

'Closing the Gap' response from the Home Secretary

"HMIC have worked hard on this thorough report which will shape the future of policing in this country. I welcome it as an important contribution to this vital debate.

"It is clear that policing needs to change if it is to meet the challenges of the modern world. We've already made the first step change with reforms which are putting neighbourhood policing at the heart of every community. By 2008 every citizen will have officers who are dedicated to policing their streets.

"I want to see local police teams working in – and responsible for – an area which in most places will be the size of one or two local wards. This will allow residents to influence the policing in their areas so the crimes they are most worried about are dealt with. It also makes the police accountable, along with local councillors, to their local community. Working with local police community support officers and voluntary and community organisations like Neighbourhood Watch, a strong and resilient local police presence will be established for every community in the country.

"These local teams will form part of a basic command unit, where a senior officer will be able to set unique priorities for their patch to address problems in that area. The senior officer will have responsibility for their area and will have the power and responsibility, working through effective local crime and disorder partnerships, to make policing work for the communities they serve. These basic command units must, as in almost all cases today, be coterminous with the local district or unitary councils so that co-operation can be made fully effective.

"On the basis of this structure we need to bring into effect the second step change – providing an effective police force above the local basic command unit level to provide support for every locality and to deal with serious and sophisticated crime. The modern threats we face today from terrorism, international drug and people traffickers and financial crime gangs need police forces which have the resources and capabilities to match the criminals.

"As the HMIC report indicates, currently, some forces are simply too small to meet these challenges. We need strategic forces able to address them effectively and to provide the support which localities need. Doing things 43 different ways no longer works and the implication of the HMIC report, which I accept, is that inevitably we will have less forces in the future. But with local accountability for tackling crime delivered by neighbourhood policing, bigger, more strategic constabularies will mean we will have forces ready and equipped for policing in the 21st century.

"I am now asking the leadership of every police force in the country to respond to the challenges set out by the HMIC Report and make their proposals for the best way to create this new strategic framework. I am confident that the challenge will be met professionally and speedily."