Annual Joint APCC and NPCC Conference

Police Reform

# Time for the police to establish a true network in the public interest

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Speech by Sir Thomas Winsor, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary

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## Introduction

I was admitted as a practising lawyer 35 years ago this week.

As many of you know, five of those years were spent as the economic regulator for the railways in Great Britain.

So mine is a very different professional background to those of many others in policing today. And there are things which can be brought to policing from elsewhere which may be quite unfamiliar – you could even say strange – to those who have spent most of their working lives in policing. But policing should always be receptive to new ideas and better ways of doing things.

Today, I'd like to talk briefly about two instruments and techniques from the world of economic regulation which I think could, with advantage, be adapted and adopted for the police.

They are force management statements and a network code.

## Force management statements

Every well-managed enterprise needs a sound understanding of the demand it faces in the years ahead, the state of its assets which it will use to meet that demand, and how much money it will have.

And in relation to those assets, the enterprise's senior management need a sound understanding of their condition, capacity, capability, serviceability, performance and security of supply.

The production of annual proof – in the form of a published statement in a specific format – that the enterprise has a sound understanding of future demand and asset

condition against projected income is mandatory in all the principal safety-critical, asset-intensive, monopoly, essential public services – gas, water, electricity and railways. These are regulatory requirements, and they're usually referred to as network management statements[1].

In my view, there is no good reason why this shouldn't be done in the most essential safety-critical public service of all.

I shan't say much more about this today, as I have already explained force management statements in communications to police and crime commissioners and chief constables, and of course at some length in my last State of Policing report[2].

So that – extremely briefly – is force management statements. My thanks go again to the 14 pilot forces, the National Crime Agency and the College of Policing for their help in their design so far.

**Network code**

The other instrument which I think the police service desperately needs is a network code. This is also something the UK has done for its essential public services several times already. It's existing technology; it's tried and tested and it works.
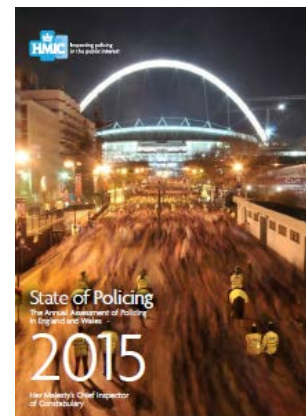
The Home Office has stressed it doesn't run the police, and wants the police service to reform itself, in a manner consistent with Government policy of there being substantial improvements in police effectiveness and efficiency.

One of – perhaps the biggest – golden keys to greater police effectiveness and efficiency is a radical improvement in police ICT – its specification, its procurement, its use and its development over time.

I suggest we can all agree that the 43-force model of policing in England and Wales has been a serious obstacle and drag on the police establishing a truly efficient and well-functioning system for the flow of information and intelligence across force boundaries.

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[1]    In the railway industry, the network management statement looks forward ten years; in the electricity industry, the period is seven years. In the police, the current proposal is for the statement to look forward four years.

[2]    *State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2015*, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, London, February 2016, pages 64-69.

The remedy which police chiefs have been pressing for over 50 years has been force mergers – the creation of nine, or seven, or five very large forces. However, such a remedy doesn't solve two very significant problems.

The first is that such a model would perpetuate force boundaries – admittedly far fewer than we have today - which, without more, will continue to operate as barriers.

The second is the enormous drain which force mergers would for years impose on management focus and time, not to mention the expense of them; that heavy price would be paid by police and crime commissioners and chiefs, and also by the public. Such massive upheaval reminds me of the wise words of Sir Robert Reid, the chairman of the British Railways Board in the early 1980s:

> "When you re-organise, you bleed".

So I suggest we approach the problem from the opposite direction.

In my office, and I am sure those of many of you, I have a large map showing the police areas of England and Wales (and Northern Ireland).

That map contains a lot of black lines, and those are the lines which delineate the boundaries of the 43 police areas. Those lines are there primarily for administrative, accountability and other purposes. If we aren't going to have force mergers, then those lines will stay where they are.



However, when it comes to the flow of information and intelligence which the police – and, in time, others – need, then those lines should be dissolved to nothing. There should be no barriers.

And the way in which we achieve that is the establishment of a completely interoperable system of police ICT.

That's where a network code comes in.

A network code is a decision-making mechanism for the establishment, revision and abolition of common operating standards and procurement of ICT. As I have said, this is existing technology from other essential public services.

To achieve this requires all police and crime commissioners and chiefs to sign up to a pooling of their sovereignty, in a way which I will describe. In my view, this is necessary if we are resolved that if police ICT is not to continue to march at the pace of the slowest soldier, with intermittent mutinies and desertions, to the peril of public safety – think of Soham – then we need a proper mechanism for getting the ICT in police to be truly and universally interoperable, and for procurement and development to be done efficiently, economically and well.

So what does this mean in practical terms?

The purpose and overriding principle should, I suggest, be true interoperability and the efficient, economical and effective establishment and reform of ICT standards and ICT procurement, and the good faith of all in policing in working to achieve that.

It needs the following things, I suggest:

(a)     a proper specification of the parties to the code, with different categories of membership, recognising different circumstances;

(b)     a sound system for decision-making, primarily through voting, with:

   (i)     the allocation of weighted votes;  and

   (ii)    different voting thresholds for different types of decision, for example: a simple majority for some things, two-thirds majority for others, and perhaps as high as a 85 per cent majority for others;  but it can never be 100 per cent, because that is what we have today;

(c)     appropriate minority protections, according to well-defined criteria;

(d)     perhaps special voting or veto rights for special categories of participant;

(e)     well-defined and narrowly-specified rights to opt out, exemptions and exclusions;  and

(f)     appropriate relief provisions for special cases.

There would also have to be a well-developed procedure for the proposal, analysis and consideration of standards and new ways of working with ICT, so everyone has their say, and everyone's individual circumstances are fully taken into consideration.

And ICT suppliers might also be given a role – but not votes – to ensure the practicalities and economies of ICT development are properly understood and at the right time.

There would also have to be well-developed transitional provisions to take police forces from where they are now to full interoperability.

And of course there should be a mediation and dispute resolution mechanism for different questions.

I proposed all of this in my first State of Policing[3] report in 2014[4], but I'm afraid not much has happened.

So, as I've been very intimately involved in the design, reform and successful operation of this sort of thing in the past, I think I should get this going.

I will shortly propose a paper about this to the police service, including the Police Reform and Transformation Board, and explain the idea in greater detail. It is the essence of efficient self-reform.

I do ask that you approach it with an open mind, and in the realisation that if we don't do this – or something which just as quickly and effectively achieves this objective – then we will be hand-wringing about fragmentation and fracture in police ICT in five and ten years' time.

Let's remember: policing is no longer all local, and there aren't 43 best ways of specifying, acquiring and using ICT.

The risks to police efficiency and effectiveness, and to public safety, are too great for the police service to limp along as it does now, stumbling and sometimes falling.

If the public realised just how bad police ICT development works today, their anger would be intense.

And let's remember: our accountability and our duty is to them.

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[3] *State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2012/13*, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, London, 31 March 2014; see in particular paragraphs 102-103. See also *State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2013/14*, HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary, London, 27 November 2014, paragraph 1.26.

[4] And in greater detail in *Policing in the New Dynamic Environment*, speech by HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary at the Royal United Services Institute, London, 29 April 2013; see in particular paragraphs 43-37.