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Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy

Summary

The Policing White Paper commits the Home Office to publishing a Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy early in 2010. The strategy will set out how neighbourhood policing will be sustained and maintained. As local authorities are key partners in tackling crime at a neighbourhood level, the Home Office is keen for LGA endorsement of the strategy. This report provides details of the strategy as it currently stands, and seeks members' views.

Recommendations

Members are invited to:

- a. Note the Home Office's intention to publish a Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy in early 2010; and
- b. Consider in principle agreement to LGA endorsement of the Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy, with the Board's Office Holders deciding whether to endorse the final strategy when it is available in February.

Action

LGA officers to reflect the Board's views in any further work related to the Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy.

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Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy

Background

1. The recently published Policing White Paper recognises partnership working between the police and a range of local agencies as being a key means of tackling local crime and anti-social behaviour problems, and making people feel safer and identifies neighbourhood policing teams as being central to this work.
2. In order to build on the progress made following the national roll out of neighbourhood policing teams in 2008, the White Paper commits the Home Office to publishing a Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy, which it is aiming to do in February 2010. As local authorities are a key local partner for neighbourhood policing teams, and through councillors are the only other body that currently has a presence in every neighbourhood, the Home Office is keen to have LGA endorsement of the strategy. The Home Office would like to see the LGA jointly badging the final strategy, alongside the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities.

The Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy

3. The Safe and Confident Neighbourhoods Strategy was originally conceived as a neighbourhood policing strategy. The Home Office felt there was a need for a new strategy as while the infrastructure was now in place for neighbourhood policing, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary reviews of neighbourhood policing in 2008 and delivery of the policing pledge in 2009 had identified areas for improvement in aspects of neighbourhood policing. There are also other challenges around increasing expectations of policing teams in a tighter public spending climate.
4. The Home Office has as a result identified three objectives for the strategy: sustain and maintain dedicated neighbourhood policing teams; embedding a whole force approach to neighbourhood working; and developing neighbourhood partnerships. The strategy will set out high level actions in order to achieve these objectives.
5. The Home Office has identified a number of risks to maintaining neighbourhood policing, such as the financial pressures in forces which may result in either dedicated teams getting smaller or being given additional responsibilities. The strategy looks to address these risks in the section on sustaining dedicated neighbourhood policing teams, and will therefore make a clear evidence based case for neighbourhood policing by demonstrating its importance in meeting the confidence target and all levels of policing such as providing community intelligence. The strategy will also define a clear role for

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neighbourhood policing in preventing anti-social behaviour and crime through things like providing a visible deterrence and problem solving.

6. As neighbourhood policing is still seen as an 'add on' by some in the police, and not core work, the strategy looks to embed the concept of working at a neighbourhood level not just in neighbourhood teams but police forces as a whole. To do this the strategy aims to make sure that neighbourhood policing and other aspects of policing are fully joined up. This will mean making better links between neighbourhood policing teams and colleagues dealing with more serious and organised crime, and is intended to produce a whole force approach to neighbourhood working.
7. The third area that the draft strategy aims to address is providing the public with a seamless service by neighbourhood partnerships. The strategy will acknowledge that neighbourhood policing teams are unable to deal with all the issues they face in their areas on their own, and that other partners have the resources and responsibilities to address some of the issues local residents want to see action on. There are already areas where the police and local partners offer a seamless, integrated service to local people, and a range of multi-agency bodies that bring local partners together such as MARACS, Family Intervention Projects and Integrated Offender Management. The strategy will look to identify good practice and encourage its take up more widely, with ward councillors expected to play a key role in neighbourhood partnerships.
8. The strategy will also argue that neighbourhood level partnerships will only work where they have strategic level support. In a time of constrained public finances these strategic partnerships will need to consider joint use of resources and how these can be used to provide a minimum neighbourhood service to all, but with priority areas seeing additional resources.
9. The draft strategy will be presented by the Home Office to ministers in mid-January. A final draft of the strategy will not be available until early February. As the Safer Communities Board and the LGA have so far been supportive of the concept of neighbourhood policing, members' views are sought on the strategy as it currently stands. Members' in principle agreement is also sought to LGA endorsement of the strategy, with the Board's Office Holders deciding whether to endorse the final strategy when it is available in February.

Financial Implications

10. There are no financial implications for the LGA arising from the report. However the strategy's aim of sustaining neighbourhood policing could have financial consequences for local authorities. Neighbourhood policing teams are dependent on the 16,000 PCSOs who make up a significant proportion of each team. The great majority, but not all, are funded by central government. Following the Chancellor's Pre-Budget Report this funding will last until 2012-

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2013, but it is not clear what will happen after that. For example even if the funding is maintained, removing the ring fencing and allowing chief constables to decide their own workforce mix could mean it is more difficult to sustain neighbourhood policing teams. If the funding is removed altogether then police authorities and chief constables will find it very much more difficult to sustain neighbourhood policing teams, at a time when councils will be under very serious budgetary pressures and may not be able to keep on or take on the funding of PCSOs.

Implications for Wales

11. The Strategy applies to both England and Wales, and therefore applies to neighbourhood policing in Wales.

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