Community Conversations in Merthyr Tydfil

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

On Tuesday 29th September 2020, the Commissioner held an online conversation with people who lived in Merthyr Tydfil.

Here is a roundup of what was discussed:

# “There is a lot of visible drug and alcohol use in the town centre and people are afraid for their safety”

A couple of people were worried about the number of homeless people and drug abuse in Merthyr town centre since lockdown measures came into place. Whilst people were worried about the effect this had on people living in Merthyr, they also asked what could be done to support these individuals.

The Commissioner acknowledged the difficulties 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 local organisations to tackle these issues in a joined-up way.

The Commissioner referred to the 'Drink less, enjoy more' campaign, which appeared to have had a positive effect on reducing how much alcohol people were drinking 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 organisations to address the issues raised.

# “Residents are not getting follow-up contact from the police”

Examples were shared where victims who reported to South Wales Police had not 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 people explained that they did not often see police officers and if they did, they were often in police cars. There was also a question about whether Police Community Support Officers could have extra powers, as they were seen more in communities. The Commissioner explained that Police Community Support Officers were the dedicated visible link to policing in communities and extra powers could lead to them being used for other purposes. South Wales Police was focused on making sure that Police Community Support Officers remained in their community as long as possible, so that they were able to build trust, establish relationships and increase confidence. The role of the Police Community Support Officers had recently been altered, placing greater importance 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 area. Whilst Police Community Support Officers were generally expected to stay in their local area.

# “I'm concerned about the number of attempts to set fire to the Theatre Soar in town centre”

A person informed us of 4 recent attempts to set fire to the Theatre Soar. These events had been reported to the police and officers had been helpful in their response. The person was concerned about future attempts and the damage this would have on the community.

The Commissioner was worried by the number of attempts to set fire to the building and agreed to speak to the policing team to see what further actions could be put in place.

# “The number of Police Community Support Officers have been reduced in Dowlais. What message does this send out”

A person was concerned that the number of Police Community Support Officers in Dowlais had been cut by half. Whilst people were aware that there had been cuts police funding, they were concerned about what message minimal police visibility sent out to residents and criminals.

The Commissioner noted that the force had invested in keeping police officer and Police Community Support Officers 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 the allocation of Police Community Support Officers in Dowlais, to further understand the decision-making process.

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

People were interested in understanding how the force were engaging with young people during the Covid-19 period. Some people also shared feedback 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, 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 about how young people to get involved in this forum.

# “Police Community Support Officers have built up a good relationship with residents in Treharris”

A person praised the Police Community Support Officers in Treharris who were recognisable in their community. They had received a lot of positive feedback from other people in their community about the relationship Police Community Support Officers had built with them.

The Commissioner appreciated the positive feedback and explained how important the Police Community Support Officer role was in 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 do not think it is a reliable service”

Some people mentioned that people had stopped reporting crimes via 101, because they could not get through in the past. A resident also said that there was a lack of awareness of the online reporting option.

The Commissioner acknowledged that it was difficult to get through to 101 when there were increases in calls 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 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.