

Agenda Item No: 3 a)
Safer Stockton Partnership
4 December 2007



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Dear Ms Smith

CASH SEIZURES AND UNEXPLAINED WEALTH

Following recent discussions at the Safer Stockton Partnership, the community safety partnership for the Borough of Stockton-on-Tees, I have been asked to write to you on these two related issues.

The first concerns the amount of cash seized during criminal investigations, usually into drug dealing. The Partnership was concerned to hear that only a small proportion of this money is returned to localities for re-investment in the fight against crime and the struggle to reduce demand for drugs, and felt that it would be very well received by local communities if the amount could be increased. Anticipating that this may present a problem for Home Office budgets (if a target level of income has been assumed) then perhaps there would be scope to increase the proportion of seizures which return to the locality above a specific target level? If we could make a new approach work – and we in Stockton would be more than happy to act as a test bed – it could set up a virtuous circle of increased support for the supply of community intelligence, more visible enforcement action, and greater community confidence in the local partners. This may also have a positive resonance with the review being led by Louise Casey.

The second issue relates to continuing concerns about the status of individuals who have conspicuous wealth (houses, cars, jewellery, etc) but no visible legitimate means of acquiring it. In some cases these are people who are well known locally never to have engaged in legitimate, gainful employment or business, and it is an affront to hard-working local people that some of these people seem to be able to enjoy a life of comparative ease and wealth with apparent impunity, carrying the risk also of inappropriate role-modelling for young people. The local partners use their best endeavours to investigate such cases, but it has been suggested that greater inroads could be made into this phenomenon if there were available some statutory powers relating to investigations of unexplained wealth. Obviously there would need to be safeguards for individuals who have enjoyed, for example, windfalls via inheritance or the Lottery, but this would not be difficult to check. Even if not many cases came to court, this sort of approach could provide a useful 'shot across the bows'.

I trust these comments are helpful and we would be more than happy to discuss them in more detail with your officials if that would be of value.

Yours sincerely

Mike Batty
Secretary to the Partnership

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