

# Prioritisation in a changing world: seven challenges for policing

Gavin Hales and Andy Higgins – The Police Foundation, September 2016

*Confronted with shrinking budgets, a wide and growing remit, and the withdrawal of Whitehall from setting priorities and targets, Police and Crime Commissioners and police forces have to decide which aspects of the police role are most important and where to prioritise their resources. And they must do so in the context of changing crime, communities and social values, while being subject to many forms of accountability, scrutiny and pressure. In this paper we draw on our observations from five years conducting research in two police forces, and our reflections on police policy developments more broadly, to identify seven challenges that confront efforts to prioritise police resources. We end with a series of recommendations.*

## **The Police Effectiveness in a Changing World project and why we are interested in prioritisation**

The *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project set out to investigate how local police services might respond more effectively to the challenges presented by global socio-economic and technological change, at a time when they are themselves in the process of significant organisational transformation.<sup>1</sup> From 2011 to 2015,

working in two English towns – Luton and Slough – that had experienced the local impacts of global change acutely, the Police Foundation worked with the police and their community safety partners to identify persistent local crime problems, improve how these were understood, develop and implement appropriate interventions, and assess both the process of implementation and the outcomes that resulted.<sup>2</sup> In Luton the eventual focus was on burglary, while in Slough it was on recurrent violence. In the process it was hoped that valuable lessons might be learned about the routes to, enablers for and dependencies of effective policing under current conditions and in the context of change.

In addition to two lengthy reports that document the full five-year project cycle in each town and that will be published later this year, a number of issues emerged that we at the Police Foundation are addressing through five shorter thematic papers. These seek to build on our local experiences and observations and contribute to national policy debates. The first paper, published in July 2016, provided a brief synopsis of the story of our project in Luton and Slough, considered

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/projects/police-effectiveness-project>.

<sup>2</sup> The Police Effectiveness Project in a Changing World project was in effect a particularly thorough problem-oriented policing project, and to that end followed the SARA process of Scanning, Analysis, Response (intervention) and Assessment (evaluation) (Eck and Spelman, 1987).

the key dimensions of change that we encountered there, discussed the notion of police effectiveness, and introduced the concept of *informed proactivity*.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper we examine the challenges for the police service of prioritising finite resources at a time of significant change, having observed first-hand how hard that is and what it can mean for service delivery.

- We start by drawing on our observations from Slough and especially Luton.
- We then briefly set out the national context and examine the priorities in the 43 Police and Crime Plans in place across England and Wales at the time of writing (May/June 2016) to see what they tell us about how Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) approach prioritisation.
- Next we identify seven prioritisation challenges that confront the police service.
- Finally, we identify a number of questions for the police service to consider, and make five recommendations about the way forward.

First, however, we briefly address the question of why prioritisation is necessary in policing.

## **Why do the police need to prioritise?**

Three purposes can be identified in what is simultaneously a practical and moral exercise:

1. Priorities express the *values* of the police service to the public, other agencies and the police workforce: what is considered to be most important and how it should be ordered. In doing so they should provide clarity of (common) purpose and help police officers and staff balance competing demands on their time.
2. In a system of *democratic accountability*, as we have with PCCs, prioritisation identifies the issues against which the elected leader should be judged by the electorate, both morally (what

they stand for) and practically (what is to be/has been achieved).

3. Prioritisation identifies where finite and increasingly scarce *resources* will be invested – largely limited to those that are discretionary<sup>4</sup>, mindful of opportunity cost considerations and value for money.<sup>5</sup> Linked to the notion of *informed proactivity* that we developed in our previous paper, effective policing requires priorities to be identified against which activity can be planned and appropriate capabilities developed.

The first and second emphasise professional and political values while the third is more managerial in nature.

*Priorities express the values and purpose of the police service, the issues against which elected leaders should be judged, and identify where discretionary resources will be invested.*

<sup>3</sup> Higgins and Hales (2016).

<sup>4</sup> These have themselves become increasingly limited and are mediated by choices about structures and operating models, which relate to the efficient and effective use of such resources.

<sup>5</sup> Under section 35 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, chief constables have a statutory duty to ensure that they, and anyone under their direction and control, secures 'good value for money'. It is worth saying that the way austerity was applied to policing, with all forces having their government grant cut by the same percentage, meant that forces that are disproportionately reliant on central government grant were hit hardest (NAO, 2015). Arguably it is in these forces that prioritisation has been most important – and also difficult.

## Prioritisation in Luton and Slough

In broad terms, across the five years that we worked in Luton (located within the Bedfordshire Police area) and Slough (Thames Valley Police area) we observed police priorities changing and prioritisation becoming increasingly difficult, reflecting national-level developments.

In many ways it was fortunate that our eventual project focus in Slough was on recurrent violence, which aligned well with the growing focus (locally and nationally) on harm and vulnerability and was seen as 'everybody's business'. As a result it generated significant and consistent buy-in from the police and their local community safety partners.

By contrast, the project focus on burglary in Luton suffered from the way burglary was progressively deprioritised, particularly by non-police community safety partners during the course of the intervention year. Partners increasingly took the view that burglary should be a 'business as usual' police concern rather than something requiring a partnership response. This took place as the number of formal police and Community Safety Partnership priorities in Luton (and more widely across Bedfordshire) proliferated as new social issues gained prominence, such as child sexual exploitation (CSE), 'modern slavery' and female genital mutilation (FGM).

Given the impact that this process had on our work in Luton we inevitably paid closer attention to how the police and their partners prioritised their resources there. We observed what appeared to be an undercurrent of risk aversion, where priorities were apparently listed not for objective reasons of scale and impact, which in many cases were poorly understood, but for a range of more political reasons including to mitigate the risk that the police and their partners could be accused of not taking a

particular issue seriously. This is reflected in the comments of local authority officers and a police officer in Luton who we interviewed

***We observed an undercurrent of risk aversion, where priorities were apparently listed for reputational rather than objective reasons.***

during the 'intervention year' of the Burglary Reduction Initiative that we developed with the police and their partners, and which ran from August 2014 to July 2015:

*"Every local authority in the country, I think, is terrified of being the next Rotherham or Rochdale or Oxford [where prominent CSE cases have been reported]"*

*"[Priority areas are those where] we could get it wrong, there'll be a big story".*

*"Child Sexual Exploitation is probably an example... Is it as much a priority because we know it's going on, or is it a priority because we feel it's very important to have it as a priority to make that statement?"*

*"The whole process of undertaking strategic assessment and setting your own priorities feels a bit of a falsehood. We went into that process... We looked at all of the data. We spoke to all of our partners... [but it] just feels entirely predictable, because we couldn't not have CSE as a priority because the national message is you have to make this a priority... We couldn't not have domestic violence as a priority... it almost feels that our priorities, realistically, are dictated to us in advance".*

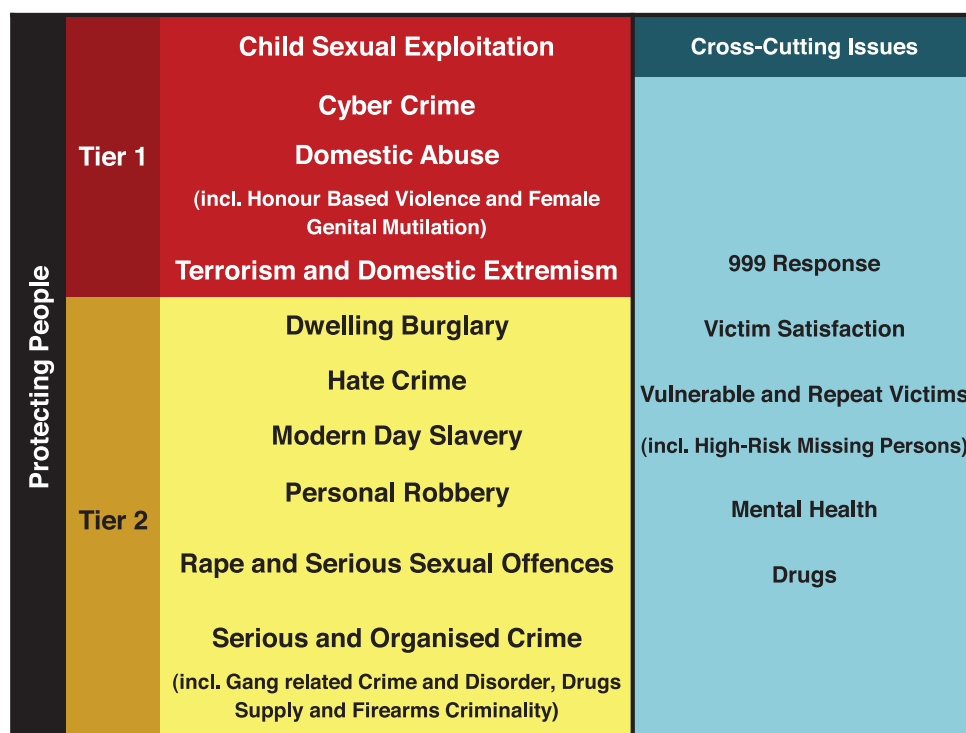
It was also suggested by a local authority officer in Luton that priorities were partly set in order to protect existing funding arrangements, emphasising a financial imperative to maintain the status quo:

*"...the absolute fear is the minute you say [something is] not a priority, the resource that it has around it would be lost. So you sort of fight to keep it as a priority in order to maintain the resources around it".*

There was also a sense that priorities were, again at least in part, fitted to existing working arrangements, here in the remarks of a police officer based in Luton:

*"The resources and the structure seem to pre-date the Strategic Assessment in the sense that, yes, there was already leads in place with plans that are already one year old in a three year cycle that seem to match up to what the Strategic Assessment told us was a*

# Control Strategy Priorities Update June 2015



**This informs:**  
How we deploy our resources

How we task

How we focus our partnership activity

Where we focus our intelligence gathering

Where we focus our training and knowledge building

**Figure 1: Bedfordshire Police Control Strategy Priorities, June 2015 Update**

*priority...the Strategic Assessment fulfilled what we already thought was a priority".*

These processes then seemed to encourage not just the maintenance of priorities from one year to the next, but also the addition of new priorities where demanded either by analysis, or more commonly small 'p' political considerations and external pressures.

Towards the end of our intervention year the Bedfordshire Police Control Strategy listed 21 'priority' issues (see Figure 1 above)<sup>6</sup>, an Annual Delivery Plan listed further objectives and plans (for example, to increase the reporting of under-reported crimes), while the PCC's Police and Crime Plan (which referred to the Control Strategy) listed 18 commitments.

In Luton, one implication of the apparent lack of clarity about priorities, and the misgivings expressed about

prioritisation processes by local practitioners, was that a number of our individual partners described feeling uncertain about how to manage their time on a day-to-day basis and which projects and initiatives they could commit to. This was reflected in mixed views among those involved in the Burglary Reduction Initiative about whether it was a good use of their time. One went so far as to describe "*feeling guilty [about] the things you make time for*".

Meanwhile, in contrast to the more stable arrangements in Thames Valley (Slough), the policing model deployed in Bedfordshire (Luton) went through a number of iterations during the life of our *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project, with changing force-level priorities at least in part reflecting changes in senior police leadership and the impact of events including financial pressures (a brief summary is provided below).

- At the start of the project Bedfordshire was operating a standard policing model for the time

<sup>6</sup> Bedfordshire Police (2015a).

including a commitment to neighbourhood policing.

- This began to shift from 2011 to a more centralised model focused on crime performance (particularly in respect of serious acquisitive crime), response times and bringing offenders to justice, which we were told drew resources out of neighbourhood policing.
- The model was then adjusted from 2013 to re-introduce local leadership and shift the focus to vulnerability, in part as a result of failings identified by scrutiny bodies.<sup>7</sup> Ambitions were, however, increasingly limited by resource constraints and neighbourhood policing was effectively reduced to a Police Community Support Officer presence, with officers given broad geographical remits that distanced them from local communities.
- Finally, a revised model was introduced in 2015 that sought to reintroduce neighbourhood policing capacity alongside a focus on 'problem solving' and increased proactivity.<sup>8</sup>

In Thames Valley the PCC's Police and Crime Plan 2013-17 lists six headline 'strategic objectives', as follows:

**Strategic Objective 1:** Cut crimes that are of most concern to the public and reduce reoffending.

**Strategic Objective 2:** Protecting vulnerable people.

**Strategic Objective 3:** Work with partner agencies to put victims and witnesses at the heart of the criminal justice system.

**Strategic Objective 4:** Ensure police and partners are visible, act with integrity and foster the trust and confidence of communities.

**Strategic Objective 5:** Communicate with the public to learn of their concerns, help to prevent crime and reduce their fear of crime.

**Strategic Objective 6:** Protect the public from serious and organised crime, terrorism and internet-based crime.

In the original 2013-17 Police and Crime Plan these were broken down into detailed actions and/or targets of which 25 were detailed and a further 20 remained 'to be developed', typically with partners.<sup>9</sup> By the time of the 2014 Police and Crime Plan 'refresh' the format had changed slightly, and the six strategic objectives were accompanied by 56 sub-objectives.<sup>10</sup>

For 2014-15 the Thames Valley Police force Delivery Plan listed six slightly different themes, as follows, accompanied by a total of 49 actions.<sup>11</sup>

1. Cut crimes that are of most concern to the community.
2. Increase the visible presence of the police.
3. Protect our communities from the most serious harm.
4. Improve communication and use of technology to build community confidence and cut crime.
5. Increase the professionalism and capability of our people.
6. Reduce costs and protect the front line.

Finally, while the force level police Control Strategy was not published<sup>12</sup>, the Berkshire East Control Strategy which covers Slough included (as at July 2016) five headline priorities with around 19 issues listed (Figure 2, over page).<sup>13</sup>

So for Thames Valley two things are clear. First, it can be seen that while there are overlaps between the three documents there are also clear differences. Second, prioritisation mechanisms are complex and multi-layered.

In summary, then, working at a local level in Luton and Slough highlighted the importance of prioritisation to securing (or not) the buy-in of the police and a range of their partners for effectively implementing proactive crime reduction initiatives.

<sup>9</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner Thames Valley (2013).

<sup>10</sup> Police and Crime Commissioner Thames Valley (2014).

<sup>11</sup> Thames Valley Police (2014).

<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing the most recent version on the Thames Valley Police website covers 2012/13. See <http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/aboutus/aboutus-stplan/aboutus-stplan-fcstrat.htm> [21 July 2016].

<sup>13</sup> See <http://thamesvalley.police.uk/youmh-tvp-pol-area-berkse/youmh-tvp-pol-area-be-cont-strat> [21 July 2016].

<sup>7</sup> For example, see HMIC (2015a).

<sup>8</sup> Bedfordshire Police (2015b).



# Berkshire East control strategy

**The focus of the current Berkshire East Basic Command Unit control strategy is on the following:**

- Predatory offending. This includes tackling domestic abuse, particularly those cases where there is a high risk to the victim.
- Organised crime groups, particularly those who commit high value robbery and burglary and those involved in illegal immigration, trafficking and drug dealing.
- Reducing the threat from terrorism.
- Promoting community safety. This includes maintaining a robust approach to the investigation and reduction of hate crime, running targeted operations to disrupt criminality and reduce fear of crime and working with community safety partners to identify and tackle neighbourhood anti-social behaviour issues.
- Burglary, vehicle crime and robbery. This includes identifying prolific offenders and related hot spot activity and improving public awareness and reducing opportunities for offending through crime advice and Force campaigns.

**Figure 2: Thames Valley Police Berkshire East Basic Command Unit control strategy**

Confronted with the challenge of burglary being deprioritised in Luton we became increasingly interested in the processes through which prioritisation happens, which highlighted a rather confused picture. To some extent that can be understood with reference to changes that have occurred at a national level.

***The big picture: there have been important changes at a national level over the last two decades and particularly since 2010***

At a national level four major changes have occurred that have had a particular bearing on prioritisation in policing:

1. **Remit:** the police remit widened during an extended period of budget growth into the first decade of the 2000s, with a greater focus on antisocial behaviour<sup>14</sup> and quality of life issues, public protection functions<sup>15</sup>, a statutory

<sup>14</sup> Exemplified by the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003.

<sup>15</sup> Notably following the publication of the Bichard Report (2004).

*Our research highlighted the importance of prioritisation to securing the buy-in of the police and their partners to partnership projects.*

requirement to work in partnership with other public services<sup>16</sup>, and the growth of neighbourhood policing<sup>17</sup>. Paradoxically, in 2010 Home Secretary Theresa May described the police task as “*nothing more, and nothing less, than to cut crime*”<sup>18</sup>, which it was widely argued ignored the reality of what the police actually do, including a range of public safety functions<sup>19</sup>.

2. **Governance:** the advent of ‘localism’ following the 2010 General Election, and in particular the election of the first Police and Crime

<sup>16</sup> Under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, with expectations of effective multi-agency collaboration further reinforced by the introduction of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) Reform Programme in 2007.

<sup>17</sup> Under the Neighbourhood Policing Programme, introduced in 2005 (see Longstaff et al., 2015).

<sup>18</sup> Home Office (2010a).

<sup>19</sup> In 2013/14, for example, only 21.5 per cent of ‘emergency and priority incidents’ reported to the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales resulted in a ‘notifiable, classified crime’ being recorded (based on data published by HMIC (2014)). See Bittner (1974).

*Four major changes have had a particular bearing on prioritisation in policing: the widening police remit, the advent of localism, a shift in emphasis from volume crime to harm and vulnerability, and austerity.*

Commissioners in 2012, marked the end of an era of highly centralised prioritisation and performance management by Whitehall. This resulted in a shift in emphasis from both the centre and local (Community Safety Partnership) levels to the police force level, which in combination with austerity (see below) meant that police forces lost the twin comfort blankets of being told what was most important, and being given more resources to deliver on it. These changes were accompanied by a better resourced and more independent Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) with a much more ambitious inspection programme, and also a better resourced Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC). This period also saw the general discrediting of simplistic performance management in policing and a shift away from the use of numerical targets.<sup>20</sup>

3. **Values:** the period since 2010 has also seen a distinct shift in emphasis away from volume crime (such as burglary and theft) towards high-harm offences (such as domestic abuse and sexual assaults) and vulnerability. This has reflected both very significant falls since the mid-1990s in traditional 'volume crime' as measured by the Crime Survey for England and Wales<sup>21</sup> and a growing awareness about both the impact of hidden and unreported offending, but also past police failures to provide an appropriate response.<sup>22</sup> One consequence has been the rapid growth of public protection related demand on the police, notably to investigate and risk manage violent and sexual offenders, the latter in partnership with other agencies.

<sup>20</sup> See Curtis (2015).

<sup>21</sup> ONS (2016a).

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, the scandals concerning child sexual exploitation in Rochdale (see Jay, 2014) and Rotherham (see Klonowski, 2013), and the disclosure of a very large number of sexual offences committed by Jimmy Savile.

Analysis suggests that the police workload is becoming more complex.<sup>23</sup>

4. **Austerity:** the introduction of public sector austerity from 2010 saw central government funding to the police service fall by 25 per cent in real terms between 2010/11 and 2015/16, with a disproportionate impact on forces more heavily reliant on central government funding relative to local council tax precepts.<sup>24</sup> This was accompanied by two political imperatives: to reform the police service, including by achieving efficiency savings through collaboration (but not structural mergers); and to 'protect the front line'.<sup>25</sup> Austerity has also impacted on partner agencies of the police service, in particular local authority public services.<sup>26</sup>

As will be seen below, these changes have contributed to a number of challenges for police forces and PCCs in relation to prioritising services. Ultimately, it is PCCs that set the overarching priorities.

## ***What do existing Police and Crime Plans tell us about how Police and Crime Commissioners approach prioritisation?***

Elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) were introduced by the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 for 41 of the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales, and the first PCCs were elected in 2012, with the second round of elections having taken place in May 2016.<sup>27</sup> PCCs must do the following:<sup>28</sup>

- Secure an efficient and effective police service for their area.

<sup>23</sup> College of Policing (2015).

<sup>24</sup> In 2015/16 65 per cent of Bedfordshire Police's funding came from central government, compared to 59 per cent in Thames Valley and a national average for England and Wales of 68 per cent (NAO, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Home Office (2010b).

<sup>26</sup> Between 2009/10 and 2014/15, local authorities' spending per person was cut by 23.4 per cent (Innes and Tetlow, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> In London the elected mayor assumed PCC responsibilities, while the City of London Police continues to have a Police Authority. There was no PCC election in Greater Manchester in 2016 as the city transitions to an elected mayor model similar to that in London; the elected PCC is assuming mayoral responsibilities in the interim.

<sup>28</sup> See <http://www.apccs.police.uk/role-of-the-pcc/>.

- Appoint the chief constable, hold them to account for running the force, and if necessary dismiss them.
- Set the police and crime objectives for their area through a Police and Crime Plan.
- Set the force budget and determine the precept.
- Contribute to the national and international policing capabilities set out by the Home Secretary.
- Bring together community safety and criminal justice partners, to make sure local priorities are joined up.

Clearly of greatest interest to us here is the requirement that PCCs set police and crime objectives in the form of a published Police and Crime Plan, to which chief constables must *have regard* (although what that means is not defined in the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011).

When we look at the 43 Police and Crime Plans in place at the time of writing (May/June 2016) we find the following characteristics:<sup>29</sup>

1. Police and Crime Plans tend not to have an overarching purpose, such as reducing harm, but rather a basket of different purposes (reflected in their stated priorities).
2. The majority of Police and Crime Plans justify their priorities based on public and private consultation, but do not invoke specific principles or values, other than acting out the will of the majority and in some cases ensuring value for money.
3. We generally see a mix of three types of objectives in Police and Crime Plans, although some plans are primarily characterised by one of these:
  - Soft targets: for example, promises to monitor crime, work with partners and increase satisfaction (e.g. Humberside).

- Hard targets: for example, that all calls will be answered in five seconds, that crime will be cut by 12 per cent (e.g. Hampshire).
- Implementation goals: for example to create a programme or implement a new model (e.g. Hertfordshire).

Examining the headline priorities mentioned in the 43 Police and Crime Plans – which is not conceptually straightforward<sup>30</sup> – we see that a majority mentioned victims (32) and crime reduction (24), followed by crime prevention (19), safety (17), antisocial behaviour (16), vulnerability (13) and justice (13). By contrast, issues such as serious organised crime (three), mental health (two), drugs (two) and fraud (one) receive very little attention as headline issues (although they are mentioned more often in more detailed sections of the Police and Crime Plans). The word cloud (Figure 3, on page 9) illustrates the range and relative frequency of different issues mentioned as headline priorities by PCCs.

*Police and Crime Plans tend not to have an overarching purpose or invoke values other than acting out the will of the majority and ensuring value for money.*

## Seven prioritisation challenges confronting the police service

Three things should already be clear: first, prioritisation is an important process that clarifies the values and informs resource decisions of the police service (and their partners); second, the world of policing is changing; and third, the question of prioritisation can be approached in a variety of ways. Drawing on both our observations from our *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project and of developments in policing more broadly, we have identified seven challenges that confront the police service when thinking about prioritisation.

<sup>29</sup> We are grateful to our intern colleague Ryan Workman for his assistance with this analysis.

<sup>30</sup> The complexity arises for a number of reasons, including the range of different approaches to presenting Police and Crime Plans, and the way that a wider range of issues beyond or subsidiary to stated priorities are generally name-checked in more detailed descriptive text. Here we have focused on headline priorities, using a simplified vocabulary for consistency across all 43 forces. More broadly, see the 'challenges' identified below in this paper.





**Figure 3: Word cloud of Police and Crime Plan headline priorities as at May/June 2016**

**Challenge 1: The police are subject to complex and changing governance arrangements that make it difficult to focus on a clearly defined smaller number of proactive priorities**

The first challenge we identify concerns the complexity of governance and accountability mechanisms and how they relate to thinking about (and doing) prioritisation. In the first instance, there are at least five levels of priority setting that concern the 43 territorial police forces:

1. The Strategic Policing Requirement (SPR) is set by the government and is intended to ensure that PCCs preserve the capacity and capability necessary to respond to national-level threats and harms to public safety.<sup>31</sup> Both PCCs and chief constables must *have regard* to the SPR (that is, follow it unless there are good reasons not to). The 'National Threats' identified in the 2015 iteration of the Strategic Policing Requirement are: terrorism; serious and organised crime; cyber security; public order; civil emergencies; and child sexual abuse (added in 2015).
2. As we have seen, PCCs must publish a Police and Crime Plan at a force level. This must initially

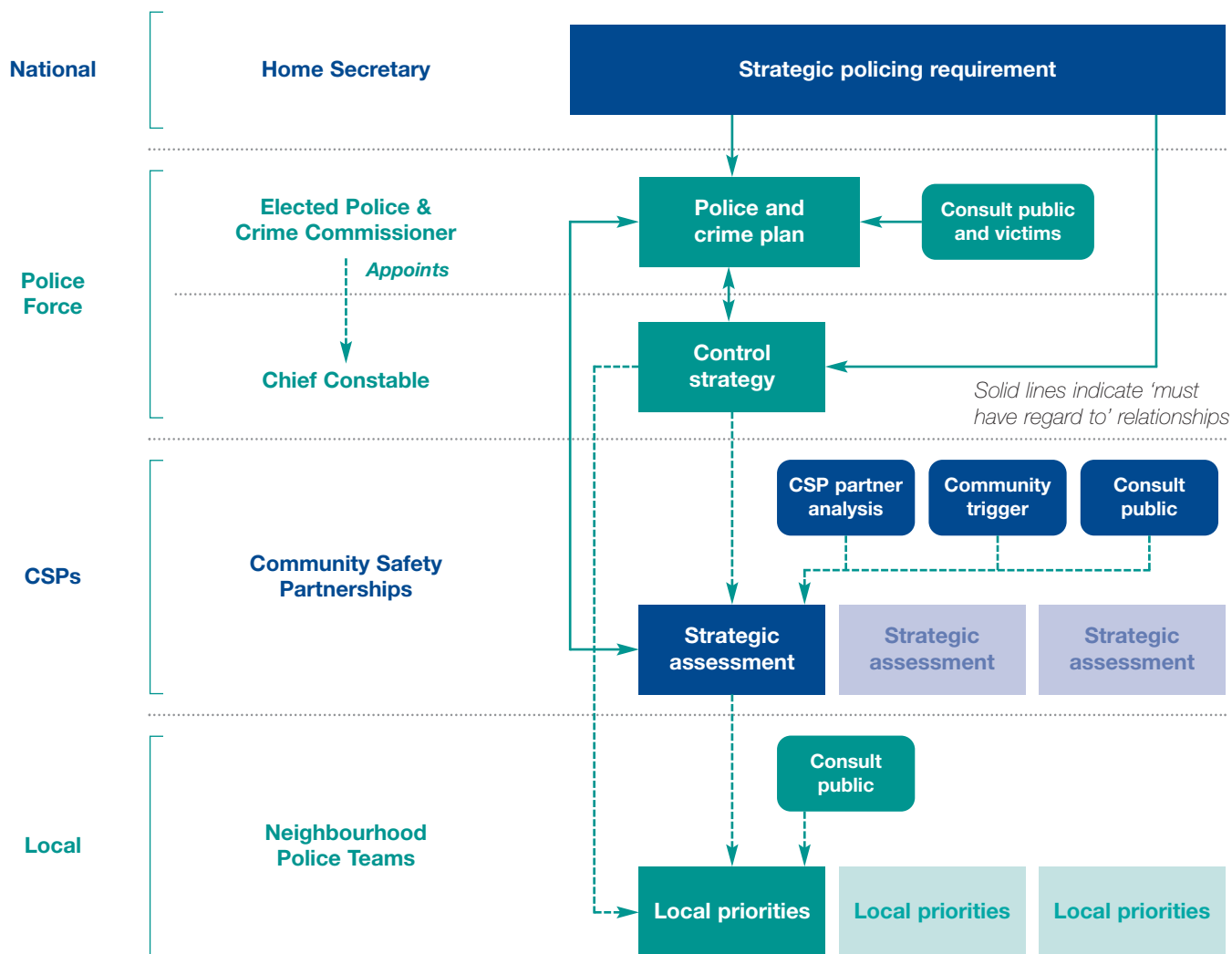
be issued in the same financial year as their election and as 'soon as practicable' after taking office. Police and Crime Plans can then be issued or varied at any time. PCCs are required to consider: the views of the local community and victims of crime; the views and priorities of the local constabulary; and, the views and priorities of other partners and stakeholders.<sup>32</sup>

3. Under the National Intelligence Model (NIM), police forces publish a Control Strategy, which is refreshed every six months and operationalised at a local level. We have seen that chief constables need to *have regard* to Police and Crime Plans, although the meaning of this is not defined in legislation.
4. At a more local level Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs, a legacy of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and of which police are a key partner) must publish a Strategic Assessment every year, and they must also *have regard* to the Police and Crime Plan. In addition, Community Triggers were introduced in 2014, which 'give victims and communities the right to demand that persistent antisocial behaviour is dealt with'.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Home Office (2015a).

<sup>32</sup> APACE (2012: 7).

<sup>33</sup> Home Office (2015b: Appendix 5).



**Figure 4: Police priority setting flow chart**

5. Finally, more local policing areas may also set priorities, for example at a ward or neighbourhood level.

These can be represented in diagram form (Figure 4 above), although some specifics may vary from force-to-force.

Here three points are worth making. First, it may be more appropriate to think of these different levels in terms of a Venn Diagram, with overlapping but not perfectly 'nested' priorities, particularly given the *have regard* to relationships that exist between PCCs, police forces and Community Safety Partnerships. For example, a PCC may have road safety as a force-level priority, but that may not feature as a priority for a Community Safety Partnership. Second, the PCC ultimately has control of most of the finances, which may well act to incentivise Community Safety Partnerships to reflect the PCC's priorities in their own. Third, the

*complex architecture* of PCCs and Community Safety Partnerships – with the former introduced without the latter being reformed – has left the role and status of Community Safety Partnerships somewhat ambiguous, particularly given that virtually all of the funding they used to manage is now held by PCCs.<sup>34</sup>

The fact that the size and complexity of the 43 police forces varies considerably may well mediate the tension between the force/PCC level and the more local/Community Safety Partnership level. For example, Bedfordshire has three Community Safety Partnerships, while Thames Valley has 12 and the Metropolitan Police has 32.

Beyond the formal prioritisation requirements outlined above, it must also be acknowledged that a range of other actors impact on prioritisation

<sup>34</sup> See, for example EFUS (2016) and LGA (2016).

decisions, highlighting the limits of localism. Of note, both HMIC and the IPCC scrutinise police forces and make recommendations, and it was clear from our research that police forces and their community safety partners are acutely sensitive to this scrutiny, particularly where they have been criticised in the past. Indeed in 2014 Olly Martins, the PCC at the time in Bedfordshire, complained that HMIC had “*started to usurp the role of locally accountable police and crime commissioners*”.<sup>35</sup> More broadly, both local politicians and the local and national media can be seen influencing prioritisation decisions, as can other interest groups. A police officer based in Luton made the following observation to us, reflecting on the way they and their colleagues felt under “*a massive amount of scrutiny*”:

*“Your actions are monitored very closely and you’re challenged by the local community, by the elected members, by people from external pressure groups as well and then overlay that with the official scrutiny of the HMIC and I can understand why people feel they’re under a massive amount of scrutiny... And that does influence sometimes decisions that are made and it does influence the way we do our job”.*

### **Challenge 2: The police role is very broadly defined and public expectations of that role have broadened further as a result of social change**

The next challenge we identify relates to clarifying the boundaries of the (initially force-level) police role within which priorities can be defined, which itself has two related dimensions: *functions* and *values*.

Policing can be understood to have *instrumental* and *symbolic* functions, with the former concerned with the likes of crime reduction, public safety and bringing offenders to justice, while the latter includes public feelings of safety, and trust and confidence in

***Policing has both instrumental functions (such as crime reduction) and symbolic functions (such as securing public confidence) and there are complex dependencies between them.***

– and the legitimacy of – the police service. There are clear but complex dependencies between these instrumental and symbolic functions, and some may be prioritised over others by invoking (or implying) values – a good example is the way that *offences brought to justice* became a Home Office mandated priority for police forces in the mid-2000s, but was then superseded (and indeed to some extent discredited, at least in respect of a number of perverse incentives to which it gave rise).

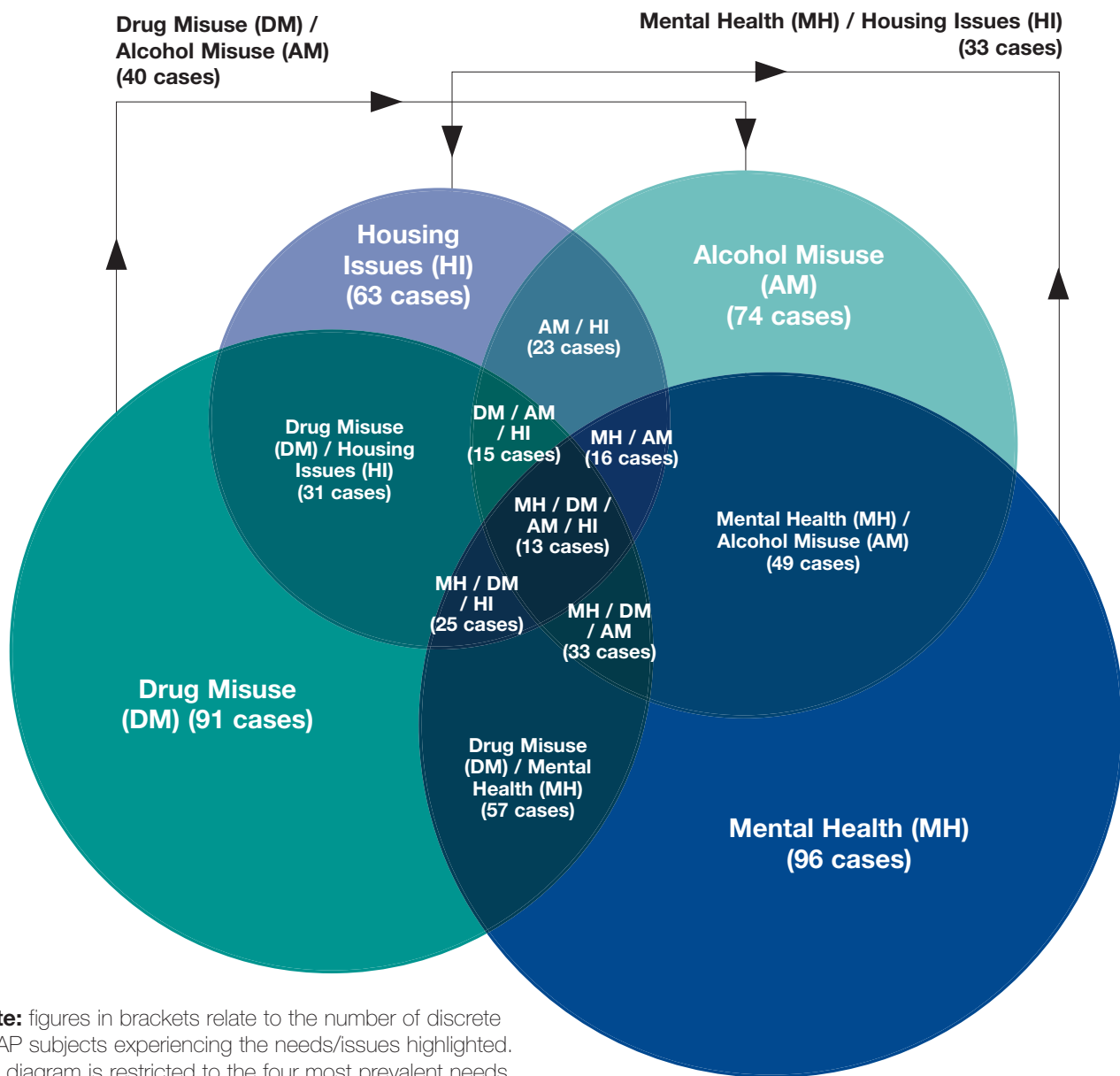
A particular point of contention relates to so-called ‘non-crime demand’, which constitutes around four-fifths of all calls for police service<sup>36</sup>, and in particular demand that arises at the interface with other public services, especially when that involves (or at least is perceived to involve) service failure by those other services. Examples often cited by police leaders and commentators include attending to people in mental health crisis, concerns for welfare calls coming from the likes of social service providers, people reported missing from institutional settings, and indeed police vehicles being required to transport patients to hospital when ambulances are not available.

More generally, and as noted above, the police role expanded in the period leading up to the first decade of the 2000s reflecting growing budgets, in particular encompassing antisocial behaviour, expanded neighbourhood policing capacity, and involvement in multi-agency public protection and safeguarding efforts. Now that budgets are contracting there is no sense that the police service is being ‘given permission’ to narrow the scope of its role, and indeed its status as a generalist 24/7 emergency service will always imply a wide remit that stretches across crime and public safety responsibilities.

***Beyond formal prioritisation requirements, a range of other actors impact on prioritisation decisions including HMIC, the IPCC, local politicians and the media.***

<sup>35</sup> Parris-Long (2014).

<sup>36</sup> In 2013/14, an average of 21.5 per cent of ‘emergency and priority incidents’ resulted in a notifiable offence being recorded by police forces; for individual forces this ranged from 10.1 per cent in Dyfed Powys to 40.0 per cent in the Metropolitan Police (HMIC 2014).



**Note:** figures in brackets relate to the number of discrete VMAP subjects experiencing the needs/issues highlighted. The diagram is restricted to the four most prevalent needs.

**Figure 5: Slough recurrent violence case-load needs profile**

Acknowledging that much of the contention about the police role arises at the interface between the police and other services, it is worth noting an important limitation of the periodic calls for a Royal Commission on policing (in particular by the Police Federation for England and Wales), which is that the police role cannot be considered in isolation of its wider (particularly public) service context. It seems that a Royal Commission would first have to define the role of the public sector, and then define first the role of *policing*, and then the role of the publicly funded *police service* within that. Here it may be that devolution will facilitate some clarity being achieved where responsibility for a range of services, such as policing and mental health care, is devolved to an elected mayor (for example).

*Policing will always have a wide remit that stretches across crime and public safety. Much of the contention about the police role arises at the interface between the police and other services.*

In the case of our *Police Effectiveness in a Changing World* project in Slough, we latterly developed with police and their partners a multi-agency case-level problem-solving panel that met fortnightly to consider individuals recurrently coming to attention of the police for their involvement in violence (whether as perpetrators, victims or both). The case-load was characterised by individuals, often in dysfunctional co-dependent relationships,

with multiple needs including housing, drugs, alcohol and mental health issues – as illustrated in Figure 5 on page 12 (which is restricted to the four most prevalent needs present in the overall caseload of 291).<sup>37</sup>

While the police were the agency that took on the most actions that resulted from the panel meetings, it seems in hindsight to be far from clear what the proper role for the police should be in such a context, beyond providing an emergency response and investigating offences. We saw numerous examples in Slough where police officers were readily drawn into something closer to a social work model, instead – for example – of limiting themselves to drawing individual cases to the attention of partner agencies and sharing their professional insights.

The same question in a different context (where it is increasingly urgent) concerns the proper role of territorial police forces, and especially local policing, in responding to transnational crime problems that are arising with growing frequency in an increasingly globalised world. This is perhaps most clear in cases of fraud and computer misuse, where a significant proportion of offences, especially those exploiting vulnerabilities of interconnected IT hardware, are global in nature, and while victims may be local to a police force the perpetrators may be located overseas. Here it is notable that only the City of London Police have fraud as a stated priority in their policing plan (here considered in lieu of a Police and Crime Plan)<sup>38</sup>, despite new data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales indicating that there were around 3.8 million fraud offences experienced by adult victims last year<sup>39</sup>.

Turning now to the *values* dimension of the police role: in addressing the question ‘why do the police need to prioritise?’ above we referred to the way priorities are a statement of values; we also found that PCC Police and Crime Plans do not generally invoke specific values or principles beyond enacting

the public will and securing ‘value for money’. So what might that look like? Perhaps the clearest example is to ask the question: should the police service prioritise improving the *aggregate safety* of a community/area (utilitarianism) or reducing *inequality in insecurity* by focusing on the most vulnerable (a form of egalitarianism)? While the general shift in emphasis – both nationally and in Luton and Slough – towards vulnerability and harm *implies* the latter is becoming increasingly prevalent, it is not a question we have heard *explicitly* asked in policing in recent years, and it certainly never arose in our time working with the police in Luton and Slough.<sup>40</sup>

***Our work on tackling recurrent violence in Slough highlighted questions about what the proper role for the police should be, beyond providing an emergency response and investigating offences.***

***Challenge 3: Democratic accountability implies an emphasis on the priorities of the majority and the public understanding of the police role, which may ignore more hidden and less frequent – but potentially more impactful – harms***

Here the insertion of more direct democratic accountability into police governance in 2012 arguably tilts the answer to the values question in favour of providing a service to the majority and poses a further, specific, challenge to the question of prioritisation. This has been acknowledged previously, for example in London where it was noted that ‘[t]here is a risk that public opinion may lead to visible street policing being prioritised at the cost of less visible, but potentially more important, aspects of policing’<sup>41</sup>.

Taking the second and third challenges above together, it is significant that the Code of Ethics published by the College of Policing does not provide a practical guide to these considerations, concepts such as *doing the right thing* (policing principle 4) and *acting in the public interest* (policing

<sup>37</sup> Fuller details of the caseload will be included in the Slough site report, to be published later in 2016 (Chapman et al., forthcoming). To read this diagram: for example, 91 cases had a drug misuse need, of which 31 also had a housing need, of which 15 also had an alcohol need, of which 13 also had a MH need.

<sup>38</sup> City of London Police (2016).

<sup>39</sup> The survey's fieldwork interviews were conducted during the second half of 2015 and asked respondents about their victimisation in the 12 months prior to interview. The fraud estimates are based on six months of fieldwork, but extrapolated to a year. The survey estimated that there were a further two million computer misuse offences last year (ONS, 2016b).

<sup>40</sup> Where police forces and others have been developing weighted crime indices (e.g. Sherman et al., ONS 2016c) we are not aware of any that have been disaggregated, and as such their application is limited to utilitarian approaches at this time.

<sup>41</sup> London Assembly (2011).



principle 9) arguably being too general.<sup>42</sup> It is also the case that the evidence base about 'what works' in policing is scant, making objective decisions more difficult (we will return to this theme below).

*How well can the public be expected to make informed decisions when electing PCCs when so much harm and related police business is hidden or opaque?*

More generally, we can ask how well the public can be expected to make informed decisions about police policy, reflected in their decisions about PCCs, when so much harm and related police business is hidden or opaque. Here the need for chief constables simply to 'have regard to' PCC Police and Crime Plans may be significant, allowing them scope for ensuring less frequent, less visible but often higher harm offences, which may not appeal to the electorate, nevertheless receive a suitable level of attention.<sup>43</sup> That this may be necessary is perhaps best exemplified by the inclusion of child sexual abuse in the Home Office mandated Strategic Police Requirement (as discussed above).

#### **Challenge 4: Complex interdependencies exist within police operating models that make decisions about core and discretionary functions highly problematic**

A further challenge that relates to the police role, but also to the complex architecture of governance and accountability (including the democratic mandate) concerns how police forces define roles that are respectively 'core' and 'discretionary', and related to this, how police forces structure their operating models. When thinking about prioritisation, it is reasonable to assume that it should be concerned primarily with discretionary functions (see 'Why do the police need to prioritise?' above).

The reality, however, is that virtually all aspects of policing have discretionary elements that involve

relative resourcing decisions. For example, emergency response resources can be modelled to different response time expectations, and resilience can be enhanced or diminished through the provision of more or fewer resources.

We can see then that complex interdependencies exist within police systems that make decisions about core and discretionary functions highly problematic. This is further complicated by the fact that around 85 per cent of police budgets are spent on personnel costs<sup>44</sup> and that police officers cannot be made redundant. Under austerity, this has resulted in disproportionate cuts to police staff<sup>45</sup>, including in operational support roles such as intelligence analysis and project management that have the potential to undermine effectiveness in 'core' functions such as crime investigation and crime prevention (as well as broader process improvement efforts).

Even neighbourhood policing has become a discretionary function in some police forces. In the case of Luton, we observed a number of impacts that resulted from the decision to withdraw almost all neighbourhood policing capacity as a response to increasingly constrained resources in austerity and to plug service vulnerabilities elsewhere.<sup>46 47</sup> Of particular note, we were told (and it became increasingly obvious) that this included a significant contraction of proactive capabilities and capacity and a loss of community engagement, both of which contributed to the difficulties we encountered in trying to implement a programme of burglary reduction interventions.

An additional complexity is the way that the national political imperative to 'protect the frontline' – and in particular neighbourhood policing – has apparently contributed to police forces blurring definitions,

<sup>42</sup> College of Policing (2014).

<sup>43</sup> To some extent this can be seen above in the differences between the Thames Valley Police Police and Crime Plan and East Berkshire Control Strategy, with the former emphasising crimes 'of most concern to the public' while the latter places a greater emphasis on domestic abuse and organised crime.

<sup>44</sup> For 2015/16 personnel costs accounted for 83.4 per cent of Thames Valley Police net revenue expenditure (excluding national policing), while the equivalent figure for Bedfordshire was 87.9 per cent (HMIC, 2015b and 2015c).

<sup>45</sup> Between March 2010 and September 2014, police officer numbers fell 11.6 per cent, while police staff numbers excluding Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) fell 20.0 per cent (20.8 per cent including PCSOs) (NAO, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> Notably domestic abuse investigations (see, for example, HMIC, 2015a) and emergency response, where average response times reportedly increased from 7 to 11 minutes (up 57 per cent) between 2011 and 2014 (Morris, 2015).

<sup>47</sup> At 31 March 2015, only 2.7 per cent (n=29) of Bedfordshire Police officers were classified as being in 'neighbourhood' roles. This was the lowest (in percentage terms) of the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales and compared with a national average of 15.3 per cent (Home Office, 2015c).

particularly between neighbourhood, response and investigative functions.<sup>48</sup> For example, in 2012 HMIC noted that Cheshire constabulary 'restructured their workforce so they do not have a response function: they are all categorised as neighbourhood'<sup>49</sup>, while the introduction of a new Local Policing Model in the Metropolitan Police saw Safer Neighbourhood Teams take on the investigation of all neighbourhood crime that occurs on their ward.<sup>50</sup> All of this serves to complicate the process of thinking about how functions might be prioritised and operating models built around them. But that is very much an inward-looking challenge.

***Challenge 5: Deciding how to define the social issues of crime and public safety to be considered when prioritising is a 'wicked problem' that cannot be satisfactorily resolved***

Looking outwards to the social world in which the police operate daily, a perennial challenge for anyone concerned with prioritising approaches to crime and public safety is how most satisfactorily to define the social issues to be considered, which could be described as a 'wicked problem'.<sup>51</sup> For the most part police forces and others default to legal crime types (robbery, burglary, violence and so on<sup>52</sup>) and then a number of 'cross-cutting themes', which are in effect sticking plasters that acknowledge both that crime type prioritisation is inadequate and that different crime types may have common drivers which in turn may fall within the remit of specialist services – for example drug and alcohol treatment. The Bedfordshire Police Control Strategy shown in Figure 1 on page 4 is a fairly typical example (notwithstanding the number of priorities it includes). Alternative approaches can be imagined, for example concerned with communities or groups of offenders, which in some circumstances may be more closely aligned to the social dynamics of much crime and disorder, but which then necessarily move away from the likes of

***The national political imperative to 'protect the frontline' – in particular neighbourhood policing – has contributed to police forces blurring functional definitions.***

problem-solving approaches that address distinct/discrete crime drivers. To take one example from Luton where we focused on burglary, we identified a younger cohort of 'generalist' offenders whose offending repertoire included burglary, but also violence, theft, robbery and drug use.

One apparent characteristic of policy development is the tendency to subdivide crime types and related social problems into an ever-growing list of subcategories. There is no doubt that this partly reflects the progressively more refined understanding of issues such as domestic abuse where issues such as so-called 'honour-based' violence, coercive control and female genital mutilation have become better understood and assumed a higher priority in policy discussions. But in this process the number of issues to be considered when prioritising grows, and in many ways the barriers to de-prioritising become ever larger, even as discretionary resources have been shrinking.

A different point concerns the way that an approach that limits itself to crime reduction may not be able to generate sufficient evidence to trigger a policy response on its own, while a wider appreciation of the socio-economic context might do better. One of our findings from both Luton and Slough concerns the relationship between housing tenure and vulnerability to crime, in the case of Slough relating to violence in houses in multiple occupation (HMOs or bedsits) and in Luton to residential burglary in areas with high rates of low quality private rental accommodation.<sup>53</sup> In the latter case, both the police and other local partners highlighted the paucity of domestic security in this rapidly growing sector of the housing market, and did so with reference to two things: first, that in existing regulations domestic security receives little attention (in contrast, for example, to fire safety);

<sup>48</sup> In their *Policing in austerity: one year on report* HMIC (2012) described a 'shift away from clearly defined functions to a more fluid construct...' (p.36).

<sup>49</sup> HMIC (2012: 36, footnote 56).

<sup>50</sup> See, for example, D'Orsi (2015).

<sup>51</sup> A wicked problem is one that is difficult or even impossible to solve because it is difficult or even impossible to adequately define (see Rittel and Webber, 1973).

<sup>52</sup> Arguably this crime type focus is a legacy of both the National Intelligence Model and the way crime type specific performance targets were implemented in the past.

<sup>53</sup> See Higgins and Jarman (2015).

*A perennial challenge for anyone concerned with prioritising approaches to crime and public safety is how most satisfactorily to define the social issues to be considered.*

and second, that the private rented market was so buoyant that landlords had no economic incentive to improve security – an unhappy tenant could easily be replaced. We suggested that a better regulated private rented sector could support the efforts of local authorities, the police and others to address vulnerability, but it quickly became apparent that the crime argument was insufficiently compelling on its own. We now speculate that the case for better regulation, including to reduce burglary vulnerability, would be much more compelling if the full range of ways tenants in low quality private rented accommodation are vulnerable could be examined and understood. To take one example: the burglary hotspots we identified in Luton were also identified as domestic fire hotspots for the Fire and Rescue Service. Layering in other data, for example on public health, would very likely make the case stronger still. And yet it seems virtually inconceivable that a PCC, police force or Community Safety Partnership would identify improved regulation of the private rented sector as a priority, simply because they almost invariably start from individual crime types when making sense of their remit and prioritising within it.<sup>54</sup>

It must be said that this challenge of how to ‘cut the cake’, or make sense of the social world, can never be satisfactorily resolved. But it needs to be acknowledged nevertheless, and police forces and their partners should be encouraged to think critically about how different approaches might lead to very different priorities and strategies. It may be that in areas such as Greater Manchester, which is to have an elected mayor with responsibility for policing, fire, health and a range of other public services, it will be possible to think more creatively about how to delineate themes and issues in order to tackle problems most effectively.

<sup>54</sup> There is also arguably an important critique of problem-oriented policing here, given the way it emphasises starting with small discrete problems that generally lead to tactical rather than strategic-level change.

### *Challenge 6: It is not possible to satisfactorily weigh the importance of poorly understood hidden harms against those that are more visible*

Reflecting the high-level shift in emphasis from crime volumes to harm and vulnerability considerations, many police forces have been moving to prioritisation processes that seek to assess the relative harms that arise in their force areas, whether on a crime-type basis or in terms of geographic distribution (for example, so-called ‘harm spotting’). A number of methods for assessing harm have been developed, for example weighting crime types by their social and economic costs<sup>55</sup>, sentencing (whether guidelines or actual decisions)<sup>56</sup>, or more holistic assessments drawing on a wider range of sources<sup>57</sup>.

Although these approaches represent an important move away from treating all crimes as equal regardless of the harm they cause, two problems can nevertheless be identified. First, they tend only to be concerned with harms related to recorded crime.<sup>58</sup> The Cambridge Harm Index, for example, weights recorded crime using sentencing guidelines and specifically excludes proactively detected previously unreported crime types.<sup>59</sup> Second, bearing in mind the point raised above (footnote 19) that on average only 21.5 per cent of incidents reported to the police in England and Wales result in a ‘notifiable offence’ being recorded, they ignore (or at least, are not yet able to contend with) harms accruing from non-crime incidents.

With the shift in emphasis from volume to harm and vulnerability, the offence types that

*In areas with elected mayors with responsibility for a range of public services, it may be possible to think creatively about how to delineate social and crime issues to tackle problems effectively.*

<sup>55</sup> See for example, Brand and Price (2000) and Mills et al. (2013).

<sup>56</sup> For example, Ratcliffe (2015), Sherman et al. (2016) and ONS (2016c).

<sup>57</sup> Greenfield and Paoli (2013).

<sup>58</sup> As such, any changes in the likelihood that victims report their victimisation to the police will result in artificial changes to assessments of harm. For example, in the last two years police forces nationally have seen a surge in the number of both contemporary and historic sexual assaults reported to them, believed to reflect not rising offence rates but rather a greater willingness on the part of victims to report offences to the police.

<sup>59</sup> Sherman et al. (2016).

have assumed a higher profile in recent years – such as domestic abuse and CSE – are typified by relatively low rates of victim reporting and therefore high rates of so-called latent demand (or latent harm), that is demand (harm) that exists but which has not been reported to the police. Furthermore, these tend to be crime types that are relatively poorly understood. While estimates for under-reporting of domestic abuse could be derived at a national level from the Crime Survey for England and Wales, the extent of the likes of modern slavery and CSE is much more opaque. It is far from clear, then, how police forces and others should weigh the seriousness (harmfulness) of these kinds of offences against those that are better understood, and indeed how much effort they should expend in seeking out unreported victimisation. It cannot be satisfactory simply to rely on recorded crime, even with the added refinement of weighting it for harm, which if nothing else may be a strong argument for ensuring that intelligence and the insights of other service providers feature in prioritisation decisions.

Our experience in Luton and elsewhere is that police forces are loath *not* to list these emerging forms of high harm crime as priorities, irrespective of the degree to which their extent and impact is understood. One imperative for doing so appears to be an *expectation* that they are likely to be much more common than is formally recorded, especially in places with particular characteristics. A detective chief inspector in an English police force said the following in conversation with us last year:

*“We have no idea if we have a big CSE problem here, but when we look at our demographics they are similar to areas known to have a CSE problem, so our assumption is that we have a problem here as well”.*

Another imperative is unquestionably concern for reputational damage; no force or local authority

***It is far from clear how police forces should weigh the harmfulness of offences such as CSE and modern slavery against those that are better understood, nor how much effort they should expend in seeking out unreported victimisation.***

would want to be accused of failing to prioritise crimes such as the sexual exploitation of children (CSE). In another English police force in 2015 the following was said at the conclusion of a discussion of Community Safety Partnership priorities that had not featured CSE:

*“It should be noted in the minutes that we consider CSE to be a priority for the partnership”.*

We also observed a safeguarding board presentation to a Community Safety Partnership that included a long list of (something like 18) ‘priorities’ during which a Community Safety Partnership member asked about the status of FGM, which was not listed:

*“Yes, and of course we will add FGM as a priority”.*

The apparent risk then is that a ‘priority soup’ results, in which complex and largely hidden (but in any case poorly understood) harms combine with risk aversion and political considerations to render everything a priority, in which case nothing is. That of course leaves the question of how much resource to commit to identifying, investigating and preventing such offences largely unanswered.

***There is a risk of creating a ‘priority soup’ in which complex and largely hidden harms combine with risk aversion and political considerations to render everything a priority, in which case nothing is.***

***Challenge 7: The immature evidence base about the nature and extent of harm, ‘what works’ to reduce it, and cost effectiveness, limits the potential for empirical analysis to guide prioritisation***

The final challenge that confronts those tasked with prioritisation concerns the limited evidence base on which to make decisions. We have already discussed, for example, the way that current harm metrics are largely unable to contend with non-crime and latent (unreported) harms and demand, and there is a general lack of empirical evidence about vulnerability despite its prominence as a



stated policy concern for the police service. More broadly, policing suffers from a scarcity of evidence about ‘what works’ in crime (and especially harm) reduction, and in particular cost effectiveness.<sup>60 61</sup> Both should be vitally important considerations when determining where to commit finite discretionary resources (bearing in mind *opportunity cost* considerations), and it is significant that they are notably lacking for the higher harm/lower volume crime types that have become more important in recent years, in particular around public protection work. This includes the kind of recurrent violence, very often in dwellings (often not involving domestic relationships), that we identified and sought to reduce in Slough – where we found none of the patterns of violence, such as town centre violence associated with the night time economy, that would be suitable for a traditional problem-oriented policing approach. At least in respect of violence in Slough it seemed that any ‘low-hanging fruit’ that might have existed had already been picked. That left us developing and implementing a case-based multi-agency problem solving panel based on ‘best practice’ (but largely un-evaluated) models such as the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs) used in domestic abuse cases, which was ultimately unable to facilitate a reduction in recurrent violence.

A vision of the situation policing might aspire to reach can be seen in medicine, where a comparatively mature evidence base about both effectiveness (what works) and cost effectiveness (value for money) allows much more objective comparison between different interventions, both in treating particular conditions (for example, a type of cancer), but also across different conditions (for example, different cancers and diabetes). This is done on the basis of what are known as Quality Adjusted Life Years (QALYs), which with sufficient empirical evidence about effect and cost can be priced; that is, the cost of providing one additional year of quality life can be established. The National

*Policing might aspire to the situation in medicine, where a comparatively mature evidence base about both what works and value for money allows much more objective comparison between different interventions.*

Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) deems that interventions that cost the NHS less than £20,000 per year of extra quality life are cost effective.<sup>62</sup> Although we are aware that the Home Office considered the possibility of setting an equivalent value for crime related QALYs during the 2000s, it does not appear that the work was progressed.<sup>63</sup> Here the contrast between the medical world and natural sciences on the one hand, and the relatively more complex and subjective nature of the social world on the other, may be a significant barrier.

## Conclusions and recommendations

The world of policing is changing in a range of important and transformative ways. Among those changes, crime and our understanding of it is in flux, as are communities, social values and public expectations; budgets have been cut; demand on the police service is not well understood; and, governance and accountability arrangements continue to evolve. Policing has to contend with growing complexity and ambiguity and the ‘right’ answers to the question of what is most important are becoming less clear even as they become more urgent.<sup>64</sup> The lack of a robust evidence base about the true nature of crime, what works to reduce it, and how to best deliver value for money risks rendering prioritisation a rather small ‘p’ political process, which may not well serve the wider public interest, particularly if the result is little more than an inventory of issues that carry organisational risk.

In this paper we have identified and discussed seven challenges that emerged first from our work in two police force areas, but which appear salient

<sup>60</sup> See in particular <http://whatworks.college.police.uk> for a sense of how limited the evidence is.

<sup>61</sup> Related to harm reduction ambitions, one area where there is almost no empirical evidence is in assessing the harm caused by police and other agency interventions (in medicine these are known as *iatrogenic* effects). See, for example, debates about the impact of stop and search on community sentiment towards the police (Ratcliffe, 2015).

<sup>62</sup> NICE (2013).

<sup>63</sup> NERA Economic Consulting (2009).

<sup>64</sup> On growing ambiguity in policing, see also Hales (2016).



*The police service can't do everything to the same degree and must decide what its priorities are. The changing world makes that more difficult but also more important.*

to national policy deliberations, and which we hope can stimulate debate. That debate could consider questions such as: Who has an authoritative moral voice on these matters? Where should policing look for guidance? What practical measures should forces take? Are existing processes fit for purpose? Do police leaders have the skills to support prioritisation? How can the police service convince the public that the right things are being prioritised?

We don't propose to try and identify the answers to those questions here, but we do have five specific recommendations on which to end:

- 1. Police leaders, including PCCs, should be more explicit about the values that should underpin prioritisation decisions.**
- 2. Police leaders need to demonstrate moral courage in being clear about what are, and are not, the priorities of the service.**
- 3. Priority setting should lead to substantive, discretionary proactivity; it should not be a defensive strategy to head-off future criticism if things go wrong. Name**

**checking an inventory of issues that carry potential organisational risk, but about which little is known (and to which few resources can be allocated), serves no-one.**

- 4. There is an urgent need to develop the evidence base about vulnerability and harm, including how to measure them and how to reduce them in a way that delivers demonstrable value for money.**
- 5. Consideration should be given to how the emerging governance landscape of political devolution, regional and national policing capabilities, and blue light service integration will impact on priority setting for police forces.**

As the only generalist 24/7 emergency service, policing will always face constant pressures: to respond to emergencies, to prevent crime and maintain order, to secure justice, to reassure, and to seek out and address harms that affect the most vulnerable in society. But the police service cannot do everything to the same degree, and as such it must decide – with others where appropriate – what its priorities are. The changing world makes that more difficult but also more important.

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## About the Police Foundation

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

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