

Fair Funding for Rural Policing

Brandon Lewis, Minister of State for Policing and the Fire Service, is restarting consultations about the ongoing review of the police funding formula. This may have a serious impact on policing in your constituency.

The National Rural Crime Network (NRCN) would like to bring to your attention two key lessons it has identified from the most recent proposal in 2015, from which the Home Office needs to learn if the next proposal is to be based on robust and fair principles.

The formula revision proposed in mid-2015 did not achieve this, creating a lottery skewed in favour of urban forces. This revision was withdrawn after serious concerns were raised during consultation, and it is vital that the Home Office does not make the same methodological mistakes in future proposals.

This is not to make a special case of rural forces, but to reinforce that, in setting policing budgets, simplicity will not meet the complex crime patterns and varied and growing demands placed upon police forces across the country.

As future proposals will have an impact on your constituency, we felt you may wish to raise these lessons with the Minister. In an environment of smaller budgets and shifting response models, Government must provide fair funding for rural policing.

1. Policing goes beyond crime

As highlighted in the attached report, *Fair Funding for Rural Policing*, inadequate indicators, which defined policing too narrowly, were used to calculate the 2015 formula revision. Any future funding formula must recognise that policing is complex and goes far beyond crime-based activity.

Recommendations

- The formula must be based on crimes per head statistics and account for serious crime and non-crime demands.
- In the current climate it must also account for increased pressures placed upon police both as other services contract and as pressures on estate maintenance increase the complexity of policing dispersed populations.

Lessons from 2015

The 2015 proposal used reported crime statistics rather than crime rates per head of population to correlate its findings. This:

- Heavily skewed their findings dependent on population size and density, favouring urban areas;
- Biased their findings by higher volume crimes, such as theft (and noticeably therein shoplifting), predominant in urban areas;
- Failed to capture or predict the demands, drivers, distribution, or resourcing requirements of serious and non-crimes, such as child sexual exploitation and road traffic incidents (RTIs).
- Negated the greater amount of police time and resource spent on responding to such incidents.
- Would have seen forces which currently receive less than average per capita allocations receive less, and forces that receive higher than average per capita allocations receive more.

This matters because RTIs, anti-social behaviour, public safety and welfare (e.g. missing from home cases) child sexual exploitation, abuse and mental health incidents, require different, often resource-intensive, responses. Rural forces have higher rates of RTIs than urban forces. Urban areas see a concentration of mental health issues, especially amongst the young, but have larger third sector and support service resources. Rural areas see higher mental health issues amongst the old, but the police often have to provide support services out of hours or in isolated locations.

2. Rurality is a substantive issue

Rurality and population sparsity are substantive issues and any future funding formula revision must include a more comprehensive review of policing demands to ensure it meets the needs of police forces across all parts of the country.

Recommendations

- Any future formula must use a greater breadth of data to map:
 - Demand, response times and service provision levels;
 - Cost of policing in complex partnership landscapes;
 - Average versus peak population demands (for example seasonal variations); and
 - Fixed, non-staff cost funding needs.
- London is not the only statistical outlier. The Home Office should make consistent exceptions for statistical outliers at both ends of the scale to ensure geographic service equity.

The cost of rural crime

A survey by the NRCN in 2015 shows that the demands and impact of rural crime on a dispersed population put it on a par with the challenges of tackling crime amongst dense urban populations.

A fair funding formula must account for these aspects. Again, this is not to say that urban forces do not have their share of problems; nor that rural forces should be treated as special cases. *Simply, complex and varied demands on police officers and budgets in different areas and contexts must be taken into account to ensure fair funding.*

Rural communities:

- On average, foot a crime bill of up to £800 million every year, including £4100 for each rural business affected;
- Are twice as worried about becoming a victim of crime (39%) compared to the nation (19%);
- Have half the confidence (33%) in the police's ability to respond to their needs compared to the nation (62%); and
- Are more likely to be victims of cybercrime and fraud, according to the Home Office's *Serious and Organised Crime Protection: Public Interventions Model*, 2016.

There are additional costs associated with rural policing in sparsely populated areas.

- Higher fixed, non-staff costs as they cannot benefit from economies of scale due to the need to serve low density populations;
- Greater travel distances from serving dispersed populations;
- Higher officer burden (by up to 65%);
- Gaps in the delivery of other services, meaning police have to deal with service provision out of hours or in isolated areas; and
- Seasonal movement from urban areas placing strains on service delivery.