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West Midlands and Surrey Police Business Partnering Programme

Purpose of report

For information and discussion.

Summary

It was widely reported at the start of the month that West Midlands and Surrey Police Forces were inviting bids from large security companies to take over the delivery of a wide range of services which have until now been carried out by the police themselves. This attracted media attention and generated discussions about what, if any, police services could be delivered by the private sector. This report provides background information on the process the two forces have entered and what services might be outsourced by the police in the future.

Recommendation

Members are asked to note the proposals by West Midlands and Surrey Police Forces and comment on them.

Action

Officers to action as appropriate.

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West Midlands and Surrey Police Business Partnering Programme

Background

1. It was widely reported in the media at the beginning of the month that West Midlands Police and Surrey Police had invited bids from G4S and other large security companies to take over the delivery of a wide range of services which have until now been carried out by the police themselves. The value of the contract would be £1.5 billion over 7 years, which could increase to £3.5 billion if other forces were involved.
2. These proposals are in line with the policies set out in 'Policing in the 21st Century' the government's White Paper on its policing reforms published in 2010. This highlighted the need for police forces to collaborate more to make savings in back-office and support functions so that sworn officers could spend more time on the streets – a study by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in 2010 finding that only 11% of officers were visible and available to the public at any one time. The government's view is that warranted officers should not be spending time working on administrative and routine tasks where their skills and powers cannot be properly used.
3. The 'Open Public Services' White Paper also included a commitment from the government to introduce an 'open commissioning' policy in a number of public services, to open services up to competition. The government did though say that it would not take a commissioning approach in matters of national security including core policing. However the White Paper went to explain that there would be support, specialist and back-office functions in these services where diversity of provision is appropriate.

The Business Partnering Programme

4. The Home Office started working with West Midlands and Surrey Police in early 2011 to identify the potential for more systematic involvement of the private sector in policing. The Home Office funded the consultancy work behind the initial stages of work. The first part of the programme set out to cost each of the force business processes, and this was followed by an examination of existing police partnerships with the private sector. This initial work suggested that a conventional outsourcing arrangement would not produce the savings desired. The programme then looked at not only reducing costs but also generating end-to-end service transformation.

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5. The objectives of the programme are to provide financial stability for both forces beyond the current spending review, improve support for the frontline, improve services to the public, reduce bureaucracy and make savings available. In terms of entering into the a long term partnership both forces have sought to take forward the work on the basis of a number of principles including shared ownership of assets and resources with partners, maintenance of a public service ethos, ensuring private sector returns are reasonable and equitable, and there is joint governance and control.
6. West Midlands and Surrey Police have now started the lengthy procurement process for this partnership arrangement. This process is currently at an early stage. The list of activities reported in the media which could be involved once a deal has been agreed include investigating crimes, detaining suspects, developing cases, supporting victims and witnesses, managing high-risk individuals, patrolling neighbourhoods, managing intelligence, managing engagement with the public, managing forensics, providing legal services, and more usual back office functions.
7. Responding to the media coverage about the proposals Surrey's Chief Constable rejected the idea that a private sector company would be patrolling the streets, and stated that the process was about seeing if the private sector could deliver behind the scenes functions better and cheaper. Surrey Police Authority also stated that the widely drafted tender documents necessary to comply with EU regulations had resulted in rumours that were untrue.
8. The proposals have also been defended by the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO). The Chief Constable of Greater Manchester Police, Peter Fahy, responding on behalf of ACPO, stated that only radical and fundamental change would allow forces to cope with the funding reductions the police face. He also argued that there were elements in a criminal investigation that did not need to carried out by a police officer, such as gathering CCTV evidence or checking phone records. Instead a police officer would oversee the investigation. This would allow routine and repetitive jobs to be carried out at a cheaper rate. The Police Federation however has expressed concern about the proposals fearing that they could lead to people being deprived of their liberty by private business employees, which would impact on the quality of service received by the public.

Existing outsourcing arrangements in policing and community safety

9. There are already a number of partnerships between the private sector and the police. The process put in train by West Midlands and Surrey Police follows for example a £200 million agreement between Lincolnshire Police Authority and G4S in December, in which G4S will be responsible for the operation of the

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force control centre, human resources, training, finance, ICT service, facilities management and a number of operational services including the custody and identification unit, the criminal justice unit and firearms licensing.

10. Cleveland Police also has a 10-year contract which covers call handling, front desk staffing, ICT, finance and training services, while Cheshire has a similar contract. Avon and Somerset Police have gone further by joining with Somerset County Council and one of the district councils, as well as IBM in a long-term outsourcing contract called South West One.
11. Councils themselves have of course been outsourcing services for a considerable period of time. This has extended to their community safety functions. Glasgow City Council for example has outsourced their community safety team as a community interest company jointly owned by the City Council and Strathclyde Police. This situation may be replicated in England as we understand that a number of areas are exploring the option set out in the 'Open Public Services' White Paper of public sector staff forming new mutuals to deliver community safety services in their area.

Conclusion and next steps

12. Although, as outlined earlier in the report, a number of police forces have already outsourced some of their back-office and administrative functions, this has not been on the scale or extent that is proposed by West Midlands and Surrey in their Business Partnership Programme. It is therefore important that the people who will be most directly affected by these changes, local residents, understand and are engaged in these developments as they are brought forward.
13. Councillors, through their links with police authorities and their future role on police and crime panels, are well placed to seek the views of local communities on these changes in the way their police services are provided and look to ensure that any concerns the public have are reflected in any final arrangements. Preparing panels to scrutinise these sorts of proposals if police and crime commissioners look to implement them will therefore be important.

Financial Implications

14. There are no financial implications arising for the LGA from this report.