THE DEBATE ABOUT COMMUNITY: PAPERS FROM A SEMINAR ON 'COMMUNITY IN SOCIAL POLICY'

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II COMMUNITY POLICING: OBSTACLES AND ISSUES

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Listening to 500 telephone conversations between the police and public callers in a district of Hull is not what I would recommend to anybody with a few weeks to occupy. (That research is reported in Ekblom and Heal, 1982, and Ekblom and Heal, 1983). But it convinced me that an understanding of community policing could contribute to a general debate on community in social policy. This is because it revealed the enormously wide range of incidents with which the police are required to deal - crimes and, for the most part, non-crimes; and also the extremely arbitrary way that many incidents become crimes rather than, say, problems for social workers, civil courts or health visitors. This may depend on which agency is called to the scene, which agency is even open at the time, and, should it be the police who arrive, on the subsequent turn of events. So the service provided by the police overlaps with the responsibilities of virtually every other agency that has begun to dip its toe into the water of the community approach. As an aside, I suggest, following Egon Bittner (1974), that the distinctive features of the work of the police relate to the possibility of the legitimate use of force.

Problems with Conventional Uniformed Policing

The rationale for community policing cannot properly be understood without an appreciation of the shortcomings of conventional uniformed policing to which it is a response. These shortcomings reached a peak a few years ago; I will caricature some of them here. One shortcoming is summed up in the phrase 'fire brigade policing': the confinement of the police response to the moment of crisis (cf. Alderson, 1979). There is little emphasis on prevention before trouble starts, or on any follow-up after the immediate crisis has passed. Likewise there is little attempt to move beyond reaction to individual crises, towards a strategic response based on an understanding of the pattern of problems in a neighbourhood.

A second shortcoming is the strictly limited effectiveness of conventional police patrolling for the control of crime - awareness of which has emerged over the last decade or so (Clarke and Hough, 1984; Morris and Heal, 1981). Financial constraints have also begun to make a significant impact.

A third shortcoming is the lack of contact between police and public, popularly attributed to the change from foot patrols to panda cars, and to a trend towards centralisation. (In fairness it should be said that fire brigade policing provides plenty of contact but on an extremely narrow and short-term basis.) Lack of broader types of contact, it has been claimed (for example Moore and Brown, 1981) may increase fear of crime, reduce mutual trust and reduce the two-way flow of information between police and public that is relevant to controlling crime.

The final shortcoming of conventional policing is the friction it can sometimes cause, particularly when the young and ethnic minorities are faced on the streets with inexperienced officers knowing little of the locality (Smith and Gray, 1985; Southgate and Ekblom, 1984).

Aims of Community Policing

Community policing has developed often by a process of accretion more than deliberate design, but its aims can be seen to relate to the shortcomings just described. It involves an attempt to broaden the police response, with a greater interest in prevention and follow-up of crimes and related problems. Prevention in particular comes to rely on an appreciation of patterns of crime and background, often social, causes of offending. There is a deliberate effort to share responsibility for the control of crime with residents, agencies and voluntary bodies, acknowledging that the police acting alone can have only limited impact. Friendly contact with the public is seen as an important end in itself, and is purposively cultivated, especially with the young and ethnic minorities. Decentralisation also has a part to play.

Features of Community Policing

Police forces have shown considerable energy in putting these various aims into practice. A central feature is the community constable, who is supposed to provide preventive advice and continuity of contact, and to get to know the neighbourhood and its problems. In some forces a specialist community involvement department operates; others endeavour to foster the community approach throughout the organisation. Crime analysis requires collation of crime or incident records

for a locality to reveal any particular troublespots such as the environs of a particular pub where bad management frequently results in aggressive drunks being spilt out onto the street; or where the lack of late night public transport leads to a trail of cars stolen to get revellers home. The police then enter negotiations with those responsible for the background causes of offending.

Relating to the young can involve discos, clubs and special activities like car maintenance clubs for driving offenders; police-schools liaison, where officers go into the classroom to talk on subjects ranging from stranger-danger to civic responsibility; and school holiday activities intended to keep the young out of trouble.

Relating to adult residents, apart from the 'tea and chat' approach, can involve anything from addressing tenant meetings on problems of vandalism, to setting up police shops in an attempt to overcome problems of centralised police stations, whose front offices seem frequently unpleasant or intimidating, to identifying local priorities and needs through surveys.

The inter-agency approach can operate at a number of levels, including referral of offenders' or victims' cases between the police and other agencies, joint casework or even policymaking. Arrangements range from transfer placement schemes for training and encouraging mutual understanding to the establishment of joint agencies such as a juvenile bureau (see for example Moore and Brown, 1981).

From the early days of community policing, forces such as Devon and Cornwall began to develop local accountability schemes, as it was felt that the police were extending their influence much deeper into civic life than existing forms of formal accountability allowed for, but much impetus for the setting up of local consultative committees has come from the Scarman Report.

These, then, are some of the key features of community policing - but I would emphasise that the extent and type of arrangements, and especially the nomenclature, vary enormously from force to force. Implementation in most cases is still very patchy or experimental.

Community policing swept in on charismatic leadership and a general tide of fashion. But while these are probably necessary for the start of a radical change in the way a large and complex organisation operates, they provide no basis for sustained progress. There are a number of ways where community policing could go from here - ways which any community-based approach could go.

Alternative Futures for Community Policing
Community policing could remain little more than a PR job -

superficial and nostalgic, like the cobbled streets, flat hats and warm accents of the brown bread advert a couple of years ago. 'Real' police work would continue as before.

Alternatively, a lot of effort could be put into making substantial changes in practice, but these could founder on inadequate planning and clumsy or half-hearted attempts at implementation. The classic mistake perhaps is the establishment of a specialist community department which is 'bolted on' to an otherwise unchanged organisation - and which just as readily drops off again. The only way ahead as I see it is the hard uphill grind. Identifying obstacles. Discovering reasons why the police, any other agency, or the public behave as they currently do, to the detriment of community involvement. Clarifying issues deserving of wider debate rather than fudging them as technical or operational questions. Building up experience piecemeal; evaluating the effectiveness, and the side effects, of initiatives. Until very recently, I am afraid, evaluation of community policing has been more tender than tough - as Community in Social Policy, Brown and Iles (1985), Cumberbatch (1983) and Weatheritt (1983) have all pointed out. Finally, there is the need to link the accumulated experiences together through some sort of conceptual framework.

I would like to use the rest of this paper first to look at some of the obstacles to community involvement, within the police and within the community. Then to try to draw these together into a framework which complements, but differs a little from, the theme of remoteness versus 'small is beautiful' that runs through Community in Social Policy. I shall focus on the 'sharing responsibility' side of community policing rather than the 'smoothing relations' side, as that is where my knowledge lies and that is where I suspect more lessons are to be pooled with other social agencies. I shall move from a consideration of the 'presenting problems', if you like, to more fundamental obstacles and issues. I begin with the police organisation.

Obstacles Within the Police Organisation
A major obstacle within the police organisation is resources, and the way they are used. Radio controllers send patrol cars to virtually all calls from the public, as they are received, a practice which consumes much of the patrols' time and interferes with planned activities and general continuity. Community constables are frequently removed from their home beat to fill gaps in emergency cover or help on public order duties; recent research has shown, moreover, that when on duty they do not often speak to the public (Brown and Iles, 1985).

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Details of calls for assistance are vital for the strategic planning of the response to local patterns of crime and disorder. However the procedures for recording the information make it of low quality and difficult to retrieve. Computerisation has come over the horizon and may help (Hough, 1980), but often the material is still just on paper: it lies there, dies and is fossilised.

Given that the police can free sufficient resources to engage in community policing by such methods as graded responding - a more planned and descriminating response to calls in line with explicit priorities - other obstacles await. Any benefits of specialist community relations arrangements may be negated by their effects on regular patrol officers - deskilling and lowering of morale (Jones, 1980). The subculture of junior officers places much value on the confrontational crime-fighting role at the expense of prevention or handling the 'rubbish' calls (Holdaway, 1977; Gonser, 1980; Smith and Gray, 1985). Community officers may become scorned by colleagues as "hobbybobbies". This scorn often extends to other social agencies and voluntary bodies and, compounded with a general need to retain professional autonomy, may partly explain the lack of referral of people's problems to these agencies, or the unwillingness of officers to engage in joint action.

These are outsiders' views. Let's look from the perspective of the officers on the ground. Radio controllers, for example, are faced with a tricky task in the field of service delivery. The principal dilemma they face in trying to conserve patrol resources is that of handling the risks inherent in deciding whether or not a call merits an immediate patrol visit. Hindsight can prove the most reasonable of decisions wrong; in the absence of explicit policy guidelines from management, the safest response to calls is almost always to send a patrol just in case.

For patrol officers, penetrating into community life is equally problematic. Involvement in disputes can lead to all kinds of entanglement. Giving forceful preventive advice to a publican on how to avoid ejecting violent drunks onto the street may be seen as invasive, where coming to the rescue of individual victims of drunks may not. In joint action with other agencies - for example, juvenile liaison - it is hard to resolve the balance between welfare types of offenders and protection of the community; in particular what types of information should be exchanged. Sharing responsibility with local residents for the control of vandalism may generate problems for the police if they try to take the law into their own hands. Participation in residents' groups may ensnare the police in local political conflicts.

Faced with such situations, officers need guidance. Yet they may be instructed to 'go forth and penetrate' the community with few tangible guidelines to determine what their involvement should be, when to limit it and, in retrospect, to defend their decisions. Philips and Cochrane (1985) conclude from a study of community liaison officers in six police forces that there is little clarity or consensus of purpose, with the level of service heavily dependent on the talents and enthusiasm of individual officers.

The absence of detailed and explicit guidance from management is thus a further constraint on the move to community policing. But for management in their turn, producing this guidance is problematic, beyond and above the absence of a body of experience on which to base it. Balancing the response to immediate risk versus longer term needs of the community is difficult. Within the police force, introducing any change is difficult where middle management may be hostile, constables suspicious, habits established and information from the ground hard to obtain. Facing the outside world, avoidance of public controversy has discouraged formulation of explicit policies in sensitive areas. Policies intended to alter the civil behaviour of particular individuals or organisations that contribute to the opportunity to offend are rejected in favour of the safer alternative - generalised public appeals aimed at raising awareness of society's common enemy, crime. Accountability may be seen as a means of controlling the police; but its absence may serve to inhibit exploration of radically new approaches.

The police, then, are isolated from the community in a number of ways. But looking beneath these 'presenting problems', it seems to me that the crime-fighting culture of junior officers is an effect of the isolation of the police from the community as much as a cause: it is a set of survival kit - a strategies for coping with a difficult role. Facing complex, ambiguous problems with little guidance from above save on 'legalities', the constables' path of least resistance is to focus on reaction to crime and to retreat into their own society (Cain, 1973; Angell, 1971). For management in their turn, moving away from the status quo poses dilemmas in their relationships with their subordinates and the public.

Obstacles and Constraints within the Community

Establishing contact and sharing responsibility for the control of crime are two sided processes. Many obstacles lie outside the police. Private citizens and organisations undertake a lot of informal policing already, but taking the transfer of responsibility

further may not be easy or even wholly desirable. Constraints exist at a number of levels.

As far as the general public goes, I shall set aside the question of people with chronically hostile relations with the police - there are plenty of obstacles that have been less well aired. For example, the high degree of individualism and privacy-seeking in our culture will inhibit any policing strategy which relies mainly on the collective endeavours of the community. The very setting up of the police organisation may have reduced private citizens' and organisations' capacity to control crime - a case of deskilling. But there is pull as well as push here - it is often easier to let the police do one's dirty work. Finally, to return to resources, the public, simply put, seem addicted to a fast patrol response to their call.

Some people's image of community policing assumes a romantic, arcadian view of society where the commonality of ordinary folk keep crime in check. The naivety of this view appears from several angles. First, at very local and informal level, informal community structure in Britain seems under-developed in comparison with, for example, Japan (Bayley, 1976). This is partly a matter of our individualistic culture; partly of social change; whatever the case, the British police often find it hard to identify sufficient explicit interest groups with whom to negotiate or to take joint action, or to whom to transfer respons-ibility for deciding priorities and tackling a given local problem. Second, attempting to relate to residents through informal 'com-munity leaders' also has problems. Are they representative? Do they have any real influence? Third, the rosy image of total harmony and consensus in local life is a myth: creating residents' associations on housing estates can articulate and amplify conflict rather than inevitably reduce it. Many of the problems the police are required to handle may amount to illegitimate expressions (violence/damage) of legitimate conflicts of interest. 'Rowdies causing disturbance' may be no more than youth versus old age (Chappell, 1981). It is not within the scope of the police role to deal with such conflicts at source - they deserve referral to the civil courts, planning or local political institutions, but rarely get it. Harmony (or at least its absence) figures again in two other contemporary areas. Neighbourhood watch schemes seem only to take root where a community of mutual interest exists - which often means in a homogeneous and middle class district. And where there is a significant divide between sections of the com-munity - as in some mining areas at the moment - community policing seems unlikely to thrive.

Doubts about the effectiveness or acceptability of police activities have been matched by disquiet about other institutions to which police might refer people's problems, or with which they might take joint action. Agencies of social concern have been criticised for ineffectiveness, reactiveness, narrowness of perspec-tive, over-defensiveness of professional autonomy, uncertainty over how to confront the issue of care versus control (Golkstein, 1979; Hadley and Hatch, 1981). Civil law - which might make for peaceful and constructive resolution of many conflicts before the police are brought in - has been described as remote, over-elaborate, costly and slow. Local government has often attracted criticism (for example Turton, 1980) for being poorly organised both for internal coordination and liaison with the police (Knights, 1981), and for remoteness from the community.

The Police and the Community

Mutual isolation between police and community, and constraints on moves towards community policing appear at every level, from the practicalities of handling telephone calls to the values and attitudes held by the public. While each element makes its own contribution, all interrelate and reinforce one another, and it is hard to distinguish cause from effect. To take an example - are the narrow channels of communication between police and public a problem, or a solution, serving to keep each party at a comfortable distance from the other? My own way of simplifying this complex picture, and of standing back from pronouncements on cause and effect relationships between large numbers of presenting symptoms, is to view it all from the fundamental perspective of the division of labour. This is where I diverge a little from *Community in Social Policy* which focuses on the problems of scale and remoteness. But I think the two interpretations are comple-mentary rather than antagonistic. Most crimes and related social problems are not simply matters for control. It is fair to say that each contains elements requiring the pursuit of a number of basic activities: co-operative assistance, care, control and the resolut-ion of civil conflicts. However, society has divided up skills, responsibilities and powers such that these four tasks are often the province of different specialist organisations or sectors of the community. Rather than problems being treated in the round, the organisations that try to deal with them may act in isolation from one another and from the informal community, out of step, sometimes in opposition and always pursuing institutional autonomy. If a problem is taken to the police, it is likely to receive a 'law enforcement' response; to social services, a 'welfare' one.

But there is a subtler process at work, which could be called 'amateur holism'. The police do provide unofficial care, social workers unofficial conflict resolution, doctors unofficial control. Each has only genuflected to the division of labour, realising that holistic remedies are required - but the result is often sporadic, amateur, unsupervised and short-term.

All in all, division of labour has come to mean that the people who have the power may not have the competence to deal with crime and related problems who have the necessary capacity; people who have the power may not have the skill; people who have the information may lack the power, and people who have the capacity may lack the incentive.

I see community policing, from this angle, as an attempt to compensate for the side-effects of the division of labour; it is an attempt to plug the gaps between the police, local and national government services, the political arenas, the judiciary and the general public, through which the problems of crime and disorder can easily slip.

To reverse the trend of the last few centuries towards increasing specialisation would be a gargantuan task. Furthermore we cannot turn the clock back to some golden age where every honest citizen exercised responsibility for controlling crime and every other aspect of community life. The division of labour represents not so much an obstacle as a series of cleft sticks (Figure 1). Each adverse feature of the excessive division of labour seems matched by disadvantages of excessive <u>integration</u>, in its impact on the efficiency and effectiveness of the way society's problems are tackled, and their acceptability.

Figure 1: Cleft Sticks

Skills -	Specialise or spread?
Responsibilities -	Separate or merge?
Powers -	Confine or share?
Informal involvement -	Distance or closeness?
Formal involvement -	Distance or closeness?
Geographic organisation -	Centralise or decentralise?

Splitting up policing skills and concentrating them within particular agencies and institutions may make them over-sophisticated, over-sold, expensive and in short supply, and may de-skill the public, who in some circumstances may be best placed to prevent or respond to crime and disorder; but diffusing them in the community may make them weak and underdeveloped, and unfairly applied.

Dividing responsibilities may result in an over-narrow treatment of problems in frameworks whose relevance is made hostage to social change, and may give private individuals the illusion that the responsibilities are being met without the need for their assistance; but broadening them may mean that a problem becomes nobody's job, or alternatively that self-policing leads to an unacceptable loss of privacy and independence in what may become a highly conformist society. Community does not always lead naturally to pluralism.

Dividing up power may lead to an unworkable set of checks and balances which, moreover, may be circumvented so that responsibilities are met by illegitimate means; but concentrating it has been achieved, in the past, at the expense of equity and the provision of services responsive to the needs of consumers.

Attempts to respond to problems in a centralised manner may result in remote, isolated organisations, clumsy responses based on inadequate information about local conditions and the neglect of problems minor to the wider community but significant to individuals or neighbourhoods; but inappropriate forms of decentralisation may lead to inconsistent, piecemeal or locally extreme approaches, and uneconomic duplication of responses to problems most efficiently and effectively tackled over a wider region (Newman, 1981).

Heightened involvement of the police in the community, continuity of posting and participation in its informal life may allow for greater mutual understanding and more sensitive policing; but failure to preserve an element of 'distance' - the 'stranger role' - may destroy officers' image of impartiality between conflicting local interests. At the more formal level, clear segregation of the police from the local political machinery has brought freedom from political corruption and a reputation for impartiality from political pressures and independence of political disputes; but it has also meant a remoteness from the levers of local influence vital for the planning and implementation of social and situational crime prevention strategies (Moore and Kelling, 1981).

Out of the Cleft Sticks: Some Ways Forward

The phrase community policing suggests wholesale cosy merging between the police, other agencies and the public in the fight against crime. Correction of mutual isolation and exaggerated specialisation is to be welcomed, but there is a danger of over-correction. Since neither extreme isolation nor extreme integration is workable we may be left with nothing more than pendulum swings of superficial change. To break out of this the real task seems to me that of role clarification, based on the fundamental

axiom that policing is a far wider concept than the actions of the police. (You could substitute the function and name of any other agency here I suspect.) There are three main elements.

1) The first is specification of which of the many and diverse problems facing society and individual people are in the realm of policing: obvious cases are prevention of crime and accidents, some kind of reaction once it has occurred, helping people in plight, control of nuisance and disorder, control or rough and ready resolution of conflict.

2) The second element is a review of the allocation of responsibilities - not simply considering the role of the police alone, but asking what aspects of policing can be acceptable/competently performed by the police alone, by social and educational agencies and local/central government departments, by private concerns, voluntary groups, private individuals and families.

3) The third element is allocation of responsibilities - which involves steering between the opposing extremes of integration and specialisation. The cleft sticks in Figure 1 become the dimensions, if you like, of a map of community involvement. Using the map, we can think about plotting a course, making selective and intelligent use of integration here and separation there. Integration of functions between particular bodies should be accompanied by suitable checks and balances to prevent them becoming too close for their own comfort and that of the rest of us. Simply forcing together agencies with differing interests and perspectives in the hope that they will happily mesh may prove disastrous. What is needed is lubrication, which holds working surfaces apart while they engage. This could take the form of clear role specifications for the various agencies, and codes of practice, for example on which information they might properly exchange on offenders. In a similar way, separation should be mitigated by creating suitably circumscribed channels of communication and influence.

There are several qualifications. First, rather than trying to re-freeze the roles of the police, the informal community and other institutions into new and rigid combinations that may fossilise in their turn, we need something more sophisticated. Means for coping with the wholeness of crime and related problems, and the shifting and overlapping role boundaries that their resolution probably requires. Means that are explicit and deliberate rather

than covert and haphazard; reconciling spontaneity, flexibility and informality with some kind of bureaucratic control and public accountability.

Secondly, we need approaches that focus on the broad picture -

- "top down" analyses of the objectives of the police and other bodies - proceeding in step with detailed "bottom up" methods which seek to analyse police work archetypical problem by problem and develop the optimal response to each (Goldstein, 1978). This may involve different agencies at different stages of the problem, using different skills, powers and procedures.

Thirdly there is a need to differentiate between two levels of service provision: on the one hand, the sophisticated organisation with a narrow capacity with accompanying expense, delay and perhaps a high threshold of entry for users; on the other, a more rough and ready way of dealing quickly and cheaply with a large throughput of people's problems. At present the police seem to have assumed the second function for a wide range of agencies, largely by default.

Fourthly, we must move away from thinking in terms of generalised intangibles such as "public spiritedness" which many seek to exhort. In the case of crime we should be examining in turn each specific role we are asking the public to perform, identifying any specific causes of people's non-intervention and seeing if there are feasible and desirable ways of getting round these.

I hope this paper convincingly shows the relevance of community policing to the broader issues of community and social policy. From the policing perspective, the term community seems to me much more than just a buzz word (which is not to say that some police officers do not use it that way). And on balance the police, at least, need to move further in the community direction in their central role of tackling crime. Taking forward the notion of community in sound practical ways is not simply a hard mindless slog; or a grand and elaborate master plan floating somewhere in the stratosphere; or a superficial, slogan-filled discussion. It needs imaginative but self-critical experimentation, a clear conceptual framework, awareness of the dangers of over-correction and wide debate.

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