

# PROPOSED MERGER OF DEVON AND CORNWALL POLICE AND DORSET POLICE

August 2018



Since 2015, Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police (DC&D) have been working together through a 'Strategic Alliance'. Operational police departments such as Operations, Roads Policing and Prevention as well as 17 other business areas are already operating across the three counties with a further 11 departments currently going through changes which will see them aligned.

The Chief Constables of DC&D Police recently announced their intention to explore a voluntary merger of the two forces. There are no recent examples of successful voluntary mergers of police forces.

Work is now underway to develop a business case for the merger for submission to the Home Office in October 2018, with a decision expected in January 2019. A detailed timeline can be found in Appendix 1.

While a public engagement programme is now underway across the three counties, the full business case will not be shared with stakeholders before its submission to the Home Office.

## 2. RATIONALE

The merger is being promoted as a practical progression of work already undertaken between the forces in order to provide “a more resilient service to communities.”

The following changes are expected if the proposed merger goes ahead;

- Devon & Cornwall Police and Dorset Police will legally become a single police force.
- There will be a reduction in the number of chief officers and a single Police and Crime Commissioner.
- A new operating model will be introduced across the three counties.
- Development of a three-county policing model will be necessary in order to maintain a geographic approach to local matters.

Some of the benefits of the merger as presented are set out below. No risks or disbenefits are described.

- **Increased operational resilience:** as policing demands arise and change, resources can be re-deployed into key areas as necessary.
- **A stronger voice for rural, urban and coastal policing in the national landscape:** the merger would provide a stronger voice for policing in the South West.
- **Wider public-sector transformation:** there will be wider opportunities to work with public-sector partners to improve public safety, reduce vulnerability and improve wellness and wellbeing.
- **Growth through reinvestment of savings in the frontline:** the merger provides resilience to future financial threats and greater economies of scale with the aim of improving public value and public safety. The streamlining of leadership processes and harmonisation of the Council Tax Police precept could mean up to 430 extra officers or staff for the new force area.

Further details about the benefits of the merger can be found here [www.futurepolicing.co.uk](http://www.futurepolicing.co.uk)

## 2. CONTEXT

### 2.1 A three county police force

Devon & Cornwall has over 500 square miles of moorland, over 700 miles of coastline & 13,500 miles of roads. Dorset is a largely rural county with two major ports and an international airport. Each area sees significant seasonal increases in population with millions of visitors and university, college & school students.

In terms of population, a merger would make Devon & Cornwall and Dorset (DC&D) the fourth biggest force area in the country (2,505,800) – less than the Metropolitan Police Service (8,787,900), West Midlands (2,864,900) and Greater Manchester (2,782,100). In terms of the number of police officers, DC&D would become the fifth largest force, having a combined total of 4197 officers, not taking into account any proposed increase in frontline officers<sup>1</sup>. In terms of geographical size, DC&D would become the largest force area in the country (4989 sq. miles) with Dyfed-Powys being the second largest (4230) followed by North Yorkshire (3208)<sup>2</sup>.

See Figure 1 below for further comparators.

	Budget (2018/19)	Population	Officers per 100,000 pop.	Size (Sq Miles)	Crime Rate per 1,000 pop.	Cost per person per day
Combined D&C / Dorset	£416m	2,505,800	167	4989	D&C – 59.8 Dorset – 64.0 Combined – 61.1	D&C – 46p Dorset – 45p
Avon & Somerset	£281.7m	1,680,700	156	1844	81.7	46p
Hampshire	£314.2m	1,969,300	145	1602	81.0	43p
Greater Manchester	£556.1m	2,782,100	224	493	122.3	57p
North Yorks	£144.8m	813,200	162	3208	47.9	48p
Dyfed-Powys	£99.1m	515,900	225	4230	49.9	54p

Figure 1: Comparable forces data

### 2.2 Local crime profile

Plymouth is one of the largest cities on the south coast and the 15<sup>th</sup> largest city in England, with a population of approximately 263,070.

As the largest urban area in Devon and Cornwall, Plymouth has a higher than average crime rate for the force area (84.7 crimes per 1,000 resident population compared to 58.1 across Devon and Cornwall as a whole) and accounts for one fifth of all recorded crimes.

<sup>1</sup> With regard to the rate of police officers per 100,000 population, a combined force would make little difference. The rate is currently 168 per 100,000 population for Devon & Cornwall and 165 for Dorset, ranking 24 and 27 out of 43 forces respectively. A combined force would have an overall rate of 167 officers per 100,000 population, a ranking of 25 out of 42.

<sup>2</sup> Note that Dyfed-Powys has a population of 515,900 and North Yorkshire has a population of 813,200 as opposed to 2,505,800 in a combined Devon, Cornwall and Dorset force. Dyfed-Powys also has a much greater number of police officers per 100,000 population (225) compared to DC&D (167) and a much lower crime rate.

Latest crime figures (April 2017 to March 2018) show that the Devon and Cornwall force area has seen a rise in crime of 22% compared to a national rise of just 13%. Despite this increase, Devon and Cornwall has the seventh lowest crime rate in England & Wales.

The 2017/18 Strategic Crime Assessment shows that:

- The highest volume of crimes can be found in the city centre and university area. 10% of Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) is related to street drinking and this has increased 6% on last year.
- Rates of sexual offences and violence with injury are escalating more quickly than seen in comparator areas (particularly for sexual offences) and the city's crime rates are significantly higher.
- Domestic abuse remains a problem for the city and reported incidents rose by 6% in this year – the proportion of crimes rose significantly whereas non-crime incidents fell.
- Alcohol has a significant impact on the health of the city's population, and rates of alcohol-related hospital admissions are significantly higher than the national average. 13% of all recorded crime is flagged as alcohol related, rising to 21% for violence.
- Hate crime accounts for 2% of all crime across the city and there has been a rise in the number of disablist, homophobic and racist crimes reported in the last 12 months.

### 2.3 Complexity of need

Plymouth has a unique complexity of need, which must be understood in the context of any discussion about a potential merger, as follows:

- Plymouth is a proud military city with a substantial service population. This brings unique challenges in terms of security and asset protection.
- Plymouth has pockets of severe deprivation, with alcohol and drug (illegal and prescribed) dependence being significant issues for the city. Much of the complexity of need across the city is linked with rising mental health problems and homelessness.
- Plymouth is the most diverse city in the current force area with significant Polish, Chinese and Kurdish communities. Plymouth is also a dispersal area for asylum seekers.
- Emerging issues of great concern to the city include the rise of organised crime and the need to tackle extremism.
- Plymouth receives many of those released from the three prisons across Devon, which places additional pressure on services including housing, employment and training. Reducing re-offending for this group is a critical area of work for the city.

### 2.4 Consultation arrangements

The decision to proceed with a merger lies with the Police and Crime Commissioner, who is charged with securing efficient and effective policing of a police area. It remains unclear though whether the proposal for a voluntary merger was generated by officers or by the Police and Crime Commissioner.

As a major decision that will impact the lives of residents across all three counties, the Council has significant concerns that there are no plans for 'formal' consultation, only engagement with key stakeholders. Considering the democratic role and responsibilities of Local Authorities, they appear to have played no formal role in the engagement process to date.

Furthermore, no further details of the proposed merger will be available until the public engagement has concluded. This raises considerable alarm about the lack of transparency and failure to disclose key facts that would enable informed feedback from stakeholders.

### 3. IMPLICATIONS FOR PLYMOUTH

#### 3.1 ADDITIONAL BURDENS ON LOCAL COUNCIL TAX PAYERS

The Devon and Cornwall Police and Crime Panel recently agreed to what amounts to an 8.9% increase in the Devon and Cornwall police precept for 2018/19<sup>3</sup> whilst government funding across the Devon and Cornwall force area for 2018/19 remains at the 2017/18 level of £179 million. The total combined funding for the Devon and Cornwall force area for 2018/19 is therefore £291.3 million.

PCC	2017/18 Gvt. funding	2017/18 Precept	2017/18 Total	2018/19 Gvt. funding	2018/19 Precept	2018/19 Total	Overall increase	2017 HMICFRS PEEL <sup>4</sup>
Devon & Cornwall	179.0	103.1	282.0	179.0	112.3	291.3	3.3%	Good
Dorset	65.7	54.8	120.5	65.7	59.0	124.7	3.5%	Good

Figure 3: Funding comparison (£m)

##### 3.1.1 Police funding by force for 2019/20 onwards

A much higher proportion of Devon and Cornwall's total funding (61.5%) comes from government. Only 53% of Dorset's funding comes from government and a higher proportion comes from the police precept element. Overall, government funding is more per head for Devon and Cornwall (£103) than Dorset (£85). This would fall to £97.6 per head for a combined force.

Having received minimal information regarding the financial impact or benefits of the potential merger, it is difficult to know whether current levels of funding, alongside the substantial reserves held by both forces, would prove sufficient to underwrite any additional costs arising from the merger of the force areas.

This is particularly relevant in attempting to understand how the additional 430 police officers or staff would be funded as a result of the merger<sup>6</sup>.

##### 3.1.2 Potential increase in Police Precept

A key issue to be addressed as part of any merger discussion is the anticipatory cost levied on council tax with a combined force. Treasurers for both Devon and Cornwall and Dorset Offices of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) are currently reviewing various models for council tax harmonisation, although this will only be reported on in the full business case. There is an expectation that a full assessment of the impact of any potential rise in council tax payments on residents will have been undertaken as part of this process.

<sup>3</sup> The level of police precept is set by the Police and Crime Commissioner and scrutinised by the Police and Crime Panel.

<sup>4</sup> PEEL assessments are annual, all-force inspections designed to judge the effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy of each police force in England and Wales.

<sup>6</sup> 'The savings as a result of creating a new force and the council tax alignment could mean up to 430 extra officers or staff for the new force area over time' - [www.futurepolicing.co.uk](http://www.futurepolicing.co.uk)

At the moment, tax payers in Dorset in an average Band D property pay around £18 a year more for their policing than householders in Devon and Cornwall<sup>7</sup>.

Legally, the levels of police precept for both areas must be harmonised for the merger to take place. One of the 'Asks' from Cornwall Council is that Dorset rates are harmonised down to the Devon and Cornwall level, although this has already been ruled out by the Assistant Chief Constable during a briefing for Councillors on 1 August 2018.

Another proposal is that the rate for Devon and Cornwall will be increased to the Dorset level to fund extra police officers. The estimated increase would mean an extra payment of £1-3 per month (£18 per year) for average Band D residents in Devon and Cornwall.

Initial estimates suggest that an increase of £18 per year in the police precept element of Council Tax for Plymouth would raise an additional £1.3m. If allocated locally, this could equate to approximately 30 new police officers or staff (based on an average of £40k per officer including recruitment and training costs). Without further information about how any increase in revenue will be allocated across a larger force area, commitment is sought that urban areas such as Plymouth will benefit through additional investment and policing resources.

## **3.2 IMPACT ON THE PLYMOUTH LOCAL POLICING OFFER**

### **3.2.1 Demands of urban areas**

Plymouth's crime profile shows a number of crime and disorder issues common to larger cities including the higher prevalence of violent offences and anti-social behaviour offences such as street drinking. There are very real concerns that the demands of policing a largely rural tri-county force area could draw critical resources away from urban areas such as Plymouth.

Based on the complexity of need and pattern of crime across the city, the Council seeks a firm commitment that appropriate resources are committed to urban areas.

### **3.2.2 Neighbourhood Policing**

Despite escalating needs and ever decreasing public sector budgets, Plymouth remains effective in keeping crime levels as low as they are. There is a strong belief that this is due to the effectiveness of neighbourhood policing across Plymouth, and due to the cross agency focus on preventative measures.

Plymouth's police resource currently includes 51 Police Community Support Officers (PSCOs - FTEs), which will reduce to 38 by 2020 as part of an existing force-wide reduction plan. This is in addition to 39 neighbourhood beat managers and 10 neighbourhood sergeants.

## **3.3 RETAINING THE BASIC COMMAND UNIT**

The possible expansion of the force area into Dorset means encompassing another primarily rural area. Other police forces have sought to 'rationalise' the number of basic command units within their area, and this is a potential risk as a result of the merger.

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<sup>7</sup> Current Band D Council Tax rates are £1,742 in Plymouth and £1,800 to £2,000 in Dorset. The police precept element is currently £188.28 in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly compared to £206.58 in Dorset.

BCU	Population of largest urban area	Crime Rate per 1,000 population (Dec 2017)
Plymouth <sup>8</sup>	Plymouth 264,199	84.74
Dorset	Bournemouth 193,657	92.68
Devon	Exeter 129,801	76.32
Cornwall	Truro 19,000	50.51 (Cornwall as a whole)
Torbay	Torbay 134,500	84.72

Figure 2: Population of largest Urban Areas/Recorded crime rate by BCU

### 3.4 INVESTING IN A MODERN POLICE ESTATE FOR PLYMOUTH

Plymouth is a city that is working hard to grow and modernise and in meeting the needs of our citizens, businesses, investors and visitors.

The merger proposal and [2017-2021 Force Estate Strategy](#) fail to reference any intention to improve the condition of the police estate in Plymouth in line with the ambitions of a modern police force.

The five-year strategy focuses on:

- Accessibility – providing space where it is needed for the public to interact with our staff and officers;
- Flexibility – adapting to changes in the workforce mix, the operating model and maximising partner opportunities;
- Integration – exploring where we can share premises with partners in places which enhance services;
- Efficiency – driving down running costs and enabling capital reinvestment to support diverse police functions;
- Wellness – providing safe and healthy working environments.

With HQ buildings already in Devon and Dorset and a new HQ and custody suite now agreed for Cornwall, the Council is keen to understand how the police assets such as Crownhill Police Station in the north of the city and Charles Cross Station in the city centre will be enabled to achieve this vision for Plymouth residents. Both buildings are full to capacity and are arguably no longer fit for purpose. Furthermore, both the merger proposal and estates strategy fail to have considered the benefits of force wide co-location arrangements. This is a serious omission that further challenges the credibility of the merger rationale.

<sup>8</sup> HMICFRS' re-inspection judged Devon and Cornwall Police good in April 2018 on crime recording after being judged inaccurate in 2016.

**APPENDIX I Timeline**

- **June to August 2018** – staff, public and stakeholder engagement.
- **10 August 2018** - Devon and Cornwall PCP extraordinary meeting to consider the outline business case.
- **September 2018** – PCCs and Chief Constables review of engagement process and outcomes, and consideration of the full business case.
- **Early October 2018** – if supported, full business case submitted to Home Office.
- **December 2018** - Home Office consideration of the proposed merger with indicative support given by the end of the year.

If the new force is supported:

- **2019** – further engagement with staff, public and our key stakeholders as plans are developed.
- **2019** – legislation changes.
- **November 2019** – shadow arrangement implemented.
- **May 2020** – elections for a single police and crime commissioner to cover Cornwall, Devon, and Dorset and new force would come into effect.