

MOTION ON NOTICE

City Council 28 January 2019



POLICE FORENSIC SERVICES

Since 2014, Devon and Cornwall Police have committed to the South West Forensics collaboration with 4 other forces, namely Avon and Somerset, Dorset, Gloucester, and Wiltshire. The scheme requires that Forensic Investigation staff share systems and services to “reduce budgets and increase efficiency for the future”. This operates alongside the wider alliance that exists between Devon and Cornwall and Dorset Police, and has not been adversely impacted by the recent decision not to proceed with merger of the two forces.

While generating some financial savings for Devon and Cornwall Police there is also increasingly strong evidence that crime scene investigation is now significantly degraded, operating under a Service Level Agreement that prohibits “forensics” attendance at “low-level” crime scenes, damaging public confidence and undermining their effectiveness in contributing to crime investigation and prevention at all levels. Effective forensic investigation is particularly crucial in urban areas such as Plymouth where there is a prevalence of acquisitive crime (eg car theft and theft from buildings) and criminal damage. These crimes have a significant impact on their victims and are often linked (forensically and otherwise) to more serious and organised criminal activity.

Our Police and Crime Commissioner recently announced that by October 2019 all of Devon and Cornwall’s Forensic Investigation staff will transfer to Dorset Police, along with Avon and Somerset’s claiming that “the move to a single employer will provide consistent working practices and simplify the collaboration’s operating model.” Council should note that the Wiltshire PCC has chosen not to transfer his Forensics Staff but continue operations within the collaboration scheme.

This unnecessary formal transfer of Devon and Cornwall’s Police Forensic Staff to Dorset is expected to go ahead without consultation with affected communities (including Plymouth City Council), and it does not command the support of affected police staff. Most crucially however, it will move important decision-making about crime-scene investigation away from local control and risks further undermining public confidence in policing and ultimately the effectiveness of crime prevention in our city.

In these circumstances this Council resolves to:

In a letter to Police and Crime Commissioner signed by the Leader of the Council, call for her to keep Devon and Cornwall Police Forensic Investigation staff under local control to retain the integrity of our policing services, and to take steps to reverse the evident reduction in the use of forensic investigation which damages public confidence in policing and inhibits long-term crime prevention.

Proposed – Councillor Gareth Derrick (via Email)

Seconded – Councillor Sally Haydon (via Telephone)