The Scottish Institute for Policing Research

LOCAL POLICING IN TRANSITION: EXAMINING THE IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF POLICE REFORM IN SCOTLAND

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Summary: On April 1st 2013 the first single, national police service of Scotland became live with day one of Police Scotland. The reform was based in legislation, the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012, with claims made by the Scottish Government that a key objective of the reform was to strengthen the links between the police and the diverse communities they serve across Scotland whilst improving arrangements for local engagement. This briefing presents the findings from an Economic and Social Research Council funded collaborative PhD project with Police Scotland, which looked to examine the impacts and implications of this reform on local policing in Scotland during the first fourteen months of Police Scotland with the primary data collected between October 2013 and June 2014. The following is a snapshot of the main themes which emerged from the research which are situated around the broad headings of organisational change and perceptions of the process and management of reform; roles, resources and workloads, perceptions of the new working environment and working with communities: perceptions of local engagement.

INTRODUCTION:

> *"…this isn't a normal merger this is a merger of the police and nobody else does what we do, nobody else can do what we do, this is the largest public sector reform in Police history, we have never done anything as big as this…"* Police Manager 01 Easton[1]

In 2011, the Scottish Government conducted two consultations on the most radical programme of police reform for a generation. The consultation process ensued that on 8 September 2011, the Cabinet Secretary for Justice announced the Scottish Government's intention to introduce legislation to create a single, national police service in Scotland. Under this new legislation local policing became (for the first time) a statutory requirement, giving key responsibilities to local police commanders to devise local policing plans for each area in consultation with local authorities and communities. This localised focus raised questions as to the potential gains and losses of such a merger and prompted a renewed focus on enduring academic debates regarding local policing strategies, governance, accountability and the relative merits of different styles of policing across Scotland's communities.

The overall research aims of this project were to explore the ways, if any, in which local policing had been altered as a result of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act 2012. The project also looked to provide a unique insight into macro level police reforms from a the front line perspective, which at present is missing from literature (Brunetto and Farr-Wharton 2003, Savage 2007 and Sklansky and Mars 2008). Keeping the research aims above in mind, the research questions were developed to explore just how reform was being experienced locally by frontline police personnel, if and in what ways reform had altered local policing and what changes, if any had been experienced in local police governance.

METHODOLOGY

The project employed both qualitative and ethnographic methodology, with a stratified sample of police personnel from across various ranks, roles and responsibilities. The inclusion of a variety of police ranks within the project was intended to provide as diverse a view as possible of reform. The data collection and fieldwork phase of the project was conducted between October 2013 and June 2014. In order to provide the most robust view of the impacts of reform on local policing within the time constraints of a PhD thesis, the data was collected from within two distinct case study areas, Easton which is located in an urban centrally based

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[1] Each case study area was given a pseudonym to protect the anonymity of participants.

location, and the more northern location of Longphort based in the rural Highlands of Scotland. In total sixty-six interviews were conducted, with forty-one of those being with serving police officers from various ranks. The semi structured interviews took place in each police station before or after each officer reported for duty. The interviews were recorded and then transcribed to produce a thematic analysis. As stated above, this report presents a snapshot of how police reform was being experienced at a specific time in its journey, and it is acknowledged that the journey of reform continues with many changes occurring after the data collection phase was completed, the most fundamental of which was the retirement of the first chief constable and the appointment of his successor.

In general the key findings which emerged from the data fell under three broad headings; Police experiences of the reform; the reconfiguration of local policing and the effect of changes to local police scrutiny. This paper will now present a snapshot of some of these key findings which were produced from the original thesis.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF REFORM

*"Just now it feels that there is one shoe and it's fitting us all, despite the fact that some of us
have a few corns and blisters and the shoe doesn't really fit" (PC 12 Easton)*

In terms of experiences of reform, the findings showed that police officers from the two very distinct geographical case study areas had very similar experiences of recent change. The concept of change in itself was not of concern to the officers who took part in this project. Change, although not of this level or scope, they suggested, has always been an ongoing concept for the police organisation, and therefore did not cause any specific level of anxiety. However, the planning and implementation of this recent reform had created a level of unease and apprehension which in the main was related to;

- Front line officers having no opportunity to provide feedback on reform at any level therefore instilling a feeling that they were being marginalised by the process of organisational change.
- The pace of reform with frontline and management officers claiming too much change was being implemented too quickly on a daily basis
- The levels of support provided by management to frontline officers with the findings showing that at a local level support was varied within and between case study areas and dependent completely on individual local team leadership in each of the case study locations.
- Communication was an issue for all police staff during the implementation of reform based on the quantity and quality of electronic communications which were not always relevant to officers or their role.

In relation to this project it was important to examine how and what ways police culture could affect how organisational change was implemented and experienced. This was of particular significance in terms of the implementation stage of reform as it would frontline officers and their interpretations of reform who would operationalise change at a street level (Bevir 2010). In the main responses were negative from both case study locations with frontline officers from both Longphort and Easton commenting that they believed that they had no role or input to either the planning or implementation stages of reform. By excluding frontline officers Bayley (2008) argues the policing organisation is losing out on local grass roots knowledge together with "…a wealth of unorganized and under-utilizing knowledge about which police activities are not working and why" (ibid 2008:14).

An additional critical theme related to the pace of change the organisation experienced. From the perspective of frontline officers and supervisors the speed at which the changes occurred caused the most anxiety with officers struggling to keep up with the ongoing operational changes.

"…it's all been so rapid and constant…it's too quick and too much change…too much change
too soon and it's not over" PC12 Easton (F 4)

In terms of being supported by management through the reform, frontline staff provided a mixture of responses between and within case study areas indicating that support was dependent on individual local leadership in each of the case study locations. This much localised and individually based context of the support given to frontline staff would indicate that variations in support were being replicated across the organisation at the time of implementation, with some staff receiving more support than others.

Existing literature on organisational change cites effective and robust communication strategies aimed at preparing, coaching and supporting the workforce through the planning and implementation of organizational change (Tops and Spelier 2012, Manuela and Clara 2003 and Osborne and Brown 2005). However, concerns

around communications was by far the largest theme to emerge from the data collected here. In the main these concerns focused on the quantity and regularity of emails received by officers from both Longphort and Easton.

> "…we get bombarded with information…" PC 01 Easton
> "…you were bombarded daily with emails…" PC 03 Longphort (M 7)
> "…I do think you get bombarded with emails…" PC 04 Easton (M 6)

In 2015 Police Scotland (PS) produced first staff survey which reported similar findings surrounding communications through reform.

KEY FINDINGS ON THE RECONFIGURATION OF LOCAL POLICING

> *"…we policed through it and didn't change too much. We still have the same people doing the same jobs…"*
> *Senor Police Manager 01 Easton*

When questioned frontline officers and their supervisors from both Easton and Longphort believed that local policing post reform had been reconfigured and rebranded almost beyond recognition in relation to pre-reform arrangements. The themes which emerged from the data were divided into five groupings;

- A change in focus away from prevention to a more enforcement led style of local policing.
- Less community engagement and an increase in abstraction rates as a result of changes to traditional shift working patterns and the amalgamation of response and CPT personnel.
- A loss of local community knowledge based on the removal of designated local beat areas for CPT officers
- Reform has resulted in changes to the roles, resources and workloads of local policing personnel, increasing overall workloads and creating confusion around the post reform role of CP officers.
- An increased focus on key performance management indicators (KPI's) and the introduction of additional KPI's which did not adequately explain or measure the daily roles, duties and responsibilities of community police officers.

Many local officers from across both case study areas stated that post reform there had been a general loss of focus on community policing and a more refocused approach to response and enforcement led styles of policing. They cited many examples of how this change had been operationalised including the removal of designated beat areas for CPT officers, the realignment of response and CPT teams, a change to their traditional working shift patterns and a renewed strategic focus on KPI figures, including an increase in stop and searches.

> "…at the moment I think with Police Scotland community policing has been thrown away in a corner and forgotten about…" PC 07 Longphort (M 8)

Local staff were perplexed and appeared particularly confused by the messages coming from management level, and talked amongst themselves in the coffee room about Police Scotland's public claims of no numerical targets being issued to frontline officers against their own experiences of not reaching targets. There was also a sense of frustration when discussing the new PS focus on 'task not ask' with officers' anger directed towards the Area Command Rooms (ACR) who they argued had no idea of CPT daily routines and duties, but post reform have a greater management role in relation to frontline officers. The accumulation of all of these changes discussed above had resulted in reduced levels of community engagement and partnership working whilst increasing the levels of abstraction from a neighbourhood level officers claimed;

> "…where as before, under the legacy force our big strategy was prevention, clearly now with Police Scotland we have gone on to enforcement… our main driver is now enforcement… and we can't have detailed engagement and enforcement at the same time" Middle Manager 01 Easton (M 2)

When at a later date I interviewed a senior police manager I probed these claims further. This senior manager agreed with the claims and stated that it was no longer the role of CPT Officers to focus on crime prevention and that the role of all officers was to enforce the law;

> "…the core purpose of my community team is to enforce the law… it's not to teach children, it's not to be parents to children it's not to be one of those crossing people…we are here to enforce the law and to have a certain gravitas and presence when engaging with the public… in some areas, we lost our way a little bit we tried to grasp the idea of prevention… I think cops better

understand what is expected of them now… cops are not teachers cops are not educators, they are police officers and they are there to arrest and charge people when it's appropriate…we have undoubtedly re branded and re marketed what community policing is…" Senior Police Manager 01 Easton (M 20)

KEY FINDINGS ON THE NEW SCRUTINY ARRANGEMENTS

"…the relationship? I wouldn't say there is one… it's all a bit dysfunctional at the moment…there just doesn't seem to be a relationship" Locally Elected Representative 05 Easto*n*

One of the most fundamental changes which occurred as part of the Police and Fire Reform (Scotland) Act (2012) was the change made to police scrutiny arrangements at both the local and national level across Scotland. As part of the Reform Act, pre-existing police boards made up of locally elected representatives, have been replaced by local scrutiny groups whose role is to "…monitor and provide feedback to the local commander on the policing of its area" (Reform Act (2012) Section 45 (2)). Post reform the national scrutiny of policing in Scotland is operationalised by the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) a public body established as part of the Reform Act with a remit to hold the chief constable to account and promote the main principles of policing.

Prior to reform local police scrutiny in Easton was conducted by a joint police board which covered policing in five local authority areas. The board was made up of eighteen locally elected members from the five local authority areas who represented a variety of political parties which met on a quarterly basis. Post reform Easton created a standalone committee for the sole purpose of scrutinising, reviewing and offering feedback to the local commander on local policing plans. There are ten members on the scrutiny committee who represent the political makeup of the council and they meet on a quarterly basis.

In Longphort the role of police scrutiny pre reform was the responsibility of a larger joint police board, similar in construction to that of Easton which covered three local authority areas and consisted of fourteen locally elected members representing the political makeup of the council who met on a quarterly basis. Post reform the scrutiny of local policing has been allocated to a pre-existing committee which has a full council membership and has responsibilities for overall financial management of the council. There are over fifty council members who meet on average every six weeks. However, increasing the number of councillors involved in police scrutiny has failed to increase either the quantity or quality of scrutiny Longphort, with policing simply added to an already heavily loaded agenda.

"There are more people involved but I am also prepared to bet without any hard evidence that the scrutiny and the audit of the police in [this area] is much less than it was in the old police board, much less, in fact it is tokenism of the worst kind…" Local Council Scrutiny Member 02 Longphort

The main themes which emerged from the data collected from members of local scrutiny groups from Longphort and Easton together with members of the Scottish Police Authority (SPA) highlighted post reform concerns around the quality and quantity of local scrutiny, the relationship dynamics between the SPA and local scrutiny groups, the politics of police scrutiny and suggestions that there was now a local democratic deficit in post reform police scrutiny. In Easton the focus for councillors in creating a stand-alone scrutiny group has been to ensure that the police scrutiny processes employed would reflect the importance that the councillor's place on local policing which in turn is reflected in the local policing plans. When councillors in Longphort were asked the reasoning behind their decision to add the scrutiny role to an existing committee the members stated that in general the feeling was that there were already too many council committees.

In terms of a working relationship between the newly created scrutiny groups and the SPA, the findings show that both case study areas reported no relationship or support being received.

"…the SPA are not particularly interested in us…there has been nothing put in place yet unless the SPA suddenly become very interested in building this relationship… I sense from the convener that there is a sense of frustration" Local Council Scrutiny Member 05 Easton.

The findings also showed that in general there was a sense of confusion amongst scrutiny members regarding their roles and responsibilities which were related to a lack of support and training for scrutiny members. The impact of financial constraints and local politics on scrutiny arrangements across the variety of councils in Scotland is perhaps something that has been overlooked by both the Scottish Government and the SPA in relation to how local scrutiny arrangements are being operationalised across Scotland.

However, it is important to highlight the hard work of many frontline officers and their managers who despite the ongoing changes they were experiencing on a daily basis to roles, procedures and general working duties, continued to focus on delivering an effective and efficient local policing service. The motto to follow for many local officers and their managers was that they needed to keep policing through the change. A full account of all the findings from this project will be developed in a final report at a later date.

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