

**National Assembly for Wales - Cross Party Group on Policing, Conference Room C,
Ty Hywel, Cardiff Bay, Cardiff,**

Wednesday 27th March 2019 @ 12:30

1. Present

National Assembly for Wales

John Griffiths AM (Labour) – Chairman

Alun Davies AM (Labour)

David Rees AM (Labour)

Adam Price AM (Plaid Cymru)

Llyr Gruffydd AM (Plaid Cymru)

Helen Mary Jones AM (Plaid Cymru)

Becs Parker – Communications Officer, Office of John Griffiths AM

Staff from offices of Julie Morgan AM, Lee Waters AM, Mike Hedges AM and Carl Spiller from the Welsh Government Homelessness team representing Hannah Blythyn AM.

Police and Crime Commissioners

Jeff Cuthbert – Police and Crime Commissioner for Gwent and Chair of the All Wales Policing Group.

Dafydd Llywelyn – Police and Crime Commissioner for Dyfed-Powys

Alun Michael – Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales

Arfon Jones – Police and Crime Commissioner for North Wales

Cerith Thomas – Police and Crime Commissioners Advisor to the All Wales Policing Team, Group Secretary

Sian Curley – Chief Executive, Gwent Police and Crime Commissioner's Team

Chief Constables

Carl Foulkes – Chief Constable, North Wales Police

Matt Jukes – Chief Constable, South Wales Police

Julian Williams – Chief Constable, Gwent Police

Jeremy Vaughan – Assistant Chief Constable, South Wales Police

Steve Thomas – T/Superintendent, Police Liaison Unit

Chris O'Driscoll – Inspector, Police Liaison Unit

Invited attendee

Steve Chapman – Welsh Government Community Safety Division, Anti-Slavery Co-ordinator

Apologies for Absence

Julie James AM - Minister for Housing and Local Government

Hannah Blythyn AM – Deputy Minister for Housing and Local Government

Mark Collins – Chief Constable, Dyfed-Powys Police and Chair of the Welsh Chief Officer Group

Robert (Bob) Evans – Deputy Chief Constable, All Wales Policing Team

Sergeant Steve Treharne – JBB Chair, South Wales Police Federation.

2. Introduction

2.1 Mr John Griffiths AM welcomed everyone to the third meeting of the Group and invited Assistant Chief Constable Jeremy Vaughan to deliver a presentation on the challenges facing the police service when dealing with persons who were homeless, sleeping rough and the connection with substance misuse.

2.2 PCC Jeff Cuthbert further explained that ACC Vaughan would set out the complexity of the issues faced by the police service and PCC Alun Michael would explain the contributions made by Police and Crime Commissioners to partnership working in that area.

3 Presentation on the challenges facing the police service when dealing with persons who are homeless, sleeping rough and the connection with substance misuse by Assistant Chief Constable Jeremy Vaughan – Policing lead in Wales on rough sleeping and homelessness

3.1 The key issues impacting on the police service in terms of rough sleeping and homelessness in Wales were highlighted as follows:

- The problems were crosscutting and did not solely apply to the police service and there was a need for a partnership response by various agencies to tackle the problem. Moreover it was not always clear who lead on partnership issues which were complex.
- There was a need to balance responding to the public, dealing with crime, aggressive begging and sleeping rough. He explained that not all beggars, aggressive or otherwise, were homeless.
- Officers had to deal with and prevent crime.
- It was a priority to protect the vulnerable.
- The police were dealing with complex needs arising from substance misuse and mental health problems.
- The police were responding to people when they were in crisis and they faced the difficulty of being unable to take them to suitable accommodation which should not be a police cell or a hospital.
- Where accommodation was available for the homeless it was not always used because they were fearful of going there because of the threat of violence or because they were not permitted to consume illegal drugs on the premises.
- In terms of a safe place for the homeless to go there was a need to provide a range of services on a 24/7 basis and not just during office hours Monday-Friday.

- Persons released from prison on a Friday afternoon were particularly affected because of a lack of availability of services on a 24 hour basis. Typically 30% - 50% of people sleeping rough had recently been released from prison.

3.2 Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael placed into context the role played by Police and Crime Commissioners in dealing with the problem and highlighted the following:

- Police and Crime Commissioners operated in a devolved environment even though Policing remained a reserved power.
- The Future Generations Act enabled better working in Wales compared to England including joint leadership on strategic issues.
- There was an ongoing refresh of community safety across Wales which was supported by Commissioners and the WLGA.
- Commissioners had taken a public health approach in Wales to tackle the causes of crime associated with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs).
- The Early Action Together programme provided a more informed approach to early intervention.
- The Commissioners response to substance misuse in conjunction with Criminal Justice agencies provided a responsive service to both victims and offenders.
- A great deal had been learned from the work done in North Wales and Gwent with regards to mental health initiatives.
- The reducing offender framework provided an overarching framework in Wales.

3.3 The Chair asked whether inroads had been made into the overall level of rough sleeping in Wales.

3.4 In response ACC Vaughan indicated that from a policing perspective there had been fewer reports and less arrests over the previous 12 months. However the Police did not hold data on the levels of homelessness in Wales.

3.5 PCC Alun Michael indicated that the police and local authority staff responsible for responding to homelessness in Cardiff worked together on the streets. He highlighted the change of approach adopted by those begging on the streets who had become more polite as opposed to aggressive. That was because aggressive begging would become a matter for the police and also the public were generous and more inclined to give to someone who was being polite. He referred to the work done to identify whether those who were begging were also homeless and mentioned a recent example whereby 15 out of 16 people begging were not homeless and it was not clear if they were exploiting the public.

3.6 He further explained that the Local Authority had adopted a graduated approach and there was sufficient support available to the homeless in Cardiff.

3.7 PCC Jeff Cuthbert confirmed that similar discussions had taken place in the Newport PSB and he was also working with the Local Authority to manage the same type of issues.

3.8 Alun Davies AM referred to the importance of the interface between the police and other services namely Health and Social Services. He highlighted the need for a holistic service and to consider where the law sat in terms of substance misuse.

3.9 ACC Vaughan referred to the wicked issue of where do addicts go to consume drugs? The Huggard Centre and Police must operate within the law and also be pragmatic when working with other agencies.

3.10 PCC Arfon Jones had visited the Huggard Centre on several occasions and it was apparent that it was not a safe environment especially for women. It did not provide drug consumption rooms which would help to take the problem off the streets.

3.11 ACC Vaughan highlighted the need to properly design accommodation because addicts will not stop wanting to take drugs.

3.12 Alun Davies AM asked where the law should help the Police to work with others for better outcomes.

3.13 ACC Jeremy Vaughan emphasized the Police treated the supply of drugs very seriously and it was not a matter of arresting the way out of the problem because dealers were being replaced within minutes.

3.14 CC Matt Jukes noted the recent change whereby 20 people had been drawn into homelessness in Cardiff compared to a previous level of 80. The use of Spice and other Psychoactive drugs was harmful to users. Other vulnerable people included street sex workers and he also emphasized that arresting people was not a long term solution. Previously the Police had pushed back against the “clean needle” approach whereas now it was routine. There was an opportunity for Wales to be progressive in this area and to start looking at things differently.

3.15 PCC Arfon Jones referred to a Welsh Government report which advocated drug consumption rooms. Moreover it was a matter for UK Government to decide whether this should be classified as a health issue as opposed to a policing matter.

3.16 PCC Llywelyn referred to the services commissioned by Commissioners which provided support to people with drug and alcohol issues targeting those in the criminal justice system.

3.17 He referred to the purpose of the Cross Party Group which should result in actions for further discussion with and thereafter influencing Assembly Members and Welsh Government. He felt there was a gap in the services available for vulnerable women leading to homelessness. There was a need to look at what services were available for the Police service and Welsh Government to address the problem in the here and now and not wait for a Home Office Solution.

3.18 Action: John Griffiths AM to invite the Julie James AM Minister for Housing and Local Government to the next meeting of the Group.

3.19 PCC Alun Michael felt that legislation had not always worked and mentioned the high number of drug related fatalities in Swansea and Neath Port Talbot which had been targeted by a critical incident lead by the PSB. A joint response had been instigated which involved the health service in particular in order to deal with mental health issues. He also referred to the women’s pathfinder work and the need to join up the work of the PSBs and RPBs. He highlighted that PCCs were not involved with the RPBs.

3.20 Adam Price AM referred to the complexity and interconnected nature of the issues in the public’s conscience which was a positive reflection of society. It was not appropriate to concentrate on individual parts of the problem and a more holistic approach was required. He gave an example to illustrate his point referring to Lloyd George Avenue in Cardiff where there had been concerns about drug use under the railway arches. Railings had been put in place by Welsh Government, with the best of intentions, to address the problem however that resulted in the drug users going elsewhere and the rough sleepers could no longer use the area.

3.21 PCC Jeff Cuthbert suggested Assembly Members should be invited to have a more detailed discussion about the issues and also to take part in a “walkabout” with the police in their respective areas. The Cross Party Group could be used as a conduit for policing matters. The Police service was interested in long term investments and welcomed more dialogue on this or any other relevant matter.

3.22 CC Mat Jukes referred to the “Give a day to Policing” event held in 2018 and offered to repeat it in Cardiff or if that was not possible within the Assembly Members constituencies. This was a period to work more closely with each other in terms of promoting best understanding and engagement. It would provide an opportunity to highlight issues such as extreme far right activity and people becoming less tolerant and increased levels of hate crime.

3.23 John Griffiths AM agreed with CC Jukes in that it would be a good opportunity to hold an event and referred to the recent tragic events of mass fatalities at the mosques in New Zealand. He highlighted the importance of countering low level intolerance of those perceived to be different and of those who are vulnerable. If left unchallenged such behaviour might result in an atmosphere in our communities conducive to division, abuse and ultimately violence.

3.24 Steve Chapman mentioned that homeless people were also vulnerable people. He had previously arranged an event at the Assembly involving Police and Crime Commissioners, Chief Constables and Assembly Members to highlight the connection with anti-slavery. That event was positively received.

3.25 Action: John Griffiths AM to write to all Assembly Members extending an offer to attend an event similar to the “Give a day to Policing” held previously and also to accompany police officers on a walkabout of their respective areas.

3.26 John Griffiths AM referred to the Welsh Government Strategy on Community Cohesion which would be a good theme for the next meeting in conjunction with the prevent strategy. There was unanimous agreement to his suggestion.

3.27 PCC Jeff Cuthbert referred to the establishment of the Policing Partnership Board chaired by the First Minister, Mark Drakeford. He welcomed any suggestions from the Chair and the Cross Party Group as a whole to contribute to the agenda of the Board. The Board was police lead and aimed to deliver a single public service irrespective of whether it was devolved or non-devolved.

4 Topic for discussion at the next meeting of the Cross Party Group on Policing

It was agreed that the theme of the next meeting would be on the Welsh Government’s strategy on community cohesion and the prevent strategy.

5 Actions

- 1. John Griffiths AM to invite the Julie James AM, Minister for Housing and Local Government to the next meeting of the Group.**
- 2. John Griffiths AM to write to all Assembly Members extending an offer to attend an event similar to the “Give a day to Policing” held previously and also to accompany police officers on a walkabout of their respective areas.**

The meeting ended at 13:25