

Police and Crime Panel Meeting

9th October 2015

Report of the Chief Executive of the Office of Police and Crime Commissioner

REVIEW OF POLICE ENGAGEMENT PLANS

1. Background

- 1.1 Following the closure of 12 Police Enquiry Offices in 2014, the Police and Crime Commissioner announced his intention to carry out a review into police engagement plans, focusing on how those localised plans have operated to date, how opportunities for engagement are advertised and communicated, and how much general awareness there is of those opportunities within the community.
- 1.2 The Police and Crime Panel considered the closure of Public Enquiry Offices at its meeting in October 2014. The Panel noted the PCC's intention to carry out a review of how police engagement plans were operating and undertook to consider this issue further at a later meeting.

2. The Review Process

- 2.1 The OPCC carried out its review in Summer 2015, having consulted with the Chief Constable. The review had four broad elements:
 - Feedback from local policing teams on engagement activity within the area, how events are publicised, how engagement plans have operated and their plans for the future.
 - Engagement with local councillors and MPs to seek their views on the operation of the existing engagement plans, in particular with regard to feedback and views from their constituents
 - A dip sample of local policing team websites to see how effectively they are being used to communicate information and engagement opportunities to the local community
 - Face to face consultation with the public (in 3 locations) to seek their views on accessibility, awareness of local opportunities and the operation of the engagement plan.

3. Key Findings from the Review

- 3.1 Of the 59 individual councillors and MPs and the 213 members of the public who completed questionnaires, only 2 made reference to the closure of PEOs. It is clear

that the closure of the 12 PEOs has had almost no impact on how members of the public choose to contact the police and there is no evidence that closure of the offices is a significant cause for concern.

- 3.2 One third of the people interviewed were aware that there were local opportunities to engage with the police, but few attended, and few had had any other reason to contact the police. Where contact had taken place this was usually via the phone. The preference for contacting the police via the phone was also reflected in the results of the consultation which the OPCC had conducted during the summer shows. During the summer consultation, just under 3,000 people took part across the whole Force region in that wider consultation on preferred ways of contacting the police.
- 3.3 The Force website does not seem to be effective in communicating the programme of engagement events which local LPAs are organising. Only one upcoming event is usually listed and members of the public make little use of the site as a source of information. In fact there is little awareness that this information is provided there. The communication channels which are most popular and considered most likely to be effective are local press and advertising, and social media.
- 3.4 Although all LPAs are providing some engagement opportunities, there is inconsistency in how areas publicise. There is also wide variation between the number and variety of events organised by LPAs, and in the extent to which officers attend events organised by others.

4. Details of the Review

Councillors and MPs Questionnaire

- 4.1.1 Questionnaires were sent out to individual councillors and MPs, and via local networks where relevant. However, there were few responses even though the opportunity to respond was repeated following an initial poor level of return.
- 4.1.2 The majority of councillors were aware of engagement events and reported good communication from local officers via town councils. Specific issues which had been raised with them included frustration with the 101 service and the difficulty of contacting the police for reporting purposes. The closure of PEOs was mentioned once.
- 4.1.3 Improvements which were suggested related to improving 101, rather than to engagement. One suggestion was that local councils could share their own surgeries with a police representative.
- 4.1.4 Councillors provided little feedback on the experiences of members of the public relating to their experience of engagement with the police, although there were very positive comments on the work of individual officers in engaging with councils.

Dip sampling of police websites

- 4.2.1 Police websites were dip-sampled for 9 of the 12 towns affected by PEO closures. In most cases (19 of 27 LPA neighbourhoods) a forthcoming event was listed.

4.2.2 None of the sites carried a full listing of events to be held over the next few months, although most of the responses from LPA Inspectors included this information. This seems to be one area where information provided to the public could be enhanced, with limited demand on resources.

Local Policing Area Questionnaire

- 4.3.1 Local policing Areas (LPAs) completed a questionnaire about their engagement plans and activities following the closure of the PEO. All of the LPAs indicated that they were carrying out the activities set out in the engagement plan, and provided a list of events which had or would be taking place. The number and variety of events varied considerably between LPAs.
- 4.3.2 Most LPAs were represented at events and meetings which were run by others, although again there were some notable differences between areas.
- 4.3.3 There were some significant differences between LPAs in their approach to publicising engagement events. While half of them used a wide variety of outlets to publicise events, the others relied more heavily on local media and/or social media. All LPAs included details of the next meeting on their local policing websites but these were not well used by the public.
- 4.3.4 LPAs received very little feedback other than comments received during, or after, their meetings – which made it difficult for them to assess the value of their events/meetings.
- 4.3.5 There was widespread enthusiasm from the LPAs for more use of social media, with Twitter referenced more often than Facebook.

Public surveys

4.4.1 In all 213 individual questionnaires were completed covering Oakhampton, Honiton, St Austell and Liskeard. The results are summarised in the table below.

Have you contacted the police in the last 6 months ?	Yes	No
	34 (16%)	179 (84%)

If yes, what method did you use ?	Phone (101)	Officer PCSO	Social media	Email	Other
	32 (94%)	1 (3%)	1 (3%)	2 (6%)	3 (9%)
	Some used more than 1 contact method				

Are you aware of opportunities to attend engagement events ?	Yes	No
	72 (34%)	141 (66%)

If yes how did you hear about them?	Press	Force Website	Social Media	Officer PCSO	Other
	40 (55%)	0 (0%)	9 (13%)	11 (15%)	12 (17%)

Have you attended any events?	Yes	No
	3 (1%)	210 (99%)

Are you aware that you can check upcoming events, and contact the police, via their website ?	Yes	No
	47 (22%)	166 (78%)

How would you prefer to be made aware of engagement events ?	Website	Email	Press & Local media	Social Media	Officer PCSO
	25 (9%)	9 (4%)	149 (70%)	57 (20%)	15 (7%)
	Most respondents favoured more than 1 option				

5. OPCC Recommendations and Next Steps

- 5.1 Following the Review, the OPCC made a number of recommendations to the PCC and the Chief Constable regarding future engagement approaches. These recommendations were broadly accepted by the two corporation soles at the Joint Management Board meeting in August 2015 and are being taken forward.
- 5.2 The core findings of the review have been that the closure of the PEOs have had very little impact on contact between members of the public and the police but that some additional actions are needed to boost publicity and communications around engagement pathways. The OPCC is working with the Force to look at possible actions that could be taken forward.
- 5.3 It is recognised that arrangements linked to local engagement may alter in due course as a result of likely revisions to the policing model and the upcoming funding announcements from the Government. However, the central nature of the recommendations, which focus on improved consistency, efficiency and communication, would appear to remain relevant to any future scenarios.
- 5.4 Summary of OPCC's Recommendations

1. Listing of events.

Provide a full listing of forthcoming engagement events for the full LPA area on the Force website, including events which are organised by others (partners, voluntary organisations etc).

2. Publicising events.

Develop a co-ordinated and consistent approach to publicising engagement events, making full use of local networks (local press, libraries, post offices, Neighbourhood Watch etc) and social media.

3. Police presence at events organised by other groups.

Officers should be encouraged to make use of engagement events organised by others. Officers are understandably frustrated that attendance at Force engagement events is often poor. LPA responses reveal a wide range of events, activities and group meetings at which there is sometimes police representation, but attendance at such events by officers varies greatly across the region.

4. Opportunities to engage via Mobile Data.

There is obviously considerable potential for Mobile Data to have a very positive impact on the nature of engagement by providing greater scope for officers to be out and about. This should be considered as part of the ongoing development work on Mobile Data.

5. Best Practice Guide on Local Engagement.

The responses provided by the LPA Inspectors included many different examples of the wide variety of engagement activity which takes place across the region, as well as activities and events organised by others. This could be brought together to create a directory of best practice as well as providing a useful overview of the diverse range of activity which takes place.

6. Use of Volunteers.

- Active consideration needs to be given to the role volunteers can play in engagement.
- To avoid any increased demand on police resources, volunteers could take responsibility for planning, organising and co-ordinating engagement programmes. This could include publicising and organising police representation at events which are not police led. There could also be a role for some form of central co-ordination. This would allow current best practise to be rolled out, and would ensure that there was greater consistency across the region.
- In addition to developing new volunteering roles at Force and BCU level, developing links with community groups such as Neighbourhood Watch would allow greater use of existing volunteering networks.

Contact for further information

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Report updated 28th September 2015