



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

Official Report

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

Thursday 18 April 2013

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JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING
3rd Meeting 2013, Session 4

CONVENER

*Christine Grahame (Midlothian South, Tweeddale and Lauderdale) (SNP)

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

*John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind)

*Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD)

*Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con)

*Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab)

*Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP)

*attended

THE FOLLOWING ALSO PARTICIPATED:

Sergeant Kate Blundell (Police Scotland)

Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick QPM (Police Scotland)

Chief Superintendent Julian Innes (Police Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Joanne Clinton

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Thursday 18 April 2013

[The Convener opened the meeting at 13:18]

Local Policing

The Convener (Christine Grahame): I welcome everyone to the third meeting this year of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing. I ask everyone to switch off mobile phones and other electronic devices completely, as they interfere with the broadcasting system even when they are switched to silent. No apologies have been received.

Agenda item 1—the only item on our agenda—is our first evidence session. I welcome the members of the panel: Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick, who is responsible for local policing—welcome back; Chief Superintendent Julian Innes, who is local police commander, Highland and Islands division, Police Scotland; and Sergeant Kate Blundell, who is from the Lothians and Scottish Borders division of Police Scotland.

Before I take questions from members, I invite DCC Fitzpatrick to give a short opening statement on the new local policing structures and how they are working in practice.

Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick QPM (Police Scotland): I hope that I have managed to work the technology.

The Convener: All the microphones will come on automatically—do not worry about that.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Thank you.

I thank the committee for inviting me back. I will briefly outline our arrangements for local policing, which have been in place since 1 April; say a little about how a local policing division operates; and make reference to the planning framework and some of the scrutiny and engagement arrangements.

I have brought with me two colleagues who are living and breathing the local policing arrangements on a daily basis. I thought that the committee might find it far more interesting to hear from them than to hear from me again.

The Convener: No, you are always interesting; do not put yourself down.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: It is very kind of you to say so.

Before I say a little about local policing, I will ask my colleagues to describe what they do, because their roles are core to the operation of local policing across Scotland.

Chief Superintendent Julian Innes (Police Scotland): Good afternoon. I am a police officer with 26 years' service. My role is divisional commander for division 4 in Police Scotland, which is the Highland and Islands division. There are four local authorities in that area, all of which are very different—in addition to the three island authorities, there is the mainland Highland Council.

My role is very much about leading and managing the team of police officers, police staff and special constables who work in the Highlands and Islands. A small team of managers ensures that we have a good understanding of local issues, that we engage with the local community and that we deliver the best possible service to meet local needs.

The Highlands and Islands is a relatively safe place in which to live, work, bring up a family, invest and start a business—that is my pitch for the Highlands and Islands.

The Convener: Do not worry—we have others here who can do that just as well.

Chief Superintendent Innes: To some extent, keeping people safe is relatively straightforward for us, in that they are safe already. As a team, we listen to what local people want from local police officers and try to deliver the best service that we can. We also try, through public engagement, to fill the gap whereby although people are safe, they sometimes do not feel that safe. That is part of our role as well. For me as a manager and leader, my role is about our visibility, our energy and the grip that we have in policing terms.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: There are 14 divisional commanders across Scotland, all of whom have been selected—as Chief Superintendent Innes has been—for their local experience and knowledge. In each of the divisions, we wanted to build closely on the existing local relationships, so we have selected individuals who already have the confidence of their communities across Scotland.

At the other end of the scale is the highly local policing that is delivered by our community teams. That is where Sergeant Blundell comes in. I ask her to describe her role.

Sergeant Kate Blundell (Police Scotland): Thank you, ma'am.

I have completed 12 years' service and am currently working as a community sergeant in West Lothian. I will give a brief history of my career so far. I spent six years working in Edinburgh in response roles and, latterly, in a community role. I worked at the Scottish Police College before going out to West Lothian, where I have been for the past three years. For two of those years I was a response sergeant, and for the past year I have been the community sergeant for the Whitburn ward and the Fauldhouse and Breich Valley ward.

As a community sergeant, my role is to ensure that keeping people safe is important. That is vital to us. Out in West Lothian—which, I am afraid, is the only area that I can talk about with any knowledge—we do a lot of enforcement and preventative policing. We work with our partners a lot. We attend hot spots and work with our partners in dealing with child offenders, as well as investigating crime and charging offenders. We have a good success rate in working with our partners, and we have reduced crime in West Lothian quite significantly.

I will give a quick example of one of the things that we do in West Lothian so that the committee can understand our work. If we find a youth at more than one antisocial behaviour incident, their details get passed to a youth worker, who will contact the social work department to find out whether it has any background history on the person. The youth worker will contact the parents to find out whether they or the child need any support. Through that method of partnership working, we have managed to reduce crime rates in West Lothian.

I have under me school-link officers, community officers and the council-funded safer neighbourhood teams. My school-link officers work mainly in secondary schools. They provide inputs to the students on everything from cyberbullying right through to anti-terrorism. They also deal with any crimes in schools and are a vital link with the teachers in the event that there are any student welfare issues or concerns.

Community officers are present in communities all the time. They attend community events, investigate crime and deal with any issues in the area. The council-funded safer neighbourhood teams, which include a council worker, deal with any antisocial behaviour. They will target offenders and assist the council with tenancy warnings and the issuing of youth notices.

My role has many levels. For example, I go to case conferences, at which all the partners come together to discuss a particular issue, which we work as a team to try to solve.

The Convener: Thank you. I could see that it is quite nerve-wracking for you to give evidence, but do not worry. I have had to do it in front of colleagues on other committees, so I know what it feels like. It is fine here, though, because we do not bite—at least, some of us do not. We have all been taking notes, as the evidence is very interesting. John Finnie will ask the first question, followed by Kevin Stewart.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I declare an interest, in that I know Chief Superintendent Innes.

The Convener: I could tell that by your face.

John Finnie: Yes, indeed.

Picking up on what Ms Fitzpatrick said, it is good to see that local commanders are being appointed and that a reputation is being built in the community—Chief Superintendent Innes has worked very hard in the community.

We get a lot of briefings, one of which relates to the fact that there are 353 policing plans for all of Scotland. I would like to be even more parochial than usual.

The Convener: Is that possible?

John Finnie: It is possible.

The Convener: Heavens.

John Finnie: We have been given examples of 10 plans. Quite coincidentally—I am sure—one of them is for the area where I reside. I want to ask Chief Superintendent Innes about the compilation of that plan. How did it come about and who is involved? I was a councillor and dealt with various community councils, which had differing demands. How do you deal with such competing demands within a ward, never mind build beyond that?

Chief Superintendent Innes: It is about striking the appropriate balance. We started planning for the ward plans through Northern Constabulary, as the legacy force, building towards strategic aims and objectives for the following year. We had therefore already done some work locally in the community in relation to what our aims and objectives would be.

To be fair, I had reservations about the ward plans. They were something new for me as a leader in Northern Constabulary, but they have gone down extremely well with local people. We listened to the results from our community consultation survey and picked out the key items from across the division. We then went to local people and asked them, through the vehicle of the community councils and ward forums, what their particular issues and concerns were for the area. There are common themes across the whole of the Highlands and Islands, but it is relatively new for us to listen and then write down and formalise

the themes. In community policing, we have been particularly good at listening and responding, but not necessarily in the most formal of ways.

It is quite exciting now that the Police Scotland website has a box into which people can drop their postcode. I tried it myself last night, and it brings up a ward plan for the postcode area. What local people would like the priorities to be can easily be seen. The website also links to the local authority plan.

We have agreed with Highland Council diary dates for September and October for the ward forums, which are well established in the Highland area. We will go along to those meetings jointly with the fire service—that is, with Scott Hay, who is my equivalent in the fire service. We will tell people what they asked us to concentrate on in the run-up to the setting up of the Police Service of Scotland and what we have done, and we will ask them what additional things they would like us to do.

This year was therefore a combination of legacy force planning and community consultation. Next year will be very much about listening to what local people within the division want, and then trying to capture that in words and prioritise it.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: The job is not done just because we have published 353 multimember ward plans, which is only the first stage. The real challenge for us now is to report back formally on each of the plans and ensure that they are living documents. We will achieve some of that with partners relatively early in Police Scotland's first year. We need to be able to refresh some of the plans and ensure that they are live and that officers who work in teams such as the one that Sergeant Blundell leads are working on those priorities and understand how they fit with the national plan and—below that and between the two—the local authority plans.

The challenge is therefore not insignificant, but I think that we have got off to a positive start. Certainly, we have had positive feedback from the members of the public who have accessed the website and from the partners whom we are working with at the local level.

John Finnie: One of the difficulties with plans is that people focus exclusively on them. How dynamic can things be? Clearly, policing can involve fast-moving situations, so priorities, or what a community may see as its priorities, can change. I imagine that policing operations could reflect that quickly, but would there be any impact on a plan?

13:30

Chief Superintendent Innes: That is exactly right. The plans are there as a guide. A plan is a snapshot in time covering what local people thought was important, and local communities can change very quickly. I would like to think that we are agile enough because we go to community councils. We have certainly committed to trying to make it to as many of them as we possibly can; if we cannot do so, we have dialogue with the chair or secretary. That is where local police officers pick up local issues. My role is to ensure that we are there, listening and agile enough to respond. Just because something is not in a plan does not mean that we are not interested in it.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: As you would expect, we manage on a national basis, but we also manage right down to the local basis. As has been said, operational policing identifies emerging problems and issues, and it is tasked on a daily basis at a divisional level. Individual teams will work on issues right down to the very local level. They will certainly have long-term priorities, but they will also be able to look at any emerging issue. There might be an area that has a problem with its night-time economy, for example, or a school may be experiencing difficulties with road safety. We are able to task around such things very quickly.

The Convener: You said that you consult community councils, but they are not always representative of communities. Do you go elsewhere? My concern is that you consult only community councils. I can tell that I am going to be done for that by them, but you know what I am saying. They are not always representative.

Chief Superintendent Innes: I understand exactly what you are saying. Younger people are often missing from community councils. We did an excellent session with young people through the Scottish Youth Parliament, and addressed 70 young people in the Highlands in the run-up to developing ward and local policing plans. We asked them questions in the community consultation survey that, as a force, we send out to people across the force area, and they gave us answers using electronic buttons. We therefore got a snapshot from young people.

Next time, we will try to have better access to minority groups. We have a well-established community advisory group in Inverness that, for next year, we will try to link into much better through a representative.

Police Scotland probably has an opportunity to have an easier read-across in Scotland on what other people are doing. A division in the east has done exciting work on the street in surveying hard-to-reach groups, going into premises that people

would not normally reach and asking questions. We will try to learn from its experience, and we have plans in place this year to do such street work across the Highlands and Islands to get to people who might not necessarily pitch up to a community council meeting.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I want to follow up on John Finnie's line of questioning.

Community engagement has been spectacularly good in some areas, but not quite so good in others, even in the previous force areas. A lot of that can be down to the local community sergeant, and I am really glad that Sergeant Blundell is here to give evidence.

How will we ensure that best practice is exported right across the country so that there is the best community engagement that we can possibly have in every area? Can Sergeant Blundell tell us her thoughts on community engagement and where she sees the sergeant's role in ward areas?

Sergeant Blundell: In my role, I quite often go to community council meetings with my community constables and listen to issues. Believe it or not, I will be Twitter trained in a fortnight. That is new to me.

The Convener: I am sorry, but what was that?

Sergeant Blundell: I will be Twitter trained.

The Convener: Right. They will not let me do that. Be careful.

Sergeant Blundell: That is another tool for us to use to get information out to the community and for it to feed stuff back to us. We also have links on Facebook, for example.

We had engagement meetings with our local communities for the ward plans. We arrange meetings with them—that is generally how we discuss with them what their issues are. My community constables have regular surgeries—they are normally once a month—for anybody who wants to come along and raise issues. That is how we speak to our communities in West Lothian. Obviously, they have our email addresses and phone numbers, which are advertised across the area, so they can speak to us at any time that they want.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: As you would expect, we are looking at what has been done—we are looking at those specific elements of good practice—in the eight legacy forces and identifying where engagement might not have been so successful, for example with particular communities of interest or minority groups.

As you heard Chief Superintendent Innes say a moment ago, he is already borrowing with pride—I

think that that is the phrase—from another part of the country something that has gone particularly well. However, in leading this part of Police Scotland's business, I see my role as ensuring that we do that systematically. I am interested not in where good practice comes from but in whether, if it works really well, we should be doing it elsewhere.

Kevin Stewart: Something that I have noticed previously, which is not exclusive to the police, is that folk sometimes like to keep their good ideas to themselves. How do we get folk out of that mindset? Will the single force help in that regard?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: It gives us a huge opportunity. I bring our divisional commanders together on a monthly basis, not only to establish that we are very focused on the job that we have to do but to share good practice. In fact, we met last week and identified that we have some good practice that we want to share at our monthly meetings. The divisional commanders will look at areas where they think that more work needs to be done. I have invited them to present, at each of those monthly meetings, on the good practice that they have identified in their divisions. In that way, we will have a peer group that is anxious to do the best that it can for Scotland. I hope that I am representing the views of our divisional commanders in saying that.

Kevin Stewart: For a long while, I have followed on Twitter the police in my neck of the woods in Aberdeen and I find it extremely useful. I am sure that the amount of retweets has helped evidence gathering in many places.

The Convener: I just did a little straw poll of how many people here use Twitter. I am getting noes from some members—I am glad that I am not alone in that. However, you are a gallus lad, so go ahead.

Kevin Stewart: I am not so sure about that, convener.

Mrs Mitchell and I serve on the Local Government and Regeneration Committee, which has been looking at community planning. In some parts of the country, there has been real engagement between the force and community planning partnerships; in others, it would be fair to say that engagement has been pretty poor. On best practice, how will you ensure that that engagement is there? Obviously, we will have the scrutiny committees at council level. However, from my perspective—I speak as an ex-councillor and ex-police board member, so I think that I can say this—sometimes the elected members do not necessarily know what the priorities are. If you have good community input into CPPs, you can get a better idea. How will you ensure best practice right across the country?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Our divisional commanders see themselves absolutely at the forefront of that. It is a real challenge for them because most of them have to engage with more than one local authority. That is a big commitment to make but I am confident that they will be able to do that well.

I want us to be seen to be proactive partners in those relationships. We are at our most effective when we come prepared to roll up our sleeves, get involved and bring to the table information and our knowledge of the crime, community safety and antisocial behaviour issues in particular areas. That is certainly the tone that we have set in Police Scotland.

We have the advantage of having that peer group of 14 who can bring their experience back so that we are able to identify where we might need extra support to make the most out of those relationships and planning processes. However, we also work with Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary and the Scottish Government, which are doing some work on engagement, scrutiny and planning processes throughout Scotland. They will also be able to point us in the direction of where things are working well, where there is good practice and where we can, as far as possible, adopt that good practice.

It is also fair to say that we are only one partner in those relationships and that, although I want us to be proactive, willing and active partners, we rely on others to come to the table prepared to engage with us effectively.

Kevin Stewart: You are right that you are only one partner. The Parliament's Local Government and Regeneration Committee would certainly be interested to know where the police service thinks that community planning is not working and where you are trying to engage but not getting much back.

The Convener: It is up to the Local Government and Regeneration Committee to call the police as witnesses and get the evidence.

Kevin Stewart: We might well do that, convener.

The Convener: There you go. Our witnesses will appreciate that we represent different committees to an extent. We have members of the Equal Opportunities Committee, the Local Government and Regeneration Committee and the Justice Committee.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Of course.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): My question is about scrutiny. Under the previous set-up, we had eight boards and eight chief constables, who were held to account. As the

Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Bill passed through Parliament, cross-party questions were raised about how local democratic accountability would be delivered in reality. You have explained to us about the 353 policing plans. I understand how they work and I know that Sergeant Blundell and her colleagues will be engaged in that. You have also outlined the system of 14 divisional commanders.

My question has two facets. One is for the deputy chief constable and the other is for the divisional commander. What structures for local democratic accountability are in place today across the 14 divisional commands? If there are gaps, what plans for local democratic accountability are coming to your desk?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: That is interesting. I will speak first, but I know that Julian Innes can illustrate the variance that I will describe. The models of scrutiny that have been adopted across the 32 local authorities can be grouped into four broad groups. One approach is where a full council has adopted the scrutiny mode. That exists in some of the divisions and their subsets. Another model is where an existing council committee, such as a community safety committee, has taken on the scrutiny role. Again, that is a very formal structure. Elsewhere, we find that particular members have come together in a group and work with representatives of other partnership organisations or advisers, although those individuals will not have a voting role in the scrutiny process. In other places, we are scrutinised through a broader partnership model, which might build on a community safety partnership or perhaps the community planning model. In that approach, the scrutiny is conducted by the partnership.

Those are the four broad models. Work is going on to establish, against a good practice framework, which of them is achieving its aims perhaps better than others, and we will of course contribute to and participate in that. However, at present, across my 14 divisions, I have 14 divisional commanders working within those models.

It would be helpful for Julian Innes to describe his experience.

Graeme Pearson: Before we go on to his experience, are you saying that all 14 divisional commanders are democratically accountable to some structure or other and that those structures are in place today in each of the divisions?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: They are, indeed.

Graeme Pearson: I see the advantage in having different models, because we are learning how to run a national police service. You will be

able to gather evidence of best practice. Will you be able to share that with all the structures so that individual members can accrue the experience from elsewhere? Is that already in place or are you developing that as we go along?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I think that we are all developing, just as each of the models—as I understand it, from my officers' experience—is developing. However, we are certainly already working with HMI and the Scottish Government to consider how those models are working in practice, where the good practice is and what our experience is of helping to develop them and being held accountable through them.

13:45

Graeme Pearson: Would it be feasible for us to get a document that sets out the structure of the 14 models that would show how each of the divisions are currently accountable to their local, democratic structures? That might give us an understanding of where the changes have taken place.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Of course we can provide that to you. I have described it in a clearly defined way, as if each divisional commander is working with one model, but that is not necessarily the case.

Graeme Pearson: It would be useful to see the models set out in that way. We all understand that the previous board arrangements were perceived to be ineffective. Democratic accountability was absent from previous structures. That will be an important lesson to learn in this new settlement, and we must keep an eye on how that develops.

The Convener: You will also have to tread carefully with regard to the democratic way in which local authorities want to do things. The approach must be very much one of consensus, because some local authorities will be upset if you go along and say, "I don't think you've been doing things very well, by the way." Would you agree that things have to be done on a mutual basis?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: All that I would say is that we are talking about scrutiny of the police service. It is about participation and engagement and ensuring that we can contribute to that scrutiny being as effective as possible. It is not for us to dictate the model.

Graeme Pearson: It is important that the local democratic group should lead in these matters. The police may well advise, but that advice can and will be rejected if it is deemed inappropriate in the local situation. I think that you would accept that it is for locally accountable people to set the principles rather than for you to make demands.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We are here to be scrutinised.

Graeme Pearson: Excellent.

The Convener: Indeedy.

Graeme Pearson: On that basis, could the divisional commander tell us how he is held to account and what he feels he is entitled to share with the local democratic set-up?

Chief Superintendent Innes: For two years, I was part of the Northern Constabulary executive team that was scrutinised by the northern joint police board. As an operational police officer, I felt that I was well scrutinised.

Graeme Pearson: I have to say that I have just seen Kevin Stewart's jaw drop.

Chief Superintendent Innes: I am just giving you my experience of the northern joint police board as an operational officer in the Highland context.

Moving on from that—

The Convener: Can I just make it clear that that was not the board on which Kevin Stewart served. There is no problem here. Graeme Pearson is being mischievous.

Chief Superintendent Innes: There are four different set-ups with the four local authorities that I deal with. We have engaged with the local authorities from the starting point of being an invited guest to be scrutinised. Although we have had meaningful discussions with local partners about how they are going to construct the scrutiny committees, how they go about that is very much the councils' business.

I am really quite excited about the four local authorities that I am dealing with, because they are all different. The scrutiny committees all hit the same day in the same week, so I have not been to them all yet. In the Western Isles—one of the ones that I have not been to yet—there is a feeling of full council. In Orkney, where I was scrutinised by the police and fire sub-committee, things are very much focused on local police and fire issues. In Highland, there is a new committee—the community safety, public engagement and equalities committee—which scrutinises police and fire services as part of its agenda. Shetland has what feels like more of a blue-light committee that scrutinises us.

I feel that I am able to put before those committees any information that is asked for. However, in advance of the meetings, we have suggested areas that members might want to ask about. For example, police performance is key, so we put in performance reports. We have put in reports about how we have been preparing and structuring for the establishment of Police

Scotland as part of the pathfinder. We have put in reports about the number of police officers in the area and how they are deployed. We have put forward our divisional plan and the ward plans for scrutiny.

It feels as though the scrutiny at every committee that I have been at has been different. It is also worth recognising that people are still finding their way with these new scrutiny committees and they are coming to the table with different levels of experience. In Highland in particular, new people were coming in at council level who had limited or mixed experience of the police, so we set up a training day for them. As they understand more about the role of police and fire services, their scrutiny will become more invasive.

Graeme Pearson: You did not mention budget. Are you able to share the budget that is allocated to your division and the financial outcomes of the decisions that you are making?

Chief Superintendent Innes: I have not yet received my budget for the division. That is fairly common practice for the first month or so. However, I am comfortable with being scrutinised about the allocation of money and how I use it to best effect. I will certainly link it to outcomes for the division. My role is clearly to use the money that I have been given to ensure that there is improvement across the Highlands and Islands. I am quite clear on that. If how we are making best use of the money is being scrutinised, I will be comfortable talking about that.

Graeme Pearson: You would be happy to see that, however each of the scrutiny panels Scotland-wide is arranged, divisional commanders will be able to report on their budgets and their use of those budgets.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: As I see it, divisional commanders are accountable for the resources that they put towards the priorities that have been identified.

Graeme Pearson: I am grateful. Thank you.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I want to probe further into what Kevin Stewart and Graeme Pearson were asking about, which was the logistics of local authorities holding divisional commanders to account and scrutinising the local plans. How frequently do the scrutiny bodies meet and are the meetings always formal? I know that you deal with four different models but, digging down into that, I would like to know whether the meetings are always held in the council chamber or whether an effort is made to go out into the community to hold scrutiny meetings in public. Has there been any tension between preventative spend and enforcement? I would imagine that, as usual, enforcement always comes high up the

agenda, so has there been any tension between that and trying to move forward with preventative policies?

The Convener: Can we do one question at a time? Margaret Mitchell has asked two questions there, so you can answer them and I will come back to her if she has any more.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: The experience so far of Police Scotland and the divisional commanders is that there is a real mix—I was going to say that it is a moveable feast. Work is still developing. We will of course be involved and will participate, whatever decisions are taken on how to develop the scrutiny models and wherever meetings take place, whether the scrutiny bodies decide to meet in a formal or more informal setting, provided that that is practical.

Our responsibility is to come to the boards or groups, however they are set up, prepared to account for the use of our resources on identified priorities. If I were to describe how things are today, I would describe a mixed picture, models that are in evolution, and a broadly productive relationship in which our divisional commanders are accorded the respect of being heard. As Julian Innes said, he feels that he is being held to account and I know that others feel the same, but it is very early days. We are two and a bit weeks into Police Scotland and I anticipate that the models will develop over time.

Margaret Mitchell: How often do you expect that meetings will have to be held if the scrutiny is to be meaningful? You have said that local plans can change and priorities can change within them so, for example, meeting twice a year might not be best practice. What should be a minimum number of meetings?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Again, that is quite difficult for me to say in some ways because we are the scrutinised not the scrutineers. Provided that these things are done in a practical way and we are able to come and provide information and data in a meaningful way at a meaningful level, those issues will find their level and we will find our way over time.

The Convener: I think that Margaret Mitchell's other question was on preventative versus enforcement spend.

Margaret Mitchell: Yes.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Looking across the plans is very interesting. I hope that I am not about to be tested on this, but I have looked at all 353 ward plans and I think that there is a tendency towards preventative work at the ward level and a real interest from communities in our being engaged with partners to work towards

resolving problems as opposed to focusing only on enforcement. I am very heartened to see that.

In terms of spend and the application of resources, we are only halfway through the first month of the financial year, but if I was ever invited back to the committee, I would be able to give a better picture at that stage.

The Convener: I am sure that you will be invited back.

Margaret Mitchell: Crime prevention panels have always been a very good source of local intelligence and have been good for community liaison. I understand that there is no longer police secretarial support for the panels and that their nominal budget of £200 has been cut. Is that the case? Would you like to comment on that? Do local authorities still give some direct funding for additional police officers? I know that it is early days, but have they indicated that they are prepared to continue with that?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: On the first point, I think that there is quite a mixed picture across Scotland. We want to move to the position of having consistency across Scotland in how we work in those areas and perhaps in how we define our terms of reference and our participation in panels and so on. That will take us a little bit of time to do.

Margaret Mitchell: Has the funding and the police secretarial support been withdrawn from all the crime prevention panels or only from those in certain areas?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We are trying to move to a position that is consistent. I cannot give you information for each particular case, but I can provide information later on the picture across Scotland. However, it is important that people are clear that we have a consistent approach and that they know what the expectation is, so that we are clear about who has which role in relation to areas such as crime prevention panels.

Sorry, but what was your second question?

Margaret Mitchell: Is direct funding for additional police officers still coming from local authorities? Have they indicated that they are keen to keep that going?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Yes. We have for this year had a commitment to additional funding from a number of local authorities. Obviously, we have built that into our planning for the year.

Margaret Mitchell: Thank you.

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): Margaret Mitchell has already touched on what I wanted to explore further around the softer crime

prevention work, in its broadest sense. Ms Fitzpatrick, you said that in community planning terms you were only one partner. To what extent are there areas in the softer pieces of work where you have completely disengaged from delivering them and where you think that community planning partners should deliver them? Are there any examples of that at the moment?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I am nervous about the use of the phrase “completely disengaged from”. In my answer to the last but one question, I do not think that I explained that aspect particularly well. Over a period of time, we are trying to achieve an approach particularly to our partnership working across Scotland that is more consistent and as effective as possible—in good practice terms. That does not mean that we are in a position to say that we will completely stop doing particular pieces of work, because where that is partnership work, that would not be the sensible thing for us to do. We would want to work with partners to redefine our role, if we think that that needs to be done, in a way that plays to partners’ strength and to our strength, as the professional policing partner, in any particular relationship.

For example, we have a number of different approaches to schools engagement across Scotland. We are an important partner that works with education establishments and we want to ensure that we are as effective as we can be in those partnerships. We may look at and make more consistent the range of activities that we are involved in and the definitions of the roles that we have inherited from the eight forces, so that schools can expect a particular level of engagement from us. We want to do that by working with those who are already engaged in partnerships. It is particularly important for divisional commanders to manage that relationship, so that we do not become less effective than we might be.

14:00

Alison McInnes: What may be important for local communities is where they see a change from a situation in which the local police service headed and provided staff and resources for something to one in which the bulk of the work has been passed over to the local authority or another community planning partner and the police are a junior partner. That will be a difficult manoeuvre to make. How will you negotiate that? What tensions exist?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: The word “negotiate” is a strong word to use in relation to such circumstances. In every partnership that we have, we all bring something different to the table. We must ensure that, in policing terms, we are

doing only those things that the police can do—we certainly bring enforcement to the party, for example. We must also enable partnerships to work effectively by doing the things that increase public confidence, for example. We can share data and information and target locations and individuals who may be vulnerable in more than one area and not only in relation to crime or disorder.

We are on a journey. We have made a good start, but we have quite a lot to do. Divisional commanders' sensitivity in handling matters and, in particular, engagement not only with the partnership but with, as you rightly say, the public, who receive the services and the product of the partnerships, will be important to us as we progress the work through the first year of Police Scotland.

Alison McInnes: Do you have any local examples that you can talk about, Chief Superintendent Innes?

Chief Superintendent Innes: If anything, we have breathed new energy into the partnerships that are out there. Indeed, a good example is the community safety, public engagement and equalities committee, which is a scrutiny board for Highland. We have taken some joint partnership reports that an individual has led on on behalf of the group. The first report that we put to the committee was on what we do on road safety across the partnership. We were scrutinised as a partnership on how we deliver road safety. That was led by the Highland Council and the police and fire services also played a part. We also looked at hate crime, which I led on, setting out what we were doing locally. The committee scrutinised the delivery of that.

We are certainly looking at the partnerships that we are involved in. I can speak only for my division, but they are different. For example, how the police interacts in the islands is to be a full part of everything. I do not think that that will ever change, regardless of how Police Scotland views partnerships, their boundaries and the guidance that it gives. The approach is effective and works well.

My pitch as a divisional commander would be, as part of that discussion, that every area is different and different communities have different needs. Therefore, sometimes it might be appropriate for us to be a leading partner on one particular issue, but other times we might take a back seat while still being at the table. I want to continue and put energy into that.

Alison McInnes: I have one more question—

The Convener: Parliament is sitting at 2.30pm and the committee must stop before then and we have other business to deal with. I will therefore

stop the evidence session at 2.10pm so that members can be released to go to the chamber. I remind members that this is our first stab at the evidence. Alison McInnes can certainly ask her question, but I will stop the evidence session in six minutes.

Alison McInnes: In the Aberdeenshire local policing plan in my region, there is an interesting section on public protection and quite a change in the way that public protection will be delivered in relation to domestic abuse, for example. It would be useful to have more information about whether that is happening across Scotland.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Julian Innes can come in on the specifics of how that works in an individual division, but the investigation of domestic abuse is an example of an area in which I have made a structural requirement for each of the divisions to devote specific resources. In all the police plans that we have consulted on across Scotland the protection of vulnerable people—including the victims of domestic abuse and children in households where domestic abuse takes place—comes through as one of the golden threads. That is a concern for people across Scotland and they want us to deal with it effectively.

You will find that each of the divisions has a dedicated domestic abuse investigation unit and works uniquely with local partners. For example, there are different arrangements for advocacy across Scotland, although that is becoming more consistent with the Crown. Each division will work broadly to a toolkit of good practice that we have taken from across Scotland and our expectation is that there will therefore be a better and more consistent standard, both in relation to investigation and tackling perpetrators of domestic abuse and in supporting victims and witnesses of that crime.

The Convener: Does Chief Superintendent Innes want to come in on that point?

Chief Superintendent Innes: As a force, we made a heavy investment in the investigation of crimes against vulnerable people and in protecting people. As a divisional commander, I am right behind the investment of time, effort and resources to protect people. It is the second key priority in our local plan, so I am not surprised that it appears in the Aberdeenshire local policing plan as well.

That investment gave me the opportunity to pick the best possible people in the division who work in those fields, take their expertise and put them together in a team. Whether that is badged the domestic investigation team, the domestic abuse task force or the rape investigation team, it involves people with particular skills in that area.

We will get the good practice and consistency of standards by bringing those people together and having consistent units across the divisions, and my expectation is that those people deliver better outcomes for some of the most vulnerable people in our communities. It is a step in the right direction across Scotland.

Alison McInnes: That is good to hear. Thank you.

The Convener: I know that there are other questions members want to ask, but I will bring the session to an end. I ask members to let the clerks know and, if we may, we will send you the questions so that you can give us the answers in a letter. The questions and the answers will be public. The session has been a bit curtailed as we have another bit of housekeeping to do, but I thank you very much for your evidence and members who did not get to ask their questions can do so later.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Of course. Thank you for the opportunity.

The Convener: Thank you. I will move on quickly as the committee has work to do and I want us to be ready for the Parliament sitting.

I refer members to the annexes to paper 1, which are correspondence from the Scottish Police Authority and Police Scotland. As requested, they have provided an indication of when might be most appropriate to consider each of the areas of interest that we identified at our last meeting. The correspondence indicates the issues that would be best to consider in the short term, before summer recess, and those that it would be best to consider in the longer term, perhaps after summer recess, as well as telling us that it is early days to consider those issues, which we appreciate.

I advise the committee that we have five meetings until the summer recess and it would be useful to pin down which areas we will focus on during those sessions. I hope that you have pens and papers out. We have meetings on Thursdays 16 May, 30 May, 13 June and 27 June. As you can see, the schedule is fortnightly. *[Interruption.]* I beg your pardon? The clerk is telling me that I missed out one meeting—we have a meeting on 2 May. It is useful to have staff—or a carer, as the case may be.

First, can I have your views on whether, following this morning's evidence session, you want to take any further evidence on local policing at this stage, with the caveat that you get to write and ask your questions anyway, or shall we just leave that for the moment until we see what written responses we get back?

Kevin Stewart: As the DCC said, we are just two and a half weeks in; it may be best to leave anything else in that area until after recess.

Graeme Pearson: I think that that is right.

Alison McInnes: I think that that is the case, but a lot of our questions were questions that ought to have been addressed to local authorities. I would like to hear from local authorities some time after the summer recess about how they feel they are scrutinising local policing.

The Convener: That is certainly possible. The Convention of Scottish Local Authorities has already indicated that it will be considering the local policing arrangements. We had a taste of the various models in that evidence session. There seem to be models for everything these days. We could see how the models are bedding in after two or three months.

John Finnie: It was remiss of me not to mention something earlier—I see that it is listed in the note by the clerk as a short-term and a long-term objective. Would it be possible to get some sort of report from the appropriate authorities on how they are dealing with the continuity of contracts and the termination of contracts? There must be a multitude of relationships and it would be helpful to know about the situation.

The Convener: I note that—we can write and ask about that when we send the supplementary questions.

COSLA has said that it probably would not be in a position to give views on local policing arrangements until after two or three months and, as we see, things are in the mix, so we will speak to COSLA later on.

The SPA has suggested that we might want to visit the forensics facility at Rushton Court in Dundee. While things are bedding down, it might be useful to get out and see stuff—taking into account the restrictions of Parliament. How do you feel about going to the forensics facility at Rushton Court? We also previously considered visiting St Leonards police station. That possibility is being explored.

John Finnie: I commend exploring the possibility of visiting the police station because that draws in both the support staff and the police operational element that we have heard referred to by the cabinet secretary and by Unison. I am keen that we explore that possibility rather than be shown around a shiny lab in the first instance.

The Convener: You talk about shiny labs—we will be putting on our boots and protective headgear when we go to Gartcosh as far I know. We have been asked our shoe size—or maybe it was just me who was asked my shoe size.

Kevin Stewart: From my experience of late—I do not know whether Margaret Mitchell would agree—going out and about, you get the real nitty-gritty of what is going on. We can have as many formal evidence sessions as we like in some regards, but you get the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth when you go on site and speak to folk, particularly when you speak to them informally. That is what I really want to do.

The formal sessions are extremely important, but I want to see what is happening on the ground. I want to go to these facilities and to ordinary police stations right across the country to see what people's feelings are at those places rather than just hearing from, in the main, the high heid yins. Having said that, I was very pleased that we had a community sergeant in for the evidence session today, as well as the DCC and the chief super.

Graeme Pearson: We are only weeks into this new arrangement—there will be a deal of confusion about what is happening immediately and it will be very difficult out there in the sticks to get the information that we need now. It is more important to find out what the current arrangements are on scrutiny and accountability and how they are structuring things, because it is accepted that the service will continue as it was in March in its current set-up in April. It is the plans that people are putting together just now that will affect the service later on.

You are quite right, Kevin, but we need to understand what the “high heid yins,” as you describe them, have in mind for their vision first. We can see what is happening out there in reality thereafter but, in the first few meetings, it is important to understand what is happening with Police Scotland now and what they plan to do.

The Convener: Right.

Margaret Mitchell: We could marry the two things—we could combine looking at the SPA rationale on independent complaints handling and custody visiting—

The Convener: That is one of the recommendations in the note by the clerk.

Margaret Mitchell: We could combine looking at that rationale with that visit because, as Kevin Stewart said, it is vital that we get out there and talk to people.

Can I put in a bid to look at information technology? I see in the note by the clerk that the SPA can provide an initial update on IT provision, so I was surprised that Police Scotland was very reluctant to give us any kind of feedback on where it was with that now, as I see that as very important.

Also—maybe after we have been to Gartcosh crime campus—we can assess whether we can

visit the forensic facility at Dundee. I would love to see it at some point.

14:15

The Convener: I am looking at the note by the clerk, which states on IT provision:

“The SPA could provide an initial update at this stage”

but the

“PSoS suggested that the Sub-Committee allows ‘a period of operational delivery’ before considering this matter further.”

We are off to Gartcosh next week, so do you want to have the SPA representatives here on 2 May—I think I am all right now and am not getting muddled again—to talk about two issues in particular: IT and also what the SPA has recommended that we look at, complaints and independent custody visiting?

Members indicated agreement.

The Convener: So at least we have something pinned down for 2 May. [*Interruption.*] I think that we want to do that, I do not care what the SPA has said. The committee has said what it wants to do. The SPA may be saying otherwise, but we are not here to take—how can I put this delicately—

John Finnie: That is what we want to do.

The Convener: Yes. Sometimes when people tell you that it is not a good idea to do something, it is a very good idea to do it. I am not suggesting for one minute that the SPA is being—

Margaret Mitchell: There were a few things that were just operational and I do not think that we are inclined to do that, necessarily.

Graeme Pearson: The other thing—I do not want to delay you—

The Convener: It is all right, we have four minutes.

Graeme Pearson: The other thing is about the “scheme of arrangements”, as it is described in the letter from the SPA. It is about the arrangement of delegation of powers and so forth. It would appear that the SPA agreed a scheme of arrangements at the end of March. It would be interesting, given the controversy, to understand what that means.

The Convener: I have no doubt that the SPA is listening attentively to what we are saying, so that is three topics at least—you are not confined to them—that we will raise with the SPA. Have we got the transport arrangements for Gartcosh? [*Interruption.*] I am trying to get transport arranged for us so that we are not all going separately to Gartcosh. Did you all get asked your shoe size, by the way, not just me?

Graeme Pearson: We did.

The Convener: Excellent. I was beginning to feel a bit strange.

Meeting closed at 14:17.

That ends this meeting. Thank you.

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