Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Written submission from Dundee City Council

Introduction

Since the establishment of Police Scotland, officers in Dundee have maintained a focus on local priorities, have set up an effective command structure and teams which have access to regional and national support, and have responded very constructively to the new arrangements which were put in place for scrutiny by the Council’s Policy and Resources Committee.

Local Priorities

Dundee City Council has eight multi-member wards, which are also the basis for local community planning partnerships. Each of these areas has a policing plan. When these plans were created they took account of the priorities in the local community plans as well as priorities from the Dundee Policing Plan. This plan in turn reflected both national and local priorities and is embedded in Dundee’s Single Outcome Agreement. National priorities such as Domestic Abuse have been an issue for Dundee for some time and now have a national focus to achieve greater success in this area. For example, a national domestic abuse toolkit incorporating best practice from across Scotland is utilised at every report of a domestic incident attended by officers in Dundee.

Police Structure and Teams

Police Scotland has created Area Commands led by a Chief Inspector, with Dundee having two areas - Dundee North and Dundee South. The role of the Area Commander has changed significantly from the role of Chief Inspector in the previous command team and this enables them to focus all their energy into operational service delivery and partnership working. The new structures place the Area Commanders at the heart of delivering local policing and at the centre of local partnerships. They attend, and present local tactical assessments to, the local community planning partnerships in their respective areas (these are also attended by all local councillors as well as community representatives and partner organisations)and attend Community Safety Partnership meetings and local Alcohol and Drugs Partnership groups. This provides a very real link between tactical partnership decision making and operational service delivery.

Dundee North and Dundee South have created an additional community policing team in order to ensure community policing cover 16 hours per day (early and late shift), 7 days a week. This has enhanced police response to community issues and provided consistency through the extended working day. Each community team is led by a Sergeant and comprises of officers with geographic responsibility across the multi-member wards as well as ‘flexi’ officers who can investigate specific crimes or incidents, target priority locations or prolific offenders, or operate as a community team when required for operations or action plan enforcement. The community
teams are led by an Inspector covering across Dundee, who co-ordinates partnership working. Twice weekly, the community Inspector attends the Multi Agency Tasking and Co-ordinating group at the community safety hub where police are co-located with the Council’s community safety and anti-social behaviour teams; this is recognised as best practice across Scotland and is continuously improving the information exchange and tasking across a wide range of partner agencies.

Dundee North and Dundee South operate uniform response officers from police offices across Dundee. They deal with emergency calls, investigate crimes, proactively patrol priority locations, conduct licensed premises checks etc and are led by a response Inspector with responsibility across the city, who can mobilise resources wherever the need is greatest. The uniformed officers are supported by Divisional mechanisms such as Intelligence units, Crime and Performance Management units, and receive investigative support for more serious crimes from detective officers in Divisional units such as the Domestic Abuse Investigation Unit, Rape Investigation Unit and the Proactive Team.

Regional support is regularly provided by the Operational Support Unit, Armed Response Unit and Major Investigation Team; these are locally based teams but have regional and national remits so they will deploy where needed. A good example recently is the Scottish Defence League rally which saw Operational Support Units from across Scotland deploying in Dundee to police the rally and the protest against it.

National support is also readily available; the Mounted Branch and Police Helicopter are now routinely seen in Dundee for events and incidents. Serious Crime Division operations have seen considerable success in Dundee, highlighted in the local press. Operation Labo was another widely reported nationally supported operation, which saw additional uniformed officers patrol priority locations across Dundee to reinforce local community teams and impact on local crime and disorder. The police tell us this kind of operation would not have been possible before reform and the ease of access to these resources has most benefited local policing under Police Scotland.

**Scrutiny**

Dundee City Council’s Policy and Resources Committee has taken on the responsibility for approving local policing plans and scrutinising the performance of the police in Dundee. The two Area Commanders and the Divisional Commander attend special meetings of this Committee which are held five times a year to focus on police, fire and community safety issues, enabling all 29 Dundee councillors to scrutinise the performance of the police and question directly the police commanders responsible for delivery of local policing. The previous arrangement was that 7 elected members from Dundee took part in Tayside Joint Police Board. A few elected members do feel that the loss of the decision-making powers of the Boards was a retrograde step, reducing local democratic accountability. Others take the view that all of our members now have the opportunity to discuss priorities, influence strategy and question performance, with a very specific focus on the needs of Dundee.
Delivery of Local Services

Some of our members have expressed concerns at Police Scotland’s proposals to close some public counter services and reduce the opening hours of others. A motion to Committee expressing opposition to these changes was supported by 12 members, but was defeated by an amendment supported by 14 members which noted that the traditional role of police station counters had to a considerable extent been overtaken by the use of phone and email and supported proposals to target available funding on the most effective operational methods.

Conclusion

We have been assured by the Chief Constable and by the Divisional and Area Commanders that local policing is at the heart of Police Scotland. Our experience to date has been that the focus on local priorities, the command and team structures, the continuing commitment to multi agency partnership approaches and the access to wider resources has assisted in the delivery of local policing. We feel we do have a good basis for local policing going forward, but the concerns of a few members about the loss of decision-making powers previously held by the Boards and the concerns expressed by some members about the impact of savings on local services should also be noted.

Dundee City Council
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