

Alun Michael opposes all-Wales force: South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner hits out at national force idea

By [Martin Shipton](#) | Apr 6 2013



South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael

Merging Wales' four police forces into one would be a huge mistake, according to South Wales Police and Crime Commissioner Alun Michael.

In a submission to the Silk Commission, which is looking at whether the National Assembly should get powers in new policy areas, Mr Michael says he favours devolving policing powers to Wales, but wants inspection and complaints to be handled on a UK-wide basis.

Earlier this week Gwent Police Chief Constable Carmel Napier signalled her support for the creation of an all-Wales police force.

But Mr Michael states in his submission: "I am surprised that the old chestnut of police force mergers has been dragged into the debate about devolution.

"I would be totally opposed to creating a single Welsh police force, whether or not policing is devolved.

"In my view it is essential that a Chief Constable should have a reasonable understanding of the

public in every part of the territory policed by the officers under his or her command, and that means having a reasonable understanding of the towns, cities and rural areas within the force area and with the officers and staff of the force.

“The vast range of communities across the whole of Wales – not to mention the challenges of both geography and demography – would make that impossible and make the Chief Constable a remote and distant figure.”

Referring to the founder of the Metropolitan Police in the 19th Century, Mr Michael said: “Sir Robert Peel was right about two things above all in the principles that he set out for policing: That the first responsibility of the police is to cut crime – that is to reduce offending and reoffending – and that ‘the police are the public and the public are the police’.

“Both of those priorities require a close sense of identity between the chief officer, the officers and staff serving in the force and the communities that they serve. There’s a limit on how big a force can become without losing a grip on that essential strategic priority.

“South Wales Police provide a good example of how a well-led force can achieve consistency when the Chief Constable has a clear vision, a focus on values and best practice, and connection to his officers at every level and to the communities they serve.

“South Wales is big but not too big, it contributes significantly at the Welsh and UK level, and when we have been struggling with the impact of major cuts in recent years – not to mention the possible threat of further cuts to come – the last thing we need is the distraction of reorganisation.”



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