

## Report of the Maidstone & District Neighbourhood Watch Association

### CONFERENCE and ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

27th November 2019, commencing 7.30pm

#### Welcome.

The Maidstone and District Neighbourhood Watch Chairman, Jim Tynan, opened the Conference Programme and Annual General Meeting 2019, and welcomed the 22 present (3 from Staplehurst). He then introduced the speakers, Superintendent Jason Wenlock, speaking on the Police and Voluntary Sector, and Sergeant Nick Hatcher talking in detail about the PCSOs.

#### CONFERENCE

##### Superintendent Jason Wenlock: Citizens in Policing.

Superintendent Wenlock first outlined the seven organized areas in which citizens assist in policing. These were as **Special Constables, Volunteer Police Cadets, Support Volunteers (including NhW), Community Police Volunteers, the Citizens' Academy, Speedwatch, and the Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS)**. He has 1000 staff who enjoy coming to work. He then discussed each group in detail.

**2.1 Special Constables (SCs).** He has 287 Special Constables (SCs) who are uniformed and warranted to the same level as regular PCs, except that they cannot carry guns. They work in 4 divisions (East, West, North and Tactical) and can take on any role within those. There are plans for a Drone Team and a Taser Team. These SCs together put in more than 100,000 hours/year, more than anywhere else in the country. Kent Police also has a unique system whereby SCs can go on transition courses to become regular PCs. This saves the force £27,067/officer in training costs. Some SCs do more hours/month than regular PCs.

**2.2 Volunteer Police Cadets (VPCs).** These cadets are 13-18 years old and wear blue uniforms. The scheme started 3 years ago and now has 400 members, several of whom are looking at careers in the police. There are 10 units so far, increasing to 11 next year, with 500 potential cadets on the waiting list. Kent was next to the last force to initiate a cadet programme, but is now doing really well and is the best example of the system in the country.

**2.3 Support Volunteers (SVs).** This group includes Neighbourhood Watch, Kent Search and Rescue (KSAR), SE 4x4 etc. It is now trying to identify roles for people, rather than people for roles. There are about 200 support volunteers, but only about half are satisfied with their roles at present. The austerity from past years makes some feel vulnerable. About 100 volunteers work in all-weather support with KSAR, helping to get people access to difficult places.

**2.4 Community Police Volunteers (CPVs).** KSAR and SE4x4 work closely with Kent Police. The Police Act, Section 38, allows Kent Police to give these groups certain items of specialist equipment and powers to use them. There are 11 strands to their actions, following authority given by the Home Office. These strands include work with KSAR pilots in private planes used for search and rescue up to 5 miles offshore. There are also hovercraft and equine CPV services. These services give volunteers the opportunities to use their own interests. A 'Dogs Group', considering stolen animals and puppy farms etc, started here in January, and by chance discovered a dog in Blackpool which had been stolen 2 years earlier.

**2.5 Citizens' Academy (CA).** This is a new venture, testing the water with groups such as NhW to get feed-back. There is a 9 week programme covering police activities how the police deal with the demands of management, firearms issues etc. Modules 1 and 2 have been completed already, with module 3 starting at the end of this month. There will be a new academy for Kent very soon. The objective is to make ambassadors for the police through better understanding of what they do, how they do it, and why. The ambassadors would also help the police with future decision-making. For example, do we approach people who have heavy tattooing differently from other citizens? We don't know or are not aware of possible issues like this unless we discuss them.

**2.6 Speedwatch.** This programme has great potential, but the police might have let volunteers down. It does not yet have enough teeth, but under Section 38 some Speedwatch volunteers may soon be given enforcement powers. These will be tried in 2 wards in West Kent, and supported by other teams for a trial in 2020. There will need to be a careful balance between guidance to motorists given by Speedwatch volunteers and any sanctions subsequently needed against them.

**2.7 Community Safety Accreditation Scheme (CSAS).** This has been going for 14 years in some form or other. For example, night club door staff may have accreditation after going on a course, and receive some form of Kent Police sleeve badge, but there have been no refresher courses, no KP policy of follow-up, and no standard operating procedures. Improvements to these problems are now in hand.

**2.8 Management of Volunteers/Citizens.** Superintendent Wenlock then outlined the management structures for the different groups of volunteers. He is now insisting that all training courses must be accredited and quality controlled. He identified a Metropolitan Police issue with an inadequate and expensive XL spreadsheet format for managing 1000 cadets. One of his computer specialist volunteers has since come up with a better electronic approach for £154 in 6 months. He now has a blend of PCs, citizens, volunteers and SCs in his operations.

### **2.9 Future Tasks.**

**a. Recruitment.** More SCs are now transitioning to full PC status. A few years ago only 14 transitioned; this year it will be 54. The SCs specialize in what suits them – not all going through the same sausage machine – so they enjoy their roles and the police force get many benefits.

**b. Open Flame.** Every month a team of SCs takes over a district for a short while. This gives the Specials experience and allows the PCs to catch up on other matters.

**c. Citizens' Academy.** Module 3 is about to start.

**d. Community Police Volunteers (CPVs).** To be expanded; 100 now and numbers rising rapidly.

**e. Taser Rollout.** Thirteen volunteers took part in a taser training course and 10 passed. All forces are interested in this scheme. If Priti Patel at the Home Office approves, trained SCs may be supplied with tasers.

**f. Transition Classes.** Some cadets may be ready to become police at 18, but others may need more maturity. If cadets work for 2+ years as volunteers they can apply for certain police roles.

### **2.10 Ambitions.**

1. The Police Commissioner loves the cadet concept, and wants Mini (8-10 y.o.), Junior (10-13 y.o.) and Cadet (13–18 y.o.) units to be developed.

2. Leadership and management skills programmes are needed, and some are already under development.

3. Joint Response Unit (JRU) capabilities should be present in all divisions. About 400 calls from police to ambulance and an equal number from ambulance to police occur monthly. The JRU is already successful in the North Division, and this idea will be expanded to other divisions.

4. Cadets and SCs can now become PCs with relatively little extra training. This will be encouraged.

### **2.11 Questions, Comments and Answers**

**Q1. Any age/height limits on PCs now?** Have to be 18, but no height limits.

**Q2. Staplehurst Speedwatch enforcement?** Could enforcement lead to aggression? Yes, if badly handled. Lots of training is needed. Education before enforcement, and careful selection of authorized people. Also looking into dash-cam usage. Essex has used Speedwatch enforcement for 6 months with no problems. Teams only go where requested.

**Q3. Payment of VPCs?** Police cadets used to be paid up until the 1980s. Now not paid.

**Q4. Where does NhW fit?** We need to consider and update how KP and NhW operate together. KP have recently changed their e-mail but people were not receiving the new e-mails. We have an aging demographic, and 5000 NhW co-ordinators who are not fully informed of issues. NhW needs an image change. The NhW Chairs are due to change things, but KP also needs to improve. Always a work in progress, but not sure what it is.

**Comment.** NhW is not very appealing for younger co-ordinators. Perhaps we should canvass families and schools with NhW ambassadors. Younger people have the technology and social media.

## **Sergeant Nick Hatcher: PCSOs in Kent**

Sergeant Nick Hatcher has only been fully responsible for PCSOs for a year, but has been in the Community Support Group (CSG) which manages PCSOs for 5 years.

PCSOs were established nationally in 2002, and were introduced in Kent in 2003. There were 8 officers then; now there are 307. They are uniformed but not warranted, and have similar but reduced powers compared with warranted PCs.

**PCSO Roles.** The PCSOs provide a high visibility uniformed presence to supplement the warranted police.

- They have roles in problem-solving and communication, rather than arrest.
- They form part of a team supporting each other and partner agencies.
- They maintain public confidence and reduce crime.
- They are a big source of intelligence, because there are not enough PCs, and because they know their patches well.

In summary, they support their police colleagues, maintain community relations and support victims of crime and anti-social behavior.

They may also have specialist roles as:

- Youth engagement officers (ex schools officers)
- Vulnerable adult intervention officers
- Domestic abuse support officers
- Missing and child exploitation support officers
- Crime prevention PCSOs (a new role, looking at situations or areas which might become problem hotspots).

**Specific Powers.** PCSOs have certain designated powers. They do not have the power of detention or arrest (though these are given in other forces).

- They can give penalty notices for, e.g. under 18s alcohol purchases; issues of firework purchases; dog fouling; cycling on pathways. These are notices of fines if the recipient is non-compliant.
- They can deal with anti-social behaviour – trying to manage issues such as begging, and general public space bad behaviours.
- They have power to disperse groups of under-16s, and demand names and addresses.
- They were given more powers in 2014 – putting 48 hour exclusion rings around areas to disperse groups. They can issue Community Protection Orders – enforcing either ‘do’ or ‘don’t do’ requirements.
- ASBOs have been replaced by Criminal Behaviour Orders.
- They have powers regarding drug, alcohol and tobacco – searching for and taking these, when appropriate. They can close premises for limited periods if these are selling alcohol or tobacco to under-age juveniles.
- They can deal with nuisance vehicles, such as cyclists on footpaths, and can seize vehicles, making use of the anti-social behavior laws.
- They can remove abandoned vehicles.
- They can control traffic (within reason).
- They can return suspected truants to school, and investigate child exploitation issues.
- They can enter and search property.
- They have roles within terrorism issues; they can photograph people; they can define and act on harassment.

The PCSOs work in partnership with many other groups, such as parish councils, NhW, Environment Agency, Golding Homes, Kent Fire and Rescue, Choices (a domestic abuse charity), MBC and KCC.

## **Questions, Comments and Answers**

**Q1. Firework controls?** There is legislation around firework sales (1 week around Nov 5<sup>th</sup>) and setting-off times, but it is old legislation which needs up-dating. Instructions on firework etiquette would be useful.

**Comment.** *It would be helpful if you could say certain things were not legal.* It would, but there are massively too many old laws.

**Q2. Section 59 regulation on vehicles?** This refers only to mechanical vehicles, not bicycles. There is growing concern over bicycle groups, such as those in Maidstone centre. Perhaps we need new orders to revise dispersal powers.

**Q3. PCSOs attending Parish Council meetings?** Different Parish Councils expect different things from their PCSOs. PCSOs should attend meetings quarterly, but some PCs prefer their PCSOs to be out in the community. The majority of councils have a PCSO presence.

**Q4. Begging – are any forms legal?** There are many forms of begging. Charity requests are usually acceptable, but some of Maidstone centre's beggars ('homeless') would be illegal under the 1800s Vagrancy Act. Maidstone begging has been much cleared up compared with a few years ago.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

### **Apologies for Absence**

Pria Webster, Volunteer and NhW Co-ordinator – other commitments

### **Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising**

The minutes of last year's meeting had been circulated prior to the meeting. They were accepted as a true record, with no objections, and there were no matters arising from them.

### **Chairman's Report**

- The Chairman reported on an interesting but frustrating year, partly caused by a reducing committee which urgently needs additional members.  
**ACTION 1.** Participants/co-ordinators consider joining the committee.
- There is no treasurer's report this year as the post is currently vacant.
- Several enquiries about starting new NhW schemes have been followed up and information packs sent.
- Our web page costs £34.13/month, and provides little service. The question is whether to close it down or not.  
**ACTION 2.** A younger co-ordinator, James Bailey, offered to have a look at the site and advise what following steps might be necessary.
- A question was raised over whether NhW should have a Facebook page. It was decided against this.
- NhW has stock in its store with listed prices totaling £1,867, but most items are seldom sold and much is probably unsaleable. It was suggested by the NhW committee that most or all of these items should be distributed free to vulnerable individuals known to the co-ordinators. The list of items should be reviewed, the revised list sent out to the co-ordinators, who should then bid/indicate an interest on behalf of their vulnerable individuals. First come, first served.  
**ACTION 3.** Agreed. The committee to revise the list and distribute to co-ordinators, with appropriate guidance instructions, via Volunteer Watch/Police Liaison Officer, Pria Webster.

**Treasurer's Report** - No report available.

### **Election of Officers**

Jim Tynan (chairman), Nick Willoughby (secretary), Ros Dean and Audrey White (committee members) were all re-elected.

**Any Other Business** - none

### **Draw of Autumn Raffle**

The raffle was drawn, and raised £42 for the charity Making a Difference to Maidstone (MADM).

The meeting closed at 21.40.