

With a General Election likely on 6th May 2010
Mark Botham looks at the views of the main political parties and think tanks.

Main Party Policy Proposals

i) Conservative Policy

The headline Conservative approach is to:

- Reduce paperwork to get more officers back on the streets. Scrap stop and search, Reform RIPA so authorisation is not needed in straightforward cases. Strengthen stop and search powers.
- Empower local people by introducing directly elected commissioners, requiring crime maps to be published and quarterly beat meetings to be held
- Increase prison capacity by 5,000. Scrap early release

In addition the document *Back on the Beat – Now for Change* was launched by David Ruffley in February 2009. It contains a number of specific proposals:

- Piloting mobile gaols to enable officer to process offenders without having to take them back to the station.
- Look at moving the completion of disclosure forms from officers to the CPS.
- Give power back to custody sergeant to charge offenders for a large number of offences so that they will not need approval from the CPS
- Cutting “unnecessary requirements” to fill in RIPA forms
- Cut bureaucracy in stop and search
- Increase use of the voluntary sector to address social problems

ii) Liberal Democrat Policy

“Cutting Crime: Catching Criminals with Better Policing”, Sep 2008

The main proposals include:

- Reviewing the police contract including lifetime employment for 30 years, the single point of entry and pay levels
- Annual fitness tests for frontline officers
- Decentralising the force by scrapping counterproductive central targets, introducing the local setting of priorities and budgets and the direct election of the majority of police authority members
- Creating a National Crime Reduction Agency to assess police and criminal justice policies on evidence and to spread best practice
- Respecting police pay awards from the Police Arbitration Tribunal
- 10,000 extra police on the streets, paid for by scrapping ID cards

iii) Labour Party

- Tackling violent crime, including: a targeted campaign against knife crime and tougher sentences for those caught with a knife; new controls on deactivated firearms; portable weapon scanners for the police; targeted action to tackle gang crime; and education to turn young people away from crime.
- Time saving technology and cuts in police red tape so that police can spend more time on the street; a new policing pledge and online crime maps to give local people more information and a bigger say in how their neighbourhood is policed.
- Reforming the justice system so that it works for the public; punishes the guilty; offers a realistic prospect of rehabilitation for the contrite; and places the interests of victims at its heart.
- Continuing to introduce tough and effective sentences for the guilty alongside action to tackle re-offending, focussing on education and work.
- We are fully committed to providing a net further 15,000 prison places by 2014 through the largest ever prison-building programme (7,000 of which will be provided by 2010).
- Tougher and more visible Community Payback schemes so that local communities can see that crime is being tackled in their local area, and justice is being done.
- A new Victims' Champion to give victims and witnesses a stronger voice in the justice system, protecting their interests and ensuring fair treatment.
- More steps to support people who do the right thing, including a £5m Community Crime Fighters programme to train 3,600 members of the public who are already active in their communities and want to do more to make them safer.

And now a look at the differing approaches of Think Tanks to the issue of policing.

i) Centre for Social Justice - ("A Force to be Reckoned With", March 2009)

The three core recommendations of the report were:

1. Interventionist Neighbourhood Teams with a commitment to intervene
 - A commitment by the police to intervene in any observed act of crime or antisocial behaviour
 - The rebuilding of discretion for police officers
 - A commitment to increasing the skills of officers to ensure that they have the capability to deliver the widest possible range of interventions
2. An elected Crime and Justice Commissioner for every Police Force area
 - Act as a figurehead for community safety
 - Chair the Police Authority and hold to account the Local Criminal Justice Board and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships

- Set local priorities for all of these agencies and influence the spending of budgets across partnerships

3. Police training for discretion and Restorative Justice

- All officers should be trained to employ discretion to judge when to make an arrest and when to use an informal approach
- Training for informal approaches should include community accountability meetings (based on Restorative Justice), which have proven highly effective.

ii) Reform (free-market think tank) – (“*A New Force*”, February 2009)

Recommendations:

- There is a lack of accountability, exacerbated by the tripartite model. There should be clear accountability to an elected commissioner of local policing services who would control the budget and set direction;
- Electorates should choose whether to stay within the existing force structure or move to more local force. Policing boundaries should be coterminous with local authority boundaries;
- Commissioners should have the authority to secede from joint operations e.g. the commissioner from Cornwall could secede from the Devon & Cornwall Constabulary;
- The body to which the force is accountable (commissioner etc) should raise the majority of the budget. Centralised funding, in the form of grants, dictates where forces should spend money and inhibits local priorities and initiatives;
- A better balance needs to be struck between where provision should be centralised e.g. IT systems and where decisions should be handed to BCU commanders e.g. local crime priorities;
- More detailed information and statistics should be made available to make strategic decisions at a more local level;
- The Home Secretary should commission national organised and serious crime services from the Met and have no responsibility for local volume crime. This would stop the Home Secretary focusing on electorally popular local visibility;
- ACPO is the prominent voice in determining policy with Chief Constables “left focusing on administrative matters and equipment choices”. This should be reversed so that chief Constables focus on operations;
- There should be full publication of police accounts including sub-divisions such as BCUs;
- The Met should lead on nationwide serious crime. Forces would have to share information with the Met which would help facilitate the introduction of compatible systems. Soca should cease to exist;
- The Met should have the power to direct interoperability. The NPIA, while well intentioned has no power to direct forces to implement the same systems/training etc.

iii) IPPR: (left wing think tank) – (“The New Bill: Modernising the police workforce”, February 2008)

Reform of accountability and governance is likely to take a significant amount of time to bear fruit. Therefore measures that can directly improve police productivity are urgently required.

Recommendations:

- Forces should look at roles that have been civilianised successfully in other forces and look more carefully at what skills are required for each police role;
- A more skilled, specialised workforce: A new configuration of roles within the Police Service with more specialist roles held by both officers and staff;
- New, more flexible team structures: Increased use of mixed teams of warranted officers and specialist civilians, drawing on diverse skills and ending a culture that sometimes treats non warranted officers as second-class citizens. Possibly apply warranted powers to a role rather than a person so that staff could move in and out of warranted roles to improve resilience (currently used in New Zealand);
- Refocused training and development: A move away from a current culture of supervision to one of active development and training for each and every police worker, addressing key skills gaps and ensuring every worker reaches his or her full potential. In addition, the creation of attractive career paths for those with non-policing experience and high-potential graduates;
- Pursue the accreditation and professional development programme set out by ACPO;
- A new culture of supporting performance management. There should be far greater emphasis on performance assessment and development by line managers. More support could be offered to officers who wish to remove poor performers from the Service. There should be renewed focus on people and resource management training so that there are better managers in place (particularly for Sergeants);
- Reward for skills, effort and performance, not length of service: A move away from a system that rewards length of service to one that rewards those who have the skills most needed in the Police Service, and those performing the most dangerous or arduous roles. There would be variable rewards according to supply and demand;
- Review the pension system to enable earlier exit without penalty. Possibly move away from final salary to enable officers to move into less demanding roles towards the end of their service;
- More efficient organisation of support resources: Creation of centres of excellence for support functions (e.g. HR, finance), accompanied by a reduction of support resources at force level;
- More voluntary mergers and collaboration on centres of excellence for specialised functions (cross-force);
- National level IT data-sharing and analysis should be coordinated by the NPIA/SOCA;

- Change performance measurement targets so they act as tools for performance management rather than ends in themselves. Measures should focus on solving serious crime and actual crime reduction.;
- Improve job satisfaction by reducing bureaucracy, ensuring equipment and technology is correct and available;

“Arrested Development, Unlocking change in the police service”, November 2009

Recommendations:

- All local crime priorities should be set at a local level, most importantly by strengthening the role of elected local government. Priorities would be set at three different levels:
 1. Reformed police authorities made up of senior councillors would set the budgets and priorities for each police force and hold chief constables to account for performance
 2. Local authorities would direct commission key police services from their respective Basic Command Units
 3. Local neighbourhood policing meetings would set the priorities for each neighbourhood policing team
- A National Policing Agency (NPA) should be established by merging the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) with those parts of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that currently coordinate or deliver national policing services. The NPA would have powers to ensure that complex and serious criminal activity that crosses force borders was being effectively tackled through collaboration and to improve the efficiency of service delivery by forces.

iv) Policy Exchange (centre right think tank) – (*“Fitting the Bill – Local policing for the 21st Century”*, 2007 and *“Footing the Bill – Reforming the Police Service”*, 2007)

Putting forces under the control of locally elected representatives fosters efficiency. Forces require the freedom to manage their resources effectively. The majority of local police leaders think central targets have made people less safe.

The following recommendations are made to move away from the influence of central government.

- All resource management should be devolved to BCU commanders including the ability to raise funds and recover costs. This must be balanced with responsibility for internal management issues e.g. abstraction rates;
- A system of performance targets should be built that reflects public priorities i.e focus on public perceptions of safety;

- The role of local authorities in policing should be reformed with more wide-ranging involvement in crime and reduction partnerships;
- The size and makeup of local police units should be developed from a bottom up process. No known methodology currently exists;
- Turnover of local commanders should be reduced;

Increased investment in the police has not resulted in an improvement in performance. The following recommendations are made for improving effectiveness and efficiency:

- Increased freedom to raise funds locally. Remove the cap on council tax increases, review the police funding formula and institute local pay bargaining;
- A clear commitment to workforce modernisation. Introduce transferable powers of arrest that could be conferred on non-sworn staff on a temporary basis by the Chief Constable;
- Unify the employment arrangements for sworn and non-sworn staff. Make them all employees of the Chief Constable;
- Review the office of constable, in particular the rank structure. Cut the number of police ranks to 3 or 4;
- Police Federation to represent sworn and non-sworn staff;
- Greater locally driven, long-term, collaboration between forces;
- Improved use of performance measurement data with key performance indicators applying to private partners supplying support services;
- Expansion of non-sworn staff role;
- Reduce resilience risks associated with workforce modernisation;
- Widen the use of private partnership – outsource support functions. The NPIA should lean on procurement training developing a standard framework for contract negotiations with private providers.

“Partners in Crime - Democratic Accountability and the Future of Local Policing”,
November 2009

The key recommendations in the report are:

- Elected Commissioners should represent each Basic Command Unit (BCU).
- Chief Constables and BCU Commanders should be released from Home Office oversight, and allowed to respond to community priorities.
- The police precept should be collected separately from council tax to give voters a clear sense of the local police provision.
- Hand commissioners responsibility for local partnership working.
- Commissioners should operate within a restructured service to close the Level 2 Gap’, and enable BCUs to focus on targeting neighbourhood level crime.

v) **The Serco Institute (think tank dedicated exclusively to the study of competition and contracting in public services)** – (“*Making Time: Freeing up Front-Line Policing*”, 2008)

The report highlights the following examples of good practice:

- Using PFI to build new premises e.g. police stations, centralising custody suites
- Co-locating with probation, magistrates court, local authorities, CPS
- Increased use of staff for roles that do not require a warranted officer.
- Use of private contractor to provide an integrated IT system compatible with mobile PDA technology
- Increased use of shared services – possibly in conjunction with neighbouring forces for greater savings
- Increased use of community volunteers in street/town centre patrols.
- Joint procurement of transport services, fleets/helicopters
- Centralised translation service provided by a private company that is used by 36 police forces.
- Contract with police surgeons on a fixed fee rather than a piecemeal basis.
- Employ ex-officers in civilian roles
- Increased use of digital evidence storage (which can be shared with other forces)

One thing is certain, whoever wins the election the police service is in line for more reform and fiscal prudence.

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