

Police Mergers

Driver – Political

Related Drivers – Counter Terrorism, Neighbourhood Policing, Organised Crime, Asset Recovery, Collaborative Working Between Police Forces, Efficiency, Public Sector Productivity, Procurement, Mobile Technology, Compatibility, Conservative Party Policing Reform

Background

A report published by the independent think tank Reform in 2008 proposes that police forces be split into smaller units with the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) assuming responsibility for running serious crime fighting across England and Wales. The current 43 forces are the most expensive police service in the world but fail to deliver security against both serious national crimes, such as guns, drugs and people trafficking, and local crimes such as anti-social behaviour. The authors state that repeated reviews of policing point towards one single force to coordinate serious crime fighting, MPS can naturally take on this role, and up to 52 more individual forces to tackle local crime on the streets.

Furthermore, the report signals that without effective police reform, England and Wales will lose the fight against crime in years to come. Serious crime is rising and mutating as new crimes emerge such as people trafficking and internet fraud, creating entrenched social problems. Meanwhile, the current position of the public finances means that the spending increases of the police over the last decade cannot be sustained and will in all likelihood be reversed. The current structure of the police presents a block to necessary reform according to the report. The 'tripartite model', with power shared between the Home Secretary, Police Authorities and Chief Constables, means that Government does not have effective control over national policing priorities.

The report sets out a number of recommendations which include:

- Counter-terrorism hubs, funded by the Home Office, operated by local police forces and coordinated by the Metropolitan Police present an exciting model for how effective national crime fighting could work. MPS should be given a formal role leading national serious crime policing
- A change in the accountability structure would be impractical given the dual national and local role of the MPS. However, greater scrutiny should come through full operational and financial transparency which is currently lacking
- There is cross-party consensus for greater local accountability for policing. The principle is right: smaller policing units solve more crimes per office than larger ones. Proposals for local accountability have floundered partly because they have tried to follow a one-size-fits-all model for the whole of England and Wales. Proposals should reflect the varying reality of local government arrangements in England and Wales. In most areas, the natural arrangement for policing is for higher tier council areas (e.g. County and City Councils) to hold police forces to account. In practice 11 forces,

such as Gloucestershire, can become accountable at a county level in their current boundaries. 25 forces, such as West Yorkshire and Avon & Somerset, could be split to reflect local government boundaries; local authorities in these areas should be allowed to secede their local policing from the regional force. Seven forces have structures that are currently incompatible with local government.¹

These recommendations, the report argues, require a new role for the Home Office and Home Secretary. The Home Secretary would become, in effect, the commissioner of national policing. The Home Office should then address itself to becoming an excellent commissioner of serious organised crime services and abandon its role in volume crime fighting at a local level.

The Conservative Party policing reform paper '*Policing for the People*' suggests a slightly similar structure:

- Locally accountable forces, with stronger local accountability, matched with effective leadership from the centre to drive collaboration, ensuring both the development of community policing and an enhanced ability to deal with serious crime.
- **Local forces focusing on level 1 crime**, with a new **Serious Crime Force (SCF)**, assuming responsibilities for most of the protective services currently delivered by the 43 forces, in particular serious and organised crime and major crime.²

Both in Sir Ronnie Flanagan Review of Policing³ and the Policing Green Paper⁴ strong collaborative working is a recurring theme. These papers place an emphasis on increased collaboration between forces to improve crime fighting capabilities as well as productivity and efficiency. The Green Paper states favours collaborative working in place of force mergers, however, there is support for police authorities to voluntary merge if there is a sound business case based upon improved performance, productivity and better resilience.

The Home Affairs Select Committee report on 21st Century Policing, the Committee states:

“While we consider the Government was right to withdraw its proposals to compel forces to merge, we are convinced of the need for closer working at a regional level. Therefore, we are not opposed to voluntary mergers but reiterate we our support for the Government to require collaboration in protective services where this proves necessary.”⁵

Potential Skills Needs

Change management skills –manage change at both an organisational and personal level effectively

Collaborative working skills – working effectively with colleagues within other forces and other law enforcement agencies

Community policing skills – to discuss and set local priorities and encourage more people to become involved in crime reduction alongside operational policing tasks

Leadership skills – ability to motivate a group of people toward a common goal

Management and leadership skills – ensure accountability at all levels of the service

Strategic leadership skills - to provide a clear vision and sense of purpose

Strategic partnership working skills – work effectively with other agencies on a more structured and formalised footing

¹ [Bassett, D., Haldenby, A., Thraves, L., & Truss, E. \(2008\) *A New Force*. London: Reform.](#)

² [Herbert, N., Keeble, O., Burley, A., & Gibbs, B. \(2007\) *Policing for the People: Interim report of the Police Reform Taskforce*. London: TFP Group](#)

³ [Flanagan, Sir Ronnie \(2008\) *The Review of Policing: Final Report*. London: Home Office.](#)

⁴ [Home Office \(2008\) *From the Neighbourhood to the national: Policing our communities together*. Cm 7448, London: The Stationery Office Ltd](#)

⁵ [House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee \(2008\) *Policing in the 21st Century*. Seventh report of the 2007-08 session. HC 364-I, London: The Stationery Office Ltd.](#)