JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 17 June 2008

Session 3

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CONTENTS

Tuesday 17 June 2008

JUSTICE COMMITTEE
16th Meeting 2008, Session 3

CONVENER

*Bill Aitken (Glasgow) (Con)

DEPUTY CONVENER

*Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
*Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP)
*Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
*Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP)
Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD)
*John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP)

COMMITTEE SUBSTITUTES

Aileen Campbell (South of Scotland) (SNP)
Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab)
John Lamont (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
Mike Pringle (Edinburgh South) (LD)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING GAVE EVIDENCE:

Colin Bain (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network)
Liz Kay (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network)
Sid Pask (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network)
Kathy Tooke (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Anne Peat

ASSISTANT CLERK

Euan Donald

LOCATION

Committee Room 1

Scottish Parliament

Justice Committee

Tuesday 17 June 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 11:09*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Bill Aitken): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to the meeting. I remind everyone to switch off their mobile phones.

Under item 1, I ask the committee to agree that consideration of the future work programme and discussion of the approach to the report on community policing be taken in private at next week's committee meeting. Are we agreed?

Members *indicated agreement*.

Community Policing Inquiry

11:10

The Convener: We turn to the substantive business of the morning, which is the continuation of our inquiry into community policing. I welcome this morning's witnesses, all of whom represent the Scottish community warden managers network. We have with us Kathy Tooke, neighbourhood warden co-ordinator at Renfrewshire Council; Liz Kay, community safety manager at Dundee City Council; Sid Pask, community warden co-ordinator at Stirling Council; and Colin Bain, wardens and antisocial behaviour co-ordinator at Scottish Borders Council. We will move straight to questions.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): While we recognise that there are similarities in the role of community wardens throughout the country, we recognise that there are local differences, too. What are those differences and what is their significance? It might be difficult to answer because the witnesses will know their own circumstances better than those of their colleagues, but perhaps in discussion we can sort out what the differences are.

Liz Kay (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network): There are a number of differences, which have come about because each local authority has tailored its community warden scheme to meet the needs of its communities. Some are placed within the housing department; some—such as the one in my area—are in the leisure and communities department; and some are within corporate services in the council. It depends on the focus that the elected members want to put on the warden services for their area. We have done some investigation of the key differences within the warden network and have developed a database, a copy of which we can leave with the committee. The database allows us to compare what the warden schemes do in different areas and the similarities and differences between them.

Nigel Don: What are the differences in the ways in which you interact with the police? We are coming at this from the focus of community policing.

Kathy Tooke (Scottish Community Warden Mangers Network): As time has gone on, most of us have begun to interact with the police in exactly the same way. It has taken a while to develop a relationship with the police, but I think that that relationship is now strong for all the warden services. We meet the police regularly and exchange information. We gather intelligence, which we pass on to the police.

Liz Kay: Key to the relationship with the police is the ability to transfer information securely. In the early stages, that was an issue for some police forces because they were not convinced that that could happen. Further, there was a need to build trust that the information that was shared with the police would not be abused in any way. Over the four years that the warden schemes have been in operation, there have been no instances of abuse of that information. In fact, we are getting to the point at which police services are commending wardens for the level of intelligence that they can collect out in the communities. That intelligence contributes not just to policing duties and to the role of the police forces but to the work of local authorities.

11:15

One of the key elements that we would like to get across to the committee today is the fact that, in all but one area, community wardens are an arm of the local authority. Because we are part of the local authority, we can pick up things that relate to community safety and the wellbeing and quality of life of communities. I am referring to overgrown bushes, street lights that do not work and missing drain covers, for example. Those things all have an impact on how people feel about their area. The level of graffiti is another example. Community wardens who work for the local authority can report back to the council about such issues, which can be dealt with much more quickly than they were dealt with under the normal reporting procedures that applied in the past.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): You said that the work of community wardens is organised through the local authority

"in all but one area".

Could you expand on that and tell us about the area in which wardens do not come under the same jurisdiction?

Liz Kay: In the Aberdeen area, there is a move towards a transfer back into the local authority.

John Wilson: Who is currently responsible for community wardens in Aberdeen?

Liz Kay: The police. However, consideration is being given to how to move them into the local authority.

Sid Pask (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network): It is interesting to note that the improved and developing relationships between the police and the local authorities were not driven from the centre. The initiative does not have to come from the police, and it does not necessarily have to come from the council. In our experience—I think that I speak for the 32 councils—the improvements have been driven by communities themselves. They have recognised the issues and have identified the problems. They have seen that the only way to tackle them is jointly, through various council services, other agencies and the community itself. The improvements have evolved, rather than having been driven from one particular direction.

Liz Kay: A key element is reassurance. As far as the wardens are concerned, it is about community patrolling rather than community policing. The level of reassurance is continually fed back both to the police and to warden services. That is important to local people.

After 5 o'clock, the community wardens are the only local authority presence that is available to people in many areas, other than out-of-hours social work and some youth work services. They can be the only avenue for reporting things to the local authority. Knowing that such an avenue is available is one of the small things that contribute to people's quality of life and sense of wellbeing.

Nigel Don: I wish to pick up on the distinction between community policing and community patrolling—I think that those are the phrases that you used. I am aware that in some areas, community wardens have no enforcement powers, whereas in other areas they have a variety of enforcement powers. One of the questions that I have still not sorted out in my mind is which model is better. I understand that the respective models will be made to work in each area, but any sensible national model, as well as containing flexibility, must provide a good answer—or a preferred or better answer. Can you sort out that point between you, please?

Liz Kay: We have discussed that at some length in the warden network. The network's view is that it would be good to have a range of powers available to wardens, which could be used in each local authority area depending on need. You are probably aware that many local authority officers other than community wardens have the ability to issue fixed-penalty notices for a range of situations. The warden network worries about whether having powers and being seen to use them extensively might impact on the relationship that community wardens develop with their communities. The important thing is to develop a trusting relationship. Wardens are not the police, so people will report things to them that they would not normally report to the police. Between us, we can supply numerous instances of that.

Colin Bain is probably best placed to speak about this point, but wardens already have powers that are not used extensively. Some of our colleagues report that, although they have powers to issue fixed-penalty notices for dog fouling, for instance, if we approach the situation with a doggie bag in one hand and a fixed-penalty notice

book in the other and ask people which they would rather have, they will go for the doggie bag. That is the sort of approach that we would like to expand.

In Dundee, we have conducted some fairly extensive consultation as part of our review of our warden services. One of the things that came back overwhelmingly from communities was that people expect wardens to have some ability to issue a range of fixed-penalty notices. However, they put a rider on that, which was that they did not want that to be taken into account in any way as a measure—it was felt that the role should be more of an educational one.

The reality is that, if someone sees a uniformed warden walking along, they will not deliberately drop litter or let their dog foul the pavement. Often, the fact that there is a patrolling presence will prevent an incident from happening.

Colin Bain (Scottish Community Warden Managers Network): I confirm what has already been said. For some time, wardens in the Scottish Borders have had fixed-penalty notice enforcement powers in relation to dog fouling and litter. The Borders is quite rural, obviously, and the public demand was such that we needed to grant those enforcement powers. All credibility would have been lost if wardens were seen trying to deter low levels of antisocial behaviour and, to a lesser degree, crime without being able to issue fixed-penalty notices. However, there is also an important education role, and we have done exactly what Liz Kay talked about. A management initiative fund was created to pay for doggie bags for the people who say that they do not have a bag with them. We also drop leaflets through people's doors and conduct informal drop-in sessions that people can take advantage of. That approach seems to have been quite effective, and the fact that people know that the wardens have those powers seems to act as a fairly useful deterrent.

Nigel Don: Am I right in assuming that you all agree that giving all community wardens a range of powers for them to use with sense and discretion would be a sensible national model with which no one would be unhappy?

Liz Kay: It would be a sensible national model, but each local authority should be able to determine whether, in its case, a community warden or another officer was best placed to issue the penalties.

Nigel Don: Can you give us any more examples of good practice with regard to the relationship between community wardens and community police?

Kathy Tooke: Although community wardens do not patrol with the police, they get involved in a number of youth initiatives with them, which allows the community to see the police and the wardens working together. For example, community wardens and the police work together to run safe kids events for primary 7 children. Such partnership working happens across all the services.

Liz Kay: Earlier, we said that we talk about joint operations rather than joint patrolling. We have been involved in joint operations that have focused on youth alcohol issues, problems with mini-motorbikes and so on.

Partnership is key to everything that we are trying to do. There are different forms of partnership working in each area. In my area, we meet regularly with the police and other key partners, such as fire and rescue services, council departments that have antisocial behaviour responsibilities and so on.

We are now introducing strategic impact assessments, which are, in most cases, prepared by the police and which take on board information from other areas. Many of the analysts who produce the assessments are paid for by the community safety partnerships. The assessments highlight the high-level issues and we have monthly operational meetings at which we put policies into practice and tackle the issues. At those meetings are managers, budget holders and other people who can say that financial or staffing resources must be devoted to an issue in order to deal with it. That way of working is developing rapidly.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): On working in partnership with the police, would it be possible for you to run some of the schemes that the police currently run? Would that be a better use of your resources and the police's resources? I am thinking of schemes such as the night football schemes that are run in different parts of the country. Could you, rather than the police, run such schemes to free up police time so that police officers could engage in other activities?

Liz Kay: Police officers do a number of things that do not require police powers. Community wardens could do many of those things, but you are talking about initiatives that it would probably be more useful for youth work staff to become involved in. We must be clear that many community wardens are not trained youth work staff, although community wardens have actively worked with the police in areas in which youth work provision has not been strong.

The key thing to remember about such initiatives is that although police powers may not be required to engage in them, they provide police officers, community wardens and other agencies with the opportunity to develop good relationships with young people who might get into bother. Community wardens have the key ability to

engage with hard-to-reach young people on the streets. Such engagement allows community wardens to channel young people into diversionary activities, a range of which is available throughout the local authority areas. Community wardens go out on to the streets knowing what those activities are, and they can direct young people to them. Such engagement with young people should never be underestimated or eroded if doing so can be avoided.

The Convener: I thank the witnesses for their comprehensive replies and for providing the amusing analogy involving a fixed penalty and a doggie bag. They have anticipated some of the questions that we wanted to ask.

Stuart McMillan: What are the key ingredients in the effective operation of community warden schemes?

Liz Kay: There are several ingredients. First, community trust must be developed so that, regardless of the authority that the community warden works for, the community will know that if a member of the community reports something to the warden, they will report that on and will be in a position to get answers and give an update on what is happening. That is important and useful, because if somebody knows what is happening, they will be less likely to be annoyed and anxious.

Working in partnership is also crucial. Good working relationships with the different agencies must be developed. We must be clear that no one agency has the answers to everything. Rather than trying to identify what one agency does, it must be realised that the sum of all the parts is important. We are increasingly finding that members of each agency—whether the police, those who work for the fire and rescue services, community safety wardens, community wardens, environmental wardens or whoever—bring a different knowledge base and different skills and expertise to difficult situations. We can find solutions by pulling resources together. Many of the groups that meet on a monthly basis, which I spoke about earlier, are can-do groups. There are problems out there, and we work comprehensively to establish and implement effective solutions. Working in partnership is the key. Anything that can be done to enhance partnership working and ensure that the right players are around the table will be beneficial. Many of us find that our colleagues in the police service frequently change their roles, which can sometimes have an adverse impact. They may do so for good operational reasons, but continuity of people around the table certainly makes a huge difference in identifying solutions to our different problems.

11:30

Sid Pask: I would like to add an important advantage of community wardens to the list that Liz Kay has given. No matter which community people live, work or travel in, the only consistently genuine contact with any form of authority that many tend to have after 5 o'clock is with community wardens.

Most schemes operate on the basis that wardens are allocated to fixed areas. For people who have been at work and who have not had the chance during the day to contact the council service that they need or the police, community wardens are a uniformed, disciplined presence on the streets in their community, usually between 5 and 9 or 5 and 10. Although many of the issues that are picked up are not necessarily to do with antisocial behaviour, the presence of community wardens provides reassurance and gives people a point of contact on issues such as broken drain covers, faulty street lights and overgrown shrubberies, which are minutiae but are nonetheless important to the community. Until community wardens came along, there was no one whom people could stop on the street and speak to about, engage with on or challenge on such topics. In that regard, the role of community wardens has been particularly important.

Colin Bain: I reiterate that the scheme's biggest selling point seems to be that the wardens are known in the community and that they know not just who lives where, but who the movers and groovers are. The wardens get that knowledge not just by attending area committees and community council meetings, but by going to meetings of smaller groups such as residents associations. They also get the knowledge by visiting schools and chatting to the kids during lunch time, which allows them to find out about the associations between the youths in a particular area, who their parents are and who the members of their peer groups are. A common thread that seems to run through the scheme is that that is an effective element.

Stuart McMillan: Continuity has been mentioned. As well as community wardens, we have environmental wardens. Would it be a positive step to merge those into one, which would avoid two or three organisations having to try to work together?

Liz Kay: Co-location and people having the opportunity to speak to one another are more important. To merge all the wardens so that they could be managed as one service might be difficult because some wardens have highly technical responsibilities and require significant technical support. Co-location would allow us to work from the same premises, which is, as you are aware,

not always possible in all local authority areas because of pressures on buildings.

The issue largely comes down to the need to establish good relationships and to build links between different officers in local authorities. Their being brought together under one management structure might well be a way forward, but it could prove difficult—certainly in the short term—given the nature of local authorities and how they work. In the current climate it might be more realistic to encourage co-location of local authority services that tackle antisocial behaviour with their police and, perhaps, even their fire and rescue service colleagues. That would be beneficial.

Colin Bain: I agree whole-heartedly with what has just been said about co-location. Stuart McMillan might be getting at the fact that some environmental wardens have an extremely narrow remit and might not have a strong technical background. That is particularly the case in my area, where, for example, there are dog wardens. A warden does not need to have a particularly large skills base to act as a set of eyes and ears and to report problems in the community, such as vandalism or graffiti. Any warden could take on board such extra reporting responsibilities. In this day and age, when people want value for money, it is not best practice to have wardens with narrow remits who are not asked to act as extra eyes and ears.

Stuart McMillan: I do not have any strong preference as regards the merging of wardens; I just thought that it was a legitimate question to ask, given what had been said.

Kathy Tooke: The answer also depends on the needs of the community. Some areas need environmental wardens to pick up on issues such as fly-tipping because they do not have other resources to ensure that such tasks are carried out. My local authority is quite big and our wardens are dedicated mainly to antisocial behaviour and blight on the community. There is also a dog warden, and in September we will have the power to issue fixed penalties, which will develop the service. Everything depends on the needs of the community and the types of warden who are available.

Stuart McMillan: My next question has, to an extent been answered. Is the presence of community wardens significantly changing delivery of community policing and affecting police-community relationships?

Liz Kay: Yes. My understanding is that we have 45 minutes for this evidence session; we could take 45 days to give you examples of that.

The Convener: Please do not. [*Laughter.*]

Liz Kay: I can give you one example from Dundee, where we have a combined operation with police, the fire and rescue service and our colleagues from environmental health and waste management. An unfortunate tenement fire, which resulted in a fatality, was caused by a lot of rubbish being left lying in the close. We now talk about a rolling top 10 fire risks. As community wardens are patrolling seven days a week, 365 days a year, they can pick up on such situations, which they report to the fire and rescue service, which conducts a fire risk assessment. If it is deemed that there is imminent risk, our colleagues from waste management will remove it. If the risk is not deemed to be imminent, colleagues from environmental health, with the police, enforce residents' removal of the rubbish.

In the 18 months for which we have operated, there have been no casualties or fatalities as a result of tenement fires. We like to think that our work is one reason for that. Communities are safer in that respect.

Communities are also safer as a result of the joint operations to tackle youth alcohol problems. That work has different names in different areas—it is called operation dry up in Dundee—and it has a big impact. Much of it is based on intelligence that is gathered by community wardens, which is then passed to the police. We recently identified agents who were buying alcohol for young people and some premises where alcohol was being sold directly to young people. The police were able to deal with that, and the cases are going to court and/or the local authority licensing committee.

Those are just two examples—we could all sit here and talk of many more. We receive feedback from communities on that work. As I said, we recently conducted a review in Dundee, using 5,000 questionnaires. One overriding feeling that came out—which is replicated across the country—is that communities feel safer because there is a presence on the streets. We should not underestimate the reassurance that people feel from community wardens being out on the streets.

We have to strike a balance between police priorities and the community priorities. The police may have different priorities because of the terrorist threat and the need to direct resources to tackling it. However, for wee Mrs Smith who lives on the corner, her priority may be the number of people who walk by her house and urinate in her close after leaving the pub round the corner, or it may be the number of young people who congregate outside the shop below her house. We have to achieve a balance between those priorities.

I mentioned earlier that much that is done by police officers does not require police powers, which is where we can—and often do—strike that

balance. There have been occasions when the police control room has phoned the warden base to say that the police are dealing with a serious incident and are therefore transferring all low-level calls to the warden base. That happens in different places, so that wardens deal with calls about vandalism, youth annoyance and so on.

Kathy Tooke gave an example earlier. She is based in Paisley, and following the car bomb at Glasgow airport there was a situation in which three police officers were standing at the end of the road. That could have been one police officer and two wardens, for example, which would have released two police officers to do police duties that require police powers.

Increasingly, wardens are being approached to take on more of a role in emergency incidents, whether patrolling perimeters or being on duty at emergency rest centres and thereby releasing police officers. That sort of thing is happening increasingly throughout the country.

Sid Pask: It is important to look beyond just what the police can do, what the wardens can do, and what the police and wardens can do jointly or with other agencies. One of the problems that we have to tackle is the community dependency culture, whereby people expect the council or the police to do certain things for them. We want to get away from that. We are trying to improve community empowerment, for which the wardens and/or the police can be the vehicle. They tend to facilitate projects and leave it to the communities to develop and run them. Communities need a wee bit of guidance to point them in the right direction, which the police and wardens together can provide. Police and wardens, backed up occasionally by the fire and rescue service, have a strong partnership, which is particularly effective in that respect.

Stuart McMillan: The issue of community wardens is raised in my surgeries from time to time. In my surgery on Friday, a lady said that although she is happy that the wardens in her area are visible, they do not get out of their vehicles regularly. She also said that the community police are visible in her area but cannot, given the new multimember council wards, patrol just one small patch all the time. The wardens and the police seem to be working together, but the partnership between them does not always seem to be fully operational on the ground. Other issues about community wardens were raised, but I will deal with them in another forum.

The Convener: Is there any reason why the wardens and the police should not be working together on the ground? In the course of inquiries, we find out that things go wrong from time to time—which happens whenever there is a human element. However, is there any structural reason why there should not be a cohesive approach?

Liz Kay: Partnership working between the police and wardens varies in different areas and has developed at different speeds. Development depends on the level of partnership working that existed when the warden schemes were introduced. Where a high level of partnership working has existed and where there is a culture and ethos of strong partnership, the partnership between the police and wardens has developed well. Where that culture did not exist previously, we have had to do a lot of work.

In the early stages, we found that in some areas there was a lot of discontent in that many police forces thought that they should have more police officers, rather than community wardens. Where the partnerships have developed well, many of our police colleagues are now saying that they get an awful lot more out of those partnerships than they had bargained for and that they do not want that to change.

I referred earlier to a lack of continuity. One of the difficulties that we have had is that, given the temporary nature of funding of community wardens until recently, as people reached the end of their contracts, they moved on because they wanted a bit of security, because they had bills and mortgages to pay. The fact that our police colleagues often changed their officers could have had an impact, too.

Strategic impact assessments, which are being rolled out in various formats, have the potential to improve the situation even more. This is the first year of that work, so different areas are at different stages, but it could enable us to identify the issues at macro level in order to take things forward at operational level. I suspect that it will have a significant impact by bringing people together and encouraging effective co-working in areas where that is not happening.

11:45

On the point about wardens not getting out of cars, the number of wardens in areas varies considerably, and increasingly they are expected to cover large areas, hence the need for vehicles. In areas that have larger numbers of wardens, vehicles can be used to take them to an area. They can then get out of the vehicle and patrol. In some areas, however, there are only a few wardens: depending on their shifts, the only way for them to respond quickly to calls that come in might be to use a vehicle. That is not ideal, but we are aware of the criticism and we are considering how we can address it in our individual schemes.

The Convener: That was a very frank answer.

John Wilson: Which mechanisms for wardens' engagement with communities are most successful, and why?

Liz Kay: One of the most successful mechanisms is the fact that wardens are out on the streets: they meet people and have the time to stop and listen, which is critical. Police officers on the beat might not have the time that community wardens have. That is the key point that is fed back to us.

Also, as Colin Bain said earlier, our senior wardens attend various residents meetings and go to different strategic events that come up. We have the opportunity to develop a range of measures and to work more closely with colleagues who also work in the community so that we can offer a joint response and be seen to be joined up in our approach and our thinking. Many things are beginning to happen, particularly as wardens are being mainlined into local authorities, which is allowing us to take those steps. It was difficult to do that in the past, but it is now much easier.

Colin Bain: Feedback to members of the public is critical. When the wardens scheme was introduced, we were all aware of comments from people who reported matters to local authorities or the police, but got no feedback on what was happening. Whether feedback is negative or positive, it is vital that people get feedback because it makes them feel that their complaint, no matter how small, is important. That is a common thread throughout the wardens scheme, because, as Liz Kay said, we have the time to listen and respond.

Sid Pask: There is a resource issue. We cannot put wardens everywhere we would like to put them. If we ask a community that does not have wardens what people would like, the first thing that they tell us, based largely on anecdote, is that they would love to have a community warden. The comments from people in places that do not have wardens alone justify the benefits that they bring to the places that have them. There is a consistent response from communities—and, I have to add, from elected members—that community wardens should be provided more widely. However, as I said, that is a resource issue.

Liz Kay: It is interesting that there tends to be cross-party support from elected members. That level of agreement does not happen often.

The Convener: Indeed.

John Wilson: Mr Pask commented on communities that are not covered by community wardens. In the network's experience, is there a distinctive nature to the areas that are covered by community wardens?

Sid Pask: I was not involved at the start of the community warden scheme—I think Kathy Tooke was—but the then Scottish Government laid down guidelines about what areas should be prioritised. Like most other things that we do in community warden schemes and in community policing, the process was intelligence led: it was based on knowing and interpreting the problems, and on consideration of how best they could be resolved. Consequently, wardens tended to be, or should have been, deployed in areas of greatest need, which were kind of summarised under the heading of regeneration areas. That is where most schemes were initiated and where they still operate, to the best of my knowledge.

Just over a year ago, we were allowed to develop an initiative of peripatetic teams, which has been particularly successful in our case because it has at least acknowledged to areas that were less blighted by antisocial behaviour that there are issues there that must be dealt with. It is, however, essential that we continue to put scarce resources where they are most needed, which is what most schemes still do.

Liz Kay: It is key that the deployment of scarce resources is intelligence led. The strategic impact assessments will increasingly help to determine that. In addition, the level of calls to warden bases or the police via elected members and council officers from other areas helps in determining where the hotspots are, which can then be responded to. As part of our review in Dundee, we will phase in full intelligence-led deployment of wardens. That could mean, for example, a warden going into an area in which wardens have not traditionally been based and working with partners for a few weeks on a particular issue. That is an exciting development for the warden network.

Colin Bain: I have a final point about something that I recently experienced. There is a risk of a backlash from a community if wardens are redeployed from their area to an area of need because intelligence says that that is where they should be. Local elected members in particular get asked where the wardens have gone. Several months ago, I moved wardens to an area of need, but the community asked, "Where are our wardens?" because they feel that they own them. There is therefore a risk in moving wardens. However, if the move is based on sound intelligence, we can tell the community that the wardens are a limited resource that we must place where they are most needed.

Liz Kay: It is critical that we give communities information about redeployment of wardens so that they know what is happening and why.

John Wilson: You have just anticipated my next question. From the panel's experience, what

support should communities be provided with to help them articulate their policing needs?

Liz Kay: A range of support is available, such as the local community planning structure and strategic impact assessments. As issues develop in local communities, some can be highlighted as ones that the police must pick up. In addition, most police officers who attend meetings provide feedback sheets to their sergeants and inspectors, which go into the system. When community wardens across the country receive information on issues about which communities are animated, they ensure that it is passed on. Those are the key ways in which support is provided.

John Wilson: What role should wardens play in local partnerships that are established to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour?

Liz Kay: We have covered some of the wardens' roles. The critical one is supply of information and intelligence. They are out there on the streets, picking intelligence up in its rawest state and feeding it into an arena in which priorities must be set. Because they have the trust and the ear of the community, they are in an ideal position to feed into professional discussions. Although communities are involved in community planning partnerships, there are still arenas in which so-called professionals seek to determine matters. Community wardens can be a bridge that ensures that we get feedback to communities. As Colin Bain said, that is critical.

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. The evidence that you have given to the committee so far this morning suggests that, after four years, the relationship between police and community wardens is working. You have mentioned joint patrolling and have highlighted specific joint operations to tackle issues such as youth alcohol consumption and mini-motorbikes. You have all stressed that partnership is the key, which is good to hear; the committee will take note of that point. Are there areas in which improvement is still required? Are there any deficiencies in the partnership working that you have said is central to effective liaison between community wardens and police and to delivering community safety and combating antisocial behaviour?

Liz Kay: Levels of information sharing between police and community wardens vary across the country. At one extreme is Dundee, where information is shared daily by secure link—we get the unedited police tasking minutes and so on. That provides wardens with the information that they need when they go out on to the street—they know what information has been requested and is required to make the community safer. At the other extreme, some police forces are reluctant to share that level of information; in some cases, the arrangement is very grudging.

Bill Butler: How do you overcome that reluctance? Would it be invidious for you to say which police forces are still reluctant to share information? You do not have to answer the second question.

Liz Kay: I would rather not do so.

Bill Butler: How can we overcome the reluctance of some police forces to share information?

Liz Kay: In many cases, there is ignorance of the provisions of the Antisocial Behaviour etc (Scotland) Act 2004, which states that there should be sharing of information, as required, and allows police forces to share information. It would help if we could ensure that secure links were available; in many cases, it is as simple as providing a government secure extranet—GSX—e-mail system. That would make it easier for colleagues who do not get the level of information that we get. There must be a two-way information flow. Joint databases are being developed in local authorities—in Dundee, we are developing a corporate database. The departments that are involved in that process work in areas related to antisocial behaviour—community safety, the housing antisocial behaviour team and environmental health. The database can be accessed by the police, through the secure link and the link officer of the council's antisocial behaviour team, who works with the community intelligence unit. There are ways of sharing information.

12:00

Bill Butler: Would it be helpful if Tayside Police spread the message about good practice in Dundee among colleagues in other police forces?

Liz Kay: I understand that Tayside Police is trying to do that in many ways.

It is about trust. The police need to know that information that they give to a community warden service will be used for the intended purpose, which is to help wardens determine what intelligence is required and provide targeted information to the police. It is important for the police to have targeted information. However, the nervousness of some chief constables if there are no secure links is understandable—nobody is knocking chief constables for that. We must ensure that there are secure links.

We must also ensure that police officers are aware of their responsibility to share information. Some police officers are not aware of that responsibility or hide behind data protection legislation, for example.

Bill Butler: I think that all the witnesses said that trust has never been broken, which is why relationships have improved steadily during the past four years. Is that correct?

Kathy Tooke: It takes time to build up a relationship. As police officers start to realise the benefits of intelligence that has been gathered by community wardens, their trust in wardens develops. I have been on the go for six years and it took a good part of three years to build up a good relationship with the police. Much depends on the people on the ground. Although inspectors and other higher-level police officers regard the exchange of information as beneficial, officers on the ground who meet up with wardens daily are a bit reluctant to exchange information. However, relationships are developing. If the same wardens and police officers consistently work in a community, they can build up trust and develop a relationship that enables intelligence to be gathered and exchanged.

Liz Kay: Life is so much easier if the police have a clear understanding of the role of community safety wardens, community wardens, neighbourhood wardens, or whatever they are called wherever they are, and wardens have a clear view on the role of the police. We are striving to achieve clarity about roles and to develop trust, which is easier to do if officers remain in a particular community. On a more strategic level, the creation of secure links would make it easier to share information.

Colin Bain: It takes time for a change in culture to get through to police officers on the beat. Every scheme encounters the same problems. If community warden schemes, or whatever they are called, are to continue, perhaps consideration could be given to ensuring that when new recruits undergo induction training at the Scottish Police College at Tulliallan, they are made aware of what community wardens do. Such an approach is needed because, with the best will in the world some police officers on the beat are still sceptical about community wardens.

Most community warden schemes have been in operation for at least two full years. We conducted an evaluation after the pilot scheme ended in October 2006, as happened in other areas, but no single agency can claim particular responsibility for a reduction in neighbour disputes and environmental problems. Reports on the evaluation of warden schemes should stress that wardens are not the only solution to problems. There was a degree of scepticism from police officers in that regard.

Bill Butler: Teamwork is essential.

Colin Bain: Yes, absolutely.

Bill Butler: Ms Kay, you said in answer to an earlier question that the extraction of police officers can have an adverse impact, and you stressed that continuity is important. Given the exigencies of the service, police officers will be extracted from time to time, but you talked about the importance of there being a well-kent face. Do the members of the panel feel that community police officers should have a minimum period of tenure, to keep the continuity and to allow people to know who is there and who is working with community wardens of whatever type?

Colin Bain: Yes, definitely—although at the moment I would not be too comfortable about saying what that minimum tenure should be. I realise that the police have other commitments and that the career paths of individual officers have to be considered but, as my colleagues have said, there must be a minimum period of tenure, measured in years. I do not think that the period spent in the community should be any less than two years, to allow the officer to become known.

Bill Butler: You started off by saying—

Colin Bain: That I would not be comfortable?

Bill Butler: Yes, but you became more comfortable as you went on, which was great.

Sid Pask: Having a minimum period of tenure is essential, and I would happily endorse Colin Bain's suggestion of two years. It is essential not so much from a community warden perspective as from a community perspective. Police managers want to deliver safer and more reassured communities, but they will not succeed if they pull in-post people.

I should make the point that it is not always a case of managers transferring people; sometimes it is a case of the officer not being the person for the job—a square peg in a round hole, in other words.

Wardens did not have to change the culture; a warden culture developed over the four years. However, the police were challenged when the warden scheme came in, because there were new faces, new kids on the block. The police had to change their culture quite significantly and they are to be commended for their success in working with partners and sharing information.

In most cases, the police have put a sustainable community policing policy in force. That has not happened everywhere but, to be fair to the police, examples of where it has not have been localised and limited. If we compare the situation four years ago with the situation today, it is like comparing night and day.

Bill Butler: So you agree about the two years.

Sid Pask: Yes—at least two years.

Liz Kay: I would certainly agree about the two years for community-based officers. There are two levels of police officer who are extracted or moved around—one is the community liaison officer and the other is the community safety inspector, or the chief inspector responsible for operations. We have had three changes of chief inspector in the past six months, which is not conducive to good working. I appreciate that police operational reasons are behind the moves, but they have created difficulties.

Kathy Tooke: I agree with what has been said. I go to a lot of community meetings and one of the biggest complaints that I hear is that the community police officers change so often. We have worked in 16 areas with 58 wardens, but we are now going Renfrewshire-wide, with the same number of wardens. I am concerned that diluting the service to cover a bigger area might impact on the visible presence of our wardens on the street. Ideally, I would like more wardens so that we can cover every area and coincide with the community police.

Bill Butler: Would you go for a minimum tenure of two years as well?

Kathy Tooke: Certainly.

Bill Butler: Thank you—I am very grateful for that uniform response.

The Convener: This evidence session has overrun, which is largely a measure of the enthusiasm of this panel of witnesses—on which I congratulate them. The session has enabled us to build on the evidence that we collected when we visited Dundee and the Borders to see community warden systems in action. I thank all the witnesses very much indeed for giving their evidence so clearly and, as I say, so enthusiastically.

Before I close the meeting, I remind everyone that the committee will meet next week, when we will largely conclude our evidence taking on community policing with evidence from Strathclyde Police, from the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, and from Sir Ronnie Flanagan, who is HM chief inspector of constabulary for England and Wales and the author of the recent report on the review of policing.

I thank everyone for their attendance today.

Meeting closed at 12:10.

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