



# Saxmundham Town Council

The Old Police Station, Station Approach, Saxmundham, Suffolk,  
IP17 1BW, Tel: 01728 604595, VAT Registration No: 571060663

Email: [townclerk@saxmundham.org](mailto:townclerk@saxmundham.org)

[www.saxmundham.org](http://www.saxmundham.org)

## Record of the Public Meeting on Community Safety held on Monday 10 June 2019 at 7.00 pm

**Present:**            **Approximately 70 members of the public**

### **Panel of agencies**

Mr Keith Turner, Access Community Trust (ACT)

Mr Rob Fawcett, ACT

Ms Morag McInnes, East Suffolk Council (ESC), Economic  
Development

Ms Zoe Botten, ESC, Communities

PC Sean Mingay, Suffolk Police

PC Ellie Minchelle, Suffolk Police

Sergeant Mark Beresford, Suffolk Police

### **Town Councillors**

Cllr J Smith, Chairman

Cllr J Fisher, Vice Chairman

Cllr N Hiley

Cllr J Findlay

### **County Councillor Richard Smith**

### **Town Council administrative staff:**

Maddie Gallop, Town Clerk (TC/RFO)

Jenny Morcom, Assistant Town Clerk (ATC)

Cllr Smith welcomed everyone to the meeting and outlined the concerns that had prompted the Town Council to hold a public meeting on community safety; the recent break in in the High Street and other problems. He then invited each member of the panel to explain their role and take one or two questions.

### **Sergeant Beresford made the following points about the work the police are doing:**

- The police are applying lessons learned from a similar situation in Leiston.
- The police are very aware of county lines<sup>1</sup> related issues.

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<sup>1</sup> The practice of using children to traffic drugs into rural areas.

- They are aware of a group of 10 – 15 young people between the ages of 13 and 16 who are gathering regularly and causing problems.
- There have been some instances of theft and assault, as well as some evidence of drug use but the group is relatively inexperienced with only three or four ringleaders. Most of the young people have no previous convictions.
- At first the burglary in the High Street appeared to be too organised for this group, but evidence now points to them and six arrests have been made. Further evidence is needed, however, before there can be any charges although police are reasonably confident that they will have this in the next few weeks.
- It is worrying that the group has progressed so far so quickly and there are also concerns that some of the young people may be vulnerable to exploitation by more experienced and organised criminals.
- The police need any information members of the public may be able to give them for instance; who is introducing these young people to drugs.
- The police are working with other agencies as well as local schools to break the cycle.
- The police need members of the community to come forward with information.

### Questions and comments

- C I've only seen one police officer in the 15 months that I've lived in Saxmundham.
- C I've seen a police car several times in the last few weeks.
- Q How do you notify police if you are worried or have information?
- A Call 101 and ask for the local police, or email via the Suffolk Constabulary website. The police are happy to receive anonymous information. In an emergency dial 999.
- C I've tried phoning 101 and had to wait an hour.
- A Its shocking but we are working to improve this – you can always email or use the online reporting system.
- A Cllr R Smith explained that he had been a Councillor in Leiston when there were similar problems and the problems were solved. Cllr R Smith offered to report the problem with the 101 service to the Police and Crime Commissioner for Suffolk.
- Q Every time we hear that they can't be charged because they are too young. At what age can you charge them? Central government needs to do something, one of the candidates for prime minister took drugs.
- A The age of criminal responsibility is 10 years. PC Mingay will be on the beat in Saxmundham

### **Zoe Botten, ESC Communities Officer explained the work she and her team were doing:**

- We focus on dealing with anti-social behaviour and we hold a multi-agency meeting each month to tackle these problems.
- Both schools are working with the police, ESC, and youth providers and we are building a very good knowledge base about these young people.

### Questions and comments

- Q What will you do to educate the parents?

- A Part of the work we are doing around county lines is about gangs and exploitation. Parents are terrified that their kids may be involved. We provide training and meetings for people working with parents and they pass on knowledge to parents about what to look out for.
- C Some parents don't care.
- C That sounds like a good list of stakeholders. Regarding the parents, there are various entries on Facebook pages that seem to indicate that parents are unaware that they are responsible for their children.
- A A Community Protection Notice may be served on a parent (of a child under 16 years).
- Q Are the primary schools involved?
- A Yes they come to our meetings.

Cllr Smith explained that the Town Council had commissioned ACT to deliver services to young people in Saxmundham, and invited Rob Fawcett to speak.

**Rob Fawcett, Access Community Trust (ACT), made the following points about the work he and his team had been working in Saxmundham;**

- We have been working here for three years, and we currently work with Leiston CYDS to deliver 12 hours youth work per week.
- These are challenging times and partnership is very important.
- We know who is involved and we can share useful information, but we also have to maintain the trust of the young people we work with.
- We also do outreach work to schools to try to stop anti-social behaviour.
- We have been able to access some funds to deliver some boxing sessions to young people and we think that further sports provision will help young people get back on track.
- Leiston CYDs deliver the Friday evening youth sessions and around 73 young people engage with us including the core group of people we are talking about tonight. We know that some young people feel pressured into it.

**Questions and comments**

- C We have witnessed children verbally abusing their teachers in lesson time, not just after school.
- A These young people are likely to have been excluded from school, but then turn up at the school because they have nowhere else to go.
- C Schools need our help.
- Q Do you actually have a police officer go into assembly?
- A Zoe Botten explained that her team were working very closely with schools and the police to run Crucial Crew Plus for the whole school which covers a number of topics affecting young people.

**Morag McInnes, ESC Economic Development Officer explained the work her team was doing:**

- We are working with Saxmundham business owners as this affects everyone.
- We are really focussing on the town centre and we want to support t the town centre.
- A thriving town centre helps build a sense of pride and security.
- We have commissioned an analysis of town centres in local market owns and this will help us to reach out to businesses in the right way.

**Questions and comments**

- Q What can you do? We have a massive number of teenagers and growth.
- A We share as much knowledge as possible to support businesses.

- C But businesses need funding to help them, they need grill on windows.
- A Sergeant Beresford explained that it was important to keep a sense of proportion, the town isn't being held to ransom. The problem is around 12 children with three or four ring leaders.
- C I pick up rubbish from the playground near Fromus walk. I never find any drug paraphernalia. I think the problem is minor.
- Q What about the railway station?
- Q What about a vigilante group?
- A Rob Fawcett invited anyone who would like to become involved to join ACT as a volunteer. They would get training and learn how to intervene positively with young people.
- C I never see this problem where I live, and I am encouraged that so many agencies are working together.
- Q As Chair of the Council – do you think Saxmundham has grown too quickly?
- A I feel the Town has grown out of its infrastructure and we need community facilities to cope with the growth.
- Q What about the new children's homes in Leiston and Saxmundham.
- A I am the manager of the new children's home in Saxmundham. It will be a 6-bedroom home for girls who have been sexually exploited. We will be staffed 24/7 and our children will be supported and supervised at all times. We will have a psychologist on site. We hope you will embrace and support us.
- Q Why is the centre of Saxmundham dying?
- A I don't agree that its dying, but we do need to improve it.
- Q Why are the rents so high in Saxmundham? In Halesworth they have come together as a community. We need to be practical.
- A (Zoe) Two weeks ago we had a meeting called 'Saxmundham Forward' to try to bring the community together. Please come to future meetings.
- C We need a High Street that's accessible to people without a lot of money.
- Q What about the vandalism at the Old Butchers Shop?
- A This is on the agenda for the meeting tonight, but it is now boarded up and the town council is working with ESC to resolve the problem.
- C Elderly people feel unsafe at night.
- C Sometimes there are 30-40 teenagers hanging around where I live.
- A (Sergeant Beresford) Saxmundham remains a very safe place and people should not feel unduly unsafe at night. It isn't illegal for teenagers to meet together, although it can feel threatening.

Cllr Smith invited members of the panel to give their closing views.

**Rob Fawcett:** You are all here because you care, so come and volunteer for ACT!

**Morag McInnes:** Business owners – please get in touch with me. The more people who get involved to work with young people the better.

**Zoe Botten:** Please report information or concerns to the police.

**Sergeant Beresford:** Thank you all. I do not support the idea of vigilante group, and I would hate you to go away feeling that Saxmundham is unsafe. It's very safe. This is about a small group of young people. Maybe we should get back together in about 6 months to see where we are. It's important that the community stays together.

Cllr Smith asked members of the public if they would like to raise any other issues. No further issues were raised.

Cllr Smith thanked the panel and members of the public and explained that there would be a short break before the Council continued with its agenda.

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