

POLICE AND CRIME PANEL**10th September 2020****REPORT OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER FOR DERBYSHIRE****POLICE & CRIME PANEL MEMBER QUESTIONS****1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide a written response to the Police and Crime Panel to the pre-submitted questions raised by individual Panel members.

2. PANEL MEMBER QUESTIONS

- 2.1 *Given the potential financial impact or implications of Covid 19, upon your ability to deliver on your obligations, in respect of establishing local priorities and, moreover, upon your budget - and therefore your capacity to honour those obligations - can we expect either a reduction, or possible withdrawal, of the grant scheme and, if so, which specific project types or funding requests will be prioritised? (Dr S Handsley)*
- 2.2 Whilst the impact of Covid-19 on both the police service and wider society cannot be underestimated neither can the potential benefits of an agile, targeted grants programme that seeks to support grassroots organisations working within the diverse communities of Derbyshire.

A foundation principle of our approach has been to support the concept of prevention and upstream management of issues as this is often significantly cheaper and less resource intensive in the long-term, removing the need for investigating crimes and tackling the social damage that it causes after the event.

Our experience has shown us that often it is smaller, microgrants, that can have the most significant impact in a local area and it is for this reason that the commissioning team have been developing an approach that will see a partnership between the OPCC and local third-sector support agencies to focus funding where it will have the greatest effect. The new Vulnerability Fund will allow us to support very localised projects, delivered by partners within communities that deliver against the broad objectives of the Police and Crime Plan but more importantly are designed and delivered by those communities. It is hoped this approach will see positive results in communities and help tackle those 'quality of life' issues that are so often raised when out meeting communities (an experience no doubt shared with Elected Member colleagues on the Panel).

Agenda Item 5

Unfortunately, successive years of financial challenges and austerity have seen an erosion of the support of grassroots voluntary/charity sector organisations who are often best placed to respond to local issues and prevent the need for police involvement. By developing this approach, it is hoped that we will be able to free up police time, allowing them to focus on more serious matters, whilst also having a positive effect on local communities and help build stronger and safer communities.

2.3 *Several years ago the Government abandoned plans to take a radical proactive look at the illegal drugs trade which blights our communities. Many things would have been up for discussion which could have included for instance, rehabilitation programs linked to de-criminalisation where it was felt appropriate, thus depleting the ill gotten gains of criminal gangs. Over time a number of strategies could have been put in place to fit many situations, and de-criminalisation would by no means be the only answer. Alas the Government chose to abandon this initiative at the eleventh hour missing a golden opportunity to finally bring about an up to date strategy for the twenty twenties going forward. (Cllr J Frudd)*

2.4 The use of drugs and the illicit trade that accompanies their use is indeed a blight on communities. As the national lead for drug and alcohol-use the PCC is on record as saying that the current system is clearly not working and that a root and branch review of existing approaches is what is needed. However, policies relating to the use of drugs is an extremely divisive issue that sees the polarisation of views and previous attempts to achieve a consensus on an approach moving forward has proved impossible, even amongst the relatively small cohort of PCCs.

The previous Chief Constable is on record as saying that it seems an anathema to put the production and distribution of potentially highly dangerous substances in the hands of serious and organised criminals. (The associated criminality should also not be forgotten such as people trafficking, modern slavery, prostitution, County Lines etc etc.)

Other developed economies have managed to developed more refined and impactful ways in which to tackle the use of illicit substances and it is hoped that in time the learning from these areas will be considered and potentially adopted in the UK.

Whilst there is clearly a criminal element in this debate, the issue of drug use should be seen as a public-health issue, rather than a criminal justice issue which could free up capacity to allow the police to focus more on the serious and organised criminality that makes significant financial gains through this trade, not to mention the significant harm it causes to individuals and communities.

Any genuine root and branch review of the current dysfunctional system would, therefore, be welcomed and supported. Dame Carol Black has been leading a review into the drugs market and approaches to tackling it.

Agenda Item 5

In the executive Summary to the first part of the review she makes it clear that whilst funding is an issue, there are more systemic problems that will need addressing if we are to properly tackle the multiple harms the illicit drug trade, and the use of those drugs, causes to individuals and society.

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