Official Report

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

Thursday 20 February 2014

Session 4

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JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING
2nd Meeting 2014, 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:

Stevie Diamond (Unison Scotland)
Chief Superintendent David O'Connor (Association of Scottish Police Superintendents)
Calum Steele (Scottish Police Federation)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Joanne Clinton

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Thursday 20 February 2014

[The Convener *opened the meeting at 13:03*]

Decision on Taking Business in Private

The Convener (Christine Grahame): I welcome everyone to the second meeting of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing in 2014. I ask everyone to switch off their mobile phones and other electronic devices completely as they interfere with broadcasting even when they are switched to silent. That goes for anyone in the public area as well. No apologies have been received.

While I am talking about the public area, I welcome Mr Derek Penman, who has been in post in Her Majesty's inspectorate of constabulary for Scotland for two weeks. You have now been named and shamed. I do not doubt that we will see you at the Justice Committee at some point in future.

I advise members and witnesses that we need to conclude this meeting at 2 pm today because business in the chamber is starting early and, as you know, under parliamentary rules, we cannot meet when Parliament is in session.

Item 1 is to agree to take item 3, which is consideration of our next steps in relation to local policing, in private. Do members agree?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Information and Communication Technology

13:04

The Convener: Item 2 is an evidence session on information and communication technology provision. Members will note that we have received a response to our request for an update on the i6 programme, the Airwave communications network and hand-held data services from DCC Neil Richardson. The response is included in paper 1 along with DCC Richardson's original response. We are due to hear from him on 6 March.

I am not an expert in this area so others will be asking the questions. In the meantime, I welcome to today's meeting Chief Superintendent David O'Connor, who is President of the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, Calum Steele, who is general secretary of the Scottish Police Federation, and Stevie Diamond, who is the chair of Unison police staff Scotland. Welcome to you all.

I will go straight to questions from members.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): Good afternoon, panel. At our previous meeting, we discussed the i6 project, and I was certainly hoping that DCC Richardson would have been here to guide us through a letter that I found to be very confusing, being a simple lad from the Gàidhealtachd. Unfortunately, in response to what I thought was a yes or no question, we got back the same management gibberish. Are you able to say whether the i6 project has been delayed? That is a closed question.

The Convener: That is a yes or no question. That would be a good start.

Calum Steele (Scottish Police Federation): I am able to say that I do not know.

Chief Superintendent David O'Connor (Association of Scottish Police Superintendents): I echo that and say that we are not involved in leading the project and we do not have any detailed knowledge of the project.

Stevie Diamond (Unison Scotland): I can add to that. We have engaged more often with i6 because it affects my members. Our last meeting with i6 was just before December. At that briefing, we were told that i6 was on track to come in at the beginning of 2015.

The Convener: You see, when you read the kind of letter that we received, you think, "No, it's not." If the answer was yes, we would just get a letter that says yes, but when you get huge paragraphs full of what John Finnie quite rightly

refers to as officialspeak containing wonderful expressions such as

"fully embraced the OGC Gateway process and regularly liaises",

you just think, "Aye. Right."

John Finnie: Well, I do not know whether I am reassured by that. I am reassured by Mr Diamond on one level in as much as I raised with Mr House the issue of engagement with staff associations and trade unions, and I am delighted to hear that that is taking place. Hopefully it is also taking place with the other staff associations.

I understood that the project was to be completed by October this year, although that might be incorrect. If it is on track, does anyone know when it is scheduled to come into effect?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: Again, I do not know the answer to that. I understand that, in projectspeak in project land, we are in what is called the detailed design phase. I assume that that means that management have looked at the user specifications and they are working with Accenture on the detailed analysis.

I understood that the implementation of i6 was to be done incrementally during 2015 and 2016. As I say, we are in the detailed design phase, but those who are directly involved in the delivery of the project would be in the best position to answer these questions.

John Finnie: Indeed. I pose these questions because we hoped to see DCC Richardson first and then to ask the trade unions and staff associations to comment on what he had said, but it has not worked out that way.

Can you confirm the level of engagement that is being had? Do the staff associations consult with front-line practitioners about what is going to be put in place?

Calum Steele: Yes is the short answer to that, but in the same way as I know that the committee has given some fairly detailed consideration to what happens with consultations in reality, the level of engagement and response is not necessarily the same as could ordinarily be expected.

I am also but a simple man from the Gàidhealtachd and I also tend to get lost in much of the computer terminology. However, if I was to draw an analogy with building a house, my understanding is that we are at the specification stage. We have had the architects' drawings that lay out the broad parameters within which the computer system will be delivered, and we are now looking at where the plugs, taps, toilets and sinks are going to go, and at what kind of worktops

we are going to put in. That is my understanding of where we are.

Once we have some of the additional details through the obligations that exist in, not least, the 1971 legislation for consultation with employees on major changes to their workplace—I know that Stevie Diamond deals with that regularly—we will be able to communicate with our members more fully and tell them exactly what is before us. To go back to my house building example, we are looking at a drawing, on which it is difficult to have practical engagement with the wider membership. We have to see what will fit in that before we can get proper, meaningful answers.

John Finnie: I am asking the questions because they were raised directly with me. I would have been delighted to hear the simple rebuttal that there is no issue and that things are on schedule, rather than some of the phraseology that is in the letter.

The Convener: Do people not use the term "milestone"—that is another official expression—when they are undertaking such projects? They say what will be achieved by certain dates. Surely somebody can tell us whether those targets have been hit. When was the specification supposed to have been done by? I am not technological, but it seems to me that things would need to be done by certain dates. Can anybody tell us those dates?

Stevie Diamond: As Calum Steele said, it is for the people who are running the project to give the committee those milestones.

The Convener: That is not you.

Stevie Diamond: We were informed that phased implementation of the programme would start from the beginning of 2015. That is as much as we know. We are told that different phases are being developed. Our members have been engaged in the design of some of those phases, but we cannot say exactly what the milestones are. I would expect a project to have milestones all the way through, but the people who are running the project would be better placed to give the committee that information.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: The timeline is important for the delivery of such projects. In addition to milestones, we often hear about gateway reviews and checkpoint reviews. That is all part of the governance arrangements. The questions are for those who are directly involved in the project.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): I might not be from the Gàidhealtachd, but I should say that I am a simple Doric loon who has had his fingers burned before by information technology projects. I am always most interested to find out

exactly where we are, although I realise that you guys are probably not in a position to tell us that.

Calum Steele gave the analogy of house building. In the main, the plans have now been produced. How involved have your organisations' members been in drawing up the plans? Your folks will have to deal with the system; they know what is required for operations and what the system should be able to do. At the beginning of the process, how much have your members been engaged with the i6 system's specification?

Calum Steele: A lot depends on what we consider the beginning to be. For as long as I have been a member of the police service, it has been looking at improving its approaches to IT. This has been a journey—to use that horrible management expression—that has lasted 21 years.

The Convener: Journeys and step changes are forbidden.

Calum Steele: No wonder there was a sharp intake of breath.

I understand that the wider harmonisation agenda was progressed—fairly unsuccessfully—under the guise of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland in the past. A lot of chief constables were brought together in a room; they would agree furiously but then go back to their forces and say, "I'm not doing it in my force." That was a big part of the malaise that existed across Scotland.

Kevin Stewart: We are aware of all the history of ACPOS and all the rest of it. To be brutal, the chief constables could have sat in a room and decided whatever, but your guys and girls on the ground know more about what is needed for operational delivery and about the systems that can be put in place to decrease rather than increase their workloads. We have all come across information and communication technology systems that were supposed to lessen people's workloads but which increased the amount of bureaucracy.

I am interested in how much front-line staff—police officers and support workers—have been engaged in what the system should deliver. Has that engagement been significant or has there not been enough?

13:15

Calum Steele: Everybody would admit that there could always be more engagement, but I suppose that there comes a point when plans have to be put down on paper. In absolute terms, almost all the work on i6 to date has been undertaken primarily by the members of the Scottish Police Federation who are engaged in the project and workstream. That is not to say that that

results in continual communication between the project and the organisation and the wider membership to let us know the rolling position and where things are. However, we have the contentment of the knowledge that those who are involved in the workstream—and in the things that Mr Stewart mentioned a few moments ago about ensuring reduced work creation for those who deliver the service—have taken considerable information and knowledge from those who deal with the very systems that they are looking at. So the answer is that the engagement is more significant than perhaps would ordinarily be the case.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: To expand on that, the most important thing about IT development is to meet the user needs.

The Convener: Absolutely.

Kevin Stewart: Absolutely.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: All along the way, we tend to identify user needs and then somewhere along the line processes change. Last year, we introduced Police Scotland, and processes have changed. When processes change, that impacts on user needs. Throughout the journey of developing any type of corporate database or IT system, we have to go back to ensure that we meet user needs. In this case, the users are the police officers and police staff out there delivering services. Allied to that are the management processes and management information that we need.

The i6 programme has six fairly substantial parts, and we have members who are working on it, too. I have absolutely no doubt that they regularly bring points to the table about meeting the needs of our members, federation members and police staff. However, my plea to the service and those who are involved in it is this: keep going back and ensuring that what you are developing is what you are delivering.

Stevie Diamond: My members have been involved in workshops, although I hate to use managementspeak again—

The Convener: That is allowed—the term "workshops" is allowed.

Stevie Diamond: They have been involved in workshops on each of the six areas of i6. Every time we have met with the managers of i6, we have stressed that we hope that that will continue.

Kevin Stewart: On 27 June 2013, in response to questioning from me, the chief constable talked about the "significant benefits" that i6 can bring. I am afraid that I am going to use managementspeak, but we have had discussions previously about the gateway dates. Quite often in such projects, when a gateway date is reached,

people find that the significant benefits that they first thought there would be are not there and, beyond that, they often find that, because there has been so much input from folks who will not be using the system daily, bells and whistles are added that are not necessarily required and may even lead to problems in future. You say that you are not aware of timelines, but do you have assurance that your members will be involved just prior to and during the gateway stage to ensure that the significant benefits that we have been told will be built into the system will be there for your members and that they will see daily that it is the right thing for them?

Calum Steele: I can only say that I am fairly convinced that those who are intimately involved in the project are almost certainly watching the broadcast of this meeting from behind their computer screens and, even if they were not considering engaging in that kind of activity, they almost certainly will be after today. In any event, because i6 is so critical to the success or failure of what the police service will deliver in IT for years to come, we will absolutely ensure that we ask questions about how things are progressing at various stages. In truth—

The Convener: Sorry, but how can you ask about that when you do not have timelines?

Calum Steele: I was just getting to that, convener.

The Convener: I was not going to let you go past it.

Calum Steele: In truth, I think that many of us would consider that the signing of the contract for i6 happened later than we were hoping, for a variety of reasons. The Scottish Police Authority wanted to ensure that it was not going to sign away its money on a vanity project, among other reasons.

We are coming up to the anniversary of the creation of the Police Service of Scotland, and that will be an ideal and natural opportunity for us to engage with the i6 project and say, "Give us a warts-and-all update on where we are." I cannot speak for David O'Connor or Stevie Diamond, but I am not intimately involved in it, and rather than the full report, we would tend to get an executive summary. We will wait for that to come, and we will then be able to decide whether we are in a critical situation or not.

The Convener: I hope that it will be in language that everyone can understand.

Calum Steele: That is often—

The Convener: We would like that as well.

Kevin Stewart: That may not be the case, convener.

The Convener: Sorry. You had finished, had you?

Calum Steele: Yes, I think so.

The Convener: Do you want to say anything, Mr O'Connor?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: The i6 system is critical. The functionality—sorry, convener—that it will provide encompasses the core parts of our business, including crime recording, crime reporting, missing persons, custody and criminal justice. However, it is not just about i6—

The Convener: The reason why I am stopping you from using those words is so that other people will understand, as well as me. That includes people outside, who may be interested in how their policing will be affected. After all, it is public money.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: Yes, and i6 is core business. It is a corporate database that we are developing, but it has to link into other developments in command and control, our human resources system and other areas.

We have seen a great deal of restructuring and reorganisation, but i6 is critical to reform in the police. It is now key. We are almost one year into Police Scotland and we need to take a critical look at the development of IT, because it is as that evolves that we will see the real reform in policing terms.

The Convener: Will you expand on "real reform" and, rather than just looking at i6 as a technical system, say what practical impacts it will have?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: I will take crime reporting as an example. If we consider how we record crime across Scotland, we have different legacy systems in place, under which crime reports are sent to the procurator fiscal. To get consistency, standards and one solution in place in Scotland is a fairly big ask, but it has to be the next step.

Kevin Stewart: Can I stop you there? In visiting Elgin, Mr Finnie and I found that some folks are unhappy about changes that have been made to protocols under the ICT that they are using. The inability to print off certain things was mentioned, but there were a number of other things. Given that the different systems are still being used in the eight former force areas, is the transition causing your members great grief, particularly as they have been so used to doing things in certain ways and there have been those protocol changes? Will i6 alleviate the difficulties?

Calum Steele: It is primarily causing frustration rather than grief, because one of the tremendous

things about the police service is that we adapt, improvise and overcome, by and large, with what we have.

The Convener: Is that what you have on your shoulder badge—"adapt, improvise and overcome"?

Calum Steele: With i6, the service is looking forward—probably more than it has done in a long time—to an IT solution to a problem that has dogged the service for years, which is that there have been many different computer systems, few of which spoke to each other, although various different approaches were taken to try to make them do that. We know that there is a potential solution on the horizon, with possible delivery of the first elements of the system in 2015, but people still have to deal with the old systems and the frustrations that are associated with that.

When you engage in any building project—to go back to my housing analogy—and you put the spade into the ground, you might find that there are things in there that you could not possibly have foreseen. I suspect that, in some instances, the frustration is associated with putting the spade into the ground and revealing things that have not previously been considered in the overall project. I do not know whether that is the case; I am just working through how things ordinarily work, and that may well be an issue.

The Convener: Can I just ask why you do not know this stuff? I appreciate that you are not at the front when it comes to dealing with this, but why are you not kept informed?

Calum Steele: There are about 15,000 computers across Scotland—

The Convener: I was talking about the i6 project. Why are you not up to speed on how it is getting on? I am not blaming you; I am just asking why.

Stevie Diamond: I have a different outlook. The i6 system will increase efficiency and make the lives of some of my members easier, but it will cost some of my members their jobs. That is why we have been better informed. We have bi-monthly meetings to keep us up to date with how things are going.

As Mr Stewart said, people are using disparate systems across the country, and there are concerns about that, as well. We are trying to take an overall look at how i6 is affecting everyone and how different processes are working. The fact that we have a view on the jobs issues might lead to us being better informed than colleagues who are perhaps more concerned about the efficiency of the organisation.

Kevin Stewart: Also important is the fact that many of your members will be using ICT as the main part of their jobs, which will not be the case for front-line police.

I am trying to get my head round levels of engagement. Have folks from the Scottish Police Federation, the Association of Scottish Police Superintendents, Unison and police staff been engaged with regularly in terms of formulating the framework for what is required in relation to i6?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: We are not a big association, but several members have been involved in the day-to-day development of i6. There has been some staff engagement, but there could have been more. As we go forward to the next stages—whatever they look like—there must be more stakeholder engagement. We need to be able to drill down into the detail as we go forward.

To go back to the point about Elgin, communication is critical and awareness is absolutely essential. When the changes are being developed, people need to understand exactly what the implications are for them not only in terms of staffing, but in terms of how jobs are done and how forms—we hope that they will not be printed—are produced. All those things will bring about change, and change management is a core part of ICT development.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): Given the disparate nature of the software packages, the servers, the Airwave terminals and the telecommunication contracts, do you think that there could have been changes to the i6 system that would have avoided closure of the control rooms?

It seems that the Scottish Police Authority considered three options but that only one—closure—was put to the SPA board, on the ground of cost. A second option involved retention of existing sites, with the roll-out of the Storm Unity software, which would have allowed controllers to establish the location and capability of available officers outside their legacy boundaries, and another option involved retention of all existing sites, with full integration of a common suite of C3—contact, command and control division—ICT technology, including common telephony, contact management, Storm Unity and Airwave systems. Could the local knowledge that exists in Aberdeen, Stirling, Dumfries, Glenrothes and Pitt Street in Glasgow have been saved, and those closures have been avoided by ICT reform?

The Convener: Before you answer that, I want you to put on the record what Storm Unity is. It has been whispered in my ear, but I am sure that other people do not know.

13:30

Stevie Diamond: At present, we have different command and control systems across Scotland. Storm is the one that is being used in Strathclyde in the main, in Lothian and Borders and also in Grampian. When the organisation was looking for a common platform, it chose Storm Unity, which is an updated version of the current system.

I have to agree with Margaret Mitchell. The service has gone for centralisation of control rooms; it spoke about virtual contact centres, but the virtual contact centre is entirely based in the central belt. If you look at the "Oxford English Dictionary" definition of "virtual" in relation to computing, you will see that it could apply to anywhere where there is a computing terminal. That is certainly the line that we have been going along.

It is as if there has been a need to dispense with people—that is certainly the case in Dumfries, where there has been obscene haste in trying to close the control room by the end of April, purely to save £675,000 this year and £850,000 in the following years. At the moment, a joint negotiating consultative committee is conducting the first part of a consultation process around the C3 proposal. That is purely about closing Dumfries. No other options have been mentioned.

As Ms Mitchell said, the proposal is about closing the Dumfries, Aberdeen and Stirling centres, while keeping some functionality in Inverness. Local knowledge will be lost. We have barely touched the edges of a consultation on that proposal, and so far we have heard no compelling information that would support a business case for taking that option. It is a difficult question to answer.

In relation to i6, the two systems are entirely different. As David O'Connor said, the systems have to link, because a crime creates a chain, although the systems are separate. I do not think that the organisation has looked closely enough at the other available options.

Calum Steele: The answer to Ms Mitchell's question is probably yes and no. I would say yes if we were to look at a start point that goes back several years, because for many years—not least the years since the financial crisis started to bite—police forces across the country could, arguably, have been accused of underinvesting in IT.

It is perhaps unfair to lay responsibility for the sins of the forefathers at Sir Stephen House's door for what he inherited on 1 April 2013, because the money just is not there. I am sure that representatives of the Scottish Police Authority will speak for themselves, and they will probably say that they must deal with the situation that prevails at the moment and that we cannot allow underinvestment and the propping up of failing systems to continue at the cost of the future success of IT provision across the Police Service.

In an ideal world, what Ms Mitchell said would almost certainly be correct—there should be proper engagement at all levels from an appropriate time. However, that time was not 1 April 2013, when the police budget and all other public services were under pressure and there was a de facto need to save money and to deliver services. That is where we find ourselves. I say with the benefit of hindsight that as nice as it would have been to have all those things in place, the reality is somewhat different.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: We see C3 as an opportunity to improve and modernise, and to integrate technology and improve capacity and capability. Perhaps police command and control should have had greater links with the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, which seems to have been looked at quite separately. As we go forward, not to look at fire and rescue and policing together could be a missed opportunity.

Margaret Mitchell: The effect of implementing the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill has been touched on. Is it reasonable to say that that is likely to add to costs for Police Scotland and to delay the i6 programme further? What would be the implications of any such delay?

Calum Steele: The questions and the observation are perfectly fair. A key area in which support from the use of technology will be important is management of custody, for dealing with instances in which people are bailed to return to police stations, and for managing a rolling clock. It is physically possible to do that with pen and paper; I dare say that, if the service finds that all else fails, that approach will be used. However, everybody recognises that that would be incredibly labour intensive and far from ideal. Technology has a key role to play in ensuring that that element of the criminal justice reforms succeeds.

The issue goes beyond that to what is in the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014, which will create a one-stop shop for providing information to victims and witnesses. To go back to the question of how success is measured, the fact that people should be able to interrogate one system rather than run around looking at several systems, which creates the potential that something will be missed, is a critical aspect that i6 will support. I hope that that helps.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: I asked the question that Margaret Mitchell raised and I was reassured that the criminal justice reforms have been taken into consideration in the development of i6.

Margaret Mitchell: Time will tell.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: As it always does.

The Convener: I will ask something because I am not technological. The question is stupid, but so be it. Will the police system speak directly to, and be totally compatible with, the Crown Office system?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: I hope that, in terms of crime reporting—

The Convener: I am also talking about accelerating court business. When the police report something, the Crown Office will decide whether there is sufficient evidence or corroboration to pursue a prosecution. That should link into the Scottish Court Service, so that all the paper chases, phone calls and emails will not be needed and all the information will feed in electronically. That will save the public money and bring prosecutions to court more quickly, for the sake of victims and the accused. I want to know whether all the systems will talk to one another.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: The current systems do that. Any movement away from that would be a huge step in the wrong direction.

The Convener: So i6 will definitely talk to the other systems.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: Yes—as far as I understand it.

Stevie Diamond: That applies to some but not all systems.

The Convener: Oh?

Stevie Diamond: I have been dealing recently with legal document officers. A proposal has been made to do away with them and to give their work back to warranted officers. We have found that that proposal was not included in the i6 process. A manual system is being used to deliver citations, for example, and different systems are being used across Scotland, but that is not part of the i6 programme. We would have thought that including that proposal would have been logical at the end of the criminal justice reform process.

The Convener: That is right. So my question was not stupid. There you are. Could that change be included now?

Stevie Diamond: We return to the idea of what i6 is. It is very defined; we understand that the approach is to say, "This is what we wanted and this is what we're getting, but we're not going to add things, so that we can deliver on time." Any add-ons will happen much later.

The Convener: I thought that people on the ground were being asked what they need. People often say, "You've missed this out," or "You should've done that." Why not start by asking people what is needed and then build the system to meet their practical requirements? Have you been saying for a while what you have said to us?

Stevie Diamond: The issue came up only when the proposal was made to do away with legal document officers. When I went round the country to speak to those officers, I found out that what they do is disparate across the country, that the systems that are used across the country will not be compatible with i6 and that Police Scotland is looking at bringing in an in-house system to manage legal documents.

Kevin Stewart: Convener—

The Convener: Is this off the track?

Kevin Stewart: No, it is exactly on that matter.

It is a difficulty that we do not have technical folk here. Mr Diamond describes something that I would describe as an additional bell and whistle. It may be that, if that were to be added on, functionality would be lost in other areas. It is difficult for us to discuss all that without having some kind of technical feed-in at the meeting.

The Convener: A whizz kid.

Kevin Stewart: It is not that I necessarily trust everything that such a person would say, because computer geeks sometimes do everything that they possibly can do to confuse us on such issues. That is one of the difficulties in the line of questioning that we are taking with you, gentlemen. The fact that what Mr Diamond said has not been communicated to the police bothers me, but there may well be a reason for it. I am speculating.

The Convener: I am looking at the situation from the point of view of the full Justice Committee, which is considering the Victims and Witnesses (Scotland) Act 2014, the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Bill, courts reform, speeding up court cases and reform of the police. If we are doing all that, we should link everything together electronically so that information passes more smoothly through to desks, desks deal with the case, the Crown decides whether to prosecute, the case goes to court and the court comes out with things electronically. It would improve the whole process. It would also mean that witnesses were informed because everybody would know that a case was being adjourned because it would be easy to communicate that. I simply do not understand why, if we are doing all that, one big organisation like Police Scotland gets its system and the courts have another.

Calum Steele: I am sure that the service will speak for itself, but I can only observe that it has been a very long-running project for the Police Service of Scotland. In fact, to be absolutely clear, it was for the previous police forces and it has

been inherited by the Police Service of Scotland. Much of the other stuff has come later. Although criminal justice reform is now upon us, it would be unfair to have expected the police to be alert to that when the service was developing its computer systems. Indeed, legislation will undoubtedly come before Parliament—perhaps in the next session—that might well have an implication for police IT that could not possibly have been considered when the project was being drawn up. However, in everything, there must be a starting point.

I rather wish that my experience of police IT was that, as projects developed, more bells and whistles were added. In reality, what has tended to happen in the past is that things got chopped off as costs ran away and many of the promised benefits were not delivered. It might just have been in the police service, but it has been very rare that things have been added on; they have tended to be taken off.

The Convener: I will move on and, perhaps, come back to connectivity between the various systems when we speak to DCC Richardson.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): I apologise for arriving late. This question might have been covered earlier but, at the last meeting at which we discussed information and communication technology with the witnesses—and, I think, Niven Rennie, who was representing the ASPS—the comments were, to put it mildly, pretty caustic and not at all supportive of the current arrangements for ICT across policing.

After that meeting, who approached the witnesses to discuss the comments that the federation, the ASPS and the union side made and to learn where the shortcomings were that supported them? Did anybody bring the witnesses together to review what was said and learn the lessons?

Calum Steele: I cannot speak for Stevie Diamond. However, not immediately afterwards but pretty close to the previous meeting, we met the head of the i6 project and had some discussions about it. In fairness, most of the discussions that we had were about consultation, which was a heavy feature of the last evidence-taking session.

It is also fair to say that we were not telling the committee things that the i6 project team did not already know. Although we were critical of the existing systems, Chief Superintendent Alec Hippman would say—I am sure that he will be able to speak for himself on this—that the i6 project was already working towards solving the issues that we were highlighting.

I was trying to give an indication of why i6 is so important to the police service. I do not think the i6 project was necessarily caused any difficulty because of the manner in which we expressed our frustrations.

13:45

Graeme Pearson: As I understood it, the evidence from what I describe as the official or management side of projects and current systems painted an entirely different picture of ICT delivery in the eight forces as they moved into a single force. That is why I wondered. Surely there should have been an emergency meeting after the previous evidence session to find out where the gap was in the appreciation of what was being delivered.

Stevie Diamond: Shortly after that meeting, we had a meeting with DCC Richardson and thereafter a meeting with Chief Superintendent Hippman. Our engagement on i6 is continuing on a bi-monthly basis, but it is not just about i6. The first time we heard about Storm Unity was when it was brought up at the SPA meeting at which the closure of the control rooms was proposed. There are other electronic systems that we have not been involved with. If we have engagement, we can understand where things fit into the big picture, but one of the big issues is that that has not happened.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: We have also met DCC Richardson and Chief Superintendent Hippman. As we go forward, there has to be more engagement. A big part is managing expectations around ICT development in the service. It is important that the right information is put out at the right time to make sure that people are aware of what is happening. There are huge expectations of ICT delivery, and we have to be honest with people.

Graeme Pearson: In June last year, it was indicated to the committee that it was too early to comment definitely on delivery. It was also said:

"The sooner we get on with it, the better."—[*Official Report, Justice Sub-Committee on Policing*, 13 June 2013; c 112.]

We are now in a different year and—one hopes—summer is just around the corner. I have to say that it is somewhat depressing that there is still no firm picture of where we are going with this ICT delivery and where the timetable lies.

The Convener: We have discussed the timetable.

Graeme Pearson: Indeed—I heard that.

Do you feel that, from your side, you can press the right buttons to ensure that the timetable is shared with us?

Calum Steele: I believe that almost everyone who is involved with the project is watching this

session. When we go back and ask the questions, we might get the timetable, which is the specific thing that you are asking about.

From some of the things that have happened in the past, my guess is that the project is still at the contract stage and discussions are taking place. There are often enormous sensitivities about sharing things when contract discussions are still on-going, and it might well be that we would hit that obstacle. That is not to say that it should not be possible for us to get better indications than we have just now.

Graeme Pearson: Unless any of the other witnesses want to add something, I do not want to go any further with that.

In the context of having waited a significant length of time before we enter the timetable period, it has been acknowledged at previous sessions that the key to the next ICT delivery will be a fundamental change in the way in which policing business is done. Some comments have been made about changing and accessing forms, for example, but all that seems to be a bit penny-ante. Are discussions being held within the service about where the fundamental changes will take place and what the new way of delivering will mean? Can you share any of that with us?

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: It is certainly uppermost in our thoughts. You are absolutely right: ICT could change the way in which the services are delivered. There will almost certainly be training needs right across Scotland for every member of police staff and for police officers. That will have to be part of the project development at the delivery stage, but I am not sighted on the full detail and the actual training needs for the new i6 project.

Graeme Pearson: It would be difficult to identify the training needs until you know what the changes will be.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: Absolutely.

Graeme Pearson: Is there are any sign that the plan is round the corner and that we will know what the fundamental changes will be? If the answer is no, that is fine.

Chief Superintendent O'Connor: We are not sighted on that.

Calum Steele: Policing will always be a people-hungry profession that will result in face-to-face engagement with the public almost as the default position. The most fundamental changes will come in what we can do when we are away from dealing with members of the public and in how we deal with process on our terminals back in our police vehicles as we are going between incidents, when we have some downtime or even when we are back in the office. The fundamental change will be

that we do not have multiple entry—that does not sound fundamental in truth, but it is enormously so for the police.

Graeme Pearson: Do you have a comprehensive picture? Chief Superintendent O'Connor has been kind enough to indicate that he has not been made aware of the picture. Have you sat down, looked at the future and been overwhelmed by the nature of the change? Have you thought that the future will be exciting, or are you still waiting for that day to come?

Calum Steele: I think that you know me well enough, Mr Pearson, to know that I am not easily overwhelmed.

Graeme Pearson: I am disappointed by that—the service is supposed to be about being overwhelmed with the excitement of the future. [*Laughter.*]

Calum Steele: I am often excited, but there is a difference between that and being overwhelmed.

The project team—or certainly Chief Superintendent Hippman—came to the joint central committee in advance of the signing of the contract. He talked us through some of the expected functionality, which followed the normal schematics, with nice diagrams on screens and so on. Largely, the expectation is that using the system will be mostly intuitive, that phenomenal amounts of training will not be required, particularly as most of the service is computer literate to a degree, and that large proportions of the day-to-day functionality will be readily understood and easily delivered. I certainly was not overwhelmed.

The Convener: I am sorry, but I am going to have to stop because we have only nine minutes left in which to cover the next agenda item. If we have achieved one thing, it is that we agreed to write to try and get a timetable or a milestone—or whatever it is that we call it—for the development of i6. Furthermore, Deputy Chief Constable Richardson is coming to our 6 March meeting.

I thank the witnesses for their evidence. I am sorry that the session was, as usual, truncated.

John Finnie: Convener, given that it is likely that, as our witnesses have said, people will be maintaining an interest in the matter, can we avoid the wait and just have a simple response from DCC Richardson on whether the project is on time? If he can avoid using much of the—

The Convener: Yes, we can ask for a response for a second time—and for it to be in language that I will understand.

John Finnie: For the avoidance of doubt, we do not need the repetition of the information that we have had twice.

The Convener: No, we do not.

Margaret Mitchell: Yes or no will suffice.

The Convener: We need something, whether that is a yes, a no or a perhaps.

Thank you all.

13:53

Meeting continued in private until 13:54.

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