



CUMBRIA POLICE AUTHORITY

Friday, 14th July 2006

PRIME MINISTER CHALLENGED

The Chief Executive of Cumbria Police Authority, Clive Alcock, has written to Tony Blair challenging his explanation given at Prime Minister's Question Time on Wednesday for the collapse of the Cumbria and Lancashire police force merger.

According to Hansard, the Prime Minister said: ***Let me explain to the right hon. Gentleman about Lancashire and Cumbria. The reason for the difficulty there is that they cannot agree on the equalisation of the precept—but it is still important, and will be important in parts of the country, for there to be either a merger of forces or a far better strategic capability that crosses borderlines***".

In the months of co-operative negotiation following the Authority's (conditional) resolution to volunteer of 24th February 2006, in the many letters, press releases and public statements drawing attention to the point (e.g. what Lancashire called a "Deal-Breaker"); both **Authorities repeatedly sought to make sure that Home Office officials clearly understood just how important it was that the question of precept harmonisation was conclusively resolved** before the final decision day.

On Monday, 10th July 2006, the two Chief Constables, Authority Chairs and Chief Executives met the Policing Minister, Tony McNulty MP, as a last chance to hear what solutions he could offer to financing the merger and council tax harmonisation. The Minister was apologetic but had no solution, which is why it was he who called a 'halt', there and then, not the chief constables or the police authority chairs.

Chairman of the Authority, Reg Watson, said the Prime Minister implied this was the fault of Lancashire and Cumbria - of their respective police authorities - when nothing was further from the truth. That is why the Prime Minister has been asked to correct the words he used on 12th July 2006 before The House and make it clear the whole merger foundered because of Government's inability to solve a problem they had known about for months.

Editors' note:

Cumbria Police Authority is made up of local people - a mixture of councillors, magistrates and independent members - and acts as the bridge between Cumbria Constabulary and all communities across the county in policing matters. Legally, it owns the buildings and land in the police property portfolio and is responsible for:

- *setting the budget for Cumbria Constabulary, including raising local council taxes for policing;*
- *consulting and engaging with local communities in Cumbria to find out what they want the local police to tackle;*

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- *setting the strategic direction for policing in Cumbria; deciding local priorities for policing and setting the Constabulary challenging targets to drive performance higher*
- *appointing (and, if necessary, dismissing) the Chief Constable; Deputy Chief Constable, and Assistant Chief Constables;*
- *monitoring and managing local police performance.*

Further information: Clive Alcock, Clerk & Chief Executive; or Stuart Edwards, Deputy Clerk to the Authority, at the Cumbria Police Authority office, Carleton Hall, Penrith CA10 2AU. Tel. (01768) 217734 Website: www.cumbriapoliceauthority.org.ukT

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