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Official Report

JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING

Thursday 20 March 2014

Session 4

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JUSTICE SUB-COMMITTEE ON POLICING
4th 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:

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP)
Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick QPM (Police Scotland)
Assistant Chief Constable Wayne Mawson (Police Scotland)
Assistant Chief Constable Mike McCormick (Police Scotland)
Chief Superintendent Garry McEwan (Police Scotland)

CLERK TO THE COMMITTEE

Joanne Clinton

LOCATION

Committee Room 6

Scottish Parliament

Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Thursday 20 March 2014

[Graeme Pearson *opened the meeting at 13:04*]

Temporary Convener

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): Let us commence the meeting. These meetings are always brief, so I would like to get started as soon as possible.

I should explain for the benefit of the witnesses and members of the public that there has not been a coup, but our convener is detained in the chamber at members' business. Under standing orders, the oldest member present—which is a cruel way to put it—must chair the meeting for the purpose of choosing a temporary convener, and that is why I have taken the chair.

I invite nominations for a temporary convener.

John Finnie (Highlands and Islands) (Ind): I nominate you to remain in situ.

Graeme Pearson: If there are no objections, do members agree that I should assume the role of temporary convener?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Temporary Convener (Graeme Pearson): Thank you.

Decision on Taking Business in Private

13:05

The Temporary Convener: This is the fourth meeting in 2014 of the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing. I ask everyone to switch off mobile phones and other electronic devices completely. We have received no apologies, and I welcome Roderick Campbell, who joins us today.

Our first item is a decision on taking business in private. Does the committee agree to take consideration of our work programme in private at today's meeting?

Members *indicated agreement.*

Local Policing

13:05

The Temporary Convener: Our main item of business is an evidence session on local policing. We will hear from Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick and colleagues on the issues raised in written evidence and during our visits. I welcome, from Police Scotland: Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick QPM, who is responsible for local policing; Assistant Chief Constable Campbell Thomson, who is responsible for local policing north; Assistant Chief Constable Mike McCormick, who is responsible for local policing east; Assistant Chief Constable Wayne Mawson, who is responsible for local policing west; and Chief Superintendent Garry McEwan, the local policing commander for Fife division.

We will have questions from members, but first I invite Ms Fitzpatrick to make an opening statement.

Deputy Chief Constable Rose Fitzpatrick QPM (Police Scotland): I thank the committee for the opportunity to come and add to the work that members have been doing in going round the country looking at local policing, as we reach the end of Police Scotland's first year.

We are now a national police service, but I am confident that we remain supremely local in nature. I say that because we are connected to our communities more than we have ever been. This year, we have consulted 31,000 people across Scotland—that has increased from 19,600—as well as our community planning partners, community councils and so on, on their priorities for the year, which are broadly similar to those that they identified for us last year.

We have 353 multimember ward plans that we are now shaping for the coming year. That is more than we have ever had across Scotland, and we continue to have our 32 local policing plans, linked to the local single outcome agreements. Partnerships, as I am sure the committee will have found, are strong and thriving, involving shared services, shared planning and new features such as the multi-agency tasking and co-ordinating group and multi-agency risk assessment conference, managing victims and perpetrators of domestic abuse across Scotland.

We are providing better services to our communities by being organised in a different way, so that local policing absolutely remains at the heart. Across Scotland, almost 13,000 police officers are directly engaged in local policing, and we recently published figures demonstrating that all those officers are supported by officers arranged regionally in north, east and west, and by

the small number of officers who are at the core in central services. All of them, whether regional or national, are deployed daily to support local policing. In the first 11 months of Police Scotland, our operational support division has provided an extra 42,250 days of policing in support of local divisions across the country.

How do we know that local policing is still at the heart of what we do and is still successfully keeping people safe? It is because people are being kept safer than in previous years. We are tackling public priorities in a way that means that violence is reduced, so that we have seen more than 700 fewer victims of violence. We know that antisocial behaviour and disorder are local priorities, and antisocial behaviour calls are down by 50,000 across the country, with 60,000 fewer disorder incidents in the first 11 months.

At the bottom of all that, public confidence and satisfaction remain high. We survey more than 1,200 people every month and ask them how well we did when we dealt with their incident. The figures that we are getting back from the public demonstrate satisfaction levels that many other public services would envy. For example, the high-level figures show that more than 82 per cent of people are satisfied overall with their policing service. As we know, that service is, by and large, delivered entirely by local policing, supported by central and specialist services.

The Temporary Convener: Thanks very much for that. We will go straight to John Finnie. Kevin Stewart has indicated that he would like to follow him.

John Finnie: Good afternoon, panel. We have heard very reassuring words from Ms Fitzpatrick, about policing being "supremely local" and local policing remaining "at the heart", but we continually hear that things are done the Strathclyde way or no way—or, more particularly, the Glasgow way or no way. I understand the need for commonality across the country in some things, but is there local discretion?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Every single officer across Scotland continues to have discretion at the heart of their policing toolkit. We know that that is the case because they exercise it every single day. I am asked about discretion from time to time, and it seems to me that a good way of describing the approach is to acknowledge that, in many areas, a national service has enabled us to be much clearer about a consistent level of service to the public for certain problems that we tackle. I will use examples from both ends of the spectrum.

Members will know that tackling domestic abuse—supporting victims and robustly tackling perpetrators—is a very high-level priority for us. However, we saw variation in the interpretation of what that meant in the eight legacy forces across the country. Every officer who deals with a domestic abuse incident continues to have discretion on how to deal with it, but we have been very clear about our expectation on police action. Now, when an officer responds to a call, which might be to a disturbance in a house or flat, we expect them to treat it as an investigation from the start. We expect them to go to the premises, and we do not expect them to take the word of an individual who comes to the door when they can see signs of a disturbance beyond them in the hallway. We expect them to investigate the incident robustly and to satisfy themselves that no woman or child is obviously distressed in the premises.

John Finnie: Forgive me, but that was happening anyway.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: It was not happening consistently.

John Finnie: I am trying to understand the local dimension. I can understand a conscious decision to target the pernicious thing that is domestic violence, but I am not talking so much about individual cases. I represent a large landward area—the Highlands and Islands—in big areas of which people are not concerned about armed robbery, to give an extreme example. What autonomy is given to local commanders to address issues? I know that you will mention the policing plan, but people still keep saying that they are told that the way is the Strathclyde way.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Discretion remains with local officers. At the other end of the scale, there is an issue around seat belts. On that issue, I would entirely expect officers to deal with what is in front of them using their discretion. If it is the first time that they have spotted a local person not using their seat belt, they should give them advice and explain to them why using a seat belt is important for their own safety. If it is the second or third time, I would ask them to tackle it in a way that encourages the person to see that the issue is important.

On your point about local commanders' discretion to tackle the things that are important locally, in many areas across Scotland, as you have said, robbery is not an issue and does not feature in the local plans for that reason. Where it is an issue, it becomes a local priority that we tackle.

John Finnie: Targets are another recurring theme. Are there targets? Who sets them and against what criteria? What is their purpose?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We have a performance framework that includes targets and performance indicators. It exists simply and

solely for the purpose of our being able to monitor, manage and decide whether we are meeting the priorities that people set for us locally and which we have set out in our plans; whether we are appropriately deploying our resources and people; whether they are being effective in the right places at the right times; and whether people have the skills to do what they need to do.

The targets and the indicators are there to help us—the senior people in the organisation—to establish whether we are really focused on keeping people safe. No targets are set for individual officers.

I expect senior managers in the organisation—right across the board—to understand what the priorities are and what they need to do to tackle them. It is senior managers who are accountable, through their divisional commanders, for how they use their resources to tackle those priorities. Chief Superintendent McEwan will be able to describe the local context and he might want to give an example of how that operates locally.

13:15

Chief Superintendent Garry McEwan (Police Scotland): I can certainly do that, ma'am.

Discretion is something that I regularly talk through with my local officers. I and my command team go out once a week to a briefing or a debriefing on discretion. It is absolutely something that we reinforce. The use of discretion is fundamental to policing in Scotland, whether it be in campaigns against violence or in other areas. When I am out working with officers and they come across individuals who are rowdy, discretion is used. We do not criminalise people for the sake of criminalising them.

I can think of recent initiatives, for example the multi-agency mobile alcohol intervention team that is in place in Fife. That initiative has seen us refer 802 under-18s who were under the influence of alcohol and/or committing antisocial behaviour to partner agencies rather than charging them with a criminal offence. Discretion is at the forefront of our minds and we should use it proportionately and when it is relevant.

We have to be wary about discretion, however. It is not an excuse for an officer to turn a blind eye to an on-going criminal act. DCC Fitzpatrick touched on domestic abuse. In the legacy Fife constabulary, we started with a domestic incidents reported to crime conversion rate of only 20 per cent. I had a discussion with a retired chief superintendent before I took up post and other areas were hitting well above that rate. What did that mean to me? It meant that some of our officers were overly using discretion in respect of domestic abuse. Our conversion rate in Fife is now 60 per cent, so we have tripled it. More serial offenders are being incarcerated for serious sexual offences and the support is there for the victims. Discretion is vital and we need to utilise it in a proportionate way. We need to be careful that we do not overindulge in discretion and turn a blind eye to crime.

I have clear targets and they are to reduce robbery and serious assault. My overarching target is to keep people in Fife safe and that is absolutely what I and my senior command team are focused on. My constables and my sergeants do not have any personal targets; they go out there with the mantra to keep the people of Fife safe. We do that by putting in place early interventions for persons whom we suspect might be intent on violence or drug dealing within our communities and measures to try to prevent such things from happening such as stop and search, high visibility patrols and intelligence-led turns. However, there are absolutely no targets for officers or sergeants.

John Finnie: That is very reassuring. I have a question that relates to the conversion rate figure that you gave. Everybody wants robust action to be taken against perpetrators of domestic violence, but is there a danger that in encouraging and ensuring that robust action, discretion is removed? People have rows in houses—it does not mean that there is domestic violence. As I understand it, increasingly not just one alleged perpetrator is being arrested from a dwelling but two alleged perpetrators because counter-accusations come in. We would not want police to lose the ability to decide that something is a minor shouting match—albeit that there might be more behind it.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: I think that you are right, but if the conversion rate is 60 per cent, that means that in 40 per cent of reported domestic incidents, our officers are still using discretion. There was an example that really hit home to me a number of months ago—I have spoken to my local councillors about it. It happened in April or May last year, when we had recently embarked on Police Scotland. A woman's sister phoned the police to say, "My sister has just been injured but her partner is away from the house." The police arrived and the victim refused to give a statement. The police left and then returned to the house an hour later and said to the victim, "We know that you didn't give us a statement but we have incarcerated your partner now—we have locked him up and detained him. We would like to make sure you're safe, make some referrals and discuss this with you." The victim broke down and talked about years and decades of sexual abuse. The question was put to her: "Why have you never told us before?" She said, "You have never locked him up before. I now

feel safe, because he is behind bars." She went on to tell us about some of the abuse that she had experienced. The police had been alerted to a number of calls, but we had not taken the right action. I am confident that 60 per cent is right—certainly in Fife and for the people of Fife.

John Finnie: For the avoidance of doubt, I commend robust action.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: Thanks.

Kevin Stewart (Aberdeen Central) (SNP): John Finnie has concentrated on his thinking that one area of Scotland is influencing what is going on. I will focus on how we ensure that best practice is exported throughout the country. I will be a bit parochial, convener, which will come as no surprise to some committee members—

The Temporary Convener: It is so out of character.

Kevin Stewart: I will look at the Grampian situation.

Mr Finnie and I visited Elgin recently and spoke with a number of members of the community. Even though we probed them, they seemed to have nothing but praise for the local police in the area. Largely, that was down to the success of communication between officers and communities, a lot of which sprang from platform for success in the former Grampian area. Beyond that, folk thought that multimember ward plans had a real influence on shaping what the police were doing in their area.

Colleagues in other parts of the country might have had different experiences and I will let them deal with those. How do we ensure that the same level of communication and listening to the public is exported across the country? How are you doing that now?

The Temporary Convener: Before Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick answers, I will leave the chair and hand over to our convener, who has now arrived.

The Convener (Christine Grahame): Sorry—I was in a debate in the chamber. I thank Graeme Pearson.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: The main mechanism, if you like, for doing that, are the people seated with me round the table: our divisional commanders and the assistant chief constables, who operate as a single team but deliver local policing according to local need. In the first year of Police Scotland, we have put a number of ideas and initiatives from round the country to divisional commanders as a group and have asked them to think about them individually in order to influence how they might operate elsewhere. When we have reached an understanding and have agreed that an example of best practice can be available to everybody locally and nationally across the country, we have introduced toolkits for officers, which are constantly updated and contain examples of best practice wherever we find it.

We have introduced some new systems, such as our vulnerable persons database, which has been developed from an idea that I believe came from the legacy Grampian force. We are about to finish rolling out an interim version of that across the country, so that for the first time we will be able to track vulnerable people and perpetrators right across the country.

We bring all these things together, road test them and offer them to people as a resource. We establish what is working and constantly seek to build on best practice by bringing people together to do so at every level, but in particular our divisional commanders. They have huge areas of responsibility and are very senior in the organisation, but every month we invest time with them to bring them together to talk about issues that have arisen and to identify best practice. We invite all our divisional commanders each month to put forward a suggestion for something that we could ask others to accept and take forward. We work with the three assistant chief constables, who are always on the road and out there. I almost wish that I could offer them commission on the things that they bring back to the centre, saying, "This is working really well. Let's have a look at it and see whether it will work well elsewhere."

The Convener: Feel free to do that.

Kevin Stewart: The panel members have talked about how they interact with each other, but interaction with the public is key. If the multimember ward plans are to work across the country as well as they seem to have done in legacy Grampian, how will you ensure that communities interact in the same way and feel as included and happy as the Elgin community was?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We are working with our local authority partners across the country—through their individual arrangements and through arrangements with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers—to identify best practice. We have had a number of workshops about partnership engagement, alongside the scrutiny arrangements, to identify how we as joint partners in, for example, community planning partnerships and community councils, can work together more effectively year on year.

As we have done our consultation for the second year multimember ward plans, the engagement arrangements, which we have shared

with partners, are more extensive than we saw in Police Scotland's first year. We are always looking for good ideas.

An issue that we have progressed this year, without losing our focus on face-to-face engagement and communication with members of the public at the local level, is a real increase in our social media and digital engagement with people. I cannot quite work my thumbs quickly enough to tweet, but that is a vibrant scene for people to give us immediate and local feedback. We have more than 500,000 followers of our social media channels.

Kevin Stewart: I praise you for what you are doing, particularly with Twitter. There is no doubt that interaction takes place. I spend a lot of time retweeting the police in my area. I understand that that interaction is often very helpful for following up inquiries.

I want to move a little bit beyond that issue. Mr Finnie mentioned discretion. Last week, I met Assistant Chief Constable Thomson. I told him about an Aberdeen difficulty, which in some folks' minds is a pretty minor problem, of cycling on pavements. Dealing with that matter was included in operation whitebeam, which was led by officers in the Seaton area. The police took members of the public out with them on the operation to see what they were doing. That gave the public an understanding of the difficulties that an officer faces sometimes when dealing with the issues on the ground and they were left feeling quite satisfied. How much discretion do you give to local officers to interact with the public and include them in such operations? That interaction is extremely beneficial. Some would call that a public relations job; I would not call it that at all.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Thank you very much for raising that example. I do not call that a PR job either; I call it tackling the issues that are important to people locally. That is exactly what our community officers are encouraged to do and be held accountable for. Indeed, we go back to people and say, "This is what you told us was a problem, this is what we have done to tackle it and this is what the result was."

I hope that we are making it easier for community officers to do that. For example, we are increasing across the country the balance of people involved directly in community policing as community officers. Fife is an example of that. However, if we look at Edinburgh city, you may be aware that earlier this year the divisional commander, because he wanted to continue to focus more effectively on local priorities, changed the balance of his resourcing between officers who do response policing, who are those who respond to the 999 calls, and officers who do community policing, who are those who engage directly with problem solving at a very local level. He altered the balance by moving 160 officers from response policing into community policing. By doing so, he changed the percentage from around 30 to almost 50 per cent of officers being involved in community policing and doing exactly those things: talking to people locally and identifying the issues that are important to them.

If I am very honest, those issues will never appear in a national plan because they are not national issues; they are issues that need to be tackled locally and they may change. For example, once we have successfully dealt with a particular issue, perhaps with partners, there must be room for us to look at other issues and move on. Community teams have the flexibility and the discretion, as you put it, to do that.

The Convener: Thank you. I reiterate my apologies for my late arrival. I was in a members' debate on the miners' strike where policing issues were mentioned. Things have changed since then, mercifully.

13:30

Alison McInnes (North East Scotland) (LD): Ms Fitzpatrick, you said that you are confident that policing will remain local in nature. The committee sought written evidence to our inquiry, and COSLA responded by saying that, following reform, policing is more centralised and "top-down" with national priorities such as stop and search and road traffic enforcement being imposed from above on local police commanders, thus creating a "collision" between national and local priorities. Do you want to comment on that?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Collision is not a word I would use to describe a natural coming together of national priorities that have been identified through a national consultation exercise that, we must remember, is asking 31 people who all live somewhere local. We aggregate all that and, while being mindful of the priorities that are set for us by the Scottish Government and the Scottish Police Authority, we use our professional judgment and analysis on things such as counter-terrorism and the tackling of serious organised crime, which have to be done at the national level because they do not generally appear at the local level.

We do that and then, at the local level, we use that information and all the other things that local commanders, officers and staff do to identify local priorities, and we operate with a single policing plan for the whole of Scotland, 32 local authority level policing plans, and then 353 multimember ward plans. All that comes together, but I would not describe it as a collision.

Alison McInnes: There are only so many person hours in a shift. How do you prioritise the different and competing demands?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I suppose the most effective way of doing that is by ensuring that each individual officer or member of staff who is involved in any activity in Police Scotland understands the job that they are being asked to do, understands how they contribute to keeping people safe and, wherever they work in Scotland, are effectively briefed and tasked with what we require them to do.

At the local multimember ward level, for the first time, individual officers can focus much more on things that are immediate to them. A couple of weeks ago, I was out on patrol with local officers in our central division. We talked about their briefing and tasking model. Before we went out on patrol, the three or four officers who I was talking to directly told me that they are now very clear about what is required of them locally, about how we are asking them to deliver that, about their discretion and about what we expect them to achieve.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: I have a point to make about the targets. There are national targets for serious and organised crime, violence, and so on, as the deputy chief constable has described, and we have found that the majority of those targets fit nicely with what the communities are telling us at ward level.

Interestingly, there were two targets that did not. One was speeding and the other was drugs misuse. All that I had to do as a divisional commander—and I know that every other divisional commander has done it—was raise the issue with the centre by saying, "These two issues are issues for us. Can they become targets for us?" and that is exactly what happened.

It is about local officers and communities identifying targets and our saying to the force executive that we want those issues to be targets in Fife. They now are targets in Fife. The approach is top-down but also, importantly, bottom-up.

Alison McInnes: I will turn to the roll-out of stop and search across Scotland. Many of us have been surprised at the scale of stop and search, especially that which is carried out on a non-statutory basis. Some young people in certain areas of Scotland might well be thinking that it is disproportionate and excessive. I am particularly concerned about the impact on young people. Does the force have special guidelines for the procedures that officers should use when engaging with very young people?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: The first thing that I will say about our stop and search approach is that we want everybody to focus on the right places and the right times to reduce violence and other kinds of criminality. We want that to be led by intelligence and also to be done in a way that fits entirely with our values. It should be done fairly, with integrity and with respect to the individuals involved.

It is very important to me that when we talk about the difference between what is described—not always helpfully—as consensual stop and search and legislative stop and search, we remember that it is all legal. We are very clear that there is a firm legal platform for it. As well as the power to stop and search people, we have a responsibility and individuals have rights.

Particularly important is the point that Alison McInnes makes about young people. I want young people to be very clear that their expectations should as high as anyone else's: that they will be treated respectfully and fairly and that what happens will be explained to them. We have started to do some work, as a single service now, with young people's organisations, notably Young Scot, with which we have a very good relationship. We want to develop some tools for young people, to help involve them in our training and the way that we do stop and search. That is already happening and has been happening, perhaps for some years, in some places in Scotland, but not consistently. The value that we can add is that we can take some of the best practice that we spoke about earlier from some places in Scotland and roll it out across the country.

When I talk to young people about stop and search, they say, "I want you to do that, because when I go out on Friday night I don't want to worry about the knife in someone else's pocket. I want to know that other people don't have a knife in their pocket, but if you stop and search me I want to understand why and I want to understand that you are doing it respectfully—you should explain what you are doing." That is what we aim to achieve with stop and search. We have recovered and continue to recover significant amounts of drugs and weapons across the country.

Alison McInnes: How do your officers ascertain that informed consent has been given for what you call a consensual search, which has no statutory footing?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We have a toolkit—which is nice shorthand for guidelines—for all our officers that explains our expectation to them: they must explain to and engage with people in a way that ensures that people understand why officers are taking that step.

Every stop and search happens as a result of an engagement between our officers and a member of the public. It is an extension of an encounter with them, and that involves talking to people. Only in very exceptional circumstances will there

not be some sort of conversation and explanation of what is happening.

Your point was about young people and it is particularly important that we use understandable language and that young people know what their rights are and what their expectations should be.

Alison McInnes: You do not advise young people that they have a right to refuse.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We ask young people for their consent and we are very clear about doing that, if it is in relation to a consensual search.

Alison McInnes: Yes, but it is very difficult for a 10-year-old to resist when they are faced by an officer in uniform who asks ever so nicely if it is all right to search them. That is not necessarily informed consent.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: That is why it is very important for us to build on work that has been going on—in some places, but not everywhere—and work with young people's organisations to get even better at ensuring that when we do that we do it in a way that helps young people to understand what we are doing.

We have with us our national lead on stop and search, who is very keen to add to what I have said.

Assistant Chief Constable Wayne Mawson (Police Scotland): If I may, convener, I want to put some context around the whole stop and search debate. Some sections of the media have reported it as a new thing; in fact, it is not a new thing at all. The reality is that stop and search volumes are down in the first year of Police Scotland. More searches were done under legacy force arrangements in total. They are down by about 4.6 per cent this year, which is 29,000 fewer stop and searches.

More important than raw numbers is the fact that we have developed our intelligence products. We take seriously the need to get our officers into the right places at the right times so that they search the right people. That way, we will be able to bring to life those laminated words, "Keeping people safe". That is what we are about, and that is what we do. That positive rate of finding drugs, knives, weapons and stolen property has gone up significantly under Police Scotland due to the improved training and the new cloud analysis that enables us to get our officers into the right places. It was 13.6 per cent under legacy arrangements and it has gone up to 19.3 per cent so far this year. That is a huge difference.

The Convener: Sorry, what is at 19.3 per cent? I got lost in the clouds. Is that the success rate?

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: Yes. That is the figure for the number of our stop searches that result in items of stolen property, drugs, knives and so on being found. That can only be a good thing. When you look—

The Convener: You could turn the figure on its head and say that nothing is found in 80 per cent of cases in which someone is stopped and searched.

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: Stop and search is one tactic in a raft of policing measures that we use.

The Convener: Forget the raft and the clouds. In 80 per cent of cases in which someone is stopped, nothing is found.

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: But that compares extremely well to the situation in the rest of the United Kingdom, and it is a huge improvement on last year.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I would also say that we monitor feedback from the public, including complaints that relate to stop and search. So far this year, out of the 615,000 searches that were performed across the country—which is a decrease on the number of the previous year—we have had 32 complaints. That is one complaint per 19,000 stop and searches. We take all the complaints seriously and they are all recorded and investigated appropriately, but that is the figure that we have.

What we have seen—

The Convener: Sorry, can you just stop there? Are you happy that 80 per cent of the stop and searches are negative? That is the crux of it. We are talking about civil liberties here, and you are just saying that it is not as bad as it used to be. However, 80 per cent of people who are stopped and searched have got nothing offensive on them.

Alison McInnes: And the point is that you have stopped and searched them with no grounds for suspicion, because if you had grounds for suspicion, you would be using your statutory powers.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: To answer your question, convener, yes, I am happy with that. Every Monday and every Friday of every week of my life I get a map of Fife that shows me where the violence is, where the disorder is and where my officers have been conducting the stop and searches. If my officers are conducting the stop and searches in the areas where there is violence, I would hope to see a reduction in the number of weapons that are found. That shows that the message is getting out in certain deprived areas of Fife that it is not safe to carry a weapon, because you will get stopped and searched. Every weapon that my officers recover off the streets

represents one less injury to someone who is walking about in that area. An individual who is walking about in an area might not know that they could get injured, so it is important that my officers are there, doing what they do.

To try to provide some reassurance, I will talk about best practice. In one high school a month, every Tuesday in that month, we arrange for the rector to bring together all the kids who have been stopped and searched—

The Convener: I hope you are not coralling them so that you can stop and search them again.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: No, it is so local officers can sit with them and try to understand how they felt when they were stopped and searched and to talk about whether they understand why they were stopped and searched and so on. That has resulted in positive feedback from the kids. They understand that it is not just about finding things but about deterring violence and preventing them from being injured in certain areas where there is a high level of violence.

Finally, on good practice, Chief Superintendent Gillian MacDonald, from Ayrshire, heard about what we were doing in high schools in Fife and has been in touch to ask questions about it. That touches on Mr Finnie's question about how we share best practice. We do not want to disengage communities through stop and search. That is at the forefront of my mind and of the minds of the officers who work with me, and that is the key element.

13:45

Alison McInnes: The use of stop and search as a deterrent is a power that you have appropriated to yourself that I am not at all sure is absolutely appropriate. There is a real risk that people will continually and repeatedly be stopped and searched, if what Mr McEwan says is right. Indeed, when we were in Glenrothes, we were given to understand that you do not map the prevalence and that you therefore have no way of knowing how many times an individual has been stopped and at what point that can be considered harassment. Do you agree that it is important to have more robust figures to make it clear who you are stopping and when?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I agree whole-heartedly. ACC Mawson will be able to describe to you the work that is going on, now that we have come together as a national service, to develop a process and system for doing that. We are able to map geographically, but at the moment there is more opportunity for us to use that information to establish how often individuals are being stopped and searched and on what grounds, and how that information is being used to reduce crime. We want to go ahead with that, and the task has already begun, to establish how we can do that more effectively.

Alison McInnes: It was surprising for Mr Mawson to say that it is not a new thing—we know that it is not new; it is mission creep that has been going on for many years—and that you have not already done that work, but it is heartening to know that it is being done now. Those statistics must be available to the public. You must be openly accountable on the issue, so do you intend to make them available?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We make available the statistics that we currently have through local scrutiny mechanisms, through our reporting to the Police Authority and through our accountability mechanisms as we develop our systems. Of course, we cannot talk about personal information and we would not want to do that, but we would be working through local scrutiny mechanisms and through the Police Authority to make that information available. Yes, we will do that.

Alison McInnes: There is much to ask, convener, but I would like to ask one more question before other members come in.

Do your officers consider refusing consent to be suspicious in itself? If so, would they move on to formal stop and search if a young person were to decline?

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: Not on its own, no. We take a case-by-case approach. If there are a number of other factors that would raise the officer's suspicions, it may move to a more statutory footing, but for refusal on its own the answer is no.

The Convener: I would like to ask about what is done on a case-by-case basis. When Alison McInnes and I visited your division in Fife, one of the things that concerned us when it was raised by your officers was that street craft, as you call it—reading individual situations on a case-by-case basis—is all very well for officers with a lot of experience, but some of the younger officers coming in might be more hot-blooded and might want a higher hit rate. They might not have the tact or subtlety, or be able to read people's body language in the same way. That point was raised by quite a few experienced officers.

Are there concerns that it could become normal for children to be stopped and searched? Perhaps they do not object because it has become something that usually happens. I can assure you that I would certainly have objected if I had been stopped and searched on the street. I would have said, "No, I know my rights," and I would probably have got into more trouble for it. The issue is about how you read such situations. Are there

targets for hitting the right numbers, meaning that younger officers are out stopping and searching people without the subtlety that more experienced officers may have?

That concern is not mine, but it is one that was raised with us.

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: If more senior officers raised that issue, I can assure you that younger officers at the college are trained to engage with members of the public, whether the situation is a stop and search, a search of a house, or a child victim being taken to a medical examination. There are sensitivities and there is trade craft and there are ways in which we have to be professional. I expect all my officers, and all officers across Scotland, to act professionally.

The number of complaints is a good measure of that. There have been no complaints in Fife, and I think that DCC Fitzpatrick said that there had been only 32 in Scotland. Compared with the hundreds of thousands of stop and searches, that is a good indicator, but it is just one indicator. That is why we are trying to find other ways to ask the people who are being stopped and searched, in the cold light of day, days or weeks after the stop and search has happened, whether there are any lessons that we can learn and whether they feel that they were treated with respect and dignity.

The Convener: My question was about the more experienced officers having genuine concerns that officers who are just coming into the service will have a culture that is different from the way in which Police Scotland is now operating and will be much more officious.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: That has never been brought to my attention by the more senior officers.

The only other thing that I will say is that the younger officers do not have stop-and-search targets or targets for anything. If there is a perception that they are trying to achieve a target, they do not have a target, so they should not be trying to achieve it.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We continually update our guidance and guidelines on that for people. The toolkit that I have spoken about tells people how best to do those things, and that is included in officer training. Although they all look very young to me, the average age of people who join the service now is 27, so they come with other life skills and they have been involved in different things.

I am very keen on ensuring that supervisors at the very local level understand and take responsibility for the professionalism of all our officers, including those who are directly under their command. We have been involved very recently in a series of extra briefings and guidelines for all our sergeants on what is expected of them as they brief and task officers on reducing violence and other sorts of crime across Scotland. We are reinforcing that with our sergeants' training. Therefore, it is not just the constables who are involved; their immediate supervisors who are with them whatever the shift are involved, too.

The Convener: So the concerns of experienced officers are ill founded or misplaced. I think that Alison McInnes would agree that that concern was put to us quite firmly by more than one officer.

Alison McInnes: Yes, I agree.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I do not have any evidence that that has happened. I feel reassured that officers with longer service understand that they have a responsibility to ensure that officers with less service are well supported in doing their job and that they understand our expectation of them.

Graeme Pearson (South Scotland) (Lab): First, I record my admiration of what working officers do every day on our behalf, the staff who support them and, indeed, the group who are here today. All too often when we question what is going on, that questioning is seen is a criticism, but it is not. Our purpose in life is to poke the system and see whether what has been described is happening out there in reality. If what you have described today were reality, we would not be having this meeting and discussing the matter.

COSLA has raised issues around consultation, and there have been comments from West Lothian, Dumfries and Galloway and Moray and input from older officers about how they perceive the system working. Therefore, we have not produced our questions from the ether.

I had no intention of touching on stop and search, but we need to take on board the fact that, in the past 20 years or so, we have had half a million fewer younger people out in the streets of Scotland. Unfortunately, we are an ageing population. I admit that I sometimes sit thinking that the young ones who are left out there have a busy day with the number of stop searches that are happening.

The issue that concerned me was that, where negative searches were achieved, the details of those who were the subject of those searches were not recorded as a matter of course. That is a real concern for the future. You have already discussed the art and the science of stop and search. I will leave that alone and move on to other topics.

I want to consider consultation in the context of local policing and delivering the ideas that you

have played out. We have gone through a consultation process. Counter closures, for instance, were the subject of consultation. I spoke to Mr Naylor, who led on that part of the debate and the plan, and made it clear to him that, if there was no public interest in the matter, it certainly was not for me to leave offices open that were not required. That was never going to be the process, but we needed to be assured that the consultation was conducted effectively and that we knew where we stood.

The same applied to what was happening with control rooms across the country. However, only at last week's Unison conference, staff told me that they had been assured that they would be consulted and kept advised, but the first information that they got about their work was from an article in the *Daily Record* a few weeks ago. We have since had the situations with traffic wardens and warrants and citations.

A number of questions arise, the first of which is about genuine consultation and how much staff hear before a decision is taken and stamped. Secondly, when such decisions are made, what is the impact thereafter on those officers who are left to fill in the spaces that have been created? My final question is more current. Apparently, a group exists in central Scotland—

The Convener: Is that off the topic of consultation?

Graeme Pearson: It is.

The Convener: Can we just keep to the failure of consultation issue for now? Then you can come back in with your next question.

Graeme Pearson: What I want to mention relates to part of the consultation. The priority crime unit is a group of civilian staff who did investigations. Only four years ago, it was applauded and awarded a prize for its good work because it had delivered improved investigations and a better quality of service, and it had increased front-line capacity and best value. That unit has ceased to operate and those staff members have been given voluntary redundancy. How do you deal with consultation in such contexts? It is quite evident that those who were subject to the outcomes feel that they were not consulted and that their views had no impact.

The Convener: Can we divide the questions into consultation—

Graeme Pearson: Yes, and I will leave it at that.

The Convener: No. We will divide the questions into those that are about consultation with the public and those that are about consultation with people associated with the force, in uniformed or civilian capacity. Those are different types of consultation.

Graeme Pearson: I am happy with that.

The Convener: We will deal with the public consultation first, please.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: When we are talking about some of the change projects that you mentioned, we have to balance the different consultations. As an employer, we have a statutory responsibility to consult staff about changes that may affect them. We must balance that with our responsibility and desire to consult the public about how we deliver front-facing services. I would not say that those two matters are in conflict, but balancing them is often challenging; we are talking about letting our staff know that we are going to start reviewing or developing proposals and doing that before we let anyone else know because we are their employer and that is our responsibility.

Graeme Pearson: Sure.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We are doing different consultations with the public. We are consulting people through our surveys and other work about the priorities that are important to them and which we want to address. We are also consulting about how we organise ourselves to meet those priorities on, for example, our front counter service.

Over the years, I have learned that whenever we or any other public service carries out consultation, we always wish that we had had several more years and many more ways in which to do that. Every public service will tell you the same thing and it is always true.

We have listened to what the public told us and we have made changes to some of the major issues that you described. For example, on our front counter service, we talked to people about the information that we had gathered about front counter usage, we developed some proposals and we talked to our staff. We put those proposals out for public consultation and we amended some of the proposals, including those on opening hours and the number of counters that would no longer offer a front counter service, as a result of that consultation. That took account of views from the public and our staff.

We also—this arose from a similar conversation to the one that we are having—had a defined period for consultation. As that period came to a close, we made it clear that we would continue to take people's views while we were processing the information that we had through the formal consultation process. We kept that process open for almost another six weeks, I think.

Assistant Chief Constable Mawson: Yes, it was six weeks.

The Convener: We asked about that matter, and that process was part of the undertaking given.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: That is right.

Graeme Pearson: I do not want to be too sensitive on the issue, but we were told that the consultation was not kept open and that it had been closed, although you would still hear some of the views. I thought that that response was a bit small minded, because the consultation was, in effect, open.

14:00

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: In fact, the public and partners were still able to give us their views, which we took into account over a much longer period than we had planned.

We wrote to people in June last year, I think, about our front counter service. As well as asking the public, throughout the period we talked to our staff about the plans and encouraged them to come up with best practice and good ideas and to help us shape the plans for the future. Would we always, in every form of consultation, like to start earlier than we did? We would have loved to have started earlier. Did we keep it going for as long as we could and continue to take views from people, including our staff? Yes, we did.

We have a number of people who are concerned about how they will be able to continue to deliver great service, with all their skills and experience, in a new organisation. We are talking to them and their representatives, including Unison. You will know that the chief constable spoke directly to Unison at its conference about proposals and how things are going.

We have a number of staff with different needs and we are doing our best to be as sensitive as possible to that, working with staff associations. We have people who have applied for and want to take advantage of our voluntary redundancy and early retirement scheme. In many cases, we are telling people that we cannot afford to lose their skills and experience because the service that we are building for the future needs them. In other cases, because we have no compulsory redundancy, we are telling people who want to stay that we are designing a new service and we are designing them into that service. It is a very complex picture and we are mindful that we need to meet the needs of both those groups of staff.

Graeme Pearson: However, you understand that we have had a commitment from Police Scotland that the changes are about putting police officers on the street. I mentioned the priority crime unit in Stirling, which was congratulated on the work that was being

"carried out to free up more officers to work on the streets and in communities throughout the force area."

In the context of getting more officers on the street, what is the logic of taking away people from the back office facilities? We gathered from our various visits that people on the street believed that they were being pulled in various directions and that it was difficult to commit to their local community needs, because they were doing other duties that took them away from the street, whatever those duties were. How will you balance that?

If it was not for the need to deliver the £63 million savings, would it have been a priority for the force to move on a lot of its support staff and rid itself of those places, or would you have sought a more balanced police family?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I know that you did not mean this, but we would never think of ridding ourselves of people who are doing a very good job for us.

Graeme Pearson: That is what it comes down to.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: We have to operate within our budget. We have a budget and we are a responsible public service; we have to operate within it. We have an opportunity as a single service to think about economies of scale, to support local policing. Colleagues who are involved in some of our centralised functions—any big organisation has functions such as finance, procurement, human resources and so on—are organising themselves so that we get a great service and still make economies, too.

As a single service, we have an opportunity not only to make economies of scale but to think about how we modernise for the future and deliver a more effective service. We have to do all that within our budget. There will be opportunities in that and there will be areas where we cannot scale up for the rest of the country an arrangement that exists in one part of the country under legacy force arrangements. However, we will still deliver a great service.

Graeme Pearson: We discussed i6 at the sub-committee's previous meeting. You would acknowledge that, in modernising the service—

The Convener: We are talking about local policing.

Graeme Pearson: I know, but—

The Convener: Slow down. You are very cute at weaving something else into a question. I want

to park the i6 issue just now. I am mindful of the time, so you need to focus.

Graeme Pearson: I am not interested in the i6 part of it.

The Convener: Well, why did you mention it?

Graeme Pearson: I am saying that we want the information technology to be in place so that when the service is modernised, we get more for less.

The Convener: That is still weaving the issue in. I am ruling on that. We are not here to talk about i6.

Graeme Pearson: I have made my point.

The Convener: You have not made your point; you have made me cross.

Margaret Mitchell (Central Scotland) (Con): I want to press the witnesses a bit more on Central Scotland Police's priority crime unit, because it seemed to be a very good local unit. The cabinet secretary said that

"with its specially-trained civilian members of staff"

working with police officers, the initiative

"can help more police officers become part of the fabric of the communities they serve"

and free up police officers to concentrate on serious crime. Can I have confirmation that it is closing?

We are looking at the budget, but although that preventative measure seems to have worked very well, you cannot scale it up. Surely that should be exactly what you do with something that works very well.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I am glad to hear members of staff being described in such glowing terms for the good job that they have done. Of course, as individuals, they have done a good job.

We are looking across the functions that are available to us to deliver to the public. I mentioned that we are shifting the balance, if you like, so that we in local policing can still meet our response policing responsibilities. We want to get as many officers as we can into community policing and what we would all describe as community teams that are locally based, focused on local priorities and available both to the public and to reduce crime and keep people safe at whatever is the most appropriate time of the day or day of the week.

In that model, we are looking at our community-based officers doing a range of things. We are asking them to respond to some calls for service that would previously have been dealt with by response policing officers and to get involved with the investigation of crime and related problem solving at a very local level.

That rebalancing enables us to have, for example, community investigation units in local policing that will do some work of the kind that the team that Margaret Mitchell has just described did. That work will now be done by police officers who will not be taken off the street to do it; instead, it will be part of community-based work and policing on the streets. We are taking a fresh look at local policing and looking at good practice around the country. Of course, the unit that Margaret Mitchell mentioned was an example of good practice that ran under the legacy force arrangements, but it is not that it is exclusively good practice that we have to adopt. We are going to do that kind of work in a different way, based around and using our community investigation units and community-based officers.

Assistant Chief Constable McCormick will be able to talk a bit more about the transition. It fits with the model that we have described of rebalancing and moving as many officers as we can into community policing and community investigation units across Scotland.

Margaret Mitchell: Forgive me, DCC Fitzpatrick. You have described something that was working very well at the local level but, because we now have a national police force, it no longer has relevance. The fact is that the civilian investigation staff who worked so well with the police officers and were delivering good results feel that they have been made redundant compulsorily because there is no equivalent job for them.

However, to move on, you talked—

The Convener: You might want to let DCC Fitzpatrick answer that point, having made it.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I will invite Mr McCormick to describe the transitional arrangements around that team, as Margaret Mitchell raised the point but, as I said earlier—

Margaret Mitchell: Before you talk about the transitional arrangements, could you address the point about performance?

The Convener: Please do not talk over each other. There has been an accusation. Does DCC Fitzpatrick want to answer it?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I wanted to say that we have a no compulsory redundancy arrangement for people who work for us in Police Scotland—

Margaret Mitchell: De facto compulsory redundancy is what I was saying—

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: There is no compulsory redundancy. We have voluntary

redundancy and early retirement schemes, and we are able to deploy elsewhere in the organisation the skills of anyone who does not want to take advantage of those schemes. They are much sought-after people with a lot of experience and skills, and we want them to carry on doing a good job for us.

Margaret Mitchell: If you are already using those civilian investigation staff, why change the arrangement?

The Convener: Could we perhaps hear from ACC McCormick in answer to that?

Assistant Chief Constable Mike McCormick (Police Scotland): In the priority crime unit in the Forth Valley division—formerly Central Scotland Police—we had two civilian co-ordinators and 10 investigators. However, it is worth recognising the context in which that group was introduced and what it now compares with.

At the time, Central Scotland Police did not have the uplift in police numbers that was provided as part of the extra 1,000 officers in Scotland, and it was also dealing with more of what it described as volume crime. At the time, priority crime included vandalism, minor housebreaking and car crime, and there has been a significant reduction in those crimes. The notion was that the unit dealt with priority crimes, but our priorities now are different from what they were when the unit was formed. It has become clear to us that it is more useful to have fully empowered police officers, who are part of the community investigation unit—as DCC Fitzpatrick said—and who can carry out the full ambit of police investigation duties; they are also visible on the street, adding to the police presence, which we know that communities find valuable. The role that that team had has diminished because of the change in the crime profile.

There is genuine added value for us in having consistency in how we do things across the country. For example, expert crime assistants join major investigation teams to support local policing. If there is an additional set of people performing a different function that is unusual and unique to an area, that is a little bit uncomfortable for the model. However, I believe that we can get better value out of using police officers in the context of where we are now, as opposed to the context that existed when the priority crime unit was introduced, at which point it was an approachable and appropriate thing.

Margaret Mitchell: That leads me neatly on to our other concern. I fully understand that the hierarchy will want targets against which to judge and analyse performance, but when we went out and talked to police officers they told us that the new priorities of performance-led policing, as referenced by Mr McCormick, created another silo, whereas previously there had been intelligence gathering, not necessarily out on the street but achieved by officers spending time talking to communities. They gathered and analysed information and worked out strategies, all of which led to effective preventative policing, as opposed to response policing or targets that may not be a priority in every area. That is our concern about the unit being abandoned, and it is the concern that we heard from the police on the ground.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: I go back to what I said at the beginning. I have to ask myself how I know whether, under a national service and with our commitment to local policing remaining local in nature, we are making a difference and whether our officers are enabled to do their job as well as they possibly can be. The bottom line for us is whether we are actually keeping people safer. We know that we are, and we know that being able to provide individual officers with intelligence, and to focus and brief them on the priorities that have been set for them by the public, is having a good effect.

The officers whom you met around the country have been instrumental in ensuring that there are more than 700 fewer victims of violence in Scotland so far this year, and that antisocial behaviour and disorder incidents are down by 50,000 and 60,000 in 11 months as against the same period last year. The focus of those officers is on what they do every day, based on intelligence and briefing. They do not have to worry about individual targets because they are not set individual targets, and that is really effective.

14:15

Of course we have been able to build on the legacy arrangements that came from the previous eight forces, but our approach to local policing under a single service is to be able to identify what is working well around the country and offer that to local officers wherever they are. Officers have the full support of a great deal of specialist assets—helicopters, major inquiry teams or dogs to search for a missing person or drugs or to recover stolen property—and we can address a local initiative by leveraging in extra people from other places in Scotland to support them. All that is now available, and the results speak for themselves.

The Convener: Before Margaret Mitchell continues, I warn everybody that we have less than five minutes. If she is brief, I will be able to get Roderick Campbell and Alison McInnes in. If the questions cannot be answered in the time available, I will ask the witnesses to provide written answers.

Margaret Mitchell: We certainly got feedback that the national resources can be very helpful. I would not like the witnesses to think that everything is negative. However, I would have been a lot more encouraged today if, rather than telling me that she had got everything entirely right and that everything from the hierarchy is trickling down to officers on the ground, DCC Fitzpatrick had taken some of our concerns on board and said, "I would like to know if officers who were doing preventative work now feel that they are more reactive, as I can learn from that." I have not heard that today.

The Convener: Can we just leave that for the moment? You can reply in writing, DCC Fitzpatrick. I suspect that it will be a long answer, some of which you have already given us.

I would like to give Roderick Campbell an opportunity as he is making a special guest appearance.

Roderick Campbell (North East Fife) (SNP): I have a very small point for clarification. There has been a lot of talk about local policing, but to what extent are community officers less locally based than they were before Police Scotland was set up? Are community hubs pulling local policemen away?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Police officers across Scotland are based locally. Every community can identify individual local officers, particularly through social media. If someone is unclear about who their local officers are and how to contact them, they can put in their postcode—

Roderick Campbell: The question is not so much where they are based as whether they come in from somewhere else when, previously, they were based in the community.

The Convener: Do you mean living in the community?

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Do you mean resident? I am sorry; I am not understanding you.

Roderick Campbell: Well, no; I am talking operationally. I understand that the position in Fife has changed: according to a report that I have seen, the number of community officers in the local area has remained the same, but they are operating in a slightly different way.

Chief Superintendent McEwan: We have grown the number of community officers in Fife—at the last count, the number had increased by 53, I think; 55 per cent are response officers and 44 per cent are community officers. We have actually increased the number of community officers.

We are in the process of hubbing our response officers to make sure that they have greater resilience to respond to grade 1 and grade 2 incidents. Our community officers are still within their local communities, responding to community concerns in Cupar, St Andrews and so on.

Roderick Campbell: That does not accord with the information that I am getting on the ground.

Deputy Chief Constable Fitzpatrick: Can I pick up the point? We still have the same number of operational police buildings across Scotland that we inherited under the legacy arrangements. We have not closed any.

We look at response times and the opportunity that we have to deploy officers quickly and effectively, and we make sure that resources are spread across the country. We monitor how long it takes us to get to incidents, and we make sure that we deploy officers throughout our operational buildings so that, effectively, they are in the communities that they are serving.

Of course, from time to time, we will reorganise or reorder that to give a service that is as good as possible.

Roderick Campbell: It has certainly been suggested in parts of my constituency that officers who were based in one part now come from elsewhere. The police station remains but it is not in active use in the same way that it was. The officers are less local.

The Convener: In the interests of time, I ask Roderick Campbell to give us more detail and we will put it in a letter.

I want John Finnie and Alison McInnes to get their questions on the record and we will put them in a letter with Roderick Campbell's question.

John Finnie: I understand that there is case law regarding blanket searching in relation to misuse of drugs and offensive weapons. I commend a booklet to you that Northern Constabulary used to issue to young people. It is called "Check It Out ... Know Your Rights".

I heard the question that my colleague Alison McInnes asked about whether you tell people that they do not require to submit to a search, which has implications for complaints; in any case, you would not be able to evidence complaints. The more knowledge people have, the better.

This is not rocket science. All that has to be asked is how many people were searched on the shift, and how many searches were successful. You do not need fancy IT systems to get those details.

Alison McInnes: I would like some further information on the reduction of participation in local diversionary projects and the many cases of withdrawal from things such as road safety education. I am thinking of diversionary projects

such as midnight football leagues in which local officers were actively involved. I understand that no officers are involved in those now. I would like to understand the rationale for those changes.

The Convener: The witnesses cannot answer the questions just now. We have a guillotine on the meeting because we have to finish by 14.25, before the chamber sits.

I thank the witnesses for their evidence. We will put those questions in more detailed form in a letter for further explanation, and that letter and your responses will be published.

14:21

Meeting continued in private until 14:30.

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