

You are requested to attend a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be held in John Meikle Room (JMR), Deane House, Taunton, TA1 1HE on 21 March 2019 at 6.15 pm.

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**Agenda**

1 Apologies.

2 Declarations of Interest.

To receive and record any declarations of disclosable pecuniary interests or personal or prejudicial interests in respect of any matters included on the agenda for consideration at this meeting.

(The personal interests of Councillors and Clerks of Somerset County Council, Town or Parish Councils and other Local Authorities will automatically be recorded in the minutes.)

3 Public Question Time.

4 Call-In, by Councillors Habib Farbahi and Ian Morrell, of the decision made by Executive Councillor Mark Edwards to approve the allocation of £825,000 from New Homes Bonus for site enabling activities on Firepool. (Pages 5 - 12)

5 Spotlight Review into Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in Taunton Town Centre (Report of the Chairman of the Task and Finish Cllr Ian Morrell) (Pages 13 - 70)

6 Scrutiny Work Programme.

Bruce Lang  
Assistant Chief Executive

13 March 2019

Members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting and listen to the discussions.

There is time set aside at the beginning of most meetings to allow the public to ask questions.

Speaking under "Public Question Time" is limited to 4 minutes per person in an overall period of 15 minutes. The Committee Administrator will keep a close watch on the time and the Chairman will be responsible for ensuring the time permitted does not overrun. The speaker will be allowed to address the Committee once only and will not be allowed to participate further in any debate.

Except at meetings of Full Council, where public participation will be restricted to Public Question Time only, if a member of the public wishes to address the Committee on any matter appearing on the agenda, the Chairman will normally permit this to occur when that item is reached and before the Councillors begin to debate the item.

This is more usual at meetings of the Council's Planning Committee and details of the "rules" which apply at these meetings can be found in the leaflet "Having Your Say on Planning Applications". A copy can be obtained free of charge from the Planning Reception Desk at The Deane House or by contacting the telephone number or e-mail address below.

If an item on the agenda is contentious, with a large number of people attending the meeting, a representative should be nominated to present the views of a group.

These arrangements do not apply to exempt (confidential) items on the agenda where any members of the press or public present will be asked to leave the Committee Room.

Full Council, Executive, Committees and Task and Finish Review agendas, reports and minutes are available on our website: [www.tauntondeane.gov.uk](http://www.tauntondeane.gov.uk)



The meeting rooms at both Brittons Ash Community Centre and West Monkton Primary School are on the ground floor and are fully accessible. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available.

Lift access to the Council Chamber on the first floor of Shire Hall, is available from the main ground floor entrance. Toilet facilities, with wheelchair access, are available through the door to the right hand side of the dais.



An induction loop operates at Shire Hall to enhance sound for anyone wearing a hearing aid or using a transmitter.

**For further information about the meeting, please contact the Governance and Democracy Team on 01823 356356 or email [democraticservices@tauntondeane.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@tauntondeane.gov.uk)**

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**Scrutiny Committee Members:**

Councillor S Coles (Chairman)  
Councillor F Smith-Roberts (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor J Blatchford  
Councillor N Cavill  
Councillor W Coombes  
Councillor E Gaines  
Councillor A Gunner  
Councillor T Hall  
Councillor R Henley  
Councillor R Lees  
Councillor L Lisgo  
Councillor N Townsend  
Councillor D Webber



## Taunton Deane Borough Council

### Scrutiny Committee – 21 March 2019

**Call-in, by Councillors Habib Farbahi and Ian Morrell, of the decision made by Executive Councillor Mark Edwards to approve allocation of £825,000 from New Homes Bonus for site enabling activities in order for site action planning and business case development to progress and to adequately secure the site and enhance the physical environment.**

Executive Councillor Mark Edward's decision announced via an all councillor email on 13 March 2019 was as follows:-

“Following the successful conclusion of the outline planning process for the site, the Council is progressing action planning for delivering the Firepool master plan, a full report on this issue will be presented to Council in due course. In order to progress matters and keep up momentum a number of tasks need to be completed on the site and it is proposed to re-profile funding from New Homes Bonus to fund this activity.

Proposed works include:-

- Funding NIDR access as Section 106 requirement to be completed by SCC in coming months.
- Site clearance and site investigations.
- Site set up works including boundary fence renewal.
- Demolitions of minor structures and slabs and making good.

Works will be completed on site to start to reinforce the prominence of the boulevard in the development, explore the provision of pedestrian access to canal road and pay and display car park from the station and enhance site appearance and security. These actions will facilitate progression of site delivery action planning for the site, viability assessments and prepare for discussions with investors and stakeholders.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

Not progressing early site enabling and preparatory works will cause delay in progressing site action planning and business case development and expose the Council to further risk and associated abortive costs and lost opportunity.”

This decision has now been called in by Councillors Habib Farbahi and Ian Morrell for the reasons set out below:-

“Considering the Council's failure to date in progressing Firepool as an employment site, coupled with a significant market emphasis against the retail economy since the granting of outline planning consent, the Council's decision on further Firepool Enabling Works totalling £825,000:

1. Lacks meaningful detail and/or evidence in support;
2. Requires, by effect of the financial sum in issue, due regard to the Council's democratic decision-making process.”

Once the Scrutiny Committee has heard the full debate on this matter, it will have two options open to it:-

- (1) To support the challenge and refer the decision for further consideration** (stating the grounds for justifying that request) – where the matter will be considered again by Executive Councillor Edwards.
- (2) To decide to take no further action** – in which case the decision of the Executive Councillor Edwards of 13 March 2019 will stand.

Contact Officer: Marcus Prouse

Telephone: 01823 219570 or e-mail [m.prouse@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk](mailto:m.prouse@somersetwestandtaunton.gov.uk)

Appendix A – Decision Form signed and published 13/3/2019

Appendix B – Call-In Request Form submitted 19/3/2019

13/03/2019

## **Record of Decision taken by Executive Councillor**

**Decision title: Firepool –Site Enabling Works**

**Executive Councillor making the decision: Cllr Mark Edwards**

**Author Contact Details: James Barra 01823 358699**

**Date of Decision: 13 March 2019**

### **Details of decision:**

#### **Firepool Site Enabling Works**

**To approve allocation of £825K from New Homes Bonus for site enabling activities in order for site action planning and business case development to progress and to adequately secure the site and enhance physical environment.**

### **Reasons for proposed decision:**

**Following the successful conclusion of the outline planning process for the site, the Council is progressing action planning for delivering the Firepool master plan, a full report on this issue will be presented to Council in due course. In order to progress matters and keep up momentum a number of tasks need to be completed on the site and it is proposed to re-profile funding from New Homes Bonus to fund this activity.**

#### **Proposed works include:-**

- Funding NIDR access as Section 106 requirement to be completed by SCC in coming months.**
- Site clearance and site investigations.**
- Site set up works including boundary fence renewal.**
- Demolitions of minor structures and slabs and making good.**

**Works will be completed on site to start to reinforce the prominence of the boulevard in the development, explore the provision of pedestrian access to canal road and pay and display car park from the station and enhance site appearance and security. These actions will facilitate progression of site delivery action planning for the site, viability assessments and prepare for discussions with investors and stakeholders.**

### **Alternative options considered and rejected:**

**Not progressing early site enabling and preparatory works will cause delay in progressing site action planning and business case development and expose the Council to further risk and associated abortive costs and lost opportunity.**

<b>The below has been completed:</b>	<b>Name(s)</b>	<b>Date</b>
Relevant ward councillor(s) consulted	Contact being made with Ward Cllrs to discuss.	13/03/19
<b>The following are If appropriate / applicable: Yes/No. If yes the implications should be set out or attached to this decision notice.</b>		
Finance implications	Please see comments below at appendix A.	
Legal implications	Yes- Appropriate due Legal process will be adhered to re demolitions and land holdings.	
Links to corporate aims	Yes –Progressing Taunton Town Centre Regeneration aspirations.	
Community Safety implications	Yes – Community safety implications have been considered in design of fencing and site clearance works.	
Environmental implications	Yes –Works will enhance physical environment and more specifically appropriate consultations will be undertaken with Environment Agency re implications of any works.	
Equalities Impact	No	
Safeguarding Implications		
Risk management	Yes –appropriate RA's and method statements will be undertaken ahead of works.	
Partnership implications	Yes will enhance prospects for positive dialogue with potential future partners.	

**Any conflicts of interest declared by Leader or Executive Members consulted on the proposed decision. If Yes provide confirmation from Chief Executive to grant dispensation for the Leader's / Executive Member's views to be considered.**

**N/a**

## Decision Maker

I am aware of the details of this decision(s), considered the reasons, options, representations and consultation responses and give my approval / agreement to its implementation.

Signed:



Name: Councillor Mark Edwards

Date: 13/03/2019

Note – This decision record is for decisions taken by Executive Councillors. The decision(s) can be implemented following publication in The Weekly Bulletin and the period for any call-in has expired.

*Note: A copy should also be sent to the Democratic Services Unit.*

## Appendix A: Finance Implications - Re-profiling of NHB approval dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015

The principles governing the spend of the £16.6m New Homes Bonus approval dated 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015 provide that:-

- NHB funding in the above categories can be used to fund specialist expertise and project related costs that will be required to deliver key schemes, as well as costs associated with 'hard infrastructure'.
- The NHB funding allocation and indicative profile will be refreshed annually, to ensure that spending plans remain aligned with an evolving picture of external funding secured, opportunities for new funding and new growth priorities.
- The profile of spending shown is indicative. With approval of the Director and relevant Portfolio Holder, spend may fall outside of the indicative years shown, within the overall sum allocated for the category and subject to sufficient NHB balance being available.

The recommendation is that:

- a) £500k is re-profiled from Major transport schemes with a particular focus on Pedestrian and Cycle links into Town Centre regeneration as this will be funded from CIL.
- b) £325k is re-profiled within the Employment Site Enabling growth category for Firepool as a key employment site. This will leave £3.375m allocated to other Employment Site Enabling projects.



## Call-In Request

To: Richard Bryant,  
Room 251, The Deane House

### Decision being challenged :-

By : Councillor Habib Farbahi and Councillor Ian Morrell

### Detailed reasons for challenge:

Considering the Council's failure to date in progressing Firepool as an employment site, coupled with a significant market emphasis against the retail economy since the granting of outline planning consent, the Council's decision on further Firepool Enabling Works totalling £825,000:

1. Lacks meaningful detail and/or evidence in support;
2. Requires, by effect of the financial sum in issue, due regard to the Council's democratic decision-making process.

**Signed (electronically):** Councillor Habib Farbahi  
Councillor Ian Morrell

**Dated: 19<sup>th</sup> March 2019**

When a completed call-in form is received, signed by at least two Councillors,

- The decision the subject of the call-in will be "frozen" for at least such time as the call-in has been considered;
- The call-in, if accepted, will be referred to the appropriate Scrutiny Committee for consideration;
- Those Councillors who have signed the call-in form will be invited to attend the Scrutiny Committee meeting to further explain why the above decision has been called-in;
- The decision will remain "frozen" until:-
  - The Scrutiny Committee decides not to support the call-in; or
  - The Scrutiny Committee's proposed alternative has been decided; or
  - The "Council's referral" mechanism has been triggered by the Scrutiny Committee.

**The right of call-in will expire at Noon on the fifth working day after the decision has been made.**



## TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

### REVIEW INTO CRIME AND ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN TAUNTON TOWN CENTRE

#### Introduction

This report sets out the findings of the Task and Finish Group (“the group”) charged to review crime and anti-social behaviour in Taunton’s town centre and adjacent urban areas.

At the heart of crime and anti-social behaviour is a lack of respect for values and basic consideration for others. A small proportion of the population can have a major negative impact upon communities.

The group’s conclusions are founded on examination of witnesses and written material. These comments are robust and will be uncomfortable reading for some.

Both Taunton Deane Borough Council (“TDBC”) and Avon and Somerset Constabulary (“the Police”) have failed in their primary duty to protect the citizen. There is presently a culture to appease a few, at the consequence of the many.

Partnership working takes place between TDBC and the Police. This ‘one team’ operates in association with other agencies, including Somerset County Council (“SCC”) and the third sector.

Neither TDBC, as the elected custodians of Taunton’s town centre, or the Police, as the public body employed to combat crime, are at the present time taking the lead to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Both need to take robust and expedient action.

#### Members of the Group

Councillor Ian Morrell (Chairman); Councillor Simon Coles; Councillor Dave Durdan; Councillor Habib Farbahi; and Councillor Roger Habgood.

#### Background

Over recent months TDBC councillors have been informed of the increased level of concern caused by crime and anti-social behaviour in and around Taunton’s town centre. This includes, but is not exclusive to, theft from businesses, drug dealing and consumption, criminal damage and anti-social behaviour caused by rough sleeping.

At TDBC’s Full Council meeting on the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018 councillors approved motions by Councillor Habib Farbahi and Councillor Simon Nicholls to:

- (1) Engage with all businesses in the town centre to understand their challenges and see if contributions via the radio link systems can help and support their businesses. Taunton Deane and the new authority have to come together with the business community to ensure a safe environment for them to operate so that they can survive these difficult times;
- (2) Establish a task and finish group to investigate crime and anti-social behaviour in Taunton's town centre and provide possible solutions.

### **Terms of Reference and Objective of the Review**

*“To make Taunton town centre and the broader Taunton urban area safer from crime and/or anti-social behaviour by tackling crime; rationalise the perception of such; and to encourage increased footfall.”*

Four areas were identified for investigation:

1. Crime and anti-social behaviour issues effecting businesses and the broader Taunton town centre area;
2. The closed-circuit television (“CCTV”) contract and performance;
3. Rough sleepers; and
4. Statistics, perception and the impact of crime and anti-social behaviour.

### **Links to Corporate Aims / Priorities**

The group's investigation is fundamental to TDBC's Corporate Strategy which states that TDBC should be:

*“Working with our communities to keep Taunton Deane a great place in which to live, work, learn and enjoy.”*

It addresses Key Theme 2 – Business and Enterprise from TDBC's adopted Corporate Strategy 2016-2020 and the key issues TDBC seek to influence and improve:

1. *Encourage inward investment and the promotion of the district as a place in which to visit and do business;*
2. *Promote the Taunton town centre and the existing 'gems' such as the Museum of Somerset and Castle Green.*

It also addresses Key Theme 3 – Our Place from the aforementioned Corporate Strategy and the following key issues TDBC seek to influence and improve:

1. *We [TDBC] want to keep Taunton Deane a place to be proud of and one which is well maintained, welcoming to residents, visitors and businesses and is easy to get around;*
2. *Ensure our high streets are clean and attractive places to visit.*

## **Process**

There was a delay in undertaking the review immediately after the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018 TDBC motion due to corporate priorities and insufficient TDBC resource. This led to the group initially meeting on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 2019. Witnesses were examined at the Albemarle Centre on the 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019. The group met on the 26<sup>th</sup> February 2019 to determine its conclusions and recommendations.

Businesses and members of the public were invited to provide submissions on Taunton town centre crime and anti-social experiences. Many did, and these are annexed to this report.

On disbandment of TDBC in April 2019 it is expected that the contents of this report will be actioned by the subsequent district council, West Somerset and Taunton Council (“WSATC”).

## **Finance / Resource Implications**

Funding requirements to ensure the delivery of the recommendations requires confirmation, save for the group’s recommendation to ensure twelve continuous months of street wardens totalling £113,880, payable from TDBC’s general reserves (which presently stand at £2.088 million – a balance above the recommended minimum reserves level approved in TDBC’s budget strategy of £1.7 million).

## **Partnership Implications**

The recommendations will have an implication on partnership working between the various agencies. This will include TDBC taking a proactive role in leading efforts to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

## **Conclusions**

The following are presented following examination of witnesses and written material:

1. It was suggested to the group that both TDBC and the Police are presently failing in their primary public duty to protect the citizen, which includes businesses, residents and visitors to the town centre of Taunton.
2. Submissions to the group by concerned businesses and members of the public include:
  - a. David Malcolm, from Rowcliffes, who has been broken into twice by the same man in the last two months - costing £1,000 a time. He said: “I have had to update security because the insurance people aren’t happy. The security fitter said it was absurd because the only place you’d find this kind

- of security is a bank. My staff are afraid to walk up East Reach on their lunch breaks."
- b. Philippe Messy said: "Not being British, I have been told to \*\*\*\* off back to my country. I have witnessed more than five times drug dealing the most shocking one was in front of my kid's school.
  - c. Simon Midge said: "As a former police officer of 23 years and former member of the town centre team i feel that it is unsafe to take my young family into the town given the presence of aggressive beggars, street drinking and drunkenness, open and unashamed drug dealing and use to the point we will travel to Bristol to shop, the town centre is feral and has been declining over the last few years."
  - d. Melanie and Richard Sekules spoke for traumatic experiences in which they were assaulted. Mr Sekules works at his tattoo shop on Each Reach with the door closed, he takes a packed lunch so he doesn't have to leave the shop, and regularly witnesses drug deals, public urination and members of the public being refused. He says he was 'savagely attacked' outside his shop at 11am by two youths. He had to face his children with two black eyes after the attack. Mel has been spat at and shouted at while out in town with her baby, and now avoids going into town.
  - e. Celia Rowan, who works in the town centre, said: "I find it harder and harder to do my real job, as I now spend so much of my working day, chasing drug and alcohol addicted thieves from the shop where I work. If I leave the shop for a lunch break, I am constantly pestered for money or cigarettes, by these same people."
  - f. Tina Ball wrote about her experience being singles out and shouted at by a group of drug users in the town. She said: I don't consider myself sheltered or frail in any manner, but this experience was genuinely terrifying. What makes the whole thing worse is this is the town where I live."
  - g. Gina Collins said: "Just last week I was at the ATM and one of the rough sleepers came up to me and another older lady and in a very rough voice shouted "you owe me money" "I want it now" really hassling us."
3. When examined by the group, TDBC's anti-social behaviour team lacked credibility due to their lack of knowledge and understanding of the issues. They were unable to appropriately answer questions on the current issues or advance a meaningful strategy to improve the present position. The group considers that TDBC's anti-social behaviour team suffers from a skillset deficit and/or poor management.
  4. It is noted that the Police has experienced financial cuts due to austerity. Considering present policing influences, the Chief Inspector in command of West Somerset and individual Police staff are attempting to achieve their best efforts.
  5. The group submit that Taunton Deane suffers an inequity on policing resources compared to the level of precept paid. This leads to the Police failing to address crime and anti-social behaviour within Taunton's town centre. The problem is compounded by the loss of the Police custody suite from Taunton to Bridgwater.

6. The group note that the Police role of Area Commander for West Somerset has been downgraded from the rank of Chief Superintendent to Chief Inspector.
7. The Police lack presence and are not responding to crimes in a manner expected by the Police's mission, vision and values to serve, protect and respect with outstanding policing for everyone by being caring, courageous, inclusive and learning.
8. The group suggests Avon and Somerset's Police and Crime Commissioner ("the PCC") too often sets priorities which can be seen as diverting resource from mainstream policing priorities. This leads, in part, to a failure to address drug related crime and shoplifting.
9. From April 2019 the total increase in Police funding, after the council tax precept rise averaging £24 per annum for a Band D property, coupled with new Home Office funding, will boost the PCC's net expenditure budget by £21 million. £17 million is required to meet rising costs. The PCC suggests that the remaining £4 million of new funds will be invested in the policing service for local residents and tackling local priorities including burglary, drug crime, violent crime and the recruitment of one hundred additional officers.
10. Unless Taunton Deane benefits from strong advocacy, the group submit that the additional £4 million for Police, out of the additional £21 million raised, will be inadequate to address the contemporaneous need suffered by Taunton Deane.
11. The present 'one team' partnership employed to combat crime, anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping includes TDBC and the Police. The partnership lacks leadership, strategy, and accountability.
12. In 2016, and at a cost of circa £20 thousand, TDBC instigated a Public Space Protection Order ("PSPO") to benefit Taunton's town centre. PSPOs deal with a particular nuisance within an area suffering a detrimental effect on the quality of life for those in the local community. Anti-social behaviour was sought to be addressed in significant part by TDBC's PSPO.
13. At the time of this report, neither TDBC and/or the Police have issued any prosecutions under a PSPO. The group finds this inaction woeful.
14. Musgrove Park Hospital ("MPH") and the South Western Ambulance Service ("SWAS") are applauded for the competent manner they discharge security functions for the benefit of patients, staff and visitors.
15. Issues suffered by MPH and SWAS are exacerbated by the failure of the 'one team' partnership to support early resolution to drug/alcohol dependency and mental health issues.
16. This problem in part has been caused since removal of funding from the Somerset Drugs and Alcohol Service ("SDAS") which has let that organisation to withdraw its regular drug testing regime and which formed part of the basis

for successful Drug Rehabilitation Requirement Orders (“DRRO”) being imposed by the Courts. With the removal of this testing, those addicted to drugs have lost an important element leading to compliance with the enforcement of the DRROs. Addictions so continue, and crime is consequently committed to fund the habit.

17. Charities and voluntary groups are commended for their efforts in seeking to improve the welfare of those who call upon their services.
18. Taunton Street Pastors offer a crucial service that assists both physical and emotional needs.
19. Pub Watch provides beneficial assistance to ensure reduced anti-social behaviour for the night-time economy.
20. TDBC has a duty to provide or secure the provision of advice and information about homelessness and the prevention of homelessness, free of charge. This advice and assistance must be made available to any person in the district. Advice and information services must be designed to meet the needs of people within the district. The particular needs of the following groups must be considered:
  - a. People released from prison or youth detention accommodation;
  - b. Care leavers;
  - c. Former members of the regular armed forces;
  - d. Victims of domestic abuse;
  - e. People leaving hospital;
  - f. People suffering from a mental illness or impairment; and
  - g. Any other group that the authority identifies as being at particular risk of homelessness in their district.
21. Rough sleeping and consequential crime and anti-social-behaviour is exacerbated due to TDBC’s present homelessness strategy, and the proliferation of charities and agency support that propose Taunton as a preferred destination for rough sleepers over neighbouring towns. In the alternative, the present rough sleeping policy is defective.
22. The group’s view relating to paragraph 21 is evidenced by statistics detailing the number of rough sleepers in Taunton, compared to other districts within Somerset. During examination the group were informed by TDBC and ARC, a Taunton charity administering homelessness issues, that Taunton has up to forty rough sleepers, with twenty known rough sleepers in the preceding week. This compares to Bridgwater where there are between two and twelve; Mendip, where there are up to fifteen; and South Somerset where there are up to five.
23. Businesses and residences along East Reach are suffering abnormally high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour due to the presence of Lindley House, located along East Reach. Under examination the group were informed of a reluctance by Lindley House, administered by ARC, to exclude residents who commit serious crime and/or anti-social behaviour either within its premises or

in public. This position has since been corrected by ARC's CEO, who confirms that residents in breach of Lindley House's crime and/or anti-social behaviour policy will be excluded – including for serious acts undertaken in public. However, due to inadequate provision by the public and third sectors for related services, namely penal and/or rehabilitation (alcohol, drug and mental health), excluded residents are faced with little option but to return to Lindley House. Despite efforts by ARC to assist these residents, a cycle of behaviour can ensue, with the source of the problem not being addressed.

24. Similar issues connected to crime and anti-social behaviour exist for businesses and residential property due to the location of the Taunton Open Door, situated along Mount Street.
25. The group are concerned for the welfare of rough sleepers, including their needs in any climate. However, the issue of cleansing litter and associated living following rough sleeping and or drug usage is not being promptly or properly or addressed by TDBC.
26. In the fight to tackle theft, businesses are not receiving appropriate support from the Police. It was reported that shop lifting from TK Maxx in any one-year amounts to circa £100 thousand.
27. Despite businesses employing significant security measures, due to the present high levels of crime and anti-social behaviour businesses are concerned that that they are unable to fulfil their duty of care to both employees and customers.
28. The Police request crimes be reported. The system of reporting via 101 and electronic mediums is onerous with limited to nil response from the police. Furthermore, despite crime recording, the Police do not take appropriate subsequent action. This includes failing to apprehend known criminals who have been prohibited from town centre businesses.
29. Whilst temporarily employed by TDBC, street wardens were able to act as first responders. The manner in which street wardens performed their duties is commended. Street wardens act as a conduit for assisting the public and reporting crimes. Furthermore, as street wardens do not benefit from powers of arrest informal resolution often occurs, which can include the return of stolen items.
30. TDBC's *ad hoc* employment of the street wardens was ill-judged. Although initially employed to address rough sleeping in car parks, the role of street wardens expanded to broader town centre anti-social behaviour issues. Street wardens enabled a sense of security, which is otherwise absent.
31. Weston-Super-Mare employ street wardens as part of a strategy to assist against crime and anti-social behaviour. The duration of street wardens needs to be meaningful in order to provide operational effect.
32. Closed circuit television ("CCTV") has a pivotal role in combatting live crimes,

whilst providing evidential support during Police charging and Court cases. His Honour Judge Ticehurst, Resident Judge at Taunton Crown Court, reports that defendants often plead guilty when confronted with CCTV evidence, whereas absent such evidence they contest the matter no doubt hoping that potential witnesses may fail to attend Court and/or fail to give evidence sufficient to lead to a conviction.

33. The CCTV operators are complimented for their work. Located in Bridgwater and under contract with Sedgemoor District Council (“SDC”), the operators work within a busy control room. However, considering the annual expenditure by TDBC of circa £250 thousand, the group is concerned that not enough operator resource is dedicated to address Taunton’s CCTV needs.
34. On examination, TDBC has been negligent by not facilitating an appropriate CCTV contract and service level agreement with SDC. This negligence is compounded by the fact that TDBC has failed to ensure that CCTV cameras are fit for purpose, or that the contract represents value for money.
35. The group were informed of unhelpful encroachments by SDC and Police that led in 2016 to the closure of the crime reduction partnership known as Somerset Businesses Against Crime (“SBAC”). SBAC operated as a financially independent unit. The loss of the scheme is unfortunate and demonstrates the disparate motives of TDBC, SDC and the Police. It also suggests that those responsible for making that decision had little to no regard or comprehension of the consequences that we now know has led to an increase in crime and anti-social behaviour.
36. SDC propose a new partnership, similar to SBAC, known as the Safer Somerset Business Partnership (“SSBP”). SSBP will be a multi-agency crime reduction partnership including TDBC, West Somerset Council (“WSC”), SDC, the Police, PCC and local businesses that wish to participate by way of subscription. It is anticipated the scheme will go live on the 1<sup>st</sup> of April 2019.
37. SSBP includes Database & Intranet for Safer Communities (“DISC”). DISC is an electronic application based on information sharing. It contains the facility to submit intelligence and incident reports. Reporting will be undertaken by subscribers of the system, businesses namely, and will cost each subscriber £100 plus VAT per annum. No information was presented to the group to qualify or quantify reduced rates of crime or anti-social behaviour and/or increased enforcement by the employment of DISC.
38. All ideas to alleviate the problems of crime and anti-social behaviour must be considered. It is noted however that SSBP will in large measure replicate the work of SBAC, previously undertaken without significant cost to the taxpayer. The group are concerned that SSBP and DISC will become another reporting mechanism, without actually providing increased levels of resource leading to enforcement and arrest. The group believe that additional resource will be better directed on increasing Police numbers and apprehending offenders.
39. A new Business Improvement District (“BID”) initiative is proposed to assist

tackle crime and anti-social behaviour issues. BID will not ensue until at least twelve months hence and is subject to majority agreement by way of vote of business rates payers. BID could provide benefits, but the group are concerned that significant costs will be expended on the administration of BID, at the consequence of funding additional front-line services.

40. It is evident that the perception of crime and anti-social behaviour is a problem. Considering the above conclusions, it is unsurprising that public satisfaction with tackling crime and anti-social behaviour is low. The group are disappointed that the only response by TDBC and the Police to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour, or the perception thereof, was an acceptance that the present system is not delivering and “could be better”.
41. The group consider that problems caused by crime and anti-social behaviour will continue until the responsible public bodies apply the appropriate resources, skillset and strategy.

## **Recommendations**

The group advise the following:

1. Robust representations by TDBC to the Police requesting senior leadership and a focus on crime and anti-social behaviour in Taunton’s town centre. **Urgent** priority must be given to reducing drug related crime and theft.
2. TDBC’s Chief Executive Officer (“CEO”) to make **immediate** robust representations to the Police and PCC for increased Police resources within Taunton Deane.
3. TDBC to:
  - a. Strongly consider reassignment of TDBC officers presently tasked with anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping matters to ensure a fit for purpose skillset;
  - b. Appoint a specialist anti-social behaviour co-ordinator, who must be a former senior police officer suggested to be the rank not less than Superintendent, to champion TDBC’s anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping policy. A former junior police officer, although likely to be competent, is unlikely to hold the required management background required to advocate on behalf of TDBC at the expected level to senior Police officers and/or the PCC; and
  - c. Until the appointment of a specialist anti-social behaviour officer is appointed, as per 2(b) above, TDBC’s CEO be charged as TDBC’s senior responsible officer on the council’s anti-social behaviour and rough sleeping strategy and operations.
4. TDBC request the Police take ownership on leading ‘one team’ partnership working. If the Police fail to undertake such, TDBC to own the role.

5. Within two months of this report the 'one team' partnership and TDBC are to instigate meaningful priorities for Taunton. This will include a costed strategy and ensure the partnership is accountable by way of meaningful and deliverable outcomes to include:
  - a. Reducing crime;
  - b. Preventing and tackling anti-social behaviour;
  - c. Making the public and businesses feeling safer;
  - d. Reducing the harm caused by drugs and alcohol and mental health issues;
  - e. Reducing adult re-offending;
  - f. Preventing offending by children and young people; and
  - g. Developing community cohesion against crime and anti-social behaviour.

This should be undertaken by way of eight strategic themes:

- a. Intervention by law enforcement;
  - b. Prevention by communicating Taunton's robust approach to address crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - c. Non-negotiable support for those identified as perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - d. Robust enforcement to protect the community, victims and witnesses as well as punishing offenders for their actions whilst deterring others from committing crime and anti-social behaviour;
  - e. Victim support;
  - f. Encouragement of the reporting of crime and anti-social behaviour to the Police, as without the reporting the true problem will remain masked;
  - g. Information sharing to deliver effective enforcement action against crime and anti-social behaviour; and
  - h. Public reassurance and community empowerment by way of engagement to foster confidence and the probability that perpetrators will be brought to justice.
6. The 'one team' partnership must seek early funding to reinstate the regular drug testing regime by the Somerset Drugs and Alcohol Service ("SDAS").
7. Musgrove Park Hospital ("MPH") and the South Western Ambulance Service ("SWAS") must be invited to become full participants of the 'one team' partnership.
8. As it is unlikely Police resources will be forthcoming in the short-term, with immediate effect TDBC must provide permanent funding for Taunton town centre street wardens. This amounts £113,880, to be provided by TDBC's General Fund Reserves, to enable a twelve-month full-time street warden service for:
  - a. Weekdays – between 0700hrs and 1800hrs;
  - b. Saturdays – between 0800hrs and 1800hrs; and

c. Sundays – 0900hrs and 1700hrs.

TDBC general fund reserves presently stand at £2.088 million – a balance above the recommended minimum reserves level approved in TDBC’s budget strategy of £1.7 million.

9. TDBC is not to renew the CCTV contract until discussions take place with SDC on an appropriate service level agreement, costs, and value for money. It is expected that meaningful proposals be concluded within three months of this report, with TDBC’s CEO leading TDBC’s negotiations. Until that date the present contract will continue.
10. Terms of the new CCTV contract is to include a CCTV operator with dedicated supervision of CCTV cameras operating within Taunton Deane.
11. In the event that SDC are unable to offer a contract to meet TDBC’s requirements, TDBC is to service CCTV operations and associated radio link inhouse. At this point the nature of partnership working *per se* will require revisiting as the reliance on outsourcing will have been deemed defective.
12. Updates on crime, anti-social behaviour, rough sleeping and the delivery of CCTV is to be brought before TDBC scrutiny at regular intervals. An annual report on each, together with incident reporting, is also to be published.
13. The Public Space Protection Order (“PSPO”) must be renewed by TDBC in September 2019. It is expected that TDBC utilise prohibition notices independently and in conjunction with the Police.
14. TDBC shall support BID, subject to the demands of the business community and any levy not being employed on additional administrative roles.
15. TDBC to publicly provide contact details of its cleansing administrators so litter from rough sleeping and/or drug usage can be reported and cleansed.
16. TDBC to work with the third sector to address and resolve issues emanating from Linley House and other temporary housing shelters. This must take a robust approach and accept the principle that criminal and anti-social behaviour will lead to eviction from sheltered housing and possible processing by other agencies.
17. TDBC to encourage the alternative giving scheme, which permits public donations to the third sector.
18. TDBC to appoint a councillor as a member champion on crime and anti-social issues. Creation of a role to assist, and lead where appropriate, on related council strategy and matters.

## **References**

- Appendix A – Original Motion to TDBC dated the 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2018
- Appendix B – Spotlight Review Terms of Reference
- Appendix C – Spotlight Review Agenda - 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019
- Appendix D – CCTV Questions
- Appendix E – Submissions

**IAN MORRELL**  
Chairman  
13<sup>th</sup> March 2019

## **Full Council – 2 October 2018**

### **To tackle crime and anti-social behaviour working alongside businesses to reverse the downward trend and thus enhance shoppers' sense of security leading to increased footfall in Taunton Town Centre**

#### **Motion proposed by Councillor Habib Farbahi, seconded by Councillor Simon Nicholls**

##### **Preamble:-**

Taunton Deane Borough Council, as the public custodians of Taunton Town Centre, is ideally positioned to oversee the regeneration of the high street and to oversee the security arrangements.

In May 2017, Sedgemoor District Council launched their own business crime reduction system to replace Somerset Businesses Against Crime (SBAC). At the time, the Conservative Executives at both Sedgemoor and Taunton Deane were warned by those running SBAC and their members that this would have dire consequences for businesses.

A survey conducted by SBAC showed that 95% were happy with the service SBAC provided and 90% did not believe that Sedgemoor would deliver a meaningful service.

SBAC received little funding from the public purse and was funded mostly by the business community it served. We questioned the rationale of the move by Sedgemoor but they went ahead with their plans.

As predicted by so many, the consequences of this action on the businesses in Taunton Deane have been profoundly felt.

The lack of co-ordination and intelligence has led to stores reporting losses spiralling into the tens of thousands of pounds. They are telling us that intimidation and violence are on the increase. This, coupled with increased anti-social behaviour, has forced visitors to stay away from a town centre that is increasingly seen as becoming lawless. It was recently reported that the town had seen over 676,000 less visitors compared to last year the same time and 9,241 fewer motorists using town centre car parking. The fear of crime is keeping people away and hurting businesses further. This cannot continue!

Visible Police resources are scarce thanks to recent cuts; the CCTV system in the town centre is not fit for purpose with controllers in Bridgwater responding to calls for help by saying they are too busy or to call 101; the absence of data sharing is leading to criminals committing offences in our town with no fear of prosecution or action.

The current administration at Taunton Deane know this and have funded two security guards to patrol the town centre this summer to reassure tourists that the town is safe. This expense of thousands of pounds could have been avoided if they had listened to local businesses and saved SBAC. Indeed, the near fatal stabbing of a security guard on Friday, 7 September 2018 might have been prevented if SBAC had still been in operation as the attacker would have been known and the situation that occurred could have been avoided.

A well-known national chain with over 1,400 stores reported that the worst shrink figures in the whole company were in Taunton.

Furthermore in the Police and Crime Commissioner's annual report it was recorded Business Crime in all regions of Avon and Somerset fell by 5% in 2017 except for Somerset West (which covers Taunton Deane, West Somerset and Sedgemoor) where it rose by 5% a difference of 10% to the rest of the service area which includes Bristol, Bath, and Weston-Super-Mare.

If we fail to address these issues, we will see further reductions in visitor numbers; continued crime and disorder in our area; and businesses (particularly the smaller, independent stores) will close leaving further voids hard to fill in the current climate.

We propose a solution to the business crime issues affecting our communities. We hope that the business community will support it and that the Full Council support this motion, which will benefit our traders and residents with increased visitors to the area.

The Taunton Deane Business Crime Unit:-

- Currently, Taunton Deane fund Sedgemoor CCTV to the tune of £250,000 a year to monitor and maintain our CCTV network.
- Local taxpayer's money is being used to generate income for another authority and with little benefit for our community.
- CCTV Operators are not pro-active in monitoring offenders, disinterested in calls for help from the businesses, and are also overstretched looking after multiple locations often with only one or two operators.
- Taunton Deane is funding work that benefits Bridgwater and other areas but not Taunton Deane.

We know this money could be more effectively used and targeted in the key areas; we need to give our businesses a dedicated service.

**Recommendations:-**

- (1) Engage with all the businesses in the town centre to fully understand their challenges and see if contributions via the radio link systems can help and support their businesses. Taunton Deane and the new authority have to

come together with the business community to ensure a safe environment for them to operate so that they can survive these difficult times.

- (2) We propose that the £250,000 per year that is currently being spent with Sedgemoor District Council would be better used here in the County Town by developing a Taunton Deane Business Crime Unit rather than the current outsourced centres that are not obviously working. Therefore cancel the current contract and seek an alternative provider.

This Unit to:-

- monitor and maintain the CCTV system;
- operate a radio link system for the area; provide high visibility security presence in the town; and
- co-ordinate a professional and compliant data sharing service.

- (3) We propose that businesses also need to contribute via the radio link systems knowing that a better quality service than that currently being received will be provided.

The community would benefit from stronger security presence and a reduced fear of crime, which would attract customers back to Taunton Town Centre.

- (4a) An external Audit should be conducted to include a review of the whole system with immediate effect to ensure that people and businesses in Taunton Deane Borough Council are getting the best possible value for the services currently provided by Sedgemoor District Council.
- (4b) A task and finish group is formed to look at issues around crime and Anti-Social Behaviour and possible solutions.



# Local Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour Spotlight Review Terms of Reference

Scoping paper by the Scrutiny Officer to set the terms of reference for a proposed scrutiny review

Chair	Councillor Ian Morrell
Membership	Councillors Simon Coles, Dave Durdan, Habib Farbahi, Roger Habgood
Executive Members	Councillor Jane Warmington
Background	At the October 2 <sup>nd</sup> 2018 Meeting of Full Council a motion was brought forward by Councillor Farbahi around tackling crime and ant-social behaviour in The Deane. Two motions were passed, one to set up Task and Finish Group to look into the issues and possible solutions and another motion to “engage with all the businesses in the town centre to fully understand their challenges and see if contributions via the radio link systems can help and support their businesses. Taunton Deane and the new authority have to come together with the business community to ensure a safe environment for them to operate so that they can survive these difficult times.”
Scope	<p><i>‘To make the Taunton Town Centre and the broader Taunton urban area be safer from crime or ASB or the perception of such to encourage increased footfall and tackle crime.’</i></p> <p>A review of the current state of play with our Anti-Social Behaviour approach is considered timely. Talking and engaging to the key stakeholders in the area would provide a broad view of the key issues.</p> <p>Investigate the causes of some of these issues around ASB/Drug Use, impact on retailers, hospitals, shoppers and the public.</p> <p>In the Police and Crime Commissioner’s annual report it was recorded Business Crime in all regions of Avon and Somerset fell by 5% in 2017 except for Somerset West (which covers Taunton Deane, West Somerset and Sedgemoor) where it rose by 5% a difference of 10% to the rest of the service area which includes Bristol, Bath, and Weston-Super-Mare.</p> <p>In May 2017, Sedgemoor District Council launched their own business crime reduction system to replace Somerset Businesses Against Crime (SBAC). There have been some reported issues with the technology CCTV and Radios and a lack of co-ordination and intelligence. Visible Police resources are scarce thanks to recent cuts; the CCTV system in the town centre has had reported issues and find out more about the equipment in use.</p> <p>Who can we link with practically externally to make a difference in this area, and also what can we do to help as an authority?</p>
Possible lines of enquiry	<p>Four Key Areas identified under broad headings;</p> <p><b>1. <u>Statistics, Perception, Impact. (RH)</u></b></p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- There is a key issue between the reality of the crime borne out by the statistics and the perception – what is the evidence? Is crime not being reported? Link between footfall fall and feeling of safety in Town Centre? Can this be evidenced?</li> </ul> <p><b>2. <u>CCTV Contract and Technology. (HF)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The CCTV Contract provider scope was last reviewed in 2011 and there could be further questions and a review into technology, equipment, operators, and value for money.</li> <li>- Compare workload and KPI's for TDBC against SDC and SSDC figures. Are the operations covering the TDBC area as per contract? Does the price increase year on year and on what basis?</li> <li>- Maintenance Contract – figures for TDBC comparative to other users? Alternative costings to ensure best value.</li> <li>- Verify SDC arrest statistics against those of police and radio link users. Dip sample claimed arrests to see if CCTV played a proactive role in that.</li> <li>- Questions around lone working and unauthorised personnel in control room whilst in operation.</li> </ul> <p><b>3. <u>Rough Sleepers (SC)</u></b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Feedback on Town Centre Wardens Pilot – was it effective project and did it have an impact?</li> <li>- More Feedback on Night Café and solutions to the problems associated with Rough Sleepers and Aggressive begging/ASB.</li> <li>- Review complaints coming into TDBC about ASB?</li> </ul> <p><b>4. <u>General Crime/ ASB Issues (IM/DD)</u></b></p>
<p>Possible witnesses (operational and policy)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Inspector L Simpson / Inspector A Pritchard</li> <li>• Community Safety Partnership Leads</li> <li>• Police &amp; Crime Commissioner/Police &amp; Crime Panel Chair</li> <li>• Office of the Chief Constable/ Chief Superintendent</li> <li>• SCC Cabinet Member</li> <li>• Relevant Officers at SCC (Chief Exec / L. Macready)</li> <li>• Representatives of Town Centre Businesses (Chamber of Commerce and Town Centre Retailers Assoc.) (C. Barrell &amp; K. Lowe)</li> <li>• Andy Sharman</li> <li>• Sedgemoor District Council and Monitoring Centre – B. Donbavand</li> <li>• Weston-Super-Mare BID (Town Centre Manager)</li> <li>• Relevant TDBC Officers (S Weetch, C Stuart, L Redston, H Stewart, K Papps, J Davis, J Hassett, S Lewis et al).</li> <li>• Billy Dawber / Street Wardens – 3D Security</li> <li>• Judge David Ticehurst</li> </ul>

## Appendix B

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Chief Executive of the NHS Trust and SWAST</li><li>• A+E Staff/ Consultants (H. Peters/ Dr. Mann OBE)</li><li>• Public Health (T. Grant)</li><li>• Street Pastors (A. Prior-Sankey).</li><li>• ARC/Open Door/Mind</li><li>• Other CCTV Operators</li></ul> <p>All witnesses/organisations to be questioned/ represented will be the most senior or appropriate person, with a timeslot apportioned on the day to ensure the best use of their time.</p>
Timescale	<p>Councillors to go for a 'Site Visit' in the evening with Streetwise/ Street Pastors in the build-up to see the work ongoing.</p> <p>Hold a Pre-meeting in the week before</p> <p>Spotlight Review meeting XX Feb 2019.</p> <p>Report to Committee March 2019</p>



# A G E N D A

**Event:** **Spotlight Review - Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour in Taunton**  
**Date and time:** Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> February 2019  
**Place:** The Loft, Albemarle Centre, Albemarle Road, Taunton, TA1 1BA

This is a Spotlight Review meeting established by Taunton Deane Borough Council's Scrutiny Committee. The meeting will not be held in public and Members and other stakeholders are reminded that some information on this agenda may be sensitive and/or confidential.

Scrutiny Spotlight Review Membership: Councillors Ian Morrell (Chair), Simon Coles, Dave Durdan, Habib Farbahi and Roger Habgood. (Councillor Jane Warmington is the Executive Portfolio Holder responsible for this area.)

Item	Time	Agenda
-	09.00	<b>TEA/COFFEE &amp; REGISTRATION</b>
1	09.25	<b>CHAIR'S WELCOME</b> Agenda and objectives for the day
2	09.30	<b>MORNING SESSION: GENERAL CRIME AND ASB –</b> Witnesses to support with evidence and to be questioned, with ½ hour at end for general discussion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chief Inspector Lisa Simpson, Area Commander – Avon and Somerset Police</li> <li>• Loretta Mcalpine, Clinical Service Manager – ED, Musgrove Park Hospital</li> <li>• Steve Townsend - Weston-Super-Mare Town Centre Manager</li> <li>• David Holtby - Crime Reduction Manager</li> <li>• Andrew Lloyd - Somerset Public Health</li> <li>• Keith Lowe – Centre Manager, Orchard Centre</li> <li>• Dave Knight - Chairman of Trustees for Street Pastors</li> <li>• Andy Sharman</li> <li>• Relevant TDBC Officers</li> </ul>

-	11.30	<b>LUNCH</b>  A lunch is provided for those Members and guests attending. An opportunity to network and make connections with those present.
3	12.15	<b>CHAIR'S WELCOME - AFTERNOON</b> Objectives for the afternoon
4	12.20	<b>AFTERNOON SESSION 1 – ROUGH SLEEPERS</b> Witnesses to support with evidence and to be questioned, with ½ hour for discussion;  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Justin Roxburgh and Daz Northover- ARC</li> <li>• Billy Dawber and Jayne Dawber – 3D Security</li> <li>• Keith Lowe – Centre Manager, Orchard Centre</li> <li>• Relevant TDBC Officers</li> </ul>
-	14.20	<b>COMFORT BREAK</b>
5	14.30	<b>AFTERNOON SESSION 2 – CCTV</b> Witnesses to support with evidence and to be questioned, with ½ hour for discussion;  <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sedgemoor Monitoring Centre</li> <li>• Relevant TDBC Officers</li> <li>• Simon Bawler - SDC</li> </ul>
6	16:30	<b>CLOSE PUBLIC SESSIONS</b> Closing comments from the Spotlight Review Chair and others.
-	16:40	<b>COMFORT BREAK</b>
7	16:50	<b>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS</b> TDBC Members of the Spotlight Review only
8	17.30	<b>CLOSE</b>

CCTV Provision

- What are the contract terms? Held with legal but broadly as per email to Cllr Morrell
- When did it commence? How long to run? What Notice? SDC first started to monitor and maintain the TDBC CCTV system in 2005. It is an annual rolling contract now. Notice is 3 months on either side.
- Who are the parties? SLA between SDC & TDBC

Strategic Aims

- What are they? Defined in the CCTV Code of Practice (further information below). TDBC Officers may have additional aims.
- When set, by whom, who reviews them? When is the next review? Reviewed as required and in contract management meetings.

Where are the Principles and objectives?

- Defined in the CCTV Code of Practice:

**2.2 General Principles of Operation**

- 2.2.1 The system will be operated in accordance with all the requirements and the principles of the Human Rights Act 1998.
- 2.2.2 The operation of the system will also recognise the need for formal authorisation of any covert 'Directed' surveillance or crime –trend (hotspot) surveillance as required by the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the police force policy.
- 2.2.3 The system will be operated in accordance with the Data Protection Act at all times
- 2.2.4 The system will be operated in accordance with the protection of freedoms act 2012.
- 2.2.5 The System will be operated fairly, within the law, and only for the purposes for which it was established and are identified within this Code, or which are subsequently agreed in accordance with this Code of Practice.
- 2.2.6 The system will be operated with due regard to the principle that everyone has the right to respect for his or her private and family life and their home.
- 2.2.7 The public interest in the operation of the system will be recognised by ensuring the security and integrity of operational procedures.
- 2.2.8 Throughout this Code of Practice it is intended, as far as reasonably possible, to balance the objectives of the CCTV System with the need to safeguard the individual's rights. Every effort has been made throughout the Code to indicate that a formal structure has been put in place, including a complaints procedure, by which it can be identified that the System is not only accountable, but is seen to be accountable.
- 2.2.9 Participation in the system by any organisation, individual or authority assumes an agreement by all such participants to comply fully with this Code and to be accountable under the Code of Practice.

### 1.3 Objectives of the System

1.3.1 The objectives of the Sedgemoor District Council CCTV System as determined by the owner / partnership which form the lawful basis for the processing of data are:-

- *To help reduce the fear of crime*
- *The help deter crime*
- *To detect crime and provide evidential material for court proceedings*
- *To assist in the overall management of several towns in Sedgemoor, Taunton Deane and in Yeovil Town Centre*
- *To enhance community safety, assist in developing the economic well being of the areas and encourage greater use of Town Centres, car parks etc*
- *To assist the Local Authority in its enforcement and regulatory functions within the Sedgemoor area Taunton Deane area and for South Somerset District Councils Yeovil Town Centre*
- *To assist in Traffic Management where applicable*
- *To assist in supporting civil proceedings which will help detect crime*
- *To assist in the training of CCTV operators, the Police and others involved in the use of the CCTV system*

#### What targets exist?

- To produce evidence within 3 days; this is currently achieved 100% of the time.
- Who set them? Who reviews them? Agreed and reviewed between all parties.
- What codes of practice do you operate under?
  - ICO <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/documents/1542/cctv-code-of-practice.pdf>
  - LA <https://www.sedgemoor.gov.uk/cctv>
- What Industry standards does the operation comply with? BS 7958
- What legal framework does the control room operate under? The Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 (RIPA), the Protection of Freedoms Act 2012, the Data Protection Act 2018 & GDPR, and the Human Rights Act 1998. Other relevant laws relating to, for example, the provision of evidence.

#### Operational control

- Who has it? SDC
- How does control of the system pass to the police? No control as standard. Control may be legally requested in special circumstances according to RIPA legislation.
- What regime does the operation run under? Operated 24/7/365 under the Monitoring Services Manager. Staffed by SDC employees, trained and qualified on CCTV Control Room Operations and licenced by the SIA. All staff are vetted by the police to NPPV2.
- What are the cameras used for? The cameras are used to aid the reduction of crime, reduction in the fear of crime, and to improve public safety, supporting our duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. To name some of the offences they are used for: ASB, theft, driving offences such as drink drivers/accidents/vehicles that fail to stop for police, county lines, drug dealing, criminal damage, assaults, robbery, sexual assaults, rape, murder, etc. Additionally, to aid the location of wanted individuals and missing persons, gather evidence and intelligence, monitor known offenders, etc.
- How many arrests have been made thanks to CCTV evidence? This will need a police response. In recent months, however, SDC has shared the following numbers of video evidence files for crime in Taunton with the police: Oct 18 - 44, Nov 18 - 43, Dec 18 - 47, Jan 19 - 40.

#### Current status

- How many sites how many councils what capacity how many cameras? 6 town centres currently monitored in SDC, SSDC, and TDBC. 167 town centre cameras in total.
- How many cameras in Taunton? Taunton (60) and Wellington (6) = 66 cameras in TDBC
- How many mobile cameras are there? None

#### Maintenance

- What is the planned maintenance programme? Preventative maintenance every 6 months, with additional attendance to deal with faults as required. Faults can be due to engineering issues, power failures or BT connections.
- How many cameras have been replaced? All have been replaced at some point since we took over the monitoring and maintenance; they get replaced when they are beyond economical repair.
- What is the up time target of the system?
- When are the cameras maintained, by whom? Preventative maintenance visit every 6 months by contracted Maintenance Company, plus attendance when a fault is evident.

#### Advancing Technology

- What technology enhancements have you been able to make? SDC has upgraded the CCTV control room to be digital ready with digital video recorders already in use for the TDBC system.
- What technological improvements are planned?
  - All cameras in the TDBC system to be upgraded to High Definition digital technology.
  - We are tendering this year for a new video management system with additional functionality being in scope to allow better imaging/controls.
  - We are also looking into digital uploads for police, to move away from DVD. This will allow for easier and quicker access to CCTV evidence.
  - We are also working with the police as an interested party on the new communications system which is called the emergency services network. (ESN) <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-emergency-services-mobile-communications-programme/emergency-services-network>. This tool will allow for a more resilient mission critical communications and is planned for implementation in 2020/2021 to replace the old airwave communications system (which the Control Room currently use).

#### Monitoring and reporting?

- Who is the accountable officer in SDC in TDBC? Alice Porter
- Who monitors the Service in TDBC? Currently Scott Weetch
- What is the frequency of reporting? Reporting was monthly until recently, however the IT system needs to be replaced to ensure reporting going forward.
- Where are reports served to whom? Scott Weetch
- Who has Access to the data? If this relates to personal data, anyone can access their data using the relevant legislation. Contract data would be shared with Scott Weetch.

#### Financial

- What is the breakdown of the payments? Quarterly in advance
- How much PA? How is that justified? As per the annual budget line. This is c£250k per annum and has historically been broken down per camera for monitoring and maintenance.
- What does the system cost? Don't understand the question – how much would it cost to replace?
- Do the other parties to the contract share the costs? Yes
- Do the other parties have the same technology? Yes
- Who sets the payments? There is an annual rolling agreement that costs can increase by 3% per annum. This will be subject to review by the new contracts officer
- Who audits the service? South West Audit Partnership. Additionally, TDBC officers monitor the contract.



Submissions**The Castle at Taunton**Anti Social Behaviour  
June to September 2019

- 12.06.18 Man with blood on his head and no top ran into Hotel and up to corridor on first floor. When asked to leave, he refused and shouted at Brazz Manager, claiming his parents were staying in the Hotel. He left the Hotel prior to police arriving.
- 04.07.18 Four teenagers came into the Hotel, making a mess in the toilets, running riot and dragging toilet roll all over the public areas of Hotel, spitting from the top floor onto the reception table and tore curtains and curtain pole from the wall.  
After they left the Hotel they were seen throwing rocks at a homeless man and were reported by a member of the public
- 04.07.18 2.30pm Distressed and rude man came into Hotel to purchase a book. He became very agitated and was rude to the reception. He said he was bipolar and not taking his meds, he then left. Returned at 6pm and was very rude to Receptionist again insisting they book various taxis for him.
- 16.07.18 A dishevelled female ran into the Bow Bar, which was not open to the public, she ran round the bar and ran out again, saying she was just checking the bar door. She returned a short time later and shouted abuse at the receptionist, then took some magazines and accused the receptionist of being a thief
- 28.07.18 A very drunk lady came into reception lobby and wanted to charge her phone in lobby. Was very rude and abusive when asked to leave.
- 31.07.18 A resident guest complained that they felt very intimidated when walking around Taunton, due to number of Homeless and drunk/drugged people around the town, particularly the beggars and drunks outside Castle Bow.
- 21.08.18 NAME REDACTED came into the Hotel and ran around public areas and function rooms switching all the lights off.
- 27.08.18 A man entered the Bow Bar and stole a member of staff's wallet.
- 29.08.18 Castle staff members had to call an ambulance for a very drunk man who had passed out under The Castle Bow, he was unresponsive & Castle staff stayed with him until ambulance arrived.
- 31.08.18 A very intimidating man, with a "tear drop" tattoo under his eye and a tag on his ankle, walked into reception and became very aggressive and verbally abusive with reception and front office staff when refused access to a telephone to make a call.
- 01.09.18 Early hours of the morning, a man was trespassing in our car park and grounds and refused to leave, when asked to do so by Night Porter. He wanted access to the Hotel and when refused he then sat on the chair outside the front door screaming and shouting abuse.

- 03.09.18 A party of three people had drinks and dined in Brazz. They were quite loud and disruptive and asked by restaurant manager to be mindful of other diners. They then ran off without paying their bill.
- 05.09.18 Early hours of the morning, a lady came to front door to ask if we had any rooms. The Hotel was fully booked but the lady asked if she could come into reception, to ring around and try to find another Hotel, as she was very frightened outside by herself. The Night Porter allowed her access but she soon became very distressed and upset, saying that she had already had contact with the police earlier, due to a domestic incident. She became increasingly distressed; the Police did come to collect her.
- 06.09.18 NAME REDACTED attempted to gain access to The Hotel several times but was prevented.
- 09.09.18 A man gained access to the kitchen area and eventually to the Staff Lockers, a member of staff's wallet was stolen.
- 18.09.18 Resident guest commented that he was really shocked by number of homeless, drunk and "high" people he encountered when walking through town. He said he was bothered and hassled several times and was surprised how bad Taunton's antisocial behaviour problems are.
- 22.09.18 NAME REDACTED came into public areas and was walking around reception; she was very aggressive when asked to leave.
- 24.09.18 Police were called to deal with two homeless people, a man and a woman who were screaming, shouting and swearing at each other on Castle Green. The woman who was on crutches then started smashing something with her crutch. Guests were leaning out of their bedroom windows watching and recording this.
- 01.10.18 A man came in and asked to use the phone and the toilet. Reception said this was not possible but he ignored them and used the toilets anyway but did leave quietly straight after.

## **Crime in Taunton & area**

I regret that my commitments in Court have prevented me from attending this important meeting.

My comments are based upon my experiences as Resident Judge of Taunton Crown Court since March 2013.

### *Crime statistics*

1. There has been a considerable reduction in the numbers of cases coming before the Crown Court over the past few months. In my experience this is not as a result in a reduction in crimes being committed but is as a result of the following factors:
  - (i) The requirement that those suspected of criminal activities and who are arrested must be charged within 28 days has led to a significant reduction in cases coming before the Courts. This is because those suspects are then released 'under further investigation.' The lack of police resources means that these cases are frequently put to one side whilst new matters are investigated, put under further investigation and so on. At a meeting with Resident Judges the Chief Constable told us that last year Avon & Somerset Constabulary had 3,000+ cases that were under further investigation.
  - (ii) There has been a significant decrease in cases alleging rape or serious sexual offending because of the need to fully carry out proper disclosure involving the examination and interrogation of mobile phones, social network sites and so on. Again a number of high profile cases demonstrated that full and proper disclosure did not

always take place (potentially leading to miscarriages of justice). The police and the CPS are now ensuring that disclosure is fully and properly dealt with in such cases. Again however the lack of resources has meant that there has been a significant decline in the number of such cases coming before the Courts whilst proper disclosure is carried out.

*Public perception and impact*

2. I am not able to comment on the public perception and impact of crime generally, save that the Victim Impact Statements that I see in almost all cases demonstrate the significantly damaging effects that crimes have upon the victims and their families. This is something that all sentencers have to take into account when determining an appropriate sentence within the Sentencing Guidelines.

*Closed circuit television*

3. The use of CCTV footage in Court together with the increasing use of body worn camera footage from the police has a considerable and beneficial effect upon the detection of crime (and arguably its prevention). Individuals involved in episodes of anti social behaviour or violence in the town centres may (if not too adversely affected by alcohol or drugs) think twice about behaving in such ways because of the presence of CCTVs.
4. Defendants when confronted with the evidence provided by CCTV and/or body worn camera footage often plead Guilty whereas absent such evidence they contest the matter no doubt hoping that potential witnesses may fail to attend Court and/or fail to give evidence sufficient to lead to the conviction.

5. It is essential in my view that CCTV equipment should be properly funded, maintained and operated at all times if it is to have any meaningful impact on the reduction of anti-social behaviour in the towns.

*Rough sleepers*

6. There has been a massive rise in the number of homeless and rough sleepers throughout the County. In a recent document sent to me one Local Authority stated that it was proud of the fact that, despite anecdotal evidence to the contrary, it only had 7 rough sleepers in its town, all of whom were known to the Council. Such a claim is demonstrably wrong in the town in question.
7. The continuing reductions in Local Authority funding have led to a massive rise in street sleepers or those forced to 'sofa surf'. Often they are the least able to cope for themselves and are often addicted to drugs.
8. The removal of funding from the Somerset Drugs and Alcohol Service has led that organisation to withdraw its regular drug testing regime and which formed part of the basis for successful Drug Rehabilitation Requirement Orders being imposed by the Courts. With the removal of this testing those addicted to drugs lost an important element leading to compliance with and enforcement of the DRR's. The addictions continued and crime consequently committed to fund the habit.

*General crime and anti-social behaviour issues.*

9. In terms of relatively minor offences of assault and anti-social behaviour generally the availability of cheap alcohol is undoubtedly the root cause of such offending.

10. The majority of those appearing before the Courts are in the approximate age range of between 16 and 24 and male. Putting it simply they often grow up and out of criminal activity.
11. The cuts to Social Services budgets, to the provision of youth services etc and to support services generally have inevitably led to an increase in feckless youths becoming involved in criminality.
12. Those families and areas likely to be associated with such activity are easily identifiable and extra resources put into such families and areas will undoubtedly be beneficial in the long run.
13. I am conscious however of the damaging and continuing effects of government cuts year upon year and the impossible task being asked of the police, the CPS, the NHS and local authorities. Each of these organisations is in my view seriously under resourced and the consequences of this are all too clear in the criminal and anti-social behaviour that leads to the appearance of some of the offenders in Court.

In my judgement it is only when proper resources are applied to tackle these issues that there will be a reduction in crime and anti-social behaviour and we can all live in the sort of towns and society that we would wish. Lack of money whilst not the root of *all* evil is certainly a significant contributor to it.

**His Honour Judge Ticehurst**

Resident Judge

Taunton Crown Court

14<sup>th</sup> February 2019



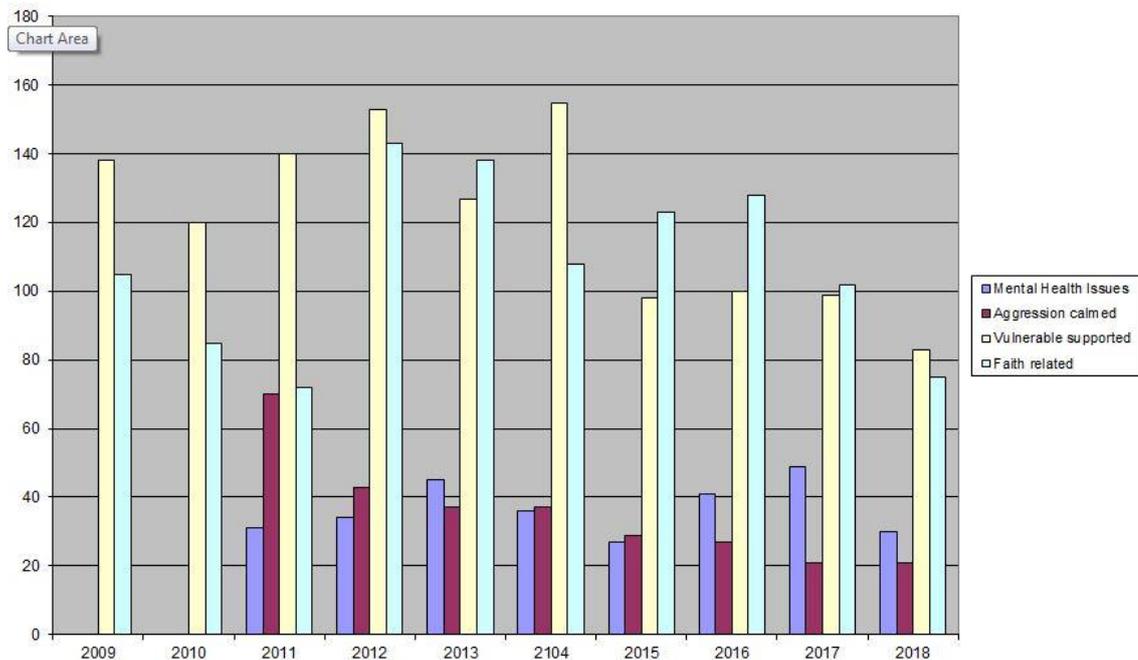
### **Feedback from Taunton Street Pastors with 2018 Statistics included**

I am pleased to share some statistics evidencing of the value of the Street Pastor teams which currently operate in Taunton town centre on Saturday nights and other special occasions, as well as on the Halcon and Priorswood estates. Our 2018 data has just been published (January 2019) but it must be appreciated that the numbers alone cannot adequately represent the impact on individuals' lives as God uses street pastors to listen, care and provide practical help as well as respond to enquiries about spiritual issues and personal faith.

To give you illustrations that are up to date: On 15 December 2018 our team prayed at the start of the evening for indications from God of where we should look to see His opportunities. Among other signs we were given pictures of a pair of walking boots and dancing Christmas trees. As the evening progressed we were led to meet a homeless man who sought prayer following the death of his brother from sudden adult death syndrome last week and the further distress he is experiencing at the death of his friend's 3 year old daughter. On conclusion of the prayer the street pastors were amazed to see a pair of walking boots sitting on the pavement bedside him (they were not his).

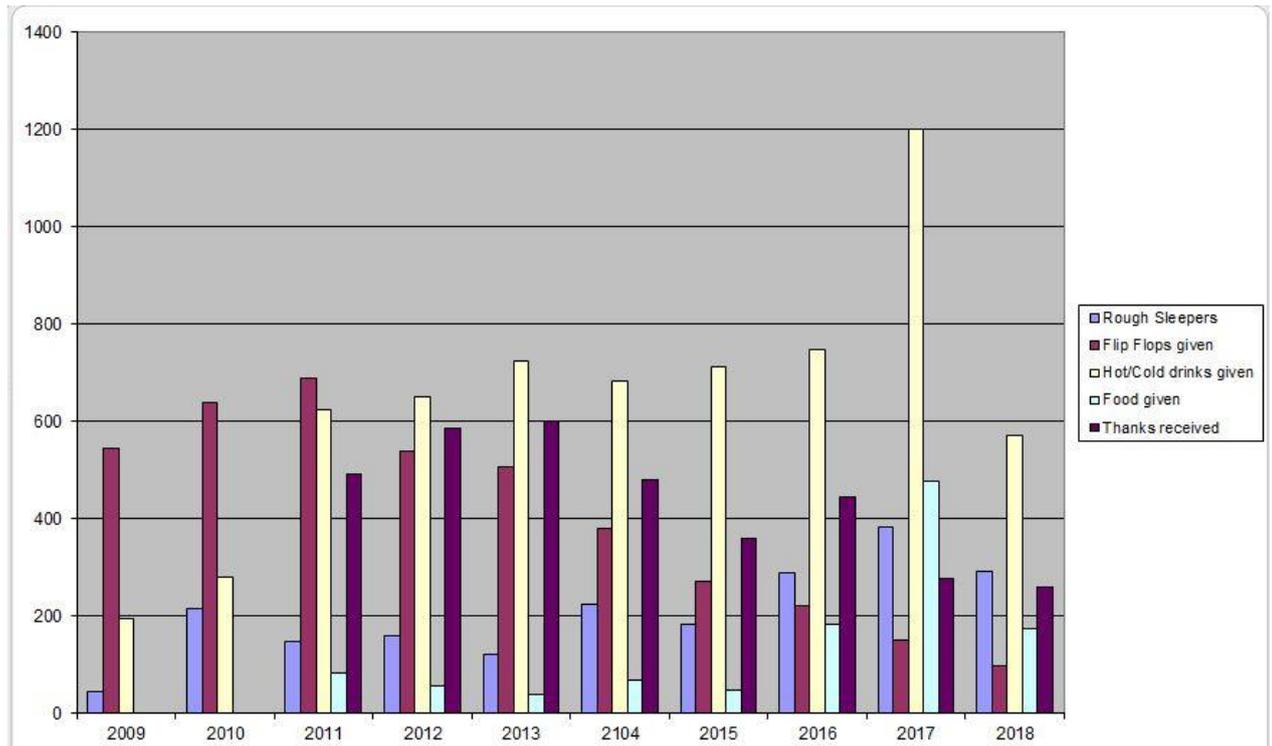
In the early hours of the same morning one team was drawn into conversation with three men one of whom wanted to discuss the existence of God – As some other street pastors prayed for their colleagues engaged in the discussion they looked up and saw that the team and the men were standing under the town centre Christmas illuminations depicting Christmas trees at a jaunty angle!

Since launching Taunton Street Pastors in 2008 we have trained and commissioned 129 Street Pastors for service



In those eleven years we:

- picked up nearly 20,000 glass bottles and cans from the streets, avoiding injured feet and harm from these potential weapons
- signposted 348 people to agencies that can help them sort out a personal problem or issue
- enjoyed conversations with nearly 1,200 people about issues relating to their beliefs
- had 2,355 encounters with people who were sleeping rough on the streets of our town and have offered a listening ear, blankets, hot drinks, food and signposting to supportive agencies/organisations
- gave away 4,167 pairs of flip flops to women to avoid injured feet from broken glass
- gave away more than 6,450 hot drinks and bottled water calmed situations down with the offer of 5,332 chewy sweets
- dispensed nearly 500 foil blankets or hoodies to prevent hypothermia
- conducted nearly 301,000 hours of patrols, night and day seeking to listen, care and help.



Our time is given free of charge without prejudice but, if we had been paid the current minimum living wage for just the hours patrolled in 2018, it would have cost £17,000

The team and individual members have received several awards for their service over the eleven years of operation, most notably the Queen's Award for Voluntary Groups,

the equivalent of an MBE for teams awarded in 2014 and an MBE awarded to our Coordinator in December 2017.

It is important to note:

- Not everyone can go out on the streets – some pray, others support financially. All are part of the team
- Town centre teams go out every Saturday night patrolling and frequently offering a free street cafe through until the early hours, working with anyone and everyone – clubbers, party goers, diners, dealing with those who are impacted by drink or drugs, the homeless, the vulnerable, victims of crime, etc.
- By being a very visible presence, we stop bad things happening, reassure and most of all just get alongside people and chat/listen
- We save lives including suicidal situations – see one such example below
- We also work in the Halcon and Priorswood estates weekly – This is increasingly important as statutory services are withdrawn yet Christian volunteers are a stable and constant presence
- It costs approximately. £11.5k to operate Taunton Street Pastors for a year. Key items of expenditure are our co-ordinator for 1 day/week (like most schemes, we pay for this from donations by churches and individuals), insurance, premises rental, running training courses for potential Street Pastors, running refresher training (all team members are highly trained and have to undertake compulsory refresher training every 3 years), providing hot drinks and water, flip flops, sweets, foil blankets, etc.
- Across the year we typically:
  - engage with thousands of people
  - have 300 encounters with rough sleepers
  - address 40 mental health situations
  - give out 600 drinks
  - give out hundreds of sweets, often to calm aggressive situations
  - give out 100 pairs of flip flops
  - have 100 faith-related conversations
  - constantly pray for our town and see answers to prayer every night
- We maintain a great relationship with most people and enjoy a strong reputation among many groups including cctv operators, door staff, the police, etc.
- Since Autumn 2018 Taunton Street Pastors have been working with their counterparts in Bridgwater to respond to the influx of some 6,000 largely male workers engaged in the construction of the Hinkley C Nuclear power station. A grant from the Hinkley Community Fund has enabled us to appoint an administrator for a few hours each week to release our coordinator for this developmental work over the next three years.
- Both Bridgwater and Taunton Street Pastor teams are made safer and are better able to help others as a consequence of the generosity of the Sedgemoor CCTV centre who have gifted the radios used by each team. Although the previous (SWBAC) CCTV scheme made radios available at a discount, the funding was always a challenge and the gift and ongoing maintenance of the Sedgemoor-provided handsets is invaluable and ensures that the Street Pastors are networked to the doorstaff, police and others who are on the same radio channel in each town. The CCTV operators have expressed their appreciation of the Street Pastor's services on numerous occasions and

welcome SP trainees to the Bridgwater-based control centre as part of their initial training. Any threat to the continuation of this provision could seriously jeopardise the safety and therefore the viability of the SP teams.

- Street Pastors experience a real sense of frustration when they encounter people with mental health issues or homelessness late at night when the statutory agencies are unavailable. Whilst the teams have considerable local knowledge of where to signpost people to, it is heart-breaking to have to conclude a patrol and go home to a warm bed and a caring family knowing others don't have those basic needs met. In situations where there is a serious mental or physical health need the SP teams are able to try and make contact with the ambulance service or the council's emergency duty team. It has been good to see the development of a partnership in recent weeks between churches, council and health agencies to offer a night café on very cold nights.

It is important to reiterate that the numbers given above cannot convey the significance of the ministry. Perhaps the following extract from the patrol report of 4 November 2018 brings it home better than most:

'As the team walked down North Street with the intention of calling into Mambo and Zinc nightclubs, but a fairly inebriated gentleman approached them and said there was a guy by the river threatening to "top himself". The team assured him they would investigate, initially thinking whoever it was he was referring to had moved on, but upon reaching the Brewhouse Theatre car park, they heard hysterical screaming coming from the area behind Morrisons, adjacent to the footbridge.'

'There was found to be a young man floundering in the river and unable to use the lifebelt someone had thrown to him. SP Ian immediately rang 999, SP Joanna tried to calm the lad's hysterical girlfriend and the team leader held the rope which the lad in the water had subsequently managed to cling on to but, in his state of panic, didn't have the desire/ability to pull himself to safety. Two men came and lay prone over the edge of the wall, with other folk anchoring their legs and managed to reach 'J' and haul him to safety. The leader supplied a SP jacket to cover him as he had been in the water for 20-25 minutes altogether, until the Fire, Police and paramedics arrived shortly afterwards, then he was placed in an ambulance and taken to hospital. The team then returned to Base and we all prayed for the situation, thanking God for a good outcome.'

A week or so later I found myself sharing this account with someone in a matter of fact way, saying, 'It's what we do.' My listener then pointed out that this is one family which wouldn't have an empty place at the Christmas table and wouldn't have to suffer the pain and anguish of a suicide which inevitably sends ripples out into the family and friends of the person lasting years, even affecting subsequent generations.

You will appreciate that a summary, even of this length, cannot do justice to the remarkable catalogue of encounters enjoyed by street pastors in parts of our community that hitherto the church has struggled to penetrate. If friends who value our work have an opportunity we would be pleased to offer a presentation with testimony highlighting more about the service we offer and the remarkable stories we have to tell.

We are grateful for the generous support by many people and charitable bodies over the years. We recognise the many calls on public and charitable funds but ask that you will feel able to continue to partner with us in this remarkable opportunity to demonstrate Christian compassion and care to anybody and everybody.

Thank you

Adrian Prior-Sankey MBE  
February 2019

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1 – R. Mudge

Dear Sir

Having seen the article in the Gazette please see my response below

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes - I can not recall the last time I was able to shop in town without hearing drunk people swearing and arguing. On one occasion I witnessed a drunk male drop his trousers and defecate in the street between willow and Halifax. This was at 3pm. Town full of people I was with with 6 and 8 year old daughters.

I have seen drunk males getting into fights in the town - near to McDonalds and north street where many grouped together with duvets and belongings. Furthermore I have seen 'packages' which I can only assume to be small packets of drugs being openly passed to each other in daylight in the town.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

I used to go into the town Center at least once a week. I haven't been into Taunton since Christmas - this is directly due to the anti-social behaviour which SCARES my children so they also do not want to go into town - I now use internet shops.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem

Drug use and dealing

Drunkenness

Public Order - swearing and fighting

Aggressive begging

Kind regards

2.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

As a former Police Officer of 23 years and former member of the town centre team i feel that it is unsafe to take my young family into the town given the presence of aggressive beggars, street drinking and drunkenness, open and unashamed drug dealing and use to the point we will travel to Bristol to shop, the town centre is feral and has been declining over the last few years

I lay the blame for this squarely at those in the Police who have the responsibility of Policing the town, there open neglect has caused the situation and there constant inability and unwillingness to deal with these problem individuals perpetuates the situation, i have written to both the MP and PCC, the MP never replied, the PCC told me crime wasn't her responsibility

When i did meet with a chief inspector and an inspector i was given rubbish about more police resources and corporate buzzwords which i feel totally unacceptable and i feel lied too by those in charge least of all an inexperienced sergeant in the post whose clear lack of interest or leadership is a reason the problem continue

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre

Yes I don't bring my family there and i hear nothing but negative comments about the feral state of the town centre

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

The open consumption of alcohol and drunkenness together with the use of controlled drugs, the presence of gangs of youths around McDonald's who are half hearted challenged by useless Police officers who just walk away and leave the problem to continue

And most of all the ineptitude of the Police namely the sergeant and inspector who must be brought to account

S Mudge

### 3. – C. and M. Douglass

-- in answer to your survey on anti social behaviour in Taunton I visited Taunton yesterday and will not be doing it again for a while!  
Not just crime and antisocial behaviour, the town itself !Parking charges are high and the public toilets are not fit for use. The toilets by the library are disgusting, daren't take a child in there !  
Yesterday two of the toilets were so filthy and full of goodness knows what, and another had somebodys bedding and belongings in it, couldn't tell if anyone was under the bedding but I didn't want to get too close ! Taunton has a lot of problems which need to be looked at, and it has nothing to do with the cuts in funding,before anyone uses that as an excuse

### 4. – G Colins

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Just last week i was at the ATm and one of the rough sleepers came up to me and another older lady and in a very grough voice shouted ' you owe me money' "i want it now" really hassling us. I was on a mobility scooter

I have seen a poor teenager give money to a beggar and suddenly he was surrounded by many of them all with hands out surrounding him

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

My wife does not feel safe in town, and we do not come in at night which we would do if there were not so many "homeless" about

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

It's the begging, the violent begging , i have seen man handling to try to get money. We have so many "homeless' well they beg and say they are home less when really they have a home. They have 2 sets of clothes, the nice ones and the dirty begging ones. Being constantly hassled and seeing them in all the doors is unnerving

5. – A. Hancock

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes. As a loss prevention employee for one of the town's largest retailers, I deal with crime, specifically theft and threats of violence regularly both inside and outside of the store.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton?

No but given my close proximity to my employer in the town centre and the fact that I'm a familiar face to a lot of shoplifters, I consider my own safety a lot more carefully than I used to. We haven't seen a decline in the amount of customers we see through the doors but having spoken with some of them, its clear that there are concerns amongst people about what state the town will be in in the future if

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

We all know that drugs and homelessness are the root cause of a significant amount of crime in this town. Certain small businesses provide a market for stolen goods which encourages desperate people to steal in order to buy drugs from dealers. In their desperation, they can become violent. Its an incredibly vicious circle. This is a national problem that cannot just be solved at a local level.

With the resources made available for policing at the level they are, the provision of Street Wardens is a crucial part of making people feel safe and secure in the town centre. They link in with the public, retailers, the police and the control centre in Bridgwater, they have a vast amount of local knowledge and help deter crime from occurring.

We need to create a robust network involving the whole town (charitable organisations included) in which information can be shared and we can work together to deter and reduce crime and there needs to be a concerted effort to tackle illegal markets involving drugs and stolen goods.

Ultimately, engagement with retailers is key. Debenhams, Marks and Spencer, TK Max and Sainbury's. Our losses combined are eye watering and the council needs to take their perspectives seriously if they want our high street to survive. I would encourage them to contact them immediately.

6. – P. Messy

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes I have, not being British I have been told to Fuck off back to my country!  
(Apologies for the swearing).

I have witnessed more than 5 times drug dealing (between the hours of 8.30 and 7.00pm), the most shocking one was in front of my kid school (Northtown) at 8.35 in the morning.

Witness in front of my all family a gentleman high on spice on a Sunday afternoon in the middle of Morissons Car Park. Tried the reach out to my local council and he passed the buck...

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Not me as I have business there as I need to be there, but some of my client have told me that they are scared in parking in the multi storey car park, they are also not comfortable with all the rough sleepers and beggars in town and come less or try to avoid Taunton. I have been trading for 5 years in Taunton and my local delivery have gone up by 60%. People are willing to use the Town but not willing to come in town.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

Drugs,

Sleeping rough,

Kids not being social and do not care about others...

I will gladly come and share all these point if invited.

## 7. – C. Rowan

In response to the questions concerning crime in Taunton, I am affected by crime for five out of every seven days, every week, as I work in the town centre. I find it harder and harder to do my real job, as I now spend so much of my working day, chasing drug and alcohol addicted thieves from the shop where I work. If I leave the shop for a lunch break, I am constantly pestered for money or cigarettes, by these same people. Up until last week, there were two wardens who were a great help to all the retailers, but apparently, someone, somewhere, decided they were not necessary! There is also a health issue with these people, apart from discarded needles, they all seem to think it's ok to use anywhere as a toilet, Goodlands Gardens, alleyways such as down the side of HSBC bank, behind Mambos. Seeing all I do see during the working day, there is no way I would venture into the town centre at night. The biggest problems i feel are the number of homeless, alcohol or drug dependant people that now live here. I know there is a place which is supposed to help these people, but i think there is a difference between helping and enabling. In my opinion, giving them clothes, food and even a bed at night is not helping them, it just enables them to carry on stealing, to get money for drugs and alcohol. These people need proper help, to change the way they live. It's also a well known fact around the town, that they take their stolen goods and sell them in the perkin warbeck and at a hairdressers down East Reach, so why is nothing done about this? I am getting to the point where I have had enough of the abuse I get from these people and the shop cannot sustain these levels of loss for much longer. I only continue because I need the money I earn to keep my house. I often feel that I just want to cry.

## 8 – T. Ball

Hi,

I felt compelled to write having seen details of the review you are taking, in the Somerset Gazette online. My reason for this is due my being aware of how the situation is deteriorating (as I live locally, in central Taunton, in the Wilton area) and also because of a particular incident in December.

1: have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes. In December I was walking into town on my own in the middle of the day, as I was walking alongside Hatchers I became aware of something drawing attention in the distance outside Boots. I quickly became aware that it was because of two women and a man, clearly under the influence of drugs shouting. They appeared to all be friends, and they were listening to the man recalling something that had happened to him, he was really shouting and swearing, and was very animated. This was attracting a lot of attention by passers-by understandably, not only due to their aggressive and loud behaviour, but also the fact that they could barely stand, they were so intoxicated.

As I was walking (quite briskly) and I came into their eye lines, one of the females, for some reason, took a beeline for me. She then started screaming at the top of her voice "what's she looking at ?" I was horrified to realise she had singled me out of

everyone, and despite her friends initially ignoring her she persisted. She became quickly more aggressive screaming "what's she f\*\*\*\*\* looking at? Her over there!" Her friends turned to look at what she was screaming about, and the man grabbed her arm to stop her coming over towards me. At this point I was incredibly scared at what she was going to do, but fortunately for me it was a very busy day ( just before Christmas) and I was able to disappear into the crowd, and get as quickly as I could into the rear of the Orchard shopping centre, and just hope and pray she hadn't seen which direction I had gone. I walked as far as Marks and Spencer's, and once inside, and sure they hadn't followed me I took a breath and gathered myself. I phoned my husband who advised I phone the police and report them, but I said I would if I saw them again... fortunately I didn't.

I am a woman in my 40s, I don't consider myself sheltered or frail in any manner, but this experience was genuinely terrifying. What makes the whole thing worse is this is town where I live.

Although what shouldn't be taken lightly is the fact that on that day there would have been countless visitors to the town Christmas shopping, seeing these people behaving in this way, and we will never know how many people said " I'm not going back there, it wasn't very nice" it's a terrible impression for families in particular.

I am so concerned at how bad things are becoming ( particularly with drug users, usually in groups) that I am considering whether this is somewhere I want to live, if I can't feel safe walking on my own in broad daylight.

Would somebody please address the very real problem we have with homeless/drug users and aggressive beggars in Taunton.

2: Does crime and ASB affect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Yes, if I am on my own.

3:Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

As I have said before, drug use, aggressive begging and homelessness are the main problems we have. All three usually go hand in hand. Is there a reason why These people are choosing to come to Taunton - very often from outside the area, what is attracting them? There is clearly an incentive for them to stay here, and perhaps this should be reviewed, some of these people are very unpleasant. We do have a much bigger problem it appears than other towns of our size.

Could somebody please address this sensitive and uncomfortable issue, as unfortunately it is a blight on our lovely town.

Kind regards

Mrs Ball

9 – G. Delahay

Dear Sir,

Could the council tell me when are they going to do something to stop cyclists cycling

on the pavement in this town. I'm not talking about 5 year old children what I see today is grown

adults on our pavements and one of these days someone is going to be seriously injured.,it's

about time something was done about this behaviour. The council have a duty to to the public to

keep the pavement safe at all times, to be honest my wife and I don't feel safe walking in town

anymore. Hope the council take a good look at this problem as this is a form of anti-social behaviour which is unacceptable, don't you think .

10 – S. Wilson

1. Occasional abuse when donations not made when requested by various beggars on the Street.

Distress when the street speakers are using loudspeakers and ranting and raving at everyone.

It's horrible when the store detectives are chasing thieves and confronting them in the Street.

It's also horrible to see drug users in doorways, before Christmas there was a drug user in the door way of the office where I work totally out of it, I called the ambulance which took over 30 mins to come, because this person was a regular user and know to them.

2. I have to come into Town to work . I would not contemplate coming in during the evening due to drunk and disorderly behaviour and abuse by beggars. I will not walk home anymore from work as Station Road and the bottom of Cheddon Road and the Station area are horrible to walk through as a women on her own. It's unpleasant and intimidating.

There is very little if any police presence in the Town except for the Police on Horseback occasionally - lovely to see but what's the point? Walking policemen would be more effective.

3. I can sit and look out of my window into the centre of the Town and regularly see drug dealers selling drugs. This also happens early in the morning when the benefits are paid by the Post Office.

Taunton has become a horrible town, full of homeless people and drug takers. Such a shame it used to be such a lovely town.

Recent comments by Ian Liddell-Grainger highlights the problems in our Town.

S Wilson

### 11 – F. Houchen

#### **1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?**

Yes - I have personally been involved in dealing with a shoplifter and have witnessed an assault.

#### **2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?**

Yes - Honestly I prefer to go to Cribbs where the problems seem less evident.

#### **3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?**

1. Homeless persons who are clearly in need of drug dependency or mental health support. Many of course are just homeless.
2. Lack of policing and security for stores and shoppers.
3. Aggressive individuals, who increasingly seem to be a feature of Taunton town centre.
4. Shoplifters.

### 12 – P. Rowland

Hi there. I'm giving you feedback you have requested regarding anti social behaviour in Taunton.

I've lived and grown up here since 1968, and have noticed a massive change in recent times last 5 years or so.

1) I recently was verbally abused by some scruffy down n out character whilst walking down station road into town on a Saturday evening for no reason. It was obvious from his accent that he was from the north of England maybe Manchester. After I ignored this individual he began the same verbal attack on another guy on the other side of the road.

2) There are now certain routes where I try to avoid walking due to the anticipation of crime or ASB. I used to walk anywhere without a care in the world but sadly Taunton has changed for the worse 3) I feel the biggest problem by far is the homeless drug takers in every disused shop doorway throughout the town most of whom are not from Somerset in the first place.

Since the closure of the police station it's got worse as these people are aware of it, not that they care anyway.

We have beggars in every street corner, I was asked for money 3 times in a 5 minute walk from canon st car park to Magdalen lane, and twice more walking past KFC.

The riverside walk along the front of Morrison's toward the bandstand and under priory bridge road used to be beautiful but is now been taken over and inhabited by various groups of drug and alcohol users who have set up on benches and under the bridge with sleeping bags etc. These are often very intimidating with their noise and their foul language and general appearance.

I could go on but this will suffice for now. Hope this information is of use for your meeting

### 13 – M. Sekules

To Whom it May Concern,

With response to the recent post in the County Gazette regarding the request for accounts of how anti-social behaviour and crime has affected local people, I am happy to provide the following account which I hope will be of help.

Firstly, I moved back to Taunton after living for 10 years in Boscombe, Dorset which has a reputation for a high crime rate, homelessness, poverty and drug abuse. Although I'd never experienced any issues, I moved back here with my children to give them a safer environment in which to grow up in. Unfortunately, the opposite has happened.

Not long after, I became involved in SWAG after my friend's daughter received a needle stick injury in Victoria Park, near East Reach and the work we did opened my eyes to the various problems Taunton has, especially with drugs, the lack of police resources and within the street people/homeless community. Now with my fiance owning a business on East Reach, it's become obvious to me that even since SWAG completed it's mission in getting the two legal high shops shut down, things have continued to get worse and worse, especially with the use of Spice and heroin which is in evidence everywhere.

Since the beginning of 2018 alone, my fiance has been threatened, witness to assaults, harassed for money on a daily basis, witness to drug dealing and abuse whilst trying to run his business. This, with the constant social media posts, reports in the Gazette about thefts, assaults, anti social behaviour in town naturally made me fearful about my own safety and that of our children. So, when back in October when I was due to meet up with a friend for coffee in town, I asked my fiance to drop me

and our baby as close to the cafe as possible so I wouldn't have to walk through East Reach. He dropped us off at the back of Fight Worx, by Crown Walk, I put my then 6 month old in my baby carrier on my chest and we walked through to the high street to go to Costa. During that 30 second walk from car to coffee shop, a man shouted abuse at my baby and I, threatened us with violence and spat in our faces. This is obviously being now dealt with by police as well as, I understand, an amalgamation of multiple charges. Whereas before I felt unsafe whilst in Taunton, this confirmed to me that I am indeed unsafe and as a consequence, I no longer feel able to come into town. As a mum with four children, including a new baby, living in quite a remote village, this has significantly impacted on my life. This has been made more so since my fiance was assaulted outside of his business a week before Christmas, a day before our eldest's birthday.

The individual who assaulted my baby and I is, I believe, currently sleeping rough, with a collection of addictions and unmanaged mental health issues. I believe his circumstances have been the same for years and have unchanged. I know that he is just one of many volatile people that are in a similar situation with seemingly no way of progressing through life and so carry on causing distress to the community in which they live. I spent a significant amount of time volunteering with RAFT and unfortunately, we encountered issues there with very aggressive, threatening individuals who sleep rough, demanding items from our warehouse and ourselves personally and generally being abusive. This contributed to me leaving the organisation.

Whilst involved in both organisations/campaigns, I liaised with TAH/ARC and whilst I have huge respect for the work they do and have done, I feel they are out of their depth and much of their good intention is lost under firefighting and dealing with issues they aren't really equipped to adequately deal with. We have a friend who slept on the streets of Taunton for 5 years and wouldn't reach out to ARC because he was too fearful of the clients that are housed in Linley House or who hang around the vicinity. Fortunately for him, he was able to get off the streets on his own accord but I wonder how many others have avoided asking for help because of the reputation it has now accrued as a place of violence and alcohol and drug abuse. I think it's a shame that these people who do have a chance of getting back into a normal life are unable to do so because so much time and effort is placed instead in the people who can't or don't want to reach a point of 'normal life'. It strikes me that Taunton desperately needs a separate facility so that ARC can continue with their initial mission and great work.

This can't be an issue dealt with the kind hearted community of Taunton, it has to come from the council and it needs significant investment. Currently, Taunton is an attractive place to be homeless in with many places providing food and basic needs, and the drug supply is plentiful. Gangs coming from other parts of the country are coming here because of this and so, those issues are becoming worse and will

continue to do so. The depth and scale of these issues alone is terrifying. Gang culture on the streets on Taunton just doesn't bear thinking about.

All of that aside, I am one of many people that now choose to actively avoid coming into town or limit their visits because of the prevalence of antisocial behaviour. My 72 year old mum included, as she had her purse stolen from her bag a few days before Christmas which left her upset and stranded as both her bus pass and bank card had gone - she wouldn't have been able to get home unless we had driven in and picked her up.

I hope we can soon see a change and start to look forwards to enjoying our town once again.

#### 14 – R. Sekules

To whom it may concern,

I read a post on Somerset County Gazette's page on Facebook about your fact finding mission regarding anti social behaviour in Taunton Centre and would like to take the opportunity to give you some insight into my personal experiences as a trader on East Reach and also as a member of the public.

I moved to Taunton in 2013 after falling in love with the town. I found a shop to rent at the bottom of East Reach and believed that it was a good place to invest in and set up shop. During the last five years I have learned that there is an insidious problem with this area of town and that it is steadily going from bad to worse. I have observed through my shop window the goings on; the drunks, the beggars and drug users. I have seen the individuals sleeping rough in doorways in the snow, I have had to clean up rubbish and excrement in my shop doorway. I have seen foreigners attacked and abused, one young Romanian lady heavily pregnant at the time. I have had to lock my shop door to prevent the begging and disruption that had become the daily norm. I have often been threatened with stabbing, with smashed windows and arson. This Christmas I had to face my children with two black eyes after I was savagely attacked by two 16 year olds at 11am off their heads on drugs and looking for fun by causing grief to me, I received around ten punches to the head, was head butted in the face and four kicks, also to the head. My partner and five month old baby boy were spat on in the face and verbally abused by a known drug addict and Street dweller in the town centre and my mother in law to be had her purse stolen from her bag. The last three occurrences were in the last 3 months alone.

I am daily a witness to drug deals, spice zombies, drunks urinating and members of the public being abused.

My landlord was told by the police that he had to pay for a secure fence at the back of the property because street people were using the space to deal and as a toilet or to inject drugs. My neighbour also had to install a similar gate at cost because these people were gaining access to the roof area and the risk of damage or break-ins was too high. She has since shut up shop and the property is up for sale, bless her. I have also had to install CCTV in the studio for protection against theft and violence.

I am well aware of where the local issues come from and I am very surprised that the council need to ask the public because the problem in my opinion is directly from a property that belongs to you. I am, of course talking about Lindley House which you Lease to ARC, formerly known as TAH. I have had many chances to meet with the staff and the CEO of this place and although it is the source of a lot of the problems I have to say it is not their fault. It is not their fault that they have had to evolve from a business that was set up to support homeless individuals to the only place that can provide for the poor vulnerable souls that deserve care like what was once provided by Tonevale before it was closed and they were released into "care in the community" only resulting in drug addiction, street sleeping and often as we have read, death.

I am furthermore aware that there has been an increase in drug activity in the town, it has been made aware to me by the police that gangs have made a move into our county town and in typical style are employing underage youths to move their hard drugs because they are easy to groom and can operate with relative immunity from prosecution.

Taunton has unfortunately become a hub for individuals who are caught up in drug abuse and anti social behaviour. It has become a co-dependent relationship, an easy option. TAH was set up to aid people to get back on their feet but I fear it is now hindered in doing so by habitual addicts with mental health issues that have no desire or ability to change and really ought to be kept in secure facilities for the safety of both themselves and the public. It is mentioned in the article which I am responding to that you aim to help the homeless "break the cycle of homelessness and addiction" I am curious how you intend to engage with people that do not want to change.

Lindley House itself is a tinderbox, a Warren of small rooms where most individuals smoke even though it is not allowed, I was given a tour and witnessed this first hand. There are no fire escapes and in my albeit amateur opinion it is only a matter of time before there is a fire. The windows of Lindley House are insecure and I am sure you are aware that there has been an incident last year where a service user threw themselves out of a top floor window. As a listed building I do not believe secure windows are an option and securing them also adds to the aforementioned fire risk.

Another important fact to consider is Lindley House', proximity to St James' school and Holy Trinity. The bushes of Victoria Park near St James often giving nasty surprises is the form of discarded needles used for drug abuse, not something that you would like a child's fingers to discover however there is a history of this. My partner has more insight than me in this regard having worked with SWAG to force you to close down the legal High shops that created many of the addicts we see today.

It is too easy to say that all the above is as a result of a degrade in society but I put it to TDBC that you have control over the main issue in town, Lindley House and that it is therefore your responsibility as landlords. The drug issues are not your responsibility, that lies in the hands of the overstretched police, the CPS and the courts however, once again Lindley House and ARC's satellite properties are a market place and a hub where a lot of money is placed in the hands of gangs and organised crime through the sales of drugs.

On a personal note, I would like to give you an idea of the personal effect all of this has had on my life.

As I mentioned I can no longer have an open door at work, I need to know exactly who is coming through my door. I do not feel safe at work, I take a packed lunch so that I don't need to leave the shop before I go home. This has had an obvious effect on my business with fewer people booking to have work done. I suffer anxiety in my free time, wondering how I can keep a roof over my family and food on the table, what will happen if I am once again injured as a result of an attack in this uncaring time in our political history, if I find myself unemployed we would soon land on the street and destitute. My fiancé will not shop in town in fact she avoids it like the plague, choosing to shop in safer towns like Glastonbury or Street. I am looking to move my business in the next year to a safer town which I cannot afford financially but in a way cannot afford not to. I look at the same scenario every day. Start up businesses giving it a try on East Reach and unfortunately more often than not closing before their time because the general public do not want to walk our street only to be blagged and abused or because of personal experiences much like my own.

It is important for you to note that this has not been an easy email for me to write, I am aware that in a way I am putting my head on a block but it is also important that you are made aware of these things.

In order to bring this correspondence to an end I will answer your three questions.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

Yes, often.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Yes, we only come into town if there is something we can't get in a safer town.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

Drug addicted beggers and the criminal youth.

16 – R. Adams

Sir/madam,

In response to a recent post on the county gazette page on Facebook I'd like to answer your questions.

1) Have you been affected by crime and ASB in Taunton town centre?

I work in security in one of the retail outlets in the town centre so I can tell you first hand how bad it has got in the town. Theft is at an all time high, the same faces everyday causing problems in the town centre. No police presance. We had the street wardens which I thought did a great job supporting areas of the town and passing on information to Cctv control and the police to try and help with the issues but now they are not around the problems in the town seem to be worst as there is no deterrent for these people. I've seen drug deals taken place in full view of everyone and I have scene on a number of occasions drugs actually being used in shop doorways with nothing but a coat covering the individual while they inject/take drugs metres from the public including small children.

In my opinion as the police resources are so stretched it was a silly move to remove the street wardens as like I stated they did such a great job at deterring crime and communicating information. Now the town has become an awful place to walk through again.

2) Does crime and ASB effect how often you come into Taunton town centre?

Like I said above I work in the security industry so I see first hand how bad the town has got. On my days off I avoid the town centre and instead I venture to Bridgwater or similar which I now believe to be a better place to live.

On behalf of my mother who often visits the town, well she doesn't feel comfortable going into the town centre anymore as the anti social behaviour not just with the homeless being intimidating towards her and other older shoppers asking them for money in an aggressive manner but the mass of youths that seem to congregate around McDonalds area making my mother and other shoppers cross the road as they cannot get passed these youths.

Once again like I said previously, the street wardens were invaluable at helping to deal with these issues as the police presence in the town is slim.

3) Which crime and ASB issues in particular do you feel are the biggest problem?

For myself I believe the biggest issue is the mass of youths that congregate around the McDonalds area visiting shops and shop lifting and making passersby feel uncomfortable.

There is also a massive problem with homeless/ drug users and drinker in the town which are now unmonitored unless passed to Cctv by a retail outlet.

The street wardens need to be a permanent fixture in the town to help deal with these issues.

They gained a lot of respect from members of the public and shop owners when they had a presence in the town and definitely contributed to a drop in anti social behaviour.

I was very shocked to hear when they were no longer a familiar site within the town centre.

Hopefully they will be reinstated soon as I cannot see there being a stronger police presence within the town in these struggling times.

17 – J. Taylor

To whom this may concern,

Recently reading through the Taunton Gazette I was amused when I came across an article regarding the sudden acknowledgment to the clearly obvious issue regarding anti social behaviour. The ASB crisis has been in Taunton for some time and many parts of Taunton are now a no go area due to the crime rate. I myself have raised concerns particularly in the location where I live concerning drugs, criminal damage, theft and continuous harassment mentioning this to Taunton council and Taunton police which is like dealing with two children in a playground unable to take any sort of responsibility for anything. I have videos, photos, emails and texts logs of police phone calls for the countless times I have tried to resolve issues but getting nowhere. Crime rate is poor because no one seems to work together and use

resources that could resolve issues. Personally me and my family are continuously let down by Taunton Council from support with crime issues, housing options, benefits, council tax and much more. Taunton has become a undesirable location to leave with an outdated look.

### 18 – S. Hill

We would like to add our experiences to your list.

Since the time of the un-necessary takeover of the Taunton radiolink by Sedgemoor District Council, Taunton has started to suffer significantly more with issues that directly affect our business as a retailer on the High Street. In summary begging, homelessness, theft and antisocial behaviour have all increased making our customers think twice about visiting Taunton.

Every day, but particularly in the morning, we (along with many other retailers) get visited by people who only visit us to try to steal goods which presumably they go off and sell. These people are rude, threatening and as well as cost us directly with stock loss, also deter our customers from visiting while they are in store. We have had to change staffing levels simply to increase our presence every morning to try to deter these unwanted visitors from either entering or thieving.

At least once a day the High Street is plagued by arguments, shouting, offensive and threatening behaviour from the same people. They often appear to be under the influence of something and completely inapproachable. This causes the street to empty of shoppers during the disturbance, and no doubt makes them think twice about returning. This is having a massive impact on our sales levels. Thankfully we are also connected to the Orchard shopping centre where we have a protected environment for shoppers to visit us from. This protected shopping centre demonstrates that where suitable security is present that shopping can still be pleasant, but that the public streets are much less desirable these days.

An example of unwanted behaviour was just this past Sunday, when an apparently homeless man made his base for half an hour or so on the benches outside our store and started shouting incessantly at passersby. Comments he angrily shouted at people included:

- "I hate children" - aimed at parents walking by with young children
- "You're all scum" aimed at a group of people trying hard to walk by quickly and ignore him

There was also offensive leering at lone-women walking by; spitting; and other generally disturbing behaviour. Hardly surprising that we have no customers visit while this is going on. Interestingly all of this is taking place within a few metres of a CCTV camera - but was anyone watching or reacting? The behaviour only ended when the man had scared everyone away and moved on of his own accord.

In general our customers often comment on the shouting, the begging, the drug dealing, that goes on in plain sight. Our staff feel intimidated and concerned when these people enter our store. They also have concerns walking to and from work. The recent incident in Tesco where a member of staff was injured has obviously made our staff and customers very aware of the potential risk some of these desperate people pose.

The lack of SBAC's data sharing system means we have lost our group's platform to share information or report issues as a group, and the continual reduction in policing is now having a much greater effect than when SBAC was around. Sedgemoor's radio system is more expensive, has no data sharing, and from our understanding has far fewer members making it less of a useful resource. It is such a shame TDBC did not insist Sedgemoor continue monitoring SBAC's radios as they had done when SDC started monitoring the cameras - a move that can now clearly be seen as nothing more than being in the interests of SDC's own purses rather than the good of Taunton's town centre.

A change of approach is essential for Taunton to return to becoming a nicer place to visit. The continual decline of footfall in the town centre must at least in part be attributed to visitors' unwillingness to visit due to the unpleasantness we all endure on a daily basis. I am sure retailers have enough problems trying to survive without the extra problems these issues are causing, and it must be an extra reason for the multiples to seriously consider their future in Taunton when stock losses are so high and footfall is so low, which if any of those national names start leaving will only lead to further problems for the town centre.

I hope something is done by the council before it becomes too late, and Taunton becomes a very different place.

#### 19 – S. Petrich

I would like to add that the most stressful part of my job, as a retail manager in Taunton, is the challenge of dealing with aggressive and often organised individuals and groups of potential shoplifters. We are a small team of women who do feel vulnerable when faced with regular confrontation. It shouldn't be like this. The begging in town is also blatant and intimidating for my colleagues and customers.

I'm sure we'll support the new proposal, we're lucky that our company is generally happy to be lead by us in the stores. Bottom line is that the customers want to be able to walk the pavements without fear of being harassed or worse. Since our refit we have had lots of comments from our customers like "so now you'll be able to see what everyone is up to" so they are clearly aware that theft is a problem. Our shrink has not really altered but we do invest hours in manning the front door, under the guise of welcoming, in an attempt to keep the wrong people out..... but we really shouldn't need to guard our doors, should we?

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> Our neighbours Treds have been hugely affected this year. I believe they support the proposal too. Their shop has had its front window smashed 3 times this year. Their lease is up for renewal soon too so let's hope they don't pull out of Taunton too.

