

Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner for Durham
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**Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner:
Chief of Staff:**

**Ron Hogg
Alan Reiss**

12 February 2018

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to provide you with some background to the rise in police recorded crime figures which we are seeing at the moment.

I published my latest Performance Report in December, and you will find it on the home page of my website, at www.durham-pcc.gov.uk. It shows a rise of 35% in 'all recorded crime' in the twelve months to September 2017, an increase of over 10,000 compared to the previous year.

I know that the public will be concerned and it is important to give these numbers context.

Currently, the independent Crime Survey for England and Wales¹ shows that Durham enjoys the sixth-highest level of confidence of all the Police Forces in England and Wales, a much better position than 2/3 years ago. We need to maintain that confidence because that is what leads people to report crimes, and therefore enables those crimes to be addressed and resolved. It also puts us in a position where we are able to provide victims with the support they need. The same survey also shows that generally the 'risk' of becoming a victim in Durham does not appear to have changed.

The Constabulary have been looking at the reasons for the increase and I believe there are three which are key.

1. Changes in recording guidelines and improved compliance with the National Crime Recording Standards and the Home Office Counting Rules. In 2016 the Home Office, advised by HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS), made significant changes to these rules. One is the much stronger victim focus, in that forces must take a victim's word that they have been a victim of crime unless there is evidence to say this isn't the case. A second is in the timing of when a crime

¹ The Crime Survey is used by the Government to monitor the extent of crime in England and Wales. It provides information about the changing levels of crime over the last 30 years.

must be recorded. This decision must be made within the first 24 hours of receiving the call; previously this was 72 hours.

In line with the Home Office counting rules, the force are now recording cases of harassment which would have been previously recorded as anti-social behavior disputes, sometimes between neighbours, and low level violent and criminal damage offences which would also have been recorded as anti-social behaviour. Whilst these changes have led to an increase in recorded crimes, we have been closing monitoring satisfaction levels to ensure we are meeting the needs of the victims.

Durham has also increased the extent to which it complies with National Crime Recording Standards and has recently been inspected by HMICFRS. I have been advised that the report will be published in the next tranche of reports expected February 2018. The force's current compliance rate is now one of the highest in the country. Increasing compliance will have made a noticeable difference to the number of crimes recorded. More reassuringly we are providing support to victims in almost all cases and the force are continuing to take crime recording accuracy very seriously.

2. People are increasingly confident to report crimes and incidents to the Police. We have seen rises in recorded cases of hate crime, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Our intelligence has led me and the Chief Constable firmly to the view that this is primarily because people are more prepared than they used to be to report such events. As above, the independently conducted Crime Survey of England and Wales indicates that confidence in Durham Constabulary is the sixth-highest of all 43 police forces.
3. There have been real increases in some types of crime. My latest performance report indicates that, to September 2017, arson increased by 66% compared to the previous year, vehicle crime by 18%, shoplifting by 13% and burglary by 7%.

In support, I would point to a recent report from The Office for National Statistics which states:

"The ONS analysis attributes these increases to improved crime recording processes and victims having greater confidence to report incidents to the police – which is particularly important for those experiencing domestic abuse, sexual offences, and harassment. We are not complacent about any crime rises, even if analysis suggests changes to recording and reporting are behind these figures."

All of this should be set against the reduction in police officer numbers, which have fallen by 25%, or 360 officers, since 2010. There are a number of consequences to this:

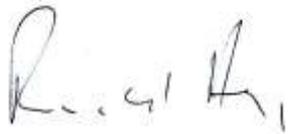
- A key part of police work is crime prevention, and such a dramatic reduction in officer numbers means that the service is increasingly being forced to operate reactively rather than pro-actively;
- This situation is now further exacerbated by the fact that officers are having to deal with twice as many recorded issues in a year, compared to 2013/14;
- Whilst I welcome the fact that victims of sexual offences and hate crime feel more confident to report, the complex and sensitive nature of these issues places increased pressure on our reduced officer numbers; and
- The increase in traditional crimes such as low-level arson reflects the strain being put on our neighbourhood resources, and the increase in crimes of theft can be inherently linked to austerity and the punitive sanctions placed on some of the most vulnerable within our communities.

In this context I praise the ongoing efforts of officers and staff and I remain wholly confident in the effectiveness and efficiency of Durham Constabulary.

Although these increases are a real concern, I would assure our communities that crimes in our area tend to be low-level, and the Cambridge Harm Index shows no increase to the level of harm in our communities.

The future only holds further challenges and increases in crime, especially as cyber-related crime continues to rise. Whilst I continue to work with the Chief Constable and partners to address these matters, and to reassure the public, I will also continue to press central Government for better and fairer police funding.

Yours sincerely



Ron Hogg

Durham Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner