

Cambridgeshire Police Authority

To: Richard Taylor: by e-mail only

29th October 2008

Dear Mr Taylor

Enquires to Ruth Joyce

I write in reply to your e-mail questions of 21 October addressed to Ruth Joyce in her capacity as a newly appointed member of the Police Authority.

Being aware of your previous correspondence with the constabulary and the authority, Ruth and I had a brief discussion and agreed I would reply on behalf of the authority also reflecting her views on the issues you have raised.

We see from some of your comments that you feel the constabulary and the authority are in some way reticent to provide information and I have to say this is simply not true. To illustrate that we want to reasonably answer your points as far as we can but we have to say we really do wonder what your interest in some of these issues is, and my replies are tailored accordingly.

My responses correspond to your numbered points.

- 1 We will be putting Ruth's photo on the website shortly. Some members, especially those holding elected posts, are happy for their personal e-mail addresses to be put into the public domain, whilst others prefer to work through the [generic police authority email] address. Hard mail enquiries can be handled via the Police Authority address at Police Headquarters. It is not our policy to provide other contact details as the methods described above suffice and prevent opportunities for "harassment".
- 2 Ruth made a personal decision not use her OBE title in connection with her authority appointment. Why is this relevant to you and why do you want to know who's decision it was?
- 3 Ruth often goes to Cambridge City Centre in the evening, both during the week and at weekends. Your enquiry implies she has no experience of Cambridge City Centre after 10pm. If so, what is your point in asking the question?

- 4 Our understanding about publicising the Area Committees is that these are owned by either Cambridgeshire Constabulary or key partners, such as the City Council and it is their responsibility to advertise these. The Constabulary press office publicises details of Neighbourhood Panels and I believe they are considering providing an online 'Events Diary' as an area for future website development. The meetings are, however, also publicised on the force website via the most recent neighbourhood profile document, which also informs the public of the local priorities set. Posters are also displayed and a press release and e-cops message are sent out by the force. The world moves on Mr Taylor and the advent of Neighbourhood Policing has shifted the constabulary's engagement with the community in a positive way. The Authority dovetails with that and most local people identify with the "police" and not with the Authority. We see little point in attempting to duplicate such information on our own website. The Authority working with the Chief Constable sets priorities but part of the new world is close working with local partners and we have a positive view about agreeing joint priorities which improve community safety overall. As lead member for Cambridge West and South Ruth Joyce will be attending Area Committee meetings whenever possible. Clearly, we think this is a curious question to ask of a member when only just appointed to the Authority and I wonder what you intend to do with the answer we have provided?
- 5 All members of the Authority in post prior to 1 October are aware of the temporary scheme to vary the application of the PACE Code on Stop and Account because they have discussed it a number of times with the Chief Constable. It has not been a priority for briefing new members. Suffice it to say that we are working with the Home Office in the context of the pilots they have running elsewhere and acknowledge mutual benefit in testing variations to the application of the Codes. Remember Mr Taylor the Codes are codes, not statutory mandates, but codes to encourage standards and their application in a consistent way. With the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing it is more relevant than ever to engage in discussions with members of the public, often in a proactive way. The question is where does this process end and Stop and Account begin? By testing the effect we better understand the consequences of change (we are sure you will understand that from your science background) and this approach is helpful. In fact it seems that early indications from our work and on the pilot sites will lead to a change in this Code. We will wait and see.
- 6 Ruth is aware of this and so is the wider authority. The fact is that whilst we endorse the principles of FoI and are rightly bound by our obligations, and endorse an individual's right to information within the context of the Act, public bodies are inundated with requests for information and we are no exception. Frankly, as a rule of thumb, 50% of the information requested seems to have no practical purpose and we really do wonder what the recipient does with it. Some "drill down" endlessly and we see no product from it in the media, at our public meetings or in other forms. We feel something will have to change to control this headlong dash for information which is an industry in itself. In practice this means that the resources which need to be deployed to handle such requests would have to grow to the detriment of officers and staff deployed to make our communities safer. The Constabulary has seen a 60% rise in the volume of FoI requests over the past 3 years and this, together with unforeseen and unpredictable staff absences (partly due to illness) has resulted in a backlog of requests accumulating. This has meant that the

Constabulary for a time is unable to meet the statutory duty to respond to all requests within 20 working days. This is being addressed but the Constabulary and the Authority are confronted with many competing demands and in the current straitened budgetary climate adequately resourcing the front line must be our first concern.

- 7 We think your enquiry is unreasonably intrusive and are surprised by the extent of your research. We will never answer such questions Mr Taylor and you have no right to know “when and where you have lived within Cambridge City”. Why is this relevant to you? Rest assured the entry on our website is accurate.
- 8 What is the point of your question? In any event it is not an either / or situation. The Police Act 2006 as amended does require the Authority to exist with a specified constitution and Ruth is fortunate – and skilled – enough to have been appointed an independent member. She looks forward to working with directly elected councillors of all persuasions.
- 9 Ruth has had contact with Cambridgeshire police both personally and professionally. Personally, she has called upon them on the few occasions when she has needed their support over issues affecting her home and local community and have found them polite and helpful, offering advice that was constructive, practical and useful. Why are you asking these specific questions Mr Taylor? What exactly is your motive?
- 10 As you correctly state, Kevin Wilkins is the Police Authority’s nominated lead for the Cambridge Community Safety Partnership and he will ensure that he keeps up to date on policing and community safety issues across Cambridge and that the Police Authority continues to be represented on the partnership and receives regular information. You may be aware that the force is represented at those meetings too, by Chief Inspector Vicky Skeels and the sector commander (formerly Insp. Jon Hutchinson, currently Insp. Steve Kerridge) and they too provide the Police Authority with a link to information regarding operational policing in the city of Cambridge via the appointed lead Authority members for the area – of which Ruth is now one.

We trust that exhausts your enquiries.

Yours sincerely



Philip Peaston
Chief Executive