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North Wales Police 'hubs' closure welcomed

The closure of controversial 'hubs' used by North Wales Police to group officers in central locations has increased "visible policing", says the force's commissioner.

The hubs were introduced in 2011 as a way to save money but had been unpopular with the public.

Following a review they were stopped.

Commissioner Winston Roddick said it was reasonable for people to expect police cover for specific areas rather than being based centrally.

Mr Roddick told BBC Wales it was not unreasonable to expect a police officer to be on duty covering a specific area rather than being based centrally and have to travel to an incident.

He said that although the hub system could work in an area such as Flint or Wrexham it did not work in rural areas.

"It proved not to be a good system in a very short time and I'm very glad that those responsible for putting it there changed their minds and got rid of them.

"Now instead of remote policing, we have a policing system based upon presence in a locality rather than having to come several miles after an incident occurred.

"By the time police go there either the incident had worsened or the culprits had escaped.

"Nothing deters crime more than visible policing," he added.

One community where the hub system was in place was in the town of Bala, Gwynedd.

When a Slovakian national, Branislav Gula, was beaten to death last November his girlfriend tried to get help by running to the town's police station, which at the time was not manned.

The situation was compounded by the fact she did not speak English and did not understand that she should use the phone outside the empty station to call for help.

A police community support officer in the town was eventually approached in the street.

The police hub for the town was 10 miles (16km) away in Corwen.

Another Slovakian national, Julius Hecko was subsequently sentenced to 12 years in prison for Mr Gula's manslaughter.

Dilwyn Morgan the county councillor for Bala said: "Things are now improving as three officers are now based in the town.

"Police are back at the police station," he said.

North Wales Police district inspector for Gwynedd south, Mark Armstrong, said: "North Wales Police constantly review staffing levels and have engaged with the local community and councillors to meet demands and expectations.

"We have done a lot of work in Bala and will continue to work closely with the local councillors, community leaders and businesses to reduce crime and reassure the local community," he added.

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