
**Awdurdod Heddlu Gogledd Cymru
North Wales Police Authority**

**Report of
STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION
MEETINGS 2004**

***BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES
TOGETHER***

**Dale Hall
Opinion Research Services**



**Awdurdod Heddlu Gogledd Cymru
North Wales Police Authority
Stakeholder Consultation
2004**

**Report of consultation meetings
with North Wales Stakeholders**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS and PREAMBLE

ORS is pleased to have conducted the research reported here for because police-community relations are obviously important both for the police and all members of the public.

This reports covers an important consultation exercise by the Police Authority regarding the Government's green paper, *Building Safer Communities Together* – but the scale of the project and the scope of the consultation was constrained by the timetable imposed by the Home Office. Nonetheless, the views reported as those of a very wide cross-section of 174 important stakeholders and deserve to be taken seriously.

We were pleased that in six lengthy meetings the stakeholders concerned not only shared their views readily but also deliberated in a critical but co-operative manner. We are very grateful to them all for taking part in this worthwhile consultation.

The facilitator was particularly pleased that so many Police Authority members and the Chair were so enthusiastic about attending the meetings and joining in constructive discussions with the participants. It meant that the facilitator was not only working *for* the Authority but *with* a significant number of individual members.

A proper report of complex discussions is not a verbatim transcript, but an interpretative summary of the issues reviewed in free-ranging conversations. While summarising the main themes and highlighting the key points, this report seeks to be faithful to what was said. While some respondents expressed criticism of the police, many were favourable and sympathetic.

We thank the North Wales Police Authority for commissioning the project as part of an ongoing programme of public consultation. At all stages of the project, *ORS'* status as an independent organisation consulting the community as objectively as possible was recognised and respected. We are grateful for the trust, and we hope this report will contribute usefully to thinking about police-public relations.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This is an important document that reports the outcomes of six major stakeholder consultation meetings conducted with a total of 174 people on behalf of the North Wales Police Authority. The report is not a long, and the detail that is included profiling the views of each of the six groups' views is important in both revealing variations between stakeholder groups and emphasising recurrent concerns. Hence, it is crucial for readers to examine the six separate sections carefully, as well as reading this summary – for otherwise the vividness and authenticity of the stakeholders' views will be lost.

1.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The report details the outcomes from lengthy consultations with: Force Officers and Police Staff; Voluntary Groups; Businesses; Partner Organisations; Local People and Communities; and Members of the Flintshire Youth Forum.

The agendas for each of the meetings were drawn from the Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, and included the following main themes: Engaging with local communities; Operational Effectiveness; Accountability; and Service Modernisation. These themes, though, were broken down or resolved into more specific topics in order to make discussion more feasible. The key topics that were presented to participants, together with further background material were:

- What do you want to know about policing – what kind of information would you like?
- Should there be published standards of what you can expect from the police
- How can the police be more visible and easy to contact for you?
- Would you like a single non-emergency number to call the local police and council services
- What do you want to know about policing – what kind of information would you like?



- Should there be published standards of what you can expect from the police
- How can the police be more visible and easy to contact for you?
- Would you like a single non-emergency number to call the local police and council services
- How can the police work better with communities to reduce crime and make people feel safer?
- Are local people interested in serving as Special Constables?
- How can we encourage more women, minority groups and bilingual people to join the police?
- To whom should the police be accountable locally?
- Should there be a single all-Wales Police Force?

While the outcomes of the discussions cannot, of course, be certified as statistically representative of all stakeholders in North Wales, the meetings included a very wide range of people and allowed all 174 of them to listen and think as well as talk.

While summarising the main themes and highlighting the key points, this executive summary report seeks to be faithful to what was said – but readers are urged to read the detailed reports of each of the six stakeholder meetings in order to capture vividly the authenticity of the people’s views. A short executive summary cannot capture the nuances and details that Authority members heard in the various group meetings – so they are referred to the fuller, later sections of this report.

1.3 HOME OFFICE THEMES

The Home Office has summarised the Green Paper under four main themes which (in this report) are dealt with in the following order: Community Engagement, Operational Effectiveness, Accountability and Modernising the Police Service. However, they themes and the contributions on each are certainly not mutually exclusive – so readers should cross-refer from one to another in order to make the necessary connections, for improving policing requires a seamless web of strategies that cannot be classified under single headings.

For example, the profile of what information the public would like about police forces is treated by the Home Office under Increasing Community Engagement, whereas it also has much to do with Accountability. Similarly, the question of the



structure of four police forces in Wales is not only about Operational Effectiveness (as in the Home Office document) but touches crucially on Accountability also. These links are important because the overall themes to emerge from the consultation for North Wales Police Authority were:

- Linking the police to the community
- Improving the effectiveness of policing
- Providing the public with more information
- Increasing accountability
- Conducting more consultation.

1.4 FACILITATOR'S EMPHASIS

There is, of course, no single *right account* of the complex discussions reported here, for careful interpretation must be combined with clear and where necessary vivid expression. However, this report has been prepared very quickly and there has been no opportunity for the facilitator and writer to test his perceptions of the discussions alongside those of other listeners. Therefore, this executive summary is presented as an honest attempt to *tell it like it is* (or was told!). The author has not hesitated to deal frankly with some important negative messages expressed in the meetings – particularly relating to Accountability – and he trusts that readers will appreciate the honesty even if they disagree with any particular emphasis.

1.5 ENGAGING WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

There was unanimous agreement that the police force should link more proactively and effectively with local communities of all types, at all levels and in all areas. The current force initiatives involving Community Police Officers, Beat Managers and Local Surgeries were widely and enthusiastically endorsed as making significant progress towards a positive situation in which communities do not just *receive* policing services passively but feel *involved* – minimally by identifying with the police and more fully by helping to set local policing agendas through formal and informal consultation.

Particularly the Voluntary, Partner and Business groups stressed that *communities* are not just area-based 'aggregations' of people or households – but are formed by common feelings, heritage, language, interests or lifestyles just as much as residence in a single area. Therefore, many said that the police should be sensitive in relating to *communities* (rather than just *the community*) by understanding their points of view, needs and traditional outlooks. Some minority group members



suggested that (especially longer-serving) police officers do not typically show the necessary sensitivity – and that this is an area where more focused training might be helpful to combat impressions of arrogance and/or remoteness.

Not only the Business Groups but many others also referred to the emphasis on motoring offences through *Arrive Alive* as an increasing barrier between the police and the community – because the publicity tends to show the police in a domineering and autocratic light – that could limit public co-operation with the police on un-related issues.

Apart from the priority for the police to relate to communities in general, the stakeholder groups were keen that the police should demonstrate their commitment to traditional priorities – namely, visible policing, better detection rates and focus on crime reduction. Many felt that only by demonstrating these key commitments could the police effectively reassure the public of their community focus.

A number of people observed that police communications with the public should be improved by reporting back more actively on recent initiatives. For example, it was suggested that Crime and Disorder Audits seem to have achieved little in practice and that there has been little or no feedback about what happened as a result.

The sections on stakeholder views that follow provide a detailed profile of the kind of information that the public would like about the police service.

More generally, there were clear suggestions that the force and the Police Authority should be more proactive in publicising policing achievements and informing the public of good news stories.

1.6 OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

While there was considerable support for the police, combined with an appreciation of the difficulties of their role, many of the groups were also concerned that the force could seem hard to contact and was not always very responsive in relation to routine or low-level crime.

Therefore, idea of a national telephone number for non-emergency contacts with the police (and possibly other services) seemed to most people a very good idea – but always providing that it is staffed by police personnel (even if non-uniformed) and links readily to the police. It is important that such a service should not seem a further barrier between the public and the police.



In general, it was stressed that the police must be more responsive in dealing with reports from the public – and in particular in keeping witnesses and others informed of investigations progress.

While the idea of an all-Wales police force might seem to fall within the context of Accountability, the Home Offices locates the topic under Operational Effectiveness, so it is appropriate to note it here.

There was almost unanimous opposition to the prospect of a single all-Wales police force, regardless of whether it reported to the Welsh Assembly Government or to the Home Office. Although most assumed that such a force would report to WAG, that probability did not raise enthusiasm for the prospect of a single force, for stakeholders thought an all-Wales organisation accountable to Cardiff would be too South- and urban-focused; and they thought that North Wales would lose-out in a process of competition for resources.

1.7 ACCOUNTABILITY

As the specific reports of the meetings will show in the following sections, the stakeholders were keen to have additional information about police budgets and cost-effectiveness. The Business Groups in particular – but not only them – were aware of the trend towards increasing costs being combined with falling detection and clear-up rates; and they were concerned about this.

More generally, the theme of accountability was in some ways the most controversial area of discussion insofar as it led many to focus on the role of the Chief Constable in particular. Apart from some important concerns about his personal style of leadership, there were serious worries expressed about the way his headship of the force personnel structure is combined with his relatively untrammelled responsibility for setting force policies and operational norms. While it was recognised, of course, that this position is not unique to North Wales, some quite informed people doubted whether – within such a centralised and hierarchic structure – this Chief Constable could ever receive critical or objective advice from subordinate officers whose careers are dependent upon his rating of their qualities.

In this context, very many people thought it was vitally important for the Police Authority to exercise both its formal powers and informal influence on the force – in short to represent convincingly the point of view of the public.



In this context, many respondents regretted that the Authority's members have a relatively low profile. It was acknowledged that hardly any of the public know anything about Authority members, and hence the public has little or no idea of the important role they play.

In this context, the consultation reported here – and the prominent involvement of the Authority members – was widely endorsed and welcomed by the stakeholders as a valuable way forward.

There were strong suggestions that the Authority should publicise vacancies more widely and prominently, and should generally raise its own profile – through increased consultation with, and increased feedback to, the public. But consultation and feedback to the public (on its outcomes as well as on force policies and performance) were not seen as ends-in-themselves; rather they were seen as ways of enhancing the Authority's essential *representative* role.

Interestingly, quite a number of participants were prepared at least seriously to consider the possibility of *direct elections* to the Authority; but even those who were happy with the current system wished the Authority to be seen to do more, mainly by putting itself more prominently in the public eye as an independent and effective counter-balance to the management structure within the force itself.

At the more grass-roots level, a number of stakeholders were very keen that Beat Managers in particular and community police officers in general should show their responsiveness – and even their accountability – to their local areas and communities. It was suggested that instead of being seen as the local agents of a hierarchic and centralised force, they should do more to represent their communities' interests and aspirations to the police force.

Neighbourhood Panels were broadly welcomed as a valuable way of achieving *bottom-up* policing, though some had reservations about their contribution.

1.8 SERVICE MODERNISATION

There was considerable sympathy for the idea that police management should be modernised and made even more effective. There was a recognition that coming through the ranks is not necessarily the best preparation for the demands of managing a large and complex force organisation, and stakeholders stressed that management roles need specialist selection, training and development facilities and opportunities.



The concept of *earned autonomy* had limited attractiveness for the force officers and staff, many of whom commented that they disliked the prospect of financial means being used to incentivise performance in forces.

While both force officers and staff on the one hand, and all the stakeholders on the other, stressed that they believed in fairness and equal rights for all, they felt the force should continue to recruit on the grounds of strict merit alone. More or less all those consulted felt that ambitious positive action measures towards 'target' communities were not justified. Instead they preferred to raise the general profile of the force as a good employer – to encourage more applications; and some suggested that the shift towards community policing would itself attract a more diverse range of applicants.

Interestingly, while ethnic and religious diversity issues were not controversial – in the context of the general agreement outlined in the paragraph above – the question of what emphasis should be put on Welsh-speaking recruits caused some disagreement, generally on East-West lines.



CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 SIX MEETINGS

The programme of consultation was completed through six lengthy meetings with:

- Force Officers and Police Staff
- Voluntary Groups
- Businesses
- Partner Organisations
- Local People and Communities
- Members of the Flintshire Youth Forum

The programme of each meeting was:

- Welcome and Introduction by a Police Authority member – in which the Government's consultation requirements and framework were outlined
- Explanation of the format and discussion topics by the facilitator
- Question and answer session
- Small Workshop discussions – as in as small groups as possible bearing in mind the total number of participants (typically four or five groups)
- Final plenary session which participants' views were recorded in a Powerpoint presentation

Each meeting was opened and introduced by a member of the Police Authority, and was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction on the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, which reviewed the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and following a question and answer session, the meeting split into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.



The meetings were particularly successful in terms of the number and range of people who attended and the readiness with which they took part in lively debate. Overall, 174 people took part in the six meetings, drawn from a very wide range of community stakeholder organisations. The Force officers and Police staff were drawn from all levels and areas of the Service; and the participants in the five public groups were also drawn from a very wide range of organisations and were diverse in terms of age, and other characteristics. Ethnic minorities were represented, particularly in the Local People/Communities meeting. Full provision was made for Welsh language speakers, both in the plenary sessions and in the discussion workshops.

2.2 DISCUSSION AGENDA

North Wales Police Authority and ORS agreed a detailed discussion agenda, under the general heading *Building Safer Communities Together*. The four general themes drawn from the government White Paper of the same name were:

- Engaging with local communities
- Operational Effectiveness
- Accountability
- Service Modernisation.

The themes were made specific by asking a number of specific questions, namely:

- What do you want to know about policing – what kind of information would you like?
- Should there be published standards of what you can expect from the police
- How can the police be more visible and easy to contact for you?
- Would you like a single non-emergency number to call the local police and council services
- What do you want to know about policing – what kind of information would you like?
- Should there be published standards of what you can expect from the police
- How can the police be more visible and easy to contact for you?
- Would you like a single non-emergency number to call the local police and council services



- How can the police work better with communities to reduce crime and make people feel safer?
- Are local people interested in serving as Special Constables?
- How can we encourage more women, minority groups and bilingual people to join the police?
- To whom should the police be accountable locally?
- Should there be a single all-Wales Police Force?

2.3 NATURE OF CONSULTATION

The consultation method was qualitative – that is, the meetings were held as conversational forums that encouraged the open-ended exchange of ideas. The method is, of course, conceptual rather than statistical, and interpretative rather than mathematical. Hence, this report is concerned with the meaning and intensity of people’s views rather than with their statistical distribution. The findings reported cannot be certified at a determinate confidence level as statistically representative of all stakeholders in North Wales; but the meetings included a wide cross-section of people and also allowed them to think as well as talk. Hence, we believe the findings are indicative of a wide spectrum of opinion – as a guide to what might be called informed debate, based upon consideration of the issues. For the discussions did not just explore participants’ instant opinions (as when asked artificially simplified questions) but brought out their arguments and assumptions – aspects that cannot be covered in a quantitative study.

The aphorism, *to understand all is to excuse all*, means that if we can only understand others’ assumptions and reasoning fully then we shall find their conclusions inescapable ourselves. While many might recoil from the implied moral and cultural relativism, the aphorism nonetheless makes the important methodological point that in social studies we should seek to find the rationality in others’ points of view. Hence, reports of qualitative discussions seek to *make sense* of people’s opinions, to see why and how they believe as they do.

2.4 THE REPORT

This report reviews the sentiments and judgements of the participants about the police service in the context of the community it serves. Some verbatim quotations are used – not because we agree or disagree with them – but for their vividness in capturing recurrent points of view. ORS does not endorse any opinions but seeks to portray them accurately and



clearly. While quotations are used, the report is obviously not a verbatim transcript of the discussions, but an interpretative summary of the views of participants in free-ranging discussions. While summarising the main themes and highlighting the key points, this report seeks to be faithful to what was said.

2.5 CONFIDENTIALITY

In the six meetings it was stressed that contributions to the discussions should be confidential (in the sense that no one would be identified in our general report of findings) and that group members should not normally disclose details of what was said to third parties.



REPORT OF DISCUSSIONS

3.1 FORCE OFFICERS AND POLICE STAFF

3.1.1 Introduction

The meeting was introduced by Mr Douglas Wynne, JP, a member of the Police Authority and was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction about the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, a review of the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and a question and answer session, the meeting broke into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.

The meeting was very successful insofar as a total of 35 officers and staff attended and took part readily in the discussions.

In addition to the 'standard' discussion topics reviewed with all the groups (see bulleted list in section 2.2 above), the Force Officers and Police Staff considered the following:

- How to provide effective leadership – within both the police force and the local community?
- Should some senior managers be appointed from without the service?
- How should forces' good performance be rewarded without 'punishing' others? Is the concept of earned autonomy appropriate?
- How to ensure a representative police service?

3.1.2 Leadership

A recurring theme of the discussions was that the North Wales Police Force certainly has leadership from its senior managers, but they could perhaps be more supportive towards managers in terms of resources rather than by what was referred to as *devolved blame*.

It was emphasised that effective leadership requires not only vision and ambition but also good communication skills and consultation with communities in order to reconcile national/local agendas.

The workshop discussion groups varied significantly in their views about the recruitment of top managers from outside police forces. Some opposed it on the grounds that external appointees could not know the detail or culture of policing, but



others were willing to endorse the ideas at the ACO level. Overall, the meeting acknowledged that there were divisions of opinion on advantageousness of recruiting only from within forces.

3.1.3 Performance Management (Forces)

When they considered how to reward forces' good performance without 'punishing' other forces, the participants were sceptical about the use of financial incentives and penalties – mainly on the grounds that the use of such devices is foreign to the police service. Participants seemed to fear a divisiveness in which some apparently more successful forces would be treated more favourable while others were penalised relatively.

However, the idea of at least ring-fencing the resources of good performing forces was readily accepted: there was no doubt that participants wanted to protect successful forces funding from possible erosion in favour of other areas.

There was similar doubt expressed about the idea of the earned-autonomy proposals.

The real issue, it was said, is how to raise standards by fair and accurate performance measurement

3.1.4 Diversity and Representativeness

All the groups had little doubt that strict fairness (in the sense of just treatment based on (in proportion to) individual merit should take precedence over the pursuit through positive action of diversity in forces – mainly on the ground that appointments and promotions are only effective and fair if they strictly on merit. It was argued by some that honesty and fairness in the police service is more important than a diversity.

It was readily accepted, though, that the forces should actively target its recruitment campaigns towards under-represented groups, but it was stressed that this approach should not compromise strictly merit-based appointments.

Concern was expressed by some that the force does not now vet applicants as actively as it once did – by the use of home visits to evaluate suitability.

3.1.5 Charter of Policing Standards

The prospect of a possible police service charter was treated relatively sympathetically – though with some significant caveats. First of all, it was accepted that it is important to provide clarity to the public about service but without raising unrealistic expectations - for example about what constitute legitimate 999 calls. However, the perspective of the of proper



standards of service but that their expectations participants was not so much that the public should be assured should be informed and managed to prevent criticism based upon misunderstandings. Some participants wanted also to stress that partner agencies should be subject to the same requirements; and that the police service must be judged by relevant standards

There were mixed views about the ideas that Community Advocates might have a role to play in representing people in respect of breaches of the service charter. Some favoured the prospect, but others were concerned about who the advocates might be in practice.

3.1.6 Visible Policing and Call Routes

Overall, there were few comments about how in practice the force can be more visible to the public – but two important approaches were generally endorsed.

First, there was general agreement that a single non-emergency number that could be use to call the local police and council services is a good idea. There was some concern that the greater volume of calls it might generate would need to be managed effectively – and a range of views was expressed on this issue. Some said that the police need not themselves manage such a facility, for local authorities could do so; others said the standard of call handling probably needed improving in any case; and others said it would provide an opportunity to reallocate non-police tasks to other organisations and to co-operate more closely and effectively with them.

3.1.7 Working with Communities

Participants were inclined to think that the best ways to reassure the public and reduce the fear of crime are achieving more public involvement in combating crime and working more closely with partner agencies.

Regarding public partnership in the fight against crime, it was observed that through marketing and public relations the police need to move from *policing by consent to policing by co-operation!*

Regarding partnerships, concern was also expressed that many of them have not yet yielded their full benefits and seem to require time to realise their potentials – mainly because, some said, the partner agencies need themselves to do more to co-operate effectively with the police.

It might be of interest to an outsider that when asked how the force might reassure the public and reduce the fear of crime no



one actually said that performance could perhaps be improved by improving detection and conviction rates, for example. To this extent there was perhaps an assumption that the service had no material shortcomings to speak of in terms of its performance.

A later submission received from an officer said the force should recognise the importance partnership officers and foster the special skills they need. They should receive specific training and also remain in post for at least three years because it takes time to make the necessary contacts. Yet too often the force seems to put untrained people in post for only a few months.

3.1.8 Special Constables

There was a degree of scepticism about whether the public values Specials and wants to serve in that capacity; and it was also questioned whether it benefits the police service to have more special constables within the force? It was pointed out that the North Wales Police Force does not even make provision for its own staff to serve as Specials! The most generally agreed points were that Specials should be paid properly for their work and should receive more support.

A more detailed opinion submitted argued that now is not an ideal opportunity to revamp the whole idea of Specials; but the correspondent said they should be renamed as *Police Reserve*, be given support in respect of membership of the Police Federation and also should receive an annual Bounty (such as the HM reserve forces). The same submission said they could be used to provide specialist accounting, IT and forensics skills.

3.1.9 Local Accountability

No one doubted that the force needs some form of Police Authority to ensure accountability. Indeed, there was some concern about possible shortcomings in the current democratic arrangements – mainly in terms of the low public awareness of the Authority and the possible undue localism of some members. Nonetheless, some participants were concerned that not all the Unitary Authorities were equally represented on the Police Authority (with nine councillor members currently).

In this context, there was more than a little sympathy with the prospect of a directly elected Police Authority – though on the whole this enthusiasm was tempered by concerns about the consequence of the politicisation of the police service – in particular about the possible consequences of populist (extremist) appeals to public sentiment being made to win



election to the Authority in some circumstances. So indirect election seemed to provide a bulwark against political pressures on the force.

Therefore, there was no categorical support for either direct versus indirect election and appointments for the Police Authority, but there was an inclination to retain an indirect system.

However, the participants certainly wanted the Police Authority to have a higher profile and to be more active in holding the force accountable.

3.1.10 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were uniformly critical of the prospect of an all-Wales police force – though some thought this might work providing there was sufficient sub-Wales operational and resource autonomy.

The main grounds for opposing an all-Wales force were:

- Cardiff is too remote from North Wales to deal effectively with the area's specific issues
- An all-Wales perspective would be too South-oriented and urban in focus
- There would be North-South competition for resources and the former would be likely to lose out
- North Wales has and needs strong operational links with the North West of England – rather than with South Wales.



3.2 VOLUNTARY BODIES

3.2.1 Introduction

The meeting was introduced by Ms Clare Cookson, a Police Authority member, and like the other five meetings was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction about the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, a review of the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and a question and answer session, the meeting broke into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.

The meeting was very successful insofar as a total of 53 people attended and took part readily in the discussions of the 'standard' discussion topics summarised in section 2.2 above. The discussions ranged widely while also focusing on some important specifics about practical policing.

3.2.2 Information Requirements

The meeting had many proposals when asked what information they would welcome about policing and the police force. They emphasised in particular that they would like more publicity or specific information on:

- Range of contact routes to police – for some said it is hard even to find out how to report routine crimes and complaints
- How to make a complaint
- More general information about police activity and crime rates
- How the police use their funding – whether they are really effective in practice – and whether they are they making progress against drugs or losing the battle?
- The general allocation of resources
- Whether the police tackle/target repeat offenders sufficiently with proactive measures to fight crime and nuisance
- Independently produced and verified police statistics – that are verified and reflect the findings of an information needs analysis
- How police bail operates



- Exactly what is required of the police by the Data Protection Act – because they sometimes seem too secretive and reluctant to release important information
- Police Authority meetings – because details are not readily available in libraries

Overall participants said the public need to know pertinent and digestible information on real issues – providing they information has an element of independence and has been verified. They also observed that the Government Green Paper is an obscure, long and complex document.

Above all, respondents wanted the police to be *responsive* to public calls and requests for service. There were many references to the police being slow to reluctant to respond to many lower-profile incidents.

3.2.3 Charter of Policing Standards

There was very general endorsement of the idea that there should be some form of police charter of service standards for response to low-level crimes and other incidents. There was concern that the public has not guaranteed response charter even for genuine 999 calls.

More specifically still, the meeting stressed that the charter must be accompanied by clear accountability for service failures. People were clear that there should be redress for individuals if standards are breached in important respects.

3.2.4 Visible Policing

The meeting made many suggestions of how the force can be more visible and reassuring to the public by reducing the fear of crime. They said in particular that:

- Beat officers often appear at quiet times but are unavailable/invisible by night – because there appears to be only skeleton staffing after dark, particularly in the rural areas
- Generally, there are not enough officers on the beat – and rural stations in particular are often un-staffed.
- Police stations should be conspicuously open – even if they have to be staffed by civilians

Overall, there was considerable support for the Community Beat Manager and Surgery systems – which were held to be good initiatives. However, people worried about the degree of



cover available for these officers outside of their normal working times. In this context, there was support for reduction in the police rank hierarchy in favour of *more Indians and fewer chiefs!* Similarly, it was said that there should be a redistribution of officers from paperwork to beat duties.

There were a number of references to the need for more accurate information about policing levels rather than the *manipulation of statistics*.

Finally, it was said that policing could be made more visible by promoting community safety partnerships more effectively (see below also).

3.2.5 Single Non-Emergency Number

There was a division of opinion on the merits of a single non-emergency number for the public to use. Some said they would not want this – particularly if it connected also with non-police services and was not a core police function. They said they would normally like to speak to *someone specific* rather than just connect to a call centre. Others were much more in favour of the idea – on the grounds that it would take the pressure off the police by reducing misuse of the 999 calls route.

3.2.6 Working with Communities

Participants were inclined to think that the best ways to reassure the public and reduce the fear of crime are by using Beat and Community officers to link with the community – which some officers do not do. It was pointed out, for example, that not all officers are equally supportive of Neighbourhood Watch and the voluntary sector in general. The meeting was clear that the police should work with local organisations and communicate clearly and frequently about policing constraints and initiatives. It was said that the voluntary sector needs easier contacts with police and Beat Managers – and that the public must be made more aware of their existence. A number of people observed that communications generally need to be improved. For example, it was claimed that Crime and Disorder Audits seem to achieve little in practice and that there is typically no feedback about what happens as a result.

It was suggested, too, that the police should work with schools – on things like bullying and other community nuisance issues – and with the voluntary groups generally.

It was also stressed that the police need to ensure that adequate victim support measures are taken following crimes. Overall, it was said that the police should be more effective, efficient and caring towards the community. It was suggested



that the police might take a greater interest in, for example, education.

One particular suggestion was for the police to be more responsive in dealing with reports from the public – and in particular to keep witnesses and others informed of investigation progress.

However, there was a general impression in the meeting that the police are too bureaucratic – for example, arrests in Colwyn Bay apparently have to be processed in Llandudno.

In short, the police certainly work hard and are appreciated, but there seem to be some important faults in the system.

3.2.7 Special Constables

There were some clear indications that the Specials scheme does not provide a real link between citizens and the police force; and some were inclined to patronise Specials as *hobby bobbies!* Some suggested that a Police Cadet scheme might be more useful in educating youngsters in the ways of the police. However, it was also said that the Specials scheme does not seem to be promoted actively – so more information and publicity is needed.

3.2.8 Equality and Diversity

While participants stressed that they were committed to equality of opportunity and fairness, and certainly were not racist in any way, they did not favour positive action and the explicit targeting of women and minority groups for entry to the police force. The main way in which they wanted to encourage minorities to join was by raising the profile and morale of the force generally – so everyone would be more inclined to join.

3.2.9 Local Accountability

It was said that the Police Authority should be more victim-focused and should encourage the provision of more information and feedback to victims and witnesses – while continuing to consult the community in general.

Opinion was broadly divided on the prospect of direct election to the Authority, but there was general agreement that the public is unaware of members' identities.

There were strong feelings that the Police Authority should do more to demonstrate the reality of police accountability. Not only should it be more obviously accountable itself, but it should also more actively hold the force to account for its priorities, policies and performance. There was some sympathy for the prospect of direct election for the Police Authority.



Some people proposed that the Chief Constable also should be directly elected (from a short-list of approved candidates) and should also be answerable for his/her conduct in office.

3.2.10 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were uniformly strongly critical of the prospect of an all-Wales police force – and some even referred to such a prospect as the creation of a *monster*. The main grounds for opposing an all-Wales force were:

- Re-structuring the police forces would be expensive and would yield no clear benefits
- An all-Wales force would be too South-oriented and urban in focus – and the North would lose resources to the South

However, it was agreed that there should be an all-Wales perspective on some issues, and also better co-operation and communications.



3.3 BUSINESS GROUPS

3.3.1 Introduction

The meeting was introduced by Councillor Dylan Edwards, a Police Authority member, and like the other five meetings was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction about the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, a review of the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and a question and answer session, the meeting broke into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.

The meeting was successful insofar as a total of 16 senior business people attended and took part readily in the discussions of the 'standard' discussion topics summarised in section 2.2 above. The discussions ranged widely while also focusing on some important specifics about practical policing.

3.3.2 Information Requirements

The meeting had some clear proposals about the information they would welcome about the police force, namely:

- Typical response times and levels for a range of crimes and incidents
- Indications of what the public can expect in terms of feedback of information on the progress of police investigations
- Clear and open statistics on the police performance – particularly detection rates and police costs
- Less about *Arrive Alive* and more on *real policing incidents*.

Respondents clearly wanted the police to be *responsive* to public requests for assistance.

3.3.3 Charter of Policing Standards

There was very general endorsement of the idea that there should be a police charter to guaranteed service standards for the public – but always providing it would be realistic and actually implemented.

3.3.4 Visible Policing

The meeting's main priority was the police should join ever more actively in Business Forums.

There were robust criticisms of *Arrive Alive* as too visible and over-promoted. It was said that the insistence on the



insensitive pursuit of motorists for speeding is doing much to worsen police-public relations. (See also Working with Communities and Accountability below.)

The participants formulated three summary points to express their understanding of what should be core police priorities, namely:

- Visible policing
- Better detection rates
- Focus on crime reduction.

3.3.5 Single Non-Emergency Number

There was agreement on the merits of a single non-emergency number for the public to use – proving always that it would be staffed properly and really would enable the police to respond more quickly and readily.

3.3.6 Working with Communities

Participants thought the Police Authority should do more to link the police force to local community priorities – by consulting with community groups in general and with the business sector in particular, in order to share discussions of policing priorities with the wider public.

The above paragraph is the tactful or diplomatic expression of a message that also came across far more bluntly for the police. It was said that through the pursuit of motorists within *Arrive Alive*, the Chief Constable in particular and the force in general have developed domineering and autocratic images that seriously jeopardise public co-operation with the police on many un-related issues. Police priorities, it was said, appear to have been slanted away from real crime in favour of persecuting motorists. (See also Accountability below.) They said the real priorities should be visible policing, better detection rates and focus on crime reduction.

3.3.7 Special Constables

There was some support for the Special Constables scheme. It was said that it is potentially valuable, though its profile should be raised – and it deserves more respect from the full-time force.

3.3.8 Equality and Diversity

Women participants in the Business Forum strongly favoured the recruitment of more women officers – but all the participants strongly rejected positive action in favour of women or other minority target groups because they thought



that entry to the force should be on merit alone. The participants said they wanted to promote *equality not favouritism!* In any case, they reasoned, a more successful community policing approach by the police will naturally attract more women entrants.

3.3.9 Local Accountability

It was said that the Police Authority should not only develop some *teeth* but should also be less afraid to *bite* the police force in order to demonstrate (to the force and to the public) the reality of accountability. Participants said that elected councillors seem too reluctant to question or criticise the police – whereas they said the police should be required to produce more meaningful and accessible information on their activities and also be prepared to exercise more control over the Chief Constable.

Participants said very clearly that they thought the primacy of the Chief Constable was too extreme and encouraged his *autocratic* views. They said that the Chief Constable is responsible for spending the allocated budget, determining force policies and structure, and also for heading administration and human resources – all of which gives him enormous power over his subordinates. So it was questioned whether he *ever receives genuinely independent advice from anyone who is not fearful for their jobs?*

In this context, the group members would like the Police Authority to fill the vacuum – by representing the ordinary person's point of view and providing the public with more information on force funding, spending and cost-effectiveness.

Currently, it was argued, there seems to be no effective control on the spending of £125M per annum on the police – for the force seems unaccountable regarding both its conduct and its performance. Policing Plans, it was said, do not really help the public – because they are so large and turgid.

The meeting did not 'vote' for direct elections to the Police Authority, but participants thought the idea should be at least considered. They were unanimous, though, that the quality of members and independence-of-mind of the Police Authority should be primary appointment criteria. Above all, they said, the Police Authority should be seen to *report to the people*. It was said that this shift of emphasis is necessary in order to reverse the current trend in which the Chief Constable see himself as the master rather than the servant of the public.



3.3.10 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were on balance negative about the prospect of an all-Wales police force – though some were somewhat sympathetic. The chief reason for opposition was that the change will do nothing to promote better quality community policing at the local level and will prove a distraction from real priorities. Doubt was expressed about WAG's ability to hold a single force accountable and participants also thought North Wales would suffer within an all-Wales context.



3.4 PARTNER AGENCIES

3.4.1 Introduction

The meeting was introduced by Councillor Malcolm King, the Chair of the Police Authority, and like the other five meetings was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction about the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, a review of the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and a question and answer session, the meeting broke into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.

The meeting was successful insofar as a total of 19 senior partner staff/representatives attended and took part readily in the discussions of the 'standard' discussion topics summarised in section 2.2 above. The discussions ranged widely and not all of the specific issues were addressed – but, nonetheless, some very important messages came from the discussions.

3.4.2 Information Requirements

Participants were clearly interested (see below) in any information about police community policing initiatives. There were also clear indications that communications and information should get to communities via their Community Beat Managers rather than always from central sources.

3.4.3 Charter of Policing Standards

The idea of a police charter was endorsed, but once more the focus of the Partners' discussion was on local services and information rather than corporate systems.

3.4.4 Visible Policing

The main focus of the meeting was upon the need to make the police a visible and active feature of communities. This was not an abstract idea but was taken to mean that Community Beat Managers should be at the very heart of police-community relations – so they should develop local links actively and remain in place long enough to ensure continuity.

It was said that the police should be less *centralist* in controlling its local police officers – for beat managers in particular should be seen as 'responsible' to their communities (rather than just as representatives of the central organisation).

Participants thought beat managers should be proactive in taking initiatives and providing crime prevention information to communities – and there was a strong feeling that beat managers should be removed from 'ordinary' responsive duties



in order to achieve this switch of emphasis. It was also recognised that police officers will need training and support, as well as sufficient time in each posting, to achieve the competence required.

3.4.5 Single Non-Emergency Number

There was agreement that the current system for contacting the police seems inefficient – so a more direct means of contact was held to be a good thing in improving public confidence.

3.4.6 Working with Communities

Just as community policing was seen to be the essence of visible policing, so participants also thought it the key way in which the police should work with communities. Therefore, they stressed that community and beat officers should develop strong local links and remain in place long enough to ensure continuity.

The participants were also keen that good practice in community policing should be diffused – so that all areas may enjoy the highest standards (rather than standards varying according to whichever personnel are in post in particular places).

A more general insight was that the police have to be more sensitive in their understanding of communities – they are not just area-based ‘aggregations’, but rather intersecting and overlapping groups of people with distinctive aspirations, lifestyles and needs. The police need to be sensitive to long-term dissatisfactions, where these are evident, and to communicate proactively with people – so regular police surgeries and the avoidance of top-down styles are essential. Therefore, it was said that the police need to consult people to find out what information they require – and what are their needs with respect to issues like anti-social behaviour.

Regarding partnerships, there was a desire that the police should clarify and refine their information sharing protocols – to ensure that where appropriate they are able to share information readily with important community partners.

Some participants were sceptical about the contribution that could be made to community policing by Neighbourhood Panels, but others certainly favoured these structures.

It was recognised that partnerships between the police and local schools have much to offer and should be actively promoted.



Many participants thought the Police Authority should do more to link the police force to young people by *going out* to consult with community groups in general and with young people in particular – rather than by just inviting individual youngsters to attend official forums.

3.4.7 Special Constables

There was some support from the Partners for the Special Constables scheme, and it was felt the force should consult communities in order to establish whether there is any interest in the scheme.

3.4.8 Equality and Diversity

The Partners did not discuss equalities issues prominently, but there was no suggestion of dissatisfaction with the current treatment of women and minority target groups.

3.4.9 Local Accountability

It is worth repeating here one key conclusion from the discussion of beat managers and community policing. It was stressed by the Partners that community police in general and beat managers in particular should be less *centrally controlled* – instead they should be seen as ‘responsible’ to their communities (rather than just as representatives of the main organisation).

In line with the emphasis on communities and community policing, the Partners stressed that the Police Authority should foster consultation with local communities. It was also suggested that the Authority needs to raise its public image substantially and be more representative of the community.

Some participants were happy to give serious consideration to the direct election of both the Police Authority and the Chief Constable (in the latter case from a short-list of approved candidates).

3.4.10 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were unanimously negative about the prospect of an all-Wales police force. They said it would be too-Cardiff-based and would neglect the distinctive rural needs of North Wales. Some, though, suggested a division in responsibility: a ‘serious crime’ force responsible to WAG or the Home Office and a local community policing organisation responsible to the current Police Authority.



3.5 LOCAL PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

3.5.1 Introduction

The meeting was introduced by Ms Morag Webb, a Police Authority member, and like the other five meetings was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. Following a short introduction about the Government's Green Paper, *Building Safer Communities Together*, a review of the key issues on which people's views were particularly invited, and a question and answer session, the meeting broke into four Workshop sessions that discussed the topics and reported separately to a final plenary session.

The meeting was successful insofar as a total of 38 people attended and took part readily in the discussions of the 'standard' discussion topics summarised in section 2.2 above. The discussions ranged widely and not all of the specific issues were addressed – but, nonetheless, some very important messages came from the discussions.

3.5.2 Information Requirements

Participants thought the police should be more proactive in providing *positive information about the police* to the media at the corporate level. On the other hand, they thought (like the Partners) that beat police should be able to work proactively within their own beat areas.

3.5.3 Charter of Policing Standards

The idea of a police charter was enthusiastically endorsed, and the most important priorities for published service standards were:

- Support of, and feedback of information to, victims
- General performance information
- Response levels and times regarding burglaries and other serious crimes
- Complaints procedures.

3.5.4 Visible Policing

The meeting agreed on the need to make the police a visible and active feature of communities – in particular by going into communities to consult on policing priorities – but always making sure that the meetings are at convenient times and places so older people and minority groups may attend. It was also said that police surgeries are an important form of visible policing at the very local level.



More specifically, the participants favoured:

- Police coming out to meet the public
- Making police officers higher profile in trouble-spot areas (especially near bars, etc)
- Possibly separating the traffic police from the more traditional forms of policing – to counteract the loss of confidence in the police as a result of the concentration on speeding (see below).

3.5.5 Single Non-Emergency Number

The idea of a nationally known number on which to contact the police was endorsed – providing it ensures direct and immediate contact with the local police force in an effective manner. It was stressed that the non-emergency number should be run by non-uniformed support staff who should provide separate lines for English and Welsh speakers.

3.5.6 Working with Communities

It is interesting that some local people as well as business representatives believe there is an *Us-and-Them* culture developing between the police on the one hand and the public on the other – as the former take an ever firmer line on speeding offences. There were a number of references to the *bad press* the force is currently getting as a result of its high-profile speeding policies – and to the tendency for this trend to weaken confidence in the police as an organisation that protects ordinary people from criminals. It was stressed that the police need to be seen to be working with the whole community – and so the force should promote positive news of its success stories that the public can understand and identify with.

Apart from the specific point about traffic offences, the local people emphasised that the uniformed beat police in general need to free themselves from a culture of arrogance towards the public and minority groups – and this is an area where more training is probably needed. Some minority groups felt that the uniform is itself a barrier to mutual understanding in the community context – because it can seem increasingly ‘military’ and ‘forceful’.

More generally, it was felt that the police should show their readiness to listen to public views in order to demonstrate their readiness to work *with* not just *in* communities. In particular, they should make links with young people and minority groups generally.



Partnership forums were valued, but it was felt there needs to be more joined-up thinking and effective co-operation between stakeholders. It was stressed that partnerships are valuable because the police cannot hope to do everything for community safety – so all parties should recognise and acknowledge their mutual dependency.

By not means least in the order of priorities, consultation with the grass roots was also recommended, particularly with minority groups and Welsh speakers.

3.5.7 Special Constables

There was support for the principle of Special Constables, but it was generally felt that they should have only supplementary roles.

3.5.8 Equality and Diversity

The local people stressed that everyone should be treated equally and with proper respect, but there was no suggestion of dissatisfaction with the current treatment of women and minority target groups.

3.5.9 Local Accountability

In line with the emphasis on communities and community policing, the local people stressed that the Police Authority should foster consultation with local communities. They also said that the Authority should raise its public image substantially, be more representative of the community and be more proactive in contacting and getting good news stories in the media.

Some participants were happy to give some consideration at least to the prospect of direct election of the Police Authority; but they also thought that co-option of additional members to the elected body could be successful in widening representation more effectively. All agreed that vacancies on the Police Authority should be publicised more prominently in order to attract a wider range of candidates.

3.5.10 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were unanimously negative about the prospect of an all-Wales police force. They said it would be too-Cardiff-based and would neglect the distinctive rural needs of North Wales. Some, though, suggested that the four Welsh forces might be made responsible to WAG rather than to the Home Office.



3.6 FLINT YOUTHS

3.6.1 Introduction

The meeting was helpfully arranged through Mr Bryn Hughes, Flintshire Youth Forum Development Officer, and was facilitated by Dale Hall, Opinion Research Services. The agenda covered policing issues that were familiar from the participants' own experience of policing. The meeting was successful insofar as a total of 13 youths aged 14 to 17 attended and took part readily. Some important messages came from the discussions. The youths were broadly well-disposed towards the police. They had had numerous experiences of being moved on by the police for skateboarding in non-designated areas, and some of them had been informally 'searched' for drugs.

3.6.2 Information Requirements

The youths had few if any general information requirements, but their own experiences of being moved on and also searched for drugs made them interested in knowing more about their rights in relation to police officers – particularly because they felt the officers were not always polite. In particular, they said they would like to know more about the alleged residents' 'complaints' that led to them being moved on for skateboarding.

3.6.3 Visible and Community Policing

The group generally favoured:

- Making police officers higher profile in trouble-spot areas (especially near bars, etc)
- Targeting major crimes more proactively.

Despite experiencing moves-on and searches, the group approved very much of visible and community policing and they welcomed patrols and community officers as reassuring to the public. Such positive attitudes are particularly pleasing since many of the youths actually thought the community officer(s) they met were somewhat overbearing in manner. It is important that personal failings can be more than compensated for by general approval for the organisation and its proactive measures.

It is striking that all the youths knew their community police officer and generally welcomed his presence in the community.

The youths were also positive about police initiatives in schools. On the other hand, these positive messages should not be taken to imply that the police do not need to work hard to relate in a positive manner to youth; for some of the group



members said they sometimes felt harassed when stopped by patrols.

Despite such experiences, the group felt no hostility towards those joining the police force – and, indeed, the brother of one participant is an applicant.

3.6.4 General Awareness

While generally well-disposed to the police, the youths had very little awareness of the force's management and accountability – mainly because they seemed not to read or watch any form of media that would normally deal with policing issues. Hence, the group's 'insularity' vividly illustrates the difficulties of informing youths or shaping their ideas about policing and public policy issues.

On the other hand, it also shows the importance of front-line community policing that makes youths directly aware of the role and contribution of the police in their areas. When the youths were so 'remote' from media messages, it is striking indeed that word of mouth and personal experience had made them so aware of their local community police officer.

The only senior figure of whom they were aware was the Chief Constable – by virtue of the publicity on *Top Gear* – and by hearing of speed traps from their driver relatives. As a result, the youths' general impression was that the police *persecute motorists unfairly in a sneaky way* with hidden portable cameras.

3.6.5 Accountability

Given the lack of awareness of the group in general, it will not be a surprise that they had absolutely no awareness or understanding of the Police Authority's composition or role. However, they said they were shocked (rather than surprised) at the size of the police budget and they felt it needed careful control.

3.6.6 Local v All-Wales Police Force

The participants were unanimously negative about the prospect of an all-Wales police force. They said it would be too dominated by South Wales and would have no understanding of the North.

