

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

The Best Value Review of Consultation has been a joint project by the MPS and the MPA. The review has challenged the current consultation processes in the MPS, compared these with other public bodies, consulted widely inside and outside the service and considered the subject of fair competition.

The main findings are listed below followed by a summary of the recommendations.

Findings

The main findings of the review are:

1. No-one appears to have overall responsibility for consultation. Individuals can be identified for specific surveys but it is unclear who will be the owner of the process and the strategy.
2. There is currently no method of effectively communicating consultation methods and procedures throughout London.
3. Borough OCUs are carrying out a lot of local consultation but it has proved impossible to identify exactly how much money and time is being spent. On the one hand this could be seen as a positive finding as it appears that consultation is not considered as a separate topic but as an integral part of all other policing activities. However this has made it difficult to cost current consultation. There are certain central budgets and functions that may be costed readily, but this only represents a small proportion of what is going on.
4. There are many areas of good practice and of professional work undertaken by the MPS. However the quality and quantity of consultation varies between different parts of the organisation. There is a general lack of consistency, little opportunity to share best practice, and no formalised systems in place to promulgate the results of consultation elsewhere in the organisation.
5. PCCGs are set-up, organised and managed inconsistently. A few of them are functioning in a satisfactory manner and it will be important to ensure that the energy and goodwill invested in them by their members is acknowledged and encouraged. However there are no agreed standards or criteria for PCCGs against which they can be measured. PCCGs do not appear to be representative of the community.
6. In most police areas the practice is for PCCGs (or their equivalents) to be the responsibility of the Police Authority who administers and funds them, and for questionnaires and surveys to be overseen by a professional unit within the police force.
7. There is no effective Pan London coordination of PCCGs.
8. The MPA would like greater community participation in consultation. The community and voluntary sector is keen for such increased involvement; representatives from a wide range of bodies participated in the review and are

seeking ways to bring together their constituent members and the MPA/MPS. They would welcome the opportunity to offer their specialist knowledge.

9. The consultation process is not currently understood and the planned timetable is not published. This raises particular problems for representatives of some community or voluntary groups who may need time to respond because of the infrequency, say, of their contacts with their own membership.
10. The research has shown that questionnaires and surveys are not particularly well regarded. Some of the members of the Independent Challenge Panel were particularly dismissive of what they termed 'market research'.
11. The current Public Attitude Survey is used as part of the preparation of the Policing Plan but limited use is made of it apart from that.
12. There are tensions between the Top-down and Bottom-up approaches. Many of the people consulted locally about policing plans (for the MPS or for their Boroughs) feel that lip service is being paid to their views. In many instances people are asked to comment on draft priorities with insufficient time being given for them to discuss the draft with, say, the communities they represent. There is a sense of frustration that local views do not appear in the overall plans, and that local plans are dominated by centrally applied priorities and targets.
13. The MPS is poor at giving feedback. People are realistic enough to accept that their views may not, in the end, be reflected in the final results of a particular piece of work, but there is a sense of frustration that the MPS generally fails to inform people consulted what happened, and why.
14. The public sector generally is reviewing its consultation. A lot of individual pieces of advice and guidance about best practice have been identified, which is valuable, but there are few strategies in place.
15. There is a gap in reaching certain sections of the community. There is no one single solution available for consulting so-called 'hard to reach' groups. Ensuring total participation is unrealistic, however an innovative and imaginative approach is essential to reaching as many sections of the community as possible.

(It is recognised that the term 'hard to reach' can be misleading and is not always liked, however, it is a general term used in consultation and therefore has been used in this report).
16. The timetables and processes for Policing Plan consultation and Crime and Disorder consultation do not seem to be effectively co-ordinated. This is inefficient and looks unprofessional to our partners.
17. There is no central support for local consultation other than financial. Specifically there is no training.
18. There is a general lack of experienced professional consultation personnel outside headquarters.
19. There is a need for a structured, publicised way of consulting with the public, that is both open and transparent.
20. It would be inappropriate to outsource the whole consultation process as consultation is, and should continue to be, at the heart of policing.

Recommendations

The main recommendations are:

1. A planning timetable should be produced and widely circulated. This should include references to all the centrally and locally instigated consultation.
2. There must be a consultation strategy. This should be owned by the MPA. The implementation of the strategy should be the joint responsibility of the MPA and MPS.
3. There needs to be a communication strategy to disseminate the consultation strategy and timetable.

MPA

4. The MPA should assume responsibility for PCCGs, their constitution, their funding and their administration as part of its move towards ensuring there is community participation in consultation.
5. PCCGs should be re-branded and re-formed and the new model should be adopted. This will involve the implementation of a new common constitution. Membership should be retained but adjusted to reflect the new constitution; the aims and objectives should be fully identified and performance measures put in place. All PCCGs should engage in e-consultation via a link to the MPA web site. Arrangements for effectively co-ordinating PCCGs should be established as soon as possible.
6. A professional Community Consultation Officer (CCO) should be appointed by the MPA to work with each Borough. The CCO should work closely with the Borough Liaison Officer and with the Community Safety Officer. The CCO should be assisted by an Administrative Officer.
7. The CCOs and their staff should provide professional and administrative support to PCCGs.
8. The CCO should seek to work with local community and voluntary sector bodies to ensure appropriate consultation is carried out. To assist with this, it is recommended that a MPA challenge fund is set up by the MPA for which the CCOs can bid for progressing initiatives with these local groups (the costings assume a MPA challenge fund of £0.25 million per year). The CCOs should also be encouraged to bid for external challenge funds and to raise funding from other partners. To assist the CCOs, an initial fund of £10,000 per Borough should be made available for the first year of operation of the new system as a one off pump priming facility.
9. A small consultation unit should be formed in the MPA to be responsible for consultation on behalf of the MPA, liaise with the MPS consultation co-ordinator, recruit and manage the CCOs and disseminate best practice. The unit should also set minimum standards and a performance monitoring regime for community consultation carried out by PCCGs and CCOs.

MPS

10. Corporate Development Group (CDG) should be responsible for consultation on behalf of the MPS. It should identify and promulgate best practice, set minimum standards and establish a performance monitoring regime for corporate and local consultation undertaken by the MPS. It is recommended that a new post is created to carry out these functions on behalf of Director CDG.
11. CDG should be responsible within the MPS for the consultation required for the annual policing plan.
12. Borough Commanders should be responsible within the MPS for the consultation required for Borough planning, for ensuring that the local consultation required as part of the corporate planning takes place, that consultation for crime & disorder strategies is undertaken and that all the consultation processes are co-ordinated.
13. The MPS should continue to have a centrally based survey unit (PIB3) to undertake corporate survey work and advice on local surveys, particularly for HQ units.
14. Consideration should be given to combining those aspects of the current Public Attitude Survey required as part of the annual planning cycle with surveys being planned elsewhere.

Implementation

Implementation should be carried out over an eighteen months period.

The CCOs and their administrative support will need to be appointed. The preferred option is for an average of one CCO per PCCG (and one PCCG per Borough – there are currently three in Westminster) but it may well emerge that some Boroughs can share a CCO whilst others may need two. An alternative option is for outer Boroughs to share CCOs but for inner Boroughs to have dedicated staff.

Costs

Records of consultation activity are not kept (apart from in key areas), which has hampered the costings for the review. The cost comparisons given here therefore, only relate to these key areas. It is assumed that other costs will remain constant.

The current costs are estimated as £1.3m (direct) and £2.7m (opportunity). The proposed solution will cost either £2.1m (direct) and £1.8m (opportunity) or £1.8m (direct) and £1.8m (opportunity) depending on the number of CCOs appointed.

The strategy will require a minimum of £0.5 million per year additional direct expenditure.

There will be some costs related to the proposed implementation team. These need to be finalised once the implementation process is agreed.