

Cutting crime in the 21st century: Informed proactivity in the midst of social and organisational change

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The Police Effectiveness in a Changing World project

The issue of police effectiveness has never been in sharper focus. Austerer times call for greater scrutiny of value for money, the discourse of 'the evidence-base' and doing 'what works' is increasingly gaining traction, and the logic of reducing long-term harm and demand through 'up-stream' intervention has become more difficult to ignore. It is no coincidence that in the current decade the College of Policing has come into being with a remit including police improvement through better use of research evidence, and that formal scrutiny (specifically) of the *effectiveness* of police forces has been introduced as part of HMIC's PEEL inspection regime¹.

Yet this is also a decade in which the policing mission is being impacted by significant change on multiple fronts. As well as dealing with funding cuts, and the implications of those for their main public-service partners, police forces are adjusting to new forms of scrutiny and governance, and to a general

shift in focus away from volume crime reduction and towards managing *threat, harm, risk* and *vulnerability*. The nature of the crime that local police services deal with is also changing.

Many forms of recorded crime are falling² but the police workload is becoming more complex³; the internet has created new forms of crime and transformed old ones⁴, while growing international mobility, migration and ever-more globalised markets have created new opportunities for criminals⁵ that manifest as harm in local communities. In some neighbourhoods the forces of global socio-economic change play out as increased transience, social heterogeneity, and atomisation, which may lead to populations that are less visible to the police, more isolated, more difficult to engage and less capable of dealing with problems as a community⁶.

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¹ In 2014 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) began an annual inspection of police effectiveness, efficiency and legitimacy (PEEL) for all police forces in England and Wales. See <https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmic/peel-assessments/peel-2014/>.

² Farrell et al. (2010).

³ College of Policing (2015).

⁴ McGuire and Dowling (2013).

⁵ UNODC (2010).

⁶ Foster (1995).

What are the implications of this multi-dimensional change for the delivery of effective local policing? How might a better understanding of the local effects of socio-economic and technological shifts be used to improve the response to local crime problems? What are the barriers to, enablers of, and dependencies for effective local policing under current conditions? These were the questions at the heart of the *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project.

Taking an Action Research approach of 'learning by doing', between 2011 and 2015, the Police Foundation research team worked closely with the police and their community safety partners in two English towns – Luton and Slough – that had experienced the local impacts of global change particularly acutely. Using a problem-oriented 'SARA' approach⁷, we set out to identify persistent local crime problems, improve the way these were understood, develop and implement appropriate interventions, and assess both the outcomes of these and the challenges of doing so. Throughout, we sought to draw on the wider evidence-base, to work in (and catalyse) local partnership, to attend to 'the changing world' and to find solutions that were sustainable. Most importantly, we sought to learn lessons from the process of doing so and from the challenges encountered along the way.

Later this year we will publish full reports detailing the process, experience and findings from each of the *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project sites. In advance of this, the Police Foundation will produce a series of papers bringing together key project learning from both towns and addressing the main issues that these raise for policing in the second decade of the twenty first century.

As the first of these, this paper serves three functions:

- First, we provide a summary of what we mean by *police effectiveness* and introduce the concept of *informed proactivity* as the mode of working shown to be best suited to delivering results.
- Second, by way of summary and introduction, we provide a brief synopsis of the story of the project in each town.
- Third, we sketch out the key dimensions of change encountered in the two sites that were found to be relevant to achieving *informed proactivity* (and thus effectiveness).

Police effectiveness and informed proactivity

What does it mean for the police to be effective? We might try a simple, rather mechanical answer equating being effective to achieving goals – the police are effective if they accomplish what they set out to achieve. But, as critiques of the use of targets in policing have made clear⁸, this can cause problems if the objectives set do not adequately, or only partially, define the mission, or if the aims are not met *in the right way*. To borrow from management theory, it is tempting to see police effectiveness as not just about hitting targets, but as '*getting the right things done*'⁹.

But what do we mean by *the right things*? Here, thinking and research activity has tended to diverge along two paths. On the one hand, usually taking crime reduction as the assumed police goal, the focus has been on identifying what the right things to do are *functionally*; delivering the police activities or tactics that are most likely to 'work' under the circumstances. In this paradigm, police effectiveness is about selecting the right approach to the crime problem at hand, ideally guided by (and perhaps even contributing to) the evidence-base, and then implementing it properly to bring about an intended outcome (usually less crime).

This broad school accommodates both managerialist pre-occupations with measuring police outputs and 'outcomes', as supposed

⁷ Problem-oriented policing developed from a critique of conventional police activities first made by Herman Goldstein (1979). He challenged the prevailing view of police work as a series of discrete incident responses and instead advocated refocusing on the 'problems' that connected them. The approach emphasises collecting and analysing information from a range of sources to improve understanding of problems and their causes, and enlisting the support of other agencies and individuals to develop and deliver 'upstream' solutions. The problem-orientated approach was field-tested by Eck and Spelman (1987) and codified into a four stage problem-solving process of Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (or SARA) which has been shown to work at least 'modestly' well (Weisburd et al., 2008).

⁸ Curtis (2015).

⁹ Drucker (1967).

indicators of effectiveness, as well as the growing body of 'what works?' research literature¹⁰, documenting the impacts of various activities, tactics and initiatives on crime.

In contrast, others have taken issue with the adequacy of crime-reduction for encapsulating the police purpose, and instead emphasise the messiness of the workload and the vast range of social problems (in addition to crime) with which the police are called on to deal¹¹. Within this framework, and influencing innovations such as community policing and the public confidence agenda, effectiveness relates to the extent to which the police use their powers to deal with diverse demand in ways that are *legitimate* in the eyes of the communities they serve. *Getting the right things done*, for this school, contains moral as well as functional connotations.

At its inception, this project hoped to explore whether changing social conditions and accountability structures might provide fertile ground on which to bring these competing formulations together, particularly with reference to a growing body of evidence suggesting that meeting community expectations of legitimate policing can increase compliance with the law¹². As was perhaps inevitable however, for a project requiring close cooperation and considerable input from those doing difficult jobs in 'the real world', it was necessary to make pragmatic decisions. To keep the project relevant to local gatekeepers an operationally conventional definition of effectiveness – emphasising crime-reduction – became expedient (although important learning about the relationship between policing styles, public engagement and effective crime reduction did emerge along the way).

The formulation of police effectiveness developed during the project starts with the current orthodoxy, in which the police mission, as set by the then Home Secretary, is 'to cut crime'¹³ and an effective police function, as defined by HMIC, is 'one that keeps people safe and reduces crime'¹⁴. Unlike HMIC however, whose effectiveness assessments cover

crime investigation, protecting the vulnerable and tackling organised crime (as well as crime prevention) we have chosen a narrower conceptual focus, grounded in the evidence-base about 'what works' in achieving the crime cutting mission.

Using targets or goals to measure effectiveness can cause problems if the objectives set do not adequately define the mission, or if the aims are not met in the right way.

Weisburd and Eck's synthesis of research findings pertaining to the question *What Can Police Do to Reduce Crime, Disorder and Fear?*¹⁵ concludes that there is little evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of 'standard model' policing activities (general patrol, rapid response, reactive investigation, etc). They argue that more promise can be found in innovations that extend from the traditional police activity set along two axes; the *diversity of the approach*¹⁶ (for example working with new partners, as opposed to a relying on narrow law enforcement tactics) and the *degree of focus* (for example on hotspots). Most promising of all were initiatives that combined diverse approaches and were highly focused (for example problem-oriented policing). More recently Lum, Koper and Telep¹⁷ have developed a three dimensional framework for mapping evaluation findings. In broad terms, this indicates that evidence of effectiveness is greatest in relation to interventions that are *proactive, place-based and specific*. Our project's own review of the evidence-base and its implications for practice suggests that limited police resources should be targeted at *high crime micro-locations, focused on problems* (rather than incidents), used to *engage partner agencies and mobilise community resources*, and in ways that demonstrate *police legitimacy*¹⁸.

The image of effective practice that crystallises from these research syntheses is of a local police function ***intervening creatively, purposefully***

¹⁰ See for example the College of Policing What Works Centre for Crime Reduction toolkit. <http://whatworks.college.police.uk/Pages/default.aspx>

¹¹ Bittner (1974: 161); Reiner (2010).

¹² Tyler (2004).

¹³ Home Office (2010).

¹⁴ HMIC (2016a).

¹⁵ Weisburd and Eck (2004).

¹⁶ Although a greater diversity of approach alone – for example in the form of community policing initiatives – has produced stronger evidence of an impact on fear of crime than on crime itself (see Weisburd and Eck, 2004).

¹⁷ Lum et al (2010).

¹⁸ Kam (2013).

and proactively, with other agencies and the support of local people, based on an understanding of the conditions that make specific types of crime more likely (and jeopardise safety) in particular places. We have termed this mode of activity informed proactivity and assume it is the working style to which local police should aspire if they are to be effective. It is also consistent with the problem-oriented policing approach which has been shown to work at least 'modestly' well¹⁹, and which was used to structure activity during our project in each research site.

A tale of two towns

In many ways Luton and Slough were ideal places to explore the impacts of fast paced social change and we are very grateful to the leaders and staff of the police and their community safety partners in both towns for allowing access and facilitating our research. Both towns are highly ethnically and culturally diverse, with young, fast-growing and fast-changing populations²⁰, and are well connected nationally and internationally through nearby airports, rail and road infrastructure and proximity to London. In many ways both have benefited from growth and global connections but both also face significant challenges including pockets of deprivation²¹, high housing demand²² and relatively high crime rates²³, as well as concerns about extremism and organised crime.

Set against these similarities, from a policing point of view, Slough and Luton sit within strongly contrasting organisational contexts. Slough is the fourth most populous of a number of conurbations within the Thames Valley Policing area – one of the largest police forces in England and Wales – and

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accounts for about nine per cent of crime recorded by the force. With the economies of scale this permits, and a strong force-level council-tax base, coupled with the local autonomy provided by a priority based budgeting system²⁴, this has led to relative resilience, consistency in local management, mature strategic partnerships and a strong commitment to neighbourhood policing.

Luton in contrast is the largest town and the source of greatest demand for Bedfordshire police – one of the smallest forces in the country and one with well documented concerns about resilience and funding²⁵. Bedfordshire has comparatively higher rates of more resource intensive serious crime than Thames Valley (reflected in twice as much spent per head on investigations) and in crime terms, Luton accounts for around 40 per cent of the force total, but this is likely to underestimate the proportion of force resources expended there. Both at force level and locally, the police in Bedfordshire have undergone a succession of leadership and structural changes in recent years, and for much of the project period, were operating a minimal neighbourhood policing model. These factors provide some of the context for the contrasting experiences of the project in each site.

The Luton story

In Luton, guided by the existing local priority picture (as it stood in 2012), the project focused in on burglary – an 'old world' staple of local policing and crime reduction research – and on two town-centre wards undergoing marked social change, including recent inward migration and transient populations. Along with well documented characteristics

¹⁹ Weisburd (2008).

²⁰ Bourner (2012); Mayhew and Waples (2011).

²¹ According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Luton became relatively more deprived in the period between 2004 and 2010 and was ranked 69th most deprived (out of 326 local authorities) nationally in 2010. In comparison, deprivation in Slough is less acute, but the town does have pockets of significant disadvantage and the proportion of children living in poverty in the town is higher than the national average and rose by 20 per cent between 2007 and 2010. See <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/english-indices-of-deprivation-2010> English Public Health Observatories (2012), Safer Slough Partnership (2012).

²² Slough Borough Council (2005); Luton Borough Council (no date).

²³ Data for 2013/14 shows that Slough has the 32nd and Luton the 47th highest total crime rate (per 1,000 populations/households) of 311 Community Safety Partnership areas in England and Wales, (Office for National Statistics, 2014).

²⁴ HMIC (2016b: 14).

²⁵ See for example the former Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's 'Save Our Police' campaign www.saveourpolice.org.uk

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(concentration in hotspots, seasonality, a locally resident, largely opportunistic offender cohort – including a substantial proportion of problematic drug users – and repeat and near-repeat victimisation) there was also clear evidence that the local burglary problem was responding to social change. Most notably, change in the structure of the local housing market – particularly the growth of the ‘low-end’ private rented sector – was implicated in the pattern of burglary victimisation within the town, suggesting that landlords’ failure to provide adequate home security could be driving burglary opportunities. The geographic correlation between indicators of population flux and burglary rates also brought questions of ‘collective efficacy’²⁶ into focus – the capacity of hotspot residents to come together to deal with problems themselves and to look out for one another. Technological change, in terms of the widespread ownership of laptops and smart-phones, was also reflected in trends in the items targeted most often during burglaries.

Using these insights and in close consultation with local police and community safety partners, a plan was developed for a programme of multi-agency work aimed at reducing vulnerability and building resilience in burglary hotspots. It was hoped that by identifying the most vulnerable dwellings in the parts of town with persistently high burglary rates, targeting residents with the offer of a home security assessment and following-up with channels of tailored support (including for those living in rented accommodation), that opportunities for burglary offending could be minimised and offence levels reduced. It was also hoped that activities that forged closer ties between neighbours, improved the community’s capability to affect change, and increased neighbourhood watchfulness, might usefully bolster community resilience and act as a defence against burglary. A number of additional intervention strands were also put forward,

including leveraging improvement in the local private rented sector, making better use of tracking technology to deter theft of laptops and smart phones and improving management of the offenders with the most complex needs.

This plan formed the basis of the soLUTIONs²⁷ Burglary Reduction Initiative delivered by a multi-agency working group between August 2014 and July 2015. This resulted in a number of key outputs including a set of multi-agency ‘street-survey’ inspection visits, a year-long programme of targeted communications focused most intensively on ‘vulnerable’ dwellings, the provision of a home security assessment service to the (very small number of) hotspot residents who requested help and the formation of a neighbourhood improvement group in one ward. Overall however, the initiative was characterised by substantial implementation challenges and several elements of the plan were left undelivered.

A process evaluation explored the context for these challenges and drew attention to the acute demand and service pressures experienced by police and local authority staff in Luton during the period and the impact of this on proactive capability. It also highlighted the changing local priority picture and the reactive policing model operated by Bedfordshire Police, which provided few proactive resources, and fostered processes, mind sets and skill-sets geared to short-term responsive activity. This had also led to a low baseline of police/community engagement, which was reflected in the reticent response to the initiative from local residents. The impact of the local partnership dynamic, which was rebuilding after a period of some discord and retrenchment, was also apparent. Given these conditions and their implications for implementation, it is unsurprising that the considerable efforts of a number of local practitioners were not rewarded with an identifiable impact on burglary levels. Impact assessment did, however, suggest that the ‘street-survey’ process (practitioners inspecting hotspot areas to identify vulnerable properties) had some predictive utility and that previously persistent geographic burglary patterns were changing and becoming less predictable.

²⁶ Sampson et al. (1997); Sampson and Raudenbush (1999).

²⁷ soLUTIONs is the local branding of Luton’s Community Safety Partnership.

Despite the lack of crime reduction success achieved through the project in the target areas in Luton, much was learned about the changing context in which crime reduction efforts now take place – both external to policing and in terms of the organisational barriers to and enablers of informed proactivity, including in relation to public engagement, partnership working, policing models and operating systems, structures and skills.

The Slough story

In Slough, the initial scanning process focused attention on violence²⁸ as a key harm generator and issue of public and agency concern, and on two wards with comparatively high violent crime rates; one, a highly diverse town centre ward used as a 'gateway' area for recent migrants, the other, in contrast, a predominantly white-British housing estate, that had in some ways been left behind by change. Crime data analysis and qualitative research with victims, offenders and local staff indicated a number of noteworthy features of the local violent crime picture. Much of the recorded violence in both wards (including non-domestic violence) occurred within private dwellings rather than in public spaces and, in the town-centre neighbourhood, houses in multiple occupation accounted for a disproportionate part of this. On the housing estate, violence (including non-domestic violence) involved both those aged 16 and under, and women and girls (as offenders and victims), with striking regularity. In relation to domestic violence, 'stress point' triggers featured prominently in accounts from victims and offenders, and the appropriateness and adequacy of the available criminal justice options were often questioned. Overall however, the violence described by the analysis resisted formulation into one or more cohesive 'problems' – hotspots were weak, drivers were multiple and lacked immediacy, with hints of cultural or 'normative' dimensions. In defiance of problem-orientation, violence in Slough presented most vividly as the corollary of multiple, unique and often complex case histories, relationships, disputes and confrontations – and it was at the fine-grained level of individual cases that coordinated intervention

activities were recommended and taken forward.

In both wards, one of the most striking features of the analysis was the degree of recurrence identified within the crime data.

The same individuals, and the same addresses, were shown to come to police attention time and again, often in both victim and offender roles, and sometimes cutting across domestic and non-domestic violence categories. Drawing on evidence relating to repeat victimisation and offending as predictors of future risk²⁹, and acknowledging that (with the exception of the minority who qualified for processes such as MAPPA or MARAC³⁰) this recurrence went largely unaddressed, a process was designed to systematically identify and direct tailored intervention to all recurrent cases. On a rolling fortnightly basis, individuals involved in violence for at least the second time within a year (as victims, offenders or both; in domestic or non-domestic violent incidents or both), were identified and subjected to research across multi-agency databases. Their cases were then put before a multi-agency panel (including local police, probation, social services and other local authority functions, treatment services, mental health services, domestic abuse support and other local third sector support organisations) for knowledge sharing, case coordination and case-based problem-solving – with the goal of initiating tailored intervention activity undertaken by panel members or their colleagues.

Over a one year pilot period starting in August 2014, the Violence Multi-Agency Panel process completed 26 consecutive cycles, and considered nearly 300 cases. Overall, (and in contrast to Luton) implementation was broadly successful. Despite some initial teething problems the initiative experienced a high degree of 'buy-in' from participating practitioners, who reflected on its positive impact on partnership working, case-

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²⁸ Defined as police recorded Violence Against the Person (VAP), which includes minor as well as more serious assaults and non-assault offences including Harassment and Threats to Kill.

²⁹ Farrell and Pease (1993).

³⁰ Multi Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) and Multi Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARAC).

coordination and improved understanding of client needs. The Violence Multi-Agency Panel also proved to be a valuable enabler of neighbourhood policing, improving information flows and moving the police response from a reactive, often incident-by-incident approach, to a more considered and person-centred one.

During the latter stages of the year however, on-going process evaluation identified some emerging doubts from practitioners about the efficacy and resourcing viability of the programme. The task of undertaking meaningful problem solving with a sizeable caseload, many of whom had complex, long-term needs and/or who would not engage with services, proved to be highly challenging and there was increasing frustration with the repeated attention given to seemingly intractable cases. Reflecting this, analysis of formal actions generated through the Violence Multi-Agency Panel suggested substantive problem-solving interventions were rarely achieved, with tasked activity often focused on providing case updates and extra research. Additionally, the lack of an explicit requirement for direct engagement with the recurrent individuals themselves (perhaps a flaw in the programme design) made it difficult for the Violence Multi-Agency Panel consistently to move beyond superficial explorations of 'causation and cure' during case discussions.

Very possibly as a result of these difficulties, for all its local buy-in, perceived value and implementation success, the Violence Multi-Agency Panel (also) failed to demonstrate a programme effect. The core measure, which assessed the frequency with which cases came to notice for further violence following the Violence Multi-Agency Panel's attention, showed no significant difference from pre-initiative levels or compared to parts of town where the Panel was not operational. Further analysis also showed no impact on the seriousness of subsequent violence or on a broader measure of police demand. While no significant impact was found for any sub-group of cases, tentative and modestly promising outcomes were observed for some more entrenched and problematic individuals, typically referred into the process as persistent but generally minor, non-domestic violence offenders.

Although practitioners in Slough can be congratulated for committing to better organise and

co-ordinate their response to those recurrently involved in and affected by violence – and while many took strong positives from the process – it is difficult to escape the conclusion that there was just not enough additional capacity available to meaningfully explore and address the array of complex needs presented by the large caseload generated. As with Luton, stepping back from the disappointment of programme failure permits a number of important reflections; not least about multi-agency case-management processes – employed increasingly often to manage newly prioritised harms – and the emerging professional orthodoxies that accompany them, as well as the realities of doing both evidence-based and problem-oriented policing under current conditions.

The active, intelligent, focused and coordinated style of intervention we have termed informed proactivity is made both more important and more difficult by the fast-changing environment in which local policing currently operates.

Dimensions of change

The experience of working with local practitioners to attempt locally tailored, evidence-based crime reduction in Luton and Slough suggests that the active, intelligent, focused and coordinated style of intervention we have termed *informed proactivity* is made both more important and more difficult by the fast-changing environment in which local policing currently operates. The remainder of this paper describes the multiple dimensions of change that were encountered during the project, and the implications of these for the ability of local policing to operate in an informed proactive way.

Changing expectations

The *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project has coincided with an incremental but definite shift in societal expectations about *what the police are there to do*. The end of centrally set numerical police targets, and the devolution of priority setting to locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners in the first years of the Conservative led Coalition Government, loosened the preoccupation of police forces with

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traditional 'volume' crimes, while substantial long-term reductions in these (particularly burglaries and vehicle crime) heralded a general decline in their public salience – and that of 'law and order' issues more generally³¹. At the same time however, lower volume but higher-harm forms of crime, including those previously 'hidden', have taken on increasing prominence. The child sexual exploitation scandals and associated public service failings uncovered in Rotherham, Rochdale and other areas, exposed the way that property crime had been prioritised at the cost of less visible, but more significant harms against vulnerable groups³². Similarly, the emergence of large volumes of historical sexual abuse allegations, most infamously concerning TV and radio personality Jimmy Savile, further highlighted the way that victims had been failed by public institutions and triggered a surge in reporting of both recent and older sexual offences. Correspondingly, the language and emphasis of policing has steadily shifted from volume crime reduction, 'performance' and 'targets' towards 'threat, harm and risk' and identifying and managing vulnerability.

In Luton and Slough we witnessed local policing and community safety arrangements adjusting to these shifts; in Luton in particular we observed the way in which local priority setting processes contorted throughout the period in the face of the proliferation of 'new' harms, shrinking resources and a conspicuous concern about the possibility of future allegations of service failure. As a result, the project's burglary focus – prioritised by all partners in 2012 – came to sit across an unfortunate inter-agency fault line by the time of intervention delivery in 2014/15, having been dropped as a priority by the community safety partnership, while it remained a 'second tier' priority for the police – with implications for the level of commitment and

resources partners were able to invest. In Slough, by contrast and good fortune, the project's violence focus was universally viewed as a gateway to the new harm management paradigm – an issue that was 'everybody's business' – as evidenced by the range of agencies that showed strong commitment to the Violence Multi-Agency Panel process.

Although the evidence-base on which it draws is largely based on efforts to tackle 'traditional' crime problems, we suggest that the concept of *informed proactivity* is at least as important for effectively policing and preventing these new forms of priority harm/crime – and perhaps even more so. This is firstly because the baseline of local understanding about the drivers and causes of these issues is likely to be less developed than for more familiar crime types and, in addition to the management of individual cases, preventative efforts will undoubtedly benefit from analysis and insight. Secondly, this is because these are not crimes which the police can rely on victims to bring to their attention – they must be proactively sought out, and the trust and cooperation of communities must be nurtured in order to bring hidden harm to light. Thirdly, this is because these are patently not only police problems; they are issues to which a range of agency skills, data, perspectives and resource must be brought to bear.

Changing communities

Three of the four neighbourhoods on which the project focused were characterised by substantial social change, including significant recent inward migration. One of the Luton wards for example³³, had seen its population grow by 35 per cent in a decade, and by 140 per cent among those aged 25 to 29 – with a related rise in the number of very young children. During the same

In the town centre ward in Slough, population growth had exceeded sixty per cent in ten years, and the proportion of residents born outside of the UK and Ireland increased from 35 to more than 50 per cent.

³¹ Ipsos MORI (2016); Hales (2016).

³² GMP (2014).

³³ We have chosen not to identify the specific wards in which we worked. Demographic descriptions are sourced from Census data accessed via the ONS Neighbourhood Statistics portal <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>.

period the proportion of residents reporting their ethnicity as white-British fell from nearly 70 to 40 per cent.

Findings drew attention to the role played by a lack of 'collective efficacy'. Offenders suggested that in some parts of town they were able to operate unchallenged 'in plain sight'.

In the town centre ward in Slough, population growth had exceeded sixty per cent in ten years, and the proportion of residents born outside of the UK and Ireland increased from 35 to more than 50 per cent. Illustrating the high levels of diversity of the area, in addition to sizeable population groups born in Poland, India and Pakistan, a quarter of the population shared a country of birth with no more than two per cent of other residents and more than half of all residents had arrived in the UK within the previous decade.

What are the consequences of this level of social flux for crime and its local management? Certainly, the qualitative accounts of residents in Slough's town centre ward pointed to a tangible 'friction', created by a large, diverse population, often with limited means, sharing the limited space, living accommodation and amenities provided by the area – which could lead to animosity, nuisance reports and sometimes to violence. This stood in stark contrast to the more socially static housing estate where violent incidents were sometimes linked in participants' accounts to long-running conflicts, disputes and reputations, spanning decades or crossing generations. These observations point to differences in the style of policing that might be required in such places, however they offered frustratingly little in the way of immediate preventative avenues for problem-oriented intervention.

In Luton, neighbourhood (LSOA level³⁴) burglary rates were found to be quantitatively correlated with a number of demographic indicators of social flux, including population growth, the proportion of residents born overseas and the proportion of households not occupied by families. While we must be cautious about inferring cause and effect here, when coupled with qualitative observations, these findings drew attention to the potential role played by a lack of 'collective efficacy' – the extent to which neighbours in an area know and trust each other, are able to come together to achieve shared goals and

are willing to look out for and protect each other. There is research evidence showing that offenders' perceptions of residents' willingness to intervene can influence their choice of target³⁵ – and the offenders interviewed for this study were clearly sensitive to natural surveillance, with some suggesting there were parts of town where they felt able to operate unchallenged 'in plain sight'. We also found evidence of a mutually reinforcing relationship between crime/fear of crime and neighbourhood atomisation; one burglary victim for example described how he and his wife would stay at home after work to avoid trouble and would take the car if they needed to venture even short distances after dark.

The possibility that less tightly bound, more socially nebulous neighbourhoods may be more prone to predation poses challenging questions about the role of the police in such places; it has been argued for instance that police intervention can only ever offer temporary respite unless accompanied by efforts to mobilise and support social capital and empower communities³⁶. In practical terms, our efforts to build neighbourhood resilience and watchfulness in Luton were hampered both by a lack of evidence on *how* this might best be achieved, as well as a lack of neighbourhood level resources, a low baseline of existing police/community engagement and (initially) difficulties in understanding these more abstract concepts. All of these might be considered important missing ingredients of effective local policing.

Changes to housing tenure

Related to the changing social patterns described above, one factor implicated in the local crime problems studied in both towns, was change within the structure of the local housing markets; in particular the burgeoning 'low-end' private rented housing sector that had developed in both areas. In each town, the proportion of households that rented from a private landlord approximately

³⁴ Lower Super Output Areas (LSOAs) are small administrative areas, typically containing around 650 households, for which a range of descriptive Census data are available.

³⁵ Bottoms (2012).

³⁶ Nolan et al. (2004).

doubled between 2001 and 2011, from around 12 per cent to about a quarter (compared with a national increase from 12 to 18 per cent) – with the proportion in the study’s Luton focus wards exceeding 40 per cent and the Slough town centre ward topping 50 per cent³⁷.

While officials in each town are acutely aware of the challenges posed by high-housing demand, under-regulated landlords and the poor conditions of some of the housing stock³⁸, the impact of these issues on crime were previously unrecognised. In

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Slough it came as a surprise to practitioners – used to focusing on public spaces to reduce violence – that around 40 per

cent of the violent offences not classified as domestic abuse, took place within private dwellings. In the town centre ward 18 per cent of this sub-set of offences was linked to properties known to be used as houses in multiple occupation – which was significantly disproportionate to the percentage of the population estimated to live in them. It seems reasonable to hypothesise that the stresses and insecurities of living in low-quality, crowded accommodation with shared facilities and little or no choice of co-habitees can be a driver of antagonism, violence and demand for the police.

In Luton, the proportion of households living in privately rented accommodation was found to be significantly correlated with local (LSOA) burglary rates, and over the longer term was found to be a more strongly associated with burglary levels than deprivation, unemployment or any other demographic variable tested³⁹. Moreover, while both social and private renting levels were correlated with overall crime rates, for burglary specifically only private renting was found to be associated. Again it is important to be cautious in

assuming causal significance – particularly when moving from area level observations to property level conclusions – and it should be noted that studies in other places have found different links between tenure type and burglary⁴⁰, suggesting the problem is highly context specific. In the light of project findings about offenders’ opportunist target selection, and what is known more broadly about the role of home security in residualising burglary victimisation⁴¹, the interpretation that neither private landlords nor transient tenants had meaningful incentives to invest in robust home security, resulting in offending opportunities and elevated burglary rates, is appealing and fitted with practitioners’ experiences on the ground.

These findings indicate that marked changes in the tenure structure in some areas of our towns and cities – linked to a broader social trends such as the widening gap between rich and poor, differential access to finance, the fragmentation of families, greater international mobility and the shift from state to market provision – impact on how, where and whether people can access a safe place to live. A striking feature of our time in Luton and Slough was the near-total lack of options available to local practitioners for addressing these crime problems by interventions addressing private rented housing. We have argued elsewhere that more potent problem-oriented responses might have been enabled had more extensive private rented sector licensing provisions been in operation⁴². More broadly this points to the limitations of problem-orientation alone for delivering effectiveness; expanding the tool-box of available responses requires thinking across the breadth of issues confronting an area and strategic, collaborative working between the police and other local ‘place shapers’.

In Luton the proportion of households living in privately rented accommodation was found to be a more strongly associated with burglary levels than deprivation or unemployment.

³⁷ These findings are described in detail in Higgins and Jarman (2015).

³⁸ Slough Borough Council (2005); Luton Borough Council (no date).

³⁹ Although no correlate was particularly strong, private renting accounted for 21 per cent of the variance in LSOA burglary rates. Multivariate analysis could only improve on this slightly; a model combining the percentage of households renting privately and the percentage of residents unemployed, accounted for 24 per cent of the variance.

⁴⁰ Livingstone et al. (2014); Tseloni and Thompson (2015).

⁴¹ Tilley et al. (2011).

⁴² Higgins and Jarman (2015).

Changing offending drivers and crime-related needs

The long-term reduction in the use of heroin and crack cocaine in the UK is well documented and it has been claimed that national trends in problematic drug use can account for up to half of the increase, and a third of the subsequent drop, in acquisitive crime witnessed over recent decades ⁴³.

More than a quarter of known local burglars were a younger 'generalist' offender type associated with an aspirational criminal identity.

Broadly in line with this, and with local practitioners' perceptions of an ageing and diminishing heroin using population, cluster analysis ⁴⁴ conducted on a

broad data set describing known burglary offenders in Luton indicated that, although problematic drug-users constituted the largest and most prolific 'type' of burglar, the older, more entrenched sub-set of these substantially outnumbered younger entrants.

While the long-term prospect of continued crime reduction, linked to falling levels of heroin and crack cocaine use, is a welcome one, our analysis also hinted at a different set of offender management challenges for the future. More than a quarter of known local burglars were assigned by the cluster analysis to a younger 'generalist' offender 'type', characterised by a broad offending repertoire, including robbery and violent offences (generally lacking in volume from the histories of problematic drug using burglars) as well as burglary and other acquisitive crimes. This group were also more likely to offend in groups, used cannabis and some powder cocaine (but not opiates) and had (probation assessed) offending drivers linked to 'lifestyle'. Qualitatively this 'type' was associated with motivations linked to peer-group dynamics and the attraction of an 'aspirational' criminal identity.

Our analysis does not permit us to assess the novelty of this offender type. However, we would speculate that while the appeal of a criminal lifestyle will be familiar to those working with young

(and young-adult) offenders, it is a motive less often associated with burglary and burglars. It is also difficult to predict the trajectory of this group's future criminal careers; a later average age of onset and the absence of heroin and crack cocaine use may suggest earlier desistance, however this also suggests that future efforts to reduce reoffending might need recalibration. With less call for drug-treatment services, greater emphasis might be required on the difficult task of developing programmes that challenge and offer genuine alternatives to the appeal of criminal lifestyles for younger offenders.

The nature of the relationship between drug and alcohol use and violent crime is contested and complex ⁴⁵. In Slough it was apparent that while the town lacked the kind of geographically focused violence problem often associated with the night-time economy, the temporal profile as well as qualitative accounts, suggested an association between alcohol – especially that purchased and consumed away from pubs and clubs – and violent incidents.

One of the dominant themes emerging from the Violence Multi-Agency Panel's efforts in Slough to deliver case-based problem-solving for individuals recurrently involved in violence was the degree to which these cases resisted straightforward, situational solutions and instead led into large reservoirs of complex and multi-dimensional need. Putting aside questions about the exact causal relationships between these needs and violent offending and victimisation, it is clear that many of those recurrently coming to notice in violent crimes lived lives affected by a range of acute and often interconnected problems, and that practitioners often saw addressing these as the only viable route to sustainably reducing risk.

Analysis of the Violence Multi-Agency Panel's case notes, assembled to aid problem solving and monitor intervention efforts (rather than resulting from any systematic needs assessments) indicated that a third of records listed an identified mental-health need, a third suggested problematic drug use or a drug related driver, a quarter indicated alcohol misuse and one in five identified housing

⁴³ Morgan (2014).

⁴⁴ Cluster analysis is a statistical technique used to identify groups of subjects – here burglary offenders – that are similar to each other, based on a range of variables.

⁴⁵ Lipsey et al. (1997); Roizen (1997).

needs including homelessness. 37 per cent of cases exhibited at least two of these and one in five exhibited three or more. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the violence suffered and generated by these individuals cannot be addressed without more holistic attention to their life circumstances.

Our research does not give us grounds to comment on trends in the prevalence of this broader set of interconnected needs, or for example on the way in which they have been affected by the economic down-turn of the last decade (it is interesting to note however that a 'hidden' increase in the level of domestic violence has been identified, corresponding with the onset of financial crisis in 2008/09⁴⁶). It was vividly apparent, however, that to varying degrees the array of state and third sector services aligned to deal with this broader complex of need and disadvantage, was extremely stretched and struggling to deal with the level of demand in Slough.

Despite the genuine spirit of multi-agency collaboration generated, the Violence Multi-Agency Panel experiment suggests that additional meaningful intervention in the lives of chaotic and often uncooperative individuals, on a scale that might conceivably bring about measurable area-level results, is beyond the capacity of existing service provision in Slough – and in places with similar levels of resource. It will be interesting to see whether the substantially greater resources invested in schemes with a generally similar rationale and approach (such as the government's Troubled Families programme) can credibly demonstrate success. Multi-agency collaboration to address complex cases of need and vulnerability is an increasingly prominent feature of the changing world of policing; the findings from Slough suggest there is an urgent need for more evidence on what is effective within this paradigm and what realistic expectations for such arrangements might be.

Changes in predictability

Analysis of burglary patterns in Luton, conducted during the project, throw up the intriguing and potentially concerning possibility that fast-paced social change may make crime hotspots less stable and resources therefore less easy to target

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geographically – particularly for longer-term, more strategic crime-reduction efforts. In broad terms, the historic patterns of burglary concentration that directed the project's focus, first to two wards and then to long-term micro-location hotspots within them, began to dissipate in the few months spent preparing to implement interventions, and were barely above typical levels for the town during the intervention period. At the same time, new concentrations emerged, including in nearby areas that were deliberately *excluded* from intervention on account of historically low incidence levels, calling into question whether project activity was actually targeted 'in the right places'. While this could of course be an inconvenient, random 'blip' against a persistent profile of differentiated risk, other findings (tentatively) suggest a different interpretation. In particular, it is intriguing that the demographic indices (including deprivation, private renting, population growth etc) that correlated with LSOA burglary rates close to Census day in 2011, became progressively less strongly associated with burglary over subsequent years, and produced no statistically significant correlations three years later. One interpretation could be that in the fast-changing places studied here, demographic patterns, and the crime patterns that accompany them, are shifting at a pace that quickly compromises the accuracy and relevance of data collected at ten-year intervals.

This is a tentative theory that requires more systematic study; however if a changing world really is becoming a more opaque and less predictable one, the implications for local policing in general and crime analysis in particular, may be far-reaching. Policing has begun to experiment with predictive techniques that go beyond 'simple' hotspot mapping, and the possibility that more sophisticated forecasting, based on a broad range of 'big' data sets, might identify locations for long-term preventative intervention (as well as just immediate

⁴⁶ Walby et al. (2015).

patrol deployment) is an intriguing one. More generally, if the locations of tomorrow's problems (as well as the issues the police will be expected to prioritise) are becoming harder to anticipate, strategic focus might best be placed on developing general and flexible resources and capabilities, such as resilience within neighbourhoods, strong links and information flows between agencies and with communities, and operating models and work-processes that are agile and adaptable to change.

Changing crime volumes

Much of the history of problem-oriented policing has been written in (comparatively) high-crime conditions. In Luton and Slough, the crime problems identified, although pressing ones for the local police, were more modest in terms of volume than those encountered in many previous studies. Compare for example recent annual burglary rates in Luton of around 20 to 25 per 1,000 dwellings, with rates of around 30 in the priority target areas – to those in parts of Liverpool studied as part of the Reducing Burglary Initiative in the late 1990s, of around 60 per 1,000 dwellings at the area level, and 160 in target locations⁴⁷.

Based on the experience of this project we would pose the question of whether the crime drop, linked at least in part to efforts by the police and others to prevent the most 'avoidable' crimes, has to some extent left a remnant-core that is less easily problematised and tackled by straight-forward situational tactics. If, following scanning and analysis, the selected 'problem' appears diffuse, dispersed, multi-faceted and ingrained (as it did in Slough), then practicable problem-level responses become difficult to identify. If, even within statistically significant hotspots, the incidence of crime is relatively infrequent (as was the case in Luton), it

may be difficult to secure the interest of local people in dealing with the problem or to justify investment; incidentally, it may also become more difficult to assess whether any intervention has been effective.

Fast-paced social change may make crime hotspots less stable and resources less easy to target geographically.

⁴⁷ Bowers et al. (2004).

While the police and their partners must remain alert to the emergence of specific crime problems in particular locations, it may be that the imperative to continue to make in-roads into what are (in terms of recent history) relatively low volumes of crime would be better addressed locally by longer-term strategic interventions (rather than relying on problem-orientation to deliver further results), and/or a focus on other under-addressed volume crimes (such as online fraud) it may also be that volumetric interpretations of crime-cutting should be explicitly challenged in favour of an overt focus on harm reduction.

Changing resources

Perhaps the most obvious change during the life of the project has been the onset of public sector austerity. Following a decade of police force budget increases⁴⁸, between 2010/11 and 2015/16, police services in England and Wales experienced a 25 per cent real terms cut in central government funding⁴⁹, while community safety and other public service police partners also suffered significant cuts. Most notably, local authorities saw spending per person fall by 23 per cent in real terms⁵⁰.

The extent to which funding cuts impacted on the police capability to engage in informed proactivity differed markedly between the two towns. In Luton, acute demand and service pressure was an ever-present feature of local service delivery and substantially impacted on attempts to implement the Burglary Reduction Initiative through multiple mechanisms. Teams operating at minimum strength were increasingly vulnerable to sickness, abstraction or peak-leave periods, meaning that pre-planned activity was difficult to schedule, coordination efforts often suffered from non-attendance at meetings by managers carrying multiple portfolios, and morale and stress impacted on personal effectiveness. In Slough, while the daily presence of high-risk crime and public safety issues left little spare capacity, it felt like a place where the police and their partners broadly took change in their stride, showed resilience, and sustained effective partnership relations.

⁴⁸ Crawford et al (2015).

⁴⁹ This resulted in an overall real terms cut of 18 per cent to police budgets. However, those cuts have fallen more heavily on forces where low council tax precepts meant that the police force was disproportionately reliant on central government grants. See National Audit Office (2015).

⁵⁰ Innes and Tetlow (2015).

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The contrast was illustrated in a small-scale survey of community safety practitioners in each site. In both towns almost all practitioners agreed that the local *response to crime and related social problems had been impacted by recent changes in funding*, but in Luton more than half said this was the case *to a great extent* while in Slough most thought this was the case *a little or to some extent*.

Perhaps the most important difference between the two sites in terms of police effectiveness relates to the policing models operated by the two forces. As a direct response to austerity, Bedfordshire police had adopted an organisational structure strongly oriented to delivering response policing and crime investigation. This left little resource for proactive interventions and fostered processes, mind sets and skill sets oriented toward short-term reactive work rather than more strategic longer term delivery. It had also resulted in the wholesale removal of police officers from neighbourhood policing roles, leaving no obvious delivery mechanism for proactive crime-reduction work, but also apparently compromising the willingness of residents to engage and cooperate with police-led initiatives. In contrast, enabled by greater resilience, Thames Valley Police were able to undertake a thorough and considered review of neighbourhood policing during the latter part of the project period and allowed Local Policing Areas⁵¹ flexibility to tailor their services to local context, through a priority based budgeting approach.

It is beyond the scope of this study to assess whether the decision by Bedfordshire to roll back proactive and community policing in order to protect (supposed) 'core functions' was dictated by funding pressure, or whether alternative choices could have been made. It is certainly an approach that has caused concern⁵² and indeed one which has been acknowledged locally as problematic, leading to the

⁵¹ Slough is one of 12 Local Policing Areas (LPAs) that make up the Thames Valley Police force area. See <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/yournh-tvp-pol-area> for details.

⁵² HMIC (2016c).

launch of a revised model in late 2015 that sought to restore a neighbourhood policing presence⁵³. Based on the evidence collected in this project it is clear that this form of 'back to basics' policing approach is particularly unsuited to delivering informed proactivity, and in a time of limited resources a new understanding of what is 'core' to effective local policing needs to be developed.

Changing partnerships and governance arrangements

It is striking that although focused on burglary and violence – both highly traditional police problems – very few of the intervention avenues developed through analysis in this project were ones that could wholly or largely be delivered by the police acting alone. It is worth emphasising the degree to which informed proactivity is an approach requiring multiple players to work toward shared goals.

In both Luton and Slough, we found community safety practitioners committed to the principles of multi-agency collaboration and numerous examples of productive joint working. In both cases however practitioners reported that working together had been made more difficult by funding cuts and the organisational restructures that followed, with personnel churn and a degree of retrenchment to 'core functions' presenting obstacles.

Particular challenges were evident in relation to tasking activity across agency accountability structures. In Luton, the local community safety partnership's delivery board clearly struggled to establish functionality (with several poorly attended or cancelled meetings during the project's initiative year) and compliance and feedback on tasks generated by the project's Burglary Reduction Initiative working group were often difficult to secure – despite initial agreements and a (nominal) community safety partnership mandate. In Slough one notable feature of the Violence Multi-Agency Panel was the consensual and non-confrontational tone set by the senior police officer who

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⁵³ Bedfordshire Police (2015).

chaired the process, which was clearly appreciated by participants and key to securing sustained participation and commitment. The seemingly unavoidable corollary of this however was 'light-touch' accountability and a conspicuously non-directive approach; it is telling perhaps that 40 per cent of the actions set in the course of the Violence Multi-Agency Panel's meetings fell to police employees. Finding better ways of 'getting things done' in a multi-agency setting appears to be an important practical challenge.

One obvious and significant change to policing in the lifetime of the project has been the introduction of democratically elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs), with the ability to hire and fire chief constables and control over budgets, including some previously managed by community safety partnerships. Overall, in our project, we found the impact of PCCs and the new mechanisms for democratic accountability to have little obvious consequence for the delivery of targeted crime-reduction efforts 'on the ground'. We would draw attention however to the possibility for tension to arise for local policing units, pulled between the police force level priorities of PCCs and the more local concern of communities and community safety partnerships. Community safety partnerships with their smaller geographic focus, multi-agency composition and (often) built-in analytic capability seem (at least in theory) to be well set-up to foster the style of effective *informed proactivity* we have described; it seems important that PCCs (and chief constables) encourage, empower and facilitate, locally focused efforts to understand and co-ordinate responses to crime problems, rather than distracting from or disempowering these.

Local policing: responding to the challenge of a changing world

The capacity of local policing to operate in the proactive, locally-informed, problem-focused, joined-up and publicly-engaged way, best suited to delivering effective crime reduction, is being impacted by simultaneous change on multiple fronts.

In a world in which the imperative to deliver outcomes is intensifying, and the focus is shifting to

Where the imperative to deliver outcomes is intensifying, and the focus is shifting to issues of harm that are less well understood and less overt, informed proactivity is more important than ever.

issues of harm that are less well understood, less overt and less likely to be police-only business, informed proactivity is more important than ever and is a working style to which local police functions should aspire.

There are significant barriers to achieving this however. The *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project has shown that even 'traditional' crimes like burglary and violence are changing in nature. Social changes such as those to housing tenure are creating new vulnerabilities; the needs, motives and patterns of disadvantage that accompany crime problems – and particularly the array of services aligned to deal with these needs – are in flux, and the 'natural' capacity of communities to resist predation can be compromised by transience, heterogeneity and fear of crime. We found however that improving the local understanding of contemporary crime problems is only part of the challenge; problem-orientation can only be effective if there are tools in the box that can be used to assemble appropriate responses, and our project came up against a conspicuous shortage of these in relation to some of the less familiar aspects of crime we brought to light. Assembling a better tool-kit represents a significant strategic challenge to which local police leaders and their community safety partners must attend.

Internal changes are also impacting on the police capacity for effective policing. To different degrees and through multiple mechanisms, we encountered local police functions in which demand and service pressure were impacting on the resources available for discretionary proactive work. It is also clear however that the impact of budget cuts is mediated through the restructuring decisions that are made in response. While we are not placed to comment on the necessity or otherwise of the strategic decisions made in the police forces encountered here, it is clear that different policing models foster and facilitate informed proactivity to different degrees.

Where reactive capability becomes the exclusive preoccupation, the systems, skill sets and mind sets needed to deliver effective, goal-oriented policing will wither; where neighbourhood engagement is neglected, requests for public cooperation including in efforts to reduce crime, will fall on stony ground; and where force-level priorities distract attention from local problems, the specific and focused responses shown to work best will be overlooked.

There are also hints of technical challenges for crime reduction practice here; we have questioned whether problem-orientation is less well suited to 'low-crime' conditions and whether hot-spotting loses some longer-term predictive value in conditions of rapid socio-demographic change. These appear good questions for further investigation; if either or both can be evidenced, the appropriate local response again appears to tend towards the strategic; addressing less proximate crime and harm drivers and developing nimble capabilities and neighbourhood resilience.

The list of changes described here is by no means exhaustive. Perhaps due to the crime types chosen for attention during the project, we gained only hints of the ways in which technological change is impacting on crime and policing; we have also said little here about the changing orthodoxies and 'professionalisation' within policing which increasingly shape decision making and practice.

Improving local policing will require that those engaged in shaping the future recognise the multiple

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ways in which the world is changing. Although the challenges of the future look markedly different from those of the past, it is important that we do not lose sight of what has been learned about delivering effective practice. We hope this project has made a small but timely contribution to this knowledge base; our experiences and findings suggest that four sets of issues in particular would benefit from close attention as part of an on-going process of reform and improvement. These relate to:

- The challenge of prioritisation in a changing world.
- How local police can work effectively with partner agencies, particularly in relation to managing harm.
- The form of neighbourhood policing required to enable effective crime and harm reduction.
- How local policing can deliver evidence-based practice development.

These are the issues to which we turn in our forthcoming project papers.

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About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused entirely on developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction, while challenging the police service and the government to improve policing for the benefit of the public. The Police Foundation acts as a bridge between the public, the police and the government, while being owned by none of them.

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