



The Scottish Parliament  
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

## Official Report

# JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

Thursday 31 October 2013



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**JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING**  
**12<sup>th</sup> 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:**

George Graham QPM (Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland)

Chief Constable Sir Stephen House (Police Scotland)

Superintendent Craig Naylor (Police Scotland)

**CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE**

Joanne Clinton

**LOCATION**

Committee Room 6



## Scottish Parliament

### Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

*Thursday 31 October 2013*

[The Convener opened the meeting at 13:15]

### Decision on Taking Business in Private

**The Convener (Christine Grahame):** I welcome everyone to the 12th meeting of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing and—I am going to say it—the third meeting this week for some members of the Justice Committee, for which we are going to get medals even if I cast them myself.

I ask everyone to switch off completely mobile phones and other electronic devices as they interfere with the broadcasting system even when switched to silent. Apologies have been received from Alison McInnes.

Agenda item 1 is a decision on whether to take in private item 3, on our work programme. Does the committee agree to take item 3 in private?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Local Policing

13:15

**The Convener:** Item 2 is local policing. I ask the committee to try to conclude this item by 2.10 at the latest so that we have time to consider our work programme. We will try to keep an eye on the clock.

This is our second evidence session on local policing. Members will remember that the first session was back in April. It is fresh in their memories—of course it is. Today, we will focus on how local policing is working under the new arrangements. We will cover recent developments that could have an impact on local policing, such as the reviews of public counters and control rooms. Members who are on the Justice Committee will know that we touched on those issues this week in our budget discussions.

I welcome to the meeting from Police Scotland Chief Constable Sir Stephen House and Superintendent Craig Naylor. I also welcome George Graham QPM, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary for Scotland. Thank you all for coming to the meeting. We go straight to questions from members.

**John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind):** Good afternoon, panel.

One of the main policy objectives behind police reform was

“to strengthen the connection between services and communities”—

that is what our briefing paper states. I am a strong supporter of the single service because I think that there are tremendous benefits to be had from it. I also hold the view that police counters might play a part in the delivery of a police service but that they are not everything—likewise with police buildings. In the part of the world that I represent, the vast majority of police stations or police offices are where officers go for a comfort break and a cup of coffee.

That said, do you think that the criticism of the counter closures is justified? I certainly established that the background in my area is that there was no contact with local communities via the policing plan. I am a great supporter of the policing plan and have said that there is a very direct link between policing and the ward. However, the police counter closures will not directly affect most wards, because they will not have a counter to be closed.

**Chief Constable Sir Stephen House (Police Scotland):** I agree with virtually everything in the question. There is no doubt that the presence of a police station or police office and a front counter is

part of an engagement policy and contact with the local community. There is no doubt about that at all.

However, I will just set our proposals in context. The consultation period ends today, but even if we were we to implement everything that we have suggested, 70 per cent of our current public counters would remain open to the public. It is important that I say that. We have 214 public counters throughout the country and we have identified 65 for which our proposal is—I stress that it is a proposal—that there would be no service. There would be reduced opening hours at a further 75 public counters; at 53, the opening hours would be unchanged; and at 21, the opening hours would be increased. I know that members know this, but I want to get it on the record because it has not been covered particularly clearly in the media: this is not about closing stations but about public contact at the police station.

We think that public counters are an integral part of our engagement with the public, but we also believe that we need to ensure that we keep up with society. There is absolutely no doubt that we have seen significant changes and drop-offs in the number of people visiting front counters. I will try to illustrate that. I am happy to let members have copies of a completely unsolicited email that was sent to one of my chief inspectors by a member of staff who has taken voluntary redundancy from a public counter post. I will not name where it is, because I do not want to identify the individual.

In the email, the member of staff says that she is going because of the workload and that she has received a good offer. She says:

"I did not take this course of action lightly but having experienced a vast reduction in workload over the years, it seemed to me only a matter of time before this happened. We have also been constantly warned for the past three years that this may happen ... The workload has been affected for a variety of reasons, the first being the advent of the Force Contact Centre taking away a huge percentage of phone calls to the front office".

That is specific to where she works, but it has happened in many parts of the country.

The vast bulk of the public who contact the police do so via the telephone. If, as part of a telephone conversation, they say that they would like the police to come round to their home address, officers will arrange that and will do it.

**John Finnie:** If consultation had taken place at ward level, what you say would have been borne out, because people's experience is that they generally use the telephone or, increasingly, social media to get in touch. That is why I feel that an opportunity has been lost. When you reflect on the

consultation, do you think that it could have been handled better?

**Chief Constable House:** When we look back on things, we can always say that maybe we could have done them a little better, but I must defend my organisation and the staff who undertook the exercise. We have had allegations from a number of sources—people have made them to my face—including from front-counter staff that the first time that front-counter staff found out about what was happening was from a TV or radio report or when someone stopped them in the street. That is not credible.

**The Convener:** I accept what you say about staff, but I think that the question was about the public at large—am I correct?

**John Finnie:** Yes—the question was also about the opportunity for engagement that could have arisen.

**Chief Constable House:** I apologise.

**John Finnie:** Apart from hearing that a big bad boy in Glasgow is closing everything, I am being sold the idea that—ironically—this is a good-news story, because across the former Northern Constabulary area hours are being extended. If something can be presented as a gain rather than elements that are lost, perhaps there will be a greater concentration on local communities. I am talking about the relationship with on-going work and the promotion—which I constantly do—of local policing plans, community councils' connection with the bigger organisation and community beat officers' involvement. I was talking more about that level than about staff.

**Chief Constable House:** I am happy to take responsibility for the fact that we might have gone on too negative an attack. I say that because we realised that people would be concerned; that was why we did a consultation. We could have said to every divisional commander in Scotland, without making a fuss, that they should change their local opening hours to what they thought seemed fit. Instead, we consulted the public.

The focus has been on the reductions and the changes. Have we been proactive enough? We are being proactive now; we are pumping out stories to say, "Hang on a minute—you might have got the wrong end of the stick," but we are probably behind the curve a little, which is my responsibility.

**John Finnie:** Has that approach reinforced the idea that the decision is one that is made by someone in Glasgow rather than a decision that is made in a local community's interests?

**Chief Constable House:** I guess that it has. I do not want to get too philosophical too early, but this is also about leadership. The development is

important and, taken in the round, it is positive and goes in the right direction for Police Scotland, by ensuring that we offer a modern service. We wanted to present it as such and I wanted people to realise the direction that the organisation is going in. I accept what you say—that approach has possibly made people say, “It’s just this guy in Glasgow,” although I work not from Glasgow but from Stirling, as you well know.

**John Finnie:** I understand that.

The situation makes it awkward for proponents to say, “Look—there will be this local consultation.” The national consultation has not removed that—it will not be an anonymous thing. What are the implications that follow on from the proposals for local policing plans?

**Superintendent Craig Naylor (Police Scotland):** The local policing plans are very much about the divisional commander engaging with local communities, community safety partnerships, community planning partnerships and so on to work out how the service will look for communities. The proposed plans were not developed in isolation by me and my team; they were produced in consultation with local command teams on the basis of existing interim plans and how we build towards the future.

The key bit for me is how we start to develop alternatives such as surgeries, work in communities, and community officers working with partners to deliver the service more effectively. That work is already in train.

**Chief Constable House:** I stress that this is a consultation process. In effect, it ends today, and we will reflect on the responses that we have received. I think that we have had about 17 internal proposals and, as you will know, we are required by legislation to look at alternative proposals from our staff. In the main, staff have responded in relation to their own individual situations. We will look at those responses and at the public responses that we have received—including letters from members and your MSP colleagues—and we will then reflect on what we are going to do.

I stress that the general direction of travel is to respond to a much reduced footfall at front counters. We will ensure that our response is appropriate. Where counters remain busy, they will remain open, but where they are much quieter, we will look at reducing the hours because that is important in terms of not only finance but efficiency. We will probably lose 175 support staff from front counters—that is the figure that we have today—who want to take voluntary redundancy or early retirement, and I do not want to backfill those posts with police officers.

**John Finnie:** Finally, on the proposal that there be a window, for argument’s sake, you said that closures are proposed for areas where the station would be retained. The downside of having a facility for the occasional caller—

**Chief Constable House:** Sorry, are you saying that we will keep a place open where it is very quiet?

**John Finnie:** It has been suggested to me that if a station remains, surely someone could just chap at the window and whoever is through the back would answer them.

**Chief Constable House:** Yes. I understand that. Again, policing is about dealing with society and humanity. If the locals know well enough that the cop is in there because they can see the car and they knock on the window, I imagine that the cop’s reaction will be to stick their head out the window and ask, “What do you want? What can we do for you?”

However, if we make it official and say that we will keep the station open from 9 to 5, that cop will not be going anywhere because they will end up being at the police station. If members of support staff want to go, we will be into the situation where police officers are at the police station when the public want them out on patrol. When members of the public phone 999, they want the officers to be out and about.

**The Convener:** Margaret Mitchell and Graeme Pearson both want to come in on the issue of police front counters, so we will exhaust that area first.

**Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con):** Good afternoon, gentlemen. Can I press you a little bit on the consultation itself and on exactly how extensive it was and what methods were used to engage the public?

**Chief Constable House:** We did not engage external consultants to carry out a big, fancy process. We looked at the consultations, work and analysis that had already been done in a number of the eight legacy forces. Where such work had not been done—in four forces, I think—

**Superintendent Naylor:** Yes, in four forces.

**Chief Constable House:** In the four legacy forces where that had not been done, we commissioned some up-to-date work. However, I do not want people to get carried away about the work that we did. In the main, the work involved the front-counter staff making a note of how many people came in. We took that approach rather than entertain the notion of paying for somebody from outside to come in and do that work. We wanted the staff to do the work, so the figures are what they have generated—

**Margaret Mitchell:** I will just stop you there, chief constable. I think that you are talking about the review; I am asking about how widespread the public consultation was.

As I understand it, the consultation was launched on 27 June. First staff and then, a couple of days later, I think, the public were invited to contribute. How did Police Scotland engage with the public in the consultation?

**Chief Constable House:** Again, we are still in that consultation process because it has not—

**Margaret Mitchell:** It closes today.

**Chief Constable House:** Yes, it closes today.

**Margaret Mitchell:** So how has Police Scotland engaged with the public in the consultation?

**Chief Constable House:** As you suggested, we got a certain amount of newspaper and media coverage. I have done a large number of media interviews about the consultation, and we have covered most of the national newspapers. People have a website and an address that they can send emails to. You will be aware that at least one regional newspaper has run a campaign—quite a few emails came in as a result of that. We have also received letters from people.

We have not yet started to review everything that has come in because the consultation has not quite finished yet—it finishes today. However, I think that it has been quite substantial. I do not think that anyone in Scotland would fail to realise that a consultation is going on, that people can express their views and that it is a real consultation process.

13:30

**Margaret Mitchell:** The police service is a public service that is undertaking a very important consultation. If the Parliament has a consultation, we ensure that it is as wide ranging and inclusive as possible. Was an equality impact assessment done of the consultation?

**Superintendent Naylor:** Yes, there certainly was.

**Margaret Mitchell:** How was that done?

**Superintendent Naylor:** Could I also explain what we have done?

**Margaret Mitchell:** Yes, certainly.

**Superintendent Naylor:** On 27 June, we wrote to every elected member in Scotland and every community council in Scotland, as well as a number of stakeholder groups, including minority groups. When we launched the formal consultation on 1 October, we repeated that exercise. Every divisional commander wrote to every stakeholder

in their division—the people they know and work with regularly. They looked at who represents the communities that they serve. We wrote to them on 1 October, inviting comment, sending them a pack, which dictates what we are proposing, and directing them to the website that the chief constable mentioned. The website gives full details of the proposals across Scotland. In the 300 or so wards across Scotland, every elected member, every community council and everyone who is a representative of the communities that we serve has been sent a personalised email or letter.

**Margaret Mitchell:** There seems to have been a big concentration on electronic communication, which many elderly people do not have access to. Where is the communication with deaf people, blind people and people from different backgrounds who speak different languages? My understanding of a proper equality impact assessment and a very thorough consultation is that it is ensured that everyone's views are taken into account.

**Chief Constable House:** I accept some of that, but I do not think that anyone who reads newspapers, listens to the radio or listens to or watches television could have missed the fact that the consultation is on-going, and that the consultation process is available. We have had letters from people, so we have not just received email responses. I have had letters from MSPs who have been contacted by a number of their constituents and who have wanted to express their views. My view is that it has been a fairly widespread consultation, and we have certainly had responses from the public on it.

**The Convener:** How many have you had to date?

**Superintendent Naylor:** I do not have exact figures, and the number changes daily—

**The Convener:** Obviously, but I wondered whether you had a fairly up-to-date—

**Chief Constable House:** I am looking at the numbers of responses, and we have had 51 from elected members, two from local authorities, four from community councils, and 69 from members of the public.

**Superintendent Naylor:** That was as at Friday last week.

**Margaret Mitchell:** I would not say that 69 is a resounding figure, but I do not think that that is because the public do not care. I again ask Police Scotland to look at the consultation.

**The Convener:** With respect, I do not think that anybody can impute anything. You can impute that the measures were not properly consulted on, but I do not think that you can impute why people have not responded, which is a matter for



conjecture. It is fair to go along the line of saying that the consultation was not wide enough, but I do not think that it would be quite fair to say—

**Margaret Mitchell:** I think that it would be worth casting another eye over it.

Chief constable, you have said continually that demand has fallen and that, if the demand is not there, counters will close. You have seemed very opposed to doing this when I have broached the matter before, but have you considered taking a more proactive approach to the use of counters, encouraging the public to use them more to express their concerns and making it clear that the service is one that you want the public to use, rather than choosing the negative, nuclear option? It seems to me that one of the major policy objectives of local policing was not to cut front-line services. You will not get much more front line than the police counter service, which is the established interaction.

**Chief Constable House:** I am afraid that we just do not see eye to eye on this subject. Where a counter is busy and used a lot, it stays open—that is the whole thrust behind maintaining front-line services. Indeed, where a counter is very busy, we will extend the opening hours. By front-line services, we also mean police officers being available to the public in uniform, on patrol and able to respond to their issues—to go round to people's houses when they call 101 and say, "I want to see a cop"; when that happens, we send police officers round to see them.

When it comes to proactivity, we are working with councils and are looking to use their contact points, as they are often better located than police stations. They get more footfall, and when members of the public come in to discuss housing issues, for instance, they will see a police officer or a member of police staff, and they might decide to talk to them about something, too. We are also looking to work with supermarkets, because of the footfall there.

An example that I think that I have used previously is that of Glasgow airport, where people would be hard put to find the public counter. Instead, we hope to put a seat and a member of staff into the contact point, which is in the main part of the airport. Thousands of people a day will see that.

I do not accept that we are not being proactive. We are trying to provide the right service for Scotland today as opposed to using building stock that is not appropriate any more, given the footfall.

**Margaret Mitchell:** I will make a final point. Although I welcome all those things and I agree that you are being proactive, there is an opportunity to do that with police counters. As you well know, when people call 101 and ask for a

police officer to be sent, whether that happens depends very much on other policing pressures at the time, whereas a person can go within dedicated times to the police counter and they will know that they can see someone face to face. They are then in control. That control is being taken away, despite all the welcome and proactive things that you are suggesting. I only ask you to reflect on that.

**The Convener:** To be frank, I have had not one email about the closure of counters, despite the fact that I convene this committee and have put out press on the issue and asked people to get in touch with me. If you have received something directly from my constituents, I would be pleased to know about that, because nobody came to me.

I found out one thing about contact that I would like to pursue with you. My colleague Margaret Mitchell has made important points about people feeling that they can contact the police and the police will turn up. I have spoken to the divisional commander in my area, who told me that the police use what she calls a diary car. Will you perhaps develop that for me? I do not think that it happens in every division—maybe it does—but that seems to me to be a way of dealing with the issue. I am not trying to assist you in any way, but I did not know about that. Will you explain to the committee exactly what it is?

**Chief Constable House:** That is not uncommon and it is not a particularly new initiative—it has lasted for a number of years because it works. If somebody contacts the police—increasingly, that happens through the 101 line, with 55 per cent of our non-emergency calls now coming in that way—and says that they would like to see a police officer, the person on the other end will establish whether the call is urgent and, if the answer is no, rather than say that a police officer will come to see them whenever possible, take a rather more intelligent and citizen-focused approach and ask, "When would suit you?" Often, the person will say that they are at work or have to pick up people from school, so it would be better if it was after 6 o'clock at night, and we then tabulate that. A car is set aside with one or possibly two people in it—often, we just use one person because the issues are non-contentious and non-evidential—and they will create a diary of appointments for the day and go and see the members of the public. Because the issues are not urgent, we can do that at a time that suits the people and, more often than not, a time that suits us, too, if it is not a peak period. We will often use officers who know the area particularly well and can therefore provide a particularly bespoke service.

Spurred by your mentioning the issue, convener, I will go away and review the issue and see just how widespread the use of that is, but it is

relatively common. Certainly, I know that it is done in Glasgow to a large extent and in a number of other areas.

**The Convener:** One reason why people go to police stations is lost property. If someone has lost their dog, handbag or wallet, they are liable to phone or go to the police station to ask if anybody has handed it in. What will happen to that service? That is perhaps one reason why we need our police counters.

**Chief Constable House:** It can be a reason, but there is no reason why people cannot report lost property over the phone. People do not have to go into the station, although if they know the opening hours of the local—

**The Convener:** No, but where do people hand in lost property? They would usually hand it in to the police counter.

**Chief Constable House:** Yes, they would.

**The Convener:** That is what they would think of doing. Maybe if they found something in a supermarket, they would hand it in there, but if it is on the street or whatever, they would hand it in to the police station. What will happen with that?

**Chief Constable House:** That is true and that is one of the issues that will be reflected in the footfall. If that happens a lot at a police station, the footfall will be relatively high and therefore I would expect that the place would not be closed down and might even have its opening hours extended. It goes back to the volume of people. For a small station in a place with relatively low footfall, lost property being handed in will be a very rare event.

**The Convener:** I am not suggesting that a counter should be kept open just for that, but what will happen? Where will people hand in lost property?

**Chief Constable House:** If property is found and someone has taken it home, which is often the case, there is no reason why they cannot phone 101 and, at some point, the diary car will come and pick it up.

**The Convener:** I just thought that I would mention it because the issue had been raised with me in a surgery.

**Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab):** At the outset, when I was conversing with Mr Naylor, I indicated that the business case might well justify some offices closing or amending their hours. My position is not that there should be no closures, but that we will be led by public opinion and an assessment of the case that is put forward.

My first question goes back to the public consultation process. There is no doubt that in the launch at the beginning of October a great deal of work was done on speaking to internal partners,

public authorities and so forth. However, there does not seem to be a structured means by which the public can click into the process and make their opinions known.

Round the table, we all know that it takes a while for people to realise that changes are being offered and then to respond to those changes. I have just come from Portobello, where people have got on their feet fairly quickly. A very brief process is being conducted, which is on-going, and 95 per cent of nearly 200 public returns indicate that people are against closure.

Why was more time not taken to consider how the public would make their opinions known? There has been what seems to me a hasty consultation process—30 days is not a lot.

**Chief Constable House:** Let me respond to the numbers that you are talking about. I am not terribly surprised that on the issue of whether the public want to keep front counters open, 95 per cent of respondents are saying, “I want more and I oppose cuts.” It is human nature and it is completely understandable: if people are asked whether they want more or less of something, they will say that they want more of it.

**Graeme Pearson:** I did not pose the question, but I think that it was, “Do you agree with the closure of your local police office?”, not, “Do you want more or less?”

**Chief Constable House:** I am surprised that it was not 100 per cent then.

**Graeme Pearson:** I presume that some members of the public have not had quite the same engagement with the police as others and would be keen to see the office close—[*Laughter*].

**Chief Constable House:** I could not possibly comment on that. I cannot believe that to be the case, but your question deserves a serious answer. I will turn to Craig Naylor, who has been far more involved, as you know, because you have spoken with him.

**Superintendent Naylor:** It is a really interesting piece of work, which I saw briefly before I came here. I understand that the question was, “Would you like the police station to remain open or not?” The police station is remaining open, and is remaining open seven days a week, so the question is not quite accurate with regard to our proposals. To be honest, also the people of Portobello are getting to keep the police station open. It will be open for shortened hours, but it is staying open. We are meeting the demands that have been made of us in that regard.

**Graeme Pearson:** The more pressing question is about the means of obtaining public opinion, given the fairly substantial changes that you have proposed. There is no structured means by which

a member of the public can come back to you. They might be able to guess their way through, but there is nothing that gives them an address to post a response to, for example.

**Superintendent Naylor:** I disagree with your point, Mr Pearson. We have been very vocal in the press. Chief Constable House, Assistant Chief Constable Mawson, who has been leading the project, and I have been in the press considerably over the past month. We also have a dedicated website with a very clear and transparent set of proposals for each territorial division and letters have come in to each divisional command team, so people are making their preferences known to us through traditional and more modern methods. The idea that there is no formal or structured method is not quite accurate.

**Graeme Pearson:** There is no formal or structured means of doing it, but there are other avenues through which to make your opinion known, if you know how the system works. However, there is not a chapter in the process that is for the public. You have spoken to elected members and other partner agencies, but there is no direct approach to the public, telling them about how individual citizens can make their opinions known.

I was not part of the process in Portobello, but I know that there was a very substantial response from members of the public in Lanarkshire. There was a lack of understanding in the responses of why some offices will remain untouched but others will have a reduced service or will close. The chief constable mentioned many of the proactive options that could be available. Was it not thought that within the project each of the affected areas could be told what options are available to them in the event of closure?

13:45

**Chief Constable House:** That sounds a very sensible proposal, but I must stress again that we are in a period of consultation. I accept that some members feel that the consultation was not as widespread for the public as it could have been, but that is not how it feels to me. We cannot open a newspaper or listen to a news item without seeing or hearing something about it. There are vox pops coming out of our ears in relation to the issue.

**The Convener:** Is that not more of a response to the fact that there was a bit of a blundered announcement of the consultation that meant that the press put its foot on the accelerator and presented it as police stations closing? I think that what the committee is getting at is that you should have been in control of it and done it in a more measured fashion over a longer period—that is the

thrust from members—rather than people finding out about the proposals in the paper or on the radio. That happened because the consultation had not been started properly, which is the committee's position.

**Chief Constable House:** I am sorry, but I do not really accept that. We have talked to the media about it and have tried to expand the coverage ourselves. I do not think that we are trying to play catch-up from that point of view. We are very happy to talk about it and we keep stressing that it is a consultation phase.

**Graeme Pearson:** I have one more point.

**The Convener:** We will move on to another topic after this.

**Graeme Pearson:** I do not seek to labour the point, but will the chief constable consider allowing members of the public to make their opinions known after 1 November so that they can be taken into account?

**Chief Constable House:** Of course. I am happy to say that because we are not pressing the button on some decision tomorrow; we will be looking at the matter over the next four to six weeks and will go back and discuss it with stakeholders. It is difficult to say, "Here are the alternatives," when we are also in consultation with partners to establish what the alternatives are. We could not always put that out to people, but most of the media articles that we have covered have said, "We're looking at alternatives such as—". I know that I have covered that every time that I have spoken to people about the matter. So, we will be open to it if people want to respond.

**Graeme Pearson:** In the public consciousness, the consultation finishes today, but you will accept comments over the next month.

**Chief Constable House:** Yes, we will accept late entries.

**Graeme Pearson:** Thanks for that.

**Chief Constable House:** I am sure that this event itself will spur more people to respond, which will be great.

**Graeme Pearson:** I think that it might.

**The Convener:** I do not know how much the public tune into meetings of the sub-committee.

**Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP):** Thank you, convener. Like you, I have not had one complaint about police counters. However, we have heard from colleagues today quite a lot about communication. Colleagues around the table obviously think that there has been a failure in that regard, but I want to stress some of the positive aspects of communication that some of us were a

bit worried about when we moved to having the single force.

Our local newspapers in Aberdeen—the *Evening Express* and *The Press and Journal*—and the other media outlets might be good in this regard too, but the level of communication that is coming from the media office in Aberdeen must be commended. Everything that I have seen in that respect has been extremely worthwhile. I am sure that members of the public respond to the requests because they are so well done.

I have been looking at some of the stuff that I got yesterday and today. Obviously, there has been some good news on statistics, because violent crime in Aberdeen city has fallen by 13 per cent in the first six months of the year; and operation maple, which is on-going, has seen a number of arrests for drug possession over the past couple of days.

I think that the public need to know about these things, but that must be handled properly. Given the experience and knowledge of your communications department, particularly in Aberdeen, would it not be wise to make best use of it for consultations in future?

**Chief Constable House:** I whole-heartedly agree. That is why, at a recent meeting of the 14 divisional commanders, I highlighted the coverage that the Aberdeen city division gets in its newspapers. They do something called “On the beat”, which involves a local inspector or chief inspector going into the local newspaper to provide half a page, not on earth-shattering, high-level crime issues but on the stuff that people are concerned about. It is highly effective, so I asked the other divisional commanders if I could see their media plans mirroring what is going on in Aberdeen city, which has a particularly effective impact. I get cuttings from most of the regional newspapers on a daily basis, and that example stands out.

Of course, success breeds success. I have done one interview with *The Press and Journal* and two with the evening newspaper in Aberdeen, simply because they are proactive, they are getting information from us and it becomes a really useful two-way process. You are effectively identifying that as good practice. I agree with that and we have asked other divisions to replicate it. I understand that it would be a very good conduit for such developments in future.

**Kevin Stewart:** I am sure that it is quite useful for the frontline bobbies who are trying to resolve issues in the communities that they are patrolling.

**Chief Constable House:** Yes.

**Kevin Stewart:** I turn to the perceived standardisation of certain things about which

concern has been expressed in my patch, particularly in relation to stop and search. In my 14 years as an elected politician, I never had any complaints about stop and search, and I should say that for 13 of those years I was also on a police board. Now, however, I am beginning to get complaints about stop and search from members of the public who think that what is being done is unreasonable. Could I have an assurance that there is no standardisation, with the procedure from elsewhere in the country being exported to other parts where it has not been the norm in the past?

**Chief Constable House:** I understand your point about standardisation, but just 30 seconds ago I finished making my point about wanting to standardise the way in which we deal with the media based on the Aberdeen example. There is sometimes a thin line between standardisation and best practice. That is my first point.

**Kevin Stewart:** Indeed.

**Chief Constable House:** Secondly, you have already identified the fact that violent crime in Aberdeen is down 13 per cent. In fact, violent crime across the country is down 13 per cent. There has been an increase in stop and search usage across the country. In some places, it has been a marked increase and in others it has been a relatively modest increase.

To put things into perspective, if you take the number of stop and searches that we have done so far this financial year and divide it not by 17,234, which is the total number of police officers, but by the number of officers who have actually carried out stop and search, which is 12,089, the figure that you come up with shows that an officer is doing a stop and search just over once a week, or just over five times a month.

Let me make it clear that that is a national average and that we do not standardise, so there are some areas where far more stop and searches are done and some areas where there are far fewer. You will find that there are far more stop and searches in the city centre in Aberdeen, particularly in the evening hours, than you would ever find happening out in Inverurie or somewhere like that, because of the nature of policing and of the crime situation. Aberdeen has a problem with violent crime at night in the city centre, and that needs to be dealt with. Stop and search is one tactic for dealing with that, so there has been an increase in stop and searches, as there has been across the country.

To give a specific figure for the Aberdeen division, an average officer will carry out a stop and search 0.4 times a week, so effectively he or she will do one a fortnight.

Obviously, there are a number of officers, so a few stop and searches are being done, but I do not see it as an avalanche. Officers carry out stop and search within a legal framework that is clear to them—they understand the law. They also do consensual searches, which is when officers ask to do a search.

Across Scotland, we are seeing a significant increase in group 5 crimes, which, typically, are driven by police action. Often, that is stop and search, when weaponry or drugs for personal use are recovered. My view is that there is a linkage: violent crime is coming down partly because we are confronting violence on the street, and part of that is done through stop and search.

If you wish to pass on to me complaints about stop and search, I would be interested to receive them, because we want to look at that and to understand the nature of the complaints. We stress to our officers that, first, they must do stop and search with integrity, fairness and respect. They have to have a reason for doing it, and they have to treat people fairly while they do it. There are no targets on stop and search, except one: we are trying to achieve at least 15 per cent positive stop and searches. We are not insisting that people carry out a particular number of stop and searches, but if an officer were to carry out 100 stop and searches—no officer will—we would expect at least 15 of those to find something. The reason to push at that is that it is just above what the national level has been for a few years, and we want to encourage officers to stop and search the right people, rather than do it at random.

**Kevin Stewart:** We are pushed for time, but I am glad to hear you say that there are no targets. What would you do—this is only semi-hypothetical—

**The Convener:** My goodness. We will tell you if that is true.

**Kevin Stewart:** It is partly based in fact. What would you do if someone who had no criminal record was searched four times in a very short period of time, and not always in the city centre? What would you do then?

**Chief Constable House:** I would expect that, locally, management would be keeping an eye on the number of people who were being stopped and searched, but the fact that someone does not have a criminal record does not mean that they do not have an intelligence record.

**Kevin Stewart:** I understand that.

**Chief Constable House:** For me, the trigger would be the other way round. The analysis would have to show not that the individual had been stopped four times, but that they had been stopped by the same officer. If the same officer

had stopped them four times, that would beg an explanation. If the individual had been stopped by four different officers, I would want to understand why that was. If you would like to let us have the details of the cases in question, we could have a look at them.

We map where our stop and searches take place. I have some examples with me, which I can let the committee have a look at, although I do not have one with me for Aberdeen. We are looking to see on a map where the violence is taking place and where the stop and searches are taking place. In effect, we insist that they happen in the same place and at the same time. Where there are differences, we challenge those. I am pleased to say that, in most areas, they are pretty much smack on top of each other. I have an example from Edinburgh, which shows that the two outlines are pretty much identical. We insist on that, because we are here to keep people safe—the purpose of stop and search is to reduce violence. We have a number of triggers that would warn us if there was something wrong.

**Kevin Stewart:** Thank you.

**The Convener:** This is not pejorative—you will have heard it before—but I would like to ask you about the concerns that were expressed when you took over as chief constable that we would have Strathclyde policing writ large. There was perhaps no bigger example of that perceived fear than the sauna saga in Edinburgh. It appears that, over the years, Lothian and Borders Police had a different culture and attitude to containing, controlling and managing the sex trade in Edinburgh from that which was adopted in the west of Scotland. It seems to me and to others that the recent decisions by the City of Edinburgh Council's licensing committee were an example of a whole culture change that came out of the blue, which seemed to be the result of a west of Scotland approach coming to Edinburgh, trampling on the management of the issue and not succeeding against the council.

That is quite a dramatic example of the fears that local policing—which seemed to be succeeding in a different way in a different place—was being overridden by a national attitude that came from the top. Would you care to comment on that?

14:00

**Chief Constable House:** I would, and I thank the convener for asking the question because I want to take on that issue.

First, it is not the role of Police Scotland and even less so the role of a chief constable to decide for councils what their policy is on the sex trade. I have been vocal in saying that on virtually every

occasion on which I have given an interview on the topic. I have no issues with the City of Edinburgh Council's approach to saunas—none at all. I did not come into office with a view to sorting out the matter and making everywhere like Glasgow—far from it. If councils want to operate a different system, they can.

I take issue with a lot of what you said. For example, between April 2011 and April 2013, Lothian and Borders Police conducted 62 inspection visits and reported licensing contraventions in saunas in Edinburgh to the licensing committee. The myth—there is a myth, although I am not suggesting that you were suggesting—

**The Convener:** No. I put the issue to you as a challenge that is out there and which the public would want me to ask you about.

**Chief Constable House:** Exactly. There is a myth that Lothian and Borders Police, in somehow colluding with the council's sauna policy, did not bother carrying out licensing inspections. That is clearly untrue.

**The Convener:** The issue was not that the police did not carry out licensing inspections; rather, it was that what the police consider inappropriate in those premises has changed.

**Chief Constable House:** I do not agree. I have the dates of every inspection that was carried out. On 28 and 29 October 2009, 56 female workers were interviewed and one male, whom I will not name, was reported to the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service for brothel-keeping charges. That was in 2009, not 2013. In January 2010, 45 women were interviewed, and 53 further women were interviewed later on. A female was charged with possession of extreme pornography and a successful application was made for the suspension of that sauna's licence, which happened in 2011. Lothian and Borders Police therefore had a history of interventions and reporting to the licensing committee.

I want to be very clear about the recent decisions by Edinburgh's licensing committee. It decided to continue seven licences and revoke six and, because the licensees all appealed, those saunas are still open. I think that *The Scotsman* described that as "a bloody nose" for Police Scotland. I have no personal view on that whatsoever. It is entirely for the licensing committee to do what it wants to with regard to how saunas are run. If there is a licensing regime, and we have a role in keeping people safe, we must do licensing visits.

**The Convener:** I hear what you are saying about keeping people safe, but some people might argue that, in endeavouring to remove contraceptives from saunas and to close down the

saunas, the police are making certain people in Edinburgh more unsafe. I cannot recall in my time the police objecting, on the lines that they have objected recently, to the well-known operations of saunas in Edinburgh. There is not just a perception that things have changed: the objections have changed.

**Chief Constable House:** I challenge the convener on her use of the word "objected". We do not object to the saunas. We carry out—

**The Convener:** No.

**Chief Constable House:** I am sorry, but you used the word.

**The Convener:** You object to what saunas are actually doing; "saunas" is a euphemism for "brothels" in some respects.

**Chief Constable House:** I do not object to it at all; neither does Police Scotland. We carry out licensing visits and we report what we find. In the case that we are talking about, we reported what we found to the Crown Office because the 18 warrants that we executed in that operation were issued by the Crown Office. Those warrants were obtained by the Crown Office—not by us—to examine and investigate criminal behaviour. Let me again stress that the operation was conceived of and run by the division in Edinburgh.

**The Convener:** Yes.

**Chief Constable House:** The Edinburgh divisional commander has worked all his service as a Lothian and Borders officer, as have the majority of his command team. The reality is that a preponderance of my command team at chief officer level is the legacy of the Lothian and Borders Police, so I do not think that the characterisation of the police force—it is not yours alone—is entirely fair. Strathclyde Police did some things particularly well that we are exporting to the rest of Scotland; there are also things that Grampian Police and Lothian and Borders Police did well—the same applies all across the country.

We do not have a downer on how the City of Edinburgh Council goes about its sauna policy. That does not cause me a problem at all. However, while a licensing regime is in place, we will carry out multi-agency licensing visits.

To scotch any more rumours about the City of Edinburgh Council being taken by surprise, I can say that there were about three or four planning meetings before the licensing visits, and the City of Edinburgh Council was represented at every one of them. It was therefore not a surprise to the council—indeed, far from it—that those licensing visits took place.

**The Convener:** I am not necessarily giving my personal views; rather, I am putting views that the

public would expect the committee to put to you and challenge you on. I take it from what you have said that there has been no change in the cultural attitude of local policing in Edinburgh towards saunas or what are in some respects, but not all, brothels. Is that correct?

**Chief Constable House:** There has been nothing in what I, or Police Scotland, am responsible for. I do not believe that there has been a change in the cultural approach to that.

**The Convener:** Okay. That could not be clearer. That is fine.

Does John Finnie want to come in on local policing?

**John Finnie:** Yes, if I may. My question is for Mr Graham, who has sat patiently throughout the meeting.

Mr Graham, I hope that you are well placed in your role to see the difference between what the legacy forces did in some respects and what the new Police Scotland will do. We were assured throughout the process that best practice would be adopted nationally. When you report, will you comment on past performance in given localities? Let us be blunt. If, with the adoption of a national policy, performance dips in a particular Police Scotland geographic area, will that be reflected in your report?

**George Graham QPM (Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland):** Good afternoon. I have been sitting here patiently, but I know that the chief constable, Sir Stephen House, has an awful lot more interesting things to say than I have.

**The Convener:** Not at all. You must not say that.

**George Graham:** I am quite happy to sit here quietly.

**The Convener:** We Grahames do not say that.

**George Graham:** Thank you, convener. I should always remember that.

I want to say something by way of context about what the inspection regime looks like just now. We have local lead inspectors for the three local—I hesitate to use the word “regional”—policing areas under the command of an ACC, and other lead inspectors have been out and about profile building and understanding the connections to local communities. We have been struck by a lot of the positives that are going on. We have not done any inspection activity in relation to local policing, but we have been struck by some of the positive things that are happening around Police Scotland and the transition to the new service. A lot of that has been to do with how the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 was set up. Local

policing was seen at the heart of it. We have lots of information and intelligence about how Police Scotland is performing locally and taking into account local perspectives and local community needs.

In May this year, we completed a thematic report that reflected on the local approach to scrutiny and engagement. In that report, which I know that members have access to, we had a close look at whether we could follow up some of that. Indeed, in consultation with the Scottish Police Authority, Government colleagues and Police Scotland, we intend to have a much closer look next year at local policing and how it is still being delivered effectively in a national organisation within a national framework, with all the challenges that the current financial situation poses.

To give a direct answer to your question, if we find that good practice is not being shared, we will comment on that. I always like to think that we can go out, inspect and find people who are doing really good things, and we often do. If we find that, we will highlight that. If we find challenges and that the local scrutiny and engagement groups are not working effectively, we will, of course, highlight that as well.

**John Finnie:** Yes. It is in the very nature of a committee such as this one that we dwell on the negatives and not necessarily on the things that are going well. It is important that that is recounted.

I wonder whether you could comment on something that was raised with the chief constable in another meeting. He has been a regular attendee at the Parliament this week.

**Chief Constable House:** Indeed.

**John Finnie:** Will you comment on the system of devolved resource management, which was different in each of the legacy forces, and the extent to which that would reinforce the local element? It is accepted that there is a transitional period, so that cannot happen immediately. Accountability and scrutiny come with resources, of course. Will you pick up on that in your inspections?

**George Graham:** I would be surprised if that were not picked up, although we would be interested in the impact of the national organisation on the delivery of services at the local level.

I know that members are all too familiar with the key elements of reform, one of which was about accessing specialist resources—and, indeed, national capacity—much more effectively. When we do our local policing inspections, we will tease out how that is working, whether it is working well,

and how local police commanders access such services. That is the kind of thing that we can look at. We want to do some fairly wide consultation, which may well include some of you as local MSPs, on where we think that we can add value next year in looking at local policing, as we do not yet have a firm view on that. Obviously, devolved budgets will feature but our main issue will be what the service looks like at the front end to the communities and people who receive it.

**John Finnie:** Finally, will you have a media strategy associated with the inspection regime?

**George Graham:** I would endeavour to do my best with that.

**Graeme Pearson:** Speak to Aberdeen.

**The Convener:** Politicians are always very careful about the media strategy, as we are very careful with the media ourselves.

Graeme Pearson has a question and then I will take Margaret Mitchell. The questions will have to be short—I am sorry about that.

**Graeme Pearson:** Happily my question is along much the same lines as Mr Finnie's. I would like Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary for Scotland not to report to the committee today, but to write to us to give an indication of the kind of inspections that he intends to conduct over the next 12 months and the kind of work that he will engage in. Will he measure, first, how well Police Scotland is protecting and improving local services and, secondly, how it is strengthening the connection between services and communities? Will those two principles become the benchmarks against which he will conduct the inspections?

**The Convener:** Can I ask for that information to be provided in writing to the committee?

**Graeme Pearson:** That is what I said.

**The Convener:** We will write out to Mr Graham, rather than him having to note down the question—it will also be in the *Official Report*.

**Margaret Mitchell:** On Tuesday, chief constable, I asked you the hypothetical question whether, if local authorities were to withdraw their funding for the 320 extra police that they provide in Scotland, you had contingency plans. The question was hypothetical then, but have you reviewed the matter or changed your opinion given the suggestion of the withdrawal of funding by the City of Edinburgh Council? How will that affect the ability to maintain the extra 1,000 police officers to which Police Scotland is committed?

**Chief Constable House:** I know that time is short, but let me understand your question. As far as I am concerned, it is still a hypothetical question—unless you know something that I do not.

**Margaret Mitchell:** I think that the City of Edinburgh Council has suggested that it was going to withdraw some of its funding. Others may follow, because—as I understand it—they may find that the additional funding that they provide is not really giving them the influence that they had hoped for over where the officers are deployed.

**Chief Constable House:** I am sorry, but we knew this when I was at the Justice Committee on Tuesday; I thought that I had gone into the issue then.

It is natural for councils to review their funding every year—they are all under pressure. I met the leader and deputy leader of the City of Edinburgh Council and we discussed the matter quite openly, in a friendly and positive manner. The council is reviewing all sorts of budget lines, including provision of assistance to children and social services, and it is also reviewing the police. Some concerns have been expressed about whether the council has control over the officers in the way that it used to have, because there are rumours that the officers have regularly been deployed outside Edinburgh, but they have not—the officers are still there.

I have explained to the council—my explanation was along the lines of my response to your previous question—that we are reliant on the funding to provide the officers. If there is a partial cut in the funding, we would have to look at the number of officers that that funds and look to reduce the number. At the same meeting with the council—Mark Williams, the divisional commander, was there—its representatives asked whether he could provide the council with a report about what the money is being used for and what use the officers are put to. He has done that and we stand ready to provide any more information to the City of Edinburgh Council to try to reassure it about what it gets for its money.

We have very recently conducted a review of the money provided by the councils and, to date, only one council out of the 32 has withdrawn funding. The funding was for two officers, and the council that withdrew the funding is one with which we have a huge range of partnerships and it simply wants to divert the money elsewhere. Indeed, earlier this week we had a discussion at a public committee of the Scottish Police Authority about joint funding of another scheme with the same council.

**The Convener:** I am sorry, but we must stop there. We can return to the matter and there are obviously many other issues that we have not raised, such as control rooms and traffic wardens—some people think that it is a bad thing that they are going and others think that it is a good thing. We may have to return to lots of other



issues, but we must finish before the Parliament resumes at 2:30.

Thank you very much for your attendance.

14:15

*Meeting continued in private until 14:29.*



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e-format first available  
ISBN 978-1-78351-970-5

Revised e-format available  
ISBN 978-1-78351-988-0