

REPORT TO: East Lothian Council

MEETING DATE: 17 December 2013

BY: Chief Executive

SUBJECT: Scottish Parliament Justice Sub-Committee on Policing:
Call for Evidence on Police Reform

1 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To formulate a response to a call for written evidence from the Scottish Parliament Justice Sub-Committee on Policing, on the Impact of Police Reform on Local Policing.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Council approves the attached draft response for submission.

3 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Justice Sub-Committee made its call for evidence on 4 November. Its original deadline was 29 November but this has been extended to 10 January, which gives the Council the opportunity to consider and discuss the draft response which otherwise would have been submitted as an officer response.

4 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 During its meeting on 22 October 2013, Council discussed Police Scotland proposals to change the opening hours of public counters and to withdraw traffic wardens. The attached draft draws on the terms of the recommendations agreed by Council at that time. It also takes into account comments from Criminal Justice Social work colleagues. Taken all together, the suggestion is that Police Scotland's engagement in partnership working is not yet all that the Council might desire.

- 4.2 Council will note the suggestion that an increase in arrests in the Lothians has been associated with recent apparent delays in the court system, which calls further into question the Scottish Government's decision to close Haddington Sheriff Court in January 2015.

5 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 5.1 This report has no impact on the wellbeing of equalities groups.

6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Financial – none arising from this report.
6.2 Personnel - none arising from this report.
6.3 Other – none arising from this report.

7 BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/14894/14_police_public_counter_service_and_traffic_warden_review (paper discussed at Council on 22 Oct 2013).
7.2 <http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/parliamentarybusiness/CurrentCommittees/69420.aspx> (Call for evidence).

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Date:

By email:

Scottish Parliament Justice Sub-Committee on Policing
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Dear Sub Committee members

IMPACT OF POLICE REFORM

1. I am writing on behalf of East Lothian Council in response to the Justice Sub-Committee on Policing's Call for Written Evidence on the Impact of Police Reform. This response has been agreed by the Council at its meeting on 17 December 2013.
2. East Lothian Council recognises the financial background to police reform. We have welcomed the commitment and engagement of local police colleagues and the creation of a Local Policing Plan.
3. However, there have been several instances where, in the Council's view, activity in practice has fallen short of reasonable aspirations to work in partnership.

Consultation and working together

4. Police Scotland recently announced proposed changes to the opening hours of police public counters in East Lothian. It also announced a withdrawal of traffic warden services in such a short timescale as to leave no realistic opportunity for the Council to introduce suitable alternative arrangements. In both these instances, Police Scotland has caused the Council and local communities concern over:
 - a lack of consultation;
 - a lack of sharing of information about how their proposals were arrived at; and
 - the fact that these changes were proposed without reference to the Local Policing Plan.
5. I attach a link to the report that was considered by Council on this subject in October 2013, and the recommendations of which were approved. That report forms part of the Council's evidence:

http://www.eastlothian.gov.uk/download/meetings/id/14894/14_police_public_counter_service_and_traffic_warden_review

6. It also appears that there has been a subsequent rethink on public counter opening times in other areas, for example in West Lothian. There does not seem to be any real transparency over the basis on which these decisions have been taken.

Centralisation

7. The reviews of the public counter service and traffic warden provision have highlighted and added to growing concerns that the creation of the national police service has led to centralisation of police service priorities and policies.
8. This centralising direction necessitates changes at local level which have consequences for local communities. Council officers value their positive relationship with the local commander, but would argue that some decisions made at central level have taken insufficient account of local matters.
9. There is also concern at a possible trend to divert resources away from preventative and early intervention work. For example, the withdrawal of the road safety (education) officer from East Lothian schools, and the possible reduction in support for the Risk Factory, will significantly reduce the work being done to educate and inform children and young people about safety. This goes against the national policy direction which has been embedded within the East Lothian Single Outcome Agreement to develop a prevention and early intervention model of public service.

Criminal Justice

10. Criminal Justice social work colleagues feel that altered policing priorities are having perhaps unintended consequences for other agencies involved, in respect of the management of offenders and alleged offenders. Evidence suggests that there has been a recent increase in summary criminal business in courts in Livingston and in Edinburgh. According to evidence presented by the Scottish Court Service in October to the Strategic Officers Group, on which East Lothian Council is represented:
 - 10.1. for Edinburgh's Justice of the Peace Court, in the three months ending August 2013 compared to the same period the previous year:
 - there had been an increase of around 50% in summary complaints registered;
 - summary complaints outstanding had increased by 139%;
 - the time taken to bring a case to court (waiting period and trial diet) had increased by 17 weeks;
 - 10.2. in Edinburgh Sheriff Court for the same period:
 - there had been an increase of around 42% in summary complaints registered;
 - summary complaints outstanding had risen by around 49%;
 - time taken to bring a case to court had increased by 2 weeks.
11. This suggests that the system is becoming overburdened (i.e. more cases coming to court and longer waiting times for matters to be heard in court)

which in turn arguably reduces the opportunity to make positive inroads into people's behaviour and attitudes.

12. Working closely with the Police is central to addressing offending behaviour. We would emphasise the need to tackle issues in a shared approach.
13. Edinburgh is due to become the receiving court for East Lothian business when Haddington Sheriff Court closes in January 2015. East Lothian Council presented evidence to the Justice Committee that an adequate business case had not been made for closure of Haddington Sheriff Court, and that little regard had been taken of the likely impact on local communities. To hear of current increases in summary criminal business in Edinburgh raises further concerns in that regard.

Resourcing

14. The Council has for a number of years provided resources to support local Police Initiative Teams, via a Service Level Agreement - in effect, purchasing extra policing cover. The Council currently provides around £0.5m each year for this purpose. The Service Level Agreement is due to be reviewed.

Conclusion

15. As mentioned above, the Council recognises the financial background to police reform and to some of the decisions of Police Scotland. However this arguably makes it all the more important that changes to priorities and procedures should be considered as part of the development of the Local Policing Plan, so that relevant parties can be consulted and the impact on communities taken into account.
16. The Council appreciates that this is the first year of the new arrangements and acknowledges that time is needed to let new processes settle. The Council looks forward to a continuing good relationship with Police Scotland.
17. Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to your thinking on policing in Scotland.

Yours sincerely

ANGELA LEITCH
Chief Executive