

POLICE SERVICE FACES UNPRECEDENTED CHALLENGES AMID GLOBAL RECESSION

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The police service faces a host of new challenges but also opportunities in the wake of the 9/11 and 7/7 terrorism attacks and the global economic downturn.

The issues are raised in a new Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) publication - *What is policing for? Examining the impact and implications of contemporary policing intervention*. The publication which highlights the views of experts presented during a Public Policy Seminar series organised by the ESRC in collaboration with the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, The Police Foundation, and the Universities' Police Science Institute.

In the booklet, seminar speakers draw on latest research findings to offer their answers to crucial questions such as: 'How responsive should policing be to community priorities and concerns?' 'Can and should the police solve more crime?' and 'What is the role for policing in securing economic and social well-being?'

Says Dr Timothy Brain, Chief Constable of Gloucestershire: "In many respects policing has never been stronger. It has emerged from the racial, political and social tensions of the 1980s and 1990s, and is delivering historically low levels of recorded crime.

"And yet all this achievement now hangs in the balance. First there is the threat of the deepening recession, then over-centralisation. Closely allied to centralism is bureaucracy. The final threat is that of politicisation. Times change; the police service must change. How the service should change is now the crucial question."

The police service has a wide range of weapons in its crime-fighting armoury - from Zero Tolerance Policing to Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. Gated communities are more common, and closed-circuit television is omnipresent. Since 1997, over 3,000 new offences have been created and a wide range of new tools and powers have been introduced.

Professor Robin Williams, of Durham University, says: “The use of forensic science, particularly DNA profiling, is now increasingly central to contemporary policing because it contributes to efforts to arrive at the truth amidst conflicting stories from victims, witnesses and suspects.

“However, some recent studies point to the dangers of misplaced confidence in many claims to scientific ‘certainty’ in the application of forensic technologies and their effective uses for crime control.”

At the same time, police officers face the pressure of quantitative targets and league tables allied with budgetary constraints, and what Sally Burke, Chief Superintendent in South Wales Police, refers to as the “perception gap” - the fact that crime has been reduced significantly over the last decade, yet the fear of crime has not as most people don’t believe the reported figures.

But as Nigel Fielding, Professor of Sociology at the University of Surrey concludes: “Police efforts can never fully meet the public’s feelings of insecurity, which vary considerably. The police have to decide priorities, and that is, ultimately, a question of discretion.”

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

1. *What is policing for? Examining the impact and implications of contemporary policing interventions* is part of the ESRC Public Policy Seminar Series. We encourage you to make use of these valuable resources, so hard copies are free and available on request. If you would like to receive a free copy, please email knowledgetransfer@esrc.ac.uk
2. The publication was based on presentations by speakers and other contributors at three seminars held on February 12, March 11 and May 8 in London, Cardiff and Edinburgh and entitled respectively: ‘How responsive should policing be to community priorities and concerns?’ ‘Can and should the police solve more crime?’ and ‘What role for policing in securing economic and social well-being?’ The seminars were organised by the ESRC in collaboration with the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, The Police Foundation, and the Universities' Police Science Institute.
3. The ESRC Public Policy Seminar Series aims to bring the best social science concepts and evidence into the policy arena and stimulate a discussion of how in the light of these insights, policy can be developed. The goal is to encourage evidence-based policy

through an exchange between researchers and policy-makers. For forthcoming public policy seminars, please email knowledgetransfer@esrc.ac.uk

4. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) is the UK's largest organisation for funding research on economic and social issues. It supports independent, high quality research which has an impact on business, the public sector and the third sector. The ESRC's planned total expenditure in 2009/10 is £204 million. At any one time the ESRC supports over 4,000 researchers and postgraduate students in academic institutions and independent research institutes. More at <http://www.esrcsocietytoday.ac.uk>