

By: Mike Campbell, Police and Crime Panel Policy Officer

To: Police and Crime Panel

Subject: Dip sample of Commissioner's correspondence following Channel 4 programme "Meet the Commissioner"

1. Introduction

1.1 The Commissioner receives a high level of correspondence in a variety of forms – emails, blogs and letters. As might be expected, there was a significant increase in volume following the Channel 4 programme "Meet the Commissioner". As much of the media comment was critical of the Commissioner, her Chief of Staff invited Panel officers to dip sample the correspondence to see whether the way in which it was dealt with was appropriate and, in particular, that any correspondence that amounted to a complaint against the Commissioner, was dealt with as such.

2. Dip sample

2.1 Officers were advised that the Commissioner and her staff have received approximately 170 pieces of correspondence about the programme. I initially sampled 10% of the correspondence, selected at random and including emails, blog comments and letters. Officers were told that the correspondence was, roughly 40% positive and 60% negative. Additional sampling of negative correspondence was undertaken to ensure that the sample fully reflected the overall 40:60 split. The Office of the PCC provided the sampled correspondence, the Commissioner (or her staff's) reply and any follow-up correspondence.

3. Comments

3.1 Every piece of correspondence was replied to and the replies were sent within a few days of receipt. All correspondents were thanked for writing and for expressing their opinion (whether the correspondence was positive or negative). In no case did the reply attempt to enter into a debate or to respond in detail to points made, beyond a re-iteration of the reasons why the Commissioner agreed to take part in the programme and her disappointment that it did not feature more of the work of the Office.

3.2 The critical comments were similar to those made in the media. They included criticism of the number of staff in her Office, criticism of those who advised her to take part, criticism of the PCC's salary, and criticism of her performance during several incidents shown on the programme.

- 3.3 In my judgment, none of the criticisms amounted to a complaint against the Commissioner and I therefore agree with the decision of her Chief of Staff to treat them all as correspondence to be replied to rather than complaints to be recorded. A few of the correspondents wrote back after the Commissioner's response to re-iterate criticisms but there were no complaints about the way their original correspondence had been dealt with.
- 3.4 A minority of correspondents made highly offensive remarks about the Commissioner personally and some made offensive comments about her staff. In all cases there comments were ignored and a courteous reply sent.

Recommendation

That the Panel notes the contents of this report.

Contact: Mike Campbell Tel: 01622 696603
