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Dear ACC Woods,

Review of NPCC guidelines on the policing of future anti-fracking protests

Keith Taylor has helpfully updated me on his recent correspondence with you regarding consultation with campaigners on the review you are currently leading on guidance related to the policing of anti-fracking protests.

As you will recall, Keith's letter of 6 February proposed seven questions and asked if you were happy for their circulation on the basis that they cover issues the NPCC wants to seek responses to. I understand your reply to him on 26 February indicated that you were happy to proceed on this basis and wanted question 5 (on improving consistency at protest sites) retained as at least some campaigners may have helpful insights they can offer.

Disappointing, however, campaigners have told me North Yorkshire Police Safer Neighbourhood Team has already been in contact with local opponents of the drill site at Kirby Misperton – but are asking only some of these questions. Worse still, at no point did North Yorkshire Police indicate to anyone that individual responses were intended primarily to feed into a review by the National Police Chiefs Council, although they have now confirmed this to me.

This matters for a number of reasons. Firstly, it is hard to see how the NPCC and the College of Policing can ensure a consistent approach by all police forces if there is no consistency at the very start, in the way consultation is conducted with stakeholders and in the questions they are asked. Secondly, it does rather suggest Keith's considerable time and effort so far has been for nought.

Thirdly, events since 2015 have helped to create, according to the feedback we have repeatedly heard, a long-term legacy of resentment and distrust amongst a significant number of largely first time campaigners about the even-handedness and motives of

the police. Any poorly-executed consultation that is not genuinely transparent risks reinforcing that distrust – and will make it considerably more difficult for Netpol in our efforts to encourage people to participate and share their invaluable experiences.

In our view, what all this points to directly is the urgent need for a proper, meaningful consultation process, one with a clear remit, questions publicised on the NPCC website, a reasonable deadline and a single point of contact for submissions.

Whilst organisations like Netpol can promote a consultation and persuade campaigners to take part, we cannot act as a buffer between potential stakeholders and the NPCC, which must be ready to listen and respond directly, even to potentially critical voices. Both the NPCC and the College of Policing has managed similar stakeholder consultations along these lines before now.

In this instance, protests against the onshore oil and gas industry have been one of the most significant public order issues of the last two years and have featured regularly in Gold Commander training. They have taken place in rural communities who have often opposed the drilling companies for many years but have little or no prior experience of demonstrations. In the case of your own community in Lancashire, campaigners won the arguments on fracking, only to see the industry imposed on them by central government.

The policing of opposition to fracking therefore poses important questions about legitimacy, maintaining 'policing by consent' and how forces plan for the legacy of protests that may take place for months or even years.

This is why, given the need to ensure new guidelines address as many of these serious issues as possible, I urge you to adopt the kind of consultation I have outlined here.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K Blowe". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Kevin Blowe
Coordinator
The Network for Police Monitoring (Netpol)