



PRESS INFORMATION

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Police Force Mergers – the options for Bedfordshire

Following instructions from the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, Bedfordshire Police Authority has now submitted its initial options concerning the restructure of police forces in England and Wales.

The options put forward are (in no preferential order):

- Bedfordshire and Thames Valley
- Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Cambridgeshire
- Bedfordshire, Hertfordshire and Essex
- The whole Eastern Region (Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk and Suffolk)

Working to a Home Office template, each of the possible options was scored against a range of criteria, including size, capability to address volume crime and provide professional services, criminal markets and cross-border criminality, co-terminosity with partners' boundaries, identity, command and control and accountability, performance and costs and efficiency.

Following guidance from the Home Secretary, options will be subject to a detailed cost benefit analysis during the next month.

Although Police Authorities and Forces were asked to consider the options of merging with forces in their region (in Bedfordshire's case, the Eastern Region which does not include Thames Valley), the Authority was particularly keen to explore the Thames Valley option further, due to the geographical positioning of these two neighbouring forces.

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Consultation will now take place across the county and Luton, to explain the process: the reasons behind the Government's proposal: why these options have been put forward and what is likely to happen next. Local MPs, community groups, parish and district representatives and other interested partners will be invited to give their views.

Meetings will take place at the following venues:

Flitwick: Flitwick Leisure Centre, 10th November at 2.30pm

Luton: The Hat Factory, Bute Lane, Luton, on 11th November at 10.00am

Bedford: Bedfordshire Police Authority, Bridgebury House, Woburn Road, Kempston, on 15th November, at 6.00pm

Leighton Buzzard: The White House, Hockcliffe Street, Leighton Buzzard on 18th November at 2.00pm.

Chairman of Bedfordshire Police Authority, Peter Conniff said today: "We have put forward the best options as we see them at the current time, within the guidelines stipulated by the Home Secretary. Whilst we, alongside many other Police Authorities, would have been happy to retain our local primacy, the Home Secretary's instructions made it perfectly clear that to stay as we are now was not an acceptable option.

"My primary concern remains the provision of an improved policing service for the people who live and work in Bedfordshire and Luton. Exactly how this is achieved remains to be seen. I should also stress that large-scale job losses are not envisaged as the Home Secretary has said that this exercise is about efficiency not cost-saving.

"Having put forward our initial options we have organised a significant programme of local consultation to obtain the views of local people. We hope that they will take this opportunity. "

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Deputy Chief Constable Martin Stuart said: “The time scale given for initial stages of the process have been particularly tight. There is to be a much more detailed assessment within the coming months and this will much better gauge the public’s view on the whole issue of amalgamation.

“What I can say is that the staff of Bedfordshire Police, officers, police staff, Special Constabulary and other volunteers are continuing to work extremely hard to provide a service to the public of Bedfordshire. I have every confidence that during this significant period of change, they will continue to do so.”

The Home Secretary placed the burden on local Forces and Police Authorities to put forward the options for change. Consultation for these initial options included officers, staff and other Criminal Justice and local government agencies.

Further information on the current position and the work being carried out will be available on the Police Authority’s website www.bedfordshirepoliceauthority.co.uk . Anyone who has any views is strongly encouraged to visit the website and either email their thoughts through to info@bedfordshirepoliceauthority.co.uk or write to the Clerk of the Police Authority, John Atkinson, at Bedfordshire Police Authority, Bridgebury House, Woburn Road, Kempston, Bedford MK43 9AX

Background information:

Earlier this year, the Home Office commissioned Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) to explore whether the existing 43-force structure in England and Wales is sufficiently robust to handle the whole spectrum of protective services, while simultaneously tackling volume crime. The HMIC report, “Closing the Gap”, concluded that the structure is no longer fit for purpose and in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness, it must change.

The report also states that in HMIC Denis O’Connor’s opinion, bigger forces are more likely to reach the required standard, and therefore recommends that new "strategic forces" of at least 4000 officers be set up across the country. In Bedfordshire the current police officer strength is 1232.

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The Home Secretary agreed with those conclusions and on 22 September 2005 wrote to the Chief Officers and Chairs of Police Authorities, setting out how the restructuring process should be taken forward, instructing them to put forward their preferred options by 28 October 2005.

Authorities and Forces are now required to carry out a more detailed cost benefit analysis of their options. The Home Secretary seeks a single option to be put forward by the end of November. By 23 December a full cost benefit analysis of that option must be provided for his consideration.

There is no specific blueprint for the new strategic forces and Police Authorities and Forces are now expected to consult widely with the community.

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