

SUSSEX POLICE AUTHORITY – 3 JUNE 2010

THE NEW POLITICAL LANDSCAPE

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CHIEF CONSTABLE AND TREASURER

Introduction

- 1.1 Following the General Election on 6 May and the formation of a Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition Government, the Prime Minister, the Rt Hon David Cameron MP, has appointed the Rt Hon Theresa May MP as the new Home Secretary and Nick Herbert MP as Minister of State for Policing. This report updates the Authority on developments following the General Election and the implications for policing and police authorities. The press releases from the Association of Police Authorities in respect of these appointments are attached at Appendix A.
- 1.2 The Association of Chief Police Officers of England, Wales and Northern Ireland (ACPO) has produced a briefing paper which includes a comparison of the Conservative and Liberal Democrat manifesto commitments which impact on policing (copy attached at Appendix B).
- 1.3 On 19 May the Home Secretary made a speech to the Police Federation Conference (copy attached at Appendix C) in which she referred to a radical change in the way Britain is policed, with less direction from Whitehall and the local community setting priorities. It is expected that legislation will be included in the Queen's Speech on 25 May. The Home Secretary also announced a complete review of the licensing laws. Power will also be restored to the police to decide on charges for various minor offences. The Home Secretary indicated her support for elected individuals to hold the police to account and thereby enhance the transfer of accountability to the local community.

Police Accountability

- 2.1 The issues surrounding police accountability have been widely discussed within the APA, ACPO and the political parties over the last few years. Indeed, the new Minister of State for Policing produced a paper in 2007 concerning elected police commissioners which included a section headed `Checks and Balances`, as follows: "Concerns have been expressed that electing individuals in place of police authorities will lead to extremism or crude populism. Taken to their logical conclusion, these are unpersuasive arguments against any form of democracy. Nevertheless, it will be important to make certain that sufficient checks and balances exist to ensure that the commissioner's powers cannot be abused. The role of commissioners would be statutorily defined. They would chair police boards on which non-executive directors would play an important role in exercising scrutiny. The mechanism for appointing non-executives therefore needs careful consideration, but while councillors and magistrates can bring valuable experience to police authorities, automatic mandate of these positions should be avoided." The paper also included some interesting comments about power of recall and reduction in the role of the Home Secretary in local policing which seems to be reflected in

the tone of the speech made by the Home Secretary. It is difficult to judge at this early stage whether this thinking will be reflected in emerging government proposals.

- 2.2 As indicated the first definitive indication of the Government's proposals will be seen from what is included in the Queen's Speech on 25 May 2010. The Authority will need to engage both nationally through the APA and locally with Sussex Members of Parliament in commenting on the emerging policing policy proposals. Nick Herbert is, of course, MP for the Arundel and South Downs constituency.

Budget Implications

3. The Government has indicated that there will be an emergency budget on 22 June 2010 which will begin to deal with the national budget deficit. The Government announced on 24 May that initial cuts will be made in the Home Office budget totalling 3.5% and has previously indicated that the police budget will not be protected from the need for cuts. The outcome of the emergency budget and future government spending proposals will need to be taken into account in the developing thinking of the Authority as part of the Serving Sussex 2015 review the arrangements for which are dealt with in the constitution report at paragraph 3, agenda item 7.

Conclusion

4. We find ourselves in a very fluid situation: the extent of the Government's commitment to police commissioners is clear from the initial comments from the Home Secretary although the form any restructuring will take is still unclear. The Authority and Sussex Police will continue to take every opportunity to pursue, through all appropriate channels, the fundamental issues regarding policing accountability. It is essential that as the proposals emerge the Authority and Sussex Police work closely together and take every opportunity to present a common voice to the Home Office, our partners and stakeholders, and our employees, both police officers and police staff, and staff employed to support the Authority. A further report will be submitted to the Police Authority in 29 July regarding this matter.

Recommended – that

- (1) the present position with regard to the Government's commitment to elected police commissioners be noted;
- (2) the Chairman, Vice-Chairman and officers be asked to take all necessary steps to influence national decision-making in respect of police accountability in the light of the Queen's Speech and the emergency budget.

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