

AGENDA ITEM 6b

Essex Police and Crime Panel	EPCP/05/17
Date: 16 February 2017	

Report title: Essex Police Engagement with Local Communities

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1.0 Purpose of Report

Priority one of the Police and Crime Plan 2016 – 20 is Local, visible and accessible policing.

This report provides the panel with information regarding how Essex Police's local policing teams engage with local communities.

2.0 Recommendation

That Police and Crime Panel members note the report.

Essex Police Engagement with Local Communities

3.0 Introduction

Engagement with local communities – whether through traditional face-to-face methods or via new online communication channels – is vital for Essex Police in understanding communities and building confidence in the police service. The launch of the new multiagency Community Safety Hubs in April 2016 helped develop new partnerships with local areas, increase engagement and demonstrate visibility.

Essex Police engages with almost 1,000,000 people every week through online channels and, while this engagement does not supplant local in-person engagement, neither should it be underestimated. Essex Police's local engagement through social media has found high-risk missing children, encouraged behaviour change and crime prevention and raised awareness about progress investigating and solving local crime.

Essex is a large and diverse county and what works in one community doesn't always translate to others. Police local engagement has aimed to achieve common access standards in terms of face-to-face contact while experimenting with different forms of contact to establish what works best.

4.0 Regular Face-to-Face Engagement

Local Community Meetings (LCMs) provide the main engagement mechanism for Community Safety Hubs to talk with and listen to residents in neighbourhoods. Each Community Safety Hub is responsible for organising and advertising LCMs, which are also promoted to the local media and on the force's social media channels. The meetings are generally led by Community Safety Hub Sergeants with Constables and PCSOs in attendance and more senior officers attending depending on local issues.

LCMs are held on average once a month per Community Safety Hub, subject to available deployable resources. There is no Community Safety Hub which holds meetings at an interval of longer than every six weeks. The meetings are generally held in the evening but some have taken place during the day and at weekends to try and reach different audiences. Attendance at the meetings varies: some meetings do not attract any attendees despite being advertised locally; others attract 100-plus attendees where local crime issues have received prominent attention, particularly in the local media.

LCMs provide a regular forum for local people to engage with their Community Safety Hub and to receive news and updates. Essex Police are looking to improve the quality and vitality of those meetings while exploring other opportunities to develop in-person engagement which could target other audiences.

For example:

- In **Southend**, officers attend residents' association meetings and meetings of the local homeless network. An independent Chair (a retired police officer) also supports the LCM with process and administration.
- In **Epping Forest and Brentwood**, the District Commander meets twice a year with the Chairs of parish councils as a group.
- In **Castle Point**, the meetings have been combined with local authority public meetings, providing a holistic approach to community safety which highlights partnership working and provides for the public a clearer service. Also in Castle Point, the Community Safety Hub operates a stall at the quarterly community breakfast sessions run by local volunteers.
- In **Harlow**, a local branch of a national fast food chain sponsors monthly 'coffee with cops' events where officers base themselves in the restaurant and free refreshments are offered to local people who want to drop in and discuss issues with officers.
- In **Chelmsford and Maldon**, PCSOs with responsibility for liaison around rural crime attend meetings of local rural forums and groups.
- Across the county, Community Safety Hubs take proactive steps to engage with faith groups, meeting local people at churches, synagogues and mosques as well as taking part in Independent Advisory Group (IAG) activity.
- Community Safety Hubs have also promoted **ride-along** opportunities where members of the community can come out on patrol with officers and see their district through policing eyes.

This local in-person engagement is supplemented by a variety of local newsletters which Community Safety Hubs either send to partners or contribute to.

5.0 Issue-Based Face-to-Face Engagement

Proactive engagement driven by local issues (for example a spike in a particular crime type or incident in a neighbourhood, or a particularly harmful incident affecting one area) takes place in local communities. Examples include:

- In **Stock**, a public meeting was held in November 2016, in response to a recent spate of dwelling burglaries.
- In **Wivenhoe**, public meetings were called in response to local concerns around low-level drug dealing.

- In **Harlow**, following the death of Arek Jozwik and the national media coverage putting the town in a negative spotlight, the local Community Safety Hub was proactive in engaging with local retailers in The Stow, the Polish community and local people concerned about anti-social behaviour (ASB).
- In **Southend**, following a serious gang-related assault, a local meeting was held with ward councillors and local residents which addressed the community's fear of crime and provided an opportunity for residents to express their views and discuss the police response.

6.0 Local Online Engagement

Online engagement has moved at pace since Community Safety Hubs began work. Over 200 individual officers and teams – many of them representing Community Safety Hubs – now have Essex Police Twitter accounts. The accounts provide real-time updates on police activity, crime prevention advice and guidance, and allow officers to answer questions from local people and share force campaigns.

Taking the **Basildon** Community Safety Hub as an example, 32 active accounts include the Local Policing Area Commander, Community Safety Hub Inspectors, Sergeants, Constables, PCSOs, Special Constables, CID, Operation Juno (domestic violence), Operation Raptor (gangs), Crime Scene Investigators and Volunteer Police Cadets. The effect of this local online engagement is to open up the world of Essex Police, ensure local people know about the work of the police to reduce and solve crime and protect vulnerable people, and to increase exposure and awareness of police appeals for information. The accounts also allow officers and the public to engage in a friendly way.

 **Kevin Baldwin**
@DetSuptBaldwin

36yr old female charged by
@OpTitan following numerous
Burglaries where homes broken into
over Christmas/New Year in South
Essex



In summer 2016, the force began an experiment with Thurrock Community Safety Hub to deliver a Facebook presence at a local level. The force's countywide page reaches hundreds of thousands of people each week and Facebook's data and metrics means we can track 'likes' on the page from each part of the county (for example, of the 134,000 people who 'like' the page, 9,000 are from Southend and 8,500 from Colchester). However, the volume of activity on that page means that it cannot provide a local service to Community Safety Hubs.

Working with the force's communications team, an Essex Police – Thurrock Facebook page was set up to provide regular updates and share content. The page has attracted over 1,000 'likes' from local people and the officers who run the page can engage with people directly and provide a response to questions and issues in the same way they could at LCMs.



The local Facebook page has proved successful and pages for Braintree and Uttlesford and Chelmsford and Maldon Community Safety Hubs have been set up (the Chelmsford and Maldon page attracted over 1,500 'likes' in the week it was set up).

7.0 Challenges and Areas for Improvement

The advantage of bespoke local engagement is that process and activity are designed around what the community wants and the resources which are available, meaning Essex Police makes promises it can deliver on. However, that means that from Community Safety Hub to Community Safety Hub the actual service offered to communities differs. While ensuring a locally-responsive service is the first priority, the force will focus during this year on establishing and promoting best practice in public engagement.

The force is striving to improve its communication after engagement, demonstrating what it has done to act on and resolve community concerns. Driving this 'you said, we did' activity provides a more coherent feedback loop.

Essex Police will be taking forward work to try to develop both qualitative and quantitative measures to demonstrate the impact of local public engagement and tie it to measures of public confidence. This work includes Twitter and Facebook polls, but may also include focus group and local public opinion

polling. This will increase the evidence base of 'what works' and help in the dissemination of best practice.

Engaging with hard-to-reach audiences, whether young people, older people living in isolated communities or Black, Asian or Minority Ethnic (BAME) audiences is vital, and Community Safety Hubs will seek to demonstrate that they know who and where these communities are and how best to engage with them.