

Notes of a meeting of Police and Crime Panels to discuss the setting up of a national Association of PCPs

Friday 17 February 2017

Grant Thornton offices, Finsbury Square, London

Thirty-seven members and officers from 25 PCPs attended this meeting, which had been convened by Frontline Consulting, supported by Grant Thornton UK, in response to the discussion at the PCP conference about the benefits of forming a national Association of PCPs. Interest in an Association had been expressed by a further three Panels who had sent apologies. Only two PCPs had responded to advise that they felt their regional network or their existing commitments meant that they would not be interested in joining an APCP at this stage (and another PCP has subsequently advised that they feel that Panels should develop independently and that any joint enterprise should be through the LGA).

The meeting began with an in-principle discussion about whether to proceed with an Association. Several of the contributors thanked Colin Ismay, Secretary to Essex PCP, for his excellent paper to his Panel setting out the background to the proposal for a national Association and the benefits which appear to flow from having such a body for PCPs.

Points made by participants about the value of a national Association included being able:

- To relate as a body of PCPs to the Home Office and Welsh Government for lobbying and representational purposes, to help influence legislation (eg on police complaints) and practice (eg on crime reporting changes), and to raise the standing of Panels
- To raise the public profile of Panels through a national Association
- To promote professional standards
- To provide specialist advice, good quality information and up to date knowledge
- To work together on horizon scanning
- To help Panels to share good practice and enable cross-pollination of ideas
- To share ideas and experience in response to the expanding role of PCCs, which poses new challenges for PCPs
- To provide support to those PCPs who are struggling with their PCCs' unhelpfulness
- To provide some stability and 'collective memory' in a landscape where PCCs may change every four years and Panels can have significant changes in membership.

One Panel representative was undecided about the proposal on the grounds that her Panel was quite capable of providing training and development. However, she saw some potential use in accessing horizon scanning and advance planning work, as well as subject experts through an Association.

There was some difference of opinion about the role of an Association in facilitating networking or in requiring a regional sub-structure. For some (especially those in an existing regional network) there were already opportunities for networking on challenges such as collaboration, including through Frontline Consulting's annual national conference for PCPs. Participants in regional networks suggested that they should continue, alongside a national Association, and others expressed an interest in a regional structure for their area as well. Overall, the main benefits that participants saw accruing from a national Association were in its potential for lobbying and representation. Consensus was that existing opportunities for networking and learning and development would not need to be part of the work of a national Association.

It was understood that a national Association would need to recognise in its work the differences for the four Panels in Wales, such as their separate legal structure and the exclusion of Welsh PCCs from the power to run a Fire and Rescue Service.

Sources of support for an APCP were suggested as the Home Office and the LGA. Some were wary of seeking a home within the LGA because of a perceived danger of politicisation; the strength of an Association was in a non-partisan approach, as exemplified by the current discussion. Also, the LGA is seen to work with leaders and executives, whereas the Centre for Public Scrutiny is the organisation that works with non-executives, such as PCP members.

Working informally with a range of organisations, such as the LGA, the Association of PCCs (APCC) and their Chief Executives' Association (APACE), CfPS and the Association of Democratic Services Officers (ADSO) was welcomed. As Dave Burn, Frontline Consulting's new Lead on Policing and Crime, is also the Vice-chair of ASDO, he was able to outline its organisational structure, by way of example. A handout included information about the APCC and ASDO. As Frontline Consulting has been working with PCPs since their shadow form in 2012, it was willing to offer support if required.

Participants then identified several features of what an Association should look like and how it should function. Principles and suggested priorities were:

- To have a simple, inexpensive and non-bureaucratic national structure and constitution that enables the Association to be nimble and fleet of foot when required
- To enshrine a non-partisan approach in its work
- To engage members and officers in discussions (with voting rights to be considered, the majority opinion being in favour of Panel members taking the decisions and officers not having voting rights, especially as some will be politically restricted, but providing advice and support)
- To focus on lobbying (immediate issues that presented were on the implications for Panels of regional and blue light collaboration; ongoing resource issues, including in relation to a Panel where its PCC was taking on responsibility for the fire service; complaints handling and possible changes to arrangements for this, further to the Home Office consultation)
- To provide a mechanism to consult and agree common positions to feed through to the Home Office, Welsh Government, APCC and others (with discussion to continue about how to prepare a common position that is democratically arrived at and gains support, bearing in mind the timescales of consulting Panels who have infrequent meetings), while respecting a Panel's right to retain its autonomy and decide its own view.

Dave Burn used a slide to indicate the range of recent requests for lobbying on issues faced by PCPs over recent months. These included police complaints' reforms, regional collaboration, blue light collaboration and related terms of reference, powers and resources for PCPs, remuneration of Panel members, non-cooperation or obstructiveness of some PCCs and promotion of the role of the PCP.

Participants saw an ultimate goal for the Association as being to ensure that the Home Office (and other bodies) always answers positively the question: "Is the role and position of PCPs addressed in this proposal, initiative or policy?" In the meantime, it was recognised that an Association would probably have to play a reactive role to others' agendas, before taking on a proactive role, for example to shape legislation.

One challenge for the future could be to address the frustration about specific areas in which Panels lack powers, although it was recognised that this raised significant questions about overall governance and accountability. Rather than powers, one possibility might be to seek a stronger and more comprehensive duty of cooperation to be required of PCCs, with clearer direction from the Home Office to enforce it. An Association of PCPs would need to establish a realistic work programme, once it was established, and consider priorities to be addressed.

Given a near unanimous endorsement of the proposal to set up a national Association, the afternoon session discussed how to proceed. Nine members and four officers who were present volunteered to form a steering group and draft a proposal to be sent to all PCPs for consideration, comment and decision. There was a discussion about whether to consult existing Panels or await the AGMs in case there were significant changes in membership. However, there was an enthusiasm to move quickly, consult Panels in their next cycle of meetings and a stated intention of holding an inaugural meeting in June 2017.

Steering Group volunteers in alphabetical order (with information about their role, the local authorities within the Force area and their region, indicating broadly a cross-section) are:

Cllr John Adams JP	Chair, Dorset PCP (County and Unitaries; South West)
Baseema Begum	Supporting West Midlands PCP (Met; West Midlands)
Katie Benton	Supporting Hampshire PCP (County and Unitaries; South East)
Cllr Sebastian Bowen	Member, West Mercia PCP (Counties and Unitary; West Midlands)
Cllr Richard Britton	Chair, Wiltshire PCP (County and Unitary; South West)
Paul Cain	Vice-chair and independent member, Bedfordshire PCP (Unitaries; Eastern)
Cllr Jonathon Evison	Chair, Humberside PCP (Unitaries; Yorkshire and Humber)
Cllr Julie Fallon	Chair, North Wales PCP (Unitaries; Wales)
Cllr Tim Hutchings	Chair, Hertfordshire PCP (County; Eastern)
Colin Ismay	Supporting Essex PCP (County and Unitary; Eastern)
Richard Jarvis	Supporting North Wales PCP (Unitaries; Wales)
Cllr Alison Lowe	Chair, West Yorkshire PCP (Met; Yorkshire and Humber)
Cllr Norma Stephenson	Chair, Cleveland PCP (Unitaries; North)

Cllr Tim Hutchings and Colin Ismay volunteered to work together on a first draft of a paper for the Steering Group to consider, before a revised proposal would be circulated to all PCPs.

The meeting provided some additional thoughts about the content of the proposal:

- A single structural option would be preferable, while providing (if desirable) options where choice could be exercised eg on costs, joining fees
- Any option would need to be feasible
- If it contained options, polar opposites should ideally be avoided
- Given that an Association, if set up, would not be running from the start of a municipal year, a pro rata rate for the first year should be considered.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to Frontline Consulting Associates and Grant Thornton UK LLP for their support.

Attendance at the exploratory meeting regarding an APCC on 17 February 2017

Bedfordshire	Paul Cain	Vice-chair and independent member
	Keith Simmons	Head of Democratic and Registration Services, Bedford Borough Council
Cambridgeshire	Cllr Ben Shelton	Chair
	Jane Webb	Senior Democratic Services Officer, Peterborough City Council
Cleveland	Cllr Norma Stephenson	Chair
	Margaret Waggott	Assistant Director (Administration, Democracy, Licensing and Electoral Services), Stockton on Tees
Cumbria	Celia Tibble	Chair
	Mark Clement	Strategic Policy and Scrutiny Advisor (Social and Communities), Cumbria
Derbyshire	David Rose	Improvement and Scrutiny Officer, Derbyshire County Council
Dorset	Cllr John Adams JP	Chairman
Dyfed-Powys	Robert Edgecombe	Legal Services Manager, Carmarthenshire County Council
Essex	Cllr John Jowers	Chairman
	Colin Ismay	Council and Member Support Manager, Essex County Council
Gloucestershire	Cllr Roger Wilson	Chair
	Stephen Bace	Senior Democratic Services Adviser, Gloucestershire County Council
Gwent	Cllr John Guy	Chair
	Catherine Forbes-Thompson	Interim Head of Democratic Services, Caerphilly County Borough Council
Hampshire	Katie Benton	Group Manager, Democratic & Member Services, Hampshire

Hertfordshire	Cllr Tim Hutchings	Chairman
Humberside	Cllr Jon Evison	Chair
Lancashire	Cllr Paul Elms	Vice-chair
	Phil Llewellyn	Executive and Councillor Support Manager, Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council
Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland	Cllr Joe Orson JP	Chairman
Lincolnshire	Cllr Ray Wootten	Vice Chairman
Merseyside	Cllr Simon Shaw	Vice Chairperson
North Wales	Cllr Julie Fallon	Chair
	Richard Jarvis	Lead Officer
Northamptonshire	Cllr Gill Mercer	Chairman
	James Edmunds	Democratic Services Assistant Manager, Statutory Scrutiny Officer, Northamptonshire County Council
Staffordshire	Julie Plant	Governance and Support Manager, Staffordshire County Council
Warwickshire	Cllr Nicola Davies	Vice-chair
West Mercia	Cllr Sebastian Bowen	Member
West Midlands	Baseema Begum	Research & Policy Officer, Birmingham City Council
West Yorkshire	Cllr Alison Lowe	Chair
	Sam Wilkinson	Police & Crime Panel Officer
Wiltshire	Cllr Richard Britton	Chairman
	Emily Higson	Corporate Support Manager, Wiltshire Council

In attendance: Ann Reeder, Dave Burn and Tim Young, Frontline Consulting
Stuart Armstrong and Stephanie Liu, Grant Thornton