



Independent Advisory Group

National Working Party

Monday 2nd July 2007

On Monday 2nd July 2007, Assistant Chief Constable David Collins hosted a working party consisting of around 40 IAG members, Police Authority representatives, Police Staff and Officers. The event was generously sponsored by the Centre of Excellence in Diversity (COED) team at the National Policing Improvement Agency, Bramshill. NPIA provided all facilities, overnight accommodation meals and refreshments at their expense, as part of their work on the COED website project.

The members of this working party had responded to a widely circulated invitation to participate in this national event, which was formulated to provide advice to ACC Collins in his work to produce guidance on the establishment and maintenance of Independent Advisory Groups.

The delegates were assigned to one of four syndicates to ensure an even distribution of perspectives, and were facilitated by staff from North Yorkshire Police and the Gay Police Association. Throughout the day, each syndicate was tasked with considering a series of questions and determining definitive answers. A précis of the outcomes is presented below.

Task 1 (All Syndicates)

The four teams were asked to consider the following question, and given 60 minutes to reach a conclusion.

What does “independent” mean, in terms of the relationship between IAGs, Police and Police Authorities?

A majority of the group responded that the relationship between IAGs and the police service should be based upon mutual trust and respect, as an absence of either would make an effective relationship difficult to sustain.

A substantial majority of the group stated that IAGs and the police service should work together as genuine partners, with the shared aim of improving delivery of policing services to *all* communities, with regard to their different needs.

There was a common view that it is the advice that Advisors provide that is independent, not the relationship, as IAGs were convened by, and are largely funded and supported by, the police service. It was voiced that IAGs are perhaps more impartial than independent.

Advisors were thought not to be responsible for the outcomes of policing decisions made, based upon their advice.

It was understood that the police are held to account to their communities through the respective Police Authority, as it is their statutory responsibility. It was acknowledged that the police are not accountable to IAGs, although two-way communication is an essential part in maintaining effective partnership working.

The group voiced the belief that IAGs are a constituent part of a wide range of community consultation structures. Since the introduction of Neighbourhood Policing, community engagement is at the heart of service delivery. IAGs were recognised as being one piece of the jigsaw.

Few delegates had experienced any collaborative working with Police Authorities, and this was suggested as a possibility to enhance partnership working.

Task 2 (All Syndicates)

The four teams were asked to consider the following question, and given 75 minutes to reach a consensus.

How should a National Steering Board be selected?

There was commonality in the view that only IAG members, or members of the wider policing family with a working involvement with IAGs, should participate. Suggested membership included:

- Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) IAG Lead,
- Association of Police Authorities (APA) IAG Lead,
- Regional IAG representatives, balancing geographical and diversity representation,
- National Policing Improvement Agency,
- Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary Diversity Lead.

Additionally, it was suggested that the following bodies might benefit from engagement:

- Office for Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR), or National Criminal Justice Board (NCJB),
- National Offender Management Service (NOMS),
- National Community Tension Team.

It was strongly felt that the members should be suitably qualified and have a sound strategic and diversity perspective. It was recognised that consideration needs to be given to the relative merits of selection versus election of members.

What should be its remit?

The group was of the opinion that a national steering board should:

- Work with strategic partners towards the aim of improving the quality of policing service delivery to all communities,
- Collate and disseminate good practice,
- Construct and review guidance on IAGs,
- Assist in defining the IAG conference agenda
- Support the work of local IAGs
- Progress issues raised at conference
- Have oversight of project work in the IAG arena

How long should members be on the Board?

The group felt that membership of a national steering board should have a tenure of 3 years, with the opportunity to apply for a second term.

How many people should be on the Board?

There was broad agreement that the group should be a manageable size, probably not exceeding 16 persons.

How should the Board be chaired?

Most delegates felt that a board should be chaired by an independent IAG member, and that the role should rotate on an annual basis.

How often should the Board meet?

There was no clear outcome for this question, although many delegates stated that bi-annual meetings, supplemented (where required) by extraordinary meetings, would probably strike a balance.

Syndicate Tasks

Each syndicate was then asked to consider a specific issue. The results of the deliberations are included below.

Syndicate 1

“Should IAG engagement be evaluated, and how can effectiveness be measured?”

The syndicate debated this question, and proposed the following:

- IAGs could be assessed on the amount and quality of advice given, possibly by maintaining an achievement log.
- Levels of awareness of the role of IAGs might be used as an indicator.
- Perception measures, such as levels of trust and confidence, could be used as a proxy measure.
- Feedback is an excellent tool for measuring success.

Syndicate 2

“What level of security checks should IAG members undergo?”

This matter was hotly debated, and some members had recently experienced issues resulting from changes in vetting procedures.

There was agreement that a security policy should take account of:

- The Human Rights Act, particularly Article 8 (Right to Respect for Private and Family Life)
- The distrust of the police service endemic in certain minority communities
- The deterrent effect on recruiting that robust security checks might have
- The benefits of engaging with individuals who have a police record
- The need for Chief Constables to exercise their duty of care to protect staff and premises
- The necessity to protect sensitive police intelligence, and the legal obligations imposed by the Data Protection Act

Several proposals were put forward:

- No vetting should be conducted, and IAG members should be trusted by the police service;
- A tiered security policy, with no checking for any member unless involved in sensitive matters
- Full security checks for all full members of IAGs, but with no checks for “affiliate” advisors.
- Checks on the Police National Computer and operational intelligence systems for all members, to ensure that they are not *currently involved in relevant criminal activity*.

It is imperative that all parties understand the sensitivities of this matter, and that any subsequent policy decision is likely to be met with resistance from some stakeholders. However, this must not hinder a decision.

The National IAG Conference 2006 included a ballot on the question, *“What levels of vetting should IAG members be subjected to?”*

The results were:

- 43% - Full
- 41% - Partial
- 16% - None

Whatever the ultimate decision, the absence of a clear national policy is a significant blockage that must be addressed. It should be remembered, however, that Chief Constables are not bound by ACPO guidance, although it is relatively rare for derogations.

Syndicate 3

“How should IAG members be recruited?”

It was recognised that IAGs should seek to recruit members from every walk of life, in an effort to reflect the diversity of the area they are working within. The media used to encourage participation should include community centres, radio, internet, print media and places of worship.

Transient/migrant communities can prove difficult to communicate with, and attention must be focused on connecting with them.

Similarly, participation by younger people can be difficult to encourage. Imaginative solutions must be sought to address this.

Networking and partnership working can be an important method of promoting the role of IAGs and thus encouraging engagement.

Syndicate 4

“What, if any, training should IAG members be given as a minimum standard?”

Although there are many skills in which members would wish to receive training, the absence of defined funding streams means that any requests must be prioritised.

Delegates suggested the following as a minimum requirement:

- Briefing on the structure of policing services
- Diversity awareness
- Chairing meetings
- Critical incident awareness
- Assertiveness training

Group Task

In late 2006, Olu Smith of Cambridgeshire IAG created www.nationaliag.org, the first national IAG website. This website was unveiled at the National Conference 2006. Olu has worked tirelessly to maintain the site on his own, and at his own expense.

The Centre of Excellence in Diversity within the National Policing Improvement agency offered to work with IAGs to create a properly resourced utility to support their activities, with editorial control guided by the IAG National Steering Board. This website would have served as a hub, signposting visitors to internal or external information on diversity issues. It would not replace www.nationaliag.org, or any other existing site.

To mark their commitment to supporting IAGs, NPIA fully sponsored this event, and offered to host further events at their facilities in Coventry, Harrogate and Bramshill.

“What content and facilities would you want from an IAG website?”

The debate was dominated by a small number of delegates, opposed to what they perceived as police control of IAG websites. As a consequence, despite heated discussion, little was achieved and a balanced overview was not reached.

The consensus of opinion amongst the handful of impassioned contributors to the discussion was that the police service should fund Olu Smith’s continuing development of www.nationaliag.org, and the offer of support from NPIA should be rejected.

Conclusion

The day proved largely positive, with some excellent debating of issues. The results of these discussions will contribute to the development of the final draft of the guidance document.

However, as a result of the manner in which the last workshop was conducted, the NPIA Centre of Excellence in Diversity have re-assessed their engagement with IAGs. Because of the hostility of certain members of the workshop towards their involvement, the NPIA COED have terminated the project to assist in the development of a fully resourced IAG website, and have withdrawn sponsorship of future National IAG Steering Group events.

Since that decision was taken by NPIA COED, Cambridgeshire Police have reviewed their support of IAGs and decided that they should be wound-up, believing that they are no longer vital given the wide range of other community consultation and engagement options available through Neighbourhood Policing methodology. Regrettably, this means that Olu Smith now feels unable to continue with his maintenance of www.nationaliag.org and has withdrawn from the process.

Any volunteers who wish to take over the management and maintenance of the site should contact Olu to discuss its future.

Next Meeting

The next meeting, which was scheduled to take place in October at NPIA Ryton, Coventry, has been cancelled following the withdrawal of sponsorship by NPIA.

We are now seeking sponsorship of future events, and any member with suitable facilities who feels able to accommodate and feed approximately 40 delegates free of charge in October is asked to make contact with Bill Scott.