



Complementary Policing Team Police
Integrity and Powers Unit
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12 October 2015

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: County Council response to the “Reforming the Powers of Police Staff and Volunteers” consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to comment upon the proposals to reform the powers of police staff and volunteers. Your proposals could provide a solution to the challenges that KCC is facing in exploring better ways of working and having a more flexible workforce whilst delivering the best service to the public.

I would like to take this opportunity to stress that as funding for public services continues to decline, it is imperative that we all strive for more effective partnership working with the public, private and voluntary sectors in reshaping services to meet the changing needs of our residents, businesses and communities. As such, we welcome the opportunity to comment on the proposed reforms and to offer our support to the Police in reshaping and redesigning their service to ensure future resilience.

In response to your consultation questions, Kent County Council offers the comments below:

1. Do you agree with the idea of giving greater control to chief officers over the powers of their designated staff?

Greater control over the powers that can be designated to staff will give Chief Officers the ability to shape their service utilising all the skills of their current

and future workforce in the best way possible. We support the opportunity for Chief Officers to have greater flexibility to empower and deploy their officers and staff in a way most appropriate to the needs of the Force and the local community. However, there is a risk that the public will perceive this to be 'policing on the cheap'; as such, clear communication with the public and partner agencies, alongside valid reasoning will be the key to alleviating any concerns.

Furthermore, a fundamental part of implementing these changes effectively will depend on establishing and maintaining robust safeguards so that the right person, with the right skills, is performing the right functions, thus ensuring both the public and staff are protected and supported.

There is the risk that the greater flexibility provided at the local level may lead to some confusion with the public and partner agencies if staff across the country are designated with a differing set of powers depending on the particular Force in which they serve. Again, communication with the relevant stakeholders will be crucial in order to clarify locally how powers have been delegated and may prove helpful for both the public and partner agencies.

2. Do you have any views on the proposed new role titles?

There are no objections to the proposed new role titles. In fact, we are exploring the use of volunteer Community Wardens to support our Community Warden Service in Kent. Kent County Council manages a Community Warden Service consisting of 70 uniformed, frontline staff that work across numerous communities in Kent. Our wardens work alongside the extended policing family and act as the eyes and ears of the communities they serve but more importantly, they promote community cohesion and support the vulnerable in those areas.

3. Do you agree with the concept of a single list of the 'core' powers that would remain exclusive to police officers?

There needs to be a clear distinction between the role of a police officer and the roles of other designated staff. As such, we agree there is a fundamental need for a list of 'core' powers that will be exercised exclusively by police officers who have the experience and training to use them professionally and appropriately.

However, in the interests of clarity for the public and partner agencies we would encourage local Forces to identify as far as possible what powers and responsibilities outside those 'core' powers will be designated to a particular post within their area.

4. Is the proposed 'core' list correct, or should other powers be added or removed?

Without greater knowledge of the wide range of powers defined in the many different pieces of legislation and how they are enforced it is difficult to comment on the 'core' list included in the consultation. However, we do strongly support the proposal that the most intrusive police powers should remain the sole preserve of officers and feel that the Police and other law enforcement professionals are best placed to establish this list.

5. Do you agree that it would be helpful to include an order-making power to enable the Home Secretary to add to the list of powers which designated officers cannot have?

Following this consultation with both the public and professionals, it should be possible to develop a comprehensive list of the current powers that are only appropriate for use by police officers. As such, whilst we would support the above proposal that the Home Secretary be able to add to the list of 'core' powers, this should only be in respect of powers that originate from new or amended legislation as agreed by Parliament or where there were public concern that a particular power should only be available to police officers.

6. Should chief officers also be able to designate volunteers with powers?

Volunteers already play an important role in society and can bring expertise that may not otherwise be available. We are strong advocates of utilising the skills and experiences of volunteers to complement public services. Therefore, the potential to give the already established Special Constabulary and Police Support Volunteers relevant powers to help them work effectively alongside regular colleagues would be very welcome; however, such volunteers should support the normal day-to-day work undertaken by Police Officers and Police Staff rather than replace them. As previously mentioned, robust safeguards would need to be in place to ensure the volunteers are given the appropriate powers, responsibilities and are properly trained.

7. Should we abolish the office of traffic warden?

As identified in the consultation, the Police Force in Kent does not have any dedicated traffic wardens and many of these functions are already managed by the Local Authorities and Civil Officers with the relevant delegated powers. Abolishing this office is likely to have little or no impact in Kent.

8. Do you have any other comments?

Whilst we support the proposals to provide Chief Officers with greater opportunities and flexibility to manage their workforce, we would expect that if or when the new powers are introduced that, in the true spirit of partnership working, Chief Officers give due consideration to the potential impact on the services delivered by partner agencies and consult with key partner agencies where appropriate.

For example, as mentioned earlier in our response, Kent County Council manages a uniformed frontline service called the Kent Community Warden Service (KCWS) which is accredited by Kent Police and has two delegated powers - the ability to direct traffic and take names and addresses for anti-social behaviour. The role of our wardens is primarily to facilitate community engagement tackling a wide range of issues from neighbourhood disputes to scams through support, mediation and signposting. The Community Wardens work closely with all partners across the county, including PCSOs, but the Community Wardens' role is strongly linked to the social welfare of our communities in supporting the vulnerable. If the role of the PCSO were to be expanded and they were to take on more enforcement powers, there is a concern that they could become a more reactive service rather than being interactive in the community and their relationship with residents could be adversely affected. This in turn could put more pressure on the Warden Service and possibly other local agencies around low level community demands and area coverage.

Whilst this impact is local to Kent, it is useful to highlight that future changes to roles and responsibilities within the Police may have wider reaching effects to such local arrangements across the country.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss the proposals in more detail. If you have any queries or concerns regarding the contents of this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me.

This response has been endorsed by KCC' Cabinet

Yours sincerely

Mike Hill, OBE
Cabinet Member for Community Services