

14 Introduction

Having considered the various systems that were designed to ensure that the police in the United Kingdom are accountable through central and local government to the community at large, it is now necessary to examine whether or not those systems are working as the designers intended.

There is no tangible evidence to show that the police are not properly accountable to the law, although there have been many assertions that they have not been so in individual cases. For the reasons already stated, it is not proposed that an examination of that aspect of accountability is necessary here; neither is it necessary in this particular study to examine the aspect of the subject concerned with complaints against the police, also for the reasons already given. Clearly, the area where accountability has been challenged seriously is in the relationships between the various Police Authorities and the Chief Constables, and it is to that aspect of the debate that most attention must be concentrated.

One of the main intentions of the Royal Commission and the ensuing Police Acts was to ensure police accountability in their relationship with government through the medium of the modified Police Authorities. There have been suggestions that the Authorities have not been a successful way of either influencing or 'controlling' Chief Constables, and those suggestions must now be considered in the light of developments in the 1980s.