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Weekly newsletter from Warwickshire's PCC

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Police and Crime Commissioner Warwickshire

Friday 15th January 2016

Building a safer Warwickshire



Welcome to my weekly newsletter

I'm Ron Ball, Warwickshire's Police and Crime Commissioner, and welcome to my weekly newsletter.

Here you will find out the latest news, what I've been up to during the week and how I am working to keep Warwickshire residents safe and supporting new projects and initiatives to tackle crime in the area. You can get in touch on 01926 413718 or email opcc@warwickshire.gov.uk

Thought of the week: A minister writes

As I mentioned last week, I have been pursuing Justice Secretary Michael Gove for action on extra powers for police to deal with illegal encampments by travellers, particularly when they are set up near to sensitive locations such as schools. It followed a commitment by his predecessor, Chris Grayling, given in Parliament in answer to a question from Tim Louth MP, that addressing the problem would be "a priority" if a Conservative government was returned at the election.

I have today received a letter from Mike Penning MP, who was replying as the Minister with responsibility for policing and criminal law policy. In his letter, Mr Penning reiterates the various powers that police and local authorities already have to tackle traveller encampments and repeated that guidance had been issued in March 2015, urging local authorities to work collaboratively with the police and other agencies to develop local protocols for dealing swiftly and decisively with problematic encampments.

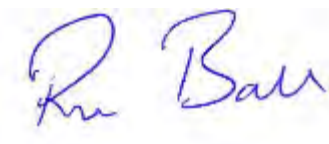
I am well aware of the current powers and indeed, Warwickshire Police and the local authorities have worked to enforce them wherever possible. However, the fact remains that the existing legislation has a number of shortcomings and is often not agile enough to deal with the problem swiftly. This is a particular problem when illegal encampments occur at sensitive locations such as schools, as we saw increasingly across Warwickshire last year.

While it does seem clear that Chris Grayling's previous commitment that reviewing and enhancing these powers will not in fact be part of the Government's immediate agenda, the Policing Minister did however acknowledge there is public disquiet over this issue.

He wrote: "Despite the existence of these powers, we recognise there is public concern that they may not be working as effectively as they should be in some areas or do not lead to speedy enough resolution in some cases. I would be interested to hear more about the extent to which the police and local authorities in Warwickshire are making use of existing powers and what barriers, in any, they have experienced when enforcing them. That would help us to keep the current legal framework under review and to assess whether further powers are needed.

"If you have any further information about enforcement difficulties in Warwickshire or suggestions on how the law should be improved, I would be very happy to consider them in liaison with my ministerial colleagues in the Ministry of Justice, Home Office and Department for Communities and Local Government."

You'll not be surprised to know this is an offer I plan to take up and I will continue to push the issue in the coming weeks.



Ron Ball
Police and Crime Commissioner for Warwickshire

'The Big Conversation' gets my backing



One of the by-products of my attending the KESWA conference in Coventry before Christmas was a meeting with Qamar Bhatti Khan, who is chair of the Nuneaton Abbey Academy. It became clear to me at that meeting that we share many objectives when it comes to community cohesion in Warwickshire.

On Tuesday afternoon Mr Khan, together with two Muslim colleagues, met with me to discuss how we could take our ideas forward. He is keen to start what he is calling a multi-faith 'Big Conversation' across Warwickshire and I have agreed to launch the event - almost certainly in Nuneaton - in the early spring. The Big Conversation will hold a number of Peace Gatherings throughout the Year before culminating in a conference in November.

There are mainstream Muslim voices in our communities who are not getting the

support and coverage from the media that they deserve. I am very keen to do what I can to change that.

Atherstone Public Scrutiny Meeting to look at Specials and volunteers



The Special Constabulary is a topic that has caught some media attention this week, with the national publication *Police Oracle* reporting on the difficulties many Police and Crime Commissioners have faced in recruiting the number of Specials (unpaid, part-time Police Officers who work in important areas of policing in their spare time). In Warwickshire this also has been something of a frustration and it is clear that my original aim of having 400 Special Constables is not going to be met by the end of my term of office, despite some good progress.

Part of the issue, as I told *Police Oracle*, has been the simultaneous recruitment of regular constables from the ranks of the existing Specials, which has meant that while we have had successes in attracting new recruits to the Special Constabulary, the overall numbers have remained relatively static.

It's not been for want of trying, however, and while the initial recruitment campaign did not deliver the kinds of numbers that I or the force would have liked, a subsequent rethink of the application process and investment in the HR capacity to give better support to applicants is now starting to yield results. The recruitment campaign is running currently - so if you are interested in becoming a Special

Constable, do visit the force website [HERE](#) to find out more.

Alternatively, if you live in or around the Atherstone area and want to know more about the role of Specials and volunteers more widely within Warwickshire Police, do come along to my next Public Scrutiny Meeting on Tuesday, where there will be a presentation from the force on just this subject. The evening is also your chance to quiz me and ask questions of Chief Constable Martin Jelly about police and crime in the local area. With the forthcoming PCC election in May, this will be the last Public Scrutiny Meeting I hold, so I hope to see a good turn out.

The meeting takes place from 6.30pm on Tuesday 19th January at the Queen Elizabeth Academy in Atherstone - [visit the OPCC website for more details](#).

Temporary staff a valuable asset to frontline policing

This week saw several newspapers run stories based on a Freedom of Information request by Conservative electoral candidate Philip Seccombe, which showed that since 2012 the total costs of hiring temporary staff within Warwickshire Police – including salaries and any agency fees – was £6.3 million. The spend per financial year increased from £1.2 million in 2012/13 to £2.7 million in 2013/14 and £2.3 million in 2014/15. This expenditure was described as a 'scandal'.

Some context here may be helpful, I think. It is certainly not the case that Warwickshire Police has been excessive in its spending on temporary staff in some sort of bid to boost 'back office' functions at the expense of frontline policing. The overall numbers of police staff employed – either through permanent or temporary contracts – has in fact reduced since 2012 but at the same time, the proportion of the workforce dealing with frontline policing has increased. It is not just me saying this - according to Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 80% of officers and staff are now on the frontline in Warwickshire, compared to the national average of 78%.

Many of the temporary or agency staff who have been taken on are directly serving in frontline roles, for example staff supporting Operation Devonport to tackle cross-border criminality, acquisitive crime and Child Sexual Exploitation, and others who have been taken on as call handlers in our Operations & Communication Centres. We have also employed people on temporary contracts to assist with child protection, domestic abuse and witness care.

The figures for temporary staff recruitment also need to be viewed in the context of the considerable under-spend on costs for staff in permanent positions. For example, in 2013/14 there was a £4 million underspend and in 2014/15 there was a £6.6 million underspend across the Alliance. The use of temporary roles has

provided the force with the flexibility to ensure that frontline services can continue be delivered to the public at a high quality, despite this period of internal change. This was a positive strategy to help protect the jobs of our permanent staff, while the force made reductions to its overall staff numbers.

I also question the premise that there is no value in back office staff – this is simply not true. Frontline policing simply couldn't exist without strong back office support, and it is notable that a number of the non-frontline temporary roles were within Human Resources to help assist with the ongoing programme of change, which has helped to deliver overall savings of £28.2 million since 2010, and also to assist with the recruitment of new officers and Specials.

Far from being a scandal, I absolutely defend the decisions taken around staffing during this period and, even with the benefit of hindsight, I wouldn't do anything differently. Frontline policing has been a priority for me from day one, as my record will show. It will continue to be a priority for as long as I hold this office.

Last few days to have your say on the precept



Click the image above to play the video (opens in new window)

There's only a few more days left to give your views on my proposal to increase the Police Precept (the smaller proportion of your Council Tax bill which goes towards funding Warwickshire Police) by 1.99%. This equates to around a penny a day for a Band D taxpayer. View the video above to hear why I am making this proposal - and if you haven't given your feedback, visit www.warwickshire.

pcc.gov.uk/preceptsurvey to have your say. You have until 12 noon on Monday (18th January), when the survey will close.

In the news: firearms and firefighting



Police and fire already work together on a number of initiatives in Warwickshire - this is the BIKE (Bicycle Intervention Knowledge and Education) team training at Nuneaton Fire Station. Picture courtesy WFRS.

This week saw a couple of stories hit the headlines which prompted comments from me. On Tuesday, *Police Oracle* contacted me about [a new scheme which is being trialled in parts of West Mercia](#), which sees PCSOs being trained up as retained 'on-call' firefighters. The story emerged from a report to Hereford & Worcester Fire Authority, which revealed that four PCSOs were being released from duties for five weeks to attend a special 'condensed' firefighting course. If the scheme goes to plan, they could be riding in fire engines and responding to blazes as early as April.

Police Oracle - knowing my previous statements around not wishing to assume governance over the fire service (despite the Government's apparent keenness for this to happen) - wanted to know whether, as an Alliance partner with West Mercia, I thought the scheme was a good idea.

As I have always stressed, I have always been keen to explore collaboration opportunities where they make sense to both organisations and are in the interests of the local community. The fire service is no different and indeed, we already do collaborate on a range of projects (see the picture above for one example), without

needing to explore full scale mergers or new governance structures.

My understanding is that in the West Mercia trial the PCSOs will be performing their additional roles in areas where Hereford & Worcester Fire and Rescue Service has struggled to recruit retained firefighters, so the overall benefit to the community should be fairly clear. This is also an excellent example of how we run the Alliance, where something can be tried in one of the forces without needing to be done across the board. While this type of scheme is not something we have discussed in Warwickshire, it is an interesting idea and I will be just as keen as anyone to hear how it goes in practice.

Thursday, meanwhile, saw me appear on *BBC Radio 5 Live's* mid-morning show to talk about the increases to firearms capability with police forces, following the announcement by the Metropolitan Police that it is to add 600 more armed officers across London.

Presenter Peter Allen quite rightly posed the question: "What about the rest of the country?" London already has by far and away the best-resourced armed capability and, notwithstanding that the capital is an obvious target for terrorism and it is right to review capability in the aftermath of the Paris attacks, terrorism can strike anywhere. I have used the argument before that Stratford-upon-Avon, for example, could easily be considered a target due to its high profile and huge tourist influx. Our big cities and other large centres of population are equally vulnerable - even if the chances of such an attack affecting you as an individual remains very low.

The Government wants to see a 50% increase in armed capability across policing but there are legitimate concerns about how this can be achieved effectively. The former Chief Constable of Northumbria Sue Sim preceded me on the programme and made the point that it would not be particularly sensible to create large armed response units in every force when, for the vast majority of time, they would have little to do. It would also go against the principles of British policing, which takes some pride in not requiring the routine arming of all officers.

I agree and made the point on the programme that, rather than the Government asking each chief constable to resource an increase in armed policing capability individually, a regional approach should be considered. If the forces across the West Midlands were to collaborate on a regional armed capability, this could provide the extra resilience necessary, without some of the drawbacks that an individual force response would pose. This is something that I will be exploring in the coming months.

Diary look ahead: Monday 18th - Friday 22nd January



Here are my key diary appointments for the coming week:

Monday 18th January

12.30pm - Attending Citizens in Policing Community of Practice meeting, York

Tuesday 19th January

10.00am - Weekly meeting with the Chief Constable, Leamington

2.00pm - Budget working group, Warwick Shirehall

6.30pm - Public Scrutiny Meeting, Atherstone

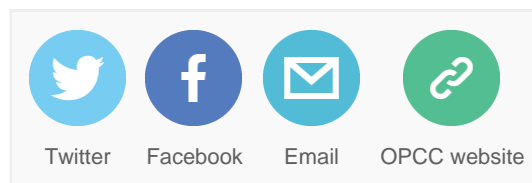
Wednesday 20th January

10.00am - Association of Police and Crime Commissioners AGM, London

Friday 22nd January

2.00pm - Regional meeting with PCCs, OPCC Chief Executives and Chief Constables, Birmingham

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