

Policing White Paper – Competencies for Police Authority Members 9 October 2009

4
23

Introduction

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) represents over 400 local authorities across England and Wales. In its role the LGA aims to put councils at the heart of the drive to improve public services and to work with government to ensure that the policy, legislative and financial context in which they operate, supports that objective.

Background

2. In responding to last year's Policing Green Paper the LGA agreed a joint submission on a cross party basis with the Association of Police Authorities (APA). This submission set out an alternative set of proposals to improve the accountability of the police to the communities they serve to those in the Green Paper, which would have seen the reform of police authority membership through the introduction of directly-elected crime and policing representatives.
3. The starting point for the joint submission was an acceptance on the part of both the LGA and APA that police accountability needed to be improved. One important component identified in improving police accountability in the submission was strengthening police authorities. The need to strengthen police force-wide governance arrangements so they are better able to hold chief constables to account, scrutinise police budgets and make real efficiency savings remains. Given that councillors form the majority of police authority membership the skills of councillors are of paramount importance in strengthening police accountability, and councils have a clear role in ensuring councillor advice and expertise in this area is effective and credible. That is not to say that councillor members do not have the skills needed. In many cases they do, and are exceptionally good at scrutinising the police, but there are inevitable variations in the levels of skills possessed.
4. To address this issue the LGA has been looking at the skills and competencies needed by councillors nominated on to police authorities, particularly for Chairs and Vice-Chairs, to ensure that they are as effective as possible from the time they become a police authority member. The LGA's Safer Communities Board which has responsibility for policing and community safety issues within the Association established a working party to look at the skills and competencies of councillor members of police authorities in July.
5. At the same time emerging policy proposals for the Policing White Paper are looking to set leadership competencies for the chairs of police authorities, to provide a further incentive to improve police authority performance. The proposals may also seek to provide powers to tackle leaders who fail. Though the LGA does not believe police authority chairs can be singled out in this way due to their corporate nature and believes there are better means of improving performance than targeting the chair for sanctions, this paper sets out what the LGA believes can be done to provide a competency framework for all members of police authorities. This will help ensure police authority scrutiny of the police is further strengthened.

submission

Local Government House, Smith Square, London SW1P 3HZ
DX 119450 Clerkenwell 3 Email info@lga.gov.uk
Tel 020 7664 3000 Fax 020 7664 3030
Information centre 020 7664 3131 www.lga.gov.uk

A competency framework for all police authority members

6. Rather than starting afresh and creating a separate competency framework that could apply to councillors, the LGA's working group started with the existing competency framework created by the APA for the independent members of police authorities. This framework is part of the joint APA and Home Office guidance provided to police authorities on the selection and appointment of independent members. The most recent version was produced in April 2008. The framework sets out the skills, abilities and personal qualities expected of police authority members. It is consciously intended to assist all those involved in the appointment of police authority members.
7. Sections 3 and 4 of the framework set out the key requirements of being a police authority member, as well as the personal skills and qualities needed. These competencies provide the foundation for the key attributes police authority members need. As such they can apply equally to councillor as well as independent members appointed to police authorities. The LGA believes that the existing competency framework can therefore be extended to councillor members as well as independent members. Attached at **Appendix 1** is a revised version of the framework, including the three points set out below.
8. The LGA would however add to the existing competencies three particular points. First would be a requirement on chairs and vice-chairs of police authorities to demonstrate an ability to raise awareness of the police authority and its role with the public, and to strengthen its relation with its chief constable. The relationship with the Chief Constable should of course be based on a professional understanding and respect about the roles. One issue that has arisen out of discussions about police accountability has been the lack of public awareness of police authorities and what they do. The APA is looking to address this but it would assist in this process if there was a requirement for chairs and vice-chairs to raise awareness of their authority with the public they serve. An additional means of doing this would be to give local communities a role in nominating some of the independent members of police authorities. This could be achieved by allowing interest groups in an area such as within an area such as chambers of commerce, businesses associations, the voluntary sector, trade unions, tenants and residents associations or from the ranks of local neighbourhood watch members or community crime fighters.
9. Second by their nature councillors have a direct contact with local residents and are regularly involved in communicating and consulting with the communities they serve. The LGA is therefore of the view that in addition to the existing competencies in the framework, there should be a requirement on councillor members to represent their communities and their interests. So in addition to the requirement to attend police authority meetings there would also be a requirement for police authority members to attend public meetings on community safety as well. Part of this competency should include their role in being a link between their home local authority and the police authority. This would mean that councillor members on police authorities received appropriate support and briefings from the council that nominated them, while the councillor member of the police authority would have to formally report back on the work of the police authority to their nominating council.
10. Third to help improve police authority performance, members' skills and abilities should be regularly reviewed so appropriate training and development needs can be identified. The LGA is of the view that the competency framework should include a personal development review process. A number of police authorities already have such review

processes in place for their independent and councillor members. These reviews should become common place, being conducted by the chair of the police authority in conjunction with the chief executive of the police authority. Such reviews should also include feedback to the council which nominated the councillor concerned. Given the political sensitivities this feedback should be to the leader of the political group on the council to which the councillor belongs. Furthermore police authorities and their members need to be open to using processes like peer reviews as a means of improving their performance.

- 11.** The LGA believes that by extending the existing competency framework (with the three additions mentioned above) other more process based means of increasing the skills of police authority members, such as the appointments panels suggested by the recent Blunkett Commission, would not be necessary.
- 12.** Given the work already done in this area and the expertise within the LGA Group and APA on improving performance, the LGA believes that the White Paper does not need to take a prescriptive approach to competencies. Instead it should include a commitment on the part of the Home Office to work in association with the LGA and APA to ensure that the competency framework applies to all police authority members. The work around integrating neighbourhood policing with neighbourhood management set out in the Policing Green Paper provides a successful existing model for doing this, with the IDeA and NPIA taking forward an exemplar programme to identify and disseminate good practice. Such an approach would be beneficial as it would provide local flexibility, which would allow for a tailored response to HMIC and Audit Commission inspection findings. This would allow police authorities to identify particular skills gaps with their local authorities and seek to ensure nominations helped provide the skills needed. This should result in a more deliberative nominations process with councils having to actively encourage a large pool of qualified applicants to ensure they could cover the range of skills police authorities are looking for.

APA: Competency framework for members of Police Authorities in England and Wales – April 2008 (as amended in light of LGA recommendations)

3 Key requirements

Given the diverse range and complexity of police authorities' functions, newly-appointed members are not expected to have all the requisite skills from the outset. But there are four essential requirements:

A commitment to policing and to the delivery of a fair and non-discriminatory police service to all members of local communities

This involves the ability to engage with a wide range of people by seeking out and listening to their views. Members have to demonstrate integrity and be committed to upholding human rights, promoting equality of opportunity and preventing discrimination or harassment.

Availability

Members must be prepared to devote at least seven to ten hours on average each week to police authority work. A recent survey of police authority members who did not have additional responsibilities indicated they spent a minimum of seven hours and up to 21 hours per week on police authority business. The average time spent was ten hours. For those with additional responsibilities, such as the chair, the commitment would be much greater.

Members will be expected to attend all meetings of the police authority and to participate effectively as a member of any committee, panel or other fora to which they are appointed, as well as undertaking preparatory work

and attending appropriate training courses and seminars. Councillor members will also be expected to regularly attend meetings with the public to seek their views on policing issues, so that their concerns can inform the police authority's work. Police authority members are entitled to reasonable time off work to carry out their duties.

A balanced approach

To promote good policing, authority members need to establish and maintain constructive partnerships with their police force and other organisations, without compromising their core responsibility of providing effective, independent oversight and scrutiny.

Nolan Principles

All members must be willing to abide by the Nolan Principles of standards of conduct in public life.

4 Competencies and personal skills and qualities

This section sets out the competencies and personal skills and qualities which are particularly relevant to the work undertaken by police authority members.

There is no expectation that all police authority members will have all of these qualities, but authorities will wish to assure themselves that, between the totality of their membership, all these qualities are available to them. All police authority members can make a valuable contribution to the work of the authority from the start, drawing on their

background and expertise gained in their working life, their involvement in the community, voluntary work or other experiences, although members will not be expected to be fully effective immediately. But they must be willing to extend their knowledge and skills in order to play a full part in the wide range of duties for which police authorities are responsible.

Competencies

Strategic thinking

Breadth of vision – the ability to rise above detail, and to see problems and issues from a wider, forward-looking perspective.

Good judgement

To take a balanced, open-minded and objective approach, for example, in evaluating policing priorities, assessing candidates for top level appointments or considering complaints against officers, and to develop an understanding of the environment and context in which the authority and force must operate.

Openness to change

The ability to challenge accepted views constructively without becoming confrontational, and to recognise and respond positively to the need for change, identifying ways in which the organisation in question could be developed, including demonstrating a willingness to use processes like peer reviews to improve the performance of their authority.

The ability to scrutinise and challenge

To be able to rigorously scrutinise and challenge constructively, and exercise effective oversight of all aspects of force performance, using appropriate data, evidence and resources.

Analytical ability

The ability to interpret and question complex written material, including financial and statistical information and other data such as performance measures, and identify the salient points.

Ability to communicate effectively

To be able to explain policing issues clearly, often in public meetings, with the media present, and to engage in constructive dialogue with local communities, the police (including representatives of their staff associations) and other key partners and agencies. To also demonstrate an ability to raise public awareness of the work of the police authority.

Community engagement

To be able to represent the views of the community to the police authority, including views from groups or sections of society with which the authority does not always hear. To also provide a link between the local authority which nominated them and the police authority, regularly informing their council on the police authority's work. In addition to understand the importance of community views in shaping local policing style and be prepared to represent their views in an impartial way, and participate in policy-making aimed at engaging local communities.

Effective time management

To be able to identify priorities and make the most productive use of own and others' time.

Personal skills and qualities

Team working

The ability to play an effective role in committees and other partnerships through listening,

persuading and showing respect for the views of others.

Self confidence

The skill to challenge accepted views constructively without becoming confrontational.

Personal development, enthusiasm and drive

To be pro-active in seeking out learning and developmental opportunities to enhance knowledge and understanding, for example on financial matters and statutory requirements, including through the use of personal development reviews. To be open to using such reviews to strengthen personal performance and range of skills.

Respect for others

The capacity to treat all people fairly and with respect; value

diversity and respond sensitively to difference.

Integrity

The necessity to embrace high standards of conduct and ethics and be committed to upholding human rights and equality of opportunity for all.

Leadership

The confidence to lead by example, establish clear goals and objectives and build support and commitment within the authority and force, as well as the wider community and partner agencies.

Decisive

To show resilience, even in challenging circumstances, remaining calm and confident and able to make difficult decisions.