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Alliance of Folkestone Residents Associations

Crime and Safety A Community Conversation

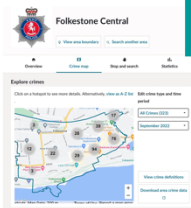
Organised by AFRA
in partnership with local police; councillors; Neighbourhood Watch
and others

This event provides a chance for local people
to hear about current crime issues and initiatives.

Find out how communities can support our local police
and work together on reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.
It's your town, so your voice matters!



Saturday Dec 3rd 1030 -1215
at the
Woodward Hall, St Eanswythe's School
The Bayle, CT20 1SE



December 3rd 2022

Crime and Safety Meeting and Outcomes: a short report

Firstly, we'd like to thank everyone for supporting this event:

Supporters included

AFRA members from local residents' associations, our partners, including community and civic voice groups such as New Folkestone Society; Shepway Heart; Folkestone Independent Retailers Group; the Old High Street Traders collective; Shepway Vox David Monk Folkestone and Hythe District Council Leader and the FHDC community safety team; Councillors from the District and Town Councils who attended or sent expressions of interest. Our local Kent police team, along with Area Commander DCI Keith Taylor and Acting Inspector Greg Pochin; IPAG group

Background to the event

For those not familiar with AFRA – the group is simply an informal coalition of residents and community groups working together to address issues of common interest.

We meet regularly to discuss a non-party-political approach to positive action which is intended to help protect a positive quality of life and everyday experience for everyone in the Town.

The idea of a community conversation around Crime and Safety was an AFRA initiative, building on our strong working relationship with local police and the community safety team.

Rather than bemoan the challenges and concerns, we accepted that we are part of the solution and that we need to work together. This event – attended by just over 30 participants - was to signal a shared determination to continue working together on several key issues.

Key issues

The meeting opened with a short outline of known issues of concern:

- Drug dealing and related crime and community impact
- Alcohol and drug abuse leading into anti-social behaviour, affecting local residents
- 'Hot spots' of trouble, often related to these issues, such as the local Churchyard.
- The balance between a responsible night time economy and residential considerations
- Licensed premises which are known for excessive demands placed on police resourcing.

Resources and systems for tackling crime and safety issues

Scott Butler, on behalf of FHDC community safety set out the remit for himself and the team, working with and alongside around 70 community organisations and agencies.

Despite the complexity of this, he described a determination to address root causes of issues such as County Lines – working with schools and education services as well as social care and youth services. He noted plans coming together for this type of event to become a regular feature of community relationships, with police actively involved in providing reassurance and a better understanding of current strategic priorities.

Police representatives present described the way in which the local team are becoming more responsive and more visible – with a new Neighbourhood policing strategy being put into place. Communication and clarity over the best channels for crime reporting and for community engagement in tackling some of the issues we face were a recognised priority for the team. Improving the police response on the phone or online was also seen as an important work in progress. Although there are clearly challenges for the service, resources are being deployed to recognise the needs of the local community - and further information on this will be provided.

AFRA data provided as a snapshot for one small locality indicated a disturbing proportion of reported incidents having an element of physical threat or actual violence; to some extent it was recognised that post-Covid the data is based on a particular context and period of time. Nonetheless, it was recognised by police and community safety representatives that this has impacted upon the well-being of local residents and upon the traders in our local economy.

Discussion and “direction of travel”

With a good representation of different interests, the conversation for the main part of the meeting clearly demonstrated support for our police and valued open engagement designed to:

- Improve public awareness of reporting and response systems
- Improve communication and visibility: ‘the Bobby on the beat’ is still a reassuring sight
- Continue partnership working to share intelligence, prioritise and plan strategically

What happens next?

1. AFRA will facilitate further informal discussions with residents and community groups
2. Feedback from the event provides senior police officers with a steer on local priorities
3. Community safety team members will build on this with further neighbourhood events
4. Licensing issues identified will be further explored and raised at the Licensing Forum
5. Councillors will note concerns and arrange police and councillor surgeries for contact
6. Proactive licensing patrols into the small hours will continue over the festive season
7. Venues are being engaged in focused discussion around addressing negative behaviours
8. Community response, including Neighbourhood Watch, will be a focus for joint working

Further information can be found on the following websites:

AFRA: core purpose and working priorities; useful community links

www.afra.network

FHDC community safety: <https://www.folkestone-hythe.gov.uk/community/community-safety>

Folkestone Police (Kent) and crime data:

<https://www.kent.police.uk/area/your-area/kent/shepway/folkestone-central/about-us/top-reported-crimes-in-this-area>