

CUMBRIA POLICE AUTHORITY

28 June 2006
Agenda Item 24c

POLICE FORCE STRUCTURES

Report by the Chief Constable

1. SUMMARY

This report updates the Chief Constable's professional advice on proposals to voluntarily amalgamate with Lancashire Constabulary. It follows changes in the national environment and new information from the Home Office. The conclusions are based on detailed consideration of the risks and benefits for policing services in Cumbria.

2. RECOMMENDATION

That the Chief Constable's professional advice is used to inform decision-making:

Amalgamation with Lancashire remains the best available option to address the protective services gap in Cumbria. Positively pursuing voluntary amalgamation with Lancashire is the best way forward to maintain and improve policing in Cumbria. Any final decision should be informed by a complete and satisfactory set of information. In particular, firm details of the precept harmonisation scheme are needed, to confirm there are no hidden costs of amalgamating and no uncertainty about the expected benefits.

3. DETAIL

3.1 Background

- 3.1.1 Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) published Closing the Gap on 16th September 2005. HMIC concluded that the "current 43 force structure is no longer fit for purpose" and that "in the interests of the efficiency and effectiveness of policing it should change". The Home Secretary strongly agreed with HMIC's conclusions and required Chief Officers and Chairs of Police Authorities to provide an option evaluation and business case by 23rd December 2005.
- 3.1.2 The Constabulary and Police Authority worked closely together to identify and assess options. On 15th December 2005 the Constabulary presented a detailed and carefully researched business case to the Police Authority. Based on this case, the Chief Constable advised that while there is a strong desire to retain Cumbria Constabulary as it stands, this is not feasible. It recommended that Cumbria should amalgamate with Lancashire Constabulary or Lancashire Constabulary and Merseyside Police.
- 3.1.3 The Chief Constable submitted the business case to the Home Office and the Police Authority made a separate submission. The business cases submitted by forces in each region were scrutinised by the Home Office and HMIC. On the 6th

February the Home Secretary advised North West forces that he considered the only practical option for the region is amalgamation of Cumbria and Lancashire, amalgamation of Merseyside and Cheshire, with Greater Manchester Police remaining stand-alone. The Home Secretary asked that by 24 February 2006 Authorities in the North West determine whether they are prepared to undertake voluntary amalgamations.

- 3.1.4 On 24 February 2006 the Chief Constable advised that, based on the analysis in the business case and assurances received from the Home Office, pursuing amalgamation with Lancashire was in the best interests of policing in Cumbria. Cumbria Police Authority and Lancashire Police Authority agreed to volunteer to amalgamate, subject to several reassurances being provided.
- 3.1.5 On 3 March 2006 the Home Secretary began statutory consultation on his intended amalgamation of Merseyside and Cheshire, plus amalgamations of the North East, West Midlands and Wales, planned for 2007. On 11 April the Home Secretary announced his intention to amalgamate other forces in the East Midlands, Eastern, South East and Yorkshire and the Humber regions, also in 2007.
- 3.1.6 Since March 2006, Cumbria and Lancashire Police Authorities and Constabularies have worked jointly with the Home Office to resolve the conditions for volunteering to amalgamate. On 26 April Cumbria Police Authority was updated that the assurances were not yet complete. The Acting Chief Constable advised that based on the business case for and the potential impacts of delaying amalgamation, pursuing voluntary amalgamation with Lancashire in April 2007 remained in the best interests of policing in Cumbria.
- 3.1.7 On 19 June 2006 the Home Secretary announced that he hoped to lay a voluntary amalgamation order for Cumbria and Lancashire before Parliament rises for the summer recess, to take effect on 1 April 2007. He also announced a delay in the timetable for compulsory amalgamations, to allow further consultation, which means that the establishment of other strategic forces will take place after 1 April 2007.

3.2 Impact of Changes in the National Environment

- 3.2.1 Local policing realities, as reported in detail in the business case, are unchanged. Cumbria Constabulary is a small constabulary with strong and stable performance, and an excellent relationship with our community; the Constabulary leads the country on citizen focus. It is with regret that changes to this proud organisation are considered, but necessary and unavoidable. The December business case provided a detailed analysis of capacity and capability in protective services and found that it will not meet new national standards, designed to meet 21st century challenges in protecting the public. The Constabulary is not in a position to provide protective service levels that the public in Cumbria has the right to expect.
- 3.2.2 The costs of addressing the protective services gap if Cumbria stands alone are £8.6m annually plus £1.6m set-up costs. The Constabulary faces extremely difficult financial prospects and will not be in a position to make the necessary levels of investment. Budget savings may even threaten current performance levels during the next three years.

- 3.2.3 The Constabulary's considered position remains that "no change" is not an option, if policing services in Cumbria are to be maintained and improved. The Association of Chief Police Officers and Cumbria Constabulary's advice has consistently been that federal or collaborative approaches to closing the gap are not a realistic alternative. The framework of a larger constabulary offers the best opportunity to move policing forward in Cumbria. The regional picture and HMIC advice effectively rule out all options for a larger strategic force except that of amalgamating with Lancashire Constabulary. The Police Authority have previously been advised of this amalgamation's benefits, including:
- a. The new constabulary would combine two acknowledged high performing constabularies, with similar policing styles and organisational cultures.
 - b. Although many key stakeholders were reluctant to see change this option represented, in their view, the best alternative.
 - c. The new constabulary will undoubtedly strengthen the protective services capability available to Cumbria.
 - d. Commitment to neighbourhood policing underpins the philosophy of both constabularies and would be capable of moving forward into the new organisation without losing importance or impact.
- 3.2.4 In February and April 2006 Cumbria and Lancashire expected to be pathfinders for a mandatory service-wide structural reform starting in April 2007. Changes in the national environment mean that now a Cumbria and Lancashire amalgamation would act as a pilot for structural reform at a later date. Home Office commitment to the creation of strategic forces has been reaffirmed, but there is a possibility that no other amalgamations will take place.
- 3.2.5 Given the clear, stand-alone case for Cumbria amalgamating with Lancashire, there are significant benefits in acting as a pilot. The Home Office has demonstrated a strong commitment to this amalgamation, in terms of practical and financial support. By starting the amalgamation process swiftly and surely, Cumbria and Lancashire would improve protective services and safeguard developments in neighbourhood policing as quickly as possible. A positive and voluntary approach to amalgamation remains a better way to maintain public confidence and protect staff morale than compulsion. Continuing to engage proactively with Lancashire Constabulary and the Home Office on amalgamation will enable Cumbria to maximise its influence in the process and the benefits for policing in Cumbria.
- 3.2.6 There are potentially real disadvantages to delaying amalgamation. The Constabulary would face a worsening financial picture, with limited prospect of improvement to protective services. Withdrawing the decision to volunteer would lead to an unknown period of uncertainty that would be hugely damaging to staff morale and public confidence. As previously reported, the Constabulary is already losing police staff. If the period of uncertainty were extended, staff shortages are expected, potentially to the point at which business as usual may be affected.
- 3.2.7 There are risks associated with being the only amalgamation in April 2007. Where national frameworks are no longer provided, e.g. personnel change management, additional local work and exposure would follow. There will be less opportunity for shared learning with other police forces. Stakeholder scrutiny is likely to be greater, as will the need for effective external and internal communications. There would be some reliance on the Home Office promptly delivering the promised practical support. These risks may drive up the cost of change and underline the importance

of proper funding. As reported separately on this agenda by the Treasurer, the Home Office has revised its funding offer upwards from £14m to £17.8m and this offer will be further analysed.

- 3.2.8 As previously reported a Joint Programme Board has been established for the amalgamation. Work to date indicates that the agenda to April 2007 would be challenging but achievable.

3.3 Home Office Information

- 3.3.1 The business case for amalgamation noted that information about precept harmonisation should be considered before any decision was made. As set out in the Treasurer's report, this issue has yet to be resolved. Depending on the model applied, realigning to one council tax precept can require a reduction in the total council tax collected. This might involve a permanent reduction in funding for policing in Cumbria and Lancashire, which would in turn threaten the ability of the new strategic constabulary to invest in protective services. In these circumstances, the case for amalgamation might no longer be valid. A clear and confirmed model for moving to one council tax precept across Cumbria and Lancashire is critical to verifying the case for amalgamation.
- 3.3.2 The Treasurer also notes that the Home Office has yet to provide a breakdown of its funding offer, i.e. the reasonable costs and savings on which it has made its calculations. The Constabulary would be concerned, in particular, to make sure that savings forecasts are achievable.
- 3.3.3 The business case underlined the need for more information on human resource management. It is understood that arrangements for chief officers are in draft and that no detailed national agreement will be provided for police staff. Documentation to this effect is awaited.

4 Conclusions

- 4.1 National developments have not reduced the need to consider changes to Cumbria Constabulary. There is a clear protective services gap and the best available solution from a policing perspective is amalgamation into a larger constabulary with Lancashire. Moving proactively towards amalgamation is the best way to secure benefits quickly and surely. Assurances have been provided that the increased risks of acting as a pilot will be offset by extra government support. However, critical information on precept harmonisation is not yet available. Given that some of the possible models for precept harmonisation threaten the case for amalgamation, this should be available to inform any final decision. Pursuing the missing assurances, to enable voluntary amalgamation, is in the best interests of policing in Cumbria.

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