

LOCAL POLICING IN SCOTLAND: THREE PRE-REFORM CASE-STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

This SIPR funded study of local policing in Scotland was carried out at the Centre for Criminal Justice and Police Studies, University of the West of Scotland. The research was based on a series of case studies, one in each of three legacy forces, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, Grampian Police, and Strathclyde Police force areas. This Research Summary presents some of the main findings which were considered to be of operational relevance to the police. The objectives of the study included:

- analysing local policing activity in relation to key elements of community policing
- explaining how priorities in local policing are developed and how overall strategic objectives are implemented at community level, and
- exploring community expectations and experiences of local policing.

DEVELOPMENTS IN LOCAL POLICING

In Scotland, local policing is the front-line of police work and is considered to be the foundation of all other policing activity. The term refers to a broad range of police activities carried out at the most local level. Historically, 'beat policing' in Scotland (Banton, 1964) has been best described as having both a community basis and a community-facing ethos. Community Policing (CP) is not easy to define, either conceptually or in practice (Mackenzie and Henry, 2009). Some of the elements of the community policing philosophy most frequently mentioned in the literature include policing that aims to: focus on problem-solving, consult with communities, promote active citizenship, be visible and accessible to the public, reassure the public, be accountable, and affixed to geographic units (Aston and Scott, 2009). Traditionally, some of these key elements have long been embedded in Scottish policing. However, in the 1970s, with a move towards a more mobile, response-led approach to policing, and with the introduction of separate Community Involvement Branches, CP became regarded as a specialism, the domain of certain designated officers only (Donnelly, 2010).

Over the last decade, developments in Scotland have brought CP to the forefront of government and policing discourse. The Public Reassurance Strategy (Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, 2007) had considerable influence on the direction taken both by individual Scottish forces and national policies. The Scottish Parliament Justice Committee (2008) report on its inquiry into CP in Scotland set out how CP could be improved and, in light of the Committee's view that the majority of the eight forces did not have clear CP strategies, made more consistent across Scotland.

The publication of the Scottish Community Policing Engagement Principles (Scottish Government, 2009) aimed to establish this level of consistency, and called for each police force to produce its own community policing engagement standard based around the seven principles laid down in the document. These principles appeared to generate a significant amount of re-organization of CP activity around Scotland, and an expansion in the number of officers involved in CP. They remain the basis of official policy and practice at the present time.

With the merger of the eight territorial forces into a single Police Service of Scotland in 2013, the policing of local communities has again become a key priority, for the public and politicians as well as for Police Scotland. These case studies of local policing took place in three Scottish forces between 2009 and 2011, so this research provides a snapshot of what CP was like pre-reform, and sets a baseline against which current developments in CP can be viewed.

METHODS

The three Scottish police forces involved in the study reflected the diversity of Scottish policing. Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary was the smallest force in Scotland, operating within an environment of small towns and

rural communities. Grampian Police area contained a broad mix of communities, including a large city at the forefront of Scotland's offshore industries, to fishing communities and with a large agricultural hinterland. Strathclyde Police covered half of Scotland, from Scotland's most populous, and deprived, urban areas to the southern part of the Highlands and Islands.

Case study areas were chosen within each force area with the intention of reflecting the diversity of policing problems encountered and socio-economic and ethnic populations served. In Dumfries and Galloway the research drew on a predominantly rural division which included villages and small towns; in Grampian the chosen area covered a coastal town and the surrounding rural area and villages; while in Strathclyde the case study area was a residential area, which included a large housing estate, on the edge of a major conurbation.

A documentary analysis of each force's policies, strategic plans and community policing programmes was undertaken. Fieldwork was carried out in Strathclyde during the summers of 2009 and 2010, in Dumfries and Galloway during the spring of 2010, and in Grampian during the summer of 2010. Police managers (n=36), from Sergeants to Divisional Commanders, were interviewed. Within each case study area interviews were conducted with police officers (n=58). Seven focus groups were also conducted with members (n=39) of local community councils. This paper summarises some of the main findings, predominantly focusing on the interviews with police officers.

COMMUNITY POLICING POLICIES

From the review of documents it was clear that forces' CP strategies related explicitly to the Scottish Community Policing Engagement Principles. The alignment of policies to Principles is indicated in table 1.

Table 1: Scottish Government CP Engagement Principles and Force CP strategies

Scottish Government CP Engagement Principles	Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary (2010)	Grampian Police (2010)	Strathclyde Police (2009)
1) Being visible, accessible, present and readily identifiable in the community and discrete when that is appropriate.	'Improve police presence'; 'be open available and approachable to all'.	'Readily accessible to all members of our Community'; 'reassure communities by our presence', 'known to our local communities'.	'consistent presence of dedicated local police teams that are visible, accessible, skilled, knowledgeable and known to the community'
2) Communicating as widely as possible using all appropriate means.	'Improve community consultation and feedback'.	'Keep the public well informed about policing issues affecting their area'.	'Providing community feedback on action taken'.
3) Consulting, listening and responding.	'Listen, understand and work with the community'; 'improve community consultation'.	'Consult with the Community and policing activity is influenced by the Community'; 'respond appropriately to any issue reported to us'.	'Community and police collaboration in identifying public concerns and prompt, effective, targeted action to address those concerns'.
4) Recognising individual needs and prioritising support to those groups of people most vulnerable to harm.	'Work with our partners to protect the most vulnerable people in the community'.	-	-
5) Working closely with other public and voluntary services and businesses to encourage people to take responsibility for their actions and how they affect others	'Promote active citizenship'.	'Encourage Communities to take responsibility for their own behaviours and actions'.	-
6) Being involved in a problem solving approach to local crime issues and accountable to communities for local policing	'work with the community in dealing with local concerns and explain what we are doing and why'	'Work in partnership with other agencies to help solve Community problems'	'Team approach to effective problem solving through enforcement, public reassurance and focused response policing.'
7) Working in partnership with other public and voluntary services and businesses on the ground to make people feel safer	'work with our partners' and 'increase public confidence and reduce the fear of crime'	'Work in partnership with other agencies to help solve Community Problems'.	'Joint action with the local community and other partners to improve the local environment and quality of life within communities in line with SOA's and CPPAs'*

*SOA = Community Planning Single Outcome Agreements. CPPA = Community Planning Partnership Agreements.

Sources: Scottish Government (2009), Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary (2010), Grampian Police (2010), Strathclyde Police (2009).

CASE STUDY 1 - DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY

Policing in Dumfries and Galloway was delivered by operational officers and a smaller number of community police officers in a 'traditional' manner. HMICS found that the force 'has a strong community focus and provides an efficient, locally based, policing service.' (HMICS 2007:1), and a strong problem-solving ethos (HMICS: 48). The fact that half of the attendees at the force's annual strategy day were from community partners was seen as evidence of a commitment to community engagement and partnership working. The force used Community Voice volunteers to consult on priorities and had an annual consultation day where participants came together to identify the force's strategic priorities. HMICS (2009) recommended that forces should make it clear to the public how consultation results are used in the planning process and commended Dumfries and Galloway for overtly linking consultation results and strategic plans and regularly updating the public about policing matters.

MAIN FINDINGS OF OPERATIONAL RELEVANCE

- Although officers said they would like to spend more time out walking and saw patrolling on foot as a good way to engage with people, improve police-community relations, and provide a visible reassuring presence, their ability to spend time on foot patrol was constrained by the large size of the rural area they policed, staffing levels and the need to respond to calls.
- Community officers tended to say they spent more time patrolling on foot than operational officers did. For operational officers the opportunity to patrol on foot was rare (sometimes as low as 1-2% of their time). Officers said they patrolled on foot as and when they could and seemed to be more likely to go out walking in towns, whereas outlying areas were mostly patrolled by car. However, officers from both groups said they would like to spend more time out on the streets.
- Staffing levels were the main constraint raised by officers when they were asked whether there was anything that had an impact on their ability to do their job. Some officers said that although they were generally well resourced there were times when they were short staffed, due to annual leave and absences. For community officers, being short-staffed meant that they had to focus on responding to calls and cancel their community commitments, such as attending meetings. This was said to have a detrimental effect on their relationships with the community.
- One of the other constraints mentioned was lack of tenure. Because community officers were often in post for only a short time, local knowledge and community relationships were not always effectively sustained.
- The relationship between community and operational officers was good. However, there was a feeling amongst both groups that there was a lack of operational understanding of the community role and this was largely because of separate working. Officers felt that there was a need for closer interaction, better communication and perhaps joint briefings.
- Although they were not directly asked about quality of service, some officers were keen to emphasise that they thought the public was getting a good service from Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary. It was acknowledged that one of the ways in which quality of service may not have been achieved in the past was in relation to updating complainers. Officers felt that this was very important and there were now standards of service to make sure that the public was updated within certain timescales and knew what to expect.
- Officers felt that community expectations of policing varied across the areas they policed. Expectations were said to be higher in outlying villages with lower crime rates, as compared to urban areas with higher crime rates. In these close-knit rural communities, community councils were said to be more demanding and expected more in terms of visibility and community engagement. In one of the villages, where there had been a more consistent police presence in the past, expectations were said to be unrealistic, with little understanding that officers had other responsibilities.

CASE STUDY 2 – GRAMPIAN

Grampian Police adopted its 'Community Focused Policing Model' in April 2010 (only a month prior to the commencement of this fieldwork). The Model involved the key activities of 'Consult, Listen, Respond and Feedback'. This was delivered through Local Policing Teams and one of the major changes involved re-naming all officers across the force as Local Police Officers. In the case study area, this involved moving away from

having one or two Community Beat Officers (CBOs) in each team working with response officers. Communication with the public was via the publication of Local Policing Plans, attendance at community council meetings, and through local media.

MAIN FINDINGS OF OPERATIONAL RELEVANCE

- When asked about their role the vast majority of Local Police Officers described themselves as response officers. One of the officers still described himself as a Community Beat Officer. Local Police Officers did not know much about the Community Focus Model, and those who did mention a change talked mainly about it involving the abolition of the Community Beat Officer role. Some officers did not recall being given any information about the Model and others said they had received an e-mail, but were too busy to read it properly. There was a feeling that the changes could have been communicated more effectively and that there was a need for greater clarity about how the Model should work.
- In outlying areas it was felt that there had been little change and it was 'business as usual', whereas it was thought that in the large city the move from separate teams of 'Neighbourhood' and 'Response' officers would have been a more fundamental change.
- Some officers thought that former Community Beat Officers would still be expected to carry out their previous duties. However, there was an acknowledgement that they would not be able to do as much of this because they were busy responding to calls. Others acknowledged that all officers were now community-focused and that activities such as problem solving and partnership working would now fall to everyone. There was widespread concern that Local Police Officers did not have time to be proactive.
- Some officers felt that the Community Focused Model was simply a more explicit statement of what they were already doing. Response officers said that there had not really been any change to their jobs. Some mentioned that they had not been allocated any community-focused work. There was uncertainty about who would undertake the roles for which Community Beat Officers had formerly been responsible. For example, officers were unsure about who would now attend community meetings and thought this would be the role of sergeants. Some officers pointed out that Community Beat Officers had built up strong relationships with the community and felt that not having the same local officer attending regularly would have a detrimental effect.
- There was a concern that there was less capacity to provide community-focused policing. Former Community Beat Officers said they were so busy responding to calls that they did not have time to do anything that was community-focused. This meant less time to patrol on foot, severance of ties to the community and the loss of continuity, local knowledge and intelligence. It was felt that the Model could be improved by increasing the number of officers and clarifying officers' roles.
- Staffing levels and paperwork were the major points raised when officers were asked about constraints on their ability to do their job. All officers saw staffing levels as a constraint. They felt that they did not have the time to be proactive. They felt there was not enough staff to spend time patrolling on foot as they needed to be close to the office and a car in order to respond to urgent calls across a large geographic area. Other effects of staffing levels raised by officers included: time taken to progress inquiries; the implementation of the Community Focus Model; maintaining quality of service in light of public expectations; updating complainers; keeping up detection rates; probationer development; and stress. Some officers felt that there was a lot of duplication of paperwork and that there ought to be an easier way of recording things.

CASE STUDY 3 – STRATHCLYDE

Strathclyde Police launched its Community Policing Model (CPM) in 2009 and fieldwork was undertaken in 2009 and 2010. The Model aimed to improve visibility and accessibility within communities, to ensure communities had a role in the identification of local policing priorities, and to enable working with the community and other partners to deliver sustainable solutions. The Model also stated that problem solving would be achieved through enforcement, public reassurance and focused response policing. The Community Policing Model was structured on the basis of at least one Communities Unit in each sub-division, consisting of a number of Community Policing Teams. Each team was based in a local council multi-member ward. At a local level this involved moving from a small number of community officers undertaking community roles to larger teams of community officers who were also expected to respond to calls and spend time patrolling on foot. Response policing was carried out by officers allocated to a Core Group.

MAIN FINDINGS OF OPERATIONAL RELEVANCE

- Visibility was the aspect of the model that Community Police Officers and managers felt had been achieved quickly, with increased on-foot presence in communities. A number of officers felt that they were now better known to members of the public.
- Those Community Police Officers who felt that they were more accessible said that this was because of the force website or the business cards and posters that they distributed, containing the local police phone number.
- Officers said that they heard about public concerns through calls, information from partner agencies, public reassurance meetings and signal interviews. In addition to signal interviews managers mentioned Key Individual Networks (KINs) as forms of public consultation in Action Plan areas and some of them said they had also used environmental visual audits.
- An Action Plan which had been run within the case study area was seen by Community Officers as having reduced youth disorder, although some pointed out that this did not provide a lasting solution and the problem may have been displaced to other areas. They were unsure whether feedback on the Action Plan had been given to the community.
- It was felt that communication of the new Model could have been clearer. Community Officers felt that there was a lack of information provided about the Model and some managers felt that changes had been brought in too quickly. There was a feeling that Core Group awareness about the Model needed to be raised.
- In relation to whether or not Community Officers were 'skilled and knowledgeable' there was an acknowledgement that there were a large number of new officers who were inexperienced and were not yet familiar with their areas.
- Some Community Officers felt that the relationship between them and Core Group was quite good and there was a willingness to help each other out when required. Other Community Officers and some managers felt that there was a lack of Core Group understanding of the CP role.
- Managers acknowledged that the existing shift pattern enabled Community Units to provide a Community Officer presence seven days a week, but officer numbers were diluted and spread over five teams. At times there were only two Community Officers on a shift covering an entire multi-member ward area.
- Managers pointed out that the abstraction rate for the force had reduced dramatically and Community Officers indicated that they were rarely, if ever, abstracted.
- There was no specific training for community policing, but Community Officers felt that they did not need any additional training for their role. However, they felt that probationers would have been involved in a wider variety of calls if they had been placed in the Core Group (rather than Community Units) and had been tutored by officers with lengthier service.
- Although managers recognised that it was impossible for two officers to cover an entire multi-member ward on foot, they did want Community Officers to patrol on foot or bicycles in order to be visible, to stop and talk to people, collect intelligence and identify problems. However, Community Officers felt that vehicle patrols were still useful and that, due to lack of access to vehicles, they were often not in a position to 'back up' Core Group officers by responding to urgent calls.
- Whilst some officers felt the CP Model had resulted in a positive impact, in that it had brought more officers into CP, others felt that the model had resulted in them being pulled further away from CP activity and more towards enforcement and targets. In the words of one of the officers: 'they want the enforcement side because they want the KPIs, whereas that's to the detriment of people's perception of the police' (SP CPO9).

DISCUSSION

Some of the key themes which emerged are briefly discussed here: models of community policing; the relationship between response policing and community policing; performance management in local policing; and the management of change in policing.

There was a considerable mix of provision in relation to the delivery of local community policing models. Policing in Dumfries and Galloway was delivered by operational officers and a smaller number of community police officers in a traditional way. In both Grampian and Strathclyde new models were introduced while this study was being carried out, but were quite different from each other. Grampian's was based on designating *all* officers as Local Police Officers, while Strathclyde's involved a balance between Community Policing Teams and response Core Groups within each sub-division.

Where local policing was delivered by separate response and community policing teams there was potential for a lack of understanding of the community role, which appeared to be largely the result of a lack of communication. Findings suggested that this could be improved by facilitating closer working, for example, through joint briefings and shared working environments. It may be preferable to avoid this divide, and where such separation does not exist and all officers are said to be locally focused, it is important to be clear about where responsibility for the role of community engagement lies. The study demonstrated that for community council representatives, having contact with a named local officer was seen to be of the utmost importance.

A number of factors such as tenure, staffing levels and time spent on paperwork were seen to constrain local policing activity. For example, in rural areas, officers' ability to be proactive, engage with the community, and spend time on foot patrol was limited by the number of officers and the need to respond to calls across a large geographical area.

Considerable challenges were found in relation to the management of change within forces. Officers often felt that they had not been consulted, were informed about important changes only via email, and did not have time to read lengthy strategy documents which had important information about changed roles. It would be preferable to raise awareness through a variety of other means.

In relation to the effectiveness of local policing, there was a need to recognise the importance of qualitative as well as quantitative indicators. Where Fixed Penalty Notices formed an important part of performance monitoring, these were seen by management to be group targets. On the other hand, officers on the ground experienced them as individual targets. Some officers felt that their discretion had been eroded and there was potential for this to have a negative impact on improving police-community relations and gathering appropriate intelligence.

Policing within local communities has again become a central focus of attention in the new single force. These case-studies demonstrate that there is much good practice on which Police Scotland can build. However, the constraints imposed by the need for cost reduction and the tendency towards standardization of policing styles generated by national strategies pose significant challenges in this crucial area of police work.

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