

**Supplementary Report by the Executive Committee
on
the Future Structure of Policing**

December 2005

CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. PRINCIPAL COMMENTS AND CRITICISMS	3
2.1. LOCATION OF THE KEY POLICE FORCES	3
2.2. THE WEST FJORDS	4
2.3. METROPOLITAN AREA.....	4
2.4. AMALGAMATION OF POLICE FORCES IN THE SUÐURNES REGION	5
2.5. THE POSITION OF THE SMALLER FORCES	5
2.6. THE POSITION OF A POLICE DETECTIVE IN THE VESTMANNEYJAR ISLANDS	5
2.7. OTHER MATTERS	6
3. SUMMARY	6

1. Introduction

At the end of October this year, the Executive Committee on the Future Structure of Policing submitted its proposals on that topic to the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs. In his letter of 25 October, the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs requested the committee to present its proposals by holding meetings in the places where it proposed to have key police forces, inviting to these meetings the police commissioners of the relevant regions, and representatives of the police officers and the local authorities. The minister asked the committee to present and discuss the proposals on a provisional basis, stating that they had been approved by him in outline, but that their implementation in detail would depend, amongst other things, on what came out of the meetings.

Acting on this, the committee organised meetings at seven locations around the country during the period 7-17 November this year. All the district commissioners, policemen and members of the local councils were invited to these meetings. All in all, more than three hundred people attended these seven meetings, at which the committee presented its proposals and called for the points of view of the aforementioned guests on them and any other comments and opinions that they cared to express. Those present at the meetings were also given the opportunity of submitting their comments and proposals to the committee in writing. After these meetings, some parties requested a special meeting with the committee or its chairman, at which further discussion and presentation of the proposals took place.

This supplementary report gives an account of the comments and criticisms expressed at the aforementioned meetings and the committee's suggestions regarding changes to, or other means of implementing, the proposals it submitted to the Minister of Justice and Ecclesiastical Affairs at the end of October this year.

2. Principal comments and criticisms

The committee's proposals allow for fifteen regional police forces in Iceland, of which seven would be designated as key forces which, according to the proposals, would be responsible for the investigation and prosecution of the larger and more complex criminal cases in their regions, as defined in further detail by the Director of Public Prosecutions. They would also be expected to promote the establishment of a co-ordinated shift system in the police forces in their respective areas. No criticisms or protests were voiced at the meetings held by the committee against this proposal as a whole, but certain criticisms were made regarding the details of its implementation in individual areas, particularly as regards the location of the key police forces in the Eastern and Western regions. The police commissioners, police officers and members of the local councils in the West Fjords also expressed clear ideas on the structure of policing in their region. Members of the local councils and others expressed their concern at the prospect of the transfer of policing functions from the less populous areas, as the distances involved are considerable and their communities tend to be isolated due to difficulties in transport and communications; concern was also expressed regarding the amalgamation of the police forces in the metropolitan area. A closer examination of the main criticisms presented, and the committee's suggestions on appropriate responses, follow below.

2.1. Location of the key police forces

The committee proposed that the key force for the Western Region be situated in Borgarnes; this was done on the basis of the town's geographical position and the assumption that responsibility for policing in the districts under the district commissioners in Búðardalur and Hólmavík districts, and also the Reykhólahreppur district, would be transferred to the Borgarnes District Commissioner. As is described in Section 2.2. below, the committee now proposes a change in this arrangement. Clear

opposition to the original proposal was expressed by police officers, police commissioners and members of the Akranes Local Council at the committee's meeting in Borgarnes. Good reasons were given for this opposition: at present, the Akranes Police have the greatest experience of the functions that it was planned to base in Borgarnes; thus, the changes proposed, involving the transfer of one police detective from the Akranes Police to Borgarnes, would disrupt the functions of the Akranes Police. With reference to this criticism, the committee now proposes that the key police force for the Western Region be based in Akranes.

A situation rather similar to the one in the Western Region, as described above, came to light in the Eastern Region. The committee's proposals allowed for the siting of the key force for the region in Seyðisfjörður (Egilsstaðir); in this, the committee took account mainly of the position and functions of the force in connection with international airport and ferry-port traffic. On the other hand, it must be taken into account that an investigative department has been operated, with good results, for far longer at the Eskifjörður District Commissioner's Office than at the Seyðisfjörður District Commissioner's Office, and furthermore, allowance has been made for the transfer of the command of policing in the district administered by the Höfn District Commissioner to the Eskifjörður Police. In the light of this, the committee proposes that the key force for the Eastern Region be located in Eskifjörður. Nonetheless, it is necessary to give full account to the special position of the Seyðisfjörður Police and to develop specialised knowledge and skills there in the fields of dealing with foreign nationals, border control and drug offences. With this in mind, the committee proposes that no redirection of the funding for the position of a detective take place between the two forces. Also, the committee is of the opinion that it is necessary to develop close collaboration between the Seyðisfjörður Police and the Keflavík Airport Police, e.g. through a collaboration agreement.

2.2. The West Fjords

The committee's original proposals allowed for policing functions to be transferred completely from the district commissioners' offices in Búðardalur and Hólmavík to the Borgarnes District Commissioner. This, and also the proposal to put policing in the Reykhólahreppur district under the control of the Borgarnes District Commissioner, was based both on the proposals of the district commissioners in the region and also on considerations of transport and communications. However, at the consultative meeting held by the committee in Ísafjörður, all those present clearly stated that it would be normal for the Hólmavík district to be included in the West Fjords Region, and this view was firmly endorsed in the letter from the chairman of the Hólmavíkurhreppur Local Council to the committee. It was also found that the local people in the Reykhólahreppur district regarded themselves as belonging to the West Fjords Region. The committee therefore proposes that responsibility for command of policing be transferred from the Hólmavík District Commissioner to Ísafjörður and that policing in the Reykhólahreppur district also be included under the West Fjords policing region. On the other hand, the committee sees no reason to change the proposed transfer of responsibility for policing in Búðardalur to Borgarnes.

2.3. Metropolitan Area

The committee's proposals for policing in the Metropolitan Area had allowed for the transfer of policing functions from the Hafnarfjörður and Kópavogur District Commissioners to the Reykjavík Police Commissioner. At the meeting that the committee held in Reykjavík, concern was expressed that the two smaller forces, and policing in their areas, would not be accorded full importance; it was felt that this would result in a downgrading of services of many types that the police provide to their local communities. These reservations were expressed particularly strongly by the chairmen of the town councils in Hafnarfjörður, Garðabær and Kópavogur. In the view of the committee, it would be vital, if it is decided to merge these three large police forces into one, to embark on a complete restructuring of the police in the metropolitan area with a view of ensuring uniform, high-quality

police services over the entire area. It is vital that all the local authorities in the area collaborate smoothly on this and that the successful collaborative projects that have been in progress in the area be continued. For these aims to be achieved, it is vital that the three forces to be merged under a single command should be involved on a basis of equality in the establishment of the new force. The committee proposes that a new police authority be established in the metropolitan area to take over all policing in the area from the three aforementioned command structures. This should ensure the involvement of all the personnel of the three forces in the formation of the new authority, in addition to which it would emphasise the importance of close collaboration with the local authorities in the region.

2.4. Amalgamation of police forces in the Suðurnes Region¹

Clear support was expressed at the meeting held by the committee in Grindavík with police commissioners, police officers and members of the local councils in the Suðurnes Region, for the committee's proposals on the amalgamation of the two police forces in the region. This would open up various options for developing and building up policing in the region and also at Keflavík Airport. On the other hand, policing at Keflavík Airport is under the administration of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, and under the Act on the Command of the Agreed Defence Area, etc., No. 106/1954, the airport police play an important role in relations between the ministry and the Iceland Defence Force. It is important that further attention be given to how policing in the Suðurnes Region could be brought under a single authority without jeopardizing the command structure in the agreed defence area. The committee wishes to point out that consideration could be given to the possibility of distinguishing between policing functions and other functions administered by the district commissioners involved, as is the case in Reykjavík at present, and would be the case in the entire metropolitan area if the committee's proposals are adopted.

2.5. The position of the smaller forces

The position of two of the smaller forces, which are in a special situation because of the great distance to the nearest neighbouring force and/or isolation in terms of difficulties in transport and communications, was discussed at the meetings that the committee held in Ísafjörður and Egilsstaðir. This refers to Patreksfjörður and Höfn í Hornafirði, in both of which there are currently four police officers. The committee's view is that the interests of the police and of the local communities in these places would best be served if these small forces were to become part of a larger force; this would involve the transfer of these police officers to other localities, with policing in these places being administered from other centres. Making these police officers part of larger forces would put the police in a better position than they are in at present to handle large-scale events in these areas and give them greater flexibility to cover staff absences for various reasons, etc.

2.6. The position of a police detective in the Vestmannaeyjar islands

Considerable criticism was expressed at the meeting held by the committee in Selfoss regarding its proposal to redirect the funding allocated for the position of a police detective in the Vestmannaeyjar islands to the key police force based in Selfoss. The committee regarded this as important in order to contribute to the development of a single investigative department for the whole of the Southern Region. In view of the clear opposition to this idea expressed at the meeting, the committee considers

¹ The area referred to in this report as the Suðurnes Region is called the Reykjanes Region in the Executive Committee's Report on the Future Structure of Policing of October 2006, the two terms being loosely interchangeable. [Translator's note.]

it would be appropriate to give attention to other methods of developing an investigative department in Selfoss without changing the financial allocations to the Vestmanneyjar Police.

2.7. Other matters

Comments on a number of other matters were received, and attention will need to be given to them when the proposals are given expression in legislation. These include the rules on legal venue, since under the proposals it is envisaged that the areas under the administration of some police commissioners would include areas under the jurisdiction of two district courts. Support was expressed at the committee's consultative meetings for its ideas on transferring other functions to the district commissioners' offices, particularly in the case of those offices which would lose their police functions under the new policing structure. The committee wishes to emphasise the importance of publicising proposals on such transfers of functions and putting them into practice at the same time as the new policing structure takes effect.

3. Summary

The executive committee proposes that the changes described above be made to its original proposals regarding a new policing structure. These are summarised below.

- The key police force for the Western Region should be based in Akranes instead of Borgarnes.
- The key police force for the Eastern Region should be based in Eskifjörður instead of Seyðisfjörður.
- The skills and importance of the Seyðisfjörður Police in dealing with foreign nationals, border control and drug surveillance should be recognised and additional support should be given to the force to enable it to pursue these functions. For this reason, no redirecting of funding between forces in the Eastern Region should take place.
- Policing in Hólmavík should be placed under the command of the district commissioner in Ísafjörður instead of being transferred to Borgarnes. The same applies to policing in the Reykhólahreppur district.
- A new police authority for the Metropolitan Area should take over all policing functions from the three forces currently operating in the area.
- Work should be initiated on the amalgamation of the police forces in the Suðurnes Region in collaboration with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. Amongst other things, attention should be given to the possibility of making a distinction between policing functions and other responsibilities of the district commissioners in the area, as is the case in the Metropolitan Area.
- No changes should be made in the financial allocation to the Vestmanneyjar District Commissioner.
- Detailed proposals on the transfer of functions to the district commissioner's offices should be presented at the same time as proposals on a future policing structure.

Reykjavík, 9 December 2005.

Stefán Eiríksson

Kjartan Þorkelsson

Óskar Bjartmarz