



Police & Crime Commissioner for Cleveland
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Cllr S Bloundele
Chair, Middlesbrough Council
Town Hall
Middlesbrough
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24 June 2013

Dear Cllr Bloundele

Cleveland Police Mounted Section

You will be aware there has been public interest and concern expressed with regard to the recent decision by Cleveland Chief Constable Jacqui Cheer to disband the Cleveland Police Mounted Section. I am aware that a motion has been submitted to your forthcoming council meeting in this respect seeking my intervention to overturn this decision.

On 22nd November last year when taking office as PCC I signed a declaration in the presence of the Returning Officer, as required by law, which includes a statement, also required by law, that I would not interfere with the operational independence of police officers.

I am therefore bound by Government policy in this respect, which is also the policy of the Labour opposition (I also signed a declaration when selected as a candidate). This is also now enshrined within the Cleveland Police & Crime Plan, as endorsed by the Cleveland Police & Crime Panel whom I report to, made up of members of all 4 local authorities and independent members.

With regard to the above, I am on record in the local media as saying this is an operational decision of the Chief Constable. Whilst there may be a sizeable group of people who would wish to keep the Mounted Section, there are others who have also expressed to me, including in correspondence and in the local media, that under difficult financial circumstances retaining the Mounted Section should not be a priority.

Equally significantly, were I to seek to intervene in this issue and otherwise direct the Chief Constable, this would be highlighted by some people as the beginnings of political interference in policing in Cleveland. I understand and respect that point of view.

The Chief Constable has prepared a report, which I am scrutinising in some detail and will publish in due course. I have invited members of the public to submit comments or suggestions by the end of this month and I will also publish those in due course. I am drawing up a detailed series of questions to put to the Chief Constable and will be having a meeting with her to discuss these which I will publish, together with her replies. I will also be reporting on this process to the Police & Crime panel.

My defined responsibilities include to set the strategic direction and objectives of the Force through the Police & Crime Plan. I have recently published my first annual report on progress. I would invite all to view both on my website www.cleveland.pcc.police.uk

The Chief Constable has highlighted recently the difficulties we face in policing the Cleveland area of over 600,000 people across 82 wards whilst needing to make cuts of around £26 million from a budget of around £137 million. This week the Chancellor will require further cuts from the Home Office, and therefore even more from local policing budgets, for the next spending review.

I have visited over 60 of the 82 wards across Cleveland since November last year, to discuss local issues with residents and understand challenges being faced, as well as witnessing the high levels of confidence being voiced in our neighbourhood officers and in policing generally.

To help deliver over £26 million of cuts there is a re-structuring now going on within the Cleveland force, to make savings from middle and senior management costs and to help develop and support neighbourhood policing. Every area of Cleveland police's budget is being critically looked at, in what are unprecedented financial circumstances.

These financial difficulties are shared, I know, by the local authorities and other public sector partners in Cleveland. There is understandable anxiety amongst residents about the provision of public services in the future.

We have good partnership working here in Cleveland, where we respect the needs and priorities of each other and also come together to tackle issues. This is true in terms of community safety where police, councils, other agencies and communities have made real progress in reducing crime. It is essential the public sector comes together in further mutual support and collaboration to face further austerity ahead. Together we may have a chance to maintain some of our most essential front line services - but if we indulge in non-constructive criticism of each other we will squander that chance. Residents across Cleveland deserve better.

Yours sincerely

Barry Coppinger
PCC for Cleveland

c.c. Mayor & Councillors
Cleveland MPs