

GRAMPIAN JOINT POLICE BOARD

Committee Room 2, Town House, Aberdeen, 18th March 2011 - Minute of Meeting of GRAMPIAN JOINT POLICE BOARD.

Present:- Councillor Greig, Convener
Councillor Hendry, Vice Convener
Councillor Bell
Councillor Cowling (as substitute for Councillor Al-Kowarri)
Councillor Dunbar
Councillor Farquharson
Councillor Howie
Councillor Mair
Councillor McKail
Councillor Penny
Councillor K Stewart
Councillor Webster
Councillor Young (as substitute for Councillor Collie)

In Attendance:- Mr Colin McKerracher, Chief Constable, Grampian Police
Mr John McNab, Deputy Chief Constable, Grampian Police
Mr Billy Gordon, Assistant Chief Constable, Grampian Police
Ms Karen Donnelly, Depute Clerk
Ms Fiona Smith, Policy & Advice Officer, Aberdeen City Council
Ms Karen Riddoch, Committee Services Officer, Aberdeen City Council

Mr Christie Smith, Head of Police Division, Scottish Government and Mr Richard Rollison, Police Reform Team, Scottish Government – Present for Item 2 only.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

1. Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Councillor Al-Kowarri, Councillor Collie, Councillor McGillivray, Councillor Shepherd, Assistant Chief Constable Colin Menzies, Grampian Police, Ms Karen Williams, Director of Corporate Services, Grampian Police, Mr Gary Craig, Depute Director of Corporate Services, Grampian Police, Mr Ian Robbie, External Auditor, Mr Barry Jenkins, Treasurer to the Board and Ms J MacEachran, Clerk to the Board.

SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF POLICING IN SCOTLAND – PRESENTATION FROM OFFICIALS FROM THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT POLICING REFORM TEAM

2. The Convener welcomed Mr Christie Smith and Mr Richard Rollison to the Special Meeting of Grampian Joint Police Board and invited them to address the meeting. Mr Richard Rollison provided the presentation which provided an overview of the Sustainable Policing Project which is being progressed on behalf of the Scottish Government and the Scottish Policing Board. The purpose of the Sustainable Policing Project is to develop a range of rigorously appraised options for further cost savings which will enable frontline policing outcome to be sustained in future years in the face of reduced funding levels.

Mr Rollison advised that a report on the Sustainable Policing Project is to be considered by the Scottish Policing Board at its meeting on 21st March 2011 and the content of this report would be published shortly thereafter. This report would provide further information on the operational and budgetary impacts of each of the options for the future structure of policing in Scotland.

The Scottish Government consultation process on the Future of Policing in Scotland is being run in parallel to the work of the Sustainable Policing Project. The purpose of the consultation is to take stock of the existing structure of policing in Scotland, which has been in place for over 35 years, and to respond to new threats and a changing world. The consultation also seeks to ensure that there is an increase of focus towards outcomes for communities and partnership working across policing in Scotland.

Mr Rollison further highlighted the financial challenges facing the public sector in general and the Police Service in particular. He stated that these challenges make the status quo unsustainable and therefore the question of how best to address these is necessary.

The purpose of any reform of the structure of policing in Scotland will be on improving services and ensuring that outcomes are delivered. Policing should become even more responsive to local priorities and ensure that links with the community planning process and with Single Outcome Agreements is enhanced. In addition, the Scottish Government want to ensure equality of access to the range of specialist services across the Police Service and wants to improve local and national accountability.

Finally, Mr Rollison provided an overview of the consultation process, indicating that the formal consultation process will last for 12 weeks closing on 5th May 2011. The consultation documents outlines three broad options for the future structure of policing in Scotland. Mr Rollison advised that the Scottish Government believe that there is a strong argument in favour of a single Scottish police force, however recognises concerns relating particularly to accountability and centralisation exist, and therefore the Scottish Government have not reached a final position on its favoured option. The timescale of the consultation means that it will be for the administration which will be in place following the 2011 Scottish Parliament Elections to determine how to progress this matter.

Thereafter followed a question and answer session where Board Members were invited to seek clarification from Mr Smith and Mr Rollison on any relevant issues.

Councillor McKail sought further information regarding access to specialist police resources, particularly on the current position and where any existing weaknesses are.

Mr Smith advised that there is varying capacity within Scottish police forces which include one of the largest in Britain and 4 of the smallest. A range of initiatives including the SCDEA and collaboration agreements have been implemented to seek to address these but it is believed that there is a better way to do this. Mr Smith provided the example of the terrorist attack on Glasgow Airport where Strathclyde Police had required to use resources from all other Scottish Police Forces to respond effectively.

Councillor Hendry noted that the existing Mutual Aid policy appears to work well in cases such as the Glasgow Airport attack where Forces have to draw resources from other Forces. In addition, Councillor Hendry sought clarification on whether the decision on the future structure of policing in Scotland was already in place notwithstanding what the outcome of the consultation process may be.

Mr Smith advised that, although the Cabinet Secretary for Justice is clear that the arguments in favour of a Single Scottish Police Force are stronger, he has not yet made a final decision in favour of any one option. Mr Smith also advised that, should any change to structure be agreed, the required legislative process will mean that there will be a minimum timeframe for implementation of at least two years. This will ensure that there remains time to resolve any outstanding issues of concern.

Councillor Bell sought further information regarding local accountability and how this would be in place in a Single Scottish Police Force. Mr Smith advised that these details have not yet been set out and would be developed in line with the outcome of the decision making process.

Councillor Bell further queried how uniformity would be achieved across all of Scotland if a Single Scottish Police Force was established. Mr Smith advised that the Scottish Government recognise that Scotland is a diverse nation with very different needs and demands across the country, therefore uniformity of service provision is not being sought, rather equality of access to national resources and enhanced local policing are the aims.

Councillor Webster noted that the consultation document made very little reference to the Sustainable Policing Project and provided very little detailed information on the pros and cons of each options. In her view the consultation document including much in the was on emotive statements rather than factual details and this would hamper and cloud the outcome. Mr Smith advised that the current Scottish Government wished to commence a broad national debate on the future of policing prior to the end of its parliamentary terms. The detailed evidence would be made available following the Scottish Policing Board the next week.

Councillor Young stated his belief that the Scottish Government were correct to be examining the current structures of policing in Scotland, however he noted a perceived bias within the document towards the central belt. Councillor Young sought further information as to whether funding for policing in the North East would remain within the North East. Mr Smith acknowledged that this concern had been raised by each Police Board outwith the central belt area and noted that the situation with respect to funding would depend on the final decision reached and is still subject to debate.

Councillor Farquharson also noted his concerns regarding the content of the consultation document noting that it provided no benchmarking information and appeared to be superficial.

Mr Smith advised that the focus of any change in structure would be on ensuring continuous improvement and that the detailed information on options would follow after it was considered by the Scottish Policing Board.

Councillor K Stewart noted that the issue of funding is key, in particular the historic liabilities borne by the Board with respect to Police Pensions. Mr Smith advised that the pensions liability was now directly met by the Scottish Government and this would not change in any new structure.

Councillor Greig sought further information on how local priorities would continue to be addressed in any new structure. Mr Smith advised that none of the models specify how policing will be done locally as this will not be imposed. There will always be opportunities to tailor service provision to local need.

Councillor McKail sought further information regarding the impact of any change in structure on the number of Police Officers. Mr Smith noted that there has remained an upward trend in police officer number over recent years and that each structural options targets maximising the number of officers on the front line.

Councillor McKail further sought information on how a single police force would function in respect of the relationship with the Scottish Government and how such a force would structure its management team. Mr Smith advised that there has been no work done regarding the design of the management and that this would follow in due course.

Councillor Bell queried how a Chief Constable would be appointed in a Single Scottish Police Force. Mr Smith advised that there would still be a Police Board appointed and that it would manage this process. He further advised that a number of countries operate a single police service and that the Scottish Government are confident that such a structure could operate well in Scotland.

There being no more questions, the Board expressed its thanks to Mr Smith and Mr Rollison for their input into the meeting and thereafter they left the meeting.

The Board Resolved:

To note the presentation provided.

FUTURE OF POLICING IN SCOTLAND – CONSIDERATION OF BOARD RESPONSE TO CONSULTATION

3. The Board had before it a report from the Depute Clerk which sought to advise Members of the publication of the Scottish Government Consultation on the Future of Policing in Scotland, to highlight the consultation timetable and invited the Board to consider the response it wished to make.

The Depute Clerk introduced the report and summarised the process processed for the preparation of the Board response. Thereafter the Convener invited Board Members to contribute to the Board response.

Councillor K Stewart highlighted that the Board response should be a rounded one which details the views of all Board Members. He expresses his aspiration as a Board Member has always been to maximise the number of Police Officers in Grampian in addition to ensuring there is proper resources to support the solving of crime. Cllr Stewart noted that in protecting the front line, Police Officers must be placed before boundaries if this was in the best interests of the public. However, Cllr Stewart also noted that, if the structure of policing is to change, as much as possible should be done to protect the North East, including pressing for the Headquarters of such a Force to be based within the North East. Cllr Stewart believes the Scottish Government are correct in seeking the views of Scotland towards the future of the police service, rather than avoiding the issue at the end of its term. In addition, Cllr Stewart noted that this consultation process would dovetail into the work of the Christie Commission and he welcomed this position.

Councillor K Stewart noted that his personal preference would be for a single Local Authority to cover the Grampian Area and include the police service, fire service, valuation board and Health service within this. This would ensure true democratic accountability and maximise the potential efficiency savings available. However, being realistic, Cllr Stewart noted that this was unlikely to occur, and therefore his preference would be for a Single Scottish Police Force being established with the retention of the maximum number of officers locally and with the retention of local accountability. Councillor Stewart closed by remarking that without a change to the structure, Grampian would see a decrease in Police Officer numbers, which he does not want to see.

Councillor Young noted his agreement with the majority of Councillor K Stewart remarks. He stated his view that the future structure of the police service should not be a political debate but should be a debate on what would provide the highest quality of service to the public. The public are only interested in being safe regardless of the

structure which exists and this should be the priority. Councillor Young noted that his preference would be for an Aberdeen Police Force to be in place, however in being realistic, Cllr Young recognised that a Single Scottish Force would be the best option.

Councillor Cowling noted that the consultation document provides no details regarding potential cost savings and service impacts. He also noted that the structure of the Police Service in Grampian has not been static for the past 35 years, rather it has constantly adapted to changing local needs. Councillor Cowling noted that he is minded to support the retention of existing structures or to move to a regionalised structure as this would maximise improvements in service delivery locally.

Councillor McKail noted that he would not support a move to a Single Scottish Force. This position was as such a structure would diminish local accountability and mean that there would be no local control of resources. Cllr McKail noted that the Headquarters of any Single Scottish Force would, more than likely, be within the central belt and therefore the North East would lose out.

Councillor McKail further noted that a Single Scottish Police Force would increase the likelihood of political influence on operational policing which would not be in the best interests of all communities. In recognising the financial challenges facing the public sector Cllr McKail noted that regionalisation could be a workable solution as it would reflect the individual identities of separate areas of Scotland.

Councillor McKail further noted that Grampian should be incredibly proud of the Best Value Audit & Inspection outcomes and work to further improve services building from that rather than focusing on changing structures.

Councillor Farquaharson noted that his preference would be for a regionalised structure to be developed. He recognised the need for efficiencies but expressed the view that there is a optimum size for any organisation and that bigger is not always better. Councillor Farquaharson noted that the North East already loses out to the central belt in respect of funding and resources and therefore a single force would not best serve this area.

Councillor Dunbar noted her support to the comments of Councillor K Stewart and Councillor Young. The status quo is not an option given the present economic climate and front line service delivery should be prioritised over structures and the location of the Force hierarchy. Cllr Dunbar believes that the liaison between local communities and locally based Inspectors would still operate regardless of the structure and this should be the priority.

Councillor Webster stated that there presently was no evidence presented that a single Scottish Police Force would provide a better service to communities and that the current consultation document was superficial. The North East has always lost out to the central belt with respect to the fair distribution of resources, and should the North East lose its own police service, this would be detrimental. Cllr Webster noted that

centralisation of services is not always better and that smaller organisations can often get better results, as evidenced in the Grampian Best Value Audit & Inspection report.

Councillor Webster further noted that the costs of restructuring the police service would be immense and cannot be afforded at this time. The focus should be on improving collaboration between current Forces and tackling any barriers which presently hinder this.

Councillor Hendry noted that, should a single Scottish force be in place, the North East would lose out to a central belt bias and this would adversely affect Grampian. Any change, if necessary, should be towards a more regionalised structure based around the 5 major cities in Scotland.

Councillor Bell noted that there was presently insufficient information available to enable an informed debate on the future structure of policing to take place. The priority of any structure should be on local accountability and control.

Councillor Greig noted his concerns also regarding the lack of evidence available to support the options detailed in the consultation papers. The consequences of each structure for local communities require to be fully assessed and understood prior to any decision being made. Councillor Greig noted that the Best Value Audit & Inspection report evidences that Grampian Police is a well performing force and that the Board is effective in holding the Chief Constable to account. Cllr Greig noted that the Board have made many efforts over many years to lobby for a fair deal for the North East and that recent centralisation, such as the formation of the SPSA, has not been beneficial to the North East. At present, Cllr Greig noted that he could not make an informed decision based on the lack of information available but that the priority in any decision should be on enhancing service delivery to communities.

The Depute Clerk advised that the views of all Members had been recorded and would be included within the draft Board response to the consultation.

The Board Resolved:

- To instruct the Depute Clerk to prepare a draft response to the Scottish Government Consultation on the Future of Policing in Scotland which incorporates the views of all Board Members and to circulate this draft response to Board Members via e-mail for comment prior to its submission.

**COUNCILLOR M GREIG
CONVENOR**