

Community Crime Fighters Training Session Rowley Mile Race Course, Newmarket 11:11:2009

This event was open to those who were members of Residents Associations, Neighbourhood Watch Teams, Local Authority and Housing Association Resident Involvement groups. Out of about one hundred people in attendance, only two of us were from Resident Involvement. The event was mainly centred on Youth Anti-Social Behaviour though other crime was mentioned. At the start and finish, presentations were given by Ministry of Justice and Home Office staff, with a short speech by the Chief Constable of Cheshire and Ministry speakers. The rest of the meeting was broken up into three workshops each with question and answer sessions. Throughout the day reading matter was given out and only one reference made to a website for further information.

Miriam Minty from the Home Office got the meeting off to a start and gave a description of the day's events.

Louise Casey, a Government Crime and Justice Advisor was the first speaker who made the following points:

- Despite the current series of meetings being oversubscribed, only three per cent of the population are prepared to get involved in fighting crime. Apathy is blamed. Efforts are now being made to increase this figure.
- Politicians cannot take the public mood for granted. There is a perceived feeling that the criminal justice system is remote and not accessible to the public. On their part the government has made improvements to the courts so that witnesses cannot be confronted, intimidated or see the defendants in waiting rooms before the case is called.
- There was a feeling of insecurity for witnesses, which prevented the public coming forward in possible trials.
- A figure of ninety per cent was quoted as to the number of people who want to know what goes on after an arrest is made and be kept informed of the progress of a case before it is heard, to retain their interest and goodwill to report crime.
- A list of contacts is needed for all homes as if the public knows who to contact, they will report more wrong doing. Standing up for what is right makes more demands on authority: Police, Local Authority, Housing Associations etc. The individual should not allow authority to fob them off when asking questions. Usual excuses include the citing of data protection, or that the person you want is away on leave or sick. A good time to ask a question is at a meeting with others present as it is harder for authority to duck an issue.
- One final and interesting point was that it is possible to contact the Probation Service and ask for those on community service to be used to clean up specific areas of litter and graffiti. The wearing of the high visibility orange clothing with the wording 'community payback' was part of the punishment. Only others to wear this colour are railway workers walking on the tracks.

Simon Ash, Chief Constable of Suffolk was the second speaker who gave a talk on how his 'poorly' performing force was being set to rectify their present short fall in performance. A printed text matter was given out but I feel that there nothing there of interest to housing issues.

The first workshop was taken by Ian Walker who was a local authority employee. This covered ASB and explained Premises Closure Orders. It was stated that all it took was three valid complaints from members of the public for a local authority to begin to investigate a case for a

closure order. Examples given were for pubs, clubs, multiple occupation houses, as well as for premises used for drug dealing and prostitution. It was stated that too few ASBO's were being initiated in Eastern England. More parenting contracts were to be tried where there was youth offending. Other issues applicable to Neighbourhood Watch were presented and the same with the question and answer session.

The second workshop was taken by a superintendent from Cheshire and a sergeant from the Peterborough area of Cambridgeshire Police on community policing. Initially the meeting was about Police Community Support Officers and their powers which were determined by their local chief constable. All areas of England now have a community policing team with neighbourhood officers. PCSO's can engage with the public and neighbourhood officers. Emphasis was placed on getting a neighbourhood officer to address local meetings, meetings should be monthly or bi-monthly and it was essential that members were not fobbed off, covered previously and information given was in simple understandable terms. After lunch, the final hour and three quarter session was taken up with Victim Support, a speaker from the Crown Prosecution Service, the Courts Service, Probation Service and summing up the day's events. All of which was interesting as it gave insight to areas that I have not previously been given knowledge of.

Victim Support, there to support victims of crime, giving help and direction after the event. Can now make a statement to the court telling of the affect the crime has had you with the right to change this statement at a later date. Witness Care Officers in the courts, possibility of pre-court visit(s) and separate waiting facilities at courts.

Crown Prosecution Service. The evaluation of evidence gathered as to the chance of obtaining a conviction. Is the case worthy of prosecution out of other interests.

Courts Service. Which Court is to be used. Magistrates are to initially determine the severity of the crime. If too serious, depending on sentencing guidelines and tariff, the Magistrates will refer to a Crown Court. On Housing Issues, the County Court.

The Probation Service dealt with Community Service which attracted many questions mainly on what happens if an offender fails to complete the sentence. It did appear that some received additional hours to attend while others may have got away with it?

Alan Jones
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