



THE CONCEPTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ARCHITECTURE OF NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING IN ENGLAND AND WALES

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This paper examines the social organisation of Neighbourhood Policing (NP) in England and Wales. Neighbourhood Policing is the name given to the mode of delivery for local policing across all police forces in England and Wales. Following a national implementation plan commenced in 2005, by 2008 every neighbourhood in England and Wales had been assigned their own dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Team. These officers were to be the public's first point of contact for local policing issues. Whilst there are quite legitimate debates to be had about the validity of how the size, shape and make-up of neighbourhoods were defined, and the different resourcing models that have been applied across the country. The establishment of the NP program represented a significant investment in local policing by any measure.

NP can, in this sense, be understood as a particular formation of the family of strategies that are collectively labelled as Community Policing. As with the other prominent formulations of Community Policing (such as problem-oriented policing or broken-windows policing), NP possesses its own distinctive concepts and configurations. So whilst in its DNA the NP approach shares much with its conceptual cousins, it also maintains distinctive elements that imbue it with a unique identity and disposition.

In order to illuminate these unique aspects, the discussion focuses upon three particular areas of interest:

- The conceptual ideas and frameworks that inform and influence the approach adopted;
- The key processes and systems that are used to deliver NP services;



- The history and trajectory of development via which these ideas, processes and systems came to be implemented.

For ease of understanding, the paper commences by examining the history of NP, how it came into being and why. It then explores some of the key processes and systems engaged in service delivery, as well as detailing the variations in policing practices that have been introduced in order to 'tune' delivery to local situational requirements. Following on from this, the paper will establish some of the concepts and ideas that help to imbue NP with a distinctive identity when compared with other formations of community policing. The conclusion will attend to issues of how NP can and should be reconfigured in an age of austerity and some of the challenges and opportunities that the current situation affords.

1. A short history of neighbourhood policing

Although it has now become an orthodoxy of policing liberal-democratic polities, it is important to note that community policing was originally proposed as a radical alternative to what Mark Moore (1992) dubs the 'professional policing model' that had been popularized in the 1960s. In reaction to the rapid adoption of 'fire brigade' policing, the original proponents of community policing such as John Alderson, saw it as a way of reconnecting individual officers with the public at a time when, thanks to the telephone and panda car, such relationships were becoming increasingly distant.

There is now a well developed critique of these original formulations of community policing centering upon a belief that whilst the reforms may have been motivated by good intentions, they lacked sufficient detail in terms of programming and too often failed to acquire traction upon local troubles. In effect, the emphasis upon foot patrol, discretion and communitarian values as a basis for a policing model, was held to be insufficiently robust and disciplined to effectively 'grip' complex social problems. It was widely articulated that community policing functioned better as 'rhetoric' than in reality (Weatheritt, 1988). Thus, although dominating debate and discussion throughout the 1980s, by the 1990s attention,



certainly in the UK, was focused upon the doctrine of intelligence-led policing. Where community policing focused upon solving local problems, advocates of the intelligence-led model were far more inclined to use generic standard operating procedures to concentrate effort on volume and serious crime. By the mid-1990s community policing was politically out of favour.

1.1 The National Reassurance Policing Programme

The revival of community policing's fortunes in the UK during the mid 2000s is principally attributable to the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) that ran between 2003-05 in 16 trial sites in England. The programme acquired its name from the attempt to respond directly to what was dubbed 'the reassurance gap' by some senior police officers. The reassurance gap reflected how, despite year on year reductions in national recorded crime rates since 1995, the British Crime Survey was suggesting that more subjective indicators (such as perceptions of crime and public confidence) were not tracking the falls in victimisation. The policing model designed to respond to this issue introduced several key innovations:

- An explicit recognition that subjective perceptions of crime and disorder were of equal importance as actual crime rates in terms of influencing neighbourhood security;
- Influenced by Skogan's (2007) work on the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy, it sought a more structured and systematic approach to delivering local policing than previous iterations of community policing had accomplished;
- Blending a community policing type focus with the disciplines of being 'intelligence-led' through the harnessing of the concept of 'community intelligence'.

In terms of its key processes and systems the NRPP model was constructed around three key components:

- Visible, accessible, familiar and effective policing. In effect, recognising that citizens attribute significant public value to local police presence;
- Using the signal crimes perspective to identify which issues and problems cause disproportionate social harm to local communities and targeting these



for interventions. In effect, this shifted police from working on those issues they deemed important to a focus upon publicly defined concerns;

- Co-producing solutions with multi-agency partners and more directly with the public. A critical theoretical issue was finding ways to get police to work with other social actors to produce, wherever possible, locally sustainable solutions. In practice it transpired that police were better at working with other institutions than with the rather more fluid and amorphous communities.

Importantly, over a twelve month period the 16 trial sites were monitored by the Home Office using a quasi-experimental research design to test the outcomes of this approach (see Tuffin et al., 2006). Based upon the research evidence collected the Home Office researchers concluded that when comparing the trial sites with their matched controls, those where police had successfully implemented the approach were seeing better performance across a range of indicators as listed in the table below.

Indicator	% Difference Between Trial and Control Sites
Confidence in police	+12
Self-reported victimisation	-5
Perceptions of crime	-11
Fear of crime	+4
Know local police	+10

Table1: NRPP Summary Results

Across the 16 sites the overall profile of results was mixed in that some sites performed better than others and the results were not uniformly positive. However, the important point is that there appeared to be some form of correlation between the outcomes achieved and the quality of implementation. Those sites that followed the somewhat prescriptive model that had been designed, performed better than those that were less attentive to implementing the processes and systems. Of salience to this discussion is the fact that some of the best results were achieved in some of the more deprived and high crime areas. In line with Skogan's (2007) findings in Chicago



and contra an oft voiced criticism of Community Policing (that it only really works in relatively stable neighbourhood settings), the NRPP found that the policing processes enacted delivered benefits in the areas of greatest need.

As will be discussed shortly, the NRPP devised many of the key practices subsequently adopted by the national roll-out of NP. Most significant of all was finding an effective role for Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). PCSOs are uniformed police staff, who do not have full police powers. What the NRPP established is that by providing a visible uniformed presence in neighbourhoods, focused upon engaging with local people to find out about their concerns, PCSOs can make an important contribution to overall feelings of community safety and well-being.

1.2 Neighbourhood Policing

The key processes and systems now associated with NP were devised and trialed under the auspices of the NRPP. Indeed, the political decision to invest in NP as a national programme was informed by the robustness and strength of the evidence generated by the reassurance trial. From about 2005, it became clear that the government was keen to see the adoption of NP across the country and so forces began reconfiguring their service provision accordingly. By 2008 all areas of the country could claim to be providing dedicated NP.

Of course, the exact nature of the provision differed. In London for example, The Metropolitan Police Service received significant levels of new funding from the Mayor for London's office enabling them to establish 'Safer Neighbourhood's Teams' in every ward across the capital using a '1,2,3 formula'. That is, each ward was staffed by a dedicated team comprising 1 police sergeant, 2 police constables and 3 PCSOs. In other parts of the country that did not see similar levels of increased investment, a more flexible form of provision was established. For example, in Cardiff, a city comprising 29 electoral wards and 350,000 residents, groups of wards have been put together in 6 'administrative neighbourhoods', each of which has a team of police assigned to it. The adoption of these different arrangements reflects



one of the key tensions in respect of NP that continues to this day and that is whether it should be based upon 'universal provision', or resources steered to areas of greater need or harm.

Given the limitations on space, it is not possible to develop a detailed account of the work of Neighbourhood Policing Teams, but broadly speaking their activities gravitate around three main tasks:

- Providing a visible police presence through foot patrols;
- Engaging with local people to identify their key problems and concerns;
- Leading the response to anti-social behaviour and so called 'low level' crimes.

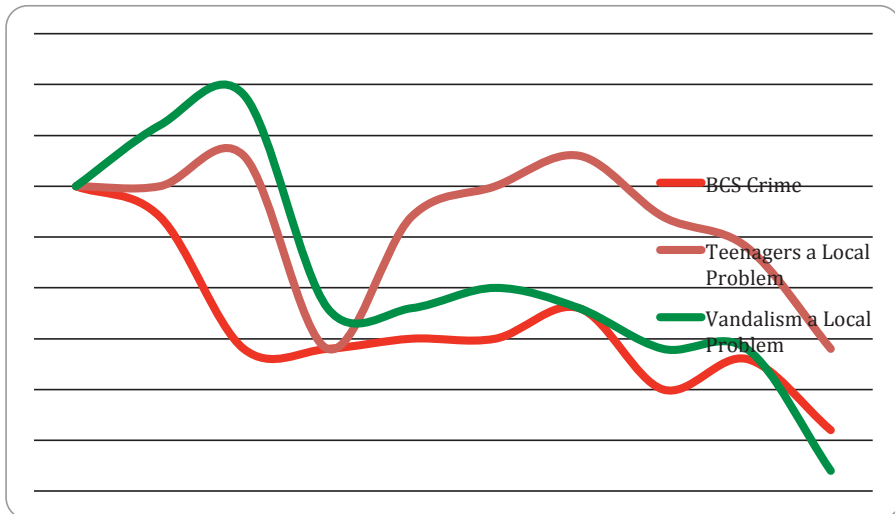
There are clear continuities with its quasi-experimental predecessor, but there are important differences also. Compared with the slightly more radical Reassurance Policing, NP was more simplistically focused upon the local delivery of policing services. Whereas the NRPP was explicit in accenting the importance of police co-producing solutions with the public, NP reduced the public's role to one of consultation. A second important difference was that in many forces the role of the signal crimes perspective in providing a systematic methodology for diagnosing those issues causing most social harm, was similarly down-played. So whereas NRPP operationalised careful and detailed engagement mechanisms to generate community intelligence about what matters most to local people across individual neighbourhoods and thus ensuring police resources are targeted to these, under the auspices of NP, this responsiveness was translated into a far more simplistic emphasis upon problem-solving local issues. Not all forces went down this route and several have continued to utilize the signal crimes method. Overall though, the process of losing such components, I would suggest, meant that at a programme level, the roll-out of NP lost a degree of 'bite'.

A critical question at this point is obviously, 'so what are the benefits of adopting such an approach?' Looking across the research literature evaluating previous formulations of community policing it is clear that the evidence as to its efficacy is mixed. Some approaches, in some places appear to have improved the situation, whereas on other occasions little in the way of measurable outcomes is achieved. Similarly, early attempts to conduct a robust evaluation of NP at scale were

somewhat equivocal in their results, albeit in the opinion of this author, the evaluation design selected was inappropriate.

However, if we look at broad national level indicators from the British Crime Survey, there are grounds for some optimism. Figure 1 tracks British Crime Survey data on levels of crime, and proxy measures for perceptions of social disorder and physical disorder over the past decade. It can be seen that across all three measures, from around 2005-06, where Neighbourhood Policing started to be rolled out nationally there have been sustained declines. Of course, these trends are not principally attributable to NP as they are manifestations of deeper social and economic forces, but it is clear that an ongoing uniformed presence is not antagonistic to such trajectories.

Figure 1: BCS Trends in Crime, Anti-social Behaviour and Physical Disorder



We can further develop our insights into what NP has and has not been achieving by examining a number of other areas of the British Crime Survey. Figures 2 and 3

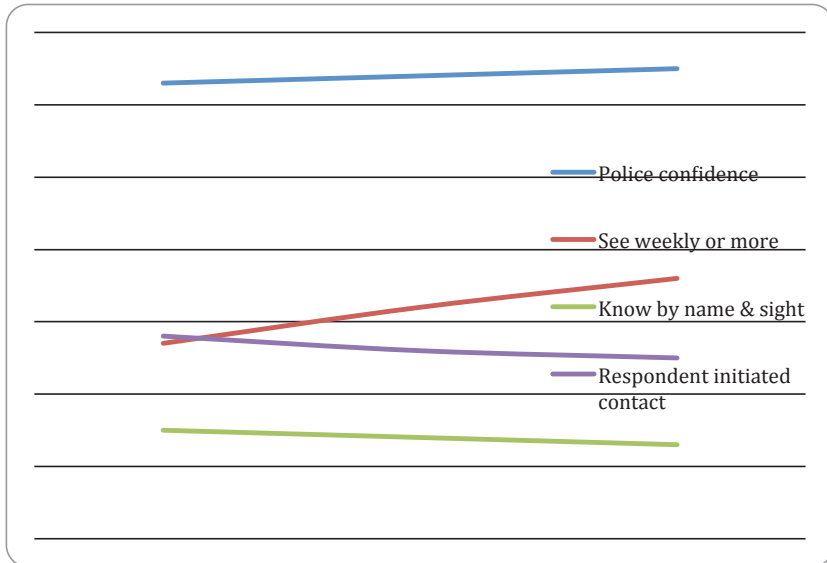


examine time trends in public confidence and police presence, using indicators of visibility, familiarity and respondent initiated contact available in the BCS from 2006/7. The data are presented separately for men and women.

For both men and women, public confidence in local police is at a much higher baseline level over time than any single indicator of police presence. For men, confidence is at 62 percent in 2006/7 and has increased at a gradual rate over time to approximately 65 percent in 2008/9. The percentage expressing confidence in police is generally a little higher for women, starting at 65 percent in 2006/7 and increasing between 2007/8 and 2008/9 to nearly 70 percent.

Over the same three year time period, police visibility for men has risen markedly, as indicated by the percentage who report seeing a police officer on foot patrol 'weekly or more'. This rises from 27 percent in 2006/7 to 35 percent in 2008/9. There is a more modest rise in police visibility for women using the same measure, from 24 percent in 2006/7 to 30 percent in 2008/9. It is important to note that other work conducted by the author for Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary has demonstrated that, out of all measures of police presence, police visibility has a powerful positive impact on public perceptions of confidence.

Figure 2: Time trends in police confidence and police presence for men



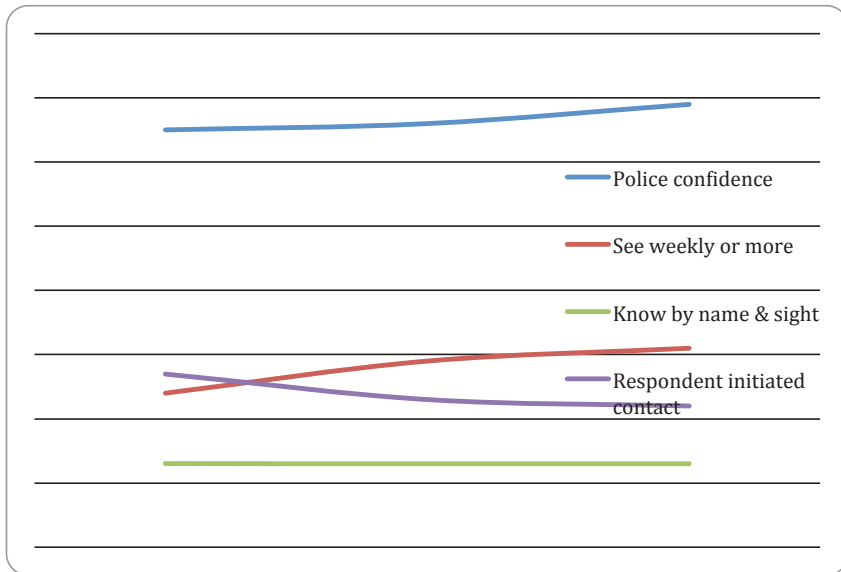
Source: British Crime Survey, 2006/7 to 2008/9

In contrast to police visibility, the percentage of men and women who initiate contact with the police shows a slight downward trajectory over the last three years. In 2006/7, respondent-led contact was more likely than high frequency visibility, particularly for women, but this had reversed by 2007/8 and the gap between visibility and contact had widened still further in 2008/9. It is likely that this is attributable to reductions in crime over this period and increasing local police availability through the roll-out of Neighbourhood Policing.

Familiarity arguably represents a more personal connection between public and police, based in Figures 2 and 3 on people's sense of 'knowing' a police officer or PCSO by name and sight. Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the percentage reporting maximum familiarity is at a much lower baseline for men and women than for the other measures of police presence. Moreover, the data shows that familiarity of this

nature to be static over the time period at approximately 12 percent of women and 15 percent of men.

Figure 3: Time trends in police confidence and police presence for women



Source: British Crime Survey, 2006/7 to 2008/9

Although it is difficult to extrapolate any solid conclusions from such national level data, it does appear that the modes of working embedded within NP are coherent with the evident trends. However, a critical factor in terms of understanding possible future developments, is the impact of the age of austerity. This is an issue we will return to in the Conclusion.



2. Concepts and ideas

The preceding section has intimated that there are a number of key concepts and ideas embedded within the processes and systems associated with NP. In this section of the paper, the intention is to separate these out and discuss their key features in isolation. The aim being to clarify their respective contribution to the delivery of NP.

- 'Community intelligence' (COMMTEL) is arguably one of the most pivotal concepts for Neighbourhood Policing. It can be defined as "information that when analysed provides insight into the risks posed by or to a group sharing some common conception of self-identity." Critically this information is acquired by engaging with communities through public meetings, surveying or interviewing in order to elicit information about their local problems and concerns. The point being to allow local communities to explicitly define policing priorities, rather than police being able to select what they will and will not work upon. The intensity and depth of the engagement methods, and thus the validity and reliability of the community intelligence available, differs between police forces. However, there is a general acceptance that some form of community intelligence should be in place to influence police activity.
- Closely aligned with the workings of community intelligence is the operationalisation of highly localised accountability mechanisms. For the most part this takes through a system of public meetings dubbed 'Police (or sometimes 'partners') And Communities Together' meetings. In part these PACT meetings are a vehicle for accessing community intelligence, but over time they have probably become more important as ways of 'doing' local accountability. If we understand accountability as involving 'taking account' and 'giving account' then this is precisely the function that PACT meetings perform in the ecology of Neighbourhood Policing. But significantly, whereas most discussions of accountability tend to be about answering 'upwards' to 'political masters', PACT meetings localise accountability and cast it in a 'downwards' fashion positioning police as answerable directly to the citizenry.
- PACT meetings provide a formalised mechanism for exchanging information with the public, but Neighbourhood Policing Teams are also encouraged to use a more informal system of 'KINS'. KIN stands for 'key individual network' who are individuals who possess high levels of knowledge about a particular neighbourhood and its rhythms and make-up. The idea being that



police can thus consult these KIN from time to time to 'take the temperature' of the community to spot any potential warning signals of impending tensions or trouble.

- Early intervention is a key principle of the approach. The idea being that by having police 'embedded' in communities they will be sensitive to any signs and signals of potential trouble. They will consequently be better positioned to intervene at points before problems have escalated and become more serious.

All of these vehicles for engaging the public listed above represent attempts to better align police interventions with public interests. To put it another way, they seek to establish ways of making local policing interventions 'evidence-led'. It is also worth noting that the embedded nature of NP teams and styles of working are now increasingly being used to craft new approaches to other kinds of problem. For example, Innes et al. (2011) in a report for the Association of Chief Police Officers have recently identified how the influence of neighbourhood policing tactics and strategies can be detected in the emergence of a more overt and publicly visible style of counter-terrorist policing in the UK.

Similar innovations are now also starting to be evident in relation to the policing of serious and organised crime. By way of illustration starting in 2008 the Universities' Police Science Institute at Cardiff University started working with the Neighbourhood Policing Teams in South Wales Police to trial an experimental community intelligence methodology. This approach had been used in other forces but only on a highly localised basis. In this project the aim was to deploy it 'at scale' across all of South Wales in order to systematically identify the public's neighbourhood security needs and priorities for policing. Based upon 4200 in-depth interviews with citizens, this work identified certain areas of Cardiff where drugs related issues were principal 'drivers' of public concern. These were not in areas of the City necessarily being identified by the police's extant intelligence. Responding to these local concerns, under the auspices of Operation Michigan covert police assets were deployed to identify the actors in the drugs markets. These individuals were filmed by covert resources and Neighbourhood Policing officers were used to



identify the individuals. The police operation then entered an enforcement phase resulting in:

- 184 individuals arrested for Class A drug supply. 110 of these were identified from the covert deployments at a cost of £2000 per dealer (approx.). The additional arrests came from overt disruptions and community intelligence;
- Prison sentences totalling 200 years were set by the Courts;
- 6 kilos of Heroin / Crack / Cocaine were seized;
- 36% reduction in serious acquisitive crime in the target areas;
- 25% reduction in anti-social behaviour.¹

In addition to these measurable impacts, more informal feedback from local communities has provided important insights into the potential benefits of these ways of working. It has been communicated that some of the individuals arrested and sentenced were previously seen as 'untouchable' and beyond the reach of the police.

Operation Michigan and the work feeding into it illuminates how Neighbourhood Policing and more specialist policing assets can be 'joined-up' to deliver more impactful interventions. It shows how a structured community engagement process can be used to identify problems, and how 'localising' specialist assets can enhance the impact of interventions in ways that are visible and meaningful to citizens, so as to build public confidence and reduce street-crime. This localisation is something that appears to have been missing from the toolkit applied by the nationally based Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). It also tends to refute oft made assumption that citizens do not care about serious organised crime issues. This case suggests that ordinary citizens may pick up on and detect the symptoms of organised criminality, but just like when going to the doctor, it requires a degree of expertise to correctly interpret any symptoms and to connect them to their cause.

¹ All figures supplied from South Wales Police's 'results analysis'.



3. Conclusion

By way of conclusion, in order to understand how NP might develop in the near-future in the UK we need to situate it against a broader political and economic backdrop. The new coalition government has set out an ambitious and potentially quite radical public service reform programme, and it is clear that they intend that the police should be central to this. Interestingly, the general tenor of the reforms seems to be very coherent with the key ideas associated with Neighbourhood Policing. The government is keen to encourage localism across key public services with much decision-making power pushed 'down and out' from central government to local levels. Ministers have also been quite open in their support for NP in that it is self-evidently aligned with these broader ideological aspirations.

However, perhaps even more important than these ideological influences is the macro-economic environment. The age of austerity has caused the government to plan on cutting central police funding by 20%. This will obviously have implications for the resourcing and delivery of NP. Confronted by such challenges a number of senior police officers have stated that in future policing will have to find ways 'to do more with less'. I want to suggest that actually a return to the processes and systems devised by the NRPP could provide a way to invert such a formulation. That is, rather than 'doing more with less' an appropriately configured style of Neighbourhood Policing could afford opportunities to do 'less with more'. Effective targeting of those problems causing most social harm in neighbourhoods could mean that police have to do *less* intervening, because they are being *more* impactful when they do act. In addition to which, revisiting the emphasis upon co-producing solutions to crime and disorder problems articulated by the NRPP, could be a way of encouraging police to rely upon doing *less* themselves, but in ways that involve *more* groups in society².

² For a more developed discussion of these themes see Carr (2005).



Research in Criminology and Sociology has long argued that police are not the guarantors of social order, but rather, local social orders are sustained by a complex web of inter-locking and inter-dependent informal social control mechanisms. What the police do afford though, is a supplementary, generalised capacity and capability for legitimate coercive force to be quickly and rapidly implemented where social order is breached or threatened. It is this sense of connectivity between the formal police led social control and more community based informal social controls that the kinds of policing processes and systems outlined herein need to be alert to in the future.

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