Briefing for the Public Petitions Committee

Petition Number: PE1618
Main Petitioner: Carl Grundy on behalf of the Riders Club of Edinburgh
Subject: Combatting Motorcycle Theft
Calls on the Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to take action to more effectively combat motorcycle theft and related offences

Background

The Scottish Government’s recorded crime statistics include figures for the theft of motor vehicles. The way in which the data is collected does not allow for differentiation between motor vehicle types (eg between motorcycles and cars).

However, motorcycle theft has been highlighted as a particular problem in Edinburgh, with the Road Policing division of Police Scotland indicating that “the current motorcycle theft trend is almost exclusively associated to the City of Edinburgh area”.

A Police Scotland news release Motorcycle Crime Operation Launched in Edinburgh (14 July 2016) set out information on steps taken to tackle the problem. It noted that:

“Police in Edinburgh have launched a new operation dedicated to tackling motorbike theft and associated anti-social behaviour in the Capital. Operation Soteria began with two days of enforcement activity in the city utilising a range of resources from across Police Scotland.”

Further information on steps taken to tackle motorcycle theft in Edinburgh has been provided by relevant officers within Police Scotland:

“I can confirm tackling both the theft of motorcycles, and their subsequent anti-social use, is a priority for Police Scotland and particularly for local officers in Edinburgh. This type of crime has a significant impact on victims.

This year we have seen an increase in the theft of motor vehicles, including motorcycles, but a reduction in the vehicles being broken into and property stolen from them.

1 Contacts between SPICe and Police Scotland (October 2016).
I have deployed resources in a sustained effort to tackle this issue. A dedicated and specialist investigation unit, supported by other plain clothed officers, augments uniformed front line officers with patrols and investigation of crimes.

Whilst it would be wrong to suggest all those responsible for these types of crimes are youths, there are clear and identified links to juvenile offending. We are supported locally by the City of Edinburgh Council’s Community Improvement Partnership into Motorcycle Theft and Anti-social Use. Clearly the issues of diversion and rehabilitation fall outwith the sole remit of Police Scotland, however I would like to assure you we engage fully with our criminal justice partners to work together on these issues. ²

The Road Policing division of Police Scotland has also noted that:

“Prevention, disruption/arrest (prior to the actual theft) is the preferred tactic for motorcycle thefts as it removes the risks which can be brought about via a pursuit scenario. During August of this year [2016] I was asked to provide a response about whether or not the police service had sufficient powers to ‘pursue stolen motorcycles’ and in turn I drafted a document which explains the risks and consideration which Police Scotland has in place. I can confirm that we have sufficient powers and I have re-attached the document for consideration.”³

The above mentioned Police Scotland document includes the following:

“Vehicle pursuits, by their very nature, carry a high level of risk due to uncertainty of the actions/risk taken by the fleeing driver. Police Scotland’s Vehicle ‘Pursuit Policy’ and ‘Approved Tactics Directory’ states that the strategic objective of a pursuit is to secure a safe resolution, which will lead to the apprehension of offenders and prevention of crime. The policy provides:

(a) clear guidance on roles, responsibilities, risk assessment and authorisation;

(b) a management structure;

(c) a range of tactical options for dealing with both spontaneous and pre-planned pursuit situations.

It concludes by stating that:

“Police Scotland has robust policy and procedures in place which ensures each individual pursuit incident is considered on its own merit. Pursuits are by their very nature dangerous, and the overriding principle is to ensure that the balance between (a) arresting those who would evade capture, and (b) police and public (including the offender) safety is not compromised.

² Contacts between SPICe and Police Scotland (September 2016).
³ Contacts between SPICe and Police Scotland (October 2016).
While Police Scotland does not have a ‘no pursuit’ policy in relation to motorcycles, buses and lorries, pursuing these vehicles does attract additional safety implications and each incident will be considered on its own merit.”

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