



the **policefoundation**
improving policing for the benefit of the public

Sponsored by

CAPITA

Oxford
Policing
Policy
Forum

Does
neighbourhood
policing have a
future?

Report of the sixteenth Oxford Policing Policy Forum

26 November 2014

All Souls College,
Oxford

POLICING POLICY FORUM

Sponsored by

CAPITA

GUEST LIST

26 November 2014

Mr Anthony Bangham	Deputy Chief Constable	West Mercia Police
Mr Mark Behan	Chief Inspector	Northamptonshire Police
Dr Ben Bradford	Career Development Fellow	University of Oxford
Superintendent Andy Boyd	Local Police Area Commander for South Oxfordshire and the Vale of White Horse	Thames Valley Police
Mr Simon Cole, QPM	Chief Constable	Leicestershire Constabulary
Ms Kate Daisley	Operations Director	Neighbourhood & Home Watch Network
Mr Hadyal Dhindsa	Assistant Commissioner	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Derbyshire
Superintendent Richard Fretwell	Ashfield / Mansfield Community Safety Partnership	Nottinghamshire Police
Mr Blair Gibbs	Principal Advisor to Deputy Mayor	Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime
Mr David Gibson	Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Hertfordshire
Mr John Graham	Director	The Police Foundation
Mr Jack Grieg-Midlane	PhD Student	Cardiff University
Professor Mike Hough	School of Law	Birkbeck, University of London
Professor Martin Innes	Director	Cardiff University
Ms Helen King	Assistant Commissioner	Metropolitan Police Service
Mr Robert Leach	Director - Police, Crime and Justice,	Capita Secure Information Solutions Ltd
Ms Kate Lloyd	Police Integrity and Powers Unit, CPG	Home Office
Professor Ian Loader, Professor of Criminology	Centre for Criminology	University of Oxford
Ms Abie Longstaff	Legal and Policy Analyst	The Police Foundation
Mr Barry Loveday	Reader in Criminal Justice, Editor of Police Journal	University of Portsmouth
Mr Robin Merrett	Ex-Assistant Chief Constable	Sussex Constabulary
Ms Gemma Morris	Chief Inspector	Dorset Police
Chief Superintendent Paul Phillips MA	Police Standards Manager – Local Policing	College of Policing
Dr Paul Quinton	Evidence & Evaluation Advisor, Uniformed Policing Faculty	College of Policing
Mr Jim Saunders	Chief Superintendent	Bedfordshire Police
Mr Barrie Sheldon	Deputy Police and Crime Commissioner	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Mercia
Dr Katy Sindall	Lecturer in Criminology and Quantitative Methods	University of Southampton
Mr Robin Smith	Assistant Chief Constable, Local Policing	Sussex Police
Mr Michael Stamper	Superintendent	Northamptonshire Police
Mr Anthony Stansfeld	Police and Crime Commissioner	Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley
Mr Jeremy Vaughan	Chief Superintendent	North Wales Police
Mr James Willer	Research Analyst	The Police Foundation

The Oxford Policing Policy Forum

The Oxford Policing Policy Forum is a joint initiative of the Police Foundation and the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. The Forum provides an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders interested in policing to discuss fundamental issues under Chatham House rules. The main purpose is to encourage informal debate rather than inviting an audience to listen to formal presentations. Participation is by invitation only (guest list attached).

Background

With the economic crisis placing increasing pressure on policing budgets, neighbourhood policing is in danger of being significantly eroded. The 16th Oxford Policing Policy Forum met to discuss whether neighbourhood policing has a future and, if so, what kind of future that might be. This meeting of the Forum was chaired by Professor Ian Loader from the Centre for Criminology, University of Oxford. To stimulate discussion, a presentation was given by Dr Paul Quinton from the College of Policing.

Opening presentation

Dr Quinton opened the Forum, setting out the history and context of neighbourhood policing. His slides can be found as an addendum to this report.

To briefly summarise, Paul started by distinguishing between community and neighbourhood policing: the focus of the former is primarily on capacity building and improving community relations whereas the latter has a greater focus on reducing crime and disorder. He then summarised the findings of the evaluation of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP), a variation of neighbourhood policing that aims to reduce the 'reassurance gap', which arises when perceptions of crime are disproportionately high given the actual risk of being victimised. The positive findings from the pilot study included improved public perceptions of police visibility, community engagement and problem solving, but the NRPP was found to be less successful in increasing collective efficacy and community cohesion. When rolled out nationally, problems with implementation resulted in the positive outcomes from the pilot study failing to accrue.

Since the NRPP was introduced nearly a decade ago, forces have adopted a range of styles of neighbourhood policing, with some focusing more on the delivery of public services and less on reassurance. The three key strands of improving visibility, engagement and focusing on problem solving have remained. But since the introduction of the budget cuts in policing in 2010, the numbers of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) have fallen and many frontline officers have been abstracted to other tasks. This has led to concerns over the future of neighbourhood policing, with recent evidence of a dip in public confidence in policing possibly reflecting the effect of these cuts.

The College of Policing is currently undertaking a stocktake of policing practice. It aims to produce an evidence base in areas such as proactive response, community engagement and demand/crime reduction. This should be completed over the next 12-18 months.

The role of other agencies

The forum began with a discussion about the broad nature of crime reduction, which, participants agreed, goes beyond the work of the police and requires the input of other agencies. It was recognised, however, that partnership working is becoming more difficult as local agencies are also facing considerable budgetary pressures and are, understandably, retreating to core business, which is placing additional

pressure on the police as it is the only 24/7 service. The question was raised: can neighbourhood policing survive the decline of partner involvement?

One participant suggested that the concept of neighbourhood wardens needed more exploring. Wardens possess similar powers to PCSOs and have had a positive effect on community policing. It might be worth considering whether wardens could be accredited and, if appropriate standards met, tasked with some of the supportive activity currently undertaken by PCSOs. There would be challenges relating to, for example, the use of technology and tasking, but some local authorities (such as Telford and Wrekin) are already subsidising the cost of PCSOs with local councils now having a say in daily tasking.

The concept of Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) was praised by some participants. CSPs are in a position to approach crime more broadly, co-ordinate the work of agencies and involve partners beyond the police service. Good multi-agency partnership arrangements make crime reduction significantly more cost-effective. Local partners, accountable to the public, are able to listen to community needs and work together with the police service to develop problem-solving solutions.

Many CSPs are working well; they take time to agree their core mission and establish common ways of working. Some suffer from high turnover of local BCU commanders, which can de-stabilise established networks, while others find it difficult to engage certain partners, particularly the health sector¹, which has a major role to play in crime reduction. Furthermore, although responsibility for commissioning was passed to Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in 2014, who can call underperforming CSPs to account, 20 per cent of the CSP budget has been cut.

It may be worth involving PCSOs more in the work of CSPs. Good PCSOs are familiar figures in their local area with good networks across a wide range of community agencies. They are often privy to first-hand information and play an important role in listening to and referring on the concerns raised by community members. Their strengths could be better exploited by local partnerships in support of their crime prevention and reduction efforts and raising public confidence in policing. As one participant reminded us, the public do not care who solves a problem as long as the problem is solved. If resources for local policing continue to be eroded, a greater emphasis on problem solving, involving other agencies and volunteers, might help to mitigate some of the loss of service to the community.

The role of volunteers was raised, with one participant even suggesting that Special Constables ought to be paid. This was felt, on the whole, to contradict the voluntary ethos of the role but was objected to more on the grounds that it would further add to the pressure on resources (they already cost money in terms of training and supervision). It was felt that Specials could be used more in neighbourhood policing, but often people volunteer with the aim of experiencing 'blue light' policing and in particular the excitement that response policing evokes. Most of those who currently volunteer are unlikely to want to "walk up and down the street". It might be worth considering the type of people the police recruit for the Special role, and

¹ The Police are not even represented on Health and Well-Being Boards.

identifying a different type of recruit – perhaps one more akin to those recruited as PCSOs - who might be more interested in local policing.

Collective efficacy

As Dr Quinton identified in his presentation, neighbourhood policing has had little success in increasing collective efficacy. There are obvious cost advantages in communities becoming more involved in self-policing and there is evidence to suggest that increasing collective efficacy can improve levels of reassurance to protect communities from crime and disorder. The big question is whether neighbourhood policing can effectively promote collective efficacy. Some participants thought not – the cohesion of communities is affected by factors far wider, such as unemployment. Others thought a focus on visibility, which plays a part in increasing confidence and engagement, could provide a vehicle for the police to encourage greater cohesion, allowing officers and PCSOs to pull communities together and network with one another. Research however shows that visibility on its own does not provide good value for money. It suffers from the ‘Goldilocks effect’ of needing to be at a level that is ‘just right:’ too much visibility can make the public anxious as to why a high level of police presence is required whereas too little leaves the public feeling that they are not being adequately protected.

One participant suggested the solution was to be found not so much in terms of numbers of officers on the beat, but in terms of PR. The police tend to be modest about how much they do and should perhaps make the public more aware of how much time they spend working with the community. Others suggested that visibility did not always require a police officer – volunteers (and PCSOs) could suffice.

The concept of ‘community’ has evolved. It is now less about a physical or geographically defined area and more about uniting those with common interests. Academy schools, for example, often have a wide and socially diverse catchment, yet the parents and pupils are linked by their involvement with the school. Visibility needs to adapt to take account of this and, in this respect, some officers are making greater efforts to engage, going directly to areas where people gather (like homeless centres or boxing gyms) rather than walking up and down streets. The notion of community can increasingly be applied to online communities of individuals with common interests.

It was felt that the police could make better use of social media websites to engage with citizens and encourage greater neighbourly participation. Sites such as Twitter allow the public to interact with officers, to raise concerns and to feel involved in their community. Social media accounts familiarise the public with a ‘voice’ and provide a contact point. Hashtags(#) allow people in the same town to link up interests, and local business and public services can re-tweet community concerns or mobilise residents to join in street parties or clean-up days.

There is increasing evidence that the encouragement of collective efficacy requires careful organisation. Neighbourhood Watch (NW) is one organisation that might have the potential to help in this area, expanding from a role based largely on surveillance to one that engages in problem solving and service delivery. NW schemes could become integral to broader crime prevention strategies by linking up with health, social welfare and other local agencies. NW is growing in many parts of the UK, becoming more representative of community interests and growing its online presence using social media to encourage the sharing of local concerns.

Some members of the forum thought there was a need for a cultural shift to greater community self-sufficiency in relation to crime prevention/reduction. Prior to Peel, citizens had a duty to police themselves, but over the many years since, people have learned to trust the police to undertake policing on their behalf and they are now conditioned to call the police as a first point of contact whenever the need arises (whether

an emergency or not). But the more the public trust the police, the more calls for service will increase and the greater will be the demand for police resources (in the last few years, the number of recorded crimes per officer has fallen while the number of calls per officer has increased). On the other hand, we risk losing public confidence where people believe policing services are being withdrawn. This conundrum is difficult to resolve.

Some participants questioned the extent to which the community should be encouraged to self-police. The police are a reassuring symbol of public order, are highly trained and are formally (if not necessarily effectively) held to account. Citizens are unlikely to reach the same standards as the police and a system that uses volunteers may attract vigilante-types or selective members of the community who wish to impose their way of life on others; further, a citizen may unwittingly place him/herself in danger.

Resourcing

Resourcing underpinned much of the discussion at the 16th Forum. The issue of police budgets, and thereby police numbers, has a direct impact on the future of neighbourhood policing.

Part of the challenge lies in making a case for retaining frontline officers and PCSOs in patrol work. Much of neighbourhood policing is intangible, which makes its effectiveness in concrete performance measures difficult to establish. Unlike crime fighting, its focus tends to be long-term rather than short-term.

One attendee was very clear that '*neighbourhood policing is core business*'. Crime constitutes just 10 per cent of the police force workload² with the rest comprising, for example, maintaining public order/safety (including 'safe and well-being checks'), tracking down missing persons, dealing with road traffic accidents and responding to calls relating to antisocial behaviour. The business model of policing is changing, moving from a focus on low risk/high volume crime, to one based on high risk/low volume incidents, such as offending by those with mental health problems, or children at risk of sexual exploitation. In patrol work, neighbourhood policing officers are increasingly responding to demand based on risk, harm and threat, rather than demand based on responding to specific criminal acts.

Crime prevention is nevertheless still considered to be core work across policing. Preventing crime at the earliest opportunity can reduce demand later down the line, freeing up officer time. Here the PCSO role is potentially of considerable value. It was also felt that engagement should be prioritised across all policing, not simply neighbourhood policing. Response officers going into a community ought to know the name of the local policing officer and be aware of broader local community concerns. It could be argued that, from a victim-focused perspective, all policing is local, so that if, for example, someone is killed in a neighbourhood, the response should necessarily involve neighbourhood police and not just response/specialist officers.

In the current economic climate it has become crucial to identify and manage risk and allocate resources accordingly. It would however be helpful to divide activities into those that could be done by anyone and

² No reference was supplied in support of this claim.

those which specifically require a police response. So for example cocooning advice to burglary victims could be given by a range of people (aided by the police) whereas in contrast, dealing with a major public disorder incident can only be done by a person with the skills and authority to enforce the law.

The Forum agreed that the police, with their can-do attitude, are not always good at sharing problems with other agencies/partners. They too often lack the skill of prioritising – some forces do not even list their priorities clearly – and find it difficult to say no when asked for assistance. Due to the elasticity of public demand, every problem tends to be considered a priority by someone. Where, for example, an elderly person has fallen in the middle of the night and there is no one else available, the police may (and sometimes do) step in, yet this is unlikely to appear on their list of priorities.

There is a continuous tension between what the public want and how much the police can achieve in times of austerity. In reality, demand always outstrips the capacity to deliver, but given the likely impact of the next round of cuts, some attendees felt a national debate should be held on what should be prioritised (as suggested by Ian Blair in his Dimpleby Lecture in 2006). The problem here is that given that the nature of the policing task differs so widely across different areas – what might be a priority in an urban area is rarely a priority in a rural community – its relevance may be limited. One participant offered the example of London, which had previously adopted a one-size-fits-all approach that did not reflect local crime priorities, improve public confidence or outcomes. Reforms in 2011 changed this to allow policing to be flexible enough to adapt to different local areas.

One participant recommended ring-fencing resources for neighbourhood policing combined with the delegation of budgets to local neighbourhoods. This model, which comes from the Netherlands, allows resources to be pooled and subsequently directed to where need is greatest. In Holland, citizens vote on what they want their officers to do, however the downside of this is that those who participate tend to be the ones to define which crimes are policed. Furthermore, the public are not necessarily very skilled at identifying future risks and therefore tend to demand resources to only deal with short-term problems.

Future of neighbourhood policing

The Forum questioned whether the term ‘neighbourhood’ means the same thing today as it used to. As discussed above, the concepts of community, engagement and visibility have evolved. Too little is known about what elements of neighbourhood policing are particularly valued by the police and the public and this needs more thought. Would it be sufficient, for example, to respond to high levels of demand for reassurance by just increasing visibility?

Many participants felt that neighbourhood policing would not have a future unless it was capable of adapting; it was very unlikely to be affordable in its current form. Most concurred with the view that neighbourhood policing needed to change, and that the concept itself needed to better reflect modern-day life. The forum was asked to consider what neighbourhood policing might look like in five years’ time. A number of questions/challenges were raised, such as whether the distinction between ‘neighbourhood’ officers and ‘response’ officers be abolished and replaced with a new narrative centred on problem-solving, risk management, value for money and effective resource allocation? If so, what would the barriers be to reducing the distinction between neighbourhood and response policing (e.g. response officers don’t have local knowledge) and how might they be overcome (e.g. by using technology to improve the sharing of intelligence)? As resources will continue to decline, how can demand be effectively managed to ensure the police are still able to deliver an acceptable level of service? Would it help if other agencies provided a 24/7 response and if so, how would this be funded? Can proactive policing survive?

The forum was warned of the importance of not dismissing the success of neighbourhood policing. The programme has been in use for many years now and although there is no evidence to support a causal relationship, there has been a marked decline in signal crimes such as graffiti or abandoned cars during this period, which has also witnessed a steady rise in public confidence and trust. A return to a more reactive style of policing would risk these benefits. So what might a future version of neighbourhood policing look like?

A new model?

There is a tension between the idea of neighbourhood policing as a means of delivering policing and of neighbourhood policing as the facilitator of a set of behaviours that encourage problem-solving and community engagement. Some felt the delivery model of neighbourhood policing was not working and that the focus should shift to that of problem-solving, with more use of hotspots policing and targeted foot patrol. Complex cases, for example those with repeat victims, need specialised solutions and different types of resources. Throwing generic, rather than targeted, resourcing at multi-faceted problems is often a waste of valuable resources. Neighbourhood policing officers and PCSOs are in an ideal position to identify the vulnerable and reduce harm in a highly targeted manner. Indeed, for neighbourhood policing to survive, its role in reducing harm and supporting the vulnerable needs to be made clearer and more defensible.

But for this more targeted approach to work, risk needs to be recognised at an early stage. One aspect of risk identification lies in managing demand; in sorting the necessary from the trivial. This is not an easy task. It would not be appropriate, for example, for the police to simply dictate their plans to the public without consultation; nor would it be desirable or even possible to persuade people to care about, for example, cybercrime rather than littering. The democratic approach to demand reduction involves listening to the local community and involving them in conversation. Local officers who know their neighbourhood well are invaluable in this regard. They are able to guide problem solving and focus resourcing on those areas of highest need. This requires good listening skills and the careful building of trust with the local community over the years. Some felt that policing should not be led by public opinion in this way; the public will always want more visibility, one participant said, and will continue to call on the police to deal with minor issues. However one participant disagreed, stating that the public are capable of prioritising, but only when given the right questions in the right way (which includes reference to a limited budget, necessitating difficult choices). If asked in this way, the public generally tend to prioritise emergency response and protecting the vulnerable.

One suggested model was based on an idea discussed earlier, namely that from a victim-focused perspective, all crime is local. According to this model, local policing should be thought of as core business, feeding into all areas of police work, from antisocial and victim support to homicide and terrorism. Alongside this, officers in all areas of policing should adopt a problem-solving approach, listening to the concerns of the community and acting in response.

The forum was unable to agree on one model of neighbourhood policing or even whether it was desirable to have a 'one model' approach. In one participant's view, neighbourhood policing should be tailored to the circumstances of specific areas as the nature and scale of demand differs so greatly from area to area. Other participants felt that, without an overall structure, neighbourhood policing would simply wither on the vine. It was potentially disingenuous, one participant stated, to present the public with a watered-down version of neighbourhood policing, and there is a serious danger that in cutting back on community officers, confidence and trust could fall.

Where the forum did agree was that form must follow function. A truly radical rethink is needed in terms of what works, and how resources might be best deployed. Evidence already exists that neighbourhood policing (in terms of foot patrol, problem-solving and community engagement) does have an impact (on crime, disorder and public confidence). But we know less about whether it works in terms of public protection, particularly in high-threat areas or in relation to high risk cases like Pilkington, where a high level of repeated police attendance was totally ineffective. Some were doubtful whether neighbourhood policing would survive, others thought it essential that it did even if in a new form. Indeed according to one participant: *'We lose it at our peril.'*

Abie Longstaff