



Annex e) (ii)

Update on the development of the Strategic Alliance and exploration of a potential merger between Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police

This report provides the Police and Crime Panel with an update on developments looking into the potential for expanding the existing Strategic Alliance, in particular the exploration of a full merger between Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police. This report focuses in particular on the process for the development and consideration of a business case locally and by government.

Background

As the Police and Crime Panel are aware, many areas of the two forces are currently fully engaged in the Strategic Alliance which has seen significant efficiencies and better working in the last four years. The PCCs and Chief Constables recognise that the Strategic Alliance has increased resilience, streamlined operational leadership and provided new opportunities all allowing re-investment in services.

In September 2017, the Chief Constables of Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police announced their intentions to explore further collaboration and closer working between the two forces. These plans are supported by the two Police and Crime Commissioners. The collective view is that it is right to explore whether a full merger between the two forces will bring additional benefits above and beyond those that can be achieved through collaboration.

Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police put in place project management and supporting governance for this new exploratory work, with Assistant Chief Constable Sharon Taylor taking on the role of Convergence Director. A monthly Convergence Board chaired by Alison Hernandez, the PCC for Devon and Cornwall, has been established and a weekly Convergence Steering Group chaired by Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer, Devon & Cornwall Police, is responsible for taking forward this programme of work with a view to developing a business case for consideration by October 2018. Martyn Underhill, the PCC for Dorset, is the Sponsor.

Developments to date

The first step in this exploratory work was the development of an outline business case to understand what the potential costs and benefits might be of any merger. In order to achieve any merger there would be a number of procedures and legal requirements which would need to be undertaken ahead of the PCC elections in May 2020.

The PCCs and Chief Constables have held discussions with the Home Office and wider government officials to clarify such requirements and to ensure that all relevant considerations and legal processes are being fully considered as part of the development of the business case. Discussions have also been held with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on what processes and procedures would apply for any required aligning of the police element of the council tax precept across both Dorset, and Devon & Cornwall.

The PCCs and Chief Constables have appointed Local Partnerships, a consultancy jointly backed by HM Treasury and the Local Government Association, to develop the outline business case on their behalf, which was considered by the four Corporations Sole and signed off mid-April.

Work is now progressing with Local Partnerships with the development of a full business case which will explore all of the issues, benefits and costs in detail.

The full business case process

Following local agreement, the full business case will need to be submitted to the Home Office for consideration. Subject to Ministerial agreement, Home Office officials would then need to issue an order under Section 32 of the Police Act 1996 to be laid before Parliament. This must be laid by 7 November 2019 at the latest to comply with electoral commission guidelines ahead of the PCC elections in 2020.

The Home Office has requested the full business case by no later than 12 October 2018 to provide sufficient time to complete the required stages within their timeframe.

There are no formal statutory tests for the business case as this exploratory work relates to the potential for a voluntary merger between two policing areas. However, the development of both the outline and any full business case will follow best practice guidance that has been used to shape fire service and police force collaborations elsewhere in the country.

These best practice criteria include tests of a clear economic rationale, clear improvements to the efficiency and effectiveness of both forces, and a positive impact on public safety. In considering any business case the Home Office will want to see sufficient support locally from the public, local Members of Parliament, Local Authorities as well as staff and Unions. There is also an expectation that there will be no clear objection from key policing bodies including Police and Crime Panels, the National Police Chiefs' Council, the College of Policing and/or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. A programme of

engagement is planned with partners, stakeholders and the public from early June until mid-August 2018.

Governance and assurance processes

Any decision to move to a merged police force across the three counties is a significant one and it is fully recognised by all of the Corporations Sole that clear governance and assurance processes need to be put in place.

There is an overarching set of principles which each of the four Corporations Sole need to see fulfilled in order to gain adequate assurance and be satisfied with any final business case. In particular the respective PCCs will need to ensure that the respective communities that they represent are adequately served by the merger proposals.

There is, pending the full business case, a shared view from the Chief Constables that a merger of the two forces offers the best long-term solution for all communities.

There will be key decision points built into the development of the final business case for merger.

The PCCs will seek assurance at various stages of the process. The Chief Constables will likewise want the same discretion, mindful that all four Corporations Sole will need to express their position prior to the submission of the business case to the Home Office. As a minimum the Commissioners will be seeking assurance once the following are known:

- Public responses to the engagement on the merger
- Council tax alignment
- Clarity on any financial imperatives for each separate police force

The Police and Crime Panel will be provided with an update at the next Panel meeting. For transparency, this paper will be shared with the Dorset Police and Crime Panel and the Devon & Cornwall Police and Crime Panel.

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