

Business Crime Link Member Report 12/03/2019.

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PCC Business Crime Forum Update:

The Business Crime Forum brings together the OPCC, Constabulary, Business Crime Reduction Partnerships, and Business Representative Bodies such as the Federation of Small Businesses and the Association of Convenience Stores.

The meeting on the 15th of February was held at Bridgwater Police Station.

Superintendent Andy Bennett gave an overview on Op. Remedy.

Op. Heron, the Constabulary's approach to business crime, had undergone a review. The feedback on effectiveness and confidence of businesses in policing sadly came back overwhelmingly negative. The respondents felt it failed to address business crime (particularly violent shop thefts or vulnerable individuals detained); that businesses had no confidence in police; that it failed to address Prolific or Persistent Offending; and that it was not effective in deterring or preventing retail crime.

The Constabulary had undertaken work to begin to address the concerns raised from the review.

Community guarding schemes (this is where businesses fund private security teams to provide high visibility support) in Sussex and Nottinghamshire that were looked into came back with a negative view from the police.

As a follow up action, I spoke with business crime partners in Brighton who run the scheme who gave a differing perspective citing PCC and Chief Constable support for the initiative. There are currently no plans to launch a similar initiative although Bath BCRP does employ a Marshalls scheme and the BID in Weston fund street wardens.

Other topics included a reasonable response to a trial of Body Worn Video in a supermarket in Bristol. Bath run a successful restorative justice programme with young offenders. Sedgemoor District Council are soon to relaunch their business crime scheme and Yeovil Crime Reduction Team have successfully attained the new National Standard for BCRPs, the first official scheme to do so in the country.

Taunton Deane Spotlight Review:

As documented previously, the decision by Avon & Somerset Constabulary and

Sedgemoor District Council to introduce a new scheme in the Somerset West area has had incredibly negative impacts on these communities.

The Panel will recall that at the time 95% of businesses were satisfied with the work being done by Somerset Businesses Against Crime (SBAC - a business funded organisation) and 90% had no confidence in the Sedgemoor alternative being an effective replacement.

Fast forward 18 months from the closure of SBAC, crime and disorder affecting the town centre had reached a point that Cllr. Habib Farbahi proposed that Sedgemoor had their contract to provide CCTV and that Taunton Deane developed it's own solution to address the situation.

This motion was knocked back but it was agreed that a Spotlight Review Task & Finish Group was set up to look into the issues and to propose recommendations to try and resolve the difficulties being experienced by the community.

On the 19th of February, a Panel, chaired by Cllr Ian Morrell, convened to spend the day looking into four key areas of concern:

- 1: Crime and ASB affecting the businesses and town centre.
- 2: CCTV Contract and Technology
- 3: Rough Sleepers
- 4: Data, perception and impact of crime and ASB.

The day was broken into three parts and representatives from the OPCC, Constabulary, Local Authorities, Businesses and Community/ Voluntary sectors were called to give evidence.

Testimonies spoke of the impacts of visible policing and a business crime reduction partnership and impacted on not just the levels of crime affecting businesses, one retailer alone lost over £100k through theft a significant increase on the previous year and unprecedented for their store.

The increase in crime had led to a decline in footfall visiting Taunton over 1 million affecting sales and the sustainability of retail within the town. Traders placed the blame firmly at the feet of visitors no longer feeling safe in the town centre.

The panel heard from amongst others about the community work delivered by the pub watch, street pastors, homeless charities to address these issues but it was apparent that they could only do so much.

It was put forward that there was a new forthcoming business crime reduction partnership which will be run by Avon & Somerset Constabulary, Sedgemoor District Council, and Somerset West & Taunton District Council.

There has been significant investment by the authorities into this and it will incorporate a radio link, a reporting database and will have four separate schemes feeding into one platform.

A police sergeant has been seconded for nine months from the police, there is also officer support from the two councils and volunteers within the community are being sought to lead on the four individual schemes.

It was noted that it was disappointing that warnings were not heard from businesses as the cost to the public purse to put right what had gone wrong could have been avoided if the wishes of businesses to continue with SBAC had been respected.

The repercussions of this action by the police and the councils have potentially cost the local economy millions and is requiring investment running into over an estimated £100,000.

The loss of the BCRP has caused untold issues and eroded confidence of the business community in policing and the councils.

Personally, I hope this new project succeeds as the community and the businesses deserve far better than they have received.

The committee has published a report which I will send on separately. It has made a series of recommendations which are yet to be approved.

Recommendations for the Panel:

1: That this report is accepted.

2: That the Panel requests the PCC and Chief Constable directly the business community in Taunton and Bridgwater to hear firsthand their issues and to support them in rebuilding their confidence in policing.

3: That the anticipated benefits of Op. Remedy are clearly communicated to the business community as if it is successful it should have positive outcomes for businesses.

4: That Business Crime outcomes and business community satisfaction are considered for inclusion in the Op. Remedy Key Performance Indicators.

5: That the PCC continues to look at business crime matters and work with partners to identify opportunities to bolster communities in working together to prevent business crime.

6: That the PCC challenges the Chief Constable to ensure that the Business Crime Strategy is delivered, particularly around addressing those highlighted issues concerning Op. Heron.