

Email to Staff Officer for Mrs Sara Thornton, National Police Chiefs Council

Dated: 3rd August 2015

Dear Mr Gasson,

Before I came back to you with some further thoughts, I have read part of the NPCC website and in particular the Blog of CC Simon Cole.

I would like to pick up on the most relevant point he makes in my view which is his reference to the days of Dixon of Dock Green. His point about George Dixon being shot dead is irrelevant. In 1966 Harry Roberts shot dead three real police officers. I am very happy for you to pass this email to CC Simon Cole.

George Dixon personified Policing at its best as I can testify being a teenager in Faversham Kent in the 1950s when the sight of the local PC would stop anybody doing anything even slightly wrong and in the 1960s when I was a member of the Metropolitan Police for six years.

What the current Police service has lost, in my view and many others to its detriment, is its link with the general public. Back in the 1950/60s in every Town the Police were known by the local population either as individuals or by sight. Even in Chelsea in the 1960s as a Pam Cooper, I and my colleagues were known by the residents and traders in Chelsea from whom we obtained valuable information on a daily basis.

I now live in Topcliffe some three miles from Thirsk in North Yorkshire. I have been here for 14 weeks having moved from Kent and in all that time walking around in four of the major Towns within twenty miles I have not seen one PC on foot. I have seen them driving around in cars and parked up on the A1 but have never come face to face. If I had a problem where I live and it was not a 999 emergency I have no idea how I would contact NYP to provide information that was more urgent than using the 101 system. In Kent at least the Borough Commanders are identified by name and photograph on the Kent Police website but in the NYP they are not. In Kent you can write directly to the Chief Constable because his email address is published but in NYP you cannot. It is all basic stuff which somebody like me out of the service for nearly 50 years should not have to highlight. It should be obvious to serving officers.

Another major problem for me and I expect for current officers is the standard of dress. I have never seen so many scruffy people in uniform. In Thirsk we have a traffic warden who you could eat your breakfast off. When I do see a police officer mostly on the television because as I have previously said I never see them on the streets they look absolutely dreadful. There were a team of officers portrayed on BBC the other evening from the NYP and only one shaved. The rest had not seen a razor for an awfully long time. They were scruffy to the Nth degree. When do you ever see a military person looking scruffy? I have done years of recruiting for various Companies I have either managed or owned and if any of those guys walked into my office for interview they would be dismissed straightaway whatever their skills. A scruffy person usually means a scruffy outcome.

One major change Mrs Thornton could suggest to her colleagues therefore is that officers should get back to the way we were when we were inspected on parade by the Duty Inspector prior to commencing the shift. In those days if the hair was too long, any stubble showing, any part of the uniform not pressed and clean, boots not shining the officer was sent away to make reparation before being allowed to leave the Station. In my six years on the streets dealing sometimes with difficult situations, one, arresting a guy outside Earls Court and marching him two miles back to Chelsea PS without handcuffs or radio, without incident. Two, disarming a nutter with a meat cleaver in a crowded Hotel and taking him back to Chelsea PS where he threatened to split his head open on the cell wall if we incarcerated him which he then went on to do. I can rightly say I believe that if you look the part by being smart your job is half done and the public will respect you.

I have for some years now been writing to Government about improving the abilities, skills and integrity of chief officers. I have advocated the appointment of retired Military senior officers at the rank of Major General or equivalent to be Chief Constables. Over the last few years we have had too many Chief Constables who have either displayed bad behaviour or poor management or both. I do not need to say who they are or have been because you will know. Unless the person at the top is good at what he or she does the people below will suffer as will the general public. Mrs Thornton may think that as part of her tenure she could introduce the idea to Government and become the person who the Public can say has vision and sense to make the Police Service better when she left her current position than when she became CC of the NPCC.

I believe that I have said enough for one day so I will now stop.

Kind regards,

David Cooper