

Policing White Paper

Summary

The Prime Minister announced in May that there would be a Policing White Paper in the autumn. Subsequently the Government has also published its draft legislative programme as part of the Building Britain's Future plans. The draft legislative programme includes a Policing, Crime and Private Security Bill. This report outlines the possible content of the White Paper and what the Government has said the Bill is likely to include. It also provides a brief update on the Board's own work around police accountability.

Recommendations

Board members are invited to:

- a. Note and comment on the possible content of the Policing White Paper.
- b. Note the content of the Policing, Crime and Private Security Bill included in the draft legislative programme.
- c. Note the update on the Board's own work on police accountability.

Action

LGA officers to reflect the Board's views in the LGA's work on the Policing White Paper.

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Policing White Paper

Background

1. The Prime Minister announced in a speech at the Home Office's Crime and Reduction Partnership conference in May that there would be a new white paper on policing matters in the autumn. The core aim of the white paper would be to give members of the public the opportunity to identify problems, and ask for – and get – action on these problems.
2. This announcement was followed in July by publication of the Government's draft legislative programme – the bills likely to be included in the Queen's Speech on 18 November. The draft legislative programme was published as part of a wider plan called Building Britain's Future, and includes a policing bill. This bill will provide the opportunity to legislate for any of the recommendations in the white paper requiring a change in the law.

The Policing White Paper

3. In his speech in May the Prime Minister outlined a number of areas for the Policing White Paper (as it is now called) to address. These included giving citizens a say in setting local policing priorities, letting the public influence how neighbourhood policing in their area evolves, providing proper recourse and redress if the promises in the policing pledge are not delivered, improving efficiency and productivity of the police, and strengthening the trust between the public and the police, especially in the policing of large scale protests.
4. Discussions with Home Office civil servants have confirmed that the aim of the White Paper is to build on the reforms introduced in last year's Policing Green Paper, and in particular identify the next stages of development in neighbourhood policing and the policing pledge. One theme will therefore be about improving partnership working by the police, both with and beyond the criminal justice system. Home Office civil servants have therefore already been supplied with a copy of the LGA's response to the Office of Criminal Justice Reform Green Paper 'Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice'.
5. Sir Ronnie Flanagan's independent Review of Policing published at the start of 2008 outlined further steps to strengthen neighbourhood policing. His proposals included greater integration of neighbourhood policing teams and other public services. As a result the IDeA is running a programme (with Home Office funding) to identify and provide guidance on good practice on bringing together neighbourhood policing teams and local authorities. This exemplar programme launched earlier this year, will conclude in March 2010, with a joint conference with the IDeA and National Police Improvement Agency.

6. Another theme in the White Paper will be police accountability. Indications from civil servants are that this will look at how the public can hold the police to account, what the public are entitled to expect from the police, and how they can get redress if the police do not deliver as they are supposed to. No mention has been made (in contrast to the Policing Green Paper) that the Home Office will be re-opening the debate about accountability at a force level. What indications there are suggest the government is thinking of how accountability can be improved at a very local level, including with increased scrutiny of the police.

7. In addition to these themes the White Paper is also likely to feature proposals around the delivery and performance management of the police confidence target. Last year's Policing Green Paper proposed that all centrally set police targets were reduced to just one – the confidence target. This target is designed to ask the public whether the police and their partners are dealing with the crime and anti-social behaviour issues that matter locally. The Home Office's view so far has been that this is a police target, but the police have been arguing that as it asks about partners' performance, specifically that of councils, that it should be a joint target. It is possible that the White Paper will seek to make the confidence target a joint target for the police and councils, and as such it would therefore be in addition to the targets in Local Area Agreements. Whilst local government is a vital partner in raising confidence levels and is very willing to play a central role in this work, adding an arbitrary target with challenging increases, which have been negotiated only with the police, is an issue which will need careful attention.

8. Councillors Beecham and Kemp, the LGA's Vice-Chair and Deputy-Chair are due to meet the Minister for Crime and Policing, David Hanson MP, on Thursday 17th September to discuss the White Paper. The Board's chair is unfortunately unable to attend due to a prior commitment. At that meeting Members will be seeking reassurance that proposals around directly-elected representatives (previously dropped following the LGA campaign) to police authorities will not re-appear in some form. It would also be helpful ahead of that meeting to have members' views on the themes the White Paper is looking at, including:

- How partnership working between the police and local authorities can be improved;
- What more can be done to strengthen neighbourhood policing;
- How the public can be given a greater say in setting police priorities;
- How police accountability can be improved at a neighbourhood level; and
- Whether the police confidence target should become a joint target.

Policing, Crime and Private Security Bill

9. As previously stated the Policing, Crime and Private Security Bill announced in Building Britain's Future will provide the government with the opportunity to introduce any necessary legislative provisions to implement the White Paper proposals. The Government has also indicated a number of provisions it is already looking to include in the Bill. These include:

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- Cutting police officer red tape;
- Adding retrospectively to the DNA database those convicted of serious violent or sexual offences before 2004;
- Providing greater support to parents whose children are engaging in anti-social behaviour;
- Protecting women from violence; and
- Introducing compulsory licences for private wheel clamping businesses.

10. The LGA will be seeking early confirmation from the Home Office of the content of the Bill, and any impact for local government, and officers will work with colleagues in the LGA's public affairs team to influence the contents of the Bill in its passage through parliament.

Safer Communities Board work on police accountability

11. The last meeting of the Board agreed to establish a Members' working group to look at how working between police authorities and local authorities could be improved, and also look at different models and structures of local police accountability in order to inform any LGA private discussions with the main political parties about improving police accountability. The working group membership has now been confirmed and there will be three meetings of the group, starting with a meeting immediately after this Board meeting, and with the final meeting being held in early November. It is proposed that the recommendations from the working group are considered at the Board Away Day in December.

Financial Implications

12. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

Implications for Wales

13. The White Paper and Bill will apply to England and Wales, and officers will liaise with WLGA officers and seek their involvement in any LGA activity.

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