

The National Policing Improvement Agency: central to change

Peter Neyroud describes the work ahead for the NPIA, the National Policing Improvement Agency.

Since the last Royal Commission into the Police nearly 50 years ago, the police service in England and Wales has been modelled within a 'balanced triangle' of local delivery through police forces (with operational accountability placed on chief constables), with governance primarily vested in local police authorities linked through membership to local authorities and the local criminal justice system, and funding and Parliamentary accountability within the Home Office. Throughout those years there has been a creative tension between the three parts of this 'tripartite system', which was designed to provide separated powers and responsibility rather than a national policing system (the concept of a national policing agency having been consciously rejected by the majority of the Royal Commission).

The tripartite system was designed at a time of relative social stability. Its framework balanced operational responsibility on the chief constable with a duty to secure an 'adequate police force' placed on the police authority, with the overall task of securing 'efficient and effective policing' shifting to the Home

service delivery is increasingly about how to drive and enable continuous improvement, with local flexibility but within a national framework.

The establishment of a National Policing Improvement Agency is therefore one of the more significant elements of the broader programme of police reform, not least because it should drive and enable a range of other reforms. The NPIA will exist from mid-2006, and formally come into being on April 1st 2007 (subject to the passing of the *Police and Justice Bill*). Its genesis was the response of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) to the Home Office Green Paper *Policing: Building Safer Communities Together* (February 2004). ACPO concluded that: "A national modernisation agency is needed for the police service to support implementation of national standards and to develop a new culture and capability arising out of the major reforms that sit ahead."

The NPIA is partly about rationalising the policing landscape, replacing overlapping and conflicting support mechanisms. Specifically, it will replace two existing police organisations (the

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Secretary from the watch committees and county police committees. Changes in demography and social mobility, with an accompanying growth in criminal mobility, growing pressure for improved policing and security, and changes in technology pose new challenges. Commentators have asked whether a system based on 'separate local police forces' (however many we end up with at the end of the force restructuring programme) without a stronger national capability is fit for purpose for the 21st century.

Further measures now seek to push the reform programme forward. Underpinning this is the civil renewal agenda – the belief in strong, empowered and active communities. The Government wants to create a police service which is more responsive to local needs and to clarify confusing police accountability arrangements, as well as creating a service better able to deal with higher level crime which goes across force boundaries.

Furthermore, the thrust of change across public

Police Information Technology Organisation – PITO – and the Central Police Training and Development Authority – Centrex), and will absorb some of the functions of the Home Office and various national projects led by ACPO.

However, the NPIA will deliver more than simply rationalisation. It will bring a new combination of strategic foresight, more effective coordination of major programmes and business change (bringing together IT and business change), and wide police service involvement in the management of change in policing. It should be a central resource to help police forces improve how they work, committed to developing a culture of continuous improvement in order to deliver better services to the public.

The main responsibilities of the agency will be to:

- look ahead and identify future challenges for policing;
- find and develop good practice and help to roll it out;

- ensure delivery of an agreed programme of key reforms;
- develop, purchase and deploy nationally compatible ICT;
- design, develop, deploy and quality assure nationally compatible learning programmes;
- help the police service to recruit, train and develop its people and leaders at all levels; and
- ensure that the workforce, processes, procurement and systems supporting policing are as efficient and effective as possible.

The agency will also ensure that the police are able to draw on the best of international policing practice. The NPIA's primary focus is the improvement of policing in England and Wales, with involvement in Scotland and Northern Ireland where agreed.

The creation of the NPIA has prompted some change in roles for the three bodies with the main roles in policing governance (the Home Office, ACPO and APA – the Association of Police Authorities). The incorporation into NPIA of a number of Home Office functions highlights the shift of the Home Office to a new relationship with the police service centred on policy, accountability and funding for policing. Similarly, ACPO has reviewed and redefined their *mission as being focused on developing the role of an 'independent, professionally led strategic body'*. The NPIA will provide chief officers with a more systematic involvement in the development of key policies, practice and programmes. For the APA, the NPIA provides national support to the duty to collaborate in the delivery of services set out in the *Police and Justice Bill*.

To be a credible driver of continuous improvement for the police, it is vital that the NPIA is professionally owned and led, and the agency is being designed to ensure significantly greater ownership than previous NDPB models. There will be a strong service membership of both the governance board and key operational boards within the agency. Peter Neyroud, Chief Executive Designate, remains a serving chief constable, and police officers who work for the NPIA will retain their office. Key areas of work within the NPIA will have an ACPO lead, to support the programme and be responsible for providing professional validation of products and implementation proposals. It is also intended that the agency achieves wide involvement of the police service in its work through the co-option of police officers and police staff as associates or associate directors for particular pieces of work.

At the same time, the NPIA's role in improving policing will have significant benefits for the wider criminal justice system. In particular, the NPIA will support effective police contribution to partnerships in the areas of crime reduction and criminal justice. It will be represented on the key governance boards such as the National Criminal Justice Board (NCJB), either by the Home Office (Policing Policy Directorate) or directly, and will seek to develop strong links with regional crime directors, local

government and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. The NPIA will also need to be a close partner of the criminal justice agencies, including through the use of cross secondments and shared programmes to develop practice. Specifically, since one of the roles of the agency is to bring together ICT and business change, close links have been built with the criminal justice IT programme.

Furthermore, the NPIA will be an organisation focused on delivering outcomes for the citizen. It will develop imaginative methods for understanding the impact of improvement in policing, both on the police service itself and on public confidence in the service (such as citizens' panels and staff days out with the public and in frontline policing). The NPIA itself will be subject to rigorous performance management, with an open and accountable set of targets and performance indicators.

In terms of national level prioritisation of change programmes, the process by which the NPIA's portfolio will be determined offers the opportunity to take stock, stop pilots and programmes that are not necessary, and modify others to increase their value. New governance mechanisms will ensure that major pieces of work undertaken by the NPIA have been prioritised and agreed by the Home Office, ACPO and the APA. *For significant programmes, the agency will work with forces to develop, with professional validation, a properly costed implementation plan before full implementation is triggered.*

The NPIA will be responsible for the management and monitoring of programmes in implementation, and for working with forces to help them meet the agreed outcomes and timescales. It is intended that this will be underpinned by a contract between the NPIA and local police forces, with negotiated implementation commitments from both linked to funding and regular performance reporting. The NPIA will always seek to operate through consensus. The careful process of national commissioning, practice development with professional involvement, and partnership with forces through implementation planning should ensure that programmes secure wide consensus.

This is probably the most substantial period of reform in policing since the Royal Commission in 1962 and the subsequent period of technology and structural change. The ambition is for real changes in the way that policing is delivered on the ground, through the Neighbourhood Policing programme, and a step change in the approach to tackling serious and organised crime and the way in which information and intelligence data support policing. All of this needs to be underpinned by a modernised workforce and significant investment in the development of leadership. NPIA is central to delivering these changes and improving policing.

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