



## **CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNCIL**

**16<sup>TH</sup> September 2010**

### **1. MEETING**

The Authority last met on 16 July 2010

The main purpose of the meeting was to discuss the options available for ensuring the delivery of an effective police service for Bedfordshire whilst facing severe budgets cuts. Also included in this report is an update on current performance.

### **2. OPTIONS FOR CHANGE**

The Authority received a joint outline business case from the Chief Constables of Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire which identified and evaluated a range of options aimed at maintaining the quality of policing services. This report was presented at a time when public services are facing significant reductions in their budgets over the coming years.

The business case had highlighted that the projected combined budget gap for the two Forces between 2011/12 and 2014/15 was £40.6m (£15.1m from Bedfordshire and £25.5M from Hertfordshire). However, the current and planned cost saving projects would deliver annual savings of £17M across the two Forces leaving a gap of £23.6m (£9.5m from Bedfordshire and £14.1 from Hertfordshire). To address this gap the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Project team had considered 9 potential options and following an evaluation of these options put forward the following three options.

1. Independence with a Preferred Collaboration Partner plus a savings programme requiring major internal cuts
2. Extended collaboration (with Hertfordshire) plus a savings programme requiring significant cuts
3. Full and voluntary merger plus a savings programme requiring cuts.

The business case had identified option 3 as the preferred option for delivery of an effective police service in both Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire. Legislation requires that the Authority consults with the public on the policing for its area and therefore at this stage Members were being asked to undertake a consultation exercise with the public and stakeholders.

The day before the Police Authority meeting Nick Herbert the Policing Minister submitted his views on the business case. The Minister had set out the Government's position on the approval of merger proposals. In the light of this he suggested that each Authority 'consider carefully' the scope for deeper and more extensive collaboration.

There was considerable discussion on the issue and by a small minority it was agreed to commence a programme of consultation to evaluate public opinion on the concept.

However, Hertfordshire Police Authority members, independently considering the same report, voted to defer taking a decision on their preferred option until further collaboration and joint working opportunities have been considered.

This means that consultation will not take place in either county and the proposals for a merger between the two forces will not be taken any further forward at this time.

Work will now begin with the joint collaboration team, plus other forces and partners in Bedfordshire, to explore opportunities to deliver significant savings whilst minimising the negative impact on the policing service provided to the residents of Bedfordshire.

### **3. PERFORMANCE**

Members of the Performance and Planning Committee are pleased with the direction of travel for Force performance in the first quarter.

Confidence and satisfaction levels are improving and particularly pleasing for Members has been the reduction in the gap between white and BME satisfaction where considerable focus has been placed. Serious Acquisitive Crime levels, (burglary, robbery, theft of /theft from motor vehicles) whilst not yet on target for this year remain lower than the previous year. Successes this quarter have been seen in the area of theft of/theft from motor vehicles. A positive impact on the of Serious Acquisitive crime performance has been the partnership working on Integrated Offender Management which has helped the Force learn more about the offending behaviour. Members will receive an evaluation of the contribution to Serious Acquisitive crime performance at its next meeting. A key improvement area continues to be the reduction in the number of domestic burglaries which in the first quarter was 21% higher than the previous year.

Over recent months the performance around tackling serious violent crime has been an area of concern. Members have voiced their concern that the targets set by the Police Authority for the number of serious violence offences recorded and detected were being missed. Members have therefore welcomed the fact that a dedicated Serious Violence Strategy is being developed by the Force which would bring together all the strands of activity for dealing with most serious violence and violence against the person.

At the meeting the Committee examined in detail the initiatives that the Force had in place for tackling serious violent crime. Members particularly acknowledged that alcohol was often a factor in violent crime, Members were keen to understand the resource implications should the current licensing laws be changed. Members felt that if the plans to banish the late night opening hours and reinstate traditional pub and club opening hours are introduced, valuable police resources will be saved. These resources could then be effectively redeployed in other areas dependent on need.

Members also acknowledged that the demand for policing services due to the night time economy had been significantly helped by multi-agency initiatives. The SOS Bus in Luton, which is available in the Town Centre on Friday and Saturday nights, has helped to reduce the call on services for the Police and the Ambulance/Health services. In addition, Street Pastors in Dunstable, Leighton Buzzard and Bedford have provided a reassuring presence and helping hand for people needing assistance.

Significant investment has been made to reduce crime in these priority areas and therefore the Authority will continue to focus their attention on these areas at future meetings to ensure that there is a return on this investment for the communities of Bedfordshire.

Tackling serious sexual crimes such as rape had, with the introduction in 2009 of a dedicated Rape Investigation Unit, intended to improve the service provided to victims and ultimately increase the number of cases successfully brought to justice.

However Members were disappointed to hear from the Chief Constable that the detection rate for serious sexual offences over the first three months of this year was only 16.5% which was unacceptable against a stretching target set by the Police Authority for the year of 27%. The Chief Constable explained that the number of detections for this type of crime can fluctuate appreciably over a few months and pointed out that the number of offences successfully brought to justice was at 34.4%, above the 32% annual target and the Rape Investigation Unit had helped to achieve this.

Violence and fear of violence remains a key priority for improvement and will continue to be monitored by the Committee.

Despite the decision by the Coalition Government to discontinue the Policing Pledge the Committee was unanimous in their view that the principles of the Pledge, namely delivering a first class service to local residents and those who need the services of the police, should not be abandoned. However, they felt that many of the ten strands of the Pledge were in fact 'business as usual' and were already being met in different ways. The need to report against every separate aspect was questioned and it was agreed that the Authority's Community Engagement Committee would consider specific areas to be monitored with a view to reducing the current level of bureaucracy around reporting arrangements.

**PETER HOLLICK**  
**REPORT OF THE BEDFORDSHIRE POLICE AUTHORITY**