Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Written submission from Orkney Islands Council

Call for written views on the impact of police reform on local policing with particular reference to:

- the impact of police reform on the police services you have in your area.
- whether local policing services have improved since 1 April, remained the same, or deteriorated in your area.
- whether you feel that local policing services have been designed to address the specific needs particular to your local area and if there have been any changes to approach since 1 April.

Response from Orkney Islands Council

Orkney Islands Council and Orkney's local police force have enjoyed a co-operative partnership approach to local service provision for many years, and have a shared commitment to community planning. The local Area Commander and his team consulted widely before publishing their Local Policing Plan for Orkney for 2013-14, with endorsement from the Scottish Police Authority. The Council agreed with the local priorities set out in the plan and it was approved by the joint Police & Fire Sub-Committee on 26 March 2013.

While our local governance and scrutiny arrangements have seen significant changes since 1 April 2013, actual police services as experienced by the public have remained, as planned, largely unchanged to date. Our primary concern is with future changes planned by Police Scotland nationally, the impact they are likely to have on Orkney, and the decision making process by which they are reached. Recent experience over changes to police counter opening hours, and traffic warden services, indicates a change in approach nationally to enforce standardisation even where this does not meet local requirements. In addition, there have been concerns about the centralisation of decision making in relation to approaches to risk management for vulnerable people which sees the previous very effective and well informed local multi-agency decision making processes seeming to take a lesser role than the central belt standardised responses. For reasons of confidentiality we are unable to give details of individual cases.

With regard to police offices, Orkney's Local Policing Plan includes the objective "Deliver a shared policing facility in Stromness" and states: "With work commenced on the Stromness pierhead regeneration project, we will work with Orkney Islands Council to provide a new shared partnership joint operating facility which will offer even better access to policing within the west mainland". On 10 July 2013 the Chief Constable of Police Scotland announced two reviews into opening hours at police offices, and traffic warden services. The Council responded to the call for views on both subjects.

Proposed changes to these services have since been announced which appear to take no account of the Local Policing Plan, nor of the views expressed by the
Council. Opening hours at the Kirkwall police counter are to be increased, despite no local evidence of need. Statements have been made that the traffic warden service is to be withdrawn completely at short notice. Subsequent discussions have negotiated an extension of a few weeks to the traffic warden service, and Orkney Islands Council has a clear expectation that this service should continue to be provided, given the unique local circumstances.

The proposals made no reference to the Stromness joint operating facility, implying instead that opening hours in Stromness were to be cut to zero. Following representations by the Council, this impression has been corrected, and a welcome re-commitment to the joint facility has been made by Police Scotland.

In all cases the changes appear to be an attempt to shoehorn local services into standardised national models. Opening hours are to adhere to one of three standard models. Since Kirkwall currently falls between two of these models, its hours are to be extended, although locally this is a much lower priority than the traffic warden service. With regard to the latter, it is no surprise that the only councils to have applied for decriminalisation of parking enforcement in Scotland are large urban authorities where the service can be run at a surplus. In rural areas, the service makes a loss and this attempt to impose it on local authorities could be perceived as cost-shunting.

We are concerned that this recent experience heralds a new approach to local policing, not by our local police force but by Police Scotland and the SPA. As a small, remote and rural community, Orkney's needs will never be compatible with a "one size fits all" policy. Given the sensitivity of our local police force to local needs and culture, it is a matter for concern that the first national consultations on proposed changes to have impacted locally following police reform should have made such a negative impression on the local community. However, we remain positive that Police Scotland will recognise Orkney's unique local circumstances and remain committed to the traffic warden service.

Orkney Islands Council
10 January 2014