

Devon and Cornwall Police Authority Human Resources Committee

8 November 2006

Open for the purposes of FOI

Joint Report of Director of HR and the Chief Constable

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## Housing Issues and the deployment of police officers

### Recommendation:

- (i) The Committee note the contents of this report.

### Introduction / Summary

The operational challenges in providing a police service across Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly are very clear. An additional, although less obvious, challenge is provided by the housing choices made by our police officers. Approximately 80% of our people want to live in approximately 20% of our geography leaving us with a number of hard to fill locations.

It is important to understand why postings vary so much in terms of their popularity. When considering solutions it is also necessary to recognise the part played by individual motivation, perception and preference. The peace and quiet sought by one person might be perceived as isolation by another.

Some locations are unpopular because they are remote, quiet from a policing perspective, or too expensive in terms of housing costs. When police officers move home they tend to take a long-term view about career opportunities within the force for themselves and employment options for partners. Since many police officers move role every 2-4 years they tend to look for locations where there is a wide range of posts within easy commuting distance.

### Background Information

There is no official list of "hard to fill" posts within the Constabulary. In part this is because of the difficulty of defining what is meant by the term. In addition the relative attractiveness of posts can vary over time. For example, at various times certain posts in Cornwall have fluctuated between being hard to fill and presenting few problems. It should be acknowledged that the very act of producing a definitive list could itself be dysfunctional highlighting issues with officers who previously had been content with their lot.

In theory there is a wide range of options that can be used to address localised imbalances. A Chief Constable, using Police Regulations could order an officer to move. Whilst this form of absolute power has been used extensively in the past it is doubtful whether a 2006 workforce would acquiesce if such an approach were tried now.

In earlier days when compulsory posting was the norm the approach was supported by the existence of police houses. The Constabulary in its role as landlord could ensure that officer and family were suitably housed, even at short notice. It is sometimes suggested now that the Constabulary considers investing in suitable properties. The wish for most police officers to be property owners, recognition that one size of police house does not fit all and the anticipated administrative burden tend to reduce the attractiveness of the idea even before Police Authority approval is sought for the substantial funding that would be required.

Transferees can and have been used to target local gaps. For example, earlier this year North and East Devon BCU identified a shortfall which was addressed by a targeted campaign resulting in 5 officers starting in July 2006. Discussions are under way with South and West Devon BCU regarding local priorities such as Kingsbridge and Dartmouth. Specific advertising of vacancies can be successful in attracting people who are highly motivated in relocating to the area in question. In some cases, although serving with other forces, officers already have property in the area.

Force tenure policy has helped reduce the scale of the problem concerning hard to fill locations. By applying a minimum period of service of 2 years for all roles we reduce turnover and provide increased continuity. High turnover was observed in hard to fill posts under the previous tenure policy where the emphasis was on moving officers when they exceeded maximum time in role.

The keyworker housing initiative provides assistance of up to 25% of purchase price by way of an interest free loan in return for 25% of the equity when the house is sold. Initial contact has been made with Ruth Bagley , Chief Executive of South Hams District Council to be followed up by discussion with Debbie Holloway of the Council and Devon & Cornwall Housing.

Other ideas to have been considered include paying removal expenses for officers moving to hard to fill locations. The average cost of moving is around £30k so such an initiative would have to be used sparingly. Such schemes can be difficult to manage as the effect of the incentives ripple through the organisation. It can be anticipated that eligible pots are filled at the expense of adjacent posts which become the new problem.

Similarly it is possible to envisage a weighting scheme with officers in some locations receiving a higher rate of pay. The challenge here is to develop a scheme with sufficient rewards to provide an incentive and to make it sufficiently focused to keep it affordable

In summary, this is a set of problems under continuous consideration. Whilst there is no complete solution there are a number of practical steps which can reduce the scale and impact of the problem.

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