Independent Advisory Groups

Considerations and advice for the police service on the recruitment, role and value of IAGS

2015

Background

Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) have been used by constabularies for over a decade. There was concern amongst some forces that the original IAGs had morphed far beyond the initial concept. For other police forces IAGs have stagnated or have ceased to be relevant. Against this backdrop of the College of Policing brought together practitioners from across the country* to re-design the IAG concept and develop new advice that would allow police forces to regain control of IAGs. This advice is also based on extensive consultation with IAG members.

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1.1   Who is this document for?

This advice document is for use by any police force that uses IAGs or is considering developing IAGs so that they can better understand and manage them.
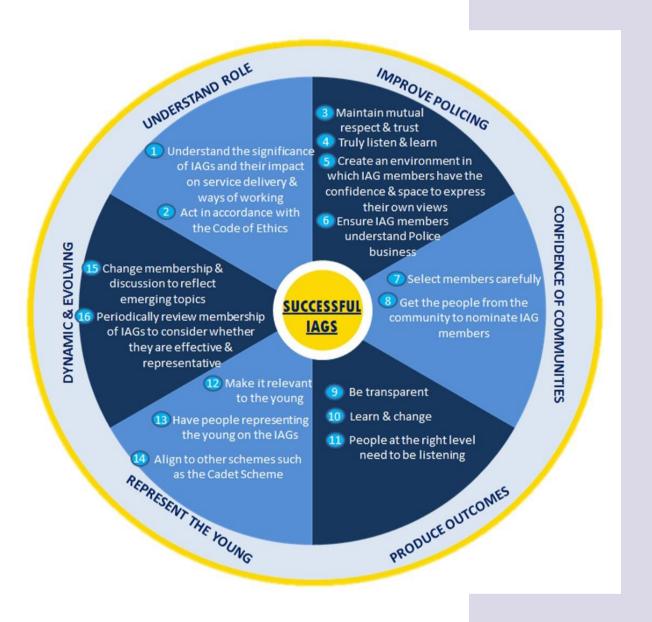
1.2   What are IAGs?

The role of an IAG is to help us to build insight into the needs, wants and assets of the groups who are under-represented in our normal decision making processes. We use this insight to shape our service for the benefit of all our communities and engender trust and confidence.

"IAGs enable us to create a genuine partnership with our communities. IAGs are independent only in relation to their views."

2.   Overview of the key components of a successful IAG

"IAGs tell us what we have missed"

To ensure a successful IAG these key components should be implemented and developed in order to shape our services and maintain an effective IAG.

3. Understand role

The role of the police is to:

- Understand the significance of IAGs and embed insights gained from members into design and delivery of the force's service and ways of working.
- Listen and act on advice given to forces by IAG members and where this is not possible, explain why not to IAG members.
- Where relevant, ensure IAG members have the right level of information or training before they can provide advice.
- Ensure IAG members have the right level of skills and undertake a learning needs analysis to address any gaps.
- Raise the profile of IAGs within the police.
- Act in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Policing http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Ethics/Documents/Code_of_Ethics.pdf

The role of an IAG member is to:

- Be present at regular meetings and forums.
- Contribute by challenging the way forces think and sharing their beliefs.
- Attend training to make members more effective.
- Act in accordance with the Code of Ethics for Policing.

4.   Improve policing

**"Being willing - motivated by a desire to improve
policing services for all"**

Both the police and IAG members should be motivated by a desire to improve policing services to all communities. To do this we should seek motivated people at outset and maintain that motivation.

4.1   How to seek motivated people

- Front-line staff (either working in the police or other agencies) will have contacts from local and diverse communities. Use these contacts.
- Have robust recruitment criteria - The IAG member should:
    - be motivated by a desire to improve services for all
    - be able to provide a perspective which is reflective of communities
    - be an effective communicator with an ability to contribute constructively to the discussion
- Test the recruitment criteria by a face to face meeting which could formal or informal depending on the potential member (some members may be deterred by a formal process)

4.2   How to maintain the motivation

Forces should:

- truly listen and learn - show IAG members the impact of their contribution.
- communicate the benefits within their organisation and to the wider public.
- Robustly manage poor performance and inappropriate behaviour of IAG members.
- Maintain a mutual respect and understanding.
- Encourage members to share negative experiences and to learn from them.

IAG members:

- need to be aware that they are listened to and supported by the organisational management.

"Truly listen and learn"

4.3   **IAG members must feel confident expressing their independent views and forces must create and maintain an environment in which they can do this**.

To do this:

- Members should have a good understanding of the needs, wants and assets of the communities they speak on behalf of and are able to articulate those views no matter how uncomfortable they are
- Members may need further support, training or reasonable adjustments to enable them to participate fully. Forces must ask what is needed and do what they can do to accommodate them
- Members should understand police business, their role and that something will be done with the information that is shared
- Forces need to be open to views - members are not there to agree with the police and should encourage them to constructively challenge.
- Members should feel comfortable speaking out
- At times it may be appropriate to agree on confidentiality so that members can speak in confidence
- Members need to be clear that if decisions are made based on IAG advice no IAG member will be held accountable.

5.   Confidence of Communities

"Get the people who know the community to nominate IAG members"

IAG members should come from and have the confidence of their communities. Forces must recognise that within any culture and sub-culture there will be differing opinions and beliefs. These differences should be reflected within any IAG.

It is important that IAG members have confidence from the community that they reflect. This could be done by:

- Getting community members and front-line staff to nominate IAG members.
- Utilising a rigorous recruitment process regarding their ability to reflect their communities' opinion.

6.   Produce Outcomes

"We are not seeking endorsement – we are looking for critical appraisal"

IAGs and the processes involved in consultation with them should be focused on producing outcomes and on understanding our business. Now, more than ever, policing needs meaningful and genuine engagement. This means real outcomes which ultimately improve policing for all.

Some ways in which this can happen are:

- People at the right level need to be listening and acting upon advice, where appropriate.
- If forces can act on the advice, this should be explained to IAGs. If they cannot act on the advice, this should also be explained.
- IAG members need to understand police business so that they can influence it. This involves:
    - being transparent,
    - giving IAG members sufficient information and training both in our business and other skills.
    - having a relationship of trust with IAGs.
- Success of IAG is be monitored based on the outcomes of the consultation/ engagement. This can be done by, for example, by scrutinising outcome logs.
- Design systems so that insights from IAGs drive organisational change and learning.
- IAG members could influence who we recruit and sit on recruitment/ promotion boards.
- IAG members could also have a seat on ethics committees.

7. Represent the young

"The needs of the young are less well known to the police"

Young people need to be represented at IAGs; they are a group whose needs, wants and assets are less well known to the police. IAGs are one way to increase this awareness. This is crucial as young people are more likely to be a victim of crime and be in the criminal justice system. The police need to encourage young people to become IAG members and be involved in scrutiny of the police service. Ways to increase this awareness are:

- Ask young people how they would like to be involved in shaping policing for the benefit of other young people? This could mean use of technology and social media.
- Engage in matters of interest to them and in their environment, for example a school or college or on-line.
- Align IAGs to the Cadet scheme in your force.
- Have people representing young people in your IAG. Some examples are: youth workers, parents, YOT, youth parliament, local Youth CCG– use what is out there.
- An age limit to join the IAG could be 16 - although younger people could be brought on board in exceptional circumstances.

8. Dynamic and evolving

"The population is influenced by immigration, globalisation & education It is always changing. We must actively involve people from a wide variety of backgrounds"

Dynamic global and local events are constantly affecting crime and policing. IAGs should evolve to respond to these sometimes confusing changes, to shape policing. The following should be considered to achieve this:

- Membership should evolve to reflect changes. The right people should be consulted to influence decisions around emerging topics or themes.
- Discussions should reflect what is important to people. IAGs should constantly be reminded that their work is affecting people's lives.
- Tenure for members and the Chair should be for a limited time-frame, after which they can re-apply for their position.
- An annual review of IAGs should take place to consider whether they are effective and representative. This could be conducted by both IAG members and the police.
- Ineffective IAG members must be encouraged to improve their skillset / contribution, but must be replaced by new members if they remain inactive and uninvolved.