



cleveland police authority

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Mr Ken Lupton
Council Leader
Stockton on Tees Borough Council
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Green Paper – Direct Elections

Dear Ken

I am writing to update you on the latest situation in the light of development at last week's annual conference of the Association Police of Authorities and to alert you to what appears to remain the Government's objective of greatly diminishing the role which Local Authorities and their Members play in the delivery of one of our most important local public services.

I am pleased to report that there was a strong unity of purpose shown at the APA conference on the need to maintain—and indeed increase—our campaign to persuade the Government to step back from its ill-considered concept of direct elections to police authorities.

The overwhelming rejection by the APA conference of the Green Paper proposals in relation to direct elections is, of course important and welcome but it is clear from the comments of both the minister and senior civil servants that they still see political merit in pursuing the issue.

It is very clear from the research conducted on behalf of the APA—and the much-vaunted findings of the Casey Review—that the Green Paper proposals do have initial populist appeal and that is a significant challenge for all of us. However, I believe that, given the scale of political and economic issues on the Government's agenda at present and for the foreseeable future, we can persuade Ministers that they should think again about seeking to enforce a fundamental change which would seriously threaten the stability of the police service, would alienate many of their natural supporters, and most importantly of all, would fail to deliver the objective of increased accountability.

I believe that one of the main planks of our continuing campaign must be to build on the damning conclusions on the Green Paper contained in the recent major report 'Policing in the 21st Century' published by the House of Commons Home Affairs Committee (I am enclosing the relevant section of their report).

The Committee's finding clearly undermine the central argument that directly-elected Crime and Policing Representatives would increase accountability—indeed the committee concluded that they could have less of a mandate to represent local people than local authority members...and warned of the danger of undermining partnership between the police and local authorities.

I believe that the conclusions of a powerful all-party select committee do provide a very useful platform in building a political consensus within Parliament that the Government should think again and, rather than attempting to impose change—in much the same way as they did with the ill-fated restructuring proposals—they should work with all parties to deliver improvements and changes which will deliver our shared objectives of improved accountability and involvement for the communities we serve.

We clearly need to generate awareness, again across all parties, within local government as to potential consequences of the Green Paper proposals—and indeed the ambitions apparent amongst some senior civil servants to go even further in undermining the involvement of local authority members (for example the apparent desire to ensure that local authority members will be debarred from chairing police authorities).

As for the public, we need to consider very carefully how best to respond to the simplistic yet appealing arguments promoted through channels such as the Casey Review that somehow direct elections to police authorities will provide an instant solution to strengthening the links between police and public.

We need to point out that in reality the opposite would be the case and that the inevitable consequences would be that the way policing is delivered to the community as a whole could be seriously distorted through the influence of individuals who gain election on the basis of single-issue and populist platforms (I believe we can all think of such individuals and groups within our areas) —and the actual working of authorities could be thrown into chaos through the inevitable tensions of having different 'classes' of members with different electoral mandates.

We need to stress the absolute central role now played by local authorities in working with the police in reducing crime and disorder—yet, if the Green Paper proposals were to be implemented, they and their members would be treated as second-class citizens in influencing all the key decisions on policing in their areas—including setting precept levels.

The current legislation ensures that, whenever decisions on police precept levels are taken, there must be majority of local authority members amongst present. Under the Green Paper proposals this requirement would end—indeed in the case of Cleveland we could well see the situation where local authority is reduced to as low as one, effectively totally disenfranchising three of four local authorities on this and

all other important decisions on local policing. I am sure you will share my view that this would be entirely wrong.

There is another strong message we need to promote at every level—the inevitable cost, both financial and organisational, which could arise from imposing changes which would have no beneficial impact on front-line policing, and indeed could undermine relationships between key partners involved in tackling crime and disorder.

At the APA conference we heard a senior civil servant telling us that in the first year of implementing such a system costs would be in the region of £20million—and we all know that if that is the civil service estimate the real costs will certainly be higher!

I do not believe that the public will believe that spending money on replacing elected councillors with elected 'Crime and Policing Representatives' can be justified at a time of economic upheaval and at a time when we all know that what people really want to see is more officers and PCSOs on their streets and in their communities.

I hope you will share our view that local people—and their elected representatives—should not have potentially damaging changes imposed because of ill-considered 'solutions' from those within Whitehall who believe they know better. I would have hoped that lesson would have been learned from the ill-fated 'restructuring' debacle but that may not be the case.

We would be grateful for your support on this very important issue which could have the most serious implications for the quality of policing in this area—and the partnerships which are now fundamental to reducing crime and enhancing community safety. I hope that we can arrange to meet with you and your local authority colleagues in the near future (and we are also making similar representations to our local Members of Parliament) but in the meantime if you need any further information please do not hesitate to contact my office.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. J. McA". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.