

Item 2, Appendix 2

POLICING IN THE 21ST CENTURY – LGA RESPONSE

Introduction

1. The Local Government Association (LGA) is a voluntary membership body and our 422 member authorities cover every part of England and Wales. With the other organizations in the Local Government Group, we work to promote, support and improve local government and to work with government to ensure that the policy, legislative and financial context in which they operate, supports that objective.

Background

2. This paper provides the LGA's response to the range of proposals set out in Policing in the 21st Century. We have concentrated on those elements of the proposals that we believe will most impact on the local partnerships at neighbourhood, Basic Command Unit (BCU), and force levels that are so important in reducing crime.
3. Though Policing in the 21st Century applies to both England and Wales, the Welsh Local Government Association, which represents local authorities and police authorities in Wales, will be submitting their own response on the specific implications of the paper in Wales. Policing in the 21st Century also treats the arrangements for London separately, and the LGA notes that London Councils' is responding in detail to it. As this sets out London Councils' vision of how police accountability could be improved in the capital, and provides a comprehensive response in the London context, the LGA concentrates on how the proposals will work in the remainder of England.

The problems with a lack of local police accountability

4. Since 2008 the LGA has argued that police accountability structures have needed to be reformed. We believe that the tripartite structure established in the mid-1960s has become unbalanced, with the Home Secretary acquiring more and more powers at the expense of chief constables and police authorities, as Policing in the 21st Century acknowledges. We also agree therefore with the analysis in Policing in the 21st Century that as a result of the distortions in the tripartite structure the police became more focused on Whitehall set targets and performance measures at the expense of local priorities and the crime and anti-social behaviour issues the public wanted to see dealt with. This has resulted in a worrying disconnection between the police and the public so that even though crime has fallen since the mid-1990s people on the street believe that crime has been increasing nationally.
5. Leaving the public without a say in how their communities are policed will have serious consequences in the long term for the fight against crime.

We believe that successful policing depends more than it does for other public services on the public making choices: choosing to report a crime; choosing to provide evidence; and turning up at court to give that evidence. Without that active cooperation it would be much more difficult for the police to cut crime.

Handing power from Whitehall back to communities and strengthening the bond between the police and public

6. Given our assessment of the problems created by the centralisation of police accountability, it is perhaps not surprising that the LGA fully agrees with the government's stated remedy in Chapter 2 of empowering the public by increasing local accountability and giving people a say in how their streets and neighbourhoods are policed. Indeed in our view the bond between the police and the public will only be restored if police accountability structures:
 - Anchor the police in the communities they serve, thereby giving them greater legitimacy;
 - Reassure the public that they and the communities they live in can set the policing priorities for their area; and,
 - Ensure the police are more clearly democratically accountable to their local community.

The police accountability model set out in Policing in the 21st Century

7. However the LGA does not believe introducing directly elected individuals is necessarily the best way to strengthen police accountability since we believe this could weaken the ability of the police, councils and other public services to cut crime. It could also fragment local partnerships and make a place-based budgeting approach more difficult to operate, added to which it contradicts the government's policies on localism and devolution. Given the current financial climate there is a need for strong and focused leadership of the police to reduce crime while driving down costs, and a reorganisation of accountability structures is an unneeded distraction at this point.
8. We also have concerns about the ability of the PCCs to hold chief constables and the police to account based on the powers, responsibilities and support set out for them in Policing in the 21st Century. The proposals seem to give commissioners no greater powers than police authorities in for example setting local priorities and the appointment of the chief constable, and lesser powers in some areas with chief constables appointing all their top management team and the police precept being subject to a referendum. Though centrally set targets have already disappeared Whitehall influence will still strongly be felt through centralised procurement; the strong duty on PCCs to collaborate on tackling cross border, national and international crimes; and the as yet

unspecified powers retained by the Home Secretary to deal with areas of significant risk or national importance.

9. The commitment to absolute protection of police operational independence in particular will make it difficult for PCCs to hold chief constables to account. In our view it will provide a means for chief constables to obfuscate and sidestep answering to the commissioner should they wish to do so. It is of course right that the police operate free from political interference, but we agree with the Independent Commission on policing for Northern Ireland which stated that all public officials including chiefs of police should be fully accountable, and therefore proposed that operational independence be replaced by the concept of operational responsibility. The LGA believes that replacing operational independence with operational responsibility would mean that chief constables' ability to conduct operations as they see fit would be unimpaired, but they could be held to account for the way in which they exercise their responsibilities. This is especially important in light of two points made in Policing in the 21st Century: that PCCs will appoint and lead their own support teams with them expected to demonstrate value for money to the electorate – which is likely to produce small support teams that may be insufficient to allow the commissioner to genuinely hold the police to account; and the role given to the Association of Chief Police Officers in providing professional leadership and standards for the service for example around protective services.
10. Furthermore the structures posed in Policing in the 21st Century deal almost entirely with force level accountability, making reference only to safer neighbourhood teams as another level at which the police can be held to account. There are already existing structures to hold the police and police authorities (and other partners) to account for their work in Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) through crime and disorder scrutiny committees, and the Councillor Call for Action. The LGA agrees with the government on the importance of partnerships in tackling crime and our view is that this partnership work needs therefore to be scrutinised and challenged on a regular basis if crime is to be driven down. The commissioners will have a role in holding the police to account at this level, but their decisions will also have an impact on policing and police partnership work. We believe that crime and disorder scrutiny committees and the Councillor Call for Action need to remain in place to allow local councillors to ensure that PCCs secure effective policing for every neighbourhood the PCC covers.
11. The LGA is supportive of changes that look to create a more efficient and cost effective way of increasing police accountability and as a result have produced an alternative model based on reintegrating police accountability structures within local government.

The LGA's proposals for improving police accountability

12. The proposals put forward in 'Improving police accountability – the LGA's proposal' published in July takes existing best practice as a starting point and from this develops proposals for strengthening police accountability. In addition to reinforcing the links and communications between neighbourhood policing teams, councillors and local residents, we argue that greater integration of the police with councils at a management level would improve crime reduction performance and local accountability.
13. At a force level we argue for the creation of Local Government Policing Executives to replace police authorities. Council would appoint two policing champions to sit on the Executives, with the Executives being held to account by a joint overview and scrutiny committee drawn from councils in the area.
14. We believe this model (which can be found at <http://www.lga.gov.uk/lga/aio/12504618>) provides the public at a local level with greater say in policing priorities, enhances the working of local partnerships and at a force level provides more effective accountability while also delivering real financial savings.

LGA responses to the consultation questions in Policing in the 21st century

Chapter Two

1. *Will the proposed checks and balances set out in this Chapter provide effective but un-bureaucratic safeguards for the work of Commissioners, and are there further safeguards that should be considered?*

LGA response: The LGA supports replacing bureaucratic accountability to Whitehall with democratic accountability. As we have argued above the LGA does not believe however the proposals to introduce directly elected police and crime commissioners are the best way of improving police accountability. Should commissioners replace police authorities it is therefore vital in our view that they are subject to suitable checks and balances – no genuinely democratic system places executive power in the hands of an elected office holder without providing a system for holding them to account between elections.

We have two main concerns with the safeguards proposed in the paper. First we do not believe the right balance has been struck between national and local safeguards, and the proposals continue to place too great a focus on national control and regulation. The Home Secretary will retain as yet undefined powers to ensure that issues of sufficient risk and national importance can be dealt with by forces. While there is undoubtedly a need to ensure that forces continue to provide effective protective services we need to guard against the risk that future Home Secretaries might use these powers to intervene in the way forces are run and direct their activity. If the government is genuinely committed to localism the powers of the Home Secretary to direct and HMIC to assess should only address police forces abilities to tackle serious crimes which require cross-border or national action.

Our second concern is the limited ability of local communities to hold their commissioner to account in between the electoral process. The American model of elected sheriffs, which has provided the inspiration in part for the government's model of course provides checks and balances by giving legislative, and therefore finance raising powers to another body separate from the elected sheriff. Even in the English model of directly elected mayors budget setting responsibility does not pass to the mayor but remains with all the councillors on the authority. The PCCs in the proposals in Policing in the 21st Century will have the ability to set policy and budgets on their own, subject to the Police and Crime Panel triggering a referendum on the policing precept. Given the current annual budget cycle in councils and police authorities a PCC's draft budget is only likely to be available in January or February meaning any referendum would have to be triggered and held in a matter of a few weeks if the local government statutory requirements on setting council taxes and issuing bills for the coming financial year are to be met. We believe a less expensive, speedier and more effective means of providing a check on PCCs would be to adopt the London mayoral model

where the Greater London Assembly has a power to amend the mayor's budget on a two-thirds majority.

The powers of recall outlined in Policing in the 21st Century are also extremely limited, and the American experience shows that it can be difficult to remove unsatisfactory elected office holders and institutions – so much so that the US Department of Justice has provided a guide for residents and public officials to set up police departments as an alternative to unsatisfactory sheriffs. The proposed powers of recall could not be exercised by local residents unless there has been a ruling by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) that there has been an incidence of serious misconduct on the part of the commissioner. For the IPCC to make such a finding they will have undertaken a thorough investigation of the complaint and doing so may not be a simple matter and could give rise to consideration of possible prosecutions. That means it is likely to be some time between the IPCC receiving a complaint and making a finding by which time much of the commissioner's term of office may have expired. We believe a better mechanism would be to allow the public to seek to recall a PCC without the need for an IPCC finding. Of course vexatious, malicious and party political recalls need to be avoided. This could be achieved by having a minimum proportion of the electorate having to sign a petition to trigger a recall election. If this were set at 10% of the local electorate given the size of the PCC's constituencies tens of thousands at a minimum would have to sign the petition which could only be achieved if there was considerable dissatisfaction with the commissioner.

No indication is given in Policing in the 21st Century of the expected size of the Police and Crime Panels. If the panels are to be an effective check on commissioners their composition is as important as their powers – a panel dominated by the same political party as that of the PCC is unlikely to provide robust challenge all the time. We therefore believe the size of the panels should be for the member authorities to agree with there being a correlation between the number of members they nominate and their population size, and there then being a set number of independent and lay members per panel. This membership would as with police authorities have to reflect the overall political balance across the authorities involved. If necessary the panel's chair would have to come from a councillor from a different political party to that of the PCC. In addition to the powers set out in Policing in the 21st Century, the LGA is of the view that panels should have the power to require the chief constable and other police officers to attend the panel so they can give evidence about the impact of the PCC's decisions on the force and its ability to do its job, and should have the power of veto in the confirmation hearings on the appointment of a new chief constable.

2. *What could be done to ensure that candidates for Commissioner come from a wide range of backgrounds, including from party political and independent standpoints?*

LGA response: Given the size of the constituencies candidates standing for election as PCCs will have to cover, they will in the main have to rely on party political organisation to reach the communities in their area to get their messages and commitments across. In order to ensure that candidates from outside the main political parties can be elected the provision of freepost campaign literature on the basis that exists for general elections and the London mayor and assembly elections could be provided, as could access to the local media.

The LG Group through LG Leadership has been working with the major political parties to increase the diversity of background of their councillor candidates and therefore their councillors, initially in London and then nationally through the 'Be a councillor' campaign. The campaign has encouraged a wide range of people to look at becoming a councillor, and also helped them consider whether they identify with any particular political party or none. The LG Group's work could be applied to increasing the diversity of police commissioner candidates – initial figures from the May 2010 London elections results show that the proportion of women councillors has increased by several percent and the number of black and minority ethnic councillors increased by over ten percent.

3. How should Commissioners best work with the wider criminal justice and community safety partners who deliver the broad range of services that keep communities safe?

LGA response: The LGA is firmly of the view that the police cannot tackle crime on their own, and we are not alone in this view. As long ago as 1991 the Home Office's Morgan Report emphasised that crime prevention was the responsibility of a range of agencies and the best way of reducing crime was by broad, multi-agency partnerships. Councils have a key role to play in reducing crime both through the direct provision of community safety services such as the funding Police Community Support Officers and wardens, investing in schemes like alley gates to make it more difficult for crimes to be committed and operating CCTV systems, and in preventing crime and disorder from occurring by for example their role in licensing the sale of alcohol, helping house ex-offenders, helping deliver community sentences or providing youth diversionary activity and family intervention projects.

Councils of course are already core members of crime prevention and reduction partnerships – Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). The police and police authorities are already responsible authorities on CSPs and there is no reason why the current structures cannot be maintained with commissioners replacing police authorities as a responsible authority. CSPs are already reviewing their structures and how they can work together more efficiently and effectively, with a number of mergers having already taken place including at a county level. The government should be looking to support CSPs as they move to different structures and enabling powers that made it simpler to merge CSPs would be helpful in this regard. However

these powers should be enabling only, without there being any compulsion to merge or follow a particular model.

CSPs often commission community safety activity jointly and the LGA does not believe there is any need for the commissioner to have a separate role in commissioning community safety activity as proposed in the paper. Indeed the results of the Total Place pilots show that separate commissioning of community safety related activities resulted in duplication of expenditure and inefficiencies. With the significant reductions in public expenditure that the government is looking to achieve the only way the LG Group believes that savings and efficiencies can be delivered without affecting frontline services is by joint commissioning of services through place-based budgets. The LGA has published a paper 'Place-based budgets – the future governance of local public services' on how this can be achieved including how PCCs could fit within a place-based approach to local public expenditure.

The placed-based budgets model of co-commissioning has substantial benefits over that of giving the PCC a commissioning role around community safety. Councils for example fund services which can reduce crime but may not be provided solely for that reason such as sporting and leisure activities for youngsters, or giving grants to local voluntary groups such as the Scouts and Girl Guides. These activities will have educational, health and community safety benefits. The best way of discussing funding for services of these sorts and others provided by for example the health service such as drugs and alcohol treatment which have both health and community safety benefits, is by bringing bodies together and breaking down service silos. Giving the PCC a commissioning role in the way proposed would merely replicate the silos and duplicate and inefficient spending that needs to be tackled to deliver savings and better services.

Policing in the 21st Century notes councillors' interest in ensuring that commissioners secure effective policing for every neighbourhood in their area. This is right and the Police and Crime Panels will provide one avenue by which issues can be raised with a commissioner. We do believe though that bringing the commissioner to local communities and having them answer questions put to them by councillors is one way of ensuring there is effective policing in every neighbourhood. One mechanism for achieving that is through the overview and scrutiny system. The implementation of the crime and disorder scrutiny provisions from the Police and Justice Act 2006 has meant every council has established a crime and disorder scrutiny committee and has implemented Councillor Calls for Action on crime and disorder matters. We believe the provisions which have applied to police authorities should continue to apply to commissioners and will allow councillors to raise issues from their wards and divisions about the delivery of policing services in their area.

4. How might Commissioners best engage with their communities – individuals, businesses and voluntary organisations - at the neighbourhood level?

LGA response: Beat meetings provide a logical means for the commissioner to engage with their communities at a neighbourhood level as it does not require any additional meetings, and provided as Policing in the 21st Century makes clear that neighbourhood policing teams engage with the whole community. Issues can be fed back to the commissioner and views sought on things the commissioner is looking to do. However the number of neighbourhood policing teams in place across the country – over 3,000 – means commissioners are unlikely to be able to visit each beat meeting in their force area over the course of a year. In many instances councillors already play an integral role in beat meetings and they have detailed knowledge of the local individuals, businesses and voluntary organisations in their wards and divisions that the commissioner may want to engage with. Commissioners should therefore look to make use of councillors to engage with the communities they serve at a neighbourhood level.

Additionally councils also regularly seek to engage their communities and the individuals, businesses and voluntary organisations in them, and have a range of means and bodies already in existence to seek views from them ranging from on-line forums, to citizens panels, to the Local Strategic Partnership. Rather than have the commissioner hold separate meetings or use separate means of engagement with the communities they serve commissioners and councils should be working together to engage and consult the communities they both serve. This would have financial benefits for both the police and the local authority and also have benefits in reducing consultation ‘fatigue’ amongst the public.

5. How can the Commissioner and the greater transparency of local information drive improvements in the most deprived and least safe neighbourhoods in their areas?

LGA response: Greater transparency around crime and police performance will provide information on the least safe neighbourhoods in the force the commissioner is responsible for, and on police performance in tackling it. Greater transparency will not of itself drive improvements in the least safe neighbourhoods, which are also likely to be the more deprived neighbourhoods. Residents in these areas are already likely to be aware that crime is high in their area, and simply want the police to take action and feedback what has been done. The issue is whether the commissioner is motivated to use the information to drive improvements in policing in these areas. The electoral process will provide an incentive, though that may not be sufficient if the commissioner draws their support from safer neighbourhoods.

We believe the crime and disorder overview and scrutiny process and Councillor Call for Action would provide a means of motivating and

challenging commissioners to improve police performance in the least safe neighbourhoods. As outlined in relation to Question 3 we believe crime and disorder scrutiny would enable ward councillors to raise concerns about local policing performance if they felt it was not improving.

In addition a key challenge in this area to commissioners could come from the Police and Crime Panels. If panels are looking at policing performance in the least safe neighbourhoods on a regular basis and calling the commissioner and chief constable to explain why performance has not improved this will encourage the force and the commissioner to ensure action is taken to make high crime areas safer.

6. What information would help the public make judgements about their force and Commissioner, including the level of detail and comparability with other areas?

LGA response: The key information the public would like to know is what the police and partners are doing to address the crime and disorder issues in their neighbourhood. The commissioner in conjunction with councils in the area and other partners should be left to agree what they are seeking to achieve in their area and then set these out for the public to see. They would then be expected to report to the public against these outcomes.

The previous government spent considerable time developing and then amending performance frameworks for policing and community safety which applied to both the police and councils. This created the problems of a police focus on central government targets outlined in Policing in the 21st Century and this should not be replicated for all the reasons set out in the consultation paper and because of the cost collecting the information imposed on the police and councils.

Value for money is a key area where the public need to be able to make judgements on the performance of the PCC. Though HMIC will be providing assessments on this, one of the key ways the public assess this is through the taxes they pay. Currently the public do not have a clear idea of how much the police cost because of the way the precept is collected. As it is included in council tax bills there is no clear distinction in the public's minds about the cost of running the council and the cost of the police. This lack of clarity and therefore lack of ability to make a judgement about the value for money that a PCC provides will persist if the commissioner collects the police precept through council tax bills. In our view PCCs should issue their own bills (though councils could still collect the precept on their behalf) to enable the public to arrive at a clear view of whether the commissioner is providing value for money.

Chapter Three

7. *Locally, what are examples of unnecessary bureaucracy within police forces and how can the service get rid of this?*

8. *How should forces ensure that information that local people feel is important is made available without creating a burdensome data recording process?*

LGA response: As stated in response to Question 6 we believe the key information the public would like to know is what the police and partners are doing to address the crime and disorder issues in their neighbourhood. Forces in conjunction with councils in the area and other partners should be left to agree what they are seeking to achieve in their area and then set these out for the public to see. They would then be expected to report to the public against these outcomes. As the commissioner and councils will be well aware of local priorities and issues, the outcomes they agree should provide the information local people will be looking for. This information will then be collected and made available to the public. The burden of data recording being shared with partners, and aided by partners making the information they already collect available.

9. *What information should HMIC use to support a more proportionate approach to their ‘public facing performance role’, while reducing burdens and avoiding de-facto targets?*

LGA response: As much as possible HMIC should be using performance information forces are collecting for their own purposes and the locally agreed priorities commissioners reach with other public sector bodies.

10. *How can ACPO change the culture of the police service to move away from compliance with detailed guidance to the use of professional judgement within a clear framework based around outcomes?*

11. *How can we share knowledge about policing techniques that cut crime without creating endless guidance?*

LGA response: The Local Government Group through Local Government Improvement and Development (formerly the IDeA) has developed a wealth of experience across local government in sharing good practice and helping authorities to improve their performance without the use of centrally created guidance. LG Improvement and Development has over the last two years worked with the Home Office on identifying best practice on integrating neighbourhood policing teams' work with other services, especially councils, and established an exemplar programme to spread this best practice. It has also worked with the Home Office on providing community safety peer reviews of CSPs. Three pilots conducted in early 2009 to develop the peer review process have been evaluated. One saw a 30% reduction in acquisitive crime over 2009, with a 20% fall in overall crime following the review. Community Safety peer reviews not only resulted in significant falls in crime

after the reviews, but also in overall savings to the public purse in the region of £15 million. Such an approach already works well in improving partnership activity, and could be continued and applied more widely to other work forces do.

Chapter Four

12. *What policing functions should be delivered between forces acting collaboratively?*
13. *What are the principal obstacles to collaboration between forces or with other partners and how they can they be addressed?*

LGA response: Councils and the police are already collaborating closely across a range of areas from looking to find savings from merging administrative and support functions as in Somerset, to merging teams as in Hertfordshire and through CSPs across England. The Total Place pilots also demonstrated a number of areas where agencies could immediately set about working more efficiently and effectively, though they also set out some regulatory and other obstacles that would need to be addressed by central government. Those obstacles that have already been identified need to be addressed by central government, and local agencies encouraged to collaborate more. One means of doing this would be to move to a place-based budgets model as described in response to Question 3.

14. *Are there functions which need greater national co-ordination or which would make sense to organise and run nationally (while still being delivered locally)?*
15. *How can the police service take advantage of private sector expertise to improve value for money, for example in operational support, or back office functions shared between several forces, or with other public sector providers?*

LGA response: Forces should be looking to follow the example of Southwest One in Somerset where Avon and Somerset Police have joined an initiative by Somerset County Council and IBM to reduce back office and operational support costs over ten years, and Surrey First which brings together the county council, police, health services and district councils to look at shared services, co-delivery and innovation. Partnerships like this can access both the expertise of the private sector but also take advantage of the savings that can be found by bringing together IT, HR, facilities management across the police, local authorities and other public services.

Adopting a place-based budget approach as outlined in response to Question 3 would also allow the police to improve value for money in conjunction with other public services. As we have already indicated the Total Place pilots showed that separate commissioning of community safety related activities

resulted in duplication of expenditure and inefficiencies. With the significant reductions in public expenditure that the government is looking to achieve the only way the LG Group believes that savings and efficiencies can be delivered without affecting frontline services is by joint commissioning of services through place-based budgets. The LGA has published a paper 'Place-based budgets – the future governance of local public services' on how this can be achieved.

16. *Alongside its focus on organised crime and border security, what functions might a new National Crime Agency deliver on behalf of police forces, and how should it be held to account?*
17. *What arrangements should be in place in future to ensure that there is a sufficient pool of chief officers available, in particular for the most challenging leadership roles in the police service? Is there a role for other providers to provide training?*
18. *How can we rapidly increase the capability within the police service to become more business-like, with police leaders taking on a more prominent role to help drive necessary cultural change in delivering sustainable business process improvement?*

LGA response: One way would be to increase the capability of the police service would be for senior police officers to take secondments out of the police service for a while. Local authority chief executives have already provided a cadre of first-class leaders to support public sector reform and they would have much to offer in supporting chief police officers to play their part in the wider leadership of the public sector.

Chapter Five

19. *What more can the Government do to support the public to take a more active role in keeping neighbourhoods safe?*

LGA response: The proposals in the paper to ensure that neighbourhood policing teams engage widely with the community are particularly important. While there is considerable good practice in engaging with the public through a variety of means some neighbourhood teams remain tied to formats for beat meetings that deter the public from attending such as holding their meetings with the public in police stations. This means parts of the community who do not feel comfortable in such an environment for a range of reasons do not attend the meetings and the police only get to base their priorities on a limited section of the local community.

Alongside this there needs to be greater support for the vulnerable, witnesses and victims especially of persistent low level crime and anti-social behaviour. The public perception of the criminal justice system is that it is not there to serve the interests of the public or the wider community. If victims, witnesses

and the vulnerable felt better supported by the criminal justice system then they are more likely to have confidence in what can be achieved. A growing confidence that their concerns and issues are likely to be taken seriously will encourage the public to become more involved in keeping their neighbourhoods safe if they feel it will result in offenders being punished.

To ensure that the views of these groups and the wider community are taken into account by the criminal justice system and CSP partners initiatives like Neighbourhood Watch and Community Crimefighters need to be built on so that the voices of different parts of the community such as the elderly, disabled and black and minority ethnic being heard through community champions.

Greater use should also be made of initiatives like the community justice panels set up in Somerset and Sheffield to reduce crime and re-offending. The panels bring victims and offenders together to make it clear to offenders what impact their actions have had, and make amends to the victim and the wider community by apologising and carrying out reparative work.

20. How can the Government encourage more people to volunteer (including as special constables) and provide necessary incentives to encourage them to stay?

LGA response: Greater consideration needs to be given to recompensing volunteers for some of the additional costs they incur in volunteering other than their time, such as meeting travel costs and greater public recognition of the commitment made by volunteers from organisations like the police would also assist.

21. What more can central Government do to make the criminal justice system more efficient?

LGA response: The government should be looking at the stages involved in court cases and whether these are necessary, such as taking pleas, considering bail applications, and imposing a fine where there is a guilty plea and the sentence is only ever a fine. These legal proceedings are not conducted in front of juries in crown courts and consideration needs to be given to whether these procedures could be updated to reduce the number of court appearances and whether matters could be dealt with more informally, cheaper and swifter between the judge or magistrates, the prosecution and the defendant – through for example the greater use of technology to allow virtual hearings for example.

22. What prescriptions from Government get in the way of effective local partnership working?

LGA response: There is a range of regulation and guidance from the Home Office on what makes an effective partnership which can stifle innovation in

the best partnerships and can also provide a shield for poor performance in other partnerships where they ensure they deliver what the regulations state they should without actually tackling crime. For example the hallmarks of effective partnerships that have force in secondary legislation prescribe who should chair meetings, how they should engage with the public and how frequently they should meet.

This level of regulation is unnecessary, and they should be removed so that only the duty on responsible authorities to reduce crime and re-offending, the duty on a range of other bodies to co-operate, strategic assessments, and partnership plans remain.

23. What else needs to be done to simplify and improve community safety and criminal justice work locally?

LGA response: In a number of areas such as Sunderland there are already close partnerships between those involved in community safety work, and the criminal justice system, such as the courts, effectively bringing CSPs and Local Criminal Justice Boards. Local areas need to be freed to set up partnerships that work for their areas. The government should be looking at providing local agencies with the flexibility to come together in forms that work for them.

The proposals in the paper to make crime information more widely available are welcome as they provide a basis for the public to challenge police progress, as at times at the moment there are efforts to restrict what local communities see – even though they are well aware of the extent of crime levels.

There needs to be a greater emphasis as the paper identifies on engaging and involving the community in action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour, and this has to involve real dialogue. When this happens the community will become more involved in assisting the police to reduce crime. With a greater flow of intelligence from the public and communities the use of techniques that can cause community tensions with the police to increase such as the use of stop and search can be reduced.

Local communities will also feel more confident in becoming involved in reducing crime and disorder if they see justice being dispensed locally. Local meetings of magistrates' courts and the community justice panels that involve the victims and the wider community and see offenders apologising to them, would encourage more people to report crimes as they would see action being taken against the offender.