



People for Proper Policing in North Wales

Fines please! Police get on-the-spot ticket machines

Daily Mail By JAMES SLACK on 5th September 2007

Police officers risk becoming more like traffic wardens as they are to get ticketing machines to issue on-the-spot fines to shoplifters and vandals.

But there are fears that the devices, which will lead to even more of the controversial £80 fixed-penalty notices being handed out, will reduce the status of officers to that of traffic wardens.

The machines have also been criticised for encouraging **"soft justice"** because police can - at the push of a button - **issue a fine, which carries no criminal record, and avoid time-consuming prosecutions.**

Government figures released last night show **193,000 tickets were given out last year (£15.4m)** - the equivalent of one every three minutes. That was **an annual increase of 30 per cent** as more and more offenders are allowed to escape the humiliation of a court appearance. At present, officers must fill out the forms on the street then make a log of the fine and the offender's details at the station. The computers - which will be introduced by December - allow officers to print an electronic "receipt" to give to the offender on the spot. Details of all the fines issued to drunks, shoplifters, vandals and jobs, as well as litterbugs, can then be downloaded on to the station computer at the end of a shift - **saving around one hour.** Officers who chose to prosecute, rather than give a fixed penalty, will have to fill out a form explaining why. Last night Shadow Home Secretary David Davis accused the Government of **"distorting police priorities"**. He said: *"This looks like they are trying to discourage police from prosecuting offences in favour of the financial slap on the wrist. These penalties are seen by many offenders as nothing more than a burden rather than a punishment. With only half being paid they are a voluntary burden at that."*

Norman Brennan, a serving police officer and director of the Victims of Crime Trust, said officers were being reduced to the equivalent of "traffic wardens", handing out tickets. **Police officers join the service to protect and reassure the public, to catch criminals and to challenge those who carry knives and guns.**

The move to electronic devices will be pushed through the Commons without a vote when MPs return from their summer break. A separate Government document, Out of Court Disposals for Adults, reveals the pressure on police not to take drunks and vandals to court. **The instruction, sent out this summer, says that even when a suspect has past convictions they can be let off with an on-the-spot fine if they are "spent or of a completely different nature".**

David Green, of the Civitas think-tank, said *"forcing police to explain a decision to prosecute was an undermining of their integrity"*. He warned of the *"corrupting effect"* of officers being urged to give out fines to improve detection rates when more serious punishment was needed.

Under Government rules for counting **the number of offenders brought to justice - a key police target - the fines carry the same weight as a conviction through the courts.** A snapshot survey in February this year found only 49 per cent of offences brought to justice - all the crimes which police counted as solved - were convictions in court.

Cautions made up 26 per cent of the total and fixed penalty notices accounted for 9.6 per cent. The Centre for Crime and Justice Studies at King's College London said that the Government had met its target only by "significantly increasing the number of sanctions that do not formally go to court". The British Transport Police, which champions the ticket machines, said they allow officers to spend 51 minutes extra on the beat per shift.

A Ministry of Justice spokesman said: "Penalty Notices for Disorder provide swift and effective justice to deal with nuisance and antisocial behaviour. Without them the courts would be clogged up with thousands of minor offences. Punishment can be administered on the spot and many of those issued with a PND would formerly have received only a warning or have no action taken against them."

The PPP comments.... The Government have set NWPF a target to increase the **number of offenders brought to justice and they gave Brunstrom the job of finding an easy way to do it ... we reported this in April (see below) Looks like Brunstrom has earned his 2 year & £250,000 extension.**

Chief Constable's Blog April 2007. Meeting in Blackfriars London. I am there to **Chair a meeting of the PentiP Board. We are producing a new penalty notice processing system for the UK.** Penalty Notices of various kinds are becoming increasingly commonplace, **literally millions are issued each year for a wide and growing range of offences from speeding to dog fouling.** When I joined the police there were no penalty notices - **all cases had to go to Court. This was and remains a hugely bureaucratic and expensive exercise.** Penalty notices were brought in to provide a quick simple and non-bureaucratic means of dealing with offences. **They worked brilliantly and are now the standard way of dealing with motoring offences**

The PPP believe that this system is dangerously corrupt, we only have to look at the corrupt use of speed cameras and the NIP system. But more seriously we will now have officers giving tickets to criminals, unemployed layabouts, drug addicts, drunks, thieves and shop lifters etc. NOW only half the fines are paid. Of these many will be paid from state benefits and from the profits from crime and drug trafficking. SO one more theft or sale pays the fine and no record results.

If this applied to prostitutes for soliciting the Government would be living off immoral earnings ... which used to be an offence!!

If such major changes to UK law can be pushed through Parliament without debate what the hell do we pay the opposition MPs for!?