

# “ PPP ”

## People for Proper Policing in North Wales

### Excerpts from the diary of a Denbighshire Police Inspector

I am **Mike Hughes**, and I am the District Inspector for South Denbighshire. My area is Denbigh, Ruthin, Corwen and Llangollen and all points in between. I live in Ruthin, so this is home territory for me. I've been in the police for 25 years. I've been the District Inspector for about 1½ years, and I was a Sergeant here for around 5 years in the 1990s (which seems like an age ago now) When Bill Shaw asked me to do this, I commented that the truth of the matter was all too many hours in front of a computer. Bill was interested whether I thought that this was a symptom of what is sometimes seen as the police being hog-tied by too much red tape and bureaucracy. To speak for myself, I don't think that's the case. It is more to do with the general electronic age, where everyone in business or public life is now just so much more accessible by email, and quite honestly I think that productivity has increased enormously as a result. One example here is a recent incident I witnessed recently travelling off-duty via the Holyhead Ferry. It resulted in an arrest dealt with by local officers over there. I had to make a statement etc, and I was able to type it straight onto my computer, as well as scanning into the system some notes I had made at the time. I contacted the officer in Holyhead who replied minutes later to say "I've got all that thanks". A few years ago, there would have been delays while things wended their way back and to via the internal post. As it is now, my evidence was instantly available to the local officers, the Custody Unit in Holyhead and anyone else who needs it, resulting in speedier justice and quite frankly it is a much quicker way of doing things. **I can remember working out when I first joined the police 25 years ago that when I arrested someone I had to physically write their name and date of birth 27 times** – thankfully that is now just an amusing anecdote from history. So I don't think I am hog-tied, it's just that we can now get a lot more done, and the hours in front of the computer are just a by-product of that.

The problem with a lot of the things I would like to tell you more about is that they deal with confidential issues or there are court cases pending, so I am very limited indeed about what I can say until it comes to court etc. – but I will do my best within those constraints

If I look back over a typical week I can see that I had series of meetings, some with landowners about issues including access onto farmland and how to manage that without damage, or whether and how far we enforce the law against off road motorcyclists in forests and on open moorland. So far as the motorcycles are concerned, the answer is that they sometimes do considerable damage, often on Sites of Special Scientific Interest or where quite frankly the landowners don't want them, so yes we will do something about them. In the last couple of months, local officers using appropriate powers seized 3 uninsured off-road motor bikes which the owners had ridden onto and along the public road in the Horseshoe Pass area.

The owners could not have the bikes back until they obtained and produced proof of insurance and paid the cost of recovery. I can see there is reference to off-road motorbikes on your public blog site, so it seems there is support for our actions there. In fact I gained something from reading that entry, as it refers to the new multi-use path around Llyn Alwen which I am familiar with having myself walked around it several times, and even run around (once). Half of the path is in Denbighshire and therefore on my patch. I was not aware that we had problems with motor-bikes there, and neither was my colleague Mike Owen who is the

Inspector for the Conwy half of Alwen – at least we weren't until I read your blog. I have also spoken to one of the Council Rights of Way officers who were responsible for developing that multi-use trail. Between us we will keep an eye on the situation, but your contributor is welcome to call us direct and tell us when and where things are happening.

The same writer on your blog also makes reference to rave parties in the forest. These have gone on for years and are a real problem as they cause misery for anyone who lives too close and does not enjoy the rhythmic bump of rave music all night or the roads clogged up with parked cars, or the attendant health and safety risks. The problem is that very often we do not find out about them until they are well under way and often we cannot get enough officers at "no notice" to safely put a stop to them. We did have real success though last June in Clocaenog Forest, where we found out in time and were able to issue a notice under Section 63 of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994. This gave us the power to require those at the party to leave or face arrest. I went to the scene with a small number of officers and served the notice to anyone we could find. In this case, they left quite peacefully and in that location at least we did not see another rave all summer. Mind you, I'm not sure if it was due to our police activities or the atrocious weather! Part of the answer is that we rely very heavily on finding out early enough, and often that means asking the public to be our eyes and ears, as well as the things we can do ourselves

Going back to my working week, I also had several meetings or phone calls with the owners and operators of licensed premises about how things are going for them, how we can address concerns felt by residents, how we can work better together to make going out a safe and enjoyable experience. These are a regular thing, and it is quite remarkable just how much we do work together through this sort of formal contact, or by Pubwatch schemes and also just calling into pubs and clubs and talking to the staff. We met up with one owner and officers from the Council Licensing Dept – it was not at all combative, in fact we were all trying to work together to find the best solution to minimise disruption for people living nearby, and the licensee was very supportive.

I attended an internal seminar for Sgts and Inspectors where (for me) one of the hot topics was how we are going to now further develop the use of Blackberry handheld computers, the dual intention being to prevent officers having to go back to the station to look things up or enter information, and also more dramatically this now means that we can now put photos of offenders and suspects right into officers hands while they are out and about. Very handy if you have just had a robbery and need to know what the suspect looks like. Another fantastic spin-off is that an officer can be sitting at the side of a road, or be looking after a crime scene (you've seen that on the TV), and be able to use that time to keep on top of the paperwork. It also means that the details are instantly available of people on "curfews" as a part of bail conditions, so that we can easily go and check them. It really does work right here, right now and we are keen to make even more use of this sort of technology.

I made an effort not just to sit in my office in Denbigh but got out and spent time with some of the officers who work in the other 3 stations on my patch - Ruthin, Corwen and Llangollen. As I said above, office work, computers and email in particular will suck up 24 hours of my day if I let them.

I spent time talking to two officers who had dealt with a traumatic incident the night before, where they had successfully resuscitated a young man who had stopped breathing. One of them is quite young in service and they acted extremely commendably.

We are expecting some electrically assisted pedal cycles very soon, so I spent a bit of time on that – selecting three Police Community Support Officers to use them in my area. I have personally used a mountain bike as a (very effective) patrol tool in the past, so I am quite excited about this new development. We all want to see officers out walking more, they sometimes feel a bit inhibited that they might need to get back to the station in a hurry (to grab the car and dash to an urgent job) and this seems like a decent compromise, which will keep them accessible to the public but also give them a bit more range.

I also decided to extend an excellent scheme we have in Llangollen where the PCSOs have a lunchtime drop in session for pupils in Ysgol Dinas Bran – I want to see that extended across more schools in South Denbighshire so we have started working on making that happen.

Other topics of the week have been as diverse as “have we got enough litter bins that dog walkers can put their carrier bags in?” to drugs warrants. We did one of those last week (21/2/08) in the Llangollen area which resulted in the seizure of a quantity of suspected Class A drugs, and a 41 year old local man being charged and released on bail to attend Court.

On a personal note I ended the week by using my day off to get some much needed exercise on the excellent mountain bike trail at Penmachno – which as I understand it has come about due to cooperation between the Forestry Commission, mountain bikers themselves and the local village community. Partnership working really is the name of the game these days, even on your days off!

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**The PPP comments** ... we really appreciate Mike Hughes taking time to provide this insight into his work and are totally supportive of this style of policing. **The PPP only exists because it wasn't happening 5 years ago and other styles of antisocial policing were prevalent.**

It is interesting to note Mike's comments regarding the vast improvements in some practical procedures from the time he joined the Police some 25 years ago and we believe that some Policing priorities started going wrong at least that far back.

Also, we are glad to learn about the use of modern technology to assist in the effective operation of Crime and Community policing rather than as a fund raising tool on our roads. Well done Inspector Hughes and we look forward to learning more from you and your team of life at the sharp end of today's Police Force.