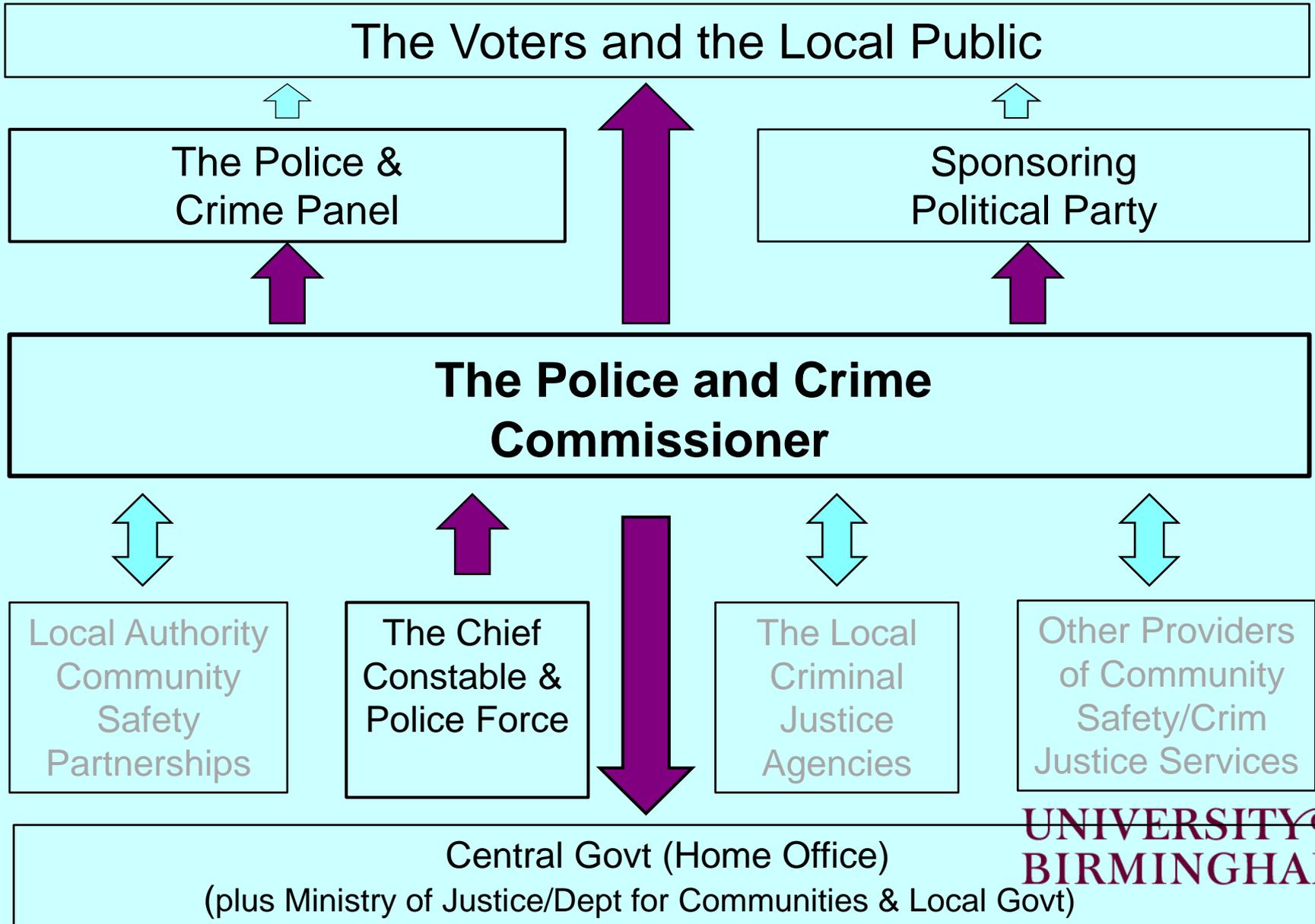


**U** **Competing Accountabilities** **B**  
*of*  
**Police and Crime Commissioners**

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*30<sup>th</sup> June 2014*

# PCC Relationships and Accountabilities



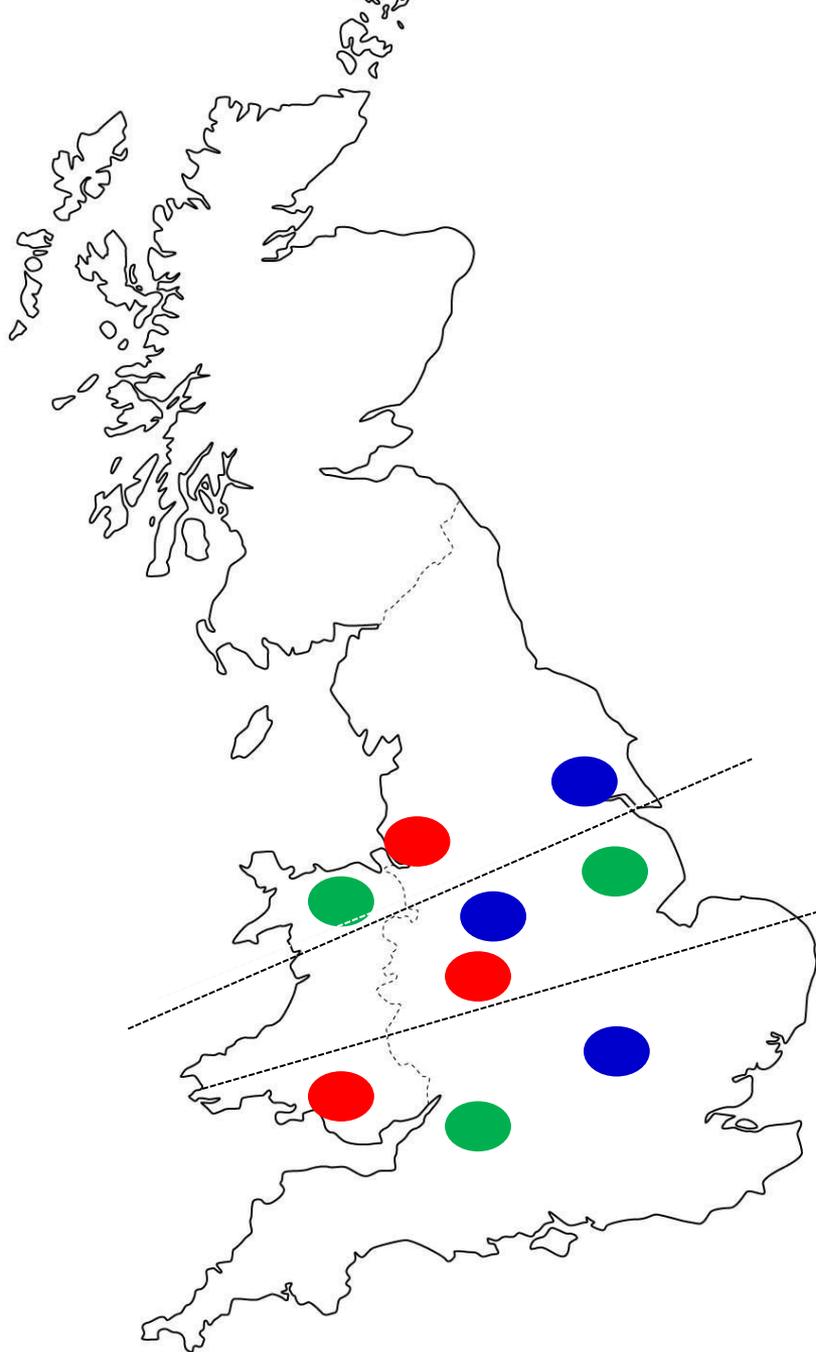
# Five Potential Accountabilities

1. Accountability of the PCC to the ***Voters and Public***
2. Accountability of the PCC to the ***Police and Crime Panel***
3. Accountability of the PCC to ***Central Government***
4. Accountability of the PCC to ***Political Sponsors***
5. Accountability of the ***Chief Constable*** to the PCC

# The Research...

- Interviews with 9 PCCs
  - conducted between June and October 2013
    - Three Conservative; three Labour; and 3 Independents
    - One of each in (respectively) the north, the midlands and the south of England & Wales
    - A cross-section of mainly rural, mixed urban/rural, and mainly metropolitan police force areas

# The Nine selected PCCs



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# 1. Accountability to Voters and the Public

- Significant out-and-about in communities and with local groups
  - *“PCCs are set to become some of the most recognised public leaders in the country – more so than most local councillors and many members of parliament.”*
  - *“The police themselves have been amazed at what this is all producing by way of complaints from public.”*
  - *“Being out and about and listening is how you learn about how the force is working.”*
  - *I have listened to your experiences, concerns, and suggestions; So in a very real sense, this is your Police and Crime Plan. You are my co-authors because you know your communities better than anyone else”.*

- *“In determining my priorities I have listened to the views that the public have expressed through engagement events and feedback questionnaires.*
- *“This plan sets out our priorities for 2013-2017 which are based on the issues you have raised. You have told me that your concerns are anti-social behaviour, burglary and domestic and sexual violence. I will ensure that wherever you live – rural, suburban, town or city – your police will work with you to deliver these priorities.”*
- *“Listening is what this job is all about – people say things to you in the street that they wouldn’t say to you in a booked appointment or if they were come into the building”.*

## 2. Accountability to the Police and Crime Panel

- Several of the PCPs shifted their position from initial scepticism and negativity to being generally supportive - once they had heard the Commissioner's explanations and had understood the thinking behind the choices and decisions.
- The challenge for former police authority members in coming to terms with their role as 'scrutineers' of the Commissioner's decisions.
- The challenge for panels of part-time councillors (from across the area) in scrutinising the decisions of a full-time PCC

- Most PCCs were fairly sceptical about the quality of scrutiny offered by their panels;
  - *“a bit tokenistic”*,
  - *“without real teeth” and “not very dynamic”*,
  - *“a wholly inadequate way of holding you to account”*.
- But do the Panels select the right councillors for the role?

# 3. Accountability to Central Government

- Contrary to expectations, PCCs commented positively on the constructive balance they felt the Home Office had struck between providing support, if and when requested (including good access to the Home Secretary in person), and allowing each to go about their role in their own way
- While recognising their obligations in support of the national ‘strategic policing requirement’, none saw this as presenting contentious pressures for them, or creating particular conflicts with their own commitments and priorities.

## 4. Accountability to Political Sponsors

- Of 41 elected PCCs, 29 were sponsored by a political party (16 by the Conservative party and 13 by the Labour party), while the other 12 (nearly one in 3) are ‘independents’.
- *“a clear message from the [election] campaign was that the public don’t want politics in policing – so the rosettes are off”.*

- But some perceptible differences in polity:
  - Three Conservative emphasised a strong managerialist agenda (improving VfM in policing, in ‘*getting upstream*’ and preventing crime; and in more *integration* between services)
  - Some very critical of the police in relation to strategic management.
    - “*They talk endlessly about strategy but are not good at it. Most of their work is about meeting deadlines in minutes and hours, and they struggle to lift their sights towards the longer term*”,
    - “*I hadn’t prepared [myself] for the shambolic state of the business side of policing - not policing itself – but the systems and processes by which it is managed*”

- Three Labour PCCs talked more about local issues – and more about *‘problem-solving’*
- PCCs with experience in the judiciary also articulated strong concerns for issues of fairness and equity.
  - One former magistrate talked of concerns about the force’s ‘stop and search’ policies and practices and spoke of the challenges in communicating with hard-to-reach groups and minorities.
  - Another with judicial experience had prioritised domestic and sexual abuse and violence in the Police and Crime Plan.
- Possibly some differences reflected the character of the different areas and criminogenic factors. But also individual backgrounds and experience of PCCs.

# 5. Holding the Chief Constable to Account

- The PCC as Principal!
- Keen awareness of the significance of the less-than-clearly-defined 'boundary line' between their own more strategic area of responsibility and that for operational policing of their chief constable
- In most cases, the boundary line had been (gently) 'tested' on more than one occasion!

- working relationships mostly described as ‘good’, but emphasising the importance of the ‘*keeping of distance*’ and ‘*retaining a certain formality*’.
- Two had made their own appointments; and two had known their chief constables very well from previous roles.
- All held regular formal meetings with their chief constables for the purpose of ‘holding to account’ (and with official minutes taken of such meetings); mostly on a weekly or fortnightly basis, plus near daily additional contact.
- Mostly PCCs have chosen to site their offices within Police Headquarters - for pragmatic and cost reasons.

# Conclusions

- The dominant accountability is with the voters and public (and with little indication of competing accountabilities in practice)
- It is still far too early to reach conclusions about the impacts of the new model of police governance through PCCs.
- But the story so far seems to be of police governance in England and Wales becoming distinctly more visible, more consultative and, by implication, more publicly accountable too.