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## New policing

Too important to be left to police alone, says Flanagan

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Peter Neyroud has spent a year establishing the credentials of the National Policing Improvement Agency as a key ally in police service reform. He tells Lynda King Taylor about a complex journey and an ambitious plan for year two

# Growing pains of a fledgling agency



**NEYROUD:** "we have improved on all the critical infrastructures"

The launch of the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) a year ago heralded what its chief executive Peter Neyroud calls a "new era in policing" with a single point of contact delivering reform priorities for the police service. His job is to be "an ally to the service – a trusted partner".

That is not easy given the NPIA had to create a central resource after long years in which the responsibility for police service development had been distributed across different organisations whose role, accountability and coordination had not always been clear, or as some officers suggested "in the interests of policing".

Neyroud says the first year "has been crucial to restore brand reputation alongside merger growing pains". He admits the transition has been a "headache" – hardly surprising since he has taken almost 2,000 individuals from half a dozen previous organisations, each with different terms and conditions, and 400 new recruits. So far 86 per cent have signed up to a new single agency agreement. "We have had a huge turnover in the first year," he says, "not to mention bringing together half a dozen different IT schemes into one, and at the same time there's been the transformation challenge of moving from an inheritance not highly regarded by the police service to a progressive NPIA." At the same time he has had to win over his customers, including 43 police forces in England and Wales alone.

"Bringing all this together has been a difficult and complex challenge and we are only just coming through it with our business plan ready for the Home Secretary," says Neyroud. "This is very much built around the future not the past – a critical step forward."

The agency will play a key role in responding to Sir Ronnie Flanagan's review recommendations, 17 of which will involve close working between

the NPIA and partners including the tripartate of the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Home Office and the Association of Police Authorities. An assistant chief constable within the NPIA will serve as a full-time manager for the recommendations in which NPIA leads or is directly involved.

There are four key areas: bureaucracy and how it impacts on frontline police work; sustaining and mainstreaming neighbourhood policing; enhancing the accountability of the police at the local level; and improving the way police forces manage resources.

Neyroud, Oxford educated and a former chief constable at Thames Valley, has to ensure that critical infrastructure is provided for all forces. That includes the police national computer, the police national database and the Airwave programme – the digital radio network used by the emergency services and part of Flanagan's mobile data recommendations for the technology to be used to record incidents, cutting the average time taken to log stop and search information from 25 to 6 minutes.

He admits the IT issues are challenging. If all the NPIA "had to do was to put 10,000 hand-held mobile data devices into the hands of individual police officers that would merely transfer the bureaucracy to the street," says Neyroud. "This would not be a gain – in fact it would be a pain." He has to enable officers to make decisions more efficiently. "Contributing to public safety, looking at the whole process, not just giving out the device and allowing it to link to an Airwave carrier."

The NPIA's second year will also be about helping forces to achieve national standards, through leadership, learning and development programmes for example. Flanagan and Neyroud endorse the need for greater standardisation in processes.

Neyroud sees advances that will be appreciated in the neighbourhood. The most important thing now is to "keep the momentum going" with an agreement that the NPIA's neighbourhood policing

programme extends to 2011 and that local authorities and others supporting public safety become increasingly involved.

Changes have been taking place in training student officers, sending them out of training centres and into the community. "You must embed at the start of a career that training is fundamentally focused on public safety and, above all, neighbourhood based," he says. "We have support packages tailored for the workplace on neighbourhood policing, and we have to change the way leaders lead – all very well having the frontline officers changing the way they work but they must see senior officers behaving in a neighbourhood way and understanding how critical it is for a genuine engagement with communities."

The nature of a fledgling agency poses challenges in itself. Apart from obvious transition and growing pains, Neyroud is in a new landscape for policing improvement. "There were so many unknowns when we started. We inherited significant work, then when you peeled back the detail, the reality was a lot more troublesome than we originally thought," he confesses.

"However we have improved on all the critical infrastructures – the national police computer has done more transactions than ever in its 40 years. The DNA database grows and gains more detections, as does the fingerprint database." He has completed the major part of the Airwave programme and others that "have hung around for a decade. We have done much to finish off things that should quite frankly have been finished some time ago." It is no mean feat when simultaneously the NPIA has been asked to identify budget savings of £30m.

"I need to continue to negotiate the mandate and gain collective support to make the programmes succeed," he says. "Equally I need good quality staff on short-term secondment as we can only succeed with truly talented people working for the agency." It becomes more problematic if more priorities are thrown the NPIA's way – the result of that would be spreading the NPIA thinner. "Hold to the priorities that have been agreed and we have an excellent chance," says Neyroud.

Every police officer in the land – and those they serve – can hope the agency receives that as a first birthday present. The NPIA is worth that.

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