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27 January 2015

Nigel Mills MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Mr Mills

Re: OzBox

With reference to your letter dated 15 January 2015 may I firstly point out that the decision to cease funding this project is the direct result of the substantial funding cuts imposed by this Government. These cuts have enjoyed your wholehearted support, a point I fervently hope that you have explained to those constituents canvassing your support for Ozbox.

Over the last three years Ozbox has been funded by a Big Lottery Fund (BLF) grant which has been jointly match-funded by the Police and Derbyshire County Council. However, both the BLF and County Council funding streams will end on 31 March. In seeking to address its own considerable financial challenges, the County Council had already given several months' notice that there would be no further grant in 2015/16 and beyond. Another bid was made to secure further funding beyond that time from the BLF, but this was unsuccessful.

The reality of the situation is that with effect from 1 April 2015, neither the BLF nor the County Council's grants would be available to meet the annual ongoing cost of £430,000 to run Ozbox in its current form. Therefore, should the scheme remain in place beyond that date, the cost would fall wholly to the Constabulary to fund the salaries, the vehicles, premises, kit, equipment and all associated running costs. This is the funding implication which then had to be considered alongside the many other competing demands on the Constabulary's reduced budget.

In considering all those competing demands, continuation of the Ozbox scheme was not considered to be of sufficiently high priority to justify the level of investment required, at the expense of core policing activities such as providing an effective emergency response, tackling serious crime issues such as domestic violence, drugs, child sexual exploitation, human trafficking, counter terrorism, the growing menace of cyber-crime and online abuse, to name but a few. Similarly, with a projected reduction of 260 police officers over the next five years, the maintenance of a visible presence in communities will be a priority if we are to retain public confidence in the service we provide to all.

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People repeatedly tell me that they want to see more officers fighting crime and I'm sure that they say the same to you. The cost to continue Ozbox is close to the cost of a recruitment round of 16 police officers and I think that the majority of the public would prefer to have 16 police officers working for the whole community.

That said, the decision regarding Ozbox was taken with extreme reluctance and I would welcome moves by any interested parties with available funds wishing to sustain the project. Perhaps you would be prepared to help source such support on behalf of your constituents?

I would also ask what representation you have made to the Prime Minister, the Chancellor and the Home Secretary to ameliorate the cuts being imposed on Derbyshire Police Service and by default projects such as Ozbox.

Finally, I should make you aware that I will be sharing this letter with my partners at the Constabulary and the County Council, before making it more widely available in the fashion adopted by yourself via social media prior to my receiving it. However, I would expect that the appropriate chronology will see it received by your office before it goes into the public domain, a courtesy I too would have appreciated.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alan Charles', with a stylized, cursive flourish at the end.

Alan Charles
Police and Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire

Cc: DCC Alan Goodwin
Cllr Anne Western

PCC Website