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FIGHTING CRIME IN ENGLAND AND IN THE WORLD: A NEW APPROACH

The Government's approach to fighting crime involves a radical shift in power from Whitehall to local communities. The police and their partners will be given far greater freedom to do their jobs and use their discretion. The public will have more power to hold the police and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to account and feel empowered to reclaim their communities. This shift will be accompanied by a new and overdue focus on serious and organized crime at a national level. Success will not be judged by a myriad of centrally mandated targets. It will be judged by the public on the simple fact of whether crime has fallen.

Central to our approach to fighting crime is police reform. Central to that reform is the replacement of bureaucratic accountability - and with it, the whole machinery of targets, performance management and initiatives - with local, democratic accountability. This will put the public in charge, making the police directly accountable to their communities through the election of Police and Crime Commissioners and mandatory local beat meetings. From May 2012, Police and Crime Commissioners will have real powers to make a difference - setting force budgets and the police and crime plan, holding Chief Constables to account and able to appoint and dismiss them.

Police are launching a new internet-based weapon in the fight against street crime.

The online guide to investigating and solving robberies has been developed by Centrex, the service's training and development authority. It is designed to help officers, from the most junior to the most senior, stay in touch with the latest developments in crime fighting. The computer-based Street Robbery Policing Knowledge Map, as it is known, replaces paper manuals which are cumbersome and quickly date. The "map" was piloted by Thames Valley Police.

Officers were able to access it for the best methods of interviewing witnesses and looking for clues like DNA at a crime scene.

Developments in artificial intelligence and machine learning mean that technology has a growing role to play in upholding the law. Even better news for those who have been victims of crime, technology is going one step further and helping to predict crime to prevent it from happening in the first place.

Countries around the world are at different stages of deploying this kind of tech - Dubai, for example, is charging ahead, having already introduced its first robot police officer. Through the robot's in-built touchscreen, the public can report crimes and even pay fines. Dubai aims for 25% of its police force to be robotic by 2050, but police officers in Dubai shouldn't worry, the initiative is all about bolstering the force, rather than replacing them!

A key to the success of crime-reporting apps is the anonymity they allow, believes James Wise, partner at London-based VC Balderton Capital. “Particularly with incidents of hate crime,” Wise said, “anonymity helps a lot, and users feel that an app is more anonymous than a phone call.” Apps are also more likely to turn the reporting of crime into a commonplace habit, Wise thinks, due to the amount of time we spend on our smartphones. The effortlessness of punching a few commands into an electronic app, it is hoped, will counter a historic reluctance to inform police about certain crimes. It was this desire to make crime-reporting easy that led a group of Oxford University students to create the ‘First Response’ app in 2015, which provides emergency information to victims of rape, encouraging them to preserve scientific evidence and telling them how best to contact police.

These are obviously much harder times now politically for Liberal Democrats and financially for all local authorities. Not all these ideas will be relevant now or affordable or appropriate in a non-urban area. But they give a flavour of how a Liberal Democrat approach to crime and anti-social behaviour puts residents at the heart of everything we do, seeks to protect those at risk in the community and tries to break the cycle of crime. We hope the ideas can be used around the country in your work and campaigning too.

List of references:

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