



BUCKFASTLEIGH TOWN COUNCIL

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Inspector A. Tomlinson
Devon and Cornwall Police
Police Headquarters
Middlemoor
Exeter
EX2 7HQ

11 December 2017

Dear Inspector Tomlinson,

Re: Policing in Buckfastleigh

Thank you for your letter of 19th October 2017 with regard to the Town Council's concerns over the level of policing in Buckfastleigh. The Town Council has considered the response and wish to follow up with further comments. Because of the seriousness of our concerns, we have also copied-in the Chief Constable, the PCC, and our MP.

We understand that whatever the validity of perceived arguments of so-called 'austerity', there is a national impact on the police which we shall not attempt to address here. It is with provision of our neighbourhood policing that we remain particularly concerned, and as you anticipated, we are disappointed with your response, although we accept that this is an issue which is essentially beyond your control.

As a council, we have been very happy with the service provided by PC Will Young and PCSO James Yates. Will is a good neighbourhood officer, and councillors have been personally saddened by his injury. We understand that he will not return to service for some time, and that there remains a risk that his injury could potentially preclude him from front-line service. Meanwhile, without the support of a neighbourhood PC, as a PCSO, James is not just severely limited in terms of the functions he may perform, but may be vulnerable in undertaking the role he *is* legally allowed to perform.

We understand (implicitly) from your letter that there is simply no budget to replace Will, even in the short-term. We appreciate that budgeting is not within your purview, but we feel we must establish for the record that **budget cuts in the Devon & Cornwall force have now deprived Buckfastleigh of a neighbourhood PC.**

Unfortunately, criminals do not take time off crime, and as budget cuts and understaffing of front-line policing have become a headline issue, we fear that the absence of a neighbourhood officer is liable to *increase* crime in the area, reversing results of a long-fought battle and hard work from your officers. It is a classic example of a false economy (although we probably do not need to tell you that).

With reference to the latest report on the 'State of Policing' by Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC)ⁱ, the report highlights the dangers that austerity has placed *specifically* in the

erosion of neighbourhood policing. We feel obliged to quote extensively from this report, as the benchmark in evaluation of policing, in order to demonstrate that we are fully cognizant of the profound damage that underfunding risks causing in this community. The report states:

The neighbourhood policing model of small teams of officers dedicated to particular communities has also played an important part in developing the confidence and trust of the public and keeping people safe.

Buckfastleigh Town Council fully concur with this view, and also note that the report had previously noted explicitly that neighbourhood policing was under threat due to cuts in funding. The report continues:

I have longstanding concerns that the bedrock of neighbourhood policing is being eroded. A dedicated neighbourhood policing team in a local community is able to build trust and confidence in a much deeper way than response officers will ever be able to. A local presence is also a vital part of understanding the risks and threats faced by a community, and is a critically important part of preventing crime.

We would like to emphasize HMIC's statement that neighbourhood policing is "**critically important**". This includes (according to the report) being a "powerful force" in terms of:

- protecting the vulnerable;
- tackling the petty crime and anti-social behaviour that blight people's lives.

Neighbourhood policing also

provides the eyes and ears in communities that can gather the intelligence necessary for disrupting serious and organised crime and terrorism. ... Where the work of neighbourhood teams is inconsistent, unstructured or insufficiently supported, it leads to a patchy understanding of threat, harm and risk within communities.

In sum, neighbourhood policing "is **critical** in preventing crime and anti-social behaviour." It should also be noted with particular local relevance that Neil Basu, the senior national counter-terrorism coordinator, has just this month warned that cuts in local policing pose a major threat to national security, in particular from far-right groups.ⁱⁱ Communities need to be connected and engaged with the police, and

That connection happens on the ground and that connection is fast disappearing in policing. All the work we've done over the last 20 years to put neighbourhood policing back on the map ... is in danger of disappearing. For me, that is a national security issue. ... it's all the local bobbies on the street who win that trust and confidence.

You may or may not be aware that Buckfastleigh is a town that has recently been targeted as a recruitment centre for far-right extremism?

We would very much like to have our neighbourhood PC back in order to address the specific problems identified by HMIC which threatens to blight Buckfastleigh if facilities are not budgeted for. In the absence of a neighbourhood PC, we feel that we are being socially sacrificed as a town in order that priorities may be placed on other matters which buy political capital for those taking the decisions to damage our community.

We also note that this is happening *before* further politically-driven cuts – already planned – are made to the force. In this regard, it is not too outrageous to infer that Buckfastleigh is being used as a test-tube in understanding what happens when the government decide that the police's primary role is no longer in fighting crime.ⁱⁱⁱ

Our primary aim is to ensure the safety of what we regard as a vulnerable community. Budget cuts increase this vulnerability. We request, with some urgency, that you may see a necessary reshuffling to current staffing to assuage our concerns, but also, we request that you fight for a proper budget in order that your division may do its job properly, without endangering either our community or national security. As elected representatives, we will of course support you in this, and do our best to ensure that those supporting decisions which potentially expose our community to harm are held to account.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Pam Barrett
Chair, Buckfastleigh Town Council

ⁱ <http://www.justiceinspectrates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-policing-2016.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/10/police-cutbacks-threaten-national-security-warns-counter-terrorism-head-neil-basu>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2017/nov/14/uk-police-funding-minor-crimes-bedfordshire-sussex-budget>

Cc: Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer
Alison Hernandez, Police & Crime Commissioner
Mel Stride, MP