

**E.R**

Friday, 3 March 2006

**HOME OFFICE**

**Police Force restructuring**

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. Charles Clarke):** Further to my written statement to the House on Monday 6 February, I should like to make a statement to report progress on the review of police force structures.

This review was announced in September 2005 and followed the publication of HMIC's report, *Closing the Gap*, which revealed stark shortcomings in the current arrangements ability to meet the policing needs of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The current 43 force structure in England and Wales has been in place for some thirty years. Much has changed in society since then and it is my responsibility as Home Secretary to ensure that the arrangements for policing are such that the current challenges can be tackled effectively. It is worth repeating my vision for the police service. The police service should be close, responsive and accountable to the communities it serves, supported by larger forces with the capacity and specialist expertise to protect the public from wider threats such as serious and organised crime. I asked the leadership of the police service to propose options for restructuring and I set out clear criteria against which those options would be assessed, alongside our commitment to roll-out neighbourhood policing in all areas by 2008.

My statement on 6 February explained that for Wales and three English regions – the North East, the North West and the West Midlands – there was only one acceptable option based on the HMIC assessment of the cases put forward. I asked the representatives of the police forces and authorities in these areas to work closely with me on how to take forward the option which will be of greatest benefit to their communities. I should say that the majority of these police areas have indicated support for change, and a wish to maintain dialogue with my Department about managing this process in the interests of policing in their areas. I am pleased to be able to announce the results of that joint working today.

Greater Manchester Police will continue to stand alone as a strategic force.

Cumbria and Lancashire Constabularies and Police Authorities have requested, in accordance with the provisions in section 32(3)(a) of the Police Act 1996, that I make the necessary alterations to allow their two areas to amalgamate into one new strategic force area. I will now consult the two Authorities on the terms of the necessary order with a view to making it in May. My officials will work closely with the areas concerned to address the necessary implementation and transitional issues and to ensure that the amalgamation is properly resourced. The new force would come into being on 1 April 2007.

As for Cheshire and Merseyside, and the forces in the North East, West Midlands and Wales, I am satisfied, on the basis of the protective services assessment undertaken by HMIC and our evaluation of the financial and other aspects of the business cases submitted to us in December, that it would be in the interests of the efficiency and effectiveness of policing for the forces in each of these areas to merge. I am accordingly today giving notice to all the police authorities, local authorities and chief constables in the affected areas (and, in Wales, the Welsh Assembly Government) of my intention to merge the following police force areas, setting out my reasons for proposing the merger and specifying the general nature of the provisions to be made:

- Cheshire and Merseyside
- Cleveland, Durham and Northumbria
- Staffordshire, Warwickshire, West Mercia and West Midlands
- Dyfed Powys, Gwent, North Wales and South Wales

In accordance with sections 32 and 33 of the Police Act 1996 these police authorities, local authorities and chief constables now have until 2 July to submit any objections to the proposed mergers. I will carefully consider any objections received. My officials should continue to work closely with these areas also to address implementation issues. Subject to that consideration I would propose to lay the necessary draft orders for approval by both Houses before the summer recess with a view to the new forces coming into being from 1 April 2007.