



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government

WRITTEN STATEMENT BY THE WELSH ASSEMBLY GOVERNMENT

Title: Green Paper “From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together”

Date: 12 November 2008

By: Brian Gibbons, Minister for Social Justice and Local Government

Background

The Policing Green Paper, “From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together” was issued by the Home Office in July 2008. The Paper sets out the UK Government’s proposals to build upon the changes in policing in recent years and to seek further improvement in policing and the ways in which it can deliver for the public. It forms the basis of the Government’s response to the independent *Review of Policing* led by Sir Ronnie Flanagan, and the *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime* Review led by Louise Casey. The document is also informed by submissions from the Association of Police Authorities (APA), and from the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The consultation closed on 10 October and I wrote to the Home Secretary with the Welsh Assembly Government’s comments on the Green Paper on 8 October.

Much of the content of the paper relates to core policing issues which are not devolved but given the Welsh Assembly Government’s role in the funding of the four Welsh police forces we consider it essential that all proposals in the paper are fully and accurately costed and have asked that any identified additional funding requirements are met in full by the Home Office.

The Assembly Government has offered support for a number of the proposals, particularly those relating to reducing bureaucracy and developing IT, and the further developments in relation to Police Community Safety Officers. The recommendations relating to closer alignment of neighbourhood policing with neighbourhood management are also consistent with our policies on public sector improvement. We also support the proposal to focus on seeking significant improvement in public confidence in the police, and to set improvement targets for all forces in this regard.

Local Accountability – directly elected members of Police Authorities

There are proposals in the Policing Green Paper for directly elected members to Police Authorities (known as Crime and Policing Representatives or CPRs). Independent members will remain, and as now at least one member will be a magistrate or 'lay justice'. At least one elected councillor will also continue to sit on the Police Authority (PA) but local councillors will no longer form the majority of PA members. Instead, CPRs will in future form the majority.

The Welsh Assembly Government does not support the proposals for directly elected members to Police Authorities. We consider that this will inevitably serve to weaken the important links between police authorities and local authorities. Moreover, it is not clear why the elected councillors who currently form the majority on Police Authorities are not considered sufficient to represent the concerns of their local communities as regards crime and community safety. From a financial perspective, local councillors also bring a wealth of experience in relation to local finances, the council tax and the Assembly Government's capping policy. They are able to see the bigger picture and especially the links between precepts and the headline council tax levels.

The paper proposes that CPRs should be elected on the basis of current Community Safety Partnership (CSPs) boundaries but that some areas may have to be combined or divided because of their size. It is not at all clear how such a proposal can be reconciled with CPRs forming the majority on a Police Authority and the Home Secretary has been told of our concerns.

Local Accountability – Elected Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Chairs

The Green Paper also proposes a requirement for the CPR to chair the CSPs in their area. The Welsh Assembly Government does not support this. Our responsibilities in relation to the work of CSPs is recognised in primary legislation and we have a formal role in determining any arrangements for the chairing of strategy groups of the CSPs in Wales. Whereas the membership, roles and responsibilities of a Police Authority are a non-devolved matter, the majority of the Responsible Authorities that make up the CSP are devolved bodies. In addition, CSPs have a range of responsibilities in Wales that are not directly replicated for Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in England, particularly in relation to tackling substance misuse, which is a devolved matter, but also in delivering Welsh Assembly

Government strategies to tackle youth offending and domestic abuse. The Welsh Assembly Government now provides the majority of the direct CSP funding that partnerships in Wales receive to assist them in fulfilling their statutory duties under the Crime and Disorder Act.

The Welsh Assembly Government considers that to require the CSP to be chaired by the CPR would be excessively prescriptive and would remove an important area of local determination. It would significantly risk impairing the CSPs' ability to function effectively. If CPRs are introduced we accept that there may be a case to require them to be a member of the CSP, particularly as regulations already require the elected member with portfolio responsibility for community safety to be a member. This would allow the CPR to be elected as chair but only if the other CSP members were in agreement.

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) – Changes to Statutory Members and Roles

It is proposed that the Probation Service becoming statutory members of the CSP by adding them to the list of Responsible Authorities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. It also proposes adding 'reducing re-offending' to the list of statutory duties on all Responsible Authorities under the Act. The Welsh Assembly Government supports these proposals but we would expect any changes in legislation to recognise the role of Welsh Ministers in the same way as is currently the case in respect of crime and disorder.

Wider Partnership Working

Public services working together to integrate and deliver citizen focussed services is a key pillar of the Welsh Assembly Government's public service reform agenda. The Assembly Government has offered support for the integration of local services but we expect that any changes will take account of the Welsh context for public service reform.

Performance Management and Improvement

The means by which the performance of the police service is measured is in essence a matter for the Home Office. However, given the increasing emphasis on the monitoring of partnership and multi agency working, it is important to recognise that the Welsh Assembly Government has a legitimate interest in wider public sector delivery. In particular the wider public service delivery landscape is very different in Wales as compared to England and this is not addressed by the Paper. Our view is that the Home Office and the Welsh Assembly Government should work together to explore the feasibility of the Assembly Government having a formal role in the setting of priorities for policing.

Police Funding

The Green Paper reaffirms the Home Office's intention to move to full implementation of the funding formula at the fastest pace that is compatible with ensuring the financial stability of all police authorities. It also includes a commitment to review all Government funding streams for the police, including general grant, the remaining specific grants and central spending, as well as the funding formula itself, to see whether the mix between them is right, fair and affordable and whether a better way to match resources to need, which still preserves the financial stability of all police forces, could be found.

The floor funding mechanism that ensures forces in England and Wales receive a minimum annual uplift in funding currently benefits three of the four Welsh forces. Only South Wales does not benefit from the floor mechanism. In addition, the funding that supports the floor mechanism operates differently in Wales to England. In England it operates as a mechanism to recycle Revenue Support Grant (RSG) whereas in Wales it operates as a discrete funding pot. Given these factors, the Assembly Government is concerned about how, for Welsh forces, a rapid move towards full implementation of the funding formula can be reconciled with maintaining the financial stability of the four forces.

The Assembly Government therefore supports a review of all government funding streams that recognises that a balance has to be struck between the additional needs of policing in urban high crime areas and the additional costs of service provision in rural areas.

The Assembly Government welcomes and supports many of the proposals in the Green Paper but we are very concerned about specific elements such as directly elected members to Police Authorities and Crime and Policing Representatives to Chair CSPs. Many of our views are shared by the stakeholders in Wales such as the Police Authorities for Wales and we hope that the UK Government will take these views on board.