

Questions from Mr RICHARD TAYLOR

Question 1 - PACE CODES

I am very concerned that Cambridgeshire Police hold the view that the PACE codes are merely guidance which they can choose to ignore. Does the Police Authority support the Police Force in holding this view?

It is my view that there are many important safeguards intended to protect people when they are stopped, searched, arrested, questioned and detained by the police contained only within the PACE codes.

Is it the case that when people are arrested in Cambridgeshire they're offered a copy of the PACE codes, then the custody sergeant says menacingly - "I wouldn't bother - we don't take much notice of those here"?

On a specific point - why are Cambridgeshire police still ignoring the requirements of PACE Code A with respect to Stop and Account, even though since 1 January 2009 PACE Code A has been amended to significantly reduce the information which has to be recorded. Currently receipts, as required by section 4.12 of PACE code A are not being issued.

Answer

Cambridgeshire Police Authority and Constabulary have full regard for all codes of practice. At its 26th February Scrutiny and Audit Committee the Authority called in a paper from the Constabulary to provide:

- Background information regarding changes to Stop and Account procedures.
- An update of the current position within Cambridgeshire Constabulary.
- Details of future action to resolve recording issues.

This paper set out that:

- Following the publication of the Flannigan review, the Chief Constable took the view that officers would cease to use the paper based system and record abbreviated details, in line with the pilot Forces, in their Pocket Note Books.
- This decision was reached following legal advice and a pragmatic approach to reducing bureaucracy, improving the quality of the interaction and removing any disproportionate delay as a result of the recording process. This is particularly important in respect of our diverse communities, where English may not be a first language.
- It is recognised that the current process does not allow data to be easily obtained and therefore scrutinised by either the Constabulary or the Police Authority. Cambridgeshire Constabulary is committed to providing an IT solution to overcome the current data issues.

The issue of receipts remains outstanding and another mechanism will have to be found if an IT supported print out is not a viable option. It is anticipated that a solution should be available within the next six months. The Authority will monitor progress with implementation of a solution.

With respect to your comments regarding the custody sergeant, Codes of Practice under PACE are offered to all detainees when brought into custody. The Authority would wish you to pass on specific details of allegations of inappropriate behaviour to the Constabulary so these can robustly investigated.

Question 2 - TASER

Why has the expanded deployment of TASER to all response police officers announced by the Home Secretary in November 2008 still not been discussed at a full meeting of Cambridgeshire Police Authority? Within hours of the ministerial announcement the Metropolitan Police Authority decided not to extend TASER use to all front line response officers in London on the grounds that they may cause fear and damage public confidence. Why was Cambridgeshire Police Authority not in a position to respond as rapidly and effectively?

Home Office minister Vernon Coaker has said "Clearly, the number of Tasers that a force has is not dictated centrally. It is a matter for individual chief constables, with their authorities, to determine what they should have". In light of that: what role did the Police Authority have in determining how many TASERs, for non-firearms police, Cambridgeshire would take from those being offered by the Home Office?

Mr Wilkins, a of the authority, had assured Cambridge City Council's North Area committee he would ensure that TASERs were discussed at a full meeting of the authority. Why has he evidently been unable to fulfill his commitment? He has reported that a paper on TASERs would be brought to a meeting of the Police Authority. When is this now due? Why was it not on the December 2008 or February 2009 agendas? Why is it not on today's agenda?

How many hours training does a non-firearms officer have with TASER before being issued with the weapon? Cambridgeshire's police have used the term "Specially Trained Unit" to describe those non-firearms officers to be issued with TASER. What is a Specially Trained Unit in Cambridgeshire; is it a typical, individual officer who has been given a few hours training?

I support police firearms units having access to TASER weapons which they can elect to use as an alternative to firearms in circumstances where they would otherwise use firearms. I would prefer to be shot with a TASER than with a gun. However I do not want to live in a country where more police officers than necessary are routinely armed with TASERs. I believe any expansion of TASER use would be damaging to the relationship between the public and the police.

Answer

Currently the use of TASERs is restricted to Fire Arms Officers. The Constabulary provided a report to Police Authority Professional Standards Committee meeting on 12 Feb 2009 regarding proposed future use of TASERs and this is available on the Authority's web site. This set out the Force's plan to deploy TASER devices to appropriately trained officers, not all front line response officers.

Recognizing that there is scope for public concern the Authority is monitoring the introduction TASER devices. The Constabulary has been asked to provide a further update on future TASER deployment to the Professional Standards Committee at its next meeting on 13th May 2009. This update will provide an opportunity for the Authority to scrutinize the details of the action plan to extend the use of TASER devices including the appropriateness of training.

A report from the February and May Professional Standards Committees will go to the planned June 29th Police Authority meeting. The report from committees is not on this agenda for today, as this Police Authority meeting was called at late notice to deal with specific estate issues and a decision was made to maintain the original reporting timetable.

Question 3 - PUBLIC SPEAKING

Why was I not allowed to speak and make a statement at the December 2008 or February 2009 full police authority meetings?

Mr Walters did not allow me, as a member of the public, to make a statement to the February 2009 meeting. However he did allow David Copeland of the Cambridgeshire Branch of the National Association of Retired Police Officers to make a statement.

I am very concerned that I was not treated in the same way as Mr Copeland. Neither Mr Copeland or I submitted a request to ask a question or make a statement to the meeting, a fact which I have confirmed with the Police Authority. I do not believe that retired police officers, or those known to Mr Walters, ought be given privileged access to the Police Authority.

I wrote to Mr Walters shortly after the meeting (on the 19th of February) asking for an explanation but he has not replied.

I would like to see a clarification of the public speaking rules at meetings of the Police Authority and details of any guidance which has been provided to the chairman on this matter published.

I note that the agendas for the December and February meetings were not published online in advance of the suggested deadline for public questions.

Answer

A number of people had submitted questions on injury pensions for the 18th February Police Authority meeting. David Copeland, who was representing National Association of Retired Police Officers and hence many pensioners, asked to clarify a point. The Chair used his discretion to allow this.

We were unaware that you wanted to ask a question at the 18th February meeting. I am sorry we have not specifically replied on this point before, this was an oversight.

With respect to seeking expert advice on Standing Order 6, as we outlined in our response to your freedom of information request, the Chairman spoke to our then chief executive whose views echoed that of the Chairman; that the Standing Order is quite clear. However following your concerns regarding this issue we have changed the wording on our agendas to help clarify the situation. The new wording can be seen on today's agenda. No other internal guidance was produced. These changes were also set out in our Chief Executives letter to you 17th February. In this letter, Dr Gregson offered to meet you to discuss any additional remaining concerns or issues you had.

Question 4 - TRANSPORT COMMISSION

Will the Chairman of the Police Authority and Chief Constable be giving evidence to the Cambridgeshire Transport Commission? How will the police be represented?

Answer

Cambridgeshire Transport Commission has been set up by Cambridgeshire County Council to examine and make recommendations on transport improvements in and around Cambridge to help ease congestion. These important issues are local to Cambridge and its immediate environs and the Authority considers it appropriate that engagement by the Police with the Commission should be through the local senior police commander. In that way any issues for operational policing can be effectively communicated to the Commission.

Question 5 - TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS IN PUBLIC PLACES

I would like to draw the authority's attention to what appears to me to be a systemic problem of police officers and police community support officers telling people to stop filming or taking photographs in public places when they have no grounds, or powers, to make such a demand. I think there is a need to look into why officers think they have powers to stop people filming and taking photographs, and for them to be reminded that generally they do not.

This is a particular problem with respect to taking photographs or video of crime and "anti-social behaviour" being committed by, or involving, youths and young people. The police's first response is not to tackle the problem youths, but to warn the person taking or offering photographs not to take photographs of youths. What has happened to the police to cause them to invoke this kind of response? Are they taking political correctness to an absurd level? Are paedophiles taking photographs of young vandals and moped riders? Are the police no-longer free to exercise common sense?

I have asked the Chief Constable about this on BBC Radio Cambridgeshire; she expressed her support for members of the public photographing, and even videoing anti-social behaviour by youths, stating that showing such images to their parents can be a very effective way of putting a stop to the problem.

On a related, but separate point I believe it is particularly important that the police don't try and stop members of the public photographing them on duty / in action when the public think they're doing something wrong.

Answer

We note your concern regarding this and ask if there are specific concerns or complaints regarding the actions of Cambridgeshire Officers that these are directed to the Chief Constable so they can be investigated.