

Warwickshire Police Authority – 27 May 2009

POLICE AUTHORITY INSPECTION

Report of the Assistant Chief Executive

Summary

This report gives Members the opportunity to comment on the recent consultation paper published by the Audit Commission and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC) proposed inspection framework for police authorities.

Recommendation

That Members be invited to submit any comments for inclusion in the Authority's response to the consultation paper on the proposed inspection framework.

I attach as an appendix to this report a copy of the consultation paper published by the Audit Commission and HMIC on the proposed inspection framework for police authorities.

Members will be aware that, following four pilot inspections, it is proposed that the inspection process will begin in earnest in September this year. The first ten authorities have already been selected and the remaining three phases of inspection will be made known in July. At the same time the final police authority inspection framework document will be published. The consultation document therefore allows a final opportunity for the Authority to comment on the proposed framework. All authorities have been invited to submit their comments by the 10th June. The APA is also co-ordinating responses and have asked for responses by the 5th June.

In considering the consultation document, Members are requested, in particular, to address the five questions highlighted on pages 5 and 6.

The questions, together with suggested comments for inclusion in the Authority's response, are set out below:-

Question 1

Do you agree with our proposed assessment themes, key questions and assessment criteria? If not, what do you think is missing?

The high level assessment themes broadly cover the key issues. The primary duty for a police authority is "to achieve an efficient and effective police force in their area" in many different ways, but it should be recognised that each authority will have a differing view on how that should be achieved.

The job of the Police Authority is to ensure that it has a coherent approach to addressing the key priorities and can show the inspection team, and anyone else who is interested, how it delivers this approach. If the inspection team focus on outcomes they will be able to fairly assess the different approaches they come across.

It is difficult for authorities to demonstrate to those not directly involved in this work. Although many of the key duties are discharged through formal processes, a large amount of work is undertaken in a more informal context and authorities should be given the opportunity to demonstrate to the respective team how this works and how it contributes to overall success. The most important element of this is the relationship between the Authority and the Force and in particular, the relationship between the Chair/Chief Executive of the Authority and the Chief Constable together with their senior team.

Question 2

Do the proposals provide a clear focus on how police authorities make a difference to securing improved policing outcomes for local people? If not, please suggest how we could make this focus clearer.

There appears to be some confusion in two of the key themes. Under the second bullet point of theme 2, it states that the Authority should demonstrate that it “properly considers the views of the public in holding the Chief Constable to account”. However, in theme 3 it highlights the importance of gaining and acting upon the views of the community. It might be more helpful not to confuse the issue of holding the Chief Constable to account and acting on the views of the public and communities.

It would therefore seem appropriate to remove the second bullet point in theme 2 to allow inspectors to focus on how the Authority holds the Chief Constable to account across the full range of duties. Community Engagement and acting on the views of the community can be fully covered as part of assessment theme three.

Question 3

Do you agree with our proposals for scoring?

There appear to be no reason to object to scoring being part of the inspection process. Members might want to question why authorities are being scored so soon after it was decided to remove much of the comparative scoring for police forces available through other inspection and performance regimes.

As it is the intention to publish these scores it is important that the framework is frozen at the start of the inspection period. All 43 authorities need to be judged against the same criteria to the same exacting standard. Whether proposed or not, it is quite likely that public scores will be used to create “league tables” of Police Authorities.

Question 4

Which of the options for peer involvement do you think that we should adopt?

A lot of contention has been caused by these proposals. The inclusion of a current or recent Chief Executive in addition to a Member should be an essential part of the inspection team. All Chief Executives have a detailed understanding of all aspects of the business of the Police Authority including that undertaken by members. This has already been shown to be a significant contribution during the pilot inspections by providing the opportunity to explain to the inspection team details of the statutory responsibilities that authorities undertake.

Question 5

Do you agree with our proposals for the police authority inspections framework?

Inspection teams should recognise that Police Authorities are usually small organisations with an operating budget of around £1m per annum. The burden that inspection places on an authority will be great. Any reduction in the preparation of documents would be welcomed. In addition, during the inspection week itself the team will need to recognise that they will be utilising a significant proportion of the working resources of a Police Authority.

Early notification of the phase in which an authority will be inspected would be welcomed as would early notification of the precise dates to allow planning. It would be inappropriate for inspections to take place in a week where either the Chair or the Chief Executive is not available.

Members are requested to put forward their comments on the 27th May or alternatively forward them to me no later than 3rd June. A response will then be prepared on behalf of the Authority for final approval by the Chair.

Enquiries: about this report should be made to Neil Gulliver on 01926 412117

Background Papers: As attached where appropriate

**Neil Gulliver
Assistant Chief Executive**