

Summary of police authority roles and responsibilities

Local police authorities, together with chief officers and the Home Secretary, make up the **tripartite relationship** responsible for the governance of policing in England and Wales:

- the **Home Secretary** sets national strategic priorities for policing, expresses the will of Government as it applies to policing, and is answerable to Parliament about how this is carried out;
- the **local police authority** sets local policing priorities, provides independent local oversight of the police, holds the chief officer to account for the policing services delivered, and is itself accountable to local communities for how it does its job; and
- the **chief officer** is responsible for the direction and control of the police force, and is accountable to the police authority for the delivery of policing services.

The primary purpose of a police authority is to provide strategic direction and oversight of its police force. The authority's fundamental statutory duties are to:

- maintain an efficient and effective local police force for its area;
- hold the chief officer to account;
- set the policing precept and police budget (except in the MPA area, where the MPA recommends the budget to the Mayor of London who sets the precept, and the City of London which operates different arrangements through the Corporation of London);
- ensure arrangements are in place within the force for proper financial management;
- ensure that the force acts within its powers and in accordance with the law;
- appoint the chief officer of police and senior police officers;
- oversee professional standards and complaints issues within the force;
- ensure that the local police force keeps improving, including receiving HMIC force inspection reports and responding to HMIC about implementing recommendations;
- consult local people and ensure that their views are reflected in the nature and style of policing and local policing objectives;
- work in partnership with others to reduce crime and disorder and the fear of crime;
- secure collaboration between forces, monitor their force's compliance with human rights legislation, and promote diversity;
- set local policing objectives within the national framework set by the Home Secretary, and publish plans and reports about the policing of their area;
- monitor force performance against plans and budgets;
- use discretionary power to require the chief officer to submit a written report on any matters connected with the policing of the area;
- meet employer's liabilities, including health and safety requirements, and ensure the force does likewise;
- ensure that the force has adequate arrangements for the management of risk; and
- publish annual accounts to demonstrate the authority's stewardship of public funds.

The responsibility for operational activities and the day-to-day management of the force rests with the chief officer.

To meet the statutory duties placed on police authorities, members are responsible – collectively – for the following functions:

Engaging with local people

A key role of police authorities is to ensure that local people have a say in how they are policed and that their views are reflected in the nature and style of local policing. Police authorities are required to consult with local communities to ascertain their views on policing and to elicit their support for and co-operation with the police. Engaging in an effective and ongoing dialogue with local people and being transparent and accountable to them is therefore critical to the work that authorities do.

Scrutinising and monitoring police performance

It is the police authority's job to hold the chief constable and force to account, on behalf of local people, for the policing services delivered. Accordingly, one of the police authority's most important duties is to set standards and targets to improve local policing services, to monitor closely and to scrutinise all aspects of force performance against those targets and standards, and ensure that action is taken to remedy weak or poor performance.

Publishing a local policing plan annually

The local policing plan sets out in detail how the community will be policed in over the course of the following three years. It includes the local policing priorities, which are arrived at following consultation with local people, and performance targets for the police force. This document is drafted by the chief officer and the authority must consult him/her about any changes to the draft. But public accountability requires that ownership of the plan rests with the police authority. To inform this process, police authorities are required to:

- engage with local communities about their policing concerns and priorities – this is a wide-ranging and on-going process;
- set key objectives, performance measures and targets, both for local priorities and for strategic priorities set by the Home Secretary; and
- ensure the plan includes strategies for improvements to the policing service delivered, including collaborative arrangements with other forces and efficiency savings.

Setting the policing precept (where appropriate) and annual budget

Police authorities are responsible for setting the police budget, aligned to priorities for policing in the force area, and then for holding the chief constable to account for how the budget is spent. Police authorities receive approximately 50 to 75 per cent of funding via central government grants, and set a precept on the council tax according to locally determined need (except in the MPA and City of London Police Authority – see above). It therefore follows that police authority members must be ready to acquire an understanding of how the funding system operates, and who is responsible for what. The chief officer is usually responsible for managing the financial resources allocated to him in the budget, although authority members will typically be involved in agreeing large contracts and capital expenditure.

Publishing an annual report and local policing summaries

The police authority is responsible for producing an annual report, to inform the community on the extent to which the local policing plan has been achieved. This will be informed by the chief officer's end of year report to the police authority. In addition, police authorities must publish, at least annually, a document that sets out how the local policing priorities will be met, as well as an objective assessment of the force's performance for the previous year. These are called local policing summaries and are circulated to every household in the local area.

Participating in local partnerships

Police authorities, along with chief officers, local authorities, health authorities and the fire and rescue service, all contribute to local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (community safety partnerships in Wales). The partnerships are responsible for producing an annual partnership plan informed by the results of a strategic assessment for the area. The plan sets out on a rolling three year basis the means by which each member of the partnership will work together to tackle local crime and drugs issues and anti-social behaviour. These local strategies are one of the elements that contribute to the development of the wider local policing plan.

Police authorities also contribute to a range of other local partnerships in the public and criminal justice sectors, such as local criminal justice boards, and have a duty to co-operate in developing local area agreements, which are the main vehicles through which councils deliver their priorities and plans. All of these partnerships will inform aspects of policing and local priorities for policing, and in turn will be informed by what the local police are doing or planning to do. In order to ensure all this activity is effectively joined up, police authority members play a key role in representing the authority on these partnerships, and individual members may, for instance, be asked to take on a lead role in a particular partnership on behalf of the authority.

Other statutory functions

In addition, police authorities have a number of other statutory functions. The most important of these include:

- monitoring the handling by the police force of complaints from the general public;
- directly considering any complaints against the chief, deputy and assistant chief constables;
- acting as the disciplinary authority for the chief, deputy and assistant chief constables;
- meeting the requirements as a police authority and monitoring the force's compliance with the provisions of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, the Disability Discrimination Act 2005 and the Equality Act 2006, to:
 - eliminate unlawful discrimination and harassment;
 - promote equality of opportunity;
 - promote good race relations between people of different racial groups and positive attitudes towards disabled persons;
 - have regard to the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons; and
 - have regard to the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life;
- to monitor the force's compliance with the Human Rights Act 1998;
- to secure collaboration with other police authorities in the provision of services where this would be in the interests of efficiency and/or effectiveness;
- to monitor the performance of the force against the delivery of the local policing plan;
- to secure the views of local communities in relation to the policing of the area and secure their cooperation with the police in preventing crime; and
- to operate an independent custody visiting scheme to provide a check on persons detained in police cells.

Key police authority relationships

To be effective, police authorities must retain their independence while engaging in a series of constructive partnerships to secure the effective and efficient delivery of the police service for their area. Key partnerships are with:

Local communities - through a range of consultation and engagement processes, to ensure that the diverse needs of all groups are properly reflected in local strategies and policing plans, and that decisions reached on policing priorities or on the local precept are reported back to communities.

The police themselves – both at senior force level and at divisional level, to develop police authority members' awareness and understanding of the pressures and challenges they face, without compromising the authority's statutory duty to maintain effective, independent scrutiny and oversight.

The Secretary of State – the Home Secretary, together with police authorities and chief police officers, forms the tripartite relationship responsible for the governance of policing in England and Wales. Much of the interface with the Home Office on issues facing police authorities will be mediated through the APA, but the Home Secretary's statutory responsibilities impact directly on individual police authorities through, for example, allocation of police grant and approval of the appointment of senior officers. Police authorities provide information, advice and views on issues that impact upon their locality through the APA.

Local authorities, health authorities and the fire and rescue service – particularly in relation to local strategic partnerships, crime and disorder reduction partnerships (community safety partnerships in Wales) and the development of local area agreements, or strategies to reduce crime and fear of crime.

Criminal justice agencies, such as the courts, probation service, Crown Prosecution Service and local criminal justice boards – to ensure that the police play an effective role in bringing offenders to justice and in protecting the rights of suspects, victims and witnesses.

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) – which provides professional advice and support not only to the Home Secretary and police forces, but to police authorities as well, by promoting good practice and offering advice on the appointment of chief officers.

The Audit Commission and local auditors – who promote good practice in policing by encouraging economy, efficiency and effectiveness in both the management and delivery of services.