



## 4 Civilians in the Police Service

By 1993, about 38,000 civilians were employed by the 41 provincial police forces in England and Wales. This constituted 28 per cent of the total staffing level of almost 136,000 people.<sup>1</sup> The expansion in employment of civilian staff in the police service has received increasing attention during the last 10 years or so. Supported by Home Office circulars, the policy of 'civilianisation' has formed an important part of the drive to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of police forces.

Although civilianisation was an important development in policing policy during the 1980s, the policy has a much longer history. The employment of civilians within police organisations dates back to the earliest days of the police service, when forces employed some civilians in ancillary and clerical posts. Recent developments have included not only the increase in absolute numbers of civilian staff, but also changes in the kinds of tasks they are employed to do. Thus, civilians are increasingly found in higher grade positions within the police organisation, and carry out tasks which were traditionally the preserve of sworn police officers. Although, the transfer of tasks from police to civilians is clearly a crucial element of civilianisation, it should be borne in mind that an expansion of civilian staff also results from increased demands on police resources. Additionally, developments in new technologies and policing methods create new functions within the police organisation. Such developments may result in increased numbers of civilians in important positions in the organisation without these positions ever having been filled by police officers. In the broader sense then, civilianisation means more than the simple transfer of police tasks to civilian staff, but more generally the increasing importance of the civilian element within the organisation.

There are also wider political and organisational implications stemming from the fact that as a consequence of civilianisation, a substantial proportion of the police service is staffed by a group with different employers, different terms and conditions, and a different occupational culture, from police officer colleagues. In exploring the policy of civilianisation, this chapter uses the definitions adopted by the Home Office

in its Memorandum of Evidence presented to the House of Commons Expenditure Committee in 1977:

‘civilian’ covers anybody employed for police purposes who is not a police officer or a special constable... ‘civilianisation’ embodies the deployment of civilians in any capacity whether or not the work was once performed by a police officer.

### **Civilianisation, policing and democracy**

Civilianisation was selected as an area of study first because it fulfilled the criterion that it was a policy area in which there had been substantial change over recent years. A detailed examination of the process which led to change addresses the central objective of the research. In addition, civilianisation highlights two central issues about the nature and organisation of the police. First, the employment of civilians in what were previously police posts raises the question of what the core functions of the police are; that is, what are the tasks that can only be performed by police officers? In so far as civilianisation was part of a wider government drive towards achieving better value for money in the public sector, it raises the question whether the police function is unique and distinct from that of other public services. Second, civilianisation raises questions about control of the police organisation. The increasing proportion of police staff who are directly employed by local authorities may be thought to weaken the chief constable’s control of the force. At present, civilians working in the police service (outside London) are employed by the county council or police authority. Consequently, the terms and conditions of a significant group of employees within the organisation are outside the direct control of the chief constable. While many commentators say this has little practical significance,<sup>2</sup> it does raise the possibility of increasing influence by local authorities over policing policy. Police civilians have the right to join a trade union and take industrial action and, as is sometimes rather melodramatically argued, through this they may have the power to decide whether the police service continues to function. In both of these ways civilianisation may perhaps act as a constraint on the ‘operational control’ of the chief constable.

Civilianisation is also interlinked with the level of central government control over policing. As was pointed out by senior representatives of at least one force, civilianisation provides a potential source of growth in expenditure on policing outside the direct control of the Home Office. As subsequent sections establish, the only direct controls that the Home Office exerts over the expenditure of provincial police forces are over police officer establishment and capital spending. Civilian employment is not

something the Home Office can control directly. Analysis of some of the implications of civilianisation gives special insights into the ambiguities and complexities of the tripartite system of control for provincial police forces.

### **HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CIVILIANISATION**

The Metropolitan Police Act 1829 recognised that the Commissioner could employ civilian clerks, which he did from the early days of the force. Furthermore, there was a 'civilian' influence in quite senior positions within the police. Loveday (1993) noted that before the 1950s there were a number of Metropolitan Police Commissioners appointed from outside the police service (Loveday, 1993). He added that most senior positions in provincial forces were given to 'civilians' – often ex-military personnel – during this period. However, lower down the police organisation it seems that the majority of civilian staff in the provincial forces were confined to clerical or ancillary posts, and it was the post-1945 period which saw the main expansion of civilian employment in the police service (see Table 1).

Table 1 shows the total numbers of civilian and police staff employed in provincial forces in England and Wales since 1955. A 1977 House of Commons expenditure committee report estimated that the number of civilians employed by provincial forces in 1945 was about 1,000 (House of Commons Expenditure Committee, 1977). Although the figures may not be directly comparable, this still suggests a rapid expansion of civilian employment after 1945, which continued up until 1975. The second half of the 1970s saw a sharp drop in police civilian employment, before the period of the 1980s, when the total number of civilians (and eventually the civilian proportion of total staff) began to expand again, this process continuing into the 1990s.

Similarly, official interest in the policy appeared well before the 1980s. An analysis of official documents and reports gives a more detailed picture of the background to the trends outlined in Table 1. One early pronouncement on civilianisation can be found in the Oaksey Committee (Oaksey, 1949) report on police pay, pensions and other aspects of police service conditions. This report recommended that 'police establishments in general should be thoroughly overhauled with a view to releasing policemen for police duty wherever possible by the employment of civilians'.<sup>3</sup>

The significant growth in the number of civilians employed by the police service post-1945 was noted by the Select Committee on Estimates Report of 1957-58. The Report suggested that this was partly due to the growing realisation that some tasks may be more economically performed

**Table 1 Civilians and police officers employed by provincial forces in England and Wales since 1955**

	1955	1960	1965	1970	1975	1980	1985	1990	1993
Civilians	7,345	9,935	13,943	21,758	26,344	26,007	27,935	34,361	38,174
Police Officers	49,211	54,616	62,243	69,927	79,752	89,316	91,173	95,883	97,473
Police staff	56,556	64,551	76,186	91,685	106,096	115,323	119,108	130,244	135,647
Civilians as % of total staff	13.0	15.4	18.3	23.7	24.8	22.6	23.5	26.4	28.1

Source: CIPFA Police Statistics

by civilians than police officers, but mainly due to the difficulty in filling police posts in the face of increasing demands on the service (House of Commons, 1957-8).

In its Interim Report of November 1960, the Royal Commission on the Police (Royal Commission on the Police, 1960) noted that progress had been made with civilianisation, but qualified this with the view that the potential number of civilian posts was limited by the need to keep a reserve of trained manpower and a number of sedentary posts for sick or injured police officers. Although the Final Report of May 1962 (Royal Commission on the Police, 1962) did not mention civilianisation, the 1964 Police Act which followed, recognised that police authorities and county councils have the legal power to employ civilians to work for the police organisation. Section 10 (1) of the Act states that police authorities or county councils may employ civilians for police purposes.

In 1965 the then Home Secretary, Roy Jenkins, set up a working party of the newly-formed Police Advisory Board (PAB) to look into the staffing shortages being experienced by the police service. Its 1967 report, *Police Manpower, Equipment and Efficiency* was the first official document to examine in some detail the issue of police civilians. It stated that there was significant room for an increased use of civilians in most police forces, and suggested a number of functions which might be carried out by civilians rather than by police officers. These suggestions were perhaps modest in relation to the functions which were later deemed suitable for civilianisation. They included school crossing patrols, duties under the Diseases of Animals Act, domestic duties, supervision and maintenance of buildings and garages, purchasing of police uniforms and stores, and physical training instruction. The report went on to list a number of slightly-more contentious areas where further progress could be made, including clerical work in connection with CID, scenes of crime,

fingerprinting and photography. The report did not seek to constrain civilian employment to relatively lowly levels within the police organisation, arguing that although the tendency in the past had been to allocate the more responsible positions to police officers, the committee felt 'that civilians can develop the necessary skill and experience to carry out duties at the higher and more responsible levels, with advice as necessary from serving police officers' (Home Office, 1967). The report recognised the need for an improved career structure for police civilians and argued that this could be best provided by integration with the wider local government career structure.

The Estimates Committee examined civilian police staff in its first report for 1966-67 and noted that civilianisation had continued to progress with the encouragement of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC). The Committee felt, however, that in some areas civilianisation could not be taken much further. The Home Office continued to adopt the general view that police officers should not be regularly employed on tasks which did not require police powers, training or experience. But by the mid-1970s it appeared that the Home Office felt that the scope for further civilianisation was rapidly disappearing. In a series of guidelines on civilianisation prepared for the Police Advisory Board in 1975 the Home Office stated that '...most forces have now passed the point at which further substantial savings by the employment of civilian staff can be attained'. The guidelines were fairly cautious and stated that posts should be civilianised only given the availability of suitable staff and taking into account the threat of industrial action. The Home Office even began to suggest a reversal of the policy in official circulars to police forces. Home Office circulars 138/75 and 191/76 called for reductions in civilian staffing, and numbers of police civilians in provincial forces fell during the late 1970s.

A 1977 report of the Expenditure Committee (House of Commons Expenditure Committee, 1977) revealed that the Home Office was at that time giving priority to police officer recruitment. In the light of public expenditure cuts, the Home Office had suggested to police authorities that economies should be made in capital spending, goods and services, and civilian staff. The Home Office stated that restrictions in the recruitment of civilian staff were a temporary measure due to the climate of economic stringency.

During the 1980s, there were major developments in the policy of civilianisation. The Conservatives came to power in 1979 and immediately implemented the recommendation of the Edmund Davies Committee that police pay be linked to average earnings. As private sector earnings

expanded over the decade, so did police pay so that by 1991 a constable was earning 41 per cent more in real terms than he or she did in 1979. Edmund-Davies, and subsequent police pay awards during the 1980s made police officers a relatively expensive commodity, and according to Loveday (1993) made further civilianisation inevitable, given the context of a government committed to a drastic reduction in public expenditure. Loveday suggested two further factors which provided an impetus to civilianisation from the 1970s onwards. First, increased levels of training and improved service conditions meant that a larger proportion of police officers' time was spent away from 'operational duties'. Second, the increased demands of paperwork and the growth of specialist units also meant that increases in police officer numbers were not reflected in the numbers available for 'operational duties'.

The rapid escalation in police expenditure resulted in the Home Office coming under increasing pressure from the Treasury to impose limits, and in 1983 it issued the circular 114, *Manpower, Effectiveness and Efficiency in the Police Service*. This signalled the extension to the police service of the government's 'Financial Management Initiative' (FMI), which sought to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of government departments by applying private sector management methods and imposing market disciplines upon them. The circular explicitly reversed the policy of the late 1970s, stating that 'the levels of civilians recommended in previous Home Office circulars are no longer relevant and should be disregarded'. In addition, it stated that the Home Secretary would not normally approve applications for police officer establishment increases in forces where police officers were filling posts 'which could properly and more economically be filled by civilians'. Civilianisation was now a necessary condition to the granting of increases to authorised establishment. A National Audit Office report found that this principle was applied in practice, and quoted the example of the West Midlands Police which was refused an establishment increase and subsequently launched an extensive civilianisation programme (National Audit Office, 1991).

The pressure for increased civilianisation was supported by independent bodies like the Audit Commission which from 1982 onwards conducted a major inspection of all aspects of the police service with a view to increasing financial efficiency. A 1983 report by the Department of Environment's Audit Inspectorate found that the average cost of employment of a civilian was about half that of a comparable officer (Department of the Environment, 1983). In 1988 an Audit Commission report commended the increased use made of civilian staff by police forces over the previous decade, and suggested further developments, in particular

the setting up of civilian-staffed ‘administrative support units’ (ASUs) (Audit Commission, 1988a).

Home Office circular 105/88 addressed civilianisation as part of a more general staffing strategy. It required forces to inform the Home Office (through HMIC) of their medium and long-term plans for staffing. It recommended that forces review their staffing levels and deployment, and provided a checklist of tasks deemed suitable for civilianisation. It also drew attention to the need for grading structures, career development and personnel management. The circular explicitly recommended that forces develop ASUs as laid down in the Audit Commission’s report. In effect, the Home Office was recognising the existence of a substantial civilian workforce within the police service which had its own identity and needs.

The end of the decade saw a slowing down of the civilianisation programme. In 1988, the Audit Commission argued that disincentives to civilianisation were caused by anomalies in the system for financing the police (Audit Commission, 1988b). Whereas the Home Office police-specific grant was paid on all police-related local authority expenditure, since 1987 the police element of the Department of the Environment Revenue Support Grant (RSG) was related only to police officer establishments. Thus, although the Home Office was encouraging the increased use of civilians, there was a financial incentive for forces to concentrate on increasing police establishments. The issue of community charge capping provided a more serious threat to the continued policy of civilianisation. In order to remain within the Department of Environment’s capping criteria, a number of forces had to cut civilian strengths and some even reduced their actual police officer strengths. The policy of civilianisation cannot, therefore, be seen in isolation from the wider questions of the determination of police staffing levels, and the complex system for financing the police service. It is important to view civilianisation within the context of these wider constraints.

### **Central controls and the determination of police staffing levels**

The Home Office has a central role to play in the determination of police officer staffing levels. Policing is a labour intensive activity, and labour costs take up by far the largest part of police expenditure. By the end of the 1980s, staffing costs were estimated to take up about 85 per cent of total police expenditure (National Audit Office, 1991). The rapid escalation in expenditure on the police service led directly to increasing concern with value for money and provided a major impetus for the policy of civilianisation. As the figures in Table 1 show, there was a steady increase in police staff over the 1980s; over the decade police officer numbers grew

by about 9 per cent. The main part of the increase in police expenditure was salary costs.

One of the main central controls over provincial police forces is the police staffing controls of the Home Office. Police authorities submit bids annually to the Home Office for increases in police officer establishment, bids which can be accepted or rejected wholly or in part. It is important to note that there is no provision for the Home Secretary to *reduce* authorised establishment of a police force. The Home Secretary has no statutory responsibility for approving the number of civilian staff, although some have detected efforts from the Home Office to increase its influence here. This was a particular concern of representatives of the Association of County Councils interviewed during the study. Police pay and conditions are negotiated in the Police Negotiating Board by representatives of police authorities, the police staff associations and the Home Office. Agreed terms are subject to the final approval of the Home Secretary. The terms and conditions of civilian staff in the police service are negotiated nationally in the local authority pay structure. The National Joint Council (NJC) for Administrative, Technical, Professional and Clerical Staff is the forum in which representatives of the trade unions and local authorities come together to negotiate terms and conditions.

When the Home Office is assessing police officer staffing bids, it takes a number of factors into account. These factors were laid out in circular 114/83 and signalled a slowing down in the rate of growth of police expenditure. The factors included the effectiveness with which existing resources were being used, whether or not a specific case had been made for the increase in posts, and whether the police authority had agreed to fund its share of additional posts. The circular 105/88 further systematised the staffing mechanism by requiring forces to inform the Home Office (via HMIC) of medium and long-term staffing plans. It reinforced the conditions for establishment increases, and recommended that forces review staffing levels and the scope for further civilianisation. If forces were to bid for additional police officers, then the precise duties and locations for additional staff had to be specified.

HMIC play a central role in advising Home Office decisions over staffing bids. HMIC gather information from each force and compare it with other forces of a similar size and character. There have been moves during recent years to standardise the kinds of information and analysis available to HMIC, as well as ways of measuring the demands upon and the performance of police forces (Weatheritt, 1993). A police staffing formula was introduced in 1989 and was used to support HMIC judgement on the relative needs of forces. This formula takes account of the size of

population of a force area, the number of traffic accidents, reported crimes, and measures of social deprivation. It is important to note, however, that the formula does not totally determine the Home Office decision on police establishment bids. The aim is to identify relative over- or under-provision, which is one of the factors used by the Home Office in assessing bids.

As was outlined above, after a rapid escalation in policing expenditure during the early 1980s, the Home Office attempted to exert control over this growth through exerting control over increases in police staffing levels. However, it should again be emphasised that these controls are limited to police *officer* establishment. The number of *civilian* staff employed by a police force is entirely a matter for the police authority. If a police authority decides to fund a certain number of posts then that is the number there will be, and the Home Office must pay 51 per cent police grant to support that. In this sense, civilianisation provides an important source of potential growth in police expenditure outside the direct control of the Home Office. This is especially the case as civilianisation, under the current structure, means absolute growth in expenditure. The Home Office cannot reduce police establishments, so the number of police officer posts does not decline with the increase in civilian ones.

The system for financing the police fully reflects the ambiguities and tensions of a part-local and part-national police service. The Home Secretary pays 51 per cent specific grant on all police expenditure, and local authorities meet the remaining 49 per cent. However, this 49 per cent is not all raised by local taxation. Central government provides support to local authorities through the Department of the Environment. This is given in the form of Revenue Support Grant (RSG). The government calculates and allocates a 'standard spending assessment' (SSA) for each authority. This SSA is based on a set of indicators which are supposed to reflect the spending needs of an authority. The SSAs are calculated annually using principles which reflect the demographic, social and physical characteristics of each area. The only element relating to the police force is the authorised establishment of police officers, which leads to the anomalies outlined earlier. Taken together with the 51 per cent of Home Office grant, the RSG means that over 70 per cent of spending on policing in provincial police forces comes from central government grants.

## **CIVILIANISATION IN FOUR PROVINCIAL FORCES**

### **Civilians as proportions of total staff**

Table 1 presented total figures for police officers and civilians for the 41 English and Welsh provincial police forces. Table 2 shows the breakdown

**Table 2** Civilians as a percentage of total staff in four provincial police forces 1975-93

	1975	1980	1985	1990	1993
Force A	24.4	23.1	23.3	25.8	27.6
Force B	23.2	22.5	25.3	27.1	27.6
Force C	24.9	23.3	23.8	28.8	27.1
Force D	24.3	22.0	23.6	23.5	25.5
England & Wales*	24.8	22.6	23.5	26.4	28.1

\* outside London

Source: CIPFA Police Statistics

for the four forces included in the study, and compares the proportion of civilians of total staffing with the average for England and Wales.

The table shows how the development of civilianisation has varied in extent and timing between forces. In all four forces studied, the proportion of civilians fell during the late 1970s, the sharpest drop occurring in force D. Again for all four forces, the early 1980s saw an increase in the proportion of forces made up by civilians (the biggest increase being in force B). During the latter half of the 1980s, there were substantial increases in the proportion of civilians in force C, a slight increase in forces A and B, and little change in force D. During the early 1990s, forces A and D showed the largest increase in proportions of civilian staff. Force B continued to increase gradually, whereas force C showed a decrease. This general trend is based on the overall proportion of civilians within the force. However, as outlined above, the implications of civilianisation go further than the absolute numbers or proportions of civilians within the police service. Of crucial importance also are the tasks which these civilians undertake. The broad totals give a general overview of how civilianisation developed across the four forces. Information about the kinds of posts which were involved can be gathered from HMIC figures on the proportion of 'key posts' which have been civilianised in each force.

### **Key posts**

As mentioned above, Home Office circular 105/88 included a check-list of functions which it deemed suitable for civilianisation. This was

**Table 3 Percentage of key posts civilianised (1987-90)**

Force	1987	1988	1989	1990
Force A	67.7	69.7	69.6	75.3
Force B	64.9	66.3	65.9	67.0
Force C	66.2	69.5	71.1	74.1
Force D	64.1	73.6	69.2	73.3
England & Wales*	64.7	67.7	69.2	72.1

\* outside London

Source: HMIC Matrix of Indicators

incorporated into the annual inspection process so that HMIC could monitor the progress of civilianisation in police forces. Since 1987, HMIC have collected statistics on the proportion of key posts which have been civilianised. The key posts include about 60 different types of policing function into which at least some police forces have introduced civilianisation. Table 3 outlines the progress of the four police forces covered by the study.

All four of the chosen forces made progress in the late 1980s towards civilianising key posts. All of the forces with the exception of force D were above the average for England and Wales, force A being the furthest advanced. By 1990, all forces had civilianised more key posts, but force B had civilianised at the slowest rate and was actually below the England and Wales average. The HMIC figures break down for each force the relevant percentage of posts in the function which are taken up by civilians. Whilst 60 posts is too many to analyse in detail here, Table 4 compares the four forces in terms of the civilianisation of 10 key functions.

This table begins to show how the analysis of totals (whether it be total number of civilians, total civilian percentage of all staff, or total percentage of key posts civilianised) hides the different approaches taken by forces. The similarities between the four forces is clear. All had comparable levels of civilianisation in the CID administration, traffic administration, control room, and research and planning functions. However, individual forces tended to stand out when the other functions are analysed. For example, all forces except force D kept the scenes of crime department about half civilianised, whereas force D had civilianised virtually all of the department. Taking enquiry or station officers, all forces bar force B had almost completely civilianised this function. Force B however had

**Table 4 Percentage of key posts civilianised in given functions (1990)**

	A	B	C	D
SOCOs*	50	50	51	92
CID administration	97	100	100	100
Traffic administration	100	100	100	87
Station officers	100	28	100	97
Gaolers	100	18	100	100
Control room	51	53	47	53
Driving school	50	50	33	33
Personnel	20	86	85	84
Research & planning	20	27	30	33
Computing	45	80	100	82

\* scenes of crime officers

civilianised only 28 per cent of these posts. This force took a similarly cautious line on civilian gaolers. Whereas force A took a quite radical approach towards civilianisation of the above functions, this did not extend to support functions such as personnel, research and computing. The force preferred to retain an extremely high police presence (relative to other forces) in the personnel and computing departments, and also a relatively high proportion of police officers working in research and planning. A closer analysis of key posts shows that it is difficult to generalise about a force's overall approach to civilianisation. The general picture is one of a uniformity of approach in certain functions, but very different approaches in others. The strong implication is that there is considerable further scope for civilianisation in the key posts as defined by HMIC. Additionally, the definition of 'key posts' may change, which makes it difficult to make comparisons over time.

### **Officers released to operational duties**

A commonly-stated objective for civilianisation is that it should release police officers from administrative and other tasks not requiring police powers or training. Table 5 shows the number of police officer posts released each year since 1985 for the four police forces covered by the study.

These figures support the claims made by both forces B and D that they started releasing officers through civilianisation early. In force A, the bulk

**Table 5 Officers redeployed to operational duties because of civilianisation 1985-90**

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
A:	0	35	0	0	6	3
B:	22	19	2	3	11	21
C:	6	1	32	23	0	0
D:	40	4	17	13	0	3

Source: Home Office Statistics quoted in Parrett (1992)

of civilianisation which released police officers took place in 1986, and although its civilian staffing levels increased substantially since that point, it appears that little of this resulted in police officers being released for operational duty. The figures also support force C's claim that the main drive to releasing officers through civilianisation occurred during 1987 and 1988.

### **The intra-force development of civilianisation**

Overall figures may well hide a great deal about general attitudes and approaches to civilianisation. For example, a force may invest resources in relatively senior civilian posts within the organisation. This could reflect a strong commitment to role of civilians in the police service not reflected in simple comparisons of absolute numbers or proportions of civilians. This section draws upon data from interviews with senior police officers and civilian staff within the four forces and focuses on the details of their approaches to civilianisation.

### ***The rationale for civilianisation***

One theme which was addressed by the interviews was the perceptions of senior officers and civilians of the rationale behind civilianisation. All four forces gave broad support to the policy, as is clear from the figures above. All four forces appeared to see the policy first in terms of cost savings, but later claimed to be developing broader concerns about organisational effectiveness. All were suffering recruitment and retention problems among civilian staff which seemed to be strongly related to the predominance of low grades among such posts. This reinforces the view that the initial rationale behind civilianisation was financial economy. Despite this, the primary aim in civilianising still appeared to be to justify bids for increases in police officer establishment. No forces actually

replaced police officer posts with civilian posts, so civilianisation always meant real growth.

### ***Mechanism of implementation***

All forces appeared to have made efforts to approach the policy of civilianisation in an integrated and systematic way, but the method by which civilianisation was implemented differed between forces. Some forces appeared to operate a bidding system in which divisions and departments applied to headquarters for more staff and resources, and headquarters personnel and finance departments assessed these requests and took staffing decisions. This was the case in two forces – A and D. Clearly, this left some control with the divisions and sub-divisions, in that local commanders were encouraged to identify posts for civilianisation. However, when a post was civilianised, the freed-up operational time did not always go to the division or department which suggested the post, which was something of a disincentive for police managers. In both forces attempts had been made to rationalise the process, with an annual bidding cycle (rather than bids for more staff coming in *ad hoc* during the whole year) and close cooperation between personnel departments and finance and administration divisions in reviewing staffing.

The other two forces had different ways of implementing civilianisation. In force C, this was done through force staff reviews, carried out at irregular intervals by a combination of senior police officers and representatives of the county council management services unit. The late 1980s saw a change in the approach adopted by force B towards civilianisation. Senior officers explained that the civilianisation programme up until the mid-1980s had not been a systematic process, but had been approached in a rather piecemeal way. There were no force reviews of civil staff, and the effects of civilianisation were not monitored. In 1988 the force took the decision that the process of preparing the staffing bids should be formalised rather than the rushed ‘knee-jerk’ reaction that had been the case before. The result was that a computerised establishment system was developed, one for the regular force and one for civilian staff. Each force post was defined and recorded in the system, and updated weekly. This made it a fairly simple and immediate job to find out the exact distribution of the force’s civilian and police staff at any one time. The system incorporated a staffing formula in which the independent variables were recorded crime, population and recorded incidents. This was used to determine the staffing needs of the territorial sub-divisions. Posts that were suitable for civilianisation arose from this constant ‘trawling’ process. Civilianisation thus became part of a wider ongoing staff review. This left

little role for the local policing units in identifying posts for civilianisation or in more general staffing issues. The police inspector in charge of developing this system compared it very favourably to the bidding system which he described as 'decibel planning'.

### ***The impetus to civilianisation***

Out of the four forces, two claimed to have started the substantive drive to civilianising posts prior to the issue of Home Office circulars. For example, force B claimed to have civilianised over 100 posts prior to 1982, and in force D, the chief constable sent a memo to the police authority claiming that 'a tremendous amount of civilianisation' had occurred in the force prior to 1980. In terms of both numbers and proportions of civilians within the organisation as a whole, this is broadly supported by the figures in Table 2 (however, in terms of the kinds of posts civilianised, the figures in Table 3 suggest that by the late 1980s neither force had civilianised as extensively as the other two in terms of HMIC key posts). Prior to 1980, forces B and D had the highest proportions of civilian staff of all the forces in the study. Force D also claimed to have been the first force to use civilian scenes of crime officers (SOCOs), and pioneered the use of civilian gaolers. The source of D's early support for the policy of civilianisation appears to be the personal influence of the long-serving senior force administrative officer, who was a civilian but in a position previously filled by an assistant chief constable. He was highly respected by the senior police officers in the force, and exerted a strong personal influence over the way that policy developed.

Interviews and documents from force C suggest that the main drive to civilianisation came much later, during 1987/88 (supported by the figures in Tables 2 and 3 above). Representatives of the force said that the Home Office circular 114/83 was a key incentive to this stage of civilianisation. In force A, the impetus to civilianisation during the 1980s followed publication of the circular 114/83, which led directly to a force structure review. The findings of this review identified a number of posts for civilianisation. Following the publication of the later circular 105/88, the force introduced a regular process by which all heads of departments and territorial sub-divisions were asked to identify suitable posts for civilianisation. Table 3 shows that force A made particular progress in civilianising key posts during the late 1980s. However, the chief constable expressed strong reservations about extending civilianisation too far in certain areas recommended by HMIC. Circular 105/88 had a central effect on the mechanism of civilianisation used in force B. The new force staffing review system was developed as a direct response to the circular. The

evidence set out above comparing levels of civilianisation of key posts shows how forces differed in the degree to which posts listed in the circular should be civilianised.

This shows that although Home Office circulars may have provided an important impetus to civilianisation in general, there was still room for different approaches as regards the details of policy. This is summed up by a statement from the civilian personnel officer of force A who reflected his chief constable's concern to keep police officers in some functions which other forces had totally civilianised:

We take a more cautious view than the Home Office. They take the view that if one force civilianises a top post, and another a deputy, why shouldn't a force civilianise both? We must not blindly follow the lead that other forces have given... we're looking at *our* needs.

A similar argument was made by a senior officer in force B who said that 'we still do resist the Home Office and HMIs, what they define as key posts we won't necessarily accept are civilianisable'.

### ***The anomalies of the grant system***

The Audit Commission (1988) argued that the grant system for financing the police contained anomalies which meant there was a financial penalty for civilianisation. Funding for policing comes from both central and local government. The Home Office provides specific grants which amount to 51 per cent of all police expenditure. Revenue Support Grant (RSG) to local authorities provides a further substantial amount, leaving only about 30 per cent for local authorities to raise from the non-domestic rate and council tax. Since 1987/88, the policing element of the RSG (in England) has been related to police officer numbers rather than to indicators of need (crime levels, population density, and so on). Thus, forces which prioritised police officer establishment increases would be rewarded with a greater RSG. The extent to which this 'perverse incentive' was actually effective is not clear. Table 1 showed that civilians as a proportion of total police staff declined slightly in force D and slowed its rate of growth in force B during the latter half of the 1980s following the introduction of the 'disincentive'. However, during the year of our research, force D did not bid for any increase in police establishment and concentrated on increasing its civilian staff, which suggests that the disincentive to civilianisation was not strong. In the other two forces, civilians as a proportion of total staff grew significantly during the second half of the 1980s. However, the disincentive effect of the grant system was acknowledged as a real constraint on civilianisation by senior staff in two forces: 'The other thing which works against civilianisation is that your Standard Spending Assessment is based on your establishment,

ignoring civilians. So you're penalised for civilianisation' (chief finance officer, force B)

In force C, the finance officer also outlined the disincentive effects of the grant system, but added that the greatest obstacle to continued civilianisation was seen as the general financial position of the relevant county council. Although the chief finance officers of forces B and C explicitly referred to the disincentive effect of the SSA, more general central government controls were seen as a greater threat to civilianisation:

You must bear in mind that the Metropolitan forces were rate-capped for three years after the abolition of the Metropolitan Counties, which artificially kept our growth down. But when that came off in 1989/90 the members had more freedom to put more money into repairing buildings, and quite drastically increase the civilianisation programme (finance officer, force B).

At the time of the research, the Metropolitan forces were all facing charge capping, and it was this (in combination with the anomalies within the method of calculating the RSG) which was threatening the continuation of the programme of civilianisation.<sup>4</sup>

Proposals set out in the current Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill would reform the system of financing the police and remove this disincentive effect. The major change would be that the Home Secretary would no longer control the number of police officers in each force, something which would in future be decided by the chief constable and police authority. This would give them greater freedom of choice over how to divide expenditure on police officers, civilian staff, vehicles, plant, equipment and computers.

### ***Personnel management***

Home Office circular 105/88 encouraged forces to 'foster the career development of civilian staff and other aspects of their personnel management'. The research found that all four forces had a personnel department for civilian staff headed by a civilian. All these departments had developed during the 1980s. One force (force A) had just appointed a full-time training officer to develop training for civilian staff. All forces had a senior civilian in charge of administration and finance, although the influence of this position varied between forces. In only one force was there a civilian who was a member of the command team. This was the long-serving and highly-respected person in force D who was equivalent to an ACC. In his capacity as force administrative officer he was a member of the force policy team. None of the other forces had a civilian post at ACC level. When the idea of creating a similar post in force A had been raised

the chief constable opposed the idea because it would reduce ‘operational flexibility’ and would reduce opportunities for career development for police officers. This force also insisted that the position of force computer officer remain a police post, despite opposition from the civilian personnel department. However, after the research had been completed in force A, the chief superintendent (administration) post was civilianised creating the most senior civilian post in the force. Force B had a senior civilian as force finance and administration officer, but he was not a member of the chief constable’s command team. In fact, this officer made clear his frustration at being excluded from the command team on the grounds of his being a civilian:

Senior officers – the chief, deputy and ACCs meet fairly regularly. There is no written agenda that senior (civilian) officers like me get to see. We don’t know which items they will discuss. We are never asked to attend, and the only way we find out about decisions on policy is if the ACC tells us.

Whilst all forces underlined the need to develop career structures for civilian staff, it appeared that progress towards this was slow. Only two forces had taken active steps towards the development of a career structure for its civilian staff. In one of the forces the personnel officer said that it was difficult to create a career structure for police civilians in isolation from the wider local authority structure, and saw integration into this as the likely development. On the other hand, the chief constable of force A supported the development of a national organisation for police civilians (outside local government), with training and promotion opportunities to be developed within this structure.

### ***The threat of industrial action***

Police officers do not have the right to take strike action or join a trade union. This was identified by the Sheehy Inquiry as one of the distinguishing characteristics of the police compared with other public services. One argument which has been used to oppose civilianisation is that civilians retain the right to take industrial action. The argument is that further civilianisation may place a key emergency service at the mercy of union action. Senior officers in two out of the four police forces (force A and B) did not appear to see this as a real threat, and pointed to the example of the national NALGO action in 1989. This had little substantive effect upon the running of their forces. One force however (force C) reported that the dispute had real effects on the operational running of the force, with civilian SOCOs and communications staff coming out on strike in answer to the union call. In this force a number of senior police officers stated that

the threat of industrial action was a barrier to further civilianisation within the force. Although the force administration officer in force D reported that industrial action had exerted a negligible effect on the force, he saw the issue one which would constrain further civilianisation. He said that the threat of strike action was 'the one main barrier to further civilianisation'.

Home Office circular 105/88 recommended that chief constables develop contingency plans to keep key areas running in the event of industrial action. Two of the key areas most often mentioned in this context are SOCOs and control/communications room staff. In the case of the latter, all four forces retained a 50:50 split between police and civilian staff. The same was true for most forces in relation to the SOCO function, except for force D which had an almost totally civilianised SOCO department. Representatives of NALGO highlighted the findings of the Operational Policing Review to support their claim that the threat of strike action had been exaggerated. This found only a small number of chief constables who had considered the danger serious enough to actually make contingency plans, as recommended in the circular.

#### ***Administrative Support Units (ASUs)***

The Audit Commission (1988) and Home Office circular 105/88 both suggested that one particularly effective form of civilianisation was the development of ASUs. These are centralised units, specialised in dealing with administrative tasks such as file preparation and other paperwork. Two forces had developed specific forms of ASU. In one force (force A), the ASUs were introduced following a pilot scheme in 1986. At the time of the research there were separate crime process units (mainly dealing with CID support) and uniform process units (dealing with non-crime matters such as minor traffic items, document checking, and accident witness statements). In the other force with ASUs (force B), the development of such units was seen as quite distinct from the force policy of civilianisation. However, it was recognised that ASUs would potentially provide an opportunity for further civilianisation in the future. The main rationale was to develop specialised units to improve the quality and the speed with which files were prepared for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). They also provided a central point of contact for the local CPS should a particular case need to be discussed, or general prosecution policy changed. So although ASUs may often be discussed in the context of civilianisation, in this force (force B) these units were almost entirely staffed by police officers. In both forces with ASUs, local representatives of the CPS were strongly supportive of their development, and reported an improvement in the

quality of process files, and in communications. However, the CPS appears to have had no direct influence on the decision to implement ASUs, or in way that they were organised.

In force D the file processing system for the whole force was centralised. The force had spent some years moving away from divisional administrative file process support, and developing a large 'administration of justice' department in the force headquarters. Following the research in force D, it emerged that the force had decided to review policy in this area with a view to devolving the function to divisional or sub-divisional level. In the other force, force C, there was pressure for ASUs which had so far been resisted by a senior management who were not disposed towards specialist units of any kind. On one sub-division, there was an experiment in centralising support for CID officers with the creation of the post of CID office manager.

Officers in all forces were aware that the notion of ASUs was popular with the Home Office and HMIC. In fact, in force B, a senior officer expressed frustration with the process by which the force had adopted the concept, without (in his view) the necessary planning and research. This contention was supported by the fact that the force first invested a good deal of time and effort on setting up sub-divisional ASUs (concentrating on court files process), but then switched to the development of larger multi-purpose units at the divisional level.

### ***Employing authority and control of civilians***

The current Police and Magistrates' Courts Bill includes a provision that all civilians working in the police service should become employees of the police authority. In two forces covered in this study, it was already the case that the employer of police civilians was the police authority (in the metropolitan and combined police authorities). In the two single county police forces the employer of civilian staff was the county council. In three of the forces, both senior officers and civilians argued that because the chief constable, under the Police Act 1964, directs and controls his force (including the civilian component), the question of which is the official employing authority was not significant. However, in force C, senior officers stressed that a lack of management control resulted from the employment of a larger group of people whose terms and conditions are not directly managed by the police. An ACC further suggested that there was a danger that employees of the county council may be used by the police authority to exert a 'political' influence over policing policy. There was no evidence of this happening, but such views perhaps reflected the difficult

relationship between senior police officers and the police authority in the area.

The findings provide evidence that being the employing authority for police civilians may provide an important source of influence for the local authority or police authority. There was evidence of a number of conflicts over the appropriate grading of civilian posts, not just between police authority and chief constable, but within forces (between chief constable and his own civilian personnel officers). The influence of the police authority in this regard is illustrated by the following quote from the personnel officer in force B:

We analyse and produce our report which obviously recommends a salary grade. But we've not only got to convince the police authority, but also the personnel adviser to the police authority that the grade is correct... We are employed by the ----- police authority, we being civilians, not the operational side. So our paymaster and our bosses are the elected members on the police authority. But for practical purposes we are employed by the ----- Police which is of course headed by the chief constable. So to some extent we've got two bosses... it's a different matter for police officers; they are employed by the chief constable and the ----- police authority has got little control over operational matters on the police side. But on grading structures and so on, of civilians, they can and sometimes do oppose what the chief constable himself would think... Not everything goes to the police authority, but everything with financial implications must go to the police authority to get their support. No matter what the view of the chief constable is, if they don't agree with those policies then they are not adopted. He can shout until he is blue in the face, but they are not adopted.

The personnel officer went on to recount how the appointment of the force's chief finance officer became a matter of conflict between the police authority and chief constable. The chief constable wanted the post to have a high grade, a grade which the advisers to the police authority considered too high. The chief threatened to put a superintendent into the post if he was not allowed to recruit a civilian at that grade, and the police authority backed down. Although the police authority lost out on this occasion, a number of sources claimed that police authority influence had kept the grades of civilians in the force very low until relatively recently (illustrating that it viewed civilianisation primarily in terms of cost savings rather than the need to match skills to jobs or continuity in certain posts).

A similar example of conflict over grading, although with a different outcome, came from force C. This also concerned the grading of the chief finance officer. On this occasion, the police authority wanted the post to be given a higher grade and the chief opposed this. The view of the police authority prevailed:

I don't know whether you know that there was a dispute over my post.  
The chief wasn't happy with the post being paid at the grade it was.  
Members insisted that it was. (Director of Finance and Administration)

The study uncovered no evidence of any overt conflict between police authorities and chief constables over the grading of civilians in forces A or D. However, it remained clear that the local authority influence was important. For example, in force A, one of the county councils covered by the force was carrying out a job evaluation exercise on the civilian staff side, for the police authority. In force D, the civilian personnel officer felt that the emphasis on equal opportunities in civilian employment was a direct result of county council policies. He felt that more resources were put into equal opportunities because of county council pressure than would otherwise have been the case. The force administrative officer explained how the staffing part of the budget plans were negotiated with the police authority over a period of time. He added that 'the county council could object to certain points or reappraise their resource proposals for the later years; so there must be a healthy dialogue with the people who provide the resources'.

There was an interesting example of conflict between senior officers and senior civilian staff within one force over the grading of civilians. The personnel officer explained that he was having an ongoing argument with a chief superintendent head of department over the grading of a civilian post within that department. The attitude of this police officer was causing him considerable annoyance, and said he was tired of senior police officers interfering in things they knew 'f--- all about!'. He later went on to describe how some police officers put recommendations directly to the command block to avoid the influence of the civilian personnel department. As the decision was often taken before he could do anything about it, this strategy appeared to work.

The consequence of this discussion is to undermine the simplistic assumption that for all practical purposes civilian staff are under the control of the chief constable. Furthermore, it would also be inaccurate to think of the management of such staff as a means by which local authorities effect 'political' control over policing policy. Although civilian employment was not used as a way of extending local authority influence over policing policy generally, there were still important aspects of civilian employment which lay outside the control of the chief constable.

#### **INFLUENCES OVER POLICY CHANGE**

As outlined in an earlier section, the policy of civilianisation in the police service has a long history. It is also a complex history and, as a senior police

officer from one of the forces covered by the study said, investigating from where policy initiatives come is like 'tracing the sources of the Nile'. He meant that the development of policy is determined by variety of influences, some of them consciously exerted by key actors in the policy-making process, and others the product of wider developments outside the control of such actors. It is often difficult to establish how and why some changes in policy came about.

However, the previous sections suggest that a number of influences were important in the development of civilianisation policy. For example, the approach adopted by the Home Office has clearly been crucial. This was particularly the case during the 1980s, when Home Office circulars began directly to address civilianisation. This was, of course, part of a wider government approach to encourage 'value-for-money' measures in the police service, and in public services as a whole. The discussion also shows that individual police forces, and to differing extents their police authorities, also had an input into the development of the policy. This remains, however, a rather broad picture of the process by which policy change occurred.

A comparison of stated policy preferences with actual outcomes (in terms of what happened within the police forces) would broadly support the notion of Home Office primacy within the policy-making process. The Home Office wanted forces to pursue the policy of civilianisation, and to differing degrees the forces studied complied with its wishes. But a number of different parties influenced, or tried to influence, the way that the policy developed. These included the relevant Home Office divisions and HMIC, the local authority associations, the Audit Commission and National Audit Office, the police staff associations and main trade union (then) representing police civilian staff, the National and Local Government Officers union (NALGO).

The information about the inputs to the policy process comes from two main sources. First, from a number of semi-structured interviews carried out within the organisations listed above (with the exceptions of ACPO, HMIC and the National Audit Office). Second, analysis of a number of documentary sources, including parliamentary reports, academic papers, articles, reports of studies carried out by some of the above organisations, police authority minutes and reports, and the internal files of the local authority associations.

### **The Home Office**

It is perhaps unsurprising that the Home Office played a crucial role in the promotion of civilianisation as a policy. Of course, the Home Office has over the years adopted a fairly consistent position of upholding the general

principle that police officers should not be employed on work which does not require their skills or training. However, prior to the 1980s this took the form of general statements of support for the principle rather than active encouragement of forces to civilianise. It was during the 1980s that the Home Office began to take specific action to encourage police forces to pursue the policy.

The Home Office is not of course a monolithic organisation, but is made up of a number of different divisions and departments. The relevant divisions to the development of civilianisation policy were F1 division (which deals with police staffing and the provincial forces), F9 division (dealing with the Metropolitan Police, but with a special interest in value for money in the police service as a whole), and the Police Requirements Support Unit (PRSU).<sup>5</sup> It appears that F1 division took the lead in developing the Home Office circulars that promoted civilianisation (as both were signed by the then head of F1 division). F9 division liaised closely with F1 about developing value for money initiatives generally, of which civilianisation, and more particularly, the introduction of ASUs were considered an important part. PRSU was particularly concerned with the development of ASUs. It participated in an influential experimental ASU in the West Midlands police force, and also produced a wide range of practical suggestions to help forces reduce the administrative burden on operational officers.

As outlined earlier, circular 114/83 extended the government's financial management initiative to the police service. Although it covered much wider ground than civilianisation, it nevertheless signalled an important shift in emphasis in policy on civilianisation. The circular stated that 'the levels of civilians recommended in previous Home Office circulars are no longer relevant and should be disregarded'. Of course, the Home Office had given broad support to the notion of civilianisation since 1945. What was new about the approach encapsulated in 114/83 was that civilians were no longer seen as shoring up the gaps in the police service caused by failure to recruit enough police officers. Rather, 'civilians were now perceived as an economic means of satisfying ever escalating demands for police services' (Parrett, 1992:88).

As was the case in the other policy areas studied, Home Office circulars concerning civilianisation did not simply appear as edicts from central government. There was, behind the scenes, a process of consultation for both 114/83 and the later 105/88, with interested parties to the debate. Circular 114/83 arose from a narrower process of consultation than did the later civilianisation circular. The shape of the circular was determined in the Tripartite Forum, which includes representatives of the Home Office,

ACPO, and the local authority associations. The later circular, 105/88, appeared after consultation through the Police Advisory Board (PAB),<sup>6</sup> which also includes the Superintendents' Association and the Police Federation. The senior official in F1 interviewed could not remember exactly why the process of consultation had been different for the two circulars. In retrospect, he felt it was probably a mistake not to have included all the police staff associations in discussions about the earlier circular. However, he noted that their inclusion in the consultation process for the later circular had done little to make them happy with the outcome on that occasion.

There was more detailed information available concerning the appearance of the later civilianisation circular. This appears to have been initiated by Home Office officials wishing to systematise and build upon the approach laid down by 114/83; this was certainly the impression given by the senior F1 official. There appears to have been a two-part process through which the Home Office consulted about the contents of the circular. First, officials in F1 division (in consultation with F9), put together a draft circular, together with the checklist of key posts. This was then sent out to the member organisations on the PAB with formal requests for written comments. The draft was also the subject of discussions within the PAB standing committee meetings. There appear to have been a number of objections to the first draft, not least from the local authority associations (see below), and the Home Office withdrew it, and began the process again with a new draft which had been altered to meet some of these objections.

Although the Home Office circulars clearly played a pivotal role in developing the policy of civilianisation during the 1980s, it is important to remember that this was part of a wider shift in government policy. The FMI was a general attempt to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the public services and government departments, and the development of civilianisation (along with performance indicators, a strengthened inspection process, standardisation of information, etc.) must be seen as part of this drive. It is interesting, in that context, that the most powerful of government departments, the Treasury, also played a role. In his evidence to the Public Accounts Committee (1 May 1991), Sir Clive Whitmore (Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office) made this clear when referring to a joint Home Office/Treasury study on police staffing:

...the provenance of this study was – going back a bit – an initiative that I took in 1988 shortly after coming to the Home Office when I discovered, rather to my surprise, that police manpower planning did not extend much beyond the current year... It seemed to me we wanted to move to at least a three year rolling programme which matched the public expenditure survey. The Treasury, when we put this to them, while

feeling that in principle this was a sensible way of proceeding, were not prepared to give it the go-ahead because, understandably, they felt that we had not yet got in place measures for assessing the use which the police were making of their resources in which they could have confidence. It was that which led to this particular study which we and the Treasury did jointly... (House of Commons Committee of Public Accounts, 1991)

Two interesting points arise from this statement. First, how important the official's own views and priorities were in developing policy. Second, civilianisation was just one part of a broader concern with efficiency and effectiveness within public services which in turn sprang from the high priority given to the control of public expenditure. Clearly, the Treasury was both a crucial influence on this broader policy, and also made particular inputs into its application to the police service.

The influence exerted by the Home Office, whilst strong, was indirect. Officials in both F1 and F9 divisions repeatedly emphasised the limits to Home Office powers regarding the process of civilianisation. The only direct controls available to the Home Office under the current arrangements are over police establishment increases, and capital spending. As outlined above, it was by relating police officer establishment bids to civilianisation that the Home Office attempted to persuade forces to civilianise posts.

### **Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)**

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary played a crucial role in keeping up the pressure on forces to civilianise. In particular, they have kept statistics comparing the rate at which similar police forces have civilianised 'key posts', and were able to ask questions of forces which resisted Home Office guidance. The ultimate sanction available to HMIC is to fail to certify a force efficient for the purposes of receiving police grant. Although this has for many years been regarded as something of an empty threat, this changed in 1992 when HMIC refused to certify the Derbyshire police force efficient for police grant purposes.

There is no documentary evidence about how HMIC contributed to change during the 1980s, but a number of senior officers in the forces covered by the study, talked about 'pressure' from HMIC to civilianise particular posts. Senior officers in forces A and B made it clear that they had not always yielded to HMIC pressure to civilianise particular posts. Earlier analysis showed how these two forces retained high proportions of police officers in some functions where other forces had civilianised much more extensively. Since 1990, the annual inspection reports of HMIC have been published, and these contain some information about how HMIC have tried to keep up the pressure to civilianise. The 1991 reports contain a

number of references to civilianisation, although mostly these are framed in very general terms. For example, in the report on force A HMIC commended the force on the progress made but recommended that the force prioritise civilianisation in posts which will release operational time. It noted that a 'nil cost' civilianisation was recommended by the HMI to the chief and police authority (which means that extra police are not recruited). The report on force B noted that the percentage of key posts civilianised in the force was below the national average and noted that there was room for expansion of the programme in the communications, scientific support and general office duties. In force C, the HMIC report commended the progress that had been made so far and urged the reinstatement of the civilianisation programme (which had been suspended due to budgetary restrictions on the council). Force D was praised for its decision not to apply for an increase in police establishment that year and to concentrate on civilianisation. Although these were rather general comments, taken along with the comments of senior police officers and civilians within the forces visited, they show how HMIC was able to keep up the pressure to civilianise posts.

### **The local authority associations**

Both the Association of County Councils (ACC) and the Association of Metropolitan Authorities (AMA) take a close interest in policing matters. As outlined above, representatives from these bodies sit on the Tripartite Forum out of which came circular 114/83, and are consulted on other draft circulars in which the Home Office judges they have an interest. Both the ACC and the AMA have a police committee, which consists of members from police authorities in England and Wales, and has advisers from all local authority disciplines. The committees liaise with other ACC/AMA committees, and report quarterly to the full association.

Both associations have generally supported the policy of civilianisation, and it appears that they had an important influence upon the way that the policy developed during the 1980s. Representatives of both the AMA and the ACC felt that they had exerted a strong influence over the development of circular 114/83. A senior representative of the AMA said that the Association had had 'a great deal of influence over that circular'. He added that whilst the Home Office do not always send the AMA draft circulars for formal comment, it was only very occasionally that they were not consulted when they felt they should have been. AMA officials did not feel that the amount of consultation by the Home Office had declined over the 1980s, and quoted an example of a more recent draft circular on football charges, saying 'the football charges draft circular was fairly precise and

specific and we didn't like it, so a year later it hasn't come out yet – so we do have some influence!'.

The internal files of the ACC suggested that both the local authority associations had managed to influence the development of the civilianisation policy. Files from 1975 onwards were examined, and they contained a number of references to consultation by the Home Office prior to the issue of circulars. For example, in March 1979 the ACC received a draft circular on police expenditure from the Home Office with a request for detailed comments. An internal ACC memo of the same time records how the ACC and AMA made clear their displeasure at the way that the Home Office tried to prescribe levels of civilians before 1977. This, according to the memo, was taken on board by the Home Office, which produced a revised circular.

In December 1987 the ACC received the draft circular on civilians in the police service (which became 105/88), sent by F1 division to a number of organisations for comments. Drafts were also sent to representatives of the AMA, ACPO, Police Federation, Superintendents Association, NALGO, and the Department of Environment. The ACC circulated this draft amongst its member police authorities and also invited comments from chief constables. A number of replies were on file, from chief constables and county councils. In general, chief constables tended to support the draft, but most of the county councils that replied expressed reservations. In February 1988 the ACC wrote to the Home Office expressing concern about a number of points in the draft circular and requesting that the issue be deferred until Home Office representatives had met with ACC advisers. The Home Office agreed to this and met with the advisers to discuss the reservations about the draft. The outcome was that the draft was withdrawn completely, and the Home Office agreed to submit a new draft in due course.

In the summer of 1988, the local authority associations held a joint seminar to discuss the issue of civilianisation in the police service. When the circular 105/88 came out in its final form, an internal ACC memo recorded that the final document was 'much more acceptable', partly as a result of the deliberations of the seminar. This suggests that the Home Office was willing to consult over circulars and respond to suggestions. Interestingly, the personal perceptions of some senior representatives of the ACC did not conform with the general impression given by the files. One official referred to a drastic reduction in both the quantity and quality of Home Office consultation during recent years, and referred to the Home Office as the most 'militantly centralist' of all government departments. Fears were raised that the Home Office was planning to involve itself more

closely in matters concerning police civilians, including the monitoring of sickness rates and matters of training and qualifications.

### **The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)**

ACPO represents all police officers in England and Wales above the rank of chief superintendent. ACPO have published a number of reports into civilianisation, and there are a number of references to the position which they have adopted in the ACC internal files which were referred to above. In recent years ACPO has played an increasingly important role in the formulation of national policing policy generally. The secretariat, funded from the common police services budget, has been strengthened, and there is a policy analysis unit and a public relations officer. The chief constable of one of the forces covered in the study (force A) was a past president of ACPO. He said in interview that he had tried to strengthen the policy-making power of the organisation by introducing the doctrine of cabinet responsibility. This meant that if an individual chief officer wished to dissent from official ACPO policy they would have a duty to come before council and explain their reasons. He saw advantages in local control, but stressed the need for ACPO to produce coherent national policy.

ACPO's position on civilianisation has changed over the years. Before the 1980s there is evidence that chief constables took a cautious view of the employment of civilians in their forces. The ACC files revealed correspondence from September 1976 in which the chief of a county force expressed concern that 'key personnel' in the service were outside the direct authority of the chief constable. The letter called for more integration of the civilian element into the police service, with career development independent of local authority structures. This caution was mirrored in 1977 by an ACPO report on trade union recognition, which expressed concern about departments becoming operationally dependent on civilians, given the danger of industrial action. Minutes of the PAB meeting of October 1978 recorded that ACPO had presented a report on civilians in the police service, which had argued for the development of a national police civilian service, outside the control of local authorities. The minutes noted that 'in general, it was agreed that there was scope only for piecemeal and not substantial civilianisation in the future'.

However, during the 1980s ACPO effectively abandoned its opposition to the policy of civilianisation. An ACPO report in 1988 recognised the importance of the civilian element in the police service, and noted that chief officers had striven to follow Home Office guidance on this matter. The report noted the conflicting pressures coming from central government on the policy, with Home Office and HMIC pressure upon chiefs to press on

with civilianisation, but restrictions on local authority spending, and disincentives inherent in the RSG, working against civilianisation.

As noted above, ACPO was represented on the Tripartite Forum which was responsible for the development of circular 114/83. The senior representative of F1 division explained that this was such a far-reaching circular, that the main discussions over it took place in the 'essentially management forum of the tripartite working party'. ACPO was, of course, also represented on the PAB which formed the forum of consultation for circular 105/88. There was no direct evidence available about the kinds of pressures which ACPO brought to bear on the shape of either of the civilianisation circulars. However, it would be very surprising if this was insignificant. However, looking at the outcomes of policy, it does seem that ACPO gave ground on a number of issues. For example, it has consistently expressed cautionary views on the issue of control, and trade union recognition, and pressed for a national police civilian service. These are all referred to, but only in a very general way, by the circular 105/88, which merely said that chief officers and police authorities should give these matters attention.

### **The Police Federation**

The Police Federation is the staff association which represents police officers below the rank of superintendent. Not surprisingly, the Federation has generally opposed the development of civilianisation in the police service. Although the Federation claims that its attitude to civilianisation has changed over time, it has consistently expressed cautious views on the subject, arguing at several stages during the development of the policy that it should go no further. For example, in July 1981 the Federation submitted a paper to the PAB which expressed concern at the growth in the civilian element in the police service, given the climate of industrial militancy at the time. The paper stressed that no civilian should be employed on duties including supervision of police officers. The paper recommended no further growth in civilian employment, and also a gradual reversal of the policy so that some duties such as SOCOs would revert to being filled only by police officers. The fact that this was just before the Home Office issued the circulars 114/83 and 105/88 underlines the extent to which the Federation lost the battle. Their position is, of course, hardly surprising. It is the job of the Federation to represent and promote the interests of police officers, and civilianisation was perceived as a real threat to these interests. Whittaker (1982) argued that the opposition to civilianisation was due to the fact that civilians could undercut police officers in many functions. Civilianisation provides a potentially far cheaper way of executing some tasks within the

police organisation. It also limits the career structure of police officers and reduces the number of sedentary posts for sick or injured officers. The Federation maintains that its position is based on the need to protect the quality of service as well as the interests of officers. It argues that civilianisation can undermine 'operational effectiveness'; for example, a control room operator with police experience will be able to make a more effective assessment than a civilian of the appropriate response to a reported incident. The Federation fears that police forces are in danger of becoming a 'rump service'. This means that the only police posts left would be those involving confrontation with the public, with major implications for the legitimacy of the police service as a whole.

A representative of the Audit Commission felt strongly that Police Federation opposition to civilianisation had been exacerbated by the terms of the debate over the policy. It had been presented purely as a method of cost-cutting rather than a method of improving organisational effectiveness and reducing administrative burdens on operational officers. It is interesting that the Police Federation was *not* one of the parties consulted prior to the issue of the circular 114/83, although this circular had considerable implications for the work of those officers it represented. This point was stressed by a senior representative of the Federation who was understandably concerned by this aspect: 'It was a very wide-ranging circular and we were not consulted about any of it. We immediately wrote to the Home Office to complain, especially after we had bitten the bullet and accepted that in the 1980s some civilianisation would be necessary'.

As mentioned above, a senior Home Office official admitted, with hindsight, the failure to consult the Police Federation had been a mistake. The later circular 105/88 was developed through consultation with the wider range of bodies on the PAB, including the Police Federation. However, as the official himself noted, this did not make it more popular with the Federation. The Federation representative accepted that there was more opportunity for them to comment in that they received a draft of the circular and a request for their views. They submitted a number of objections, mainly to particular posts which were recommended for civilianisation. However, these representations had little effect, and none of these recommendations were followed when the circular was finalised. In fact, the Police Federation's representative said that the final version, from the Federation's viewpoint, was even worse than the draft. He was extremely doubtful about the worth of the consultation exercise:

In relation to 105/88 we made a number of what we thought were valid points which seem almost to have been brushed aside. You begin to wonder whether the consultation has any value, or whether it is a

cosmetic exercise in that they have to ask but don't have to take on board any of the points made. One would expect at least some of the points you make would be taken on board.

Despite the fact that the Police Federation's natural opponents in the debate over civilianisation were the civilian trade unions, it seemed that NALGO and the Federation maintained cordial relations. The two organisations had a number of formal and informal contacts, and relationships were described by a senior NALGO official as 'cordial and extremely frank'. Of course, the two shared some common interests. For example, representatives of both organisations expressed strong opposition to perceived government plans to privatise certain policing functions altogether. In the long run, NALGO's success in promoting improved wages and conditions for its police members strengthens the Federation argument that civilianisation does not lead to major cost savings. There has even been a suggestion from within the Federation that the civilian element of the police service could be incorporated into its ranks. Although senior Federation representatives remained opposed to this, they recognised the implications such a move would have for the overall influence of their organisation. In the words of the Police Federation deputy secretary at the time of the research; 'it could make the Police Federation a very powerful body; it currently represents about 125,000 police officers, add civilians establishments to that and you would have a staff association that would rival NALGO and the TGWU'.

### **The National and Local Government Officers' union (NALGO)**

Before its merger with health unions to form UNISON in 1993, NALGO was the union with the highest membership amongst police civilians, and by 1991 had an estimated 25,000 members in British police forces. In general terms, NALGO's position was one of support for civilianisation for two main reasons. First, that it provided for a more effective use of staffing resources in the police service. Second, in the sense of its own organisational interests, the policy clearly expanded the potential membership base and influence of NALGO. The internal structures for dealing with police-related issues were as follows. Under the national and local government committee which covered all local government matters, there was a national police advisory panel which advised on service conditions for police civilians. There were fourteen district police panels (with one representative from each police branch in the district) who nominated representatives to this panel. Police NALGO branches fell into two categories; 'proper' police branches that consisted only of police civilian members, and branches that formed part of a wider local

government branch. The latter generally occurred where there was a single county police authority, although NALGO was encouraging the trend toward more separate police branches. Representatives outlined the need to deal with police civilian matters separately from those concerning other local government employees.

An important part of NALGO's influence over policy concerning police civilians was through its negotiating position on pay and conditions. The pay and conditions of civilian employees in the police service are negotiated nationally in the National Joint Council (NJC) for Administrative, Technical, Professional and Clerical Staff. The local authority associations form the employers side of this body. During the 1980s, NALGO pressured for matters concerning police civilian employees to be seen as distinct from those of the wider local authority workforce. This was strongly opposed by the employers' side. An ACC memo of June 1980 expressed strong opposition to a NALGO suggestion that white collar staff employed by police authorities should have a separate negotiating body outside the NJC. This subject occasionally surfaced in subsequent years, with a strong memo from the NJC in 1987 to the PAB stressing that matters of police civilian pay and gradings are matters for the NJC and individual authorities only.

In 1987, the NJC decided to set up a special advisory sub-committee dealing with the special interests of police civilians. This was supported strongly by NALGO. The local authority associations appeared to have mixed views on this development. They remained fearful of any link between civilian and police pay, because of the huge cost implications for them as employers. The AMA made this explicit with a letter to the NJC in 1987 expressing concern that the specialist sub-committee should not become a negotiating forum, and should not develop links with the PNB. However, minutes of an NJC meeting in 1988 explained that an important part of the employers' acceptance of a specialist sub-committee was to enable more effective resistance to Home Office interference in matters concerning police civilians:

The employers' decision was taken against a background of concern that increasing Home Office interest in civilianisation would lead to central government and sectional police service influences growing over issues affecting numbers, gradings and conditions of police civilians, to the detriment of the role of police authorities and of the national council.

As well as influencing policy through its role in collective bargaining, NALGO was one of the bodies consulted by the Home Office about draft circulars. Interviews with senior representatives of NALGO gave little support to the contention that Home Office consultation has been declining in quantity and quality over recent years. On the contrary, representatives

felt that the Home Office was increasingly likely to consult with them. With 114/83 NALGO had to 'chase' the Home Office in order to make an input, and representatives reported a tendency to ignore the existence of civilian trade unionism in the police service. However, a national NALGO official said that this position had changed and that their comments were now 'genuinely invited'. As well as members of the PAB, NALGO were formally consulted about the circular 105/88.

### **The Audit Commission and National Audit Office**

The Audit Commission was established by the Local Government Finance Act of 1982. Its purpose is to be an independent body appointing auditors to all local authorities in England and Wales, and to undertake and promote value-for-money (VFM) work amongst its clients. About 70 per cent of local authority audits are done by the District Audit Service (the public sector audit wing coming under the Audit Commission), the rest is done by private firms who are hired by the Audit Commission. The work on promoting VFM in provincial police forces began in about 1986. Audit guides for use in forces appeared in 1988, and a series of published 'police papers' began at about the same time, many of them receiving significant media attention. The general theme of its work is that of applying principles of business management to police forces, and disseminating good practice. The research papers started off by examining support services, and then gravitated to more sensitive areas, for example operational command structures. At the time of the research, the group at the Audit Commission working on policing issues was quite small, with one person seconded from the Treasury working on police issues full-time. The team varied depending on the current subject of research; at the time of the study there were two others. Over the previous year, the group had employed the services of a retired Home Office official, and a former chief constable, and had commissioned work by private firms on a fixed-fee basis.

The Audit Commission played an important role in stimulating the development of ASUs. Its 1988 paper *Administrative Support for Operational Police Officers* appears to have been very influential, both within local forces and nationally. Senior officials in F9 division argued that this report led directly to the specific recommendation of ASUs in the circular 105/88. The District Audit Service can also follow up on themes from police papers at the local force level. An HMIC report on force A notes how the district auditor carried out a thematic audit of the force, with special attention paid to civilianisation and ASUs.

A representative of the Audit Commission's police group explained that the Commission had developed important contacts with ACPO and the

HMIC. ACPO set up a special committee, initially chaired by James Anderton (then chief constable of Greater Manchester), to liaise with the Audit Commission. The Commission also gave twice-yearly seminars to chief officers on their particular subjects of study. A particularly close working relationship had developed with chief officers of HMIC, who were consulted by the Commission before it decided on new areas of study. HMIC also made extensive comments on draft reports by the Audit Commission prior to publication. The representative of the Commission stressed that they were not 'led by the nose' by HMIC. It was the 'quality of advice' which characterised the relationship, and the Audit Commission remained 'an independent body'. The Commission also had a number of informal contacts with the Home Office, in particular with F9 division.

The Audit Commission has been critical of the role played by local authorities in policing; in a paper on performance measurement it argued that police authorities should take a more active role in developing policy. According to the representative of the Audit Commission, a lack of relevant expertise appeared to hamper the local authorities' inputs. He accepted that the Audit Commission had exerted a considerable impact on Home Office thinking, but underlined that this was not because of the statutory position: 'The Home Office isn't obliged to take us seriously but it does because we produce things which get written about and talked about and which we think are right'.

The subject of value for money in provincial police forces has, in recent years, also come under the scrutiny of the National Audit Office (NAO). The NAO (headed by the Comptroller and Auditor General) is an independent agency that certifies the accounts of all government departments and a range of other public sector bodies. It has statutory authority to report to Parliament on the economy, efficiency and effectiveness with which departments and other bodies use their resources. The NAO takes an interest in provincial police forces in so far as it must audit the accounts of Home Office grants paid to these forces. It has no power to examine the books and records of local police forces or police authorities. In 1991 the NAO published a report into the value for money measures in provincial police forces (National Audit Office, 1991).

### **The House of Commons Public Accounts Committee**

In 1991, this powerful Select Committee of the House of Commons examined value for money in provincial police forces, and considered in particular the report of the NAO mentioned above. The Permanent Under-Secretary at the Home Office, along with the Chief HMI, Sir John Woodcock, were questioned very thoroughly by MPs about the role of the

Home Office in promoting value for money in provincial police forces. The Committee criticised the inability of the Home Office under the present structure to exert direct control over the progress of civilianisation. At the same time there was the feeling that attempts should have been made to overcome these structural constraints.

A number of MPs on the committee, most notably Labour members, strongly criticised the Home Office for its tardiness in trying to exert more central controls over provincial forces. The main thrust of the argument was that provincial police forces absorbed a large amount of public expenditure, £3 billion in 1989-90. The fact that so much of this came from central government meant that it would have been an abdication of the Home Office's public responsibility *not* to seek to ensure that this public money was spent in the most effective way possible. Alan Williams MP made very strong criticisms of the lack of central control over spending in provincial police forces, describing it as 'one of the most appalling shambles I have heard in my time on this committee'. Tim Smith MP closely questioned the Permanent Under Secretary about the tripartite system:

What is so special about this tripartite system? Now nearly 90 per cent of local government spending across the board is financed either by the business ratepayer or by the central taxpayer and yet we allow local authorities considerable independence in the way in which they manage their resources. (House of Commons, 1991:18)

Alan Williams strongly criticised the Permanent Under-Secretary on the HMIC findings about relative over- and under-provision of staffing in provincial police forces (and the lack of Home Office action to rectify the situation). Sir Clive Whitmore had to remind him that police officers and civilians were not employed by the Home Office, and that under the current legislative arrangements the Home Office did not have the power to transfer resources from one force to another.

So the pressures upon the Home Office to increase its influence over provincial forces did not simply come from within government, as a response to Treasury pressures. The all-party House of Commons Public Accounts Committee made very strong criticisms of the Home Office's lack of control, and certain members strongly implied that it was failing in its duty, given the amount of centrally-raised taxation revenue that was used to fund provincial forces.

#### **POLICY-MAKING AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL**

A number of themes arise from the preceding section examining the main influences over the policy of civilianisation. First, it was the national level which was the crucial forum for the development of the policy. There was

relatively little impetus from individual local forces or levels below this, in terms of initiating the policy. This was summarised by the representative of the Police Federation who said: ‘the main discussions of the policy emanating from the Home Office take place at PAB level... if we lose the battle within the PAB or its standing committee there is little that can be achieved locally’. A second important theme was the central importance, within this national level, of the publication of Home Office circulars 114/83 and 105/88, which were the main factors in initiating the policy. The first circular laid down the principle of civilianisation, and the second systematised the approach with more detailed advice. Information about exactly why the Home Office came to adopt the approach embodied in the circulars was hard to locate. A senior official from F1 explained that the subjects for circulars arise in a variety of ways:

It’s not really possible to generalise about how a topic assumes such importance that central guidance seems to be called for. Perhaps new legislation or regulations may require extra guidance. The police service or the local authority associations may be particularly concerned by a particular issue and say that it would be helpful to have central guidance on this, that or the other. The HMIC, as they proceed on their programmes may pick up on areas where forces are acting differently, and it would be helpful to have guidance on best practice. It could happen in any one of a number of ways.

What the official did not mention, however, was the pressure from within government, which led to extension of the FMI to the police service. This pressure, it seems, came largely from Treasury officials, concerned at the rapid expansion of expenditure on the police at a time when control of public spending was the central plank of government policy.

It is also interesting that the senior official did not mention the Home Secretary in his discussion of sources for the subjects of circulars. This underlines another important feature of the national level policy-making process; the central role played by officials in deciding upon and formulating policy. Of course, the importance of controlling public expenditure, and the FMI, were initiated by elected ministers. But the particular application of the policy to the police service, and the timing, seem to have been related more to the agendas of senior civil servants than members of the Government.

A good deal of attention has been focused upon the centralisation of power in the process of police policy-making. However, an important feature of the findings about civilianisation concerned the incomplete nature of the controls at the disposal of the Home Office. Thus, paradoxically, the findings show the power of Home Office advice in stimulating forces to civilianise, but also relative weaknesses in controlling

the implementation of the process. So although the dominance of the Home Office in policy-making has been frequently criticised, it is clear that the Home Office could not issue instructions to forces; though influential the circulars are only advisory. This was a point openly accepted by senior Home Office officials:

The advice is probably pretty general, but that's because they are essentially local issues which vary from force to force and need to be worked out separately. (Senior official - F1 division)

The Home Office has no direct control over civilianisation. The only direct controls we have are over police manpower and capital spending... it is up to a police force to decide how many civilians it employs. It only needs the police authority's readiness to foot the bill. (Senior official - F9 division)

Thus, the influence of the Home Office was exerted indirectly, through controls over police officer establishments, and backed-up by HMIC in its annual inspections. The uneven development of civilianisation between the four forces covered in this study is testimony to the indirect nature of Home Office controls. This was a point which was repeatedly used by members of the House of Commons Public Accounts Committee to criticise senior Home Office officials. However, as officials explained, the statutory limitations on the Home Office under the 1964 Police Act largely prevented a more effective control of the growth of staff in provincial forces.

An important feature of the background to the Home Office circulars was the importance of the consultation process prior to publication. Details about this process were uncovered for the two circulars 114/83 and 105/88. A senior F1 division official gave a brief description of the criteria applied when deciding which bodies should be consulted:

Once it becomes clear that one must take action, then the first step is to ask who the other interested organisations are. Usually ACPO have to be brought in because they are responsible for actually making it happen. The police authorities, represented by the AMA and ACC, ought to be involved if expenditure is involved because they would provide 49 per cent. If it had a direct impact on the actual work of police officers then there would be a case for involving the Police Federation and Superintendents Association.

Even though some sources were sceptical about the degree to which the Home Office was prepared to take advice on board, there was some strong evidence that the Home Office did in fact respond to criticism. For example, it withdrew its first draft of 105/88 following criticisms from the local authority associations.

A further interesting point about policy-making at the national level was that a number of different coalitions came together over different aspects of civilianisation policy. Although the parties to the debate had broad positions supporting or opposing civilianisation, there were differences over particular issues. This resulted in several shifting coalitions and different strategies adopted by different groups to put a strong case in the PAB. One example was contained in an internal Police Federation paper from 1989, which gave insights into the Federation's strategy to effect the development of civilianisation at PAB level. This paper recognised the need for civilian support in the police service, but stated that the policy was now being taken too far. It identified the two parties most strongly pushing for more civilianisation; what it called a 'strange coalition' of central government and the trade unions. The paper outlined the basis on which these could be challenged; central government by calling into question the evidence in support of the cost-effectiveness of civilianisation, and the trade unions by highlighting the danger of industrial action.

Another 'strange coalition' arose from the positions adopted by NALGO and ACPO on civilian career structures. During the 1980s, ACPO argued at the PAB in favour of a national police civilian service. NALGO argued that police civilians were a distinctive group, and sought to set up structures to deal with their issues separately from those of other local government employees. This, of course, is in opposition to the local authority associations who wish to develop career structures within the wider local government context. The ACC's strategy at the PAB to oppose a separate police civilian service was to stress the implications of giving power to the unions on a national basis. It appears that this was sufficient to convince the Home Office. An ACC memo from 1980 recorded strong opposition to a NALGO suggestion that white collar staff employed by police authorities should have a separate negotiating body. The ACC wanted them to remain within the National Joint Council (NJC) for Administrative, Professional, Technical and Clerical staff.

ACPO and the Police Federation have united in using the fear of industrial action as a cautionary pressure against civilianisation. In 1981, the Police Federation submitted a paper to the PAB highlighting public sector union militancy and the likely effects of strike action in the police service. This has also been a concern of ACPO over the years.

Not surprisingly, there were a series of formal and informal contacts between the various parties to the policy-making process which facilitated information exchange and discussion. For example, NALGO reported meetings with representatives of HMIC, and an annual meeting with senior representatives of HMIC. There were also on-going contacts with the local

authority associations at all levels. NALGO representatives explained they had a 'steady liaison' with the Police Federation. By the end of the 1980s, NALGO officials also had contacts with ACPO level officers through inputs into Bramshill and Hendon training courses for senior officers. The Audit Commission referred to the informal contacts with the Home Office and the close relationship with HMIC, as well as their desire for a more fruitful input from the local authority associations.

The developments at national level show the limitations of concentrating too much on overt conflict. The main party to explicitly oppose the policy was the Police Federation. There was little evidence of overt challenges from ACPO, although arguably they had far more influence over the development of policy. Although the Home Office did have a central role in developing policy, as the above has shown, there was a process of consultation prior to any circular. This suggests that the Home Office comes to adopt an approach after taking the positions (or expected positions) of other groups into account. Thus, the Home Office, although powerful, perceives that it has to consult with various bodies when building new policing policies. It is even possible to argue that the Home Office and ACPO may be joint authors of some circulars. Commenting on the relationship between the Home Office and ACPO, for example, Rock (1990:15) has argued that:

...the Home Secretary would be wary about issuing a circular or initiating a policy which would meet with strong resistance in public. Overt conflict is rare. In this sense, chief constables comply with advice which they are not reluctant to accept. They work within a negotiated order that anticipates most of their responses. Instead of being subject to peremptory, public and unexpected commands, the politics of their relations revolves around nuanced and solicitous gestures. The role of the Home Secretary and his officials... remains akin to that of a constitutional monarch, not that of a director.

#### **LOCAL FORCE LEVEL**

Most of the bodies operating to influence development of policy at the national level also had, to different degrees, links with the local force level. ACPO is of course made up of chief officers from the local police forces, and the views of individual chief constables would clearly be crucial to the development of civilianisation in each force. For the local authority associations, police staff associations, and NALGO there were a number of links with the local force level. The Edmund-Davies Committee (1978) recommended the establishment of formal consultative mechanisms via the staff associations within police forces. All the forces in the study had a joint consultative committee (JCC) including representatives of the Police

Federation, Superintendents' Association, NALGO and other civilian trade unions. There was little evidence of JCCs having a strong influence on the development of civilianisation. From discussions with senior officers, the JCC appeared to be a forum for informal discussions and information exchange rather than for negotiation over the details of policy. The nature of the police organisation has not encouraged the development of local bargaining between management and workforce. Local input from NALGO has also probably been limited, constrained by the lack of a uniform local framework for its organisation. Some police forces had their own police branches of NALGO, whereas civilians in other forces were subsumed in the wider local government union branch. The civilian personnel officer in force A supported this interpretation when he reported that, in terms of local policy, 'NALGO and the Police Federation had virtually no input into civilianisation'.

Findings about policy-making at force level also confirm the view put by the representative of the Police Federation, that the PAB, and therefore the national level, was the most important in developing policy. The room for negotiation at the local level was limited, according to this view, to the 'small level of discretion' left to chief constables in the area of sedentary posts. The best that could be hoped for was to try to soften the approach of the local chief constable on this matter. In so far as chief constables broadly followed Home Office advice to civilianise this was true. Nevertheless, the case studies of the individual forces showed that within the framework of broad support for the policy, there was considerable room for differences of approach.

Thus, for example, the actual mechanism of civilianisation differed between the force that used staff reviews, those which operated a staff bidding system (in which sub-divisions and departments needed to identify posts for civilianisation), and the force that operated a centralised establishment system with little role for the departments and sub-divisions. An earlier section has shown that the four forces civilianised at different overall rates, and that although there were similarities between the kinds of posts civilianised, forces retained an individual approach in some kinds of job. For example, force B retained a high proportion of police officers in front offices and custody suites, and force A had comparatively few civilians working in personnel and computing departments. In all the forces visited there were regular meetings between the command team and the staff associations, but these were not seen as having a major impact upon force policy. It is highly likely that the personal views of the chief constable were an important determinant of differences. For example, the chief constable of force A stated his belief in the importance of retaining a proper

career structure for police officers with a variety of senior positions to be kept open for them. Perhaps this explained the high police presence in computing, personnel and research. This was not a position completely supported by the chief constable's own personnel department. The civilian personnel officer put a strong argument in favour of employing a qualified civilian to head the computing department, but concluded 'the force says it must be a policeman!'. A senior civilian employee in force C reported that the chief constable took the view that civilians should not be employed in jobs which involved supervision of a police officer.

### **The influence of police authorities**

The police committees of the local authority associations are made up of members of local police authorities. Thus, a potentially important channel of influence for elected members was through the activities of the national associations described above. The other was, of course, activity on a local level. Civilianisation provided an area of potential influence for the police authorities over the police service.

In forces A and D, interviews with leading members of the local police authorities suggested a broad consensus in favour of civilianisation, though often based on different interests and rationales. There was little evidence that police authorities saw civilianisation as a potential for expanding their influence over the framing of policing policy. No police authority made a systematic effort to exert control over civilian staff and, it seemed that the authority accepted that civilians were part of a police service over which the chief constable had ultimate authority. Yet, as shown earlier, police authorities on occasion exerted a significant influence on decisions about grading and salaries.

The police authority of force B appeared to take a more active interest in civilianisation policy than their counterparts in other forces. The minutes recorded that the authority requested a report from the chief constable into progress with civilianisation, and plans for future development (which the chief duly provided). The final decision on grading matters in this force was the responsibility of a personnel sub-committee of the police authority, not the chief constable. Although the force personnel officer worked to gain acceptance for the chief's proposals, and these proposals were only occasionally rejected, this process of negotiation still had to take place. The example of the conflict over the chief finance officer's grade was referred to earlier. Additionally, the personnel sub-committee itself reviewed the Home Office circular 105/88 and considered the implications for the force. The police authority minutes note how the chief agreed to ask the personnel sub-committee's permission before a person in receipt of an occupational

pension (ie. ex police officer) was recruited to a civilian post. According to the minutes, the chief fulfilled this promise. This close interest in civilianisation appeared to be particularly related to the authority's desire to make cost savings. A number of police officers in force B felt that this was a somewhat over-simplified approach to the policy. They said that the predominance of low grades amongst the civilian employees was a result of a deliberate police authority policy. The conflict over the grading of the force finance officer had arisen because the chief wanted to appoint someone at a higher grade than members thought was necessary.

Force C had the only police authority which had overtly difficult relationships with its chief constable. The chief tended not only to take action without the agreement of members, but provided minimal information about developments in the force. However, the issue of civilian staff in the police provided a rare example of police authority predominance over the views of the chief. This involved another example of conflict over grading, with the chief wanting a lower grade for a senior civilian post, and the police authority insisting the employment be made at a higher grade.

There is no evidence that police authorities initiated the policy of civilianisation, or indeed were instrumental in determining the different approaches between forces. However, it would not be accurate to portray them as passive 'rubber stamping' bodies to the policy of civilianisation. This finding is supported by an ACPO survey of 1988 which found that 48 per cent of local authorities *prevented* their police forces from employing people in receipt of an occupational pension in civilian posts. Although this is not evidence of police authorities making a comprehensive input into the policy of civilianisation, it does show that where police authorities had statutory powers, the view of the chief constable did not inevitably prevail. The Home Office was clearly the central influence determining the development of civilianisation policy, but that influence was more indirect, and the process of change more complex, than might at first appear from observation of the outcomes.

## **DEMOCRATIC INFLUENCES AND CIVILIANISATION**

### **Equity**

In contrast to the other specific policy areas included in the study, the 'equity' aspect of democracy appears to have little application to policy change in relation to civilianisation. The policy of civilianisation had more of a direct impact within the police service, and its implications were not a central feature of the public debate about policing. Thus, only in terms of internal organisational issues can the notion of equity or fairness be applied, for example regarding the lower status of civilians generally. A number of

studies have shown that in terms of pay and conditions, and status within the police organisation, civilians have traditionally occupied a disadvantaged position within the police organisation. Although respective positions of civilians and police staff were not a key focus of this study, the research did reveal evidence of such inequalities, where for example, senior civilian staff were excluded from decision-making forums. Similarly, little evidence was found of proper career structures for civilian employees. Recent work by Loveday (1993) and Highmore (1993) has shown that these kinds of problems are still experienced within police forces generally.

### **Delivery of service**

This aspect is the main focus of the policy of civilianisation. Although there is disagreement about the effects of the policy, in general terms it seems difficult to deny that civilianisation has increased the policing services available to the public. Operational time has been freed up by employing civilians on jobs that would otherwise have occupied police officers, and administrative structures have been rationalised. Additionally, in both forces with ASUs, the CPS reported a marked increase in the quality of police files that were sent to them.

However, in more specific ways, evidence about the effectiveness of civilianisation remains equivocal. Parret (1992) identifies three main objectives of the policy. These are the release of officers for operational duties, a more cost-effective provision of police services, and an improved delivery of police services (through civilian specialisms and continuity in post). The first of these appears to have been central to the initial developments of civilianisation in the UK, although arguably the next two objectives became more important as time went on.

In terms of release of police officers to operational duties, there are various estimates of the exact effects of civilianisation. For example, the Home Office circular 105/88 states that in the three year period from 1985 2,035 police officers were released through the employment of 3,040 civilian staff in the police service. The Operational Policing Review carried out in 1990 estimated that 4,303 officers were redeployed as a result of civilianisation between 1983 and 1989. However, Parret (1992) notes a perception at lower levels within the police service that the number of operational officers has not increased to the degree implied by such figures. These sorts of doubts were also expressed by officers working in sub-divisions of the forces covered by this study. A common question asked by such officers was, where had these 'released' officers gone to?

The actual effects of civilianisation on operational deployment are extremely difficult to measure. In the first instance, the definition of

operational is unclear and may change. Secondly, there are civilians who are employed in new functions which were never carried out by police officers. Third, civilianisation may release pockets of police time, rather than release whole officer posts to other duties. However, during the latter half of the 1980s, the National Audit Office found no increase in the proportion of police officers available for operational patrol, despite civilianisation. As noted above, although forces could provide figures for numbers of officers released by civilianisation, few forces analysed where these released officers went. There was certainly a kind of 'leakage' in operation whereby operational officers are drawn upon for other requirements. There are a number of new functions within the police organisation – including career development and equal opportunities – which have sucked in some police officers. The administrative burden on police officers has increased due to PACE and increased levels of reported crime. Additionally, specialist departments have reduced operational patrol strength. Loveday (1991:12) used this finding to argue that civilianisation did not in fact lead to more effective delivery of service. He stated that in view of the static proportion of police officers available for patrol, civilianisation had 'only served to increase the overall cost of the police organisation'. Loveday's conclusion is, however, based on the assumption that the context of policing has remained unchanged during this period. The constraints upon operational patrol availability outlined above would have occurred whether or not forces had been civilianising. Thus, if civilianisation had not been introduced, it can be argued that operational availability *would* have significantly dropped.

The second of Parret's (1992) criteria concerned the cost-effectiveness of service delivery. There is no doubt that, due to civilianisation, the police service has been able to employ a much larger number of staff at a given cost. There have been a number of estimates of the direct cost savings of civilianisation, a Department of Environment Audit Inspectorate study in 1983 estimated that the average employment cost of a civilian was about half that of a police officer in a 'comparable' function. The National Audit Office (1991), on the assumption that each released officer would have otherwise been recruited, estimated a notional saving of £51 million from civilianisation in the period 1985-89. However, it should again be emphasised that in practice, civilianisation meant real growth. No forces actually reduced numbers of police officer posts with the expansion of civilian employment. Arguably, chief constables' main priority was still to expand police officer establishments, and civilianisation was simply a means of doing this.

In terms of improved delivery of policing services, the effects of civilianisation are hard to distinguish from wider factors. It would be hard to deny that the employment of specialists in functions such as computing, personnel and research benefits the police organisation. As noted above, the extent of the release of police officers to operational duties has been limited by the growth of other demands on the police organisation. The result has been that actual operational patrol time has not been significantly improved. Research evidence as to the influence of civilianisation upon public perceptions of policing style and customer satisfaction is limited. Shapland *et al.*, (1990) found that a majority of the public had no objection to being dealt with at the police station by a civilian for routine matters, but for crime matters the majority preferred to see a police officer. However, Parret (1992) notes that research into the civilianisation of the public enquiry role in the Metropolitan Police suggested that most customers did not even know that they had been dealt with by a civilian rather than a police officer. So the evidence on the effect of civilianising certain posts upon public satisfaction is inconclusive. However, there is also little evidence to support the contention that policing services have been reduced in effectiveness due to the lack of 'police experience' of staff such as control room operators. More research is required to provide evidence about the effects of civilianisation upon the delivery of policing services.

### **Responsiveness**

Civilianisation was only in a limited way a response to local elected bodies. As the above sections showed, members on police authorities broadly supported the development of civilianisation, viewing it in narrow cost-saving terms rather than stressing the wider organisational implications. Elected members on police authorities did exert an influence, perhaps a rather negative one, in keeping grades low and in decisions on whether to employ ex-police officers. The interventions of local authorities could not really be represented as a coherent programme of developing civilianisation. Furthermore, the real impetus to civilianisation came from central and not local government. The policy was strongly encouraged by the Home Office, the central part of which was the extension of the Financial Management Initiative to the police service. Even though this was an area in which the police authorities had real financial responsibilities, the main drive towards change came from the centre. This was only in an indirect way a response to 'public' pressure. One of the above-stated objectives of civilianisation, the release of police officers to operational duty, can in part be presented as a response to the perceived public desire for 'more bobbies on the beat'. This certainly was a central consideration

in the minds of police authority members when asked about civilianisation. However, the more detailed implications did not attract much attention in terms of public debate, and were more an internal matter for the police organisation. Civilianisation appears to have been a response more to shifts in the wider political and economic context than particular changes in public opinion or the activities of representative bodies. It was one of a series of 'value for money' initiatives developed by officials in the context of the Government's commitment to control the growth of public expenditure.

### **Distribution of power**

The previous section described how a number of organisations came together in the system and made policy through a process of negotiation and bargaining. It is clear that power was not distributed evenly between the different actors within the decision-making process. The balance was clearly tilted towards the Home Office with regard to the other parties, and the chief constables with regard to the police authorities. However, it is important not to over-state the notion of Home Office dominance in such a way as to simplify the view of the policy-making process. In the first case, the influence of the Home Office in the case of civilianisation may seem greater than is the case in reality. This is because of the general agreement of most of the other key players (the Police Federation being the significant exception) with the broad thrust of the policy. The power of the Home Office was also partly counter-balanced by that of other parties to the process, whose influence varied with changes in the constraints of the system. These constraints included wider developments, such as the changes in police pay, and the reduction of industrial conflict which occurred during the mid-1980s (each of which strengthened the hand of the supporters of civilianisation).

Previous sections outlined the process of consultation which occurred prior to the issue of Home Office circulars. Although the Police Federation representative implied that this consultation was worthless, that the Home Office had already made its mind up on a course of action, there was evidence that the Home Office was prepared to respond to the comments of the local authority associations. There was a process of accommodation and negotiation which is not always recognised in examinations of the increase in Home Office influence. At the local level, there was also evidence of some checks and balances. Chief constables could not simply do as they wished in terms of civilianisation. Civilianisation required police authority funding, and there was evidence that police authorities had the power explicitly to go against the chief constable's wishes on certain

matters. However, this rarely took the form of a positive and coherent input into the development of policy.

It is also important to note that the main players within the policy-making system should not be assumed to be monolithic bodies. Within organisations there are different interests and views which must work themselves out into an organisational 'view' on preferred policy outcomes. This is as true of the Home Office as it is of ACPO, the Police Federation or the local authority associations. There was a also process of negotiation prior to the final decisions within forces, with the civilian personnel departments, and then between these departments and the police authorities. With regard to civilianisation, although policy change did not conform to a pluralist model, power did appear to be more dispersed than centralisation theorists would allow.

An interesting theme which arises from the above discussion concerns the conflicting pressures which were brought to bear on the Home Office. On the one hand, there was criticism, in particular from the ACC, that the Home Office was exerting an increasing influence over civilianisation (and other policy areas) that were the proper domain of the local authorities. On the other hand, MPs on the select committee appeared to be arguing that there was too much pluralism under the present structure. With spending on provincial police forces running into billions of pounds, they expressed shock that it had taken so long for the Home Office to start developing more central controls. One of the main points made by the senior Home Office official was that strict controls were simply not possible under the current tripartite arrangements. It would require legislative changes for the Home Office directly to control the number of civilians employed for police purposes, or transfer resources between forces. MPs made the point that 70 per cent or more of policing expenditure is financed by central government. At least two MPs suggested that the Home Office had not exerted enough central influence to ensure that these resources were well-directed. This argument appeared to be that there was too much dispersal of power within the decision-making process to have optimum effectiveness in terms of service delivery.

### **Information**

Policy development regarding civilianisation is a good example of an area in which both the quantity and quality of available information has increased over recent years. The Audit Commission and HMIC have developed a range of indicators with the aim of producing reliable measures of police performance. An off-shoot of this, along with the other VFM work being carried out, is that there is now a much more information available

about the organisation and outputs of policing. The central part civilianisation played in the VFM drive in the police service has meant that there are relatively good sources of information available about the implications of the policy. However, what is still lacking is reliable information about the actual effects of the policy. As outlined earlier, although there is a good deal of information available about the numbers of civilians employed and in what kinds of jobs, there is still little information about what the operational time released by their employment has been used for. The National Audit Office report referred to earlier found that irrespective of the number of posts civilianised, the number of police officers available for operational patrol during the late 1980s remained constant at 55 per cent. Parrett (1992) noted that police forces rarely monitor or evaluate the release of officers by civilianisation. His survey found that few forces carry out a pre or post-civilianisation review of posts to be civilianised, and rely on the general HMIC data to monitor developments. The Audit Commission has argued for a more proactive role for police authorities, not just in terms of the framing of policing policy, but also in informing the public about the options available so that the public is more able to have a real input into policy. A representative of the Commission argued that Police Federation opposition to civilianisation was significantly related to the way that the policy had been presented. The debate was framed in restrictive terms of narrow cost cutting and putting more 'bobbies on the beat'. This was in spite of the fact that research suggests little effect of visible patrol on actual crime rates.

Instead of taking public opinion at face value, there is a job to be done in informing public opinion... It's all very well saying that you want more bobbies on the beat, but also you want to dial 999 and have a very quick response... so we've got the business of trade-offs and optimisation to do. You need to be getting public opinion in terms of priorities for action in a resource-constrained system whereas what you've got at the moment is 'we want more of everything and all out of the same pot', which cannot be done.

### **Redress**

The policy of civilianisation has been reversed in the past, not as a direct decision about civilianisation itself, but rather as a result of the wider financial climate. It is unsurprising then that this change in direction of policy cannot be represented as a response to specific pressure from groups opposed to its implications. The only party in the debate which consistently argued against continuing the policy, and even occasionally for reversing it, was the Police Federation. As the previous section showed, on this subject at least, the arguments of the Federation became increasingly

marginalised. There are few who would now argue for a reversal of civilianisation.

### **Participation**

The element of participation by the general public in the development of civilianisation was extremely indirect. Only in so far as the Home Office was responding to an elected government who had campaigned on a platform of reducing growth in public expenditure and introducing VFM measures in public service provision, did the wider public 'participate' in the development of policy. The other forum for the input of elected members was the police authorities. As noted above, they did not really initiate the policy change and contributed to the development of policy in a somewhat piecemeal way. Local consultative committees and other 'participatory' bodies had no real input into civilianisation. So this is as far as participation went: the participation in the process of choosing a national government who developed civilianisation as part of a broader policy, and in the process of electing local councillors who made some contributions to the development of the policy. Indeed, it would be unrealistic to expect a more direct participation than this. As with many details of public policy, it would be a fruitless task to look for a general public 'view' on civilianisation. This probably went as far as the general desire to see 'more bobbies on the beat' and no further. The local participatory mechanisms (such as consultative committees) and even police authorities themselves are simply not capable of framing and initiating detailed policy changes like civilianisation. Public participation in the development of the policy was participation in the sense of the democratic élitist model. The public took part in the process of electing people who took broad policy decisions and employed a series of experts, who themselves developed the details of policy.

This once again brings into question the idealism of placing participation as a central concern of democratic process. The participation of the wider public in policy change was not only limited, there was even some suggestion that it was somewhat negative in its effects. The Audit Commission representative argued above that the tone of the public debate over civilianisation had strongly contributed to opposition from some police officers. A precondition to more effective participation in the framing of policy was the provision of more information about the implications of the different options. This would require greater efforts, not least from police authorities, to inform the people they are supposed to represent about the available choices and their implications.

**Notes**

1. The figures are taken from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Police Statistics. The figure for civilians includes traffic wardens, and the figure for police officers is actual force strength rather than authorised establishment. The figures exclude London.
2. During interview, representatives of the local authority associations, the Home Office, NALGO, and the police service implied that the question of who actually employs police civilians is of little practical importance.
3. It is interesting to note that this encapsulates the principle of civilianisation later laid down in the Home Office circular 114/83.
4. The Department of Environment drew up charge capping criteria which meant that the force could either set up its planned budget and risk capping, or make cuts and halt its civilianisation programme. In early 1991 representatives of the Metropolitan Police Authorities jointly lobbied the Home Secretary, and a joint statement from the chief constables warned to the damaging loss of both police and civilian jobs if budgets were capped.
5. PRSU is dominated by seconded police officers, and has as one of its main functions to carry out research, keep up to date with current research in the police service, and to keep police forces updated with news of relevant research. One of PRSU's central functions is to maintain an information desk which keeps a centralised record of current research, and acts as a clearing house and a central reference point for individual forces who wish to develop research themselves.
6. The PAB includes representatives of the police staff associations, and the local authority associations. The full board meets twice a year with the Home Secretary in the chair. There is a PAB standing committee which meets quarterly. The purpose of the PAB is to advise the Home Secretary on general questions concerning the police service, but which are not matters for formal bargaining.