

A letter to Johnno Of Real Policing.

The link is on our website and at <http://www.realpolicing.co.uk/>

I fully support the aims and ideals of your campaign.

I spent 17 years in HM Diplomatic Service before joining the Met as a mature entrant in 1989. Having worked in foreign countries and war zones and seen their police forces at work, I was always proud to think that the police in the UK were the best in the world. I spent 8 years stationed at Wembley, of which 5 were as a Home Beat, before transferring to Heathrow where again I was a Home Beat (for the Northern Perimeter Road) until I was trained as an AFO and used more and more in that role. I retired from the Met in September 2004. I was always proud to wear the uniform, and always tried to do the best job I could, but gradually felt more and more let down as changes imposed by the Home Office (such as Sector Policing, and then a whole new system of forms for arrests) with hardly any consultation with the troops on the ground, had the effect of making us less available to do the job I had joined for - catching criminals and preventing crime! Most of the changes seemed either to be for the benefit of the bureaucrats rather than the public, or as a vote catching response to some latest bad press. The victims of crime seem to come way down in the order of things - there being one organisation for them (Victim Support) but several for offenders.

With regard to having teams at the station to take over the processing of prisoners, I can confirm how effective and useful that can be. When on duty at Heathrow January 2001, I was on armed security patrol in Terminal 3 on a late turn shift. I arrested a female shoplifter at 7.50pm. We were on a quick change-over to early turn next morning. There was no room at Heathrow Custody, so we took her to Uxbridge. They were piloting a scheme there where two PC's did an attachment for a few weeks to process prisoners to allow their colleagues to get back on patrol. By the time I had written my IRB my prisoner had been interviewed and charged, and all fingerprinting, DNA, PNCB forms and other paperwork completed, and a crime report entered on the computer on my behalf. This meant that I and my partner were able to leave Uxbridge at 10pm, check in our weapons at Heathrow and be back in on time for security duties at 6am next morning

While response vehicles are a useful tool for various aspects of policing, walking the beat gives an officer a more in-depth knowledge and understanding of his ground, as well as becoming a familiar and trusted face to the local community who, like most of us, do not like change. Once they have their "own" local Bobby, they feel they have a personal contact with the police. Some would wait for me to be on patrol to invite me into their homes and give me information about problems and problem individuals in their neighbourhood. An officer on foot is more approachable to his parishioners, he spends more time in a street, he can check out all the back alleyways and rat-runs on his patch, so that he knows them as well as the local ne'er-do-wells. He (or she) can target the "quality of life" nuisance offences, which if unchecked encourage those responsible to go on to bigger and better crimes. I have been able to investigate cases of criminal damage which occurred while I was on leave, because I knew where to go to make my enquiries, resulting in identifying the culprits, informing the parents and getting the damage paid for, without any arrests being made. A good Home Beat can provide valuable, possibly life-saving, information on addresses to robbery or burglary squads planning to execute search warrants on that address.

Because of the amount of time spent at the station, either reading endless memos or "distance learning modules", completing arrest paperwork and case files. those officers actually out and about in response vehicles are racing from one job to another, and often having to give minimal time and attention to each call. When taking over my beat in Wembley and speaking to residents, especially with regard to "quality of life" nuisance offences, I often heard the comment, "Well, the coppers in the patrol car turned up, but they didn't seem to be really interested." With lists of outstanding calls reaching double figures, the coppers in response vehicles don't often have the time to be interested.

If we don't patrol a neighbourhood regularly, both on foot and by vehicle, we leave a vacuum for jobs and criminals to fill. Working together both modes of policing complement each other and can be very effective. Having said that, we also need to shake up the process at court and the sentencing, which no longer seems to be geared to providing a deterrent. Once again, more trouble seems to be taken over offenders rights and welfare than the victims they rob assault, maim or kill - including police officers. Police officers, with their courage and professionalism, go out and catch criminals, but if the Criminal Justice System is run for the benefit of the criminals and the bureaucrats, lawyers, magistrates and judges who run it, rather than the public they are there to protect, it all seems rather pointless - and the criminals know it!

A case in point is that of PC Daniel Coffill, 23 years old. When off duty he was punched and kicked to the ground by two teenage thugs after he refused them a light - for a cannabis joint! 18 months later he is in a persistent vegetative state, requiring 24-hour care by his family and is unlikely ever to walk or talk again.

The two thugs were sentenced to 9 and 8 years in prison, although they have effectively taken his life. They appealed against their "excessive" sentences. The Coffill family were not told of the appeal, so could not make any representation at the hearing. The judge cut their sentences by two years, and he also quashed the arrangement for them to spend 4 years on licence after release. Whatever happened to the judges or magistrates who used to declare in court, "I'm not having my police officers assaulted by the likes of you!"?

Good luck with your campaign, Johnno.

Met Police Retired.

The PPP comments ... this ex officer describes the real policing that is exactly what the PPP wants and also the awful reality that is the control freak world of the home office and it's placemen like Brunstrom and the incompetent Police Authority members that support him out of fear and ignorance.