JUSTICE COMMITTEE

Tuesday 24 June 2008

Session 3

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JUSTICE COMMITTEE
17th 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:

Sir Ronnie Flanagan (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary)
Chief Constable Stephen House (Strathclyde Police)
Kenny MacAskill (Cabinet Secretary for Justice)
Chief Superintendent Anne McGuire (Strathclyde Police)
Alastair Merrill (Scottish Government Police and Community Safety Directorate)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Douglas Wands

SENIOR ASSISTANT CLERK

Anne Peat

ASSISTANT CLERK

Euan Donald

LOCATION

Committee Room 2

Scottish Parliament

Justice Committee

Tuesday 24 June 2008

[THE CONVENER *opened the meeting at 10:00*]

Community Policing Inquiry

The Convener (Bill Aitken): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I open this meeting with my usual admonition that all mobile phones must be switched off.

The first item on the agenda is the continuation of our community policing inquiry. Our first witness this morning is one of our most distinguished police officers, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, who has given tremendous service in Northern Ireland and other parts of Great Britain. Sir Ronnie is Her Majesty's chief inspector of constabulary for England and Wales, to which post he was appointed in 2005. He is also the author of the recent report "The Review of Policing", which covers England and Wales. Previously, he was the chief constable of the Police Service of Northern Ireland when it was created in 2001, and was chief constable of its statutory predecessor, the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Sir Ronnie, you are particularly welcome to the meeting. As committee members have had the opportunity to read your report, we will proceed straight to questions.

Paul Martin (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab): Sir Ronnie, in "The Review of Policing", you ask what constitutes successful neighbourhood policing. How do you define the word "successful" in that context?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan (Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary): I would describe such policing as successful if there are teams in neighbourhoods that are known to and by those who live there and which work in partnership with the community to address the policing priorities that local people have had real, meaningful input in deciding on.

Paul Martin: How do local people get to know who their local officers are?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: The officers in those dedicated teams, which work at ward, parish and local neighbourhood level, will be easily identified and can be instantly contacted by local people through websites, mobile phones and a wide variety of other means.

Paul Martin: I am sure that other members will ask about how all that works in practice.

What key lessons have been learned at national, force and local levels from implementing neighbourhood policing? What are the key implications for forces in Scotland in that respect?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Members will know that, as a result of measures that took effect on 31 March, there are now 30,000 officers and community support officers dedicated to neighbourhood policing. In a sense, therefore, the programme has been rolled out. However, in my review, I wanted to take a much wider look at the issue and see neighbourhood policing not as a programme that had to be rolled out by a given date but—to use the current jargon—as a golden thread connecting local, force, regional, national and, indeed, international levels. Neighbourhood policing should be seen not as some special adjunct to policing or as separate to, for example, counter-terrorism measures or efforts to deal with serious and organised crime, but as very much integral to the fabric of policing.

Of course, although neighbourhood policing teams have been rolled out in every neighbourhood in England and Wales, that is by no means the end of the story. The neighbourhood policing programme team, which is based centrally in London, assists forces, and the inspectorate uses specific grading criteria to assess how those forces are doing with regard to neighbourhood policing. Last year, we considered two forces in England and Wales to be poor, six forces to be excellent and the rest of the 43 forces to be good or fair.

Paul Martin: Do you think that, as politicians, we are obsessed by police numbers in community policing?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: There is a debate around the numbers and value of community support officers. The Police Federation of England and Wales has expressed concern that the community support officer role might be an attack on the important role of the office of constable. In assuring the federation that that was absolutely not the case, I used the following analogy with regard to policing teams. While I was at school and university, I worked on a building site as a plumber's mate. I was not a plumber, but I did not attack the professionalism of plumbers—I removed all the routine tasks from them so that they could concentrate their efforts where they could make the most difference. Community support officers in England and Wales have an invaluable role to play in helping constables, without in any sense threatening the important traditional role of the office of constable.

Cathie Craigie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab): You used a very good analogy—we could have done with it earlier this year when we were considering other aspects of policing.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: I used it at the launch of the final report of the review—I wanted the headline "Police report written by plumber's mate", but that did not happen.

Cathie Craigie: The media had too much respect for the plumber's mate.

You have reminded the committee that neighbourhood policing involves a team-based approach. What distinctive contribution should the police make to that approach within the extended group of people who are, in modern times, involved in policing?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: When I finalised the report, I said that neighbourhood policing should be an integral part of neighbourhood management, and that it has to involve partnerships across the board; for example, in housing, education and health. In conducting the review, we found that there was not a sufficient degree of joined-up government. The Department for Communities and Local Government was doing many good things that had an impact on policing, such as dealing with difficult families or difficult neighbours, as they might be termed on some estates, but I was determined that there should be much closer collaboration between the whole range of partners.

I have always felt strongly that policing is much too important and has too great an impact on all our lives to be left to the police alone. I was part of the working group that brought about the creation of the National Policing Improvement Agency, which is similar to your Scottish Police Services Authority. I was determined that it would not be the police improvement agency, but the policing improvement agency.

I will wind the clock back to the Good Friday agreement in Northern Ireland, when Chris Patten was commissioned to make recommendations on policing. That work involved significant reform of the police, but that was not by any means the whole story. It is crucial that neighbourhood policing does not involve the police alone, and that the police play an important role in listening to people, understanding the problems that they face and working in partnership with those who are doing their best to address those problems.

Cathie Craigie: You spoke about the golden thread running through the whole of the police force. It is clear from some of the information that the committee has heard and from members' own experiences that that thread should be extended to other agencies. Do you think that we have to legislate for that, or should the agencies be proactive in bringing those working relationships together?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: One of the most effective pieces of legislation in England and Wales in recent years is the legislation that deals with crime and disorder reduction and the creation of crime and disorder reduction partnerships. Prior to that, we all talked a good game about partnership, but that legislation forced people to take responsibilities and placed responsibilities on local government, so that everybody had to work in partnership. I am not suggesting that anything that works in England and Wales will automatically transfer to here or vice versa, but through close connections we can all learn from one another. In my view, that legislation in England and Wales played a beneficial role in forcing people to work in those partnerships.

Margaret Smith (Edinburgh West) (LD): What are the key ingredients of effective partnerships and what geographical scale is most appropriate for them? A few weeks ago, I spent some time in my Edinburgh constituency with a neighbourhood action unit that is co-located with the community safety and parks people in the council. That approach seems to be working fairly effectively. What do you consider to be the key ingredients of effective partnership working? Co-location is helpful, but is it a prerequisite?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: I do not suggest that one size fits all—what is good for one neighbourhood will not necessarily be good for a totally different neighbourhood with different problems. However, in my experience, co-location works extremely well—I have seen that in many boroughs in London and in many areas in the West Midlands. It is beneficial when the teams are in the same place. They know one another, share experiences and learn by looking through the eyes of the citizens who live in the area and by understanding the problems that those citizens face. In my experience, where co-location exists, it represents good practice.

Margaret Smith: I have one more question on partnerships. Police officers and people such as community wardens and other members of staff in councils now have to work together much more than they did in the past. Is there a place for joint training, particularly for more senior members of staff and more senior officers?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Yes. In England and Wales, the Improvement and Development Agency provides an opportunity for across-the-board training. For example, the London Borough of Westminster, as a policing borough, is bigger than many forces in England and Wales and is headed by a commander—the equivalent of an assistant chief constable. Police officers there are members of teams with other partners from outside policing. In some instances, those teams work to priorities that are set by the chief executive. Where that works well, the police have confidence, so that the commissioner does not

think, "My people are off." There is still line management, through assistant commissioners, the deputy commissioner and the commissioner in the Metropolitan Police, and the police have confidence that they are not giving up their resources.

That is why I have made a recommendation about running a pilot on pooled budgets. In England and Wales, some members of the Association of Chief Police Officers have great concerns about that, as they think that they would somehow be ceding part of their budget for other purposes. In fact, I am pretty confident that the police would benefit from pooled budgets, as would policing generally—again, I draw a distinction between the police and the much broader approach to policing.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): Good morning. I want to extend that point. What lessons can be learned about leadership, management and supervision of community policing from the neighbourhood policing programme down south?

10:15

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: In any endeavour, the most difficult change to bring about is cultural change. The neighbourhood policing approach involves empowering citizens. When I was asked to conduct the review by the then Home Secretary, Dr John Reid—I am sure that you know him well in this part of the world—we decided to keep it as narrow in focus as possible and to concentrate on four workstreams: enhancing local accountability; reducing bureaucracy; truly embedding neighbourhood policing; and making the most efficient use of resources.

Of course, we immediately found that all those elements are intertwined. If central Government in England and Wales was to let go of some of the levers, such as centrally derived targets that are imposed locally, ministers wanted to be assured that the other side of the coin was that local people would have a real say in determining policing priorities for their area and that there would be robust mechanisms for holding the police to account for delivering on local priorities.

Neighbourhood policing represents a cultural shift. Leadership and effective management of teams are important—indeed, they are a crucial sine qua non if the approach is to work.

Nigel Don: Who does the leading? Can an analogy be drawn between policing and doctors' practices, in which doctors are the senior medical people but who runs the practice can be a matter of argument between senior partners and practice managers? In policing, which side should be doing the leading?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: I referred to the legislation on crime and disorder reduction partnerships. In the first instance, many partnerships were chaired by the police—I guess that the police have a can-do culture and want to get on with things—but that is no longer the case.

The answer to your question is that it depends on the problem. I remember having difficulties with two schools in north Belfast—a large Protestant secondary school and a large Catholic secondary school. The schools finished at the same time each day and there were attacks on each school's school buses, so a massive policing operation was needed every day to ensure that pupils from both schools got home safely. The headmistress of the Catholic school said to me, "If you can persuade the bus company to send eight buses half an hour early, I will adjust our working day and we will finish half an hour earlier." It was tremendously difficult to get the bus company to rearrange its schedules so that it could provide the right number of buses. I was a facilitator and not a leader in dealing with that problem—ultimately, it was the bus company that led.

Who should lead the team that addresses a problem depends on the problem. Sometimes colleagues who are involved in housing might take the lead and sometimes the police or people who are involved in education might take the lead. When people work in teams they must be confident that they can be expected to lead on one issue but not necessarily on all issues.

Nigel Don: Abstraction of community policemen has come up many times during our inquiry. What level of abstractions is acceptable and how can abstractions be organised?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: The issue is not easy. In my final report I talk about

"the ability of chief constables to react to threat, harm and risk",

because contingencies will arise in which the threat to the public is such that a chief constable will have no option but to engage in abstractions.

I said in the report that we should value neighbourhood policing. Whether we are talking about officers at basic command unit level, as we say in England and Wales—roughly the level of superintendent or chief superintendent—or the sergeants, constables and community support officers on the ground, those people should not be abstracted for at least two years. I am not so naive as to think that such a target can always be adhered to, but chief officers, middle-ranking officers and all who are involved in neighbourhood policing should have the target at the forefront of their minds.

Nigel Don: I take it that you feel that there should be a minimum two-year tenure.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Yes, as an absolute minimum. I see no reason why constables cannot have a fulfilling career by staying in neighbourhood policing for their entire career. Not everyone feels the need to progress upwards. The culture has to be such that we value that work, and it must be recognised as being valued.

Nigel Don: Should all constables be community policemen early on in their service, so that they know what it is about?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Exactly.

Bill Butler (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab): Good morning. What are the key lessons from the neighbourhood policing programme on the recruitment, training, development and retention of community officers?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: I will start at the top and work down. Superintendents and chief superintendents must successfully go through the police national assessment centre—PNAC—process if they want to be appointed at ACPO level. It used to be virtually a given that someone had to have at least three years as a basic command unit commander—in other words, they had been in charge of their own borough or what we used to call divisions. Among other things, we found that that indirectly discriminated against many women officers, who, due to their family circumstances, looked after professional standards instead, although they had all the skills that were transferable to BCU command as well.

A much broader view is now taken in the PNAC process. The inspectorate conducted a piece of work to consider closing the gap between local crime and more serious organised crime—indeed, national and international crime—and in a profile of top teams, we identified a certain stereotype as being successful. As a result, we take a much broader view. For example, we give much more credit to those who have well-refined investigative skills so that they are not discriminated against in the selection process at a higher level. When they get through the selection process, the training very much emphasises the importance of neighbourhood policing.

Having considered selection and training at the highest level, I will come right down to recruitment. It is important that the initial training emphasises a citizen focus. When I joined the police service in May 1970, the first thing that happened to us was that we were taken into a classroom and taught a definition of courtesy. We were taught that courtesy is an essential quality that will smooth many a path. The public have a right to expect it and its complementary quality, good temper. It should always be remembered that an angry or overzealous police officer is unlikely to be able to deliver to the public the quality of service that the public has a right to expect and which it should demand. I am not suggesting that knowing the definition—if someone has a good enough memory to retain it—makes them courteous, but it impressed upon us from day one that the organisation wanted people to be treated properly and courteously. That is a simple but important tenet, which should run through all aspects of policing. From day one of a police officer's training, it is crucial that they grasp the importance of understanding the problems that people experience in their neighbourhoods and of working with them to try to address those problems. All training programmes, at whatever level, should reflect that.

Bill Butler: Do you favour the use of the least experienced officers—probationary constables—or more experienced officers in community policing roles?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: The inspectorate is completing a thematic inspection of what we call front-line supervision—that is, the relationship between, largely, sergeants and constables. The inspection came about as a result of my growing fear that what was actually being supervised was the process—whether the right boxes were being ticked and the right documentation completed—rather than the encounter between police and public on the ground.

I think that we will make quite a number of recommendations to ensure that proper emphasis is placed on supervision. Less-experienced officers—that is, probationer constables—need to receive proper guidance from sergeants and more senior, more experienced constables. They need to work together in teams that have a proper blend of more experienced officers and more recently appointed officers. What counts is having that blend and the proper supervision of the encounter between police and public; the sergeant should not simply sit in the station and check that the right documentation has been completed.

Bill Butler: The committee has heard evidence that performance measurement is often skewed towards response policing. How can performance management measures be developed in ways that recognise and reward community policing activities? Obviously, this is about the difference between quantitative and qualitative measurements.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: We should simply ask the public what they feel and what their experience is. We need to move towards having much more qualitative measures such as surveys of the public. For example, whereas in the early days the inspectorate in England and Wales assessed forces' performance on neighbourhood policing by

asking how well forces were progressing in rolling out neighbourhood policing teams, we now ask much more about what outcomes those teams are achieving and to what extent public confidence and reassurance have increased. As I pointed out in my review, there is a real risk that an overdependence on number-crunching targets can produce skewed effects and unintended outcomes. It is important to move towards much more qualitative measures.

Bill Butler: It is more difficult to measure the success of diversionary work and work in support of community groups. By contrast, it is easier to measure the number of arrests and so on. How do we overcome that difficulty in measuring the qualitative factors that you have stressed?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: I have seen examples of very good practice in that regard. For example, West Midlands Police's targets include data that are collected for the British crime survey. We simply need to ask people about their experience of policing in their area and what would give them the greatest level of increased confidence. Time and again, when people are asked that abstract question, they say that they want to know and be able to contact their police and to have real influence on how policing is conducted in their area. If we ask people at the outset what they want, we can then go back and ask them about their experience of what is delivered. That can be more difficult, but I think that it is worth the extra effort.

Bill Butler: Is there not a pressure from the wider community or society at large for easily measurable and quantifiable measures, such as the number of arrests and so on? In tandem with that, are not police officers who wish to progress under pressure to meet those more easily identifiable measures because more credit is given to arrests than to the diversionary measures that might prevent offences? Does not that tension exist?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: In my view, the public service agreement targets in England and Wales placed too much reliance on outputs—for example, the number of people arrested, the number of offences brought to justice and the number of sanction detections—but I think that that is now recognised. I pointed that up in my preliminary report and reinforced the point in my final report with recommendations that are now being piloted in four different force areas—West Midlands, Surrey, Staffordshire and Leicestershire—where a completely new approach to crime recording is now being trialled. Under that new approach, crimes are still recorded—we do not suggest any dilution of that—but a much more streamlined approach is taken to how they are dealt with bureaucratically and administratively. I think that we are moving away from those number-crunching targets that were imposed.

10:30

I mentioned that Dr John Reid originally commissioned my piece of work, but he stood down not long after he commissioned it. One of the first things I did was to go to the then chancellor—I assumed, as turned out to be the case, that he would be Prime Minister—and the new Home Secretary in the week after she had been appointed to ask whether there was still the appetite for the change in emphasis that had been exhibited by Dr Reid. I was reassured then, and have been reassured since, that there is a move away from numerical quantitative measures towards, in my view, much more important qualitative measures.

Bill Butler: I am obliged.

The Convener: On how you can satisfy yourself that the community is in turn satisfied with the police service, we politicians are aware that some people have louder voices than others: some are agitators and others are determined to get something done for their area, and they may not be representative of the community. Have police forces in Northern Ireland or down south attempted to carry out a more sophisticated market research approach?

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: My experience in Northern Ireland was that when we held public meetings there was the risk that you mentioned that he who shouted loudest was heard most. It is important constantly to survey people. Sir Robin Wales, who is mayor of the London Borough of Newham, helped me with the workstream on local accountability in my review. He outlined his experience with a major new development. Four public meetings were held, to which only those who were opposed to the proposed new project turned up, shouting loudly in opposition. However, a widespread survey that was conducted throughout the borough found that there was about 80 per cent support for the project. The public meetings would have led people to a completely different conclusion. I am not suggesting that we should not hold public meetings, because people need to have a voice—particularly if they represent a minority view—but they must be supported by scientific surveys of public opinion.

Margaret Smith: You highlight the important role that police authorities can play in supporting and embedding neighbourhood policing. Can you give us an idea of the specific roles and responsibilities that police authorities should have in that field? It would be helpful if you could give examples of where neighbourhood policing has worked most effectively.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: Police authorities can act on the scientifically conducted surveys that I described to reflect back to the police service the views that they discern from the public in their areas. I know of some authority chairs in England and Wales who go out to the shopping centre on a Saturday afternoon and canvass opinion among shoppers. Such work is important in respect of a police authority's profile. In some of the work that we conducted as part of the review, we found that police authorities in England and Wales had a very low profile. By and large, people did not know who comprised their police authorities or what police authorities do. I think that there is a case, certainly in England and Wales, for authorities having a much higher profile. Authorities have an important role to play in reflecting back to the police the views of local people.

The Convener: We have now covered all the issues that we wanted to address. Thank you for coming and giving evidence—your answers were the acme of clarity. I find some amusement in the prospect of your having a late change of career in the direction of plumbing. The evidence session has been very useful and I am very grateful to you for taking the time and trouble to come and see us today.

Sir Ronnie Flanagan: It has been a great pleasure. Thank you very much.

The Convener: I will suspend the meeting briefly to allow a change of witnesses.

10:34

Meeting suspended.

10:36

On resuming—

The Convener: I welcome the next witnesses, who are both from Strathclyde Police: Chief Constable Stephen House and Chief Superintendent Anne McGuire, who is head of community policing implementation. Chief Constable House, we have had the benefit of reading an extremely interesting paper that you produced, and some of us had the benefit of an extremely useful informal briefing from Chief Superintendent McGuire when we visited her former bailiwick in Motherwell. I invite you to begin your evidence with a brief presentation.

Chief Constable Stephen House (Strathclyde Police): Good morning to you all, and thank you for the opportunity to give evidence to you in person. I know that time is short—we are grateful for the time that we have—so I will take up none of it. I will simply hand over to Anne McGuire, who is leading on development and implementation of the community policing model in Strathclyde Police.

Chief Superintendent Anne McGuire (Strathclyde Police): Good morning. For those of you who have heard this presentation, I apologise for the repetition. For the rest, I would like just to give you a brief background to community policing in Strathclyde Police, and refer to some catalysts for change, a review of the findings and where we are with the model's implementation. I believe that members have a copy of the presentation in front of them to assist.

On the background, community policing is not new in Strathclyde; it has been there for the past 25 years. Our involvement started with Strathclyde Regional Council back in the 1980s. That was the first community-focused initiative, which was based in areas of priority treatment. However, it was on a very small scale, with only about 20 or 30 officers.

Since then, however, there has been an exponential increase in numbers, particularly during the 1990s with the disaggregation of Strathclyde Regional Council and the formation of the 12 unitary authorities in Strathclyde, which amounted to 533 wards at the time. The then chief constable, Sir John Orr, decided that he wanted to have a community police officer for every ward, so we went up to that number—533. His successor, Sir William Rae, decided to augment that and to increase the commitment to community policing with weighting for certain areas. He had an aspirational figure of 645 officers, which was never achieved. We currently sit at 586 community officers in Strathclyde.

Over that time, a variety of approaches to community policing have developed, with an emphasis on diversion, education, liaison, problem solving and enforcement, or an amalgam of some of or all those aspects. More recent catalysts for change take us up to last year. First, we had the appointment of a new chief constable, with new vision, experience and outlook, and a particular commitment to community policing. We also had the electoral reform that took place in May last year and the emergence of multimember wards, which meant rationalisation in Strathclyde from 533 to 134 wards, with collective political responsibility. There is, therefore, no longer an organisational fit, as far as the police are concerned, because we are still based on the old wards system. We have had a lack of collective responsibility, and a lack of resilience as a result.

Another two catalysts relate to funding. Obviously, the Scottish Government decided to augment the Scottish police service by 1,000 officers—Strathclyde's share of that is 465. As the committee is aware, the cabinet secretary has expressed his desire that they be put into community policing. In addition, local authorities in Strathclyde have agreed to augment community

policing to the tune of nearly 200 officers. That brings our current strength to 586. By Christmas this year, we will have 1,000 officers in community policing and 1,200 officers by 2011. That is the equivalent of the fourth-largest force in Scotland at present.

The Convener: I am sorry—what will be the number by 2011?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: We currently have 586—

The Convener: You will have 1,000 by—

Chief Superintendent McGuire: We are going to have 1,000 community police officers by Christmas and 1,200 by 2011, which currently makes us the equivalent of the fourth-largest force in Scotland.

There have also been developments in policing in the United Kingdom. Members have probably heard about the neighbourhood policing models that exist down south. There is no single model, they are not mainstreamed and it could be said that they are relatively restrictive because they deal with only two or three issues. However, the models have been well evaluated and found to have very positive aspects, which have been incorporated in our model.

Public demand is another aspect of the matter. Public surveys and consultations have showed that the people of Scotland very much wanted more officers on the beat and more officers with whom they could identify, as opposed to wardens or police community support officers. Last but not least was the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland's public reassurance strategy, which started life as the Strathclyde public reassurance strategy. It required a corporate structure at its base and it now underpins our new community policing model.

A review of community policing in Strathclyde found much that was good about it and much that the public liked, but there were also areas for improvement. The first of those related to community participation. We were particularly good at liaising and engaging with recognised groups, but not so good with individuals or the general public, so we had to create a process whereby the public could identify their issues and express their concerns, which became our priorities on which we could provide feedback. It can be argued that although we have addressed public concerns we have not been particularly good at providing feedback. By doing that, we felt that we would build up the confidence of, and participation among, the communities that we serve.

Another issue of concern was abstraction. Some time ago, we set a figure for abstraction levels of no more than 20 per cent. Unfortunately, those levels were exceeded regularly and, in some cases, were as high as 43 per cent. Use of community police officers often became the default position for football matches, marches, parades and even in relation to response policing—an area about which the public often commented that there was a lack of police visibility.

On visibility, of 3,500 people who were surveyed in 2006, 52 per cent did not even know that they had a community police officer, never mind who the officer was, despite huge investment by the service. Part of the reason for that was a lack of tenure policy, which led to poor continuity, poor knowledge and a resultant poor service to the public. In addition, 29 different shift patterns were in operation in Strathclyde Police, none of which covered a seven-day period. It was relatively rare that a community police officer worked on a Sunday, which is arguably the best day for visibility, to liaise with the community and to provide that reassurance.

Another issue related to corporacy—there was no corporacy of style or focus in community policing; instead it was a matter of personal preference for the community police officer. That often led to a lack of appropriateness or effectiveness in communities.

Another area for improvement was related to the appreciation and understanding—within the organisation—of the role of community police officers. Senior and middle management often did not quite understand and appreciate the importance of community police officers, which led to a lack of complementary styles between community policing and response policing. In some cases, there was antipathy between the two forms of policing.

10:45

Despite the increased investment in community policing, there was a lack of performance measurement and management. We knew from anecdotal evidence that community police officers were well thought of and respected, but unfortunately the performance of the officers tended to be amalgamated with general subdivisional performance. We were unable to evaluate specifically what the officers were contributing.

Another area that required remedial action was training. Increasingly, the role of a community police officer was specialised—involving problem solving, partnership working, mediation and restorative justice—but there was little recognition of that in terms of training. As a result, there was frequent underachievement.

I hope that I have placed the issues in context, so I will now move on to discuss the new community policing model. After the conclusion of the environmental scan, we decided that we needed a corporate model that was flexible and could address the diverse needs of the communities of Strathclyde. The model was based on three key principles, the first of which was visibility. We required to be known, accessible and knowledgeable, and there had to be continuity for communities, with as little abstraction as possible. We wanted our officers to be on foot or on bicycles, because the public had told us that police cars did not reassure them.

The second principle was community engagement: we needed to seek out and listen to public concerns, and we needed to make those concerns our priorities and address them. We then had to provide feedback, thereby managing expectations of our capability and capacity.

Last but not least was problem solving, which is a longer-term issue with partner agencies. The aim is to collaborate in order to deliver sustainable solutions to communities. That will build up confidence and co-operation, so that we ultimately arrive at the situation in which we are not delivering a service to a community, but with a community.

Support for the new model requires the establishment of what is known as a communities unit. Basically, the unit is a problem-solving unit that will enhance accountability, prevent duplication of effort and offer a clear delineation of roles within co-ordinated timeframes, which we do not have at present. The unit will adopt a team-based approach, operating in terms of its collective knowledge. The unit will not operate as a collective unit, but it will provide greater resilience and will be based on the multimember wards. The unit will offer more hard-edged policing; there will be less involvement in diversionary activities and education. It is not that we do not think that such things are important: they are, but they are not necessarily the role of the police. When it comes to diversionary activities, we feel that we are here to facilitate such pursuits so that they can take place in a safe and trouble-free environment. The same feeling applies to inputs to schools. However, where there is a disproportionate need for inputs to schools, that would obviously necessitate the deployment of a campus officer.

The Convener: May I interrupt you, chief superintendent? We have this information, and we also have the document on the community policing model, which we have read with considerable care. There may therefore be no need to reiterate the information.

We have a series of questions to ask you on community policing, and committee members will be interested in hearing your answers. We have the general picture, but before we ask questions, are there any specific issues that you would like to raise?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: Most of the issues are probably covered by the information on the model. Would committee members like to hear about where we have reached with implementation?

The Convener: I think that that information will come out in your answers to our questions. We have found all your information tremendously interesting, but we have some questions that we hope will take us to the nub of the matter.

John Wilson (Central Scotland) (SNP): Good morning, chief constable and chief superintendent. Given the wide diversity of social and geographical environments across Strathclyde, how confident are you that implementation and operation of the proposed community policing model will be as effective in, say, Easterhouse as it would be in Oban?

Chief Constable House: I will start off. That question is valid because outside observers of Strathclyde Police tend to think that is all right for us because we can design a model that fits Strathclyde, but which might not necessarily fit the rest of Scotland. However, people who know the areas that Strathclyde covers, as John Wilson's question clearly indicates he does, know that that one force must be as diverse as the model for the whole of Scotland.

Anne McGuire has been talking about flexibility, and we are looking at the key principle of visibility and problem-solving. I expect the local divisional commanders to follow the principles of what we are talking about, by which I mean things such as visibility, continuity and the red-circled concept that we do not abstract people from other community teams—I aim to keep them in post for a minimum of two years. Outwith that, divisional commanders should have the flexibility to deploy where they need to deploy. In Easterhouse, that would be very different to the outskirts of Oban or in the town itself.

There has to be a mix, which is partly the culture of the organisation that we are developing. We are starting to devolve more responsibility to the divisional commanders. However, as Anne McGuire also said, that is backed up with a performance culture, which means that we must understand exactly how the divisional commanders are performing, but allow them to get on and achieve things in the way they think best suits their communities.

I expect that the communities in Strathclyde that already have good problem-solving local officers—a good number of them do—will be able to build on that foundation. Some of the more troubled areas that we police, which might not have the benefit of that kind of policing, will be able to enjoy that benefit in the future.

Paul Martin: The document sets out a programme but not real-life examples for local communities. For example, in Easterhouse, you might see a police officer patrolling the local shopping facility at the Fort, but you would not see them patrolling Ruchazie, which is in my constituency. Are there any examples that show that that does not happen? Surely the people of Ruchazie are entitled to a local police officer instead of that police officer being in the Fort shopping centre.

Chief Constable House: That is a very specific example. We are trying to lay out a model of policing to which all communities in Strathclyde will have access. We will be increasing the number of officers to 1,200, which means that all parts of the organisation and the Strathclyde Police area will get the same level and quality of community policing. Paul Martin is saying that it is patchy at the moment, and we agree entirely. At the moment, as Anne McGuire suggested, some communities do not know that they even have a community officer, never mind who it might be.

Paul Martin: It looks good if a police officer is visible in the Fort shopping centre, but I argue that the crime is taking place outside the shopping centre in areas such as Ruchazie and Blackhill, which is not where we see the police officers. Are you saying that your model will consider not just the visibility of officers who are patrolling the Fort shopping centre, where people who are shopping think it is nice to see a police officer, but in the most difficult areas where they are not currently visible, and where the people are more deserving of their presence than the Fort shopping centre is?

Chief Constable House: Absolutely. If we are putting officers into a shopping centre, that brings up the question about officers patrolling on a private property that already has its own security staff. That question might be for another debate, but if you want my views on it, I would want to ensure that our officers are patrolling public spaces, not private spaces. If there are security guards, we can liaise with them, but I would tell the shopping centres that if they want police to patrol their private area—in which they make a profit—we would be delighted to receive a contribution from them for policing, and for putting extra cops in the shopping centre.

I have probably not answered Paul Martin's question very well. I want officers to patrol the areas in which there are problems. As Anne McGuire said, the first thing we need to do is to go out and ask the community where it perceives there to be problems. There is a well-established mechanism—as, I am sure, members have heard from other witnesses—involving a visual audit and local meetings to establish local priorities with the public. If people tell us that there are problems on a certain housing estate or in a number of streets, we will examine our criminal intelligence information, which will tell us that, for example, 80 per cent of our calls are in those five streets. I would then want to know why the community cops were not patrolling those streets.

As Anne McGuire said, we want hard-edged, problem-solving officers. We do not want officers wandering around all the time nodding to the members of the public who like them and who want to see more cops. I want those officers to be in the faces of people who do not want to see more cops, because we need to deal with them. We are talking about a hard-edged model of policing, which is moving away from the diversionary activities in which some of my officers take part. Those activities are hugely laudable—the officers are doing all sorts of diversionary activities with difficult groups of kids—and we will not withdraw from that completely. We will still be present, but we will look to our partners rather than ourselves to run those diversionary activities. As an organisation, we will be far more focused on what we exist to do, which is to keep the peace on the streets, and to deal with people who do not want to keep the peace and bring them to court.

John Wilson: It is clear that your community planning model envisages community policing teams being principally concerned with enforcement rather than with being involved in diversionary activities and supporting community groups. However, many community officers are involved in both activities. Last year I took the opportunity to tour with Coatbridge police officers. On a Friday night, a number of the officers were involved in diversionary activities with young people, particularly in Coatbridge golf club. They indicated, however, that they were involved in those activities outwith their normal duties and that they were voluntarily giving up their time to work with the kids to ensure that they had alternatives.

If you are moving away from involvement and engagement in such diversionary activities and from working with community groups, how does that fit in with your statement that the officers will be more involved in enforcement rather than, in some cases, in engagement with those community groups and youths? How does that square up in relation to taking forward the community policing model?

Chief Constable House: I hope that I can put this across in my answer: I do not, in my own

mind, have any trouble squaring it up at all. At the moment, we in Strathclyde Police are very keen on partnership working, and I have a number of officers who have won national awards for the diversionary activity that they have started: they have initiated an activity, implemented it and are running it themselves. It is laudable, and I have given them awards myself, but is it what they are paid to do and is it what the public expect, or is it the job of other agencies?

As Anne McGuire said, the police officers will work to solve the problem: that will partly involve enforcement, but also diversion. We will then go to our partner agencies—the local councils or voluntary sector organisations—and say, "We've got troubles with gang activity in this area at this time of day." We expect, from our experience, that a five-a-side football competition, a golf competition or some sort of social event run at a particular location at a particular time would be the right way of getting those kids to do something constructive by keeping their idle hands busy. We know that that works.

To be clear, I am not suggesting that diversionary activities do not work: they do—as my cops tell me—but they also work when they are run by agencies other than Strathclyde Police. We need to be better customers of our own partners and tell them what we would like, where we would like it and when.

Of course, my officers would still be present at diversionary activities. There might, for example, be a five-a-side football competition involving rival gangs, whose members would be mixed up in different teams. Such a situation would be a powder keg, so police officers have to be present to keep the peace and ensure that the voluntary sector organisations and council operatives who are involved in such activities are safe and sound.

11:00

However, I do not expect officers to organise such events, to look for sponsorship to cover the cost of footballs, nets, hall hire and so on. Instead, I expect them to be told what is needed and where and when it is needed, while our partners manage the events. The cops will provide a visible presence to maintain law and order and to ensure that the kids take part in and get something out of such events. They are not being withdrawn from diversionary activities; we play our rightful part in them, and ask our partners to do the same.

John Wilson: We might well debate the phrase "rightful part" later on. After all, the diversionary activities that officers currently organise and get involved in ensure that, on Friday and Saturday nights, certain young people in many of our estates and communities are kept off the streets and are not being arrested, locked up and criminalised as a result of causing trouble, committing acts of vandalism or are being drunk and disorderly.

A couple of weeks ago, a community police officer told me that, when he attended a community council meeting in the Strathclyde area and raised the issue of wildlife crime, a number of people sitting around the table were able to tell the officer the sort of wildlife crimes that were being committed, the people they thought were engaged in such activity, the vehicles that were coming into the area and so on. That officer received a lot of information—intelligence, if you like—through engaging with the community council. Are you saying that you expect your officers to withdraw from such engagement? After all, as my example makes clear, community organisations impart to local officers a lot of useful information, which then forms part of the intelligence base that we hope allows the police to carry out more efficient enforcement.

Chief Constable House: You have just answered your question for me. I agree that officers need to be present to collect intelligence so that they can carry out more efficient enforcement. I am not suggesting that we should have a bunch of Robocops doing nothing but walking the streets and locking people up—far from it. However, the fact is that an officer can be in only one place at one time. It might be fine for an officer to spend time identifying need, organising events, getting sponsorship, picking up nets and footballs and so on—which is, after all, what they do at the moment—but they do all that not on voluntary time but on police time, which is paid for by the public. As a result, they cannot patrol the housing estates that we want them to patrol or attend all the council meetings that they should attend.

Other agencies and partners, including voluntary sector organisations, can arrange and organise diversionary activities to perhaps a better and more consistent standard than Strathclyde Police officers are trained to provide. We can work in partnership with them to ensure that we do what we do best, which is to gather intelligence and listen to the public at various meetings, and that the partners do what they do best, which is to arrange the activities.

Cathie Craigie: Recommendation 3 in the Strathclyde model document is that

"Special Constables become an integral part of every Community Policing Team and be used exclusively in that capacity".

I note from the document that the Strathclyde Police force area contains 533 wards, but there are only 360 serving special constables. How will you manage a situation in which there are fewer

special constables than there are wards, especially given that, as I understand it, recruiting special constables has been difficult?

Chief Constable House: Your maths is spot on—the numbers do not work out. Compared with other forces, Strathclyde Police has a very low number of special constabulary. West Midlands Police—a similar-sized force that covers the Birmingham conurbation—has 900 specials, whereas we have about 300 special constables. It is a suitable ambition for Strathclyde to increase its number. One of the first answers is to change the mathematics by increasing the number of special constables. We are trying to attract more special constables through recruitment drives. Awkwardly, however, special constables keep resigning to join the regular police. There is a major recruitment drive for regulars, too, and we lose an awful lot of specials because of their joining the regular force. Many people join the specials to see whether they like the work. If they do, they join the regular force. It is difficult to keep the numbers topped up.

I met all the Strathclyde special constables at a group meeting, and I talked the matter through with them. We do not tend to post specials, who are volunteers. If someone wants to become a special and work in a particular area, that is where they work. It would be a bit offhand of us to tell someone that, despite their request to serve as a volunteer police officer in a town near where they live, we want to post them to a town 20 miles away. The typical response would be, "Hang on, I'm doing this for virtually nothing and I want to serve my local community."

We should be aware of what the volunteers want to do, but there is a need-based situation. We consider the level of disorder and violence in particular areas and deploy the specials to those areas when a top-up is required and when extra visibility and patrols are needed. In such situations, the special constables go to the more difficult areas to work with the community team there.

Cathie Craigie: I acknowledge the valuable role that special constables—if that is the right term; that is what I call them, anyway—perform in the community. I am familiar with officers who have worked in my area over the years. I am concerned by the low number of officers in Strathclyde, which has been an issue for a number of years. Recommendation 3 in the Strathclyde model seems important. How long will it take you to increase the number of volunteers to the level that is required to implement the strategy?

People might suggest that using volunteers allows you to police on the cheap, at the expense of those volunteers. How do you respond to that?

Chief Constable House: Your question about how long it will take to increase the number of volunteers is valid. The short answer is that it will take many years to reach a level of around 900 officers in the special constabulary—which is indeed the right terminology. That is ambitious, particularly as we are recruiting into the regulars, too. The pool is partly the same. The more people we take into the regulars, the fewer will come into the specials, to some extent. We need to consider how to attract special constables with a view to increasing the numbers. Recommendation 3 is more important for the integrity, identity and value of the specials than it is for the community policing model, which does not depend on the number of special constables that we get.

We are not making up the numbers with special constables—far from it. If we were trying to do that, we would be way short of achieving it; we have not even got one special constable for each multimember ward. The recommendation binds the special constabulary into a meaningful corporate role. At the moment, specials are used for different roles in different places—not unlike community cops in some respects—across the vast Strathclyde Police area of 5,500 square miles, and they have different expectations in those different places. In some places, specials go out on foot patrol; in some places, they go out in vehicles. In some places, specials patrol alone; in some places, they patrol only in company with an officer. Guidelines are not as corporate as they should be.

Recommendation 3 is about giving the specials an important role in community policing. However, that role is more important to the specials than it is to community policing, if you see what I mean. The model does not depend on the number of specials that we have.

I do not agree that using special constables is policing on the cheap. I see special constables in their purest form—somebody who joins not with an eye on joining the regulars, but to give something back to the community—as a huge vote of confidence by the public in the police force that polices their area, because they are saying that they want to join the organisation on a part-time and voluntary basis. The specials are important from that point of view alone. I do not see them as policing on the cheap at all, because they are volunteers and they could disappear just like that. They can turn up to work or not, depending on the pressures on their diary. Therefore, we cannot depend on them and it would be a dodgy and dangerous tactic to use them as policing on the cheap. That is certainly not how we view them.

Cathie Craigie: The wording "an integral part" suggests to me that the special constables will form quite a large part of the strategy.

Chief Constable House: That is a valid point. You are correct that if we focus on those words, the model could be read in that way. However, the meaning is that they will be important and valued members of the community policing model, not that the model will not exist without them—far from it. If we had no specials, we would go ahead with the model and there would not be a huge difference. The point is to ensure that they contribute to the force's major initiative.

The Convener: Historically, Strathclyde has not had a great many specials. Perhaps Chief Superintendent McGuire could let us know what the thinking was behind that, although I know that she is not responsible for those decisions.

Chief Superintendent McGuire: Indeed. In one aspect, the model will enhance visibility—there is little doubt about that. However, most important, the aim was to give the special constabulary a true sense of identity in Strathclyde Police and to allow them to identify not only with the regular team with which they work, but with a community. They will also participate in problem solving, thereby enhancing their role and, we hope, the satisfaction that they get from it. At present, the special constabulary are deployed in disparate ways. The aim was to bring some corporacy to add value to the organisation and, more important, to add value to the role of the special constabulary and what they get from that role.

Cathie Craigie: In some of Scotland's communities, community wardens work closely with police officers and have been integrated into local policing models. However, there is no mention of community wardens in the Strathclyde model. Why is that?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: I am happy to answer that. The wardens will be very much involved in the communities unit. That will be part of the problem-solving approach. The wardens are part of the local authority structure. Looking at the wider problem solving, we hope that their role will become more complementary to that of the police, with less duplication and, perhaps, conflict arising. We did not specifically include them in the model, but their involvement in the sustainable solutions that come from the problem-solving unit, which is known as the communities unit, is implicit.

Chief Constable House: The other reason is that, although most local authorities in the Strathclyde Police area have some form of warden, the wardens' powers and duties and the expectations on them vary widely. The councils recruit different kinds of people into the role. Therefore, if we had included wardens in what is a corporate policy—as we have set out, that is what we are trying to put in place—we may well have been asking wardens in some force areas to do things that they are not trained to do and which the councils do not want them to do. The approach that councils take to wardens is a bit inconsistent, which sometimes leads to confusion among the public about their role.

That is another reason why we did not include a thread on wardens in the model. However, everywhere I go in the Strathclyde Police area, I find close working between local officers, particularly community officers, and the wardens. Late last week, I attended a weekly tasking meeting in Greenock. The wardens' supervisor, who is employed by the council, comes to that meeting, brings the intelligence that the wardens have gathered on the street and talks about the crime trends, after which deployments are discussed. The wardens play an integral role there, but we must leave that to the local level because local officers know exactly where the wardens fit into the scheme of law enforcement—the situation is not the same across the whole Strathclyde area.

11:15

The Convener: Although we hope that there would be cohesion, if there is not, neither you, as chief constable, nor Chief Superintendent McGuire, as a divisional commander, can overrule the views and requirements of a local authority.

Chief Constable House: That is right. As the chief superintendent said in her presentation, I have spoken to all 12 of our local authorities in Strathclyde, eight of which have contributed extra funding for extra police officers. Some of those authorities also employ wardens, and some that have not contributed funding for extra police officers have decided to put their money into having extra wardens instead. That is their choice—they decide what best suits their needs.

Bill Butler: Good morning, chief constable and chief superintendent. Your strategy document is very clear about the need to address the problem of abstraction via a red-circling approach. How confident are you that that approach can be applied consistently and sustainably? In other words, can you guarantee that the red-circling approach can always be maintained?

Chief Constable House: I cannot. I would be foolish to give that guarantee. We must try to retain a golden share that says that, in the event of extreme operational activity, we will have to abstract officers. That might be done for a natural disaster, very bad weather, a terrorist attack or something else unforeseen—perhaps some large-scale industrial or environmental protest. Who knows what will come along? We must be able to say that we will have to abstract people for such events.

As Anne McGuire said, the red circling is meant to deal with the day-to-day grind that we face of

community cops being abstracted from their daily beat to cover, for example, football matches or demonstrations. However, the worst or most insidious abstraction is for staffing up response cars. To use a vernacular example, a sergeant deploys officers like a football manager and looks to fill a couple of slots on the team. The first slot that the sergeant will deploy and try to fill is the response cars because, understandably, our current mindset is that we must provide an emergency response to emergency calls from the public. If the sergeant does not have enough officers to do that, she or he will look to deploy them from the community cops.

Such deployment is what we seek to stop with the red-circling approach. We will require a senior officer to have a view on the red circling to ensure that abstraction does not happen as a matter of routine. My experience elsewhere tells me that the whole thing will turn on that. If abstraction levels stay high, community confidence will not be built. The officers will not develop awareness of community problems and will not be there consistently enough for the public to hold them to account.

I would not want to say that we can guarantee the red circling as such, but I guarantee that we will do all that we can as an organisation to make red circling work and to make it as difficult as possible for officers to be abstracted on a routine basis. It is not my expectation, as chief constable, that officers will be abstracted on a routine basis; rather, it is my expectation that they will patrol in the areas to which they are deployed.

Bill Butler: That is very clear—I am obliged.

You were very clear that the minimum tenure for community officers should be two years. That mirrors evidence that we heard from other witnesses, including Sir Ronnie Flanagan. Do you have a view on the maximum tenure for community officers? Should they stay as community officers or should they move on? Is there a maximum?

Chief Constable House: I refer to my personal experience in Strathclyde, which is only seven months old but is, I think, most valuable. About three months ago, I was patrolling in Easterhouse with a community cop who has been the community cop there for 20 years. My question to myself as I did that was why on earth I would want to move that officer, who was extremely effective and involved in the community. He knew everybody and everybody knew him.

There could be only a couple of reasons for moving such an officer: one would be that they wanted to move for their career development or for a change, and the other would be that they were not performing any more. However, by introducing an annual performance assessment—as I am sure we will in a little while—and by giving the community cops a clear performance framework for what we expect from them, we will know whether they are performing. If they are performing and if they want to stay for longer than two years, it would be madness to move them.

We will certainly not have a policy of shifting people around automatically every two years just to keep them sharp. I do not think that that keeps people sharp; it makes them fed up and it confuses the public and the local representatives, who are just building a relationship with someone when it is time for them to move on and everything has to start all over again.

Two years is the minimum time that I would expect people to stay in the job. However, if they want to stay longer, if they are performing and are good at the job and if the job suits them and fits them, I would expect them to stay.

Bill Butler: That is clear and pragmatic, if I may say so.

How will you recruit officers to work in community policing teams? Will they be selected? Will they have to apply and be interviewed, or will they simply volunteer?

Chief Constable House: They will come from a mix of sources. Obviously, we have our existing community cops, most of whom I expect to stay. However, some may wish to move on if they see that the role is changing in a way that they do not like. I would not like them to stay if they no longer liked the role.

A fair number of officers who are in response jobs at the moment have indicated that they are interested in joining the community policing teams. That is before they are even aware of what the shift system will look like; they are therefore taking a leap of faith, which shows that a good deal of interest and positivity exists within the force about community policing.

A major source of community police officers will be the probationers who join the organisation straight from training school. When Anne McGuire and I first talked about this idea with others, we felt that it was strange and a bit of a risk. We thought, "Oh, we're going to take probationers straight from Tulliallan and put them into community units, where they're going to be walking about and meeting the public." Then we all looked at each other and thought, "Hang on a minute—that's exactly what we want them to be doing."

When I joined the police 28 years ago, we got deployed, walked around with a radio, and met people. Today, officers go from one incident to another at which they meet either a victim, an offender or, at best, a witness. I am afraid that it is

in the nature of the job for response officers to start categorising people, saying, "This is the victim, this is the offender, and this is a witness." They do not meet ordinary members of the public; they meet only those categories of people.

We want probationers to join Strathclyde Police, go on to the communities unit, and meet the public. They may subsequently meet people as victims, as witnesses or even as offenders, but they will know who they are and they will understand that the vast majority of members of the public lie outside those categories and are never offenders, never victims and very rarely witnesses, but are just members of the public going about their lives.

The aspiration is that probationers will join, do such work for at least two years, and get to understand the community that they are policing. If, after the two years, they want to specialise, they might want to apply to become a response team officer. They would have a good basic grounding in policing and would understand the area, and we could give them extra training in driving and in the various other skills that they will need to become what we expect of every cop at the moment—officers who can respond to high-stress emergencies and deal with them as if they are experts when, in fact, they were in the training classroom only five or six weeks previously.

We are turning round the process, but we are doing so in a way that the original developers of the police service in Scotland, England and Wales envisaged before we got into a response culture.

Bill Butler: That was a very clear answer; I am obliged.

The Convener: Would you envisage promoting a community officer within his team or would you feel the need to move him to another unit?

Chief Constable House: I would not feel the need to move somebody just in order to move them to another kind of policing. If someone joined as a community cop, worked as a community cop for four or five years, got the required experience and passed the selection process for sergeant, they could be a sergeant on a community team. Whether it would be advisable for them to be in the same community team would depend on the dynamics of the team. Staying might make life more difficult for them, but they could move to the neighbouring team and be a sergeant there.

Strathclyde's habit in the past few years has been that, on promotion, officers have to move to a different specialism. I do not agree with that. I am interested in operational effectiveness. If an operationally effective cop is promoted to sergeant, they will be an operationally effective sergeant, and they should be left as an operational sergeant. It might be easier for them to take command of a new team rather than people who were their close colleagues and probably friends, but that is a matter of personal fit.

Paul Martin: You talked earlier about the performance of community police officers and how we quantify that locally. I have been an elected member since 1993, and I cannot remember ever being asked formally by a senior police officer what I thought of community policing. I do not recall a community being asked for its views either.

Chief Constable House: I would like Anne McGuire to have a go at answering. Briefly, though, I am looking for a different set-up. When we set the teams up, the officers will go out and ask the public, "What are you concerned about in the area? What would you like us to fix?" That will become the to-do list for the community team in that area. The team will go back to the community and say, "We think we've done some of these. How do you think we've done?"

Chief Superintendent McGuire: The community policing teams will be evaluated in two ways: quantitatively—in terms of the outputs in relation to crime and offences—and qualitatively. We have started doing surveys. Previously, they were conducted on a subdivisional basis, but this year's survey will be conducted on a multimember ward basis, which will probably give the community policing teams baseline information on what communities think. Quite a large-scale survey will have to be carried out to ensure that we get a broad cross-section. All the multimember wards will be surveyed and people will be asked their opinion of community policing, of the environment and of the service that they are receiving. That survey, which will be carried out annually, will give us the baseline figures for this year.

Paul Martin: Technically, and on paper, it sounds all very well, but I am thinking about the real-life experiences of communities. I live in Robroyston. If I wanted to tell you what I thought about the performance of my local police officer, how would I do it, other than through hearsay? The problem with the current system is that it depends on the sergeant becoming aware of the local police officer being good or bad. How do we properly quantify and assess the quality of an officer's performance? In the real world, no proper mechanism is in place to allow the public to do that, or even, sometimes, to find out who their police officer is. If I am a member of the public, how do I find out who my local police officer is?

Chief Constable House: We are working on a partnership with local newspapers. We are asking for the names and photographs of the officers to be published in the newspaper so that the public can identify them. All of the officers who are in

place at the moment are comfortable with that. We are considering doing the same thing on our own force website. I acknowledge that not everyone has access to the internet, but people do increasingly have such access.

Anne McGuire referred to the baseline. I expect the sergeants who are in charge of the teams to hold a public meeting in each multimember ward, to which they will invite not only the public but local representatives. Anne McGuire, the divisional commanders and I will go to some of those meetings to check that that is happening. I expect the sergeant to be at the front of the room with a pen in hand and a flipchart, asking, "What are the local problems?", and writing them down. Six months later, I expect there to be another public meeting, and the same flip chart, and I expect the sergeant to stand up and say, "I think we've dealt with this one, this one and this one. What do you think?" The answer might be, "Well, you haven't quite dealt with the top one because the groups of kids are still hanging around. It's not as bad as it was, but you still need to do more." "Okay, thanks very much." I expect it to be as informal yet direct as that.

I do not expect the public to be given a secret ballot on whether they think community constable House is doing a good, bad or indifferent job—tick the box as appropriate. I do not think that we are ready for anything like that yet. However, I expect the sergeant to listen when the public say that we have not solved the first problem at all because the public do not know the community cop very well, they do not see the community cop very often and, although their name is on the website and they are present, there has not been a great deal of engagement. The sergeant must pay attention to that.

11:30

Paul Martin: On the involvement of the police board in developing strategy, I will use one example. You appear to be moving away from the principle of campus officers.

Chief Constable House: No.

Paul Martin: Well, your model document does not give the same commitment to that as does the current regime. Campus officers have been a helpful addition. How will the police board deal with what is effectively a resource decision taken by the chief constable? How can the board influence that decision? I am just using campus officers as an example.

Chief Constable House: First, to be clear, I am convinced that if campus cops are properly selected and put in place, they are extremely important. We are in active discussions with a number of local authorities to increase the number of campus cops—they are a very good thing. That is the model for our engagement with schools and education, and we are backing it.

Other models for engagement with schools in Strathclyde are not quite as well defined. I want campus cops to be in uniform, patrolling school grounds and acting as a police officer whom the children and teachers can identify as, first and foremost, a police officer. Campus cops might have the odd bit of input into the odd lesson, but they are not teachers and they are not trying to be teachers, because they are not trained to be teachers; they are cops who can carry out stop-and-searches around the school grounds if they have intelligence about knives, and they can seize knives and take people off to the legal system. That is important, and all the feedback that we have received shows that that model is effective, so we are committed to it.

I apologise if the document is a bit unclear on that. It must be my fault, because we had the same debate at the police board two weeks ago, when Anne McGuire gave her presentation, and we had to clarify the point.

On the general point, the police board appoints me and gives me a budget. We have presented to it the community policing model as a strategy. Decisions about where and how officers are posted are operational decisions and are down to me. The board gives me the resources to do the job—although, in some instances, I get extra funding from elsewhere—and I am therefore accountable to the board for doing a decent job.

Stuart McMillan (West of Scotland) (SNP): What do you see as the role and purpose of community engagement within the strategy? I am reminded of a comment that Chief Superintendent McGuire made earlier about seeking out and listening to community concerns.

Chief Superintendent McGuire: That is exactly what it is about. We are a large, impersonal and, at times, bureaucratic organisation. Mr Martin raised the issue of accessibility. It is recognised that we are good at engaging with certain established groups but not with the general public or individuals. The point is to make us more accessible, for us to have more of a listening ear, and to go out to communities. It is not just about being reactive or receptive; we have to reach out to communities, find out what their issues are, and build up confidence and rapport. We can do that only by reacting to those issues and by communities seeing tangible results or their issues becoming our priorities. We must feed back the result of our actions to communities.

Stuart McMillan: Following on from your response to Paul Martin's question, paragraph 3 of your document refers to the current lack of special

constables, the difficulties in keeping them, and getting more people into the job. Paragraph 19 mentions the development of a marketing and awareness strategy. I am reminded of something else that was said earlier, about how, in the past, members of the public did not know that they had a community police officer, never mind who that individual was.

The marketing proposal is about going out to speak to the community at public meetings and so on. What about other ways of communicating with the public about who community police officers are and how they can move things forward? As politicians, we spend most of our time at elections putting leaflets through people's doors. Will that approach be considered?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: It will. The plan is to have posters. We will also use our website, which is being developed at the moment. The names and faces of community officers will appear on the website, with details of how to access them—e-mail addresses, telephone numbers and hours during which they operate. Posters will be put up in communities, and there will be leaflet drops and community portals. We will use all sorts of technology, as well as public meetings. We will also make ourselves highly visible on the streets.

Stuart McMillan: Some of the events that take place in halls that I use for my surgeries are not well attended. Not everyone will go to a local community hall to participate in community events. Sometimes the only way of getting through to people is to go directly to their door.

Chief Superintendent McGuire: Yes. We have not discounted any means of publicising who we are and what we are for. A plethora of methods will be used. We must balance public expectations with the fact that the model is at an embryonic stage. We have made a conscious decision to launch it not as a big bang initiative but with a slow creep, to allow community teams to be built up and to start to act as teams, so that they become greater than the sum of their constituent parts. If we brought in the initiative with a big bang, expectations of delivery might be raised too high. It will take time for delivery to come through.

Stuart McMillan: My next question is about partnership working. The committee has heard evidence that community planning provides

"a ready made mechanism to deliver benefits across the spectrum of policing and wellbeing at a local level".

How will community planning be integrated into the community policing strategy?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: Flexibility is built into the model, and in each division it will be aligned with the community partnership model. At subdivisional level, the communities unit should be the working team. Above that, at divisional level, where the divisional commander sits, the approach will be more tactical and strategic. Multimember wards were selected as the ideal places in which to locate communities units because they tend to provide the basis for service delivery to communities and local authorities. That allows our service delivery to be aligned with that of local authorities and community planning partnerships.

Stuart McMillan: What plans exist for independent evaluation of the community policing model? What would you define as key criteria for measuring the success of the model's implementation and operation?

Chief Superintendent McGuire: As I said, our performance management framework includes qualitative aspects as well as quantitative outputs. Success will be defined in relation to single outcome agreements and the Scottish policing framework. If communities view the initiative as a success, we will deem it a success. If they see a tangible difference and think that the police are more accessible and visible and are tackling issues for them, the initiative will be a success.

John Wilson: How much consultation with community planning partnerships and local authorities took place before Strathclyde Police drew up the model?

Chief Constable House: During my first couple of months in the job, I visited every local authority in the Strathclyde Police area and met a number of local representatives. Right from the start, I spoke about the community policing model. Since then, I have met a number of representatives again. One of my assistant chief constables has given a presentation on the model to all 10 community policing groups in Glasgow, to indicate what we are planning to do. Subdivisional commanders and divisional commanders have given similar presentations across the organisation.

I am confident that community policing is integrated, that people understand it and are behind it, and that local authorities support it. Some authorities have done so financially, and they get a buy-in from doing that. It is not just that they provide the cops; they feel far more involved, for example in questions about the problems that they want the cops to focus on and therefore the areas in which they are based. The authorities discuss with the divisional commander exactly where the extra officers will go: it is a fundamental partnership.

John Wilson: So you are satisfied that the majority of community planning partnerships and local authorities have signed up to the model.

Chief Constable House: Yes, I am.

The Convener: I have a quick sweeping-up point. I appreciate that you might not want to share much about the shift system with us at the moment but, if you do, will you say what the current state of play is?

Chief Constable House: I think that that falls under the heading "Commercial in confidence"—it is currently a matter of debate with staff associations.

We are determined that the current situation, in which we have umpteen different shift systems for community cops, is not appropriate. In many instances, they do not cover all seven days of the week, and it is common for there to be no community cops on duty on Sunday. Everybody accepts that that is nonsense—we cannot continue that system.

We will not expect community cops to work 24 hours. We will not expect them to work past the early hours of the morning and provide a 24-hour service, because the majority of communities are abed at that time. If we had officers on duty then, they would not be available during the daylight and working hours. We are considering compressed hours for officers, but we also want them to be available when communities are busiest, which is often late afternoon and early evening and, in some communities, the early hours of the morning.

Finding a shift system that deals with those issues and provides enough days off for officers to feel that it is an attractive option is difficult, but we are homing in on some answers. The Scottish Police Federation has been very constructive and co-operative so far.

For background information, we are stuck in a problem in that Strathclyde Police is halfway through rolling out a brand new shift system for all its officers. That started about a year ago, and the roll-out is just about finished. While all response team officers develop on to a new shift system, we are trying to introduce another new shift system for community cops, which takes some negotiation.

The Convener: I will not press you further on that point, as I appreciate the sensitivities.

There being no other issues, I thank both our witnesses for their attendance. The evidence session has significantly overrun because our interest in the subject is such that we wanted to be clear in our questioning. A lot of work and thought has gone into the project, and I thank both witnesses for answering the questions so clearly.

Chief Constable House: Thank you for the opportunity, which we appreciate.

11:43

Meeting suspended.

11:45

On resuming—

The Convener: The final witnesses are Kenny MacAskill MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Justice; and Alastair Merrill, deputy director, police powers, performance and resources. We have a series of questions for the cabinet secretary, which will be asked against the background of the letter that we received only yesterday in which he presented a number of views.

Paul Martin: Good morning, cabinet secretary. The committee has heard evidence on different approaches to, and models of, community policing. In your view, what would successful community policing look like?

The Cabinet Secretary for Justice (Kenny MacAskill): Well, I think that it is what works. It is clear that the model varies from area to area, from individual to individual and, indeed, from officer to officer. That said, clearly there must be parameters. The committee heard earlier from Chief Constable Steve House, who has a particular vision for Strathclyde that seems to me to be heading in the right direction and which we fully support.

The Government has concluded that there is no particular template for community policing but that parameters must be set so that communities can be assured of a level of service. However, the level will vary depending, for example, on whether the locality is urban or rural or on whether it is under greater pressure than other areas because of criminal offending. Indeed, the level will also vary depending on the attributes of particular officers. We therefore need set parameters within which to operate with some flexibility.

Alastair Merrill (Scottish Government Police and Community Safety Directorate): Simply, the starting point for the community engagement model that has been developed with the participation of all key stakeholders is that communities should have a clear understanding of the level of policing that they have a right to expect, how that policing is being delivered and how their views are taken into account. The model that the cabinet secretary submitted to the committee yesterday sets out proposals for a community engagement standard that has been accepted by all the key stakeholders.

Paul Martin: How would you communicate in this engagement strategy with, for example, the community of Blackhill in my constituency? I cannot recall any formal communication over the years between the people of that community and Strathclyde Police. What can they look forward to because of the new strategy?

Kenny MacAskill: Those are ultimately operational matters for the chief constable to direct. As the constituency MSP for Edinburgh East and Musselburgh, I represent the area of Craigmillar and Niddrie, which is perhaps akin to Blackhill. I can say from my experience of that area that there is particular engagement by police officers there, who ensure that they engage with local organisations, which might involve meeting the community council or the neighbourhood alliance, or going in and out of the schools.

We want to ensure that the officers engage. Speaking anecdotally, I know that officers in my locality engage differently depending on their own nature. Some officers are very engaged—not simply those in the youth action teams but others who are perhaps progressive and sports orientated. Others perhaps prefer to meander round at a slower pace, engaging with organisations. It is about allowing individual officers to use their common sense and engage with their communities in a variety of ways.

It would not be appropriate for me, as the Cabinet Secretary for Justice, to give a particular prescription for Blackhill, because that is within the remit of the chief constable, who I believe is heading in the right direction. I can say only that in my experience as an MSP in an area similar to Blackhill, rather than as cabinet secretary, what matters is engagement, courtesy and, indeed—as well as engaging with the community at a slower pace, if I can put it that way—the ability to respond rapidly when incidents arise, which they do in Craigmillar as they do in Blackhill.

Paul Martin: I am being constructive about this, but Mr Merrill said that communities should know what to expect. The people of Blackhill say that they want to engage with their police officers. All I am asking is how that will be formally carried out. What if the police force decides not to do that? How can those local people then say, "In tangible terms, this is what we are entitled to"? That is the point. Are we not going to bother with that?

Kenny MacAskill: I accept your point. That is part of the reason why we instructed Paddy Tomkins to carry out a review. We need to have parameters within which matters operate. It is clear that there are some absolute no-brainers. We cannot expect every individual in every community to know the name of their police officer, but it is appropriate for police officers to go around and introduce themselves to key stakeholders in the community. Police officers should seek to engage and interface with those stakeholders—that is a matter of common courtesy. In the main, officers do that routinely, but sometimes it is worth restating the obvious. As I said, that is where we are heading. It is important for the police to be accessible, visible and identifiable.

Paul Martin: The 2004 report by Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland highlighted confusion about and ambiguity in the use of the term "community policing" in Scotland. Do you believe that we need a national strategy or should police forces have the opportunity to develop their own local strategies?

Kenny MacAskill: We need both. There are overarching principles and parameters that have to be met, but we must also recognise the need for local flexibility. As we have said on a variety of other matters, we operate in different ways in Glasgow and Gareloch, and we operate in different ways in different parts of Glasgow. What we have is a description and not a precise definition. We must ensure that we have appropriate levels of understanding of the rights that exist for communities. Within that, chief constables, in their operational directives, and individual officers will choose to interact in different ways according to the dynamics that exist.

With many such matters, we are ultimately talking about personalities and the interface between individuals. We must set broad parameters and perhaps even bottom lines that have to be adhered to, but within that we must allow people to get on with their jobs in the manner that they regard as best, and to some extent we must allow them to operate in the manner that suits their community best. That is about fostering relationships and trying to make them work. Sometimes they break down, it has to be confessed, but we must try to maintain and enhance them.

Paul Martin: Can you give me an example of a bottom line?

Kenny MacAskill: The bottom line is that people should be able to know who their individual officer is, who covers what, and where they can reach them. That is the bottom line that people are entitled to expect. There has to be some interface. Beyond that, we get into operational matters, but clearly it is a question of setting out the parameters of what is meant by community policing, which brings us back to the definition of being visible, identifiable and accessible.

John Wilson: Good morning, cabinet secretary. How can the Government ensure that forces produce a community policing engagement model, that that is fit for purpose and that it is adhered to?

Kenny MacAskill: That is part of the reason why we asked Paddy Tomkins to consider the matter. We want to find examples of best practice and make them available across the board.

As you heard, some chief constables are out and running. Others are approaching the matter in a different way. I return to the point that I made in my previous answer. We need to set some broad parameters and understand what the bottom line is. Thereafter, we must seek to ensure that we check that against delivery. That is partly about HMIC, but all the stakeholders agreed to the model, and the boards are there to hold the chief constables to account.

The Government stands by the separation of powers that exists between the Cabinet Secretary for Justice and his department, the chief constables and, to a growing extent, the board conveners, who have to check that the chief constable is delivering value to communities. We hope that the conveners will have a good involvement in that, because there is a duty of best value on the boards. It is not simply in a financial sense that we seek best value. We want the boards to ensure that they get the best service from the police in their communities.

John Wilson: You have said that boards and their conveners will hold chief constables accountable. Do conveners and board members have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the issues that they may be asked to take up with chief constables to ensure that they perform their duties?

Kenny MacAskill: I believe so. Our department and I are responsible for ensuring that. Many conveners are new. I have been deeply impressed by them. I meet them regularly. The Government has made it clear that we will seek to ensure that they are provided with the proper information. They have gone to their work with a will, which is a good thing, and we will encourage them.

New guidelines were introduced last summer and the performance framework is in place. We meet conveners every six months and sometimes more often if particular matters need to be discussed. If they feel that they are not being properly provided with information or resourcing to allow them to do their job, I am more than happy to meet them to discuss that. I prefer to provide for them and to allow them to do their job, just as my remit is to ensure that chief constables are properly resourced and provided for but to allow them to operate independently.

John Wilson: Concern is often expressed that community policing is not part of core policing and that performance management indicators do not fully recognise the breadth of community policing activities. How should such concerns be addressed?

Kenny MacAskill: We should recognise that all police officers—whether they are represented by ACPOS or by the federation—see community policing as a core and integral part of policing. We and Paddy Tomkins are considering key performance indicators, but measures are already in situ. I have no doubt that the committee will make valuable comments, which we will take on board.

The policing performance framework and a package of measures on capability have been established, but we must always refine indicators to ensure that they are fit for purpose and meet changing circumstances. The police now recognise that community policing is fundamental and core. It is not the only aspect of policing, because the police have a variety of other responsibilities in the complicated world in which we live. We need to have the indicators and indices that we want. What we have established is not set in tablets of stone and we are happy to review and refine it, but we have enough to allow us to make progress. If the measures do not address everything, we will enhance them.

Bill Butler: In oral evidence and during fact-finding visits, concern has been expressed about abstraction and the tenure of community police. On the leadership and management of community policing, would you like forces to implement policies on abstraction—such as the red-circling approach in Strathclyde—and minimum periods of tenure for community officers?

Kenny MacAskill: As Cabinet Secretary for Justice, I think that it would be inappropriate for me to comment on such operational matters. However, as I said in response to Mr Martin, I know the distress that communities can feel when officers seem to come and go. With my constituency member hat on, I have made representations about ensuring that communities feel that they have some ownership—if I can put it in that way—of their officer. Most chief constables seek to work towards that and we hope to work out such issues. However, my official response as cabinet secretary is that the matters are operational. I can see good practice, but the decision is ultimately for the chief constable.

Bill Butler: I understand that. Is the red-circling approach as outlined by Chief Constable House a sensible and practicable way of reducing the percentage of officers who are abstracted? Obviously, he could not guarantee that no abstractions would occur.

Kenny MacAskill: I can see why that is seen as sensible and desirable for operations.

Bill Butler: Most witnesses have said that two years should be the minimum tenure for community police officers. We are not asking you to direct operational matters—we would never ask you to do that—but do you think that there should be a minimum tenure and does two years seem

sensible to you? Should there also be a maximum tenure?

12:00

Kenny MacAskill: Those are matters of common sense. I can see why there would be operational benefits to a minimum tenure and why there is a good reason that it does not work on occasion. It is a matter of sharing good practice.

An officer in my community once averred to the community that he was being moved. He blamed his bosses and the chief constable for shifting him. The community was up in arms, so I made inquiries. It turned out that he wanted to move but just did not have the heart to say to the community that he wanted something different and did not want to hang around any more.

Ultimately, it comes back to personalities—the individual officer and the individual community. One of the strengths of communities is stability, but tenure is an operational matter.

Bill Butler: You are right that appearances can sometimes be deceptive.

The committee has seen at first hand how community policing across Scotland typically involves a range of people, such as police, community wardens and special constables. What should the police's distinctive contribution be within that extended community policing family?

Kenny MacAskill: Again, that is an operational matter. Obviously, there are matters on which only the police are empowered under statute and common law. How community wardens, whom I value, work in some communities is different from how they work in others. Fundamentally, there are matters that must always be police responsibilities and which, ultimately, they have to deal with. Equally, there are cases in which, if the police do not take the initiative, something might not arise. Whether such matters should always be within their domain and portfolio must be considered. A range of people must seek to work closely in partnership with the police, which must play a leadership role. However, it is ultimately for the police to decide what to deliver and where to venture, depending on their resources and other operational requirements.

Bill Butler: Are you saying, in effect—as many witnesses have done—that the key to successful community policing is partnership and that the various parts of the partnership complement one another?

Kenny MacAskill: Absolutely. The strength of our police force in Scotland has always been that it is of, from and for our communities. That is how it must remain, so the matter is best dealt with in partnership. There may be instances in which the police, for understandable reasons, feel that they cannot do something, but there may be instances in the same community in which they feel that, if they do not do something, nobody else might. We might continue to run with that, but they might seek to pass that role to a partnership organisation.

We want to deliver what works. We need flexibility with some fundamental principles. However, you are right that it is about partnership. To be frank, we get the policing that we deserve in our communities; if we do not co-operate with or provide for the police, things are made difficult for them. They are there to try to assist, but they cannot do everything and it is for them to judge what they should seek to do.

Bill Butler: I am obliged.

Margaret Smith: Good afternoon, cabinet secretary. I was interested in your story about the police officer who had requested to be moved. In my community, a similar situation happened with the owner of a post office. I am sure that, by the time the local community had the petition going, he was mightily concerned that the truth was going to come out. Sometimes, there is a little bit more to such situations than meets the eye.

Creating effective partnerships between the police and other local agencies has emerged as a key theme in the course of the inquiry. The other day, I visited the neighbourhood action unit that covers my constituency. Co-located with the police are people from community safety, the parks department, housing, community wardens and environmental wardens. How can effective partnerships be encouraged and supported? Where people are getting it right, is best-practice information being passed on where it might be useful? Is the framework now in place for that to be done as effectively as possible—for example, the pooling of financial resources to develop such partnerships?

Kenny MacAskill: I believe that it is in place. Single outcome agreements and mutual respect not just between the Government and local authorities but involving other stakeholders—perhaps in health, as you pointed out correctly—are part of the Government's ethos. That is why we support community planning partnerships.

We must allow some of the matters that Margaret Smith mentioned simply to develop. I have no doubt that there will be some turbulence and glitches, but if we maintain the same respect that we have at present, we will be able to address that. It is a matter of making sure that we properly resource such partnerships and provide best practice, which always has to be updated and reviewed. However, the model allows for benchmarking and the sharing of experience.

If we in Scotland approach the situation from the point of view that the glass is half full rather than half empty and we recognise that nobody enters into politics or public life, whether in health or local or national Government, to make Scotland less safe or more lawless, I think that we can get there. We will have to address certain matters, but together we can make our communities safer and stronger.

Margaret Smith: Thank you for your letter about the Scottish community policing engagement model and policing principles. As regards community engagement, how can communities be supported so that they can participate effectively in community policing initiatives and articulate their local policing needs? I am thinking particularly about how we manage the public's expectations. We have just spoken to the people from Strathclyde Police and we are interested in what they are trying to do, but there will always be public expectation that something will transpire as a result.

How do we ensure that the public are involved as effectively as they can be? What mechanisms can best ensure that the police are responsive to the needs and concerns of local communities?

Kenny MacAskill: The model allows chief constables to set standards and, through those, to manage what people are entitled to expect and to ensure that it is made available to them. We need to leave some of those things to operations at local level; it would be impossible and counterproductive to seek to micromanage them from St Andrew's house.

Wearing my constituency member hat, I think that policing in Musselburgh differs significantly from how it is dealt with in Craigmillar, which is also different from how it is dealt with in Lochend—from small-town Scotland to an urban deprived area to an inner-city area with some deprivation problems. Each area has to be dealt with differently and each has minimum expectations to which it is entitled. Despite some glitches, my constituency is well served by the police.

There are always issues, of course, one of which was raised at the Craigentinny and Meadowbank community council in whose area my constituency offices are located. I spoke to Portobello and Leith police stations because the issue arose on the border between the two areas, which I think was partly the problem. That matter will be worked out between the local inspector and superintendent and indeed the community councils. Such matters have to be dealt with locally. It is our responsibility to ensure that there is adequate resourcing, sufficient good practice to follow and opportunities for that to be shared. However, as cabinet secretary I cannot be too specific about such matters; that would be wrong.

Margaret Smith: One thing that we have in common—this is true for all members of urban areas—is that diversity within our constituencies.

Does the cabinet secretary agree that it would be a positive development to move in the direction of having more local statistics and information, as that would give people a better idea of what was happening in their communities? Does he agree that, as a result, people's perception and fear of crime would be more likely to remain at manageable and realistic levels than if they continually saw citywide or national figures that did not correspond to the situation in Musselburgh or Lochend or wherever?

Police engagement with communities is very positive when dealing with stakeholders such as MSPs, community councils and people in recognised and recognisable groupings, but it is perhaps not quite as good when dealing with the community as a whole. One criticism is that, although the police might take on board conversations or comments that are put to them at a community council or elsewhere, they are not always good at providing feedback afterwards on what action was taken as a result of those comments. Will the community policing engagement model be able to cope with that need for feedback to communities? Communities should not only be asked for their opinion, but given meaningful local statistics and meaningful feedback on what action has been taken.

Kenny MacAskill: That is a remarkably good question. The official answer is yes, as the Scottish policing performance framework allows local reporting consistent with what is provided at national level. I find it helpful when the local officer attends our community council meeting to explain, for example, whether the headline in the local evening paper about rising levels of knife crime applies in the centre of Edinburgh, where knife crime is relatively rare. In that situation, the local bobby can explain that we live in a safe community. I would have found it helpful if the local officer had been present at last night's meeting; unfortunately, he was elsewhere, but as he is normally present that is not meant as a criticism. I agree that local statistics can be helpful, but that is provided for.

However, statistics are only as good as what people do with them and how they explain and extrapolate things from them, so feedback is also useful. That is why I have always welcomed the presence of the local bobby at community council meetings. Doubtless, it is often a nuisance to the local officer if the meeting takes place during his time off, when he would be taking the kids out or doing something else, but his attendance can be helpful in allaying fears and picking up concerns. He might then need to go away afterwards and

deal with the matters that are not being addressed, such as the issue that was raised with me last night.

We believe that our approach will allow chief constables to set standards and, at a higher level, allow boards to hold them to account. At local level, statistics should be provided to impart information. There must be a two-way flow: communities need to be able to advise of their concerns and, equally, they need to be told exactly what the situation is, whether good or bad.

Stuart McMillan: Good afternoon. In England and Wales, the Flanagan review highlighted the important role that police authorities can play in supporting and embedding neighbourhood policing. Should police boards in Scotland play an active role in the development and monitoring of community policing? If so, what form might that take?

Kenny MacAskill: That is part of our belief in the tripartite arrangements involving chief constables, boards and the cabinet secretary and the justice department. Obviously, joint police boards exist to hold chief constables to account and to reflect local needs and wants. Boards can reflect wide and varying areas—especially in the case of Strathclyde—but they have democratic input from across the political spectrum. Having met many members of Strathclyde joint police board, including its convener, I am aware that it is not simply focused on the city of Glasgow, but reflects wider concerns.

To some extent, what you propose is a matter for police boards to develop. How that will happen will depend on the individual board's interaction with its chief constable. Nevertheless, your point is correct: such a model is beneficial, as it allows us to examine how we provide frameworking, resourcing and benchmarking. Ultimately, I trust and hope that the relationship between the chief constables and the boards will allow that work to blossom.

12:15

Stuart McMillan: Do you think that the individual force community engagement models will provide boards with a means of measuring the effectiveness of the force in terms of community policing?

Kenny MacAskill: That is a rather technical question. I ask Alastair Merrill to answer it.

Alastair Merrill: The short answer is yes. The police conveners, the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, ACPOS and HMICS were involved in the development of the community engagement model. It is seen as linked to the Scottish policing performance framework, which provides both for national consistency in gathering performance information and for local measures. That is widely seen as fundamental to enabling boards to hold chief constables to account in a way that is consistent across forces and to discharge their duty of best value.

Stuart McMillan: On another point, we received a letter from you, dated 20 June, in which I was interested to read, under the heading "Community policing principles", that community policing involves

"being visible when it is appropriate and discreet when that is appropriate".

I was confused about when it is appropriate to be discreet. We have heard, today and previously, that some communities do not know who their community police officer is, or even that they have one. Community police officers should be visible at all times, rather than

"discreet when that is appropriate".

Kenny MacAskill: I ask Alastair Merrill to comment, after which I will add my observations.

Alastair Merrill: That principle attempts to capture the idea that community policing involves much more than designated community police officers. People who work in family protection units, dealing with potential sex offenders in communities, are also involved in community policing. Their role requires them to operate with a great deal more discretion than the designated community police officer, whose primary purpose is to be out engaging with the community. That principle is an attempt to capture the sense in which community policing goes beyond having officers on patrol in the community, talking to people. It recognises that a lot of stuff goes on that may not be directly visible but that is, nonetheless, important to the building of safer and stronger communities.

Kenny MacAskill: Some of it is just down to allowing the individual community police officer to use his common sense and judgment. There will be times when it is appropriate for him to be out in his uniform, visible to the public—for example, at fairs and community events. However, there will be times when, as Alastair Merrill has pointed out, that is inappropriate as well as times when it is reasonable for him to turn up in his jeans. He might be attending a community council meeting before slipping away to do whatever he has to do—he is not on duty. It is about using common sense.

There are good examples of when an officer's not being visible has merits. He might be dealing with sex offenders, as has been mentioned, or an old buddy might have phoned him up to complain about some antisocial behaviour without wanting a uniformed police officer to attend. In such cases,

some common sense and discretion should be exercised. Also, we know that a lot of the problems in some of our communities are related to antisocial behaviour and require to be addressed in a way that will not exacerbate them. If, as is sometimes the case, the police cannot provide the solution, the matter must be referred to the local authority.

Paul Martin: I have a separate question on the allocation of community police officers. Do you believe that the same number of police officers should be allocated to Easterhouse as to the leafy suburb of Bearsden? Should we think not about allocating a certain number of officers to each multimember ward, but about allocating them to where they are actually required?

Kenny MacAskill: Those are operational matters. Clearly, needs are greater in some areas. That is an operational matter for officers, because the situation can change. There is no set formula that specifies what ward X requires. The issue depends on a variety of matters, including geographic and demographic issues. That is an operational matter to be decided by the chief constable.

Paul Martin: On that point, is it not an operational matter whether a chief constable places police officers on the streets or within an intelligence unit? You have made statements in which you have made it clear that you require officers to be placed on the streets. I argue that that is an operational matter, as is the issue of where the resources should be placed.

Kenny MacAskill: We have made clear our commitment to put 1,000 additional officers on our streets and we are working in conjunction with ACPOS, which has made a commitment to us to ensure that we increase the visibility of policing. However, issues about where individual officers go and the particular numbers that are set are operational matters on which it would be inappropriate for me to seek to direct chief constables. Along with every chief constable, I am signed up to delivering an increased visible police presence. To the credit of chief constables, they are setting about that with a will.

The Convener: As there are no other points for the cabinet secretary, I thank him and Mr Merrill for attending.

Subordinate Legislation

Licensing (Transitional Provisions) (Scotland) Order 2008 (SSI 2008/194)

12:21

The Convener: Agenda item 2 is consideration of one negative Scottish statutory instrument. No points were raised by the Subordinate Legislation Committee. Do members have any questions or are we content to note the order?

John Wilson: The order will change the Licensing (Scotland) Act 1976 so that people do not have to produce certain documentation to get a provisional licence. I am not clear whether we should grant provisional licences when a building warrant or hygiene certificate is not available. It is argued that that gives a potential licensee an opportunity to proceed without having the necessary paperwork, but what are we granting when we grant a provisional licence? I assume that a provisional licence is an operational licence. Are people going to operate in premises that do not have building warrants or hygiene certificates?

The Convener: The order is a temporary expedient until the new Licensing (Scotland) Act 2005 comes into operation. I could not imagine the situation that you set out arising, but we will write to the Cabinet Secretary for Justice to clarify that. Do members agree to note the order?

Members *indicated agreement*.

The Convener: That concludes the public part of the meeting.

12:23

Meeting continued in private until 13:05.

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