Stirchley Ward) Observer and Deputy Whip, Labour Group added that many of the comments and concerns raised by residents were common in many of the wards in the city, including her own Stirchley Ward and was a real concern. All City Councillors were committed to working with their respective police teams to ensure they understood that engaging with and building trust with the local community was absolutely essential to resolving many of the issues that were constantly raised/reported by residents.

Concluding the discussion, Mr Foster reiterated his commitment to working with and supporting both Cllrs Shabina Bano and Saqib Khan in

rebuilding the relationship with the police teams and Small Heath residents, to challenge the issues and concerns raised on their behalf, and to organise a walkabout in the ward with both Cllrs, police teams, residents and community groups.

Cllr Bano and residents thanked Simon Foster, Police and Crime Commissioner for his attendance and presentation.

| ACTIONS/ RECOMMENDATIONS MADE | WHO | BY WHEN |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Informal/Drop In Monthly events with the police teams to be set up | Cllr Bano/Police Sgts for respective police teams | Buy-in needed from local police teams – timescales to be agreed |
| 2. Walkabout with PCC, Police Teams, Cllrs, residents/community groups | Cllrs/PCC/Police Teams | Arrangements and timescales to be agreed with police teams and office of PCC |
| 3. StreetWatch Groups to be supported by the local police teams | PCC/Police Inspectors /Sgts | As soon as possible |

Meeting closed 6.35pm