



Home Office

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Steve McCabe MP  
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Dear Steve,

At the Westminster Hall debate on aggressive anti-social behaviour on 10 October I undertook to write about any points that were raised that I did not have time to address during my remarks.

Before addressing those points, I want first to stress again what I said during the debate about police resources. The Government is clear that the police funding settlement represents a fair deal for the police and reinforces this Government's commitment to protect the public. Since 2015, police forces have received broadly flat cash direct resource funding and we are increasing investment in transformation and improved communications and technology capabilities.

The 101 non-emergency number: I was asked whether the Government would conduct an assessment of the performance of police forces in responding to 101 calls. We have no plans to do so. Anyone contacting the police should of course have their call handled within a reasonable time, but this is an operational matter. It is for Chief Constables and elected Police and Crime Commissioners to decide how best to manage their communications with the public. I am, however, aware that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services have said that there is scope to improve efficiency in this area, and I am sure that police forces will respond positively to this.

A national data strategy for the police: This was suggested as an alternative to individual police forces developing their own expertise and practice. As the Royal United Services Institute report on Big Data and Policing highlights, issues resulting from system fragmentation and disparity are by no means insurmountable. The Home Office is investing over £1bn in national law enforcement digital programmes, which will give forces the modern communications and data tools they need. We are also supporting the digital transformation of policing through programmes such as the National Police Chief Council led Digital Policing Portfolio.

In addition, a project is currently under way between the Home Office and Ministry of Justice to link data for recorded crimes to data on prosecutions and convictions. This is at an early stage but if successful will provide a much better vehicle for end-to-end understanding of the Criminal Justice System.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services' inspections of anti-social behaviour: The police response to anti-social behaviour is part of the annual PEEL inspection programme. The Effectiveness strand of PEEL includes the core diagnostic question: "How effective is the force at preventing crime, tackling anti-social behaviour and keeping people safe?". As set out in published reports, all forces receive a grade for this diagnostic question which, with other indicators, informs the force's overall grade for Effectiveness.

Collecting data on the use of the anti-social behaviour powers: The statutory anti-social behaviour powers are designed to be local in nature, to enable local agencies to respond appropriately to the issues that occur in their areas. We do not require these agencies to report to us each time they use the powers. However, our Anti-Social Behaviour Advisory Group, which brings together frontline practitioners, helps us to understand how the powers are being used in practice.

Criminal Behaviour Orders: We have no plans to review how these Orders are being used. The Crown Prosecution Service has published guidance for prosecutors to make it clear that the decision whether to make an Order is one for the independent judiciary, taking into account all the circumstances and the evidence presented. The guidance recognises that the court may refuse to impose an Order and, if so, the reasons for this should be noted on the Hearing Record Sheet, which forms part of the case file. The Crown Prosecution Service has also published a guide for the police on preparing applications which sets out the required standard of content for a Criminal Behaviour Order file.

The Vagrancy Act 1824: The Government has no plans to review the provisions of this Act to tackle people who were referred to as fake beggars during the debate. Begging itself is an offence and we are satisfied that the police and other agencies have the powers they need to deal with this issue.

Psychoactive substances: In response to the question raised during the debate, the Government has no plans to amend the legislation to create an offence specific to disorderly conduct while under the influence of psychoactive substances. We are satisfied that there are sufficient powers available to respond to anti-social behaviour associated with psychoactive substances.

Stop and search: I do not accept what was said about changes to stop and search and rises in violent crimes. The fall in knife crime between 2010/11 and 2013/14 occurred during a period when total stop and searches reduced by 30% and weapons-specific searches fell by 50%. Stop and search reform is working. More prohibited items including offensive weapons are now being taken off our streets, whilst fewer innocent members of the public are being stopped for no good reason.

The involvement of under-18s in acid attacks: A voluntary data collection from police forces undertaken by the National Police Chiefs' Council found that there had been 408 cases of attacks using corrosive substances between November 2016 and April 2017 and that 21% of the offenders, where age was known, were under 18. This is why we are consulting on making it an offence to sell products containing the most harmful corrosive substances to under 18s, to make it harder for them to obtain the types of products that are of particular concern and which are being used to inflict serious harm and severe life changing injuries.

Crimes involving motorcycles, mopeds and scooters: Recent reports of increases in the theft of these vehicles and their use in other crimes or anti-social behaviour is a concern. That is why the Minister for Policing and the Fire Service and I co-chaired a roundtable event on 12 September, to bring together a range of interested parties to discuss what more can be done. All those who attended agreed that the response needed to be a combined effort from government, law enforcement, industry and civil society and are now working together to develop a comprehensive action plan focused on real, effective and preventative action.

This work sits alongside the review that we announced recently into the law, guidance and practice surrounding police pursuits and response driving. It is vital that we protect public safety and ensure that officers are accountable for their actions, but it is also important that skilled officers have the confidence to protect the public by pursuing offenders where it is safe to do so.

Gangs and gang culture: There were a number of references to gangs during the debate. The Government's approach to ending gang violence and exploitation is focused on reducing violence, including knife crime, and protecting vulnerable individuals from exploitation by gangs. Our strategy includes tackling the criminal exploitation and trafficking of children that is a feature of county lines drug supply. A number of Government Departments, law enforcement agencies and local government agencies are working together to lead a national response to this issue. As I said during the debate, I would be happy to meet with you to talk about a local area review in Birmingham to tackle gangs and county lines drug supply. I am pleased to note that you have been in contact with my office to arrange a meeting.

Finally, I am arranging for a copy of this letter to be deposited in the House Library so that it is accessible to Members who attended and participated in the debate as well as others who might have an interest.



**Sarah Newton MP**