



Carolyn Thomas MS
Chair of the Petitions Committee
Welsh Parliament

Dear Carolyn

Re: P-06- P-06-1463 Continue to fund school police officers who educate children and support schools

Thank you for your letter dated 20th December 2024, regarding the Petitions Committee considering the above petition. You stated that the Committee noted that these school programmes had been running for 21 years, and members had questions that relate to both the funding and operational outcomes. Therefore, contact was made with both the Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners for the four police forces in Wales, to ask:

1. Clarity on if and how your schools programme has changed.
2. The outcomes of the investment made over the past 21 years.
3. Views on the impact of the cut to Welsh Government funding.

Given that your correspondence was issued to all Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners, it was agreed that a collective response from Policing in Wales would be appropriate. The most significant issue was the lack of any notice being provided to Chief Constables and Police and Crime Commissioners, of Welsh Governments decision to step back from the partnership and cease their funding commitment. This placed Policing in Wales in an extremely challenging position in having to make short term financial decisions that impacted on other areas of service delivery that could have been avoided by earlier engagement and discussion.

I would like to reassure you that all four forces are committed to providing the best possible response to supporting children, young people and schools across Wales and have continued to deliver a service since the funding for this key area was stopped.

1. Clarity on if and how your schools programme has changed.

The purpose of the funding for the Wales Police School Programme (WPSP) over many years has been to support primary and secondary schools, as well as Pupil Referral Units (PRU) across Wales to:

- a. Educate children and young people about the harm substance misuse can cause to their health, their families and wider community.

- b. Promote the principles of positive citizenship through the medium of education.
- c. Achieve a reduction in the level of crime and disorder within our young communities.

Since the announcement of funding withdrawal by Welsh Government, all forces have had to implement new initiatives. The sudden removal of the funding negatively impacted policing and left little to no time for stakeholder engagement and consultation, resulting in surprise and disappointment.

North Wales Police – have continued to deliver the ‘As was’ WPSP programme with all their 16 School Police Officers (SPOs). This has been subject to force review (supported by Force Optimisation Team) and through Force Budget Setting. A proposal was given to retain all SPO posts going forward but to revise the SPO role and responsibilities for modern day policing and to support the force vision. The proposal outlined how the 16 SPOs would continue to support ‘in school visibility and educational inputs’ but evolve to include responsibility for expanding the Mini Police Initiative and focused community engagement activity into their role.

Dyfed Powys Police – the WPSP was a highly valued and widely used service across the force. During an already challenging financial environment, the force has continued to provide a service to their schools. A decision to retain the 14 SPOs was approved by the Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner, which provides a designated single point of contact for every educational establishment. A schools Service Manager police staff post oversees the tactical operational delivery of the SPO team, whilst collaborating with key partner agencies and stakeholders. Dyfed Powys Police are operating a new Police School Service based on local challenges, needs, and policing demands. Crime Prevention Education in primary and secondary schools reinforces the Chief Constables priorities and the Police and Crime Commissioners Crime plans.

South Wales Police – The service is now known as South Wales Police Youth Engagement Services (YES). The role of the SPO has been superseded by the new role of the Youth Engagement Officer (YEO). The force has retained the 25 officers that work within the education context and now more broadly with young people in the community who are at risk of criminalisation, exploitation and working with vulnerable families who are at risk of harm, delivering targeted interventions in line with policing priorities. These officers are divided across the 3 geographical areas, aligned to the Community Safety Partnership department, and play integral role in supporting our police youth volunteers. The force has additionally retained the WPSP Regional Manager, now known as Youth Engagement Services Manager (YESM), who has oversight of the work of the YEOs across the force and works at a strategic level with a range of partners around Policing Priorities as they pertain to the young. The South Wales YESM retains communication with the former WPSP managers in Dyfed Powys and North Wales Police to share best practice and resource materials being used by officers in schools and the community.

Gwent Police – have used the change in funding to develop a future school provision program facilitated by Neighbourhood Officers embedded within their communities. Gwent has retained guidance from former school liaison funded officers who are now operating in a coordinator role to ensure that Neighbourhood Officers are adequately trained to conduct this function. All schools have been appropriately risk assessed regarding the frequency of engagement required, and the force is monitoring this new model and will seek feedback throughout the academic year.

2. The outcomes of the investment made over the past 21 years.

The Youth Justice Blueprint for Wales (2019) sets out a strategy preventing children from entering the Criminal Justice System, minimising their contact with it and maximising opportunities for diversion to support them to lead crime free lives. The vision for the Youth Justice in Wales adopts a 'children first' rights approach, ensuring that efforts are child-centred rather than service-focused. Recognising that responding in this way is in the best interests of the child, to best meet their individual need.

School Police Officers (SPO) have been focused on building relationships with children as they progress through the school system. Previous reviews highlighted, Police Officers operating in schools were paramount in establishing productive and positive contact and was found to break down barriers particularly for hard-to-reach groups and communities which may have an inherent mistrust of authority.

The role of the SPO goes far beyond the delivery of crime prevention education in the classroom. During the 2022/23 academic year, officers reported to have collectively dealt with 4,826 crime incidents in schools across Wales involving children and young people. 1,067 Restorative Justice sessions were delivered, and 830 Safeguarding referrals were submitted by our Police operating in schools across Wales to protect and safeguard children and vulnerable families at risk.

All Wales Statistics, 2022/23:

- 17,816 Crime Prevention deliveries / lessons.
- 85% of schools accessed.
- 556,564 Number of Learner Contacts.

Over the past 21 years, every child in education within Wales has had access to this vital service and has given the children and young people a voice to report directly to the Police if they needed to. It has enabled public trust and confidence in the Police to develop from a young age and encouraged children to learn about the Law and consequences of breaking the Law through engaging inputs within their school environment.

Positive interventions have been delivered throughout Wales which are aimed at preventing the criminalisation of children. To deliver this effectively, police officers have worked with Education and multiple agencies to identify and support children and young people at risk of harm. The programme, has long provided dedicated SPOs, delivered crucial educational and wellbeing support to students aged 5-16 through a bilingual curriculum. It has ensured not only pupil and student safety but also contributed significantly to their development and pastoral care.

The key performance indicators, set by Welsh Government and reported regularly, highlight the impact the SPOs have across Wales, from Education Access, Safeguarding and Policing, Educational, and WPSP Core Delivery, and those figures have remained consistent throughout the past 10 years.

3. Views on the impact of the cut to Welsh Government funding.

There was no consultation with Policing in Wales prior to the announcement to withdraw Welsh Government funding effective from 31st March 2024, nor was there any consideration of the impact this decision would have on Policing, Education, or other Strategic Partners. The Wales Police School Programme (WPSP) was firmly established within all four Welsh forces and very well respected by the school communities.

Stakeholders therefore had no opportunity to express how they might be affected by the loss of the services in the WPSP format. The removal of funding left policing with a collapsing time frame in which to conduct relevant stakeholder consultation to better understand the impact to schools and what kind of service was possible to be supplied by policing alone.

Schools throughout Wales had benefited from the quality and consistency in Crime Prevention and safety inputs delivered by specialist police experts. Teachers in their feedback to policing did not feel competent to deliver on such specialist topics and noted that they did not carry the gravitas necessary to have such a positive impact as that generated by police officers in classrooms.

The WPSP was jointly funded by Welsh Government and the four Welsh Police forces. Previous reviews of the Programme evidenced the value and positive impact of Police engaging with children in schools. The Schools Police Officer (SPO) role focused on fostering a safe and engaging environment that served as an outlet for young people to learn, share opinions and ask questions on important issues and topics affecting their lives and communities.

At the time of the Welsh Government announcement, the Programme was implementing the recommendations from the, 'Implementing the Vision of Wales Police Schools Programme' review (2023). This review was commissioned by Welsh Government and Policing in Wales, for the purpose of modernising and ensuring that the strategic aims were more aligned to strategic objectives and priorities. A National Change Manager had been appointed and was coordinating the delivery plan across Wales.

During the final review of the WPSP, the recommendations (which were in the process of being implemented before Welsh Government announced the finding withdrawal) had recommended that a more effective and rigorous Performance Framework be established, which better captured outcomes with regards to our service users, schools and children. Section 6 of the 'Implementing the Vision of the Wales Police Schools Programme Report', was dedicated to the proposed development of a new Outcome Performance Framework post its 2023 review. In this section it noted that this well-established programme had undergone five reviews, between 2006 and 2019 and that the Programme has been received positively. The reviews gathered qualitative evidence which indicated that the presence of SPOs in schools is welcome, positive and adds value. The challenge, however, was to evidence the positive contribution the programme made within the complete system. The report noted that there 'is a complexity of measuring the attribution of outcomes due to the environment in which the Schools Programme operates. SPOs did not of course work in isolation, there are other partners involved and there is the potential for joint enterprise and endeavour to influence results.'

It also, therefore, helps to identify key outcomes that partners themselves (schools) attribute to the existence of the WPSP, from more recent stakeholder's consultation. With a focus on how they as the recipients of the service identify and view the outcomes. Stakeholder's views were sought during the final term of the academic year, 2024. This was during a period where although the WPSP had ceased to exist, the four Welsh forces still delivered the same service up to the end of the summer term 2024.

Schools attested that the relationship between the SPOs and the school was invaluable in support of them as a community, and that collaboration was at the heart of the effectiveness of what they perceived was achieved through these services. Schools reported satisfaction with services performed by competent police officers regarding both crime prevention education engagement and supportive policing services. SPOs were credited for their collaborative approach to working with schools, and reciprocity was recognised as an important feature of the relationship between the partners. Schools recognised a raft of positive outcomes that were generated by the involvement of SPOs in their schools, and they experienced an alignment from these police services with their values and priorities, which they also recognised they often shared with policing.

Many case studies have been supplied over the years to Welsh Government with the quarterly reports with examples of specific outcomes for young people from Police interactions in the classroom and through the supportive policing services.

One of the key strengths of the Wales Police Schools Programme was its collaborative approach which ensured parity of services to schools. As a result of the withdrawal of funding and individual force choices there no longer exists consistent service across Wales.

Police forces in Wales now operate differing models of school engagement. All forces provide designated School Police Officer roles which continue to offer crime prevention education to schools based on policing priorities. These officers also provide a supportive schools policing service. Whilst some current approaches have been well supported, there also is not any security in the service long term should there be a change of direction from a new Chief Constable or Police and Crime Commissioners.

Yours Sincerely



PCC Dafydd Llywelyn
Chair, Policing in Wales
Group



CC Amanda Blakeman
Chair, Welsh Chief Officer