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Date/Dyddiad 7 November 2005

Dear Mr Chaffey

### Social Justice and Regeneration Committee – Restructuring of Constabulary

Thank-you for your letter of 28<sup>th</sup> September and the opportunity to submit comments on future structural arrangements for police services in Wales.

I have had discussions with Cabinet Members and relevant officers on this issue and there is a general feeling of inevitability that we are moving towards larger police service areas, with an all-Wales force seen as the most likely outcome. The need for a strategic approach in a number of key areas is recognised and understood. The critical issue at the local authority level, though, is that the Basic Command Units (BCUs) remain in place following any such restructuring. Indeed, we see the potential for **devolvement of more powers to BCUs working in close partnership with local authorities.**

At present, the Chief Constable for Gwent is relatively **accessible** to local authorities for a range of issues. It will be important when working collaboratively with neighbouring authorities that we do not find it more difficult to achieve joint decisions with the Police at the 'Greater Gwent' or other levels. This is particularly relevant in the context of **'Making the Connections'** which is encouraging public services to work together. Some of the discussions about having a regional tier of police administration to bridge the gap between BCUs and one (or two) large service(s) may take on a particular relevance in this respect.

Inevitably, there will be **costs** associated with any re-organisation and it will be important to be able to demonstrate clearly that these costs will be outweighed in the medium term by efficiency savings from moving to a smaller number of service areas. Furthermore, we would like reassurance that BCUs' existing resources will not be diminished as a result of any changes, and that at least part of any efficiency savings will be reinvested at the BCU level. This would apply particularly to BCUs that cover more than one local authority area as there would be a need to build their capacity and strengthen

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their **performance** as effective local bodies. We would be concerned if efficiency savings were to be channeled primarily into the establishment of Wales-wide strategic teams and would certainly be opposed to any transfer of funds from BCUs to the 'centre'.

Below I have included some further comments relating specifically to the terms of reference as set out in your letter.

#### **Relationship between police and the communities they serve / identity**

There is a danger, at a time of trying to get closer to the community, that the creation of a larger service will be seen as a backwards step. However, if local relations with the BCU are maintained/strengthened, this should lessen such fears. It will be important that performance at the local level does not suffer as a result of any changes - and this includes performance in terms of alleviating fear of crime. The continued emphasis on **neighbourhood policing** is welcomed in this respect and any opportunity to strengthen this approach should be taken.

#### **Impact of any change on Community Safety Partnerships and other partnership arrangements**

Linked to the above point, the switch to a Wales-wide police authority would cause us some concerns given our representative system of democracy. With the likelihood of only ten local government seats on such an authority, clearly 12 local authorities would not be directly represented. (The different population size of local authorities should also be taken into account as a factor when determining representation).

This again leads us to seek a strengthening of relations at the local level. There is the possibility of introducing a system of accountability directly between the BCU commander and the Local Authority as part of this re-organisation.

The Community Safety Partnerships may offer another option, although, of course, there are presently two Community Safety Partnerships (for Caerphilly county borough and Blaenau Gwent) linked to a single BCU.

The changes under consideration could be linked to giving local Partnerships more flexibility to agree their own performance targets instead of having these set nationally.

#### **Relationship between the police and those services which fall directly within the responsibility of the Welsh Assembly Government**

As part of its Social Justice remit, the Assembly already has some responsibility for issues including

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substance misuse and domestic violence. Having a single Wales service could lead to more consistent practice instead of having potentially four different 'takes' on national policy.

I trust that the above comments are helpful. If you have any queries on any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



**Malgwyn Davies**  
**Chief Executive.**

Copy To:

Mr Tim Peppin - Head of Policy + Central Services