

**Northern Joint Police Board
Finance and Policy Working Group**

Minutes of Meeting of the Finance and Policy Working Group held in Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Tuesday, 9 October 2007 at 2.00 p.m.

Present

Representing the Highland Council	Mr M Rattray Mr A Millar
Representing Comhairle nan Eilean Siar	Mr N M Macleod Mr I Mackenzie
Representing Orkney Islands Council	Mr R K Leslie
Representing Shetland Islands Council	Mr A Cooper

Officials in attendance:

Mr G Sutherland, Deputy Chief Constable
Mrs R Moir, Assistant Clerk

Mr N M Macleod in the Chair

1. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Mr G M Smith, Mr W J Ross and Mr B Murphy of the Highland Council.

2. Scottish Parliament Justice Committee Call for Evidence on Effective Use of Police Resources

Members were advised that, on 17 September 2007, the Scottish Parliament's Justice Committee had launched an Inquiry focussing on how police officers in Scotland were managed and deployed, with particular reference to plans announced by the Scottish Government to provide for an additional 1000 police officers, and that the Board had been invited to submit comments by 17 October 2007. The Inquiry was expected to report early in 2008.

In this connection, there had been circulated:

- (a) copy of the Inquiry remit;
- (b) copy draft response on behalf of the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners Forum by Mr D Higgins, Forum Administrator, on which all Conveners had been invited to comment by 15 October 2007; and
- (c) copy comments submitted by Northern Constabulary to the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland to inform the ACPOS response.

The Inquiry remit set out a number of key questions on which respondents were invited to comment:

- (a) How many police officers do police forces need in order to effectively tackle all elements of their work and are the resources provided to the police sufficient to achieve this?
- (b) What is the role and remit of Chief Constables in prioritising resources on different areas of policing?
- (c) Which traditional police functions should always be carried out by police officers and which can be carried out by others?
- (d) If Chief Constables favour recruiting additional officers, how do they propose to deploy them?
- (e) How quickly can additional police officers be recruited and trained?
- (f) What role do Police Authorities or Joint Police Boards (including elected councillors) play in determining local policing priorities?
- (g) How do policing priorities differ between urban and rural areas?
- (h) How would police boards prefer to see additional resources deployed?
- (i) What is the view of the general public about the priorities for additional police resources – more community officers, targeting serious crime, or, perhaps, road traffic offences?

In introducing the discussion, the Convener emphasised the need to make a strong case for additional officers for Northern Constabulary. The Deputy Chief Constable indicated that the Force would be generally supportive of the points made in the draft response on behalf of the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners Forum (SPACF), and also offered comments on each of the questions in turn. The Convener also invited comments from each Member present.

During the ensuing discussion, a number of key themes/priorities emerged. Members recognised and supported the frequently expressed view of the general public that there should be an increase in the number of visible front line police officers, while at the same time recognising that front line policing could also be delivered by less visible covert deployment. In addition, the number of demands being placed on police resources had steadily grown as new legislation had introduced new duties, for example in relation to monitoring requirements for different categories of past offenders or policing of new statutory offences. While police forces willingly took on such responsibilities, there was a danger that resources might ultimately be stretched to breaking point.

There was merit in exploring the possible reallocation to other agencies of some duties currently the responsibility of the police; however, Members generally felt that these could more appropriately be identified by the professional officers currently undertaking these tasks. Having learned, however, that there had not been a fundamental review of the constitutional position of the police in Great Britain since the Royal Commission on the Police in 1962, Members expressed the clear view that such matters should be the subject of a further fundamental national review, rather than taking a piecemeal approach to individual functions.

Members also underlined the importance of the Scottish Government honouring the commitment it had made to the provision of 1,000 new police officers across Scotland, and emphasised that these should represent new resources and not simply comprise, wholly or partially, an expectation of redeployment of existing resources through restructuring or a demand for efficiency savings. Members also considered it

important that, given current figures suggesting a higher per capita spend on policing in England and Wales than in Scotland, there should be an appropriate overall allocation for Scottish policing. When considering the particular interests of Northern Constabulary, it was vital that full recognition be given to the impact of sparsity and peripherality factors on the costs of policing in remote rural areas. In this context, attention was drawn to the recent report on police funding in Scotland by Professor Arthur Midwinter.

Against the background of these fundamental principles, Members also commented on the individual questions to be considered by the Inquiry.

Q.(a): No attempt to define the optimal number of officers for a police force would be meaningful in the absence of a fundamental review of the demands on the whole sector. However, what was vital was that any boost in numbers through the deployment of additional officers had to be accompanied by an adequate increase in funding to support such increased staffing on an ongoing basis. In response to a question, the Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that the Force had very little scope for boosting police numbers at points of high critical demand through, for example, the deployment of part-time officers. Nor were forces able to call on any arrangement such as an “agency bank”, which might be available to other professions.

Q.(b): Whilst confirming the importance of good relationships between Chief Constables and their respective police authorities, Members underlined the autonomy of Chief Constables in operational matters and thus in prioritising resources on different areas of policing. It was important that Chief Constables should not be subject to party political pressure in operational matters.

Q.(c): Whilst taking the view that a number of functions currently carried out by uniformed police officers could satisfactorily be the responsibility of other agencies, for example in areas such as mental health or licensing, Members recognised that there was also substantial advantage to the Force in maintaining strong grass root community links, as these underpinned effective community policing. Rather than seek to define appropriate functions, Members pointed to the agreed need for a fundamental national review of policing. Such a review could also consider appropriate areas for joint working with other agencies, as well as those suitable for complete transfer of responsibility.

Q.(d): Members generally underlined the importance of front line policing, both overt (for public confidence) and covert.

Q.(e): The Deputy Chief Constable expressed his belief that, through cooperation with the Scottish Police College and willingness to make a short term surge in the training effort, it should be possible to recruit and train the additional officers allocated to the Force within a reasonable timescale.

Q.(f): The Deputy Chief Constable drew attention to the many points of contact between Board members and the Force management, whether at local area level through regular Member meetings with Area Commanders, involvement centrally in the Chief Constable’s periodic Strategy Seminars, or at full Board meetings. The Board recognised its role in representing local communities and in striving to increase public safety, whilst acknowledging constraints on public funding. Within the Highland Council area, the potential significance of the new Ward Forums in promoting police/community contacts was highlighted.

Q.(g): While recognising that urban and rural areas largely shared the same concerns on crime issues, such as the misuse of drugs and crimes of violence and dishonesty, emphasis was again placed on the impact of sparsity and peripherality on the delivery of policing services to tackle these issues, and the need for this to be recognised when allocating resources. Such factors also impacted on the perception of police performance, due for example to longer rural response times. At the same time, there was a view that the public expectation of the police in rural areas was in fact higher, particularly in relation to what might in more urban areas be regarded as low level crime, attracting a lower priority response. Such higher expectation in rural communities created its own pressures on deployment and on prioritisation.

Q.(h): Members generally supported the approach in the draft SPACF response, with its emphasis on front line policing.

Q.(i): The Deputy Chief Constable drew attention to the Force's two yearly public survey, whose results regularly indicated a demand for more officers on the ground. Attention was again drawn to the potential role of the new Ward Forums within Highland Council as a means of gaining public feedback. The significance of road traffic issues within the Northern Constabulary area were also highlighted, with particular reference to young people involved in road incidents. While a suggestion for more involvement at school level education was acknowledged, the Deputy Chief Constable also highlighted the impact of past high profile public campaigns targeted at young people.

Following discussion, the Working Group **AGREED:**

their general support for the arguments made in the draft response by the Scottish Police Authorities Conveners Forum; and
that the Assistant Clerk draw up a draft Board response, based on the points made during discussion, to be circulated to all Working Group Members for comment prior to finalisation in consultation with the Convener and Vice Convener and thereafter submission to the Justice Committee Inquiry by the deadline date of 17 October 2007.

3. Scottish Police Services Authority (SPSA) – Transfer of Police ICT functions

Members were reminded that the Police, Public Order and the Criminal Justice (Scotland) Act 2006 had established the Scottish Police Services Authority to provide a range of police support services to all Scottish Police Forces, these services largely comprising those previously delivered as Common Police Services. On 21 September 2007, the Scottish Government had issued a consultation letter inviting observation on draft documents which required to be made by the Scottish Parliament to effect the transfer of Police Force ICT functions, staff and property – and associated budget allocations - to the SPSA on 1 April 2008. This letter had invited comments by 15 October 2007. The Assistant Clerk had attended a meeting the previous week between Scottish Government officers and Police Authority/Joint Board Clerks or their representatives to discuss the issues arising from these draft documents, and had considered it appropriate, with the agreement of the Chairman, to bring these matters to the attention of the Members of the Working Group.

The document on which the Scottish Government was seeking the most immediate comments was the draft Scottish Police Services Authority (Police Support Services) (Modification) Order 2007, which set out the definition of information and

communications technology systems for the purposes of the forthcoming transfer and further defined the future role of the SPSA in this regard. In so doing, the Order appeared to enlarge on the original provisions of the enabling 2006 Act. The definition now proposed was very wide ranging and effectively meant that, in future, all Force information and communications technology systems, for whatever purpose within the organisation, would in future be supplied and controlled by the SPSA as the sole provider and operator. Should Police Authorities or Joint Police Boards wish to make a case for any aspect of their ICT systems being excepted from the new Order, such representations had to be made immediately and could not be revisited at a later date, once the secondary legislation had been enacted. The subsequent Staff and Property Transfer Orders would flow from the provisions of this first Order. In the light of concerns expressed at the meeting in Edinburgh as to the extremely tight timescale for response, the Scottish Government had extended the deadline to the end of October 2007.

In commenting on these issues, the Deputy Chief Constable confirmed that the Force did have a number of concerns about the implications of these developments. There were clear advantages to be realised in ensuring communications systems that were compatible and could communicate data, in particular operational data, readily and effectively between Scottish Forces. However, these developments inevitably removed a large element of local control from Forces and Boards over the development, operation and maintenance of ICT systems, which were integral to all aspects of a Force's activities. He suggested that the Board might wish to emphasise its expectations that such a development should lead to a better delivery of service and should not lead to cost inflation and suggested that the Board might also wish to seek assurances that transferring staff would be treated well and not suffer financial or career disadvantage.

He also reminded members that the Force had recently introduced a new Command and Control system which was state of the art and very effective in meeting the Force's requirements. It had involved considerable investment, not only in initial development and other capital costs, but also in staff training. It could anticipate a further lifespan of several years of operational and thus cost effectiveness. The Northern Constabulary system, however, was not that which was being selected by the SPSA for eventual rollout across Scotland and the Board might wish to argue that premature replacement of any systems would not represent Best Value. Compatibility with the majority system could be ensured meantime without early replacement.

The Assistant Clerk also advised that it had emerged from the meeting in Edinburgh that it would also be important for the future protection of the Board's interests that it agree a robust Service Level Agreement with the SPSA for future service delivery. The Convener emphasised that the Board must seek to ensure Best Value and should seek assurances that the SPSA itself would be robustly audited to ensure that it was delivering Best Value to the client Forces and, in particular, would not seek to replace any systems that were still operationally effective.

The Deputy Chief Constable undertook to forward a briefing paper to the Assistant Clerk within the following few days on any specific representations the Force might wish the Board to support in relation to the current consultation on the pending Scottish Police Services Authority (Police Support Services) (Modification) Order 2007.

The Working Group **AGREED** that, in consultation with the Deputy Chief Constable and/or other senior Officers, the Assistant Clerk draw up a draft Board response to the Consultation on the draft Order, to be circulated to all Working Group Members for comment prior to finalisation in consultation with the Convener and Vice-Convener and thereafter submission to the Police and Community Safety Directorate of the Scottish Government by the end of October 2007.

The meeting ended at 3.50 p.m.