

STRUCTURE OF THE POLICE SERVICE

A structure to fit the role

- 12.1** The structure of the police organization should reflect the role that the police are asked to perform. In the preceding chapters we have made proposals for a police service which is working in partnership with the community at the neighbourhood level and at the level of the local district commander. We have recommended an approach in which policing with the community is the core function of the police, and where decision-making is devolved as far as possible to those responsible for delivering services to the community.
- 12.2** The present organisational structure of the police is the product of decades of security policing. Historically police forces were organized on military lines, and the RUC has retained more traces of this than most, at least in part because of its close working relationship with the military. Headed by the Chief Constable, it has an establishment of two Deputy Chief Constables (although only one post is currently filled) and 12 Assistant Chief Constables or civilian equivalents. Northern Ireland is divided into 3 regions (headed by Assistant Chief Constables, each of whom has a Chief Superintendent deputy), 12 divisions (headed by Chief Superintendents, each of whom has a Superintendent deputy) and 38 sub-divisions (headed by Superintendents). “Community Affairs”, as we have noted before, comes within the purview of the Assistant Chief Constable responsible for “Operational Support”, not within that of the Assistant Chief Constables responsible for the regions, divisions and sub-divisions. (There are also “Community Affairs Units” within sub-divisions, which again shows that, as we observed in Chapter 7, community work is seen as a distinct, specialist activity.) Special Branch, headed by its own Assistant Chief Constable, comprises more than one tenth of all regular RUC officers, and has its own support services including even an aircraft.
- 12.3** This is a police force with a complicated and multi-layered command structure, the development of which has been driven much more by the response to security threats than to the demands of community policing or management efficiency. Many submissions received by this Commission, and many serving or retired police officers, have suggested to us that the structure should be flattened and streamlined, as has been the trend in police services (and other organizations) elsewhere. Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary has recommended repeatedly in his annual reports that the RUC should move to a “Basic Command Unit”¹ structure, removing the divisional tier from the force structure. The RUC’s own “Fundamental Review” of 1996 also envisaged the removal of the divisional layer from the command structure, and the reduction of the number of sub-divisions from 38 to 24. We too believe that substantial restructuring is necessary and, unlike the “Fundamental Review”, we believe that much of it should happen with immediate effect.
- 12.4** *We recommend that there should be one district command for each District Council area.* We have already recommended in Chapter 6 that there should be one District Policing Partnership Board for each District Council and police district. Making local government, local police and local

¹ A Basic Command Unit is a geographically based unit, large enough to be broadly self-sufficient, reporting direct to the chief officer team at police headquarters.

policing partnership board boundaries coterminous should strengthen the relationship between the police and an identifiable community, and enhance the responsiveness of the police to the community's concerns and priorities. Because of its size, the Belfast Council district should be split into four sections – North, South, East and West, as noted in Chapter 6, with one police district command and one District Policing Partnership Board sub-committee for each section. But otherwise the police district commands should match the council areas. There would therefore be 29 district commands, unless it is decided to reduce the number of district councils. We have heard a suggestion that the Assembly may in time decide on somewhere between 10 and 15 councils. Should this happen, the police district commands should also be brought into line.

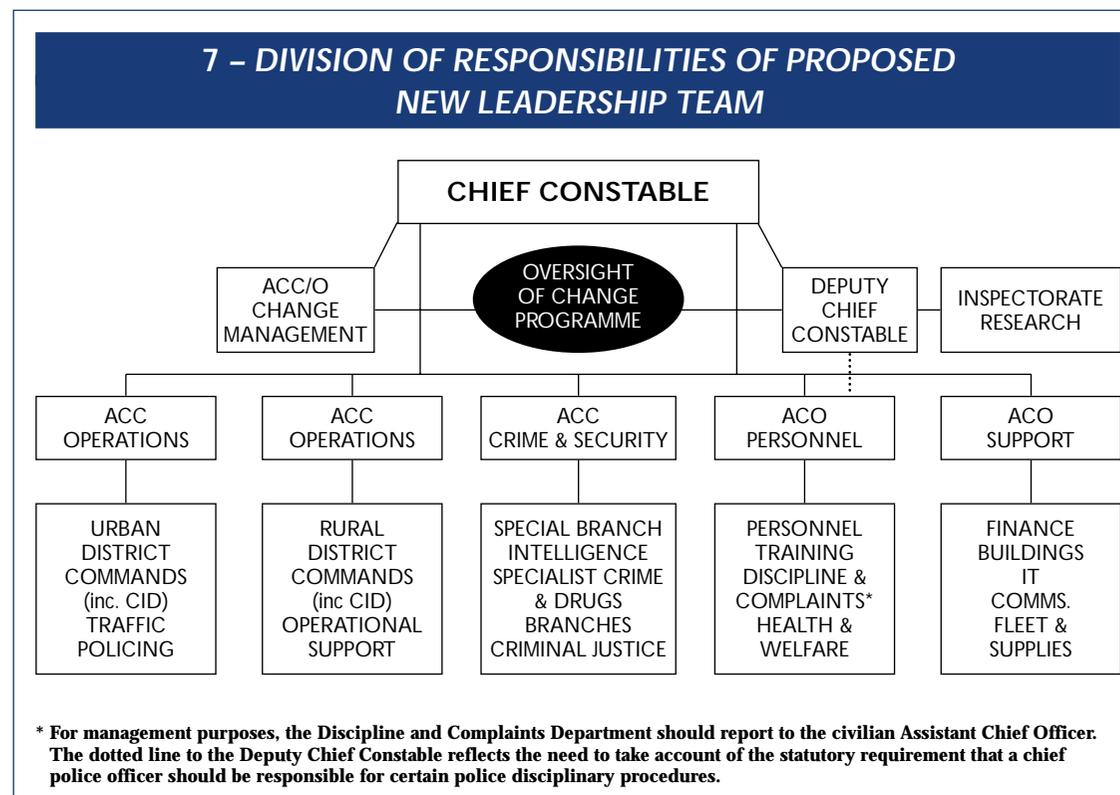
- 12.5** Matching the police district to the District Council areas does not make perfect sense in terms of resource management in those council areas which have a small population, such as Moyle (pop. 15,000). In Great Britain the trend is now towards Basic Command Units covering areas with populations in the range of 70,000 – 200,000. However, while in the longer term, particularly if the number of District Councils is reduced, it would be right for each police district to become a Basic Command Unit, we believe that in present circumstances the greater need is for robust arrangements for accountability at the local level. For this reason we have recommended that police districts should correspond to District Council areas, although it is of course unrealistic to expect every district to have a self-sufficient command unit, including CID and other specialist police functions. *In general we recommend that each district command should be headed by a Superintendent and resourced sufficiently to be self-contained for day-to-day policing purposes and capable of marshalling strength to cope with most unexpected demands. However, in the districts with small populations we recommend that the commander should be a Chief Inspector, and that the districts should draw on assistance from larger neighbouring district commands for functions in which it is not feasible for a small command to be self-sufficient.*
- 12.6** The district commanders will give the best service to their local communities if they are empowered to take decisions locally and if they report directly to police headquarters. *We therefore recommend the removal of the divisional layer of management and the regional headquarters, and that there should be a direct reporting line from each district commander to the appropriate Assistant Chief Constable at central police headquarters. District commanders in smaller council areas, whatever their rank, should have such a direct reporting line, reflecting the accountability arrangements recommended in Chapter 6. We also recommend much greater delegation of decision-making authority to district commanders than is the case now with sub-divisional commanders, including control over a devolved budget and all police resources in their district.*
- 12.7** Some respondents suggested to us that there should be a number of separate regional police services, or that “community policing” might be delivered by one or more services operating at the local level while certain other policing tasks should be performed by a higher level or central police service (sometimes called “two-tier” policing). We have considered these options but reached the clear view that a decentralised but unified police service is greatly to be preferred. There are several reasons for this.
- 12.8** We recognise the useful role played by wardening services employed by District Councils or other agencies, as well as part-time reservists and neighbourhood watch initiatives. These are supplementary to, and supportive of, the role of neighbourhood police officers as we conceive them and will continue to be so. We do not favour separating “community policing” from other

policing tasks. It is a central theme of this report that policing with the community should be the core function of the entire police force. We would certainly reject any idea of an upper tier of policing superior to neighbourhood police officers, and implicitly excused from community policing obligations. Moreover, an arrangement whereby community-based police services dealt with local or lower-level matters, while a centralised police force without local credentials intervened to deal with heavier tasks, would seem likely to exacerbate the divisions in Northern Ireland society rather than heal them – the very opposite of what the Agreement and this Commission are seeking to do. There are also salutary experiences elsewhere in the world of localising police services to the point of fragmentation. The Dutroux report, for example, found that problems of communication between police departments in Belgium had contributed to the appalling paedophile atrocities there. We learned, on a visit to the Basque region of Spain, of serious problems arising from poor coordination between the three police services operating in that area. Northern Ireland is a small area with a population smaller than that served by many constabularies in Great Britain or by the Garda Síochána in the Republic of Ireland. A multiplicity of police services would not lead to effective or efficient policing.

Police Headquarters

12.9 *We recommend a slimmer structure at police headquarters – one that reflects the shift of focus towards community policing and the delegation of responsibility to district commanders, and permits a more rigorous and strategic approach to management. Specifically, we recommend:*

- a. that there should be no more than one Deputy Chief Constable.* We have considered whether a Deputy is necessary at all, as opposed to a designated senior Assistant Chief Constable who could deputise for the Chief Constable when necessary. For the moment, not least because of the need for strong, dedicated change management over the next few years to implement the proposals in this report, we have concluded that a Deputy position is justified.
- b. that the number of Assistant Chief Officers be reduced to six from the present twelve.* The reduction from 38 sub-divisions to 29 area commands, coupled with greater autonomy for area commanders, should allow the number of regional Assistant Chief Constables to be reduced from three to two. Special Branch (see paragraph 12.10) and Crime Branch should, we believe, be made responsible to a single Assistant Chief Constable. “Community Affairs” should no longer be a part of a separate Assistant Chief Constable command but should be the mainstream of the work of the regional and area commands. We doubt that the remaining elements of the “Operational Support” command justify an Assistant Chief Constable position in the longer term. But for the next few years there will need to be sufficient command resilience at police headquarters to implement the extensive programme of change recommended in this report. So we recommend that an Assistant Chief Officer post be retained for this purpose. As we recommend in paragraph 10.3, the post should be filled by a specialist in change management, who could be either a police officer or a civilian. The Assistant Chief Constables currently responsible for support services should, however, be replaced by civilian equivalents (see also Chapter 10 on Management and Personnel) and two such “Assistant Chief Officers” should in our view be sufficient to handle all support services – one in charge of all personnel issues, including occupational health and safety issues, and one in charge of finance and administration (box 7 shows the division of responsibilities between the six ACCs/ACOs).



c. *that the position of “Deputy Assistant Chief Constable” should be deleted forthwith.* These posts, which are peculiar to the RUC, are held by people with the personal rank of Chief Superintendent. Superintendents, in charge of district commands or headquarters departments, should report directly to Assistant Chief Constables or Assistant Chief Officers and not, as at present, indirectly through layers of Chief Superintendents and Deputy Assistant Chief Constables.

d. *that the rank of Chief Superintendent be phased out* and positions now held by Chief Superintendents be held in future by Superintendents (except of course for those Chief Superintendent positions, such as divisional commands, which we have recommended for deletion).

Special Branch

12.10 Special Branch consists of about 850 officers, some 10% of a regular force strength of 8,500. It has its own support units, including 280 uniformed officers, a training unit of 90 and even an aircraft. Several respondents have described it to us as a “force within a force”, and RUC officers, serving and retired, have made similar comments to us, a common observation being that sub-divisional commanders often know very little about the activities of the Branch in their areas. We noted in the preceding chapter that Special Branch has enjoyed priority in the deployment of IT systems, while CID officers have had no direct access to computers at all.

12.11 Special Branch has played a crucial role in countering security threats over the years and preventing or intercepting terrorist attacks. Officers from several other law enforcement agencies – including the Metropolitan Police, the Garda Síochána and the FBI – have emphasised the importance of Special Branch’s counter-terrorist capabilities being maintained. Recent events have made it clear that it will be a number of years before a confident judgment can be made as to whether the security threat in Northern Ireland is in long term decline. The police service must

remain equipped to detect and deal with terrorist activity, and for this they will need a good intelligence capability. Intelligence work requires special procedures. (See also paragraphs 6.43 to 6.45.) On the other hand, we do not think it healthy to have, in either reality or perception, a “force within a force”, and we do not believe that the present size of the Special Branch establishment is fully justified.

- 12.12** *We recommend that, as a first step, Special Branch and Crime Branch be brought together under the command of a single Assistant Chief Constable.* We understand that a good proportion of Special Branch work is already done in support of crime investigations rather than on security matters. Experience elsewhere has shown that a decrease in paramilitary-related crime is frequently offset in a peaceful situation by a growth in other types of organised crime, often involving violence. There are therefore good arguments of both effectiveness and efficiency for linking Special Branch and Crime Branch. It is also common practice in other British constabularies, and in the Garda Síochána, to have a “Crime and Security” command.
- 12.13** *We recommend that there should be a substantial reduction in the number of officers engaged in security work in the new, amalgamated command.*
- 12.14** We do not believe it would be practical to give full management responsibility for security policing to district commanders, but *we do recommend that security officers be required to keep their district commanders well briefed on security activities in their districts, and that district commanders should be fully consulted before security operations are undertaken in their district.*
- 12.15** *We further recommend that the support units of Special Branch be amalgamated into the wider police service.* The residual establishment of what would then be the security section of the crime and security command should be kept under review. Further reduction would depend on developments in the security environment.
- 12.16** Finally – a point which is not so much a matter of organizational structure, but rather of personnel management and culture – *we recommend that officers should not spend such long periods (15, 20 years or more) in security work as has been common in the past.* We have recommended in Chapter 10 that a tenure policy should be introduced. After five years or so, an officer should be posted elsewhere in the police service, and it should be the rule for all specialist police officers either to begin their careers as part of a patrol team or at least to experience neighbourhood policing at some stage in their career. The point is that all police officers should understand that neighbourhood policing is the core function of the police, and should regard themselves first and foremost as part of a community police service regardless of their current assignment.

Reserves

- 12.17** At present the officer strength of the RUC is almost 13,000, including a regular force of 8,500, a Full Time Reserve of 2,900 and a Part Time Reserve of 1,300. The Full Time Reserve is a direct result of the security situation of the last thirty years with officers engaged on three-year contracts to support the regular force in security-related policing work. Over the years they have become an integral part of the RUC, and have carried out the same duties and borne the same risks as their regular colleagues. The RUC’s own Fundamental Review in 1996 proposed that, in the event of a sustained improvement in the security situation, the Full Time Reserve should be disbanded.

We recommend that the future police service should not include a Full Time Reserve. This is in no way a judgment on the calibre and commitment of the reservists and, as we make clear later, we do envisage that there should be an opportunity for them to apply for the regular service. It is purely a question of how the police should be structured and resourced. In Chapter 13 we discuss the implications for the size of the police service and we make recommendations as to the arrangements to be made for those officers now serving in the Full Time Reserve.

12.18 The Part Time Reserve is a locally recruited body. It has had very low recruitment from Catholic/Nationalist areas and is therefore overwhelmingly Protestant in composition. It does, however, have a much larger proportion of women officers – 35% – than the police service as a whole. We see great advantage in a part time reserve locally recruited from every neighbourhood in Northern Ireland, including a large proportion of women officers, enhancing the connection between the police and the community. As we noted in Chapter 9, we also envisage that part time reservists should substitute for regular officers who may need to be redeployed temporarily to deal with public order policing demands. *We recommend an enlarged Part Time Reserve of up to 2,500 officers, the additional recruits to come from those areas in which there are currently very few reservists or none at all.*