



Home Office

Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people



Home Office

Chapter 3: Removing Bureaucratic Accountability

Chapter 3: Removing Bureaucratic Accountability

3.1 Police officers should be crime fighters, not form writers. We have set out how we intend to replace bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability. Police and Crime Commissioners are a crucial element of this but other changes are needed too. We need to move the responsibility for telling the police how they should do their jobs out of Whitehall and return it to Chief Constables, their staff and the communities they serve.

3.2 This second radical shift in power is already underway - from Whitehall to the police. Frontline officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) will be subject to less central bureaucracy so they can get on with the job of keeping the public safe. Currently, according to HMIC, only 11% of the police are visibly available to the public at any one time.¹ We need far more of them out on the streets, in communities, visible and available. We will stop officers filling in unnecessary forms, from 'stop' forms to data requests from central government. We want officers to focus on police work not paperwork and processes.

3.3 This will be achieved by:

- Ending Whitehall interference in policing – freeing the police from central control by removing Government targets, excessive centralised performance management and reviewing the data burden that is placed on forces – but ensuring that data is still available to local people;
- Reducing bureaucracy and promoting judgement – supporting professional responsibility and cutting red-tape;
- Ensuring that the leaders of the service take responsibility for keeping bureaucracy to a minimum at force level.

Cutting the bureaucracy imposed by Whitehall on police forces

3.4 The Government will continue to have a role in setting the national strategic direction for the police, but it will have no role in telling the police how to do their job – that is for the police; or in holding them to account for how well they have done it – that is for the public and their Police and Crime Commissioner.

3.5 We have already removed the remaining Government-set target on police forces to improve public confidence. From now on it will be for communities to decide how well their force is doing. We have also removed the Government imposed Policing Pledge, which was often viewed as ten targets in disguise.

3.6 The increased provision of accurate and timely locally focused information to the public will be critical in empowering them to effect real change in their communities. We do not want to end up with a system where forces put out the minimum amount of data. Commissioners need to lead the way in ensuring that this is about showing the public the real figures; figures about what the public think matters locally, not what the force considers is important. HMIC will consider how to adapt their approach to shine a light on police performance on behalf of the public.

¹ Valuing the Police, HMIC, 2010, http://www.hmic.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocuments/Value%20for%20Money/VTP_NFS_20100720.pdf

3.7 The previous Government not only adopted a centralist and top down approach to the police, but equally to partners across the criminal justice system and community safety world. Partnerships have focused on following prescriptive processes and targets set by Whitehall which have pulled them in different directions and prevented them from focusing on what matters locally. Chapter 5 sets out how we will remove some of this prescription so that public outcomes can be better achieved.

3.8 Over the years the amount of data central Government has collected to assess the police has piled up to the extent that it is getting in the way of common sense policing. It is important that crime data is recorded in a consistent way across the country so that the public can have trust in statistics and compare the performance of different forces. However, it does not all need to be reported on centrally. We will review the use of data for performance management, police assessment and public information so as to reduce bureaucracy and remove targets in disguise.

3.9 The public need to know that when they report crime to the police they will be taken seriously and that any information produced by the force, Commissioner or anyone else can be trusted. Objective information about forces on a standardised basis will be necessary as the public value comparable information, including as we set out earlier in relation to local crime data. We also want to explore how justice information can be made more transparent so the public can hold wider justice agencies to account.

3.10 This needs to be balanced with the need to reduce excessive recording and reporting arrangements that keep officers away from the front line. We will look again at the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS) and how crime is recorded.

Reducing bureaucracy and promoting professional judgement

3.11 Too much police time is spent filling out forms and following procedures that are unnecessary and have come as a result of an overly risk averse culture. We want officers out on the streets fighting crime, but analysis shows the amount of time being spent on paperwork creeping up to 22% in 2007/08 with almost half of that not related to reported incidents. We want to restore professional judgement and discretion to the police. Whole shopping trolleys' worth of guidance is loaded onto the police during the course of a year. Whether this is guidance for officers on how to dress or 92 pages on how to ride a bike – this has to be reduced. Local police forces often think of better ways to do things but are prevented from making changes by strict guidelines. We will be ruthless in identifying those processes that are unnecessarily time-consuming for police officers and support staff. The police need to work with partners across the criminal justice system to reform those CJS processes that generate bureaucracy for the police and vice versa.

3.12 By September, HMIC will have completed its analysis of how working practices and processes across the criminal justice system can be improved to reduce duplication and bureaucracy. We will look to its findings to identify specific measures to improve the efficiency of the processes necessary to get cases into and through the system and to deliver better outcomes for the public.

3.13 By the end of this year, we will scrap the national requirement for the 'stop' form in its entirety and reduce dramatically the burden of the stop and search procedures. We will also maximise the use of available technology to further reduce the paperwork in policing so that, for example, an officer will only need to record manually three pieces of information on a stop and search record.

3.14 We will take a close look at processes under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) and the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) to minimise the paperwork involved for police officers, balancing the importance of reducing unnecessary bureaucracy with the need for appropriate safeguards to protect the public from the improper use of some of these powers.

3.15 We will return decision making to police officers, which is why we are taking action to return charging decisions to officers for a broader range of summary offences and will roll this out from November 2010.

3.16 We will also remove barriers to a common sense approach to policing. This involves reforming those health and safety practices that underpin a risk aversion culture that can sometimes prevent police officers from intervening and protecting the public. Lord Young will publish his review of health and safety law and practice across the public sector, including policing, in September. Following on from this, we will work with our partners to ensure that police officers are able to get on and do their job unhindered by unnecessary regulation or practices. As a first step we will support the Health and Safety Executive to embed the approach taken by their guidance, *Striking The Balance*, which sets out a common sense approach to applying health and safety policy to policing, central to which is that police officers that do the right thing and put themselves in harm's way to keep the public safe should be properly recognised and supported.

3.17 These changes are the start of freeing the police to do their job - cutting crime and building confidence with the community they serve. We are keen to hear views on what else gets in the way of this.

Ensuring the leadership of the service takes responsibility

3.18 Not all bureaucracy is Government imposed. Much has been generated locally, sometimes as a result of the tendency to collect information and monitor it, even when no longer required to do so nationally or locally. Some of it has been generated by national policing organisations, for example, ACPO and NPIA guidance. The service itself needs to examine its internal processes and doctrine which can lead to unnecessary bureaucracy. Action needs to be taken to challenge the culture of risk aversion that has developed in policing. Officers all too often collect information just in case it is needed rather than applying a common sense approach. This culture change will need to be supported and embedded by chief officers giving consistent messages to their forces about the information they need to collect and what is not needed. The police must be able to decide how incidents are dealt with and resolved and we will look to ACPO to show strong leadership in promoting and supporting the greater use of professional judgement by police officers and staff.

3.19 Police and Crime Commissioners will clearly have a role to play in getting the balance right between preserving the information and processes needed to focus on the public's priorities and removing anything that is inefficient or unnecessary.

3.20 Work will continue with Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and IPCC to ensure that the revised misconduct and unsatisfactory performance procedures (introduced in December 2008) are used effectively. Those procedures enable local police managers to deal with public complaints, misconduct and poor performance in a less bureaucratic and adversarial way. They have helped shorten the timetable for dealing with cases and have placed more responsibility on local managers as part of their engagement with their neighbourhoods. In most serious misconduct cases, for example those which may lead to dismissal, they have reduced the time taken to hold officers to account.

Consultation questions:

1. Locally, what are examples of unnecessary bureaucracy within police forces and how can the service get rid of this?

2. How should forces ensure that information that local people feel is important is made available without creating a burdensome data recording process?

3. What information should HMIC use to support a more proportionate approach to their 'public facing performance role', while reducing burdens and avoiding de-facto targets?

4. How can ACPO change the culture of the police service to move away from compliance with detailed guidance to the use of professional judgement within a clear framework based around outcomes?

5. How can we share knowledge about policing techniques that cut crime without creating endless guidance?