

A natural experiment in neighbourhood policing

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Neighbourhood policing is widely considered to be the bedrock of policing in England and Wales, yet as forces have responded to changing demand and shrinking budgets, the form in which it is delivered has diversified and in some cases become diluted and diminished. In this paper we describe the implications of two starkly contrasting neighbourhood policing models for enabling the mode of police working that evidence shows to be most effective. Drawing on the findings of our five-year Police Effectiveness in a Changing World project, we argue for the on-going importance of a well informed and locally engaged, proactive, neighbourhood-level capability to tackle the new challenges and priorities confronting the police. We end by highlighting some of the key questions, including about purpose and remit, resource allocation, service integration, workforce and support structures, which will need to be addressed in developing a new neighbourhood policing, capable of delivering the Policing Vision 2025 and fit for a changing world.

Police Effectiveness in a Changing World

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 social, technological and organisational change. In particular, it sought to identify enablers of, barriers to and dependencies for effective local policing, in the

context of changing crime patterns, societal shifts and internal police reform.

In the course of the project the Police Foundation research team spent five years working with the police and their community safety partners in two fast-changing English towns, Luton in Bedfordshire (Bedfordshire Police area) and Slough in Berkshire (Thames Valley). Using an action research approach and guided by problem oriented principles, we set out to identify persistent local crime problems, improve the way these were understood, develop and implement appropriate interventions, and assess both the outcomes of these and the challenges of doing so.

In addition to two comprehensive site reports (forthcoming), the insights generated during the project form the basis for a series of thematic papers addressing some of the key issues facing policing in the second decade of the twenty first century.

This is the fourth paper in the series; it describes the way in which two very different approaches to neighbourhood policing enabled and constrained effective working practices in the two sites. Drawing on our findings and the wider literature it then considers the on-going relevance of the neighbourhood approach to policing in a changing world and identifies some of the issues that will need to be addressed in designing its 'next generation'.

Neighbourhood policing¹

Neighbourhood policing is not easy to define. Differences in the contexts, emphases and techniques used in its various versions, along with the range of other strategies with which it has been combined, mean that its essential characteristics are difficult to distil. Mackenzie and Henry (2009) perhaps come closest by identifying five 'generally accepted dimensions':

- Decentralisation of responsibility (from central headquarters to local officers and the communities they serve).
- Partnership working (between local officers, other agencies and local people).
- Community engagement (in setting priorities and identifying and delivering solutions).
- Proactive problem-solving (instead of responding to crime once it has happened).
- A shift in organisational philosophy (to give the community level priority within police structures and decision making).

As we suggest later, however, the last of these in particular, may not always be fully realised.

While a definition might be elusive, as a style and approach, neighbourhood policing might best be illustrated with a description of what a good neighbourhood police officer – or indeed a Police Community Support Officer (PCSO) working in a neighbourhood role – would spend their time doing. Such an officer is likely to be assigned to a small geographic area, ideally for a meaningful period of time, and would make it their business to be seen out and about, on foot and at public events, to get to know local people and become an approachable and trusted presence within the community.

Rather than being assigned to provide speedy assistance when someone calls 999, or investigate crimes that have already happened (although some neighbourhood officers may do some aspects of this work), neighbourhood officers are more likely to

spend time building a picture of what is going on 'on their patch', understanding the issues and problems that really affect people's lives and working on practical ways to make things better. An important part of their job is to listen to local concerns, both informally and at public meetings, and come to an agreement with the community about the local issues that are most important. They would then engage with other parts of the police, as well as local contacts in other agencies and members of the public, to tackle these problems in ways the community supports and can even participate in.

By working in this way, over time, local people may come to see the police (as a whole) in a more positive light, which might have a range of benefits including greater public willingness to report crime, pass on useful information, obey the law and maintain acceptable standards of behaviour. In addition, because local people trust them and because they can easily spot what's out of place, neighbourhood officers are in a good position to identify potentially important information which they can pass on to other specialist parts of the police, who can then intervene to prevent harm or detect serious crimes.

Although the above pen portrait may be idealised to some extent, it makes it easy to see why neighbourhood policing has been widely adopted and has become regarded as the 'bedrock' of British policing².

A brief, recent history

The origins and development of neighbourhood policing are complex, contested and non-linear and cannot be covered in detail here.³ It has been suggested that its emergence and ubiquity requires explanation on at least five levels⁴:

- As a response to specific crisis events – in the UK, particularly the race riots of early 1980s.
- As a response to more general crises of police effectiveness and legitimacy, including growing doubts about the efficacy

¹ For consistency, the term *neighbourhood policing* is used throughout this paper, although it is acknowledged that alternative terminology (eg community policing, local policing, safer neighbourhoods etc), is often used to refer to equivalent functions. We use the term *local policing* to refer to all policing functions provided at the level of Basic / Operational Command Units, including response and local investigation as well, as neighbourhood policing.

² See for example National Debate Advisory Group (2015).

³ Much more detail is provided in the Police Foundation report *Neighbourhood policing: Past, present and Future*. (Longstaff et al., 2015).

⁴ Mackenzie and Henry (2009).

of criminal justice responses and ‘standard model’ police tactics to control crime.

- As a response to a changing and increasingly fragmented and plural society.
- As a return to a more ‘traditional’ policing style.
- As a politically valuable rhetorical vehicle.

In the UK context, we might also add specific concerns about reducing fear of crime and increasing confidence in the police, including by tackling ‘signal crimes’⁵, as embodied in the 2003 National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP)⁶.

With due regard to the NRPP and The Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy – influential predecessors on either side of the Atlantic – the modern chapter of neighbourhood policing in England and Wales, begins with the ‘new neighbourhood approach’ set out in the Home Office Strategic Plan of 2004 and backed with £50 million funding and the provision for 25,000 PCSOs⁷.

Between 2005 and 2008, ward-level neighbourhood policing teams were established, first in pathfinder areas, and then rolled out nationwide, consisting of a sergeant, supported by a number of constables and PCSOs. These were set the goals of tackling low-level disorder, improving quality of life in communities and increasing public confidence in the police. Although HMIC identified inconsistencies in implementation⁸, and despite a growing acknowledgment that different neighbourhoods might need different approaches⁹, ring-fenced central funding, national practice advice and a single ‘public confidence’ target (which forces largely delegated to neighbourhood teams to deliver) mark out the final years of the last Labour government as a period of relative national consistency.

This was not to last. The change of government in 2010 triggered a process of incremental diversification and – in many cases diminution – of neighbourhood policing across England and Wales. The removal of the central confidence target, devolution of strategy to locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners and, in particular, funding

cuts amounting to 18 per cent across the service in real terms¹⁰, provided the flexibility and imperative for forces to review their workforces

and operating models. This resulted in innovation, and thus variation, in the resources and responsibilities allocated to neighbourhood teams.

A survey conducted by the College of Policing in 2013¹¹ identified that while some forces planned to retain ‘traditionally’ configured neighbourhood policing teams, many others were merging neighbourhood functions with elements of response, investigation or both. In some cases neighbourhood functions (such as engagement, visibility and problem-solving) were increasingly becoming the sole responsibility of PCSOs, while the concept of a geographically dedicated resource was being stretched, with only a single officer or PCSO allocated to one, or sometimes several, neighbourhoods in some forces, while other officers were deployed more flexibly over a wider area. Although different approaches have been taken to resource allocation, the survey identified that neighbourhood teams were often made up of ‘*what is left, rather than what is needed*’ (p11), once other functions had received their allocation – a tendency that prompted HMIC to warn that ‘*Forces’ ability to prevent crime and reduce demand will be seriously undermined if their neighbourhood teams are materially eroded*’¹².

Both the inconsistency across forces and the worrying contraction in some places, resonate strongly with the contrasting circumstances we encountered in Bedfordshire and Thames Valley during our research into police effectiveness.

Project overview

The full story of the project in each town has been summarised elsewhere¹³ and will be detailed in our

Neighbourhood policing is increasingly made up of ‘what is left, rather than what is needed’ creating a risk that the police capacity to prevent crime will be ‘undermined’.

⁵ Innes and Fielding (2002).

⁶ Tuffin, Morris and Poole (2006).

⁷ Home Office (2004a), Home Office (2004b).

⁸ HMIC (2008).

⁹ Flanagan (2008).

¹⁰ National Audit Office (2015).

¹¹ College of Policing (2015).

¹² HMIC (2014).

¹³ Higgins and Hales (2016).

forthcoming site reports. In short, as a piece of embedded action research it involved Police Foundation researchers working with local police officers and other community safety practitioners, over an extended period, to develop and deliver locally tailored, evidence based crime reduction initiatives within a problem oriented framework¹⁴. The table on page 5 provides a summary of the approach, key findings and developments at each stage.

What we mean by effectiveness

What it means for the police to be effective is contested and dependent on context, and during our project period we noted shifts in societal expectation about the police role and purpose, which inevitably have a bearing on how effectiveness is understood¹⁵. As we set out in the first paper in this series¹⁶, for largely pragmatic reasons, our thinking primarily focused on crime reduction and drew on a broad evidence base¹⁷ to characterise the mode of working shown to be best suited to delivering results.

In synthesis this tells us that an effective local policing function intervenes *creatively, purposefully and proactively*,¹⁸ *with other agencies and the support of local people, based on an understanding of the conditions that make specific types of crime more likely (and jeopardise safety) in particular places*. We have called this mode of policing informed proactivity and view it as compatible with, but conceptually broader than, both intelligence-led policing and the problem oriented approach which was used to develop, implement and test crime reduction initiatives in each project site.

¹⁴ Problem oriented policing developed from a critique of conventional police activities first made by Herman Goldstein (1979). Goldstein challenged the prevailing view of police work as a series of discrete incident responses and instead advocated refocusing on the 'problems' that connected them. The approach emphasises collecting and analysing information from a range of sources to improve understanding of crime problems and their causes, and enlisting the support of other agencies and individuals to develop and deliver 'upstream' solutions. The problem-oriented approach was field-tested by Eck and Spelman (1987) and codified into a four-stage problem-solving process of Scanning, Analysis, Response and Assessment (or 'SARA') which has been shown to work at least 'modestly' well (Weisburd et al., 2008). The SARA model provided the template for the crime reduction work carried out in Luton and Slough as part of this project.

¹⁵ Hales and Higgins (2016).

¹⁶ Higgins and Hales (2016).

¹⁷ See Kam (2013), Weisburd and Eck (2004) and Lum et al. (2010).

¹⁸ We use the term *proactive/proactivity* in the broadest sense to refer to any activity undertaken to prevent or mitigate the impact of crime or antisocial behaviour before it has occurred. This includes, but is much broader than, proactive law enforcement operations undertaken by the police to arrest or disrupt those involved in on-going criminality.

Informed proactivity: an effective local policing function intervenes creatively, purposefully and proactively, with other agencies and the support of local people, based on an understanding of the conditions that make specific types of crime more likely in particular places.

Informed proactivity in practice

Ultimately, as the table (on page 5) indicates, neither of the project's initiatives succeeded in bringing about an identifiable reduction in crime. As discussed in detail elsewhere¹⁹, the reasons for this differed across the sites. In Luton a highly challenging local service context meant that implementing the initiative (a task undertaken by a multi-agency practitioner working group, supported by a Police Foundation project officer) proved extremely difficult. Identifying resources to deliver project tasks was a constant challenge with plans easily derailed by staff sickness, holiday periods or last minute reactive abstractions. Finding local staff to take ownership of programme elements was particularly difficult; local tasking systems, particularly those operating across multiple partner agencies, often faltered; and attempts to assist and galvanise local residents proved difficult to deliver and met with an underwhelming public response.

In contrast, despite some 'teething problems', implementation in Slough was broadly as planned and benefited from what appeared to be a robust and resilient local policing function, with strong partnership connections. New analytic and information sharing practices were implemented to support the programme, a multi-agency practitioner group came together and grew in cohesion, and a number of sensible, case-level interventions were instigated, often driven by energetic and well-embedded neighbourhood policing teams. On balance the disappointing outcome in Slough is more likely to be explained by design/theory failure (in terms of a lack of explicit emphasis on engagement with/involvement of individual cases) than implementation deficiencies.

¹⁹ See our forthcoming site reports.

The project on a page

		Luton	Slough
Scanning	Methods	Harm scoring, comparative performance analysis, focus groups, stake-holder consultation, academic advisory group input.	
	Geographic focus	Two fast-changing central wards with recent inward migration.	A deprived, diverse central ward and a 'traditional' housing estate.
	Crime-focus	Residential burglary – an established local priority.	Violence, including domestic and other violent offences.
Analysis	Methods	Crime mapping, statistical analysis, offender and victim interviews, street-survey, practitioner engagement.	
	Findings	Familiar features: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Micro-location hotspots. - Seasonality. - Locally resident, problematic drug-using offenders. - Opportunist offending. - Repeats and near-repeats. 	New hypotheses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low-end private rented housing providing inadequate home security. - Low collective efficacy in transient hotspots. - Younger 'lifestyle' offender group. <p>Diffuse and multifaceted violence problem: weak hotspots, multiple non-proximate drivers.</p> <p>Violence (including non-domestic violence) often in private spaces.</p> <p>Notable levels of recurrence – individuals coming to notice time and again. Cross-overs in role (victim/offender) and type of violence (domestic/other).</p>
	Analysis to action	Practitioner workshops, evidence review, local sign-off of proposals, action plans developed by multi-agency working groups.	
Response	Model	Multi-agency target hardening and community resilience building in hotspots. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Street survey visits to identify vulnerable premises and environmental issues. - Targeted home security advice and on-going resident engagement. - Home security assessment offer. - Channels of support for residents. - Neighbourhood improvement group. 	Multi-agency case-based problem solving approach focused on key wards. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematic identification of recurrent victims and offenders in key wards. - Multi-agency research and case level information sharing. - Case-conferencing with a 'problem solving' emphasis. - Multi-agency tasking and review.
	Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Substantial challenges. - Additional strands (re: tracking technology and complex needs offenders) undelivered. - Little resident take-up, reticent public response. 	Largely successful. Sustained practitioner commitment and process improvement. Analysis indicates only modest uplift in engagement with cases which may have been a programme weakness.
Assessment	Impact evaluation	No evidence of impact on burglary. Rate in hotspots unchanged on previous year and generally in line with comparator locations.	No evidence of impact on violent crime or demand on police. Rate of recurrence in line with matched cohorts in other parts of town and previous years.
	Process evaluation	Delivery impacted by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Acute demand and service pressure. - Changing priority picture. - A reactive policing model. - Low base-line of public engagement in target areas. - Realigning partnership dynamic. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Facilitated improvements in partnership working and information sharing. - Driven by, and an enabler of, neighbourhood police teams. - Embraced challenging caseload with limited resources. - But questions over outputs, tasking processes and 'orthodoxy'.

As this suggests, and as we describe in the following sections, at the time of the project's delivery phase (mid-2014 to mid-2015), the police and their partners in Slough were better placed and proved more able to work in a way approximating informed proactivity than their counterparts in Luton.

We should state that in making this observation we imply no criticism of the officers and staff from Bedfordshire Police or their community safety partners whom we encountered in Luton during the initiative; the project is indebted to a number of individuals, in both sites, who dedicated considerable amounts of time, effort, skill and resource to the project, based on a strong commitment to its rationale and potential benefits. Instead we draw attention to the contextual differences that appeared to enable effective working practices in Slough and inhibited them in Luton. This paper focuses on the implications of one such difference, namely the contrasting neighbourhood policing models operating in the two towns during the period.

Similarity and difference: why neighbourhood policing became an issue

While not identical, Luton and Slough have much in common; both are large, ethnically and culturally diverse towns, with young, fast-growing and fast-changing populations²⁰. Both are also well connected through nearby airports, rail and road infrastructure and proximity to London, but both also face challenges including pockets of deprivation²¹, high housing demand²² and relatively high crime rates²³, as well as concerns about extremism and organised crime.

The policing context of the two towns contrasts markedly however. Slough is the fourth most

populous of a number of conurbations within the Thames Valley Policing area (one of the largest police forces in England and Wales) accounting for about nine per cent of its recorded crime. A relatively strong force-level council tax base and opportunities for economies of scale, coupled with a degree of local autonomy delivered through a priority based budgeting system²⁴, appeared (to us, as external collaborators) to provide a basis for stability and resilience in the face of budget cuts, and in particular, for the maintenance of a strong neighbourhood policing function. At the time of the project's implementation phase, Slough had a neighbourhood policing establishment²⁵ of 33 constables and 36 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), supervised by six sergeants and three inspectors, each in charge of one of three geographic sectors. Although some difficulty was being experienced in recruiting and retaining PCSOs and aid requirements generated regular abstractions to duties outside of the town, this equated to a planned ratio of one neighbourhood officer or PCSO for approximately every 1,800 town residents.

Luton in contrast is the largest town and the source of greatest demand for Bedfordshire Police (one of the smallest forces in the country), and one with well documented concerns about resilience and funding²⁶. Although for its population size Luton tends to record fewer crimes than Slough, it has comparatively higher rates of more resource intensive serious crime, with the difference even more pronounced

At the time of our research Luton had one neighbourhood police officer or PCSO for approximately every 4,400 residents, less than half the provision made in Slough.

²⁰ Bourner (2012), Mayhew and Waples (2011).

²¹ According to the Index of Multiple Deprivation, Luton became relatively more deprived in the period between 2004 and 2010 and was ranked 69th most deprived (out of 326 local authorities) nationally in 2010. In comparison, deprivation in Slough is less acute, but the town does have pockets of significant disadvantage and the proportion of children living in poverty in the town is higher than the national average and rose by 20 per cent between 2007 and 2010. See DCLG (2010), English Public Health Observatories (2012), Safer Slough Partnership (2012).

²² Slough Borough Council (2005), Luton Borough Council (no date).

²³ Data for 2013/14 shows that Slough had at that time the 32nd and Luton the 47th highest total crime rate (per 1,000 populations/households) of 311 Community Safety Partnership areas in England and Wales. See Office for National Statistics (2014).

²⁴ Thames Valley's priority based budgeting process involved assessing the contribution of all force spending to the delivery of force priorities. The process included a commitment to locally tailored service delivery and gave Local Policing Areas some discretion in the way funding was used to meet community needs. HMIC (2016a) p.14. See also http://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/18_december_2014.pdf (pp3-4).

²⁵ The 'establishment' is the number of planned and funded posts.

²⁶ In 2016(b) HMIC said 'Bedfordshire Police has low levels of funding compared with other forces. It needs to do more to match its very limited resources to the challenging demands it faces' and 'the force still faces financial risks and uncertainties. The savings plans remain austere and continuing workforce reductions are planned through to 2019/20' (p7). See also the former Bedfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner's 'Save Our Police' campaign <http://www.bedfordshire.pcc.police.uk/fluidcms/files/files/Save-our-Police-Leaflet-web.pdf> [Accessed 7 December 2016].

at the force level (reflected in more than twice as much per head of population spent on investigations in Bedfordshire than in Thames Valley²⁷). In recorded crime terms, Luton accounts for around 40 per cent of the force total, but this is likely to underestimate the proportion of force resource expended there. Both at force level and locally, policing had undergone a succession of leadership and structural changes in the years preceding and concurrent with our involvement, which included the decision to scale back neighbourhood policing in order to protect 'core' response and investigation functions. As two locally-based senior officers explained to us:

"[The] response to austerity involved sucking back officers from their community teams and the neighbourhood teams. We [had previously] built up quite a strong neighbourhood policing model with neighbourhood officers working in sergeant-led teams alongside PCSOs in all the main areas of the force and under [the then chief constable] we sucked all that back to deal with core policing functions of responding to and investigating crime."

And...

"There was definitely a focus, in terms of when somebody picks up the phone, what is our core purpose? Our core purpose is that, when somebody needs us in an emergency, we're in a position of being able to go and respond to it. When a crime has happened that we've got the ability to be able to investigate it effectively."

Interviewer: *"Do you know what the driver was for that change?"*

"Austerity."

In the wake of these decisions and at the time of the project's implementation phase, Luton's neighbourhood policing establishment consisted of three inspectors, three sergeants, 36 PCSOs and six constables (who had been returned to neighbourhood duties to fill the gap in police powers created by the total removal of PCs). This represents one neighbourhood officer or PCSO for every 4,400 residents. Even disregarding the

reliance on PCSOs over warranted officers, this is less than half of the level of neighbourhood provision made in Slough.

In both towns the role of neighbourhood policing teams had evolved somewhat to include responding to some appointment-based, non-emergency calls for service. In Luton, however, acute demand and the removal of more usual team structures had also led to a strong pull of PCSOs into *police* support work, such as collecting CCTV or guarding crime scenes (as opposed to *community* support work), leaving little time for proactivity or community engagement. As local police officers told us:

"It does feel like we are ... robbing Peter to pay Paul. We have a daily management meeting where we actually decide what our priorities are for the day. Very often that is the ... summary of the outstanding jobs, and very often the neighbourhood officers will be volunteered to help, because we just haven't got the resources."

"PCSOs were not designed to be a standalone role; [they] have now ended up drifting along without a clear mandate. Operational demands and acute shortages on section [in police response teams] have resulted in the PCSOs being used as a spare resource."

The contrasting implications of these organisational differences for the project's two crime reduction initiatives are set out in the next sections.

The Slough Violence Multi-Agency Panel (VMAP): enabling effective neighbourhood policing

The response to recurrent violence in Slough developed through the project, which became known as the Violence Multi-Agency Panel or VMAP, was an attempt to supplement the incident-by-incident police response and investigation of violent crimes, with a more holistic 'person-centred' assessment of individuals who repeatedly came to notice as victims of (often 'low-level') violence, violent offenders, or both. VMAP involved routine analysis of police data to identify recently recurrent individuals, research and information sharing to build a picture of possible case-level drivers and risk

²⁷ £14.30 versus £5.40 per head of population spent on investigations in year ending March 2016; see HMIC (2016c) p.17, HMIC (2016d) p.17.

factors, and multi-agency case coordination and conferencing, to agree and task appropriate intervention activity. The initiative had a local focus on four of the town's 14 wards and as such, neighbourhood policing teams were envisaged as playing a key role.

In the execution, as the key 'on the ground' interface with local residents and communities and a principal source of knowledge about local crime and related issues, neighbourhood officers can take considerable credit for providing much of the momentum and energy that accumulated behind the VMAP process. The initiative was fortunate to benefit from the involvement of experienced local officers who 'knew their ground', could provide insights into local families and individuals, showed real commitment to improving the lives of residents, and provided natural, practical leadership to what became a close-knit and well-functioning multi-agency group. It is telling that over the course of the pilot year the police took on 40 per cent of all formal actions generated through the process, with neighbourhood officers taking the majority of these.

Importantly, the processes adopted by VMAP can be seen as enabling effective local policing in a number of ways. First, officers noted the shift it made possible from the 'standard' reactive police response to a more considered and proactive footing, based on dealing with 'whole people' rather than incidents. As one neighbourhood officer told us:

"Well, it [violent crime] has been addressed in the past by reacting to what's gone on and I'll go to it one day, she [a colleague] will go to it the next, he will go to it the next, and there's absolutely no continuity in how to deal with that particular person ... We're [now] talking about how we deal with that person, and how all of us around that table can work to deal with that person and get that person into a situation or a scenario where they are happy. People that are committing crime are generally crying out for help in some way ... That's where [VMAP] works, that never happened before."

Second, VMAP's systematic research and analysis processes brought information out of police and other agencies systems, and made it available to direct and inform front line police (and partner) activity. In the words of two officers;

The VMAP programme plan was implemented energetically, the way information was shared and put to use improved, partner relationships developed and resources were better targeted to proactively engage and assist those at risk. This was only made possible by a well-established and embedded neighbourhood policing function.

"I don't think we'd [previously] have got all the research which is what underpins everything. I certainly wouldn't have had anybody to be able to put it into some sort of format and, [identify] ... actually, this is the issue. So there's been a lot of benefits to it."

"[The VMAP process] wants me to get to know that other one [the case I don't personally know about] like I know the other ones. Why are they here? [In the VMAP caseload, produced through data analysis] There's a reason they're here, I want to find out about that person, I want to see if I can get to know them ... Then over the space of about two weeks I will make sure I visit that area at least once to try and knock on the door and speak to [the individual] ... not mention anything about the assault, just to say 'how's everything going?'"

Third, the regular opportunities VMAP provided to discuss cases with colleagues in other agencies who had knowledge of, and different perspectives on, the same individuals, aided the transfer of useful, often 'softer' case information.

"[Other VMAP practitioners will] give me the personalities of the people we're talking about because, they'll know a little bit about them that I don't know, and I think that's really important as well. So that young lad [who] assaulted somebody, one of the youth workers in here was telling me what he's like and what he enjoys and stuff. If I go and visit him I know that, don't I?"

This knowledge transfer was clearly a two-way process and appreciated by partners, as these quotations from non-police VMAP participants illustrate;

"The [neighbourhood] police officers, they've got so much information, because they know the clients, because they're having that contact all the time, and they're really good to link in to, as well. So, they've been invaluable."

"What I find quite useful, is information that we're given from the neighbourhood police officers, on that day to day basis, how that person's behaving in the community, because that service user's not necessarily going to give us that information and that's something we can challenge that individual [with]."

As we have discussed elsewhere VMAP was not without its flaws; the resources at its disposal were limited and quickly exhausted, improvements in internal processes probably masked an only modest uplift in actual engagement work, and multi-agency 'orthodoxies' may have led to case activity that was 'sensible' but not explicitly focused on crime prevention²⁸. However, neither these issues nor its failure to deliver a reduction in violent crime should detract from its achievements. The programme plan was implemented energetically and (generally) faithfully, the way information was shared and put to use improved, partner relationships developed and resources were better targeted to proactively engage and assist those at risk. In short, when it functioned at its best VMAP demonstrated many of the hallmarks of informed proactivity and this was only made possible by a well-established and embedded neighbourhood policing function.

The Luton Burglary Reduction Initiative: what happens to informed proactivity when neighbourhood policing is diminished

The Luton Burglary Reduction Initiative (or BRI) was envisaged as a multi-component, multi-agency programme for improving home security and promoting 'collective efficacy'²⁹ in a number of small, persistent burglary hotspots characterised by diverse

communities, high rates of 'population churn', and lower quality, privately rented housing. As mentioned earlier, implementing the programme came up against considerable challenges and only two elements showed tangible progress during the year.

The 'core' part of the programme commenced with a set of street-survey visits to the identified hotspot areas by PCSOs, assisted by colleagues from Luton Borough Council and Bedfordshire Fire and Rescue Service. These had the purpose of identifying and recording homes with apparent security flaws, engaging those living in them, including with the offer of a free home security assessment, and identifying any public-space environmental risk factors requiring attention. Follow-up work included further resident engagement efforts, carrying out home security assessments when requested, and routing the referrals generated from these through appropriate channels of support provided by the local Home Improvement Agency, local authority housing department or 'bobby van' scheme³⁰.

Despite some difficulties in assembling multi-agency teams, the street-surveys were carried out relatively successfully during the first two months of the pilot year, resulting in identification of around 500 apparently 'vulnerable' dwellings within the target areas; however, the follow-up activity proved more difficult to instigate and deliver. It quickly became clear that BRI tasks were being over-looked (both by police employees and others) within busy, fluid workloads full of more 'time-critical', reactive tasks. It was also clear that stretched operational leads were unable to follow-up and scrutinise the multiple individual actions required to make the process function, particularly when these were distributed across a number of agencies. To compound matters residents' take-up of the home security assessment offer – designed as the gateway to tailored support – was disappointingly low, with only around 20 requests received initially, and only a handful more generated by further publicity and extending the offer to all 4,400 dwellings in the hotspot areas.

To support the core programme, attempts were made to catalyse activities that would bring local

²⁸ Higgins, Hales and Chapman (2016).

²⁹ 'Collective efficacy' refers to the extent to which neighbours know and trust one another, share an understanding of acceptable behavioural norms and are willing to intervene (together or individually) to protect their neighbourhood from crime and related problems. It can act as a protective factor in neighbourhoods that might otherwise experience high levels of crime; Sampson et al. (1997), Sampson and Raudenbush (1999).

³⁰ The Bedfordshire bobby van scheme provides help with home security to vulnerable and elderly residents. It is run on a charitable basis by Bedfordshire Police Partnership Trust <http://bedspolicepartnership.org/>.

people together, increase neighbour watchfulness and improve collective efficacy among hotspot residents. Progress here was slowed by difficulties in establishing ownership and finding local resource for this element of the work, however during the second half of the year a local authority employed community development officer was able to bring together a small 'neighbourhood improvement group' in one ward, that took some first steps toward addressing various local quality of life issues. It was not possible to make any progress on several other proposed work strands, initially suggested by police and partners, and then short-listed for further development, including making better use of tracking technologies to detect and deter theft of laptops and smart phones, and improving service coordination for offenders with the most complex needs.

The challenging implementation conditions experienced in Luton can be attributed to a combination of factors including acute levels of demand and tangible pressure on Luton's local services, a changing priority picture, and a local partnership dynamic that was in the process of realignment after some discord. At least as relevant for understanding these difficulties however, was the policing model operated by Bedfordshire police at the time, which (as described earlier) was heavily oriented towards reactive, response policing and provided only a skeleton neighbourhood policing resource. This impacted on the delivery of the Burglary Reduction Initiative through a number of mechanisms.

First and most straightforwardly, small and often reactively tasked neighbourhood policing teams, provided little capacity for delivering pre-planned, non-urgent, proactive policing activities, such as the targeted engagement and crime prevention work required here – and there was no other police resource available to do this instead. As a local supervisor explained:

"[The Burglary Reduction Initiative is] ... for the police ... resource and time intensive. It's taken a lot of time. We don't have many PCSOs ... you say you only want four? Well, there are only four some days [covering an area of the town], so it's been intensive that way."

And as other officers and police staff commented:

"When I first started, in my opinion ... [it] was better. You had your dedicated teams, they got to know their communities and they got things done. Now, we are just response police, and there are just not enough hours in the day for the work that's coming in."

"Years ago we had the resources where people could be proactive, and they would go out looking for burglars. They would go out looking for robbers ... and that doesn't happen now because we're so reactive. We're so driven by what's going on on the [police] radio."

The thinly spread resource also meant that neighbourhood staff, although nominally attached to an area, were often deployed across the town, reducing the potential for local knowledge, insight and relationships to be developed and put to use.

Second, the response-oriented policing model inevitably tended to foster short-term mind-sets and working habits and had resulted in an apparent deficiency in

Local policing must be engaged as well as being proactive and informed.

the skills and operating processes required to plan and deliver a sustained programme of discretionary work, as those in supervisory roles noted;

"We're probably quite good at quick-time, but it's when it's slow-time I just wonder if it goes off the radar and gets forgotten."

"In terms of analytical skills and problem solving, project management skills, those people will be probably already consumed in continuous improvement or intelligence or something."

This made it difficult for the Police Foundation's project officer to hand over elements of the initiative to local staff, as originally planned, and to rely on existing processes to make things happen.

Third, local officers and PCSOs reflected on the way that current arrangements had weakened their ability to generate local intelligence and a working knowledge of their neighbourhoods, which might have proved of significant value to the initiative.

"[Previously] we could deal with a lot of community issues. So, we'd break down

barriers by going into schools, seeing the kids, speaking with the parents, doing school talks all the time, literally just doing general patrol whilst on foot, getting to know the area. Now, no time for it at all. It's a lot of: 'do this, do that', you haven't got time to go into schools ... We're losing touch with the community."

Finally and perhaps most crucially, the Burglary Reduction Initiative exposed the deficiency in the police's capacity to leverage local relationships, familiarity and trust in order to involve residents in local policing efforts. While it should be acknowledged that the police and others in Luton had invested heavily in community cohesion work³¹, research interviews with practitioners repeatedly drew a link between the public's reluctance to take up the home security assessment offer and the lack of a consistent and familiar neighbourhood policing presence (in what were, admittedly, quite transient and 'low adhesion' neighbourhoods) – coupled with some public disappointment with the policing services experienced.

"In the past, when we've had ... a dedicated local police officer and a dedicated team in an area, they've established a working relationship. But then something happens and then that team is dissolved, and away we go, and then six months later we're back in a neighbourhood saying, 'hello, this is us, can we work with you?' People become resistant because there is no continuity."

"The community are disheartened by what they see as a lack of response by police. They get told to phone 101 for non-urgent items and then get held on the line for long periods of time. The demise of neighbourhood teams has not been helpful ... people no longer seem to know their PCSOs so the relationships that were developed have been a complete waste of time. If there is some consistency in neighbourhood teams people would have more confidence".

"You're trying to re-engage with people that you've disappointed, and that's the way the circle keeps going."

There is a clear reminder here that to bring about change, local policing must be *engaged* as well as being *proactive* and *informed*. This was, incidentally, a conclusion that Bedfordshire police leaders had reached for other reasons; reflecting on the challenges faced in managing the public reaction to a number of controversial incidents in the town, a senior officer explained:

"People hadn't seen police officers. They had no real relationship with police officers. For instance they didn't have a local beat officer who they may say, 'well we don't trust the police, but we trust you because we see you'. We didn't have that footprint in those communities. People didn't see police officers very often ... the individual officer reputation we realised carries an awful lot of weight in managing concerns in small communities."

Although it came too late to alter the fortunes of our *Police Effectiveness* project, this realisation influenced the decision by senior management, coinciding with the final months of our time in Luton, to redesign Bedfordshire's local policing model, placing a stronger emphasis on proactive and community focused capabilities. At the time of our final practitioner interviews, the question of whether this would free-up sufficient resource to begin addressing the drivers of crime and demand, rather than just reacting to it, was very much a live issue.

"They say [the new model is] going to be community [focused], but I think it's going to be engulfed in section work [response and investigation], and that will include everything else ... in my opinion, it's clumping us all together."

Interviewer: *"And the danger of that is?"*

"There will be no community work done."

Findings from a natural experiment

Slough and Luton were considered prime sites to study policing in the context of change because of the similar social shifts taking place in each town. However, it was incidental differences in the way policing was organised between the two places that proved most instructive for understanding the

³¹ Promoting harmonious relations between, and countering extremism within, Luton's diverse communities.

enablers of police effectiveness. Reflecting on the experience of facilitating locally tailored, evidence-based, problem oriented crime reduction initiatives, in two very different organisational contexts, four conclusions stand out. These are not new but bear re-emphasis:

1. Local policing needs to be structured in such a way as to allow meaningful resources to be directed at non-immediate goals, which if achieved should result in a reduction in demand on immediate, reactive resources. At its most basic, this involves ring-fencing officers and staff (or some part of their time) for proactive work, but it also involves embedding a more preventative mind-set and developing tasking and monitoring processes that mean non-time critical tasks do not get forgotten. It also means equipping staff with problem solving and project management skills and carving out the space in which they might use them.
2. Proactive policing efforts need to be informed by local knowledge derived from effective use of the information held in police systems, from individuals in and data held by partner organisations, and from working closely with local people. Obtaining and interpreting this information requires strong relationships as well as analytical skills and capacity.
3. To be effective, including in practical efforts to reduce crime, local police must have an underlying bedrock of engagement and consistent personal connection with people living in the places where they work. Whether it is by paying attention to crime prevention advice, being willing to invite officers into homes to assess security, working with officers to address personal risks or behaviour, providing intelligence or listening and starting a dialogue when things get tense, local populations hold a crucial key for unlocking police effectiveness. They will only allow it to turn if there are trusted officers, embedded in communities, who stand as guarantors that this will lead to impactful, appropriate and legitimate action.
4. Building useful local knowledge and engaging and involving local people in making places

Much of the functionality for delivering engaged and informed proactive policing has come to be located within neighbourhood policing teams.

safer, is particularly challenging in changing and churning communities such as those encountered in this project. As neighbourhoods and their populations become increasingly varied and diverse, it becomes more important to consider both the relative level of resourcing and the style of policing³² most appropriate to each setting.

While it is possible to imagine alternative delivery mechanisms, much of the functionality for delivering the kind of engaged and informed proactive policing described above, has come to be located within neighbourhood policing teams. The respective solidity and fragility of these in Slough and Luton provides a vivid illustration of what is compromised when these become significantly depleted.

The national context

In the months preceding the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review, during which our pilot initiatives drew to a close, the language used to describe the style of policing that would need to be adopted if further funding cuts were imposed became increasingly vivid. Senior police figures evoked a bleak future in which local policing would be reduced to a 'blue light' emergency service, taken back to the 1970s, and forced to operate in an increasingly 'paramilitary' style³³.

The truth, however, is that in some places, and to varying degrees, austerity-driven force remodelling exercises had already begun to push local policing models in this direction. At the more modest end, this involved a blurring of the lines between neighbourhood policing work and elements of response and investigation³⁴; in Bedfordshire,

³² According to Nolan et al. (2004) neighbourhoods can be either *strong* (low crime with 'interdependent' communities that are organised to address problems themselves), *responsive* (high crime but with communities that are working effectively), *vulnerable* (low crime but lacking the community resources to address problems should they arise) or *anomic* (high crime and highly dependent on the police), they suggest that the style of policing required differs in each context.

³³ BBC (2015), Davenport (2015), Dodd (2015).

³⁴ College of Policing (2015).

Neighbourhood policing must be considered an essential part of the 'core' of an effective local policing function. The type of stripped-down model adopted in Bedfordshire during this period should not be considered an acceptable response to, or consequence of, austerity.

however, national data suggest a more radical experiment in reactive, stripped-back local policing was underway.

In March 2015, only 11 per cent of the police officers and PCSOs employed by Bedfordshire Police were in designated 'neighbourhood' roles, compared with an average of 23 per cent for the 43 territorial police forces in England and Wales. Only City of London police (which has a tiny residential population) had a smaller proportion, while three forces allocated more than 40 per cent of officers and PCSOs to neighbourhood policing roles^{35 36}. On average, the 43 forces in England and Wales provided one neighbourhood officer or PCSO for every 2,300 people; in Bedfordshire the ratio was more than one for every 5,000³⁷. Bedfordshire also weighted its neighbourhood workforce more heavily towards PCSOs (rather than warranted officers) than any other force (see charts 1, 2 and 3 on pages 14 and 15).

It is beyond the remit of this study to comment on whether the decisions taken by the Bedfordshire police leadership about their policing model were necessitated by funding and demand pressures or whether alternative choices could have been made. In either case, based on the evidence collected during this project, it was clearly a move that had significant consequences for the ability of the force to engage in effective working practices, a conclusion echoed by HMIC³⁸ and one

acknowledged locally, reflected in the decision to redesign the model in mid-2015.

Having documented what is compromised when neighbourhood policing is (largely) removed, it is clear that it must be considered an essential part of the 'core' of an effective local policing function, rather than an optional extra, and that the type of model adopted in Bedfordshire during this period should not be considered an acceptable response to, or consequence of, austerity.

Core functions

Writing in 1979, John Alderson, then chief constable of Devon and Cornwall Police, envisaged a revolutionary new form of community policing as a '*first tier policing strategy*', which would be '*backed up*' by second tier emergency response and third tier detection, which '*should receive a greater input of community help flowing from the first tier community policing*'.³⁹ Thirty years later, describing the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, Wes Skogan focused on the cultural change required within police departments to transfer responsibility for priority setting and delivery to local communities and their officers.⁴⁰

Both, in different ways, emphasise the priority and primacy that should be given to the neighbourhood and the officers embedded in it, within police thinking, structures and operating models. Neighbourhood policing, so conceived, requires a reshaping of, rather than addition to, other aspects of police working, so that these support and supplement the neighbourhood rather than the other way around.

It has been suggested that the English and Welsh model, with its top-down legacy of 'reassurance' policing, has failed to embrace this fundamental shift in philosophy⁴¹. The stress-test of austerity appears to have borne this out by revealing an inverse view of what is 'core' and what is

The stress-test of austerity has revealed an inverse view of what is 'core' and what is supplementary to local policing.

³⁵ It is acknowledged that the function performed by designated 'neighbourhood' officers has become more ambiguous over time and the roles performed by the officers and PCSOs described by this data will, to some degree, vary between forces. See for instance note 5 of the source data (Home Office (2015)) which refers to the joint neighbourhood and response roles performed by Local District Policing Teams in Essex and Kent.

³⁶ A number of forces including Bedfordshire (30) and Thames Valley (5) identified relatively small numbers of other police staff as working in 'neighbourhood' roles; these have been excluded from this analysis and it has not clear what functions these individuals performed in our study sites.

³⁷ Across all functions (and outside of London) police forces employed between 1.4 and 2.7 police officers per 1,000 population. Bedfordshire employed 1.6 (more than 10 other forces). Thames Valley employed 1.9 (more than 22 others).

³⁸ HMIC (2016e).

³⁹ Alderson (1979) p240.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Mackenzie and Henry (2009) p16.

⁴¹ Tilley (2008).

Chart 1: Proportion (%) of all police officers and PCSOs in designated 'neighbourhood' roles, by force (March 2015) ⁴²

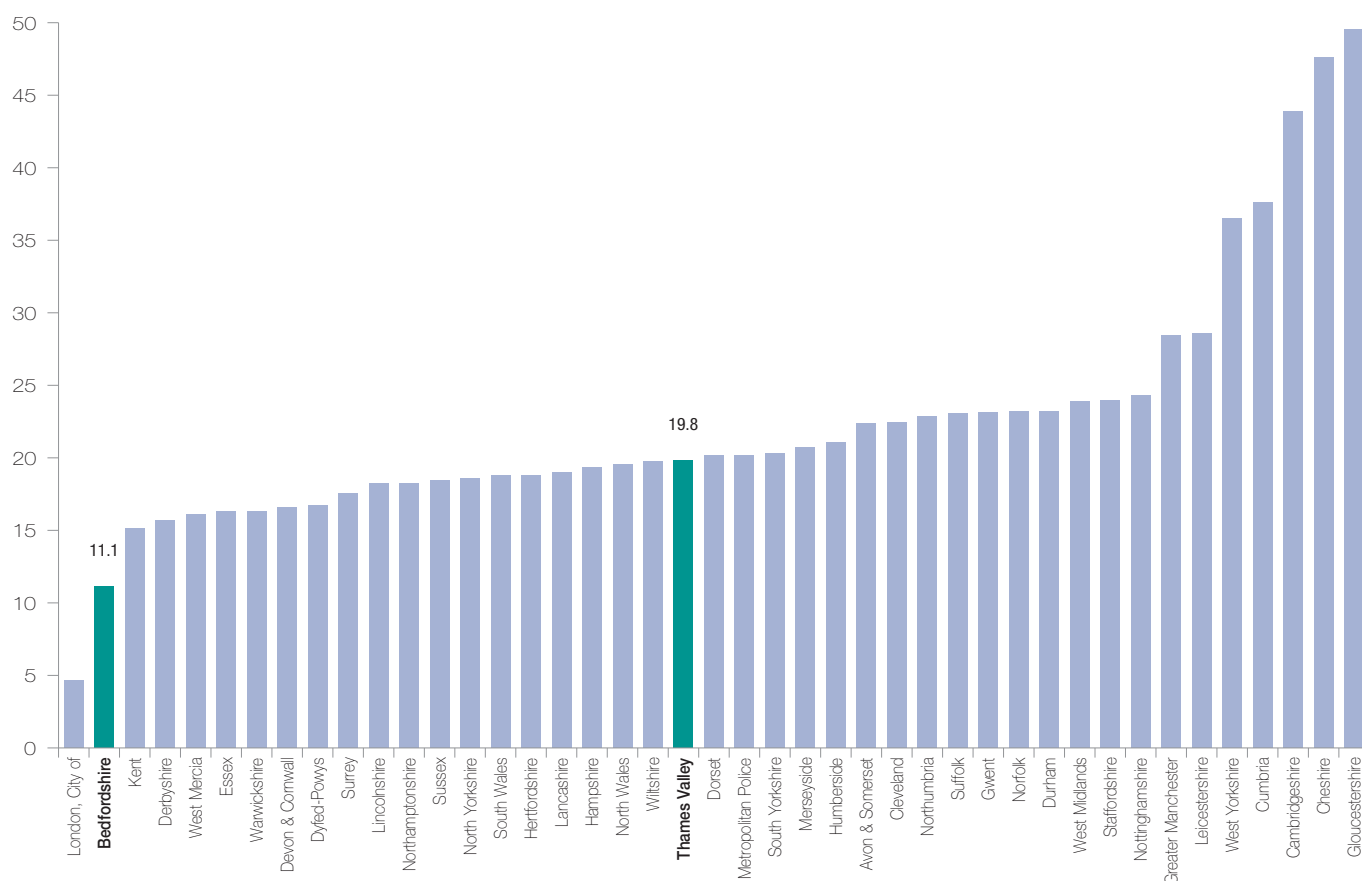
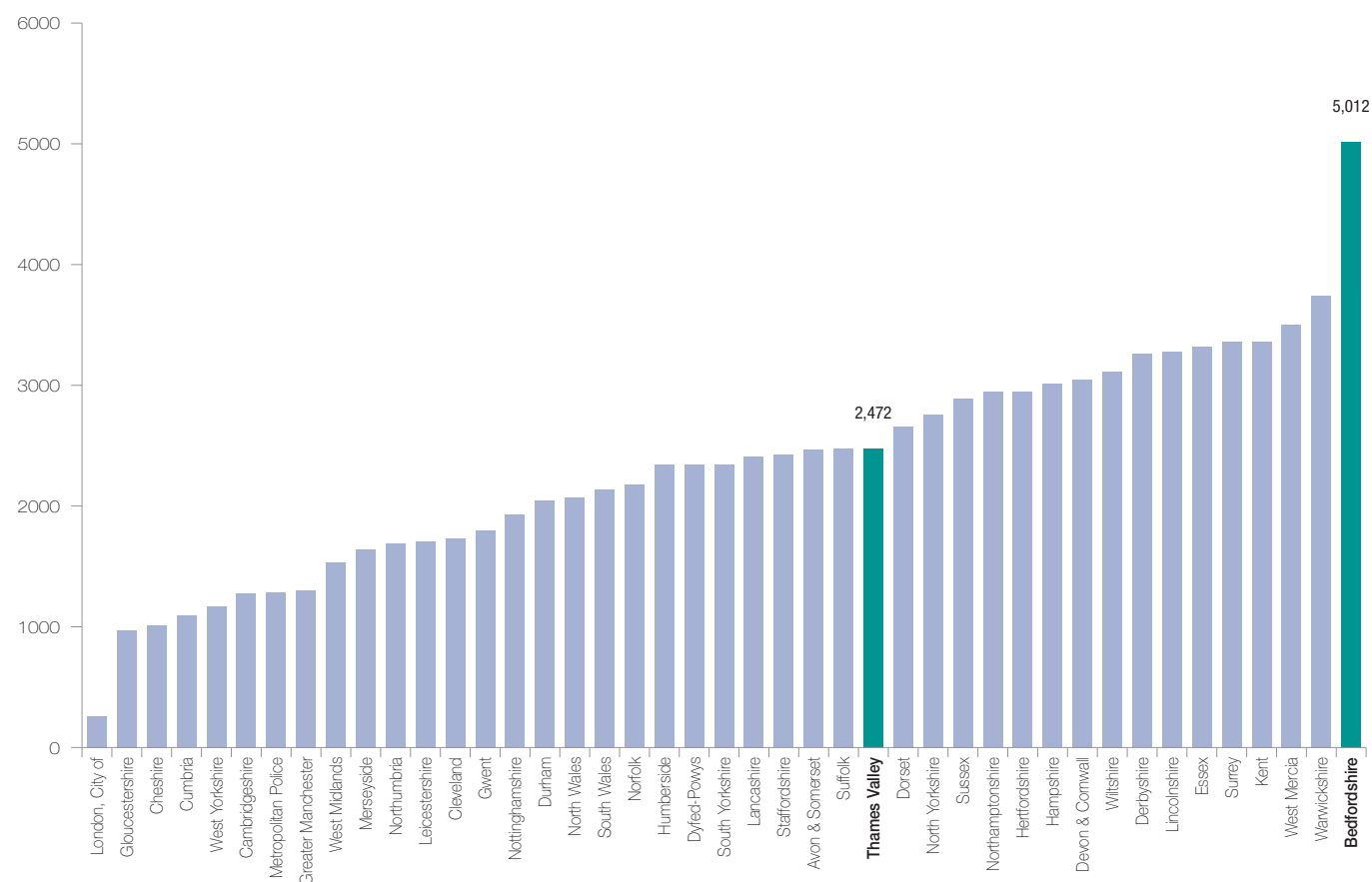


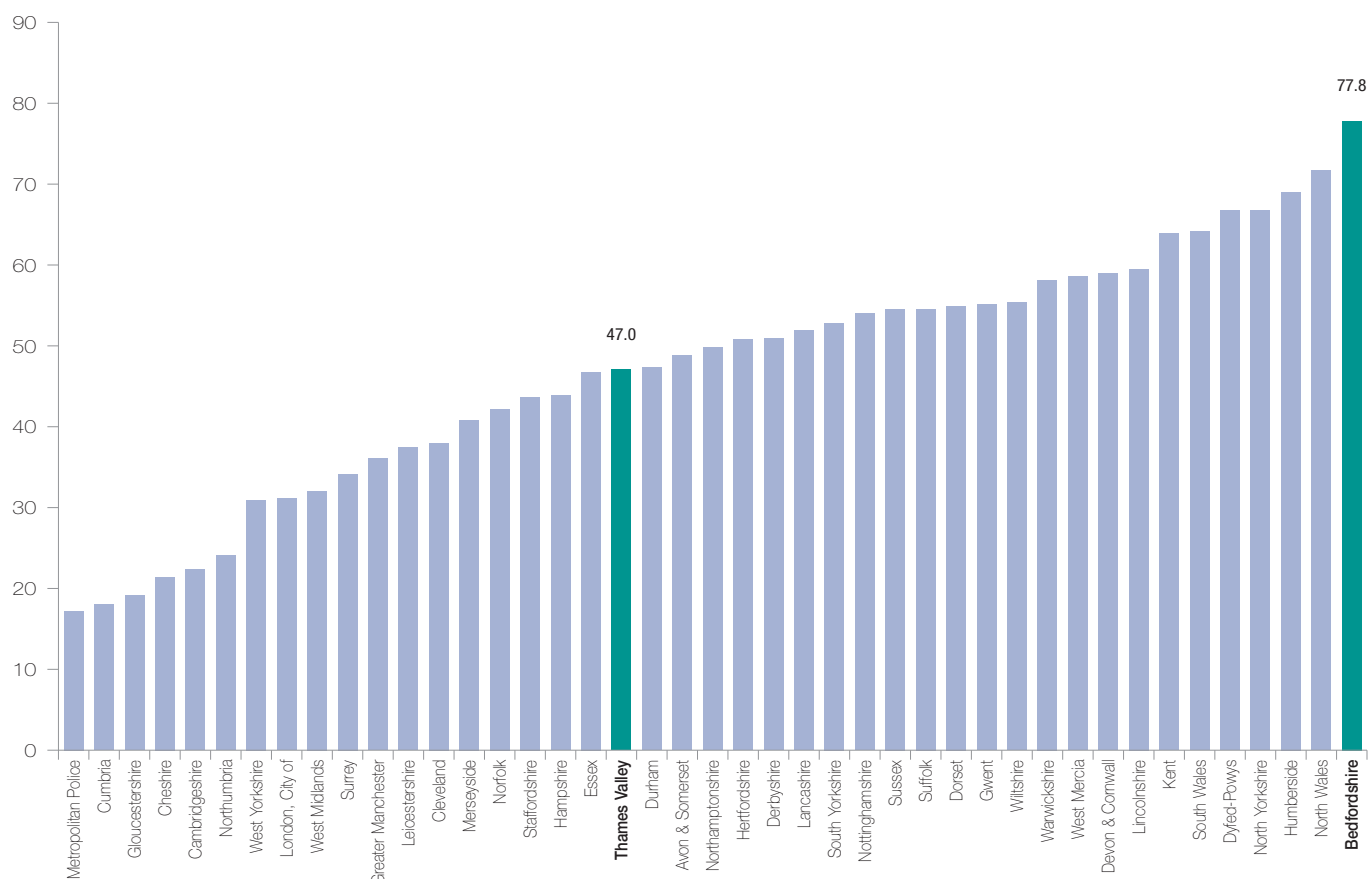
Chart 2: Force population for every police officer or PCSO in a designated 'neighbourhood' role, by force (March 2015) ⁴³



⁴² Source: Home Office (2015).

⁴³ Source for force level population data: ONS (2016a).

Chart 3: Proportion (%) of those in designated 'neighbourhood' roles who were PCSOs, by force (March 2015)



supplementary to local policing, explicitly in Bedfordshire, but also echoed more widely; 'what is left, rather than what is needed' ⁴⁴.

Neighbourhood policing in a changing world

The 2013 survey conducted for the College of Policing's *Practice Stocktake* reflects something of an identity crisis for neighbourhood policing in the second decade of the twenty first century. It describes force leads searching for clarity about what they should expect their neighbourhood teams to deliver – and how to measure their contribution – in an era where public confidence, fear of crime, visibility and to some extent property crime and antisocial behaviour, have been supplanted by concerns about 'hidden' harm and vulnerability (including online vulnerability) ⁴⁵.

Similarly, while we have demonstrated the value of neighbourhood policing for providing the kind of

informed, locally targeted proactive capability that has been shown to be most effective in reducing crime, it would be easy to dismiss the evidence base for *informed proactivity* (coming as it does from a period when research tended to focus on the acquisitive, 'volume' crime priorities of the day) as of little relevance to the current challenges of 'threat, risk and harm'. This would be a mistake for four reasons.

The first is that the emergence of 'new' and newly prioritised forms of crime and harm does not remove the onus on the police to think and work in a preventive way. Doing so will require an informed understanding of new crime and harm generators in their local contexts, from a baseline well below that which already exists for familiar problems like burglary, town centre violence, robbery or car crime.

Second, 'traditional' crime problems such as these will also continue to be part of core business for local police, and a proactive, preventative response will be required, not least to reduce demand on reactive services. As we have described elsewhere ⁴⁶ these

⁴⁴ College of Policing (2015).

⁴⁵ See our project paper on the prioritisation challenges facing policing; Hales and Higgins (2016).

⁴⁶ Higgins and Hales (2016).

Informed proactivity continues to be relevant because we cannot rely on those who suffer the types of harm now being prioritised, or those living in fractured, changing neighbourhoods to come to the police with their problems, without concerted engagement efforts.

'old-world' crime types were found to be changing in character in response to social and technological developments, and it will be necessary to continually review and refresh approaches based on local analysis and understanding.

Third, the new challenges of harm and vulnerability are rarely, if ever, ones that the police can address by working alone. Effectively managing at-risk and dangerous individuals, as well as tackling more structural drivers of local harm, will require strong relationships between informed, local police officers and those in other organisations who share similar goals.

Finally, informed proactivity continues to be relevant because we cannot rely on those who suffer the types of harm now being prioritised, or those living in fractured, diverse and fast changing neighbourhoods (like those on which we focused in this project) to come to the police with their problems, or to cooperate in police-led activities, without concerted and on-going engagement efforts.

Neighbourhood policing has a clear and vital role to play, in all four regards.

Where do we go from here?

With the at least partial, and possibly temporary, reprieve offered to policing by the Comprehensive Spending Review at the end of 2015, the spectre of stripped-back, 'tooled-up' local policing has retreated from public discourse and, a year on, there is cause for cautious optimism. The recently published Policing Vision 2025⁴⁷, signed up to by all forces, along with their Police and Crime Commissioners, recognises the need for local police functions that work to deliver safety in increasingly complex communities. It states that this should be

based on a 'proactive and sophisticated understanding of community needs', maintaining a 'tangible link between citizens and police' and working 'seamlessly' with partner agencies to address the sources of demand. The Vision contains high-level commitments to focus on proactive prevention, to identify and tackle recurring issues and individuals, to adapt to local evidence of impact, support efforts to build cohesive communities, share data, utilise academic knowledge and invest in analytics. It also calls for far greater alignment and integration with other local public services, moving towards a 'whole-system' approach.

Although it seems to be a vision in which local people and communities largely remain the subjects of, rather than participants in, policing and public service decision making⁴⁸, it includes much that is consistent with broad learning about what makes for effective local policing, and also acknowledges that local neighbourhoods are part of a rapidly changing world.

There is a clear role for neighbourhood policing in delivering this vision, however this will be a different form of neighbourhood policing to what we have seen in the past – rolling back the clock by a decade is neither affordable nor an adequate response to the policing challenges of today and tomorrow; the 'good old days of PCSOs on the beat' are just as illusory as those of the local bobbies they were created to replace.

The way policing is delivered has also changed. Gone are the days of centralised policy making and large-scale national programmes; it is for Police and Crime Commissioners and chief constables, in consultation with their communities, to decide how policing services are organised and focused. However, a shared national vision presents an opportunity to draw a line under a period of inconsistency and experimentation, in which dwindling resources have been stretched over the remnants of old frameworks and it has become

⁴⁷ APCC and NPCC (2016).

⁴⁸ While the Vision acknowledges the need to understand community needs, demand and vulnerability there is no mention of community involvement in decision making or priority setting, and while it emphasises the importance of working with a range of partners, there is little explicit role given to local people in contributing to local solutions. It does commit to supporting 'multi-agency neighbourhood projects to build more cohesive communities and solve local problems' but it adds that 'it will often not be realistic for the police to play the central role' in these.

progressively less clear what neighbourhood policing actually means. Consensus on how the future should look makes it possible to contemplate a new set of national, evidence-based principles through which to make that vision a reality. We conclude by briefly setting out some of the key issues that would need to be addressed in formulating this set of principles.

Clarity of purpose: Numerous roles and functions have been assigned to neighbourhood policing during its recent history, both implicitly and explicitly. It has variously been conceived as the provider of visible public reassurance, the front-line of the war on antisocial behaviour, the brand ambassador for the police service, a pragmatic generalist social 'fix-it' service, and the 'golden-thread'⁴⁹ connecting specialist functions with 'grass-roots' intelligence⁵⁰. However, none of these resonates fully with current police concerns and priorities, such as identifying vulnerability, preventing harm, reducing demand, looking after victims and responding to 'risk, threat and harm' in private and online spaces. Neighbourhood policing can contribute to all of these, but it must begin with a clear understanding of *what it is for*.

If it is to be valued, including by those who decide how funding should be allocated, and if its contribution is to be assessed and systematically improved, the next generation of neighbourhood policing will need to proceed with a definitive statement of purpose.

What is needed, where? It has become increasingly clear that policing lacks a sophisticated understanding of demand, and, as discussed earlier, neighbourhood teams have often lost out to areas of business where demand is more simply understood and matched with resource; it is much less clear what it takes to prevent crime (or harm), particularly over the longer term, than to provide a response once it has occurred. The issue becomes even more complex once 'latent'⁵¹ demand is considered, alongside that reported by the public.

⁴⁹ O'Neill (2015).

⁵⁰ Research by the Police Foundation on the impact of organised crime on local communities (conducted in association with Perpetuity Research) found significant disjoints in the flow of information between Neighbourhood Police teams and specialist units, suggesting the 'golden thread', though theoretically appealing, may be difficult to achieve (Crocker et al., 2016).

⁵¹ HMIC (2015).

Starting from its new statement of purpose, there is a need to establish what resource is realistically required to deliver against the assigned remit.

Linked to this are questions about how resources should be allocated geographically. Neighbourhood policing has sometimes tended towards an (ostensibly) egalitarian, 'universal service' model, in which every neighbourhood (often defined at the ward level) has received a standardised, dedicated provision. However, such a model pays little heed to relative demand in each area, the style of neighbourhood policing each requires, or even to variations in population size⁵². There are important questions to address about whether the goals of neighbourhood policing (once set) would best be met by concentrating resource where it is most needed or whether those goals should contain a commitment to universality – and, if so, how those can best be met (and/or be seen to be met).

Proactivity versus reactivity: As we have described here, the capacity of neighbourhood officers and PCSOs to undertake the vital proactive work needed to address the local issues that generate crime and demand, can be jeopardised if their workloads become dominated by reactive tasking. At the same time, however, dealing with calls for service within the neighbourhood, or investigating specific local crimes, can be an effective way to build relevant knowledge, establish community relationships, nurture personal trust and provide continuity of ownership – as well as lightening the load on other areas of business. A framework is needed to delineate the optimum workload for neighbourhood teams that provides time to engage in longer-term preventative work, including through developing knowledge and relationships, while dealing with that portion of 'patent' demand that fits most appropriately with the

Consensus on how the future should look makes it possible to contemplate a set of national, evidence-based principles – through which to make that vision a reality.

⁵² Within the Metropolitan Police area where universal models have, and continue to be advocated (MOPAC, 2016) ward population sizes vary between 5,000 and 27,000. Across England and Wales the variation is much greater (ONS, 2016b).

neighbourhood remit. Existing organising concepts such as response/investigation/community, proactive/reactive, front line/auxiliary, mandatory/discretionary may need to be reviewed and rethought.

Service integration: The Policing Vision 2025 is bold in its ambition for greater alignment and integration in multi-agency local service provision. Given the increasing complexity of demand, particularly in regard to issues such as mental health and safeguarding, increasingly close collaboration between local police, health, education, social services and others seems a necessity. There is also much to be said for neighbourhood police officers fulfilling an 'outreach' or 'gate-keeping' function within the broader integrated local service complex, while also providing a much needed practical, proactive resource. Closer integration may also have potential to improve inherent weaknesses in multi-agency tasking arrangements⁵³; however partnership working brings challenges in terms of defining, agreeing and maintaining a focus on shared objectives while retaining unique service identities and accountabilities. At the strategic level, the imperative for the police lies in ensuring the integrated vision is one that other services can also share; more locally the challenge will lie in resisting service drift.

Support structures: If neighbourhood policing is genuinely to be reimagined as the 'first tier' of policing, considerable thought needs to be given to how it is supported and enabled. Like the headquarters of national supermarket chains, re-conceived as 'store-support centres'⁵⁴, making the local front line work as effectively as possible will need to be a key focus for much of the rest of the service. In particular, if efforts are made to carve out space for local proactivity, attention needs to be given to how that resource is *informed*. This is a multi-faceted task; in addition to the knowledge they can generate for themselves through local contact, neighbourhood teams will need to be the recipients of locally focused flows of intelligence and analysis, based on information held on police systems and from partner agencies (the change in working practice enabled in Slough by new processes to

analyse, share and mobilise information is a good example of this). To understand the complex challenges they face, local teams will also need connectivity with specialist policing units, with appropriate information flowing down as well as up the 'golden thread'. In addition, neighbourhood practitioners will need exposure to new ideas and to evidence generated through academic research, as well as access to the skills and resources to systematically assess their initiatives and approaches and enable evidence-based local practice development.

Work-force: During the course of our project we encountered some exceptional neighbourhood police personnel, who were deeply embedded and knowledgeable about their communities, committed to forging links with other agencies, and who set about improving their neighbourhoods with energy and ingenuity. We also encountered policing and other local service functions that were severely impeded by apparently ceaseless personnel churn, in part as a result of seemingly continual organisational restructuring. If people living in changing neighbourhoods, located within a changing world, are to be kept safe, they will need practically engaged local public services that can provide some level of consistency and continuity, build and maintain local relationships and develop an in-depth understanding of 'whole-places' and how they are changing. They will also need services with the skills and systems capable of identifying and mitigating threat, risk, harm and vulnerability, in hidden, private and online spaces, as well as on the streets.

To play a full and integral part in this, tomorrow's neighbourhood policing teams will need to be places where the brightest and best will want to spend meaningful portions of their careers, and in which they can gain reward, recognition, challenge, new skills and professional development.⁵⁵ The goal-oriented, well-connected and organisationally supported 'first tier' function, sketched out above, can be imagined as a place where that might be possible; the task of making it a reality however will not be straightforward.

⁵³ Higgins, Hales and Chapman (2016).

⁵⁴ See for example <http://sainsburys.jobs/role/store-support-centre> [accessed 3 Jan 2017].

⁵⁵ It will be interesting to follow the progress of the College of Policing's Advanced Practitioner Pilot which includes a local community policing strand. See <http://www.college.police.uk/What-we-do/Development/Advanced-practitioner-pilot/Pages/Advanced-Practitioner-pilot.aspx> [accessed 3 Jan 2017].

Final thoughts

In this paper we have described the ways in which a strong neighbourhood policing function can enable police effectiveness as a delivery mechanism for informed proactivity – and how a depleted one can undermine it. The capabilities and resources offered by a well-resourced and embedded neighbourhood policing function – proactive capacity, local insight and outreach, mutually trusted community contacts, and constructive practitioner-level inter-agency relationships – are likely to prove vital tools for meeting the new challenges of hidden harm and vulnerability in increasingly varied, fast-changing and globally interconnected neighbourhoods. Indeed, we have argued here that neighbourhood policing should be a ‘core’ part of the response.

The Policing Vision 2025 represents a welcome commitment to steer away from the brink

Building a next generation of neighbourhood policing will require refreshing its purpose, establishing what skills, resources and styles are needed, understanding how this differs between neighbourhoods, and reconsidering how it should interface with the rest of tomorrow’s police service.

approached most closely by Bedfordshire in 2015. However, while its key aspiration of greater local service integration has revolutionary potential, building a next generation of neighbourhood policing fit for a changing world will also require refreshing and restating its purpose and functions, establishing what skills, resources and styles are needed to deliver that, understanding how this differs between neighbourhoods, and reconsidering how it should interface with the rest of tomorrow’s police service.

New Research

In 2017 the Police Foundation will undertake a new research project which will:

- Chart the changes to neighbourhood policing in England and Wales over the last decade.
- Identify and consolidate what has been learned from the different approaches taken.
- Consider how limited resources and policing styles might best be matched to increasingly varied and diverse neighbourhoods.
- Explore the potential role of neighbourhood policing in addressing new policing challenges particularly around vulnerability and tackling online crime.

The research will aim to establish a set of evidence-based principles on which a ‘next generation’ of neighbourhood policing might be founded.

Find out more, get involved and share your thoughts at <http://www.police-foundation.org.uk/the-future-of-neighbourhood-policing>.

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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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