



## **Police and Crime Panel**

**15 June 2018**

### **Report of the Police and Crime Commissioner**

## **UPDATE ON DEVELOPMENT OF STRATEGIC ALLIANCE AND EXPLORATION OF A POTENTIAL MERGER WITH DORSET POLICE**

This report provides the Police and Crime Panel with an update on developments looking into the potential for expanding the existing Strategic Alliance with Dorset, in particular the exploration of a full merger between Devon and Cornwall Police and Dorset Police. This report focuses in particular on the process for the development and consideration of a business case locally and by government.

### *Background*

As the Police and Crime Panel are aware, many areas of the two forces are currently fully engaged into a Strategic Alliance which has seen significant efficiencies and better working in the last four years. The PCCs and Chief Constables recognise that the Strategic Alliance has increased resilience, streamlined leadership and provided new opportunities all allowing re-investment in services.

In September 2017, the Chief Constables of Devon and Cornwall and Dorset Police announced their intentions to explore further collaboration and closer working between the two forces. These plans are supported by the two Police and Crime Commissioners. The collective view is that it is right to explore whether a full merger between the two forces will bring additional benefits above and beyond those that can be achieved through collaboration

Devon and Cornwall Police and Dorset Police put in place project management and supporting governance for this new exploratory work, with Assistant Chief Constable Sharon Taylor taking on the role of Programme Director. A Convergence Board chaired by the PCC for Devon and Cornwall has been established and a Steering Board chaired by Chief Constable Shaun Sawyer is responsible for taking forward this programme of work with a view to developing a business case for consideration by November 2018.

### *Developments to date*

The first step in this exploratory work is the development of an outline business case to understand what the potential costs and benefits might be of any merger. In order to achieve any merger there would be a number of procedures and legal requirements

which would need to be undertaken ahead of the PCC elections in May 2020 and these are also being fully explored.

The PCCs and Chief Constables have held discussions with Home Office and wider government officials to clarify such requirements and to ensure that all relevant considerations and legal processes are being fully considered as part of the development of the business case. Discussions have also been held with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government on what processes and procedures would apply for any required aligning of the police element of the council tax precept across both Dorset and Devon and Cornwall.

As reported previously to the Police and Crime Panel at its meeting in December 2017, the PCCs and Chief Constables have appointed Local Partnerships, a consultancy jointly backed by HM Treasury and the Local Government Association to develop the business case on their behalf. Currently they are working on the development of an outline business case – and subject to sign off this would then proceed to the creation of a full business case.

If the outline business case is positive then work will progress to the development of a full business case which will explore all of the issues, benefits and costs in detail.

#### *The full business case process*

Following local agreement, any full business case will need to be submitted to the Home Office for consideration. Subject to Ministerial agreement, Home Office officials would then need to issue an order under Section 32 of the Police Act 1996 to be laid before Parliament. This must be laid by 7th November 2019 at the latest to comply with electoral commission guidelines ahead of the PCC elections in 2020.

The Home Office has requested the full business case by 12th October 2018 to provide sufficient time to complete the required stages within their timeframe.

There are no formal statutory tests for the business case as this exploratory work relates to the potential for a voluntary merger between two policing areas. However, the development of both the outline and any full business case will follow best practice guidance that has been used to shape fire service and police force collaborations elsewhere in the country.

These best practice criteria include tests of: a clear economic rationale; clear improvements to the efficiency and efficiency of both forces; and a positive impact on public safety. In considering any business case the Home Office will want to see sufficient support locally, from the public, local Members of Parliament, Local Authorities as well as staff and Unions. There is also an expectation that there will be no clear objection from key policing bodies i.e. Police and Crime Panels, the National Police Chiefs Council, the College of Policing and/or Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services. A programme of engagement will be put in place with partners, stakeholders and the public.

### *Governance and assurance processes*

Any decision to move to a merged police force across Devon and Cornwall and Dorset is a significant one and it is fully recognised by all of the corporation soles that clear governance and assurance processes need to be put in place.

There is an overarching set of principles which each of the four corporations sole need to see fulfilled in order to gain adequate assurance and be satisfied with any final business case. In particular the respective PCCs will need to ensure that the respective communities that they represent are adequately served by the Strategic Alliance and subsequent merger proposals.

The drivers for Alliance and merger are different for each PCC and Chief Constable, and therefore the identification of the range and quantity of services within an Alliance is different whilst the forces remain separate identities.

There is a shared view from the Chief Constables that a merger of the two Forces offers the best long term solution for all parties. However, in considering the future it is important that we understand the community impact of any decisions in this area and that we identify and properly mitigate any optimism bias.

There will need to be key decision points built into the development of the final business case for merger. The evolving nature of policing and the needs of our communities mean that these will need to be flexible.

The PCCs will seek assurance at various stages of the process. The Chief Constables will likewise want the same discretion. As a minimum the Commissioner will be seeking assurance once the following are known:

- Public responses to the engagement on the merger;
- Council tax alignment;
- Clarity on any financial imperatives for each separate Police force; and
- PCC scrutiny of alliance performance.

The Police and Crime Panel will be provided with regular updates as this work progresses. For transparency, this paper will also be shared with the Dorset Police and Crime Panel.

### **Contact for further information**

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