

ACU/2/11



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Roger Chaffey  
Social Justice & Regeneration Committee  
Welsh Assembly Government  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Thursday, 27<sup>th</sup> October, 2005

Dear Roger,

### POLICE RESTRUCTURING IN ENGLAND AND WALES

I have been asked by members of the Wales Association of Community Safety Officers (WACSO) to provide written comments to the Social Justice & Regeneration Committee for the policy review relating to the restructuring of the four Welsh forces.

After consulting our membership, it is clear that the majority of community safety officers across Wales do not have any strong opposition to the creation of an all-Wales police service – the most likely final option to be presented to the Home Secretary.

However, members are unanimous in their view that the current Basic Command Unit (BCU) structures must be retained and strengthened, together with the police commitment to deliver neighbourhood policing and partnership working at both electoral ward and sub-ward levels. Indeed the placing of BCUs on a statutory footing is something we welcome.

Members are also of one voice in calling for greater autonomy for BCUs, particularly in respect of their ability to set targets and priorities (thereby ensuring allocation of adequate resources) that better reflect the needs of their respective community safety partnerships. It is therefore essential that the Police Reform White Paper proposals for BCUs contained within *Building Communities, Beating Crime* are not lost in the restructure.

WACSO recognises the difficulty that would arise in the creation of a new all-Wales police authority and the need to ensure democratic representation on that authority from all 22 unitary council areas. There is also recognition that if every unitary council is afforded a representative it cannot be equitable for smaller authorities such as Merthyr Tydfil, Ynys Mon and Blaenau Gwent to have the same level of representation as Cardiff, Swansea and Rhondda Cynon Taff.

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WACSO would therefore want to ensure that the new police authority structure would recognise and accommodate both regional and local accountability and enable the 22 councils and community safety partnerships to maintain clear and real links and communications with the authority.

In fact the restructure may provide the ideal opportunity to bring the police authority "closer to the people" by using the CSP structure as a network of local area boards, with each council's executive or cabinet member for community safety sitting on the partnership's overarching or strategic group as well as being the police authority appointee (as suggested by *Building Communities, Beating Crime*). Why try to create a totally new structure when it might be easier to adapt existing ones.

If it proves necessary to limit the membership of the new all-Wales police authority, it would then be feasible for a middle tier of regional boards – perhaps reflecting three geographical areas of Mid & West, North and South Wales – to sit between the CSPs/local boards and the new all-Wales police authority executive.

WACSO recognises that regional and cross-border crime does not conform to boundaries such as the English/Welsh border and that there are coherent arguments for trans-national mergers, such as North Wales and Cheshire/Merseyside, South Wales and Gwent with Avon & Somerset/Gloucestershire and Dyfed-Powys with West Mercia. However, the benefits of such cross-border mergers may very well be outweighed by the complications this causes for police strategic management teams working simultaneously in devolved and non-devolved contexts. It could also result in adding to the chaos of existing community safety partnership funding arrangements and target-setting and monitoring procedures.

There is a strong local identity in all four areas of Wales that form the current footprints of the police forces. This identity is not only traditional but also cultural. Any move to an all-Wales Force or other combination of forces would need to ensure this identity must be kept. Otherwise the communities currently served by these forces will undoubtedly express their displeasure. This could be overcome by introducing within the all-Wales Force, for example, regional or area 'Divisions' mirroring the current force boundaries. There would be a need to keep the current BCU structures within these 'divisions' in order to operate the current CSP structure. This would help ensure a seamless transition and provide a business as usual approach.

WACSO does have concerns about how the restructuring will impact on other areas of partnership working, such as criminal justice matters. These could range from provision of secure accommodation, jails etc having to be kept within Wales (i.e. South Wales). Similarly barristers currently serving north Wales from the Chester Circuit may not then be available. There are no Chambers in north Wales.

Finally it would be wrong, in presenting a WACSO viewpoint, not to acknowledge the strong feeling against an all-Wales force that has been expressed in some areas (particularly Wrexham), based mainly on the stronger cultural, operational and resource links that the police have with Cheshire and Merseyside. There is serious concern about an all-Wales force being singularly focused on a Cardiff /South Wales centre, with a host of experiences showing that, typically, North Wales loses out.

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Another question raised by North Wales members was in relation to the setting of precepts and the risks associated with local council taxes going into an All Wales pot.

I trust the views of WACSO members will assist the committee in its deliberations on this matter.



**Stephen Carr**  
Chair

CC: All WACSO members