**WCN Policing & Community Safety in Westminster 12 June 2019**

**Round table discussion notes**

**Table facilitators:**

**Adam Taylor, Westminster City Council**

**Hilary Nightingale, WCN Chair & Partnerships and Public Affairs Manager,** **Cardinal Hume Centre**

**Jackie Rosenberg, CEO, One Westminster**

**Ellen Lovatt, Inspector, Metropolitan Police**

**Questions discussed**

**A:**

*How do the local communities you work with experience policing in Westminster?*

Many people wished that police stations were open for longer hours e.g. after 5pm and at weekends as often when people want to access a police station (e.g. Church Street) they are closed.

Some people mentioned that online reporting might be an appropriate way of reporting concerns especially for young people (who are often reluctant to contact police eg. if they have witnessed a crime). However, it is **not** appropriate for all residents (eg. those who do not have access to a computer or do not have digital skills) so a variety of contact methods need to be in place.

Some people who have come here from countries where the police are known for their brutality, transfer this fear to the London police. They are also frightened of being reported to social services.

One table reported that some young people still view the police with a ‘sort of disgust’ – some trying not to have any contact with the police at all, or if they do seeing it as adversarial. Many of them are perhaps not aware of their rights.

*If they have contacted the police what was the response like?*

Generally speaking, people find that if they call 999 for a non urgent incident, they are told to call 101 but struggle to get through to the right person owing to the complicated system.

The online reporting system is clunky and some of the drop-down boxes don’t work

Dedicated Ward Officers (DWOs) are not considered to be visible at the right times. After 5pm people feel they don’t see them and can’t contact them when they need them. One person mentioned building a good relationship with DWO, only to discover some months later that the individual had moved on and all the things that had been discussed and planned with them seemed to have been ‘lost’.

Some people for whom English is a second language report real communication problems as few, if any, police can communicate with them in their native language(s).

One person reported that in the case of a domestic violence incidence, police were very good at helping the woman concerned collect her things and get all the support agencies involved. Another remembered that when a local school wall collapsed, there had been an excellent response from the police.

A number of people reported delays in police responses to incidents and some reported difficulties in getting through to the same officer they had reported the incident to.

Some saw police attending community meetings to engage with residents as a tick-box exercise, mentioning they failed to respond when needed.

For older people anti-social behaviour issues, rather than crime per se, are the key concern and the police are seen as responding ¾ of the time. Feedback is positive when there is a response

Sometimes it is difficult for the police to handle complex situations. For example. residents (Churchill Gardens) complain about youth anti-social behaviour when attending youth projects/sports, but also complain when young people have no activities and therefore just end up “hanging around” – which would they prefer? Police response to these complaints is seen as “heavy handed” – police need to take the opportunity to engage with young people and reduce the need to intervene in this way, but also to challenge residents at times.

*Would they know how and who to contact for police/anti-social behavioural issues?*

There was a considerable lack of knowledge about how to report crime and who to contact about concerns around crime.

Crimestoppers – more information needed about how to use this service and what is and is not appropriate to report to it.

Police need to publicise all ways of reporting crime and concerns. Parents, for example, would like to know where they can go for advice if they discover their child is taking drugs or involved in dealing. Fear of what might happen to them – and their children -- stops parents coming forwards to the police for help and advice. What about a drugs amnesty?

**B**

*What are the crime and antisocial behavioural issues that matter most to you and the communities you work with?*

Risk of violence, particularly for young people.

Risk of being drawn into crime – a concern for young people.

Fear of being taken advantage of e.g. scams, fraud, etc. particularly older people.

Drug dealing of class A drugs and knife crime.

Parents worry about their children at the end of the school day and there is apathy from residents to report incidents of crime

Domestic abuse is considered to be on the increase due to the worsening economy and is not well reported, particularly among groups that feel disconnected from the UK. Consider joint awareness campaign with police, social services and women’s charities.

Residents are interested to have a better understanding of what happens when antisocial behaviour is reported to Westminster City Council and if this filters through to the police.

One charity reports that the incidences of domestic violence are increasing in Westminster, and that only a small fraction of incidents are reported.  Women are afraid to go to the police because of risk of reprisal, family breakdown or community shame, and those who do may be reluctant to provide evidence.

*What should the police be focussing on?*

Developing a good reporting structure for how to report crimes.

Should be more promotion of police services across all ages. For example, in schools there should be workshops that are fun and engaging and an education programme for parents.

Specific areas mentioned included petty crime and drugs offences (Soho Square - flower beds used to stash drugs). Effects of homelessness, petty theft, pick pockets. Youth congregating in St John's Wood by Harris Academy and breaking into blocks.

Offenders/drug-dealers causing issues in local areas may not always be from that area – they need taking away from the area – police response needs to separate out those who live on the estates and those who don’t.

Tackling the issues that lead to young people getting involved in crime and offending – the poverty of opportunity.

Increased use of third-party reporting and alternate pathways to help.

*Do priorities differ between the different local communities?*

Nothing recorded as regards differences in priorities in local communities in the discussions – except that one group noted that there are generational worries that could be described as the result of being at different stages of life eg. older people fear being ‘mugged in the streets’ and some parents fear their own children, who in turn fear the older gang members.

**C**

*How should we work together to ensure that local policing priorities are representative of community need?*

Police recruiting - Community Champions programme

Volunteers to work alongside police effort eg. the police could train charitable organisations to educate parents and raise awareness of key issues.

*How can we ensure that the local community is engaged in tackling them together with local safety partners?*

Dedicated Ward Officers play an important role and it would be helpful, if they were available to work appropriate hours/days to be able to build links and respond to needs of the community.

It would also be helpful to get more information about what would be a police matter – sometimes people don’t realise that actions of others are criminal e.g. coercive control.

It would be really helpful to have workshops on a variety of topics in community venues and information then shared with residents, service users and so on.

The Community & Voluntary Sector has an important role to play in sharing information both ways – i.e. from police to community and also concerns of community passed on to police.