

## **Hampshire and Isle of Wight Local Government Association**

**25 November 2005**

### **Hampshire's Strategic Force Project – Background Paper**

#### **Report of the Clerk to the Police Authority and the Chief Constable**

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### **Introduction**

The Home Secretary wrote to all police authorities and forces on 22 September 2005 requiring them to submit options for the improved delivery of 'Protective Services' within new organisation structures, which are being called 'Strategic Forces', by the end of October. The options considered had to include amalgamation with other Forces but could also include an option for an individual force to become a strategic force following some internal restructuring. Simply doing nothing was not an option available within the terms of the review unless protective services were already delivered well by a 'strategic force'. The timetable for submissions was, and continues to be, very demanding and the methodology for self-assessment of options has been laid down by Home Office guidance documents. The Home Office and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) have undertaken validation of the rationale behind the selection of preferred options.

The trigger for this work is the Dennis O'Connor report 'Closing the Gap' on the capacity and capability of Police Forces to deliver the range of protective services to the standards defined by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The context for this report is the increased threat from terrorism, the lessons learned from Soham about major crime investigation and new research from the O'Connor report about the extent of serious and organised crime in non-metropolitan areas.

Protective services are defined as:

- Counter terrorism and domestic extremism
- Serious organised and cross border crime
- Civil emergencies and emergency planning
- Critical incident management
- Major crime (homicide)
- Public order
- Strategic roads policing

The O'Connor report findings were unequivocal; that smaller forces were less good at delivering protective services, that no forces except the largest metropolitans were delivering protective services to the required standard and that forces had to be a minimum size and thus able to configure their resources in a way to become a strategic

force and thus deliver protective services well. Whilst there are some professional concerns about the methodology and assumptions made in the O'Connor report, HMIC and the Home Secretary have accepted the findings and the concept of Strategic Forces. The Home Office guidance sets a minimum size as either 4000 officers or 6000 staff. There is no set optimum or maximum size.

Forces were required to demonstrate that they can deliver these protective services effectively in the future without impacting on level 1 performance and neighbourhood policing. The objectives set by the Home Office include that the proposals should be acceptable to the wider public and reconciled (where possible) with key stakeholders own agendas. There is no new money currently available for this change programme.

A project team under the leadership of Ch Supt Paul Stickler and reporting direct to the Chief Constable was set up in early October and includes Members and staff of the Police Authority.

### **Timetable**

- By 28 October 2005: all options identified, audited account of those discounted, stage 1 and stage 2 assessments on all options remaining. Initial business cases for preferred option, current force and at least 2 others options. Regional discussions or liaison. Submitted with supporting evidence to the Home Office.
- By 7 November approx: feedback from Home Office re acceptability of options
- By end of November: Fully documented business case on preferred option. Record of analysis and stakeholder engagement, cost benefit analysis, risk assessment. Submitted with supporting evidence to Home Office.
- Goes to Home Secretary for final decisions 23 December.

### **Consultation Arrangements**

Stakeholders were contacted twice in October when the review commenced. The Chief Constable wrote to relevant agencies personally and a joint letter from the Police Authority and the Force was sent to all criminal justice agencies, local authorities and CDRPs asking for a return of views by 20 October. The project team contacted the Police Federation and other staff organisations and the Chief Constable and Authority members have attended a meeting of the Federation. A focus group for public consultation has been organised for November jointly by the Force and the Authority using the precept group who are already familiar with policing issues. Wider public consultation and communication was deliberately left until there was more and specific information available and will be carried out in November.

### **Home Office Response to Hampshire's Initial Submission**

The options sent to the Home Secretary at the end of October by way of a joint letter from the Chief Constable and the Chairman of the Police Authority were:-

- Hampshire Constabulary to remain as a stand alone force but with additional investment in protective services
- A merger of Hampshire Constabulary with Dorset Police and Wiltshire Constabulary
- A merger of Hampshire Constabulary with Dorset Police

The goal of both the Chief Constable and the Police Authority is to provide the best possible service to the residents of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight and they believe that the Constabulary is well placed to perform as a strategic force. If, however, local amalgamations are the preferred option of the Home Secretary then the other two options put forward represent the best possible solutions based on professional judgement.

The Home Office response to Hampshire’s submission was received on 9 November. It made it quite clear that, whatever the professional and community merits of the options proposed, Government Office regional boundaries had to be observed. Therefore, the proposed mergers with the Dorset and Wiltshire Forces have been classified by the Home Office as “not suitable for progression at this stage”. At the time of writing this report, a response was awaited from the Head of the Police Structures Review Unit to a letter from the Chief Constable, seeking clarification around the Home Office stance on this position, particularly with regard to the policing advantages of force restructuring taking place solely within Government Office boundaries.

The Home Office preferred options are:-

- |    |                        |   |
|----|------------------------|---|
| 1. | Two strategic forces   | Kent, Surrey and Sussex<br>Thames Valley and Hampshire                |
| 2. | Three strategic forces | Kent<br>Thames Valley<br>Surrey, Sussex and Hampshire                 |
| 3. | Three strategic forces | Kent, Surrey and Sussex<br>Thames Valley<br>Hampshire (stand alone)   |
| 4. | Three strategic forces | Kent and Sussex<br>Thames Valley<br>Hampshire and Surrey              |
| 5. | Four strategic forces  | Kent<br>Thames Valley<br>Surrey and Sussex<br>Hampshire (stand alone) |

Both the Authority and the Constabulary continue to believe that Hampshire as a stand alone strategic force is the best option for providing policing for the residents of the two counties. However, it has not ruled out looking further at its original proposals.

A meeting of the South East Region police authority Chairmen and Chief Constables took place on 14 November 2005 in order to discuss the Home Office response to initial submissions on options with a view to developing a regional response. The outcome was not known at the time of writing this report.

An update will be given to HIOWLA by the Chief Constable and the Clerk to the Hampshire Police Authority and the views of Members will be sought.