

**MINUTES OF THE DISTRICT POLICING PARTNERSHIP PUBLIC MEETING
HELD ON MONDAY 9 AUGUST 2004 AT 7.30PM
IN MAGHERA LEISURE CENTRE, COLERAINE ROAD, MAGHERA**

PRESENT Cllr Miss K A Lagan, Chairperson
Cllr P McLean, Vice-Chairman
Mr J Conlon
Cllr R A Montgomery
Mrs M Donnelly
Cllr T J Catherwood
Ms S Ewing
Miss A Scott
Cllr P McErlean
Cllr G Shiels
Ms F Symington
Cllr J A McBride
Dr D Shortall
Mrs M McCormack
Cllr J Junkin

Also present Mr J A McLaughlin, Chief Executive, MDC
Mr M McCrory, DPP Manager
Ms P Shaw, Secretary

1 Apologies

Cllr Rev Dr R T Wm McCrea and Mr J Campbell.

2 Declarations of Interest

No member had any interest to declare.

3 Confirmation of Minutes

PROPOSED by Cllr T J Catherwood,
Seconded by Ms F Symington, and

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED that the minutes were an accurate record of the meeting.

4 Matters Arising

1. Cllr Montgomery thanked the members for their best wishes during his recent illness.
2. Cllr Catherwood thanked the members for offering their sympathy on the recent death of his father.
3. The DPP Manager advised that the CCTV in Magherafelt was now fully functional.
4. The Chairman updated the meeting on his meeting with the ACC regarding the suggested amalgamation of Magherafelt and Ballymena DCU's. The ACC had stated that

this suggestion was largely rumour although it might form part of a future internal discussion. He would not rule out that something like this might happen in the future.

5 Chair Changeover

Cllr McLean vacated the chair and invited Cllr K Lagan to take the position. Before doing so he thanked the members, staff and police for all the support that they had given him during his year as Chairman. He felt although it was the first year in which the DPP had been in existence, that it had achieved a lot.

Cllr K Lagan assumed the responsibilities of the Chairman and congratulated Cllr McLean on the way that he had chaired the DPP during the previous year.

6 MORI Report

The DPP Manager, Mr Michael McCrory, presented the findings of the MORI report. It measured the public's perception of the effectiveness of policing within the Magherafelt area and also analysed what the public perceived as being the most important policing issues within the district.

Members sought some clarification on how the poll was structured and spoke of their disappointment that the local police were not perceived in a more positive light.

7 Report by the District Commander

The District Commander Superintendent John Lindsay introduced to the meeting Inspector S Martin and Inspector S McAuley.

The District Commander presented his report (Appendix I) for the months of April - June 2004. He highlighted that the most significant feature was that violent crime had decreased by 68% on the same period last year.

Members Questions

(a) Ms F Symington enquired if any progress had been made in tracing the perpetrators of the pipe bomb attacks in Hazeldene and Maghera.

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that there had been no witnesses to either of the attacks and as of yet they had received no feedback from the forensics department. Due to their (forensics) workload it could be several months before the report was received.

(b) Miss A Scott enquired if a perpetrator had been found for the recent assault on the 13 year old girl at Meadowbank Recreation Centre.

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that there was no cause for public alarm. The person was known to the 13 year old and he was confident that there was no danger of this individual being involved in any further attacks.

8 Questions from the Public

(a) Cllrs Lagan, McBride and McErlean posed the following questions to Superintendent Lindsay:

Section 32 of the Police (NI) Act 2000, obliges police officers “to prevent the commission of offences and where an offence has been committed, to take measures to bring the offenders to justice”.

In light of known reports to police regarding the display of flags supporting proscribed organisations and flags placed to deliberately harass or provoke a breach of the peace, to ask what action has been taken, under the obligation of the above mentioned Section 32, in regard to the following offences within Magherafelt District:

1. Breaches of Section 13 of the Terrorism Act 2000 – flags displaying support for proscribed organisations;

2 Breaches of Article 3 of the Protection from Harassment (NI) Order 1997 – erection of flags as a means of sectarian harassment;

3. Breaches of Article 19(1) of the Public Order (NI) Order 1987 – erection of flags with intent to provoke a breach of the peace.

Furthermore:

4. To ask for a copy of the PSNI policy on flags;

5. To ask if this policy has been assessed for equality implications;

6. To ask if the PSNI will provide all necessary assistance to the responsible agency in having these provocative flags removed.

Cllrs Lagan and McBride stated that flags from whatever source where offensive and made the opposite community feel intimidated. They cited the example of the Leckagh Estate which they said had an excessive number of flags, most of which were of proscribed loyalist paramilitary organisations. They added that these flags were also used to “mark out territory”. As a result of this the nationalist population of this estate had decreased over the years from 45% to 15%. They urged that the police should take measures to have these flags of proscribed organisations removed. They added that this applied also to republican flags which caused offence and intimidated members of the loyalist community.

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that the only effective way to have these flags removed was to discuss the matter with those who are erecting them and to try to convince them and the local community of the benefits of having them removed. He further stated that it would be the wrong tactic for the police to remove these flags, as those erecting them would only see it as a challenge and would in turn erect two or three times as many more. He said that in summary it was a problem which could only be solved by working along with the local community.

In relations to points 4, 5 and 6 of the question Superintendent Lindsay replied that he didn't know if a copy of the PSNI policy on flags was available, he felt sure that if it existed that it would have been equality proofed and finally he had offered their services on various occasions in relation to the removing of flags.

Inspector Martin added that in the Leckagh Estate there were at one stage 31 flags, now only 3 of them are paramilitary the remainder had been removed. He stated that this had

been achieved through consultation with the local community and this was the only effective way to have them removed.

Cllr Montgomery agreed with Superintendent Lindsay. He cited the example of Tobermore, which a few years ago had been awash with paramilitary flags. These have now all been removed and this had been achieved through negotiation with the local community.

Cllr Lagan stated that she felt that the police were taking no action to resolve the problem and the public felt that no action would be taken even if specific example were reported. She again reiterated that the flying of the flags of proscribed organisations was illegal and something had to be done. Cllr McErlean agreed with Cllr Lagan and added that flags caused fear and hate in the community.

Mr John Conlon and Miss Alison Scott stated that they agreed with Superintendent Lindsay, in that the only way forward was through consultation with the community. Both of them added that no one could disagree that the situation had improved in recent years, as was evidenced by the fact that there was now a lot less illegal flags being flown.

Superintendent Lindsay added once again that consultation with the community was the only way in which the matter could be resolved in the long term and he disagreed that the police were doing nothing.

(b) Mr Jim Campbell posed the following question to Superintendent Lindsay:

None injury Traffic accident on Friday 11 June outside Dorman's Bar, Queen Street, Magherafelt at almost 2.15pm. Police attendance requested, lorry driver advised by PSNI not to move vehicle until arrival of officers. Police arrived at almost 3.30pm from direction of Moneymore. Lorry moved 5 to 10 minutes later. During this time town was grid locked in all directions with tailbacks to Castledawson roundabout (2 miles) and similar distance at the Moneymore Road. Journey times from Castledawson roundabout to Queen Street in excess of 1 hour. No diversions were in operation therefore emergency services would have been in an impossible situation should their services have been required.

No doubt there must have been a shortage of manpower available to cover this accident yet from 7.00pm onwards on this same evening Magherafelt was covered by police officers to police a band parade. These officers appeared to be powerless to stop bandsmen and their followers from urinating in public at various locations through the town.

Could the PSNI in future insure that bandsmen and their followers do not urinate on the streets and around peoples homes and businesses?

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that one must bear in mind that Magherafelt was not meant to take the volume of traffic which it now carried. In addition, during the last eight months the majority of his officers were based in Bellaghy PSNI station, due to the ongoing rebuilding of the Magherafelt PSNI station. Both of these factors would help to explain the delay in the police responding to this situation. He stated in relation to the bandsmen urinating in the street, that he was not aware of anyone acting in this lewd fashion. He further stated that he would encourage the provision of portaloos, although such provision was not widespread. However he could assure the public that the PSNI do

not ignore such behaviour. He stated that the Magherafelt PSNI station would be completed within the next two months and hopefully then his officers could respond much more quickly.

Ms F Symington enquired when the sanger at the Magherafelt station would be removed. In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that he thought it was scheduled to be removed at the end of August.

Cllr Lagan highlighted the recent "cruise" which had happened at St Lurach's Carpark, Maghera. She added that when the police were informed only two police cars arrived, which was a totally inadequate response to the 60-80 cars taking part in the "cruise". She stated that the problem was only got under control when a Technical Support Group arrived from Ballycastle.

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated that two cars and four officers were all the resources that were available on weekday nights and unless they had prior information, it was very difficult to respond quickly and adequately to such an event.

(c) Cllr McBride enquired as to the measures being taken by the PSNI to enforce the restriction of disabled parking bays to accommodate those drivers designated as disabled.

In reply Superintendent Lindsay stated recently 34 fixed penalty tickets had been issued and in addition some people had been cautioned and asked to move on. He highlighted that there was only 1½ traffic wardens to cover Magherafelt

9 Any Other Business

Ms F Symington stated that she felt it would be a good idea to have the questions circulated along with the agenda and also asked that the seating plan be varied from meeting to meeting. Members agreed to both of these requests.

Date of next meeting

It was agreed that the next public meeting would be held in The Rural College, Draperstown on Monday 4 October 2004 at 7.30pm.

The meeting concluded at 9.30pm.

J A McLaughlin

The foregoing Minutes are hereby Confirmed.

_____ (Chairman)

_____ (Date)