

Scrutiny Management Commission

Monday 28 November 2005

Police Force Restructuring

The Chief Constable told the Commission that it had become increasingly difficult for Police Forces to respond strategically in a short time scale, which is partly due to the way that the Police Service is organised into 43 forces. He said that the conclusion of Her Majesty's Inspector of Police Constabularies, Denis O'Connor, had been that while Basic Command Units and the local police structure remains fit for purpose, the 43 force structure needs to be examined. He outlined the constraints within which the Police Authority and Chief Constables had to work in order to present their options for change.

They should not seek to create new forces which crossed Government Regional Office boundaries. Nor should they divide existing forces into 2 or more parts, between new forces that were being proposed. There was also a constraint around the size of the force. A strategic force is defined as one that is self-sufficient in terms of resources and better placed to handle incidents such as the Soham murders or the multiple London suicide bombs in July 2005. This is considered unviable with less than 4000 police officers or 6000 staff overall.

The Chief Constable told the Commission that two options were identified as viable for further consideration, within these constraints specified:

- The amalgamation of Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire as one police force and Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire as another
- The merger of all five forces in the region (Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire) into one regional force.

He also said that a preferred option had to be put forward by 23 December 2005.

The Chair of the Police Authority Janet Birkin confirmed the outline given by David Coleman.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from the members present.

Councillor Peter Berry expressed concern that a larger force would result in a loss of officers with experience of the local areas that they patrolled. He added that as a Councillor, it was reassuring to meet officers who had detailed knowledge of the City and his ward.

The Chief Constable responded by telling the Commission that the Home Office had indicated that it did not expect any change to affect neighbourhood policing. He said that more resources were being put into neighbourhood policing over the next two financial years, which would equate to around another 250 Police Community Support Officers within Derbyshire who would be put into neighbourhood teams.

He told the Commission that where he did anticipate there may be significant change is that Councils will have a diminished voice on the Strategic Police Authority. Current legislation allows a regional authority to be created on the same basis as the existing county based authorities. He said that this could mean 17-23 members for the whole region of five counties. Derby City currently has 2 members on the Police Authority, but could have less in the future.

Councillor Turner asked where the proof was that pointed to 4000 being the optimum number of officers that a force should have.

David Coleman responded by referring to the research carried out by Denis O'Connor, which had assessed all the forces against the seven "protective services". These are concerned with strategic services over and above local policing:

1. Major Crime (e.g. homicide)
2. Serious or organised crime
3. Counter terrorism
4. Public order (e.g. large scale events)
5. Road Policing
6. Critical incidents
7. Civil contingencies

Denis had found that there was a general correlation between the size of a force and its ability to respond to protective services. David Coleman also pointed out that Derbyshire along with many other forces was deemed not to meet the required standard to deliver protective services and was considered to be insufficient in size.

The Chief Constable also pointed out that by its nature policing always has more demands placed upon it than resources and that an ability to prioritise those resources is essential.

The Chair of the Police Authority said that she would hope that there would be an improved service as a result of the changes being considered. She said that a chief constable with a larger pool of resources will be able to deal with level 2 issues better as he or she will have greater flexibility to respond.

Janet also told the Commission that the Government intends to protect neighbourhood policing, which is very important to the Police Authority, who needed reassurance that it would be. She told the Commission that until the Police Authority get some of these assurances it will be difficult to choose a

preferred option. Janet said that some of the required information will be related to financing the change, including precepting powers, which is currently not available.

Councillor Graves asked the Chief Constable and the Chair of the Police Authority to indicate what they thought the optimum number of officers would be.

The Chief Constable said that if 4000 police officers were taken to be the optimum size then Derbyshire were currently several hundred officers below that figure. Janet Birkin told the Commission that Derbyshire was under resourced, but that she could not comment on the police operations.

Councillor Care referred to the Chief Constable's comment that it was increasingly difficult for the police to respond and asked whether this was due to an increase in the number of incidents or a higher expectation of the response from the public. She also asked whether the answer would be improved high level cooperation, structure or reverse agreements so that the police could respond quickly to incidents.

The Chief Constable responded by telling the Commission that investigations are more sophisticated and the demands on investigation teams much greater than they were 20 or 30 years ago. The media interest and coverage contributes to the public's expectations. Internal enquiries have also contributed to the higher demands on police forces. Investigations tend to be more in depth and require more resources now. There are more investigative demands, which arise from, for example, criminals' use of computers and mobile communications. He said that in his opinion incidents were not necessarily more frequent, but more a function of the type of enquiry carried out.

He gave an example of police involvement following the international incident of the Tsunami on 26 December 2004 and also the large police requirement at the G8 meeting at Breadsall Hilltop, which required 1100 officers earlier this year. He said that collaborations between forces do happen and there is a willingness to do so. He said that it was difficult to organise as there are 43 times the communication to have and it is perceived that fewer forces would make this easier. The benefit of a police force amalgamation would potentially be realised through a restructure of back office functions. For example in the East Midlands there are five training schools, five HR departments, estates departments and procurement departments. By rationalising these some savings could be identified. 85% of the police force's budget is spent on people and the savings in the back office could be redirected to front line services. The finances associated with these potential savings are not yet known.

Janet Birkin commented that this is the biggest decision that has been made in policing in some years and her concern is that the Home Secretary considered that this could all be addressed through strategic forces, in other words, making them bigger. She said that the Police Authority was concerned

that within a very limited timescale, from 19 September to 23 December that very little opportunity has been given to explore alternative ways to address the level 2 concerns. She said that police forces all agree that they need to be fit for purpose to address the identified gap. However she was not certain whether strategic forces were the best way of doing this.

Janet emphasised the concern that the tight timescale has given the Police Authority, who would wish to ensure that all the issues raised by the Chief Constable at this meeting could be addressed and a sound business case developed as a result.

Councillor Latham asked how big the force was in Derbyshire currently and if it were joined with Nottinghamshire or the other four counties how big it would be respectively. She asked for clarification that Rutland was included in Leicestershire. Councillor Latham also commented that she thought the Police Force and Authority were being rushed into making their decision.

The Chief Constable confirmed that Rutland was included in Leicestershire and provided the Commission with the following indicative figures:

	Officers	Staff	Total
Derbyshire	2100	1200	3300
Nottinghamshire + Derbyshire	4600	2500	7000
All five combined	9500	5000	14500

He added that he did not foresee a central control centre being used, due to the number of calls that would be experienced.

Councillor Graves asked about the effect for Derby residents and whether either David or Janet thought that the City would be the net losers in any amalgamation of forces.

Janet emphasised that at this stage in the process they have not seen a sound business case for either amalgamation. She said that the Police Authority needed to look longer term and that if Derbyshire was joined with a less well performing force it should work to bring that up to the standard. In addition she commented that with the right senior management structure in place good performance should be achievable and maintained at an appropriate level, provided the appropriate resources were available.

The Chief Constable told the Commission that he would be cautious about assuming that joining with Nottinghamshire would be a bad thing. Their current performance ought to be seen in the longer term as there was no reason to believe it would not improve in the future. He pointed out that Nottinghamshire is already better resourced than Derbyshire, with a budget of £25m more than Derbyshire and 400 more officers than him for a population that is 60,000 greater. In his opinion there are things that could be done to avoid Derbyshire losing resources.

Councillor Turner asked about the level 2 resourcing issue. He did not consider that this was a reason to amalgamate existing resources, but rather was a question of needing more resources. In addition he commented that the true crime figures are unknown as many people do not report crime as they consider there are not the resources to address them.

The Chief Constable referred to his earlier comments about the number of incidents not necessarily having increased, but rather that the nature of those incidents had changed, for example terrorism and international organised crime. He considered that the police needed to be able to respond in a more modern way. He outlined the differences between level 1 – level 3 crime, and pointed out that they are not mutually exclusive:

Level 1 – Local crime

Level 2 – Cross border crime

Level 3 – International crime

He said there is a belief in the Home Office, which he does not necessarily share that making the savings he alluded to earlier, would provide the necessary resource for front line policing. He said that there is some basis to think this would help address level 2 crimes, but it will not address it in full.

The Chair of the Police Authority said that she had recently attended the National Conference for the Association of Police Authorities at which the Minister of State Hazel Blears had been a speaker. Janet told the Commission that the general feeling at the conference was that National Police Authorities are concerned that they have not had any guidance as to how any restructuring would be financed and that in her opinion she does not think any additional funding will be made available. She said that the Minister had told the delegates that any amalgamated forces would be expected to be reconfigured in a way in which it could make the savings suggested by the Chief Constable earlier.

Councillor Skelton asked whether Nottinghamshire had a plan in place that would deal with its apparent internal issues.

The Chief Constable said that he would not normally comment on matters relating to the management of other forces. However, he understood that Nottinghamshire had been engaged with the Police Standards Unit and the Home Office and that a strategy was in place and showing some early signs of success.

Councillor Travis commented that what seemed to be emerging from the discussions at the meeting was that there was little time to make these important decisions. She also wanted to know if the French and Belgian police models had been considered, whether the possibility of a national police force had been looked at and if there is an argument for keeping the 43 forces as they are, but with enhanced cooperation to share specialist officers and equipment to deal with level 2 situations.

The Chief Constable said that he considered there was a potential alternative case for keeping the police force structures as they are and increasing collaboration even more than is currently done. He said that one of the difficulties has been that forces often find themselves in different financial situations, particularly with regard to the grants available. He gave an example that IT had been purchased separately by the five forces in the East Midlands who are on different contracts and timescales and there is an opportunity to combine this area for example. David also said that if collaboration were given a weight of compulsion by the Home Secretary that it could be made to work.

With regard to the European police service examples the Chief Constable was not certain whether those systems worked better than in Britain. He said that he does not think that a national police service would be considered appropriate due to the political power that this could bring to Chief Constables.

Janet added that the issue of collaboration had been raised at the National Conference and that Hazel Blears had made it clear that strategic Police forces is the best business case and that collaboration would have to be a large part of this. Janet said that collaboration would be in addition at that level and the Derbyshire Police Authority was reluctant to move into something about which they are not 100% certain, but at the same time there is benefit in engaging with the Government and to keep dialogue open.

Councillor Roberts considered that there is a great deal that the Council can do in relation to building a better police provision for the City of Derby about which he spoke specifically. He said that he didn't mind which option was pursued as long as the provision that the people of Derby experienced and were expecting will continue. He said that at its last meeting the Council had indicated that it would wish to work with the Chief Constable and the Police Authority to achieve the best result for the city. He asked if there was anything in addition that he could take back to the Council Cabinet that they should do to support the Chief Constable in maintaining and improving its current provision.

The Chief Constable commented that the level of cooperation that the Police experienced with the City of Derby was a real strength for progressing. He reiterated that there is a determination that neighbourhood policing will continue and improve. He said that there were plans to do this in place for the next 2 years and saw no reason why that should change even with the restructure that could take place. He added that he counted the City of Derby as one of the strongest supporters of policing and could not ask much more of them.

Janet added that while she would agree with what the Chief Constable said the Police Authority recognises a gap in the protective services and that they are not reluctant to change in order to move forward. She reiterated her comment that a preferred option could not be provided due to the lack of a sound business case or cost benefit analysis to demonstrate that strategic

forces are the way forward. She added that the Police Authority had good partnerships across the county and would be anxious that these continue whatever the final outcome. The Police Authority take into consideration the views of all their partnerships in the decision making process.

Councillor Jackson asked whether the proposed changes would make the Police more effective. She referred to a specific dispersal order that seemed to be working in her ward.

The Chief Constable said that these were powers that the police had nationally and that amalgamation wouldn't change these powers. He said that an amalgamation with Nottinghamshire may give an opportunity to release resources that both counties could benefit from, but that was only speculation at this stage. From his point view he would wish to make his police force as prepared as it could be for any resulting amalgamation.

Councillor Graves asked what public consultation had taken place with regard to this issue and when the final decision will take place.

Janet Birkin responded that only five weeks were available to put forward the options which fitted the pre determined criteria set out by the Home Office. Only once this had been established could any consultation take place. She also said that the deadline was too soon to indicate a preferred option and that the Home Office has been told that the region would not be responding until the financial costing had been considered, which would be early December. She said that the Police Authority had consulted as widely as it could in the time since the end of October 2005, which included partners, stakeholders, local authorities, the criminal justice board, providing a questionnaire on the website and giving radio interviews. She added that without costing information or a possible structure it was difficult to consult fully.

The Chief Constable added his frustration at the amount of time available to do this review.

Councillor Care asked if any feedback had been received from other regions.

Janet said that it was timely that the National Conference for the Association of Police Authorities had recently taken place as the general view there was that the timescales were a problem, that the criteria set down meant that the number of options available to some forces was limited to only one and that no sound business case had been put forward to indicate the benefits of any restructure. She said that the precepting arrangements were also an area of concern.

The Chief Constable said that there is a feeling of inevitability that some sort of change will take place and that none of the Police Forces in the East Midlands region are opposed to a change. He said that it was recognised regionally that in order to deliver a more strategic and effective service that some change will need to take place. He added that the East Midlands are

seen as a region that has adopted a very mature approach to the review compared to others, who are either opposed to it or will not work with their neighbouring forces.

Councillor Travis commented that she got the impression from this meeting that Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire would be able to work collaboratively.

The Chief Constable said that he has less concerns about working with Nottinghamshire than the general views that he has picked up from other people. He went on to say that the five force option was likely to yield the greatest efficiency savings, but would also be the one that would take longer and be potentially more difficult. However he emphasised that at this stage he does not think that one option is obviously better than the other if at all.

Councillor Skelton asked about whether indications of when the changes would be in place had been given.

Janet said that a preferred option had to be indicated by 23 December 2005 and that the decision would depend on information from the Government to reassure the Police Authority of its concerns. Once that has been given it is anticipated that the Home Secretary will make his decision by February 2006, with a wish to implement the decision by April 2007. Janet also pointed out that this will depend upon whether the Police Authority does this voluntarily otherwise the timescales would move out by at least four months, due to the Parliamentary processes that would have to be pursued.

The Chief Constable added his own view that there is an electoral timetable in place and that the Government would probably wish to have any change in place as soon as possible therefore.

The Chair thanked Janet and David for attending and giving the Commission an indication of the situation in which they currently find themselves.