



NPCC Chair Sara Thornton: We must “re-imagine” policing in the UK

20 Jul 2015

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Chief Constable Sara Thornton has today argued that the twin challenges of changing requirements and cost pressure mean that we have to think imaginatively and radically about policing.

Speaking to the Police Foundation, she stated that the service must be focused on getting the right outcomes for the public - which will entail better demand management, a commitment to evidence-based policing, further integration with other organisations and a constant emphasis on legitimacy. Very different workforce skills and a change to leadership culture will be needed.

The Police Foundation's annual John Harris Memorial Lecture has been running since 1983. Previous speakers include Keith Bristow QPM, Sir Thomas Winsor, The Rt Hon Lord Judge and The Rt Hon David Cameron MP.

In her speech, CC Thornton concluded:

“The pressures of changing requirements and significant reductions in the budget demand different approaches. This requires fresh thinking and determined leadership. The establishment of the National Police Chiefs’ Council in April provides an opportunity to reset the way in which chief officers work together: we have been asked to contribute our ideas and we are up for the debate with the public, elected representatives and our staff to inform the “re-imagining of policing’.”

Dr Rick Muir, Director of the Police Foundation said:

“The police service is under unprecedented pressure, having to deal simultaneously with financial austerity and changing patterns of crime. The police need to better understand the changing nature of demand on their services. The rise of cyber crime and growing concern about child sexual exploitation in particular require a wholly different kind of policing. This year's annual Police Foundation lecture by Chief Constable Sara Thornton provides a timely opportunity to reflect on these challenges and consider how the police, the government and citizens can work together to meet them.”

The full text of CC Thornton’s speech is set out below.

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“Re-imagining policing”

Check against delivery

I have attended this annual lecture many times over the last ten years and have always enjoyed being part of the audience. I had never anticipated this role reversal and am genuinely humbled to be following in the footsteps of so many outstanding public servants.

I have also worked with the Police Foundation over the years and been stimulated to think and enjoyed lively debate. As Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police I attended the annual Oxford Policing Policy Forums: a few hours sitting in the Old Library at All Souls provided sanctuary from the pressures of operational policing! More recently, Thames Valley Police has worked very closely with the Foundation on the substantial research project *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World*. The intensive evidence-based work that officers and staff have undertaken with the Foundation is bearing fruit. In two very deprived parts of Slough we have pioneered new ways of working to reduce the violence which is all too endemic in the lives of local people.

I have decided to take as my theme the issues with which I found myself grappling as both a local chief constable and now as Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council. I will argue that the twin pressures of changing requirements and the need for policing to cost less mean that we need to think imaginatively and radically about policing. The aim of the Police Foundation is to promote debate on policing, police reform and tackling crime. I would like to contribute to that debate this evening.

You will all know that old joke about someone asking for directions and the answer is, "I wouldn't start from here". If we were going to design policing for 2020 we would not start from here. We need to look at the problem from different angles.

So my aim in this lecture is to persuade you that we need to re-imagine policing. But in doing so I neither implicitly criticise my fantastically committed and hard working colleagues up and down the country nor do I intend to step into the world of elected politicians.

In respect of the former, as my colleague Chief Superintendent Sutherland says:

"You are brave and you are brilliant. You are capable and you are compassionate. You are fearless and you are funny. You are patient and you are professional. You are long-suffering and you are loyal. You are humble and you are humane. You are inspiring. You are extraordinary. You are the Everyday Heroes and Heroines who police our streets."

Nor do I ignore the advice of Shami Chakrabarti in her 2007 John Harris Memorial Lecture:

"I can certainly sympathise with chief constables who might prefer the microphone to the truncheon and see why ministers love the feel of a bullet proof vest. I can only ask those with senior roles in policing and politics to beware the real dangers of continued constitutional cross-dressing."

I am a police officer not a politician.

When I first became Chair of the National Police Chiefs' Council I had an important discussion with chief constable colleagues about the position we should take with the Government. I knew there was a view that the Association of Chief Police Officers had adopted an overly political position. We have reformed the Association by moving from company status to that of a collaborated unit, hosted by a police force, and are putting all the national functions on a proper footing. We also needed to reset the way in which we worked with a range of stakeholders. Chiefs agreed that it was our role to work with an elected Government and that 90 per cent of our effort should be focussed on operational co-ordination and collaboration. However, it is important I do speak up on behalf of the service.

Government funding to police forces has been cut by about 25 per cent in real terms over the last five years and we are set for similar cuts in the next five to come. HMIC concluded that forces had risen to the challenge of austerity, making £2.5 billion worth of savings and protecting frontline services as best they could. There are numerous examples of sharing staff, buildings and equipment, some with other organisations and some with other police forces. Two thirds of forces are already co-located with other organisations or have plans to do so. Most forces have

significantly reduced expenditure on estates, fleet and procurement and there are a range of innovative approaches to the costs of business support services.

While staff numbers are in no way the measure of productivity, we cannot ignore the fact that the recent National Audit Office report explained that numbers have reduced by 36,000 between March 2010 and September 2014, and most fear that we are set to reduce by another 35,000, from 191,000 to 156,000, over the next spending review period.

When I was Chief Constable of Thames Valley I was always careful to avoid shroud waving. Admittedly, the challenge was not as great in the Thames Valley as some areas because local taxation was a good source of revenue. But I can confidently say we cut budgets but did not cut services. The local MP for Witney quoted my comments to local radio:

"What I haven't done at all is reduce the number of officers who do the patrol functions, so the officers you see in vehicles, on foot, in uniform, on bicycles. We haven't cut those numbers at all."

I do not have a history of crying wolf and I am not doing so now.

Many of my colleagues have commented on the fact there was little discussion of policing in the election campaign. There was no hue and cry about levels of crime or police funding. As an electorate, we elected a Government which made no promises to protect expenditure on policing. The need to restore economic health was seen as the priority and the latest Ipsos MORI polling does not even have crime in the top ten issues that concern the public.

However, the loss of over 70,000 posts in ten years is a game changer. Cutting staff numbers at this level and not changing the way we work will cause service failure and unacceptably stress our staff. The response in the last five years has been about efficiency: we have reduced "supply side" costs, we have done more with less. Forces have re-structured, civilianised, rationalised estate and cut discretionary spend. As the Chief Constable of West Midlands has said, the next five years will be about doing less with greater focus. Public services can cost less but they will have to be delivered differently.

If we "slash and burn" there is no way that we can offer the same protection to the public. We need to create more capacity by taking steps out of process, people out of systems and making our people more productive.

We need to re-imagine the whole system, not incrementally reform.

Recent short term successes, including the fall in traditional crime from 19 million to 7 million since 1995 and steady levels of public confidence, risk masking the need to respond to long term challenges such as globalisation, digitisation and new threats. We need to reappraise our approach - and do so before it is too late.

This lecture is about policing but I think that it has a wider application. Public service reform was at the heart of the Blair Government's ambition and the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit had a central role. It has been fashionable to knock Sir Michael Barber's "deliverology" but, as I have thought about this lecture, I have been struck by the absence of any one big idea about transformation across Government. Nudge, Big Society and What Works have been talked up but have not yet taken off. I have been involved with the Chief of the Defence Staff's strategy forum and Her Majesty's Courts Service transformation steering group. Both are grappling with very similar issues - including looking to technology innovators for inspiration. But it may be that there is no longer one "best way" to deliver public services.

This is categorically not going to be a call for the restructuring of policing. Restructuring is not the silver bullet that will solve the funding gaps and the twin rocks of local taxation differences and local politics which undid Charles Clarke's attempts to restructure nine years ago remain. Following the introduction of local Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012, they are arguably harder and rockier.

We live in a world that is digitally enabled and globally connected and this is having a tremendous impact on policing. We see this in the terrorist threat, in people trafficking, in organised crime, child sexual abuse and fraud.

Many new crimes have been enabled and some old ones made easier. Fraud is one example and it is estimated that, in the next Crime Survey of England and Wales, over three million frauds will be reported. These will be perpetrated from all over the world. While support for victims and prevention will need to be focussed in territorial policing, it is clear that work to track down the offenders will need to be national and international.

David Anderson's recent report on interception and communications data illustrates the extent to which digitalisation facilitates crime. He argues that:

"There are individuals who will take advantage of any unpatrolled space to groom, abuse, blackmail, steal secrets from, threaten, defraud and plot destructive acts of terrorism against others. Any state that claims to protect its citizens must have the ability effectively to detect, disrupt and prosecute such behaviour. The central issue is how that ability can be combined with the expectation of privacy which law-abiding people have and deserve.

"There may be all sorts of reasons - not least, secure encryption - why it is not physically possible to intercept a particular communication, or track a particular individual. But the power to do so needs to exist, even if it is only usable in cases where skill or trickery can provide a way around the obstacle. Were it to be otherwise, entire channels of communication could be reduced to lawless spaces in which freedom is enjoyed only by the strong, and evil of all kinds can flourish."

The report focused on terrorism but we also see the loss of police capability in the day-to-day of policing. It affects our ability to track down and safeguard the self-harming missing teenager, lost child or person suffering a mental health crisis.

The College of Policing's recent work on demand illustrates very clearly the way in which demand is changing as "traditional" acquisitive crime falls and information crime, internet-enabled crime and crimes targeting the vulnerable increase. The offences that are becoming more prevalent require different skills and expertise and necessitate greater levels of cross-organisational working.

Responding to the abuse of children is probably the greatest challenge facing the service. There are many high profile investigations, a massive increase in reporting and long standing difficulties in the response to the exploitation of the most vulnerable young people. It has been estimated that the number of investigations in forces will have risen 88 per cent since 2012. Operation Hydrant, which maintains an overview of all high profile and institutional investigations, has 1,500 nominal records.

The challenge is enormous but can be met if we focus on effective policing, pursue integration and re-shape the workforce.

The need for policing to respond to changing requirements and to cost less will require us to ensure that all we do is focused on the right outcomes. We will need to manage demand and ensure our policing strategies are effective and evidence-based. We will need to ensure the way in which we police is driven by the need to maintain legitimacy.

Public sector organisations, including the police, rarely have sole control of the process for producing the public service for which they are responsible. They rely on information, compliance and effort from a wide range of actors including the public. Or, in other words, the Peelian principle that police officers are only those members of the public who give full-time attention to the responsibilities of all citizens remains as relevant in 2015 as it did in 1829.

"Public value" theory prompts us to think about the value we are trying to create. What outcomes are we delivering for the citizen? The Harvard professor Mark Moore's ideas prompted several think tanks to advocate this approach about ten years ago and we have just started to think about its application to policing!

So what are the police for? What is the value we are trying to create in policing? What is the purpose of a police force? The activities it carries out are not an end in themselves but a means to an end. But what end? Is the purpose to patrol the streets? Is it to reduce crime? Or is it to make people feel safer? The more broadly the purpose is framed, the more we are able to think of different ways of achieving the desired effect.

It could be argued that the performance management of the 1980s onwards focused too much on outputs or results. Not only did it fail by Goodhart's Rule that, when a measure becomes a target, it ceases to be a good measure - but also because focusing on outputs means we limit the different ways to think about outcomes. As the Australian academic John Alford said we need to "think expansively about ultimate purpose, and concomitantly, about means of realising them."

In our recent response to the National Debate Advisory Group report on *Reshaping Policing for the Public*, chiefs said that:

"Within the context of reducing budgets and changing demand the police service can continue to provide service and protection but it will have to be delivered in different ways – not all may be initially favoured by the public or political commentators. We are determined to be as innovative as possible in meeting these challenges."

And in that context, is visible patrol a feature of policing which may be the right response in some circumstances rather than an end in itself? When budgets were larger we could afford higher levels of visible patrol and we have increased visibility in recent years with more Special Constables and Police Community Support Officers. But is that sustainable?

We need an honest conversation about what policing is here to do, not only now but also up to and beyond 2020, in recognition of the changing operating environment and significantly reduced resources resulting from the public sector spending cuts and austerity measures.

The report of the Independent Police Commission, published in November 2013, argued that the police role was not limited to crime fighting and that it had a broader social mission to improve the safety and well-being of communities and promote measures to prevent crime, harm and disorder. And while the vast majority of my colleagues support that broader role, it does come at a cost.

The broad role of the police as the service of last resort puts huge demands on policing. I fear that in promoting accessibility, we have not always done enough to encourage people to engage with the appropriate organisation, adding cost and complexity. And policing is 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so after 4pm on Friday the public turn to the police as a first resort. But is this affordable?

The recent work on demand by the College of Policing showed that only 22 per cent of police incidents are about crime and that, of the remaining police incidents, 15 to 20 per cent are linked to mental health issues. I am not arguing there is no role for the police but why are we called to other public institutions to restrain patients who have become violent?

We also need to tackle "failure demand", which is the work created when we do not do things right for the public first time. Insufficient information on our websites and poorly worded letters or emails can all cause avoidable work in call centres.

So we need to focus on managing the demand placed upon policing and this is not just compiling a list of things that we will not do. We tried that several years ago. Some might recall Ingrid Posen's 1995 work on core and ancillary tasks, which resulted in our losing responsibility to escort wide loads, and that was all. If we are to think wisely about demand then we need to think about the whole system - we need to think about working with partner organisations to take mainstream policing upstream to focus on prevention and early intervention. This accords with the Peelian

principle that states "the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them."

Malcolm Gladwell uses the example of Million-Dollar Murray. Murray Barr was an ex-marine with a very bad drink problem in Reno Nevada. He was homeless and was constantly being arrested, taken to hospital or put on detox programmes. The local officers who dealt with him day-in and day-out got so fed-up of the revolving door for people like Murray, and the fact that 50 per cent of their time was spent dealing with similar problems, which they tried to work out how much it was costing the state. And over 10 years they calculated that it would cost a million dollars. Hence Million-Dollar Murray!

Louise Casey's excellent Troubled Families initiative is an example of this kind of approach. Many public services are focused on a small number of people and families - all responding to the symptoms but not really addressing the causes. However, if a range of practitioners work together effectively they can be more effective at tackling causes, as well as responding to symptoms. The efficiencies will be found through public services exploiting the grey areas between silos. We need to understand the totality of the issues in an area and address them by thinking and acting more horizontally.

Innovative thinking has often led us to collaboration and I am convinced that we need to share resources across forces. Indeed, we have had a 87 per cent increase in national level mutual aid compared with last year. The recent National Debate Advisory Group report recommended we standardise and scale-up specialist capabilities to cross-force or regional structures. We have already agreed to scale-up undercover capabilities, prison intelligence and digital forensics - this will continue.

Working together makes sense if we are ever to go upstream and prevent harm rather than merely respond to it. The Cities and Local Government Devolution Bill provides an opportunity to bring more public services together through a shared budget and common objectives. But is the answer collaboration or integration? Collaboration can so often feel sub-optimal. The local join-up to protect vulnerable people can often result in two people rather than one attending a meeting. It cannot be efficient for colleagues to attend meetings which last many hours when only 20 per cent of the agenda is relevant. Multi-agency safeguarding hubs are a great idea, but so often we have staff from several organisations all in one room filling their own databases with the same information and doubling-up when they see clients. I think we need multi-disciplinary teams: managing and being managed by people from other sectors focused on the shared endeavours of delivering public value and reducing the opportunity for individuals to harm others.

We then need to be employing effective tactics. What is the evidence that what we do works? What do we know about preventing crime?

One of the original proponents of evidence-based medicine, Archie Cochrane, argued:

"If we are ever going to get the 'optimum' results from our national expenditure on the NHS we must finally be able to express the results in the form of the benefit and cost to the population of a particular activity, and the increased benefit that could be obtained if more money were made available."

This works on two levels in policing. Firstly, we need to be able to demonstrate that public money spent on policing is well spent on delivering benefits to the public, but also the lack of money should drive us to be even more demanding about the need for evidence of effectiveness.

In the response to the recent National Debate Advisory Group report the NPCC argued that police visibility is not an end in itself but a useful tactic when tackling certain problems. The essential part is the accessibility of local policing to local people, not wall-to-wall coverage of local policing teams irrespective of threat, risk and harm. Some chiefs argued this as a matter of financial necessity, but others would have in mind the US Police Foundation's Kansas City preventive patrol experiment.

As George Kelling wrote in the introduction to that 1974 report:

"Ever since the creation of a patrolling force in 13th century Hangchow preventive patrol by uniformed personnel has been a primary function of policing. Police themselves, the general public, and elected officials have always believed that the presence of police officers on patrol severely inhibits criminal activity."

The report went on to show that across 15 large beats, neither increasing nor decreasing the number of marked police cars assigned to routine patrol had an effect on crime, service delivery to citizens or citizen's feelings of security.

However, some of you will know that the evidence does not end there. When Larry Sherman demonstrated that over half of all crime was concentrated in around 5 per cent of locations, the idea of focusing patrols on those crime "hot spots" sparked a generation of police experiments - almost all of which show that more policing of hot spots does reduce crime. In the Minneapolis experiment, Sherman and David Weisburd found, "clear if modest general deterrent effects of substantial increases in police presence in crime hot spots". Anthony Braga's 2012 review of 20 similar studies found that 17 showed noteworthy reductions. Since then, Barak Ariel has found crime reductions from extra patrols at hot spot experiments on the London Underground, in Birmingham and in Peterborough. And in 2012 David Weisburd won the Stockholm Prize in Criminology for showing that crime reductions in hot spots rarely lead to displacement of crime to nearby locations.

Hot spot policing is one of the strongest examples of using research to improve policing and, therefore, being able to demonstrate effectiveness. It shows that patrol is effective when targeted on pretty small areas but not when it is random and lacking in focus. Moreover, separate experiments in Philadelphia suggest that foot patrol is effective in some kinds of hot spots and offender-focused policing is effective in other kinds of hot spots. So the evidence does not show that "bobbies on the beat" is an outdated idea but that it can be effective as part of data-driven targeting of preventive patrol.

British public and elected officials are no different from the American ones described by George Kelling - they believe in a general inhibiting effect of patrol - but maybe it is time for a wider public debate that is informed by the evidence?

We need to adopt evidence-based management which Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton describe as:

"A willingness to put aside belief and conventional wisdom, the dangerous half truths that many embrace, and replace these with an unrelenting commitment to gather the necessary facts to make more informed and intelligent decisions."

Lastly, we need to maintain the legitimacy of the police in the eyes of the public. There is a growing body of evidence which shows people obey the laws which disadvantage them personally if those laws are applied fairly. These findings support what is known as "procedural justice theory". It has some similarities with nudge concepts, in that procedural justice places emphasis on normative or non-forced compliance. So the way in which police officers exercise their powers impacts on the need for enforcement. David Smith argued that, "the bottom line is that maintaining police legitimacy means actively cultivating the values and ethics of policing as a profession." The professional model values expertise, independent judgement and ethical values. And I will return to that later.

The sort of organisation that I envisage - clear about public value, focused on what works and providing integrated services at all levels - will require very different skills and expertise. And as I said at the beginning, I am not criticising my current colleagues in any way, but we need to develop new skills among our existing staff and bring in people with new skills.

Importantly, I think that the challenge of securing the right skills and expertise is about the leadership of the service, but it is also about those who do the job – in particular the 100,000 constables. The recent Leadership Review by the

College of Policing focuses on the need for expertise and emphasises the importance of valuing expertise and not hierarchy, with emphasis placed on what officers and staff know rather than what rank they hold. The report calls for a, "fundamental change in the way we equip the whole police workforce with leadership skills and knowledge". The College has a vital role in developing professional practice that is ethically based and informed by the evidence.

I can think of three areas where current practice does not facilitate this professional approach; the reward package, the rank-based approach to professional knowledge and the supervision of officers.

The current reward package focuses on rank and time served and, if we are to implement a model based on expertise, then there will need to be a radically different approach to pay and conditions. But we surely have to move away from a model where a constable with six years service is paid the same, whether they have numerous accredited skills and significant expertise or not? Generation Y is not looking for a step-ladder shaped career - but for an individual's unique skills and contribution to be recognised.

The challenge is how we move from the current structure to something that will facilitate the development and retention of the specialist skills required in policing in the future. And a very hard part of that work will be to ensure that we unpick the complexity of a workforce model where we have police officers with warrants who never use them and police staff who use legal powers on a daily basis.

It has often struck me that we have an approach to knowledge which gives constables a little and tests them on it, sergeants a little more and tests them on it and then inspectors a little more and tests them on it. This approach to examination on promotion builds in dependence and undermines professional independence.

Likewise, we still have a very heavy supervisory structure. Police officers do make extremely significant decisions, yet these are largely done on the street and supervision is mainly confined to checking the database entries back at the station. This is not another call for sergeants to go on patrol but to equip professional officers properly and then let them get on with it. We need professionally confident officers and staff who work comfortably across organisations, understand others and are able to exert influence and form alliances. We need to be looking outwards at every level.

Similarly, the College Leadership Review focused on the need to have a leadership culture where challenge is welcomed and there is openness to change. A focus on ethics and evidence will facilitate a more challenging approach. However, it is also clear that the "wicked problems" which we face need a more collective approach to leadership. We need to harness the contribution of the team. The one "heroic leader" cannot both define and solve the sort of problems that confront policing in 2015, let alone 2020.

The track record of change in policing is varied. The occupational culture is very strong and tends to look back to a glorious heyday which never existed. And, as David Weisburd and Anthony Braga observed in the US context:

"Police departments are highly resistant to change and police officers often experience difficulty in implementing new programs."

And it is not just policing in the 21st Century. Reluctance to change was highlighted by Machiavelli in *The Prince*:

"There is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order, this lukewarmness arising partly from fear of their adversaries ... and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who do not truly believe in anything new until they have had actual experience of it."

However, the pressures of changing requirements and significant reductions in the budget demand different approaches. This requires fresh thinking and determined leadership. The establishment of the National Police Chiefs' Council in April provides an opportunity to reset the way in which chief officers work together: we have been asked to

contribute our ideas and we are up for the debate with the public, elected representatives and our staff to inform the “re-imagination of policing”.

Download the speech here

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