

Closing the Gap: A Review of the 'Fitness for Purpose' of the Current Structure of Policing in England and Wales

Purpose

- 1 To provide Members with details of the HMIC report, 'Closing the Gap: A Review of the 'Fitness for Purpose' of the Current Structure of Policing in England and Wales', together with the response of the Home Secretary to the reports' findings and the key issues for local government.
- 2 Members are asked to seek to agree a position for the Association on these proposals.

Background

- 3 The HMIC report, 'Closing the Gap: A Review of the 'Fitness for Purpose' of the Current Structure of Policing in England and Wales', was published on 16 September 2005.
- 4 The report provides a professional assessment of the ability of the current structure of the 43 police forces in England and Wales to provide effective and sustainable protective services to a common standard in the future. Protective services have been grouped under the following 7 headings:
 - Counter terrorism and extremism
 - Serious organised and cross border crime
 - Civil contingencies and emergency planning
 - Critical incident management
 - Major crime (homicide)
 - Public order
 - Strategic roads policing
- 5 The report sets out an analysis of the current key issues on capability and capacity of protective services, the economics of policing and risks posed by organised criminality. The report concludes that while Basic Command Unit (BCU) arrangements and neighbourhood policing provides a solid platform for the future, the current 30 year old, 43 force structure of widely different sizes and capabilities does not.
- 6 HMIC found the need for a more efficient, integrated operating platform above BCU level. The report stresses, however, the importance of 'community affinity' to local services in providing a wider recognisable role and an accountable face in localities, and that any new structure must be small enough to relate to local communities.

- 7 The report puts forward a set of options for change, supported by a number of design considerations which could enable the creation of a strong configuration which supports dynamic protective services and the necessary development of neighbourhood policing.
- 8 In a letter to Chief Constables and Chairs of Police Authorities in England and Wales on 22 September 2005, however, the Home Secretary outlined that the government shared the view that “the establishment of strategic forces offers the best long term business solution”. The letter also stated that they believed that this option would lead to “enhanced capacity and capability in the provision of protective services, economies of scale and commensurate efficiency savings, and clarity of responsibilities and governance” and that there was a prospect of strategic forces being established over the next 18 to 30 months.
- 9 The Home Secretary has requested Police Forces and Police Authorities to consider future policing structures in two key phases:
 - By the end of October 2005 – identify a shortlist of the most promising options for change within each region.
 - By 23 December 2005 – produce a final report with the preferred option for change.
- 10 The parameters set by the Home Secretary are:
 - That the probable solution is for ‘strategic forces’ with a minimum of 4000 officers or 6000 officers/staff combined
 - That the proposals should not split existing forces
 - That proposals should not cross Government Regional Office Boundaries
- 11 The Home Secretary has indicated that he is prepared to consider other models put forward, but that a compelling case would need to be made for models which do not meet the above parameters. Currently none of the Welsh Police Forces meets the required minimum figures of 4000 officers or 6000 officers/staff combined.

Key Findings of the HMIC Review

Police Organisational Fitness

- 12 Forces of over 4,000 officers or 6,000 staff tended to meet the standard across the seven protective services mentioned. They demonstrated good reactive capability with a clear measure of proactive capacity.
- 13 The report concluded that there was “stark evidence that very few forces assessed fully meet the required standard. It is apparent that size matters. Large forces are likely to have much better capability and resilience whilst smaller forces in many cases find it hard to provide services to an acceptable standard. That said, being bigger is not enough to guarantee strong protective services. The environment also matters e.g. the presence of cities, sports activities or annual

events, and exposure to risk and challenges also enhance the repertoire of protected services that forces offer the public”.

- 14 Vulnerability of smaller forces was evident in relation to counter terrorism and acts of extremism, serious and organised crime and public order.
- 15 In relation to major crime, success relied on forces having dedicated Major Investigation Teams (MITS) or not. The capability in road policing appears to be independent of size and is overwhelmingly focused on casualty reduction rather than a wider remit around criminality.

Performance Management

- 16 Whilst many police officers acknowledged that the existing structure was inadequate for the present, let alone the future, they were uncertain about the best way forward. Protecting the public is at least much about readiness to respond as was evident in the 7 July 2005 London bombings, as it is about conventional outcomes.

Shortcomings on Protective Services

- 17 These can be contributed to a number of factors beyond those areas discussed earlier. There has been a rise in the national focus on volume crimes over the past 10 to 15 years coupled with development of performance regimes and regulatory/support infrastructure to complement that focus. This problem is unevenly spread.

Organised Crime

- 18 Particular effort has been made to map out markets associated with organised criminality without relying on conventional police information. This generally points to organised criminality being concentrated around metropolitan areas. When viewed in conjunction with conventional police data, and recourse to information on drug use, counterfeiting and people trafficking from external agencies reveals a different picture of organised crime markets. This approach suggests that these problems are widespread, vibrant and growing, with only nine forces being listed as having a relatively lower level of activity. There is good evidence to believe that other risks such as those posed by civil contingencies, terrorism and domestic extremism are widespread rather than narrowly based.

What Does the Consolidated Picture Tells Us?

- 19 By combining the results of this national assessment with the data obtained from the Risk Assessment, plus other data, they have been able to identify those regions of the country that are at most at risk. Vulnerable forces and groups of forces in providing protective and volume services are not evenly spread even on a very regional basis. Most vulnerable parts of the country do not always have large capable forces within the geographic area that could easily support them. In contrast some are relatively strong and proposals for change will require careful consideration and a measure of pragmatism.

- 20 The report notes that it is only a matter of time before the identified gaps elsewhere are exposed if early action is not taken.

The Economics of Protective Services

- 21 The case for change will need to take proper account of economic factors. The current structure of policing does not support the efficient provision of protective and support services and change may improve efficiency. However, the report notes that the analysis for this review has been hampered by the absence of comparative financial information on the cost of protective service outcomes.

Stakeholders

- 22 Little work has been done on the way members of the public identify with police forces. Some partners and local politicians identify with districts/BCU level services while a smaller but important group, value links with county/super at county level. This suggests that public resistance to combining smaller forces can be eased to some degree by emphasising those local arrangements i.e. BCU at neighbourhood level will not change. On the whole the Association of Police Authorities is broadly supportive of the collaboration and whilst the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) generally agrees the need for change, some Chief Officers are more inclined towards amalgamation while others favour regional support relationships.
- 23 The report notes that the government would seek co-terminosity in any new arrangements.

Creating a 21st Century Police Service

- 24 The evidence regarding capability, criminal risks and economic factors points to significant inadequacies in the present approach, which will not be remedied by the present organisation of policing. **That said the methodology is configured in a way which weights certain factors above others and does not adequately deal with the identity, geography and topography of Wales.**

Restructuring

- 25 The existing 43 force structure is over 30 years. It matches local government borders and has emphasised the need to drive down volume crime and provide local policing with considerable success. But current scope and scale act as restraints to improve protective services and the economics associated with them.
- 26 In creating a structure with this fixed purpose, the goal should be to create organisations that are large enough to provide a full suite of sustainable services yet still small enough to be able to relate to local communities.
- 27 The report notes that BCU's are the crucial building blocks for both the current structure and the possible new arrangements and sets out the design considerations for forces in the future:
- Size: the review indicates a minimum size of 4000 police officers.

- Capability: changes must take account of the capability of potential partners.
- Criminal markets: understanding of the underlying criminal markets and contacts which any new entity is to operate.
- Geography: scale and demography may require a measure of pragmatism
- Risk: opportunities to reduce risk are maximised by considering current capability.
- Co-terminosity: consider established political and partner boundaries.
- Identity: whilst accepting the local focus public perception, historical and natural boundaries should be maximised where possible.

Options for Change

28 The report sets out five options:

- Collaboration: this would support the status quo but is not favoured given the modest scale of collaboration to date.
- Lead force for specialist capabilities: this would have significant implications for smaller forces.
- Lead regional force: one force within an ACPO region being resourced as a lead force to host personnel, financial and logistics on behalf of other forces in that region.
- Federation of forces: forces clearly below standard could self reform by contracting together to be served by a common set of protective services. Importantly, local forces would be preserved. Local policing (BCU) would remain local, decentralised and relatively independent.
- Strategic forces: the most radical option with forces being re-grouped against a framework of design considerations such as critical mass, criminality and geography. The report notes that this would be a prescriptive form approach as well as, possibly the most disruptive and least locally friendly. However, the report states that BCU's need not be disrupted whilst force level services are rationalised. This could happen relatively quickly if a new executive authority were appointed at an early stage. This is the option which the Home Secretary supported in his letter to Chief Constables and Chairs of Police Authorities.

The Response by Police Forces and Police Authorities in Wales

29 In response to the Home Secretary's announcement of plans to enhance policing structures across England and Wales, the four Welsh Police Forces and Police Authorities have been working together to address the many issues involved in the proposals. A project team has been established which includes specialists from policing across Wales. The project team has been working to identify, evaluate and assess all the options for policing structures in Wales in the future, in line with the criteria set out by the Home Secretary.

- 30 Following a number of meetings drawing on the expertise, experience and knowledge of specialist police staff and officers, and also involving the WLGA and the Welsh Assembly Government, four options are now under consideration. These are:
- No change: maintaining the status quo as four existing police forces/authorities
 - Two forces: a merger between North Wales and Dyfed-Powys; and a merger between South Wales and Gwent
 - Two forces: a merger between North Wales, Dyfed-Powys and Gwent; with South Wales remaining as a stand-alone force/authority
 - A single Police Force/Authority for Wales.
- 31 The four options were discussed at a meeting of the Strategic Board (consisting of the four Chief Constables and the four Police Authority Chairs) on 19 October 2005. The outcome of these discussions are still to be discussed by one of the Police Authorities and further details of the discussions will be provided at the meeting on 28 October. The report to the Home Office with the final agreed options will be submitted in the week ending 28 October 2005.
- 32 Based on the strict assessment model set by the Home Office, the option for a single strategic force scored the highest by a considerable margin. This option scored almost twice as high as the other three options. North Wales Police Authority have expressed concern for the potential negative impact the creation of a strategic police force and authority may have on services provided in North Wales.
- 33 Should the option for one strategic police force and authority be put forward as the preferred option in the final report on the 23 December 2005, further discussions would need to be held as to developing the detail of how this would operate in Wales. There is currently a strong sense that some sort of regional governance and accountability structure between the strategic force and BCU level would need to be implemented. A potential governance model for Wales was presented to a meeting of the Police Authorities of Wales on 14 October 2005, which is attached at **Appendix 1**.
- 34 Whichever option is put forward as the preferred option, there will be a need for both political and public support. In light of the very tight timescale to which the review is operating, the National Assembly of Wales is currently seeking to secure additional time.

Key Issues For Local Government

- 35 There are a number of factors arising out of any restructure of police forces which local government needs to consider. How can we ensure:
- Co-terminosity with BCU, Community Safety Partnerships and local government boundaries and support joined-up working by all partners across community safety;
 - Synergy with other police reform agendas such as Neighbourhood policing;

- Assurances that the resources available to Basic Command Units are ring fenced;
- The proposed strategic police forces have accountability structures in place at a local and possibly regional level which must include local authorities;
- Clear consultative links to local authorities and the communities they serve
- That governance of any new police area's includes local authority representation;
- That, where possible, historic boundaries are protected; and
- Any new performance management framework reflects local needs and does not lead to any additional burdens.

36 Within the new arrangements there may also be potential impacts on scrutiny, performance management framework and member training/capacity.

Recommendations

37 It is recommended that:

37.1 the key findings of the HMIC Review and the subsequent request by the Home Secretary that Police Forces and Local Authorities should put forward proposals for change be noted;

37.2 the three options which are to be submitted to the Home Secretary by the Welsh Police Forces and Authorities be endorsed; and

37.3 members are asked whether it is possible for the WLGA to confirm a preferred option from the proposals submitted or whether another approach is suggested.

Author: Steve Thomas WLGA Director
Tel: 029 2046 8610
E-mail: steve.thomas@wлга.gov.uk