

Meeting with Laura Moffatt MP On the Respect Agenda



Tuesday 28th March 2006
House of Commons

Those present;

Cllr David Shreeves - Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement
Don Edwards - Community Safety Officer, Crawley Borough Council
Linda Connor - Sussex Police, Crime Prevention Co-ordinator
Graham Rowe - Street Scenes Manager, Crawley Borough Council
Catherine Falvey - Senior Community Development Officer, Crawley Borough Council
Tricia Newell - Neighbourhood Watch, Crawley
John Wright - Chairman, Crawley Neighbourhood Watch
Brian Aldred - Neighbourhood Watch, Crawley
Nick Somers - PCSO, Sussex Police
Mike Watson - PC, Sussex Police
Matt Becker - Probationer, Sussex Police
Ian Barnes - Sergeant, Sussex Police
Mark Piper - Inspector, Sussex Police
Thomas Grimshaw - Crawley resident & Metropolitan Police Officer

Laura welcomed everyone to the meeting and following general introductions there was a very wide ranging discussion on the governments Respect Agenda and what it means in Crawley.

Perceptions of Anti Social Behaviour and Crime Rates

- Visible and responsive policing helps to make people feel safer.
- There was concern that local papers only really highlight the negative stories.
- It takes a lot of work to interest them in a good news story – but it can be done!
- Concerns about the new licensing laws have proved to be unfounded and in fact there has been an improvement.

Police Community Support Officers and Community Wardens

- PCSOs were universally thought to be an excellent resource in Crawley's neighbourhoods, effective and well respected.
- The PCSOs and CWs work well together as a team tackling community based issues.
- The possibility of additional powers for PCSOs was discussed – in some areas they carry batons, handcuffs and spray – but the local view was that this would damage the community role.
- They were viewed as very accessible – *'you can contact a PCSO with a problem and know they will deal with it'*.
- The PCSO role is separate from and complimentary to the police. They can get involved and get to know their communities.

Proposals to Merger of Surrey and Sussex Police Authorities

- It was felt overall that this was about savings at the 'top' and would have little negative impact on local policing.
- There were some concerns about the potential impact on local policing.
- The proximity of Crawley to Surrey means there are a lot of 'cross border' issues which would be more efficiently dealt with through better communication.

- It would help to spread the load for major policing events like conferences in Brighton.
- In general people aren't concerned if it's a Sussex or a Surrey and Sussex Police Officer that comes to them.

Youth Services

- There are gaps in the Youth Service provision, Crawley does need more and better service.
- The funding is help by West Sussex County Council and has to be bid for – but there is a problem with protecting those budgets and the projects they fund.
- The provision in Broadfield and Bewbush is reduced and that should be addressed urgently.
- An additional £1 million has gone to West Sussex County Council for Youth Services as a result of the recent Budget and Young people are required to set the agenda for how it is spent.
- Crawley's Young Persons Council has already done some work on this with a recent conference attended by over 500 young people from across the town. Two things they had indicated they would like to see were;
 - ◊ Youth Café's.
 - ◊ An annual event for young people.
- A West Sussex County Council criterion for bids made against 'Positive Activities for Young People' money requires Crawley Borough Council to evidence that the users were either involved in crime or had that potential. This was generally thought to be the wrong message to send and difficult to evidence.
- It can be difficult to recruit to the Youth Service because jobs are often part time and poorly paid.

Illegal Traveller Encampments

- Concerns about illegal traveller encampments and associated anti social behaviour increase anxiety but in reality not all groups of travellers are badly behaved.
- The permanent site solution was widely agreed to be the only way forward but the problem of finding a site which is acceptable to residents is proving difficult.
- Experience elsewhere is that permanent sites tend to work well and cause few problems.
- There is a public perception that the police don't deal with the problem but the police are hamstrung without a permanent or transit site to move them on to.
- The Irish famously resolved this by introducing a trespass law but in fact they also doubled the provision of sites and as a result have not had to use the trespass laws at all.
- The Deputy Prime Minister is pushing for local authorities to provide more sites and is funding that.

Anti Social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

- The early ones were less effective but as people have seen those who breach them receive a custodial sentence they are beginning to take them more seriously.
- There was a call for the ASBO process to be much faster – although it was acknowledged that it is faster now, sometimes as quick as 5-6 months.
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts provide a more low key option and are proving very successful even though they are not legally binding.
- If an Acceptable Behaviour Contract fails it means that an ASBO can be served more quickly.
- ASBOs and ABCs can give young people a 'get out' if they are subject to peer pressure – they can say that they have no choice etc.....

Cleaner Neighbourhoods

- Substantial extra money is being put into grass cutting and cleaning budgets at Crawley Borough Council.
- Keeping neighbourhoods clean and tidy is important because otherwise they can get into a neglected state and downward spiral.
- Street cleaning which was done 3 times a year will be 4 times a year from April '06 and 6 times a year from June '06. This should make a substantial difference to the appearance of the neighbourhoods.
- Fly tipping is now removed within 48 hours of being reported to the Council and there is much more proactive work being carried out by the Intensive Cleaning Team.
- By July the Graffiti removal team will be able to remove all graffiti within 24 hours.

The Respect Agenda

- Good sustainable youth services which meet the needs of young people in their own neighbourhoods are essential.
- Working together is an essential part of the Respect Agenda and the recent HM Inspection of Sussex Police particularly highlighted the work they do with partners.

At the end of the meeting it was generally agreed that it was extremely useful to meet together for a general discussion.

A commitment was made to meet again in one year – Laura agreed to co-ordinate that meeting.