



REPORT TO CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL

19 November 2009

1. MEETING

The Authority last met on 23 October 2009. Set out below are some of the issues discussed.

2. COLLABORATION PROGRAMME – PROGRESS TO DATE

To date the programme has delivered more joint operational units than any other similar venture in the country. The following sets out a précis of these units and other collaborative ventures.

MAJOR CRIME UNIT

The Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Major Crime Unit (B&HMCU) was established in November 2007. A review of the performance of the unit was undertaken earlier this year and up to the end of March 2009 achieved the following :

- 100% record of investigation and clear-up of murder cases
- Twenty-five sentences of life imprisonment have been handed down in relation to investigations
- Increased capacity for cold case review which has seen a number of successes.
- increased sharing of skills and expertise and improved resilience and capacity, with recognition by the HMIC that the joint unit meets national standards
- Annual efficiencies of £168,000 across the two forces are being achieved as a result of the creation of the unit, which are being reinvested into the delivery of frontline policing services. That figure is projected to increase by £300,000 per year from this next policing year.
- Having a dedicated team has eliminated the need to 'abstract' frontline officers to support major crime inquiries

In addition the Unit had some performance indicators to deliver (over period of November 2007 to May 2009) which included:

- Increased sanctioned detection rate from 20.7% to 25.7%
- A reduction in crime of 16.45% (in Bedfordshire)

In particular improvements had been seen in respect of the sanctioned detection rates in the key areas of robbery and domestic burglary.

- Increased sanctioned detection rate from 29.3% to 31.9%
- A reduction in crime of 12.17% (in Hertfordshire)

DOGS

In April 2009 the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Dog Unit went live with management and training based at RAF Henlow and officers deployed from bases across the two Forces. Officers are routinely assigned to incidents and operations across the county boundaries on a shift system designed to better match resources to demand. This unit saw a reduction of 9 constables across the two forces and delivered annual efficiencies of circa £363k. (£199k to Bedfordshire and £164k to Hertfordshire).

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS DEPARTMENT

Also in April 2009 the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Professional Standards Department was created. Based at Biggleswade but with staff based on each of the 5 BCUs across the two forces the department is delivering annual efficiencies of circa £176k whilst improving resilience and giving enhanced anti-corruption capability. (This unit sees Bedfordshire increase costs by £20k per annum and Hertfordshire secure annual efficiencies of £196k).

SCIENTIFIC SERVICES

The third unit to go-live in April 2009 saw a joining of the two Scientific Services functions under a single management team as well as the creation of a single chemical laboratory at Welwyn Garden City. This delivered immediate annual savings of £185k (£111k for Bedfordshire and £74k for Hertfordshire) however the management team was tasked with reviewing all the contracts, processes and staffing arrangements with a view to finding a further £300k annual savings from April 2010 (an additional £180k for Bedfordshire and £120k for Hertfordshire). A plan for these savings has been developed and will be considered by the Joint Operational Board in October.

FIREARMS

In July 2009 a joint Firearms Support Unit went live with training delivered from the Bedfordshire Police Headquarters at Kempston and deployments from the two respective headquarters. This venture has seen improvements to the training facilities available and no change to the availability of Armed Response Vehicles whilst delivering a saving of 7.5 constables and annual efficiencies of circa £437k (£226k for Bedfordshire and £211k for Hertfordshire). The unit is fully compliant with NPIA standards and is attracting much interest from other forces.

CIVIL CONTINGENCIES AND PUBLIC ORDER PLANNING

On 1 September a joint Civil Contingencies and Public Order Planning Unit (including Search) was established. Based at Hitchin Police Station the unit will pull together three distinct areas of operational policing: contingency planning (mainly with partners), operational planning for major incidents/events (mainly police only and includes CBRN/public order training) and search training and deployment. This will deliver increased resilience whilst producing annual efficiencies of circa £260k (£151k for Hertfordshire and £109k for Bedfordshire).

Aside from the joint units a number of other collaborative ventures have been undertaken between the two forces around vehicle recovery, website management and Legal Services and benefits are also being realised in these areas.

The programme team is currently working on a number of work strands: ICT, Procurement (includes Cambridgeshire Constabulary), Recruitment and Serious and Organised Crime.

In summary the current collaboration ventures would deliver an annual efficiency of £2.263 million across the two forces with effect from April 2010 (Bedfordshire annual efficiency will be circa £937k whilst Hertfordshire's will be circa £1.326 million). The two forces have been able to secure two pieces of financial support from the Home Office in respect of their collaboration activities, the first was £300k towards the set-up of the Major Crime Unit and a further £485k towards the first year's running of the programme.

A full review of the performance of the joint units established on 1st April is to be undertaken shortly

As I mentioned at the last meeting there was the intention in September for each Authority to consider a business case for a potential merger if it was considered operationally and financially sound.

Both Police Authorities have now been briefed on the current and emerging financial and performance situation in both Forces, together with an assessment of the available options for change that could be considered to address the likely funding gap whilst maintaining or improving services.

In short these options can be summarised as:

1. Completion of the existing collaboration programme and change programmes in each Force.
2. Delivery of a full collaboration in respect of all aspects of the two organisations except Police Authority, Chief Officers and local policing.
3. Voluntary merger.

As a result of this first detailed consideration of the issues faced and the

potential solutions the Authorities have identified areas where further work is required to enable firm decisions to be taken. A significant factor in all the options will be the future funding situation which will become clearer between now and the end of the financial year. As a result the revised options will not be re-presented to the Police Authorities until the next financial year; i.e. 2010/11.

There are clearly no foregone conclusions. All options will assess the benefits to our communities in terms of service quality, resilience and cost.

Should voluntary merger become the chosen option it will need the support of both Chief Constables and agreement of both Police Authorities. A merger proposal would then require support from the Home Office and, ultimately, Parliamentary legislation for it to be implemented. During that process there would, of course, be consultation with the workforce and the communities across both counties.

We are focused on improving the services Bedfordshire Police Force currently give to the public and building on the significant steps we need to take under the current review of working practices and the continuing Collaboration Programme.

With regard to regional collaboration programme the Authority has approved in principle the establishment for regional arrangements to tackle serious and organised crime.

3 YARLS WOOD DETENTION CENTRE – CLAIM UNDER THE RIOT DAMAGES ACT

In October of last year the High Court had ruled that Group 4 and their insurers were not entitled to claim from the Police Authority for the damages resulting from the disturbance. The claimants appealed to the Court of Appeal against this decision who have ruled that Group 4 and their insurers are entitled to make a claim against the Authority and our insurers under the Riot Damages Act 1886.

The Authority is obviously disappointed with this decision but any successful claim against the Authority will be met by the authority's insurance.

It is likely that there will now be a further hearing in the High Court in due course to consider the merits of Group 4's claim.

PETER HOLLICK
REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY