

Dorset Police Authority

Transition to police and crime commissioners

About this review

On 15 November 2012 the first elections outside London for police and crime commissioners (PCCs) will be held across England and Wales. PCCs will hold chief constables to account for policing in their force area on behalf of the public. New police and crime panels will scrutinise the actions and decisions of each PCC and make sure information is available for the public, enabling them to hold the PCC to account. Police authorities will cease to exist.

During early summer 2012,¹ Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) assessed how police authorities are preparing for this change. We examined their transition plans and visited every authority to ask:

- Is the police authority ensuring business as usual until November 2012?
- Has the police authority got a plan for managing the transition to PCCs?
- Are arrangements in place to secure a seamless handover to PCCs?
- Are other stakeholders properly involved in the transition process?

This report summarises what we found in Dorset. A thematic report, *Preparing for Police and Crime Commissioners*, is available from www.hmic.gov.uk

Findings

Summary

Dorset Police Authority began planning for the move to PCCs in July 2011, when its first transition board meeting took place. The chief executive of the police authority leads on the transition plan, with a project team in place to support the handover to the PCC. Transition board meetings include representatives from the police authority, the force and key partners.

The police authority is committed to maintaining business as usual in the lead up to November 2012: for example, it has retained oversight of the policing of the Olympic Games in Dorset, and continues to monitor the force's wider performance. The authority has also freed up staff time by combining meetings where appropriate and therefore avoiding duplication of work.

¹ Meetings with police authorities took place between April and June.

Police authority members are to be commended for their continuing commitment and professionalism.

Ensuring business as usual until November 2012

The authority is aware that the policing of the Olympic Games is a critical period for the force. It is continuing to support and oversee this, and other areas of performance, while at the same time reviewing its own structures and preparing for a new governance model.

The authority is not putting off key decisions until the arrival of the PCC. For instance, it has continued to press ahead with regional collaboration work and the planned IT project with Wiltshire Police.

Plans for managing the transition to PCCs

Dorset Police and Police Authority have a clear transition plan in place, which is flexible enough to absorb any changes or contingencies that may be needed. The overall principles of the transition plan are: 'The PCC is the voice of the people in policing', and 'The chief constable is the professional voice of policing'. The transition board has a risk register, which is reviewed on a monthly basis to make sure action is being taken on any new or emerging issues around the plans.

The police area returning officer is closely involved with the transition planning and the authority is strongly committed to ensuring fairness, consistent messages and transparency for all potential PCC candidates.

The authority has developed an internal and external communications strategy for the public, staff and prospective candidates.

Arrangements to secure a seamless handover to PCCs

It is important that the incoming PCC is able to work effectively from day one. It will be for them to decide how they wish to run their office, hold the force to account and engage with the public to identify local priorities. The authority is planning to put a minimum level of resources in to the office of the PCC, thereby allowing the PCC to make further changes once in office.

The force and authority are preparing helpful handover reports ('legacy statements') for the PCC, which review achievements and identify challenges and risks for the future. A new single governance model has been prepared and will be introduced before the PCC takes up office.

How stakeholders are involved in the transition process

Partner agencies (including from the criminal justice and health sectors) have been engaged and involved in the authority's transition plans, and representatives attend the transition board meetings. The authority and force are also developing the 2012/13 police and crime plan with their partners, who have had an opportunity to help map out any service gaps and identify the commissioning roles that they are likely to require from the incoming PCC.

Plans for the police and crime panel are progressing, with Dorset County Council taking the lead.

Next steps

HMIC will continue to monitor the transition to PCCs, with a focus on the arrangements that will enable PCCs to work effectively from day one.