

April 1995 was a watershed: perhaps not in the history of the 20th century, but certainly in the world of police authorities.

Strengthening the local voice in policing

Ruth Henig explains some recent changes in the work and structure of the Police Authorities.

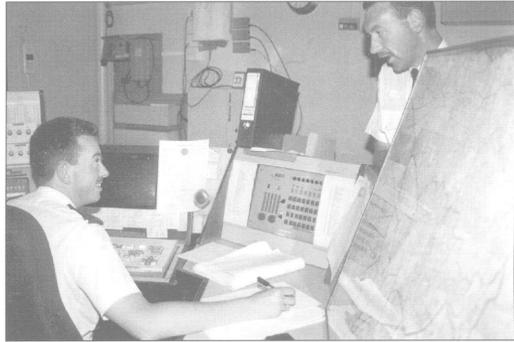
Pre-April 1995, police authorities were large, unwieldy bodies, widely perceived to be ineffectual - the weak link in the tripartite relationship, comprising the Home Secretary, Chief Constables and Police Authorities, responsible for the governance of policing in England and Wales.

Arguments raged over whether the controversial Police and Magistrates' Court Act 1994 increased central Government control or strengthened local accountability. Certainly the Act changed the face of police authorities. It sought to streamline their operation and make their involvement with policing much more focused and dynamic. Police authorities became free standing, corporate bodies, independent of local government.

It is no secret that many of us opposed some of these changes. But the new authorities are working far better than anyone, including the Home Office, expected. That is why the current Home Secretary has made it clear that he has no plans to make any changes during the life of this Parliament.

Tighter controls

The reduction in authority size to 17 members has resulted in much tighter control of police authority business. The introduction of



Kirsty Cunningham

independent members, local people who are neither councillors nor magistrates, has added a new perspective, as well as extending the range of expertise available to of police authorities. All police authority members play an equal part as can be seen by the fact that six police authorities are currently chaired by magistrates and seven by independent members.

The 1994 Act clarified the respective roles and responsibilities of each of the tripartite partners. In constitutional terms, police authorities have significant statutory power. Their fundamental duty to "secure the maintenance of an efficient and effective police force" gives them a very wide remit to enquire about the management of their forces. The police authority's job is to hold the chief constable to account, on behalf of local people, for how well the policing service is delivered.

It is significant - and deliberate - that the central government money for policing is paid to police authorities and not to chief constables. The decision to balance the power between chief constables, who have operational independence and police authorities, is an important check. The 1994 Act also gave police authorities a range of important new duties:

- To set local policing priorities, reflecting consultation with the local community
- To publish an annual policing plan setting out the national and local objectives and targets and the resources to be allocated to them; and
- To report back to the community at the end of the year on the extent to which policing plan has been met

So what difference has the last three years made? It has to be said that some police authorities started slowly. Many played only a minor role in determining objectives and targets and setting their policing plans in the first couple of years. But things are beginning to change. Police authorities have gradually begun to recognise the extent of their powers. They are increasingly taking a more active role in the policing plan process and recognising the critical importance of their role in monitoring force performance and making sure that the chief constable delivers.

Police authorities have long realised the importance of their statutory responsibility for consultation with the community. But the added requirement to consult about local priorities has prompted considerable efforts to reinvigorate the consultation process and find new and more inventive ways of reaching a wider cross section of the local community. Police authorities know that consultation is a vitally important, transparent link to the local community - it is demonstrable accountability in practice.

A national association

Another momentous event took place on 1 April 1997 - when all police authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland came together to form a national association to represent their collective interests - the Association of Police Authorities.

Police authorities are now able to speak with one authoritative voice in the national debates on policing, alongside our tripartite partners, ACPO and the Home Office. Like police authorities locally, the national body has two

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clear functions. The first is to represent professionally police authorities in consultative exercises on those aspects of policing which are properly their responsibility, and on the various national negotiating and consultative bodies.

But as well as strengthening the third leg of the tripartite stool nationally - which was long overdue - the APA also supports the operation of police authorities locally. Individual police authorities are potentially isolated. Whilst it is right that they should concentrate primarily on the local needs of their particular area, they can all benefit from mixing more widely, learning more of what others do and exchanging their own experiences. The APA has a key role to play here.

Looking ahead

Police authorities have plenty of challenges and opportunities ahead of them. The Crime & Disorder Bill will require us all to work much harder in partnership to drive down crime and make a real impact on the safety of our communities. Initial fears that police authorities might be marginalised by the Government's decision to give a lead role in the development of local crime and disorder strategies on local authorities and chief constables, will I think, prove to be unfounded. Police authorities' expertise in consultation, planning and target-setting, taken together with their control of the budget and responsibility for making sure that forces deliver, mean that they must be important players in the new partnerships.

The Government's Comprehensive Spending Review, with its related platform of Best Value and value for money are right at the forefront of police authorities' priorities. Best Value will require police authorities to strengthen even further their ability to monitor force performance and will accelerate the long overdue move towards properly costed policing plans. If not, the spectre of intervention lurks.

The business of securing

adequate funding for policing, traditionally shared between ACPO and police authorities, is likely to change. Police authorities will have a key role both in supporting and driving forces to achieve greater efficiencies and in addressing how those efficiencies can be demonstrated to the Home Office and the Treasury. If authorities and forces individually and collectively fail to demonstrate that they can work co-operatively together to make the kind of savings that, for example, shared procurement programmes will achieve, then again we are likely to see centralised intervention.

A local challenge

The APA supported the creation of the National Crime Squad and the National Criminal Intelligence Service as a sensible way of reinforcing local efforts against serious and organised crime. But the corollary of that is that local forces have to continue to demonstrate that they are an essential counter balance to an increasingly centralising impetus. And that crux of that demonstration has to be that police authorities can show that they are rigorously and conscientiously holding police forces to account on behalf of their local people.

So the main challenge which police authorities face on all fronts is in proving that central intervention is unnecessary. If the structure of local policing which we so value is to be retained, police authorities will need to demonstrate to central government that there are effective accountable mechanisms in place locally. That means proving that we are doing the job the 1994 Act gave us and there will be plenty of opportunity to do that with the range of new initiatives we face.

The future of police authorities in joint working with forces locally, and ACPO and the Home Office nationally, to meet the challenges and make the most of the opportunities is one which I look forward to with enthusiasm, on behalf of local communities.

Dr Ruth Henig is Chairman of Association of Police Authorities.

May I ask when you joined the force and when you were appointed Chief Constable of Lancashire.

I joined the force in October 1966 and I was appointed Chief Constable of Lancashire on 31st July 1995, almost three years ago.

Managing change

Pauline Clare talks to Penny Fraser.



Lancashire Police

How do you regard the job of policing in this country? What has changed over the 32 years since you first joined?

If I were to take it from an operational point of view, first of all, I think it's become much more dangerous; obviously there are lots more firearms and drugs around. But at the same time I think we've become much closer to the community. We attend lots of public meetings these days, we seek public opinion on lots of issues, I think

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there is a greater openness with both the public and the media and of course we want to work in partnership now with the public and other agencies.

So what do you regard as the main challenges confronting the police today? Are they linked to dangerousness and the risks that police officers confront in their everyday duty?

I think it's not just about risk and those sorts of operational difficulties, but it's also about high demand as well from members of the public. I think there is a greater demand for police services these days and there are greater expectations as well about what we can provide. Therefore policing is much more complex. I think that is one of the biggest challenges we're having to face. Not only because there's more legislation now, but because the criminals are also far more sophisticated these days; they tend to be more mobile and we've got to make greater use of intelligence in helping us to solve crime. I think we've got more difficult choices to make because of course we have limited budgets. We are free-standing now, not tied to county councils. We have set budgets and we have choices to make about whether we should spend that money on officers, equipment, vehicles etc. The rate of change is absolutely enormous as well - that we have to cope with.

You've talked about some of the main challenges facing the police, the fact that there are difficult choices to make, budgetary limitations and also the fact that criminals are more mobile and more sophisticated in their use of technology and weaponry and so on.... How well placed are the police to meet those kinds of challenges?

We know what our priorities are, not because we believe that we know what's best for the public but because we've consulted the public and they've told us what it is that causes them most concern so our priorities have been set around that. I think we have got far better at long-term planning in order to meet the challenges. We have far better ideas now about what our long-term goals are. We have corporate strategies, operational strategies, human-resource strategies like any other organisation. We are

into financial forecasting. We believe that we are also giving better value for money now, which is one way of meeting these challenges. Obviously we'll be looking at Best Value in the future which is the latest government initiative.

The other thing of course is that in the past the police service believed that it could solve society's problems itself. But now we accept that the problem of crime and disorder isn't an issue for the police service alone. It is an issue for the whole of society and we want to work with other people to deal with local problems.

What do you think is the best strategy for the police: to meet the public's demand or to persuade the public as to what is a reasonable demand to make of their policing services?

I think what we've got to do is to make the public aware of what we actually can provide. When we receive a demand from the public we've got to find ways of managing that demand. I am sure you are aware that the number of mobile phones is increasing significantly each year so it is actually very very easy to contact us. We've then got to say, how can we actually manage this? Do we have to deal with this at all? Can we deal with this problem over the telephone by giving advice? Is this an incident where it is necessary to deploy an officer to deal with it, or a member of the support staff or whatever? A lot of it is around managing expectations and managing demands.

One thing I wanted to raise with you is the issue of different organisations carrying out some of the functions that have traditionally been associated with the police, notably, patrolling and security. I wondered whether you thought some of the local authority patrols, private security firms and city guards that have been piloted in some areas, are a welcome development and also how you propose to work with those other providers of policing?

I don't have any difficulty with it. Lots of different organisations have carried out policing functions for many years, Customs and Excise for instance, but I don't think they've been terribly visible have they? It became more of an issue when some organisations became

highly visible by putting on a type of uniform and patrolling the streets. But we actually work quite closely with a lot of security organisations, for example at sporting events or at the policing of political party conferences and that works quite well. When it comes to actually patrolling the streets, then I would argue that that is best done by fully fledged police officers. Because police officers are trained, they're properly equipped, they're accountable and of course we have carried out checks as to the suitability of those people to carry out public duties. Now of course, at the present time, and I know it is going to change, the private security organisations are unregulated, but I do know also that many of the bigger private security organisations want to be regulated.

Can you see that regulation fitting in with current police accountability arrangements or do you see that as something that will be separate to the police routes of accountability to the public?

I think when it is first set up they will carry on doing the types of things that they do now outside policing and with different terms of reference but I've got to say that if the public places greater demands on us for our policing service, I think the police service needs to determine whether patrolling is a core element of policing. If it's not then maybe we should think about handing it over to someone else. If we determine that it is core, and therefore vital that we do it, then we should look at ways of actually providing greater cover and it may well be that we would have to think about having a second tier of officers to carry out that duty. If we've got this enormous demand from the public then we've either got to turn round and say we can't deal with it or we've got to think of creative ways of achieving it.

You asked about local authority wardens, and again I don't have any difficulty about that at all. We have had a warden scheme operating within a part of Lancashire, Accrington, for a number of years. It was a partnership arrangement between the Lancashire Partnership Against Crime of which Lancashire Constabulary is a member. It's a local authority and also a private security firm and a group of people were appointed in uniform to patrol the town centre area. The

idea was to reassure the public and they became the eyes and ears for the police service and passed on information to us, and I've got to say it's worked extremely well.

Has it been a success in terms of reducing crime too?

Yes. It is very difficult to quantify from a crime prevention point of view, but from a public reassurance point of view it certainly worked. And there is a feeling that there are less crimes being committed in the town centre.

Can we move on to talk about some of the changes that you've instituted since you've been head of the Lancashire force? Which initiatives do you feel have been particularly successful or particularly noteworthy?

Well, I've mentioned the long-term planning which we've engaged in. We've made some structural changes as well. But I think the important thing is the changes we've made to the way our staff operate. What I've tried to do is empower both police officers and support staff - giving them the responsibility rather than retaining decision-making within the police headquarters. They now, as officers or support staff, can play a proper role in making decisions about working practices, plans, how we spend money, or how they use their time. They have a say in policies as well. And because we have also devolved budgets out to divisions and that includes staffing costs, the decisions can be made at the place where the money is available, so they can make choices. And also I've done a little bit to encourage income generation and sponsorship as well.

Was this in response to difficulties in the way that uniformed staff and support staff worked together?

There have been problems in working relationships - I think there have been in many constabularies where they are seen as two separate organisations working within a constabulary. One of the platforms of our human resource strategy was that we wanted to encourage a single employee culture, so what we are trying to do is say, well, there are people who are support staff and there are police officers, but as far



Town wardens in Stockport town centre - part of the Council's community safety and crime prevention initiatives.

as possible, policies, practices, regulations will apply to everyone. So we are trying to make people feel that they're all part of a team, irrespective of whether they are police or support staff.

So there is a greater understanding of the respective roles of each?

And there's an encouragement as well - we have far more senior support staff now working within the organisation - we have mixed divisional management teams of support staff from police personnel and much more acceptance of equality of role and sharing of information and support.

But I think probably the biggest change has been the adoption of a new policing philosophy. When we prepared the corporate strategy, what we were really aiming to achieve, was to make the people of Lancashire feel safe, involved and reassured. We asked ourselves the question, what sort of style of policing is appropriate to help us achieve this? And we decided to go, after quite a lot of research, to a problem-oriented policing style. This is something we picked up from the United States. It was very successfully tried over there in San Diego. What it is about is police officers stopping dealing with just the symptoms of an issue, like persistent vandalism or constantly going back to repeat burglaries. It's about trying to address the underlying problem.

Now of course the police service can't do that alone: we

must work in partnership with the community and other agencies to achieve that. So we've broken up the whole of the force - it's in six divisions - but within those divisions we have clearly identifiable geographic areas with officers, both uniformed and detectives working in set areas so that they can actually identify what the problems are and then work with the people to try and solve them. So we aren't constantly being called back and people aren't constantly becoming victims. We're trying to solve problems once and for all which is a challenge but the repeat calls have reduced since we implemented the system. The public have told us in meetings that they know there is a greater police presence around and that makes them feel more reassured.

How do you feel, if at all, that your approach to the job and the way that you carry out your duties is affected by being a woman in the role of Chief Constable?

You won't be surprised to hear me say that I've been asked this question many times before. To be honest with you unless I am asked the question it is just not an issue I ever think about. I just think about myself as being a police officer and having been one for 32 years it is not surprising that I think like that. So I am a police officer first and foremost, and then a woman, and I really don't believe that the fact that I'm a woman chief constable affects the way that I make decisions, or how I run the force. But

all managers do put their own stamp on things, don't they, and I think we all have our own styles and personal preferences, myself included.

Do you think there are any specific hurdles to be overcome by women police officers who want to make it to the top of the profession?

There aren't that many men who make it to the top, when you think about it.

There are 43 forces in England and Wales and 128,000 police

officers, I think, in the country. So there are not going to be that many that get through. And there are a lot of women quite frankly who don't want to get through. They are very happy with the roles they perform. But I think what's encouraging is that women are about 17% of the Lancashire force now. What's more we're getting a greater mix, not just of women but also people from ethnic minority groups and disabled people. We've still got a long way to go but things have improved slightly. We still don't have as many women as we should have in the middle ranks but I think there are 10 women who are members of the Association of Chief Police Officers. We now have two women Chief Constables, two women who are deputies, or the equivalent. So we're getting through but we're still under-represented. We have quite a number of women departmental managers in the Lancashire constabulary in charge of information technology, finance, legal services, scientific support, and of course they've all been selected and appointed because of the skill levels, not because of any positive discrimination.

What are the significant differences in the kind of employment conditions that exist for women, in comparison to when you were appointed in 1966?

They're just totally different. When I joined the police service, if you married, and you were a woman, you had to leave. If you married a police officer you were

allowed to stay in the force. If you then became pregnant, you had to leave because there was no maternity leave. So when you think about the situation for women then and think about the position now, where there is maternity leave, and there is paternity leave as well, where we now have career breaks, we have part-time working, we have job-sharing, things have changed considerably. They're probably far from ideal, but having said that, I do think we have made quite a bit of progress.

If you could make one major change to the way that policing is carried out in this country, tomorrow, what would that be?

I really don't think I could answer it, to be honest with you, because I don't think you could come along and wave a magic wand. I think the changes that we need to make in the police service have got to be much more evolutionary and much more calculated. Unless of course it's an operational matter, which of course requires more or less instant decision-making. I think we've got to carry out research, we've got to consult with people, we've got to work with others, we've got to use our money and time and resources very wisely and that requires quite a lot of careful consideration and certainly not impulsive decision-making.

Do you think the police service in 32 years time will look much as it looks now or will it be very different?

Gosh, I think there will be greater use of technology, I'm sure about that. I don't believe that we would have the number of police forces that we have at the present time. I think it will be much more a national organisation, quite honestly. Depending on who's in office at that time, whether it will be far more centrally controlled, who knows? But I would think it will be far more clearly specified what the role of policing is exactly because I think a lot of that is left to local discretion at the present time.

Maybe there will be more female chief constables....

There could well be.

Pauline Clare is Chief Constable of the Lancashire Constabulary.