

WHO NEEDS CRITICAL FRIENDS?

INDEPENDENT ADVISORY GROUPS IN THE AGE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME

COMMISSIONER

Bill Dixon

Professor of Criminology

School of Sociology and Social Policy

University of Nottingham

University Park

Nottingham

NG7 2RD

William.dixon@nottingham.ac.uk

Abstract

In the early 2000s, many police forces in England and Wales set up independent advisory groups (IAGs) following an inquiry into the flawed investigation of the murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, by London's Metropolitan Police. Members of IAGs were to act as critical friends of the police providing independent advice on policies, procedures and practices, thus ensuring that no section of their local community was disadvantaged through a lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs. Based on a case study of an IAG in an English police force, this article reviews the operation of IAGs following the radical changes made to police governance by the introduction of directly elected police and crime commissioners (PCCs). Its main argument is that more thought needs to be given to the role of IAGs in this new landscape and urgent steps taken to clarify their relationships with police forces and PCCs.

Introduction

On 5 July 2017, the print edition of *The Guardian* newspaper carried two stories that illustrate the continuing need to guard against racism and other forms of discrimination in policing, and the role that critical friends of the police may be able to play in doing so. The first story reported on an investigation carried out by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) into the murder of an Iranian refugee, Bijan Ebrahimi, on 14 July 2013 (Morris, 2017). The Commission found that the local police force, Avon and Somerset Constabulary, had failed to protect Mr Ebrahimi in the face of 'a violent seven-year campaign of hate' by his neighbours. There was evidence that the force had treated him 'consistently differently from his neighbours, to his detriment and without reasonable explanation'. According to IPCC Commissioner Jan Williams, 'Some of the evidence has the hallmarks of what could be construed as racial bias, conscious or unconscious.' The second story concerned the appointment of Neville Lawrence as the chair of a new 'community

reference group', whose members would act, in the words of a senior Metropolitan Police officer, as 'critical friends' of the police able to 'represent Londoners and what Londoners feel' about the force's response to knife crime (Dodd, 2017). Mr Lawrence, readers were reminded, had 'fought a long campaign to expose the police blunders and prejudice' that had dogged the investigation of his teenage son, Stephen's, murder by a gang of white youths in 1993.

Read together, what these two stories suggest is that, a quarter of a century after Stephen Lawrence was killed in a racially motivated attack on the streets of South London, and almost 20 years since Sir William Macpherson (1999) identified what he described as institutional racism as a feature of the way in which his murder had been investigated, relationships between the police and black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities in Britain remain fraught with difficulties. They also imply that the police may have to rely on independently-minded – Neville Lawrence was quoted in *The Guardian* as saying that he would not be a 'nodding dog' – people from those communities to act as critical friends if these difficulties are to be overcome. This article has two main aims. The first is to look at what critical friendship means and how it works in practice from the perspective of the independent advisory groups (IAGs) set up in the wake of the Macpherson Inquiry. The second is to consider how the role and status of one such group and its members has changed following the election in England and Wales of police and crime commissioners (PCCs) under the terms of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act (PRSRA) 2011. It begins with a brief introduction to the history of IAGs, combined with a review of the rather sparse literature on their work. Subsequent sections set out the latest official thinking on their role, function and governance and note that the institutional context within which

IAGs operate was transformed by the replacement of police authorities with directly elected PCCs in 2012. This is followed by a short account of the background to research conducted by the author in an English police force area identified as 'Cityshire'. The main argument of the article is contained in the next section. This considers how personnel from Cityshire Police (CP), representatives from the office of its PCC (OPCC) and the members of the IAG itself (CIAG) see and experience the practice of critical friendship in the context of a new, and still rapidly changing, landscape of police governance. A concluding section offers some thoughts on the development of IAGs, and critical friendship more generally, in the age of the PCC.

Independent Advisory Groups

The first IAG was established in London in January 1999 as the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) readied itself for the publication of the report of the Macpherson Inquiry the following month (Drewery, 2002). This IAG for 'visible minority groups' (Newburn and Matassa, 2002: 42) was followed by a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Advisory Group set up in February 2000 in the wake of the bombing of the Admiral Duncan pub in the Soho area of London by the Nazi sympathiser, David Copeland. The groups were presented as evidence of the seriousness with which the MPS was engaging with the conclusions of the Macpherson Inquiry (Drewery, 2002). These famously included the finding that 'institutional racism' existed in the MPS, other police services and other institutions across Britain (Macpherson, 1999: para. 6.39).¹ According to Macpherson (1999: para. 6.17), the kind of 'unwitting racism' evident in the MPS's response to the murder of Stephen Lawrence, could arise from of 'a lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs', 'well-intentioned but patronising words or actions', an 'unfamiliarity with the behaviour or

cultural traditions of people or families from minority ethnic communities’ and/or the ‘racist stereotyping of black people as potential criminals or troublemakers’. The report concluded that: ‘It is incumbent upon every institution to examine their policies and the outcome of their policies and practices to guard against disadvantaging any section of our communities’ (Macpherson, 1999: 46.27). The purpose of the two IAGs established by the MPS in 1999 and 2000 was thus to: improve communications with groups not usually in dialogue with the police; prevent the escalation of incidents into more critical/criminal events; anticipate community responses to police actions; and provide advice to the police on everything from the broad sweep of policy and strategy to the conduct of major investigations and proposed operations (Drewery, 2002: 14).

This is not the place to trace the development of IAGs from these early beginnings in any detail. Suffice to say then that, within some five years of the first group emerging in London, Janet Foster and colleagues (2005: 51) were able to report that over four-fifths of all police forces in England and Wales had established a force-wide IAG while 70% had set up groups at basic command unit (BCU) level. Over two thirds of forces had called on IAGs to advise on particular campaigns or operations. Given the extent and rapidity of their spread across the landscape of post-Macpherson policing, it is slightly surprising to find that, at least as far as the academic literature is concerned, IAGs seem to have risen almost without trace. The only in-depth discussions the present author has been able to trace are the insider accounts provided by Brathwaite (2009), Azah (2009) and Murji (2011). Brathwaite (2009) writes from the perspective of a senior police officer involved in liaising with what was initially known as the Lay Advisory Group (LAG) set up by the MPS in 1999; Azah (2009) as a lay adviser and, later, the second chair of the IAG the LAG became from December 1999. Interesting though these two contributions are, it is to Murji’s (2011) work that we must turn for a thorough examination of critical

friendship in police governance relationships. Murji writes not just as a student of such relationships but as a former member of the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA), the body formally responsible for governing the MPS until its replacement, in 2012, by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) under the terms of the PSSRA referred to earlier. Although Murji makes it clear that he never attended meetings of the IAG, he had been, in a sense - and much like Brathwaite and Azah - an insider immersed in the business of holding the police to account (Murji, 2011). His reflections on the status of members of the MPA and the IAG as critical friends of the police are all the more instructive for that.

The police and critical friendship

Murji's starting point is the distinction he draws between the formal, statutory functions of the MPA and the more informal, voluntary advisory role played by the IAG. He characterises the former as embodying the 'accountability' of the MPS to its police authority, the latter as providing some kind of 'answerability' to the communities it serves (Murji, 2011: 261). Lister and Rowe (2016: 5) make a similar point when they note that 'community engagement' with groups in conflict with the police is better seen as a form of 'answerability' than as 'public accountability', since there is generally no sanction for failings on the part of the police.² If, as Murji suggests, both police authority and IAG could be seen as critical friends of the police, the nature of that relationship differed in important respects according to their contrasting roles and status. Critical friends, like Orwell's farm animals, may be equal; but some are more equal than others. As for the notion of critical friendship itself, Murji (2011: 158) observes that it appears paradoxical in that, for most people, 'friends are not supposed to be critics, and critics are rarely friends'. Yet it is precisely in this paradox that its value may lie. Critical friends enjoy a unique position in relation to the police. On one hand, they are insiders with privileged access to information, participants in decision-making able to deflect unwarranted or ill-informed

criticism more robustly and credibly than the police themselves. On the other, they are outsiders, independent of the police organisation, well-placed to evaluate, question and challenge established ways of thinking and doing and pass on the concerns and criticisms of a wider public (Murji, 2011; Waddington 2010).³ Drawing on his own experience in the first IAG in London, Azah (2009: 183) captures the potential tensions between the two facets of the role - friendly insider and critical outsider – well when he remarks that, from the outset, ‘there was always going to be a compromise between getting up close to the service to understand its culture and being compromised by its processes and bureaucracy’. A final point to be taken from Murji’s work is just how much less was, and still is, known about the work of IAGs than the more public operations of the old, pre-2012 police authorities and even of the PCCs that replaced them:

IAGs may be useful critical friends but we lack information on what the key messages from and impact of IAGs have been. In both operational and policy areas, there simply is not enough known from ‘the inside’ about what happens in them as IAGs remain closed from both public and academic scrutiny. (Murji, 2011: 263)⁴

Before an attempt is made to shine a light on this hitherto hidden world, it only remains to consider the most recent, but rather dated, guidance on the role, function and governance of IAGs, issued by the now defunct Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in 2011, and to sketch in the immediate background to the research in Cityshire.

ACPO’s Advice and Guidance on the role, function and governance of IAGs

In his forward (sic) to the Guidance, the then Commissioner of the City of London Police states that IAGs evolved to start the process of creating the genuine partnerships with all sections of the community advocated in the report of the Macpherson Inquiry (ACPO, 2011: 5). The guidance was the outcome of an extensive process of consultation with police forces and authorities, the Home Office and IAG members culminating in a conference held

in November 2010. It was formulated to assist in the delivery of ACPO's Equality, Diversity and Human Rights (EDHR) Strategy, and explicit reference is made to paragraphs 6.17 and 46.27 of the Macpherson Inquiry report on 'unwitting racism', and the need to guard against its effects, respectively. What the guidance has to say about 'independence and the role of the IAG' is worth quoting in full:

IAGs provide the valuable role of critical friend to the Police Force/Police Authority, not as an independent group but as a forum where independent advisors can give independent advice on the development and review of policy, procedure and practices identified by the Police and the Police Authority in partnership with the IAG. The IAG role is not one of formal scrutiny, but ensures the policies, procedures and practices of the Force meet the strategic aims of the EDHR strategy and provide a safeguard against the service disadvantaging any section of the community through lack of understanding, ignorance or mistaken beliefs as set out by Macpherson. (ACPO, 2011: 11, emphasis in original)

Elsewhere on the same page it is made clear that police forces must work in partnership with their police authority and IAG to encourage the active participation of people from diverse groups. The word 'independent' refers to the status of advisers as people independent of the police, and the nature of the advice they provide from their perspective as an individual member of the community, rather than the relationship between the IAG as a group and the police organisation. Later in the document it is stated that advisers may also be called on to provide their 'unique perspective' on 'critical incidents' where the police response may have a significant impact on the confidence in the police of the victim, their family and/or the community (ACPO, 2011: 16). Two points in particular are worth noting at this stage. The first is that IAGs are intended to act as critical friends of both police forces and police authorities, the formal, statutory bodies established to govern forces under legislation dating back to the Police Act 1964 and what was then the last major reform of police accountability in England and Wales. The second is that the purpose of the critical

friendship offered by IAGs is to advise and guard against error. It is not for IAGs to usurp the role of police authorities by scrutinising forces in a formal way.

Advice from the College of Policing

The ACPO guidance has not been comprehensively updated since it was published in 2011. However, the College of Policing, the body charged with setting standards for the professional development of policing in England and Wales since 2012, did issue some further advice on the recruitment, role and value of IAGs in 2015. This document provides a more contemporary gloss on the advice provided by ACPO. It is intended to 'allow police forces to regain control of IAGs', some of which 'had morphed far beyond their original concept'.⁵ It puts a new emphasis on IAGs as providing insights into the 'assets' of (unspecified) under-represented groups as well as their 'wants and needs' (College of Policing, 2015: 2 and 4). Specific reference is made to forces and IAGs adhering to the Code of Ethics for Policing published by the College in 2014 and to the importance of the latter involving young people and reflecting the diversification of communities as a result of immigration and globalisation. The closest the document comes to mentioning critical friendship is when it states that, 'We [the police] are not seeking endorsement – we are looking for critical appraisal' (College of Policing, 2015: 10).

The age of the Police and Crime Commissioner

Perhaps the most remarkable thing about the College of Policing's document is that it makes no mention of the most far-reaching reform of police governance in England and Wales in half a century - a reform that had swept away police authorities, one of the three key partners referred to in the ACPO advice of 2011, and replaced them with directly elected

police and crime commissioners. Equally startling is the fact that PCCs were not represented on the working group that drew up the College's advice.

There is a burgeoning literature on what prompted the Coalition government elected in 2010 to undertake this transformation, and on the effect that the introduction of PCCs has had on police governance.⁶ There is no space to summarise that literature here; but the following points are significant if the work of the Cityshire IAG is to be seen in context. The first thing to note is that section 1(9) of the PRSRA 2011 formally abolished the police authorities established under the Police Act 1964. Other subsections, (5) – (7) of section 1, set out the core functions of the PCC. They make it clear that PCCs are to take over from police authorities in securing the maintenance of an efficient and effective police force and holding the chief constable of their local force to account for the exercise of her/his functions under the terms of the Act. As amended by section 14 of the PRSRA 2011, section 96(2) of Police Act 1996, also charges PCCs with making arrangements for obtaining 'the views of people in that area about matters concerning the policing of that area' after consulting the chief constable. The Policing Protocol, issued by the then Home Secretary, Theresa May, under section 79(1) and (5) of the PRSRA 2011, sets out the official view of the legal powers and duties of PCCs in relation to the other parties to the new, quadripartite structure of police governance established by the Act. Paragraph 17(i) of the Protocol states that the PCC must 'provide the link between the police and communities, working to translate the legitimate desires and aspirations of the public into action'. In the absence of any reference to IAGs in the Act and the Protocol, or to PCCs in the College of Policing's advice, the scope for confusion and contestation over their respective roles and responsibilities in facilitating communication between police and public is palpable.

References to IAGs in the literature on PCCs are similarly hard to find. So, for example, there are none in the index to the comprehensive empirical study of PCCs by Cales and Owens (2016). The idea of critical friendship appears in shorter discussions of the new governance arrangements by Lister (2014) and Raine (2016) but then only in the context of the relationship between PCCs and the Police and Crime Panels (PCPs) established under section 28 of the PRSRA 2011 to scrutinise the exercise of their statutory functions.

Whether PCPs are models of critical friendship at work is open to question with Lister (2014), Bailey (2015) and Loveday (2018) all expressing serious misgivings about their ability to provide the 'checks and balances in relation to the performance of the PCC' envisaged for them (Home Office, 2011: 5, para. 24).

The research in Cityshire

Cityshire is one of a number of larger forces outside London that are responsible for policing both a significant conurbation and a rural hinterland of smaller towns and villages. At the time of the research in 2015 and 2016, Cityshire (like many similar forces in England and Wales) was coping with the demands of policing an increasingly diverse population after undergoing successive rounds of budget cuts and organisational restructuring prompted by austerity measures imposed in the wake of the global financial crisis of 2007-8. The research in Cityshire on which the remainder of this article is based was commissioned but not paid for by the local police force. Access to the Cityshire IAG was negotiated with the force before the agreement of the Group and its membership was sought, and given. The research concentrated on the main force-wide IAG. In the words of the document dating from January 2014 that served as its constitution, the principal purpose of this Group was to

be 'a strategic group who seek to improve two way communication between [Cityshire] Police and the diverse communities of [City] and the County'.

Three other IAGs existed in the force area at the time of the research. One dealt with issues of disability, while the other two were responsible for improving relations between the police and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) community: one in the centre of the main city; the other in a town some 35 miles away. As became evident during the course of the research, the four IAGs operated almost entirely independently of each other. Fieldwork for the research was carried out by the author between May 2015 and September 2016. It consisted of the observation of six of the seven meetings of the IAG that took place between these dates as well as scrutiny of both internal and public documents, including agendas and minutes of Group meetings and the 'constitution' referred to earlier.

Interviews of between 30 and 40 minutes' duration were conducted with five of the most active independent advisers, three police personnel (two officers and one member of police staff) with experience of interacting with the IAG and two members of staff from the office of the PCC (OPCC) for the force area.⁷ Informed consent was obtained from participants and confirmed in writing before each interview commenced. All interviews were conducted face-to-face at a place of the interviewee's choosing. They were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed thematically.

Cityshire Independent Advisory Group (CIAG)

As of July 2016, CIAG's list of members/independent advisers consisted of 31 names, compared with 28 11 months earlier in August 2015. One of the 31 was recorded as having resigned while three were described as 'new'. Both lists assigned members to a particular faith ('Muslim', 'Jewish', 'Christian pastor' and so on), ethnic ('African Caribbean') or

national ('Rwandan', 'Polish') group.⁸ This was a source of some controversy and one of the advisers interviewed for the research took exception to being identified as belonging to a group which s/he felt s/he did not represent. From the interviews conducted with members of CIAG, it seemed that what they brought to the Group was a degree of familiarity with policing issues acquired in the course of interactions with the police as the providers of complementary or related services. Their relationship with the police was based on shared or overlapping interests rather than direct experience of encountering them as victims of crime, let alone as suspects or the targets of police-initiated contacts involving stop and search or other coercive powers.

Although members received e-mail updates from the police co-ordinator on matters thought to be of interest to the Group, the main business of CIAG was conducted in its regular meetings. Of the seven meetings held during the fieldwork period, only one attracted an attendance of more than eight advisers; and two struggled to reach the quorum of five. If attendance at meetings is taken as a rather crude yardstick, less than a fifth of CIAG's members could be described as active. The agenda for these meetings was framed by the member of police staff responsible for servicing the Group in consultation with its chair and a senior operational commander from the force. It tended to follow a standard pattern. The opening welcome, introductions and apologies for absence were handled by the chair followed by formal approval of the minutes of the previous meeting and discussion of any matters arising. Surprisingly perhaps, it was at this point that many of the more lively exchanges took place, most notably over the Group's unsuccessful attempts to persuade the Chief Constable of Cityshire to insist that the force's officers record all instances of the use of informal powers of 'stop and account'.⁹ The remainder of a typical

meeting was taken up with one or more presentations by the police and/or a representative from another official body on an issue of current concern. For example, advisers attending a meeting held early in 2016 were given a presentation on the work of an inter-agency panel on hate crime followed by an update on Prevent, one of the main strands of the British government's counter-terrorism strategy. Meetings generally ended with a series of standing agenda items on themed issues of particular concern to the Group and consideration of any other business.

The reaction to police and other presentations tended to be rather muted. Serious concerns about the impact of budget reductions and restructuring on levels of service simmered away beneath the surface of many discussions only to boil over in unexpected places, such as in response to a presentation about Cityshire's estates' strategy at a meeting held in the early summer of 2015. As far as the themed issues taken as standing items were concerned, stop and search and positive action in recruitment and retention were the only areas in which the CIAG seemed to have had any impact, and continued to challenge policy and practice as contemplated in the guidance issued by ACPO and the College of Policing. That these issues had been raised in the first place, and were kept alive on the Group's agenda throughout the period of the research, was largely down to the doggedness and skill with which they were pursued by its two most assiduous and imperturbable members.

From observing CIAG at work over a period of almost 18 months, it would be unfair to say that the Group was incapable of critically appraising the work of the Cityshire force along the lines envisaged in the College of Policing's advice. Having said that, the police were routinely represented at meetings by at least one senior officer of the rank of superintendent or above and were generally able to respond to any criticisms offered by the

Group with equanimity. The only signs of discomfort obvious to this researcher were evident on those occasions (of which there were several) when police representatives were challenged over the Chief Constable's refusal to accept the Group's advice on recording stop and account. When it came to the crucial issue of budget restrictions, the police were happy to share advisers' indignation at the effects of government-imposed austerity measures as long as too many questions were not asked about exactly what should be cut back in response to them and how deep those cuts should be – decisions for which Cityshire Police and its leaders were responsible along with the PCC.

Critical friendship

Important though it is to have a sense of the extent to which CIAG's advisers were able to function as critical friends in practice, only the interview data reveal how that role was seen by those involved in the work of the Group, and the way in which the arrival on the scene of another critical friend in the shape of an active and politically astute PCC affected the dynamics of police governance in Cityshire.

There was widespread agreement among advisers and police representatives alike that the idea of critical friendship was at the heart of the relationship between the IAG and the police in Cityshire.

There is no point having an IAG if everyone is just going to hold hands and have sandwiches and go home and be happy about everything. You have got to be open to being challenged. (Adviser)

It is really important that people are there for the right reasons and the right reasons are to robustly but fairly represent the views of the communities that they tap into so that the police can benefit from that contact, that experience and that viewpoint. (Police Officer)

The competing demands of being at once insiders with privileged access to the police and outsiders able to tell them things they did not necessarily want to hear 'without fear or favour' (a phrase that came up in several interviews) was also widely acknowledged. An effective adviser needed to know 'what the police do and how they do it' as one of their number put it. But the critical distance that comes from independence was seen as equally important. One adviser had this to say:

Being independent means that I am free to represent my own views without any fear of any kind of comeback from any of that. I have no allegiance to the police. If I see something I think is clearly wrong, I will speak up ...

A member of police staff who worked very closely with the CIAG captured the spirit of the ACPO guidance distinguishing between its members as individuals who are 'independent-of-mind' and the Group itself, which could not be 'totally independent, because it's our policies and procedures that we're asking people ... to look at and advise on'.

While the police and most of the advisers thought that CIAG and its members managed to function successfully as insiders and outsiders, friends and critics, one member of the Group had serious misgivings:

In the main, the people that come along are police-lovers, which is very nice, but it makes it difficult for us to be critical friends. They are not critical, they are friends. There is a bias towards friends rather than critics.

This adviser maintained that CIAG had been 'incorporated into the culture of the police force' and no longer existed as an independent body. Its members did not come 'from the groups the IAG was set up to give a voice to'. The more radical an adviser was, this individual claimed, the less time they were likely to last as a member of the Group. That this adviser had very evidently not been a victim of this process of acculturation only partially detracts from the force of her/his argument. Nor can it be assumed that police

representatives were unhappy with the robustness of her/his approach. On the contrary, a member of police staff talked about this adviser in glowing terms: ‘... like a Rottweiler ... fantastic ... exactly what we want’.

Advice and answerability

CIAG’s position in the institutional structure of police governance, and the limitations of advisers’ role as critical friends, were also evident to all concerned. The Group’s advice was provided very much on a ‘take-it-or-leave’ basis. This comment is typical:

The role of the IAG is to advise them. [...] If they are doing something that is wrong, then suggest to them, that they do it this way, to comply. You can’t tell them to do it. You can say, ‘We think it might be better this way’. You have to virtually leave it at that. (Adviser)

This is not to say that members of the Group did not expect the police to explain why their advice had not been taken when it was rejected; or to suggest that the police were oblivious to the need to do so, if only as a matter of common courtesy. But the distinction between advising and scrutinising, answerability and accountability was not lost on the parties to the relationship either. One adviser had this to say:

We are not an accountable body, we are an advisory body. So ... the most we can do is to tell the police things that we have seen that we either like or dislike. (Adviser)

A similar view was expressed by a senior police officer with considerable experience of working with CIAG. S/he contrasted its role with that of a ‘scrutiny panel’ established to monitor police use of stop and search:

They [the panel] almost give us actions and we are accountable to them. The IAG, I think, are far more of a critical friend role ... We can give them information; they can challenge us on it. We are almost answerable to the IAG, not accountable to them.

Reflecting on the role of the PCC as an elected public representative, this officer was clear that the PCC was not in the business of giving advice to the force but had a 'right, a mandate to govern'. 'Who are we', s/he asked, to say, 'Sorry, [PCC], no, we are not doing that here'? Yet, for one adviser at least, the lack of any formal powers to hold the police to account did not mean that the IAG was any less effective. Indeed s/he believed that the Group's 'grass roots agitation' on the need for positive action in police recruitment and policies on temporary promotions (or 'acting up' as it was frequently referred to), had 'done a load more than any politician could have achieved'.

Critical friendship in the age of the police and crime commissioner

This none-too-subtle allusion to the relative effectiveness of the IAG and the PCC as agents of change in policing is indicative of the tensions and uncertainties that had emerged in relations between the three key partners in the work of IAGs identified in the ACPO guidance in the wake of the replacement of the Cityshire police authority by a PCC. The clearest evidence that things had changed was that a member of the old authority's staff had attended meetings of the IAG on a regular basis, whereas the PCC took the view that s/he would only go along if specifically invited to attend and given advance notice of the agenda. In practice, this meant that the OPCC had very little to do with the IAG and was unrepresented at the meetings observed in the course of the research reported here.

CIAG's reaction to this was one of sorrow rather than anger, reflected in this comment from a longstanding member of the Group:

I think there should be somebody from the police commissioner's office there. [...] Just the odd visit from one of them, just to say, 'How are you doing? What do you think?' wouldn't go amiss. (Adviser)

A police officer with an equally substantial history of involvement in the Group put the lack of contact between CIAG and the OPCC down to 'personality and history'. As this officer recalled it, the incoming PCC had been anxious to set up a group of advisers to support her/him in discharging her/his functions following the elections held in November 2012. The chair of CIAG let it be known that the PCC need look no further than the existing Group for help. The PCC declined this offer, commissioned some independent research on the needs of BAME communities in Cityshire, and established a separate steering group to take forward recommendations emerging from it. As a member of the PCC's staff said, that steering group had become 'a kind of IAG to the Commissioner's office' working alongside other local bodies. These included another, more broadly-based inter-agency group concerned with hate crime and the stop and search scrutiny panel mentioned earlier. In any event, at the time s/he was interviewed for this research in the autumn of 2015, the PCC had formed the settled view that s/he had 'no formal role with the IAG': 'It is the force's advisory group. It is not my advisory group.'

Conclusion

If the newspaper stories with which this article began are anything to go by, the need for the police to have access to candid, independent advice on their policies and practices is at least as pressing now as it was when the report of the Macpherson Inquiry (1999) was published. Whether the independent advisory groups set up as part of the police response to Macpherson are in position to meet that need, either wholly or in part, is too broad a question to answer on the basis of the exploratory study of the work of one such group reported here. What can be said is that their role, status and governance ought to be reconsidered in the light of the transformation in the landscape of police governance

brought about by the election of police and crime commissioners in November 2012 and May 2016. Insofar as IAGs like the Group in Cityshire have played, and continue to play, a constructive role as critical friends of the police, offering answerability to the communities they serve to complement the formal mechanism of accountability represented by the PCC, their relationships with other actors need to be rethought. These actors include PCCs who are themselves expected to articulate the views of local people and play the part of critical friends in both supporting the police and holding them to account but – at least in the case of Cityshire - may no longer see themselves either as working in partnership with IAGs and the police or as recipients of the former’s advice (as provided for in the ACPO guidance). They may also extend to a range of other groups with responsibilities not dissimilar to IAGs summoned into existence by PCCs anxious to have critical friends of their own in addition (and perhaps as an alternative) to the statutory police and crime panels established under the PRSRA 2011. If IAGs have a place in the new landscape of police governance at local level, dominated as it is by the PCC, that place needs to be marked out much more carefully than it was in Cityshire. In the absence of greater clarity, the risk is that the advice of these well-established critical friends will be drowned out in the clamour of newer, louder voices speaking with the explicit or implicit authority of the PCC.

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¹ Macpherson defined institutional racism as: 'The collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people'.

² Interpreted in this way, 'answerability' can be seen as a mild variant of Marshall's (1978) explanatory and co-operative form of accountability with the relationship between the MPA and MPS having features associated with his more muscular subordinate and obedient mode.

³ In a paper cited by Murji, Waddington writes on police pursuits as a self-styled 'academic critical friend' of the police.

⁴ Why so little research seems to have been done on IAGs – and none by non-participant observers – is a mystery. It may well have something to do with the fact that they have no basis in statute and/or the difficulty of getting access to bodies tasked with giving candid but confidential advice, thus making them both relatively invisible to, and hard-to-reach by, independent researchers.

⁵ How or why some groups had changed is not made clear.

⁶ Caless and Owens (2016) provide a book-length introduction informed by a wealth of empirical data.

⁷ The representatives from the OPCC were interviewed together. All other interviews were one-to-one.

⁸ Advisers saw themselves as facilitating two-way communication between the police and minority ethnic and faith groups rather than as representatives of a particular section of the community. Members were not elected, nor were they delegated to attend CIAG by local organizations. According to its 'constitution', selection for membership of CIAG was by invitation from the police and the Chair following submission of an expression of interest in joining the Group.

⁹ See Young (2016) for a critical discussion of the issues raised by the relative invisibility of powers of 'stop and account'. A legal requirement to record the use of such powers was introduced in 2005 but abolished six years later leaving it up to individual forces to decide whether and how to keep track of this form of on-street activity.