Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Note of visits to Dumfries and Galloway, Fife and Moray

Background

1. At its meeting on 14 November, the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing agreed to split into three groups to visit Fife, Moray and Dumfries and Galloway in January 2014 to see first-hand how local policing arrangements are working in practice and to inform its future work in this area. The Sub-Committee selected these areas to cover a mix of geographical areas and models of local scrutiny.

2. A note of the key issues arising from each visit is set out below.

Visit to Dumfries and Galloway, Monday 13 January 2014

3. Margaret Mitchell and Graeme Pearson visited Dumfries and Galloway on Monday 13 January and held meetings with:

   • the police divisional management team, including the Local Commander, Chief Superintendent Kate Thomson;
   • inspectors, sergeants and constables from the local community policing team;
   • the chair and vice-chair of the Police, Fire and Rescue Sub-Committee of Dumfries and Galloway Council;
   • representatives from a range of community and victims’ groups, including community safety partnerships, Victim Support Scotland, and Annandale and Eskdale Safe and Healthy Action Partnership; and
   • community councillors representing Ecclefechan, Gretna, Kirkcudbright, Dalbeattie and Dumfries.

4. All meetings were held at Police Scotland Divisional Headquarters in Dumfries.

5. Key issues arising from the meetings in D&G include:

   Local and national priorities
   
   • D&G is the third largest local authority area in Scotland, but has a small crime profile. D&G division “hit the ground running” with two murders and a significant increase in road deaths in 2013. With police officers focusing on these operational demands, there was little time to concentrate on preparing for and implementing reform, e.g. training on new models such as IT systems. However, the area had immediately felt the benefits of being able to call on national resources very quickly.
   
   • The community policing team expressed concern regarding the national response teams, e.g. the time
that they take to respond to local incidents and their unfamiliarity with the geography of local areas. It also suggested that lower-level drugs offences, which tend to be the types of drug offences committed in D&G, may be missed if the national drugs’ team priorities are higher level crimes. Community councillors had similar concerns that the national force may focus on serious issues and that more ‘minor crimes’ in D&G may no longer be investigated.

- Staff from D&G Council noticed that, for the first time, local police were keen to include serious and organised crime as part of the single outcome agreement, which they felt had arisen from national priorities.
- The community policing team highlighted a drop in morale amongst officers since 1 April 2013 and a general feeling of being “on the Strathclyde model now”.
- Police also stated that, where previously two cars would have attended an incident in DG, now there can be up to five cars attending.
- There was a lack of consultation with police officers on the ground, including in relation to the impact of new legislation.

**Targets**

- The Local Commander confirmed that she sets local targets, while national targets, e.g. reducing road deaths, are set centrally. She confirmed that police officers do not have individual targets. She said that she “still believes in discretion” and that this is “actively encouraged” by the Chief Constable. The divisional management team acknowledged that inspectors would probably feel as though they are under greater scrutiny than previously, e.g. performance meetings are held more regularly (every week). Community policing inspectors agreed that more detailed information is now being recorded for performance indicators, e.g. increased recording of stop and searches.

**Police counters, traffic wardens and control rooms**

- Three police counters in the area are earmarked for closure. In these areas, the police are exploring the possibility of becoming involved in community hubs as an alternative.
- The Local Commander confirmed that the D&G area currently has two police traffic wardens (based in Dumfries). Community councillors described the plans to remove police wardens as “depressing”, highlighting flaws in the consultation and that their views were not taken into account. Local councillors also had concerns that the traffic warden duties would now have to be covered by local authorities.
- Concerns were also expressed regarding proposals to reduce control rooms, with a potential loss of local knowledge.

**Visibility of police officers**

- The divisional management team noted that there were “huge anxieties” before the single force became
operational, especially amongst community groups and partnerships. In response, D&G police had tried to enhance visibility of police officers. Local councillors said they had seen more foot patrols in the last few months which “make a real difference”; while community councillors said they would like to see more.

- The community policing team and community councillors said that the public was probably unaware of any noticeable changes since 1 April 2013.

**Local scrutiny**

- Local councillors said that a full committee of the council should have been established rather than a sub-committee. There are 9 members on the Sub-Committee, which meets bi-monthly alternately focusing on police and fire and rescue. The Sub-Committee had therefore only met once to look at policing since 1 April 2013 and so they felt it was too soon to comment on how local arrangements are working in practice. Local councillors did however note that more information regarding budgets and police numbers and staff would be helpful and the chair said that he would welcome devolved budgets.

- The Sub-Committee is to consider a local plan for the first time at its next meeting, however, members are unclear what would happen if they do not agree it.

- The local authority funds a small number of additional police officers (one inspector and a small number of officers working in youth justice).

- The community policing team said that the large number of plans based on multi-member wards is not necessary for the population of D&G and indeed it was unclear whether they deliver. Some noted a feeling of real local accountability before police reform and suggested that the new local scrutiny function is not as effective.

**Loss of police staff**

- The community policing team argued that Police Scotland should have conducted a comprehensive review of how to deliver services most efficiently rather than a blanket loss of support staff to make savings.

- They highlighted that they are spending more time in the office covering previous police staff roles than on the front-line.

- Police officers highlighted a loss of detailed analysis work which would have been conducted by police staff to inform strategies, e.g. providing data on when to target particular crimes, e.g. seatbelts, drink-driving etc. Instead they were being channelled into silo working.

- Community councillors highlighted that “community police officers seem to be a bit stretched”. Some said that the community police officer’s attendance at community council meetings had become intermittent in the last nine months or so.
Community engagement

- Many community and victims’ groups highlighted “excellent engagement” with the police, which appears to focus on a preventative rather than reactive approach, e.g. police officers working in schools and developing informal relationships with young people. Victim Support Scotland confirmed that police support with the referral scheme was at the same level as the previous year. As well as involvement with community police officers, many groups suggested that there were also strong contributions from senior police officers in the area.

- A member of staff from D&G Council highlighted that, this year, police officers reported “more paperwork and more hoops to go through” in arranging an annual concert for young people than in previous years, although this had not affected the outcome on the day. He also highlighted that he had worked in a number of other areas of Scotland and that, in his experience, police relationships with young people in D&G were much more positive.

- Some community councillors provided examples of difficulties experienced in reporting crimes through the 101 non-emergency number and for those crimes to be recorded and followed-up.

- In general, D&G before reform concentrated on preventative work. Concern was now expressed that there was pressure on them to shift this emphasis to enforcement.

Visit to Fife, Monday 20 January 2014

1. Christine Grahame and Alison McInnes visited Glenrothes on Monday 20 January and held meetings with:

   - the Divisional Management Team, including the Local Commander, Chief Superintendent Garry McEwan, and Councillor Kenny Selbie (Chair of Safer Communities Committee);
   - Community Inspectors/ Detective Chief Inspector/Domestic Abuse Detective Inspector;
   - Community and Response Officers Group; and
   - Safer Communities Committee Councillors and Fife Alcohol and Drug Partnership/Woman’s Aid/Partnership & Policy Manager Safer Communities Committee.

2. All meetings were held at Police Scotland Divisional Headquarters in Glenrothes.

3. Key issues arising from the meetings in Glenrothes include:

   Local and national priorities/plans
   - Officers advised that, in general, local policing in Fife had remained the same since the inception of the single service.
• Local priorities in Fife tend, in the main, to reflect national priorities and there is no pressure from the centre to limit or define local priorities which are included in local plans. Adapting local plans and managing the concerns of the local community were still very much the responsibility of the local commander in Fife with best practice promulgated by Mr House. For example, in Fife, shoplifting, vandalism and housebreaking feature consistently as local priorities which are reflected in local plans.
• It was expected that ward plans would be seen to accurately reflect local concerns and priorities and could be adapted accordingly as concerns about specific activities were raised. Officers advised that there is a bottom-up approach when it comes to informing and developing local plans.
• Policing across Fife was still regarded as a very community-focussed operation and as such, the transition to the single service had not had a detrimental effect in terms of identifying and responding to local concerns.

Local scrutiny
• A number of “transition meetings” had been held with safer communities committee councillors and there was no evidence of any great changes to the way in which the police interact and engage with local partners. The local plan committee was due to meet on 21 January and would include, amongst others, partnership members such as the local alcohol/drug partnership and social work services.
• The safer communities committee councillors were keen to emphasise that the direct role of scrutiny in relation to local plans should be paramount to ensure that there is not a complete drift towards national priorities which would lead to a dilution of the focus on local priorities. It was noted that the local plan committee would have a significant role to play in this regard.
• Councillors expressed concern that the issue of scrutiny in relation to what were deemed to be operational matters had not been addressed as part of the move to the single service. This was seen as a weakness of the previous arrangements where police boards could not scrutinise such matters.

Enforcement/Community engagement
• As pointed out above, policing in Fife was still seen as a very community-focussed operation and to that end 76 community engagement meetings across the area take place every two months to allow communities to feed in their views and/or concerns. The meetings are generally well attended and the concerns expressed by the local community appear to be consistent in that they focus on antisocial behaviour, vandalism, dog-fouling, etc. The meetings are however, useful for the police in developing local plans.
• Members were advised that ‘P’ Division has the same number of community officers in the local area as it had prior to the formation of Police Scotland.
• The safer communities committee councillors and partners stated that the move to a single service had not had any negative effects in terms of their engagement with the police, which was still seen as very positive and beneficial for all concerned.

Targets
• Community and response officers said that targets could be set (e.g. speeding offences/mobile phone use in vehicles, etc) and these would be communicated to officers before heading out on a shift.

• Officers were asked whether a target culture had developed since the inception of Police Scotland and whether this had contributed to a removal of local discretion in dealing with what may be perceived as less serious matters (such as failure to wear a seat belt). They were also asked whether this had had any effect on local engagement. It was pointed out that such discretion did still exist but there was the possibility of a drift away from this as a new generation of officers progress through the ranks of the new single service which is viewed by some as more target driven.

• Officers were also asked if they were concerned about the possibility of “league tables” being used to compare performance across divisions. Members were advised that Police Scotland does not operate on the basis of league tables in relation to performance across divisions. It was acknowledged that performance may be open to comparison across divisions but that any differences in performance would be analysed by Police Scotland in order to gain an understanding as to why significant differences, if any, were occurring.

Stop and search

• It was acknowledged that the number of stop and search incidents appeared to have increased quite dramatically since the inception of Police Scotland but officers stated that this was partly as a result of a more sophisticated recording system being introduced. Previously, the recording of such searches was not carried out consistently and, while such incidents would have been noted by some constables in their notebooks, they were not officially recorded or held centrally. All such incidents were now recorded uniformly and entered onto a database. Although the recording system for searches was more sophisticated there was no way to determine when someone may have been the subject of one or more negative searches as the database is anonymised.

• Senior officers advised that there are no centrally set targets for the number of searches to be carried out. Officers advised that of 7,500 searches carried out, 24% had yielded positive results. With regard to the 7,500 searches, only one official complaint had been received.

• Members pointed out that the results showed that three quarters of the searches had resulted in negative results and asked whether this was a potential barrier to fostering good public relations. Officers stated that the searches were used primarily as a preventative measure and were, more often than not, evidence-led and targeted in areas which had been shown to have significant levels of drug crime and violent crime. They also stated that the public had responded positively, viewing the searches as “something being done” to combat such crimes. There was also an emphasis on officers being expected to clearly explain the reasons for searches and to carry them out in a sensitive, non-aggressive manner. The expectation was that searches would only occur where officers had reasonable grounds to carry them out.

Resources
The Divisional Management Team observed that the move to the single service and a reduction in budgets had not resulted in a decrease in the number of officers “on the ground”.

The policy being deployed in terms of back-office functions was that no police officers would be used to fill these posts in the event of civilian support staff leaving the service. The Local Commander stated that, in some cases, posts and functions had simply been given up (e.g. project management) and that senior officers no longer employed PAs to manage diaries etc. It was also stated that decisions on voluntary redundancy were taken locally and that civilian staff would not be allowed to leave on this basis if the work was still necessary.

It was observed by all officers that the move to a single service had resulted in far more streamlined access to national resources such as the police helicopter, diving teams, etc. This was seen as an extremely welcome development.

As far as possible, objectives and resources are closely matched to deal with local and national priorities and as such had, amongst other things, contributed to the work of the specialist domestic abuse unit in ‘P’ Division. It was observed that the application of targeted resources had allowed the unit to develop sophisticated responses to domestic abuse and to carry out much needed proactive work in tackling the problem. It was also observed that the dedicated work which the unit performs had allowed other officers on the ground to deal with other matters.

Members were advised that targeted resources had improved responses to domestic abuse incidents significantly. The domestic abuse unit contributes to an information sharing protocol which includes social work services and the NHS. Daily meetings are held between partners to assess and respond to domestic abuse across the region: these include Multi-Agency Tasking and Co-ordinating meetings (MATAC which is perpetrator focussed); and Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC which is victim focussed).

Partnership working in relation to domestic violence was viewed as a very positive feature of the unit and outcomes, particularly for women, had improved as a result.

Morale

Community and response officers conceded that morale was currently low and while this may in part have something to do with the major changes inherent in the move to the single service, the major factors were the reduction in police pensions and staff cuts. However, there was a feeling that, although it is early days for the single service, an ‘esprit de corps’ was being fostered and that having national priorities and a co-ordinated vision of what policing should be were positive factors in engendering that spirit. One officer also pointed out that the move to a single service had resulted in opportunities to work in other parts of the country with the positive benefits of working with, and learning from, new colleagues.

Visit to Moray, Monday 20 January 2014

1. John Finnie and Kevin Stewart visited Elgin on Monday 20 January and held meetings with:
• The police divisional management team, Chief Superintendent McLaren / Superintendent Cooper / Chief Inspector Findlay;
• Community Council representatives and partnership representatives including the partnership development officer;
• Police and Fire and Rescue Service Committee Members;
• Community and response officers group;
• Community Inspector, Inspector Strachan.

2. All meetings were held at Police Scotland Divisional Headquarters, Elgin.

3. Key issues arising from the meetings included:

Local and national priorities
• Since 1 April 2013, Aberdeenshire and Moray division has become a single command structure with four community policing teams. Support staff have been lost but it was felt that this has not had a detrimental effect on local policing as this reflects a more streamlined way of working with centralised functions such as HR and Finance operations.
• A local policing plan has been produced and each ward has an individual Multi-Member Ward Plan which addresses issues specific to the area and also links into the local Moray police plan. Consultation took place with communities and elected members on the drafting of the local policing plan.
• Local representatives felt that there had been effective engagement with the police on the development of the local police plan and individual ward plans.
• Anti-social behaviour, violence and assault have been identified as key priorities for the area and police performance in the area is ‘better than it has ever been’.
• It was felt that there had been no detrimental effect on local policing and engagement with local communities since Police Scotland’s inception although it may be too early to be sure. Some concerns were expressed regarding the potential impact of disappearing services in rural areas, although it was acknowledged that there had not been any sign of this as yet.

Local concerns regarding current ways of working
• The community and response officers group expressed concerns regarding a reduction in local police officers on the ground. The divisional management team highlighted that there were currently more police officers working in small expert teams providing advice and expertise to community police on local issues such as domestic violence. It was felt that while deploying police officers in this way provided expertise, issues were raised regarding the advice coming from officers who do not attend the crime scene or follow-up visits. In addition, concerns were expressed regarding local police officers’ ability to use discretion when dealing with incidents.
• A Divisional Rape Investigation Unit has been set up using five police officers to help support police officers on the ground and adopt a multi-agency approach to this crime.
• Concerns were raised regarding an increase in bureaucracy, including increasing amounts of paperwork, however, it was acknowledged that this was not necessary as a result of moving to one police force.

• IT issues were raised by community officers highlighting issues such as it not being possible to print off guidance notes. In addition, it was not clear that the roll out of i-6 programme across all police divisions would provide an improvement on the current IT systems in place in Moray.

Police counters, traffic wardens and control rooms

• The local commander confirmed that they have lost two police traffic wardens, leaving no wardens in the area. He confirmed that local police have taken on the role of monitoring traffic offences and there does not seem to be any detrimental impact.

• Community representatives and councillors from the Police Fire and Rescue Services committee expressed concerns regarding the lack of traffic wardens and said that this had resulted in an increase in the number of short stay parking bay breaches. Both Groups also raised questions regarding the consultation which took place as they felt that they were not properly consulted before a decision was made to lose both police traffic wardens. Discussions took place on whether or not the council could investigate the decriminalisation of certain parking offences which highlighted the difficulties in terms of regulation and proper consultation with councillors on this issue.

• The review of police counters was discussed and community representatives praised the consultation process and felt that their views were heard. It was felt that the decisions to close or downgrade certain counters were based on robust information and, where the decision was unpopular, such as Fochabers, police had engaged successfully to allay fears. On a related matter, the operation of the 101 phone number to contact local police was praised.

Targets

• The divisional management team confirmed that their performance targets had gone from ‘reds to green’ in all areas and that the division was performing well, despite the financial pressures it faced. It was pointed out that these targets were only discussed at management level and that individual officers are not set targets which they must achieve. Serious assaults, a local priority, were down by 28% and recorded crimes were among the lowest in Scotland.

• Local officers said that they did not have targets but felt that there was more of a standardisation approach being taken and gave the example of new procedures relating to the handling of taking people into custody and how they have less ability to use their own discretion where they felt that a suspect would not merit the use of the new procedure.

• Although individual officers were not set targets, there was a mood amongst officers that the service was more target-focussed and a pressure for them to measure, document and charge each incident even where they felt an informal caution may be more appropriate.
Morale

- Overall, community police were praised by local representatives and partnership representatives for their efforts in engaging with the community on issues of importance to each area and representatives felt that local policing arrangements in Moray worked very well.
- Community officers felt that morale was currently low which was due in part to the loss of support staff and also their ability to use their own discretion when dealing with day to day incidents. Concerns were also expressed regarding the fact that officers could be moved to any part of the country.