

best foot
forward

headquarters'
support for police
basic command units



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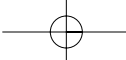
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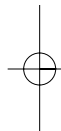
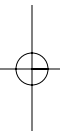
B E S T F O O T F O R W A R D

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MANAGEMENT PAPER • BEST FOOT FORWARD



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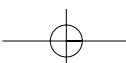
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Preface

It is 13 years since the Audit Commission produced its first report on policing. During this time, it has maintained a keen interest in how police forces are structured and managed. The 1991 paper, *Reviewing the Organisation of Provincial Police Forces* encouraged forces to streamline internal structures and to clarify the role of 'basic command units' (BCUs) (Ref. 1).¹ Three years later, *Cheques and Balances* (Ref. 2) provided guidance to forces and police authorities on new approaches to planning and financial delegation introduced by the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act of 1994.

The past decade has witnessed major developments in public service management thinking on issues such as delegation, accountability and the best means to deliver service improvement. For the police, the greater emphasis now given to local problem solving is encapsulated in the establishment of statutory partnerships under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. And, from April 2001, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) will carry out inspections of BCUs as well as force-wide reviews. Against the backdrop of local performance focus, this paper explores the role

of HQ in managing and supporting BCUs.

BCUs are geographical service delivery units within police forces. While BCUs deliver the majority of day-to-day policing services, force headquarters (HQ) retains a vital role in two broad areas:

1. Strategic management and leadership, including negotiating trade-offs between competing risks and resource demands.
2. The provision of specialist and support services.

This paper suggests ways in which forces can improve those activities that support frontline policing delivered by BCUs, and can strengthen performance management within a culture of devolved responsibility. It also flags up wider questions about how policing services are organised that need to be addressed through further research and debate.

The paper is based in part on interviews and focus groups with around 200 HQ and BCU staff in seven forces. Information was also drawn from a questionnaire completed by 160 BCUs and 29 chief officers in 30 forces. The study team consisted of Helen Oxtoby and

Philip Hall, with support from John Saunders and Andy Bruce, under the direction of Greg Birdseye. The Commission has benefited from guidance offered by a study advisory group (Appendix 1) and from additional discussions with colleagues in HMIC.

The Commission is grateful to all those individuals and organisations that have contributed to this study, including those who commented on earlier drafts of the paper. As always, however, responsibility for its content and conclusions rests with the Commission alone.

¹ Throughout this paper, the term BCU refers to territorial police commands. Except where specifically noted, it does not include specialist, force-wide, operational command units.

1. Introduction

1. Crime and disorder are matters of considerable public interest. *How safe is my local area?* and *How successful are the police at catching criminals?* are questions that concern us all. Over the past year, recorded burglary fell by 8 per cent and vehicle crime by 7 per cent, but violent crime rose by 7 per cent and robbery by 21 per cent (Ref. 3). Although 78 per cent of people think that their local police do a 'very' or 'fairly' good job, satisfaction with many specific police activities is falling. In particular, satisfaction with the level of foot patrol has fallen from 23 per cent to just 20 per cent over the last year (Refs. 4, 5).

2. Demands on the police service are high. Forces and authorities face the challenge of maintaining the confidence of their communities with limited resources. While seeking to devote a greater proportion of their time and effort to preventive work – including statutory partnerships with local authorities and other agencies – forces must continue to respond to immediate calls for service. They also need to balance resources between day-to-day policing and 'acute' services, such as the investigation of serious crime. Major criminal activity is ever more

sophisticated and increasingly transcends force borders.

Current challenges

3. In January 2000, for the first time, the Government published crime statistics for local policing areas – known as BCUs. The availability of this information has served to focus attention on local, as well as force-wide, police performance. Reflecting this new focus, HMIC will carry out inspections of BCUs' effectiveness from April 2001, to identify strengths and weaknesses and to disseminate good practice across the country.

4. The decision to publish crime data and inspect performance at BCU level reflects the view that, for most purposes, policing is a local service. But it also presents a new challenge for police forces. BCUs are not – and were never intended to be – autonomous. BCU commanders are held accountable for local policing outcomes, by the police authority, through the chief constable, and operate within a policy framework that is predominantly determined at force or national level. And, while they deliver most frontline policing services, BCUs draw on support and resources from other parts of the organisation. Chief officers must

balance a focus on local performance with a force-wide responsibility to deliver economy, efficiency and effectiveness (and to provide mutual aid to other forces).

5. The external challenge of BCU performance will place a spotlight on the activities of force HQ in support of local units. For example, it would be unsatisfactory if BCUs did not receive the quantity or quality of support that was required or had been negotiated. Moreover, the central role of the BCU in local crime reduction, in partnership with the community and local agencies, prompts the question of whether BCUs have sufficient control over the resources necessary for the prevention and detection of crime and disorder in their area. At the same time, however, difficulties may arise where BCU commanders become detached from the strategic management of the force as a whole. The question of how forces can best address these issues forms the subject of this paper.

The external challenge... will place a spotlight on the activities of force HQ in support of local units.

Introduction to the national policing framework

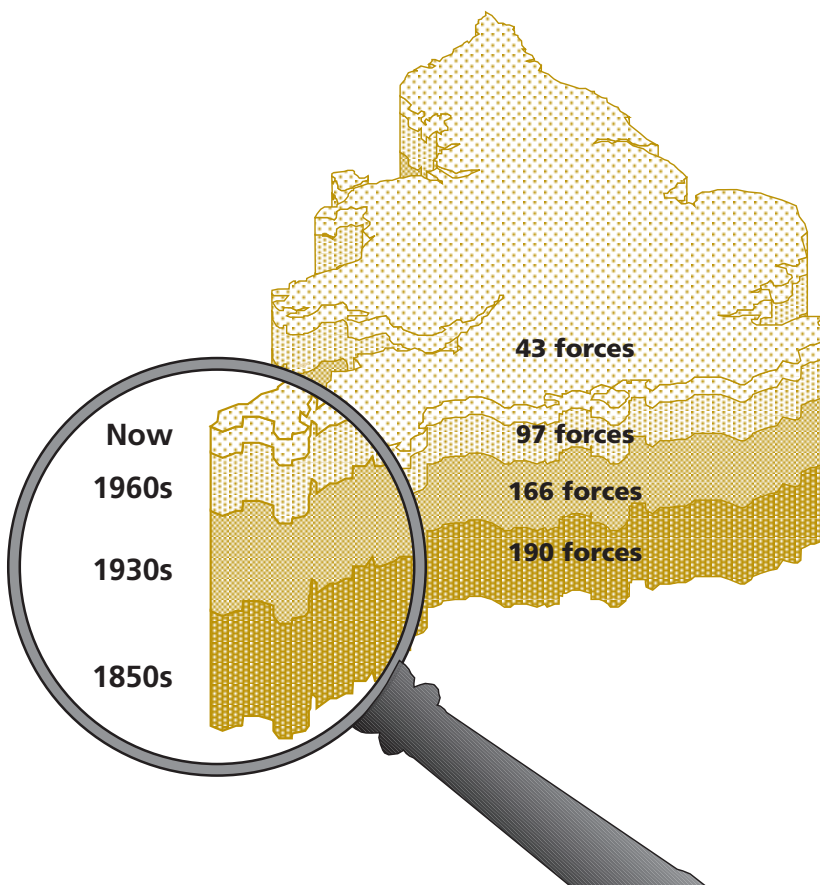
6. There are currently 43 police forces in England and Wales, a number that has reduced over time [EXHIBIT 1]. Once organised on a HQ, divisional and sub-divisional basis, most forces now operate with two main tiers of command – HQ and a number of BCUs. The median force has 6 BCUs, the largest 32 (or 21, if the Metropolitan Police Service is excluded) and the smallest only 2. BCUs have been defined as ‘the lowest level within the command structure able to respond to all incidents and deal fully with most of them without frequent external support’ (Ref. 1). They are variously known within forces as operational command units, divisions or areas.

7. There are currently 318 BCUs, ranging in size from under 100 to over 1,000 officers, with 85 per cent having in the range of 100 to 400 officers [EXHIBIT 2, overleaf]. The majority are headed by a superintendent who reports directly to an assistant chief constable (some smaller BCUs are led by an officer of chief inspector rank). The resident population of BCUs varies from 4,000¹ to over 300,000, and may operate from a single police

EXHIBIT 1

The changing structure of policing in England and Wales

The number of police forces has reduced considerably over the past 150 years.



Source: Home Office

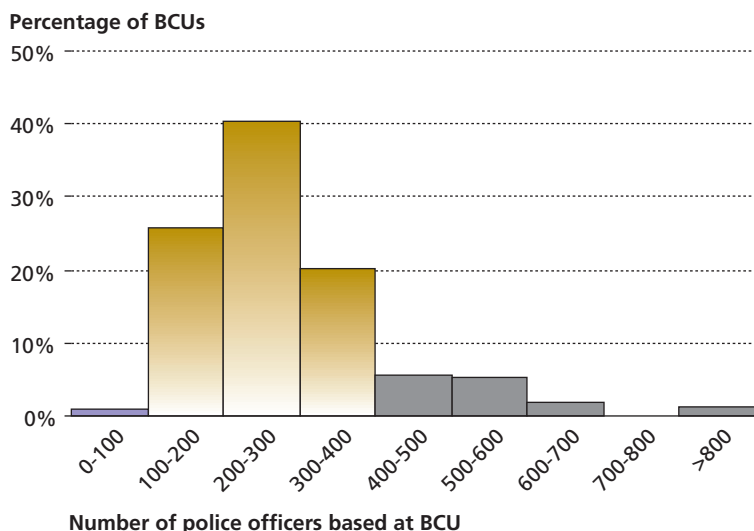
station or more than a dozen. Typically, each BCU is divided into geographical sectors for the

¹ Fewer than 1,000 in one City of London BCU

EXHIBIT 2

Basic command unit sizes

85 per cent of BCUs have between 100 and 400 officers.



Source: Home Office/HMIC

purposes of patrol, each under the control of an inspector. Forces periodically review their BCU boundaries: 40 per cent have made changes to theirs within the last two years. It is becoming increasingly common for BCU boundaries to be aligned with those of local authorities – a trend driven by the establishment of statutory crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) at district or unitary authority level.^I

8. While BCUs deliver the bulk of policing services, they have no independent, legal status. Statutory responsibility for policing is divided between the Home Secretary, police authorities and chief constables under the terms of the ‘tripartite arrangement’.^{II} The Home Secretary sets overarching aims and objectives for the police service, while police authorities have a statutory duty to secure provision of an efficient and effective service in their area. Chief

constables are accountable to their police authorities for the delivery of policing services, and have delegated responsibility for day-to-day financial management. The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 places a statutory duty on chief constables and local authority chief executives to work together to develop and implement a strategy for reducing crime and disorder, based on an audit of local problems and community priorities. Home Office guidance on crime and disorder partnerships (Ref. 6) indicates that the main police role under the 1998 Act lies with the divisional (or BCU) commander, under the authority of the chief constable. In addition, police authorities are responsible, under the Local Government Act 1999, for ensuring that local people get ‘best value’ from their police service [EXHIBIT 3].

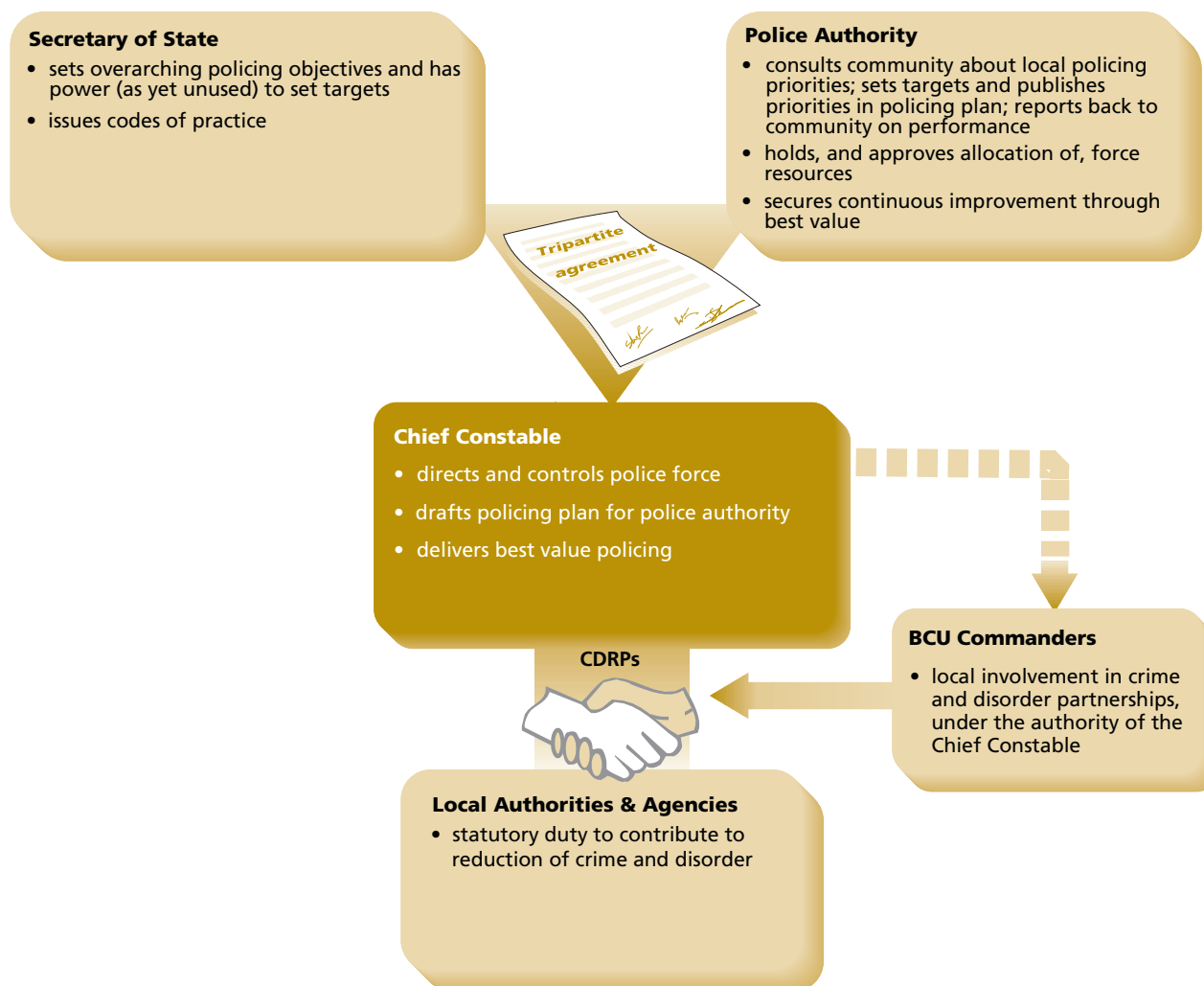
I There are 376 CDRPs. Approximately two-thirds of BCUs share a common boundary with, or are wholly enclosed within, a CDRP. The remaining one-third of BCUs have boundaries that cut across CDRPs.

II First recognised in statute in the Police and Magistrates’ Courts Act 1994, subsequently replaced by the Police Act 1996.

EXHIBIT 3

The legal framework for policing

Responsibilities are divided between the Secretary of State, police authorities, forces and local partners.



Source: Audit Commission

9. The police planning framework is increasingly complex and demanding, with forces (and BCUs) expected to balance local priorities – identified through community consultation – with national objectives set by the Home Office. Additional resources have recently been made available to increase police numbers and for specific crime-reduction initiatives. In return, forces are required to make annual efficiency gains – to be recycled into frontline policing – of at least 2 per cent on their base budget each year. In 1999/2000, the police service delivered efficiency gains totalling £183 million. Under best value, authorities must achieve continuous improvement by reviewing all activities over a five-year period.

Scope and objectives of this paper

10. This paper explores the role of force HQ in managing and supporting frontline policing delivered by BCUs. It recognises, but does not address in detail, other activities of the HQ function. Ministers require that, over a five-year period beginning in April 2001, every BCU in England and Wales will be subject to inspection by

HMIC and that the subsequent reports must be placed in the public domain. Inspections will look at BCU activity in the context of HQ support. This paper aims to assist that process and to help forces review support functions at a time of increasing performance pressure. The Commission has taken care to ensure that recommendations within this paper are consistent with, and complementary to, HMIC guidance on BCU inspection (Ref. 7).

11. The achievement of strategic policing objectives requires a clear rationale for how services should be organised and managed, and what should be the relative resourcing of different activities. This is a complex task, undertaken against shifting patterns of risk and a background of both national and local political imperative. There is a wider debate to be had around the most appropriate structure for delivering policing services, recognising the wide variation in BCU and force size, and the existence of national agencies, such as the National Crime Squad. This paper addresses but one piece of the jigsaw – the relationship between a force HQ and its BCUs, in terms of management and support. In the course of its research, the

Commission has identified wider questions for the model of policing that require further debate within the service. It looks forward to contributing to this debate through additional research and publications in the future.

2. An overview of the roles of headquarters and basic command units

12. In order to identify areas for improvement in HQ support to BCUs, it is first necessary to understand how roles and responsibilities are divided between HQ and BCUs, and how this differs between forces. There is also merit in comparing against the development of management practice in other organisations so as to draw out potential questions for the police service.

Who does what? – the current picture

13. The core responsibility of BCUs is to provide day-to-day policing services in their area. The main activities, common to all BCUs, are:

- mobile and foot patrols;
- 24-hour response to emergency and other incidents;
- the investigation and detection of 'volume' crime, such as burglary, theft, criminal damage, robbery and assault; and
- crime reduction, in partnership with other local agencies and the community.

14. Force HQ is the strategic centre of the organisation and provides specialist policing and support functions. Within these two broad roles of HQ, five major activities can be identified:

1. Setting and co-ordinating force-wide strategy, policy and standards, including responding to national initiatives and statutory requirements.
2. The scrutiny and monitoring of performance in BCUs and HQ departments, reporting to the police authority, Home Office etc.
3. Allocating resources to BCUs and HQ support departments, in line with the overall budget set by the police authority.
4. Provision of business support – for example, finance and human resource (HR) management.
5. Direct provision of specialist operational functions and/or support to BCUs in these areas – for example, major crime investigation and underwater search [EXHIBIT 4].

EXHIBIT 4

Main functions and activities of force headquarters

Police HQ is the strategic centre of the force and provides specialist operational and business support.



Source: Audit Commission

15. The relationship between HQ and BCUs is in transition. Some forces have been more ambitious than others to date, but the direction of change is clear – BCUs are acquiring increasing devolved capability. This reflects a wider trend in organisational management: that of moving decision making closer to the frontline, be it school headteachers and governors, health primary care groups or, in the private sector, regional directors of national companies. There is widespread acceptance that local managers will perform more effectively, and make better use of resources, if they have control over the means by which corporate objectives are achieved.

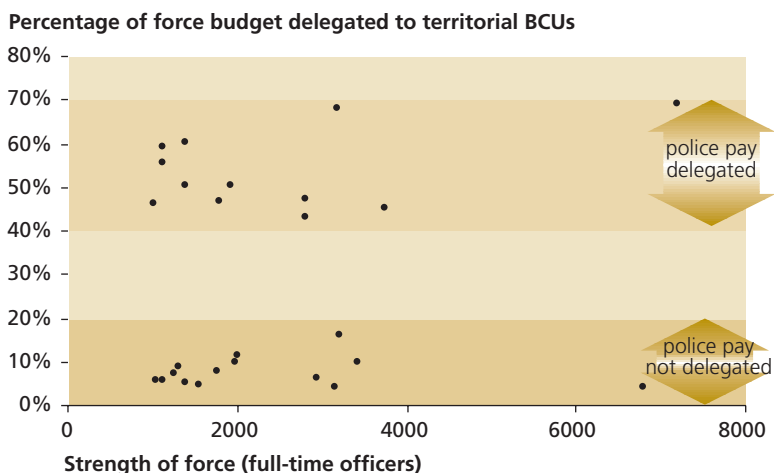
16. Police forces vary considerably in the extent to which they have devolved financial responsibility to BCUs. The proportion of total force revenue expenditure that is delegated to BCU commanders varies from 5 per cent to almost 70 per cent, irrespective of force size [EXHIBIT 5].¹ It will never be sensible to delegate everything – BCUs do not provide all policing services and some spending decisions are more appropriately taken centrally.

¹ Excluding pensions and capital financing.

EXHIBIT 5

Proportion of force expenditure managed by BCUs

The proportion of expenditure (excluding pensions and capital financing) delegated to BCUs varies from around 5 per cent to almost 70 per cent, irrespective of force size.



Source: Audit Commission survey data from 26 forces

However, the budget for police pay (which represents more than 50 per cent of the total costs) is currently delegated in fewer than half of forces. Some, but by no means all, of the remaining forces have plans to pursue pay delegation in the near future.

The relationship between HQ and BCUs is in transition.

17. In addition to budgets, some forces are seeking to devolve certain functions or responsibilities to BCUs that were traditionally managed from HQ. For example, some BCU commanders now manage specialist crime or operational functions such as road policing, dogs, armed

response and specialist detective squads. Forces also vary in the degree to which specialist, non-operational staff – in particular financial and HR managers – have been devolved to BCUs [EXHIBIT 6]. As a result, the proportion of police officers located in BCUs (as distinct

from HQ) varies from 60 to 95 per cent, while the proportion of all staff located in BCUs ranges from 50 to 80 per cent.¹

18. What lies behind differing approaches to devolution? In the case of functional responsibilities, the wide variation in BCU size clearly affects the degree to which specialist functions can be sustained at a local level. But differences – especially those around financial delegation – also reflect the philosophies of individual chief officers. Police forces are complex organisations. Decisions about where budgets and functions should be managed are made in the context of (changing) service delivery aims and limited resources. The increased emphasis within policing on community engagement and local partnership working heralds a move towards greater devolution of decision making. However, a fundamental reappraisal of accountability frameworks and how much managerial freedom should be given to individual service managers – be they BCU commanders or heads of specialist service units – has yet to become widespread.

EXHIBIT 6

Location of specialist support functions in fieldwork forces

Forces vary significantly in the degree to which specialist responsibilities are devolved to BCUs.

Specialist functions	Surveillance	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Armed response	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
	Road policing	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
	Scenes of crime officers	●	●	●	○	○	○	○
	Criminal justice administration	●	○	○	○	○	○	○
	HR specialist(s)	●	●	○	○	○	○	○
	Finance specialist(s)	●	●	●	●	●	○	○
Police forces	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	

- Some specialist staff managed by BCU
- Function managed at intermediate level between HQ and BCU
- Specialist staff managed wholly by HQ

Source: Audit Commission fieldwork

¹ Data from annual returns to HMIC, as at March 2000. Figures exclude the City of London force.

Key questions on the role of HQ

19. BCUs are now established as the primary vehicle for tackling volume (that is, non-major) crime. To a large extent, BCU commanders discharge the statutory responsibility of the chief constable to reduce crime and disorder, in partnership with other local agencies. As a result, one would expect to see change in some aspects of managerial approach and culture on the part of HQ. As the police service adapts to new ways of working, forces must answer some critical questions:

- *To what extent are BCU commanders able to deploy resources flexibly, without reference to HQ?*

- *How are they held accountable for their decisions?*
- *How well do support functions help BCUs to deliver policing objectives?*

20. The new, external, focus on BCU performance provides the police service with an opportunity to review HQ activity from a bottom-up, service-led, perspective. In so doing, forces and authorities need to address four key issues:

1. **How is performance most effectively managed** and what is the right balance between HQ and BCU roles?
2. **On what basis should resources be allocated** and how much capacity should there be for resource trade-offs at a local level?

3. **How can support services become more responsive to BCU needs**, in terms of both operational and business functions?
4. **What scope exists for greater collaboration between forces** in order both to increase the efficiency and to enhance the capability of specialist and support services?

The following chapters consider these questions in turn, each concluding with a checklist of action points. The final chapter of the paper summarises conclusions and presents recommendations for action.



3. Strengthening the performance management framework

21. Police authorities and forces are now subject to a rigorous performance regime that incorporates best value, efficiency planning, external audit and inspection. However, in some forces, the traditional command and control approach to management has not developed sufficiently in response to changing circumstances, resulting in:

- **BCUs having insufficient involvement in policy making**, thereby becoming detached from the objectives and management of the force as a whole;
- **inadequate scrutiny of value for money, integrity and professional standards**, alongside more easily measurable performance outcomes; and/or
- **undue central control of BCU activity**, rather than devolved responsibility within a clear framework of corporate accountability.

Involving BCUs in corporate and strategic decisions

22. In a modern, customer-focused organisation it is essential that unit managers play an active role in

policy making at the highest level. It is increasingly common for BCU commanders to be members of their force's main policy forum – but this was not the case in two of the seven forces visited for this study. In response to the Commission's survey of 160 BCU commanders, 14 per cent were dissatisfied with their level of involvement in force policymaking and 30 per cent were dissatisfied with HQ's response to policy issues that they raised. Forces need to ensure that BCU commanders are fully involved in setting, and have 'buy in' to, wider corporate objectives. Where this does not occur, there is a danger of parochialism and growing antagonism between HQ and BCU staff.

23. It is pleasing to note that BCU representatives are invariably included on HQ working groups developing new force-wide processes and systems. However, some study interviewees complained that they were not consulted early enough, often being included only after key decisions had already been made. Forces and authorities should consider ways to ensure that BCUs are the drivers of force policy, not merely its recipients. This might involve, for

example, including BCU commanders alongside chief officers on the force's top policy team, providing opportunities for BCUs to share ideas, or encouraging BCU staff to scrutinise both HQ support activities and each other, as happens in the Durham Constabulary [CASE STUDY 1, overleaf].

A more comprehensive approach to performance management

24. Understandably, the current focus of performance management is on areas covered by national best value performance indicators (BVPIs), most notably crime and detection rates.¹ However, there is a growing realisation within the service that other aspects of performance – such as the use of resources and the maintenance of professional standards – need to be addressed (as well as those policing outcomes that are not amenable to simple measurement, such as levels of reassurance).

¹ There are 34 national BVPIs for 2000/01 (Ref. 8).

CASE STUDY 1**Involving BCUs in force decision making – Durham Constabulary**

Durham Constabulary introduced its force philosophy – *Aiming for Excellence* – more than a decade ago. The original objectives were to clarify roles and introduce effective structures for communicating and securing accountability.

Financial control lies with the centre – relatively few budgets are delegated to divisional (BCU) commanders – but BCU staff can influence how financial and other resources are used through a series of decision-making and user groups. These groups include:

- the policy advisory group (PAG) (every five weeks) – attended by the chief officer team, all divisional and departmental heads, plus staff association representatives. All force decisions are agreed in this forum. Each meeting is observed by two non-members of PAG, from a nominated division or department, thus adding transparency to the policy-making process;
- operations and crime conferences (also every five weeks) – HQ and BCU operations and crime managers meet with the Assistant Chief Constable to share experiences and problems, and to develop policies or proposals for consideration by the PAG;
- a number of strategy or user groups for HQ services (most held quarterly) – for example, personnel, training, property, administration and IT. These groups are attended by a cross-section of staff, always including at least one BCU representative. They are minuted, result in agreed actions and are often chaired by a member of staff from outside the department in question. They are more than ‘talking shops’ – for example, the training user group prioritises training demands for the months ahead.

As a result, there is no perception of secrecy or the hoarding of resources by HQ. The view from BCU commanders is that ‘we get what we need if we put a good case’ – one example being specialist equipment and vehicles for policing remote roads. The Chief Constable keeps in touch with divisional issues by meeting with each commander every five weeks. He also receives copies of the minutes from divisional management team meetings.

Durham’s approach would not work everywhere, but it has proved a highly successful means of balancing local and central need in this small, tightly knit force.

Source: Durham Constabulary

25. Of the four forces visited in which pay budgets had been delegated, BCU commanders in two forces felt that HQ did not push them hard enough to demonstrate *how* resources had been used to deliver results. This is a matter for concern, as chief constables must satisfy their police authorities that resources have been used to best effect. In a situation where individual BCUs may control annual budgets in excess of £10 million, it is not enough merely to construct league tables of BCU crime performance. As one BCU interviewee put it: ‘if it was my business, I would want to know where the money was being spent’. West Midlands Police have recently developed their performance management arrangements to incorporate a stronger emphasis on resource utilisation [CASE STUDY 2].

26. In addition to scrutinising performance and resource management (in both BCUs and support departments) and reporting to the police authority, the role of HQ involves supporting and developing leadership at BCU level. Pilot inspections of BCUs by HMIC have highlighted the critical role of good leadership within an effective BCU. Forces would benefit from

CASE STUDY 2

Comprehensive performance management of BCUs – West Midlands Police

West Midlands Police has devolved considerable functional and financial responsibility to its operational command units (OCUs), but within a strong culture of accountability. Both OCUs and HQ departments operate within a performance management framework – *Forward in Unity* – that links their activities to the local policing plan.

The force has now developed a package to support the monitoring of devolved units. This contains guidelines for OCUs in four areas:

1. The preparation and review of OCU performance plans, showing how the OCU intends to achieve its targets within the policing plan.
2. Developmental issues, for example, implementing new force policies or responding to external challenges.
3. Financial position – assessing spending against the budget and actual against planned staffing levels.
4. Self audit of processes to ensure, for example, ethical crime recording practices.

OCUs have a quarterly review with the Assistant Chief Constable to assess their progress in each of the above areas, and to agree future action points. In addition, OCU performance data are published and updated monthly on the force intranet.

Source: West Midlands Police

more frequent informal contact between tiers of management to discuss and solve problems, especially between BCU commanders and chief officers. In some forces, such contact is limited to formal, quarterly, performance assessment meetings. Such arrangements should also enable chief officers to ensure integrity and the maintenance of operational standards, and to act as a conduit

for good practice across BCUs and partnership areas.

27. Force HQ also has a role to play as the champion of professional business standards. As finance and personnel specialists are increasingly employed at BCU level, a different approach is required from HQ. It is common for such staff to have a ‘dotted line’ of accountability to their head of profession at HQ, but most BCU staff interviewed

acknowledged that this arrangement had little practical impact. Without devaluing the contribution of local finance and personnel officers to BCU management, forces need to ensure that professional standards and corporate policy are not diluted by devolution.

28. Local specialists can easily become isolated. If this occurs, it becomes more difficult for HQ to monitor professional standards and ensure career development opportunities for the staff themselves (other than through periodic inspection). This is a particular concern where the postholders are inexperienced, or, as in a few cases, underqualified. Regular, collaborative meetings between HQ and BCU specialists are a must. Another way of strengthening links would be for senior managers from HQ to be consulted as part of the individual target setting and appraisal of BCU finance and personnel officers.

Clarifying responsibility and strengthening accountability

29. In a mature regime of devolved management, direct control is replaced by accountability to the

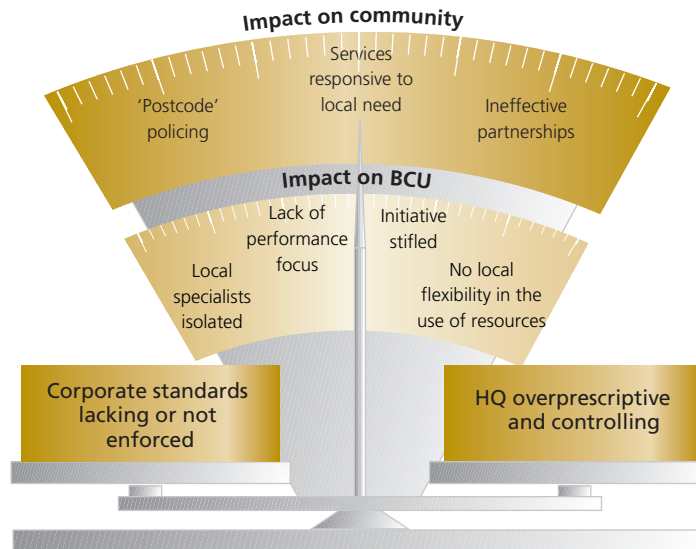
centre through a system of performance measurement and monitoring. This requires a change in behaviour on the part of both HQ and BCUs, and a clearer definition of respective roles. The challenge for forces is to empower BCU commanders (and other devolved unit heads) without creating parochial ‘mini-chief constables’ or uneconomical units. They must also retain the ability to deal efficiently and effectively with problems at force level and above, and to maintain standards across the organisation (avoiding postcode variations in service quality). A balance needs to be struck. Forces should encourage local initiative, for example, in relation to partnership working, but within a framework of agreed corporate objectives, standards and values [EXHIBIT 7].

30. Forces are at different stages of implementation of such a system. It is widely recognised that skills – including resource management – must be developed to enable local managers to effectively discharge their new responsibilities. This is best achieved by a progressive process of devolution; training and recruiting staff as required. Problems have arisen where

EXHIBIT 7

Striking the right balance between local discretion and central cohesion

Forces need to adopt an approach that encourages local initiative within clear limits.



Source: Audit Commission

responsibilities have been devolved without sufficient checks. For example, there is an emerging tendency for BCUs with devolved responsibilities to add administration/co-ordination posts, often creating roles that duplicate activities that are (or should be) carried out at HQ, such as wide-ranging performance review.

The challenge for forces is to empower BCU commanders without creating parochial ‘mini-chief constables’ or uneconomical units.

31. In some cases, it appears that devolution has not been considered because of an assumption that standards can only be assured through direct control. So, for example, it is sometimes argued that specialist officers can never be based in each BCU (as opposed to a central operational support unit), because expertise will be diluted. Alternatively, specialist functions may be devolved, but accompanied by such a panoply of rules and policies that the original objective is largely defeated. BCU commanders are rightly frustrated by such situations.

32. The full benefits of devolving responsibility for road policing, for example, will not be achieved unless local commanders have the ability to vary the number and workload of traffic officers in line with local objectives. Moreover, devolution does not preclude the centre from setting objectives and monitoring broad standards – for example, a minimum number of specialist officers that must be available for duty and be trained in the use of specific equipment or techniques [CASE STUDY 3]. This is not to say that functional devolution is the best option in every case (if specialist units are very small, diseconomies of scale may result, or opportunities for

CASE STUDY 3

Devolution and performance management in Lancashire Constabulary

Lancashire Constabulary has pursued a staged process of devolving budgets and responsibilities to its BCUs and HQ operational support divisions. However, local flexibility is subject to certain constraints and co-ordination by HQ.

At present, 80 per cent of the total force budget is managed by BCUs and HQ operational support divisions. BCUs receive a 'bottom-line' budget which they are free to allocate across different expenditure headings. In order to ensure that BCUs adhere to corporate policy, including agreed policing style, and that wider commitments can be met (for example, in relation to major crime investigations and policing public disorder), a 'divisional operating policy' (DOP) clearly sets out the limits of BCU autonomy.

The DOP allows BCUs to develop their annual policing plans and three-year strategies with a knowledge of corporate requirements. It specifies requirements in areas such as:

- a minimum number of operational constables;
- named divisional management posts – for example, at least two superintendents, at least two chief inspectors, a HR manager and a finance/administration manager;
- each division must have certain specialist units – intelligence, armed response, dogs, road policing and a support unit – each with minimum staffing levels and stipulated qualifications/training; and
- other specialist capabilities – for example, at least one major incident suite.

All BCU commanders must account for their performance in a quarterly, face-to-face meeting with the Deputy Chief Constable, a process that is reported to be challenging but constructive. They may carry forward budget underspends of up to 2 per cent, but the full amount of any overspend is subtracted from the next year's allocation.

Devolution has had practical impact. For example, the Pennine Division has decided to change the balance between uniformed patrol and designated traffic constables, in response to local priorities. Eight 'traffic' constables have been diverted on to general patrol duties. The new arrangement has been carefully monitored to ensure that performance against BCU road policing targets is not adversely affected. In fact, the number of road casualties is running at 60 per cent below the level under previous staffing levels – the best performance in the force. The BCU also reports that the reduced number of specialist officers has made it easier to ensure that they maintain their expertise. However, it is accepted that the Deputy Chief Constable could still direct the BCU to increase road policing resources if performance is seen to fall without good reason.

Source: Lancashire Constabulary

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION

Performance Management

- 1) Are BCU commanders involved in force-wide policy development through membership of the main force policy group?
- 2) Are BCU representatives included in HQ working groups wherever relevant?
- 3) Do chief officers challenge BCU commanders in a regular, structured way on how they have used their resources, as well as on performance against targets?
- 4) Do chief officers make time to support and develop leadership at BCU level, for example, through informal, one-to-one problem-solving sessions?
- 5) What arrangements are in place to ensure that finance and HR specialists in BCUs operate within professional standards and maintain expertise?
- 6) Is greater devolution held back by insufficient skills among BCU staff, and what plans exist to develop such skills?
- 7) Are respective HQ and BCU roles within the performance management framework kept under review to ensure mutual understanding and to avoid duplication?
- 8) What potential is there for greater devolution of responsibility to BCUs and a commensurate reduction and refocusing of HQ activity?

33. In other services, devolution has usually been accompanied by a reduction in the size and costs of HQ, in line with its more tightly defined role. As yet, there is little evidence of a similar trend within the police service. For example, most forces now employ professionally qualified personnel and finance officers at BCU level [see EXHIBIT 6, page 13], a development commonly associated with the delegation of budgets (but often resisted by the respective heads of department at HQ). But staffing levels at HQ remain unchanged. One would not expect HQ to shrink in direct proportion to BCU growth; demands have grown in some areas and the policy-making function is almost entirely unaffected by devolution. But more can be achieved. West Midlands Police has reduced HQ finance staff by one-seventh, and the personnel department by almost one-third as a direct result of large-scale devolution to BCUs. Where BCUs have been allocated funding for finance and HR managers, HQ should allow them maximum discretion, consistent with statutory responsibilities and proper professional practice. For example, local personnel managers should take an active role in career development and absence management.

mutual support be lost), but that its costs and benefits should be considered fully and openly.

4. Aligning resources with need

34. A key role of any HQ function is to allocate resources and scrutinise how they have been used. The difficulty of measuring relative need for policing services is reflected in the complexity of the national funding formula, which contains more than 20, differently weighted, variables. In seeking to maximise value for money from limited resources, individual forces and authorities face two major decisions:

1. **How should resources be allocated** to BCUs and HQ departments so as to best reflect agreed service objectives and priorities?
2. **To what extent should budgets be delegated** to local managers, and what flexibility should they have to alter resource deployment without repeated reference to HQ?

Allocating resources between HQ and BCUs

35. Within forces, resources are typically distributed using one, or a combination of, the following methods:

- needs-based formulae, often based on the national funding formula;

- the assessment of needs or bids from budgetholders; or
- historical expenditure under a particular budget head.

Resource allocation is not an exact science, but decisions should be based on the most up-to-date picture of need (and risk) possible. At present, for example, one-third of forces do not use a needs-based

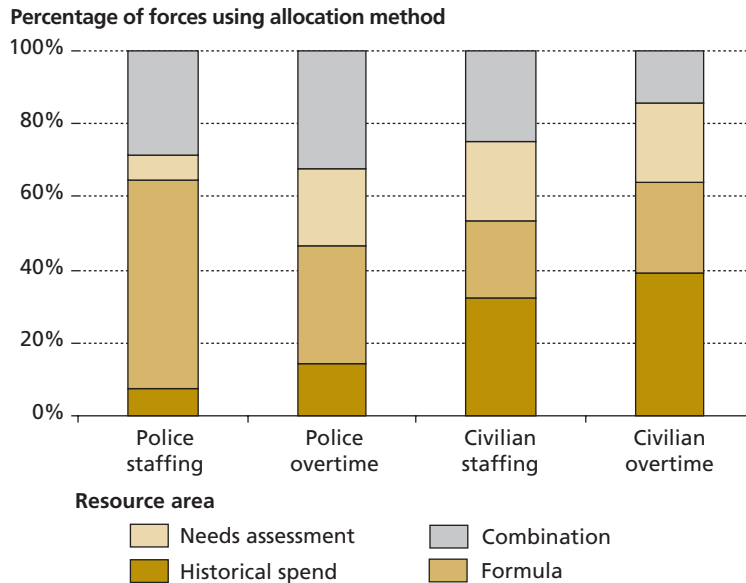
formula or assessment to determine civilian staffing budgets, and one in six base police overtime allocations on historical spend alone [EXHIBIT 8].

36. No method of resource allocation is ever likely to attract universal support. But, in the Commission's survey of 160 BCU commanders, one-half had serious concerns about their force's

EXHIBIT 8

Methods of resource allocation from HQ to BCUs

BCU resources are not always based on an up-to-date assessment of need.



Source: Audit Commission survey of 29 forces

approach. The main reasons given were that the allocation method relied too heavily on historical information, that it failed to respond to robust business cases, or that HQ's share of the cake was disproportionately large.

37. A key difficulty is how to divide the total funding 'pot' between HQ (specialist and support services) and frontline policing delivered by BCUs. It is common for needs-based formulae to be applied only to the amount left *after* an amount has been 'top-sliced' for HQ functions. The division of resources between BCUs and specialist support functions tends to be based on historical figures, reviewed as and when additional resources are available or cuts required. Moreover, for smaller areas of expenditure, it is not uncommon to find all BCUs in a force being allocated the same budget, regardless of relative need. In contrast, some forces, including North Wales Police, have developed a more rigorous approach [CASE STUDY 4].

38. There is a need for greater transparency in resource allocation decisions, particularly now that the performance of BCUs is open to public scrutiny. Forces and

CASE STUDY 4

Resource allocation in North Wales Police

North Wales Police has a financial strategy that links operational and resource planning, with spending controlled as close as possible to the point of service delivery. Three years after its introduction, the force delegates over 80 per cent of its budget to operational commands and redirects resources on the grounds of relative business need.

The process requires all parts of the force to compete for resources on the basis of meeting force objectives. Annually, departments and BCUs submit a bid for the activities they need to carry out to deliver agreed objectives. Departments may use a variety of sources of information to support their business case – for example, historical information, HMIC reports, best value reviews, results of local consultation, and so on. Departmental managers and BCU commanders are then invited to present their proposals to the senior management team, who make the final decision on the budget.

Bids are assessed alongside progress in meeting objectives, and BCU budgets are subject to a 'reality check' – based on an adaptation of the national funding formula. The process has allowed the force to redirect resources in response to changing business needs. For example, it is estimated that in the past 3 years, £6 million from HQ budgets has been diverted into new technology/equipment and increasing frontline police numbers.

Source: North Wales Police

authorities should involve BCU commanders and HQ departmental heads in a review of allocation mechanisms to ensure that:

- the division of resources between HQ and BCUs is based on a bottom-up, rather than top-down, evaluation of need alongside a force-wide assessment of risk;

- staffing establishments – both police and civilian – are based on an up-to-date assessment of relative need; and
- non-pay budgets are revised annually in the light of business cases.

39. The majority of BCU commanders interviewed perceived some inequity in the relative staffing levels of units within the

4 • ALIGNING RESOURCES WITH NEED

force, particularly in relation to support staff. Indeed, changes in officer numbers and administrative workload mean that historical support staff allocations do not always reflect current need, as

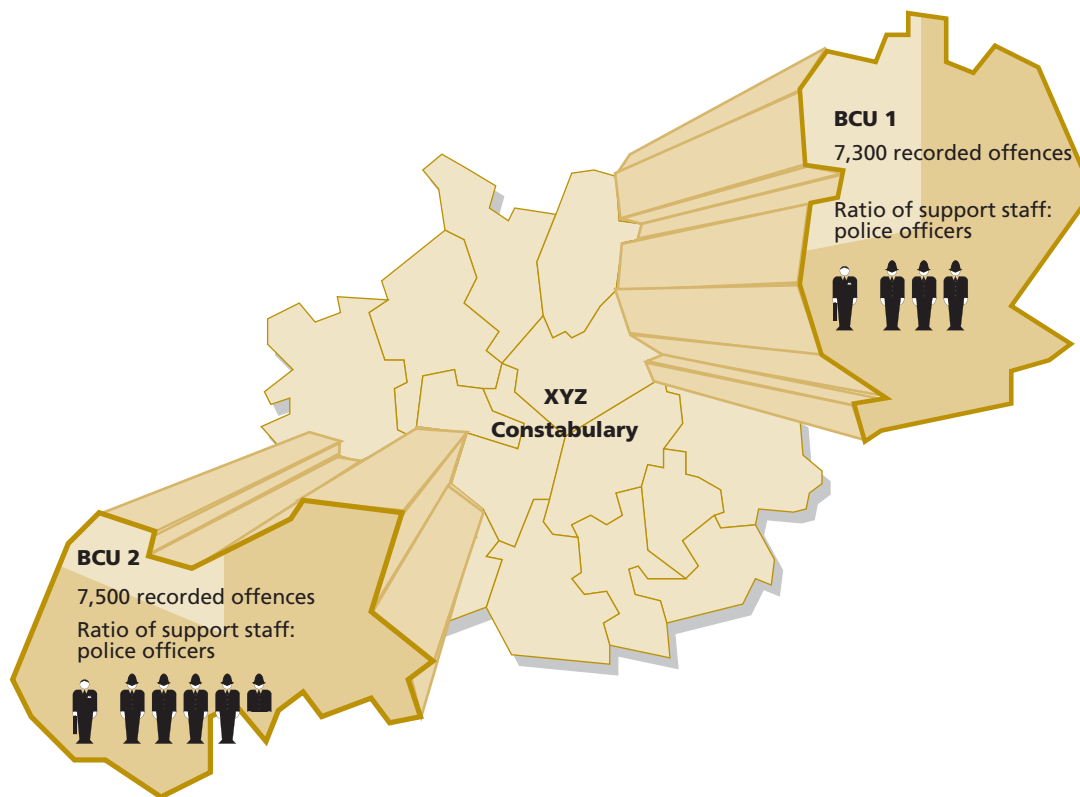
measured, for example, by crime levels [EXHIBIT 9]. However, concerns would be less well founded if BCUs had *chosen* to apply their resources differently, in response to locally identified need. There is, therefore,

a more fundamental question: at what level should decisions be made as to how resources are deployed – across and between budget headings – to deliver agreed objectives?

EXHIBIT 9

Anomalies in support staffing levels between BCUs

Support staff allocations have not always kept pace with changing needs.



Source: Illustrative example based on Audit Commission fieldwork

Extending devolved financial responsibility

40. The case for local financial management is based on the principle that aligning operational and financial responsibility establishes clearer accountability for the use of public resources. In the six years since the Commission's report, *Cheques and Balances* (Ref. 2), some forces have significantly developed and extended financial delegation. But progress varies considerably: the proportion of force revenue expenditure that is delegated to BCU commanders varies from 5 to 70 per cent.

41. Holding budgets engenders a greater degree of ownership, since BCU commanders (and other service managers) can allocate their resources in line with local operational decisions and reap the rewards of tighter financial control. The Commission's research team found many examples of the practical impact of this. For example, some BCUs had acted to reduce mileage, expenses and telecommunications costs (knowing that they would recoup the benefits) and reported that they were better able to plan operations that involve police overtime.^I The key test of delegation, however, is

whether or not BCUs have sufficient flexibility to carry out their role efficiently and effectively.

42. In many forces, the ability of BCU commanders to influence how resources are used remains unnecessarily constrained. One-third of BCU commanders surveyed for this study feel that they have insufficient control of allocated resources to achieve the performance targets for which they are held accountable.^{II} Concerns centre around two issues: flexibility over resource deployment (in particular, the ability to vary the number and mix of staff); and the equity of arrangements for 'abstracting' staff from BCUs to support activities elsewhere in the force. A recent joint inspection report, *Calling Time on Crime*, identified similar problems around the ability of BCUs to make a meaningful contribution to partnership initiatives without significant devolved financial responsibility (Ref. 10).

43. Around two-thirds of policing resources are consumed at BCU level, yet BCUs manage only 30 per cent of total expenditure. While overtime and utility budgets are almost always delegated, police pay – which represents more than one-

half of total spend – is locally managed in fewer than one-half of forces [EXHIBIT 10]. Moreover, three-quarters of BCUs report that they hold some budgets over which they have little or no spending control, and almost one-half are unable to move expenditure between certain budget heads. Even where police pay budgets are nominally held locally, it is rare for BCUs to be able to vary staff numbers and roles, including the balance between police and civilian posts.

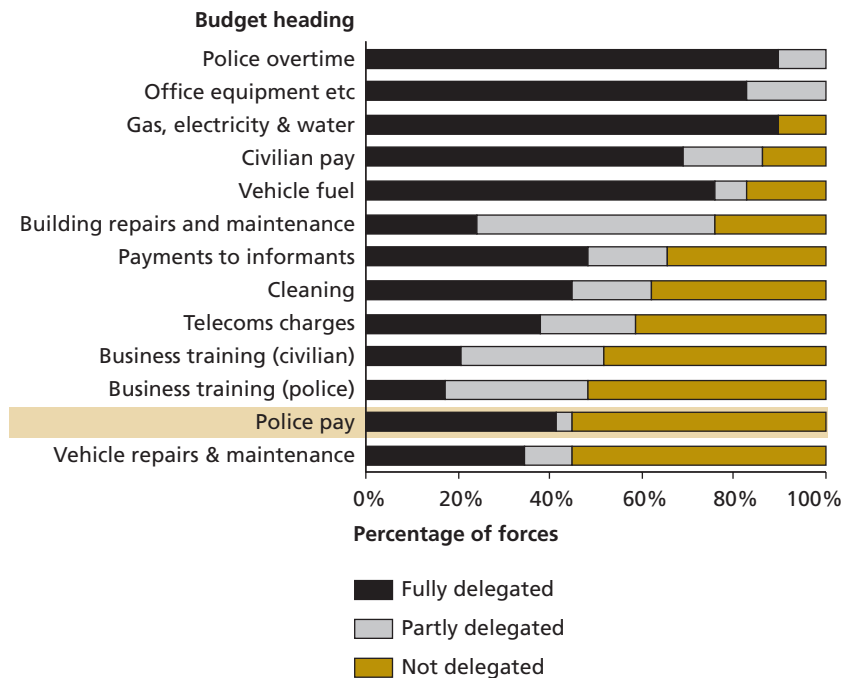
I For examples of financial delegation in Scottish forces, see the recent Accounts Commission report, *Credit to the Force* (Ref. 9).

II Respondents were asked about the degree to which they could control how resources are used, setting aside any views on the total quantity of resources.

EXHIBIT 10

The extent of financial delegation to BCUs

Police pay, the largest budget, is locally managed in fewer than half of forces.



Source: Audit Commission survey of 29 forces

There is no point in delegating budgets if spending decisions remain centrally determined.

Making delegated financial management work

44. What should be the way forward? Clearly, the chief constable needs to retain an overview of how resources are used, as well as of financial probity, in

order to report to the police authority on these matters. Moreover, force managers must balance local crime reduction against other demands on resources. And police numbers remain a highly sensitive political issue, both nationally and locally, to the extent that it is now considered unacceptable to increase the civilian establishment at the expense of the police one.

45. At the same time, an integrated approach to the performance management of BCUs requires greater local financial freedom. There is no point in delegating budgets if spending decisions remain centrally determined. Forces and authorities should:

- **move towards setting overall BCU budgets according to local policing requirements**, rather than apportioning budgets line-by-line;
- **extend delegation to BCUs** to include, in particular, pay budgets, following risk-assessment and the appropriate training of BCU staff; and
- **within delegated budgets, allow BCUs as much flexibility as possible**, consistent with financial regulations and

retaining the ability of HQ to prescribe expenditure or require savings in exceptional circumstances.

46. If the benefits of devolved management are to be realised, forces need to move towards allocating 'bottom-line' budgets to BCUs and allowing commanders to divide resources between different budget heads. HQ should lay down guidelines that are specific, but not unnecessarily restrictive, and then monitor compliance against these. The attention of HQ then shifts towards monitoring whether and how agreed objectives are delivered, rather than the control of individual budget heads. For example, HQ would continue to negotiate central purchasing contracts, but delegate budgets to BCUs from which to purchase. BCUs must 'take the rough with the smooth' in terms of making efficiency savings in delegated budgets where this is required to meet corporate targets.

47. Of course, such comprehensive financial devolution cannot be implemented overnight. Transitional arrangements will be required for a period of time. For example, there is merit in delegating budget *proposals*, rather than actual

budgets, in the first instance. This will allow the force to monitor and predict the likely impact of BCU spending decisions on central departments, and identify where further corporate guidance is required. Commanders of BCUs themselves need to develop the skills to take on their role. Only one-half of BCU commanders surveyed for this study had received training or guidance in financial management prior to appointment, with many saying that national training had not prepared them adequately for this aspect of their job.

48. Delegation needs to be justified in terms of operational benefits, economics and corporate policy. Sensibly, forces are taking a phased approach to its introduction. They must take account of the skills of existing staff at BCU level and the capacity of the IT infrastructure and financial management systems. A more devolved regime also requires the provision of more comprehensive financial regulations and an enhanced role for internal audit.

49. There are good reasons why not all budgets relating to BCU activity should be delegated. In particular, delegation is inappropriate where

the cost of local administration would be disproportionate – for example, insurance. And there will continue to be a need for HQ to hold back some contingency funds, to be trickled out to BCUs during the year, as circumstances permit. Some BCUs further delegate budgets (in particular, overtime) to sector inspectors. It is worth noting that, while it is useful for sectors within BCUs to keep track of their spending, it is not economical for financial administration to occur at this level.

50. As the largest budget, the delegation of police pay carries both the greatest potential benefit and the highest risk. The principal advantage of delegating police pay is to give BCU commanders the ability to vary staff numbers and roles, with any 'savings' (for example, from being temporarily below strength) accruing to the BCU rather than HQ. It also allows basic and overtime budgets to be managed as an integrated whole. Forces that have not delegated pay are concerned about the need for HQ to maintain an overview of total officer numbers, balance skills and experience, and to control officer movements. However, other forces have demonstrated that – with

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION

Resource Allocation

- 1) Are resource allocation methods service-led and based on a bottom-up assessment of need?
- 2) Are BCU police and support staffing allocations kept under regular review? What happens when strength falls below establishment?
- 3) Is there a rationale for deciding which budgets should be managed by BCUs, based on a balanced consideration of both the risks and benefits?
- 4) Is there a predisposition towards delegation – including pay budgets?
- 5) Do BCU commanders have access to the requisite skills, support and training to manage budgets effectively?
- 6) Within the force’s framework for delegation, do BCUs have sufficient flexibility to spend money in line with local priorities?
- 7) Are local resource management decisions monitored as part of performance appraisal?

51. It is for individual forces and authorities to decide on the most appropriate system for their circumstances. There are, however, clear benefits – for the organisation as a whole – of allowing greater local flexibility over resource deployment, a case now strengthened by the importance of community and partnership working in the fight against crime. While it is theoretically possible for BCUs to influence resource allocation without significant delegation from HQ, in practice, this is only feasible in the smallest and tightest-knit of forces. A force’s approach to financial delegation needs to form part of its overall approach to organisational and performance management. In particular, forces should actively develop the capacity of BCU staff to take on devolved financial responsibility and should implement the support systems, checks and balances necessary to make it work.

investment in the IT infrastructure, appropriate financial management skills in divisions, and the provision of comprehensive guidelines – these difficulties can be overcome.



5. Improving support to basic command units

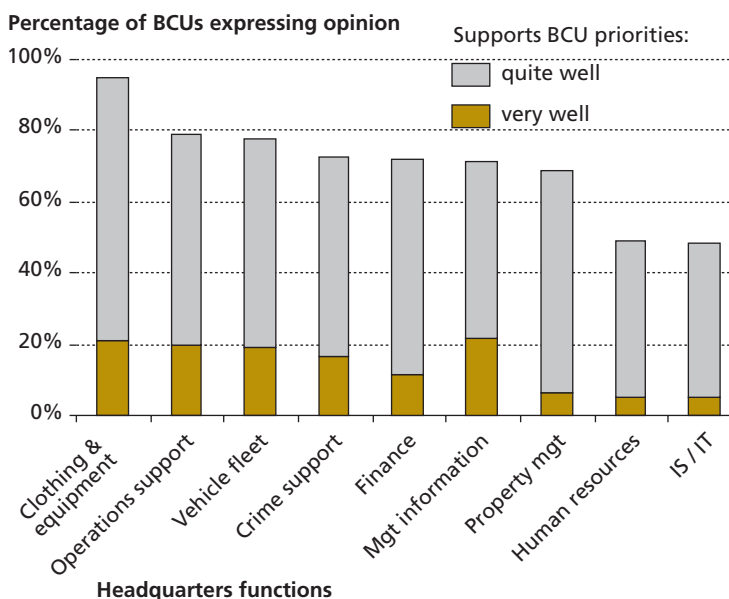
52. BCUs are not autonomous; they rely on both operational and business support provided by HQ. Support should be responsive, of high quality, cost-effective and meet the needs of users. But it often falls short of these objectives. Of 160 BCU commanders surveyed by the Commission about a range of HQ services, 70 per cent felt well supported but only around 20 per cent said that their priorities were very well supported. Fewer than 50 per cent were satisfied with the key business support functions of HR and information systems/technology (IS/IT) [EXHIBIT 11]. Of course, attitudinal information needs to be viewed in context. Expectations vary and some HQ actions, although necessary, will always be unpopular. But these results should give rise to concern, particularly since demands from BCUs are likely to increase once they become subject to inspection by HMIC.

53. What can be done to better match support to BCUs' needs? The Commission's research has identified four main areas for improvement:

EXHIBIT 11

BCU views on headquarters support services

Fewer than 50 per cent of BCU commanders believe that functions such as IS/IT and HR support their priorities well.



Source: Audit Commission survey returns from 160 BCUs across 30 forces

1. **A lack of strategic and performance focus** within support functions means that support activities are not always aligned with operational objectives.
2. **BCUs have not sufficiently developed as 'intelligent clients'**, able to specify requirements and understand what can reasonably be provided.

- 3. **Roles, policies and processes are sometimes unclear,** resulting in gaps and duplication between HQ and BCUs or hampering fast and fair access to support.
- 4. **Communication between HQ and BCUs is often poor,** a situation not aided by the low visibility of some senior HQ staff.

to review support activities and processes, but forces need an ongoing mechanism to ensure that these services are driven by operational objectives.

- 55. There are two imperatives: that support activities fit within the wider force planning framework; and that the services provided reflect what ‘clients’ need and have

requested. In relation to the first point, many forces are now introducing annual business plans for HQ departments, drawn up in conjunction with BCU representatives, and including quantifiable performance targets [CASE STUDY 5]. Others have developed longer-term strategies aimed at better supporting BCU

Aligning support activities with operational objectives

54. Recent developments place a spotlight on the actions and performance of BCU commanders. But a similar degree of scrutiny has rarely been applied to support functions. In the current climate, it is vital that forces challenge themselves to answer questions such as: *Why do this activity?; Who is the client?; Is it achieving what we want?; and Could these resources have greater impact elsewhere?* As one chief officer explained: ‘we are always saying that frontline policing is the top priority, but many of our actions imply just the opposite’. A common example is the transfer of frontline officers into positions at HQ before a replacement is available. Best value provides a good framework

CASE STUDY 5

Business planning and target setting in support departments – Lancashire Constabulary

Lancashire Constabulary require all HQ support departments to produce an annual business or policing plan. They are drawn up following meetings with divisional representatives and include:

- a brief departmental profile, setting out the overall mission and activities;
- an explanation of how the department’s activities relate to the force’s five corporate objectives, including performance targets where possible. For example, the Operations Department aim to reduce motorway casualties by 5 per cent and to produce leaflets for non-English speaking families of fatal accident victims;
- departmental objectives, including rationale and associated performance targets. For example, the HR Department undertakes to develop and enhance physiotherapy services to promote earlier return to work for staff with physical injuries and to introduce drugs and alcohol policies. The Administration Department aims to cost each of its major services to facilitate external benchmarking and to improve customer satisfaction against measures set out in the departmental service level agreement;
- organisational objectives – for example, improving leadership and communication, or reducing sickness absence – and a list of actions that will be pursued; and
- financial information, including reference to efficiency gains made and planned.

Source: Lancashire Constabulary

needs. Cambridgeshire Constabulary's IS strategy links to the policing plan and includes objectives such as providing remote IS access to support local partnerships.

56. Consultation alone is insufficient to guarantee responsive support services. Service level agreements (SLAs) – documents outlining what services will be provided and to what standard – are now widespread within the police service. However, most of the practitioners interviewed for this study felt that SLAs had little value beyond the initial process of negotiation, where providers set out what could be available and BCUs explained their needs. Many existing SLAs are years out of date and around one-half were drawn up without any input from BCU staff, making a match between provider and user needs highly unlikely. Even where BCUs do not formally 'purchase' support services, forces should ensure that SLAs meaningfully empower BCUs (and other clients). The quantity and standard of services provided should be driven by BCU needs, and reinforced through specific sanctions for non-performance.

57. The Commission's survey found that BCUs were less satisfied with business support services – in particular, IS/IT and HR – than operational support. This is perhaps unsurprising; such functions having a regulatory as well as purely supportive role. Nevertheless, the existence of good working relationships in some forces implies scope for improvement in others. Business support departments receiving high satisfaction ratings are characterised by openness, a good understanding of BCU needs and a willingness to respond accordingly.¹

Developing the 'intelligent client role' within BCUs

58. Getting the best from support services is a two-way process. BCUs must clearly articulate their needs and seek to shape the services provided. Few of the BCUs visited for this research had given much thought to how they could make better use of HQ resources to deliver local objectives. For example, it is extremely rare to find a reference to support functions within BCU

operational or business plans, reflecting an under-developed 'client' role. Equally, if BCUs fail to articulate their needs well, resources are wasted and working relationships suffer. For example, it is not uncommon for BCUs to make costly alterations to buildings without reference to the force estates strategy, or to develop databases that are incompatible with force information systems and which duplicate work elsewhere. At the same time, however, there is much that HQ departments can do to clarify respective roles and streamline processes for accessing support.

Clarifying roles and policies: streamlining processes

59. Effective and efficient support requires mutual agreement on roles and responsibilities, clear criteria for assessing need, and delivery mechanisms that ensure fast and fair access. Written policies cannot (and should not) account for every eventuality, but they can establish a framework of common understanding and reduce the likelihood of duplicated activity and service gaps. The previous chapter stressed the need for clear financial policies in the context of devolved

¹ Analysis of fieldwork interviews in 14 BCUs across 7 forces and survey returns from a further 160 BCUs.

financial management. Research for this study identified two further areas in particular need of attention:

1. Clarifying respective responsibilities for HR management and developing capacity to address issues locally.
2. Improving the effectiveness of tasking and co-ordinating mechanisms around specialist operational support.

60. Some forces still lack comprehensive HR strategies, causing problems at both HQ and BCU levels. Several of the forces visited had gaps in personnel policies, with no agreed procedure on issues such as staff allowances, non-mandatory training or transfers. This leaves individual BCUs having to 're-invent the wheel', or facing accusations of inequity from officers moving around the force. Acknowledging that HR management is a fast developing area, many BCUs were disappointed with the speed of response from HQ on policy issues, such as finding appropriate placements for officers returning from sickness absence to light duties. The absence of clearly specified roles in such areas can lead to buck-passing, with HQ failing to appreciate local needs and BCUs using this as an excuse for not

dealing with manageable problems. For example, BCUs sometimes complain that HQ requires officers to attend centrally organised training regardless of pressures on the BCU. But often such training is essential and has been agreed in advance with BCU commanders.

61. Even where HR strategies do exist, there remains an urgent need to develop practical competencies. A key finding of early BCU inspections is the need to strengthen leadership and management skills at the local level. Meanwhile, the service faces growing demands to address issues of diversity and equality. As in many organisations, the potential of staff appraisal schemes is greatly underexploited. Most BCU staff see performance and development review (PDR) as a centrally imposed scheme, so it is rarely used as a positive tool for improvement. Forces need to develop and implement more robust appraisal schemes that are co-ordinated centrally but – crucially – owned locally. The role of BCU-based HR managers is central. For example, the personnel officer in one Birmingham BCU reads and quality assures all PDRs in her division.

62. Inevitably, some duplicated activity arises from inadequate or non-integrated information systems. A common problem is the requirement for personnel or financial data to be entered and updated in more than one location. In addition, the not entirely similar demands of BCU commanders, chief officers, police authority members and local partner agencies for management information almost guarantee some overlap in the activity of HQ and BCU-based analysts. Forces are continually working to address IS/IT problems, but there may be scope to rationalise the production and analysis of management information. Job descriptions for analytical roles should be reviewed so that HQ and BCU activities are complementary and duplication is minimised.

63. For operational support services, forces need to develop effective tasking and co-ordinating mechanisms to ensure that specialist units can meet demand but avoid long periods of unproductive 'down-time'. In some forces these mechanisms work well. However, problems reported include:

- confusion as to when HQ fraud and drugs squads would undertake jobs within a BCU;

- BCUs not bidding for HQ surveillance resources because the process was excessively bureaucratic and time-consuming;
- frustration where procedures do not make clear the criteria under which bids will be accepted and rejected, or BCUs do not receive explanatory feedback; and
- the lack of a force policy on staffing major investigations resulting in HQ crime support wasting time ringing round BCU commanders to beg for officers.

And, while BCU commanders accept the need for HQ to abstract officers for force-wide initiatives, they are often frustrated when this occurs without an agreed framework or consideration of the relative ability of BCUs to contribute.

64. Clear policies are an essential first step. For example, some forces lack a policy on the staffing of major investigations such as that used in the Suffolk Constabulary [CASE STUDY 6]. North Wales Police uses SLAs to establish a common understanding and to manage expectations between HQ and BCUs, for example, in relation to road policing activity [CASE STUDY 7]. Increasingly, forces use intranet

CASE STUDY 6

Policy on staffing major investigations – Suffolk Constabulary

Suffolk Constabulary has had a major investigations policy document (MIPD) in place for over five years. Major crime enquiries are centrally funded and the budget managed by the Head of Crime Management. MIPD procedures come into play whenever a senior investigating officer (SIO) is appointed – murders, rapes by strangers and other exceptional cases.

The MIPD lays down suggested staffing levels for both the incident room and the inquiry team, depending on the category of crime, and indicates from where staff should be drawn. Area commanders have given their full support to the arrangements. In order to ensure that no one BCU is unfairly disadvantaged, each area command and department submits a weekly return to Crime Management at HQ, showing the number of officers currently posted to major inquiries. In the event of a further incident or additional staff requirements, decisions are made so as to equalise abstraction levels as far as possible.

Source: Suffolk Constabulary

CASE STUDY 7

Establishing mutual responsibilities through service level agreements

In North Wales Police, the roads policing function is centrally managed within the Operational Support Division (OSD), but operates from a number of bases across the force. In order to co-ordinate the day-to-day activities of the Traffic Operations Branch of the OSD with those of BCUs, an SLA has been drawn up and posted on the force intranet. The SLA has sections on responsibilities, staffing, personnel policy, customers, performance, arbitration policy and costs.

The responsibilities section describes the activities for which HQ Traffic Operations have sole or primary responsibility, the support provided to BCUs, and also what BCUs are required to do in return. For example, roads policing officers have sole responsibility for conducting vehicle pursuits and primary responsibility for ensuring that roadworks comply with road safety legislation. In addition to taking responsibility for such specific tasks, Traffic Operations support BCUs, for example, by responding to immediate calls for assistance. In return, BCU-based officers are expected to deal with prisoners who have been arrested for non-traffic offences where substantial further inquiries are required.

Source: North Wales Police

technology to circulate policies and ensure that they are kept up to date. There is considerable potential for IT-based solutions to problems of organisational co-ordination. For example, Lancashire Constabulary is in the process of creating a database of HQ and divisional planned operations, together with seasonal crime predictions, to allow BCUs to time their bids for operational support more sensibly. Nevertheless, there will always be a need to strengthen day-to-day working relationships through improved communication.

Improving internal communication

65. Balancing the differing priorities and perspectives of units within a dispersed organisation is a challenging task. The quality of working relationships between HQ and BCUs, and satisfaction with support, was noticeably lower among staff below BCU commander level than above.¹ This suggests a need to improve day-to-day communication and understanding both between HQ and BCUs and within BCUs themselves. For example, BCU staff often perceive – not always with justification – that HQ departments have not consulted

on new processes or unfairly receive priority in resource allocation decisions such as new IT equipment.

66. Chief officers have often encouraged greater openness and interaction between HQ and BCU staff, and believe that it is happening, but the reality is otherwise. BCU interviewees at all levels remarked on the positive impact of senior HQ staff visiting BCUs regularly, both to see and be seen. (It is, after all, difficult for BCU staff to sustain the belief that central departments are responding to local needs if their managers rarely, if ever, leave force HQ.) More contact, both formal and informal, would also serve to improve BCUs' understanding of what HQ can feasibly provide. While four-fifths of chief officers surveyed said that BCU management understood the full range of HQ roles very or quite well, fewer than one-third felt the same of other BCU staff.

67. Many forces are taking positive steps to improve communication. Durham Constabulary employs a cascading core briefing, the contents of which are agreed at each force policy group meeting, while the Chief Constable of Dorset holds regular roadshows to hear divisional concerns and to inform staff of new

developments. In Cambridgeshire, divisional IT surgeries have been well received and emphasise that information systems are core to the business of policing.

68. Face-to-face communication is, of course, easier in smaller forces; larger forces tend to rely more heavily on electronic or written communication. Two-thirds of forces now run an intranet, and a similar proportion use email to communicate policy and information to BCU-based staff. West Midlands Police run an intranet-based question and answer forum, where senior staff at HQ respond openly to questions on issues such as the policy for allocating driver-training courses or eligibility for housing allowance. While intranets or blanket emails are not effective for targeting messages (there is a need, as a minimum, to check that messages are understood and acted on), they can be used to encourage greater interaction.

¹ The Commission's study team visited 2 BCUs in each of 7 forces, meeting around 150 BCU staff in total. Interviewees included officers and support staff of all levels of seniority.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION

Improving support to BCUs

- 1) Are the activities of support departments aligned with operational objectives set out in the policing plan?
- 2) Is support department performance subject to a similar level of scrutiny to that of BCUs?
- 3) Do HQ departments produce annual business plans, informed by discussions with customers?
- 4) What steps have BCUs taken to operate as more 'intelligent clients' for support services, specifying need and seeking to shape the services provided?
- 5) Are SLAs negotiated documents, actively driven by client needs?
- 6) Do support services regularly ask users, at all levels, what they think of the services provided? Has anything changed as a result?
- 7) Are there objective and transparent criteria for prioritising access to support services?
- 8) Have BCUs considered how they could better use support resources to achieve local objectives, for example, when drawing up BCU plans?
- 9) Are BCUs fulfilling their side of corporate policies and SLAs? If not, why not?
- 10) Does the force have an active HR management policy, setting out respective HQ and BCU responsibilities? Is a personal appraisal scheme in operation?
- 11) Are tasking and co-ordinating mechanisms operating to the satisfaction of both BCUs and specialist departments?
- 12) Do HQ support staff visit BCUs, to see and be seen, inviting feedback and addressing problems?
- 13) What efforts are being made – at both HQ and BCU level – to improve communication and mutual understanding of respective roles?

6. Increasing collaboration between forces

69. Most forces already collaborate with neighbouring forces to provide some aspects of specialist support. For example, West Midlands Police uses West Mercia's facilities for its firearms training, will shortly organise motorway policing jointly with three surrounding areas, and is involved in a regional recruitment campaign across seven forces. Similarly, Durham Constabulary collaborates with neighbouring forces on air support, armed response, underwater searches and identification parades. Surrey, Thames Valley and Hampshire are working together to address problems of vehicle ram-raiding.

70. It is encouraging to note that the number of joint initiatives within the service is expanding rapidly. The Commission hopes that best value reviews, together with regional structures of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO), will identify further opportunities. The situation in which individual forces act in isolation is a luxury that the service – and the public – can no longer afford. There is considerable untapped potential for efficiency gains, as well as enhancing the capability of the police service as a whole to respond to rising demands

and more sophisticated criminality. Further action is possible in the short term, but more radical developments may require structural or legislative change.

Exploiting opportunities in the short term

71. Many existing joint initiatives involve a pooling of resources (for example, helicopters) among forces, rather than a reduction in the total resource. Sometimes, the top priority is to increase capacity, rather than to realise efficiency gains, but forces and authorities should seek to achieve both wherever possible. In so doing, they will need to take calculated risks and ensure that the operational impact is kept under review. Maximising opportunities for collaboration – for example, the use of regional consortia for procurement, recruitment, training or research and development – also requires a degree of standardisation in force processes and practice. Individual forces and authorities must be prepared to compromise their own way of doing things in order to deliver greater benefits overall.

Thoughts for the future

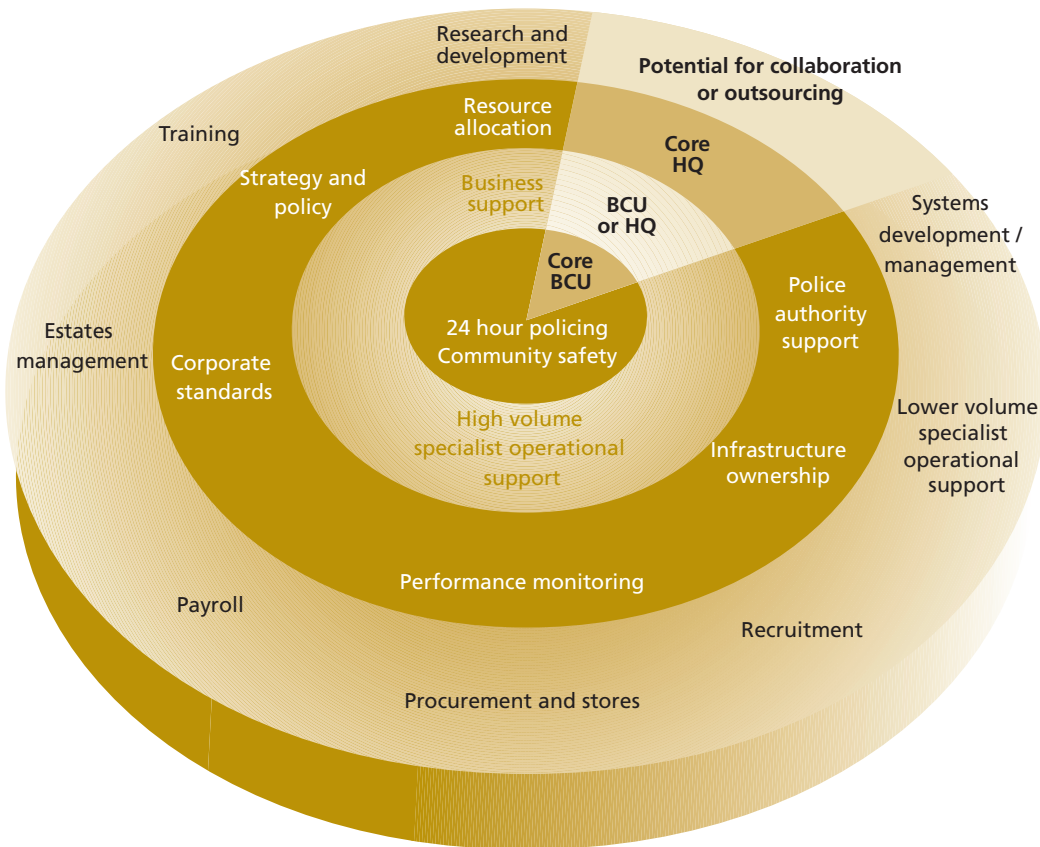
72. Police forces and authorities face unrelenting pressure to increase the proportion of resources available for frontline service delivery. A logical response to this situation is to consider which activities *must* be carried out by HQ and which could either be devolved to BCUs or be provided in collaboration with other forces (or by external agencies). With an appropriate organisational framework, it is possible to foresee a more tightly defined role for HQ, managing BCUs and co-ordinating higher-level services, many of which could be organised across forces or bought in from other providers [EXHIBIT 12, overleaf]. If forces do not pursue collaboration to its full potential, it is likely that the argument for structural change – with its associated costs and upheaval – will become increasingly difficult to resist.

Individual forces and authorities must be prepared to compromise their own way of doing things in order to deliver greater benefits overall.

EXHIBIT 12

An illustrative example of future policing roles

It is possible to foresee a more tightly defined role for HQ, managing BCUs and co-ordinating higher-level services.



Source: Audit Commission

The question of structure

73. Theoretically, the focus on BCUs and statutory partnerships as the primary vehicles for crime reduction, in combination with the emergence of new national policing agencies such as the National Crime Squad, should allow greater consensus on the most appropriate size and role for force HQ. But, although all forces work towards similar objectives, there remains little evidence to link any approach to BCU size, force size, or the internal location of particular functions, to improved performance. While variation is not inherently a bad thing, the absence of evidenced best practice is almost certain to mean that valuable resources are being wasted in some areas.

74. No structure can ever be perfect. Even within a single force, the variation in BCU size militates against a 'one size fits all' approach to the location of specialist functions [EXHIBIT 13]. Where clear benefits can be identified, internal restructuring is one response to this problem (Ref. 11). However, the primary task for force managers should be to recognise structural imperfections and to develop processes that compensate

intelligently. Structure is not the only – nor probably the most important – factor in achieving corporate objectives.

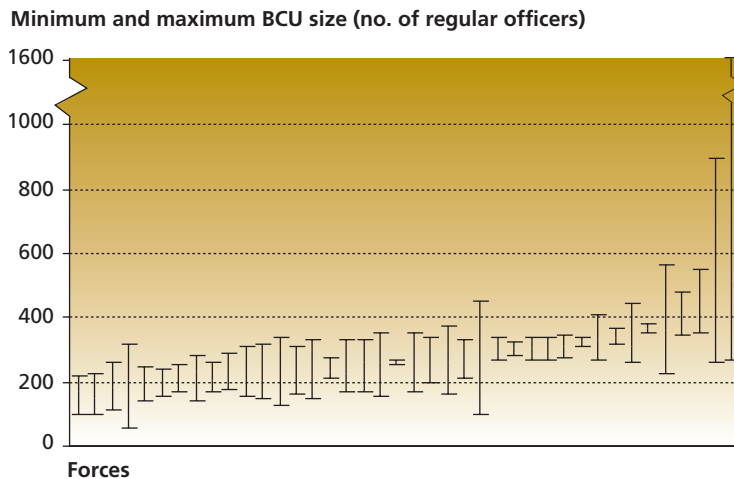
75. Encouragingly, there is a growing appetite within the service to explore some unresolved issues around 'what works' in structural terms and to learn lessons to improve efficiency and effectiveness. It is generally agreed

that a major programme of force reorganisation would be inadvisable without clear evidence of pursuant economic and operational benefits. However, HMIC inspections, supplemented by other research, could offer insights in a number of areas [BOX A, overleaf]. It is recommended that the Home Office ensures that any future changes to policing structures are informed by

EXHIBIT 13

Variation in the size of BCUs, within and between forces

The wide variation in BCU size militates against a 'one size fits all' approach to internal structure.



Source: Home Office/HMIC

BOX A

Suggestions for further research into the question of policing structure

1. HMIC to distil findings from BCU inspections with a view to identifying:
 - the optimum size range for a BCU, so that it can be relatively self-sustaining yet manageable;
 - any effect on performance of boundary alignment between BCUs and CDRPs; and
 - evidence around the impact of central, versus local, management of specialist operational functions (for a given BCU size).
2. ACPO/Home Office to consider sponsoring research to determine the optimum economic size for functions such as:
 - call-handling; and
 - major crime investigation, below National Crime Squad level.
3. Pilot projects to explore the benefits of, and barriers to, greater inter-force collaboration on both operational and business support services, for example:
 - payroll and pensions;
 - air support; and
 - recruitment and training.

such research. Similarly, professionally endorsed conclusions should be incorporated into police management training and be implemented in practice.

CHECKLIST FOR ACTION

Collaboration with other forces

- 1) Is the force actively seeking opportunities to collaborate with neighbours to provide specialist and support services?
- 2) Is the force willing to adjust its own policies and procedures, if necessary, to realise shared opportunities?
- 3) Do joint initiatives seek to realise efficiency savings as well as to increase capacity?

7. Conclusions

76. This paper highlights issues faced by all police forces and authorities as they seek to adapt to changing demands and new methods of service provision. Although internal boundaries will continue to shift, BCUs are now firmly established as the foundation of the police service and the primary vehicles for reducing and detecting 'volume' crime. Inspections by HMIC will examine BCU performance against local and national targets and assess the quality of leadership displayed by the management team. Inevitably, this will bring the quality of support and management provided by force HQ into sharper focus.

77. The respective roles of HQ and BCUs are in transition; some forces are pioneers, but others have some way to go. The key conclusion of the Commission's research is that most BCUs have insufficient delegated powers to be sure of carrying out their role efficiently and effectively. While recognising that BCUs can never be fully autonomous and that HQ must retain some flexibility of deployment, there are strong reasons why – for those policing services that are delivered locally – as much decision making as possible

should be local. While central 'command and control' management remains appropriate for some policing functions, it is unlikely to be the best way of managing day-to-day services. In the case of volume policing, devolving greater responsibility to local units – and allowing resource trade-offs to be made closer to the service user – is likely to lead to a better service.

78. Allowing BCUs greater freedom over operational and resource management does not present a threat to probity and standards, provided that forces simultaneously strengthen performance management and accountability. HQ should lay down guidelines for service managers, monitor performance against these and provide support where necessary. In addition, there is a need to involve local commanders more fully in corporate decision making, ensuring that they have a stake in the performance of the organisation as a whole. Resource allocation mechanisms need to reflect an up-to-date assessment of what is required locally to deliver agreed strategic priorities.

79. The trend in other sectors has been towards greater local

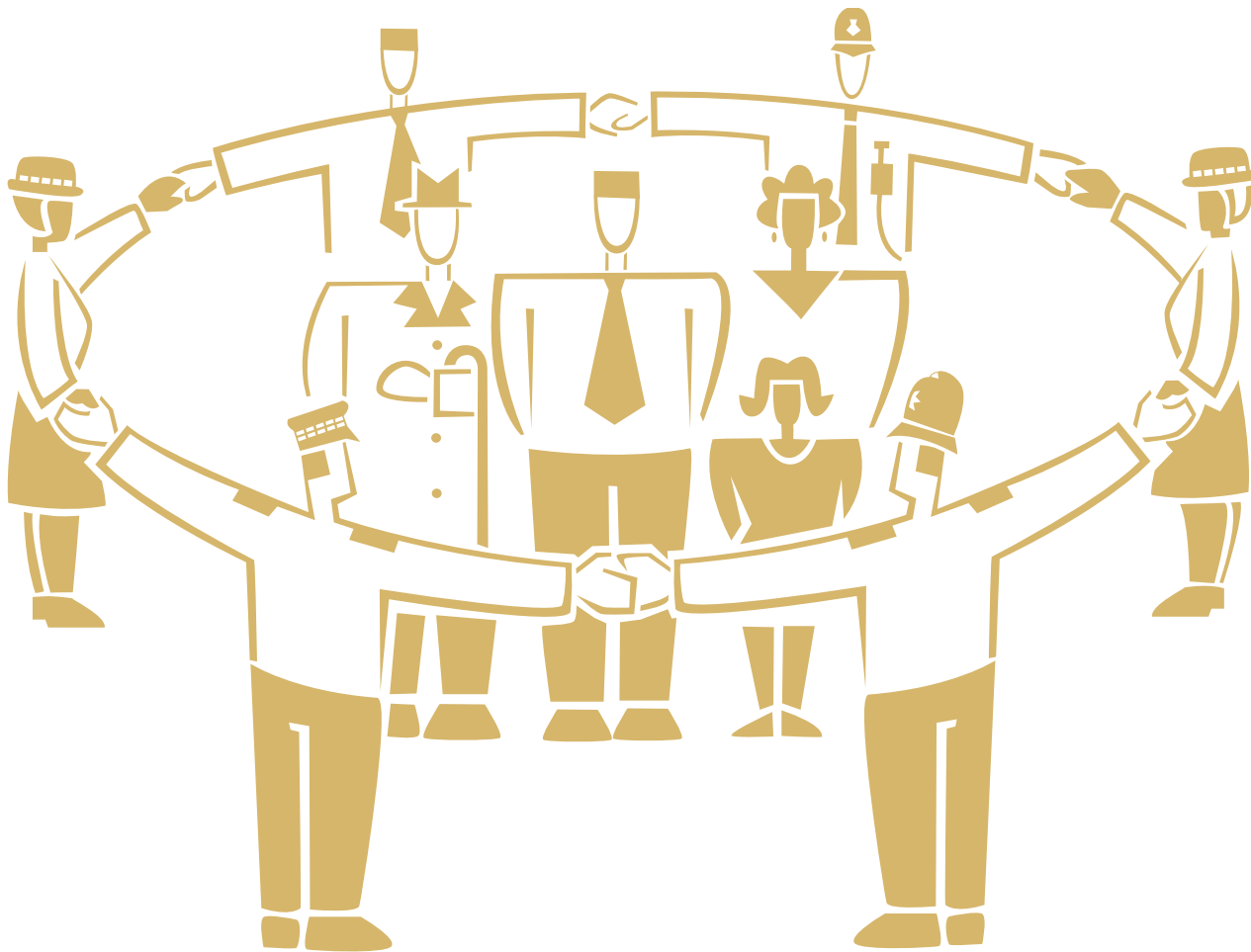
differentiation of service, accompanied by down-sizing and the outsourcing of central support services. Such an approach is not entirely applicable to the police service, insofar as HQ has a major role in negotiating between national and local priorities and carrying out high-level operational functions, over and above the management and support of BCUs. However, there is scope for a more bottom-up approach to decision-making. In addition, there is potential to extend collaboration between forces in the provision of specialist services, in order to increase both efficiency and effectiveness. There also needs to be a greater willingness, in some parts of the service, to look outside for ideas and to evaluate practices against those in the private sector and other public services.

There is scope for a more bottom-up approach to decision making.

80. At a time of growing demand on the service, it makes sense for HQ to concentrate on the functions that it alone must perform. Alongside strategic direction and balancing demands for resources, this includes an

expanding role in assuring performance, value for money and standards. This paper includes a series of recommendations and detailed checklists for action in relation to BCU support and management. Forces and

authorities should use the focus on BCU performance – together with the best value framework – to clarify and strengthen the strategic and specialist role of HQ, while enabling partnerships to thrive and respond flexibly to the needs of local communities.



Recommendations

Chief officers should:

- Strengthen performance management arrangements to include greater consideration of value for money and professional standards within BCUs.
- Within a performance framework, and clear corporate policies, allow BCU commanders as much freedom as possible to make decisions in relation to the services they provide, including influence over resource management. In tandem, they should develop the skills of BCU staff, and provide an appropriate support infrastructure, to enable BCUs to take on these new responsibilities.
- Actively develop and support leadership among BCU commanders through greater one-to-one contact and providing opportunities for mutual learning.
- Make BCU commanders members of the force's main policy team.
- Challenge whether the existing division of roles and responsibilities between HQ and BCUs is the most effective and efficient way of delivering operational objectives.
- Review resource allocation mechanisms to better reflect relative need and strategic priorities.
- Seek and exploit opportunities to significantly extend collaboration with other forces in areas of specialist operational and business support.

Police authorities should:

- Use best value reviews to challenge the role and responsibilities of BCUs against those of the strategic centre.
- Help to develop the force's approach to corporate performance management so that it becomes comprehensive, while enabling local flexibility in response to need.
- Regularly monitor the performance – including value for money – of both BCUs and HQ specialist and support departments.

Heads of support departments should:

- Focus on providing support services that meet the needs of BCUs and link to policing objectives through business planning, performance measurement and user involvement.

BCU commanders should:

- Develop an 'intelligent client' approach to support services, identifying and communicating need for these resources and considering how they could be better used to help to deliver local objectives.

The Home Office should:

- Use BCU inspections and other research to develop an understanding of:
 - the optimal size and configuration of BCUs; and
 - what works in terms of the management of support functions – and why.
- Ensure that future changes to policing structures are informed by these conclusions.

Appendix 1: Members of the study advisory group and forces visited during fieldwork

Members of the study advisory group

Graham Davey	Clerk, Devon and Cornwall Police Authority
Fionnuala Gill	Association of Police Authorities
Tyson Hepple	Policing and Crime Reduction Group, Home Office
Stewart Hindley	Superintendent, Greater Manchester Police
Denis O'Connor	Chief Constable, Surrey Police
Ron Pearce	Superintendent, West Midlands Police
Peter Winship/Kate Flannery	Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)

Forces visited on fieldwork

Cambridgeshire Constabulary	Lancashire Constabulary
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary	North Wales Police
Dorset Police	West Midlands Police
Durham Constabulary	

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The Audit Commission has produced a number of studies covering related issues. The following may be of interest to readers of this paper:

Misspent Youth

Young People and Crime

With two out of every five offenders in 1994 being under 21, the subject of this study is high on the public agenda. Misspent Youth explores how effectively £1 billion a year is distributed between the police, youth justice services, probation, legal aid, the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts and prison service, and considers how resources might be better used to reduce offending.

National Report, 1996, ISBN 1862400075, £20

Misspent Youth '98: The Challenge for Youth Justice, Update, 1998, ISBN 1862400997, £15

Misspent Youth '99: The Challenge for Youth Justice, Update, 1999, ISBN 1862401667, £10

Local Authority Performance Indicators 1999/2000

Police and Fire Services

The police indicators cover 999 calls and emergencies, crime levels and detection rates and resources. For fire services, the indicators highlight brigades' performance in meeting national attendance standards, the time brigades take to carry out inspections for fire safety certificates and resources.

January 2001, ISBN 1862402663, £15

Action Stations

Improving the Management of the Police Estate

The police estate – the land and the buildings owned by police forces – is worth more than £2.5 billion, yet the management of these assets is often overlooked in forces' value for money strategies. Drawing on best practice in asset management from the public and private sectors, this national report will help police property managers to review their property portfolio. It identifies opportunities for rationalising and increasing the flexibility of buildings – for example, through joint use with other organisations – and balancing operational needs while minimising running costs.

National Report, 1999, ISBN 1862401381, £20

Cheques and Balances

Police Planning and Financial Delegation

This practical manual provides police forces with advice and good practice case studies on financial delegation, costing and planning. Specific references are made to the challenges and opportunities presented by local policing plans.

Management Handbook, 1994, ISBN 0118861417, £11

The Doctor's Bill

The Provision of Forensic Medical Services to the Police

This report examines the current arrangements for providing forensic medical services, highlighting the need to develop national standards for training and quality assurance, a more structured framework for organising and monitoring the service as a whole, timely training for custody officers and better custody suite facilities. It makes recommendations for police forces and authorities, including those managing the provision of forensic medical services, custody officers and those responsible for training and strategy.

National Report, 1998, ISBN 1862400845, £20

Streetwise

Effective Police Patrol

Streetwise examines how well police forces are coping with the challenges posed by a rising level of demand as policing and becomes even broader in scope. It focuses on the management of police activities and resources, in the context of public expectations and the role of other agencies in helping to maintain safe communities.

National Report, 1996 ISBN 0118864181, £12

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The way in which policing services are delivered is in transition. More and more, the police are working in partnership with other local agencies to reduce crime and disorder. This means an enhanced role for local police divisions – or basic command units (BCUs). However, forces must also strengthen specialist expertise to tackle major crime, which is increasingly sophisticated and often transcends force borders.

As the police service adapts to new ways of working, it faces four key questions in relation to the role of headquarters (HQ):

- How is BCU performance best managed?
- What is the right balance between allowing BCUs to deploy resources flexibly in response to local need and ensuring corporate standards and values?
- How can HQ support services become more responsive to operational demands?
- What potential is there for further collaborative working between forces in respect of specialist and support services?

This paper is designed to help police forces and authorities to review the relationship between their HQ and frontline policing units. It raises issues around managerial culture and processes, and includes helpful checklists for action. The paper is essential reading for senior police officers and police authority members, as well as for policymakers in the field of policing.

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