



Report 17 - September 2006

The proposed revisions for the policing services in Northern Ireland are the most complex and dramatic changes ever attempted in modern history.



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THEMATIC REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS BY THE INDEPENDENT COMMISSION ON POLICING FOR NORTHERN IRELAND:

DEVOLUTION IN POLICING

OFFICE OF THE OVERSIGHT COMMISSIONER
FOR POLICING REFORM

SEPTEMBER 2006

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Oversight Commissioner
Al Hutchinson

This is the 17th report of the Oversight Commissioner for Policing Reform, and represents a thematic review and analysis of the devolution of decision making and authority within the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) as well as other key areas which support the implementation of the 175 recommendations made by the Independent Commission on Policing Reform for Northern Ireland, more commonly known as the Patten Commission.

Devolution in Policing is the fifth in a series of focussed reviews of the key themes necessary for success in contemporary policing, and evaluates Northern Ireland's transition toward the full implementation of the Independent Commission's goals. Previous thematic reports addressed human rights and accountability, policing with the community and training. These and all other oversight reports can be found on our website at www.oversightcommissioner.org

My previous report, released in June of 2006, noted that the primary policing institutions in Northern Ireland, including the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Policing Board, the District Policing Partnerships and the Police Ombudsman have largely implemented or are well on the way to implementing the majority of the Independent Commission's recommendations for comprehensive policing reform. These agencies and the people that deliver their services daily have accomplished and continue to accomplish what has been asked of them, often in extremely difficult circumstances. As I was pleased to report in June of 2006 a total of 124 out of the 175 Patten recommendations are now considered implemented. Moreover, the permanent institutions for policing governance and accountability, the Policing Board and the Ombudsman continue to demonstrate their ability to fulfil their mandates as expected.

By contrast it is disappointing that I must also report that some seven years after the publication of the Independent Commission's recommendations in September of 1999, which followed wide-ranging and comprehensive consultations across the entire community, there are still obstacles to achieving the accepted and representative policing service envisioned by the Independent Commission. At this stage of the policing reform process these obstacles arguably have less to do with specific reform issues or the functioning of an effective police service, and are essentially political and societal in nature. As I have stated on several previous occasions it remains the case that collective politics has failed policing in Northern Ireland, not the reverse. This collective political failure and its resulting vacuum have a clear impact on the success of further policing reforms and on the well-being of all communities in Northern Ireland.

As pressure mounts for the political parties to reach an agreement to restore the Northern Ireland Assembly by the 24 November 2006 deadline, societal and other issues including ongoing paramilitary activity and sectarian violence, other organised criminality, and violent assaults, many increasingly racial in nature, continue to plague both individuals and entire communities. These criminal activities not only represent challenges to the criminal justice system and the wider community, they divert critical public resources away from other important areas such as education, housing or health care.

By itself the restoration of a Northern Ireland Assembly cannot resolve these societal challenges, but achieving political devolution and ultimately powers over policing and justice would certainly represent a significant step forward. This is particularly the case with respect to giving local communities a means and a voice to engage ever more meaningfully with the police in resolving



local crime and other problems in a spirit of cooperation and partnership. For those who choose to see, the developments of the past few years represent an enormous leap forward with respect to successful policing reform in Northern Ireland, an achievement which has not gone unnoticed in other societies which have faced or continue to face similar challenges. This is a source of great pride for many of the police officers and other officials that I have met over the past five years, as it rightly should be for all of the people of Northern Ireland.

Devolution in policing is a concept that extends beyond police structures and processes. It is highly significant that the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 envisioned it essential that policing structures and arrangements be, amongst other things, professional, effective, impartial, free from partisan political control and accountable to both the law and the community. The Agreement also stated that any future policing service should be delivered with *the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility*. This was also reiterated in the Independent Commission's Terms of Reference and is very clearly reflected in many of its subsequent recommendations.

For example, the Independent Commission understood the importance of local political engagement in policing, and recommended the devolution of responsibility for policing, with the exception of national security, to the Northern Ireland Assembly. This would be supplemented by the devolution of a significant governance role to a newly formed and more representative Policing Board. The Board would enjoy enhanced powers for holding the Police Service to account and to ensure that it was as efficient, accepted and effective as possible. To engender public confidence in policing generally the Independent Commission also endorsed the concept of an independent Police Ombudsman with the direct power to investigate complaints against the police, thereby assuring the accountability of police officers for their actions.

In addition, the new Police Service was to be structured to ensure a minimum degree of hierarchy while also achieving a maximum degree of delegated authority. This was to be achieved in part by having the police deliver locally-based solutions to crime and other community problems, through their work with locally representative District Policing Partnerships (DPPs), and through the creation of police command units which would be coterminous with existing district councils. These objectives only underscored the need for police officers at all levels to make decisions based on local information, their own professional judgment, and without necessary recourse to the chain of command. This notion runs like a thread throughout the Independent Commission's report, with devolved decision making and the delegation of authority being addressed either specifically or indirectly in 52 recommendations (see attached Appendix A).

As the following thematic report shows, with the exception of the devolution of policing powers to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the devolution of authority and decision making has generally been accomplished as intended. In large part this is due to the successful stewardship of the Policing Board and the keen scrutiny of the Ombudsman, however significant credit must go to the PSNI and to the leadership that has been displayed at all levels of the Police Service. In most cases police officers have enthusiastically embraced the new reality of their delegated powers and have employed them appropriately and successfully in their interactions with the community. Challenges certainly remain, as this report will also show, including the natural tendency of large organisations to retain decision making at the centre and the fact that the police have yet to be fully accepted in all communities.

Another potentially significant challenge to the Independent Commission's views regarding devolved decision making in policing is represented by the ongoing Review of Public Administration (RPA). The Independent Commission recognised that empowerment and the delegation of authority would work best if police commanders could respond locally to their respective communities within the established 26 district council areas. Accordingly 29 District Command Units (DCUs) were established coterminous with the existing district councils, with the establishment of four DCUs in greater Belfast; the Commission also recognised that district boundaries were likely to change at some point in the future, via an initiative like the RPA. The changes now being considered as part of the RPA are becoming increasingly clearer and the Government has already announced that by 2009 the number of district councils will be reduced to seven. This will in turn affect both the structure of the Police Service itself as well as that of the existing DPPs.

One probable outcome is that the Police Service will reduce the number of DCUs to eight, with presumably an equal number of District Policing Partnerships; however the latter issue has not been decided by the Policing Board and the Government and a number of options exist. These kinds of changes inevitably entail both specific challenges and risks. Among the risks, as pointed out above, is the strengthening of natural organisational tendencies to re-centralise decision making while also strengthening traditional rank hierarchies. If this were the case it would certainly be to the detriment of local police empowerment and consequently the wider community. In addition, the scope and degree of change implied by the RPA may adversely impact existing modes and levels of service delivery. Finally, the principle of the devolution and delegation of decision making within the Police Service recommended by the Independent Commission, and its importance for police engagement with the community in resolving local problems at that level, could also be jeopardised.

Although these risks are real and significant it is important to note that the re-organisation implied by the RPA also represents an opportunity. For example, rationalising the distribution of police resources across Northern Ireland also has the potential to increase the organisation's efficient use of these resources, thereby allowing a greater police presence and visibility in the community. It is also an opportunity to continue to reduce the size of the police estate, to improve the Police Service's record on civilianisation, and further increase the level of delegated decision making to police officers at all ranks.

The challenges facing devolution and delegation of decision making in policing are not insurmountable. It is critically important that the existing drive to implement both the letter and the spirit of the Independent Commission's recommendations on devolution continues. This will only support and nourish the evolution of a policing service which, in the words of the Good Friday Agreement, is "active in constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels". Based upon my own experience of policing reform in Northern Ireland, and that of the oversight team, I remain optimistic that these challenges can all be met successfully and that the proper devolution of decision making, in all its meanings and applications, will result in a degree of police and community engagement that the people of Northern Ireland both desire and deserve.

H. Alan Hutchinson
Oversight Commissioner



▶ ▶ abbreviations

▶ ▶ background

| | |
|------|--|
| ACC | Assistant Chief Constable |
| ACPO | Association of Chief Police Officers |
| BCU | Basic Command Unit |
| DCU | District Command Unit |
| DPP | District Policing Partnership |
| HQ | Head Quarters |
| FTR | Full Time Reserve |
| HMIC | Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary |
| IT | Information Technology |
| NIO | Northern Ireland Office |
| PfG | Preparation for Government |
| PSNI | Police Service of Northern Ireland |
| RPA | Review of Public Administration |
| SLA | Service Level Agreement |



The Belfast Agreement

The Good Friday or Belfast Agreement of 1998 established a vision for policing in Northern Ireland that called for a Police Service structured, managed and resourced so that it could be effective in discharging a full range of functions in a normal, peaceful society. The Agreement declared it essential that policing structures and arrangements are such that the Police Service is professional, effective and efficient, fair and impartial, free from partisan political control; accountable, both under the law for its actions and to the community it serves; representative of the society it polices; and operating within a coherent and cooperative criminal justice system which conforms with human rights norms. Furthermore, that these structures and arrangements should be capable of delivering a policing service active in constructive and inclusive partnerships with the community at all levels, *“and with the maximum delegation of authority and responsibility”* (emphasis added).

The Agreement went on to affirm that “these arrangements should be based on principles of protection of human rights and professional integrity, and should be unambiguously accepted and actively supported by the entire community”. The policing reforms which ultimately flowed from the Belfast Agreement, and which are addressed in greater detail below, held that the structure of policing in Northern Ireland was the product of decades of security policing, with multiple levels of hierarchy and a bureaucratic culture. This form of organisation had, not surprisingly, been driven and shaped by security threats rather than the demands of community policing or management efficiency.

The reforms were developed in the belief that for the effective, efficient and economic use of resources in achieving policing objectives, there must be a means to ensure independent professional scrutiny and inspection of the Police Service in order to ensure that proper standards are maintained. This view would also lead to the creation of a Policing Board which would be responsible for negotiating the annual budget with the Northern Ireland Office, or with the appropriate successor body after the devolution of policing. The Board would then allocate the police budget to the Chief Constable and monitor performance against the budget.

Report of the Independent Commission

The Independent Commission on Policing in Northern Ireland, which was chaired by Chris Patten, now Lord Patten, was established as part of the Agreement in June of 1998 and delivered its report in September of 1999. The Independent Commission recommended that human rights and policing with the community should be the core functions of the Police Service, and that the structure of the police organisation should reflect the role that the police were being asked to perform. Further, that the Police Service should work in partnership with the community at the neighbourhood level and at the level of the local district commander. The Independent Commission envisaged a substantially different style of management within the Police Service, with senior managers delegating far more than they had been accustomed to in the past, and with middle managers acting with greater decision making authority than was previously the case. Going further, it was recommended that decision making be delegated as far as possible to those responsible for delivering services to the community, down to the level of Neighbourhood Policing Teams. The Independent Commission believed that having senior managers focussed on strategy rather than on detail would yield significant benefits. The necessity of supporting this cultural change with management training was also recognised.

They also recommended a slimmer structure for Headquarters; one that would reflect the shift of focus towards community policing and the delegation of responsibility to district commanders, and one that permitted a more rigorous and strategic approach to management. At the same time, the Independent Commission emphasised the need to protect the corporate capacity of the Police Service by sustaining the authority of the Chief Constable as the effective head of the Police Service with *full* operational responsibility, coupled with a responsibility to account directly to the Policing Board. The Independent Commission encouraged Headquarters departments to focus on strategic issues and to fulfil the essential role of the centre by providing support services to District Command Units (DCUs). Central command was encouraged to establish a system of accountability at each level of the Police Service.

In support of the concept of devolution and community engagement, it was recommended that there be one DCU for each District Council area, and that DCU Commanders should have fully devolved authority over the deployment of personnel within their command, including the discretion to decide, in consultation with their local community, how best to balance resources between static posts and mobile posts. It was also recommended that DCU Commanders should have devolved budgets, the authority to purchase a range of goods and services, and a capacity to finance local policing initiatives.

The Independent Commission recommended that neighbourhood policing teams be empowered to determine their own local priorities and set their own objectives, within the overall annual Policing Plan and in consultation with community representatives. In the Commission’s conception, the beat manager and his or her team would then organise their own community liaison mechanisms and, in partnership with schools, clubs, businesses and others, decide on such matters as how to programme neighbourhood patrols. Decisions taken in this way are much more likely to be responsive to local community needs than directions from senior ranks far removed from the locality. It was also proposed that officers assigned to security roles be required to keep their DCU Commanders well briefed on local security activities and, in consideration of community impact, that Commanders should be fully consulted before security operations are undertaken in their district.

The Independent Commission proposed that the Policing Board assume the primary role for ensuring democratic accountability of the policing programme. Primary to its powers is the statutory authority to hold the Chief Constable and the Police Service publicly to account. The Board has responsibility for setting objectives and priorities for a strategic policing plan, negotiating the annual budget with the Northern Ireland Office, monitoring police performance against approved plans and appointing all police executives at chief officer level. The Board was also charged with coordinating its work closely with other agencies that were involved in issues of public safety. The creation of District Policing Partnerships also represented a form of devolution, as one of their primary purposes was to allow community representatives and police officers to address and resolve crime and other issues at the lowest possible level.

The Independent Commission recommended that a Police Ombudsman should be appointed to provide an independent and impartial complaints and investigation service for members of the public affected by the conduct of police officers in Northern Ireland. The creation of this office is a further illustration of the comprehensive system of accountability that now affects policing in Northern Ireland.



Devolution – The Concept

It is important for the purposes of this report that the parameters and meaning of devolution in policing are commonly understood. In the context of governmental structures the term devolution describes the statutory granting of powers from the central government to governments at a regional or local level. This political form of devolution continues to dominate current public affairs in Northern Ireland; however it is neither the mandate nor the purpose of this report to comment on the standing of that issue other than to say that, in the absence of a functioning Assembly, devolution has not yet been achieved.

In the narrower context of organisational development devolution describes the delegation of power, usually in the form of authority to make decisions, and normally from a central to a regional, or from a superior to a subordinate, level of the organisation. As previously indicated the concept of delegated decision making to a local level was a recurring theme of the Independent Commission's report. As was also noted this present report will deal mainly with issues internal to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, as well as with the potential impacts or consequences which emanate from the ongoing Review of Public Administration (RPA), particularly with respect to how the RPA might impinge on the attainment and sustainability of the Independent Commission's recommendations.

The Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 gave devolved authority to the Policing Board to ensure a policing service which is efficient and effective, to hold the Chief Constable accountable for his functions and those of the police, to monitor the performance of the police and among other responsibilities, to assess the effectiveness of District Policing Partnerships (DPPs). By virtue of these expansive responsibilities, the Policing Board is responsible for overseeing progress toward an organisational culture where authority over local issues is delegated to the lowest effective level of command or supervision as well as moderating the critical relationships between DCUs and DPPs.

The Independent Commission's recommendation that policing with the community be the core function of the Police Service and the core function of every police station has major implications for police managers, for the structure of the Police Service, its culture and training. Locally based policing is effective only within the context of a devolved management structure, where decision making on local issues can effectively be made by a local commander and by the empowerment of neighbourhood policing teams. The Independent Commission made explicit reference to devolution in Recommendation 76, proposing that police commanders have fully devolved authority over the deployment of personnel, devolved budgets and local purchasing, as well as the ability to finance local policing initiatives. Changes to the structure of the Police Service were influenced by this recommendation, and various features of financial and human resource management were introduced to establish a more decentralised style of management.

The national agenda for policing reform places strong reliance on the delegation of responsibility and accountability in promoting higher levels of effectiveness and efficiency, and above all in achieving more beneficial outcomes for the community. Findings of the Public Services Productivity Panel of Her Majesty's Treasury were wholly in accord with these views. Delegation of decision making is also frequently noted for its effect on increasing innovation, promoting trust, confidence and morale, and for engendering a culture of performance and client-oriented outcomes.

There are certain conditions vital to the successful adaptation of a devolved management structure. For instance, there must be a requisite hierarchy that facilitates and does not obstruct, good two-way communication, as well as training for managers and staff, help mechanisms, frequent coaching and consultation, supportive IT and regular performance reviews. A strong corporate philosophy with detailed policy that informs managers without being unduly restrictive must also be in place. Underlying these efforts should be the understanding that the primary objective is to free the appropriate manager(s) to make decisions based on timely, relevant information and thereby to enhance their capacity to act locally and effectively.

Devolution of Responsibility for Policing

The Independent Commission advocated that responsibility for policing should be devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly as soon as possible, except for matters of national security. As noted above this has not yet occurred. The Northern Ireland Assembly was in operation between 2 December 1999 and 11 February 2000, between 27 May 2000 and 10 August 2001, and again between 11 August 2001 and 14 October 2002. As this thematic report was being finalised discussions between political parties were ongoing towards a 24 November 2006 deadline for restoring the Northern Ireland Assembly. A Preparation for Government (PfG) committee is currently sitting and is examining the devolution of policing and justice powers.

In anticipation of devolution the Government published a discussion paper about the devolution of policing and justice, in conjunction with the introduction of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill, in February 2006. The introduction of this Bill, as well as more recent attempts by Government and local political parties to re-establish the Northern Ireland Assembly, reflects some progress. If political agreement cannot be reached the responsibility for policing will continue to rest with the Government and the Policing Board.

Other aspects of the devolution of responsibility for policing to Northern Ireland have been achieved with some success. The most notable examples are the creation of the Policing Board and District Policing partnerships, and the implementation of other related recommendations of the Independent Commission. These are key components for ensuring that the underlying goals of policing reform and local devolution continue to permeate policing and these achievements represent important milestones on the path to installing a fully devolved policing oversight and accountability system for Northern Ireland.

Reforming the police

The process of policing reform with strong reliance on the devolution of responsibility and the principle of accountability are central themes of the national police reform agenda. Police reform places the District Command Unit at the forefront of community and neighbourhood policing, positioning DCUs as directly accountable to local communities for service delivery. Police Services in England and Wales are now organised around Basic Command Units (BCUs) as the main deliverers of policing to the public. Calls to increase the level of delegation to BCUs have come from the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) since the mid-1990s.



Effective delegation is seen as an essential factor in providing BCUs with the flexibility and empowerment to deliver results. Papers produced by HMIC, the Police Standards Unit, Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), and other policy sources within the Home Office and the National Audit Office offer constructive proposals for pursuing managerial delegation and provide descriptions of good practice from police services comparable to PSNI. Of the many excellent documents produced by the Home Office to promote police reform and efficiency, a draft paper entitled: "Making Delegation Work – Guidance for the Police Service on delegation to Basic Command Units and Departments", is the most directly pertinent to the challenges confronting policing in Northern Ireland. This document provides a detailed and comprehensive account of the advantages of delegation of decision making, the benefits to be gained and the pitfalls to avoid. It provides a context for organisational relationships and responsibilities, discourses on operational delegation, finances and personnel, and includes a functional check list.

The document also offers a comparison of the dimensions of transitional leadership, a "how to" guide, and emphasises the vital importance of audit, inspections and other accountability mechanisms. It also recognises that there are important issues of corporacy and points out strategic managerial areas where centralised control remains imperative. While there must clearly be allowances for variances in organisational circumstance, such as size and location, this document is a useful reference for the Police Service as it pursues the outcomes intended by the Independent Commission and seeks to avoid the centralising pressures created by processes such as the Review of Public Administration.

There are progressive steps underway to ensure modern and sustainable policing. In September 2005 the Policing Board established a tripartite Strategic Working Group consisting of senior representatives from the PSNI, the NIO and the Board to consider the workforce modernisation and policing reform agendas for Northern Ireland. This working group has responsibility to ensure that the key recommendations from the Government's policy paper entitled: "Building Communities, Beating Crime: A Better Police Service for the 21st Century" are taken forward. Additionally the Group is tasked with ensuring accomplishment of recommendations from the HMIC report "Modernising the Police Service".

Review of Public Administration (RPA)

The team leading the current RPA published a final summary document of decisions on 21st March 2006. This followed extensive research and consultation, regarding the configuration of public services including a reduction in the number of local councils. The document confirmed that the number of local councils will be reduced from 26 to seven by 2009.

This will have a significant impact on the future policing structures and the delivery of policing in Northern Ireland. Many of the Independent Commission's recommendations for policing reform centred on the location and size of DCUs, with the notion of one DCU per council area deemed as the most appropriate. Any change to the number and size of district councils will therefore have a direct effect on the size, number and set-up of DCUs. The Police Service in conjunction with the Policing Board must consider how best to adapt organisationally to this type of significant change to the district council system.

▶ ▶ **devolution and accountability**



Accomplishments

Devolved authority brings with it an increased responsibility for accountable policing. The Independent Commission emphasised that organisational transparency was an important aspect of police accountability. In other words, the community should have some means to determine what its Police Service is doing and why. Greater transparency also translates into increased public confidence, and perhaps ever more active cooperation and participation. The Policing Board and the Police Service maintain an active programme of public affairs, which in itself contributes to the notion of democratic accountability. Publications include the Annual Reports of the Policing Board, Annual Policing Plans, Omnibus Surveys, and Independent Reports on Custody Visiting, together with a variety of topical media releases and special reports. Police Service and Policing Board websites are both well-designed and informative, providing access to meeting agendas, minutes and in the case of PSNI, policing plans and personalised contact information for senior managers and organisational leaders at all levels, including for all 29 DCUs. The Policing Board's Corporate Plan for 2005-2008 includes a commitment to building public confidence through accountability and accessibility.

The functioning of the District Policing Partnerships is a vital factor in affording public transparency, as well as in terms of the Policing Board devolving its own governance over policing to a more local level. In accord with the Policing Board's DPP Code of Practice, DPPs meet in public session a minimum of six times each year to receive the District Commander's report. This should consist of a summary of recorded crime and detection rates within the DCU/council area, and an update on specific issues that may have aroused the DPP's or the public's concerns or interests. DPPs have increasingly influenced the inclusion of local priorities into the annual policing plans of DCUs. Plans and reports are made available to the public in hard copy and on the internet.

During the latter half of 2005 the Board completed a review of DPP activities with recommendations improving DPP performance and attracting greater direct participation by the public. Members of the public, initially drawn from the memberships of DPPs, the Learning Advisory Council and the Prison Lay Visitor programme, have volunteered to attend police training sessions at Garnerville and other police training institutions. To date upwards of 66 people have observed police training. Preliminary indications are that the programme has received strong support.

Under sections 59 and 60 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 the Policing Board has the specific power to call for reports from the PSNI and initiate enquires on any aspect of the PSNI's activities. This authority, and its judicious exercise, is a critical demonstration of commitment to democratic accountability. While there is ample evidence that the Board has exercised its functions as intended and with vigour since its inception, it has not yet relied on these specific powers in relation to any issue.

Within the Police Service biannual structured accountability reviews of all 29 DCU Commanders are conducted by their respective Regional ACC, as proposed in the Independent Commission's Recommendation 78. These sessions provide the essential scrutiny of a commander's stewardship of his or her DCU within the devolved management system. The priorities of each review are established in advance through analysis of DCU management reports and key performance indicators across the spectrum of operational and administrative areas. Members of the local DPP commonly attend the operational and community portions of these reviews, which provides them the opportunity of participating in a very direct and transparent accounting of the DCU performance.

Remaining Issues

Our evaluations over the past five years have indicated that while a process of devolution and delegation is taking place, a culture of fully devolved decision making remains a work in progress. In a devolved management structure it is imperative that all levels within the organisation understand their responsibilities and obligations and this is particularly the case with respect to senior managers and administrative or support departments. In the Police Service, the evolving relationship between the DCU Commanders and Headquarters departments is critical to the success of the overall devolution initiative. For these reasons the Independent Commission recommended that Service Level Agreements (SLAs) be established between Headquarters' departments and DCUs to ensure the development of mutual accountability and a service-oriented culture by HQ departments, along with an array of mutually negotiated expectations for service delivery. SLAs currently exist between DCUs and several departments including Finance, Crime Operations, Training and Crime Analysis. Other SLAs, including for Information Services, are intended, however experience to this point would imply that documentary agreements alone cannot ensure the required culture of support and service-orientation on the part of centralised departments.

To ensure success, the commitment of staff of the support services needs to change from the standard bureaucratic reaction of defaulting to centralised control, to a service culture with client-friendly attributes. At the same time, in order to ensure this type of culture develops, DCU Commanders must also fully comprehend Police Service policies in all their ramifications, accept their devolved responsibilities and respect the requirements for standards and corporacy in key areas. Commanders must also recognise their key role in establishing and developing workable and applicable PSNI policies while supporting the achievement of the organisation's strategic objectives. For a conventional bureaucracy, this conversion is as challenging and dramatic in its own way as the transformation of police operations moving from a security orientation to a policing with the community model.

The second issue is the "expectation gap" and the fact that the public has yet to perceive any benefits from devolution in policing structures and processes. The Policing Board conducted four omnibus surveys of public perceptions commencing in October of 2004, with the latest report being issued in April of 2006. The survey instrument employed measures perceptions of police performance, confidence in fair and equitable treatment, and satisfaction with police patrols. Approval ratings for the Police Service have varied little since inception despite the many structural and programmatic improvements to service. After showing early improvement the factor measuring confidence in the Police Service's ability to provide an ordinary day-to-day policing service to the people of Northern Ireland has lapsed back to 2004 levels. Responses to a question intended to evaluate the performance of local police registered a positive early trend but this was not sustained. None of these returns reflect the degree of effort and determination invested by the PSNI in promoting and delivering policing with the community. While this is disappointing, it may reflect rising public expectations of the police, possible frustrations with the lack of a breakthrough in police relations with all communities, or an accurate evaluation of police performance as experienced by the public. This issue illustrates the continuing need for the Policing Board and Police Service to maximise the devolutionary principles espoused by the Independent Commission, so that local communities and local police feel empowered to deal with their local problems.



► ► devolution and the structure of the police service

Another issue relating to devolution in policing concerns the role of the District Policing Partnerships and their part in delegated accountability. In the recent past the operation of DPPs has come under some criticism on grounds of apparent public apathy and sparse attendance. It would be a mistake to judge performance only on this basis, and it is important to recall that it is the representatives of the public, in the form of both independent and elected DPP members, who already represent and serve as a proxy for public views and objectives. It should also be borne in mind that the degree of interest in participating as a member of a DPP remains extremely high, despite continuing threats and intimidation, which in itself is a testament both to public interest and an understanding of the benefits of direct participation in policing. Public meetings of police authorities and community forums are common throughout the democratic world, and have many shared aspects. One of the most striking comparisons is that when the public is confronted with a contentious policing issue, halls will be packed with citizens. Correspondingly, when public levels of concern with policing are low attendance will fall precipitously. An investment in marketing the opportunity to directly address community concerns, coupled with the introduction of specific and local topics to attract interest, as well as invitations to advocacy groups, can serve to improve public attendance and input.

Public meetings are not the only means of ensuring police attention to local matters. DPPs are responsible for gaining the cooperation of a wide cross-section of the public in preventing crime. This involves consultation with non-governmental organisations, community groups and statutory agencies, and bringing findings back to consultation with the police. DPPs serve an invaluable purpose by connecting the police to the public and the public to the police, and DPP activities are a vital conduit for providing information on crime and disorder of local concern. Efforts to improve their function and promote their benefits to the public in every possible way should command the continuing attention of the Policing Board and the Police Service. The future restructuring of the DPPs which will result from the changes of the RPA will therefore represent a major challenge for the Policing Board and the PSNI.

Communicating the positive results of policing will remain an ongoing challenge. Policing in Northern Ireland operates in an environment that constantly questions and examines every facet of police activity. This is coupled with an ongoing requirement for all agencies involved in policing, particularly the Police Service and the Policing Board, to be ready to respond to the public and to the media. To its credit, the Policing Board appointed an external panel in 2005 to conduct an independent assessment of the Board's performance. The panel reported publicly in November of 2005, and made many salient observations and recommendations for improving the Board's performance. These were entirely consistent with the Independent Commission's intentions in this regard. Among the proposals was that the Board should review the amount of its business conducted in public and strive to become more effective in communicating to the public the work it is doing and its achievements. While lauding the robust style of questioning of the Chief Constable and chief officers, the panel suggested that the Board consider how more of these inquiries could be conducted in public to raise public awareness about the issues the Board was attempting to address. While all evidence suggests that the Policing Board is doing a thorough job of examining police efficiency and effectiveness, it is nonetheless desirable that this duty is not only being done but is seen to be done as well.



Accomplishments

Responsibility for acting on the Independent Commission's recommendations initially rested with the Northern Ireland Policing Authority and the Chief Constable of the former Royal Ulster Constabulary. The Authority resolved that there should be one DCU for each existing District Council area, with coterminous boundaries. As recommended by the Independent Commission, an exception was made for a devolved relationship for service delivery in Belfast City, where four DCUs were created. With the advent of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, governance responsibilities were assumed by the Northern Ireland Policing Board. Currently there are 29 DCUs functioning under a Regional Command structure for Urban and Rural policing. It is a distinct credit to policing that despite operational demands, this major re-organisation was accomplished within 18 months, accompanied by a determined effort to devolve decision making for local policing to the appropriate level, stimulate and develop community partnerships, and deliver a range of devolved support services.

The Independent Commission observed that the changes envisaged in its report could only be achieved if the police management committed itself fully to the programme. Outside bodies can monitor, but cannot implement change or directly ensure that it is implemented. While stressing that the first priority must be to get the right management team in place, the Commission recommended that the Police Service leadership team include specialists in change management, and that a first priority should be to develop an orderly programme for change. The Policing Board and the Police Service responded by bringing about the progressive transformation of the chief officer and civilian equivalent group into a core team committed to introduce and adapt to change, and to installing a management culture based on performance and service delivery.

A "top-down/bottom-up" process of strategic planning was introduced by the PSNI management team, whereby Governmental goals and Policing Board priorities are transmitted down through the Police Service to DCUs, while eliciting an upward response in the form of objectives, performance indicators, targets and local objectives from DCUs. Returns from all 29 DCUs contribute to a final comprehensive Policing Plan for Northern Ireland, ultimately approved and communicated publicly by the Policing Board. Successive annual versions produced since 2002 reflect a progressive refinement of the process, particularly with the recognition of local community priorities and improvements to performance indicators.

Remaining Issues

The vision for local policing that was articulated by the Independent Commission, and reflected in the many achievements in policing over the past several years, now faces a further challenge in the form of the Review of Public Administration (RPA) and the certainty of another major organisational restructuring. The Government has communicated a reduction from the current 26 district councils to a total of seven. It is reflective of the Independent Commission's intentions that policing boundaries will be altered accordingly to maintain the principle of coterminous boundaries. Larger police districts offer advantages of greater operational flexibility and economy of administration, and consolidation is consistent with a trend in comparable jurisdictions. Nonetheless, the risk is that the drive for greater operational efficiency may adversely affect hard-

won partnerships and a dutiful focus on local concerns. This effect can be minimised by the Police Service and Policing Board with due attention to the principles and processes of devolution within the new structures of the police service.

Supportive information technology (IT) systems are also a requisite element of a devolved management structure, speeding up and clarifying communication between managers and employees and providing rapid access to information, organisational policy and assistance if required. While slow to make progress in the initial years of implementation, the Police Service's IT programme is now beginning to deliver on the Independent Commission's ambitious vision. Changes dictated by the RPA may impinge on plans that were designed to service a structure of 29 DCUs. A compatible IT systems design should be included in plans accommodating to the RPA.

While the PSNI is not unique in its challenges in downsizing Headquarters and devolving authorities, the issues of downsizing and devolution will remain and will be relevant to the RPA police restructuring. The Independent Commission recommended that there should be a slimmer structure at police Headquarters, one that reflects the shift of focus towards policing with the community and the delegation of responsibility to DCU Commanders, and permits a more rigorous and strategic approach to management. Numbers or percentage targets were not included and the specifics were confined to a recommended reduction to senior ranks, an objective achieved early in the change process. The Police Service then turned its attention to efficiency measures designed to shift police officer positions from Headquarters to DCUs, with mixed results. Ultimately 613 officers left Headquarters, mostly due to attrition or severance. Only 66 officers actually reported to a DCU. These developments were somewhat counterbalanced when Criminal Justice emerged as a major department of Headquarters, with a staff complement contributing to an increase in officers assigned there. Next, Criminal Operations expanded to take responsibility for a greater number of serious criminal investigations, resulting in the transfer of 213 officers back from the DCUs to Headquarters, although the investigators remain classified as "front line". Two regional command structures, Rural and Urban, were also created in order to ensure coordination and accountability of the DCUs.

The assignment of public order units, road policing and staff assistance to the two Regional Command structures, however logical, represented a step away from a fully devolved model. These many changes and movements of personnel made it impractical to assess actual progress towards slimming down Headquarters by number counts alone. Responsibility for achieving a slimmer Headquarters is now dependent on management of the Human Resources Strategic Plan.

The Police Service is mindful of the HMIC publication, "Modernising the Police," a thematic inspection of workforce modernisation, the role of management and the deployment of police staff. PSNI adopted the HMIC definition of "front line" positions for measuring operational resources compared to "back office" allocations, establishing a front line policing target of 60% of total officer complement for the current year. As of April 2006 the actual was 65.38%. The Policing Plan 2006-2009 includes a goal to take that figure to 72% by 2007-2008. Efficiency measures applied to back office operations hold promise of other reductions, implementing measures identified by the Anti-Bureaucracy User Group. In addition, all major functional units of the Police Service are charged with contributing to the Gershon efficiency target of 7.5% savings over three years. The impact of



▶ ▶ devolution and operations

these various efforts should maintain focus on reducing administrative overburden at Headquarters. There remains a lack of clear understanding of the role of Headquarters departments versus the Chief Constable's vision for greater autonomy on the part of DCU Commanders. This is exacerbated by the natural tendency within a devolved management structure for the many operational priorities, now being generated by the various organisational levels, central, regional and district, to compete for resources and attention.

These are serious issues that will require the attention of the Police Service and the Policing Board. The most likely prospect is that, so long as Headquarters departments retain the capacity to direct and control the DCUs, they will continue to do so. Arguably, the reduced ability of the Police Service to meet its own objectives with respect to increasing civilianisation and the appropriate movement of civilian staff out of the Police Service are symptomatic of a lack of progress on other initiatives to reduce both the size and role of Headquarters. Adapting to the impacts of the RPA will present opportunities to address many of these issues, including the devolution initiative and the shift of resources away from Headquarters to a reduced number of DCUs. This should allow Headquarters and its departments to focus more on strategic and corporate issues.



Accomplishments

Central to the success of any effective policing with the community model is the decentralisation of decision making responsibility. This allows police commanders and individual officers to exercise greater autonomy, and shifts the focus of accountability to a much lower level. During the early stages of organisational change within the Police Service transitional policies provided DCU Commanders with the authority to manage their local operational and resource requirements. Successive policy and procedural initiatives affecting financial management and human resources have added impetus to this process. The guiding principles are contained in the Chief Constable's policy, General Order 35/2004, Policy on Devolution. This policy was issued in June of 2004 and describes a vision of the Police Service moving away from its traditional hierarchical structures, driving decision making down to the lowest appropriate and possible level.

As a principle of devolution and local accountability, the Independent Commission recommended that intelligence officers keep DCU Commanders well briefed on security activities in their districts and that DCU Commanders should be fully consulted before security operations are undertaken in their district so that community impact was considered. This important practice increasingly functioned as intended and despite some initial negative impact caused by centralisation of Crime Operations, the overall intent has been achieved. Although these specific recommendations will be impacted as a result of the Security Service assuming responsibility for national security matters in 2007, the principle of devolution has not changed. That means the DCU commanders should be aware of all policing activities impacting their communities, including those intelligence matters that have passed into the criminal domain.

Remaining Issues

The Chief Constable's policy referred to above acknowledges the importance of delegation in supporting the policing with the community philosophy, and it is imperative that this policy is implemented in every aspect. The Independent Commission signalled its understanding of the changing nature of policing by focusing on the neighbourhood policing team as the primary unit for service delivery. In essence this describes a "team-centred" rather than "constable-centred" system, which with proper team management ensures both continuity and flexibility. Recent developments in mobile communications systems coupled with an abundance of operational information, soon to be available to police officers at their finger-tips or through voice transmission, all contribute to improving the empowerment of front line officers. All these influencing conditions have occurred at what might be described as a fortuitous time, presenting an opportunity for the Police Service to progress towards the goals of policing with the community on a framework of a devolved but more capable organisation. This will only be achieved if the Police Service turns its attention to expanding the vital policy framework that will sustain the concept of devolution, particularly in the face of challenges such as the shift to larger DCUs under the Review of Public Administration.

A Best Value Review of the police patrolling was conducted by the PSNI in 2005-2006 and surfaced a number of issues. Its recommendations were wide-ranging and comprehensive, with many issues impinging directly on the status of devolution and delegation to DCUs. The report revealed a need for the continued improvement of the means and measures by which devolution is practiced through revisions to business processes. The focus on effective and efficient service delivery of

patrolling ensures an emphasis on features eminently supportive of policing with the community, including partnerships, collaborative problem solving and re-assurance strategies aimed at reducing internal assignments away from patrolling and improving police visibility in the community. This and other reviews indicate that the Chief Constable and the Police Service are aware of the importance of continued devolution and community partnerships, and it will be important that the devolution initiative continues to be driven at the highest levels of the organisation, and that the Independent Commission's recommendations in this regard are fully implemented. The Policing Board will have a clear monitoring role with respect to the efficiency and effectiveness of any changes.

Another operational issue that is frequently raised with respect to devolution is the impact on local policing that was the result of the recentralisation of detectives. The new Crime Operations Department formed in March of 2004 to build police capacity to investigate serious and organised crime, now has responsibility for investigations which include murder, attempted murder and sexual offences among others, as well as terrorist offences. Crime Operations is also responsible for the gathering and management of criminal intelligence. The current operational structure is compliant with ACPO guidelines and there is no disputing the compelling professional logic driving these recent changes.

Nonetheless, the concomitant loss of talented investigators to DCUs, and with this the ability of local DCU Commanders to oversee investigations in their districts, has arguably adversely affected their authority with their respective communities. This could only be observed internally and externally to be a step back from the objective of achieving a fully devolved police organisation. This issue also illustrates the difficulties faced by the Chief Constable, in his task of resolving the tensions between a need for corporacy and the logical implications of a full devolution of decision making. Viewed from another perspective however, it may also illustrate the natural and possibly irresistible tendencies for centralised departments and a resourceful conventional bureaucracy to exercise control over DCUs and other field operations. This is a situation where the creation of larger DCUs with increased capacity, as a result of the RPA restructuring, may actually create an opportunity to increase the presence and visibility of local detectives in communities.

▶ ▶ devolution and finance



Accomplishments

Finance Department led the way in the introduction of policies and procedures that increased the administrative authority of DCU Commanders, extending decision making over budgets and procurement among others. Business Managers were posted to DCUs to take responsibility for budget development and the day-to-day administration of local policing budgets. Currently 87% of the police budget, including salaries, is devolved to DCUs with plans for progressively more authorities to be devolved. The extension of local financial management is included in the Policing Plan 2006-2009.

Since introducing devolved budgets the Police Service has reported that its expenditures are within the limits of budget appropriations, something which had not occurred in the many prior years when spending was heavily impacted by the unpredictability of the security situation. While this performance was admittedly accomplished in conditions of increasing normalcy, this should not detract from the credit due to DCU Commanders, who accepted their responsibilities and employed the new expenditure controls entrusted to them as intended and with solid results.

Remaining Issues

There remain institutional barriers to the further delegation of authority such as those represented by established Governmental financial controls. These are beyond the authority of the Chief Constable to influence. For instance, DCU Commanders favour the greater use of local suppliers for efficiency reasons, and to promote community engagement. Existing Government restrictions require conventions such as comparative estimates, minimum insurance coverages and demands for market-tested solutions. This tends to marginalise smaller local firms, as does a Police Service requirement for security reviews. There is currently a £1,000 limit on local purchasing without constraints. Coupled with local and corporate requirements for security reviews, formidable barriers continue to exist before the Independent Commission's goals for financial delegation can be fully realised.

As an example, the Best Value Review of Patrolling called for the full delegation of vehicle budgets including associated purchases and running costs, more control over establishments, and the need to formalise an operational contingency budget. While salary budgets for police officers and civilian staff are devolved, Commanders do not feel a sense of control over amounts or payments. As might be expected, the report observed that the first priority of the DCU management team is always focussed on operational needs, and budgetary aspects are sometimes overlooked. New operational requirements are introduced locally and centrally, without consideration for budget implications. Budget adjustments can be imposed by either the Government or the Police Service, and may occur in mid-year.

This can be disruptive of planning at the DCU level, as Commanders are powerless to object and must find solutions within their own means. Police overtime is also subject to ad hoc and regional diversions, often at short notice, with DCUs being obliged to perform. Other problems include personnel reassignments which affect budgets developed either by the Region or Headquarters without prior warning to or consultation with the DCU and overtime budgets may be reduced to cover unexpected Regional contingencies. Other issues relate to the terms of virements between accounts and the authorities related to them, control over accrued savings, police and civilian pay, transport services, supplies, training, and a budget for policing with the community

initiatives. These and other issues that have been listed illustrate that achieving the proper balance between Commanders in the field and central departments is not easy. They also illustrate that these inevitable tensions between the centre and the field are a normal and expected part of the organisation's evolution to a more decentralised structure.

The Best Value Review of Patrolling concluded that IT had to be controlled centrally as it is subject to a corporate strategy, and must be coordinated with strategic objectives and in compliance with procurement regulations, functionality, quality, cost, and health and safety concerns. The majority of funding for core IT projects and equipment has been provided by Patten non-severance funding and it was felt that this would be difficult to control other than by means of the current system, which seems a reasonable approach. In totality, the impact of recommendations of the Best Value Review of Patrolling would create more local flexibility in budgetary control as well as more decision making authority over devolved budgets. In circumstances such as purchasing, legislative or regulatory changes may be required to accomplish organisational goals, and a robust implementation process will be needed.

▶ ▶ devolution and human resources



Accomplishments

In the initial deployment of resources to support DCU Commanders in carrying out their devolved responsibilities, Personnel Managers were assigned to the larger DCUs, with shared staff arrangements extended to the smaller districts. Decision making over the operational deployment of personnel within DCUs was delegated to local Commanders consistent with the Independent Commission's Recommendation 76. Of less certain status is the implementation of Recommendation 54, which proposed that community consultation should be part of the decision making process on how best to balance resources between static posts and mobile patrols.

PSNI Human Resources recently launched an extensive addition to the Police Service's intranet, providing detailed policy information in a user-friendly format on all facets of management affecting both police and civilian staff. The delegated authority of DCU Commanders over human resource matters is spelled out in detail. This feature has the potential to achieve much in terms of stimulating administrative problem solving and ensuring that Headquarters is sensitive to issues at all levels of the Police Service.

A Managing Attendance policy delegating responsibility and accountability to DCUs for sickness and absence levels was first introduced in 2001. In July of 2003 the Police Service issued three more General Orders providing updated guidance to all commanders, supervisors and staff on every aspect of PSNI sickness absence policy. A Distance Learning Module and a lesson plan were released concurrently for the assistance of line managers. The devolved management system provides a comprehensive break-out of all categories of sickness absence, including officers injured on duty as a separate category. Sickness absence rates were driven down from base line figures, with the greatest improvement registered among regular officers. Although targets for further improvements are embodied in the current Policing Plan, this success is evidence of the potential success of an appropriate devolution of control within a human resource domain.

The Police Service conducted a cultural review in April 2005 in order to gain an understanding of the attitude of police officers and support staff. Once results were analysed the Police Service chose to concentrate its efforts in five main areas: roles and responsibilities, empowerment, management, diversity and communications. The Chief Constable concluded that effective delegation is not yet happening consistently across the organisation and that if this element is not addressed the net effect would be that decisions would continue to be made through the rank hierarchy, rather than at the lowest appropriate level. Aside from negative effects on the management of priorities by senior officers, this would also limit the speed and effectiveness of decision making overall, particularly with respect to the lower organisational levels. On the positive side, Chief Inspectors, Inspectors and Superintendents rated levels of empowerment as relatively high. The fact that the survey was conducted, and the positive response by PSNI senior management, reflect an increasingly risk tolerant and resilient organisational culture which is willing to submit to self-examination and policy correction.

Remaining Issues

Establishing a proper balance of responsibility and authority on the movement of police officers between DCUs, Regions and Departments is more difficult to achieve. As DCU Commanders became accustomed to accepting their responsibility for achieving results, they have become increasingly critical of the lack of consultation generally, and the lack of control over staff transfers

in particular. Such transfers can remove key officers from a DCU, often at inopportune times, while new officers can be assigned centrally to a DCU without regard to timing or budgetary implications. Headquarters recently negotiated a new devolved decision making agreement with Urban Region, designed to allow the Region considerable latitude to re-deploy officers and direct the transfer process. This agreement has the potential for extension to other areas, particularly when the consolidation of DCUs occurs under the RPA. The annual performance appraisal process is also a component of the devolved management system. Following a recent HMIC review of the appraisal process the Police Service is in the process of revising the assessment instrument.

It is desirable that DCU Commanders be granted more discretion over selections and transfers, although not to the detriment of legitimate corporate strategy and standards. At this time there are no definitive or authoritative police management guidelines for achieving the appropriate balance. This has the effect of making the Police Service somewhat of a pathfinder in this regard, and developments within the PSNI will doubtless be analysed by many other police services. The Police Service has defined the next steps in the devolution of budgets and procurement and if commitments are met this function should meet the terms of the original vision. In the field of human resources there is less clarity of means and methods.

▶ ▶ **devolution and training & development**



Accomplishments

The Independent Commission envisaged the evolution of a different management style within the Police Service to encompass devolved budgets, authority and decision making. Consequently, the need for training and learning in support of this new style became critically important. One response was the development of a Centre for Leadership designed to provide an understanding of leadership perspectives, promote empowerment and encourage an ethos of performance management. The introduction of the Leadership Grid Module has enabled participants to develop skills in leadership, personal management, problem solving and team effectiveness, and is open to all personnel. In collaboration with Centrex, the Police College incorporated the Centrex training module introduced under the title: "Core Leadership Development Programme". This provides an opportunity to develop a leadership learning model that addresses the needs of post-probationary constables, sergeants, inspectors and police civilian staff of equivalent rank. The Police College also included a number of existing developmental courses for Superintendents, Chief Superintendents, ACCs and civilian equivalents. Programmes include a Certificate in Police Leadership Skills, a Professional Certificate in Management, a Professional Diploma in Management and a Master's in Business and Public Administration. Programmes are accredited through the Chartered Management Institute.

The Police Service developed a purpose-designed Beat Officer Course for Sergeants and Constables assigned to Neighbourhood Policing Teams. This was in part intended to encourage local decision making by front line officers. The course is delivered by the Police College's Operational Development Programme, and includes among other things policing with the community policy, the use of problem solving folders and the development of local partnerships to assess the root causes of public disorder and criminal activity.

The Independent Commission encouraged the introduction of targeted training services to DCUs and Headquarters departments. The development of Service Level Agreements (SLAs) was recommended as a way to commit both parties to cooperation in the provision of training, while allowing Training Branch to maintain training standards and support for corporate objectives such as policing with the community and human rights. In May of 2005 the Police Service ratified General Order 13/2005, District Training, which extended a pre-tested SLA to all 29 DCUs. SLAs between the Police College and DCU trainers are monitored at three-month intervals by a sub-group of the Learning Advisory Council. In a good example of its own important role in monitoring police training, the Policing Board is coordinating the efforts of DPPs to establish their own training SLAs with DCU Commanders.

Remaining Issues

Management training is not only a key requirement for existing police supervisors, but it is also strategically important for the cadre of recent PSNI recruits who will soon occupy supervisory positions themselves. These individuals represent the future leadership of the Police Service, and management skills will be required in order to sustain the environment that is being shaped through an increasing delegation of authority. The Independent Commission recommended that all police managers should have management training, as appropriate, and that every manager should at some stage of his or her career complete a management course in a non-police environment.

Frequent management workshops were proposed so that managers could discuss and develop with each other how best to reshape the organisation. Since our oversight evaluations have begun the Police Service has conducted workshops on a variety of operational and administrative issues. There are still officers assigned to Neighbourhood Policing Teams who have not received any formal training in policing with the community. This seems to be an anomaly which cannot be readily explained. In addition, although work on a pilot citizen's course is completed, this recommendation has not been implemented fully. Aside from any other benefit, the course is one more way in which the Police Service can increase its transparency as well as working directly with members of the community consistent with a devolved style of operation.

It is not clear at this time how many DCU trainers will be required under a revised DCU structure which will result from the ongoing RPA. This in turn affects the degree to which officers in these essential positions can acquire training in order to maintain their often rigorous operational commitments. Despite the existence of an SLA there is some doubt that the role of DCU trainers has been satisfactorily resolved, a concern which is shared by HMIC. It will be important that the newly aligned larger DCUs have the local training capacity to meet community and DCU needs, as well as the significant requirements of larger organisational training needs.

Training and development is often called the engine of change. To employ this analogy further, the Police Service's future capacity may be in peril through the lack of preparation of middle managers to assume future organisational responsibilities. The new "super DCUs" which will be the result of the RPA will require and can only function when DCU Commanders possess all the necessary sophisticated knowledge and skills to achieve their objectives. In addition, supervisors and front line officers at all levels will continue to require training and "mentoring" to take full advantage of the new structure of delegated decision making.

Continuity and sustainability in training are an issue. There are now more than 2,000 police officers with less than five years service. Progressive early retirement programmes have left the PSNI with an officer corps which is therefore still developing its managerial expertise and confidence in working with devolved responsibilities, all conditions which call for the vigorous maintenance and periodical rejuvenation of the training and development programme. Unfortunately, the absence of stable leadership in the position of Director of Training has become a chronic problem in its own right, and continuity and sustainability should become a major focus of effort for the Policing Board and the Police Service.

▶ ▶ **future challenges**



The Review of Public Administration

Aside from any other impacts, the ongoing Review of Public Administration will have a major impact on the Police Service and its methods of service delivery. The reduction of DCUs from the current 29 down to eight (this assumes Belfast being split into two DCUs) will in itself pose significant challenges to the organisation, and will require the kind of consultative and supportive decision making structure intended by the Independent Commission if it is to succeed. This is arguably one of the biggest challenges faced by the PSNI in recent times, and in terms of its structural impact at least approaches the challenges which the Police Service faced in implementing the Patten policing reforms. It is important to note that this also represents an opportunity to combine the efficiency gains resulting from restructuring with the benefits of devolution in policing.

In the six years since the major policing reorganisation was commenced the principle of having coterminous DCUs and district councils has proven to be extremely successful in connecting policing strategies and allocation patrol patterns with local concerns for public safety. While there is no denying the advantages offered by merging district council areas for the sake of both governance and policing efficiency, adapting to the RPA has the potential to at least temporarily disrupt local police and community relationships, relationships which have been developed and carefully nurtured by all concerned over a long period of time. There is also an inherent risk to the decision making authority of the leadership of neighbourhood policing teams, as DCU Commanders grow more geographically distant from their neighbourhoods and their local policing partners. If care is not taken to sustain community influence and flexibility of operation at the supervisory and middle-management levels, the increasingly attentive response shown by the Police Service to community needs may become a potential casualty.

The cycle of policing reform and change begun by the Independent Commission in 1999 called for the police leadership team to produce a programme for change, to be presented to the Policing Board, and which should be reviewed periodically with the Board. No less effort should be devoted to the challenges presented by the RPA. Transformation to this new order will challenge the ingenuity and commitment of the PSNI to the original goals for a devolved system of policing. The merger of districts will also present a formidable challenge to the Policing Board and the Police Service to sustain public confidence in policing, by providing a forthright and complete public explanation of how plans to combine existing DCUs will affect local relationships and partnerships with the police, how the visibility and responsiveness of the police will be increased, and how the DPPs will be organised in the future.



The Independent Commission 1999 report offered a compelling vision of policing for Northern Ireland that is remarkable for its congruity and the interconnectedness of its component parts. The Commission recommended that policing with the community should be the core function of the Police Service, a decentralised system with multiple local commands performing within a framework of corporate policy. Since implementing the template of 29 DCUs, which corresponded to existing district council boundaries, the police and the public began working towards a close conjunction of interests on all matters affecting public safety. This has been and remains a challenge since not every community has engaged with nor accepted the Police Service.

The local police, through neighbourhood problem solving and public engagement, have acquired an intimate awareness of issues of concern to the community. The public have become more familiar with local officers and found opportunities to engage in productive partnership arrangements. Council members and independent members have contributed to District Policing Partnerships, gaining more knowledge and awareness of public safety issues within their communities while also influencing policing priorities and encouraging community engagement with police. These features are at risk if adaptation to the changes to be introduced by the RPA agenda is not done with care and sensitivity.

The primary burden for addressing these many challenges and developing appropriate solutions falls on the Chief Constable. In the exercise of transitional leadership, chief officers are called upon to demonstrate strategic leadership, show trust in department heads and DCU Commanders, and establish realistic, measurable and achievable corporate strategies and targets. This must all be done while simultaneously institutionalising and sustaining the developing system of devolved decision making. Devolved organisations pilot transformation from a dependency model to a responsibility model; from central control to self-managing teams and a culture of personal performance and responsibility. We are certainly satisfied that in terms of intent and ethos the Chief Constable ascribes to the principle of delegation in policing. However, aside from goals applying to financial management, there is no specific mention of the pursuit of delegated authority elsewhere in the Policing Plan 2006-2009, although the Plan commits the Police Service to establishing a new DCU structure by 31 March 2007.

Major cultural change of this magnitude, performed while fully engaged in the dynamics of providing an effective policing service and ongoing security challenges, requires unrelenting perseverance and a capacity for sound strategic planning. Accommodating to the terms of the RPA represents a major goal for the Policing Board and the Chief Constable. Failure to sustain the development of a devolved organisation means foregoing the potential advantages of delegation, and failing to dismantle the final vestiges of the bureaucratic and hierarchical practices that existed in the past. If not conceived and managed with care to preserve the benefits of delegation and devolution, implementing the RPA could cause the unravelling of much of the reforms achieved since the release of the Independent Commission's report. The ultimate potential of the Police Service for fulfilling its commitment to the people of Northern Ireland may rest in the balance of getting this strand of devolution right.



RECOMMENDATIONS WITH EITHER DIRECT OR INDIRECT DEVOLUTION AND DELEGATION IMPLICATIONS

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EXCERPTS FROM “MAKING DELEGATION WORK”¹:

Role of the Chief Officer:

- Demonstrate strategic leadership
- Show trust in department heads and BCU Commanders
- Demonstrate transformational leadership
- Set corporate strategies and targets
- Define limits of delegations
- Hold Managers / BCU Commanders accountable for performance
- Implement robust internal inspection

Role of Department Heads / force HQ:

- Hold Managers / BCU Commanders accountable for performance
- Implement 10 hallmarks of effective performance management
- Implement robust internal inspection regimes

Role of BCU Commanders:

- Match delegated resources to local priorities
- Carry out the day-to-day management of their own resources
- Delegate resources within the BCU to align financial and operational responsibility
- Produce plans which input into force budget & target setting, and planning processes
- Be accountable to chief officers for performance

GENERAL PRINCIPLES FOR SUCCESSFUL DEVOLUTION

- Trust and confidence
- Good two-way communication
- A Requisite hierarchy
- Frequent coaching and consultation
- Help mechanisms
- Training for management and staff
- Appointment policy
- Specified role definitions – e.g. Regions
- Accountability mechanisms
- Regular performance reviews
- Supportive IT systems
- Selection training and development of staff to a level appropriate to tasks.
- Principles and values leads to high levels of commitment
- Focus on competitive success – leads to stretch goals
- Freedom to decide – leads to fast response and innovative strategies
- Capability to act – leads to decisions based on fast, relevant information
- Focus on “please the customer” – leads to positive customer outcomes
- Ethical information – leads to “one truth” throughout the organisation
- Self-managed teams

¹Making Delegation Work: Guidance for the Police Service on Delegation to Basic Command Units, Draft Report, Home Office, 2005.



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