

Ms T Ridge
Chair
Bournemouth Community Safety Partnership
St Stephens Road
Bournemouth
BH2 6EB

25 March 2014

Dear Tina

Call for a Report - Street Drinking and Vagrancy in Bournemouth

Vagrancy and street drinking is an impactful and distressing issue. It can change the public's perception of their locality, and increase the fear of crime. For the vagrants and street drinkers themselves, they are a high risk vulnerable group who need support and diversion.

Recently, I have received two separate complaints from Bournemouth Councillors about vagrancy and street drinking in the centre of Bournemouth. There is an irony here, as many would argue the key agency for changing outcomes with street drinking and the homeless are Bournemouth Borough Council.

I have also received numerous complaints on this matter from local constituents and this matter is raised regularly at my public forums in the town.

The main emphasis of these complaints is the lack of police enforcement in this area.

I am concerned that Councillors and the public appear to consider police enforcement as the answer to this complex and historic issue. Whilst I accept the police have a role to play in enforcing certain aspects of the law in relation to vagrancy and street drinking, enforcement should never be the main solution.

My concern is that the vagrancy and street drinking issue appears strategically disconnected. Initiatives appear to revolve around enforcement of the street drinkers themselves rather than tackling other root issues, with limited evidence of innovative longer term approaches to the issue.

For example, attempts to explore "wet tents", or additional enforcement of off licences (such as in Hampshire) or reduction in super strength alcohol sales (as in Weymouth) appear lacking. In relation to the wet tent issue, there is huge support for this approach amongst the third sector, and the public. However, this idea appears to fall at the first hurdle every time with Bournemouth Borough Council.

As Police and Crime Commissioner, it is clear to me that these are complex and multi-agency issues requiring complex and multi-agency solutions.

The Office of the Dorset Police & Crime Commissioner

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I feel the CSP is best placed to coordinate this.

As you are aware, under Schedule 11, paragraph 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, I am able to request a report from a Community Safety Partnership (CSP) when I have concerns that the responsible authorities are not carrying out their functions in an effective and efficient manner and where I consider this to be a reasonable and proportionate request. I am therefore asking you, as Chair of the Bournemouth CSP, to provide me with a report on the issue of street-drinking and vagrancy in Bournemouth. It will be essential that this report includes the CSP approach to these issues to date in meeting your objectives as set out in the Partnership Delivery Plan 2013/14 (including the work of the ASB Street Drinking Group), and the future steps that the Partnership consider necessary.

I am also aware of the recent changes to St Pauls, and of the new DPPO's, so an indication of the benefits already realised from these initiatives would be helpful.

I look forward to your response in due course and in working together to find new and exciting ways to tackle this important area of community safety work.

Yours sincerely

Martyn Underhill
Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner

Copy Cllr John Beesley, Leader of Bournemouth Borough Council
Tony Williams, Chief Executive of Bournemouth Borough Council
Debbie Simpson, Chief Constable