

‘Open Letter’ from the Chair of Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel to members of the public in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly

March 2015

Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the PCC doing to address it?

At its meeting on 6 February 2015, the Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel (PCP) agreed to conduct a scrutiny review in relation to the **“Is the significant decline in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth reflected across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and if so, what is the PCC doing to address it?”**

The role of the PCP is to provide support and scrutiny challenge to the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), to promote openness in the transaction of police business and also to support the PCC in the effective exercise of their functions. The PCP is not responsible for scrutinising the performance of the police force as a whole or the Chief Constable, as this is the responsibility of the PCC. Both the role of the PCC and the PCP were created as part of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, which brought in new structural arrangements for national policing, strategic police decision-making, neighbourhood policing and policing accountability.

It has come to light at recent Police and Crime Panel Meetings, that the number of Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in Plymouth has fallen significantly which is concerning, and it is unclear why. Additionally, it is also not clear whether this is the case across the rest of the Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly – and the Police and Crime Panel would like to understand this better.

The Police and Crime Commissioner has a priority in his Police and Crime Plan 2014-17¹:

Priority 6: “To encourage and enable citizens and communities to play their part in tackling crime and making their communities safer.”

To assist, attached at **Appendix I**, are relevant extracts from the Police and Crime Plan in respect of the Police and Crime Commissioner’s Priority 6 and commitments to how he intends to encourage and enable citizens and communities to play their part in tackling crime and making their communities safer.

This scrutiny review will, therefore, seek to:

- **Understand whether the fall in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes is reflected across the whole of Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly**
- **If this is the case, to understand why?**
- **Whether the PCC is doing enough to deliver “Priority 6” in his Police and Crime Plan that would encourage greater community volunteering and involvement in schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch.**

¹ <http://www.devonandcornwall-pcc.gov.uk/Document-Library/The-Police-and-Crime-Plan-2014-FINAL.pdf>

The PCP is due to undertake the review at its next meeting on 10 April 2015 and will be adopting a 'select committee' style approach. In order to assist the PCP Members in effectively scrutinising the topic, the Panel is seeking written evidence from stakeholders and members of the public through the provision of responses to the following questions:

1. **Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme?**
2. **Do you think there has been a fall in Neighbourhood Watch Schemes in your area (please state which area)?**
3. **If your answer to Question 2 is 'Yes', why do you think that is the case?**
4. **Do you think the PCC is doing enough to encourage and enable greater involvement by citizens and communities to support policing, reducing antisocial behaviour and to help reduce crime and, in particular, Neighbourhood Watch Schemes?**
5. **If your answer to question 2 is "No", what do you think the Police and Crime Commissioner should be doing to encourage greater involvement in schemes such as Neighbourhood Watch?**

The PCP would be grateful for your written responses to some or all of these questions. **The deadline for written responses is Wednesday 25 March 2015** and responses should be sent to:

Sarah Hopkins
Community Safety & Partnerships Manager
& Lead Officer – Devon & Cornwall Police and Crime Panel
Plymouth City Council
Civic Centre
Plymouth
PL1 2AA

Email: sarah.hopkins@plymouth.gov.uk

Please also let us know if you would be willing and able to attend PCP meeting on 10 April 2015, as a witness, to provide verbal evidence. If so please provide your contact details. Note: There will be a limited opportunity to hear from witnesses and those invited will be notified in advance.

Please note that, depending on the level/number of responses received, we may need to summarise responses for presentation to the Panel.

Members of the public are welcome to attend and observe Police and Crime Panel meetings. For more information about when meetings are occurring, and to view archived

and live webcasts of Panel Meetings, please visit the Panel's website:
<http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/dccpmeetingsandminutes.html>

Members of the public can also ask questions in respect of the functions of the Police and

Crime Panel at Panel Meetings – to find out more about how to do this, information is available at <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/dcpcpquestions.html>

Yours faithfully

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R Croad', with a horizontal line underneath it.

Councillor Roger Croad
Chair, Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel

(Plymouth City Council is the Host Authority for Devon and Cornwall Police & Crime Panel and views expressed by the Panel are not necessarily those of the Authority).

APPENDIX I

The priority in the Police and Crime Plan 2014-17:

- **Priority 6: To encourage and enable citizens and communities to play their part in tackling crime and making their communities safer.**

Extracts from the Police and Crime Plan in relevant to Priority 6:

1. "...Focusing on crime prevention where we want to work collectively with individuals, communities and businesses..."
2. "...The public want to do more and we want to look at how we can engage them more directly in keeping their communities safe. Closer engagement provides a valuable bridge between the police and communities and will help foster greater understanding and boost confidence in the police..."
3. "...This Plan initiates a review of the current extent of volunteering within the policing family to explore the benefits of widening the use of volunteers and to look at how we can make the most of volunteering. It also recognises the need to address issues relating to infrastructure to ensure that volunteers are properly supported. We will be working closely with the police service and partners to engage these groups closely in work to encourage greater participation by individuals and communities in crime prevention and to improve community safety..."
4. The Commissioner will: "Actively encourage and enable greater involvement by citizens and communities to support policing, reducing antisocial behaviour and to help us reduce crime."
5. Through this Plan the Commissioner expects the Chief Constable to seek out new opportunities for volunteers to support officers, staff and PCSOs in appropriate circumstances. A specific review of existing volunteering opportunities will be carried out and steps will be taken to ensure that there is a clear, robust strategy and that support systems and structures are in place.
6. The Commissioner will:
 - Champion and enable greater involvement by citizens and communities to support policing, and help keep their communities safe including ways to prevent crime occurring.
 - Support the development of active citizenry schemes and community projects by working to remove unnecessary barriers and red tape.
 - Establish PCC Awards to recognise the most effective schemes and ideas.
 - Explore how the police and partners can better support existing schemes.
 - Ask the Chief Constable to review the scope and scale of volunteering in policing and examine:
 - The volume and range of volunteer roles and civic engagement opportunities.
 - The potential costs and benefits of more radical approaches to civic engagement and community involvement.
 - How we can make the most of volunteering.
7. The Commissioner expects the Chief Constable to:
 - think creatively about how to work with citizens and communities in policing, crime prevention and community safety and, in particular how they can help manage demand on the police in peak summer months
 - Review the current extent of public participation within policing and community safety, including the existing support infrastructure and work with the Commissioner, partners and volunteering organisations to build a strategy for:
 - Greater involvement of volunteers in policing, including a wider range of roles.

- Identifying and pursuing opportunities to work with others to boost volunteering.
 - Improving engagement, support and infrastructure within Devon and Cornwall Police to ensure the long term sustainability of volunteering and satisfaction of volunteers.
 - Improving the diversity of the volunteer base
8. The Commissioner will work with partners to:
- Engage them in work to review the relationship between policing, communities and citizens – to share experiences, ideas and best practice.
 - Assist with the establishing of networks and promote opportunities for the public to participate in policing more effectively through guidance, support and advice.
 - Support him in finding new ways to optimise volunteering and in helping with the review of existing activities.
9. **Delivery of 'headline' performance measure "Number of hours worked by volunteers:** (currently RAG-rated as RED "transformation of performance is required").