

# Reinventing local policing

### FAST FACTS

- The Scottish Government is consulting on its Draft Police Priorities.
- Reform Scotland welcomes the emphasis placed on localism and accountability within the draft, though the priorities don't explain how different policing practices can be pursued in different areas if all under the direction of a single Chief Constable.
- Reform Scotland called on the Scottish Government to drop its 1,000 extra officers pledge in 2015. We therefore welcome the fact that the Scottish Government has now done this, which ensures that police deployment is an operational, as opposed to a political decision.
- Local authorities need to have a far greater role within policing, with a return to the tri-partite governance structure.
- Localism can be re-injected into policing through funding and governance.
- There needs to be a change back to the old system where there is roughly a 50/50 split in funding policing between local authorities and the Scottish Government.
- To ensure the different needs of different areas of Scotland are taken into account, there should be a councillor from each local authority on the Scottish Police Authority.

### CONTEXT

The Scottish Government has put its Draft Strategic Police Priorities for Scotland out for consultation. Reform Scotland has responded to that consultation and this briefing summarises that submission.

The current Strategic Police Priorities, which provide the framework for what is expected of the police, were set out in 2013 as part of the creation of the new single force. The Scottish Government is reviewing those Priorities, taking account of the experience of the single police force to date. The Priorities are focused around six themes and are supposed to give a broad strategic direction to Police Scotland and the Scottish Police Authority:

- Localism
- Prevention
- Response
- Collaborative working
- Accountability
- Adaptability

### BACKGROUND

Police Scotland was formally established on 1 April 2013 and is currently the second largest police force in the UK after the Metropolitan Police.

The Police & Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 had abolished the previous eight territorial police forces, their governing bodies and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency.

There are 14 local policing divisions, each of which is headed up by a Local Police Commander, as well as specialist divisions, such as Organised Crime and Counter Terrorism. Operations Support divisions support functions such as Road Policing and Air Support.

It is the job of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) to hold the Chief Constable to account for policing in Scotland. The SPA's members are appointed by the Scottish Government.

Local authorities no longer contribute towards the financing or governance of policing in Scotland, though they contribute towards Local Police Plans.

Reform Scotland was against the creation of the single police force, fearing that it centralised control over policy and removed what local accountability and control there was. The eight-force structure was far from ideal, but centralisation was a move in the wrong direction as it did not allow for the necessary local flexibility to deal with the different local needs and priorities across Scotland.

However, we accept that wholesale police re-organisation is not on the cards. Therefore, it is necessary to re-inject localism back into the current structure and, therefore, have welcomed the opportunity to feed into the consultation process.

The draft priorities rightly states:

*“what works and is right for a community in one part of Scotland won’t necessarily work as well or be right in another.”*

However, that recognition seemed to be absent when the single force came into being. For example, prior to the police merger, different policies were pursued with regard to policing prostitution across Scotland. There was, arguably, a “pragmatic” tolerated approach in Edinburgh which contrasted with a more zero tolerance approach in Glasgow.

In the [Scotsman on 30 May 2014](#), Steve Allen, the former deputy chief constable of Lothian and Borders Police, commented on the impact that the police merger had had, saying that it had:

*“brought together fundamentally different leadership styles that created misunderstandings.*

*“They felt that some of their basic principles and beliefs about policing were being challenged. Others believed that they were not performing in a way that was expected of them and it spilled out into a wider political arena.*

*“The sauna raids in Edinburgh challenged a way of policing that had existed for a decade or more in terms of style and methods.”*

So while the emphasis placed on localism in the draft priorities is welcome, there is no explanation of how the need for different policing practices across Scotland, but carried out by one force, will actually work. In practice how can two very different policing policies (and this is only one example) be pursued under the ultimate authority of a single Chief Constable?

The draft priorities highlight the Local Police Plans, which enable councils to specify measures

to be included. However, this appears to be only an ability to contribute and advise, as opposed to the statutory and equal role afforded to local authorities under the old tri-partite structure.

### Police numbers

One of the themes highlighted by the priorities is accountability. In our report [The Thinning Blue Line](#), published in June 2015, we expressed our concern about the Scottish Government's 1,000 extra officers pledge. While more police officers can obviously be a positive thing, concerns had been expressed by organisations such as Unison, which represents police staff, that this arbitrary target, combined with pressures to find savings, had led to Police Scotland getting rid of civilian staff. As a result, police officers were having to backfill those roles, which inevitably must mean that they spend less time patrolling the streets. In other words a politically motivated arbitrary target was potentially impacting on police deployment, something which should be an operational decision.

As a result, Reform Scotland called for that pledge to be dropped, arguing that police numbers, and deployment, had to be an operational decision. Chief Constables have to have the ability to put resources where they feel they are most needed, including in non-policing roles. Having an arbitrary target focused on police numbers harms that operational independence. Reform Scotland reiterated our call to scrap the extra officers pledge in our 2016 manifesto. Therefore, we welcome the Scottish Government's decision to end this arbitrary target.

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Reform Scotland believes that there are two ways that localism, with clearer lines of local accountability, can be re-injected into policing in Scotland – through funding and governance.

**Funding:** As the old adage goes, “He who pays the piper calls the tune”, and if local authorities are to have any meaningful input into policing in Scotland they must contribute toward the cost of policing. If local authorities have no control over the purse strings then it will be difficult for councils to adopt differing policies towards policing, or even have a meaningful input into policy direction. As a result, there needs to be a change back to the old system where there is roughly a 50/50 split in funding policing between local authorities and the Scottish Government. This would also allow for greater accountability to local communities as well as an increased input into local policing.

**Governance:** The Scottish Police Authority is basically a quango with members appointed by government and this blurs transparency and accountability. Rather than the government nominating all members, the membership should be made up of a split between local government and central government appointees to reflect the split in funding. To ensure that the need for diversity and flexibility is accommodated by a single police force it would be necessary to have a representative from each local authority. This would of course lead to a very large police authority – depending on the number of local authorities. However, this representation is necessary to ensure the different needs are appreciated and represented on the board as well as delivering a clear line of accountability back to voters.

### Local Government reform

While Reform Scotland believes that these policies can help increase localism within policing, we do have one note of caution. The SNP manifesto included a commitment to *“review the roles and responsibilities of local authorities”*. Reform Scotland believes that reforms to local authorities need to be made ahead of reforming police governance – the horse must be put before the cart, otherwise there is a danger of needing to review and reform police and council relations once again.

It is also important that the lessons of the police centralisation be heeded. Media reports<sup>1</sup> have suggested the Scottish Government is considering merging NHS Boards, cutting them from 14 to potentially as few as three. Reform Scotland believes NHS boards’ responsibilities should be devolved to local authorities, something we have highlighted can be easily piloted in areas such as Fife where the local authority and health board have coterminous boundaries. However, the need to reform local government first applies here just as it does with regard to the police. It is clear that the Scottish Government is seeking to review and reform local government in Scotland. This should be the priority, and then we can look at how councils with potentially new boundaries interact with other public services.

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<sup>1</sup> Courier 5/7/16