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The Long Goodbye: A note on the closure of rural police stations and the decline of rural policing in the UK

Abstract

This research note documents the recent (and very political) controversy surrounding the closure of police stations in the UK between 2007 and 2012. It examines the statistics as reported in the press and discusses the rhetoric used in the debate to draw conclusions about how the closure of police stations will affect rural policing and rural crime.

On the need to preserve the distinctiveness of rural policing

It is widely agreed that rural policing, particularly in the UK, has a distinctive cultural identity (Young, 1993; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004; Mawby & Yarwood, 2010). An integral part of the architecture of rural policing is the rural police station as symbol of public order (Carson, 2004). Indeed, the ubiquitous police station plays a major part in the architecture of public reassurance (Millie, 2012) particularly in the rural domain. **A distinctive part of the culture of policing in the UK has been ‘Community Policing’ (Somerville, 2009).** A major theme of this distinctive cultural identity is the ‘*Constable (in the) Countryside*’ (Yarwood & Cozens, 2004; Mawby & Yarwood, 2010) in which the rural bobby is eulogised (Smith, 2010). Rural policing has been a distinct feature of British policing history since the Rural Policing Act of 1839¹ made provision for effective policing in rural areas. A similar Act in Scotland in 1857² saw the introduction of a system of rural and county police forces. As a result, the rural bobby is now very much a part of the rural idyll (Mingay, 1989). During the last decade, various scholars

have warned against the related closure of rural police stations and the demise of the country bobby on efficiency and effectiveness grounds (including Neyroud, 2001; McLaughlin, 2004; McLaughlin, 2008; Smith, 2009; Mawby & Yarwood, 2010; Smith, Laing & McElwee, 2013). **In this note we review the literature and provide some basic supporting empirical evidence to highlight this very important, slightly controversial and very topical subject.**

Reviewing the Literature on rural policing and rural police stations

As the subject of this note relates to a UK context the review of the literature has been confined to this context.³ Although it deals primarily with the closure of rural police stations, such closures are not confined to rural areas but affect urban areas too. However, in the rural area the damages are more visible and more difficult to reverse. **We begin this review by defining what we mean by the terms ‘Police Station’ and ‘Rural Police Station’.** In the Collins online dictionary a police station is defined as *‘the office or headquarters of the police force of a district’*. Historically police stations were sometimes also referred to a *‘Station House’* because police officers lived on the premises. Dictionary.com further elaborates referring to a police station as a premises *‘...from which police officers are dispatched and to which persons under arrest are brought’*. Wikipedia defines a police station as *‘a building which serves to accommodate police officers and other members of staff’*. However, a police station can vary in size from a Headquarters building to one the size of a small house. Nor must one forget that in some areas smaller single room buildings known as *‘police boxes’* may still be in service. Police stations are therefore defined by their size and functionality. When

it comes to defining what a rural police station is, one has to delve into definitions of rurality. The most obvious tautological definition of a rural police station is one which is situated in a rural geographic area that is located outside of a city or town. Thus what is not urban is rural.⁴ Clearly it is an issue open to individual interpretation because some small market towns are classified as rural too. In this note we use the definition by the UK Government Department – ‘The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs’ (DEFRA) which uses population data from the latest census. DEFRA definitions have various grades but basically any area with less than 26% of its population living in a market town.⁵

The literature on the rural police station and their closure

The literature on police stations, urban or rural is sparse but evidence can be gleaned from official documents, the web, and from sources such as documents in the possession of ‘The Police History Society’.⁶ It is helpful to begin with a discussion on the history and siting of rural police stations. It is widely accepted that in the UK that the ‘County Constabularies’ as they were referred to were often organised ‘on a village basis’ and that until the 1960s most villages of any size had a ‘police house’ or ‘police station’ situated in them. These village stations were often staffed by a single ‘Uniformed Constable’ and became known in policing circles as ‘single stations’. Each police division had a number of ‘single stations’ grouped together under the command of a larger station normally in a small country town and usually with a Sergeant in residence. These were referred to as a ‘sub-divisional station’ or ‘divisional station’ depending on size. The siting of such police stations circa 1850 was initially dependent on geographic and demographic variables

such as population density and the proximity of villages to each other. Another factor was the technologies of the time. When police stations were allocated the prevailing technology was the pedal cycle and the horse drawn cart. In many rural forces there was a police station in every sizable village. However, where distance was an issue there were also stations sited in the open countryside near busy road junctions. The deciding factor was how long it would take an officer on foot or on a cycle to travel between stations. The advent of the motor car changed this formula drastically and by the 1950s and 60s with the advent of police 'panda patrol cars' there was a need for a reappraisal. This led to the first round of wholesale police station closures. Many villages lost their 'local bobby' for good. Since then the closures have occurred on operational grounds based on the decision of a Chief Police Officer. However, what differentiates current closures from the historical closures is their political nature and the fact that they are primarily austerity measures taken to prune budgets.

Millie (2012) drew attention to the importance of the police station within the architecture of public order and community safety. Neyroud (2001) stressed that the closure of police stations was a burning issue and that the phrase 'hard to reach' groups in police consultation (originally code for 'ethnic minorities') has expanded to include some groups of rural residents. In particular, the studies of McLaughlin (2004/2008) both drew attention to the logical if unintended consequences of a performance management framework in the UK - namely plans to close traditional 'blue lamp' police stations on grounds of economy and effectiveness. McLaughlin stressed that it is truly remarkable that there has been a lack of academic research and strategic thought on the role of the police station *per se*. Furthermore, McLaughlin considered the paradox of a hyper-

centralist performance management regime coinciding with a shift to hyper-localist neighbourhood-driven policing. Moreover, McLaughlin talks of the politically ‘wicked issue’ of closing police stations, describing it as “*a suitable illustration of the contradictions that plague British policing*”. McLaughlin criticises the Home Office's performance management regime for systematically disassembling the ‘structures of feeling’ and traditions associated with what he refers to as the ‘*Dixonian policing model*’. In particular, he accuses the authorities of asset stripping multi-functional ‘blue lamp’ police stations with no understanding of their cultural and symbolic importance, especially their contribution to the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of the public. McLaughlin argues that as a consequence, public legitimacy is degraded as technical capabilities are enhanced. Smith (2010), in a case study set in a Scottish context, drew attention to the inexorable closure of rural police stations, along with the demise of the rural bobby and the deskilling of the rural policing function. Smith, Laing & McElwee (2013) discussed the effect of the closure of rural police stations in the UK on the rise of rural crime **concluding that the closures were but one part of the wider picture of the changing landscape on rural crime in the UK and that whilst there is clearly a need to reduce to fiscal costs of policing, this has to be balanced against the needs of the individual communities because withdrawing services without putting in place a workable strategic plan, is not a sensible course of action.**

From this cursory review it is apparent that rural policing is an emotive, socially charged subject that extends far beyond the practicalities of everyday policing and the the politics of convenience.

Concerns surrounding police station closures in rural areas

Cuts in rural police services are a common theme in the work of Mawby (Mawby, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2009; Mawby & Jones, 2004). In conducting the 2000 and 2004 Crime Surveys in Cornwall, Mawby (2002, 2004) found that these cuts involved either reducing the services that a police station provided or closing the station altogether. Where a station was closed, telephone calls from members of the public were transferred to a distant station (from the Scilly Islands, for example, they were rerouted to Exeter - Mawby, 2002), and they also had to travel further to access an alternative station. Where a station remained open, it was often only for limited hours, and even when in use by police officers it was not always open to the public.

The closure of rural police stations must be seen in the wider context of the slow yet seemingly inexorable closure and withdrawal of services in a wider rural context (Farmer, Lauder & Richards, 2003) and the changes in service provision in rural areas (Higgs & White, 1998), which have seen the closure and removal of doctors' surgeries, small town hospitals, churches, pubs, banks and shops (Jones, 2002; Pincott, 2004; Paddison & Calderwood, 2007) in favour of multiservice outlets (Mosley, Parker & Wragg, 2004; Hope, Anderson & Sawyers, 2000). Francis (1999) argues that the closure of the village police station in particular has undermined popular imaginings of the rural as safe and predictable.

The politics in play

A number of concerns have been raised by politicians and in particular most recently by the Conservative Party. In Scotland the Conservative Party blames The Scottish National Party and the heritage of Labour for the closures. McLaughlin (2005) blamed the process on New Labour, new localism and the democratic renewal of police accountability because they contributed new layers of complexity to the governance of locality which only served to exacerbate the existing drives for efficiency and effectiveness driven by performance management regimes in general and the Best Value Directive favoured by the Labour Party. For McLaughlin the disappearance of the 'local bobby' and the closure of police stations is symptomatic of how community concerns were of secondary importance to police chiefs and police authorities working to Home Office performance scripts.

Official arguments for the closure of such police stations can appear convincing because statistics clearly demonstrate that the extent of crime in rural areas is lower than that in urban areas. Moreover, people's perceptions are that the prevalence of antisocial behaviour in rural areas is lower than in urban areas. The annual recorded crime statistics in Scotland suggest that the crime rates recorded in rural areas are significantly lower than in urban areas.⁷ The chief arguments for closure are based around police organizational and operational requirements and the justification for this are centred around a complex web of arguments are based on the PESTEL framework in that they are a mixture of - political, economic, social, technical, environmental and legal factors.

Even if some closures can be justified on grounds of short-term efficiencies, there are long term consequences to consider. A Conservative Party (2012) communiqué, for example, suggested: *“Keeping a police station open that is rarely visited and taking*

officers off the street in order to do so may not always be the best use of public funds. Nevertheless, police stations are important to local communities and the sheer number of closures is worrying". Although the public now communicate more with the police service by telephone, mobile phone and internet, **anecdotal evidence suggests that** some rural residents still prefer speaking directly to an officer or member of staff. It seems clear that the closure of rural stations can have greater impact than the closure of urban ones because alternative facilities are often much further away in rural areas and response times slower. With station closures, police officers have to travel further to access IT facilities, complete paperwork etc, resulting in more time spent on travelling and less on 'policing'. Similarly, suspects (and solicitors who have to be present) have to travel further for questioning and detention. All this obviously adds to the cost of policing, particularly in rural areas, thus casting doubt on the claimed savings arising from station closure.

The main argument against closure, at least in rural areas, is that it is almost impossible to reverse if the premises are sold.⁸ The Scottish Conservatives believe that local police stations have a greater role in promoting local policing and should be protected as far as possible. Also, according to the Countryside Alliance (2011), rural areas in England and Wales already have fewer police officers, special constables and PCSOs per head of population than urban areas.⁹ **A feature of both the Scottish Conservative and Countryside Alliance pleas is the fact that they are based on emotive responses.¹⁰ What is missing from the literature is a debate on how the closures are affecting rural policing, and the views of public etc. Clearly there is scope for future research to capture and document the views and emotions of stakeholders.**

The deskilling of the rural police officer

The closure of rural police stations is linked to a wider deskilling of rural police officers over the past decade (Smith, 2010). Rural community policing skills are not taught at the Scottish Police College, nor by the former National Police Improvement Agency. In the UK, there is no official definition of rural crime and no framework for how it should be recorded. If the police do not record or define crimes by location of rurality, however, it is unlikely that they will even be aware of the extent of the problem. One argument often used by the Police themselves is that police forces are community orientated and police communities according to local needs. Yet this is contradicted by the closure of police stations and the removal of officers to urban areas. Furthermore, in England and Wales, the Association of Chief Police Officers has a portfolio for rural crime headed by a Chief Constable but its sister body in Scotland does not. There is clearly scope for improvement here.

Methodology

One of the major problems in conducting research for this note has been that in attempting to obtain data it is not possible to obtain one set of official statistics that cover the whole of the UK and these had to be obtained from various sources. Frustratingly, we were forced to treat Scotland, and England and Wales as separate entities because of issues of a historical, legal and political nature. Scotland has an independent legal system and laws. This leaves room for statistical error and misinterpretation. Thus, to obtain details of the stations closed the authors used several methods. Firstly, using documentary

research methods (Scott, 1990) the authors made a search of the internet for documents and press articles on the closures.¹¹ Additionally, the data used in this request in relation to Scotland is based upon FOI Request Methodology. The Scottish Conservative Party submitted an FOI request and shared this information with the researcher¹². It is also of note that the factual basis behind the data in the press reports was derived from FOI reports submitted by individual journalists. We attempted to merge the data from these various sources but in the absence of reliable official statistics it is not possible to conduct a conclusive quantitative analysis. We acknowledge this weakness in our methodology. These factors led to our decision to write a research note to highlight this important topic to allow us to provide evidence via documentary methods – hence the footnotes.

The figures and the findings

According to Ensor (2012), since 2000, approximately 1,017 police stations have been closed in the UK, the majority of which have been in rural areas. One of the interesting features on press reporting of the closure of rural police stations relates to the emotive rhetoric used.¹³ According to the information obtained from the FOI request, between the years 2007 and 2012 in Scotland 56 police stations were closed and 23 had reduced opening hours imposed on them; of those closed, 31 (55%) were in rural areas (Scottish Conservative Party, FOI request, 2012). To illustrate the scale of the problem we present two examples – in this period Northern Constabulary in Scotland have closed 26 police stations and in England Gloucestershire is selling off 18 of its 29 police stations.¹⁴ Whilst statistically these numbers are small they are representative of the emerging trend for the

closure of police stations in the UK. Policing, and particularly rural policing, is not about statistics it is about public reassurance and community policing. As argued above, successive political parties have sought to blame each other for these bleak statistics but the trend continues unabated and is likely to continue. To be fair, not all of the closures are net losses as there is also a noticeable trend to open new police offices to correspond with where the majority of the perceived demand for policing is sited. Interestingly, this will generally be in urban areas. There are no centralised, publically available figures for the balance in terms of numbers opened, and closed, nor is there a readily available figure relating to associated savings, or costs incurred upon which informed observers can base their judgement on. Between 2007 and 2012 the former Dumfries and Galloway Police closed 3 stations¹⁵; the former Lothian and Borders Police closed three stations¹⁶; the former Central Scotland Police closed two stations¹⁷; the former Strathclyde Police closed ten stations¹⁸; the former Tayside Police closed 4 stations¹⁹; and the former Grampian closed four stations²⁰; and the former Northern Constabulary closed twenty six stations, none of which was located in an urban area²¹. There are no figures for the former Fife Constabulary.²² In relation to the reduction of hours the former Lothian and Borders have reduced hours at nineteen rural stations²³; the former Central Scotland force reduced the hours at one station, which is open only when staffed; finally, the former Tayside force reduced the hours at two stations.²⁴ What is significant about the figures discussed here for police station closures is that they are a cumulative loss and that the losses occur in cycles. For example, in the UK between the years 2000 and 2007, 600 police stations were closed. Between 2007 and 2012 a further 361 closed in England and Wales. It is believed that more closures are imminent. The different systems of policing and

governance which exist between Scotland and England and Wales only serve to confuse the real figure. Clearly there is a need for a full statistically based quantitative research project to scope the full extent of the issues.

Developing innovative new policing models

The closure of rural police stations has not been planned in conjunction with other measures in relation to innovative policing. To correct this, there needs to be a planned and implemented increase in the number of innovative policing practices (see Smith, Laing and McElwee, 2013, for a discussion on the role of Parish Constables, Rural Special Constables, Village Bobby schemes²⁵, mobile police offices, the opening of temporary police stations in village halls, and other community driven models such as farm, horse, shop and pub watches). Some forces such as Lincolnshire have pioneered the use of rural intelligence officers and rural community beat officers, and the introduction of the wildlife crime officer has been a welcome innovation. However, such innovations are introduced piecemeal and the advantages are in danger of being lost due to the financial pressures brought about by the recession and the age of austerity.²⁶ There is also a tendency towards the introduction of quasi-policing methods in rural areas (Merritt & Dingwall, 2010) using village orderlies and wardens.

Conclusion

Whilst it could be argued that the closure of most police stations in the UK has been for operational reasons, or in answer to an increased demand for cost savings, the net result is the loss of a community resource and a move towards a different model of policing that

has not been properly planned. However, the way we as a society interact with the police has changed: we are more likely to contact them via the web or by email, as well as by phone, and less likely to visit a police station.

The closure of a rural police station has a symbolic effect as well as an operational one (Millie, 2012). Many of the officers who formally policed the rural areas are moved to urban policing environments where their knowledge and skills are lost to their rural communities. The closure of police stations impacts on the number of police officers actually policing the rural area and also impacts upon the loss of core rural policing skills.

Since the Rural Policing Act of 1839, and the Police Scotland Act 1857 rural policing has been an integral part of the framework of policing in Britain as we know it. However, the changes discussed herein have resulted in potentially irreversible changes in the way policing will be carried out in the future. Rural policing is a specialised and under appreciated policing role which is increasingly under threat. What is disturbing is that the closure of so many rural police stations has been done without public consultation. It is clear that delivering effective rural policing will prove increasingly difficult. **Another potential outcome of the closure of rural police stations may be that the commission of crime in rural communities may become more organised as is the case in Italy (Sergi & Lavorgna, 2012).**²⁷

There are obvious limitations to this exploratory note. **Although this note has been confined to the UK mainland there is scope for extending future research to include Northern Ireland and Eire in the sample because both are undergoing similar patterns of closure (Burke, 2013; FitzGerald, 2013).**²⁸ There is scope for quantitative studies to

determine the extent of the problem and for qualitative studies to understand the social issues and their consequences.

The closure of rural police stations and the withdrawal of police officers, and resources from the countryside conducted in the manner of a “*long goodbye*” must be addressed urgently before irreparable damage is done. Whilst there is clearly a need to reduce the fiscal costs of policing, this has to be balanced against the needs of the individual communities. Police stations must be viewed by Politicians and Bureaucrats in their proper context as symbols of ‘community policing’ (Millie, 2012) and not just as being irrelevant in operational and fiscal terms or as ‘obstacles to reform’ as suggested by McLaughlin (2005/2008). There have been repeated warnings over the years from spokespersons from The Countryside Alliance as well as from Policing academics, including McLaughlin (2005/2008), Mawby and Yarwood (2010), and Smith (2010) but these appear to have been ignored. In their book ‘*Rural Policing and Policing the Rural: A Constable Countryside*’ Mawby and Yarwood (2010) raise the issue of rural policing in the United Kingdom and argue for its maintenance. There is an urgent need for a rethink on the closure of police stations and the withdrawal of policing services from the countryside before it is too late to reverse some of the more damaging consequences.²⁹ Legislative changes to working practices have also impacted on the resourcing of police manpower but as history has proven that once a station has been closed there is no return of the service to the community. Closing police stations is surely not the only possible answer. Moreover, there is a pressing need to have a UK wide policy on rural crime and policing. This is of vital importance because all the recent changes in respect of rural policing discussed in this paper have occurred at a time of great organisational change.

For example, on 1st April 2013, the eight former Scottish forces became one force, known as Police Scotland. There are still 43 individual territorially based Police Forces in England and Wales albeit that they now have an additional tier of governance and accountability in the form of elected Police Commissioners. Thus because of these governance issues there is the potential to a two-tier system of rural policing in the UK in which constituents in one part of the country have a different level of service provision than those in another County. The obvious casualties for this lack of communication will be rural policing itself and individual rural communities who may well be left to '*self-police*' themselves (Somerville, 2009). This goes very much against the grain of the tenets of community policing. Whilst applauding the spirit of these monumental changes to the policing landscape and welcoming local influence over policing as a necessary innovation we make a further plea for a joined up approach because there is evidence that individual Commissioners in England and Wales are critical of the closures of local police stations and are working behind the scenes to reverse them. We appreciate that the situation is complex but without a universal policy of local consultation, elected public servants will have to go through the costly process of reversing decisions made by central government at great financial and emotional cost to the community and to the country.

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Footnotes

¹ This is also referred to as the Rural Constabularies Act of 1839.

² See the Police (Scotland) Act, 1857. For a discussion on the development of policing in Scotland see the works of Carson (1984/1985). Carson argued that the social forces giving rise to the conditions under which the institution of police could emerge was related to the development of capitalist relations in Scotland necessitating the need for rural as well as urban policing. It is ironic that it is the capitalist forces of austerity that brings about their demise.

³ There are practical reasons for this approach in that although there is some material on rural policing in the US and Australian contexts there are so many different variables in respect of the scale of rurality. Also, in referring to the UK this article covers England, Wales and Scotland but not Northern Ireland. However, it should be noted that the closure of rural police Stations is a phenomenon which is affecting Northern Ireland and Eire too as evidenced by numerous press reports. This is clearly an emerging trend and may not be purely a UK political problem.

⁴ "Defining the Rural Population". Hrsa.gov. Retrieved 2013-08-22.

⁵ Sourced from DEFRA documents.

⁶ Much of the knowledge in this section was gleaned by one of the authors during ethnographic interviews with rural police officers.

⁷ For example, in Northern Constabulary, the total crimes and offences recorded per 10,000 as 466, compared to 694 in Strathclyde and a Scotland wide average of 598 per 10,000.

⁸ Although interestingly, in May 2013, North Wales Police did reverse a decision taken in 2011 to locate rural officers in controversial hubs where they were located to cover wide areas. See the coverage at North Wales Police Hubs closure welcomed (accessed 5.7.2013) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-23193595> for fuller details.

⁹ Figures obtained by the Countryside Alliance in 2011 indicate that there was one police officer for 1,037 people in rural areas in 2011-2012, compared to 581 people in urban areas. Similarly, in 2011-2012, there was one police community support officer (PCSO) for 4,794 people in rural areas compared to 3,530 people in urban areas. In the same year, there was one special officer for 3,335 people in rural areas compared to 3,004 people in urban areas.

¹⁰ Countryside Alliance Chairman Barney White-Spunner is concerned that policing and crime in rural areas will become a forgotten priority and that there will be a further reduction in police numbers and spending in rural areas. He called for proper consideration of careful planning so as not to disadvantage those in the countryside, remarking "*These figures will make worrying reading for country people, many of whom have found themselves victims of crime*".

¹¹ Obtaining concise, correct and up to date official statistics on the closure of police stations for the whole of the UK is difficult. One often has to rely on the reporting of journalists and information located via the internet which can be sensationalist and morally laden in a judgmental sense. *The newspaper accounts although highlighting the closure of police stations focus on rising crime rates and fear of crime (Slack, 2008) and sensationally warn that the crisis and in particular the scale of the budget cuts is leaving the police on a metaphorical cliff edge' Hughes, 2012). Hughes was reporting the words of Tony Melville, the Chief Constable of Gloucestershire Police.*

¹² The FOI asked all former Scottish police forces (8) for the numbers of police stations closed in the past 5 years; and the numbers of police stations which have had their opening hours significantly reduced (i.e. those that have lost 24 hour cover status or which have moved from a full time to a part time basis), in the past 5 years.

¹³ The rhetoric used by Ensor is strident in that she trumpets the 'End of the Bobby on the beat' as third of police stations close. She remarked "*Hundreds of thousands of residents living in rural areas will soon be left without a local station and will have to report crimes to officers based miles away*".

¹⁴ The story was covered by the Sunday Express (<http://www.express.co.uk/posts/view/340639/Is-it-the-end-of-the-road-for-YOUR-local-bobby->) as well as the Scotsman and Scotland on Sunday.

¹⁵ These were Portpatrick; Langholm; and Locharbriggs all of which are rural.

¹⁶ These were Fauldhouse; Mid-Calder and Newcastleton which are all rural.

¹⁷ They were Stenhousemuir and Denny. The former is a rural station.

¹⁸ The fact that the then largest single police force in Scotland could not (or would not) provide names of stations or details on reduction in hours of stations is of concern because, although predominantly an urban force, Strathclyde does include Argyll, the majority of the Inner Hebrides and Ayrshire. With Scotland now being a single police force, there is a very real risk that policing will become increasingly centralised and less localised because the urban crime fighting focus of Strathclyde will likely pervade the new force for some time to come.

¹⁹ These were Kinloch Rannoch; Monifieth; Dundee City Centre; and Methven. Of these only Dundee City Centre was an urban station.

²⁰ These were Peterculter; High Street, Aberdeen; Silverburn, Aberdeen; Cullen. Of these only Cullen is a rural police station although Peterculter is a suburban area in the countryside.

²¹ These were St Margaret's Hope, Orkney; Conon Bridge; North Kessock; Helmesdale; Foyers; Newtonmore; Cannich; Kinlochleven; Uig; Castletown; Reay; Golspie; Scalloway; Dunrossness; Lybster; Bettyhill; Evaton; Cromarty; Ardersier; Drumnadrochit; Beaulay; Spean Bridge; Broadford; Barvas; Carlouay and Ness. Northern was one of the most remote forces in Scotland in terms of land mass and distance between stations.

²² An FOI request located on the internet revealed that other than the relocation of two call points to Local Council Service Offices there has been no closure or opening of police stations in Fife since 2006.

²³ These were Newbattle, Gorebridge, Penicuik, Bonnyrigg, Loanhead, Musselburgh, Tranent, Prestonpans, Haddington, Armadale, Whitburn, Broxburn, Galashiels & Blackburn; Westerhailes, Drylaw, Craigmillar, Oxcgangs, Corstorphine & Edinburgh Airport.

²⁴ The figures discussed above do not cover the practice of 'ghosting' police stations where the station is not officially closed but there are no operational officers based there. This practice is often used where no public consultation has been carried out and there will likely be a public outcry. Such stations are only used when operationally necessary as in the case of a major incident or crime in the area. The stations appear on the official role of the force but are not operational.

²⁵ Such as the Grampian Police Village Bobby Scheme which operated from 2000 to 2003.

²⁶ For a discussion of the effects of austerity on policing see the 2012 HMIC Report (HMIC, 2012).

²⁷ It is unlikely that the end of the recession will result in a reduction of the criminal activities committed by organised crime groups in rural areas. As the crimes currently committed by these opportunist entrepreneurial criminals become more embedded in the criminal community, there is a danger that they will become more attractive to even more ruthless organised criminal groups and mafias as is the case in Italy. Whilst this speculative there is the potential that the increasing gap between government policies and our law enforcement capacity to effectively police rural areas is widening to a point where there may be an increased danger that this could lead to an expansion of traditional organised crime groups in rural areas. The issues discussed herein are obviously exacerbated by the current financial crises in Britain, Eire and across Europe. This has created new markets and marketplaces for criminals and mafias to exploit.

²⁸ See also the discussion / blog at <http://www.crimetalk.org.uk/reviews/articles/910-closing-rural-stations-and-crime-prevention-in-ireland.html> for fuller details.

²⁹ Otherwise we may be heading for a 'Constable(less) Countryside'.