

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC MEETING OF  
WELWYN PARISH COUNCIL  
HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23<sup>RD</sup> SEPTEMBER 2009 AT  
THE CIVIC CENTRE PROSPECT PLACE WELWYN  
WHICH COMMENCED AT 7.30PM?**

**PRESENT:** Councillor J Blackburn (Chairman) and Councillors M Benson,  
S Butler, I Colpitts, C Hukin and I Skidmore.  
Police Constable S Deal  
Codicote Parish Councillor J Warwick

**IN ATTENDANCE** A S Pack Acting Parish Clerk  
J Lewis Office Administrator

**APOLOGIES:** Councillors A Blackett, B McKay, L McLusky,  
P Neville and H Ober

**MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC:** 36 List of attendees attached as APPENDIX 1

**1. The Chairman Councillor J Blackburn welcomed all present and opened the meeting.**

The Chairman advised the reason the Parish Council had called this Public Meeting was because one of the questions asked of the community in the development of the Welwyn Parish Plan was

*“Should the Parish be allocated more Police Community Support Officers (PCSO)”?*

Of the 505 people who responded to this question 79% were in favour of increasing the PCSO presence in the Welwyn Parish.

In March 2009 a Councillor put a proposal to the Council as follows:

*“that the Parish Council should co-operate with the Police and fund 50% of a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) for the Parish at a cost of £ 14,000 per annum for a two year period”.*

The Parish Councillors had mixed views on this subject and decided to hold a Public Meeting to ascertain the community’s views towards incurring additional expenditure increasing the PCSO presence in the parish from one to two.

Individual Parish Councillors are able to express their opinion on this subject, as the Council as a body does not presently hold a view on this subject.

A vote will be taken at the end of this meeting, however although this will be taken into account, the Parish Council as a democratic body will make up its mind taking into account other issues also. The Chairman advised 1,500 leaflets had been hand delivered by Councillors in the Parish, copy attached as **APPENDIX 1**

The leaflet detailed that to part fund a PCSO would cost £ 14,000 which would cost a “D” band property £ 3.23 per annum, or 6p per week.

**2. PRESENTATION BY POLICE CONSTABLE (PC) S DEAL**

PC Deal explained he is a warranted Police Officer with all the powers vested in the Police, a PCSO is not warranted and therefore has limited powers, however is a visual professional representative of the Police Force, is its eyes and ears, intelligence gatherer and a friend of the Police family and has the full support of warranted Police Officers.

Modern day Policing means a PC no longer walks the beat or can be a visual presence each day, the local PC is expected to react to crime in the beat area, however, although based in the Welwyn area, can be abstracted to any area were crime is of greater importance. An additional PCSO however, if part funded by the Council would be dedicated to the Parish.

PCSO's are an extra strata of policing introduced by the Government to compliment warranted Police Officers. There are over 250 PCSO's in Hertfordshire acting as professional witnesses and is a vibrant part of the police family. A Police Constable works 10 hours a day and has days off when there would be no police presence in the parish. A PCSO can be a visible presence when no other policing is available and although the financial commitment is an issue, the benefits to the community should also be a factor in decision making.

The Chairman thanked PC Deal for his presentation and advised that the Parish Council had through the Herts Association of Parish and Town Councils (HAPTC) consulted other Council's who had considered either funding or not funding a PCSO in their communities. Tring Parish Council had voted against funding a PCSO however Hatfield Town Council were funding several PCSO's and had reported a positive experience.

### **3. PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR J WARWICK OF CODICOTE PARISH COUNCIL.**

Councillor Warwick advised Codicote Parish Council initially had been in full support of part funding a PCSO in partnership with Knebworth Parish Council, as they considered this the nearest initiative available that introduced a "Bobby on the Beat". In the first year of the two year contract, the PCSO was only in the village 2-3 hours a day due to travelling from his/her base in Hitchin and sharing with Knebworth. In the second year this improved.

On the positive side, the PCSO attends meetings with the Parish Council when asked, visits residents, is easily accessible via mobile phone (funded by the Parish) and the Parish receive a log of the PCSO's duties.

On the negative side. The Parish Council have no involvement in the selection, appraisal and development process or his/her work rota. There is no allowance for holiday cover, maternal leave or sickness and in summary the PCSO was not seen on foot enough in the village.

Codicote Parish Council has been without a PCSO for three months due to resignations and training and this service has been missed by the community.

The Parish Council now fund one PCSO fully and one 50% funded shared with Knebworth. Although the Parish Council were told the PCSO would only be abstracted in extreme circumstances, this had not been their experience; the PCSO had been abstracted to cover the Knebworth Pop Festival and crime in Knebworth. In their experience it is down to the PCSO's superiors to dictate his/her work pattern.

### **4. THE CHAIRMAN INVITED QUESTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC**

**Q. John Roper, Carleton Rise**

How did the people of Codicote feel about the lack of a PCSO in the village for a three month period contrasted with their experience when the PCSO was a visible presence?

**Ans. Councillor Warwick.**

The Clerk received many phone calls about the lack of visibility of the PCSO, problems of anti social behaviour and vandalism increased again due to no visible presence of a PCSO. Although the Parish complained to the Police, as the PCSO was in training this could not be resolved quickly.

**Q. Andrew Howland, Oaklands.**

A Police notice was displayed in the village advising contact details for one PCSO and one PC had this originally been two PCSO's? Also, as at the moment one PCSO covers from the outskirts of Knebworth through to the Ayots and the crime rate in the Oaklands area is so low, does the parish need another PCSO?

**Ans. PC Deal**

PC Deal confirmed there had only ever been one PCSO assigned to the Welwyn Parish. Although the crime rate in the Welwyn Garden City/ Welwyn area is the lowest in Hertfordshire, the visibility of PCSO's helps to keep crime in the area low, due to intelligence networking and relationships built up in the area.

Each ward has a priority plan, if a member of the public reports a problem; this becomes part of the priority plan which is driven by the communities priorities.

**Q Mark Kingham, Beckett Gardens**

Mr Kingham explained that twice recently he had called upon the Police to attend incidents, the first response was within 5 minutes and the second response late Saturday/early Sunday morning had been within 15 minutes. This response was excellent, why do we need additional cover by a PCSO?

There have been over 700 additional Police Officers employed in the area. Why can't these additional Officers be put back as a visible presence on our streets rather than additional PCSO's?

**Ans. PC Deal**

The duties of the additional Police Officers are to respond to crime as efficiently as possible; this is not the role of the PCSO. A PCSO's role is to gather intelligence, be a presence in the area full time, respond to local calls, talk to people in the village operating mostly on foot. The PC is based in the parish but has a much wider role, covers Oaklands to Knebworth, up to Wheathampstead and into Sherrards Wood. Also rural crime is on the increase and is a big issue for the Police Officers at the moment.

The PCSO assigned to the Welwyn Parish, Rob Taylor, has been voted Hertfordshire Community Support Officer of the year in recognition of the time and effort he puts into the job.

Police Officers are part of a response team whose role is to react to crime not just in their own area, which is why a PCSO can be a more visible presence in the community than a Police Officer

**Q Barry Norton, School Lane**

Is there any evidence that a PCSO has the effect of reducing incidents or greater crime detection?

**Ans. PC Deal**

I do not have statistics to answer this question, however local knowledge indicates that the presence of a PCSO in the community can contain anti social behaviour and vandalism, as demonstrated in Codicote.

**Q John Walton, Tewin Water Farm**

If it is decided the parish does need an additional PCSO, what is the cost of Policing per "D" band property, and the cost of funding a PC against a PCSO?

**Ans. PC Deal**

The cost of funding a PC is approximately £ 45,000 with salary and on costs, however funding an additional PC is not an option, the Police Authority only allow one PC per ward.

There are 256 PCSO's in Hertfordshire and they have solved 1,089 crimes in the year.

**Councillor Colpitts**

Councillor Colpitts explained, as a retired Police Constable, he now works for Herts Constabulary, however is not involved in policing issues. Councillor Colpitts is involved as a volunteer in the Neighbourhood Watch scheme.

Although the recorded crimes detected by PCSO's are 1089, there are no figures on crime prevention which is a role in the community PCSO's undertake. We should not confuse the role of PC and PCSO's, PCSO's are not a substitute for PC's, they operate in a different way.

The Parish Council takes a holistic view of anti- social behaviour, and law enforcement is only one strand of this holistic approach. The role PCSO's can play fostering strong relationships in the community, getting to know trouble makers, using powers of persuasion, averting crime is another strand. The Parish Council have established a Youth Sub-Committee who are looking at activities for the youth of the village also again trying to offer young people services they can access in an attempt to solve the vandalism and anti social behaviour we are experiencing.

PCSO's can also confiscate alcohol from underage drinkers and issue fines to people who sell alcohol to underage youths

**Q. Borough Councillor H Hughes, Canonsfield**

What would a second PCSO for Welwyn achieve that the existing PCSO could not do?

**Ans. PC Deal**

A second PCSO would give extra support and additional hours of coverage. A second PCSO would also prove useful as a partner to give support in some situations to the existing PCSO.

**Q. Derek Hammond, Elmoor Avenue**

Could you clarify the hours a PCSO would be working in the parish and what the area covered would be? Would it include Welwyn Village, Oaklands, Mardley Heath, Digswell, Woolmer Green and the Ayots?

**Councillor Benson**

The Parish Council would need to establish a clear definition of the area Herts Constabulary would require an additional PCSO to cover.

**Ans. PC Deal**

The area covered would need to be clarified before the Council agree any funding.

**Q. Councillor J Blackburn**

1. If the Parish Council undertakes funding for a two year period, what happens after this period has expired?
2. What guarantee is there that the PCSO will not be abstracted from the parish?
3. What area would the PCSO cover and what would be his/her duties?

**Ans. PC Deal**

1. The role would be evaluated after the two year period and a contract if desired, re-negotiated.

2. The existing PCSO is taken away from the parish no more than half an hour a week, a second PCSO would be the same.
3. The duties of a second PCSO would be the same as the existing PCSO

**Q. Ray Ferry, Near the BP Garage**  
What powers will the PCSO have?

**Ans. PC Deal**  
The powers of a PCSO are many and varied, they

- give professional witness statements
- detain a suspect for up to 30 minutes and if the suspect tries to escape this is an offence
- issue fixed penalty notices with a fine of £ 80
- give evidence to enable vehicles to be seized.
- Confiscate alcohol from underage youths
- Prosecute traders who sell alcohol to underage youths

**Q. Tony Last, Danesbury**  
Is it hazardous for a female PCSO to undertake this role especially after dark?

**Ans. PC Deal**  
This is a very safe community and 50% of PCSO's are female. They are trained and self aware and keep in contact with the control room at all times. If in doubt a PCSO, male or female, can call for assistance.

**Q. John Mitchell, Digswell**  
There is considerable anti social behaviour on the Playing Field in Ottway Walk, at the Welwyn North train station and in the car park. Would a PCSO visit these areas?

**Ans. PC Deal**  
A PCSO would undertake these duties. PC Deal and the PCSO regularly visit the playing fields in Ottway Walk at the moment and are in discussions with the station about trying to combat anti social behaviour in this area. Additional CCTV coverage is being explored.

**Q. Councillor J Warwick**  
Codicote Parish Council is experiencing anti social behaviour and vandalism at the tennis courts however the PCSO only works until 11pm. Can cover be extended to after this time?

**Ans. Pc Deal.**  
Negotiations can be undertaken about the times PCSO's work.

**Q Peter James, Grange Hill**  
The PCSO has a large area to cover, how do they retain visibility? If a resident sees a crime being committed do they ring 999 or does the PCSO respond?

**Ans. PC Deal**  
The police control room who answer the 999 call will send a Police Officer to the scene; however a PCSO may be in the vicinity and arrive earlier. The PCSO would then ask for Police Officer assistance.

**Q. Ron Oxley, Codicote Road,**  
The village already has one PCSO; with modern communications anyone can easily contact headquarters as quickly as a PCSO could. The Neighbourhood Watch Scheme also is a communication tool the community can call upon.

**Ans. The Chairman**  
This comment was noted.

**Councillor M Benson**

Parishioners in the Welwyn Parish have the luxury of being able to control how the money raised locally is spent. This is the only tier of local government where the community are able to do this. The PCSO in Welwyn village is doing a brilliant job, you should ask yourself, do we need another PCSO. Could the Parish Council spend £ 14,000 in a better way, maybe by employing a Youth Officer to help youths in the area? Often it is people's perception of crime rather than crime itself which is the worry. Ask the Police how they deploy Officers into the community, could this be improved without the need for the Parish Council to 50% fund an additional PCSO. Remember you are the people who would lose control of £ 14,000 if you vote to pay this money to the Police.

**Q. Terry White, Welwyn Village.**  
How can Welwyn avoid the situation in Codicote? Was there a noticeable difference when the village was without a PCSO for three months?

**Ans. Councillor J Warwick**  
With the right PCSO who is given a mobile phone, they do an excellent job. A PCSO can prevent crime as the eyes and ears of the village. There was a noticeable difference the three months without a PCSO, vandalism and anti social behaviour increased.

**Q. Terry MacIntire, Welwyn Hall Gardens**  
If the Parish Council pay 50% towards the employment of an additional PCSO, will the Parish Council be part of the interview panel?

**Ans. Councillor Benson**  
No, the Police would be the employing body not the Parish Council.

**Q. Brian Spry, The Crescent**  
What percentage of the annual budget of the Parish Council would £ 14,000 represent?

**Ans. Councillor Skidmore**  
£ 14,000 represents approximately 5% of the budget however this would be an increase in the Precept which equates to £ 3.23 per annum for a "D" band property which is 6p per week.

**John Roper**

The first PCSO in the village worked closely with young people. She also worked on her own for a long period due to the Police Officer being off on long term sick leave. The only police presence in the village was a PCSO

**Q. Mark Kingham, Becket Gardens**  
Does Codicote Parish Council consider their investment in PCSO's value for money?

**Ans. Councillor J Warwick.**  
Initially yes, however with no PCSO in the village for three months, the Council are now re-considering this investment.

**Q. Mark Kingham, Becket Gardens**  
Ideally the time a PCSO is needed in the community is 6pm – 2am to deal with alcohol related problems. Is this possible?

**Ans. PC Deal**

The Council would need to enter into negotiations with the Police regarding the times a PCSO works in the community. However, for alcohol related problems late at night the powers of the Police Officer are required. This sort of problem cannot be handled by a PCSO who has limited powers.

Not all problems are dealt with by the Police. If licensing is a problem then a Licensing Officer will deal with these problems. Problems with the emergency one-way system not working properly, the Highways Authority will handle these issues.

**5. THE CHAIRMAN ASKED FOR A VOTE OF THOSE IN FAVOUR OF SUPPORTING FINANCING 50% OF AN ADDITIONAL PCSO AT A COST OF £ 14,000**

**For: 26**  
**Against: 14**

**The Chairman thanked PC Deal for his interesting presentation and for answering the questions raised, and Councillor J Warwick for sharing Codicote Parish Council's experiences of funding a PCSO.**

**The Chairman thanked parishioners for attending and declared the meeting closed at 8.52pm**