

The Flanagan Review's work on Local Accountability

Decisions

1. Members are invited to note the background in this paper on the work Sir Ronnie Flanagan's Review of Policing is conducting on local accountability as a context for a presentation from Sir Robin Wales. It would be helpful to have the Board's:

- a. Views on the themes highlighted in the local accountability section of the interim report published by the review in September 2007;
- b. Direction on the LGA's input into the Flanagan Review's work on improving local accountability and transparency.

Actions Required

2. LGA officers to reflect the Board's views in continuing engagement with the Flanagan Review, the Home Office and other departments.

Action by: LGA Safer Communities team

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Summary

1. Sir Ronnie Flanagan has now handed the interim report in his review of the police service to the Home Secretary. As part of its preparation for the final report, the review is looking in more detail at how local people can have a greater say in setting local policing priorities, and how local accountability can be improved. Sir Robin Wales, who is jointly leading the work on this topic, will provide an outline at the Board meeting of where the review has got to on local accountability, and what further work it will be doing in this area.

Background

- 2.1 Sir Ronnie Flanagan has been commissioned by the Home Office to review a range of policing issues. His review is focusing on four areas of work: reducing bureaucracy; embedding neighbourhood policing; improving local accountability, and; improving efficiency. A draft of the final report is due to be produced before Christmas, with the launch of the review's conclusions in early January.
- 2.2 The review's interim report, which was published in September, sets out its thinking so far. It concentrates on the reducing bureaucracy and neighbourhood policing strands of the review's terms of reference. It also sets out some of the issues the review will consider in making recommendations to improve local accountability and transparency. Details of what the interim report says on local accountability can be found attached at Appendix 1.
- 2.3 The LGA responded in the summer to the review, ahead of the publication of the interim report. The Board agreed in July that our response would concentrate its comments and engagement on the neighbourhood policing and local accountability work strands. The response reserved the LGA's position on local accountability, though the role of councils was emphasised in:
 - Leading delivery through local partnerships. The review's attention was drawn to the work local authorities do through partnerships, in particular CDRPs and LAAs.
 - Ensuring decision-making processes are transparent and open through the overview and scrutiny procedures, which will be extended when the provisions in the Police and Justice Act 2006 come into force.
 - Fostering community engagement. Local authorities are ideally placed to encourage greater participation in local decision-making and priority setting. There is also a key leadership role for frontline councillors in understanding and representing the needs of their wards.

The Review's work on Local Accountability

3.1 The interim report identified seven priority areas to be looked at further by the review. From these it would seem likely that the key issues to be addressed on local accountability in the final report will be:

- **Working out what the police should be held to account for locally;**
- **Identifying what role there is for the public in holding the police to account;**
- **Addressing the recent process of centralisation, which has shifted the balance of power to Whitehall;**
- **Pinpointing what is not working in current accountability arrangements, and setting out how they can be fixed.**

Points for discussion

4. It would be helpful to have guidance from the Board on the points the LGA should be making to the review about local accountability. Points that the Board could consider include:

- **What policing issues are people concerned about? Those at a force level, those at a BCU/CDRP level, or those on their street and in their neighbourhood?**
- **What role is there for local authorities and ward members in holding the police to account, and in getting the police to respond to local concerns?**
- **Does the LGA want to see parallel accountability structures that do not involve councils and councillors, and what scope is there for “double devolution”?**
- **How could the existing accountability structures be improved? What changes could there be to the roles of police authorities and councils, and in their relationships to each other?**
- **Does local accountability mean some police resources will have to be dedicated to local priorities, rather than national targets?**
- **Should local communities be able to decide their own accountability structures?**
- **Should more training and development opportunities be provided to councillors on police authorities to maximise their ability to hold the police to account?**
- **What is the LGA's alternative to the establishment of parallel structures of accountability?**

Implications for Wales

5. There are no specific implications for Wales that need to be addressed in our response to the Flanagan Review's work on local accountability.

Financial/Resource Implications

6. There are no exceptional financial requirements raised by this report.

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Summary of the local accountability section of the interim report from the Flanagan Review

Overview

Sir Ronnie sets out the benefits for the police in being more open and transparent. The benefits not only include involving local people in services that they pay for as taxpayers but also in providing intelligence to the police, especially on those issues in their locality that affect their confidence in the police and how fearful they are of crime. The interim report goes on to add that the local partnerships the police have are vital in delivering their objectives. The section concludes by saying there is therefore much to be gained by greater accountability to local people and local partners.

Context

The interim report notes the changes already underway which will improve accountability including greater powers for LSPs, the introduction of LAAs, and the new national performance landscape in which will look at services delivered by the police on their own and in partnership.

Local accountability: why does it matter?

The interim report states that accountability is crucial in providing legitimacy for police work, and the confidence people have in the police. The report goes on to state it is therefore worrying that dissatisfaction with the police is not at a lower level. Part of the reason for this, it is proposed, are the levels of responsiveness from the police and the existing ways of holding the police to account.

What is local accountability?

The report says accountability exists in different ways at different levels and there has to be a distinction between responsiveness, answerability and accountability. Responsiveness is the police's behaviour, answerability is the process where the police explain and justify their actions, while accountability is a set of institutionalised relationships which bring about appropriate responsiveness and accountability. Local accountability involves elements of all three.

Specific areas of intent

The report identifies seven issues that have to be considered if local accountability is to be made to work. These are:

1. Principles of accountability
 - A set of principles must be set out to provide a framework for forces to assess themselves against, so there can be local flexibility to meet local situations and needs.
2. Enhancing the role of local people
 - Thought needs to be given to how to engage people and what roles local communities want in the process. This includes identifying mechanisms for greater participation such as participatory budgeting.
3. Community Cohesion and tackling social exclusion
 - Local accountability means engaging not just with those with the loudest voices, but also with those most in need. It means therefore

engagement with all sections of the community which will have benefits to community cohesion.

- 4. Providing a quality customer service**
 - **Every contact every officer has with the public has an effect, which then impacts on how the service is judged. Local accountability mechanisms must ensure police officers understand this.**
- 5. Structures and systems**
 - **There has to be a clear understanding of what the police are to be held to account for, by whom, how and at what level. The review will look to see if existing structures can deliver the engagement required or whether more radical options are needed.**
- 6. Provision of information**
 - **Local people need appropriate information if they are to play a meaningful role in holding the police to account. The review will look at ways of providing simple, accessible and timely information, and how it can be made in a standard format.**
- 7. Performance targets**
 - **There needs to be flexibility in the performance framework for local people to set local priorities and hold the police to account for meeting them.**

Next steps

The report says the review will engage with stakeholders to develop proposals which will deliver greater local accountability.