



Police Federations of Wales submission of evidence to the
Social Justice and Regeneration Committee

Restructuring of Constabulary – Democratic Structures

The Police Federation of England and Wales (PFEW) was established in 1919 by the Police Act and is currently governed by the Police Federation Amendment Regulations 2004. It is the representative body for all police officers up to and including the rank of Chief Inspector, this equates to a total in excess of 141,000 officers of which 7,613 serve in Wales.

Our statutory duty is to safeguard the welfare and efficiency of our members and thereby enhancing the efficiency of the service. In light of that remit we are concerned that the source of funding for restructuring has not as yet been established.

It is essential for the improved welfare and efficiency of our members that best practices in relation to health and safety, resources, equipment and the supporting infrastructure is viewed as a priority and implemented appropriately. We already have several “centres of excellence” in Wales delivering driver training, firearms training and information technology and we must ensure that the advancements in such areas are not lost in the rush to restructure.

The ultimate aim for the construction of a strategic police force in Wales must be to dramatically improve the quality of service delivered to our communities at a local and regional level. We are concerned that failure to manage the process effectively may result in some areas experiencing no improvement or worse still deterioration, with resources being drained from all our communities particularly in the area of Neighbourhood Policing. There is a genuine concern amongst officers and within the communities we serve, that the creation of such a Strategic Force would mean the depletion of resources from the more rural areas that are already being policed with minimum staff. The Police Federation would require firm assurances from Government that resources will not level out, but will increase in real terms – and in all forms- to meet the surging demands placed upon a modern service in both urban, rural and post industrial areas across Wales.

It is vitally important that the service we provide to our communities is protected and wherever possible enhanced.

We should maintain the resilience inherent within officers who have forged strong local links and not rush to withdraw them from their communities without fully assessing the impact.

The “latest risk” approach to setting priorities for policing has introduced the regular shifting of targets and objectives. The Tony Martin murder case highlighted a gap in the policing of rural communities and our focus moved to “filling the rural policing gap”. The events in Soham led to the Bichard Report and again gave a new priority in relation to information exchange and the use of information technology. We must ensure that in the rush to fill the Level 2 gap we do not undo or undermine the improvements and results we have gained in other areas of policing.

Wales, as a country, has wide-ranging and varied crime and disorder problems across a huge geographic area and there is a concern that the new structure could simply lead to increased bureaucracy and poorer communications, not better local results. What works in Meirionnydd or Monmouth does not necessarily work in Cardiff or Carmarthen; we must not lose sight of that fact. There are huge cultural differences across Wales and with

no suitable road links across the Country any efforts to overcome such difficulties would be seriously frustrated.

Neighbourhood policing is recognised as the foundation of our success in Wales. We have local structures and partnerships in place to deliver a service that needs to be enhanced and developed.

The Police Federation is an apolitical organisation and, as such, it would be inappropriate for us to comment on the devolution of Policing at this time. Suffice to say, though, that we would need targets set by one authority and with our local needs of paramount importance.

In addressing the democratic structures required to underpin the effective policing of Wales, there already exists ad hoc arrangements and opportunities for consultation with governments and authorities. The Police Federation would seek to further strengthen and formalise these arrangements with an overall view of improving the efficiency of a new strategic police force within Wales. It is recognised that there may be a shadow Police Authority constituted and, to this effect, the Police Federation understands that there are differing levels of consultation and engagement with the current four authorities. We would be seeking the standardisation of best practice in these arrangements.

Issues

It is the Police Federation's view that effective consultation with those who are democratically elected to represent rank and file police officers can only better enhance the governance of a police force and lead to a service delivery which is fit for purpose. The national leaders of the Police Federation of England and Wales are fully consulted by the Home Office and we would aspire to mirror this arrangement with the Welsh Assembly Government in order to build upon our current arrangement. We would hope to be further consulted by WAG on prospective legislation which would impact upon service delivery policing.

Addressing the democratic structures within the consultation, the Police Federation would wish to highlight the need for regional and local accountability for the proposed new strategic force in as much as factors of resourcing, neighbourhood policing, the deployment of non-attested officers (such as PCSO's) and how these will fit into the objectives of a restructured police authority, local government, Welsh Assembly and the Home Office.

The governance of a Police force should be inextricably linked to the local communities they serve and this should be reflected in the constitution of any relevant authority. The concerns we have in relation to local accountability, vis a vis local policing, could be exacerbated by a remote command structure.

There should be a clear and transparent structure in place to allow local communities to air their views on policing issues in an effective manner.

Although the Police Federation does not feel that it would be appropriate for us to offer options for democratic structures, we would welcome the opportunity to inform any subsequent debate in relation to future proposals.

Once again, we would like to thank the Social Justice and Regeneration Committee for this opportunity to express our concerns and submit this report for your information and consideration.