

12 July 2010

Reforming police accountability: Directly Elected Individuals

Summary

As Board Members are aware, the coalition agreement included a commitment to reforming police accountability, and the Government's legislative programme outlined in the Queen's Speech included a commitment for a Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill this session. This will include provision to establish directly elected police commissioners in order to make the police more accountable to people locally.

Recommendations

Members are asked to:

- Note the report; and
- Provide comments on the programme of campaign activity as outlined in paragraph 5

Action

Officers to incorporate Members' views into the development of the campaign tactics.

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Reforming police accountability: Directly Elected Individuals

Background

1. At its May meeting, the Board received a brief update on the key community safety commitments from the new coalition government. Members will recall that one of the main proposals included in the coalition agreement was to replace police authorities with oversight of the police by directly elected individuals. Subsequently the government's legislative programme outlined in the Queen's Speech included a commitment to introducing a Police Reform and Social Responsibility Bill after the summer recess. This will include provisions introducing oversight of the police by directly elected individuals (as police commissioners are now being referred to).
2. Since May, the LGA's Office Holders have considered the LGA's response to the proposals. Office Holders provided a steer that the LGA position should be principled and robust opposition to these proposals, and have subsequently approved a campaign plan to oppose the proposals.

Information on the government's proposal

3. Clarification has been sought by the LGA and other interested parties about the detail of the proposals from Home Office ministers and officials. It is clear from these discussions that the Home Office is at an early stage in developing the proposals, but what information has been available suggests that the core of the proposals will be based on the model set out in Nick Herbert MP's (the new Policing Minister) 2007 policy paper 'Policing for the People'. Further information on the proposals will be available in July when the Home Office will be publishing a paper setting out further details.

Views of other organisations

4. The Association of Police Authorities agreed at a meeting of its Council on 29 June that it would work with the Government to improve police accountability. The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) publicly criticised the proposals, warning against the dangers of politicisation of the police during the general election. However, since the formation of the new Government, they have not made any public statements on the proposal and we now understand that they have no desire to fight the government over this proposal, provided commitments not to interfere with operational independence are delivered.

LGA Group campaign plan

5. Our campaign objective is to persuade the Government to drop proposals for directly elected policing individuals and, if this is not possible, to ensure the Bill

is implemented in the most beneficial way to local government. Delivery of the campaign plan is not dependent on all the political groups playing an identical role. Instead it looks to make maximum use of the particular strengths and advantages each group enjoys. Key elements of the plan include making the case for further consultation and discussion of the proposals rather than publishing a bill; highlighting the potential costs of implementing the proposals; lobbying the government to abandon the proposals; working with councillors and party activists to lobby their MPs and Peers; and generating public debate on the proposals. We are exploring whether there might be a platform to launch the campaign and any agreed alternative model at our annual conference.

Financial Implications

6. Campaign activity will be met from within existing budgets.

Implications for Wales

7. The proposal for directly elected individuals to oversee the police would apply equally to the four Welsh police forces as it would do in England.

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