

## **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.

- (4) 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.