

POLICE Question Time

with  Cheshire
Police Authority

WINSFORD, 28 JUNE 2010

THE PANEL

- *Margaret Ollerenshaw, Chairman of the Police Authority*
- *Phil Thompson, Assistant Chief Constable*
- *Chief Superintendent Craig Guildford, Area Commander for Western Cheshire*
- *Steve Collett, Chief Executive, Cheshire Probation*

MAJOR INCIDENT MANAGEMENT

Q What lessons can be learned from the recent events concerning Derrick Bird in Cumbria and could the Panel reassure the public that a similar event in Cheshire would be handled more effectively?

A The Assistant Chief Constable reported that whilst these events were rare, the force was prepared for such an incident. Cheshire has specialist firearms trained officers located throughout the whole force area and also centrally located at Headquarters. The geography/terrain and road networks in Cheshire are not as challenging as Cumbria. In Cheshire, officers receive specialist training as first responders to ensure that they can deal with a developing situation as well as containment.

The Chief Superintendent outlined the various stages and checks which were undertaken when an individual applied or renewed a licence. Cheshire have removed 16 licences recently

The Chairman added that the Authority had been criticised in the past for not investing in protective services and therefore had made some significant investment in air support with the purchase of a new helicopter and the construction of a dedicated 100 metre firearms training facility which it was hoped would also be rented out to other forces to generate income. The Authority and the Chief Constable were reviewing systems following the lessons learned from this tragic event.

Q How thoroughly is the mental stability of applicants for firearm licenses investigated?

A The Chief Superintendent commented that the applicants details were checked on various intelligence databases and that they had to declare any relevant medical conditions and their doctor was also contacted about whether they were fit to hold a licence.

Q Concern was raised about a 45 minute response by the police to a murder in Chester.

A Chief Superintendent Guildford advised that the Western Area has the best incident response in the county at 10 minutes and that the aim is to respond to a Grade 1 incident, which included crimes such as murder, within 15 minutes. The incident in

question was not originally reported as a murder, therefore did not receive an immediate response.

- Q Will there be cover for when the new helicopter is being serviced?
- A The Assistant Chief Constable reported that Cheshire had reciprocal arrangements with North Wales Police to provide air support cover when required.

SUPPORT FOR PEOPLE WITH MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS

- Q What safe places do you use for people picked up by the police who have mental health problems and are there psychiatric liaison nurses available? Does the custody suite have 24 hour mental health cover?
- A Chief Superintendent Guildford advised that the three custody suites in Cheshire had a contract with a medical provider for 24 hour cover by a doctor and a number of nurses. Custody Sergeants are also trained to identify to ascertain whether an individual is fit for detention, interview; and for a mental health assessment. Whilst the custody suites are used as a place of safety whilst awaiting a mental health assessment, Leighton Hospital and the Countess of Chester Hospital are also used. Individuals may also be asked to voluntarily attend hospital.

Mr Collett of the Probation Service added that besides dealing with dangerous offenders with psychiatric conditions they also deal with low-level mental health issues and assist in helping people to access services.

ROAD POLICING

- Q Concern was raised about indiscriminate parking causing obstructions at road junctions.
- A The Chief Superintendent advised that these types of issues can be raised at the local community meetings as a priority for action can be tackled at neighbourhood level by police officers or PCSOs.
- Q Why is no action taken against people riding on the pavement causing problems to elderly and infirm pedestrians and mother with prams in the areas of Winsford and Hartford?
- A The Chief Superintendent advised that enforcement was undertaken by the Police in the form of education and advice. The questioners were invited to speak with the local officers to ensure that the appropriate areas were targeted.
- Q What enforcement action is taken against speeding motorists and drivers using mobile phones? A request was made for speed cameras on the A49 between the Fox & Barrel and Alvanley Arms public houses in Cotebrook.
- A The Assistant Chief Constable reported that the Constabulary participated in a number of national road safety campaigns which included targeting speeding; drivers not wearing seatbelts; and motorist using mobile 'phones whilst driving. The speed limit on the section of A49 is 60mph, however, there is an advisory 40mph due to the road conditions.

ILLEGAL TRADE

- Q What action can be taken against a retail outlet illegally selling alcohol and drugs?
- A Chief Superintendent Guildford reported that once intelligence has been received, the appropriate action can be taken which may include being targeted by local officers who work with Trading Standards. If an individual is prosecuted they would be removed from the premises and the Police would work with the company to offer appropriate training.
- Mr Collett reported on the various support services that were offered to individuals for drug and alcohol treatment.

PCSO POWERS

- Q PCSOs have had a lot of criticism - will they ever get more powers?
A resident would like to see the police or PCSOs monitoring the parks with drinking bans more often.
- A Chief Superintendent Guildford reported that the Community Safety Partnership had tasked the local council to designate more 'alcohol free zones' which would assist the Police with enforcement. Whilst all the officers in the Neighbourhood Policing Teams worked together, PCSOs were allocated to a smaller dedicated area, and therefore, able to receive intelligence due to their closer links with the local community and local knowledge.

The Assistant Chief Constable advised that PCSOs were a valuable additional resource in community policing and wanted to maintain the separation of roles between PCSOs and police officers. PCSOs predominantly performed more 'community work' and worked with other partners and are able to seize alcohol from under 18s.

POLICE VISIBILITY

- Q Would it be more beneficial to switch the emphasis from police investigation after a crime to prevention with greater police officer visibility?
- A The ACC discussed the need to have a balance of both crime prevention and detection.
- Q Concern was raised that cuts in police funding will impact on rural policing.
- A The Chairman commented that the Authority was required to make significant savings over the next three years and were working with Constabulary to identify where efficiency savings can be made whilst maintaining the current level of service. The Assistant Chief Constable reported that the current neighbourhood policing structure to deliver local policing would remain, however there was an opportunity to review the service in particular back office services. Cheshire remains one of the lowest funded police forces in the country despite of a 17% increase in Council Tax three years ago.
- Q A questioner requested the need for a police presence in the vicinity of the new Academy on Grange Lane/High Street to target problems associated with additional traffic and pupils on foot, truancy and the purchase of alcohol and cigarettes from local retailers.

- A The Chief Superintendent reported that Inspector Snasdell and the local authority representative would review traffic planning and the traffic lights sequence. Trading Standards did actively undertake test purchasing selling to under 18's at local retailers. There were a series of interventions being undertaken to target the sale of drugs in the area. Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements and work with other agencies ensured that known offenders were monitored. Partner agencies and Police School Liaison Officers visited to schools and targeted vulnerable children playing truant.

CRIMINAL RECORDS

- Q Concern was expressed about the accuracy of data recorded and disclosed by Cheshire Constabulary's Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) and that disclosure should be limited to matters of proof that have been established through the Courts.
- A The Assistant Chief Constable commented that decisions on disclosure were not arbitrary and that the Authorising Officer takes account of the material provided and balances the necessity and proportionality of the disclosure against the subject's rights and has a duty to weigh that balance in favour of protecting children and vulnerable adults.

'Appeals' are not part of the CRB process but 'disputes' are and every disclosure consideration was dealt with by the Authorising Officer within 24 hours of receipt. There is no ongoing backlog of dispute cases in the Constabulary. The service level agreement with CRB is that 95% of applications are returned within 14 days. The Force has achieved that target every month of 2010 with the exception of March, when 93% was achieved and Cheshire is a high performing Force in this area of business.

Neither statute or stated case restricts the Authorising Officer to consider only Court findings of guilt.