

**Proposals of the Executive Committee  
on  
the Future Structure of Policing**

**October 2005**

**Contents**

<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>2. THE COMMITTEE’S TASK</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>3. PREMISES FOR CHANGES AND FOR THE COMMITTEE’S PROPOSALS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>4. THE COMMITTEE’S PROPOSALS</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>5. THE COMMITTEE’S PROPOSALS IN FURTHER DETAIL</b> .....	<b>5</b>
5.1. THE METROPOLITAN AREA .....	5
5.2. WESTERN REGION .....	6
5.3. THE WEST FJORDS.....	6
5.4. NORTHERN REGION .....	6
5.5. EASTERN REGION .....	6
5.6. SOUTHERN REGION .....	6
5.7. REYKJANES REGION .....	6
<b>6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CHANGES</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>7. LEGISLATIVE AMENDMENTS</b> .....	<b>7</b>
7.1. THE POLICE ACT .....	8
7.2. THE CODE OF CRIMINAL PROCEDURE.....	9
7.3. OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS.....	9
<b>8. TRANSFER OF RESPONSIBILITIES TO THE DISTRICT COMMISSIONERS’ OFFICES</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>9. CHANGES IN THE FUNCTIONS OF THE NATIONAL COMMISSIONER OF POLICE AND THE TRANSFER OF FUNCTIONS</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>10. SUMMARY, TIME-FRAME AND CONCLUSION</b> .....	<b>11</b>

## **1. Introduction**

By a letter dated 27 May 2005, the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs, Björn Bjarnason, appointed a three-man executive committee and commissioned it with the task of expressing in further detail the proposals of the task committee on the future structure of policing, taking account of the discussions of the matter that have taken place among the police and the district commissioners.

More specifically, the letter commissioned the executive committee with formulating proposals on the number, size and command of the police regions. In this connection, the committee was also entrusted with examining ideas on special police commissioners, directors of customs and executives of the power of prosecution, and to give attention to the division of financial resources between authorities in connection with the changes it proposed in the size of the police regions and the structure of policing. Furthermore, the committee was given the task of drawing up a survey of the legislative amendments necessary in connection with the expansion of police regions.

The letter of appointment from the Minister of Justice emphasised that the purpose of enlarging the police regions was to raise the range and effectiveness of services provided by the police to the public in Iceland; police capacity was to be increased in all fields of both ordinary policing and criminal investigations. This meant, amongst other things, that it should be possible to maintain round-the-clock police functions in as many localities as possible across the country, with capable investigative departments to handle investigations of the more complex cases from all over the country.

The following were appointed to the committee: Stefán Eiríksson, Deputy Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs (Chairman), Kjartan Þorkelsson, Hvolsvöllur District Commissioner, and Óskar Bjartmarz, who at the time was Chairman of the National Association of Police Officers and is now Chief Superintendent of Police in Seyðisfjörður.

## **2. The committee's task**

When the executive committee began its work, considerable discussion had taken place among the district commissioners and police officers on the future structure of policing following the submission of the Report by the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing which was published at the beginning of this year. The main proposal made by the task committee in its report was to reduce the number of police regions in Iceland to 5-7. While the opinions that have been voiced on this, and on other proposals made in the report, have not been unanimous, it is nevertheless clear that almost all the district commissioners and police officers who have expressed a position on the matter consider that there is a need to change the structure of policing in Iceland, though they have different ideas on how this should be done.

In the view of the executive committee, it is important for the further development of policing in Iceland, in all fields, that changes be made to its structure. The committee also believes that proposals regarding changes should be both clear and realistic, with no uncertainty as to whether they would produce the results aimed at, and furthermore that it would be better to make changes in a relatively large number of small steps rather than vice versa so as to give better opportunities to evaluate the changes that are made. Last but not least, it is important that a broad positive consensus of support be obtained for the changes that are made.

The committee began work as soon as it was appointed. It examined the ideas and proposals already in existence and evaluated the need for change. It also considered the possible ways of effecting changes, including ideas regarding the appointment of separate police commissioners; following this, the committee's formulated its proposals. In the middle of September, the committee presented its proposals, in outline, to a meeting of district commissioners and a meeting with the leaders of the National Association of Police Officers. The committee received various comments and reactions to its proposals at these meetings; after considering these, it gave the proposals presented in the present report their final form.

### **3. Premises for changes and for the committee's proposals**

The Report by the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing presented a detailed account of the basis on which that committee made its proposals. The report contains an account of the current state of affairs in Iceland, the number of police regions and the reasons why the work of many of the regional forces, and consequently the services they provide, are restricted because they are so small; this is stated without in any way disparaging the efforts of the police commissioners and police officers involved. The reason cited for this in the report is that high, and growing, demands are being made of the police and their work. The police are expected to attend to all their functions professionally and in accordance with the needs of a changing community, and also the needs of the local population in each region. The police are expected to be efficient and their work is expected to produce good results; at the same time, they are expected to be open and to respond positively to the needs of their ordinary private citizen, to be visible in their work and above all to guarantee the safety of the general public and the government authorities. In addition to this, the police are expected to have the capacity to handle the investigation of complex criminal cases, to assimilate, both rapidly and effectively, innovations in their work, to play an active role in international police collaboration and to ensure that all cases are fully investigated within a reasonable length of time and in conformity with the provisions of law, international human rights conventions and the Constitution.<sup>1</sup>

Obviously, it is difficult for a small regional force to live up to all the demands mentioned above. Demands regarding improved utilisation of public funds, and regarding greater specialisation to cope with criminal investigations, also make it necessary to think in terms of creating larger regional forces, particularly in the metropolitan area.

It is in the light of the foregoing, i.e. the increased demands being made of the police regarding a higher level of services in all areas and the demand for improved utilisation of public funds, that the executive committee has made its proposals. The committee believes that its proposals would secure the goals set out by the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs in the committee's letter of appointment.

### **4. The committee's proposals**

As is stated above, the Report by the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing proposed a structure with 5-7 regional police forces, but if this is not adopted, then the task committee proposes greatly increased collaboration between the regional forces on all matters. Following thorough consideration and examination by the District Commissioners'

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<sup>1</sup> For further details, see pp. 35-36 in the Report of the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing.

Society, including a society meeting on these matters held earlier this year, the society proposed having 12-16 regional police forces, instead of the present figure of 26.

In its work, the executive committee has attempted as far as possible to integrate the views mentioned above and also others that were expressed at its meetings with the District Commissioners' Society and the National Association of Police Officers. On this basis, the committee makes the following proposals on the structure of policing.

It is proposed that there be fifteen regional police forces in Iceland. Of these, seven should be designated as key forces and be entrusted with the operation of investigative departments and handling the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex cases, as defined in further detail by the Director of Public Prosecutions. The key forces should also take the initiative on establishing a co-ordinated shift system within a defined area, so attempting to promote the adoption of round-the-clock manning of police stations at more localities than is the case at present. In this way, collaboration between the forces in each region could be increased, thus making all police monitoring more efficient and raising the effectiveness of ordinary policing. These proposals allow for the transfer of responsibility for policing functions in the very smallest regions from the local district commissioner to one of the nearby forces.

Entrusting seven regional forces with the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex cases would substantially strengthen the capacity of the police to investigate crime in all parts of the country. It would increase the scope for specialisation in each and every locality, in addition to which criminal investigations in general would be boosted, with extremely well-trained and experienced investigators being involved in the investigation of all the larger and more complex cases.

It is assumed that ordinary policing would be improved in all parts of the country, and that the number of police stations would remain unchanged.

## **5. The committee's proposals in further detail**

Here follows a description of the committee's proposals in further detail as they apply to each geographical region, the establishment of key policing regions and the transfer of policing functions from the smaller regions to nearby forces. In its proposals regarding the location of key forces, the committee takes account mainly of topographical features, i.e. an attempt is made to have the forces based in a central position within the region.

### ***5.1. The Metropolitan Area***

It is proposed that Reykjavík be the key policing region, and that the police forces in the metropolitan area, i.e. in Reykjavík, Kópavogur and Hafnarfjörður, be amalgamated into a single force. The main reason for this is that at present, these three forces work closely together at ordinary policing under the direction of the Police Telecommunications Centre. Furthermore, the metropolitan area is one cohesive area from the point of employment and commercial activity, and the municipalities in the area collaborate closely on various matters, e.g. the operation of a fire brigade, rubbish disposal, public transport, etc. The investigative departments of the three forces in the area deal, to some extent, with cases involving the same individuals, and it is likely that greater efficiency would result from having a single unified police force for the whole area.

### **5.2. Western Region**

It is proposed that Borgarnes be the key policing area. The police forces in Búðardalur and Hólmavík would then be merged with the Borgarnes force, which would also handle policing in the Reykhólahreppur district. Other offices in the region with the command of police forces would be those in Akranes and Stykkishólmur.

### **5.3. The West Fjords**

It is proposed that Ísafjörður be the key policing region. The area now covered by the force in Bolungarvík would be merged with the Ísafjörður region; so too would the present Patreksfjörður region, with the exception of the Reykhólahreppur district (see above).

### **5.4. Northern Region**

It is proposed that Akureyri be the key policing region, and that the Ólafsfjörður and Siglufjörður regions be merged with it. Other offices in the Northern Region with the command of regional police forces would be those in Blönduós, Sauðárkrúkur and Húsavík.

### **5.5. Eastern Region**

It is proposed that Seyðisfjörður (Egilsstaðir) be the key policing region. The Eskifjörður district commissioner's office should also undertake police command functions, with the police force at Höfn í Hornafirði being merged with it. In choosing the location for the key force in this area, the committee took particular account of the fact that Egilsstaðir is centrally placed in the region and that Seyðisfjörður handles increasing volumes of international traffic, both by air and by ferry.

### **5.6. Southern Region**

It is proposed that Selfoss be the key policing region. Other district commissioners' offices exercising command of police forces should be those in the Vestmannaeyjar islands and at Hvolsvöllur; the police force at Vík í Mýrdal should be merged with the Hvolsvöllur force.

### **5.7. Reykjanes Region**

It is proposed that Keflavík be the key policing region. In the committee's view, it would be natural to consider a complete merger of the Keflavík Police and the Keflavík Airport Police; however, as is generally known, the latter force is under the control of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. A merger of these two forces would result in a substantial boost to policing functions in this region, as has been demonstrated by the good collaboration that has taken place between them in recent years.

## **6. Financial implications of the changes**

On the financial side, the changes proposed here are relatively simple to implement. It is envisaged that only a small part of the tasks handled by those small forces that will continue

to operate independently would be transferred to the investigative departments of the key forces. This is based, amongst other things, on the available crime statistics.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, it would be necessary to make a close examination of the staff numbers in each individual region and how these resources are utilised, and of the numbers of superior officers, the numbers of officers in the investigative departments and the numbers of ordinary police officers. Naturally, structuring of the regional forces in the future must take account of the Regulations on ranking within the police.

As regards individual regions, the following must be borne in mind in connection with financial allocations and transfers:

- Metropolitan Area. Funding now allocated to the Hafnarfjörður and Kópavogur Police would go to the Reykjavík Commissioner of Police. At the same time, the proportions of police cases handled by the head offices of these forces would have to be considered, with appropriate funding transferred to the Reykjavík Police.
- Western Region. Funding now allocated to the forces in Búðardalur and Hólmavík would go to the Borgarnes Commissioner of Police. In these proposals, it is envisaged that policing in the Reykhólahreppur district would come under the Western Region, and the appropriate transfer of funding would have to be made to meet this cost. As regards an investigative department, it is envisaged that this would be located at the key regional headquarters in Borgarnes, and thus that the funding now allocated for a police detective at Akranes would be redirected to the Borgarnes force.
- West Fjords. It is envisaged that the all funding currently allocated for policing by the forces in Bolungarvík and Patreksfjörður would be channelled to the force at Ísafjörður, with the exception of funding for the Reykhólahreppur district, as noted above.
- Northern Region. Funding now allocated to the forces in Ólafsfjörður and Siglufjörður would go to the force at Akureyri. It is also envisaged that funding currently granted for the position of a detective in Sauðárkrókur would be channelled to the Akureyri force.
- Eastern Region. Funding now allocated to the force at Höfn would go to the force at Eskifjörður, while the funding for a detective at Eskifjörður would be redirected to the force at Seyðisfjörður.
- Southern Region. Funding now allocated to the force at Vík í Mýrdal would be redirected to the force at Hvolsvöllur, and funding for a detective in the Vestmanneyjar islands would be channelled to the office at Selfoss.

## **7. Legislative amendments**

Under the committee's proposals outlined above, the structural changes in policing involve the transfer of the investigation and prosecution of the more serious and more complex criminal cases to seven key police forces, these same key forces taking the initiative on collaboration with other forces in their geographical areas on the establishment of a joint shift system for the police in the area. At the same time, it is envisaged that policing functions be transferred completely from the very smallest district commissioners' areas to police forces located nearby.

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<sup>2</sup> For further details, see Afbrotatölfræði ('Criminological Statistics') 2003. This contains detailed information on the total numbers of criminal offences during that year, broken down by category and the police regions in which they were committed.

In this connection it would be necessary to give attention to legislative amendments, in particular to the Police Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure.

### **7.1. The Police Act**

In the Police Act, the main amendments would need to be made to Articles 6 and 8, in which provision is made for police regions and the command of the regional forces and police investigations. For convenience, the committee has compiled the following proposal for the wording of these articles in conformity with the proposals presented in this report.

#### **Article 6. Police regions and command of the regional forces.**

Iceland shall be divided into 15 police regions. Command of the regional forces shall be exercised by the Reykjavík Commissioner of Police, who shall be in command of the police in the region including the City of Reykjavík, Seltjarnarnes Municipality, Mosfellsbær, Kjósarhreppur, Kópavogur, Garðabær, Hafnarfjörður and Bessastaðahreppur, and the district commissioners based in the following locations: 1. Akranes, 2. Borgarnes, 3. Stykkishólmur, 4. Ísafjörður, 5. Blönduós, 6. Sauðárkrúkur, 7. Akureyri, 8. Húsavík, 9. Seyðisfjörður, 10. Eskifjörður, 11. Hvolsvöllur, 12. Vestmannaeyjar, 13. Selfoss, 14. Keflavík. A deputy police commissioner shall be employed at the office of the Reykjavík Commissioner. The regions under the command of the police commissioners according to items 1.-14. of this paragraph shall be determined in a regulation issued following receipt of the comments of the police commissioners and local authorities involved.

Police commissioners shall exercise command of the regional police forces in their regions. They shall attend to the day-to-day control and administration of the police in their regions and be responsible for the execution of the work of the police in their regions. The shift structure, and ordinary policing in the police regions in the Western Region, Northern Region, Eastern Region and Southern Region shall be co-ordinated and made uniform as far as possible. The Minister of Justice shall issue further regulations on the form that collaboration is to take and the regions that are to be involved in it.

Police commissioners shall be in overall charge of search, rescue and salvage operations on land. Rescue and salvage operations under the arrangements for civil defence are subject to separate legislation. The minister shall issue regulations on collaboration between the police and scout rescue teams.

Under special circumstances, the Minister of Justice may entrust a party other than the regular police commissioner of a region with the command of the police on a temporary basis.

The Minister of Justice may appoint another person who meets the legal requirements instead of the regular police commissioner in order to handle an individual case.

#### **Article 8. Police investigations.**

The police shall carry out the investigation of offences in consultation with the prosecutors.

Special investigation departments shall be operated at the offices of the following police commissioners:

1. at the office of the Reykjavík Police Commissioner, serving his region;
2. at the office of the Borgarnes Police Commissioner, serving his region and those of the police commissioners in Akranes and Stykkishólmur;
3. at the office of the Ísafjörður Police Commissioner, serving his region;

4. at the office of the Akureyri Police Commissioner, serving his region and those of the police commissioners in Blönduós, Sauðárkrókur and Húsavík;

5. at the office of the Seyðisfjörður Police Commissioner, serving his region and that of the Eskifjörður Police Commissioner;

6. at the office of the Selfoss Police Commissioner, serving his region and those of the police commissioners in Hvolsvöllur and in the Vestmanneyjar islands, and

7. at the office of the Keflavík Commissioner of Police, serving his region.

The Minister of Justice shall issue further regulations, in accordance with the proposals of the Director of Public Prosecutions, concerning the types of offences to be investigated at the special investigation departments under paragraph 2. Other offences shall be investigated in the police areas in which they are committed (*cf.*, however, items *a* and *b* of the second paragraph of Article 5). In addition, the Minister of Justice shall set rules on how investigations are to be directed, when offences are to be investigated under the direction of the National Commissioner of Police under item *a* of paragraph 2 of Article 5 and when commissioners of police are to seek the assistance of the National Commissioner of Police with an investigation under item *b* of paragraph 2 of Article 5.

A forensic department shall be operated at the Office of the Reykjavík Police Commissioner to carry out on-site investigations, comparative studies and other similar studies and to preserve and maintain the police fingerprint archive and photograph archive. The Forensic Department shall serve all the regional forces in Iceland, and the National Commissioner of Police shall set further rules regarding its operation.

## ***7.2. The Code of Criminal Procedure***

Work has been in progress recently on a review of the Code of Criminal Procedure, and the Minister of Justice is planning to present a bill on a new code to the Althingi shortly. Furthermore, the Minister of Justice has announced that separate legislation on the prosecution may be enacted. In the light of this, the committee does not intend to make any specific proposals regarding amendments to the Code of Criminal Procedure, but wishes instead to point out that attention will have to be given to making the appropriate provisions in the new code to allow for the transfer of the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex cases to the seven key police forces. It is essential that there be no discrepancy between the Police Act and the Code of Criminal Procedure on this point. In this connection, reference is made to Articles 27-29 of the code.

## ***7.3. Other laws and regulations***

The committee points out that attention will have to be given to amending legislation other than statutes named above in which reference is made to the police and the investigation of criminal cases. This will include changes in the wording of the Act on State Executive Power at the Local Level. The appropriate changes will also have to be made in the Regulation on the direction of police investigations and collaboration between police commissioners on the investigation of criminal cases, etc.

## **8. Transfer of responsibilities to the district commissioners' offices**

The committee's proposals allow for responsibility for policing functions to be transferred completely from at least nine district commissioners' offices, i.e. those in Hafnarfjörður, Kópavogur, Búðardalur, Patreksfjörður, Hólmavík, Siglufjörður, Ólafsfjörður, Höfn and Vík í Mýrdal. It is also proposed that policing in the Reykjanes area be the responsibility of a single district commissioner's office in Keflavík; at present, policing at Keflavík Airport is under the command of the Keflavík Airport District Commissioner, who is under the supervision of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

According to this scheme, the number of district commissioners' offices without policing responsibilities would rise by at least nine; at present, the Reykjavík District Commissioner is the only one who is not responsible for policing in his district. Clearly, this would result in most of the offices listed above being left with additional capacity to undertake new responsibilities. The committee calls for special attention to be given to transferring tasks to the aforementioned offices; in many cases it should be possible to do this without great additional funding. The Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs has already presented ideas on transferring certain functions from the ministry to the district commissioners outside the metropolitan area; functions mentioned in this connection include the publication of the Law and Ministerial Gazette and the Official Gazette, the issue of permits to foreign nationals for the purchase of real estate, permits for adoption, the ratification of charters and the supervision of funds, authorisation and supervision of real-estate agents and the licensing and supervision of funeral undertakers and authorised translators. Other functions both large and small could be mentioned in this connection, e.g. supervision of the collection of fines and legal costs on a country-wide basis and the production of passports and certificates of other types.

In the view of the committee, the district commissioners' offices would be ideal locations for public administrative functions of many types, and it would be natural to consider transferring such functions to them from other ministries besides the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs. It is important that such transfers be made at the same time as changes are made to the policing structure in the country as a whole.

## **9. Changes in the functions of the National Commissioner of Police and the transfer of functions**

As is discussed in the Report of the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing, expanding and building up the capacity of the regional police forces would create the conditions necessary for a transfer of functions from the Office of the National Commissioner to other commissioners. It is clear that if it is decided to entrust seven regional commissioners' offices with the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex criminal cases, then the regional commissioners' need for the investigative assistance now provided by the Office of the National Commissioner will be considerably reduced. At the same time, it would be natural if the energies of the National Commissioner's Office were focussed more on the administrative side of policing, particularly as regards increased collaboration between the regional forces; the National Commissioner's Office would give assistance and resolve disputes regarding the co-ordination of shift systems between the regional forces and handle functions concerned with strategic planning and financial administration.

When it comes to transferring functions from the National Commissioner's Office to other police forces, the committee wishes to point out that, amongst other things, consideration could well be given to the possibility of transferring the International Department from the

National Commissioner's Office to the combined force in Keflavík, since specialist skills in this area have been built up at the office of the Keflavík Airport District Commissioner in recent years. Various advantages can be seen in harnessing the skills of the regional forces in this way. The transfer of functions from the National Commissioner's Office could be effected in two ways. On the one hand, certain regional forces could be entrusted with the execution of centralised functions, as is the case at present with forensic studies, which are carried out by the Reykjavík Police for all forces in Iceland according to law. The other way would be for the National Commissioner to continue to be responsible for specific functions in the same way that he is at present, but with the authorisation to delegate responsibility for them to certain regional commissioners as his agents. Attention must be given to these alternatives in connection with the legislative amendments (mentioned in the discussion above) which would be necessary if these proposals are adopted.

## **10. Summary, time-frame and conclusion**

In this report, the executive committee presents certain proposals for changes in the structure of policing in Iceland. These are that the number of police regions be reduced to 15, of which seven would be responsible for the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex criminal cases throughout the country. These forces, here referred to as key forces, would also be responsible for co-ordinating their shift systems with those of the forces in their neighbouring regions within their operational areas so as to guarantee a higher level of policing and greater visibility.

The committee's proposals are based on premises for change which are described in detail in the Report submitted by the Task Committee on the Future Structure of Policing in January 2005. If these changes are made, a considerable improvement would result in the services provided by the police all over Iceland. Not only would the quality of criminal investigations be raised and such investigations become more efficient and sophisticated all over the country, but policing would also become more visible and it would be possible to provide round-the-clock police services in more places than is the case at present. The police would also be in a better position to achieve the goals set in the field of policing; these are discussed in detail in the section of the aforementioned report by the task committee which deals with strategic planning, and are also stated in the performance management agreements between the Ministry of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs and individual police commissioners and in those commissioners' plans.

The committee believes that its proposals are such that they could be put into practice at short notice. As is discussed above, they entail legislative amendments, an examination of financial details and the transfer of funds between regional forces; in addition, it would be natural, in the context of these changes, to consider the transfer of functions, on the one hand to district commissioners who will no longer be responsible for policing and, on the other, from the National Commissioner's Office to individual regional police commissioners. The committee proposes that the changes be effected, following the appropriate legislative amendments and an examination of the financial details, etc., as from 1 July 2006. The implementation of the changes should be monitored closely from the outset, with consequences and developments subject to regular evaluation.

In the view of the committee, the proposals it presents here are clear and would achieve the aims stated in its letter of appointment. Obviously, it would have been possible to go further than the committee has done here; on the other hand, it regards it as important to achieve the broadest possible consensus regarding its proposals. Thus, these proposals represent a certain compromise between the various viewpoints that have been expressed on the best means of upgrading policing in Iceland in the next few years.

Reykjavík, 24 October 2005.

Stefán Eiríksson

Kjartan Þorkelsson

Óskar Bjartmarz