



Central Scotland police

Andrew Cameran Q.P.M.,B.A

Chief Constable

Falkirk Area Command

West Bridge Street

Falkirk

FK1 5AP

Tel No. (01786) 456000

Fax No. (01324) 678899

Waiter Douglas

Secretary . Airth Parish Community Council

34 South Green Drive

Airth

Falkirk

FK28JP

Dear Waiter,

AIRTH PARISH COMMUNITY COUNCIL - COMMUNITY CONSTABLE

Thank you for your letter dated 26th October 2007 in relation to the above subject.. My. apologies for the delay in replying but as you are aware I have received a steady stream of Identical letters from other residents of Airth, Letham and Dunmore following your circulation of copy letters and I felt it best to wait until most, if not all, had arrived.

I have obviously discussed the current situation with Chief Inspector Bob Beaton, Stenhousemuir Police Office and can hopefully address all of the points that you raise in your letter.

Let me start by saying that I recognise your concerns and in no way underestimate or deny your experiences. I agree with your views on a community policing philosophy, which are in accordance with Central Scotland Police's stance and desires, albeit we have to operate within obvious constraints and limitations.

This is a subject that you know I am acutely aware of as I have a history of involvement with policing in your area and was the local Inspector in the year 2000 when the responsibilities of the community officer for Airth and Letham were realigned. A full time community officer for Airth and Letham was something that had been introduced a short time previously by my predecessor, although in the context of limited resources and all policing challenges being faced in the wider Stenhousemuir, Larbert, Carronshore, Airth area I could not rationalise why he had done so.

As explained at that time it was impossible to justify such a committed resource to Airth and Letham whilst other much more heavily populated areas, suffering from a greater number of policing issues, had no community officer coverage whatsoever. I am aware that every senior officer who has succeeded me since has reviewed this decision, recognised the issues and came to the same conclusion. The current Chief Inspector, Bob Beaton, is no different in this regard and I am aware that he monitors your situation on an ongoing basis.

All correspondence should be addressed to the Business Services Unit, Area Command Headquarters, West Bridge Street, Falkirk FK1 5AP (Telephone 01786 456000) and not to Individual stations/departments

You have asked me to consider the changes that have occurred over recent years and support the introduction of a full time community police officer for Airth Parish.

The ratio of community officers to population throughout the Falkirk Council area currently stands at 1 to 5,400 people approximately, a figure which is generally reflected throughout the Central Scotland Police area. This covers all areas including those recognised as suffering from significant deprivation and subject of regeneration funding. This is a ratio that we will constantly strive to improve upon.

The latest population estimate for Airth and Letham, available from Falkirk Council, is 1,925. If we were to include Dunmore and other outlying homes I agree with you that the overall figure would come to slightly over 2,000 people. I am informed that aside from the development at Dunmore Park there is no more significant expansion planned locally in forthcoming years. From this it can be seen that it would be disproportionately favourable on the basis of population alone (1 to 2,000+ people) if we were to allocate a full time officer to Airth Parish.

The villages of Carron, Carronshore, Airth, Letham and environs are currently served by one full time community officer (Constable Marshall) and another officer (Constable McLaren) who currently works 32 hours per week, which equates to 80% of a full time officer. In 2000, when Constable Muirhead was the community officer for Airth and Letham there was another officer who had similar responsibility for Carron and Carronshore (Constable Biffin). From this it can be seen that there has, in fact, been little reduction in terms of the number of available policing hours that can be provided by community officers with specific responsibility for these areas. Indeed, on a population basis it could be argued that Airth Parish still benefits from significantly higher levels of community policing than other identifiable communities.

A comparison of reported crime/offences across the Falkirk area similarly does not support the creation of a dedicated officer for Airth Parish by a significant margin. I do not intend to go into detail in this regard but would be happy to provide further information if required. I can assure you that in relative terms Airth Parish is still a low crime and safe place to live, hence one of the reasons why it is so attractive to house buyers.

I do not deny that Airth Parish suffers from antisocial behaviour of a type described by you and I can assure you that I, Chief Inspector Beaton and our officers will do everything possible to tackle such behaviour. This will include working in partnership with other interested representatives, agencies and groups such as locally elected members, Education, Detached Youth Workers, Reporter to the Children's Panel, Community Council and parents. I would endorse your comments in respect of Councillor Martin who has been a long time supporter of Airth as the sole councillor for the erstwhile Forthside Ward and now as part of the larger, multi-member, Carse, Kinnaird and Tryst ward.

As an aside, it is an interesting analogy that Airth Parish did not enjoy an exclusive Councillor under Forthside Ward as Councillor Martin was shared with other villages and areas such as Skinflats and Carronshore. The ratio of Councillors to population is not dissimilar to that of community police officers.

Antisocial behaviour of a type described by you is unfortunately an all too common occurrence and whilst it may have always existed any increase and the manner of such behaviour undoubtedly reflects a cultural change amongst certain youths that has occurred over recent years. This is something that affects every community throughout the UK and has become an additional problem for the police and other agencies to tackle.

From reading your letter I understand that certain community members may have challenged local youths about their behaviour whereupon the youths have become abusive and in turn their parents have reacted similarly. I believe this reflects such an attitudinal change in society which cannot simply be put down to a slight alteration in the community policing provision within Airth and Letham. I would suggest that even Constable Muirhead, as you remember him, would find increasing challenges with some of the behaviour presented by certain youths today.

I note that you highlight that the Community Centre is vandalised on a regular basis and that the new Health Centre has also had its windows broken. This is particularly surprising and concerning to me as our research has revealed that there have been no official complaints of these crimes made to the police.

I am in agreement with you that proactive community style policing is an effective tool in tackling such behaviour and it is a manner of policing that I would certainly wish to maximise. I agree that it is the preferable option. It is not, however, a panacea for antisocial behaviour, rather a part of the wider approach we need to adopt with all partners and members of the community.

Whilst stating this, it has also to be recognised that we are required to provide a reactive policing service which places heavy demands on available resources. There has been, and continues to be, an increasing demand on such resources from a variety of areas. Mr Cameron, Chief Constable, has been very proactive and successful in gaining additional resources for Central Scotland Police over his tenure and as you rightly state he is a strong supporter of community policing. You highlight the fact that we have enjoyed an increase of over 56% in establishment since the early 1980's and I would agree with that figure, which if anything may be on the low side. The benefits of this have been significant in terms of improved performance over a period when we have been subject of unprecedented increased demands and expectations. To demonstrate this I would highlight the following statistics:

	1985	2007
Reported Crime	18,000	21,000*
Detected Crime	37%	60%
Fatal Road Traffic collisions	40	18
Serious Road Traffic collisions	500	143
Misuse of Drugs offences	74	2000

* This figure has decreased considerably from a peak in the early 1990's

Technology such as mobile telephony and internet access coupled with ever increasing public expectation has also meant significant increases in demands for police services which last year exceeded 150,000 such requests throughout the Central Scotland Police area.

When you comment that "more police are used for specialised duties" and enquire about "greater flexibility in terms of available resources" I would provide the following list of departments as an example of some of the areas where Central Scotland Police has to allocate resources, which did not exist 20 years ago:

Disclosure Unit	Drugs Unit	Domestic Violence Unit
Resource Management Unit	Computer Crime Unit	Force Intelligence Bureau
Family (Child Protection) Unit	Financial investigation Unit	Fraud Unit
Offender assessment Unit (Sex offenders)	Custody Unit	Policy Strategy & Quality Unit
Criminal Justice Business Area	Professional Standards	Unit Diversity Unit
Community Planning	Public Assistance Desk	Force Communications Centre

These units are primarily demand led, some required by considerable legislative change and reflect the ever changing demands placed on modern day policing which, unfortunately, is a considerable distance away from the perception of halcyon days of village policing.

Due to all of the foregoing I am not in a position to provide you with a full time community constable for Airth Parish at this time.

I know that this will not be the response that you wish to hear but hopefully you will understand the conflicting demands that we face that do not allow me to support your request at this time.

I have been in discussion with Chief Inspector Beaton about proactive steps that can be taken to address the issues that you face and I know that he has recently attended one of your Community Council meetings along with the two community officers responsible for Airth Parish who are regular attendees. I am also aware that these two officers have recently commenced a surgery based within the new Health Centre in Airth, although to date no members of the public have attended this.

It would be my intention to attend one of your Community Council meetings, perhaps early next year, when we can discuss some of the issues you raise. I have copied this letter to Chief Constable Andrew Cameron and all Councillors from the Carse, Kinnaird and Tryst Ward. I have not sent this letter to each of the community members who sent me a copy of the original letter that you distributed (300+ homes) as I do not believe that to respond individually would be efficient and justifiable use of public funds. It would be my intention, however, to place a short open letter in the Falkirk Herald directing those members who wish to be more fully updated to contact Airth Parish Community Council direct. I trust that this would be in order.

I appreciate your committed efforts in relation to this matter and I would give you my assurance that Central Scotland Police are equally committed to addressing all policing issues brought to our attention in a fair and equitable manner.



Gordon Samson Superintendent Area Commander Falkirk