



Collaboration/Merger -
Norfolk/Suffolk - Suffolk Position Statement

1. Strategic Position

- 1.1 On 24 April 2009 the Suffolk Police Authority (the Authority) considered its strategic position on collaboration and merger with Norfolk at an informal meeting. This was followed on 22 May 2009 with formal consideration of the issue at a full meeting of the Authority (see Paper PA09/36).
- 1.2 At this latter meeting the Authority reaffirmed the position it had reached at its earlier meeting, namely that it supports collaboration as a means of jointly delivering services where it addresses the Protective Services capacity gap and/or creates efficiencies that can be reinvested in frontline policing, but it does not support the merging of the two policing areas of Norfolk and Suffolk in the foreseeable future.

2. Historical Context

- 2.1 The report "Closing the Gap" in 2005 concluded that the 43 force structure was no longer fit for purpose. This led directly to the national amalgamation debate of 2005/06 wherein, amongst other things, the design criteria for a strategic force was identified as a minimum of 4,000 officers or 6,000 officers/staff.
- 2.2 In July 2006 the debate on amalgamation of forces as a way forward to close the gap in protective services came to an end. There were a number of unresolved issues, namely:
 - start-up/transitional costs;
 - precept equalisation; and
 - accountability at a sub-strategic level.
- 2.3 Following the collapse of the amalgamation agenda authorities and forces were urged to collaborate to enhance the protective services and to drive out savings and efficiencies (see McNulty letter of 31 July 2006).
- 2.4 During the amalgamation debate the Authority formally refused to volunteer for amalgamation on two occasions, in both December 2005 and April 2006. It had a number of concerns including the anticipated cost of amalgamation, the time that would be taken to recover the costs of reorganisation from efficiency savings, the impact on partnerships, the loss of efficiency and performance, and the diminution of service for Suffolk. There was also extensive local support against amalgamation.

3. Collaboration with Norfolk

3.1 Suffolk has been involved in a number of long-standing collaborations eg air support with Cambridgeshire and Essex and the Project to provide police investigation centres with Norfolk (and formerly Cambridgeshire). Following receipt of the McNulty letter Suffolk embarked upon collaboration projects within the Region. More recently and from 2007, in view of the lack of regional progress, it has been involved with Norfolk in what has been labelled as "the Preferred Partnership".

3.2 The Authority considered a paper (Paper PA07/87) in December 2007 upon the collaboration with Norfolk. The purpose of the collaboration was stated as being to enable the development of operational capacity and capability and to realise cash savings to invest in the delivery of frontline services. In particular the report stated:

"This process is not about the potential now, or in the future, to merge the two forces The Chief Constables believe collaboration provides an opportunity for both forces to add up to more than the sum of their individual parts. Both forces will retain the independent identity they and their communities value, yet make the step change in delivery of support and frontline services required".

3.3 As a result of the year 1 of this collaborative venture, formal agreements to collaborate under s23 of the Police Act 1996 have been executed during 2009 in respect of a joint Major Investigation Team, a joint Witness Protection Unit (involving Cambridgeshire too) and a joint Technical Interventions Manager. Whilst work was undertaken to progress towards a shared HR function the proposals in this regard will not be progressed (see Paper PA09/36).

3.4 A year 2 programme of collaboration projects are being pursued and which cover:

- uniformed/specialist operations;
- special branch;
- source handling;
- fraud and financial investigation;
- automatic number plate recognition; and
- technical interventions stage 2.

4. Merger Discussion

4.1 In March 2009, as the first year of the collaboration venture with Norfolk drew to a close, all parties considering the year 2 projects raised the questions of where collaboration was ultimately leading and what was the longer term vision for collaboration. In this context Norfolk Police Authority and Norfolk Constabulary suggested that the two Authorities should consider a voluntary merger.

4.2 The Authority considered this matter as set out above at paragraph 1.1 and agreed its strategic position upon collaboration/merger with Norfolk as per paragraph 1.2. The reasons for continuing the collaboration venture and for not agreeing to pursue merger are set out below. This position has been communicated both verbally and in writing to Norfolk.

5. Strategic Context

- 5.1 Whilst the Comprehensive Spending Review will continue with some certainty for 2010/11, from 2011/12 a much harsher financial context is likely.
- 5.2 Cashable efficiencies will become increasingly more difficult to find.
- 5.3 At present Suffolk can maintain top quartile performance. However the harsher financial climate is likely to impact upon local policing performance.
- 5.4 Suffolk must take steps to enhance its protective services.
- 5.5 The Authority and Constabulary will need to develop a strategic response to meet this context.
- 5.6 Collaboration is one way of addressing both the finance and protective services issues.

6. Factors which have guided the Authority to its current Strategic Position on Collaboration/Merger

Financial

- 6.1 A merger with Norfolk would bring difficulties over harmonising the differing precept levels between the two policing areas where there is a differential of 19%, with Suffolk being the lower of the two in level of precept. Harmonisation was an insurmountable difficulty in 2006 even where policing areas wished to amalgamate. This precept differential would lead potentially to an increase in cost for policing in Suffolk as Suffolk Council Taxpayer's rates gradually increase to catch up with Norfolk rates. Any diminution in Norfolk's rate of precept would lead to significant reductions in the levels of precept income generated in Norfolk. Merger would inevitably lead to increase in cost for Suffolk Council Taxpayers or a diminution in levels of service as efforts to harmonise are pursued.
- 6.2 Figures to suggest savings of £43m in the two policing areas are unsubstantiated and have been produced with an insufficient degree of rigour. As a consequence they are unreliable evidential material upon which to make a decision to pursue a merger agenda.
- 6.3 The financial recovery period for merger would be extensive as up front investment would be required and would be a significant drain on any savings yielded in the early years of merger. There would be significant costs involved in achieving, amongst other things, common IT systems, harmonisation of terms and conditions and a common identity.

General

- 6.4 Suffolk is one of the lowest cost but best performing forces in the country.
- 6.5 Amongst the shire forces Suffolk has the second lowest cost for policing per head of population.

- 6.6 Suffolk has some of the highest levels of public confidence in policing in the country.
- 6.7 Suffolk's commitment to collaboration accords with and is in line with the current thinking of the Home Office wherein collaboration is seen as the key to generating the funds necessary for additional protective services capacity and achieving the benefits of merger by different means.
- 6.8 Joint efficiencies of £645K have been achieved in year 1 of the collaboration with Norfolk.
- 6.9 Suffolk is making very good progress on landing the police investigation centres project with Norfolk - itself a ground-breaking blue ribband collaborative project of great complexity in the policing world.
- 6.10 Suffolk has a programme of collaboration for year 2 with Norfolk to deliver further significant efficiencies as well as pursuing other collaboration opportunities with partners elsewhere in the policing and public sector family.
- 6.11 Collaboration requires high levels of energy and it is important that this energy is not unnecessarily diluted by a debate / investigative work on merger and when the obstacles to merger, apparent in 2006, still remain unresolved, outstanding and valid at the present time.
- 6.12 A merger with the policing area of Norfolk would create a force below the critical mass identified for a strategic size force in 2005/06. This would mean that extensive collaboration with other policing areas would still be required to address the protective services gap.
- 6.13 The new authority for the merged policing areas would be less representative of the locality and there is a consequent risk of remoteness.
- 6.14 The current recession, awaited outcome of the local government review and the prospect of a general election in the next 12 months creates a climate of great uncertainty. It is considered that this uncertain financial and political climate is not a propitious time to consider a major organisational reorganisation.
- 6.15 The pursuit of merger would likely have a significant negative impact on performance in the short to medium term.

7. Progressing Collaboration

- 7.1 The Authority believes that collaboration provides the best opportunity for the continuous improvement of protective services and the generation of efficiencies whilst maintaining and enhancing the current high levels of performance.
- 7.2 The Authority's consistent approach to the merger debate needs to be recognised, understood and respected if collaboration is to flourish.
- 7.3 Governance of the collaboration agenda is important to the Authority. It believes that good governance leads to good outcomes. Collaboration is an issue of

strategic and financial significance. Collaboration is identified in the Annual Governance Statement 2009 as a significant governance issue. As such the Authority needs to be fully involved. In this regard the Authority confirms its satisfaction with its current governance arrangements. It will require to see comprehensive business cases put forward for consideration of collaboration. The Authority considers that its decision-making processes are entirely adequate for making timely decisions on collaboration. With eleven Authority meetings scheduled per year and with numerous other decision-making opportunities should that be necessary the Authority provides a nimble decision-making mechanism. An appropriate degree of forward planning and preparation will ensure that the Authority is provided with the right information at the right time to make timely and well-informed decisions. The Norfolk and Suffolk Joint Statutory Committee (JSC) will govern those collaborations where s23 agreements have been entered into. However the Authority is satisfied that there is no diminution in the effectiveness of pursuing the collaboration agenda by retaining decision-making capability to itself. The position on decision-making by the JSC was made clear in Paper NS09/1 to the first meeting of the JSC.

- 7.4 There are valuable lessons to be learnt from year 1 of collaboration with Norfolk. They will help inform the progress and delivery of the year 2 programme and beyond. It will be important to work upon the features of the relationships that are essential to make collaboration a success. There is a need to learn and adapt together in a complex environment whilst respecting the cultural differences and approaches of the two policing areas. In order to capture the learning from year 1 a targeted, independent and time-limited study should be undertaken without delay and which will inform how year 2 is planned, managed and delivered. The Authority considers that this will yield considerable benefit and help deliver the requisite degree of trust and mutual understanding necessary for collaboration.
- 7.5 In order to deliver the considerable benefits of collaboration the respective energies of each policing area must be directed to achieving that upon which there is agreement - the need to collaborate.
- 7.6 In the consideration of its position the Authority has been fully cognisant of its statutory duties including in particular the requirements of article 4 of the Police Authorities (Particular Functions and Transitional Provisions) Order 2008.