

Present: Councillor Sue Ransome (Chairman), Councillor Ben Evans (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Alison Austin, Anton Dani, Viven Edge, Paul Gleeson, Martin Griggs, Stephen Raven, Brian Rush and Stephen Woodliffe

Officers –

Head of Place and Space and Senior Democratic Services Officer

Also in attendance: County Councillor Paula Cooper

108 MINUTES

The minutes of the last meeting, held on 20th March 2019, were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

Guests:

Mr Marc Jones, Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner

Chief Inspector James Trafford

Boston Police Inspector Andy Morrice

109 UPDATE ON ACTIONS FROM THE MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The Head of Place and Space updated the Committee on actions recorded in the minutes of the last meeting as follows:

1. Letters of thanks had been sent to the members of the public who had served on BTAC's Events Working Group in recognition of their hard work and achievements.
2. Liaison was ongoing with respect to CCTV signage at Burgess Pitt play area in order to deter littering.
3. Street names were being added to the 'before and after' photographs illustrating the work of the BTAC Operatives.

110 APOLOGIES

There were apologies for absence from Councillors Yvonne Stevens and Nigel Welton.

111 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

Councillor Stephen Woodliffe declared that he was the Council's representative on the Police and Crime Commission.

112 PUBLIC QUESTIONS

Mrs Pam Kenny put the following question:

"What negotiations has the Council or BTAC had about turning off some of the streetlighting within the town areas of Boston?"

The Head of Place and Space gave the following answer:

“The Borough Council only has around 60 Footway Lights within the BTAC area, none of these lights have been turned off therefore no negotiations have taken place, all other Street Lights within the BTAC area are the responsibility of Lincolnshire County Council.”

As a supplementary question, Mrs Kenny asked if the Committee had concerns about public perception regarding safety, as it acted as a parish council for the town.

The Head of Place and Space responded that the Committee was not a parish council; it was a Committee of the Council and none of the Council’s Street Lights had been switched off.

113 PUBLIC SPEAKING TIME

Mr Paul Kenny addressed the Committee to query the response to four other questions submitted by members of the public, which had been rejected in accordance with the Constitution on the grounds that they did not relate to matters for which the Committee had responsibility.

The Chairman pointed out that the public speaking time was not for raising or discussing Public Questions.

114 BRIEFING BY POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR LINCOLNSHIRE

The Chairman welcomed Mr Marc Jones, Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner, Chief Inspector James Trafford and Boston Police Inspector, Andy Morrice.

As a reminder, the Committee read out the minute regarding the reason for the original invitation to the Commissioner to attend a BTAC meeting:

“Due to grave concerns in respect of serious issues of safety within the town centre in the evening, coupled with the potential future cuts to policing within the County, Lincolnshire Crime Commissioner Mr Marc Jones be requested to attend a meeting of the committee to identify how such potential future cuts to policing would further impact on Boston.”

The Commissioner began by giving a Powerpoint presentation, which covered:

- The role of a PCC and how it fitted into policing
- The Police and Crime Plan 2017-2021
- The ‘tools’ used by the police: All Terrain Vehicles (ATVs), Drones, 4x4s, Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) and Body Worn Videos (BWVs)
- Road Safety, including information on the Road Safety Summit, statistics, Community Speedwatch, the Safer Roads Team and Neighbourhood Policing
- An explanation of the complex nature of policing, with information and case studies on modern slavery, the challenges of change in demand, sex offences and domestic abuse
- Reducing re-offending
- Challenges faced by the police, including assaults on officers and weather conditions

- Public engagement, partnership working, cross-border working and university engagement
- Statistics from the Lincolnshire Crime and Policing Survey for Boston and South Holland
- Financial challenges

The Commissioner stressed that the PCC represented the public to the police and not the other way around and that, although candidates stood for election under a political banner, they became apolitical as soon as they took up the PCC role.

The Commissioner responded to questions and comments as follows.

During discussion of the Community Speedwatch scheme, Members were advised of the different ways to engage with the scheme, such as using reactive signs and/or collecting data and using hand signs in teams. There had only been one incident in the parish area engaging with the scheme and the police would attend to provide back-up if necessary. Where parishes were reluctant to engage with the scheme to tackle speeding issues in the local community in case of reprisals, they could consider engaging in the scheme through each other's parishes if they wished; participation was definitely to be encouraged.

It was noted that the new process of using Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) saved officers considerable time by not having to return to the office to complete paperwork and the process became faster with use.

Mental health issues amongst members of the public were a significant problem for the police, with officers having to spend significant amounts of time accompanying people in Accident and Emergency. The Commissioner sat on the Health and Wellbeing Boards and the Mental Health Board for Lincolnshire to ensure the police were represented. There was a mental health force in the control room now to triage patients rather than necessitating police attendance or attention at A&E; it had diverted 250 people away from these services in its first year and was being extended.

There was a Youth Diversionary Panel in Lincolnshire that successfully avoided the need to involve the criminal justice system through the participation of young people in unpaid work and training courses. Other schemes were to be introduced; working with a former DJ, for example, to gain experience of the music industry as long as they signed up for educational qualifications.

When discussing the fear of crime, the Commissioner was of the view that this was out of perspective and not helped by media reporting of figures of court cases, where many related to people who did not live in Boston. In general, the media was not constructive when it came to balanced reporting of crimes by foreign nationals. There was a complete lack of promotion of the positive aspects of life in the Boston area and a real need for public relations personnel, in particular to attract doctors, for example, to the area.

A Member stressed the importance of the Committee's concerns regarding community safety, demonstrated by its funding of CCTV cameras and the Mini-Police scheme etc.

In particular, the figures relating to knife crime made it appear that it was a similar problem to cities such as Manchester.

The Commissioner responded that knife crime was everywhere and the police had come down heavily on it. There had been an increase across the county in terms of arrests for possession in a similar way to the targeting of drugs, which resulted in figures increasing and a corresponding increase in the perception of crime. Perception was way out of alignment with actual crime; the problem was no more significant than in neighbouring areas such as Stamford, Grantham and Gainsborough. Statistics could be misleading and a public relations professional was needed to portray the truth; it was a real challenge.

Boston's Policing Inspector agreed, stating that Boston did not have a problem with knife crime. No child had been excluded for taking a knife into school. There had been some historical issues with respect to domestic-related murders. Reports of use or threat had been consistent in the last two years.

A Member raised concerns about the increase in council tax for the Lincolnshire Police and Crime Commissioner, in view of Government's reserves, particularly due to the low level of wages in the Boston area and the jobs that had been cut despite the increase in the precept.

The Commissioner explained the Government's grant was not comparable across the country and additional funding had been consumed to pension liability changes. Reserves held had not been for police resources. Lincolnshire's police budget was amongst the lowest and it had been considered prudent to stay with that. There were inequalities in the system. The Government formula was broken, but it was very difficult to change and if the grant was increased other areas would receive less. Reserves had been used the previous year, but this could not be done again in the current year and it did not cover overheads.

A Member suggested that the police could use special constables, as they were an excellent, low-cost resource. In particular, they could deal with cars that had no tax or MOTs.

The Commissioner agreed that they were an extremely valuable resource, but there was still a cost, particularly in terms of training and, as there was a limited number of trainers, their numbers had actually halved. There would be an increase in use of specialist officers, for example, to deal with cyber-crime. The police had recently acquired the ability to seize cars, but this was not a top priority, though it did help to tackle organised crime. People wanted the police to deal with various important issues, but they all took up resources, which were being stretched ever further.

A Member commended the work of the police and recognised its finite resources and expressed the view that the fear of crime was worse years ago, though it would be good to see more action with respect to minor crimes, which led people to worse crimes, and that there be more police officers even if it meant paying more. Another referred to problems experienced with the 101 service with officers not attending or ringing callers back.

The Commissioner stressed that the limited resources available to the police had to be prioritised and directed to the greatest need, which was constantly changing. It was sometimes the case that, when the police stated they would attend an incident, they then prevented from doing so by an incident of greater need, though it would be helpful if they could communicate this. Sometimes, members of the public could not be given information if they were witnesses. There was a regional forensics body funded across five forces that gathered evidence, but it would be a waste of resources to use them in some cases, even if it would make people feel better, and they had to be upfront about this. It was getting more difficult to obtain evidence to progress cases. They needed to prevent people becoming victims of crime in the first place.

The Chief Inspector added that it would be highly advantageous to adopt Zero Tolerance to crime, but they would need to multiply resources.

A Member referred to the community learning to live together and that the Council should promote community cohesion.

In response, the Commissioner referred to a specific campaign to recruit Eastern European officers and PCSOs and added that the Mini-Police officers were also diverse. Boston had come through significant changes, but the area was very safe; there were issues, but they had to be kept in perspective and the past had to be looked at realistically.

The Chairman thanked the invited guests for their input and this was echoed by Committee Members.

The Committee heard that Inspector Morrice would be working out of the force for six months and that Inspector Fran Harrod would attend BTAC meetings in his place when possible.

The Meeting ended at 8.00 pm