

Forum: Norton, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Wollaston & Stourbridge Town

Date and time: Wednesday, 27th October 2021 at 6.30pm

Venue: Online on Microsoft Teams

Attendance: Councillors Laura Taylor-Childs, Karen Shakespeare, Colin Elcock, James Clinton, Ian Kettle, Angus Lees, Alan Hopwood, Steve Clark and Nicolas Barlow.

Officers/Police: Simon Manson (Area Liaison Officer, Dudley MBC Public Health), Carol Tromans (Community Development Worker) and Charlotte Fletcher (Senior Health Improvement Practitioner) (Dudley MBC Public Health), Sergeant Lee Wood and PC Matthew Ingram (West Midlands Police).

Members of the public: 2

1. Welcome and introduction to the meeting

The Area Liaison Officer welcomed everyone to the meeting, ran through the online etiquette and attendee guidelines for the meeting and explained the format of the meeting. He acknowledged the long gap since the last meeting of the forum was due to the Covid-19 pandemic and that meetings were being trialled online for the ten forums this autumn. Members and Officers introduced themselves.

2. Appointment of Chair and Vice-Chair

Councillor Alan Hopwood was appointed as Chair of the forum and Councillor Steve Clark as Vice-Chair for the remainder of the 2021/22 municipal year.

3. Apologies and declarations of interest

None were received.

4. Communities Together

Subject

Action/Response

A resident referred to the importance of pollinators and asked whether Councillors would support the idea of allowing local residents to 'adopt' areas to grow native wildflowers and other plants suitable for bees and butterflies, perhaps using the 'blue heart' notices from the Blue Campaign.

Members supported this and felt that identifying appropriate locations would be key. Suggestions from local residents were welcome. Councillor Shakespeare reported that discussions had been held regarding rewilding on the Three Fields in Norton ward.

St. Peter's Church, Pedmore, provided feedback on the Community Forum funding for the repair of footpaths around the Church. Efforts were being made to create a bird friendly environment around the Church.

Noted

Oldswinford and Stourbridge Social Cricket Club – the Area Liaison Officer provided feedback from the club regarding funding provided by the forum for sight screens and on the activities of the club, which ran a wide range of teams across various age groups and for disabled cricket players. The group thanked the Council for taking swift action in response to travellers occupying the ground in June.

Noted

Stourbridge in Bloom – the Area Liaison Officer gave feedback on behalf of the group on the In Bloom Gold Award achieved for the town with the help of funding from the forum. Planning had already begun for 2022 with more groups and individuals volunteering their support.

Noted

5. Police update and discussion

Subject

Action/Response

Sergeant Wood referred to a challenging year due to the pandemic and provided comparative crime figures for the three wards for 2021-22 to date, against the previous 12 months. Whilst there had been a reduction in some crime areas such as burglary and knife crime, vehicle and violent crime had increased. Members queried whether there were any particular action being taken to address these issues.

Sergeant Wood responded that 4 additional PCs had been assigned to his team since he joined in September 2020. Probationary and special constables could also be brought in to help with operations being carried out in Stourbridge bus station and the town centre around the night-time economy.

A resident reported that local WhatsApp groups and the Nextdoor App in Stourbridge gave the impression that burglaries and vehicle crime were rampant.

In response the Police advised that the nature of crime had changed to some extent with the pandemic with some types of offences reducing and others rising.

The use of social media within communities was useful but residents did need to report to the Police and send in any intelligence e.g., number plates (where it is safe to do so).

There had been a spate of catalytic converter thefts in the area. Vehicle crime included a wide variety of offences, some less serious but all needed to be recorded.

Councillor Clark referred to issues regarding addicts and people who appeared homeless around the town centre, which seemed to have reduced with support being offered or action taken against some individuals. He also provided information in relation to planning applications for the former Page Arms and other town centre buildings which would help deal with the problem with empty premises.

PC Ingram advised that a range of civil interventions were used. Some individuals had been moved on, some premises with whom they were associated had been closed and that the Police were working closely with the Local Authority's Housing Team and others on persuading the public to donate to charity rather than pass money onto individuals.

Councillor Clark noted that Boots Chemist was now running a needle exchange programme.

Councillor Taylor-Childs added that the Housing First Team had been working with individuals and that Change Into Action had been launched for people to donate through the Churches Housing Association of Dudley and District (CHADD). Data was being looked at to see if action was effective in reducing the problem or had been moving the problem elsewhere.

Councillor Shakespeare had received a complaint of instances of a flasher on Stanley Road and asked if she could Email this to the Police.

The Police responded that they were not aware of this. It was advised that the best way to contact the Police would be by calling 101 or online reporting. Email responses may take longer should staff be on rest days. The Web Chat and WM Now can also be used for non-emergencies.

Complaints of speeding in Wollaston and the town centre.

Sergeant Wood replied that there would be operations around the town centre soon. Operation Hercules would be using drones to investigate car cruising and speeding problems. It was advised that speed cameras were not up to specification and needed replacing. The Police would be working with the Council's Highways Team together with local residents and were looking at vehicle surveys to identify problem areas. Speeding and drug issues remained the hot topics at present.

6. Community form funding

Applicant

Wollaston Allotment Society

Recommendation

To approve £5,000.00 funding for surfacing the access to the allotments on South Road.

7. Arrangements for next meeting

The Area Liaison Officer indicated that this round of Community Forums, which were being held online, would be evaluated before a decision was made on the format of future meetings and a date for the next meeting set. Links to a survey and to a review session were shared to enable participants to provide feedback.

Meeting ended at: 7:48pm