

Statement by the Police & Crime Commissioner, Alun Michael

I aim to be very precise in what I say today because so much has been said in the mainstream press and media as well as in social media about events in Ely on the evening of May 22 that it can be difficult to disentangle what is dependable fact from what is merely widely believed and what is still under investigation.

The responsibility of the Panel is, of course, to hold me to account for the way in which I carry out my duties as the Police and Crime Commissioner for South Wales on behalf of the public of South Wales. My role involves a wide range of duties which include holding the Chief Constable and the Force to account on behalf of the public but that is far from being the whole of the role. The Panel holds me and my team to account and not the Chief Constable or the Force.

In making my report to you and responding to questions I am conscious that two teenage boys, Kyrees Sullivan and Harvey Evans, have died and that there are two families plus their friends who are grieving their deaths. The frustration and anger that follows such losses clearly deserves respect and is a part of the mix in explaining what has been said by a variety of people. That must be respected and held in our minds while working through the events of 22 May.

I am also conscious that a community that I know to be warm and resilient as well as having significant social and economic challenges has been scarred by one night's violence and damage. It is very sad indeed that Ely has appeared in the national news for all the wrong reasons and the community certainly needs respect and support in coming to terms with the impact of those events. The violence and damage that took place the same evening was truly shocking so our thoughts must also be with the residents who were put in fear and danger as well as with the police officers who were injured. Those who took part in the violence simply do not represent the people of Ely and their actions have cast a dark shadow over this proud community.

While the police officers in Ely have suffered a lot of abuse in the past fortnight there have been many local people coming up to them and thanking them for the courage shown by the officers who tackled the violence on the night and who showed great courage in protecting the public.

I think I should start with what is certain about what happened before going on to what is currently under investigation and what may remain difficult to determine.

Two boys were riding an electrically powered bike on the streets of Ely at approximately 17:55, We now know that at one point there was a police vehicle behind them.

Did that “following” amount to “pursuit” or being “chased” by the police? Was the police activity appropriate? Those questions are being investigated by the Independent Office of Police Conduct. There are those who “know” the answer - so the mainstream media have quoted the beliefs and views of a number of individuals and locally there was certainly a belief, spread through social media and word of mouth, that the boys were “chased” by the police.

Second there is the road traffic accident in which, tragically, the two boys died. What was the nature of the vehicle they were riding? How did the accident happen and what caused it? We do know that at the time of the accident in Snowden Road there was no police vehicle in the street. Apart from that we will have to await the outcome of the road traffic investigation by South Wales Police.

Third there was the outbreak of violence and damage that was covered so widely in the media and was such a shock to the local community.

Neither police activity nor the road traffic accident can in any sense be described as the cause or excuse for the violence and damage. In relation to the disorder, I can now confirm that 20 people have now been arrested. 17 males and 3 females, aged between 14 and 36 have been arrested on suspicion of riot and released on police bail while the investigation continues. Over 290 pieces of body worn footage from police officers has been gathered, as well as several hours of videos posted on social media, drone, helicopter, and CCTV footage. The investigation team has had lots support from the community who have provided 50 responses using the Major Incident Public Portal and needless to say this has been gratefully received and is a truer reflection of the Ely community that I know. In due course it will be for the courts to determine guilt or innocence of each individual who is prosecuted and the punishment where guilt has been established.

It is important to acknowledge that there had been warnings from community leaders about the danger that frustration and tensions amongst young people in the area created an environment in which conflict and violence could be triggered by specific events in ways that could not be predicted. Ely and Caerau were identified by the Probation Service as an area needing specific attention, leading to the Grand Avenues project.

Many agencies have sought to do their bit, either as a part of wider initiatives or partnership work across the City or as specific local initiatives. There are many

ways in which there have been positive initiatives - for example the Black Police Association ran their first outreach project with young people in Western High School. But the First Minister has spoken tellingly of the cut in resources available to Welsh Government and therefore to Local Government and other agencies in seeking to deal with social and economic disadvantage and to offer opportunity and direction to young people in communities like Ely, Caerau and many other areas of Cardiff, South Wales and across the country. None of this explains or justifies specific incidents of violence and damage but has helped to create strains and stresses for families and individuals which lead to an environment in which bad things can happen.

The First Minister rightly pointed to the importance of the police being a part of the solution and the inevitable impact in the cuts in police officer numbers and police finances which we have experienced over the past decade and more. In recent times, police officer numbers have been restored, but it will be some time before new and newly trained officers become equivalent to the large number of highly experienced officers that were lost from 2013 onwards.

With the support of Welsh Government, Neighbourhood Policing in South Wales has been strengthened with additional PCSOs. Their responsibility is to be a part of the local community, to listen to problems and concerns expressed by local residents, to help in solving problems, and drive prevention and early intervention, and helping to build the competence and resilience of local communities.

We intend to hold an event in each local authority area in the Autumn to bring together Councillors and PCSOs – both as part of celebrating 20 years since the first group of PCSOs were appointed in South Wales and to share ideas and encourage all to come up to the very high standard of the leaders in this work.

I can certainly confirm the investment of time and effort that has been put into making the most of this capacity for neighbourhood policing and the personal commitment and determination of Chief Constable Jeremy Vaughan to make it a success - but the most professional and committed policing cannot change the underlying social and economic challenges that are faced in many places across South Wales.

I have faced considerable criticism from those who “know” what happened on the evening of 22 May for responding the following morning to requests from the media for immediate certainty about what had happened the previous night.

Comments include the suggestion that I was lied to by the police, suggestions that I had allowed myself to speak for the police when it is my job to hold them

to account, and some generalised criticism about the role of Police & Crime Commissioners in general.

I am very willing to respond to questions from the panel on any of these matters, but when things happen I believe it is my duty to respond when I can to requests for information to the best of my ability in order to deal with misapprehensions and give as much clarity as possible at the time. I do not speak FOR the Police but share what I know as a lay elected representative of the public as openly and as clearly as I can especially when senior police representatives are engaged in coping with and investigating fast-moving situations.

There were rumours of a police chase as early as the Monday night when I was briefed on developing events and updated on the Tuesday morning. At that time there was nothing to suggest a connection between any police vehicle and the boys on the bike and of course had that been known I would have phrased my responses a little differently. It wasn't and in any set of circumstances you can only base your responses on what is known at the time.

As soon as video evidence became available, showing the bike passing a video camera followed by a police van, I was told that this was the case but it did not change the basic information that two teenage boys had died in a tragic road traffic accident and that while there were rumours of a police chase there was no police vehicle in Snowden Road, where the collision occurred, at the time of the accident. The new information triggered an immediate referral to the IOPC which has to be asked to investigate relevant or potentially relevant police activity in the period shortly before death or serious injury.

It's very important indeed to allow the careful investigation by the IOPC to be undertaken and to await their conclusion, but of course that takes time and both the Media and the public are hungry for information and for answers.

In particular it is understandable that people want to know the rights and wrongs of police activity and that is what the IOPC will provide but only in the fullness of time. They have complete access to police data and information but have also gone proactively to local residents seeking evidence, video footage, and any other information that might help in their inquiry.

The IOPC has promised that this will be carried out in a timely manner and I hope very much that will be the case on this occasion. Timeliness is important for families who are waiting for answers and it is also important for police officers, who, in the past, have often had to wait months and even years for conclusions to be reached and made public by the IOPC, whether that outcome be to lift the clouds that have hung over them or to require further official action.

Without referring further to the work now being undertaken by the IOPC it is worth looking at the general background and public expectations in respect of E-bikes, e-scooters, electric motorcycles and off-road bikes. One of the most frequent issues raised with me and my team by local councillors is nuisance activities in communities and neighbourhoods across South Wales by those using such vehicles, with the commonest request being for the police to more to tackle the nuisance along with concerns that young people in particular may be putting themselves and members of the public generally at risk.

Just as an example, over the weekend an incident was reported in Swansea, where a young child was taken to hospital after being hit by what was described as an off-road motorcycle, fortunately the child wasn't seriously injured. And I have heard a lot about other near misses from a number of communities.

Conscious of those concerns a lot has been done along with our Local Authority partners to reduce risk and harm, trying to apply a problem-solving approach and experience of what works to the conditions of a variety of particular areas. These are issues that have emerged in different ways in different locations but are concerns expressed in relation to city streets, pavements, pedestrian areas and in towns villages and across Valleys communities.

The definitions are important: E-scooters and electric motorbikes are mechanically propelled vehicles and that means there is a legal requirement to comply with the Road Traffic Act, so the driver or rider would need a licence and the vehicle would need to have insurance and tax. There is a legal exemption for Electrically-assisted pedal cycles within strict rules, so they must be pedal-powered rather than by a battery and motor alone. There are also power output restrictions.

Legal definitions do not tell the whole story because there is the question of what interventions are appropriate. There is guidance from the College of Policing and there is also Force Policy on what is appropriate and in what circumstances.

It is complicated and we have to ask whether there is a need for legislative change and/or a review of police powers and responsibilities along with those of local authorities. What are the responsibilities of those who sell these vehicles and those who regulate sales? I have to be frank and say that identifying the questions that need to be asked is easier than finding the answers, but the events of May 22nd have certainly started a lot of people asking the questions.

Finally I want to say a word about the way in which South Wales Police are responding to and helping in the process of recovery following the events in Ely on May 22.

Ely is a warm community which has great strengths as well as significant challenges and it is very sad for it to be in the public eye for all the wrong reasons. It is vital for its strengths to be recognised and for every organisation with a part to play to support community leaders in bringing people in the area together to rebuild confidence and move forward collaboratively. That was the clear message emerging from the meeting on the Friday May 26th chaired by the First Minister, Mark Drakeford, who himself represents the area in the Senedd.

Those present included elected representatives at every level along with the leadership of Cardiff Council and Welsh Government. We all acknowledged the need to draw on the strengths and local knowledge of residents and voluntary leaders to develop a community plan for Ely to address the long-term needs and to focus on actions and outcomes for people in Ely and Caerau.

Members of my team and the local policing team will work hard with partners and with the community to build trust and confidence while making a positive and lasting difference for the area. Recovery after an event of this sort takes time, effort and patience and it will not be easy for the local community, for the police, for the council or for elected representatives.

There is no clear cause or justification for the violence but there are clearly issues that are contributory factors that go deep and which require long-term organisational commitment and investment. They had been highlighted by local community leaders and elected representatives on many occasions - long before the events of 22nd May. That is why we are already involved in work locally and why there is a need for the UK Government to invest more in supporting work to give hope and opportunity – not just to Ely but to many of our local communities across Cardiff, Wales and the UK. The challenges, the social and economic issues and the worries in the community of Ely are replicated in many other areas. They are clear and obvious and they need to be addressed.

In the meantime we have all made a commitment to pull together to do the best we can with the resources available to us and to support local residents in rebuilding resilience and confidence - while also bearing in mind the need for two grieving families to receive support and answers to their questions as

quickly as possible. Our shared commitment was spelt out in a formal Statement by Jane Hutt, the Minister for Social Justice (see below).

That is the background against which, with all our partners, we will work hard at rebuilding confidence in Ely and other communities across the South Wales area.

Statement by Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

TITLE **A Community Plan for Ely and Caerau**

DATE **26 May 2023**

BY **Jane Hutt MS, Minister for Social Justice and Chief Whip**

Following the tragic death of Harvey Evans and Kyrees Sullivan on Monday evening and the disorder in Ely, the First Minister and I today held a meeting in Ely, with representatives of the local community, Action in Caerau and Ely, the South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner, the chief executive and leader of Cardiff Council, the MP for Cardiff West and local councillors.

We began our meeting with a moment of reflection for Harvey and Kyrees. Two families are grieving for their sons and the people of Ely and Caerau have experienced a collective trauma. Our thoughts are with the families and friends of Harvey and Kyrees.

The meeting was not designed to examine the events of Monday evening or to trespass into the territory of the Independent Office of Police Conduct investigation but to discuss how we can collectively support the community.

All the agencies around the table recognise the distress felt by local people and have committed to jointly sponsor a grassroots-led initiative to create a community plan for Ely, which will respond to the long-term needs of residents. It will be focused on actions and outcomes for people in Ely and Caerau.

The First Minister and I were clear this work will be done in genuine partnership with the people of Ely and Caerau. We want to listen, to learn and to draw on the strengths and local knowledge of residents and respond to their concerns.

We also agreed to explore what we can do together to provide more immediate support for children and young people over the summer months.

To support this community-led work it was agreed that I will chair a reference group which will bring together the local authority, schools, primary care services, youth justice services, the police, other relevant agencies, and the voices of children and young people as a resource for those developing the community plan.

We were all clear that this group would fully respect and engage with existing local and regional partnerships. I will provide further detail about this in due course.

The work we do in Ely and Caerau will help inform wider programmes to engage with and support other communities across Wales.

We are determined that this Community Plan will ensure the local community in Ely and Caerau can recover from the events of this week.