

Stonewall Cymru Consultation Response to Social Justice and Regenerating Committee consultation on Restructuring of Constabulary of Wales.

As a basis for this response Stonewall Cymru have consulted with lesbian, gay and bisexual [LGB] people who are members of the police / lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender [LGBT] consultation groups in the Dyfed Powys, South Wales and North Wales police force areas, and some of the police officers involved in diversity liaison.

Closing the Gap

Stonewall Cymru appreciates the point made in the Home Office paper *Closing the Gap* that the UK police service needs a major development to deal effectively with the increase of international terrorism and the domestic volume of crime. We understand the argument that police forces need to be of a large enough size to be able to respond dynamically to complex, volatile threats to individuals, neighbourhoods and businesses. We particularly support the view that such a re-organisation must also remain local enough to understand the diverse context within which it operates and consequently are focusing our response on this issue.

In Wales there are particular issues around the geography and topography of the country and the languages and culture of the people. The topography and consequent poor transport links between the North and South has led to a much greater flow of traffic by the general public both for social and cultural connections on the East-West latitude. For instance LGB people in the North who are fearful of being 'out' in their locality will travel to Chester, Liverpool and Manchester to socialize, in the Mid the movement is towards Birmingham, and the M4 corridor is used in the South with very little movement North. It could also be said that the access of criminality to Wales is through this East – West flow of traffic, for instance the possibility that house robberies increased across the North at a pace with the development of the A55.

We understand that the establishment of an all-Wales police force is the favourite solution and would seriously regret the reduction of 3 police forces to Basic Command Units and the consequent loss of local expertise in recognizing and addressing issues in particular regions. An all-Wales police force, probably with headquarters in the South, would be striving to work on the logistically much weaker South – North meridian to the inevitable detriment of the rural more sparsely populated parts of Wales.

The *Closing the Gap* paper makes reference to stakeholders views and public identity with their local police forces and some people feel this is a particular issue for North Wales and would favour a joining of the North Wales and Cheshire forces to achieve the recommended figure of 4000 officers and best policing of the North.

Terms of Reference particularly considered:

- (i) The relationship between the police and the communities they serve in Wales, and matters of local identity

- (ii) The impact upon any change on membership of Community Safety Partnerships and other partnership arrangements

In view of the history of sexual orientation and past discriminatory legislation local police link work with members of the LGBT community is vital in developing confidence and trust to increase the reporting of homophobic hate crime. The issues are illustrated in the Stonewall Cymru's Counted Out survey 2003 which found 1 in 3 people had been the victim of physical violence or bullying with over 50% feeling unprotected by the law,

Discreet police / lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender [LGBT] consultation groups with local police forces has been in operation in the UK and Wales since the 1980s. Over the years each of the 4 Welsh police forces has worked with LGBT consultation groups although, as is often the case with volunteers, some have been more active than others at different times. The groups of both the South and North Wales police forces have been sustained throughout the last twenty years. Two years ago, under encouragement by Stonewall Cymru, the Dyfed Powys police LGBT consultation group was set up and in Gwent although currently there is not such a group in operation there has been one in the past and discussions are underway to re-establish.

This partnership work on community safety issues for LGBT people has led to the development of self-reporting hate crime forms, policy development and practical partnership policing of public sex locations and assistance in officer training up to senior levels on LGBT community issues. This communication has led to changes in attitude and a more open, understanding policing approach and although the reporting figures of homophobic hate crime are still very low across Wales there has been a steady increase in the numbers of recorded reported incidents of hate crime (eg: in North Wales figures increased from 50 in 2000 to 400 in 2005).

The concerns raised by members of the police LGBT consultation groups are:

1. Influence to effect change - currently local police LGBT consultation groups can speak directly to the senior police management to recommend and effect change in the way issues for LGBT people are policed. An example of local influence would be a meeting that took place with a Chief Constable, after a newspaper reported the use of an inappropriate word by the Chief Constable in an internal meeting and his apology, which led to a frank discussion with representatives from the LGB community, his increased awareness and offer to meet with some of the young LGBT people in the area.

But if there was just one police force in Wales that chance of influence would be greatly reduced for people living in areas away from the police headquarters. The onus would be put on to the groups to travel for what could be up to 5 hours across Wales to a meeting, which would be impossible for unfunded voluntary peer support groups, or that the opportunity was only available to people local to the police headquarters.

2. Police Authorities – currently there are 4 police authorities across Wales giving many opportunities for community representation to provide a voice and guidance

in police policy and practise. If there was an all-Wales police force with one authority this would considerably reduce community participation.

3. Model for policing – There were concerns that the model for policing LGBT people in one geographical area in Wales was very unlikely to be appropriate for another region, for instance there are likely to be issues around policing homophobic hate crime in the context of rural isolation being 'out' in small villages can be very different to urban life with gay clubs and larger number clusters of LGBT people. There was concern about an all-Wales police force needing to prioritise services by population numbers and a consequent reduction of policing in rural sparser populated areas.
4. Geography & topography – As transport systems across the whole of Wales favour movement East-West an all-Wales force will have logistic difficulties in organizing consultation groups. For example the Dyfed Powys police force currently has considerable difficulties in getting community representatives to travel from the South to the North of Dyfed Powys and vice versa to attend their Service Equality delivery meeting (aka Under Represented Groups) this would increase considerably with one force.
5. Response time for follow up work - There was concern that there would be an increase in the time taken to undertake any incident follow up work leading to convictions between the police and the CPS due to the distance between the headquarters and the rest of Wales.
6. Reduced confidence in police - There was concern that there would be an overall reduction of confidence in the police as a result of an increase of distance between the headquarters and the rest of Wales.
7. Support from LGB community - the developments of GPA branches in the 4 police forces has received considerable support from the LGBT community across Wales this link could be lost through restructuring.

Response from a Member of the South East Wales Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered Community Police Liaison Group (formerly BLAG) to the Proposed Changes to the Infrastructure of the Existing Police Forces in Wales: –

Our community in Cardiff values highly the expertise and experience that has accrued in the Minority Support Unit in the city under the auspices of Bridget Daly and her fellow officer Richard Paines. I would be extremely concerned if the changes to the police forces in South Wales led to this expertise being diluted or withdrawn. I know that the community values above all else the fact that the MSU is accessible and known to us with a visible and regular presence in such events as Mardi Gras, the South East Wales LGB Forum and other launches and happenings. This greatly increases the likelihood of members of the LGBT community reporting crime to the MSU or referring others to them to report crime or seek support.

From an LGBT point of view the changes would have to take close account of the necessity of officers working in this field having in depth knowledge and appreciation of local social groups and the local commercial scene. Obviously this type of

knowledge and presence would be undermined if the unit were removed from the locality.

Recommendations

- That consideration be given to retaining and developing the partnership work between the police and LGBT people.
- That consideration be given to the major issues of regional differences and the transport, logistics and cultural links across Wales.
- That consideration be given to increasing the effective ways of community safety partnership working together to the advantage of all across Wales.