

Special edition: Update on police force restructuring in the East Midlands

Why is the police service being restructured?

The structure of forces throughout England and Wales is being reviewed in response to a report published by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary in September 2005 which recommended the creation of bigger forces with the capacity and capability to protect the public from such threats as serious and organised crime and terrorism, while continuing to deliver effective local policing services.

What is the proposed structure for the East Midlands?

The Home Secretary's preferred option is for a single strategic police force for the East Midlands. This would involve the amalgamation of the Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and Northamptonshire forces. In reaching his view, the Home Secretary has considered professional policing and financial assessments of two options for reconfiguring forces in the East Midlands. The other option was a merger of Nottinghamshire-Derbyshire and a merger of Leicestershire-Lincolnshire-Northamptonshire.

Who decides what will happen?

The Home Secretary has invited the region's police authorities to consider volunteering for amalgamation by April 7. If they do not volunteer, the Home Secretary has the power to initiate a merger as explained below.

Will they volunteer?

That is a decision for each police authority. Nottinghamshire Police Authority meets on April 4.

What happens next?

Following a meeting with the Home Secretary earlier this week, the Strategic Board representing the Chief Constables and the Chairs of the region's five police authorities is discussing the proposal for a single East Midlands force with Home Office officials and HMIC, and is seeking clarification on funding, governance arrangements and other issues.

Is a merger inevitable?

The Home Secretary has emphasised that, on the basis of the assessments that he has received, a single force for the East Midlands is the only acceptable option. However, unless police authorities volunteer, the Home Secretary must consult police authorities and local councils before making up his mind to proceed. A compulsory merger must also be approved by Parliament.

Are there any concerns about a merger?

The region's forces and police authorities have expressed concerns – namely the historic under-funding of forces in the East Midlands and the need for increased investment, the complexity of merging five very different forces and the substantial investment necessary to carry out an amalgamation – and the Home Secretary has acknowledged these issues. He accepted that a merger would be complicated and would need appropriate funding. The level of funding that may be available is unclear at this stage. The region's forces and authorities have also communicated their desire to provide a level of protective services as good as anywhere else in the country, without this compromising local policing.

How soon would any merger happen?

The Home Secretary's expectation is that a new force will come into effect in April 2008 or possibly earlier if the police authorities are willing to volunteer.

