

Item 1

Special Constables

Purpose of report

For discussion and direction.

Summary

With the upcoming Government spending review likely to result in fewer numbers of police officers, increasing the number of special constables offers a means of sustaining frontline policing. Councils can promote the role of special constables to both the public and their staff and the NPIA is seeking the LG Association's assistance in promoting special constables to local government. James Deller, a special constable, who also works with the NPIA will attend the Board meeting to discuss this issue.

Recommendations

Members are asked to comment on the presentation and consider whether the LG Group should promote the role of special constables and, if so, how it should do so.

Action

LG Association officers to action any member decisions.

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Special Constables

Background

1. At its last meeting, the Board received a paper on the forthcoming Spending Review and the impact that this is likely to have on policing and community safety budgets. As members will recall from this discussion, the Home Office is facing a reduction of between 25 to 40 per cent in its budget, and at the Association of Police Authorities (APA) and Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Conference in June, Home Office civil servants said they were working on a 25 per cent reduction in police funding, with this working out as a net 17 per cent reduction in grant by the end of the spending review period.
2. A report by Her Majesty's Inspectors of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Audit Commission, 'Sustaining value for money in the police service' was published in July, and indicated that police forces could make savings of 12 per cent through cost cuttings and improvements in productivity. However, opportunities for making savings from back office and support functions are narrowing and making the savings necessary to reach the 17 per cent figure the Home Office identified may mean a reduction in police officer and Police Community Support Officer numbers. Though the government does not accept the figures, the Police Federation has argued that from a total of approximately 140,000, up to 40,000 police officer posts could be lost.
3. The Government is also keen to promote the concept of the Big Society. A key strand of Big Society is encouraging volunteering to a greater extent, and government ministers have publicly stated that they want to see an expansion in the number of special constables, pointing out that there were 67,000 in the 1950s, but there were 15,505 at the end of March 2010. However, the current trend is positive, with numbers rising steadily over the last 18 months. A report in the Sunday Express at the end of September suggested that the Government is considering council tax rebates for members of the public who become special constables following a submission by ACPO. This desire to increase the number of special constables would bring a valuable local and lay person's perspective to policing, and an increase in their number would go some way to compensating for the loss of any police officers as a visible presence on the streets could be maintained, though they should not be seen as a cheaper alternative. Irrespective of the spending cuts, there is a desire to increase the number of special constables.

Encouraging more special constables

4. The National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) has for some time been running a programme to promote the role of special constables. The Employer

Supported Policing programme was designed to enable the police to engage with employers about special constables, both so employers could better support staff who were already special constables and to encourage employers to allow staff to become special constables.

5. In order to provide employers with some certainty of the benefits to them as an organisation in having staff who are special constables, and consistency and clarity around the operation of the scheme, the NPIA has established four options for employers ranging from simply promoting the concept of special constables to giving significant support to staff who are special constables, including giving them time off for training and paid time off for special constable duties. The NPIA argue that there are considerable benefits for an employer in supporting their staff to be special constables including lower staff turnover, greater staff motivation and loyalty to the business and increased training for staff in a range of areas that can be useful to the business, such as conflict resolution, problem solving and decision-making.

Local government and special constables

6. The NPIA sees local government as having an important role in promoting and supporting special constables, and already has a number of councils involved in its employer supported policing programme. With thousands of staff employed by local authorities, there is a considerable pool of people from which special constables could be drawn if councils are supportive of the concept. Councils also regularly communicate with residents, businesses and organisations in their area in a variety of ways which provide a good means of advertising the role of special constables in order to attract further volunteers.
7. The NPIA would therefore like to work with the LGA to promote special constables to the local government sector, so councils can both advertise the scheme and also support and encourage their staff to serve as special constables. James Deller, a special constable, and the NPIA's special constabulary regional co-ordinator in the south-east will be attending the Board meeting to give a presentation on the employer supported policing scheme and how he sees the LGA being able to assist in promoting special constables.

Financial Implications

8. Any costs associated with work on this area will be met from existing LG Group budgets and resources.