

“POLICING – BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER”

RESPONSE OF LANCASHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY

1. Introduction

The Authority (“LPA”) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Government’s consultation paper on the proposed next stage of policing reform. It shares the desire of the government for a steady movement towards “an engaged, responsive, truly representative local police service operating within clearly understood statutory and partnership arrangements.” It recognises that there are a number of routes through which this movement can be pursued, and that sometimes finely balanced choices will be needed as to which route to select.

In making these choices, LPA believes it is important to be guided by the views of the local people whom the police serve. The Authority has therefore sought to inform its response by using material from a variety of sources of consultation. In particular, it has arranged for a specific telephone consultation exercise to be undertaken with some 400 members of its joint citizens’ panel “Opinion!” on a number of key options presented in the paper. The detailed results of this exercise are appended to the current response. It has also reviewed earlier surveys of all 3000+ members of the panel for information that has a bearing on the consultation paper. The Authority has also sought views through its existing structures, including its community meetings, committee structure and website. Last but not least, it has drawn upon the advice of the Lancashire Constabulary itself.

One general point is worth making at the outset. The “direction of travel” desired in the consultation paper can only be pursued if all parties to the tripartite structure follow it together. There are certainly implications for the way Forces and Authorities operate, but there are also implications for central government. A truly local police service needs the space and the resources to respond to the local situation. Central government needs to play its part in providing these, or expectations will be raised which cannot be delivered; the resulting disillusionment would do great damage to the connection between the community and its policing that the consultation paper is so concerned to reinforce.

2. Increasing Community Engagement

Information about policing for communities

There is a mass of information potentially available about policing, and a considerable number of routes by which it can be distributed. Like many authorities, LPA produces a free newspaper for every household in its area (jointly with the Constabulary), operates its own website, briefs its citizens’

panel several times a year, and runs regular community meetings. The Constabulary, with its greater resources, is able to do considerably more. The issue is really about selecting out that information which resonates with communities, and delivering it in a way to which they can relate. This argues for information pitched at the level of the community, and provided locally i.e. within its boundaries. A recent survey of citizens' panel preferences for obtaining information about the Constabulary indicated a strong preference for direct personal access to information, whether through the telephone (35% at present; 47% preferred), the website (23% at present, 18% preferred) or visiting the local police station (14% at present, 18% preferred). A separate survey suggests a willingness to engage with new visual ways of presenting information, with a clear majority of respondents both understanding and appreciating the "police monitor" presentation of comparative performance information. Experience in community meetings shows that those attending are "turned off" by lengthy statistical presentations on the position for the policing division as a whole, and are only really engaged when the discussion turns to incidents and issues that are recognisable locally. Feedback on what the police are doing about these matters is generally of greatest interest.

Visibility and Accessibility of the Police

Lancashire people are no different from others in wanting to see their local officers on the streets. 96% of the citizens' panel thought it important to see police officers in their area, with 41% describing it as essential and 40% regarding it as very important. When asked why, 58% thought such a presence was a deterrent to criminal or anti-social behaviour, and 41% said it reassured the public. LPA has responded strongly to this view. It has increased its budget specifically to provide 80 additional "community beat managers" (CBM's) in 2003/04, following a specific budget consultation that showed strong willingness to pay extra for such an improvement in the service. It has also fully endorsed the Chief Constable in leading the way nationally in the recruitment of Police Community Support Officers and in devising a local Accreditation Scheme for employers of similar staff. LPA will be developing measures for the extent of "front-line" policing actually delivered in the area as Activity-Based Costing information becomes available, but in the meantime has closely monitored the appointment of the additional CBM's to satisfy itself that the "contract" with the council-tax paying community is being delivered. It is encouraging that in a recent survey, over half of the citizens' panel report seeing a police officer in their area within the week prior to the survey being carried out. Having said that, it is also important that the Force is not unbalanced by a preoccupation with the "bobby on the beat" to the exclusion of all else.

Use of Specials

LPA recognises that recruitment and deployment of the Special Constabulary is primarily an area where Forces should comment. If however government wants to encourage employers to support the Specials (or other forms of volunteering) it should consider what it might do to incentivise employers in this direction. Some form of tax break for employers who are prepared to

release their staff in this way (perhaps by amendment to the National Insurance regime) could for example be helpful.

Volunteers

In Lancashire the Constabulary have launched a major new initiative on the recruitment of volunteers, drawing in part from their detailed knowledge of similar practices in the USA, and the authority have enthusiastically supported them in this. The Best Value review programme was amended specifically to incorporate a review of the volunteers initiative this year. A majority of the citizens' panel (57%) have supported the use of volunteers in policing, but around a third (35%) had mixed feelings about the idea, indicating that such programmes should be carefully launched and properly resourced. The panel expected volunteers to be properly trained and given regular appraisals. They felt they should be directed to tasks essentially standing at the interface between the public and their police: resourcing enquiry desks, staffing mobile exhibitions, giving crime prevention advice, and supporting victims of crime. It is important to recognise that the benefits of this positioning flow both ways: the community get a more informed relationship with their police, but the police also learn more about how their community would like them to operate. Working with volunteers has the potential to bring a sharper focus on customer care on to the "inside" of the Force itself. This is not however to detract from the wide range of existing volunteer organisations and community groups (such as Neighbourhood Watch) who already play a role in assisting the police in their activity.

Community Groups

Lancashire is an area with a strong community tradition, but its communities are very diverse and face a range of quite different situations. A large majority of the panel (84%) felt they could have an impact in making their area a better place to live, and feeling safe in their community was seen as of primary importance in this. However, panel members also felt some degree of "powerlessness": only 21% agreed they could influence decisions affecting the area, and many experienced personal difficulty in "becoming involved" (due to eg inflexible or demanding work schedule, transportation, inadequate child care). In this connection, LPA is very pleased that the Constabulary is one of eight forces piloting the National Restoring Reassurance Programme in two wards of the County. Much of this work is about community empowerment, demonstrating to two disadvantaged but quite different communities that they can make a difference to their environment. It is important that experiments like this are allowed to proceed flexibly, not imposed in a "one-size-fits-all" approach, and that they are – crucially – developed and resourced in a way that enables them to become self-supporting once the focus moves on to other areas of need. In launching these initiatives, as much attention needs to be paid to making them sustainable in the longer term as to achieving quick wins in the short term.

Business Sector

LPA agrees that to some extent, the business sector remains an unexploited resource for policing purposes. The loss of the direct funding link when the National Business Rate was introduced no doubt has been a factor. Having said that, the Constabulary have developed good links with local business in combating anti-social behaviour in town centres (eg “BAND” – Burnley Against Night-time Disorder). In addition, there is a longstanding general partnership with business on the subject of crime prevention in the Lancashire area (“LANPAC” – Lancashire Partnership Against Crime). LPA will be making communication with business a priority in its new consultation and communications strategy.

3. Accountability of Policing

General Processes

The consultation paper’s three-tier analysis of accountability at neighbourhood, BCU and Force level is sound, and was used in Lancashire’s own response to the Home Secretary’s Edith Kahn lecture (“Connecting Policing – a Lancashire Response”). As we pointed out in that response, there needs to be considerable scope for experimentation at the neighbourhood level, so that solutions can be tailored to the local situation on the ground. On the other hand, the community appears to believe that this is a crucial area of activity, with 37% of the citizens’ panel believing that their community’s problems cannot be solved by people or organisations from outside the area. This may reflect fatigue with “hit-and-run” initiatives, or a loss of trust in organisations who are no longer seen as accountable to the local community. Either way, it demonstrates the importance of the neighbourhood tier of accountability.

The next tier up, that of the BCU, is growing in importance. Here, it can be argued that it is in danger of outstripping the accountability structures which should surround it. As operational delegation to BCU commanders grows, and as Forces (and their authorities?) become more strategic organisations, the ad hoc arrangements that current govern BCU accountability need to be formalised. In Lancashire, the authority is invited to be represented at every one of the quarterly performance BCU performance meetings held between the ACC Ops and staff in each of the 7 operational divisions, but this is not a privilege extended to all authorities at present. The consultation paper itself is in danger of sending the wrong message here, by suggesting that new police boards should include members “nominated by Basic Command Units” – surely the person who is accountable should not be able to choose the person to whom they are accountable? For the sake of transparency, a standard framework of accountability should be devised for the country as a whole. As we have argued, this should certainly involve police authorities in whatever form they are to continue, and could usefully also draw in representatives of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships within the BCU area. Drawing on the analogy of accountability at Force level, these “BCU Boards” should arguably have an involvement both in the production of the BCU plan and in

the appointment of the BCU commander. In addition, as we have also argued, to achieve sensible police authority involvement at BCU level, some form of geographical criterion needs to be brought into the selection process for authority members, to ensure that there is a reasonably local member(s) to serve on such a board.

Accountability at force level is covered later on in this response.

Local Service Level Agreements

In our telephone survey, we specifically explored this area. We found that there was a strong desire for additional local service standards, setting out the quality of local police services over and above any national standards. A large majority (71%) was in favour of this, primarily because different areas are perceived to have or generate different problems (41% of reasons adduced). Such local standards could also help in encouraging a sense of identity with the local police service. We agree with the Constabulary here that such standards should flow from a shared view of the gaps in the current service, should be given space to operate within national planning objectives, and should involve all agencies active on the local CDRP and not just the police.

Single Non-emergency Number

Many of the concerns expressed to the authority in earlier years were about the Constabulary performance on call handling. Through a combination of management action and investment in new technology, this situation is being turned around. However there are still calls routed through the communications rooms which would be better dealt with elsewhere, so alleviating their workload. We believe with the Constabulary that a properly constituted and resourced “one stop shop” for non-emergency calls would be a helpful development. This could usefully exploit the contact centre technology now being developed under the national e-government initiative by many local councils. It should be as local as possible, however: earlier citizens’ panel surveys showed a strong desire for those answering to have detailed local knowledge, although a central service that could provide this would be acceptable.

Community Advocates

Again, this was an area we examined through our telephone survey. A clear majority of responses thought the services of a community advocate in their community was very (23%) or fairly (48%) necessary. The various roles proposed for such individuals were all supported (see appendix) apart from helping the police to decide how to use resources locally, where views were more mixed: the main focus was accepted as being upon acting at the interface between the police and their local community, articulating concerns in each direction. Significantly, when it was put to the respondents that local councillors should undertake the role of community advocate, a majority (57%) disagreed, most of them (44%) strongly. It is unlikely that police authority members would be able to undertake this function to any great

degree, being spread too thinly over the Force area to engage with communities at the required level. However, there could be merit in the police authority setting up and maintaining a network of such advocates across its area, in much the same way as it currently maintains the network of independent custody visitors (and will shortly create a network of independent members of police tribunals). This would distance the advocates from the local Constabulary at an operational level, but keep them connected to the wider policing enterprise.

Neighbourhood Panels

For the reasons set out above, we believe this to be an important level of engagement and of accountability. We welcome the consultation paper's undertaking not to approach this subject on a "one-size-fits-all" basis, and its emphasis on joining up such panels with CDRP and BCU level structures. We asked our telephone survey which groups should be involved on such panels, and there was support for all the types of member we suggested (see appendix), including local volunteers, neighbourhood watch members, neighbourhood wardens and special constables. There was also a desire to add young people and youth workers to such a panel.

Partnership Working

We share the consultation paper's concern to make partnership working more effective. At its best, in the Lancashire area, this can be seen in CDRP's in which all partners share equally in the task in front of them. But there can be times, not necessarily in Lancashire, where to quote the Constabulary "one partner can reflect in the glory of a successfully achieving partnership, and blend into the crowd when targets are failing to be met." When things start to slip in local partnerships, it is too often the local Force, with a "can-do" attitude and more to lose publicly than other partners, which takes the lead in sorting the problems out. This then leads to a dependency culture in which all matters to do with crime and disorder are seen as the police's lead responsibility. We argued in our Edith Kahn response that all parties to CDRP's should be held equally accountable for its successes and failures. Should more emphasis be placed on crime and disorder issues in the scrutiny of local authorities and primary care trusts by their own inspectorates?

New Accountability Options

As these options focus very much upon the role of police authorities, we felt it was particularly important to seek guidance on our response from our citizens' panel, rather than respond on the basis of what might be seen as "vested interest". The telephone survey found that most respondents (44%) were in favour of replacing the Police Authority with a Police Board, although as many were not bothered which was in place or did not know, and 10% thought it a bad idea. A desire for more representation of community issues, and a wider variety of opinions/people, were the driving factors in these views. When asked to choose between the two models proposed in the consultation paper, a clear majority (58%) favoured a board drawn from various groups, rather

than one that was solely directly elected (37%). There was agreement that a directly elected Board could risk being too political or focussing upon inappropriate issues (68% saw this as a high or medium risk), and this perception may well have influenced the vote against direct election for the board as a whole. On the other hand, the most popular types of member for the more diverse option (81% in agreement) were those directly elected by the public or nominated by the locality, demonstrating a clear desire for greater local involvement in the selection of police board members. There was also strong support (76% in agreement) for local people who were selected and appointed by the Board itself. The lowest level of support (but still 67% agreeing) was for local councillors as Board members.

We would concur with this general view from the telephone survey. In particular, we believe it to be crucial to retain the ability for the Board to be able to co-opt members itself. LPA, like other authorities, uses the present arrangements for independent membership to “rebalance” its membership and make it more representative of the community it serves. Thus of the 5 independent members, three are women and two are members of the ethnic minority communities. One of these individuals, a member of the ethnic minority community herself, has made it clear that she would not have stood for election to the authority if that were the only means of appointment. The representativeness and the diversity of the Board depend heavily upon this co-option facility being available in the future.

We have also argued in our Edith Kahn paper that the process of nominating local councillors to the police authority needs overhauling. As undertaken currently, the community at election time does not know it is electing a member of the police authority. The pattern of local councillors nominated to the police authority need follow no criteria other than political balance, and can produce a skewed outcome in terms of geographical representation as a result. (For example, there is currently no member of the authority from the Burnley area despite the well-reported disorders there a few years ago). This argues for a tighter selection process for elected members of the authority, if not for direct election itself.

Finally, we asked in the telephone survey for views on the alternative option for oversight arrangements which covered the whole area of community safety. A majority (58%) thought that a single agency to oversee all agencies active in this field was a good idea, although a significant minority(25%) opposed it. Most were influenced by the thought that one body would be more controlled and accountable, and that there would be better co-ordination and communication. As an authority, we certainly believe that there is potential to build on the joined up working apparent in CDRP’s, and now in the Local Criminal Justice Board.

Accountability for Resources

This is a foundational part of the police authority’s role. We spend a considerable amount of time each year (six divisional meetings over a five-week period, reaching some 300 individuals in total) explaining the budget

position of the authority, and canvassing views on options for the future. Once those views are gathered, we seek to construct a budget which reflects the views put to us, and to hold the Chief Constable to account for delivering it. The current year's experience with the appointment of 80 CBM's illustrates this (see above). We are aware of developments with the Constabulary (the Resource Management project) and nationally (Activity Based Costing) which will enhance the authority's ability to deal with this issue.

4. Operational Effectiveness

Force Structures

We accept that no structural arrangement should be immune from review. We are however concerned that in our own area, that review is being driven not by policing considerations, but as a by-product of local government reorganisation. The Boundary Committee's recommendation for a combined Lancashire and Cumbria police authority to deal with the policing "fall-out" of two of its three unitary proposals for the Lancashire area has only a cursory justification in policing terms. It may well be that such an authority has greater capacity to deal with what the current Chief Constable has described as the "gap" in dealing with Level Two policing issues, but it should be proposed and assessed on that basis. It also needs to be assessed from the angle of community involvement. If such an authority is to be introduced, it is hard to see how seventeen police authority members can hope to maintain the same level of community contact that is currently achieved by thirty-four. We will be developing these issues in our response to the Boundary Committee, but they are likely to be common to any restructuring that produces larger forces than are currently the case. In the limited airing that the proposal for Lancashire has had at community meetings to date, strong concerns have been expressed at the prospect of the authority becoming more remote and less community-linked.

Central Support

Although this element of the paper focuses upon supporting and enabling, the groups listed (HMIC, PSU, Centrex, to say nothing of the Audit Commission) are also heavily involved in inspecting and directing. We agree with other police authorities that this plethora of inspectors does not work well for the service, and would be better rationalised into a fewer number of bodies.

5. Modernising the Police Service

Earned Autonomy

We are sceptical about this proposal. In so far as it has been borrowed from the local authority context, it does not command too much confidence. It can too easily become an apologetic for a general increase in central government

control, allowing government to release control for a favoured few whilst increasing it for the rest. It can become divisive, and demands a strong measurement base which can become either too judgemental or too numeric. Either way, it creates its own industry at the expense of resources that could otherwise have been used for frontline policing.

Workforce modernisation

We are strong supporters of the Chief Constable in his desire to extend the police family, whether by the appointment of PCSO's, the use of volunteers or the introduction of community accreditation schemes. This process itself is likely to introduce more modern approaches in the Force as a whole. As noted above we are concerned at too narrow a focus upon "sworn officers" to the exclusion of all else. It is important that government does not measure success in employment terms solely in terms of uniformed police numbers, attractive as that may be politically, as this can work against modernisation by restricting opportunities for civilianisation and efficiencies in general. In Lancashire the Chief Constable has embarked upon a major new project involving mobile communications (going well beyond Airwave) which has the potential to release significant resources for mainstream policing. This "infrastructure modernisation" is just as important as workforce modernisation, and is arguably an inextricable part of it, but it is not assisted by a narrow focus upon numbers of uniformed staff. The service needs to think in terms of productive time, as any modern business would, and to deploy resources to achieve the best results from that angle.

Representative Police Service

In a diverse community like Lancashire, the achievement of a representative service is an important contributor to community confidence in the police, as well as being desirable in its own right. We feel that the extension of the extended police family is helpful here as well, in that it opens up more pathways for under-represented communities to become involved in policing activity, and hopefully to progress into full employment within the service. We are aware of initiatives being taken by the Constabulary to make the recruitment process more local, in partnership with other recruiters, and support this as a further way of making the service more representative of its local community.

Leadership and Management

We were concerned at the original direction of the government's leadership initiative for the service in that it seemed to be removing many aspects of local control over the appointment process. The material in the consultation paper is reassuring to the extent that it focuses more upon an advisory service and upon personal development of the leadership cadre. However, the temptation to impose police leaders upon the community may still need to be resisted. It is clear from the material set out above that the community feels that it does not have enough say in the policing of its local area, and the removal of its

representatives from any effective role in the selection of local police leaders would aggravate that situation.

6. Conclusion

As set out above, we appreciate the opportunity to contribute to the debate started by the publication of "Building Safer Communities Together". We have tried to approach that debate from a mature angle, drawing upon extensive consultation with our local communities. The consultation paper indicates that there will be further dialogue as the way forward is developed, and we look forward to participating in that as well.

**Lancashire Police Authority
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