THE POLICE FOUNDATION
The UK's policing think tank

Cumberland Lodge
exchanging views, inspiring minds

salesforce

Cumberland Lodge Policing Conference 2023

REPORT

THE POLICE FOUNDATION
The UK's policing think tank

GETTING THE RIGHT THINGS DONE

DELIVERING GOOD POLICING IN THE 2020s

RUTH HALKON AND ANDY HIGGINS

DECEMBER 2023

Cumberland Lodge Policing Conference 2023

Getting the right things done: Delivering good policing in the 2020s

Report

About Cumberland Lodge

Founded in 1947, Cumberland Lodge is a charity that empowers people, through dialogue and debate, to tackle the causes and effects of social division. Our vision is of more peaceful, open and inclusive societies. We convene timely, multi-sector conferences, seminars, webinars and panel discussions that engage people of all ages, backgrounds and perspectives in candid conversations on issues that affect us all. We also commission rigorous, interdisciplinary research to guide our conversations, and help us to refine key themes of discussion into practical, policy-focused recommendations. We actively involve students and young people in all aspects of our work, providing a wide range of opportunities to nurture their potential as future thought leaders and change makers.

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Our mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. We do this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

Contents

Foreword 4

Conference speakers 4

Key insights from the conference 5

1. What are the police being asked to deliver and by whom? 6
2. Are the police delivering what the public want? 7
3. Beyond red, amber, green: New ways of managing performance 10
4. Working out what works and how to use it. 12

Conclusions 14

References 14

About the authors 15

Foreword

Amid the discord and contest of the first years of this decade, the need for 'better policing' has emerged as a rare point of social consensus. But what does it mean to provide 'better' policing, or to improve police productivity, in the 2020s? This report seeks to address these questions by bringing together crucial insights from a conference convened by Cumberland Lodge and the Police Foundation. *Getting the right things done: delivering good policing in the 2020s* is an interpretation of conversations held over a long weekend between senior police officers, academics, practitioners, partners and representatives from non-profit organisations and the private sector. This report sets out to capture the nuances of the debate and the differences of opinion, while bringing out key points and insights. These are not recommendations in themselves but serve to encourage others to reflect and question what they think good policing is and how we might reach it.

Underlying the report is the recognition that, for many years, those who suffered the most from bad policing are the ones whose voices have been heard the least. This report seeks to emphasise that better policing can only come about through really listening to those voices, not just to the ones that shout the loudest, and through delivering change that works for all parts of society

Launched at New Scotland Yard on 13th December 2023, this is the latest in a series of reports on policing and society produced by Cumberland Lodge through its long-standing association with the police, and the first to be co-created by the Police Foundation. We are extremely grateful to the members of our Police Conference Steering Committee, for their help in developing and facilitating the discussions, to Canon Dr Edmund Newell and all at Cumberland Lodge for making the conference happen, to our sponsors Salesforce, and to Ruth Halkon and Andy Higgins of the Police Foundation who have written this report. We hope that its publication will be an important step towards defining what good policing is and helping us reach it.

Olivia Pinkney CBE, QPM

Chair of Cumberland Lodge Police Steering Committee and former Chief Constable, Hampshire and Isle of Wight Constabulary

Conference speakers

Canon Dr Ed Newell – Chief Executive Cumberland Lodge

Serena Kennedy KPM – Chief Constable, Merseyside Police

Ian Loader – Professor of Criminology, Oxford University

Alan Pughsley QPM – Former Chief Constable, Kent Police

Baroness Louise Casey DBE, CB

Katrina Ffrench – Founding Director, Unjust

Malcolm Graham – Deputy Chief Constable, Police Scotland

Hannah Shrimpton – Director, Deputy Head of Cohesion and Security, Ipsos

Hannah Hesselgreaves – Associate Professor, Northumbria University

Rob Wilson – Professor, Northumbria University

Gillian Routledge – Chief Operating Officer, Lancashire Police

Tony Simpson – Partner, Oliver Wyman Consulting

Lee Freeman KPM – Former Chief Constable of Humberside Police

Adam Swersky – CEO, Social Finance

Joanna Traynor – Co-founder, Senseia

Jason Langley – Co-founder, Senseia

Jim Colwell – Acting Chief Constable, Devon and Cornwall Police

David Halpern CBE – Chief Executive, Behavioural Insights. Visiting Professor, King's College London

R. Mark Evans OBE – Executive Lead: Future Policing, New Zealand Police

Danny Shaw – Former Home Affairs Correspondent, BBC

Key insights from the conference

1. There are some fundamental aspects of service provision that the police need to be consistently better at delivering. In acknowledging this, however, it is important to avoid nostalgia and oversimplification: the modern police operating environment is incomparably complex to that of the past.
2. The police achieve outcomes as part of a system (or of multiple overlapping systems) of agencies and actors. Improving police delivery requires attention to *systemic* effectiveness and the appropriate role of the police within groups of other contributors.
3. The police serve an increasingly complex, diverse and at times discordant society. If it is to understand what is required of it, it needs to adopt an attitude of institutional openness, humility and a willingness to listen.
4. Progress towards consensus about what constitutes good policing can be made if the public are helped to engage in deliberative dialogue,[1] and through adopting a policing approach that puts wellbeing, human rights, and community cohesion at the centre.
5. Focusing on learning and development, enabling the police workforce to learn from mistakes and building an evidence base of 'what works', will encourage better performance and improved outcomes for the public.
6. Encouraging diversity of thought in a workforce is as important as diversity of backgrounds and characteristics. Without it, organisations become vulnerable to 'group think', which means institutional problems are not recognised or addressed.
7. Instead of targets, tolerances can be used to measure performance. Upper and lower limits should be defined by the data, evidence base and what is achievable. Performance outside of these bands should not lead to 'punishment' but rather an assessment of root causes.
8. Technology and data are powerful assets, if used wisely and with the appropriate help from experts. Policing could collect data in a much more open and transparent way, share it with public and partners and be better at understanding it and communicating what it means.
9. There is significant scope for improving police delivery through applying scientific knowledge, testing and adaptation, but this remains hampered by institutional barriers and underinvestment.
10. Adopting an evidence-based policing philosophy can be a crucial part of cultural and ethical reform, not just a technical exercise in improving effectiveness.

1 Myant and Urquhart, 2008 https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2009/12/social-research-methods-guides/documents/deliberative-methods/deliberative-methods/govscot%3Adocument/Deliberative%2BMethods.pdf

1. What are the police being asked to deliver and by whom?

Amid the discord and contest of the first years of this decade, the need for 'better policing' has emerged as a rare point of social consensus. In the wake of tensions arising from the policing of the Covid-19 pandemic and the challenge laid down by the Black Lives Matter movement, police agencies across the western world are struggling to define their mission and purpose and secure the support of the public. Against this backdrop, UK policing has faced its particular crisis of confidence, triggered by a barrage of misconduct scandals (most notably the murder of Sarah Everard by a serving Metropolitan Police officer). These events have directed intense scrutiny onto police culture, trustworthiness, and institutionalised prejudice.

At the same time, there have been longer-running concerns about falling crime detection rates, the evaporation of visible policing, and the service's failure to adapt to the digital age. These concerns have overlayed doubts about police efficacy, legitimacy, and social relevance. The resulting 'omni-crisis' has spawned a flood of damning reviews, reports, and inspection findings and provoked pointed interventions from central government. Not surprisingly this has brought about a tangible withdrawal of public support, sparking claims about the breakdown of our bedrock model of policing by consent.

The urgent need to improve, reform and deliver more effective and legitimate policing therefore permeates the operating context. But what does it mean to provide 'good' (or better) policing, or to improve police productivity, in the 2020s? And, which of society's increasingly varied and discordant voices should hold influence, as these questions are discussed and debated?

Such questions appear necessary precursors to more mundane attention to police delivery and effectiveness, but also resurface long-running debates about the police mission and purpose, which – for all their apparent intractability – deserve to be revisited in the context of social change. The familiar pattern of these exchanges – pitting a 'no-nonsense' narrative of police as crime-cutting law enforcers, against the more expansive and complex reality of public demand for safety and order maintenance (Loader, 2020) – resonates with recent calls for the police to go 'back to basics' in the face of crisis.

No going back?

The conference was warned about the need for nuance in these debates. For instance, while there is agreement about there being basic things that the police should be 'excellent' at but too often get wrong, the idea of 'going back' also seems to evoke a mythical golden age which was often highly problematic. For example, in the past the way the service responded to the perverse incentives generated by target-driven performance was particularly controversial.

A 'back to basics' narrative also risks overlooking the complexity of the modern police operating environment. A large proportion of incoming demand now relates to 'non-crime' issues, such as people missing from home, mental health crises, or welfare concerns. In this respect 'crime fighting' is revealed to be a one-dimensional account of what society asks the police to do. With the transition to a digital society, and in the face of escalating demand linked to domestic abuse and 'hidden' harm, 'traditional' policing seems inadequate. It is also revealing that the average amount of time police officers spend, per incident they attend, has increased, and that many have come to view their role more in terms of safeguarding than crime fighting (Charman, 2018). Finally, with substantial reductions in personnel and funding over recent decades, policing has had no option but to innovate, reprioritise and adjust the way it operates.

Modern policing then, is complex not basic, and there is no going back because society has changed irrevocably. But the persistence of this simplified narrative speaks first, to the need for policing to better explain complexity to the public, and second, to the undisputed truth that there are fundamental aspects of police delivery that could – and should – consistently be done better.

Policing within a system

In relation to public dialogue, there is some evidence that more deliberative approaches, that give citizens more contextual information, and allow them to discuss and debate its implications for policing and society, can shift public views, promote productive discussion, and aid a move towards consensus (Higgins, 2019). There are also indications that the pervasive experience of threat and insecurity that, to some extent, underpins the public demand for policing, has shifted over recent decades. Visceral anger at the lack of a police presence in towns and cities is being replaced by a greater sense of 'peripheral suffering' on the margins of society, and of 'ambient harm' resulting from a general lack of 'urban

care'. All of this emphasises the importance of policing seeking to define and explain its *role within a system* of other agencies and individuals, that work together to create better places and enable people to live safer and more satisfactory lives.

The second point (relating to service improvement) recognises that, while police delivery will often need to respond to local conditions, there are common, core processes, often crucial to the public experience of policing, where optimum effectiveness and efficiency could be better defined and more consistently replicated. Model systems that allow providers to benchmark service quality and productivity are already being used in the health sector and elsewhere, to promote a clearer understanding of 'what good looks like' and identify areas for improvement. In policing, attention is currently being given (via the independent Productivity Review), to defining 'best' and evidence-based practice. This includes areas such as burglary investigation, responses to domestic abuse, contact management and antisocial behaviour, with a view to boosting productivity, national consistency and enabling a better understanding of return on investment. The College of Policing already plays a role here, through its What Works Centre for Evidence Based Policing, Practice Bank, and Authorised Professional Practice,[2] however, calls were made during the conference for the College to be bolder in using its voice and agency to define what constitutes good policing.

Attention is also turning to policing's productivity barriers, including the bureaucratic burdens of crime recording, and the opportunity costs of dealing with large volumes of mental health demand which diverts the police away from other important activities. Here, concerns for systemic effectiveness and the focus on 'core' police delivery appear to be coming together, for instance with the emergence of the *Right Care, Right Person* approach (College of Policing, 2023). But the narrowing police mission indicated by these developments is not always necessarily aligned with 'demand reduction', a preventative focus, or with building community relationships. The conference heard, for instance, about the benefits arising from deploying Police Community Support Officers to work with looked-after children.

So, divergence from so-called 'core tasks' and complexity remain, as policing seeks to understand and articulate its mission in a rapidly changing society. But there is greater consensus on the need for the service to retune its ears to those sections of the public who need it most, and who are most impacted by its actions and decisions. Crisis provides a poor context for building relationships; communities, including those whose faith in police was once assured, are maintaining a greater distance, and an unravelling vortex of withheld cooperation and sub-optimal outcomes looms undeniably close.

Some speakers expressed concerns that policing has too often turned its attention inward, been too concerned with reputation, and listened too exclusively to voices of power, while crime victims, minority groups and frontline staff have been ignored. For all its complexity and irresolute mission, the conference heard time and again that good policing in the 2020s must begin from a place of listening.

Key insights

1. There are some fundamental aspects of service provision that the police need to be consistently better at delivering. In acknowledging this, however, it is important to avoid nostalgia and oversimplification: the modern police operating environment is incomparably complex to that of the past.
2. The police achieve outcomes as part of a system (or of multiple overlapping systems) of agencies and actors. Improving police delivery requires attention to *systemic* effectiveness and the appropriate role of the police within groups of other contributors.
3. The police serve an increasingly complex, diverse and at times discordant society. If it is to understand what is required of it, it needs to adopt an attitude of institutional openness, humility and a willingness to listen.

2. Are the police delivering what the public want?

To know if policing is delivering what the public want, it needs to be sure that it is asking the right questions and – most importantly – *really listening* to the answers. Moreover, the service also needs to ensure that it is engaging with, and listening to, all sections of society, rather than making assumptions about people's needs or expectations based on location, age, or the colour of their skin.

The conference heard that this is not a skill that the police have always excelled at. One delegate described the familiar 'parent/child' pattern of local police officers

2 See https://www.college.police.uk

dictating to residents what their priorities should be, rather than the other way around. It was suggested that this was changing, with a growing realisation (at least among some in the service) that policing needs to be done *with* the public, as equals, rather than *to* them. Confidence will only improve (it was argued) if the police can show the communities they have failed over decades, that they can serve without favouritism and bias, and when police officers recognise that serving the public is a privilege.

What do the public think about the police and what do they want?

Public views about the police are complex and nuanced. Simple statements about whether public 'confidence' or 'trust' in police is going up or down are of limited value without further considering who is doing the trusting, whom they are trusting, and what they are trusting them to do. Assessing what members of public think the police are doing, or should be doing, and whether they think they are doing it well, depends significantly on who and what is asked. Yet, that attempt still has to be made if the police are to understand what is required of them, and various survey metrics provide useful insights.

For instance, asking representative samples of the public whether they would speak highly or critically of the police in their local area gives useful information about how the public feel about the institution. Charting this over many years shows (what one presenter described as) *"a beautifully depressing cinching of public opinion"*, as the number who would speak positively has fallen (from 36 per cent in 2017 to 21 per cent now), while those who are critical has remained stable at around 18 per cent. This suggests that a notable public distancing from the police is occurring within once supportive sections of society.

The conference was told that, although these figures were worrying, it is important to put them into context. While a lot has been written about a *crisis* in public confidence, survey data suggested this may be overstated, at least in historical context. When looking at longstanding questions about trust in police to "tell the truth", 61 per cent of people in England and Wales answered in the affirmative in 1983, compared to 63 per cent today. However, this is still a decline from a high point of 76 per cent just a few years ago. There may be more to learn, from the historically unusual peak in public support during the years before 2020, than the more recent return to 'baseline'.

The story is different in Scotland, where the conference heard that public trust in the police as an institution is high, at 84 per cent according to the Scottish Household Survey – although Scots are less fulsome when asked if they have confidence in local police (which, interestingly, is the reverse of the picture in England and Wales). Scottish confidence in local police declined sharply during the Covid period, from 70 per cent before the pandemic, to 49 per cent in December 2020, returning to 53 per cent by March 2022. Current indications are that (unlike south of the border), confidence is returning to pre-pandemic levels (a contrast one speaker suggested might be due to a policing approach that puts wellbeing, human rights, and community cohesion at the centre of its philosophy).

The conference was powerfully reminded, however, that there have always been communities who have not spoken positively about the police. Black and Asian people especially, have for decades suffered unfairness, discrimination, and violence from those who enforce the law.

This discrimination is so pervasive and entrenched that it permeates the language. Describing people as 'ethnic minorities', for example, could suggest that they are "minor things" and therefore matter less. Instead the term *racialised communities* was put forward to show that discrimination is something happening *to* groups of citizens, not because of them. Similarly, it was suggested the term 'police service' should be used instead of 'police force' as the former indicated it was there to protect and serve the public, rather than to dominate and protect the interests of power.

The conference heard how these communities have been exhausting themselves, speaking out for years yet had been 'gaslit' by a police service that insisted the problem lay with them, rather than the society they lived in, and treated them as problematic rather than affording victim status. For these communities (one speaker reflected) the recent Baroness Casey Review revealed nothing new and merely brought attention to police prejudice and discrimination that had existed for decades, yet it had taken the death of a white woman at the hands of a police officer to bring these issues into full focus. The speaker expressed relief that the Review meant more people were beginning to speak critically about the police, and that the police may finally be beginning to listen. The time and effort required to repair decades of harm, however, should not be underestimated.

Are the police effective?

As well as recent controversy over police conduct and culture, it is clear that the deterioration of public support is also linked to a wider sense of falling service

standards, decreased visibility, and lack of engagement. Although there is little data to link random patrols with reduced crime, and evidence on hotspot patrolling is mixed, polling from Ipsos shows there a link between perceived police visibility and public confidence, such that the fewer police officers the public see, the more likely to they are to report that the police are withdrawing from the places where they live and the issues that matter to them.

This perceived lack of visibility is linked to a growing sense that the police are unable to keep people safe, detect crimes or bringing offenders to justice. The latest data shows only a third of the public are confident that the police would be able to stop violent or non-violent crime from happening, a smaller proportion than in all but one of 29 countries polled. A decline in citizen views about the standard of public services is not unique to the police, however. Only a third of people think the NHS is providing a good service nationally, with recent declines linked to longer waiting lists and increased pressure on the workforce (Buzelli et al, 2023). More generally, trust in institutions such as the government, the civil service and the press, has fallen sharply in recent years, linked to economic and political instability and a more complex and fragmented society (Duffy, 2023).

For victims of crime, service satisfaction is linked to being treated respectfully and being listened to, for instance by being kept up to date with the progress of a crime investigation. But this seemingly relatively simple task is something police systems often struggle with. While in other sectors technology allows people to know (for instance) when their parcel will be delivered, getting updates from the police is often a source of frustration, resulting in numerous calls for updates, or in them giving up on their case entirely. The conference heard that in one force, 40 per cent of 999 calls had been found to be the product of "failure demand". In Scotland, where confidence in police is generally higher, the lowest markers are also for feeling adequately informed on the progress of cases.

So, what do the public want?

Surveys of public opinion show a perception gap between what the public *think* the police spend their time on, what the public think the police *should* spend their time on and what the police actually *do* spend their time on. For example, while 44 per cent of the public think the police should prioritise sexual crime and rape, only 20 per cent think they currently do – yet rape investigations take up a significant proportion of police resources and are a classed as a priority crime by many forces. What the public say they think is important and what they call the police about can also be very different: surveys show public doubts about whether police should deal with mental health demand, for instance, yet the same people ring up the police if there is a crisis. Research asking people where police should allocate resources also shows no clear consensus. While visible policing and responding to 999 calls were ranked as slightly more important aspects of service delivery, many people also prioritised investigating serious crime, responding to national threats and crime prevention. Again, research suggests some degree of public consensus can be reached if citizens are enabled to engage in deliberative dialogue; giving people more information and allowing them time to think and discuss can move the debate beyond instinctive responses.

Towards a solution

To some extent the drivers of public trust and confidence are beyond the influence of the police service. But there was a consensus that, whatever else the public wanted, they wished to be treated by the police with empathy and respect – and this is something the police should be able do something about.

There was debate about whether these 'soft skills', which one speaker argued were rather "fundamental skills for life", could be taught, or whether the police should concentrate on recruiting those who have them, or indeed both. But it was agreed that a lot could be done by fostering reflective practice and spending more time listening to those who trust the police least. For all the ambiguity arising from opinion polls, what many communities have been telling the police for many years is clear, policing needs to change, and to do so quickly, if it has any hope of retaining public confidence.

Key insights

4. Progress towards consensus about what constitutes good policing can be made if the public are helped to engage in deliberative dialogue, and through adopting a policing approach that puts wellbeing, human rights, and community cohesion at the centre.
5. Focusing on learning and development, enabling the police workforce to learn from mistakes and building an evidence base of 'what works', will encourage better performance and improved outcomes for the public.

3. Beyond red, amber, green: New ways of managing performance

The lure of New Public Management

If the police were in the business of manufacturing a simple product, then performance management would be relatively easy. There would be a simple mission (to make a profit) and there would be clear indicators and targets that could be set and measured to keep production on track. There would still be some complexity and the need for strong research and development to improve working processes, but it would be relatively easy to know what was needed to improve and what difference it would make.

A speaker suggested that generations of police leaders have been tempted by the simplicity of this vision of performance management, borrowed from the private sector, assuming that crime can be cut, or the public made safer, by simply setting targets, for example, for burglary reduction and reinforcing the imperative to staff through punishment and reward. But policing doesn't build widgets: its mission is far more complex and harder to define, and it has a workforce exposed to trauma that tries exercise its own judgement to make a positive difference. Moreover, police governance is far more complex than in other sectors. Each police force is answerable to a Police and Crime Commissioner or a Mayor, while the Home Office also sets expectations, and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services and the Independent Office for Police Conduct monitor performance and conduct and regularly make recommendations. With many voices making demands for police improvement, and the external factors (such as the role of the Crown Prosecution Service in determining charge and conviction rates) often overlooked, the best course of action for police leaders is not always clear.

In this context, the police are struggling to come up with effective ways of managing performance. Delegates agreed that the using private sector performance management tools (and also private sector competition) to promote a greater focus on delivery, had not been a success. Focusing on targets had been bad for policing, and for the public, and had bred a culture that drove negative behaviours and distanced the police from the public. The pressure to deliver meant that, instead of taking the time to make sense of what was going on, police middle-management often turned to tactics with a low cost and "certain impact", or began to "game the system", producing "dodgy data" to avert the wrath of superiors – all leading to poor outcomes for the public. One speaker said that targets around arrests and stop and search, for example, had not made the public safer, but instead drove negative police behaviours, encouraging officers to go after 'low hanging fruit' (young people, in deprived areas, often Black, suspected of possessing cannabis) – further damaging relations between the police and racialised communities, and jeopardising the progress made over the past decade in reducing arrests of young people.

The conference heard that part of the problem with current management was the lack of diversity, which not only meant organisations missed out on talent, but made managers vulnerable to groupthink. Yet, creating a diverse workforce can too easily be seen as another target-driven, box-ticking exercise, meaning that while the organisation may look more diverse on paper, all those hired either think the same or are too afraid to say what they really think.

The problem with data

According to one speaker, the police are data rich but insight poor: they possess a huge amount of information from which to draw but lack the context to interpret what it means. They are often too quick to move from measuring a problem to managing it, without taking time to understand it. In this way, performance management gets locked in a plethora of 'reds' and 'greens' without understanding why the target has been set at all.

For example, in relation to male violence against women and girls, police recorded crime data is used to influence policy, but it is essentially unreliable as a lack of trust means people are not coming forward to report. A speaker argued that, in this case, the focus should be about turning data into insights about what it means to be a victim of domestic abuse, what the police can do about it, and whether their strategies work.

Gathering and analysing data is science but using it to decide what to do can be an art form. For example, there is good evidence on the nature and drivers of burglary offending. But focusing on processes rather than people does not get to the nub of why some people offend or how that might be prevented in future.

Compounding the problem, austerity has led to a loss of data analytic skills within policing, thus reducing capacity to interpret data and generate insights. It was argued that the police service urgently needs to

improve its research capabilities and ensure that it has specialists who enable it to be in control of the data, rather than the other way around. Instead of using data to "squash down complexity", they should lean into it and look at the story the data is telling.

Several speakers referred to an oncoming "tsunami of big data", which could either overwhelm the police or be an enabler. It was suggested that policing should embrace robotics as a way of improving poor quality data. Tasks such as cleaning up duplications and errors in massive data sets had previously been dismissed as too hard, but one force with "98 years' worth of dodgy data" had managed to clear up 50 years' worth in three months, using machine learning. Technology and data are powerful, if used wisely and with the appropriate help from experts. It was argued that policing could collect data in a much more open and transparent way, work to understand it and communicate its implications to the public and partners– but this tended to be put in the 'too hard' box.

So, what is to be done?

There was consensus that the police need to leave behind existing cultures and behaviours and be given the freedom to find new ways of managing performance that embrace uncertainty and risk. It was suggested that fear of the very real consequences of failure often led to police managers becoming too risk adverse, and to a governance and performance management system that discouraged innovation. In order to bring about change, the workforce needs to be allowed to make, and learn from, mistakes, and to build an evidence base by learning and applying 'what works'. Focusing on learning and development in this way would encourage better performance and improved outcomes for the public.

Although excessively borrowing New Public Management techniques from the private sector was considered by all to be a bad idea, it was agreed that the police could still learn a huge amount from private sector practices. One speaker described how promoting inclusivity, encouraging diversity and changing cultures could benefit both the public and private sectors. For example, having a diverse workforce, and embracing a diversity of thought as well as background, in which staff felt listened to and proud of working towards a common goal, would build a culture that encouraged productivity, talent retention, and discretionary effort. Focusing on workforce wellbeing, it was suggested, would be more effective in driving performance than any amount of target setting.

There was debate, however, on how this process of change should be carried out. The conference was told that policing needs to prepare itself for a long journey of discovery and self-exploration with an uncertain and changeable destination; however, one attendee suggested that not having a fixed destination might be bad for morale, as the police workforce needed somewhere to aim for.

Similar disagreement was apparent around 'system change' and whether it was possible, or even desirable. Some argued that change could only be carried out if the right frameworks were put in place, focusing on values and core standards in order to create a culture in which people can deliver outcomes that work. One speaker spoke about how leaders could model good behaviour, by themselves showing vulnerability and being authentic about who they were, and their backgrounds and limitations. Leaders who are not afraid of being their authentic selves gave their workforce the psychological safety to do the same, thus improving the way they treated each other and the public.

Others, however, argued that system change was too difficult and that 'policy' left people cold. Instead of attempting large scale, top-down behaviour change (which might take years or never happen at all), it was best to concentrate on what could be done on day one. System change would come about through enough people "doing something on Monday", prioritising quick cycles of learning that encouraged emergence, iteration, improvisation and then monitoring and reflection. The Human Learning System approach encourages those in the public sector to acknowledge the variety of human need, to use empathy to understand the lives of others, view people from a strengths-based perspective and trust people with decision making. Under this approach, the individual should be placed at the centre, and the police would cooperate with other public sector agencies to provide a bespoke solution, to create the outcomes that the individual believes they need to thrive. If enough people adopted this approach, it was argued, organisational culture would change.

The answer to the debate, as with most issues, perhaps lies somewhere in the middle. Performance still needs to be managed. Relying on public funds, the police need to be able to measure what is important and demonstrate how what is being achieved aligns with their mission. Instead of damaging targets, one speaker suggested, tolerances should be set – using the data and evidence to determine what good looks like and what is achievable. Performance outside of these

bands should not lead to ‘punishment’ but rather an assessment of root causes. Instead of prioritising either a Human Learning Systems approach, or one based on management metrics, the police may need to do both.

Key insights

6. Encouraging diversity of thought in a workforce is as important as diversity of backgrounds and characteristics. Without it, organisations become vulnerable to ‘group think’, which means institutional problems are not recognised or addressed.
7. Instead of targets, tolerances can be used to measure performance. Upper and lower limits should be defined by the data, evidence base and what is achievable. Performance outside of these bands should not lead to ‘punishment’ but rather an assessment of root causes.
8. Technology and data are powerful assets, if used wisely and with the appropriate help from experts. Policing could collect data in a much more open and transparent way, share it with public and partners and be better at understanding it and communicating what it means.

4. Working out what works and how to use it

The idea that policing might be improved by generating and applying scientific knowledge is not new: formal experiments on the impact of foot patrol first took place in the USA in the 1970s, while Evidence-Based Policing, a paradigm for using the *“best available research on the outcomes of police work to implement guidelines and evaluate agencies, units and officers”* (Sherman, 1998) is now 25 years old. In the UK, the College of Policing is in its second decade and hosts one of the country’s longest established What Works Centres, while Societies of Evidence Based Policing are thriving across the English-speaking world. But, as Professor Larry Sherman observed while giving “Two Cheers” for Evidence-Based Policing in his 2018 Police Foundation lecture, a ‘tipping point’, where rigorous and continuous *Targeting, Testing and Tracking* becomes mainstreamed into police organisational culture and governance, has not yet been reached. Much could still be gained from taking a more consistent approach to applying research knowledge to police practice, and from systematically evaluating the effectiveness of innovation – a process described to the conference as *“Test, Learn, Adapt”*. But there are also significant institutional barriers to doing so and associated issues requiring careful consideration.

Applying behavioural Insights: Benefits and challenges

The conference heard about the potential for applying learning from behavioural science to public policy issues. Examples include understanding environmental influences on human action and decision making and making it easier for people to ‘do the right thing’ – such as abstaining from crime or engaging with the police and justice processes. When trialled at scale, the impact of theoretically informed, low-cost initiatives, (such as redesigning police penalty notice forms, or sending reminder SMS messages to victims and witnesses during prosecutions), can be assessed using randomised control experiments (or other techniques) and careful analysis of outcome data. Interventions that incentivise manufacturers to improve the security of consumer products have also proved to be effective.

The knowledge gained from such studies can inform wider practice and provide persuasive evidence in funding discussions. But work is required to better embed the habit of evaluation into public policy delivery, in policing and more widely. Bravery is often needed for officials to be open about knowledge gaps and potential flaws in current delivery models. More could be done to promote evaluation skills, literacy, and curiosity within professional development pathways, and opportunities to scale up and leverage evaluated practice in new contexts could be more systemically sought.

The complexity of police business can also provide a challenging context for rolling out evaluated practice. Subtle differences in local conditions can lead to ‘replication failure’ (when trials repeated elsewhere are unsuccessful). Pilot schemes can benefit from an energy and delivery focus that is difficult to reproduce, and a lack of ‘programme-fidelity’ (preserving the crucial features of the intervention) is a recurring theme in the history of police improvement efforts. With this in mind, the distinction between *establishing* and then *applying* ‘what works’ might be seen as unhelpful. Rather, a continual learning process or ‘journey’, involving adapting research findings to local conditions and progressively refining knowledge about the specific ‘active ingredients’ that contribute to better outcomes, might seem more appropriate.

Tension also exists between using research evidence to determine 'what gets done' (and not done) in policing, and more consultative/democratic processes that bring public will and priorities to bear on decision making processes (police station closures, for instance, is an area where public sentiment often appears at odds with the efficacy data). Moreover, authorities have sometimes been accused of 'spraying on' evidence to justify politically motivated policy choices. Potential mitigations exist in deliberative processes that provide panels of citizens with evidence and involve them in decision making processes. More broadly, there may also be value in nurturing public awareness and demand for evidence in policy making, particularly in the crime and justice arena, where ideas about human agency and responsibility tend to predominate in debates about cause and effect.

An evidence-based culture

The conference also heard about the way evidence-based practice and policy have been brought to the fore as part of a long-term process of national police reform in New Zealand, linked to guiding emphases on prevention and procedural justice. The value of maintaining a capability to rapidly review research evidence in response to major events and disruptions was illustrated, as was the important role played by evidence-informed decision making in negotiating politically charged and controversial issues.

In an operational context, the importance of making research evidence useful, relevant, and accessible to frontline officers was emphasised, as was the way sharing control of the research process with policing's 'critical friends', could help promote dialogue, reconciliation and reform.

Research, and an openness to new sources of expertise, can also offer policing useful mechanisms for self-reflection, allowing questions of culture and legitimacy to be set in a new light, and for systemic inequalities and injustice to be revealed and better understood. An example was provided of a cultural audit conducted in a British police force, where a combination of an external expert perspective, qualitative research and use of sociological, psychological, and neuroscientific theory, had provided staff with new ways of understanding organisational dynamics and address the drivers of discriminatory behaviour. Positive changes were beginning to be observed in staff survey indicators of wellbeing, organisational engagement, and perceived relationships with the community.

Evidence-based improvement then, should be viewed as a key enabler of police cultural change, not just a technical exercise in improving effectiveness. Commitment to reform, however, requires investment, and perhaps the clearest conclusion to emerge from the conference was that police research and development, and its infrastructure for enabling organisational and individual learning, remains significantly under resourced.

Key insights

9. There is significant scope for improving police delivery through applying scientific knowledge, testing and adaptation, but this remains hampered by institutional barriers and underinvestment.
10. Adopting an evidence-based policing philosophy can be a crucial part of cultural and ethical reform, not just a technical exercise in improving effectiveness.

Conclusions

This report does not seek to provide a definitive account of the proceedings of the 2023 Cumberland Lodge Policing Conference. Instead, the authors offer a nuanced reflection on the complex debates that took place – often between those with very different views and experiences – about the role and delivery of policing in the 21st century. Although there was considerable agreement about the problems facing the police, from a crisis in legitimacy, to falling service standards, there was less consensus on the drivers of these problems, or the solutions needed. This often depended on whether participants felt the solution required 'more' or 'less' policing. This debate is not unique to the United Kingdom. Many police agencies across the developed world are facing exactly the same challenges of defining their role, securing public legitimacy and meeting the range of demands placed on them from countless quarters. In the US, for example, the fierce debate triggered by the murder of George Floyd in 2020, and the growth of the Black Lives Matter movement, shows an almost irreconcilable gulf between those who feel the police exist to keep people safe, and those who see them as the tool of oppression; between those who feel the answer to society's ills is more policing, more arrests and tougher sentences, and those who believe these can only be fixed if policing is 'defunded' and the money used to reduce poverty and inequality.

In the same way, the key insights drawn from each of the conference's sessions are not recommendations but seek to show that policing already has access to many of the tools it needs to function effectively in the next decade and beyond. Technology and data can be powerful tools for change, in helping weed out inefficiencies and communicate better with the public and victims, as some forces are already demonstrating. Legitimacy can be built by adopting approaches that prioritise listening to the public, and the workforce, and explaining decision making transparently and openly. Police practice can be improved by encouraging innovation and learning, and by approaches that help the police understand and use 'what works'.

The problems facing policing are wicked (there is no single solution) and complex, many will take time and investment to address. A weekend conference can only hope to sketch them out and gesture towards solutions that may bring change in the longer term. Yet, the abiding message of the conference, as delegates left, was one of hope for the future. The fact that the event brought together an abundance of voices from the police, government, campaigning organisations, charities, academia and the private sector shows that the question of what is the 'right' thing for police do to, and how they should go about it in the 21st Century, is not one for the police alone to answer, but is everyone's business.

References

Buzelli, L., Williamson, S. Gardner, T. and Cameron G. (2023) *Public perceptions of the NHS: a winter of discontent.* London: The Health Foundation. Available at: <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/public-perceptions-of-the-nhs-a-winter-of-discontent>

Charman, S. (2018) *Perspectives on policing: from crime fighting to public protection – the shaping of police officers' sense of role.* Perspectives on Policing. London: The Police Foundation. Available at: <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/publication/perspectives-policing-crime-fighting-public-protection-shaping-police-officers-sense-role/>

College of Policing (2023) *Right Care Right Person toolkit.* College of Policing. Available at < https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/right-care-right-person-toolkit#:~:text=Right%20Care%20Right%20Person%20(RCRP)%20aims%20to%20ensure%20vulnerable%20people,out%20of%20a%20healthcare%20setting>

Duffy, B (2023) *Trust in trouble? UK and international confidence in institutions.* The UK in the World Values Survey. Available at: <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/policy-institute/assets/confidence-in-institutions.pdf>

Higgins, A. (2019) *Understanding the Public's Priorities for Policing.* London: The Police Foundation. Available at: <https://www.police-foundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/understanding-public-priorities-final.pdf>

Loader, I. (2020) *Revisiting the Police Mission: Insight Paper 2 for the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales.* London: The Police Foundation. Available at: <https://policingreview.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/insight_paper_2.pdf>

Sherman, L. (1998) *Evidence-Based Policing. Ideas in American Policing Series.* Washington, DC: Policing Institute. Available at: <https://www.policinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Sherman-1998-Evidence-Based-Policing.pdf>

About the Authors

Ruth Halkon

Researcher, The Police Foundation

Ruth Halkon is a research officer at the Police Foundation. She was a co-author of the *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales,* and, among other things, has written on roads policing and on police contact and public confidence. As well as assisting in running the Police Foundation's busy events programme, she also writes the Society of Evidence Based Policing monthly newsletter. She is currently an independent adviser on the British Transport Police Rape Review Panel. She joined the Foundation from the Metropolitan Police where she served for three years as a police constable in Haringey in North London. Prior to joining the police, she worked as a journalist for local, regional and national newspapers and news agencies. She has a BA in English Literature from the University of Cambridge and an MA in Newspaper Journalism from City University.

Andy Higgins

Research Director, The Police Foundation

Andy joined the Police Foundation in 2013 to lead on analysis and evaluation for the *Police effectiveness in a changing world* project and became the Foundation's Research Director in 2017. He has researched and written on public confidence and technology, public policing priorities, neighbourhood policing, multi-agency case management, supra-force governance and contributed to the *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales*. Before joining the Police Foundation Andy spent nine years working in analytical roles with the Metropolitan Police Service. He has also worked in commercial qualitative and quantitative market research and has degrees from Oxford and the Open Universities.

© 2023 The Police Foundation

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, without the prior permission of The Police Foundation.

Enquiries concerning reproduction should be sent to The Police Foundation.

Email: info@police-foundation.org.uk

www.police-foundation.org.uk

Charity Registration Number: 278257

THE
POLICE
FOUNDATION
The UK's policing think tank