

Community Conversations aim to provide residents across South Wales with the opportunity to talk to the South Wales Police & Crime Commissioner about their local policing, issues impacting their community and the role of the Commissioner.

On Tuesday 29th September, 2020, the Commissioner held a virtual conversation with residents of Merthyr Tydfil.

Here's a round up of what was discussed.....

**There's a lot of visible drug & alcohol use in the town centre and people are afraid for their safety.**

A couple of residents flagged concerns in relation to perceived increases in homelessness and drug abuse in Merthyr town centre since lockdown measures came into place. Whilst residents were concerned about the impact this had on people living in Merthyr, they also asked what could be done to support these individuals.

The Commissioner acknowledged the complexities and challenges in resolving these issues and advised that he had raised similar concerns with Ministers. The Commissioner advised that it remained a priority for him to work with partners to tackle these issues in a joined up approach.

The Commissioner referred to the 'Drink less, enjoy more' campaign, which appeared to have had a positive effect on reduced alcohol consumption in the night time economy, particularly in Swansea and Cardiff.

The Commissioner agreed to speak to the local policing team about the issues in Merthyr Tydfil town centre and would ask them to work alongside other partner agencies to address the issues raised.

**Residents aren't getting follow-up contact from the police**

Examples were shared where victims who reported to South Wales Police hadn't received any follow up contact from officers since their initial report. Some of these victims were vulnerable and were experiencing re-occurring issues.

**The Commissioner was concerned about the lack of follow up provided to victims and agreed to progress these issues with the local policing team to ensure contact was made with each of the individuals.**

**The issue of 'follow up' will also be discussed at an organisational level, to understand where improvements need to be made.**



**Can PCSOs have more powers, similar to other police forces?**

Some residents explained that the visibility of police officers was very low and they were often only seen in their vehicles.

There was also a query about whether considerations had been made to give PCSOs extra powers, due to the roles being more visible in communities.

The Commissioner explained that PCSOs are the dedicated visible link to policing within communities and extra powers can lead to them being abstracted for other purposes. South Wales Police is focused on ensuring that PCSOs remain in their community as long as possible to build trust, establish relationships and increase confidence.

The role of the PCSO had recently been redefined, placing greater emphasis on communications and problem solving, listening to the community and finding solutions.

The Commissioner also noted that officers were more likely to be seen in their cars as they were required to cover a larger geographical distance. Whilst PCSOs were generally expected to stay in the locality and as a result, were seen more on patrol.

**I'm concerned about a number of arson attempts on the Theatre Soar in town centre**

A resident informed us of 4 recent attempts of arson on the Theatre Soar. These incidents had been reported to the police and officers had been helpful in their response. The resident remained concerned about future arson attempts and the damage this would have on the community.

**The Commissioner was alarmed by the number of arson attempts and agreed to speak to the operational policing team to see what further measures could be put in place from a prevention and safety perspective.**





**“The number of PCSOs have been reduced in Dowlais. What message does this send out?!”**

A resident was concerned that the number of PCSOs in Dowlais had been cut by half.

Whilst residents acknowledged resourcing and financial constraints, they were concerned about what message minimal police visibility sends out to residents and criminals.

The Commissioner noted that the force had invested in keeping police officer and PCSO numbers up. Whilst the funding of additional police officers from Central Government was welcomed, it still meant officer numbers remained fewer than what the force had in 2010.

The Commissioner agreed to speak to force colleagues about PCSO deployment in Dowlais, to further understand the decision making process.



**“How are young people responding to the lockdown in Merthyr from a policing perspective?”**

Residents were interested in understanding how the force were engaging with young people during the Covid-19 period.

Some residents also highlighted feedback received from young people about how unsafe they felt walking through the town centre because of the amount of homeless people living on the streets and increases in drug and alcohol consumption.

**The Commissioner acknowledged that the last 6 months had been a very difficult period, particularly for young people. The force's approach in responding to Covid-19 restrictions remained to be 'Engage, Explain, Encourage, Enforce'.**

**The Commissioner agreed that he would speak to the local neighbourhood team and ask them to speak to the young people and their representatives, to further understand their concerns.**

**The Commissioner referred to South Wales Police's Youth Volunteers scheme and noted the group of Youth Volunteers in Merthyr were particularly active in the local area.**

**The Commissioner also informed residents about the recent developments of his '#Young Voices Conversation' forum and welcomed individual conversations with residents about how young people to get involved in this forum.**

**“PCSOs have built up a good rapport with residents in Treharris”**

A resident praised the PCSOs in Treharris who were recognisable in their community. They had received a lot of positive feedback from other people in their community about the rapport PCSOs had built with them.

**The Commissioner appreciated the positive feedback and re-iterated the importance of the PCSO role within the community.**

The Commissioner also advised that he would share this positive feedback with the local neighbourhood policing team.



**“Some people are not reporting via 101 as they perceive it to not be a reliable service”**

Some residents mentioned that people had stopped reporting crimes via 101, because they couldn't get through in the past.

A resident also advised that there appeared to be a lack of awareness of the online reporting option.

**The Commissioner acknowledged that it was difficult to get through to 101 when there were spikes in demand to the Public Service Centre, however, South Wales Police remained one of the best forces in England & Wales for their response times.**

**Demand had increased in the last 3 years and this increase in demand had led to the development of online reporting mechanisms. The Commissioner agreed that online reporting should be promoted more and welcomed working with local councillors and communities to promote this online service.**

**The Commissioner agreed to speak to force colleagues about people's reluctance to report via 101 and how online reporting could be better promoted to communities.**

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