

Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council consultation response to 'Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people'

Please note: Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council has prepared a response to the chapters considered to directly impact on the Local Authority.

Chap 1: The Challenge

Consultations questions:

1. Will the proposed checks and balances set out in this Chapter provide effective but un-bureaucratic safeguards for the work of Commissioners, and are there further safeguards that should be considered?

Rotherham Borough Council are opposed to the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners. Members of Rotherham MBC are directly elected with the overarching duties and powers for economic, social and environmental well-being for the area, and as such are fully empowered to both participate in delivering community safety, holding partners to account and being held to account by the communities they serve. The South Yorkshire Police Authority consists of 9 elected members (nominated by local councils to reflect political balance in the county), and 8 Independent members of which 1 has to be a magistrate.

It is difficult to understand how the proposals provide greater checks and balances to these existing arrangements. The safeguards that need to be taken into account are:

- Risk of Commissioners elected on 'extremist' or 'single issues' resulting in policing being dominated by fringe/radical views. Need also to ensure that political patronage is not allowed to cloud the process
- Dangers that the appointment of Commissioners could be counterproductive, producing a split democratic mandate, and even lead to conflicting priorities between them and the elected members of the local authority.
- Managing inevitable tensions between the Commissioner/ the Chief Constable/ Local Councils especially when the commissioner sets the police precept that councils have to levy.
- Need to establish clear terms of reference and responsibilities between the Commissioner and the Policing Panel are crucial otherwise there is the potential for tension and conflict.
- Increased bureaucracy locally generated by the cost of running the actual election processes, holding referendums and appointment of Commissioners support team.
- Reducing the answerability of the Chief Constable and Force to only the post of the Commissioner when current at present they are held to account to a more wider and diverse Police Authority.

2. What could be done to ensure that candidates for Commissioner come from a wide range of backgrounds, including from party political and independent standpoints?

A planned recruitment strategy with local communities and interest groups along with local partnerships over time will contribute to encouraging diverse candidates; there is a real risk that the timescales proposed will not accommodate the work necessary for this.

Responding to some of the concerns set out in question 1 and the possible use of deposits, such as in elections might be considered to prevent frivolous candidatures.

All those submitting applications should be required to declare political and financial interests.

3. How should Commissioners best work with the wider criminal justice and community safety partners who deliver the broad range of services that keep communities safe?

The Commissioner will need to demonstrate how:

- They contribute to achieving the goals of the local Community Safety Partnership
- They have robust structure in place to ensure the views of elected representatives and community activists at a local level are taken into account
- They ensure local priorities are reflected

The Commissioner will be required to become a representative on each local CSPs (replace existing Police Authority representation), as well as participate in the county wide Criminal Justice Board

4. How might Commissioners best engage with their communities – individuals, businesses and voluntary organisations - at the neighbourhood level?

In Rotherham structures already exist within the local authority that ensure widespread community engagement on crime and disorder issues, overseen by an effective partnership structure and democratic scrutiny.

The Commissioner can best engage:

- Through existing channels including Neighbourhood Action Groups, Resident Associations, PACT meetings, Area Assembly meetings etc.
- By working with CSP partners to ensure widespread consultation on local issues.

There are concerns that Commissioners will only be able to engage with communities through the appointment of a number of Commissioner Representatives which will result in an added layer of bureaucracy at a local level.

5. How can the Commissioner and the greater transparency of local information drive improvements in the most deprived and least safe neighbourhoods in their areas?

The success of the Safer Rotherham Partnership in reducing local crime issue has been driven by effective use of local information and assessment of need enabling targeted activities. The Commissioner will need to build on this to:

- Ensure that the right resources are in the right place avoiding situations where the 'person who shouts loudest' gets the most attention.
- Work with all partners to tackle issues
- Ensure a good flow of accurate information on which to base decisions

6. What information would help the public make judgements about their force and Commissioner, including the level of detail and comparability with other areas?

The public will value information that:

- They can understand and uses clear language
- Focuses on the issues that are important to the local community
- Provides clear definitions (i.e. through both simpler definitions and fewer categories of crime)
- Provides clear targets and goals which help the public to measure success

Chap 5: Tackling Crime Together.

Consultations questions:

19. What more can the Government do to support the public to take a more active role in keeping neighbourhoods safe?

The following support from the government would be welcome:

- Making ASB and low level crime more of a priority for Police with a requirement for them to improve their responses to minor ASB thereby building a better rapport with the public
- Reallocating resources to provide additional funding and support for Neighbourhood Watch
- Working with insurance companies to offer premium incentives for members of Neighbourhood Watch (NW)
- Making membership of schemes such as Pub Watch and Responsible Retailer schemes mandatory for license holders
- Addressing nationally the issues around large retail outlets/supermarkets selling alcohol at significantly reduced prices

20. How can the Government encourage more people to volunteer (including as special constables) and provide necessary incentives to encourage them to stay?

The government can:

- Make volunteering more accessible through working with employers to release staff to volunteer
- Consider 6 month voluntary work with the Police or similar agencies for school/college leavers, or as part of pre-employment training
- Ensure volunteers are offered coaching and training offering pathways for personal and professional development
- Have a volunteer representative on the Police and Crime Panel.

21. What more can central Government do to make the criminal justice system more efficient?

The government are encouraged to:

- Shift to a victim focus. At present the balance still lies too much with the perpetrator of crime and not with the victim. This discourages victims from coming forward to seek redress
- Increase use of restorative justice programmes, thereby keeping some low level crime out of the mainstream justice process altogether
- Speed justice up. Too many cases take too long to bring to a conclusion, again discouraging victims from coming forward or from assisting the police in criminal investigations. This is also linked with restoring the balance between the victim and the criminal
- Consider use of FPNs for ASB which PCSOs could issue.

22. What prescriptions from Government get in the way of effective local partnership working?

Rotherham is concerned the extent of government guidance & requirements that may be required in implementation of proposals set out in Policing in the 21st Century, possible risk could 'set back' existing effective local partnership working arrangements.

The government are requested to consider national campaigns which can appear arbitrary and do not recognise local issues and solutions.

A helpful prescription from government would be consideration of a national information sharing protocol for Community Safety Partnerships

Draft consultation prepared by:

Steve Parry

**Safer Rotherham Partnership Manager/Neighbourhood Crime & Justice
Manager Neighbourhoods and Adult Services Directorate RMBC**