

Perth & Kinross Council Policy and Resources Committee

5 March 2014

**Report by Chief Inspector Whitford, Perth & Kinross Local Policing Area
Tayside Community Policing Division**

POLICE AND FIRE REFORM: LOCAL SCRUTINY AND ENGAGEMENT

OPERATIONAL REPORT PART 1

Abstract: The attached report provides members with background information and proposals in relation to community engagement in North Perthshire.

1. RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members note and question the operational report.

2. BACKGROUND

North Perthshire covers the majority of the policing area to the north and north east of Perth, and covers the main communities of Blairgowrie, Alyth, Coupar Angus, Pitlochry, Aberfeldy, Dunkeld & Birnam. The area measures over 1400 square miles from Drumochter and Glenshee in the north to Burrelton in the south and from Rannoch Station in the west to Alyth in the East. There are 3 police offices based within the section located at Pitlochry, Blairgowrie and Aberfeldy. Between the main towns and villages, the remainder of land is covered by numerous farms and estates with a large proportion of upland / mountains. The section is divided by 2 trunk roads namely the A93 (Perth - Forfar road) and the A9 (Perth - Inverness road).

The geographic nature of the section provides many different and unique policing challenges. The area hosts some major events such as Etape Caledonia, and the Colin McRae Rally. In the winter months, roads can be closed due to heavy snowfall and several areas are subject to flooding. The A9 and A93 trunk routes carry a large number of skiers every winter to resorts in the Cairngorms and Glenshee respectively as well as provide arterial routes for private and commercial transport. Due to the mountainous nature of the area, north Perthshire also attracts hill climbers, walkers, and extreme sports enthusiasts. Weather conditions can significantly affect travel, local industries / business, and local residents. North Perthshire is no stranger to severe weather events and the impact on communities, especially the vulnerable, of events such as major flooding, snow coverage, or extended power outages, cannot be understated.

The area is also home to an aging population, many of whom can become vulnerable due to geographical isolation or extreme weather. Many residents are fairly affluent and given their rural location and excellent roads infrastructure, can be seen as attractive targets to travelling criminals or bogus workmen.

North Section includes the multi member wards of Strathmore, Blairgowrie, Strathtay and Highland, which are served by 13 Councillors. There are also 10 community councils in the Pitlochry area and 7 in Blairgowrie. These are generally held on a monthly basis. Other meetings which Police are invited to attend on a regular basis are Community Tasking and Co-ordination Groups (CTAG), Case Integration Group (CCIG), Locality Development Forum, Highland Perthshire Crime Prevention and Community Safety Panel, Highland Perthshire Community Learning & Development Partnership (HIPSHIRE), Integrated Team Meetings, Pubwatch (Blairgowrie) and the Blairgowrie and Rattray Council Forum.

3. HISTORICAL POLICING STRUCTURES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Historically north section comprised 2 areas (Pitlochry and Blairgowrie) with separate line management and community officer teams.

Prior to the LPA restructure in 2013, Community Officers or Section Sergeants were tasked to attend community council meetings. Despite there being a large number of meetings to attend the vast majority of these appointments were kept and lines of communication between the police and councils were maintained on a regular basis.

Although separate communities; a lot of the issues and crime trends affecting them were very similar. In order to support the police response, the radio channels were amalgamated to allow a greater knowledge of ongoing incidents and this naturally led to a merger of the two areas under a single line management structure and the rationalisation of community officer posts.

4. PRESENT POLICING STRUCTURES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Presently, Inspector Burns has geographical responsibility for North Section in addition to the management of Team 3 throughout the LPA. She is now supported by 5 team Sergeants and two Community Sergeants.

Public expectations of the Police from local councils and residents in north Perthshire is noticeably higher than in other areas of the LPA, and part of the challenge to maintain good engagement is to manage these expectations whilst continuing to deliver an excellent quality of service to meet the specific needs of those communities. Criticism has been received from Councillors and Community Councils regarding the lack of, or inappropriate Police representation at Community Council meetings and lack of continuity in updating them after meetings. Geographically, isolation and certain vulnerabilities also tend to increase public expectations of the Police and we must take cognisance of these factors.

Following restructuring of the LPA, it has been extremely challenging for the section to ensure police attendance at community council meetings particularly in the Pitlochry area. Whilst there is now a greater flexibility of movement for staff around the LPA in order to respond to operational requirements, a number of teams in the rural areas do require backfilling by officers from outwith the section, who through no fault of their own, have limited or no knowledge of the section. These officers will not therefore be tasked to attend community meetings for obvious reasons.

In relation to attendance at Community Council meetings, procedure has been to send the local Community Officer wherever possible, but shifts or exigencies of duty often prevent this. Due to the modified status of the Pitlochry Community Officer for a number of months, Pitlochry effectively lost its Community Officer capacity on a long term basis. This situation was compounded by the fact there were no other Community Officers to provide any resilience. Because of this, on a number of occasions we were unable to send a police representative to community meetings or tasked response officers who were unable to add any real value to the meetings.

5. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MODEL

Essentially, this situation needs to be improved upon, whilst at the same time we need to effectively manage local expectations and strike a balance. It is impractical to send a Community Officer to as many meetings as we did previously due to increasing demands, and restructuring of the LPA which has had an impact on local resources within the section. That said, with positive and effective communication, we aim to improve community support for the following engagement model in relation to Community Councils. It is proposed the new process will be as follows:

- Dates of meetings established in the local area, and identify appropriate officer to attend well in advance and update Scope¹. Co-ordinate Inspectors, Community Sergeants and Community Officer diaries to ensure appropriate spread of representation throughout the calendar year and update Scope accordingly.
- Public Consultation document prepared by Community Safety and forwarded to the section Community Sergeants (or alternative agreed point of contact in their absence) each month.
- Document sent to officer identified to attend the meeting and e-mailed to Secretary/Chairperson for discussion at the meeting.
- Any issues raised for Police are noted for follow up action and updates, or if no police representative in attendance, the Secretary or Chairperson raises the document for discussion and thereafter completes the form with relevant issues raised by members, and e mails its back to relevant Community Sergeant.
- Completed document returned to Community Safety.
- Minutes from Community Council forwarded to Police.

¹ Scope is the Police Scotland resource management tool.

It is important that where officer attendance cannot be achieved, prior notice should be given (if possible) to the Secretary / Chairperson advising them accordingly. In the event a Community Officer is attending an urgent call and is diverted from attending the meeting, then the Community Council will at least have the public consultation document which can be raised by the chair at the meeting.

Furthermore, in order to supplement attendance at meetings, section Inspectors and Community Sergeants should diary in at least 2 Community Council meetings per year. This should avoid the situation where no police representative attends for several meetings in a row and will allow an effective spread of meetings throughout the year.

North Section Inspector is currently making arrangements to meet with representatives of each Community Council, Highland Perthshire Community Safety & Crime Prevention Panel, and the Blairgowrie & Rattray forum, to inform them of how we can improve the situation.

Similar arrangements are being made by North Section Community Sergeants to hold regular meetings with their respective councillors, in order to facilitate face to face contact on a regular basis and provide a platform for meaningful engagement.

Where an officer can attend a community council meeting, their attendance should be limited to covering the police part of the agenda only. Most Community Councils cover this in the first 10 minutes or so of a meeting. This would allow the officer to deliver the police report and obtain any feedback with the most effective use of time.

Furthermore, we should now consider opportunities to work jointly with the Local Authority in respect of attendance at Community Council meetings.

6. PROPOSAL

The introduction of Police Scotland and recent re-organisation of the LPA has seen the role of the Community Officer develop. Community Officers are expected to be dynamic and driven individuals who will take a lead role in the development of intelligence, drive forward performance in relation to dealing with local crime issues, proactively enforce road traffic legislation in line with our priorities, identify local criminals in order that they can be actively targeted in accordance with offender management plans, carry out licensed premise checks, deal with repeat callers, respond to Grade 3 calls and generally assist response officers where necessary.

In order for effective community policing to take place in North Section, it is proposed to increase the number of community officers in North Section. These officers could carry out a 3 early, 3 late, 3 days off shift pattern, which is already an agreed working pattern and could work in teams which would enable:

- Better and more appropriate representation at Community Council meetings
- Improved scope for stop searches to be carried out
- Intrusive licensed premises visits
- Improved resilience
- Corroboration for enforcing road traffic legislation in line with our priorities.
- Take a lead role in the gathering and developing of intelligence.

It is also proposed that whilst community officers will be allocated areas of responsibility, it will be made clear that as part of the local community policing team, they must maintain an overview of all community policing issues which affect either the Pitlochry or Blairgowrie areas. It is anticipated this will enhance cohesion between the Community Officers and provide a better quality of service to communities.

In order to address this, one officer has already been reinstated to a Community role (based from Pitlochry). Notes of interest have been requested across the LPA seeking interest from suitable candidates, as this may assist the LPA by minimising the staffing impact on specific teams or sections, and would be in the interests of fairness.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications as a result of this report.

8. STAFFING IMPLICATIONS

There are no staffing issues as a result of this report.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

This report does not have any impact on the environment.

10. SUMMARY

The attached report updates members regarding operational matters and gives context to the proposed community engagement model of the local policing area.

11. COMPLIANCE

Is the proposal?

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| (a) Human Rights Act 1998 compliant? | YES |
| (b) Equality & Diversity compliant? | YES |

