

Richard Lewis,  
Chief Constable

7th September 2020

Dear Richard,

I am writing to advise that after considerable reflection it is my intention to resign as Police and Crime Commissioner.

Pressure is part and parcel of the job of a PCC, particularly so in Cleveland. I have felt under siege since the damning report into Cleveland Police 12 months ago, and have been working and making decisions while experiencing considerable, cumulative stress. It has reached the stage where this is now impacting upon my health.

Recent events will only add to this and therefore I do believe it is better that I step aside now and allow someone else to take charge until the re-scheduled election in May 2021.

I am proud of the fact that for the past five years my office has received an annual award for openness and transparency - one of the few in the country to achieve such a feat. I have always been of the view that the business of the Force and the PCC should be conducted as openly as is realistically possible and I am always open to suggestions as to how we could do this better.

As you will know, Force mobile phones do not support whats app messaging.

My office, as with many other organisations, has approved the use of whats app groups on personal mobiles and these have been particularly beneficial during the ongoing Covid crisis, where we do not have day to day office contact. These groups are for short term transitory messaging like business continuity with a procedure for each group admin to prompt a weekly cleardown so that information isn't held for longer than necessary and on personal non-work devices.

I do use whats app on my personal mobile phone and I have cleared messages on a regular basis, not with any intention to conceal anything, but simply due to storage capacity limits. Recent focus on this area has led me to consider whether that was the right approach and it is right and proper that the appropriate independent authorities now consider this.

To be clear, the deleted messages were of a mundane, logistical nature and did not, to my recollection, include anything significant to the work of the Force or OPCC. Communication of that nature would only be made through secure emails on Force devices. That communication is retained and can be accessed for scrutiny if appropriate.

It is clear that the force is making progress in its journey of improvement. That's what the focus must be on, but that would not be the case if I remained in post whilst the situation regarding the whatsapp messages was looked into. That, along with my health concerns, has made me decide to stand down with immediate effect.

It has been a huge honour and privilege to have been elected and then re-elected to serve local communities as their first Police and Crime Commissioner.

I am proud of the work carried out by my office, often under very difficult circumstances, including supporting good practice in policing, developing comprehensive support for victims and the vulnerable, working to re-habilitate offenders and prevent re-offending and constantly engaging with our local communities and being accountable to them.

I wish you every success in the future, along with my successor, as well as everyone in my office and the entire workforce of Cleveland Police.

Yours sincerely

Barry Coppinger

Copy to : S.Dennis, Chief Executive;

Chair & members of Police & Crime panel & appropriate officers.