

Tuesday, June 30, 2015

## The harmonics of leadership, ethics and accountability in policing

Yesterday, I was fortunate to be among the few invited to the launch of the new report by the **Committee on Standards in Public Life**, on leadership, ethics and accountability in policing. Called "**Tone from the top**", this report sets out to call on the Prime Minister and his government for:

*greater energy and consistency to be applied to promoting high ethical standards and for a more robust set of checks and balances in the accountability structures of local policing to enable the public to make a fair and balanced assessment of their PCC*

**And to make a series of...**

*recommendations [which] are intended to support both current and future arrangements. With the introduction of elected metro mayors taking on the powers of the PCC and increasingly devolved powers and budgets, this is an apposite moment to make our recommendations.*

**Now: I have not read the whole report.** My intention is to do and write a more comprehensive review of it in coming weeks.

Yesterday, the invited guests were treated to a summary of the report and welcoming responses from the **College of Policing** (Professor Dame Shirley Pearce), the **IPCC** (James Dipple-Johnstone) and the **APCC** (PCC Julia Mulligan). (Sadly the main author of the report, David Prince, was absent due to a medical appointment that had to take priority.)

I would like to record my impressions of the work done. It is evident that the group responsible for the report have taken soundings and evidence from a wide range of people (including my colleague **Bernard Rix**) and visited several locations around the country to explore in depth how local leadership and accountability are working. *So, who am I to critique this body of work..?!*

But... I must record a **certain sense of disappointment** that the recommendations (*page 10*) made have not gone far enough to begin (what must eventually happen) a robust process of tackling some of the substantial accountability deficits in the PCC based governance model. The CSPL had a **golden opportunity to challenge** and set out the significant difficulties with the model, but appear to have **failed** to do so... *To be fair, I may well revise my opinion once I have read the full document. But the recommendations so far have not exactly 'wowed' me...* Maybe, the Committee judged that this was not the moment to call for legislative changes to be made to increase the power of the Police & Crime Panels, for example. But right now, for me, the **tone of the report does not harmonise** with the practical experience on the ground that I have been picking up from several quarters.

I asked these questions yesterday:

1. What is the Committee's view on the need for guidelines on purdah in advance of the elections next year?

2. What is the Committee's view on the need for primary legislation to enact the necessary changes identified by their research?
3. What is the Committee's view on the need for extra resources for the Police & Crime Panels?
4. What is the Committee's view on the why PCCs need their own code of conduct when surely the Code of Ethics published by the College of Policing could well apply to them too?
5. What is the Committee's view on the need for structural change to further professionalise policing especially with regard to how complaints about the police are handled; and whether now was the time to 'sort' and streamline the complex and confusing (to the general public and many others) architecture of IPCC/CoP/HMIC/HO?
6. What is the Committee's view on the how well local PCC convened ethics committees are functioning and what impact are they having?

I was more keen to listen closely to the answers than write down the detail of what was said in response. But I felt most honoured when Lord Bew said that with regard to Q1 (**which I wrote an article about**) that I had "done a service by flagging" this issue. I hope that the Home Office will now run with this and put in place some guidelines that are mindful of the recommendations of CSPL report and which address all the risks involved in the forthcoming PCC elections.

In respect of Q2, I was told there may be opportunities to amend legislation in the pipeline to address some of the matters highlighted. I would hazard a guess that **Baroness Harris** may well take this forward. She had already mentioned the need for primary legislation.

Regarding Q3, there is the hope (and recommendation) that PCPs will become more strategic but I fear that the very wide variation in the effective practice of PCPs will continue and extra resources will still be wanting.

My notes do not record the comments with regard to Qs 4 & 5 and the answer to Q6 was that they are very variable...

**It seems to me that one of the real dilemmas in this whole matter is the opposing pull between the need for national consistency of good governance practice and the localisation of accountability arrangements.** *Another public service circle to square...*

I hope someone was recording the presentations and discussion - because there were some excellent and insightful questions and comments from the likes of **Paul West**, **Baroness Angela Harris** (as already mentioned), **Chief Superintendent Irene Curtis**, **Roy Bailey**, **Professor Francesca Gains** and **Sir Desmond Rea**.

I will write more...