

Notes of the All Party Parliamentary Groups meeting for Policing and Rural Services

15 September 2015 – Committee Room 20 – House of Commons

Present: Graham Stuart MP (Chair); John Howell MP; Baroness Harris; Chris Davies MP; Judith Cummins MP; Lord Harris;

In attendance: Julia Mulligan NRCN Chairman and PCC for North Yorkshire; Tony Hogg PCC for Devon Cornwall and Isles of Scilly; Tim Passmore, PCC for Suffolk; Chief Constable Simon Prince, Dyfed-Powys and National Policing lead for Rural and Wildlife Crime; Clive Harris NFU Mutual; Graham Biggs, Rural Services Network; Cllr Cecilia Motley, Shropshire Council and Chair of the Rural Services Network; Nick Payne Rural Services Network/NRCN, Sgt Matt Howells, Dyfed-Powys Police; Dale Cox NFU Mutual; Sarah Lee, Countryside Alliance; Oli Strudwick Country Land and Business Association; Andy Tremayne, APCC; James Waters APCC; Martin Deller, APCC; Sam Hall, Researcher to Graham Stuart MP.

Apologies: Dr. Sarah Wollaston MP; Chloe Smith MP; David Macintosh MP; Rt. Hon Sajid Javid MP; Rt. Hon Dominic Grieve MP; James Cleverley MP; Baroness Byford; Sam Gyimah MP; Dr. Liam Fox MP; Rory Stewart MP; George Freeman MP; Jo Churchill MP; Tom Tugendhat MP; Rebecca Pow MP; Christopher Salmon PCC for Dyfed-Powys; Dawn Osborne (APCC); June Armstrong, Institute of Community Safety

1) Introductions

Graham Stuart introduced himself and welcomed everyone to the meeting and commented that this was the first meeting of the two APPGs together. If this was considered of value there was a suggestion that the arrangement could be repeated once a year.

2) NRCN Survey Results and “Rural Policing Matters”

2.1 Julia Mulligan was invited to deliver her presentation (please refer to the slides attached). The NRCN had been set up to draw together all Forces and organisations with an interest in rural crime and policing matters with a view to sharing best practice and improving performance and partnership working. The NRCN had been initially supported with a Home Office Police Innovation Fund grant which extends to March 2016. The survey had been designed to better inform the Network and others about the perceptions of rural crime and the experiences of those who had suffered it. Rural Crime is very much under researched currently by comparison with other topics in policing. JM asserted that the survey was certainly the largest and possibly the first national survey of rural crime across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. JM emphasised that the survey was based on a self-selecting sample of respondents unlike the Crime Survey for England and Wales which was a randomised larger sample. The NRCN results therefore must be treated with a degree of caution but viewed in the national context the survey has produced some interesting and valid considerations.

2.2 JM apologised that arrangements to provide 30 hard copies of the report for Parliamentarians to take away had not been delivered in time by a courier company as had been arranged in advance. A small number of copies had been printed off by colleagues at the APCC and brought to the meeting.

2.3 JM described the top line findings and illustrated these comments with her experience in North Yorkshire.

2.4 She believed that rural communities were resilient but needed some rural specific mechanisms of engagement and interventions to successfully reduce rural crime and the fear of crime. Too often urbanised models of engagement are used by organisations and when rolled out in to rural communities are less successful as a consequence.

2.5 Approximately a third of policing demand in North Yorkshire is linked to mental health related issues but there were considerable difficulties as austerity reductions in other services was now impacting on this with the police being the service of last resort. Low demand and low populations are linked and measures need to be more sophisticated to relate demand assessments to population densities when making changes to services. The traditional policing approach of using “threat risk and harm” is not sufficiently sensitive to rural communities and their needs. The decreasing trend in confidence in the police in rural communities must also be seen as a “risk” that needs to be factored in. JM believed that measures of vulnerability do not take into consideration rural contexts and may be subject to an urban bias..

2.6 JM then turned to the Rural Policing Matters campaign and acknowledged the extensive work that had been undertaken in Devon and Cornwall to model the implications of the Home Office proposals for changing the Police Funding Formula. The consultation on these proposals concluded on 15 September. Around 850 people had signed an NRCN petition and the PCC for Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly would be presenting a large petition to 10 Downing Street later that afternoon.

2.7 JM concluded her presentation by referring to the current debate around Devolution and the serious consequences she saw in decisions being made without all partners’ views being taken in to account. Police in many instances had not been included in the discussions which had led to the bids being made to government that were difficult for policing and in particular made no consideration of local funding arrangements (council tax precept)..

2.8 A short discussion ensued before Tony Hogg was invited to contribute his thoughts on the detailed implications of the changes to the Police Funding Formula which his Force in Devon and Cornwall had been assessing. In short TH had now concluded that the consequence of the new formula would mean that he would have to double the size of his current projected savings over the next 4 years to £60M. TH did not believe the new formula was fit for purpose and provides no clarity or improvement on the current largely discredited formula. He had worked with other organisations to lobby for a better formula as his investigations suggest the proposal will produce some very anomalous results. He cited various issues such the population criterion which recognises the impact of commuting but not tourism, the formula is reliant on the crime demand on the police yet the NAO recognise that this accounts for only around 30% of the demand on the police with the bulk of the demand coming from non-crime related issues. “Hard Pressed Families” is still going to be used as a demographic criterion but this has largely been abandoned by the private sector in assessing the characteristics of local populations. The use of an indicator for bars is also urban/metropolitan biased and produces significant grant funding anomalies between similar Force areas – North Yorkshire/ Devon and Cornwall.

3) Chief Constable Prince – National Police lead view

3.1 Chief Constable Prince was then invited to give an overview from his perspective as the National Policing Lead for Rural and Wildlife Crime. SP explained this role and how it related to the National Police Chiefs Council (which has superseded ACPO). SP said he did not believe that it was helpful to impart conflict between rural and urban areas in these difficult times with austerity measures now biting hard. However he did believe that the police needed to better understand rural issues and the differences in delivering successful rural policing. He acknowledged that the picture was made up of rural specific issues and those that occur in both rural and urban settings but the context/impact of that crime in the respective area will often be different. It was important to recognise that the approach needs to be tailored accordingly and not a simple one size fits all approach.

3.2 Preventing crime in rural communities will be a big challenge against a background of reducing confidence. We need to build and maintain effective partnerships as this not only a job for the police.

3.3 He acknowledged the earlier point made about Threat Risk and Harm but asserted that rural areas are also subject to Serious and Organised Crime. He cited the Horsemeat scandal as an example which was obviously also a national and international issue at the time.

3.4 Population density is important to the police but he asserted that it works both ways in both urban and rural settings. He was currently looking at some research from overseas which had sought to quantify this.

3.5 SP concurred that rural crime had not been researched sufficiently and he was collaborating with the College of Policing to address this.

Discussion

3.6 John Howells MP sought clarity around the points made about mental health. JM explained she was involved in a first contact review in her area which has shown that on a Friday afternoon, Social Services departments are effectively shut down which leaves NYP officers as the service of last resort. This is a major drain on police time at weekends and in the evenings. JH asked if moving social services in to the NHS might improve this. JM referred back to her earlier concerns about the devolution debate and the fact that police had not been invited to contribute to the talks but may be impacted by the consequences if the bids are approved. She had also discussed this with the minister Greg Clark. JH then asked about linking up with Ambulance Services. JM agreed that this would offer potential back office savings and SP commented that he had a very effective mental health collaboration with the local NHS in Dyfed-Powys. JM added that practice and cooperation with the Ambulance Service was very varied.

3.7 Chris Davies MP asserted that in his discussions in his constituency, there was a perception that neighbouring Forces do not collaborate effectively enough. He thought that this was inaccurate but it was clearly a widely held view. JM acknowledged that collaboration is variable. This was one reason why the NRCN was set up. PCCs are trying to build logical relationships with their neighbouring Forces. She also thought that the key to addressing inaccurate perceptions was maintaining good quality Neighbourhood Policing Teams. She was very concerned that in many areas these teams could now be under threat because of planned cutbacks. Furthermore where these teams exist there is also too much churn and staff turnover which means that effective community relations have to be rebuilt every time an officer moves on. Police need to get used to going where people congregate to engage with them and not expect the population to come to them.

3.8 Graham Stuart MP asked about the role of volunteers. JM said her Chief Constable was now the lead for Citizens and Policing and volunteering for the police was nationally very popular. Many PCCs were expanding their Special Constable arrangements and looking to use and recruit volunteers to assist them. SP also commented that even where there is good partnership working and other effective NPTs, we know that rural crime whilst lower than other areas is still significantly under reported. That challenge still needs to be addressed. He added that most Ambulance services do not meet their response time targets in rural areas. Dyfed-Powys is looking to try and address first responder cover in other ways and has first aid training initiatives under way in schools. He commented that he continues to try to protect frontline policing but that this was now becoming extremely challenging. Reductions in policing in rural areas are much more keenly felt by the community than elsewhere.

3.9 Tim Passmore referred to the particular challenges of Cultural and Heritage Property Crime. He was also concerned like others about the additional cuts that the current funding formula changes would impose on Suffolk which provides the lowest cost of policing per head of population. He also referred to Food crime and his belief that we needed to develop a National Food Crime agency as the Horsemeat scandal was not a one off. Good visible local policing complimented by effective national coordination was his guiding principle. Suffolk uses volunteers and have developed some effective local schemes with horse riders and dog walkers. TP also expressed concern about devolution proposals for the police. He is also worried that the Ministry of Justice plan to close magistrates' courts in Suffolk, reducing from 3 down to 1. This will have serious implications for the administration of justice in the county of over 1700 square miles poorly served by public transport and will add to police operating costs.

3.10 Lord Harris referred to a Parliamentary question he had posed to previous minister about the police transporting patients instead of the Ambulance service. In his reply the Minister had asserted that this rarely happened and only Ambulances should carry people to hospitals. Further enquiries with the NHS had also affirmed this response but the Police said it was a frequent event. His question had related to the situation in London and he was concerned to hear that this might be an issue in rural areas. The assembled concurred that this was regularly occurring across the UK that police were transporting people to hospital where the ambulance service had not been able to respond. Lord Harris asked for this to be quantified so that he could take up the issue again. SP agreed to look in to this.

3.11 Lord Harris was also concerned about the retrenchment of organisations from working in partnerships due to the consequences of austerity reductions already made. JM concurred and said there was now a risk of a blame game culture developing which is not helpful whereby people are falling in to gaps between service providers. The focus needs to be on the needs of the affected individual. Extra costs to providers will arise in putting things right after the event. (E.g. Missing from Homes)

3.12 Tony Hogg said he believed some Forces are considering offering people the choice to pay more for their local services in the lead up to precept setting next year. He said that this had arisen because there was a risk that police may become capable of only being responsive to incidents as they occurred – 'firefighting'. He also alluded to the hidden issues of rural crime such as domestic abuse.

4) NFU Mutual presentation

4.1 Clive Harris then provided his presentation on the work of NFU Mutual – see slides.

Discussion

4.2 JM said that the security measures on agri plant were very varied depending on the manufacturers. CH said his company had made a major impact on the big companies e.g. JCB and John Deere but there were now many manufacturers operating in the market. The trend now is for thieves to look at smaller/older units which are less likely to be fitted with trackers or other security measures.

4.3 GS asked whether Govt should be asked to legislate to insist that security measures are installed on new equipment at the point of manufacture as this was becoming common on other products. CH concurred and said the industry had begun to take the issue seriously but any help from Govt would be welcome.

4.4 SP referred to the problem of dealing with livestock theft. Expertise was building in the police and some very successful schemes in relation to sheep are being rolled out with the NFU and NFU Mutual to train officers and provide a means to hold animals pending investigation that does not compromise the host farmer's own business with DEFRA and Animal Health - movement licenses etc. What was needed was a universal system for scanning and interrogating a database.

5) Next Steps

5.1 JM asked the attendees to sign the NRCN petition and lobby/make representations to the Home Office ministers on the proposed changes to the police funding formula. The NRCN was willing to support Parliamentarians in this regard with any information required.

5.2 Tony Hogg would circulate his analysis of the implications of the formula for people to use and take forward.

5.3 Hard copies of the NRCN reports would be provided to the MPs/Peers as soon as possible

5.4 SP to investigate the Ambulance service issue raised by Lord Harris and provide further information to him and Graham Stuart MP.

5.5 The recently announced proposals for "blue light" integration were welcomed by the PCCs and can certainly deliver some significant back office savings without compromising the independence of the two organisations. The APPGs could assist in facilitating further discussion on this at the appropriate time.

5.6 It was agreed the joint APPGs meeting be reconvened in 2016 to review progress with these matters once again.

Nick Payne

24 September 2015