

Pwyllgor Cymunedau, Cydraddoldeb a
Llywodraeth Leol

Communities, Equality and Local Government
Committee

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14 December 2011

Dear Carl

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee inquiry on Community Safety

On 5 October, the Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee held a one-off evidence session on community safety to explore the impact of the public spending cuts on front line policing and to look at the implications for local communities and community safety policy in Wales.

During the session, the Committee heard evidence from the Association of Chief Police Officers, Police Authorities Wales, the Police Federation, the Welsh Local Government Association, Wales Association of Community Safety Officers and the GMB union.

The purpose of this letter is to draw to your attention the issues raised by witnesses; to outline the Committee's views on those issues; and to seek your views on actions that can be taken to address those issues.

1. The impact of the public spending cuts on front line policing

The Committee was told that all police forces and the police authorities in Wales are attempting to minimise the impact on the front line of cuts to police funding. However, it was estimated that about 1,700 police officers and police staff are going to disappear over the period of the Comprehensive Spending Review, which will ultimately impact on the range and level of services that can be provided. It was also made clear to Members of the

Committee that the cuts are one part of a number of dilemmas that the police forces are facing at this point in time, with changes to the terms and conditions of employment for police officers and police staff and significant changes to the governance structures of policing.

The Committee intends to keep a close eye on these developments and will hold a further evidence session this time next year to consider their implications for Wales.

2. Details about the Welsh Police forces' reform programme designed to improve efficiency and reduce costs

The Committee heard that the Welsh police forces are 'redefining and re-profiling what they do as an organisation'. Each of the four police forces is taking action within its own area to ensure that the effect on front line services and visibility will be minimised. Each of the forces has its own efficiency/ reform programme. The Committee was told that all forces are currently on target to deliver their savings within the timescales. Securing the right level of council tax precept is fundamental to this. Police Authorities Wales gave a strong commitment to supporting the council tax precept of up to 5 per cent but could not give the Committee any guarantees. The question of whether the new Police and Crime Commissioners would support that position was raised.

3. The implications for local communities and community safety policy in Wales

It was suggested that the impact on communities is potentially significant taking into consideration changes to policing divisions and to the interface with elected representatives and local authorities emanating from the changes to the governance structures of policing. The Committee was told that fewer resources will mean that communities will have a different view of policing and the level of policing services in their community.

The Welsh Government should work closely with the four police forces to ensure communities are engaged in a continuous process of consultation in order to maintain their confidence in policing.

Members were assured by ACPO Cymru that where police stations are going to close, the police forces will be providing an alternative presence in the community, and that local communities will be involved and consulted on proposed changes.

It is important that the Welsh Government works with the Police forces to monitor the impact of police station closures, as this, coupled with the proposed closures of local courts could have consequences for victims and offenders.

The Wales Association of Community Safety Officers highlighted serious concerns about the impact of spending cuts on the delivery of the community safety agenda in Wales, both in terms of direct funding cuts for Community Safety Partnership (CSP) funded projects and posts and the wider impact of the broader cuts on other public services and the additional funding they have been able to provide. It was suggested that the services most affected would be youth intervention and prevention projects and the loss of specialist staff such as

anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse co-ordinators. The complex nature of the funding in the community safety arena, where posts are often split funded between the Home Office and Welsh Government means that it is difficult to assess at this point in time what the impact of the cuts will be; this will depend on where the main funding for particular projects and posts comes from.

In our view, the Welsh Government should provide detailed information about how it intends to ensure sufficient funding is available in the longer term for these types of services and posts. The Welsh Government should also publish plans on how it intends to ensure these issues remain priorities for the newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners and Police and Crime panels.

In addition to concerns raised about specific CSP-funded posts and services, Members of the Committee also heard that there is a risk to the specialist work that police forces do, such as dealing with domestic abuse. In particular, there were concerns that police officers will not be able to spend sufficient time with victims as well as the proper assessment of the level of risk that could exist for a victim because of cuts to police staff and training for front-line officers.

The Welsh Government should seek assurances from ACPO Cymru that domestic abuse will remain a key priority for the four police forces in line with the Welsh Government's Strategy for tackling domestic abuse and violence against women.

Members of the Committee were pleased that ACPO Cymru could confirm that Welsh Government funding for 500 Police and Community Support Officers (PCSOs) would be used to provide additional resource and resilience for the forces and not be used to subsidise existing neighbourhood policing levels. The Committee was told that the four forces will maintain their current PCSO strength so that Welsh Government funding will be used to deliver double the number of PCSOs over the three year period.

The Welsh Government should provide information on how it intends to monitor and evaluate how effectively this funding has been used and its impact on local communities, including how the PCSOs will be designated and used, and how effective they are and what they deal with.

I trust you will find this information helpful. The Committee would be grateful for your views on the points raised above.

Yours sincerely



Ann Jones AC / AM
Cadeirydd / Chair