



THE POLICE FOUNDATION

The UK's policing think tank

The future of
neighbourhood policing
How to deliver locally
preventative policing at a time
of austerity

September 2017

Background

The principle that dedicated local police officers and Police Community Support Officers should be embedded in and responsive to the problems of the communities they serve has long been a bedrock idea in British policing. There is good evidence that when implemented well, neighbourhood policing can deliver positive outcomes in terms of crime and antisocial behaviour, feelings of safety and confidence in the police.

In a policing context increasingly dominated by vulnerability and online crime, many aspects of the neighbourhood policing approach remain fundamental. *The Policing Vision 2025* spells out a commitment to shift the focus of local policing from reactive to proactive activities, based on a sophisticated understanding of community needs, improved analytics and increased multi-agency integration. In the wake of recent terrorist incidents, the case for 'grass-roots' intelligence gathering through strong community connections, has also gained urgency. However, from a point of relative uniformity, following the roll-out of the national Neighbourhood Policing Programme in the mid-2000s, the form taken by neighbourhood policing across England and Wales has shifted and diversified. New policing models adopted in response to emerging patterns of demand, budgetary challenges and a radically altered partnership picture, have resulted in considerable variation in the size, structure and remit of local police teams – as well as in the names by which they are known.

While local engagement and informed proactivity has remained strong in some areas, HMIC has warned that in others *“forces’ ability to prevent crime and reduce demand will be seriously undermined if their neighbourhood teams are materially eroded”*. With further deterioration noted in 2017, a process to formalise evidence-based 'national principles' on the 'essential elements' of neighbourhood policing is now underway, led by the College of Policing.

To explore these themes further, the Police Foundation and KPMG brought together a select group of decision makers from across the policing community for the third in a series of policing policy dinners to consider questions, such as:

- What has happened to neighbourhood policing to date and what are the implications of these new models for policing local communities?
- What role do neighbourhood officers have in tackling complex crime threats such as cybercrime, fraud and terrorism and are current neighbourhood teams doing this?
- How can neighbourhood teams be maintained in an ongoing context of constrained finances?
- Where has neighbourhood policing seemingly achieved positive outcomes and can these examples of best practice be applied more widely?

The session began with a short presentation of emerging findings from the Police Foundation's *Future of neighbourhood policing* project.

Neighbourhood policing in 2017

All attendees were in agreement that the traditional model of neighbourhood policing, with officers patrolling every neighbourhood up and down the country, talking with residents as they went was, unfortunately, now a thing of the past. The discussion focused on how the police should best move forward at a time when austerity and dwindling budgets are coinciding with a 'tsunami of demand' from the public.

A number of issues were covered during the discussion, with attendees focused on the most pressing questions currently facing the neighbourhood policing approach; targeted versus universal coverage, speciality neighbourhood roles versus 'hybrid' models and the importance of keeping up with shifts in local communities - whether that is an increase in diversity or an upsurge in online activity, particularly among the young.

There was agreement among participants on several issues but on others, differences in opinion which led to an interesting and thought-provoking discussion.

It was suggested that idealised notions of 'community' did not apply nationwide, with some commenting that in their towns and cities there were 'communities of oppression' with long and troubled histories of regular contact with the police. Yet it was stressed that neighbourhood policing as a model of interaction was more essential than ever, particularly for addressing vulnerability within 'hard-to-reach' communities, especially when considering the increased risk of radicalisation and terrorist activity, online fraud and serious organised crime.

Universal versus targeted coverage; spray or steam setting?

Attendees were in agreement that if police funding continued to decrease, it is unthinkable for the police to continue to cover *all* bases. Thus tough and unpalatable decisions have to be made, with some attendees likening it to opting for the 'least worst option'. It was agreed by all that it was paramount that the police are always able to respond to emergencies within an acceptable time frame. Similarly, the police must retain the capability to respond to terrorism and large scale public order incidents. Yet there was an acceptance that at current staffing levels the police cannot continue to effectively do so while also resourcing neighbourhood policing in its traditional form.

A number of attendees focused on the need to determine where a locally focused preventative resource was most needed. It was suggested that emergency response and major investigations are often likely to be preferred to visible neighbourhood police patrols, as their results are easier to quantify and the public need is more immediate. A desire to maintain the long-standing model of local officers regularly engaging with local residents was identified as unrealistic by some attendees, stating that among some personnel there is still a false hope that the 'cavalry are coming' and budgets will soon recover.

The analogy of a household cleaning spray was used to help illustrate one potential approach to the current dilemma. '

The police should offer the public two distinct 'settings' based on local risk profile; the 'spray' for the general population, a 'general mist of awareness' that the police are active in their area and available to them when required, and the 'steam' for areas or communities of particular concern, where the police could concentrate precious resources on individuals who really required dedicated resources and where more often than not police officers are in need of local intelligence.

Public demand and the police

There was concern expressed that while tough questions do need to be made, corrosion of the universal service offer could lead to questioning from the public about how their taxes are being spent. Populations who may not be considered in greatest need of police services (for instance those in more affluent areas with lower levels of crime) are often the most demanding of neighbourhood officer attention, and most involved in local politics, therefore sustained efforts must be made to educate the public that the police can no longer fulfill certain localised roles in all areas due to the financial reality they currently face. Some attendees stressed that the police need to be as direct and honest as possible with the public in order to explain this prioritisation of key roles.

Yet there were reservations among some attendees about just how significantly a lack of physical neighbourhood presence would actually impact on public satisfaction with the police. Recent statistics were quoted that demonstrate that while there had been a notable fall in the number of people who reported recently having seen a uniformed

officer in their neighbourhood, there was no equivalent decline in public satisfaction with the police service. Some attendees suggested that these figures provided further support for a more segmented model of local policing.

It was suggested that a large majority of the population do not currently, and perhaps do not wish to, actively engage with their local neighbourhood officers on a regular basis. This observation provided further support for a reduction in visibility and engagement in lower risk communities, with some advocating a diversion of resources to where they are most desperately needed; resources being allocated by need above all else. In order to enable a more segmented approach there was a suggestion that increased police activity online could plug the gap, along with increased attempts to encourage the public to see the internet as an ideal medium for more functional police contact.

Online communities, digital neighbourhoods

Attendees agreed that the traditional notion of community had changed drastically and that for large swathes of the public, particularly those under 30, their 'communities' were now primarily online. Among teenagers and young people a lot of their interactions (with friends, family and even their school) are now digital; therefore they may expect any interaction with the police to be similar.

There was an expressed anxiety that the police service as a whole, was still failing to recognise the importance of establishing a proper trusted presence in the online space. It was suggested that some senior leaders still expressed reluctance about the value of digital engagement. While many UK police forces have begun experimenting with social media platforms as far back as 2008/2009 (with all forces now having established some form of presence across the web) there was a suggestion that there was still a long way to go, especially in terms of public understanding that the police were online and digitally capable.

With regard to a more differentiated approach it was suggested that social media and digital services could provide the general population 'mist'. Such an approach could free up significant officer hours to focus on the most urgent response and public protection matters. There was an agreement that at present online policing services are used by comparatively small sections of the national population. Attendees stressed that it was vital that both the public and the police saw the online

medium as one of the primary methods for communication. Efforts are currently ongoing in a number of forces to receive and deal with crime reports online, one example of a move away from the traditional method of reporting crime to your local neighbourhood officers.

Diversity across the police service

There was lengthy discussion around the importance of police forces representing the diversity present in their neighbourhoods, whether in terms of ethnicity, religion or social background. While the police service has gradually become more diverse over the past decade it is still far from being representative of the local population in a number of geographical areas.

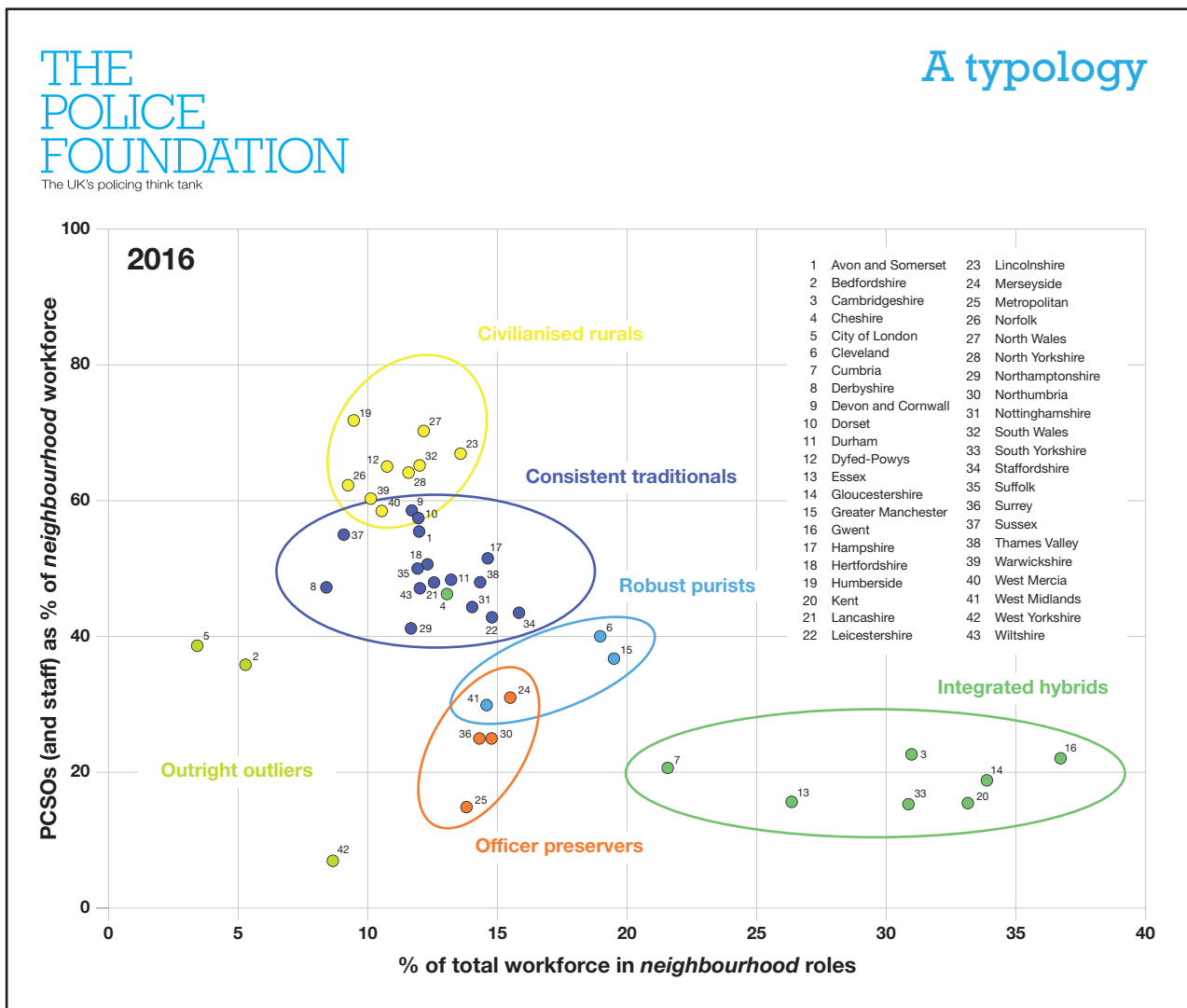
The importance of locally engaged policing for delivering 'policing by consent' was emphasised. In a more operational sense it is felt that local communities continue to provide their neighbourhood officers with intelligence on local crime activity. If the community view their local police as outsiders, with whom they share no common experience or identity, it is unlikely they will see them as trustworthy. In certain, particularly urban areas, it was particularly important that officers were trusted by the community, as an important dimension of ongoing activity to prevent violent extremism. Without a significant and sufficiently diverse neighbourhood offering it is possible that key information will never reach the ears of an officer.

'Bespoke' neighbourhood roles or 'hybrid' models of policing

The Policing Vision 2025 indicated a desire to shift neighbourhood policing's focus from reactive to proactive. There was discussion among attendees about whether such an approach is possible if certain forces push ahead with hybrid models of neighbourhood officers.

There was therefore some discussion over

whether the police should separate neighbourhood policing roles from other primarily response or investigation based responsibilities. Some attendees argued for a bespoke form of neighbourhood officers, with a unique training programme, who are given free rein to continue neighbourhood duties without fear of being dragged away to other tasks. Whether such a model was financially viable was discussed.



Findings presented in the Police Foundation's report 'Neighbourhood policing: a police force typology' 2017

Collaboration across the public sector

Attendees noted that while there had been 20 per cent cuts in police budgets, public sector agencies, who face similar demands to the police at the neighbourhood level, had faced cuts of 40 per cent or more. This led to a discussion of the potential for increased collaboration across hard-pressed agencies. A number of examples of police collaboration with agencies including mental health services and housing services were cited. Attendees agreed that in many cases the different agencies are providing a similar service and it may be in everyone's interest - including the public's - that decisions are made about which agency should lead on such cases. All the services in question wish to engage with the same sections of the community, it therefore makes sense for some of the responsibility to be shared.

Individual examples where members of the public had a distrust of certain public-facing agencies, and thus preferred to deal with any available alternative, were outlined. An individual may be suspicious of mental health professionals, for example, and thus will only request contact with a police officer, or vice versa, and local multi-stakeholder teams must be flexible enough to reflect these preferences. It was stressed that while cooperation should certainly increase, the police must be wary of allowing service remits and identities to become too blurred. While there are many similarities in the services being provided, the police still play

a very specific role and any suggestion of a general all-round public servant was dismissed as unwise. It was agreed that there was no reason why collaboration should dissolve clear distinctions between service roles.

The national policy vacuum

Attendees agreed that while the national model of neighbourhood policing, established during the mid-2000s, may have rightly, given way to a more nuanced local variation, a national perspective and overview should still be maintained. There was a call for more comparative work *between* forces and improved frameworks for the sharing of best practice, especially when most forces were experiencing similar constraints on their budget.

It was suggested that a policy vacuum currently exists in Westminster, due to Brexit demands, and therefore any hope for government-led innovative policy measures in this area was misplaced. It was stated that at present there is little sign of significant central policy innovation around this topic.

**Authored by Kieran Lewis
Policy and Research Officer
The Police Foundation**

Attendees

The session was held under the Chatham House Rule, however a full list of attendees can be found below.

David Boyle	Chief Superindendent, Bedfordshire Police
Richard Cooper	Superintendent, Gloucestershire Police
Hardyal Dhindsa	Police and Crime Commissioner, Derbyshire Police
Juliette Everett	Superintendent, Bedfordshire Police
Nicholas Fox	KPMG
Dr Yvonne Hail	Research Fellow, The Unity Project
Andy Higgins	Research Director, The Police Foundation
Marianne Huison	Superintendent, West Yorkshire Police
David Jamieson	Police and Crime Commissioner, West Midlands Police
Martin Jelley	Chief Constable, Warwickshire Police
Andrew Lea	KPMG
Kieran Lewis	Policy and Research Officer, The Police Foundation
Rory Leyne	KPMG
Gareth Morgan	Chief Constable, Staffordshire Police
Dr Rick Muir	Director, The Police Foundation
Emma Taylor	Chief Inspector, Greater Manchester Police
Dave Thompson	Chief Constable, West Midlands Police
Paddy Tipping	Police and Crime Commissioner, Nottinghamshire Police
Tom Silva	Hadley Trust
Viv Tong	KPMG

The Police Foundation and KPMG would like to thank all of the attendees for their contributions to this session. Any further comments or feedback is very welcome and should be directed to **Kieran.Lewis@police-foundation.org.uk**

About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation was founded in 1979 and is the only independent charity focused entirely on influencing policing policy and practice (and related issues) through research, policy analysis and training/consultancy. Its core aim is to challenge the police service and government to improve policing for the benefit of the public. Since its inception, the Police Foundation has become an influential think tank on a wide range of police-related issues, working closely with external funders and other third sector organisations.

About KPMG

KPMG's policing team offers practical advice and experience to help enable clients design, deliver and implement real change. We have worked with over 30 police forces in the UK on their most strategic challenges, from the design and implementation of new operating models and implementation of new technologies, to the creation of platforms for sharing information. Our knowledgeable team uses data to prioritise improvements. They bring well-established techniques to improve frontline performance, enhance customer centricity and increase efficiency. Most importantly, our team help police forces develop these skills so that our work is not a one-off, but helps empower our clients to continue to adapt and improve outcomes. We offer insight from, and access to, our global network to give a different perspective on how other countries and sectors are managing similar complex challenges.