

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE - 25 APRIL 2011
REPORT ON: CONSULTATION ON THE FUTURE OF POLICING IN SCOTLAND
REPORT BY: CHIEF EXECUTIVE
REPORT NO: 158-2011

1. **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To advise Committee of a Scottish Government consultation document on the future of policing in Scotland and to seek instructions on how to respond.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members' instructions are requested on how the Council should respond to the consultation document.

3. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

There are no direct financial implications from this report.

4. **MAIN TEXT**

4.1 **Consultation Document**

4.1.1 The Scottish Government has published a consultation document inviting contributions to the debate about the future of policing in Scotland. Copies have been sent to the group secretaries, the Lord Provost and Depute Lord Provost.

4.1.2 The consultation document provides some contextual information about policing in Scotland, identifies opportunities and challenges, and assesses the strengths and weaknesses of the current model in relation to local engagement and partnership, accountability and efficiency. The consultation document expresses the Scottish Government's view that the status quo is untenable and that reform is necessary. It sets out three options for consideration, and suggests that the merits of these should be considered in relation to:

- improving services and the delivery of better outcomes at local and national levels
- accountability to, and close engagement with, local communities
- delivering efficiencies while protecting front-line services as far as possible

4.2 **Options for Change**

4.2.1 The three options, and the arguments for and against these as set out in the consultation document, are summarised below:

1 **Retain Eight Forces With Increased Collaboration**

The consultation paper suggests that there are not obviously strong arguments for this option. It suggests that the existing structure is not ideally suited to address threats which cross national and force boundaries. The paper says that this option offers the least scope for savings and, given the financial challenges ahead, may require reductions in front-line policing. To achieve necessary efficiencies, there would have to be complex collaboration and sharing of services and the Scottish Government says that it has not seen compelling evidence that this would deliver significant savings.

2 A Rationalised Regional Force Model

This option would involve a reduction to three or four large regional police forces. Arguments in favour include that co-operation across a reduced number of forces would be less complex than the existing structure and there would be some improved scope for providing communities with access to specialist skills, equipment and capacity. However, the paper says that this option does less to address the weaknesses in national capacity than the third option below, and there would still be a need for organisations such as the Scottish Police Services Authority and Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency to provide national police services. The savings achieved through some reduction in duplication could be used to sustain front-line policing, but there are concerns that large forces may tend to centralise some functions and services.

3 A Single Scottish Police Force

Advocates of this option argue that a single force would provide improved capacity to respond to threats which cross force and national boundaries such as terrorism and large-scale emergencies and would make it easier to deliver a consistent standard of service. Those in favour also believe it offers significant scope for sustaining and enhancing front-line police services by delivering savings and efficiencies through reducing the duplication inherent in having eight different forces, and would give all communities equal access to specialist skills, equipment and capacity. Concerns about a single force include the argument that there may be a tendency to centralise functions and services, and questions about accountability. The consultation document says that those who favour a single force are encouraged to set out how these concerns could be met. One suggestion mentioned in the consultation document is the possibility of a consultative 'blue light' committee for each local authority or Community Planning Partnership, with responsibility for scrutinising plans and performance in their area.

4.3 COSLA's Position

4.3.1 COSLA's Leadership Board has made clear its opposition to a single Scottish police force. In considering its approach to public sector reform in general, COSLA has set out a number of principles:

- reform should be framed in terms of the improvement of outcomes - the effect which services have on people's lives
- reform should look at the whole of the public sector not just one element
- reform should be based on robust evidence and a business case that generates community benefit - which implies greater integration of public services at a local level, rather than central aggregation
- reform should not focus on structures and boundaries to the exclusion of other issues relating to finance, policy, systems and governance
- local democracy and accountability should be at the heart of the reform process and should be enhanced by reform rather than diminished

4.3.2 In relation to the specific consultation document on the future of policing, COSLA has expressed the following concerns:

- there has been no consideration of how any structural change would impact on the outcomes for local communities
- there has been no consideration of local partnership working and there is a significant risk that this will be lost, damaged or hampered under a different structure
- there has been very little consideration of governance and accountability
- history demonstrates that re-structuring public services is costly, high risk and frequently reduces rather than adds value. Any financial argument for re-structuring is almost impossible to sustain and there is almost no chance that re-structuring could be cost beneficial in the short or medium term
- service improvements and efficiencies need to be found now. However, focus is being diverted from this to a structural debate that may never produce savings
- the savings proposed by police reform assume a substantial reduction in jobs, including those of police officers as well as support staff. If the key to savings is reducing staff numbers, this does not require structural change, which would have considerable upfront costs

4.3.3 COSLA's view is that efficiency savings can be made within the current system and they are keen to work with government and the police to ensure that efficiencies are achieved now (regardless of boundaries) rather than wait for reform legislation to be passed and structural change planned and implemented.

4.4 **Request for Instructions on Response from Dundee City Council**

The consultation document includes twelve questions on which comments are invited, which are listed in Appendix 1. These require reference to the full consultation document. Members' instructions are requested on how the Council should respond.

5. **POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

This report has been screened for any policy implications in respect of Equalities, Sustainability, Strategic Environmental Assessment, Anti-Poverty and Risk Management. There are no major issues. The consultation document is seeking comments on any equality issues relevant to the options as part of the Scottish Government's Equality Impact Assessment.

6. **CONSULTATIONS**

The Depute Chief Executive (Support Services) and Director of Finance have been consulted on the content of this report.

7. **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

A Consultation on the Future of Policing in Scotland : The Scottish Government - February 2011.

Appendix 1

Questions from Consultation Document

The consultation document invites responses on the questions set out below which require reference to the consultation document.

Question 1 : How could Police reform improve services and the delivery of outcomes?

Question 2 : What do you think are the greatest opportunities and challenges facing policing in Scotland today and how do you think they should be addressed?

Question 3 : How can partnership working between the Police and other organisations be improved?

Question 4 : How can the Police better engage with communities to help them be more resilient and self-reliant?

Question 5 : What arrangements and relationships do you think would lead to the greatest improvements in national and local accountability?

Question 6 : Do you agree that change is necessary to protect frontline services?

Question 7 : Which option do you think should be pursued and why?

Question 8 : How could we best improve accountability, deliver efficiencies and deliver service improvements at local and national levels?

Question 9 : Do you have any views on how the process of change should be approached, including the extent and pace of change within a given option?

Question 10 : To assist with Equality Impact Assessment on the reform, please describe any equality issues (in relation to race, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation, transgender people and religion) relevant to each of the options

Question 11 : To assist with our Regulatory Impact Assessment, please describe any financial or other impacts for business, charities and the voluntary sector relevant to each of the options

Question 12 : Do you think there needs to be any change to the existing roles and responsibilities of the key bodies responsible for policing?