

Predictions of doom have not materialised and PCCs are proving they have the potential to be an effective catalyst for change

blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/the-predictions-of-doom-have-not-materialised-and-pccs-are-proving-they-have-the-potential-to-be-an-effective-catalyst-for-change/

11/27/2013

*The low turn-out in the Police and Crime Commissioner elections lead to a great deal of scepticism about the newly created role but it has now been a year since the first cohort took office. To mark the anniversary Policy Exchange published a collection of essays giving an insight in to the experience of the PCC “pioneers”. **Charlotte McLeod** summarises the findings.*



This month marked the one year anniversary since the election of England and Wales’ Police and Crime Commissioners. In 2003 Policy Exchange’s first report calling for the creation of locally-elected representatives was published, and since then Policy Exchange has played a key role in the development of the policy. Most recently, we published [‘The Pioneers: Police and Crime Commissioners, one year on,’](#) a collection of essays from a cross-party group of PCCs.

When the Coalition pledged to ‘introduce measures to make the police more accountable through oversight by a directly elected individual,’ opponents were quick to dismiss the policy. Both Ed Miliband and Yvette Cooper called for the plans to be scrapped, describing it as ‘the wrong policy for the wrong time.’ The policy also received criticism from those within the policing sector, raising concerns over the potential politicisation of the police and the risk of interference with the police’s operational independence.

With the PCC elections receiving widespread criticism for the low turnout of 15.1%, cynicism has continued throughout their first year, heightened with sensationalist and often unrepresentative media coverage. Admittedly, some PCCs have not aided their popularity through appointments or expenses errors that have thrust them into the media spotlight, in the first year of a new and very public post.

However, the one year anniversary may have marked a turning point. Focus is beginning to away from election reproach and expenses scandals, and towards the recognition that these reforms are beginning to work. The predictions of doom from vested interests who opposed the introduction of PCCs have not materialised – a good reminder that reformers should often treat such self-serving prophecies with a pinch of salt.



This week saw the publication of Lord Stevens’ policing review, calling for the PCC model “to be discontinued in its present form”. Alternatives proposed include a directly-elected Policing Board (which would involve complex elections for multiple members and the disappearance of an accountable figure), an Elected Chair overseeing an indirectly-elected Policing Board (diluting the strength and clarity of leadership of the current model), or effectively a return to policing representatives from the local authority (reversing the great improvements in visibility and accountability). Yet before this review, recent statements from Labour representatives had suggested that many were realising the huge potential that the PCC reforms hold for the future of policing and crime.

The Labour PCC for Greater Manchester, Tony Lloyd, describes in our publication how ‘I was sceptical to the idea...

[but] as the year has gone on, I have seen more and more how Commissioners have the potential to be an effective catalyst for change, and how local people can be involved in decision-making and policy-formation on a level that has simply never been seen before.' At a recent Policy Exchange event, David Hanson MP indicated that there are now three options for Labour regarding PCCs: to keep them as they are, to improve the scrutiny arrangements, or to widen their powers. Although this week's policing review has attempted to discredit the model, it is becoming clear that once you let the democratic genie out of the bottle, it's very hard to put it back in.

Our collection of essays from PCCs goes beyond the media headlines, the political disagreements and the conflicting polls. It provides a valuable insight from the pioneers themselves, highlighting their achievements, campaigns and ambitions, and focuses on four themes; doing more with less, cutting crime, delivering for victims and the public, and what the future holds for PCCs.



(Credit: West Midlands Police)

The PCC for Northamptonshire, Adam Simmonds, outlines his commitment to the integration of police and fire services to deliver the most effective and efficient services to meet the needs of his communities. Chris Salmon, PCC for Dyfed Powys, has launched a Commissioner's Fund that puts money at the disposal of front line officers to support projects they feel will prevent crime. Matthew Ellis, PCC for Staffordshire, highlights his dedication to sustainable improvement in the support, training and multi-agency collaboration for dealing with mental health in the criminal justice system. Martyn Underhill, PCC for Dorset, has opened a Victims Bureau, offering support and signposting for victims to the information and help they need through the partnership of all local criminal justice agencies, providing an 'end to end' service.

Vera Baird QC, PCC for Northumbria, has spent her first year dedicated to pursuing community confidence, putting victims first and cutting crime through early intervention. The Northumbria Commissioner has launched a 'Safe Newcastle' course, providing vulnerability training for the prevention of attacks and sexual abuse in the night time economy. Using her unique position as a PCC, she has led from the front and brought together partners to bring about change.

At the national level, Olly Martins, Labour PCC for Bedfordshire, details his decision to write a letter to the Ministry of Justice regarding the national procurement of electronic monitoring, calling for greater use of compulsory GPS tagging within a localised framework. The letter was co-signed by 26 cross-party PCCs, and received support from local MPs and widespread media coverage. As the first occasion on which PCCs came together to lobby the government, it highlights the potential for PCCs to become a powerful force at the national level.

Our publication demonstrates the pioneering work PCCs are carrying out for their local communities, in a much more visible and accountable role than police authorities could have ever accomplished in the past. Looking to the future, our report published earlier this year 'Power Down' calls for further powers to be devolved to PCCs across the wider criminal justice system, a call echoed by PCCs themselves and the Home Secretary. If PCCs hands are tied with a lack of direct control over criminal justice, how can we expect PCCs to fulfil the 'and Crime' aspect of their role and truly work towards cutting crime through effecting change in the wider criminal justice arena? As Policy Exchange celebrates ten years of influencing the localism agenda through the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners, we hope policy makers will seize this once in a generation opportunity to take advantage of the creation of these increasingly influential, directly-elected local commissioners.

Note: This article gives the views of the author, and not the position of the British Politics and Policy blog, nor of the London School of Economics. Please read our [comments policy](#) before posting.

About the Author

Charlotte McLeod is a Research Fellow in the Crime and Justice Unit at Policy Exchange. She was called to the Bar by The Honourable Society of the Inner Temple in November 2012, following completion of the Bar Professional Training Course at City Law School and LLB at Cardiff University.

