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7/7/17

Dear Mr. Pullinger

Re. Clarity of government language on police funding levels

As has been stated in the past, the Authority seeks to encourage compliance with the high standards of the Code of Practice in all public uses of data and information, regardless of whether the source is an official statistic or not. We therefore write to you express our concern at a lack of clarity and consistency in the language used by the Government to describe funding for policing which makes it extremely difficult for the public to discern what is actually happening.

You will be aware that at the 2015 Spending Review the Conservatives gave a commitment that “there will be no cuts in the police budget at all. There will be real-terms protection for police funding”^[i].

The following day the Home Secretary wrote to Chief Constables explaining that “[t]otal central Government resource funding to policing, including funding for counter-terrorism, will be reduced by 1.3 per cent in real terms over four years.” She added that it was only after taking into account the ability to raise local council tax, that a “flat real settlement for policing as a whole” could be achieved.^[ii]

The idea that real-terms protection could be achieved by raising the precept to the ‘maximum’ allowable was re-emphasised by the Home Office in the 2016/17 Police Grant Report, when it was stated that “police spending would be protected in real terms over the Spending Review period, when precept is taken into account.”^[iii]

However, by this year’s Police Grant Report, Home Office ministers were claiming that raising the precept would simply achieve flat-cash protection, with the Policing Minister at the time stating “every PCC who maximises their local precept income this year and in 2017-18 will receive at least the same direct resource funding in cash that they received in 2015-16.”^[iv]

In the Parliamentary debate which followed the same minister went on to claim that it was in fact real-terms protection being offered:

Andy Burnham:

Let me remind the Minister—we need accuracy on this because police officers on the front line deserve it—that the promise of the 2015 spending

review was “real-terms protection” for the police throughout this Parliament. Has he met that promise, yes or no?

Brandon Lewis: As I have already outlined twice to the right hon. Gentleman, we have met the promise of the spending review. Police and crime commissioners who maximise their precept are in the same position.

Brandon Lewis, Hansard, Police Grant Report, 22 February 2017, c. 1034,
<https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-22/debates/7B394BF0-F226-47AF-8C71-E56D7B716F1F/PoliceGrant>

A month later, the Policing Minister claimed that increasing the local precept would actually lead to an increase in funding, stating “if they are using the precept abilities they have, not only is every single police force in the country, bar one, protected, but indeed, this year overall we are seeing an increase in the resources for police forces.”^[v]

And this month we have once again seen a number of contradictory statements from the Government over what sort of protection they claim to offer in terms of police funding.

On the 22nd June, the Home Secretary stated that the Government had “protected overall police funding in real terms since 2015”.^[vi] However on the same day, a Home Office spokesperson suggested the protection on offer was in cash-terms:

“Police spending was protected in the 2015 Spending Review, and the Met has had a broadly flat cash budget since then including precept – in line with every other force in the country.”
Home Office spokes, Independent, 22 June 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-police-cuts-budget-finsbury-terror-attack-london-bridge-funding-a7799446.html>

“We expect the Met, along with all other forces, to manage their costs within their broadly flat cash budgets by improving efficiency and productivity.”
Home Office spokes, Independent, 22 June 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/theresa-may-police-cuts-budget-finsbury-terror-attack-london-bridge-funding-a7799446.html>

Five days later, the new Policing Minister claimed that the “2015 Spending Review protected overall police spending in real terms, and the 2017/18 police funding settlement maintained that protection.”^[vii]

But the next day, the Home Secretary claimed that since 2015, “we have protected the police budget in cash terms”, before adding that “[to] be able to say that we protect it in real terms, I have to draw attention to the police transformation fund.”^[viii]

Given that (i) forces have to bid for funding under the Police Transformation Fund and they may or may not be successful and (ii) so far only £41,540,353 worth of bids have been successful^[ix], can you provide clarity on whether it is appropriate to include all the money set aside for the Police Transformation Fund into the overall settlement in order to justify a claim that real-terms protection has been achieved?

We believe the looseness of language deployed by ministers and officials gives a misleading impression that central Government has made no reduction to its funding for the police when there has been real-terms reductions in central Government funding to police forces since 2015. Can you please advise on how ministers and officials might improve the language they use in order to prevent against inadvertently misleading the public about the level of protection being offered? Indeed, we would also seek to emphasise that the reality of ‘flat cash’ increases often equal real-term reductions in funding overall. Furthermore, even with flat

cash-figures, savings are still required in order to take into account unavoidable cost pressures such as the apprenticeship Levy and pay awards.

Government claims to have protected funding are based on an assumption that PCCs will increase their precept to the maximum amount allowable each year. This is a caveat which ministers sometimes forget to include when setting out what has happened with police funding. For example:

“On the issue of resources I would simply remind him that of course we have, of course, protected police budgets over the period of the comprehensive spending review settlement.”

Theresa May, PMQs, Hansard, 14 September 2016, c. 900, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2016-09-14/debates/16091429000002/PrimeMinister>

“This Government has maintained protection for police spending in a fair provisional funding deal for policing.”

Brandon Lewis, Hansard, Written Answer 61870, 3 February 2017, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-01-26/61870/>

“We are protecting police budgets.”

Theresa May, Hansard, 28 June 2017, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-06-28/debates/3F71FFD2-0345-41FD-886D-61F2E7EB0A7D/OralAnswersToQuestions>

However, when determining whether the Government is in fact living up to a promise it has made to protect funding, whether in real or cash-terms, we believe it is inappropriate to include local precept income as to do so assumes that ministers have agency over a funding stream which in reality they cannot control, and which may or may not increase in line with their expectations.

In fact, not every police force area has increased its precept to the maximum allowable amount as assumed by central Government. For example, in 2016 the Conservative Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, actually cut the precept leading to a reduction in funding for the Metropolitan Police^[x].

We would therefore ask you to advise on whether there is a risk that the public could be misled about the action the Government is taking if local precept income is taken into account when assessing their claims on police funding and whether, at the very least, ministers should be expected to make clear that their promise is dependent on the actions of others over whom they have no control? Additionally, as the government is making the statements on funding levels based on the assumption that precept levels would be raised to their ‘maximum’, surely this would represent a potential transferring of the tax burden onto local ratepayers.

Furthermore, when the Home Secretary announces specific increases – for example for firearms officers – it should be made clear whether or not this is additional money, or is coming out of the existing pot for police funding. Taking money from the existing pot makes it more difficult to maintain neighbourhood policing; anti-terrorism commanders are the first to tell PCCs that the intelligence from the neighbourhood is vital to them. We therefore seek to underline, that shifting money from one part of policing to another is not without cost to policing and ultimately to the public.

We also seek to underline to you our concern regarding the growth in top-slicing of the overall police budget which the government is alleging to have been protected. It should be explained to the public what activity is top-sliced and how much, and that top-slicing for

specific policing needs such as counter-terrorism, which may well be expanded further in future, will reduce the amount available to local forces in order to support neighbourhood policing.

Additionally, the extent to which money has been taken from the 43 police forces since 2010 should be quantified in figures: as it is obvious that this reduction will have reduced the resilience with which officers can be deployed. The figures are important, to overcome the impression that the cuts have been non-existent or minimal in the past two years, whereas the cumulative effect has indeed been considerable.

We await and look forward to your response on these issues.

Yours sincerely,



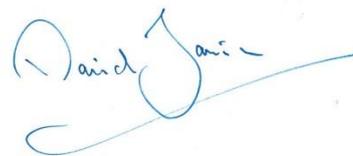
Dame Vera Baird QC
PCC for Northumbria



David Keane
PCC for Cheshire



Paddy Tipping
PCC for Nottinghamshire



David Jamieson
PCC for West Midlands



Keith Hunter
PCC for Humberside



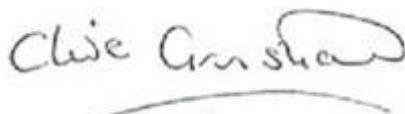
Alun Michael
PCC for South Wales



Mark Burns-Williamson
PCC for West Yorkshire



Hardyal Dhindsa
PCC for Derbyshire



Clive Grunshaw
PCC for Lancashire

Barry Coppinger,
PCC for Cleveland

Jeff Cuthbert
PCC for Gwent

Ron Hogg,
PCC for Durham

Dr Alan Billings
PCC for South Yorkshire

Lord Willy Bach,
PCC for Leicestershire

[i] George Osborne, *Hansard*, 25 November 2015, c. 1373, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2015-11-25/debates/15112551000003/SpendingReviewAndAutumnStatement>

[ii] Theresa May, letter to chief constables, as reported in *Independent*, 26 November 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/police-cuts-george-osborne-pledge-to-protect-funding-challenged-amid-claims-freeze-could-leave-a6750526.html>

[iii] Lord Bates, *Police Grant Report England and Wales 2016/17*, HLWS431, 17 December 2015, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2015-12-17/HLWS431/>

[iv] Brandon Lewis, *Hansard*, *Police Grant Report*, 22 February 2017, c. 1032, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-02-22/debates/7B394BF0-F226-47AF-8C71-E56D7B716F1F/PoliceGrant>

[v] Brandon Lewis, *Hansard*, 6 March 2017, c. 560, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-03-06/debates/AF7A3445-626D-45A5-973A-FBAFEE4A40C3/OralAnswersToQuestions>

[vi] Amber Rudd, *Hansard*, 22 June 2017, c. 196, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-06-22/debates/D00D2537-BD22-4E4D-8E65-FE170E02848A/TerrorAttacks>

[vii] Nick Hurd, *Written question 786*, 27 June 2017, <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2017-06-22/786/>

[viii] Amber Rudd, *Hansard*, 28 June 2017, c. 605, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-06-28/debates/BC4CBE6F-0750-4939-A277-0745C918E944/HealthSocialCareAndSecurity>

[ix] Home Office, *Police transformation fund: successful bids 2016 to 2017*, 12 April 2017, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-transformation-fund-successful-bids-2016-to-2017>

[x] Mayor of London, *press release*, 22 February 2016, <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayors-budget-supports-growth-while-cutting-tax>