

Telegraph & Argus

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Rising crime: the true cost of police cuts

CRIME figures are rising across England and Wales – after two decades of near continuous decline, it looks as though the slide has come to an abrupt end.

Theresa May was a fortunate Home Secretary who presided over falling crime statistics despite making drastic cuts to police budgets which reduced the thin blue line by 19,000 officers.

But the latest figures suggest the thin blue line is stretched a little too thin these days.

In Bradford there has been a 13 per cent increase in recorded crime across the district. Officials say the picture isn't as bad as it appears.

West Yorkshire Police and the county's Police and Crime Commissioner blame a new method of recording crime statistics for painting an unnecessarily depressing picture. So can we trust the latest figures any more than we could the record-breaking reductions that were being reported until recently?

Anecdotal evidence would suggest we can. In July, the T&A reported how retailers in Wyke have been left counting the cost after a spate of burglaries and shop raids.

Police chiefs in West Yorkshire candidly admit their officers are exhausted and struggling to cope. Since 2006, the number of people per police officer has risen from 379 to 493 - substantially above the national average of 467 - due to both an increase of 6 per cent in the overall population and a 19 per cent decrease in police numbers.

Rising crime always spells trouble for a Tory Prime Minister. She may have been a lucky Home Secretary, but Theresa May's luck ran out months ago.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

The four stages of man are infancy, childhood, adolescence and obsolescence. - Art Linkletter

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ON THIS DAY

25 years ago: Animal rights campaigners were threatening to protest at the opening night of a big top in Bradford. Anger had flared over fears of the welfare of some animals featured in the world famous Chipperfield Brothers Circus, which kicked off a 13-day stint at Forster Square.

50 years ago: More than 6,000 Dockers voted in London to begin a strike against the introduction of decasualisation at the royal group of docks, unless their demands were met.

BID EFFORT SHOWS WE MEAN BUSINESS

Two months after its launch, **Perry Austin-Clarke** asks how Bradford's BID effort is going?

SEVENTY per cent of businesses who have so far responded to a feasibility survey say they are in favour of setting up a Business Improvement District for Bradford.

The figure, based on 115 responses to date, is seen as "very encouraging" by the team behind the move to set up the initiative which has already been established in more than 270 cities, towns and districts across the UK.

Consultants Heartflood, who have been commissioned to carry out the independent study to establish how much support there is for a BID in Bradford, say they are aiming for about 200 responses.

That would represent about a third of the city centre businesses and organisations that would be likely to be asked to participate in the scheme which, based on experience of other BIDs across the country, would be a high quality representative sample.

Chris Gregory, director of Heartflood, told the audience at an open meeting held for city centre businesses earlier this week, that the signs were good that a BID could be successful in Bradford.

"Obviously, there is a long way to go yet and a great deal of work to be done but, based on the feedback we've had so far, I'm quite confident that businesses are behind the scheme and understand its value."

The feasibility study is not just aimed at understanding the level of support for the scheme but provides an opportunity for businesses to identify key projects they believe could help boost trade in Bradford.

Businesses yet to respond can still have their say by filling in



'BUSINESS DELIVERING FOR BUSINESS': Ian Ward, manager of The Broadway shopping centre

an online form (which takes about seven minutes to complete) at bradfordbid.co.uk.

Once enough responses have been received, Heartflood will produce a report outlining whether there is sufficient support to proceed and identifying the projects those who took part believe should be tackled with the highest priority.

That should happen in November, followed by the creation of a shadow BID board who will consult further with businesses and pull together a Business Plan to be launched in Autumn next year.

The final physical area that the BID will cover will be part of that consultation and all of those affected will be invited to take part in a binding ballot on the creation of the BID with the result due to be announced in October 2018.

The BID itself cannot go ahead unless more than 50 per cent of those who respond – which must also correspond with 50 per cent of the total rateable value of all votes cast – are in favour.

That figure is so crucial because

a "Yes" vote will lead to a levy of about 1.5 per cent of their rateable value being imposed on affected businesses for a period of five years, after which there would have to be another vote to renew the BID.

For a business with a rateable value of, for example, £20,000 that would mean an investment of £300 per year in the BID. Big businesses, such as a department store with a rateable value of, say, £350,000, would invest £5,250 per year.

There is no opt out for individual firms who would all be liable to pay the levy but the BID Development Group, which is running the initiative, says it is considering an exemption level of about £12,000 which means that small businesses falling below that would not be liable to pay and would not be able to vote in the ballot.

They would still be able to join the BID on a voluntary basis and benefit from some of the services for an annual voluntary contribution of about £100.

Mr Gregory said experience shows that smaller businesses often receive the biggest benefit

from the scheme.

Ian Ward, chairman of the BID development group, told the open meeting that if the BID area contained about 600 businesses, as is thought, that would generate about £500,000 per year for five years, which could have a huge impact on the city centre.

"It's really important to remember that this has nothing to do with Bradford Council," he said.

"This is about businesses in Bradford delivering for business: it is entirely run by the private sector.

"Anything and everything the BID does is in addition to what the Council provides. It would not take over any of the Council's core services."

Experience elsewhere shows that BIDs can have a real galvanising effect on driving improvements in the city centre and put pressure on the Council to deliver a better service with its limited resources.

"It can provide a real voice for business," said Mr Ward.

"But it can only happen if the results come back in a positive way."

If it is successful, it is proposed that the BID will revolve around four key pillars: Safer, Cleaner, Alive and Promoted.

Some of the suggestions that have already been put forward include:

- Making the city SAFER through additional policing, better CCTV and securing the prestigious Purple Flag status for managing the evening economy;
- Creating a CLEANER city via additional street washing, improving cleansing standards and removal of graffiti and flyposting;
- Working to make the city more ALIVE through a range of major new events, improving the appearance of vacant units and promoting incubation space to develop new businesses;
- Developing a better PROMOTED city through co-ordinated campaigns, targeting visitor growth catchments and working with partners to market Bradford as a destination to a new regional and national audience.

Mr Ward, who is also general manager of The Broadway shopping centre, had previously chaired the Liverpool city centre BID.

"I know what a difference it makes," he said. "You only have to ask people in Liverpool – where the BID is in its third term and heading for 15 years – what a massive improvement it has brought about and how it has brought people in the city together."

This is about businesses in Bradford delivering for business: it is entirely run by the private sector

- BID development group chairman Ian Ward