

SOMERSET WEST COMMUNITY POLICE FORUM
RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

GENERAL MEETING HELD IN THE SOMERSET WEST LIBRARY HALL
ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2009

1. Present

As per Attendance Register. Apologies were received from Supt M A Williams, Supt A Preston, Johnny Brown, Peter Kinnaird.

2. Opening and Welcome

The Chairman, Mr Andrew Cosmopoulos, welcomed all present and presented apologies from Supt Williams who was away on a course. He also apologised for the fact that the previous public meeting had had to be abandoned when SAPS was called out to an emergency situation in Sir Lowry's Pass. He said that Const Suzan Jantjies would take any questions from the floor for the attention of Supt Williams on her return. Before proceeding with the meeting, he asked Councillor Stuart Pringle to give a short rundown of the current CoCT plans regarding street people, as Cllr Pringle had to leave for another engagement directly afterwards.

3. Statement by Cllr Stuart Pringle

Cllr Pringle explained that, in the 2008/9 financial year, the CoCT had piloted a programme in the Southern Suburbs in order to deal with the problem of street people. The issue was one of such great magnitude that it would have to be tackled from a number of different fronts. He said that, together with Cllrs Jespersen, Venter, Heuvel and Middleton, they would be working on emulating the model from the Southern Suburbs. The first step would be the "Please don't give" project. Kind-hearted citizens should not give street people food and money; this only made the problem worse. They could rather buy a book of tickets which entitled the user to stay in a night shelter or access to a meal. Firstly their particulars would be noted; if they were stranded in the region, they would be put on a bus and sent home, and a follow-up call would be made to their family to see that they had arrived. Many were foreigners, and the UN office would be contacted about them. Thirdly, it had to be ascertained whether they were eligible for a Govt. grant.

The other issue was substance abuse. The City had started programmes, and also had a list of organisations which could help. A Displaced Persons' Unit had been launched, as internationally it had been found that small units of this nature operated best, with the co-operation of local social workers. They were budgeting to appoint two Street People Co-ordinators for the next financial year (starting June 2010). This programme had been relatively successful in the Rondebosch/Claremont area but did not mean that there would never be vagrants again. It was a step in the right direction, and in line with international best practice. A meeting had been arranged for October 2009 with all the NGO representatives and the City, but the implementation would take longer. He was hoping to put something in place in the meantime. There was a possibility that an information pamphlet may be out by Dec 2009 or Jan 2010. He added that the Mayoral Committee member for Social Development was very enthusiastic about this plan. In response to a question, he said that the coupons were not available here yet. NGO's had until end September in apply for grants-in-aid, thereafter the scheme would be worked out.

In reply to a further question he said that the Nuisance By-Law was in place and that any anti-social behaviour was a criminal offence, and fell to the Law Enforcement Department to deal with. He said that he would like to see greater synergy with regard to SAPS and Law Enforcement.

4. Statement by CPF Chairman, Andrew Cosmopoulos

Mr Cosmopoulos gave a brief overview of the CPF's activities in the preceding four months. The website was launched in August thanks to Alastair Shand who acted as Webmaster and Helderberg Crime Watch who sponsored the site. The Chairman said that the success of the site depended on input from the public and encouraged residents to visit the site, www.somersetwestcpf.org.za and use it as another means of communicating with the CPF.

The CPF had been actively involved in helping to establish new Neighbourhood Watches (NW), of which there were currently five (Steynsrust, Heldervue, Helena Heights, Berg-en-Dal and Westridge) with a possibility that Parel Vallei may start up a Watch too. Mr Cosmopoulos asked residents to look up the details of the NW's on the website and contact the co-ordinators in their areas, as it was all about opening up the lines of communication and becoming the eyes and ears of the neighbourhood.

Regarding the Sub Forums, the Chairman said that the CPF was involved with getting a Rural Crime Sector Forum off the ground in the Sector 2 Rural area of Raithby, Firgrove, Bredell Road and up to Avontuur and an election meeting would be held there on 28 September 2009.

The Garden Village Sub Forum had been plagued with difficulties and had only represented one suburb; it had therefore been decided to hold a public meeting in the Gordon High School hall on 29 September 2009 and get residents from the four suburbs of Garden Village, Helderzicht, Paardevlei and Victoria Park together to elect an interim steering committee representative of the whole area. At the moment a lot were being held ransom by a few and the issues needed to be aired. Three weeks' notice would then be given of an election meeting for the new CPF, as per regulations.

The Sir Lowry's Pass Sub Forum presented a similar scenario; the committee members elected in January 2009 had all fallen by the wayside after being enthusiastic initially and the Forum had been dissolved. The CPF had initiated a new round of meetings in SLP and it was hoped that this time, with a different approach, the community would be motivated to set up a functional CPF. The new election meeting was scheduled for 21 September 2009.

5. Crime stats and feedback

Insp Fleischmann gave an overview of the crime stats for the past three months. He said he had received a request to break it down into suburbs but that this would take too long. He would therefore report on the more serious crimes, including house and business robberies, carjacking and crimes involving firearms. Housebreakings were the most problematic as they could easily lead to violence and even murder. There had been three aggravated cases in one month for an average of 18 housebreakings per month in Somerset West. The most affected areas were Lionviham, Heritage Park, Helena Heights and Steynsrust, and to a lesser extent, Westridge, Somerset Ridge, the flats around Somerset Mall, Oldenland Road/Golden Hill, Helderrand and Morningside. The crime patterns were always shifting and prevention depended on the alertness of officers and residents. Building activity and weather could contribute, it had been found that poachers came to the area looking for easy income when the weather prevented them from going out to poach.

There had been a 159% increase in businesses broken into, with over 70 in the last three months. Mostly laptops and smaller items targeted. Insp Fleischmann said that a lot of business owners were negligent, and did not install cameras or set alarms. He would like to see business represented at the meetings, as well as organisations such as Business Against Crime, who were not present. Problem areas were the businesses between the railway line and Main Road, and the Triangle area at the Mall.

Motor vehicle theft totalled 81 vehicles in three months, problem areas being close to Shoprite/Checkers and the library on Saturday mornings between 8 and 11. All types of vehicles were targeted. A new trend was the theft of motorcycles and scooters, especially newer models. SAPS was keen on obtaining information on where the market was and asked for anyone with information to come forward. Insp Fleischmann also advised that thieves were breaking into houses, loading up the owner's vehicle with goods and using the remote controls to open up garage doors and drive away. He advised residents not to leave remote controls and vehicle keys lying around or in the vehicles but to put them away or take them with them on leaving the house for extended periods. Some of these vehicles had been found in the Nomzamo/Lwandle area which may mean that the criminals were locals, or just abandoned there. He also advised the public not to leave valuable items in their cars as there had been a 57% increase in theft out of motor vehicles, particularly in the CBD at night, and at sports venues e.g. De Beers.

In reply to a question on murders and rapes, he said that there had been no murders, and 7 rapes, including Raithby and Sir Lowry's Pass.

A resident questioned the fact that cars were being stolen in the Checkers/Shoprite parking areas where car guards were employed. Discussion followed regarding registered and unregistered car guards. Registered car guards had to have training, which took 3 months, and had to have at least an E grade in security training. Vagrants and others who just donned yellow bibs and acted as car guards were not entitled to operate. They were still a problem at the Post Office. Law Enforcement was not represented at the meeting to answer questions.

The new CoCT parking officials had started operating but it had been found that they came from areas outside of Somerset West and this affected the employment of locals. It was also mentioned that vehicle theft had increased in the Strand once they had started operating.

The Chairman was then called away to an emergency as his two month old baby was rushed to hospital and the Treasurer, Mr Tony Van Minnen took over in the absence of the Deputy Chairman, due to illness.

6. CPF Award for Excellence

The CPF had decided to make a monthly award for outstanding results by a member of the security companies and this initiative was supported by a sponsor, Vetus Schola Protection Services, who had made a sponsorship of R1 000 available to the prizewinner. Nominations had been called for and it had been decided to grant the award to Armed Response Officer Pierre Pietersen of Secure-Rite Security for outstanding work in July, August and the first week in September 2009. His average response time to call-outs was 4 minutes and he was responsible for numerous arrests for housebreaking, possession of stolen goods, and theft out of motor vehicles. He had also won the trophy for most arrests from his employer as well as Armed Response Officer of the Month and two awards for tactical shooting and speed shooting. Mr Van Minnen congratulated him on behalf of the CPF and handed him his award certificate and the cash prize.

7. Questions

7.1. Mr Gavin Smith said that the Strand SAPS had started an sms service to subscribers alerting them to suspicious vehicles and other information regarding crime, and asked if it was possible to start a similar service in S/West. Const Jantjies, SAPS Communications Officer, said that she would find out and let the Forum know.

7.2. A resident of Green Oaks asked for information and advice on securing complexes/estates. Mr Willie Engelbrecht of HCW offered to advise him.

7.3. Google Street View – Alastair Shand, Webmaster for the CPF, advised the meeting on the Google Street View filming of residential areas for the internet and asked for input from the public, crime intelligence officers and security companies. Discussion followed regarding the pros and cons. The only apparent advantages would be to potential tourists. Residents could also take part in the survey on the CPF website. Mr Shand said that he would also post the link for “opting out” so that residents who objected to the invasion of privacy could request to have their homes blurred out on the programme.

7.4. Response times – A resident asked SAPS what the average response time was and Capt Young cited the example of a burglary in Irene Avenue that day where the response time had been 4,5 minutes. Residents were advised to acquaint themselves with the cellphone numbers of the Sector Vans and urged to contact the Sector vehicles directly instead of going through the charge office. Mr Van Minnen also reminded residents to keep their alarms properly serviced so that SAPS and the security companies could concentrate on real crimes and not waste their time running around after false alarms (over 90%).

There were no further questions. Residents were reminded that they could leave written questions for Supt Williams on the sheet provided for later response, or through the CPF website, www.somersetwestcpf.org.za.

There being no further business, the meeting ended at 20h00.

A COSMOPOULOS
CHAIRMAN

9 September 2009

Next meeting: 10 November 2009, 19h00, Somerset West Public Library