

Your Home, Your Forum Meeting Notes

Forum:	Stourbridge
Date and time:	Thursday, 6th February 2025 at 6.30pm
Venue:	Stourbridge Institute Club, 12 Bell Street, Stourbridge DY8 1AE
Attendance:	<p>Councillors P Bradley (Chair), A Tromans (Vice-Chair), C Eccles, M Hanif, J Clinton, I Kettle, J Thorne, J Griffin, S Clark and A Hopwood</p> <p>Council Officers: M Johal (Liaison Officer (LO)), C Tromans and A Stan (Community Development Workers), C Southall (Neighbourhood Services), and Mark Wilson (Community Safety Officer)</p> <p>West Midlands Police: S Foster (West Midlands Police and Crime Commissioner), Inspector S Crowe and Sergeant I Mohammed</p> <p>Approximately 46 members of the public</p>
Meeting end time:	8.20 pm
Agenda item	Notes
1. Welcome and Introductions	The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and went through the housekeeping arrangements.
2. Apologies	Apologies were received from Councillors E Cobb, T Creed, P Lee, P Lowe and K Razzaq.

3. Declarations of Interest	None
4. Notes	The notes of the meeting held on 30 th October 2024 were confirmed as a correct record.
5. Community Safety	<p>Mark Wilson (MW) (Community Safety Officer) was in attendance and provided a brief presentation on the work of the Team.</p> <p>It was noted that the Team led for the Authority on supporting communities to develop solutions that help tackle crime, fear of crime and anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>MW offered to undertake awareness sessions on extremism should anyone be interested. Contact details were made available, as follows:- mark.wilson@dudley.gov.uk 01384 816883</p> <p>In response to a query on the budget, the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) informed the meeting that he funded seven community safety partnerships, of which Dudley received £1.4 million. He also explained about various other initiatives that were funded from the community safety partnership budget.</p> <p>The meeting were informed about the process for disposing of needles.</p>
6. Dudley Have Your Say	<p>Mark Wilson (Community Safety Officer) informed the meeting about the upcoming survey.</p> <p>The following was noted:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dudley borough residents would be able to have their say on community safety issues. • Dudley’s community safety partnership ‘safe and sound’ would shortly be asking local people what should be done to help make the borough a safer place

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • People who live, visit or work in Dudley borough will be able to say what they think the big community safety issues are by completing a survey online www.dudleysafeandsound.org • An event would be held on 12th March, 2025 at the Savoy Centre from 6.30 – 8.30 pm and registrations could be made online on the safe and sound website. • The survey would remain open until the end of March. <p>Further information was available on the safe and sound website www.dudleysafeandsound.org</p>
<p>It was agreed that Agenda Item No 8 – Police and Communities Together be considered as the next item of business.</p>	
<p>7. Police and Communities Together</p>	<p>S Foster (SF), the PCC introduced himself and briefly explained about his background and role.</p> <p>SF then explained about the draft Police and Crime Plan which had been subject of a three-month consultation period and that it was expected to be published in March. The PCC's priorities included:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rebuilding community policing; • preventing and tackling violence; and • reducing the number of people tragically killed on our roads

Community safety priorities which were developed in consultation with partners and communities and are informed by West Midlands Police's Strategic Assessment, included the following:

- Preventing crime and anti-social behaviour
- Serious and organised crime
- Supporting victims and witnesses
- Violence and intimidation against women and girls
- Cyber-crime and fraud
- Serious Violence
- Offending and reoffending
- Substance misuse

The PCC further explained about the West Midlands Police budget as well as police performance and made the following key points:-

- There were 800 fewer police officers and 500 fewer PCSO's and he would continue to campaign for additional resources and return of officers for the West Midlands;
- The police precept for the West Midlands was equivalent to 27p per taxpayer which would be used to invest in the police;
- £174 million was being invested into police in addition to Government grants;
- West Midlands Police (WMP) had managed to recruit 1400 police officers, of which 570 had been allocated to the community under the neighbourhood policing operation model;
- WMP response times were provided and it was noted that 999 calls were answered within 6 seconds, on average.
- WMP had increased their arrest rates from 1,500 to 4,800 per month.

- Recent ONS statistics had revealed that crime (including knife crime) had reduced by 8% in the West Midlands.
- More offenders were being brought to justice.
- Bids of £5,000 could be made by community organisations from the proceeds of crime. The pot was currently valued at around £330,000. Details of the bidding arrangements would be released shortly.

Inspector S Crowe (SC) cited the current response rates and clarified that 999 calls were answered in less than a second, on average. 101 calls were answered in less than 30 seconds, on average and it was stated that DY had the best response rates across the force. Further, the new national online home reporting facility would assist with ongoing improvements.

The following is a summary of key issues raised by the public at the meeting:

Issue	Response / Follow Up Actions
	Noted.
The closure of the front office would have an impact on reporting.	SC commented that the strategy moving forward was to have police officers out and about in the community. There were various reporting options available, including the new online home reporting system. Ward Councillors were also available to discuss issues and onward reporting.
Average response rates provided were challenged. A member of the public stated that he had waited for over 6 minutes on a particular call before it dropped resulting in him having to	SC advised that figures for average response rates were correct. Insofar as operators asking questions, this was

	<p>redial. When calls are answered, the operator asks numerous questions which lengthens the process by which time perpetrators have taken off.</p>	<p>necessary to assess the crime and situation to prioritise calls accordingly.</p> <p>Should residents experience any problems in calls being answered, SC asked issues be reported direct to him for investigation.</p>
	<p>Issues around drugs at Redhill and other areas were mentioned.</p>	<p>SC asked that issues be formally reported so that the police could act on intelligence.</p>
	<p>Reference made to an article citing knife crime was the worst across the West Midlands. It was queried what plans were proposed to tackle the issue and to reach out to youths.</p>	<p>The PCC acknowledged this was an immediate and pressing issue and recognised the numbers of serious knife crime were high. The PCC outlined the plans to combat knife crime which included holding WMP and the Chief Constable to account, working together via the West Midlands Violence Reduction Partnerships and engaging youth workers to educate youngsters at schools and those ending up in Accident and Emergency.</p> <p>Surrender bins had also collected 1700 weapons.</p>
	<p>Reference was made to the closure of Halesowen and Stourbridge holding cells and the nearest custody blocks to Dudley was queried.</p>	<p>SC stated that Oldbury was mainly used as well as Bloxwich and Wolverhampton sites.</p>

		<p>The PCC indicated that custody blocks in the West Midlands were expected to increase from 4 to 6.</p>
	<p>Councillor J Thorne referred to stop and search powers and asked how reactive the police were, particularly in relation to knife crime.</p>	<p>SC advised that the police reacted to intelligence and were proactive by educating youngsters in schools. In terms of stop and search this was very much part of policing but proportionate. They could not stop and search everyone and reasons were needed to use these powers which came from intelligence.</p>
	<p>Whether any research had been done to establish any correlation of youth centres closing and increase in crimes involving young people between 12 to 18.</p>	<p>The PCC referred to a report on knife crime by the All Party Parliamentary Group and confirmed there was a link between cuts to youth services and rising knife crime.</p> <p>Reference was made to other various initiatives to tackle the issue including £100k being invested to open up safe spaces for young people.</p> <p>SC advised on scheduled events for young people that included boxing and that further details were available on their website.</p>

8. Have Your Say	The following is a summary of key issues raised at the meeting:							
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="586 242 1281 287">Issue</th> <th data-bbox="1281 242 2132 287">Response / Follow Up Actions</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="586 287 1281 590"> <p>Academies More and more schools were becoming academies and it was queried whether the Council had any powers to stop this and why there was no community involvement.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1281 287 2132 590"> <p>The Chair indicated that the Council had limited powers. The Vice-Chair stated that he was happy to support campaigns to keep schools in the Authority's control.</p> </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="586 590 1281 1104"> <p>Local Authority Staff Reference was made to decisions made by the Council to balance the books, such as closure of public toilets which impacted on the community. However, it was queried why there was no investment in staff training as money was being wasted by staff incompetence, particularly tenancy fraud where accommodation was falsely obtained. A particular case was referred to together with the lack of response.</p> </td> <td data-bbox="1281 590 2132 1104"> <p>The Chair acknowledged the problems and commended the current Director of Housing in dealing with issues.</p> </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Issue	Response / Follow Up Actions	<p>Academies More and more schools were becoming academies and it was queried whether the Council had any powers to stop this and why there was no community involvement.</p>	<p>The Chair indicated that the Council had limited powers. The Vice-Chair stated that he was happy to support campaigns to keep schools in the Authority's control.</p>	<p>Local Authority Staff Reference was made to decisions made by the Council to balance the books, such as closure of public toilets which impacted on the community. However, it was queried why there was no investment in staff training as money was being wasted by staff incompetence, particularly tenancy fraud where accommodation was falsely obtained. A particular case was referred to together with the lack of response.</p>	<p>The Chair acknowledged the problems and commended the current Director of Housing in dealing with issues.</p>	
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	<p>Stourbridge Business Improvement Plan Progress was requested on the Stourbridge Improvement Plan as it was noted that only cabling had been fitted for CCTV with no further work being undertaken.</p>	<p>The Chair explained about funding in the region of £3 million that was awaited. There was a need to generate evidence to submit to the West Midlands Combined Authority to draw down that funding. The monies were ringfenced for works to the Rye Market. Additional monies in the region of £120k from Community Infrastructure Levy funding would also be made available and used for improvements.</p>
	<p>Borough Town Halls/Leisure Centres Reference made to tendering of Leisure Centres and expressions of interest to run Halesowen and Stourbridge Town Halls. Money had been wasted on rebranding Leisure Centres in the region of £175k. It was queried why the Council could not retain and manage the establishments to run them at a profit themselves.</p>	<p>The Chair stated that there would be no changes for the next 5 years and that a functional review was currently underway.</p> <p>It was noted that leisure centres received a subsidy from the Council. These subsidies would continue to be paid if run by external organisations.</p> <p>The Environment and Regeneration Select Committee were scrutinising this work and would look at issues thoroughly.</p>

	<p>Mary Stevens Park - Sons of Rest The secretary was in attendance and indicated that the building was under threat of closure. The future of the establishment was queried.</p>	<p>Councillor I Kettle stated that the issue had been mentioned at Ernest Stevens Management Trust Committee. A report on the matter had been requested and feedback would be provided in due course.</p>
	<p>Town Councils Reference made to a media article on a proposal to undertake a feasibility study on establishing Town Councils in Dudley.</p>	<p>Noted.</p>
	<p>Council Housing The Government had directed Councils to have housing plans in place to build homes. This seemed to be contradictory given the Local Authority were selling off Council homes, cutting services and were in a financial predicament.</p>	<p>Councillor C Eccles (MP for Stourbridge) stated that she had fed back to Westminster that Government housing proposals and associated figures could not be accommodated in Dudley. It had been queried whether the Council could be absolved from those numbers.</p>
	<p>Derelict/Vacant Shops It was suggested that vacant shops in Stourbridge could be converted to living spaces instead of being boarded up. The former Citizens Advice Bureau building was decaying. Reference was</p>	<p>The Chair referred to Compulsory Purchase Orders (CPO) which could be used to takeover properties. However, difficulties arose in issuing CPO's due to the length of time taken to gather evidence and prove the building was detrimental</p>

	<p>made to another Council where buildings had been sold for £1 which allowed the community to take ownership of the property with a view to improving and modernising the establishment.</p>	<p>to the area. A current example of a CPO was provided in relation to a brownfield site which had taken 2 years.</p> <p>The Vice-Chair indicated he was happy to speak to groups about their ideas.</p>
	<p>Children's Services A resident referred to the lack of consistent social workers for children and stated some youngsters had 12 different social workers in 12 months. This resulted in work having to be repeated when staff left which added to incompetence. It was suggested that employee contracts mandate staff to be in position for certain periods.</p>	<p>The Chair acknowledged consistent staff was important but stated that agency staff tended to move around. It was difficult to dictate to the workforce that they are not able to seek other positions.</p>
	<p>Chairs Remarks The Chair referred to the financial position of the Council and on its statutory/non statutory duties. Adult Social Care and Children's Services carried the biggest budgets at £100m and £90m respectively with a total budget of £366m.</p>	

	<p>Reference was made to comments made by the public about the Council wasting money and it was stated that several initiatives were being put into place to combat issues. Additional scrutiny of expenditure in the form of Value for Money Panels had been set up to approve expenditure of £500 and over. New structures had been put in place reducing senior staff by half.</p> <p>It was stated that change was happening.</p>	
<p>9. Date and time of next meeting</p>	<p>To be confirmed at the Annual Meeting of the Council on 15th May, 2025. Details of future meetings will be available on the following link thereafter:- Your Home, Your Forum</p>	