Chief constable preparation, selection, tenure and retirement in the 'New Landscape of Policing'
CHIEF CONSTABLE PREPARATION, SELECTION, TENURE AND RETIREMENT IN THE 'NEW LANDSCAPE OF POLICING’
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1. Introduction

On 18 July 2015, The Times described senior police leadership as being ‘in crisis’ owing to the 2012 police reforms that heralded the ‘New Landscape of Policing’ (HASC 2011). The following year the Home Affairs Select Committee expressed concern about the low number of applicants for chief constable vacancies (HASC 2016;15) and in March 2016 Sir Tom Winsor stated the behaviours of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were having a ‘chilling effect’ on the recruitment of talent to chief constable posts. Twenty-six chief constables retired between April 2015 and March 2017 and there is a question as to whether the ‘pipeline’ of officers through the Strategic Command Course (SCC) is sufficient to meet future requirements.

The College of Policing’s Leadership Review (2015) stated that chief officers are highly visible, exposed to multiple systems of accountability, and responsible for maintaining their force’s reputation. They have an extraordinary burden of responsibility for ensuring the effectiveness and integrity of police work. The review acknowledged chief constables can find themselves isolated, receive limited preparation for the role, and sometimes lack both support and constructive challenge. This paper was commissioned by Chief Constables’ Council to understand if the police service is experiencing an unprecedented turnover of chief constables, to consider the pressures faced by those occupying the rank and the perspectives of officers considering applying to become a chief constable. The paper builds on the College of Policing’s Chief Officer Appointments Surveys Results and Analysis (2017) and asks:

Are chief constables becoming less experienced in the rank?
How well do retired chief constables feel they were prepared for the role?
Why there are limited numbers of applicants for chief constable vacancies?
What are the factors behind the increased turnover of chief constables?

The work will identify broad findings and propose recommendations for consideration by Chief Constables’ Council and other stakeholders.

A blended methodology was adopted to incorporate both a quantitative and qualitative approach that engaged past, present and future chief constables as well as serving HMIs, PCCs and a senior Home Office representative. The ‘time in rank’ of 382 individuals who have held the offices of commissioner, chief constable, deputy commissioner and assistant commissioner in England and Wales since 1980 was analysed to test the hypothesis that chief constables currently remain in office for a shorter period than their predecessors. This analysis was supported by thirteen semi-structured interviews of chief officers who retired between April 2015 and March 2017 to inform an understanding of the pressures of the role. The use of retired chief constables offered the advantages of perspective and candour that might not have been achieved in interviews with serving officers. Seventy assistant chief constables and deputy chief constables responded to an electronic survey regarding the factors influencing their decisions when considering whether to apply for chief constable vacancies. Seven further interviews were conducted with current PCCs, HMIs and a senior Home Office official to capture the perspectives of critical stakeholders involved in the governance and oversight of policing. Finally, one serving chief constable was also interviewed and six serving chief constables reviewed a draft and commented on the document. All interviewees were given guarantees of anonymity. References likely to indicate the identity of individuals have been depersonalised to ensure comments are un-attributable and remain confidential.

The term ‘chief constable’ includes the chief constables of all Home Office forces as well as the ranks of commissioner, deputy commissioner and assistant commissioner in the Metropolitan Police.
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Service (MPS) and City of London Police. Fulltime Presidents of ACPO (since 2003) and the Chair of the NPCC are also included within the analysis. Individuals holding the rank of chief constable in other police forces, such as British Transport Police, Civil Nuclear Constabulary and MOD Police are excluded from this study owing to different governance arrangements and conditions adopted by organisations not subject to Home Office oversight. During the period this paper was written the IPCC was replaced by the IOPC. However, all interviews mentioning the IPCC predate the establishment of the IOPC and refer to the practices and investigations of the IPCC.

The paper will begin by considering the tenure of chief constables between 1980-2018 to assess whether there has been an increase in the ‘churn’ of chief constables since the 2012 police reforms. The document will then use the interview material and survey results to explore the process of becoming a chief constable by considering perceptions of the preparation, application and selection processes. The third section of the paper will examine the main challenges faced while performing the role that contributed to the decisions by chief constables to retire. The penultimate section of the paper is used to capture the reflections of the retired officers on their careers. The document this then brought to a close with a brief conclusion and summary of the eleven recommendations.

2. Chief constables 1980-2018

![Graph](image)

**Figure 1: Chief constable tenure in England and Wales 1980-2018**

For policing in England and Wales, the period between 1980 and 2018 was characterised by significant social and political change, a series of high profile critical incidents and pressure to initiate comprehensive institutional reform. Between April 1980 and March 2018 382 officers have held the rank of chief constable or the MPS equivalent. A year by year snapshot of the period spent at the rank of chief constable (as opposed to the time spent as a chief constable in a single organisation) was undertaken to test the hypothesis that policing in England and Wales is currently experiencing an unprecedented turnover of chief constables and that current post-holders are less experienced
than their predecessors. The findings of this work are presented in figure 1.

The analysis demonstrates that since 1980 there has been a steady decrease in the tenure of chief constables culminating in an unprecedentedly short average period in rank of 3.8 years in 2018. In respect of chief constables outside the MPS the average length of service in the rank is 3.65 years, for officers working at the chief constable equivalent ranks in the MPS the average tenure is 4.63 years. It is of note that between 1980 and 1996 officers served at the rank of chief constable for longer periods outside of London. However, in 1997 this phenomenon was reversed with officers serving longer at chief constable rank in the MPS than their non-MPS colleagues. Although it is difficult to prove causality a sharp fall in the tenure of non-Metropolitan chief constables in 1997 coincided with the Police Act 1996 reflecting a radical shift in police governance and an enhanced HMIC and Audit Commission inspection regimes which increasingly focused on delivery against performance indicators and value for money. A restructuring of the MPS in the mid-1990s may also have contributed to this change. A similar reduction in non-MPS chief constable tenure occurred in 2002 ahead of the introduction of fixed term appointments and extensions for senior officers (Police Regulations 2003; Regulation 11). More recently 2013 and 2017 saw the further loss of experienced chief constables relating to the PCC elections of 2012 and 2016. A PCC acknowledged this phenomenon:

Chief constable tenure can relate to the PCC turnover. When a new PCC comes [my force’s chief constable] would have one year and then it is likely that there would be an opportunity for a new PCC to appoint. It has not been created in that way. I think chief constable tenures will be increasingly aligned to a 4-5yr term in office for PCCs.

![Figure 2: Average chief constable tenure in England and Wales 1980-2018 by decade](image)

Figure 2 illustrates the decline in the length of time spent at the rank of chief constable by decade. On average a non-MPS chief constable in the 1980s had 1.65 years more experience than their colleague serving in the 2010s. During the 1980s there were eighteen chief constables with more than a decade of service in the rank outside of London. In the 2010s there were five. An examination of the careers of chief constables between 1980 and 2018 therefore supports the hypothesis that
the time spent at chief constable rank is decreasing with those leading the police service a remaining
in post for a shorter period. This phenomenon is mirrored at senior levels in other areas of the public
sector including Local Authorities, education and the NHS. The Cabinet Office’s Public Service
Leadership Taskforce has initiated a study focusing on the retention of senior leaders across the
public sector. It is proposed that any recommendations made as a result of this research are revisited
following the completion of the Cabinet Office work.

The responses of non-police interviewees were mixed in respect of whether currently reduced periods
of tenure were positive or negative. A senior Home Office official observed that higher levels of ‘churn’
presented greater opportunity for fresh perspectives and the introduction of new ideas. Moreover,
they emphasised that most senior public appointments were for three years. Others expressed
concern at the shorter tenures of chief constables with an HMI commenting; ‘we are losing some
of our brightest and best too early and this cannot be good.’ Another observed that reduced periods
in the rank impacted the ability of chief constables to grow into the role, particularly if they
were new to the force. A serving chief constable commented:

There is a reality that there is a shelf life. Six years feels about right as chief to me, but
an organisation needs to hear a different voice. Three years is incredibly short if you are
new to organisation but it is different if you’ve done three as the deputy as well. There
is no doubt that the election cycle plays into all this.

A PCC felt the current average length of chief constable tenure was a little short and explained that a
mirroring of the PCC election cycle was increasingly likely as the system becomes more established:

Instability is not a good thing. PCCs elected over a four year term creates some synergy
with a chief constable and it is natural that they would think about their tenure as well.
Four years is a good time to stake stock of an organisation, depending on what the
prevailing issues are. I think it is all very much down to the performance of the individual
and their relationship with colleagues, the PCC and partners. I wouldn’t want
to see it fall less than four years... Four years is probably an ideal minimum, but clearly
when behaviour or performance needs to be challenged then things must happen but
hopefully that is the exception rather than the rule.

A different PCC suspected the increase in chief constables leaving the service was a temporary and
predictable by-product of the 2012 reforms: ‘It was a very comfortable world with very little scrutiny
before 2012. The world changed, and some could not cope with it. Some made a decision that it was
not for them and left in 2012... We will look back and say that there was a step up in the quality of chief
constables.’ Another PCC acknowledged:

Most of the people have got thirty years in and decide to retire then, others have left in
difficult circumstances owing to different reasons. There are examples of where direct
PCC scrutiny has been more challenging and it’s now quicker for PCCs to make certain
decisions. Relationships between PCCs and Chief Constables are very important. If
things break down, the trust and confidence breaks down. It is a mix of things and on
the flip side things can be strengthened where there are good relationships.

The diversity of chief constables has also been a matter that has drawn comment. In her 2009
retirement interview Chief Constable Barbara Wilding (South Wales Police) stated: ‘We’re not
representative at all yet. We definitely need more women chief constables because we bring a different
dimension to the debate’ (Caless 2011:16).’ A decade later a national survey of PCCs, chief officers,
Superintendents and HR leads highlighted concerns regarding a lack of diversity in
command teams (College of Policing 2018). An interviewee observed ‘a lot of the chief officer teams in my areas are very male and very white.’ Another commented:

I see that the way the organisation looks is indicative of its culture and, for an organisation that has a leadership which is not very diverse, it may not be a huge jump that it is not terribly inclusive. It is an indicator. The extent to which the police service is representative of the community it serves is an indicator of how inclusive the organisation is likely to be.

Figure 3: Number of Female chief constables in England and Wales by year 1994-2018

Between 1980 and 2018 there have been four minority ethnic officers of chief constable or equivalent rank equating to 1% of the total cohort. Over the same period there have been thirty-four female chief constables equating to 8.9% of the total. Figure 3 charts the number of female chief constables since Pauline Clare’s appointment in 1995. The proportion of female non-MPS chief constables rose rapidly from 2008 but fell sharply from ten in 2014 to three in 2017. Outside London the ‘churn’ of women chief constables was disproportionate to their male colleagues. Thirteen female chief constables served between 2012 and 2016 with nine leaving the service in the same period resulting in a ‘churn’ of 69%. In comparison, 62 men served as chief constables between 2012 and 2016 and thirty-one left the service in the same period resulting in a ‘churn’ of 50%. There are currently nine women holding the rank of chief constable across England and Wales, five of whom are serving in forces outside the MPS (11.9%). Nevertheless, the future for greater gender diversity within the most senior police ranks appears positive with twelve female deputy chief constables (28.6%) in post outside the MPS. However, at the time of writing there is only one ethnic minority deputy chief constable outside London.

3. Preparation, application and selection

3.1 Preparation
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Retired chief constables were asked ‘how well do you feel you were prepared for the role?’ Ten out of the thirteen chief constables interviewed had been ‘Special Course’ officers. An interviewee emphasised the benefits of the course stating; ‘Bramshill would be my touchstone in terms of my values which would be reset when I went back for Special Course events but they would then be knocked away again when I returned to my day job.’ A non-Special Course chief observed:

There is some benefit from being on the accelerated course because it gives you exposure to things. That would have helped me and prepared me for this role. There is something about needing to appreciate being the lead of a force and what it means. It is quite a lonely place.

However, another interviewee expressed concerns regarding the hubris and sense of entitlement the Special Course could generate and wondered if the approach was a healthy one for the police service: ‘I’m not a huge fan of the accelerated promotion system, it is a silver spoon and a self-perpetuating prophecy. There is a massive amount of talent that is suppressed within policing. I don’t see why there has to be a rapid acceleration as a formal process.’

An HMI adopted a different view and felt the police service was poor at identifying, training, preparing and selecting its senior leaders when compared against other public-sector organisations and encouraged the service to be better at spotting talent and supporting staff through ‘deliberate planning rather than accident and happenstance.’ This theme was also reflected within the College of Policing’s Chief Officer Appointments Surveys Results and Analysis (2017). The College of Policing are responding to these concerns and will establish a national ‘Leadership Hub’ for the development and selection of senior police leaders. The hub will offer careers guidance at an earlier stage in the development of police leaders, support workforce planning and offer an ‘executive search’ function for chief constables and PCCs.

Retired chiefs and serving HMIs questioned whether PNAC was selecting the right candidates to progress to the chief officer ranks. PNAC provides an objective national selection standard but it was felt the process should take into account the judgement of officers through their careers as well as assessing the individual through the PNAC exercises. One contributor expressed concern regarding the level of attrition at PNAC suggesting the service should;

Get rid of the SCC log jam and PNAC fast. Quite how some excellent candidates have not made it through the process is astonishing. I wonder if we have enough of a pool coming through. It is a very self-limiting talent pool. It is a bizarre system that is not replicated anywhere else in the public sector. You would not have people not being appointed to chief executive jobs in local authorities because they have not been through a particular course. There is a mind-set that once through PNAC and the SCC people are ‘oven ready’ chief officers. I think we need to look at a pool of talent. It shouldn’t be a sausage factory. The service needs more competition and more talent. We should stop creating artificial blockages within system. It doesn’t happen elsewhere.

The need to expand the pool of officers interested in promotion to chief officer ranks also was recognised by interviewees who acknowledged several barriers:

Not one single Superintendent in my force wanted to go to ACPO. When I asked why they said it was PNAC, the time out, the preparing and the coaching. They looked around and liked command as a Chief Superintendent rather than going to a new force. This is the heart of our problem. We have talented people who do not want to go through the factory because it does not grab them. They look at PNAC, the need to get
support from their chiefs and ask themselves ‘do I want to move?’ They consider the impact on their family and their extended career. What if you get there with 15yrs service?

Almost all interviewees were positive regarding their experience of the Strategic Command Course (SCC). Those whose attendance predated the new ‘short course’ placed value on the relationships developed with colleagues and opportunities for personal development and reflection. The responsiveness of the training and evolution of the course content was also recognised by retired chief constables. A PCC also acknowledged the quality of the current SCC having supported recent syndicate sessions. However, he felt that there was;

...a disconnect between what the command course delivers and what the realities are when people land back at their respective forces in senior and responsible leadership roles. This is more around the partnership agenda and national portfolios. Not operating in silos and understand the PCC world without getting involved in the politics.

A retired officer recalled a ‘behind closed doors’ discussion in their SCC with a chief constable who had resigned following a major incident in his force as being particularly formative:

He was very open regarding the mistakes he made - we learnt the most from this but it was clear that whatever happened he was unable to do enough. I recognise that when dealing with troublesome PCCs and others whatever you do will never be enough. It is more about how other people react rather than being able to deal with it. I learnt that there is a need to take an objective view.

Two interviewees similarly commented they would have benefitted from such an input to help develop political skills when working with the media, ministers and PCCs. One commented:

What was not covered was the 'Harry Potter - dark arts' piece that recognises that sometimes things out there do not always go well. It would have been useful to have had an input on strategies that are available for when things go wrong organisationally and personally. It would have been good to have given people political savvy to see where the pitfalls might occur and how to manage them. It should not be on the job learning.

Others stated they would have benefitted from a greater focus on matters relating to financial leadership and the opportunity to engage with organisations beyond policing to avoid the development of insular and defensive mind-sets. Several chief constables referred to the SCC as being viewed as a gateway to chief officer ranks rather than an opportunity for professional development. One interviewee recalled, ‘there was a bit of a sense that on passing we were all going to set foot into the golden uplands where people would scatter rose petals where we walked.’

While it was widely acknowledged that individuals should take responsibility for their own professional development, some interviewees felt the absence of national guidance or a framework to support chief officers beyond the SCC was problematic. Without an agreed national structure chief constable felt vulnerable to ‘fat cat’ allegations when investing in professional development for themselves or their immediate team. The requirement for post SCC development within a national framework was felt to be more acute owing to the reduction in ACC posts, resulting in reduced opportunities to oversee a range of portfolios, accelerated progression through chief officer ranks owing to a high level of retirements, and the increased complexity associated with chief officer roles. One interviewee suggested, ‘we should be slowing down people’s progression and giving them
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opportunities in other sectors and even the opportunity to experience different cultures abroad.’ The College of Policing are responding to these concerns. New chief officer role profiles outline appropriate CPD activities and the College of Policing will establish a national Leadership Hub for the development and selection of senior police leaders. The Hub will offer careers guidance at an earlier stage in the development of police leaders, support workforce planning and offer an ‘executive search’ function for chief constables and PCCs. However, awareness of this activity was limited amongst those interviewed for this paper and it is suggested that ongoing work by the College of Policing relating to the establishment of a chief officer ‘leadership hub’ and role profiles to support CPD is communicated to forces and PCCs.

3.2 Application considerations

There has been a progressive decline in the availability of candidates for some chief officer posts over the last decade and in March 2016, the Home Affairs Select Committee (HASC 2016;15) expressed concern about the low number of applicants for recent chief constable vacancies. PCCs have therefore been faced with a very small pool of candidates from which they can select chief constables. More than half of chief constables appointed in 2015 were the only candidate for the job with a national average of just 2.21 applicants for each position (NPCC 2015). Interviewees and survey participants were asked to consider the drivers behind this phenomenon and identified three main themes; job (in)security, financial implications and work-life balance (figure 4).

![Figure 4](image_url)

Figure 4: What are the factors influencing ACCs and DCCs when considering an application for a chief constable’s post? (weighted average)

The insecurity associated with the PCC power to remove a chief constable under s.38(3) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 was identified as the most significant factor for officers considering applying for a chief constable role by the survey of ACCs and DCCs. An HMI commented:

If you are a DCC and 44 years old what are you going to do? To apply for a job like the Chief of [a struggling force] is a high-risk opportunity compared with being the DCC in [a well performing force]. The combined toxicity of some PCCs and putting yourself up as a media target dissuades people putting their heads above the parapet.
Potential future chief constables reflected this sentiment describing concerns regarding the risk of a ‘sword of Damocles’ hanging over their careers:

I have worked with a number of PCCs - seven since being a chief officer and found most difficult unhelpful and in some cases unprofessional. Why would I want to work cheek to jowl with someone who could terminate my contract? The pay differential is not great enough for the pressure, personal accountability/spot light and impact on family ($40(2)) to be worth it!

The role of a chief in unattractive. Why would any sane person place their operational independence and financial security at the whim of a politician? I have worked too long to place my personal reputation on the line to place it at risk of being thrown under a bus for political expediency. The private sector is now more attractive than ever for somebody of my stage of service.

This issue, combined with longer working lives owing to pension changes, is likely to further dis-incentivise officers applying for chief constable posts before they reach pensionable service. A survey respondent commented:

I am very concerned, having seen it first hand in a force where the chief constable is made extremely vulnerable by the actions and behaviour of PCC, and the PCC ability to almost arbitrarily remove the chief constable is extremely worrying, especially as I am DCC with many years still to serve before achieving pensionable service under the new regulations.

A retired chief constable also highlighted the risks that officers who were not at a pensionable length of service faced:

I had 30 years’ service when I got the chief constable job. I was financially secure and went to Cumberland lodge the year PCCs came in. Some ex-police officers who had left policing and become council chief executives described their relationships with council leaders. They said; ‘don’t do it if you need the money’. It is very different if you are a 24-year officer with a mortgage, kids going to university and a raft of other financial responsibilities. It would be a different dynamic with the PCC if you could not afford to go. I worry about very aggressive PCCs in challenging forces who have preconditions about what you, as chief constable, are expected to do. One to one marking is problematic in this type of situation. I’ve been lucky to have two one to one relationships with good PCCs but they are not all good just as not all chiefs are good.

Another officer made a similar point regarding the protection that reaching pensionable service offers a chief constable within the current PCC model: ‘He appointed me with a three-year contract but I had 33 years so there was not much he could do to me. It would have been very difficult if it was someone who was under their pension age. That would be hard.’ It was acknowledged in a separate interview with a retired chief constable that ‘recent pension changes will impact on decisions to progress to PNAC and beyond. There is also a risk of burnout given longer careers.’

The perceived absence of checks and balances in respect of the exercise of the s.38 legislation was acknowledged to be a greater barrier for those considering becoming a chief constable but yet to reach pensionable service. It was noted by a number of interviewees that chief constables who have experienced conflict with their PCCs have found it very difficult to continue to work within policing in
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other roles. Even with the option of legal challenge and later exoneration the exercise, or threat of s.38, can be career ending. This situation further reduces the pool of suitably qualified and experienced officers to fill vacancies in forces by effectively barring officers who have performed the role elsewhere and disincentivising potential applicants. It is recommended the Home Office consider mechanisms for retaining chief constables whose contract is not renewed within policing to ensure talent is not lost to the service.

The financial implications of promotion were also identified as a barrier for those eligible to apply for chief constable posts. Pension arrangements, lifetime allowance taxation and salaries were cited as reasons why eligible officers were not pursuing chief constable roles. One chief constable commented that for every year they remained in work beyond their pensionable service they lost 3% of their pension. Other chief constables described annual tax charges accrued as a consequence of breaching the lifetime allowance as being between 62% and 116% of their salary. A serving chief constable commented: ‘If you are below chief officer level, and the lifetime allowance is cap £1m, why would you seek promotion? An objective financial advisor would say ‘why are you doing it?’ Couple that with the scrutiny, risk and aggravation why would you want to do it?’ A PCC acknowledged:

Life time allowances and pensions are a real barrier. People don’t want to leave but can sit at home and do nothing and get two thirds of the benefits. This encourages people to retire. The remuneration element currently works against people staying in the role for longer.

Survey respondents also cited the tax implications associated with promotion as a disincentive to pursuing promotion:

The annual allowance and lifetime allowance charges are making promotion of limited value in the longer term, leaving and securing further employment offers a better work life balance and less stress. Police leadership is suffering from a decade of political hostility and funding cuts - life is too short to work into retirement without being supported better.

The difficulty with making that decision [promotion] is that the remuneration has been so significantly eroded with annual and lifetime allowance taxation, as well as the erosion of personal income tax code for earners over £100k, which means that the pressure and challenge does not feel adequately worth taking the risk for when set against the erosion of the financial incentive through these tax measures.

An HMI commented:

There is certainly no incentivisation within the system. I’ve been told by officers that they are quite happy being an ACC because if they go further it costs them in terms of their pension and relocation packages have stopped by PCCs owing to negative media scrutiny.

Another HMI observed: ‘The pay and remuneration system runs against the interests of policing... You should create incentives with pay and rewards to encourage people to do the things you want them to not what you don’t want them to do!’ Nevertheless, CPOSA advice is that officers are in a better financial position if they are promoted. The complexity, and fluid nature of pension and taxation rules, combined with the scrutiny under which chief officers operate was identified by some interviewees as a source of anxiety and confusion. It is proposed CPOSA and the NPCC work with
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HMRC to provide clear and consistent guidance regarding tax liabilities and pension implications to ensure officers considering chief officer roles understand the financial benefits and dis-benefits associated with promotion.

3.3 Applying to another force

When asked about factors influencing a decision to apply to be a chief constable in another force ACCs and DCCs, responding to the survey, highlighted the reputation of the PCC, distance from current home and competition from internal applicants as the main considerations (figure 5). One respondent commented:

The character and values of the PCC would be a key influencing factor. If they were stepping into operational matters or seeking to assume roles traditionally the responsibility of chief constables, it would reduce my likelihood of applying significantly. The packages available and fixed term contracts mean I would not consider moving or relocating my family. It is just not worth it financially or domestically.

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<td>Reputation of the PCC</td>
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Figure 5: What factors would influence your thinking when applying for a chief constable role in another force? (Weighted average)

Interviewees and survey responses highlighted that the disruption caused by a requirement to either live away from families, perform a long commute or uproot partners with careers and children in school were significant factors for deputy chief constables considering responding to adverts for chief constable posts. 64% of prospective chief constables stated they would not move to a new house and relocate their family to take up a chief constable role and 74% stated that they would not stay away from their family to become a chief. A PCC recognised that social and economic changes have impacted on the geographical mobility of chief officers: ‘There are family dynamics at play. If you went back ten to twenty years a chief would be married with children and they would be the breadwinner. Now wives work and decisions around relocation have to be based on not just one breadwinner.’ A chief officer articulated the importance of balancing family and professional life:

My chief officer career has begun at a point when my children are at senior school age - this represents the life stage that many of us are at. This makes it much more difficult to consider relocation, I personally could not contemplate moving away from children at a
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time when they need me most. This comment is balanced against the fact that I have achieved the chief officer rank whilst balancing family life and I feel proud to have done so.

Chief constables and PCCs were conscious of perceptions of the fairness, integrity and transparency of selection processes and welcomed recent publication of the College of Policing’s Guidance for Appointing Chief Officers (2018). However, at the time of writing twenty-seven (62%) of the forty-two chief constables outside London were deputy chief constables in their own forces indicating that internal applicants are likely to be at a particular advantage. A survey respondent questioned the viability of pursuing a chief constable’s role in another force if the local DCC is also applying: ‘I do not trust the process. Most roles now are given to the incumbent who has interest and I do not believe the processes are run with a view to enabling outside candidates any measure of success. This is the critical factor affecting applications.’ An HMI commented; ‘the Deputy is not going to upset the PCC if they want to be Chief. They will see considered as a chief in waiting by many.’ Another potential chief constable observed:

Transparency of the process and fairness in decision making is an issue. Selection is often too weighted to internal or known candidates and many ‘deals’ are done before the advert even goes on. Often a case of knowing when it’s worth the ink on the paper and when to leave it well alone as the role is already earmarked for others.

The importance of the relationship between the chief constable and PCC means that a PCC who appoints an external candidate is likely to be taking a risk. ACCs and DCCs who responded to the online survey stated:

It will often be the internal candidate that is selected and unless you have had previous positive engagement with the incumbent and PCC then there is little or no chance of success.

The degree of transparency in the application process is now perceived as clouded with the advent of PCCs. Whether it is correct or not, the assumption is that the current DCC would always be in prime position to succeed a Chief.

The ‘one to one’ nature of the PCC/CC relationship, and the absence of what used to be influence from the HMIC, has created a perception that these jobs go to internal candidates and there is no point in applying

However, the importance of the relationship with the PCC also constrains deputy chief constables, and sometimes chief constables, from responding to adverts from other forces:

There are situations where a DCC in a certain post will not apply for another post to avoid jeopardising their relationship with a PCC in their home force. Also, why would you go for a job in another force that you might not get because the DCC in the other force has also been forging a relationship with their PCC and is well placed to take over from the incumbent chief? You might as well stay where you are in your home force until the chief moves on. The relationships at the chief officer level with the PCC are very important.

Before 2012 there was a convention that most chief constables of large forces had previously been chief constables in small forces. Between 1980 and 2012 all six West Midlands police chief constables had been chiefs in other forces before taking up the appointment, in Greater Manchester
two of four chief constables had been the chief constables elsewhere and four of nine West Yorkshire Police chief constables had held the rank in smaller forces. However, the introduction of PCCs and the criticality of the relationship with the chief constable, a changed HMICFRS posture and the fact that the salary of DCCs in larger forces is greater than that of many chief constables of smaller forces may mean that, in the future, the appointment and selection process for deputy chief constables will be as important as it currently is for chief constables.

One PCC described how they had gone to considerable lengths to impress upon potential chief constable candidates that the process would be open and transparent. Nevertheless, despite the PCC’s efforts the assurances were met with some scepticism by those eligible to apply leading to the conclusion that ‘the response was really one of paranoia regarding the system being fiddled. I think that it will take time for this to go. The stuff we are taking about is probably a result of the system as it used to be rather than the way it is now.’ One chief officer suggested:

The generic approach to sending applicants a 'mailshot' seems rather impersonal and takes little account of experience, skills or individual thoughts or views on the role advertised. A discussion with the PCC or perhaps 'head-hunters' focussing on their specific consideration of my work and performance as a DCC might generate more consideration of whether to apply for a role or not. I would be more likely to reflect if there was an opportunity to have a non-committal discussion about the parameters of the post, logistics, etc.

Outside London s.38 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 currently requires the selection of chief constables to be made by PCCs. Previously, under the 1964 Police Act, the Home Secretary approved chief constable appointments, although this had been modified by the Police Reform Act 2002, where responsibility was delegated to the Senior Appointments Panel (SAP). The SAP, run by the Chief Inspector of Constabulary, matched individuals to the most suitable chief officer jobs and offered advice to the police authority. Although the appointment, and final selection, was made by the police authority, the shortlist was created by HMIC and the Home Office (Brain 2013;17). An interviewee recalled this approach and suggested that in the future:

HMICFRS could support PCCs by undertaking a ‘star chamber’ function to assist in the selection and appointment of chief officers. At the moment HMICFRS can offer advice to PCCs if they ask but who else in policing has the knowledge of the forces and individuals? If HMICFRS don’t do this who would? There is a question as to whether HMICFRS should have a role in this or not. HMIC used to ‘seed the panel’... How can a star chamber be melted into a system where PCCs can hire and fire chief constables? Where do the SCC scores go and how do they inform future career trajectories?

The College of Policing’s Chief Officer Appointments Surveys Results and Analysis (2017) also identified support for the development of a nationally coordinated ‘executive search’ function to help encourage applications for chief officer vacancies from suitably qualified candidates. A Home Office official noted that ‘where the College of Policing has been involved in drumming up interest in these roles we have seen a wider field, partly due to individuals understanding that the competition is genuinely open.’ Current College of Policing work to develop the ‘Leadership Hub’ will help address this issue.

Some interviewees also proposed that a reinstatement of the requirement to have served within another force at a chief officer rank could widen the pool of prospective chief constable applicants. Others who contributed to this work expressed the opinion that this was a blunt strategy and to readopt this approach, which ceased in 2007, may have the effect of reducing the volume of
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applicants instead of increasing them and could be discriminatory to officers with caring responsibilities. However, there was broad consensus that professional experience that extended beyond a single force was important for those performing the chief constable role. It is therefore proposed that further work is undertaken to consider whether experience of serving with a different force or organisation at a senior level should be a requirement for chief constables to widen the pool of prospective chief constable applicants and avoid organisational introversion.

4. Challenges

4.1 Operating context

When asked about factors that contributed to the pressures of being a chief officer retired chief constables spoke about the changing nature of the role specifically referencing sub-optimal policing structures, greater accountability and scrutiny, reducing resources and negative occupational cultures. A chief constable observed:

Rotherham, Hillsborough and the hacking enquiry all conspired to provide a perfect storm. The Metropolitan Police spent two years locking up journalists, the impact of austerity, Theresa May doing away with Bramshill and ACPO. The critical focus is on just the police now and not the ambulance or fire services. This has left the service at a national level in a bad place.

Interviewees recognised the police service was experiencing operational strain and that ‘staff are rushed of their feet with old fashioned processes. They are constantly being told to “do more and do better”. There is a sense of exhaustion.’ An HMI recognised that, ‘within ever straightened financial circumstances’ forces are having to quickly adapt ‘to meet new forms of demand, CSE, modern day slavery, CT - these things were not even on the radar a few years ago. The whole vulnerability piece is changing the dynamics of policing in England and Wales.’ One chief constable articulated a sense of ‘being under attack’ resulting in a defensive mind-set and leading to the service being:

Beleaguered, under pressure, undervalued and subject to no leadership from the Home Office. We should be proud of the service’s history and its ability to rise to the challenge but sometimes we fail to recognise the need to learn and grow in a world where blame and scapegoats are a requirement by scrutineers.

An HMI sympathised with the challenge faced by chief constables stating: ‘Chiefs have a tendency to be pulled by their PCC, the media and the HMICFRS in contradictory directions and are invited to do the job without the preparation policing should have given them and any useful guidance about what good actually looks like.’ Another HMI suggested that the question for chief constables is ‘how do you maintain your personal welfare in the face of unsustainable expectations?’

Whilst the need to change and reform policing was well recognised three retired chiefs highlighted a leadership culture characterised by transactional managerialism, command and compliance. Reflecting on their career a retired chief constable from another force stated; ‘we gorged ourselves on performance culture. The culture was so embedded. Some was surfaced like in Kent but we were all doing it.’ Although a reduced emphasis on quantitative performance was welcomed the legacy of the approach was highlighted by one retired officer as presenting a barrier to reform:
Command and control culture passes up to chief constables. How many would you look at and think they are a strategist? How many think about structure and command as opposed to how we are going to be? This is a product of a target-based culture turning red to green drove a succession of middle managers to become strategic leaders through a Darwinian promotion process. We’ve promoted transactional leaders. In Chief Constables’ Council, we see successful transactional people who are now being told to transform in an environment where transactional performance equals votes, and re-election for PCCs. We have two generations of leaders who are transactional and who have not been given the time to learn different approaches. Direct entry is not the answer. It is giving people time to learn and do the things that they need to do. Assessments of policing continually ask, ‘how much?’ not ‘who and why?’ The conservatives created a perfect storm by expecting transformation from transactional leaders, cutting numbers and introducing a transactional governance system.

While several retired chief constables recognised that the College of Policing’s ‘Leadership Review’ (2015) articulated the requirement to adapt the leadership approach within the service disappointment and frustration at a perceived lack of progress in this area.

What happened to the Leadership Review and the Code of Ethics? Bugger all - these are key moments in time that have not been progressed in any meaningful way. I asked [College of Policing] ‘what had happened to the Leadership Review and the Code of Ethics?’ They said they didn’t know.

However, the Leadership Review has initiated a significant programme of work that is being led by the College of Policing resulting in the publication of Guidance for Appointing Chief Officers (2018), the Chief Officer Appointments Surveys Results and Analysis (2017), chief officer CDP workshops, chief officer role profiles, the Competency and Values Framework (2016), review and changes to PNAC, and values-based recruitment guidance. As in the case of the development of the Leadership Hub, there appeared to be limited awareness of this College of Policing activity in these areas, and how the work was linked to the Leadership Review (2015), amongst many of those participating in this work.

The wider direction and focus of the College of Policing was also criticised by seven interviewees. One retired officer described it as ‘irrelevant’ and stated, ‘no one understands its priorities and their priorities don’t seem to be shared by anyone else.’ The College of Policing’s ‘professionalisation’ agenda elicited particular frustration with retired chiefs, PCCs and HMIs questioning exactly what the concept meant, identifying the tension between being a profession and direct entry and the need for police officers to have degrees. Others expressed concerns that the pursuit of degrees for all officers created a risk of been viewed as less inclusive resulting in a disconnect from communities. Ironically, the contemporary focus contrasts with debates held during the 1920s regarding the need to ‘professionalise’ policing. Reform measures following the 1918-19 police strikes emphasised the idea of professional police leaders appointed on merit and capability as the preferred alternative to direct entry appointees, often with military backgrounds, identified by county joint standing committees. The establishment of a meritocratic and professional senior leadership cadre emerged through the interpretation of case law to encourage the police to see themselves individually both as part of a wider policing function and as operationally independent of police authorities (Wall 1996).

A recurring theme within the interviews was the hostile environment, both internal and external, that chief constables can find themselves operating within. It was implied this was likely to disincentivise officers who may be considering PNAC and thinking about roles in other forces.
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Several retired chief constables described how, on transferring from another force to a chief constable post, they encountered hostility from, and were undermined by, senior leaders within their new organisations. One reflected that ‘this meant I was regularly being placed in a position where I was on my own as opposed to being with friends.’ It was suggested that ‘people don’t move between forces so much because the networks are not there.’

Interviewees also drew attention to the way that senior police officers are presented within elements of the mass print media and that this can have the effect of creating a ‘siege’ mentality within the chief officer ranks. Individual chief constables have been periodically criticized in the media for their bonus and expenses packages, despite these being within national or local regulations. Referring to recent tabloid articles relating to chief officer contracts in which private photographs and photographs of chief constable’s home addresses were published a retired chief constable commented:

I recognise that chief constables are in public life and have always been fair game but partners and family are not but they are impacted. Intrusion is a real issue and a disincentive for those considering performing the role. There is very venal media coverage of the service. It does put people off.

It was suggested the responses to media criticism could be improved by the encouragement of more ‘fly on the wall’ documentaries to illustrate the complex operational demands that have to be managed by a police force. A retired chief commented ‘one of the things that really surprised me coming out of the service is that people know very little about policing and don’t know what to ask.’ Another chief officer whose force had supported this approach felt that it had been very effective stating:

In some ways, it was a bit like having the HMICFRS in every day. We talk about legitimacy what is more legitimate than having your force subject to a fly on the wall documentary about how they work and behave. We may have found that officers and staff were not acting as we would have wanted them to but if this had been the case we would have dealt with it.

4.2 Police reform and structures

Six retired interviewees drew attention to the current structure of policing which was described as ‘absolutely flawed... bonkers’ and ‘bizarre, unhelpful and dysfunctional’. A retired chief officer stated: ‘43 different forces with their own systems and operating models is a nightmare and I agree with Sir Tom [Winsor] that someone has to take a brave decision. However, with PCCs it is really difficult and probably never going to happen.’ Most of the retired officers stated that the challenges presented by the current configuration of policing were compounded by internal cultures, the inability of the policing model to operate effectively as a coherent system and an ideological doctrine of localism. One chief constable summarised the shared frustrations as follows:

The governance, funding and inspection model pulls us to the local level. The locally based governance model draws chiefs into narrow solutions through nonsensical structures which are not coterminous with other public-sector partner organisations. There is no ability to move money around the system to reinvest in shared technology and this prohibits the level of change required. We need to reconsider how funding is allocated, what HMICFRS inspects and what the IPCC looks at. Everyone believes in collaboration, but only if it is done their way. This results in inefficient responses and
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the ability to make the necessary changes is diminished. However, it is just not worth investing time and effort in the structure debate because it will go nowhere.

However, interviewees acknowledged that the absence of national uniformity in many areas can also be a strength owing to the requirement to operate in conditions of complexity and deliver services tailored to meet local needs. During interviews, it was recognised a ‘one size fits all’ approach to all areas policing would be inappropriate but that shared technology and infrastructure was considered critical:

Localism was a mantra they threw in our faces but it is totally illogical. The Government has bottled difficult decisions and said; ‘just get on with it’. I think £3-400m can be saved through technology but we are seven years late in coming to this. The Government has not allowed the creation of the economies of scale to deliver savings. Collaborations struggle because structural change is confused with localism and accountability. Collaboration is a farce because no one can work out who has done what.

Several retired chief constables felt that localism was used to justify the absence of much needed national decision making in respect of police force structures.

The current government position is a barrier because it is so light touch. There is national direction regarding security and organised crime but everything else is local. Where is courageous leadership from politicians? It’s just not there. Localism means that national politicians are not accountable for anything. When the issue of accountability is raised, they say it is down to PCCs. The government has refused to make decisions and has refused to help. They look at policing and are critical when they don’t create the conditions for us to be effective.

Another interviewee observed: ‘We’re not given the money or the power to get on and do things. Over the weekend there were headlines regarding a 30% reduction in traffic policing and this was blamed on chief constables by an MP from the party that made the cuts.’ Some retired chief constables referred to the degrading of the police service referencing the Conservative desire for a smaller and less intrusive state citing dismissive comments by MPs regarding police pay and a failure to value the public sector which demotivates officers. One interviewee observed ‘if you are going to rip the heart out of public services the best thing to do is rubbish them.’ A retired female chief constable felt perceptions of class also impacted on how the civil service and ministers viewed senior police officers:

There remains a real class bias - the attitude of young chippy civil servants who can dismiss us as ‘thick cops’ can be irritating. I was aware that comment was passed on my choice of clothing and I was judged on this. These attitudes and judgements are briefed to senior officials and ministers - Is it any wonder that there is a view that we are ill-educated and thick?

Nevertheless, there was a measure of sympathy for the government’s stance on some issues. An anonymous chief officer interviewed between 2008-10 stated:

Chief officers are the only Crown servants I’ve ever come across who offer commentary on policies. You can’t whinge about being politicised if you then comment publicly on policy, off the cuff often, and implicitly criticise the government. No other Crown servants, in the home ministries, or in the Foreign Office, would dream of such actions:
policies are for ministers, actions for the agencies. The police have a lot to learn about dealing with central government (Caless 2011; Interviewee 21).

Other interviewees recognised the pressures to reform the police service faced by the government. One retired chief constable observed:

If you are the Home Secretary and consider how many chief constables have gone under a cloud, how many are under investigation, how many that PCCs have tried to get rid of and you start to realise that a high proportion have gone or will go owing to conduct or perception issues. Then consider how many are applying to be chief constables - virtually no one. These are top jobs in mission critical public service, the numbers through the command course are insufficient. Meanwhile SPADS are saying ‘it is an unreformed element of the public service’. The Home Secretary’s response is ‘right we must do something’. Therefore, the response is a proposal in the conservative manifesto to bring in external candidates to chief officer posts.

One interviewee was cautiously optimistic in respect of the potential for national change based on the Prime Minister’s understanding of policing and the concept of the ‘self-reforming sector’. However, they recognised the requirement for a cultural shift predicated on the various elements of policing to ‘all pull together on one script and step away from the combative culture and focus on the common good.’ There was a perception among retired officers that collaboration schemes, between forces and with other organisations, created muddied lines of accountability, offered elusive operational and financial benefits and had diminished the leadership role of chief constables. An interviewee stated that government policing policy as being key to their decision to retire stating:

Government changes to structures and conditions has changed the job of chief constable into something that is very short term. We have not been given the permission to change. When you add in the reduction in funding and governance changes chiefs find themselves utterly disempowered. It’s a now a smaller and much shorter-term job.

4.3 HMICFRS

The oversight functions performed by the HMICFRS were recognised as critical to the legitimacy of policing by interviewees although some retired chiefs expressed concern about the accountability of the organisation. Five retired chief constables interviewed commented on the changed posture of the HMICFRS. One interviewee felt the appointment of a non-police officer to the head of HMICFRS ‘had avoided the unfortunate perception of an old boy network in government circles which historically devalued the inspectorate’s findings.’ Others missed the more supportive and ‘pastoral’ approach that had historically characterised the relationship between HMICFRS and chief constables commenting that ‘HMICFRS used to help young chief constables coming through. No one wants to help chiefs at the moment – instead they want to rubbish them.’ Several interviewees compared the HMICFRS approach with that adopted by Ofsted by describing a more combative and competitive culture generated ‘by the HMICFRS and the political need of the PCC to evidence they are helping to run an organisation that is top of the tree.’

The frequency of HMICFRS inspections were considered unhelpful to forces trying to improve their grades through innovation and transformation. A retired chief asked, ‘how do you change following the publication of a report in June in time for a September inspection?’ Another interviewee noted that HMICFRS were not the only inspection organisation for policing and observed: ‘There are far too
many inspections. If you have twenty inspections none are of very much value. I think that they should just be looking at a small number of areas where there are going to be issues.’ Several chiefs felt some HMICFRS reports were employed to unfairly criticise and rubbish policing and have been used against individuals. One interviewee commented that when ‘coupled with the power of PCCs negative HMICFRS inspections can be used as bullets to fire at people.’ However, HMs were all acutely conscious of the impact a negative inspection report can have on chief constables:

Chiefs are under tremendous scrutiny from HMICFRS and I recognise just how difficult it can be to detach personally from some of our judgements. I spend days chatting and reassuring chiefs who have not had strong scores from inspections prior to publication. I also speak with PCCs and sometimes have to be blunt with them stating that a ‘requires improvement’ or ‘inadequate’ is not a reason to get rid of the chief constable. I recognise that the publication of an unfavourable inspection can be a really difficult time for chiefs. I am always alert to PCCs who may use it as a device to replace their chief constable.

While recognising that HMICFRS has a public platform, six interviewees questioned the internal credibility of HMICFRS reports in relation to the standards used to inspect forces against, the relative prioritisation of different policing areas and the value added by HMICFRS products. A retired chief was particularly frustrated by what was perceived to be a focus on the negative:

HMICFRS say that when they do a debrief they only concentrate on the negative. They run past success and then revel in the negative. We might be doing the most innovative things in policing and it doesn’t even get a mention. I don’t think they are performing their role because they don’t look at policing in the way it needs to be looked at. Currently it’s all about opinion. In effect, you have the law according to the HMICFRS which does not chime with the APP, academic evidence, the PCC plan or the chief constables’ professional experience. Therefore, we are compelled to suffer the opinion and personality of an individual.

The inability of the HMICFRS to identify priorities for the police service was identified during interviews as a source of frustration amongst some retired chief constables. One interviewee commented ‘HMICFRS are like 5 year olds chasing a football. It is a case of ‘do this - do that,’’ while another observed ‘HMICFRS is a very muddled landscape with different internal agendas.’ The benefits of HMICFRS inspections were questioned during the interviews in light of the increased HMICFRS budget, limited alignment to PCCs’ Police and Crime Plans and the significant opportunity cost of inspections: ‘There is a lot of empty process - that does not change the outcome. We need to stop doing it. There are lots of unintended consequences in institutions. HMICFRS is driving this.’

The difficulties of moving off the HMICFRS ‘naughty step’ was highlighted in seven interviews. One retired chief described ‘a situation of halos and horns. Forces identified as ‘poor’ get poorer and gaps widen while others operate in a protective bubble.’ It was noted HMICFRS reviews do not take into account the financial context within which forces are operating and consequently the least well-funded forces struggle to achieve the standards of better resourced areas. Moreover, three retired chiefs perceived a tendency to dismiss forces as failing without clear evidence. Three interviewees commented on the negative impact that ‘inadequate’ grades have on forces with one stating:

HMICFRS is just a pure inspection model that does not really improve anything. When they constantly pop up and say your force is shit again and again you can't do anything about it. How do you feel about it and what are you supposed to do? The problem is that it doesn't connect to anything. The same forces that are struggling ten years ago
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are struggling now. It is a cycle that keeps repeating itself. What is the point of it? In health and education, they incentivise high performers to work with those viewed as having challenges. All the current system does is put people under incredible pressure to be incredibly short term. You hit the target and miss the point by trying to do the things that hit the inspection.

A retired chief recognised there was an HMICFRS negativity in respect to some forces and that this could be exacerbated by conflict between different personalities. Some interviewees expressed frustration at the absence of a clear mechanism for escalating concerns resulting in a sense of procedural injustice that compromises the perceived legitimacy of inspectorate activity, its conclusions and subsequent learning opportunities. A PCC commented that the resultant ‘unpredictability and constant conflict is taxing. Chiefs are in a better position now however because of the support they receive from PCCs in respect to the HMICFRS’.

**4.4 IPCC**

Several retired chief officers referenced the need for accountability, scrutiny and transparency in policing but were concerned about the timeliness of IPCC reports, their objectivity and the quality of the investigations. One chief officer commented; ‘the reality is that the IPCC are investigating most chief constables.’ Interviewees were particularly uneasy about the effect of protracted investigations on individuals. On retired chief constable described a case they were involved in that had lasted six years S40(2), whereas another talked about a matter for which they were served papers in 2014 but were yet to be interviewed. An interviewee observed, ‘if they were criminal cases they would be thrown out for abuse of process. Suspended police officers should be subject to bail rules.’

Seven retired chief constables questioned IPCC objectivity and its impact on the police service. One felt the IPCC’s approach over-emphasised their independence from the police and therefore they were not truly objective and balanced. Another commented, ‘many feel the process is simply against the police officers being investigated as opposed to seeking to understand what has happened in a neutral manner’. Another stated, ‘it feels like we are all culpable until proved otherwise.’ A retired chief offered the following example:

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The focus on blame by the IPCC was an issue repeatedly raised by interviewees. It was observed that police officers are subject to an investigation and discipline process far harsher than that experienced by many other professions. This, coupled with a perception that the IPCC is configured to find individual wrong-doing, ‘leads to a defensiveness, a back covering and a genuine feeling across the service that a situationally well-intentioned decision with direct negative consequences will get you into trouble.’ The approach, described as ‘unjust and unfair’, was ‘eroding morale and the vocational approach.’ Interviewees commented:

In terms of the wider service I worry a lot about where we are going around the vocation of policing - the stresses and strains of policing. We are downtrodden and the
diminution of terms and conditions adds to this. Add complexity, challenge and stress why would people do it?

I feel for operational staff who are doing their very best and dealing with system failures every day and get the butt end of it from the public and the IPCC. I worry about the IPCC and their approach. The personal accountability generates a huge amount of pressure. What we are asking people to do is massive and when they don’t quite get it right they are hoisted on their petard.

Several interviewees raised the importance of the police service becoming more of a ‘learning organisation’ but felt that the decisions and actions of the IPCC mitigated against the adoption of such an approach. However, a retired officer also recognised internal barriers to moving away from a culture of blame observing; ‘there is a danger I direct all my ire at the IPCC. Some IPCC work is very powerful but we do not harness it because we are not a learning organisation.’ A different chief asked: ‘How do we develop an accountable but not blaming culture? We are the other end of the spectrum to Matthew Syed’s ‘Black Box Thinking’.’ Another retired officer commented; ‘The fear and the blame thing is also important and officers fear that the organisation is out to get them. The blame culture is a strong part of our problems’.

Some chief constables questioned the quality of IPCC reviews and the treatment of those under investigation. One commented that ‘there are some good investigations, but they are so inconsistent.’ In many interviews the apparent absence of IPCC accountability was raised with one officer stating:

What concerns me is the IPCC. Who guards the guards? They are investigating individuals for things that they are guilty of every day. They need to deliver expeditious and high-quality investigations to put guilty people in prison and clear innocent people. They are not held to account and are failing on most counts.

Interviewees described the personal impact of being under IPCC investigation for significant periods of time. One stated ‘I was subject to IPCC investigation as a chief officer - they go on too long. If you’ve got a tough job you can feel beleaguered. Another reflected ‘I experienced a high level of isolation. I was damaged by having been investigated by IPCC’ Six retired officers specifically mentioned the impact on their family private life of being publicly investigated by the IPCC. One offered the following example:

Interviewees felt the way the IPCC operated regarding its investigations of chief constables could be a considerable disincentive to other colleagues considering the chief officer ranks.
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My worry is that people say; ‘I would love to be a chief, but I do not want to put myself and family through this.’ As a consequence, good people won’t put themselves forward. The IPCC bear some responsibility for this. There is a real fear of being hounded out when you’ve done nothing wrong. If you are enjoying your time as a Chief Superintendent or ACC why would you put yourself forward?

Reflecting on the low number of applicants for chief constable jobs and the reduced volume of officers applying for the PNAC a chief officer commented: ‘The media criticise chiefs and the IPCC and HMICFRS become more and more aggressive. It is a very unattractive role to take on. It is absolutely non-stop. With family pressures as well why would you do it?’ Similarly, an HMI commented:

There are too many people being suspended for misconduct and this needs to be addressed. The atmosphere created by the vulnerability of chief constables to misconduct allegations is having a chilling effect on applications. It is hardly a surprise that it is acting as a disincentive to potential candidates.

4.5 PCCs

The introduction of PCCs in November 2012 represented a profound change to the governance of policing in England and Wales requiring chief officers to rapidly adapt to new ways of working. One interviewee described it as ‘the biggest change in my service. No one could have envisioned the impact. It is not the same as it used to be. We are all trying to find our way and grapple with the changes.’ The experience of the retired chief constables of working with PCCs fell into three broad categories; positive, neutral and negative.

In most instances, retired chiefs worked with their PCCs very effectively and felt the new system was a considerable improvement when compared against the Police Authority model offering better accountability, improved public engagement and greater levels of innovation. A retired chief reflected: ‘Locally we were doing really well, we have a good PCC relationship, better than it was with the Police Authority, and we are far more effective.’ Another retired chief stated; ‘moving from the previously dysfunctional police authority to the PCC has been a joy for me in my force.’ However, interviewees recognised the quality of their relationship PCC was largely a matter of providence: ‘I was lucky in my PCC. Many PCCs are personality driven and mine had lots of experience, nothing to prove and no ambitions beyond the role of PCC.’ Another said:

I was extremely fortunate in my PCC. For us it was purely luck - some colleagues had a really difficult time. Our PCC came to well-run force in a benign political environment and we were well funded. The absence of any one or two of these factors would make for a very different experience.

The criticality of the PCC and chief constable relationship was identified as a vulnerability within the new model which was described as a four yearly ‘lottery’ for forces.

I had two PCCs. It was very difficult working with the first PCC who was highly challenging. He was totally politically driven and not that bright and this made my job much harder. He was the most difficult person I’ve ever worked with in my public service. It really got me thinking that there must be a different life out there. The second one was more sensible.
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The absence of checks on the behaviour of PCCs was identified as problematic by many interviewees and drew comparisons with the preceding police authority model. An HMI observed that although ‘police authorities they were not without their critics. The one thing that they did provide was a group with different constituents and individuals that had different priorities. This created a need to cater for competing interests.’ In contrast PCCs ‘are elected officials whose mandate is without question and lasts for the duration of their tenure.’ Another interviewee stated; ‘the whole thing around PCCs should be rethought... There is no protection for chief constables who have a really important role to perform.’ During a 2015 interview a PCC recognised these vulnerabilities:

You must not assume that being eccentric and having lousy judgment are prerequisites for the job, even though some of my PCC colleagues exhibit these characteristics in spades. There are six or seven really good PCCs who are transforming the policing landscape, perhaps up to a dozen who have opened up the system and made policing transparent, and about 22 who are absolutely bleeding hopeless (Caless and Owens; Interviewee 58).

A PCC interviewed for this work also acknowledged the diverse mixture of those elected in 2012 but felt strongly that, as the role has become more established, PCC capability has improved:

In the first cohort there were about 23 who were in the wrong place and in the wrong job. They had no idea around the crafts of politics and diplomacy. Both parties had better selection processes that were tighter and more rigorous. We now have better individuals, there will always be bad ones, but they now come from substantive backgrounds and have business experience.

PCCs were introduced to make the police service more accountable to the general public, rather than to their former police colleagues and for this reason retired chiefs and an HMI were sceptical of retired police officers performing the PCC role. Interviewees cited a lack of objectivity, experience of broad command and fresh perspectives. The challenges were described as being particularly acute by three recently retired chief constables in cases where the PCC had recently served as an officer in the same force or worked with the chief in another force. In 2012 there were four recently retired police officers elected to perform the PCC role, and in 2016 two were re-elected and two ex-police officers were newly elected. Consequently, there have been six recently retired police officers working as PCCs since 2012 representing 12% of the total PCC cohort. In each case the PCC was elected to a force with a female chief constable meaning that of the thirteen female chief constables serving between 2012 and 2017 38% had a recently retired ex-police officer as a PCC. By 2017 four out of six of the female chiefs had left their post early citing conflict with their ex-police officer PCC. It was identified in the opening section of this paper that between 2012 and 2016 female chief constables left the police service at a disproportionately higher level (69%) than their male colleagues (50%). If the four female chief constables had not left the service early the levels of male and female ‘churn’ would have been more equitable at 54% and 50% respectively.

The number of female chief constables in England and Wales outside the MPS in 2017 was at its lowest point since 2008 at almost a third of the 2014 high. In comparison, the number of female officers of chief constable rank working within the MPS has almost doubled since 2014 and increased from one in 2012 to five in 2017. Some interviewees were cautious about drawing firm conclusions from this data owing to the small numbers with one PCC observing:

I’m not sure it is about gender. Statistically the size of the sample group is too small. The changes in governance would have had an impact. In each case it would not have
made a difference as to whether it was a man or a woman. I think it is around competence and higher expectations - new individuals found that people had not had a grip on force. A unique set of circumstances and I think you need larger numbers to make sound conclusions.

However, an interviewee stated ‘I had a PCC who was a vindictive misogynistic bully’ while another commented ‘the whole way some PCCs deal with women worries me.’ A retired chief officer, who did not have an ex-police officer as a PCC, stated: ‘Some PCCs who are ex-police officers have disproportionately had female Chiefs that they have tried to get rid of. This misogyny has caused damage to families and the individuals they lead.’ PCCs were introduced to expose policing to increased public accountability. It is suggested legislation be considered to ensure that recently retired police officers are ineligible to stand for election to PCC.

Retired chiefs commented on the increased politics within policing since the introduction of PCCs and the corresponding requirement for chief constables, and chief officer teams to be more politically aware. This was also an issue highlighted by a PCC who observed, ‘chief constables have got some difficulties in navigating the political landscape.’ The electoral cycle, and the desire for re-election, were highlighted as areas that could create tensions within chief constable and PCC relationships. For example, the experience of one interviewee was that, after election ‘the first year is spent briefing and the third is spent building towards re-election.’ Other retired chiefs articulated the challenges of establishing medium to long term organisational plans that could be challenged, cancelled or reversed every four years. Some interviewees envisioned a time when chief constable appointments would be aligned to the four-yearly election cycle.

The desire of some PCCs to be re-elected was identified in interviews as driving behaviours that were not conducive to the effective and ethical delivery of policing. One retired chief commented, ‘I did not trust the PCC it was all about getting votes in’. Interviewees described a growing combative and competitive culture between forces whereby PCCs used HMICFRS inspections to evidence that they were running an effective organisation. The requirement for positive reports can present a reluctance to identify and acknowledge areas for improvement. In one example the chief constable sought to develop the force through an open peer review process that resulted in HMICFRS involvement:

The PCC was really angry and abusive and in one of his worse moments he said it was all my fault because if the chief constable had not sought the peer review he would not be getting a beating from HMICFRS. He would not relent. I said we should not hide anything and I still don’t know if it was the right call. It damaged individuals in the force to be subject to such awful headlines, it hurt them to hear the PCC say such things about their chief.

Other retired chiefs contrasted their experiences of working with police authorities with the PCC’s ability to use force resources to achieve short-term benefits and enhance their re-election chances. One recalled ‘he wanted to do dreadful things go to the forces budget that would not have made it sustainable just so he could get re-elected.’ An interviewee described being pressurised by their PCC to allocate more police officers to an area within the force comprised of the PCC’s political supporters, while another commented:

The power and ego went to the PCC’s head. He made some obtuse and perverse decisions and would not see a different perspective. The evidence and facts would make no difference. He absolutely became a politician. It was important for him to be seen in the right places and be in the papers.
Reflecting on the move from police authorities to PCCs a chief observed; ‘we now have a system whereby an individual has had to go out and sell decisions as opposed to making a decision based on a rational assessment of organisational need.’ Another interviewee recalled ‘in police authorities you got different points of view often from the independents.’ During interviews examples were offered whereby chief constables were directed by PCCs not to comment on certain issues. For example, one chief felt their force should be amalgamated with a neighbouring force but was forbidden by their PCC from articulating this position. Another was required to share anything they had written for publication with the PCC’s office ahead of submission. One retired chief felt the censuring of operationally independent chief constables had the effect of ‘weakening the ability of policing to occupy the middle ground between society and the state.’

The Policing Protocol Order 2011 states that the PCC ‘has a statutory duty and electoral mandate to hold the police to account on behalf of the public’ as well as control over police funding. In 2015 the Committee on Standards in Public Life concluded that there was confusion among the public, chief constables and PCCs ‘about roles and responsibilities, especially in relation to where operational independence and governance oversight begin and end (Bew 2015;10).’ The interviews did identify some misunderstandings regarding the respective roles of chief constables and PCCs and how they are exercised. A retired chief constable stated: ‘It is important that the chief makes the operational decisions and not the PCC. In some forces PCCs commit to police officer numbers and take away the chief’s responsibility and ability to manage risk.’ One interviewee stated: ‘In my first meeting with the new PCC I was told that I now worked to him as he was the head of the organisation. I challenged this and made it clear I was not the PCCs deputy. I needed to explain the legislation to them as they did not understand it.’ Another retired chief observed: ‘His deputy still says chief constables are no longer independent in their own right and just need to do what they are told. He does not understand the constitutional position.’ This issue was also recognised by an interviewee who observed; ‘the line between scrutiny and oversight and operational independence has been blurred further.’ In some areas the effect of the introduction of PCCs, in the absence of clear checks and balances, may have been to subordinate professional leadership to the political. In recognition of this issue, it is suggested that Chief Constables Council would benefit from the support of a police constitutional expert to ensure clarity in respect of the difference in role between a chief constable and a PCC. In light of the turnover of chief constables and the PCC election cycle, it is also recommended that new chiefs and PCCs are formally briefed on appointment regarding the legislation and emerging case law relating to the two roles.

A number of retired chief constables relayed their experiences of coming under pressure from their PCC and being scapegoated when things were not going well. One stated that ‘in difficult situations the PCC will always sacrifice the chief constable rather than themselves.’ Another reflected ‘there is an element of your force your fault’. A contrast was made by one interviewee with the regular positive comments made by Members of Parliament in respect of the military and the absence of compelling comments regarding the pride and admiration of PCCs for policing. It was felt that many PCCs believe they appear strong through a manufactured and theatrical ‘holding to account’ of chief officers to give an impression of doing a good job. In one example the PCC ‘felt that we were going to be categorised as failing by the HMICFRS so he was building towards the script that the chief constable is bad and that he was dealing with it. People saw through him and saw the excesses of his behaviour.’ Interviewees described the vulnerability of being dismissed by a PCC under s.38 of the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act. A senior leader commented:

There is no counterbalance to a single person’s view. It is easier to get rid of a chief than it is to get rid of anyone else in the organisation. It is a system that it is a half-way house. In the US, you are tied to a politician’s apron strings but if they want to get rid of
you they have to compensate you and you are not professionally tainted. This does not
happen here and it is as if you have done something wrong.

A different chief described the pressure that their PCC’s behaviour, and the threat of the s.38 power,
created: ‘My values were tested on a daily basis and my livelihood and my family’s livelihood were at
risk of being thrown away because I could not compromise my values. This cannot be right based on
one individual with no checks and balances.’ S.38 was contrasted with the protracted process to
remove a police officer who is not a chief constable from the police service based on their
performance. An interviewee commented ‘it cannot be right that there is no accountability and the
only check is judicial review. What a waste of public money.’

My biggest worry is the issue about protection for police leaders. Why are we so singled
out in terms of employment law that allows us to be treated in this way? People think
you get a pay off! What will it do in terms of the quality of leadership that you get in the
future?

A Comparing Police and Crime Commissioners (CoPaCC) report published in May 2015 concluded:
‘PCCs are not accountable to a board or answerable to any sub-committees, nor do their decisions need
prior discussion and analysis by members. All executive authority for the office of the PCC is vested in
the individual PCC.’ An interviewee concurred:

Policing is now subject to the vagaries of elected individuals who could be great but could
also be awful. The PCC model lacks the depth and the quality of the governance that used
to be there. The public could not care and are not interested in PCCs. The governance has
been weakened significantly but no one cares. The argument was that people were not
interested in police authorities but at least they had balance.

The current situation contrasts strongly with arrangements under the Police Authority model
whereby any call for the dismissal of a chief constable required the support of the Home Secretary
using the Police Act 1964. This legislation had the effect of protecting Sir Kenneth Oxford
(Merseyside 1976-89) and Sir James Anderton (Greater Manchester 1976-91) from dismissal by left
wing police authorities following the 1984-5 Miners’ Strike. However, the Police Reform and Social
Responsibility Act 2011 does require that the PCC takes note of HMICFRS and the Police and Crime
Panel opinion regarding the exercise of the s.38 power yet they can ignore any opinion offered. In
reviewing attempts to dismiss a chief constable in September 2016 Sir Tom Winsor concluded that
the use of the power was ‘conspicuously unfair, disproportionate, and so unreasonable’ that he
could not understand how the decision had been arrived at. The presiding judges in the case, Mr Justice
Garnham and Lady Justice Sharp stated the approach adopted was ‘wholly disproportionate,

Presently, the existing accountability and investigatory mechanisms are limited in respect to the s.38
power. The IPCC can intervene only when a PCC has been accused of a criminal act; HMICFRS has no
locus to investigate the actions of a PCC and, individually and collectively, and many Police and
Crime Panels have proved ineffective in modifying the actions of a PCC or in calling them to account.
One retired chief commented, ‘there are no checks on a PCC’s decision-making – they don’t have to
take any notice of what the panel says or what the HMICFRS say...’ A different interviewee stated:

My PCC did not understand governance. The whole system is flawed how can you put
so much power in the hands of one person? I don’t know. The Police and Crime Panels
are a waste of time. The PCC was increasingly becoming involved in operational policing
and this undermined me.
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The Policing Protocol Order states PCCs are responsible for the governance of chief officers, and Police and Crime Panels should maintain a regular check and balance on the performance of the PCC in that context. Each PCC is responsible for complaints against chief constables, and the Police and Crime Panel are responsible for complaints against a PCC. Interviews indicated that the Police and Crime Panels operated very differently in different forces and may present an opportunity to provide effective scrutiny of PCCs by acting as a middle agent or a review body.

Retired, serving and potential future chief constables have expressed concerns regarding the potential exercise of s.38 by PCCs as well as other behaviours that have the effect of disincentivising talented officers from pursuing appointment to chief officer roles. Conversely, a relationship between a PCC and a chief constable can be too ‘cosy’ and detrimental to effective scrutiny. One interviewee was keen to emphasise that improved accountability should be viewed as an evolution of the PCC model and would be beneficial to the delivery of policing in the round:

I want service to be self-reforming and it should not be about unpicking things. But there needs to be checks and balances meaning that you can have operationally accountable chief constables. There is a danger that if we do it it sounds like chief officers moaning. There are good PCCs and there are bad chief constables. Some bad chief constables are not being picked up by this process.

To help address this issue, it is proposed a strengthened Police and Crime Panel, supported by clear guidelines and HMICFRS, could assist decision-making and provide enhanced oversight, accountability and legitimacy for forces. However, the creation of any potential ‘safeguards’ would have to be carefully considered against the importance of the PCC being able to effectively exercise their functions.

A PCC invoking s.38 is likely to suspend the chief constable, thereby disadvantaging the officer trying to refute any allegations by preventing access to force systems and contact with colleagues. There is no statutory requirement for Police and Crime Panels to review the suspension of a chief constable but the panel is required to review or scrutinise the actions and decisions of a PCC and make recommendations (HMG 2013). It is suggested that the use of suspension and s.38 to address the underperformance of a chief constable be subject to a period of action planning and supervised review, potentially involving both HMICFRS and the Police and Crime Panel, before any public announcement is made.

Whilst recognising some of the challenges faced by the first PCCs as the new model developed a PCC emphasised the positive nature of the new arrangements citing much improved scrutiny and a more business-like environment. They argued this more professional approach exposed weaknesses in some leadership teams leading to the retirement of some senior officers. Moreover, the PCCs elected in 2016 have greater relevant experience, are subject to rigorous selection processes and are better supported by their respective political parties thereby ensuring a more professional approach. The PCC emphasised national police reform activity being undertaken by chief constables and PCCs as illustrating a strong sense of joint enterprise and a series of productive relationships between politicians and police officers.

An interviewee recognised that ‘some good people have been badly hurt as a result of poor behaviour by PCCs.’ The unpredictability of the electoral process, ex-police PCCs, perceptions of misogyny, increased politicisation and ethical challenges, vulnerability associated with the s.38 power and the absence of clear PCC accountability all undermine the attraction of the chief constable role to some talented individuals. These issues are compounded by confusion regarding
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the respective roles of PCCs and chief constables as well as changes to pension arrangements which, when combined with the insecurity of tenure presented by s.38 powers, act as a significant disincentive for younger deputy chief constables to apply for chief constable posts. An HMI concluded: ‘A system has been created with PCCs and pension rules that has established incentives that operate against the interests of retaining good and experienced leaders within policing.’

5. Reflections following retirement

Several chief constables cited disillusion with the role as a major reason for retiring. Having aspired to the role they indicated they felt unable to achieve what they had hoped to owing to the constraints of the office and felt it appropriate to ‘step away’. Some added they felt they did not ‘fit’ with the broader direction of travel the police service was taking, particularly in respect to ‘professionalisation’ and wanted to avoid becoming reactionary voices or viewed as ‘part of the problem’. One commented:

I never thought seriously about leaving the police until I became a chief constable. Whilst I was at this rank the thought went through my mind on many occasions. However, the pension meant that it was not viable to leave. It crossed my mind often when thing things got very difficult. When you balance out the profit and loss of the job you are doing at the time... I felt that I was asking myself ‘ok I’m doing this but is it really worth it?’ I’d never previously felt that the downsides were outweighing the rewards until I was the chief constable.

Other chiefs articulated their frustrations with an inability to escape the sub-optimal structures of policing by referencing a political reluctance to pursue force mergers and the weakness of alternative collaboration arrangements. They commented; ‘if it wasn’t for the government’s judging mergers I would still be a chief. For me collaboration was the end.’ Another observed:

Collaboration is presented as the golden bullet for austerity. We are more efficient and effective as a service but the amount of money we have wasted through collaboration is significant! Multiple ‘corporate soles’ all trying to agree but they have different priorities, return on investments, PCCs etc... We all want to reduce cost and get resilient but we are seeing collaboration for collaboration sake.

A chief officer from another region expressed a similar sentiment:

Looking back, I spent a considerable amount of time spent utterly frustrated because of the inability to get on and do things. We developed a huge plan to collaborate and when we presented it to PCC he said, ‘how dare you!’ There was then a proposed quasi-merger but it lost clarity from not having a single person in charge.

However, six of the officers interviewed were clear that they retired at the right time for them with the majority going to second careers, predominantly in academia. However, other factors were also mentioned as considerations that shaped the decision to retire including a sense that PCCs may either want a long-term commitment or a new chief to see through new organisational change. Some interviewees felt their deputies would make strong chief constables for their forces and did not wish to block them or see them move to a different force. It was acknowledged by all interviewees who retired at a time of their choice that reaching pensionable service was key to their decision-making.
Many retired chiefs who were interviewed spoke about a sense of isolation that was compounded by an attritional effect of political and financial issues, media scrutiny and long hours. Some also felt the multiple layers of accountability were disproportionate in comparison with other public positions operating at similar levels and this further contributed to the pressures they experienced. One interviewee commented: ‘There is a psyche with chiefs that we are utterly resilient and will accept the unacceptable. I feel chiefs are now there to take the punches. Depending on where you are it can be hard but no one gives a shit about it when you fall over.’

Those chief constables who had experienced significant challenges commented on the absence of formal support structures as there are for colleagues operating in other ranks. Comments included:

There is nothing from the rest of the service in terms of support. You do become pretty resilient but the support mechanisms around chief constables is really quite poor. It depends on individuals taking the time to pick the phone up and check if people are alright.

What really upset me was the lack of support from rest of the service. I formed the impression that they thought if it all goes wrong they won’t be involved.

In terms of being a chief there is nothing that supports you. I wonder how [my successor] will manage - is the service just watching? I experienced a very difficult environment. There is no formal framework for support. It’s not NPCC or CPOSA because they all have day jobs.

There is a question regarding who you go to for advice. To just 'suck it up' is not an answer. There was no one to go to with the necessary confidence and experience in the region and no one got the local issues within my personal network.

There is limited support for chief constables. [Chief constable] helped me and some people on my syndicate were also ‘go to’ people. But here is no formal support. The stuff around PCCs is hard and all chiefs are really busy. The culture is that you get on with it.

When dealing with a particularly challenging issue an interviewee had anticipated support from the Home Office but was disappointed to find that, ‘the Minister did not seem interested in discussing the issues. Anyone going into that job at that time would be isolated. Had it gone wrong it would be bad for policing but there was no support from the Home Office.’ It was recognised that before 2012 the HMIC would have played a role in supporting the welfare of chief officers as might the chair of the Police Authority. However, the HMICFRS role has changed and PCCs would be unlikely, and not well placed, to offer support. One recently retired chief constable discussed a challenging incident they had been involved with and described the value of drawing on an informal peer network they had developed over a number of years:

The experience taught me a lot about calling in favours – the ability to tap into chief officer development and welfare support was important. It was invaluable to have a trusted network of peers who I could bounce ideas off. Some colleagues won’t agree but it is valuable to have someone play devil’s advocate and candid conversations with peers are very important. I wonder how much we encourage chiefs to build their networks?

Although it was recognised peer support between serving chief constables could be challenging to
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achieve owing to ongoing investigations, the day to day demands of the role and regional collaboration activity, several interviewees proposed that the service should make more use of retired chief officers for this purpose. One retired chief constable observed: ‘It’s a huge loss. Where do new Chiefs go to speak to people who have lived with these things? If you’re not connected how do you get hold of people? It is sad that people are leaving in their early fifties at the height of their profession and walking away from it.’ Other interviewees stated, ‘the service should make more use of retired people who can support still serving colleagues’ and, ‘the use of recently retired chief officers in a ‘phone a friend’ capacity would be very helpful.’ Proposals included mentoring to new chiefconstables as well as to chief officers seeking offline sounding boards in respect to specific challenges.

HMIs also commented on the absence of support networks for chief constables and that ‘being a chief can be a lonely place.’ One HMI suggested that HMICFRS, the College of Policing, NPCC and CPOSA were well positioned to develop a mentoring infrastructure comprised of recently retired chief constables that might also include the establishment of a senior women’s network. It is therefore recommended that the College of Policing and the NPCC develop a mentoring scheme comprised of a cadre of retired chief officers to support serving chief constables. The College of Policing’s Leadership Hub could enable this approach.

When asked whether they would, knowing what they now know, join the police again if they had their time over about half of the retired chief constables interviewed responded with an unequivocal ‘yes’. The remainder said they would but added a range of caveats. One interviewee replied, ‘no and I would tell my daughter not to join. I feel that particularly on the gender thing. I feel that for female leaders it is a much harder place to be.’

Some of the responses containing caveats related to a sense that the role of a police officer has changed since the mid-eighties. One interviewee commented; ‘there are still committed people who see it as a vocation but it is becoming a rapidly harder job to do.’ Recognising the changing nature of policing a retired officer stated: ‘If I go back to 1986 I would say yes. If I was 21 now in 2017 I sincerely wonder if I would be up to it.’ Another reflected; ‘yes in 1985 but not sure if I would have joined again now in the context of what I know and how it has changed.’ There was also recognition of occupational cultural and systemic barriers within policing from one interviewee who stated: ‘The opportunity to help people at their lowest point is probably one of the most rewarding things we can do. The challenge is getting the system to help you do that instead of it being an inhibitor.’ While being positive about re-joining the police two interviewees were clear they would not choose to be chief constables again in the current environment:

If you’d asked would you want your old job back for three times as much pay the answer would be no. It felt like it became a thankless task. I was worn out and when your family are asking ‘is it worth it?’ and you are asking the same thing it is difficult.

I would do it again but I wouldn’t apply to be a chief constable. In the current climate I would not be prepared to apply to be a chief constable again. I would not want to enter into a deeply damaging relationship with a PCC and there is too much luck in it.

The positive responses typically recognised there had been some challenging times and frustrations but, on balance, the experience and value of a policing career was something that they would repeat if given the opportunity to do so. Comments included:

Yes, I really enjoyed it. I left wanting more, feeling it was a valuable job and that I had come full circle. I’d set out to do a job for the public, working with people and
protecting people from the bullies in society. Although we hadn’t always achieved as much as we’d have liked I felt I contributed in a positive way. I would join again. It was a really good career.

So, the things that attracted to me was; a sense of achievement, fun, it was outside work and it matters. I wanted something that matters, something that I could be proud of doing, that was good, could make a difference and make society a better place. It is great that over three decades later this has not changed. I am not cynical and embittered. To me it is remarkable that so many people who I speak to when they leave say the same thing. Many say they had a dark time at some period in their career but the vast majority said; ‘I would do it again’. For me there is nothing else I would choose to do knowing what I know now. I never got bored of it.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the tenure of chief constables between 1980-2018 supports the hypothesis that there is a higher ‘churn’ of chief constables than experienced in the last forty years. The review found that since 1980 there has been a steady decrease in chief constable tenure culminating in an unprecedentedly short average period in the rank of 3.8 years in 2018. For chief constables working outside the MPS the average length of service in the rank is currently 3.65 years. This figure has fallen annually since 2014. On average a chief constable in the 1980s had 1.2 years more experience than their colleague serving in the 2010s. Again, the average period of tenure is shorter if MPS officers are removed from the data with non-metropolitan chief constables serving in the 1980s enjoying 1.65 years more experience then chief constables serving in the 2010s. During the 1980s there were eighteen chief constables with more than a decade’s service in the rank outside of the MPS. In the 2010s there were five.

The retired chief constables were supportive of their experience of the SCC but many felt that there was little formal professional development available between the ranks of assistant chief constable and chief constable. Consequently, the interviewees felt that while they had been prepared well for the ACC rank they had not received formal professional development to enhance their ability to perform as a chief constable. There was support for the establishment of a CPD ‘framework’ to support post SCC development to avoid allegations that chief officers were behaving inappropriately when investing public money in professional development. This issue was also highlighted by the College of Policing’s Chief Officer Appointments Surveys (2017;34) and as a consequence a national ‘Leadership Hub’ will be established to provide CPD and coaching for chief officers. However, many of those interviewed for this paper were unaware of the proposal. It is therefore recommended that ongoing work by the College of Policing relating to the establishment of a chief officer ‘Leadership Hub’ and role profiles to support CPD is communicated to forces and PCCs (p.11).

Perceptions of the precarious nature of the chief constable role owing to the s.38 legislation presents a barrier for those considering the rank, particularly if they have not reached pensionable service. Conflict with a PCC can be career ending and it has proved difficult for officers to remain in policing in any other role under such circumstances. This situation reduces the pool of suitably qualified and experienced officers to fill vacancies in forces by effectively ‘barring’ those who have performed the role elsewhere and disincentivising potential applicants. It is recommended the Home Office consider mechanisms for retaining chief constables whose contract is not renewed within policing to ensure talent is not lost to the service (p.12).

The financial implications of becoming a chief constable were highlighted by many contributors as a
significant disincentive for those both performing the role and individuals considering filling chief constable vacancies. The complexity, and fluid nature, of pension and taxation rules combined with the scrutiny under which chief officers operate was identified by some interviewees as a source of anxiety and confusion. Participants in the research emphasised that for many consideration of the extra demands of the role, set against an assessment of the salary and taxation, made the prospect of either promotion to chief constable, or remaining beyond pensionable service in the rank, a financially unappealing prospect. The research identified that the pay and remuneration system appears to perversely run against the interests of policing. It is suggested that CPOSA and NPCC work with HMRC to provide clear and consistent guidance regarding tax liabilities and pension implications to ensure officers considering chief officer roles understand the financial benefits and dis-benefits associated with promotion (p.13).

Twenty-seven (62%) of the non-MPS chief constables were deputies in their current forces indicating the advantages of being an internal candidate. More than half of chief constables appointed in 2015 were the only candidate for the job with a national average of just 2.21 applicants for each position (NPCC 2015). The survey of DCCs and ACCs identified that the biggest factor impacting on a decision to apply for a chief constable’s vacancy in another force was the reputation of the PCC. This was followed by the distance of the job from the applicant’s current home. 64% of prospective chief constables stated they would not move to a new house and relocate their family to take up a chief constable role and 74% stated that they would not stay away from their family to become a chief. The third most significant consideration for potential external applicants was the presence of internal applicants for the vacancy. The establishment of the College of Policing ‘Leadership Hub’ should help address this issue. However, to challenge the perception that the internal candidate is automatically favoured, it is recommended further work is undertaken to consider whether experience of serving with a different force or organisation at a senior level should be a requirement for chief constables to widen the pool of prospective chief constable applicants and avoid organisational introversion (p.16).

Interviewees indicated the resilience of senior police leadership is stretched between a ‘professionalisation’ narrative, technocratic inspection and national and local politics. Although the retired officers cited frustrations with the strategic direction of policing and government policy the manner in which the scrutiny roles of the IPCC, HMICFRS and PCCs are currently exercised were highlighted as greater disincentives for those considering applying for the top jobs within policing. The policing arrangements in England and Wales will mature but ‘over scrutiny’ and personal vilification undermine the institution to the detriment of the public. Issues identified as being of particular concern included relationship with HMICFRS and the strong correlation between the election of recently retired male ex-police officers to PCC roles and the early retirement of four female chief constables. Consequently, it is suggested that the NPCC, with the College of Policing, propose to the government that consideration is given to legislative change to ensure former police officers should be ineligible to stand for election to PCC (p.26).

In 2015 a Committee on Standards in Public Life report concluded that there was confusion among the public, chief constables and PCCs regarding respective roles and responsibilities, particularly regarding the issue of operational independence. It is therefore recommended that Chief Constables Council would benefit from the support of a police constitutional expert to ensure clarity in respect of the difference in role between a chief constable and a PCC. In light of the turnover of chief constables and the PCC election cycle, it is also recommended that new chiefs and PCCs are formally briefed on appointment regarding the legislation and emerging case law relating to the two roles (p.28).

The ability to hold PCCs to account beyond the election cycle was further identified as a concern,
particularly in respect of the use of the s.38 power to dismiss a chief constable. The unfettered power, electoral ‘lottery’ and changes to pension rules all conspire to make the role of chief constable less attractive to officers who have not reached pensionable service. The introduction of checks and balances through the strengthening of Police and Crime Panels and an enhanced HMICFRS role regarding the use of s.38 may offer deputy chief constables some reassurance when considering applying for chief constable positions. Therefore, it is proposed a strengthened Police and Crime Panel, supported by clear guidelines and HMICFRS, could assist decision-making and provide enhanced oversight, accountability and legitimacy for forces. It is further suggested that the use of suspension and s.38 to address the underperformance of a chief constable be subject to a period of action planning and supervised review, potentially involving both HMICFRS and the Police and Crime Panel, before any public announcement is made (p30).

The retired chief constables talked about the isolation of the office and commented on the absence of formal support structures that are present within the police service for other ranks. A number of retired chief constables suggested the service could utilise recently retired chief officers for this purpose. It is therefore recommended the College of Policing and the NPCC develop a mentoring scheme comprised of a cadre of retired chief officers to support serving chief constables. This approach could be supported by the new Leadership Hub (p.32).

The diminishing tenure of senior leaders combined with a limited ‘pipeline’ of suitably qualified and motivated candidates to fill strategic level roles are not trends unique to policing. Other areas of the public sector such as Health, Education and Local Government are experiencing a similar phenomenon. Therefore, it is proposed that the above recommendations are revisited following the completion of work by the Cabinet Office’s Public Service Leadership Taskforce regarding the retention of senior leaders across the public sector (p.7).

The current dearth of applicants for chief constable positions bears testimony to the fact that those closest to them acutely recognise the demands, pressures and vulnerabilities of the position. An objective assessment of the last five years indicates recent police reforms have conspired to make the role of chief constable a more short-term appointment. This work identified broad consensus between PCCs, HMIs and chief constables that the declining average period of chief constable tenure is unlikely to provide the level of stable strategic leadership currently required by policing. Furthermore, within the current arrangements officers eligible to apply for chief constable positions are likely to consider the post less attractive than they might have a decade ago owing to unease regarding role insecurity and remuneration considerations. The successful delivery of the College of Policing’s ‘Leadership Hub’ will help address concerns relating to the development of senior officers, career planning and national overview of talent within the service as well as supporting PCCs and chief constables in the identification of appropriate candidates to fill vacancies. However, in light of the wider context of extended police officer careers, changes to tax liabilities and perceptions of ‘unfettered’ PCC powers the current situation is unlikely to improve significantly. Chief Constables’ Council, HMICFRS, the APCC, Home Office and the College of Policing are encouraged to consider the measures proposed as a result of this work with a view to ensuring the future delivery of policing is enabled by the most talented senior police leaders.
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