

OLNEY TOWN COUNCIL



Minutes of the Olney Town Council Extraordinary Meeting held 7:00pm at The Olney Centre on Monday 13th September 2021

Present: Councillors Aldred, Bethune, Geach, Geary, Pibworth, Rodden, Rowland, Whitworth
Ward Councillors Cllrs Geary, McLean
Matthew Barber - Police & Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley
2 Members of the Police:
Gemma McCormack – Licensing Officer
Samantha Pearce – Neighbourhood Sergeant
15 members of the public

OTC21/154 Apologies for absence

Resolved: apologies received from Cllrs Brock, Brown, Stokes, Varley, Brown, Tennant, Ward

OTC21/155 Declarations of interests on items on the agenda

Resolved: none received

OTC21/156 A Q&A session with The Police and Crime Commissioner

Q – Cllr Whitworth asked when will Olney be in receipt of better policing? The town is growing at an alarming rate, and we are constantly being told that resources are being pulled elsewhere. The police are aware of the situation at the recreation ground and feels a banning order should mean no alcohol or barbeques.

Matthew Barber said this was an operational issue, there is a potential solution by changing some responsibilities within MK and this was something he would talk to Local Area Commander about. There are more police officers in Thames Valley than ever before but there is a much bigger population than 11 years ago, he is expecting another 400 officers to come on stream over the next 18 months or so. Matthew Barber said one of his challenges was to try to relieve some of the administration burden on Police Officers. PCSO's have limited powers but they are important, more money in the budget to recruit more PCSO's. They will come into train later this year (late Sept/Oct).

Samantha Pearce spoke on the Public Space Protection Order, this covers across Milton Keynes (including the Olney area). The offence is the refusal to comply with a reasonable request from an authorised officer to either cease drinking in the area or to take their alcohol away from the area. The Police cannot legally issue a fixed penalty notice as the legislation is very specific, you need to give that option first.

Signed: Cllr P Geach, 1st November 2021

Cllr Geach said the frustrating thing is once the 'offenders' have been given a warning they may never be seen again. He asked if the Officers may be able to do a circuit and to give the warnings and then do another circuit to give a ticket. Sgt Pearce agreed that going forward they would employ this tactic.

Q - Member of the public asked – looking at the stats for just July there were 40,000 crimes but that police were unable to prosecute. He asked for figures for commercial and domestic clear up rates for burglary in force area and are the figures for solving crime rising or falling from 10 years ago.

The Police Crime Commissioner advised he would have to come back on the exact figures. Outcome rates are not good, partly a reality with the nature of policing, particularly when we see the way the nature of crimes that are recorded where there is little if any evidence. Vehicle crime, bicycle theft, harassment where likelihood of having any evidence is incredibly low. Things are improving we have gone from about 20th to top 8 in overall outcomes. He said he Chairs a Board called Local Criminal Justice Board which are looking at key areas of Crime. Things are moving positively in the right direction.

Q - Cllr Rodden felt that speed on Olney Roads as a result of pandemic has increased (due to less cars on the road) and asked how we deal with this.

Matthew Barber – advised that Community Speed watch had been running for the last 6 months and a trial had been running in two areas of Thames Valley south of Oxfordshire, which takes existing Speed watch groups and moves them to a new technology system, called Community speed watch online (which is a not for profit organisation), currently operating in Surrey and Sussex but hoping to spread to other forces across the country.

The problem with community Speed watch is that it is well supported in some areas but in other areas it is not supported at all. The system is now being centralised. Mathew Barber is coordinating, and money is being invested into the new online system, this provides training for volunteers, which can be done online. It could potentially be a really good system which will allow those to see who is around or on holiday – data entry is input only once, and once in there it is in there. This will largely automate the old system.

Matthew Barber stated that from next month the aim is to start rolling this out to existing groups. By the end of the year all existing Thames Valley should be covered with the new system. In the Spring encouragement for new groups to start up will take place and money is set aside to fund groups. The key thing is joining it all up – once the data is on system so it can be seen by the safety team. If there is a problem, it is a conversation with local authority into how the traffic can be slowed down.

Cllr Geach asked that the Speeding Working Group, via the Chair of Recs & Services, at Olney Town Council speak to Samantha Peace so we are on the list for the trial of the new equipment/system.

Q - A resident stated people will automatically slow down when they see Speed watch and people who would be speeding slow down. The speaker questioned why people slow down when they see speed cameras.

Matthew Barber said ultimately what he wanted was for people to slow down on the road. If the impact from Speed watch community groups is that people slow down that is great. There are some people who will habitually speed and they need to be stopped, that is where enforcement comes.

Q - The speaker replied that this meant volunteers would have to be out 24 hours a day. They also mentioned the noise of cars that the adapted cars will slow down and speed up when they go by cameras. Why couldn't they have a camera, people slow down when they see a camera?

Matthew Barber responded he had no problem with speed cameras and was having a discussion with Roads policing about what the current funds are we have from the money that comes in from fines that we have to recycle within road safety. More cameras can be looked at and he wouldn't rule that out. People will still slow down for the camera and speed up again. Average speed cameras are better as they have longer duration, the problem with those is not only cost but also complex, they only work if you can measure speed between point a and point b, so every time you have side road you need another camera.

Q - Cllr Geach asked if we could talk about travellers' encampments as it is quite topical here at the moment.

Matthew Barber said this is one of the five key points in the Criminal Justice Plan and this is a problem for every community. The challenge in dealing with unlawful encampments is that it is not in itself a criminal offence. On Private land, if the landowner does not ask them to leave the police have no power at all – even on council land the local authority have to go to court to get an eviction notice. This is a Civil matter until possibly someone resists eviction and then it becomes a criminal matter. We all have greater expectation of what the police can do with encampments than they actually can.

There is legislation going through parliament at the moment which will make it a criminal offence to reside on land in a vehicle with the intention of depriving someone of the amenity of the land, once asked to leave by

the landowner. In this instance you would still need the landowner to ask them to leave. This shifts the balance of power.

The first year this comes in, which is likely to be spring or summer 2022, there may have a short-term increase in the problem. Encampments may become bigger with a feeling of safety in numbers – it will take police time to get together. Matthew Barber feels once we get through first season, it will be a big shift in responsibility. There will still remain a role for local councils to provide transit sites for people who want to move around the country.

Cllr Geach– asked Matthew Barber to speak with John Campbell (the Chief Constable) about the possibility of using mutual aid to response to be quicker and proportionate.

Matthew Barber said Cross border policing is important in things like this. We have at the moment a force reserve and if we can continue with that resource they could be used for encampments.

Q - Cllr Whitworth – can there be engagements with local traders to let them know when PCSO are in the area, could the council be alerted to that so we can then let the local traders know and so they have a number to call for quickness?

Matthew Barber said it should be regular enough that it should not be notable whether they are in the town centre or the surrounding area. He is asking all forces to look at strategy of neighbourhood policing that tries to make sure officers are visible, not just in being there. There are things they can do like giving them visible vehicles. As far as the response is concerned 101 response times is one of the issues, it is better than it was a couple of years ago, on average (over 24hour period) it is just over a minute and a half but there will be those times when going through a busy period. If you need a response if there is something happening call 999.

A local shop worker said they did call 999 and they waited 2 ¾ hours before they got any help. Matthew Barber was concerned and said he will take details from the resident and look into this.

Samantha stated that James was the PCSO for Olney – James gets dropped off and when he is on duty in Olney he is on foot. In terms of contacting the local team if something is happening Samantha would strongly advise using 101 or 999, these calls get dispatched through the control room and the most appropriate unit gets despatched.

Samantha said they cannot give out a phone number for PCSO as they may be deployed elsewhere, deployment each day is too fluid.

Signed: Cllr P Geach, 1st November 2021

In the Olney area when it is the PSCO day shift, he will be in Olney, they work on a rolling shift. This is full time, employment and is dedicated to Olney. Sometimes with another PCSO if he is free.

Cllr Geach said there was a point there about visibility and we should discuss how we know when the PCSOs are in the town.

Samantha says James know the hotspot areas and he will patrol these, if he hears of a job coming in he may be in attendance at someone's house, he needs to pop in on businesses and Samantha says she will check this with him.

Q - Cllr Whitworth said that lots of residents are struggling with trying to report crime online – the site crashes or people get halfway through and can't find issues that they want and half of them are giving up.

Samantha said she would look into and get back.

The Police Crime Commissioner tended to agree the platform that police use is clunky, there are lots of different modules for different types of crime and they are rolling out more which should make it easier. You do need to channel questions. Residents also highlighted not everyone is computer literate.

Matthew Barber said the more people that can move to online the better as it will free up 101 for those that can't. but this is not replacement for phone.

Q - Cllr Colin Rodden- stated there were a lot of instances of canisters of Laughing Gas and has heard this is the second largest drug for 16–24-year-old, causing big problems, can we help to inform young people of the potential dangers?

Matthew Barber advised possession of these is not an offence. Police have got a HOLMES unit, all the Schools officers in Thames Valley Police are now linked into this unit. Matthew Barber has a really good PC, Maxine, leading the school's liaison work and building a relationship with principally senior schools, trying to get to primary schools as well. Working with Charity's, they have developed a game called 'Mistakes and Ladders' which is a way of getting message across to primary school children. Work to be done on preventative work, at the moment a lot of intervention work is with children mid to late teens.

Signed: Cllr P Geach, 1st November 2021

Q - Cllr Geach asked that If the town were to provide an equipped post usable by officers. What is the chance of having Policemen stationed in Olney? He believes this is something everyone would support, feeling of reassurance in small communities.

Matthew Barber stated he is happy to discuss this and likes the idea of reopening or having a police station, but the concern is that police officers need to be out in community. He doesn't want to create an office where Police sit and do paperwork. This is useful and he was happy to take away feedback and discuss this further.

Q – A resident said that with Olney being on the A509 major road which is becoming more major with the changes being made, unless something is done now, we feel like we are being forgotten and asked Matthew Barber to please remember us when you leave tonight, and that we are hoping to see some policing changes.

Matthew Barber – MK, Olney and surrounds area are as important as each other. We have more police officers, but the population has increased, there are also more police coming. Matthew Barber wants to do more planning for future, how are we going to plan for a minimum level of increase? We need to recruit slowly and try and plan to recruit to at least meet proportionately population growth. Problems are replicated elsewhere.

Cllr Pibworth – someone drowned at the recreation ground. We never heard anything about that, why?

Samantha advised that a decision was taken at the time by the Duty Sergeant not to say anything. Going forward nothing was mentioned the Police Office said she had spoken to Corporate comms team and couldn't say much more on this. What she can say is that it wasn't alcohol related and it was a tragic accident no foul play.

Q – The resident said they had been in Olney for 30 years – she works at the hospital, and about a year ago came home after a terrible shift and saw what felt like thousands of people down at river and just cried at the window. There was no social distancing, the resident rang 101. Within five minutes there was a police van driving down, but they didn't have the power to do anything, all they could do was advise. She applauded the police for their quick response and said they did everything they could.

Matthew Barber– generally he thinks the Police do a good job and most the time they get it right.

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Q - Cllr Rowland – Asked the Police Commissioners what his view was on Town Wardens, and would that be a way of overcoming problems?

Matthew Barber replied, Yes potentially, depending on the terms of the SPO, the level of powers they get will vary. Chief Constable has given powers in towns like Reading etc and they can issue fines, also Town Councillor Officers, there are lots of things to look at. It may be that the additional funding through MK Borough, £800,000, there might be an opportunity for a conversation. With problems like anti-social behaviour there isn't any one solution, there is a role for the Town Council and a role for the Borough, given the time of year this will probably ease off now, if we can get things in place for next Spring.

Cllr Geach Thanked Sam, Matthew and Gemma for coming and that we hoped to see them often.

The meeting closed at 8:21pm