

KEEPING COMMUNITIES SAFE IN CHALLENGING FINANCIAL TIMES**Kenny MacAskill MSP – Cabinet Secretary for Justice****INTRODUCTION**

President - thank you for your introduction.

I know we have all been shocked by the terrible events which unfolded in Cumbria on Wednesday and I am sure you will join me in offering deepest sympathies to all those affected by the tragedy which has struck Cumbrian communities.

As ever, the emergency services have acquitted themselves superbly well in extremely difficult circumstances. I would like to pay tribute to all those who had to deal with yesterday's aftermath in very traumatic circumstances. I know that this included officers from Dumfries and Galloway Police, who provided assistance to their colleagues from Cumbria Constabulary by deploying an armed response unit at the border and by providing policing support for Cumbria's motorways. Also, the scenes of crime officers from the Scottish Police Services Authority who provided forensic support following the incidents.

We have, of course, experienced a similar tragedy in Scotland and our thoughts are with the victims of the shootings in Cumbria, their loved ones and the communities which have been so badly affected.

More than ever events like these highlight the excellent work you do and once again I say thank you on behalf of the Scottish Government for your service.

There can be no doubt that we are entering a phase of unprecedented challenges. Greater financial challenges, yes, but also the continued challenge of keeping our communities safe. The whole of the public sector will need to work together to target available resources on frontline services and improving outcomes for people.

I am proud of the role police play in keeping our communities safe. I am sure that you agree that our priority must be to maintain and improve outcomes in our communities. This will mean some hard choices. I expect we will have some tough conversations. However, I know that we share a commitment to maintaining outcomes for our communities, and I want us to find a way through the challenges ahead by working together.

EXAMPLES OF EXCELLENT POLICING

I want to take some time to reflect on some of the successes in Scottish policing in the past year.

Tackling serious organised crime is one of my top priorities and I welcome the commitment the police and your wider law enforcement partners are giving to tackling this scourge across Scotland .

Earlier this week I was in Dundee to celebrate your achievements in tackling serious organised crime in the 12 months since our organised crime strategy was published.

I was particularly interested to hear from PC Ursula Honeyman about how our strategy is being translating into action on the ground in communities in Dundee. Partnership between the police and other agencies is paying real dividends in communities across Scotland.

I want to acknowledge the hard work and dedication of officers working on Operations such as Silver, FACET and Greengage. These Operations disrupted serious organised crime groups and ended the misery these groups had inflicted on our communities through drugs.

In terms of public protection, I would like to commend the dedicated officers working on operations, such as Algebra, which successfully broke up the largest paedophile ring ever dismantled in Scotland. That was a landmark case in Scotland, and a prime example of policing excellence and effective partnership working.

And I want to mention the Sex Offender Community Disclosure Pilot in Tayside. This successful pilot shows how public support can be harnessed to promote child protection. I was therefore very pleased to announce the provision of £300,000 to Scottish police forces to help them roll out this success story throughout Scotland.

SCALE OF FINANCIAL CHALLENGE

As a Government, we have demonstrated our solid commitment to a well resourced police service.

Police funding is at a record level, £1.4 billion in 2010-11. We are meeting our commitment to 1000 extra officers in our communities by continuing to pay for those officers already in forces, and for the final tranche of 201 officers to be recruited this year.

And in April we took on responsibility for the full funding of police pensions, which includes taking on the risk of increasing costs over future years to protect operational police budgets. Police funding is now £235 million per year more than the previous Government provided, an increase of 20%. All this at a time when we are facing £500 million of cuts, imposed by the Treasury and set out in the draft Scottish budget presented to Parliament.

However, as you know, those levels of funding cannot continue. We are entering a period where we will face major economic and financial challenges for several years to come.

Scottish Government economists have estimated that real terms cuts in funding could continue into 2014/15, and that even if slow annual growth returns after that overall funding levels will take 12 or more years to return to current levels of public sector funding.

During that period of time the equivalent of around £25 billion will have been taken out of public sector budgets in Scotland. So this is not a short term problem. We need to be planning now for a new financial climate that lasts for perhaps a generation.

OPEN TO THINKING DIFFERENTLY

So in the challenging times ahead, I want us to focus first and foremost on how we can make our communities safer.

That means maintaining or enhancing community policing, making sure that people know how to get in touch with the police if the need arises, and making sure they know what service to expect when they do. It is about working with local people to detect and prevent crime.

Safer communities is our bottom line. And if we are going to deliver those outcomes in the context of shrinking budgets, we cannot afford to carry on as before. We are a small country, and we can no longer afford to do everything 8 times over. Whether it is procurement, IT, or back-office functions, we need to focus on cutting duplication and finding more efficient ways to work. It is time for some fresh thinking and new approaches. We cannot afford for any options to be "off the table", whether this be streamlining structures or new ways of working.

I do not have a blueprint for how Scottish policing will look in 5 years' time, or 15 years' time. But looking at the figures we know that it will not be sustainable to carry on as before.

We need to look afresh at Scottish policing to make sure that we continue to deliver safety and security for our communities in the tight financial times ahead. And I want to participate in a process of dialogue with all policing partners about what the solutions should be. In doing so, we need to critically examine all the options, and by all means discard those that won't work. But as we do that, we need to identify those that will. A solution that meets only half of the problem won't be enough.

This may mean some tough conversations. We will need to work together for the common cause and where we disagree, do so respectfully.

EFFICIENCIES, ENCOURAGING POLICE TO DO MORE

In recent years, forces have responded well to Efficient Government targets, consistently exceeding the targets you have been set. Your re-investing of those efficiencies has brought real benefits in terms of increased resources at the frontline and improved services to communities.

I am also encouraged by some of the work that is going on in forces at present to identify and deliver efficiencies through restructuring, reductions in overtime, changes to working practices, better fleet and estate management and many other initiatives.

But if we are to protect services to communities, then we need to do much, much more. That means taking every opportunity within forces to improve processes and structures. It means taking every opportunity across forces and ACPOS to collaborate and share services wherever that can add value and deliver efficiencies.

And it means working with local partners, in force areas, and with sectoral partners, in the justice system and the emergency services, to deliver important efficiencies for the long term.

COLLABORATION WITH OTHER PARTS OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR

It will not be easy, but you are not on your own.

The whole of the public sector in Scotland will be looking to re-shape services to deliver better outcomes with smaller budgets. More collaboration and shared services must be part of how we do this.

It will be challenging. There will be barriers to be overcome. However, we must find a way through if we are to keep delivering for communities.

That is why I am delighted that the Scottish Government and ACPOS will host a "speed networking" event for strategic decision-makers in the police and other public sector organisations later this month. This event will help to facilitate an important dialogue which now needs to happen. I hope we can begin to create a step change in collaboration and sharing services.

CONCLUSION

So in conclusion, I want to come back to the values and objectives which bind us together. Making communities safer is at the heart of my job, and the job of everyone in the room. I value the work you do, and have great respect for the enormous contribution you make.

That is why I want to work with you to take a fresh look at streamlining structures and finding new, more efficient ways of working. The choices will be tough, but must be faced if we are to continue to deliver the crucial outcomes for our communities.

There will be occasions where we disagree with each other, but I hope we can do that with a level of respect, and with an eye to our shared goals. We all want to:

- Make people safe, and *feel* safe;
- Build strong, resilient communities; and,
- Deliver a police service which is high quality, continually improving, and responds to local people's needs.

I look forward to working with you to achieve this, in the challenging times ahead.