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Dear Clerk & Councillors

PARISH COUNCIL UPDATE FOR ANNUAL MEETING 2017

It's that time of year when the inbox fills with (welcome) invitations to annual meetings of our parish councils across the District. With 52 parish councils, the town council of Daventry and 20 Parish Meetings, you can see that if every council met monthly on a different day of the week, Monday to Thursday and I attended each one, it would take me around 18 weeks to get through them all! Equally I am trying to dissuade my smaller team (of which more, later) from attending every parish meeting, and am trying to manage expectations around what information we can routinely give. This comprehensive letter seeks to give you an annual update so that there is a common understanding of local policing. It should complement the update I sent out last Christmas and messages you will be receiving from the new District Inspector for Daventry and South Northamptonshire Districts, Kev Byrne.

My opening comment could be misinterpreted as downplaying our relationship with the parish tier of local government. Nothing could be further from the truth and some will already know my passion for local governance at parish level. It is **you** who know what's going on at street level, where the concerns are, and it is **you** and your Clerk/Executive Officers who know how to get things done. It is **you** who have the rapport and networks with the neighbourhood, and it is **you** who set local budgets according to local needs and concerns.

When I compare these comments with my job as one of the local neighbourhood sergeants for Daventry District, in the current context and climate, I cannot do without a robust relationship with parish councils. And when I say 'robust', that includes a relationship which allows us to have a good understanding of our mutual business, as well as good disagreement on matters of contention, and an ability to offer each other good and critical feedback. At the now many parish meetings I have had the privilege of being invited to over the past year, councillors will have heard my pride in the relevance today of the principles of Robert Peel, the founder of policing, who talked of 'the police being the public and the public being the police'. He also talked of the effectiveness of policing being borne out not by the visibility of police on the streets but the absence of crime and disorder from them.

Whilst the local policing team has reduced in size over the past three years, the Force is entirely committed to neighbourhood policing – something the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) briefed police leaders on at a seminar I attended this week, when he said *‘Neighbourhood Policing remains core to our policing model and I’ll be checking it does.’*

The context of these words was the review which has been ongoing over the past year to see how the force can balance the need to reduce budgets against a growing and insatiable demand for policing new areas – the areas of child sexual exploitation, safeguarding, online crime, fraud, mental health and missing people.

I don’t envy the Commissioner his job of balancing these demands – he has acknowledged the newer demand in the recent policing plan. As just one example of the newer and growing demands of policing, the PCC referred to the changing threats for which he has to commission police services. One of these is Child Sexual Abuse, of which he soberly reminded us:

- Child sexual abuse reports are up by a staggering 417%
- 69% of reports relate to victims who are 10 years of age or under
- 3% of reports relate to victims who are 2 years or under
- Where indecent sexual images of children are involved, 34% of these are classified as Category A – which involve the rape or sexual torture of the victims

These are shocking statistics but help to explain why and how we need to allocate our resources around the threat, harm and risk in the county to protect people (especially the most vulnerable) from harm, and therefore why areas of low vulnerability and risk may see different levels of policing, according to the new policing plan.

I can assure you of my resolve and energy, and that of all colleagues, in doing the best we can, within the resources we have, to deliver that plan. Whilst the recent inspection by HM Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) has identified areas for improvement in our ‘effectiveness’, I consider that you should be assured by our good rating in the previous two inspections of our ‘efficiency’ (are we using our resources in the best way?) and ‘legitimacy’ (do we police ethically, with integrity and according to our stated values?). For more information, do check out the HMIC website and look up Northamptonshire.

Neither the force nor I have been secretive of the fact that the staffing of neighbourhood policing teams has reduced. However, for the first time in my 25+ years’ service, this has been done in a scientific way, according to the vulnerability and harm of a locality. In other words, a practical and academic assessment of a locality’s vulnerability and harm has identified the makeup of the policing team it requires.

Equally, a similar assessment of its needs for response policing has identified when and where our officers are best deployed.

Daventry District is one of the safest places to live in the county and those of you that have heard me talk, know of the some of the issues that face other Northants communities which just don't affect Daventry. So the shape of our local policing offer looks something like this:

- **Response policing** (where you call us for an ongoing incident or emergency) will be serviced by our 24/7 response teams based out of Daventry. Officers will have the mobile technology so that they don't have to keep returning to the station. The teams have had their numbers increased according to the demand, threat, harm and risk, which is why some of our neighbourhood policing team numbers have reduced (we were constantly backing up the response teams anyway)
- **Neighbourhood policing** | The force has re-pledged its commitment to neighbourhood policing and that every community will continue to have a named local contact and neighbourhood presence. That presence may not be someone walking the streets of Great Oxenden at 3am (by way of example), but it may comprise an online presence (many of the local officers are now using social media), It may comprise regular email or online contact, bearing in mind that 88% of the population use the internet daily and 90% of 16-24 year olds use mobile data online. What it will absolutely rely on is accessibility to local policing services, and I refer to contact with us later on in this report.

Dedicated neighbourhood resources will focus on community issues – the hours spent on neighbourhood policing will not reduce even though there will be fewer neighbourhood officers. Whilst that sound like spin or marketing talk, it does make sense, and I explain this. Our team will comprise 2 sergeants, 5 constables and 6 PCSOs **plus** sponsored PCSOs, of which we currently have 3. There will be scope for further sponsorship later in the year and I am aware of a number of parishes asking more information about this, which we will have ready in time for parish budget-setting at the end of 2017. But the reduced officer numbers will work in a regime where they are 'red-circled' to their core role, rather than constantly being taken away to cover elsewhere (and the red-circling started at the beginning of April.)

Daventry Police Station remains one of four policing 'hubs' in the county and remains an operational station with a public Enquiry Desk which opens in accordance with public demand, Monday to Saturday, 10am to 4pm. (Telephone extension 341010)

We report to the new inspector (Kev Byrne) who will oversee the two districts of Daventry and South Northants. In reality, this is the team size we have been working with since Christmas, but with the added protection that these officers will not be drawn away to support response policing or myriad other abstractions – the red-circling I refer to earlier.

We will be able to concentrate on community engagement, problem solving, working with partners, visibility and accessibility, using a 'what works' principle and 'hot times' – our officers will patrol visibly according to patrol plans which maximise visibility and prevention.

- **Specialist support** – for specialist jobs, but also for backup and presence across our District, we are supported by regional teams – at a recent rescue incident at Pitsford water, for example, our response comprised officers from response teams, my team, an armed car from the A14 (deployed in unarmed mode), a Leicestershire officer from the M1 who works on our joint operations unit, as well as CID officers from the north of the county. This was in addition to resources from Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue, with whom we are working closer than ever.
- **Growth areas** – the force will be developing its demand and contact management to make us more efficient – better management of calls which don't need an immediate response. This will include an appointment schedule so we can see people more quickly at police stations or community hubs. Another huge area of growth is around our duty to safeguarding: our safeguarding teams will be centralised, a domestic abuse prevention/investigation team will offer a consistent, countywide service and a proactive team will support safeguarding and all areas of policing where threat, harm and risk dictates where they should be deployed. In Daventry District, whilst we have low crime and disorder, we spend oodles of our time dealing with vulnerable people, with low-level (but serious) domestic violence (or coercion), missing people, and people with mental health issues which put them at risk.

From the many parishes I have visited, I recognise (as does the force) that our 101 system does take a knocking – sometimes justifiably, sometimes not. What we do know about our own District is that:

- People are reticent to call us to report suspicious circumstances and hesitate to use 999
- People think we are too busy or wouldn't be interested in the information offered
- People don't like it that there is nothing between a 999 and 101 call
- We could make better use of the Crimestoppers – the charity which welcomes anonymous information either by calling on 0800 555111 or sending a message online at www.crimestoppers-uk.org.
- www.fearless.org is another website aimed at empowering young people with an option to pass on information about crime with guaranteed anonymity.

For those reasons, at Christmas I put together a guide to when and how to contact us, and this has been circulated to parishes with this letter in an updated format.

At one of his regular visits to the police station recently, I was proud to update our MP, Chris Heaton-Harris to some of the hard work that has been going on in recent months including:

- The arrest of rural criminals who have been targeting farms and stables stealing large quantities of farm equipment. Some of the equipment stolen from Northamptonshire has been seized in a Welsh police area and we are returning over £20k worth back to owners, with the immense help of the NFU
- The execution of warrants under the Misuse of Drugs Act and the arrest of local people suspected of supplying drugs. This follows successful operations to locate and close cannabis factories like the one at Crick, with the support of organisations like Neighbourhood Watch
- Working meaningfully with partner agencies to ensure that people who take up large amounts of police time receive the attention of the healthcare agencies which are the more appropriate people to help. We have also successfully prosecuted an individual for the wasteful use of police resources.
- Building rapport with local support groups (like the mental health wellbeing group) so that there is confidence in the policing service we offer.

I'll now turn my attention to some of the key areas which are regularly raised with us at parish meetings.

Speeding & Traffic matters: This is an issue which is raised in virtually every parish. I cannot endorse enforcement in every parish, and we concentrate our resources where the speeding is a factor in collisions where there is serious injury or death. When we have less formal enforcement, we normally catch around one-third of local people. Community Speedwatch is a great way of engaging with the local community and providing a less formal sanction, and I commend it to your council if you haven't already adopted it.

Road JAG | A mantra of mine when addressing these issues includes the 3Es of Engineering, Education and Enforcement. Rarely will I allow enforcement to be the 'de facto' option, when there are other options. That is why I encourage parishes to be aware of the Roads Joint Action Group (JAG) – part of the Community Safety Partnership. This group meets regularly and comprises representatives from Highways England, the Highways Authority, councils, police, fire service. Its recommendations are meaningful and definitive.

The Chair of that group is Kevin Fagan (kfagan@daventrydc.gov.uk), and the group can apply shared learning to other contentious issues in rural communities like parking around schools – so that solutions which work in one place can be recommended to others.

Statistics: In the old days, local officers used to pore over their computer screens for hours, to provide crime and statistics to bring to parish councils, and these days are now past. Firstly, much of these statistics are now available to members of the public on websites like www.police.uk or www.checkmystreet.co.uk. Secondly, at the (now many) parish meetings, I am rarely asked about the statistics as people are more interested in the qualitative aspects of the service rather than the quantitative. That said, we have a police volunteer who has taken on some of this 'nice to do, but not must-do' work, which is why some (not all) parishes receive a report. We are trying to extend this service.

Neighbourhood Watch is active on this District and the District coordinator, Andy Crisp (andycrisp@btinternet.com) would love to hear from any parish interested in setting up a scheme. We have had some good successes with our active NHW schemes, and a large number of coordinators meet here at the police station on a quarterly basis.

Visibility: Everyone wants the police to be visible (including me) but we need to be effective too. A recent spate of crimes in one of our villages has provoked a correspondence about whether we should increase patrols, and I have had to say that this is just not an effective use of resources. Accessibility to policing is key – do you know who your local officer is, and (more importantly), do you have the right rapport with him/her and vice versa. Parish councils can help with this, especially when there is a single point of contact. Most of my PCSOs now operate Twitter accounts, and this is a great way of finding out about news of what we are up to. Woodford Halse Parish Council posts the local PCSO's live Twitter feed on its parish Facebook page. I use Twitter and it's a great way of communicating both ways.

Responsiveness: That recent spate of quite unusual burglaries, targeting specific addresses across our district within the space of two hours one evening, has caused natural concern, and an understandable kneejerk reaction from the community to request increased visible patrols. As a resident of this community I do understand those concerns, but will not be responding by putting on extra uniformed patrols, as my professional judgment is that this will not prevent or detect these crimes. However, what we are doing is to increase plain-clothed patrols across the patch whilst encouraging the community to report suspicious circumstances. I am involving the parish council concerned, and the local NHW, in that message, which is why a good relationship with parish council and community groups is key, and why I have taken the time to give you this report in its detail, which I am using as the template for meetings I cannot get to.

I appreciate this is a lengthy report, but given that I won't be able to get around all Parish Annual Meetings, I am hoping that it provides a more general update on the policing of our District – reputed to be the second largest rural district in England. If you would like me to come to a future parish council meeting to respond to this report or other matters, please do ask me and I'll happily attend.

I hope I have made it clear that I see parish councils as key in the accessibility to policing I have described, as we do our best to protect all members of the county from harm whilst maintaining all the effective parts of policing to keep this District one of the safest places in the county.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Dobbs', written in a cursive style.

SAM DOBBS
District Sergeant