Justice Sub-Committee on Policing

Impact of police reform on local policing

Written submission from HM Inspectorate of Constabulary Scotland

Local policing is the cornerstone of the wider police service. It is the part of policing that interacts with the public on a daily basis and is essential in building good relations with persons, localities and communities across Scotland. Strong relationships strengthen the legitimacy of the police to carry out their role and support communities to improve their safety and well-being.

The Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012 (the Act) seeks to place communities at the heart of the provision of police, fire and rescue services. The Act requires the police and fire services to work in partnership with others to ensure the services are accessible to and engaged with local communities; promote measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder and improve the safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities in Scotland. This is to be achieved through the three key elements from the Act:

- the designation of a Local Police Commander and Local Senior Fire and Rescue Officer;
- the production of a local policing plan and a fire and rescue plan for each local authority area and approved by the local authority; and
- the creation of formal relationships between the Councils and the services.

Between December 2012 and February 2013 HMICS, supported by HMFSI, conducted an initial review of emerging local scrutiny and engagement arrangements with two principle aims. Firstly, to provide reassurance that emerging practices were not detracting from the efficiency and effectiveness of the services and, secondly, to begin the development of overarching good practice characteristics as a foundation for future inspection and audit activity. That review found that progress was being made in all areas toward the delivery of the three key elements of reform. Local Area Commanders and Senior Officers had been appointed and interim local policing and fire plans prepared. All local authority areas were at various stages in their development of local scrutiny and engagement arrangements, with all anticipating structures in place by 1 April 2013. In pursuit of our aim to develop good practice characteristics broad descriptions were included throughout our report as an initial guide to commanders, senior officers and local authorities in the development of the new arrangements. These have since been incorporated into non-statutory national guidance issued by the Scottish Government1.

Overall our initial review found that the development of local scrutiny and engagement structures were broadly welcomed and, by increasing the numbers of councillors involved in local police and fire committees, were seen as offering a real opportunity to take policing and fire services closer to local democracy. However, we recognised that at that time it was too early to make any meaningful judgement on the impact of these changes. We stated then that it would be our intention to return to the issue as part of our future inspection programme.

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Since publication of that report we have continued to monitor progress through routine HMICS activity and consultation. This has identified that to some extent our intended course of action has been overtaken by the rapid and wide ranging progress of change within the Police Service of Scotland. This has led us to conclude that a review of local scrutiny arrangements alone would be too narrow in focus to address the pace and nature of these changes.

To this end we consider that a wider review of local policing arrangements would provide a more holistic view. We recognise that such a review is complex and covers a wide range of issues that are delivered by all fourteen local policing divisions across Scotland. As a consequence we take the view that an inspection of this nature cannot be conducted as a single piece of work and requires both focus on issues and locations over time in order to provide a more rounded view of the overall state of policing in Scotland.

This exercise therefore will be the first in a programme of inspection activity that will form an integral part of our inspection work-plan in the coming years.

Our overarching aim in this inspection programme will be to examine the efficiency and effectiveness of Police Scotland’s local policing model and how this is contributing to achieving the national objectives of:
- We live our lives safe from crime, disorder and danger
- We have strong, resilient and supportive communities where people take responsibility for their own actions and how they affect others
- Our public services are high quality, continually improving, efficient and responsive to local people’s needs

To assist in our assessment of the impact of reform on local policing and whether this is contributing to the achievement of national objectives and justice priorities we will consider a range of questions including:

1. What evidence is there to show that the service in the area is improving the safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities?
2. Is the Police Service, working in collaboration with others where appropriate, to achieve that main purpose by policing in a way which:
   a. is accessible to, and engaged with, local communities; and
   b. promotes measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder.
3. Has there been a strengthening of connection between the service and communities through the new local scrutiny and engagement arrangements?
4. Is there more equal access to specialist support: and
5. Have savings been achieved with an improvement in local services?

A report will be prepared outlining the findings of the review and progress against the national objectives and priorities. The report will contribute to the overall assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of local policing in Scotland.

HMICS
10 January 2014