"Jack of all trades and master of none," is this a true reflection of today's British police

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Abstract: The purpose of present study is to explore the British policing methods and their effectiveness. Generally, four key goals of their policing include preventing crime and disorder, pursuing and bringing to justice those who break the law, keeping the peace, and helping the public. When considering these aims carefully, it leads to a subsequent question: If the majority of regular police officers are not directly fighting crime, what are the reasons for it and what are they actually doing? This is the foundations for the "Jack of all trades" argument of this paper, which gives rise to the two competing paradigms. One is that the role of the police should involve much more than simply apprehending criminals. Furthermore, the other paradigm suggests that the police are simply spending too much time on the activities that are not part of their main duties. These polarised viewpoints need to be taken into account before any meaningful conclusions can be drawn. This paper argues that the answer can be found in the culture of policing by examining the goals that the British police forces are currently attempting to achieve. It is clear that as the police have finite resources, they have to make choices about how to deploy them. This requires reconsidering their priorities and placing more emphases on some activities more than others.

Keywords: British Police, Policing Methods, Crime and Disorder, Crime Prevention

1. Introduction

The purpose of present study is to explore the British policing methods and their effectiveness. With this in mind we must acknowledge that the police are called upon routinely to perform a bewildering miscellany of tasks, which range from controlling traffic to controlling terrorism [1].

Despite the diverse range of their duties police activity can be clearly categorised. This was illustrated by the report of the Sheehy Inquiry, which "saw policing as encompassing four main aims: to prevent crime; to pursue and bring to justice those who break the law; to keep the peace; and to protect, help and reassure the public" [2]. Such analysis spawns a further question: "if the majority of police officers are not directly fighting crime, what are they doing" and why? [3].

It is here that we see the foundations for the "Jack of all trades" argument which gives rise to two competing paradigms. The first of these is that "the role of the police should involve much more than simply catching criminals", while the latter suggests that "the police are simply spending too much time on activities that are not part of their main job" [4]. These polarised viewpoints need to be considered before any meaningful conclusion can be drawn. But even if we agree that the police are "Jack of all trades" does it really follow that they are "master of none"?

An answer can perhaps be found in the culture of policing by objectives currently attempted by police forces in Britain [5]. It is clear that the police have finite resources and consequently they have to make choices about how to deploy them which inevitably means prioritising some activities over others [6]. Strong argument can thus be made that the opening title to this work is a truism which reflects the harsh and bureaucratic reality of modern policing, and this is what this paper will investigate.

2. Jack of all Trades

2.1. Generation

The police force has held a statutory duty for the prevention of crime since it first gained a permanent

presence in London in 1829 [7]. While this fundamental objective remains unchanged, modern times have given birth to a service orientated approach with an aim to de-emphasise the more forceful aspects of policing and to inculcate a more responsive image [8]. Resultantly it is evident that the traditional model of state police is being challenged by a growing diversification of policing provision [1].

This idea is reinforced by studies which have consistently shown that not more than 25 per cent of all calls to the police are about crime, more often the figure being 15-20 per cent [3]. This suggests that a large portion of police time is spent restoring order and providing general assistance with typical instances involving young men drinking beer on a street corner, tenants refusing to leave an apartment from which they have been evicted, a dog barking persistently late at night and a neighbour obstructing a driveway with his car. These are but a few examples of the "Jack of all trades" nature of police work which clearly demonstrate that despite the popularity of the crime fighting image, a great deal of police work is mundane [9].

Confident assertion is hereby made that police work cannot accurately be encompassed by terms such as law enforcement of crime control [4] as it is increasingly apparent that officers have to act as untrained and temporary social workers giving rise to what is in effect a secret social service [10]. Consequently "the police are working and responding almost as an all-purpose emergency service … whether or not a call involves a crime" [4]. With this in mind how do the police organise themselves relative to the diverse range of work they are expected to undertake.

2.2. Jack of all Trades: From Models of Methods

The idea of "Jack of all trades" can be demonstrated through a series of policing models in effect the theory behind the practice. These are best illustrated as "the enforcement model, the service model and the community model" although it is imperative to remember that there is no perfect model of policing, and it is probably necessary to borrow elements from each model to arrive at a police service that meets all the demands of the public [11]. This quotation is of particular importance as it classically illustrates the point we now to turn to examine.

The conceptual basis of the enforcement model concentrates on the control of crime and the enforcement of the law. This largely coincides with "the basic message given by western democratic governments during the twentieth century … that crime could be controlled by catching criminals and processing them through the system". Not only does this approach physically remove criminals from our streets it is also seen to bring offenders to justice and thus act as a general deterrent to others tempted to commit crime [12]. Central to this model is the notion that the police adopt a reactive stance, their responses being controlled by the public, for it is the public

which activates demand for their service [11].

Notwithstanding the enforcement model it is evident that the meaning of police crime prevention has shifted in recent years. This has been exemplified by an expansion of specialist crime prevention departments in police forces, providing advice to citizens on methods of minimising the risk of becoming the victims of crime, and alerting them to the dangers of some kinds of offences [13]. Consequently it is submitted that the police have become knowledge workers with their main function to broker information about risks to public and private organisations concerned with the regulation and governance of people and territories.

The above has given rise to concept labelled as the "service" and "community" models of policing. The former advocates that policing priorities are set in consultation with the public while the latter gives precedence to maintaining order and public tranquillity over crime control, with the police and the community sharing responsibility for dealing with crime and disorder [11]. To fully comprehend this new approach we must acknowledge that these two ideas are interdependent in respect of the fact that the latter is largely a product of the former. With this in mind they have strong ties to a concept known as "problem orientated policing", a system concerned with "systematically addressing relevant problems in the community" [14].

It is clear that the service model features a close responsiveness to what the community wants and is largely reactive. Here we see a system where public concerns are built into the priority-setting process via some type of community forum [11]. By contrast to the enforcement model a service orientated force would have to re-think the balance of effort it expended on crime control, order maintenance and general services taking care not to deplete the number of officers available for general patrol. This manner of policing is becoming increasingly prevalent in present times.

Implementing the community model comprehensively has proved to be very difficult as those communities most in need of community policing seem to have taken to it least enthusiastically [14]. This is best explained in one of two ways, firstly that the marginalised and disaffected and those living in fractured communities, among whom relationships with the police have been least trusting, have not been quick to embrace a redefinition of policing and secondly because those who would like to work more closely with the police can be deterred because of intimidation from other residents [15]. Either way it is apparent that this method of policing has been met with a mixed response, perhaps because the term community itself is notoriously slippery – it often seems to imply shared norms, values and ways of life often where no such attributes exist.

The above has demonstrated the practical and theoretical principles behind the "Jack of all trades label". Despite this we must remember that models of policing are in

themselves nebulous and elusive concepts, often the subject of heated academic debate.

3. Master of None

3.1. Policing the Goals of Government

Published in 2005 the National Policing Plan (2005-2008) presents five key policing priorities: to reduce overall crime, to provide a citizen-focused police service which responds to the needs of communities and individuals, to take action with partners to increase sanction detection rates, to reduce people's concerns about crime, and to combat serious and organised.

While the above objectives seem credible in reality they represent the politicisation of the police, a phenomenon codified by the Police Act 1996 which gave the Home Secretary power to determine the national policing objectives and performance indicators for all police forces.

This was later supplemented by the Police Reform Act 2002 which allowed the Home Secretary to issue guidance to police authorities and chief officers of police as to the matters to be contained in any three-year strategy plan, and as to the form to be taken by any such plan. Thus the priorities listed in the National Police Plan have been set at central government level and are often linked to budgetary constraints and political ideology.

The problems arising from such centralised objectives stem from the fact that the inherent dominance of efficiency over effectiveness will encourage monetary value rather than social value in policing [16]. This prompts a situation where the appearance of rationality is satisfied by the publication of statistics on expenditure, objectives, performance and crime thus suggesting a magic formula by which resources can be converted into actions and actions into outcomes for society [17].

As a result it can be said that the adoption of business excellence models is on the increase in the police and this type of approach is bound to dominate for the foreseeable future [8]. This is perhaps best summed up in the words of the regularly recited maxim whoever controls the purse strings controls policing.

A further concern arising from the centralisation of police priorities lies in the nature of their relationship with government. Examples of this are counter-terrorist initiatives which all too often have involved the passage of new, emergency legislation, generally providing for the extension of the powers available to the police and / or the security services. These powers are often presented as being temporary with the reality being that over time there is a long-term process of normalisation in which the gap between special and normal policing powers narrows or even disappears [18].

This gives cause for concern – out of 895 arrests made under The Terrorism Act 2000 a mere 23 have resulted in conviction. Others were dealt with under 'conventional' criminal justice disposal methods and a massive 496

resulted in no action whatsoever. Additionally, in the case of *A Secretary of State for the Home Department* (2005) the House of Lords ruled that Anti-Terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001 (which authorised the detention of foreign nationals for 90 days without trial) was incompatible with the Human Rights Act 1998.

A different but equally valid example can be found in the policing of the miner's dispute in the mid-1980s, and the subsequent violence on the picket lines between striking miners and the police [9]. Here the police were seen by many as enforcing the political will of the Thatcher government. Both of the above instances highlight the problematic nature of the relationship between police and government in which the former are sometimes seen to act as the enforcement wing of the latter.

Despite these negative examples a clear benefit of centralising policing work can be seen in the establishment of both "the National Crime Squad (NCS) and National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS)" [19]. Created by central government these units second officers from other police forces with an overall remit to target criminal organisations committing serious and organised crime. This has clearly increased the ability of police forces to co-ordinate their activities across force boundaries [20]. Nevertheless it is evident that there are undercurrents of opposition among the British police to claims about how serious and widespread organised crime is [21].

3.2. How Effective are the Police?

There were '5.6 million crimes recorded by the police in 2005/2006, a fall of one per cent compared with 2004/2005'. It is widely acknowledged that measuring police effectiveness is not an easy task with the standard measure for many years being the clear up rate, or proportion of cases in which a suspect was detected. Today this number varies widely from 90 per cent for homicide, 62 per cent for violence against the person and 12 per cent for burglaries. While the foremost of these figures suggests that the police are at least mastering some areas of their practice the clear up rate it is often seen as a crude measure which offers no evaluation or insight into the quality of the investigative process [9].

A further problem in reliance on statistics is that published league tables of detection and crime levels not only fail to exemplify what really concerns the public, but also because what gets measured has a very significant effect on what gets done and what is prioritised [17]. This sits well with items previously discussed as the more that the agenda is set by the National Policing Plan, the less that the consultation locally about local policing plans has any real content. Accordingly it is increasingly apparent that the hallowed status of constabulary independence is likely to come under increasing pressure as a result of emerging and future reformations of the context of police policy making [22].

Current government intervention must be compared with the decision in R v MPC, ex parte Blackburn, where lord Denning held that "every constable in the land … should be,

and is, independent of the executive … he is not the servant of anyone save of the law itself". More recently the above issues have been raised by Conservative leader David Cameron who "said he thought the police felt put upon by Home Office regulations and targets, rather than being focused on the people they were meant to be serving". He also commented on the apparent lack of influence of local police authorities stating that the police are supposed to be accountable to police authorities, but I do not think anybody knows who sits on police authorities or what they do [16]. While this paper is not a work of political commentary these remarks echo points previously made.

Public perception is an equally important measure of police effectiveness: despite the number of crimes estimated by the British Crime Survey falling in recent years comparatively high proportions of people still believe the crime rate to have risen - 62% of people thought that crime as a whole had risen compared with 42 per cent who though that crime in their local area had increased [19].

An additional point to consider is the view of victims who stated that they were satisfied with the service received 'in 58 per cent of cases that the police came to know about'. Similar figures were obtained from witnesses, of whom '59 per cent were very of fairly satisfied by the way the police dealt with the matter'. Overall these statistics suggest that victims and witnesses of reported crime are generally pleased with the service provided by the police [19].

4. Conclusion

This paper set out to investigate the notion that the police are "Jack of all trades and master of none"; whilst doing so we have reviewed the functions of the police alongside the theoretical background behind modern policing strategies. It is here that we have seen they do a great deal more than simply fighting crime and consequently the first part of our opening title rings true.

Our argument has also highlighted key difficulties in modern policing such as government intervention and the centralisation of policing objectives. This has given rise to a situation in which the focus of policing has moved away from local communities and towards politically motivated targets. Such a trend supports the idea that the police are "master of none" as they now appear the subject of political expediency and an ever more strident rhetoric on the part of governmental ministers expressing frustrations at the levels of police performance and the need for more radical reform [16]. Consequently we have seen how policing has suffered as the hands of senior officers become increasingly tied in bureaucratic red tape.

Despite the above it is clear that there is more to policing then any one model or doctrine and this we have seen through the concept of a "secret social service". Such ideas alongside fairly high levels of victim satisfaction suggest that our title needs slight modification in order truly to reflect reality. As a result it is proposed that the statement "Jack of all trades, master of some" best reflects the finding of this work.

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