

A study of visible security patrols in residential areas

The provision of local policing no longer resides solely with the police but has become increasingly fragmented and multi-tiered. Those involved in policing activities now include sworn police officers, special constables, community support officers, neighbourhood wardens, private security guards and active citizens. Adam Crawford and Stuart Lister of the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of Leeds, conducted a study of initiatives that seek to provide public reassurance through visible patrols in residential areas. Focused primarily upon Yorkshire and Humberside, the study found that:

-  Over half the housing agencies surveyed said that they had become a lot more concerned with crime and disorder issues in recent years. Three-quarters agreed that the police need to co-ordinate better and accredit the work of other providers of security and patrols.
-  Two-thirds of police divisional commanders and finance directors in the region said that generating income through the provision of additional policing was important.
-  In a national survey, manned private security companies identified 'residential areas' as the area of greatest potential growth across the sector over the next five years.
-  However, the division of labour within this mixed economy of policing is neither well-organised nor effectively co-ordinated. Developments have largely been ad hoc and driven by local markets. Relations between different providers vary considerably, ranging from effective co-production and co-ordination to indifference, competition and hostility.
-  The boundaries between the diverse providers, their respective responsibilities, roles and limitations are often unclear. This can leave the public uncertain about what can legitimately be expected of them.
-  The initiatives studied all highlighted the importance of engaging with local residents, exploiting their knowledge about local crime and disorder problems and providing them with a stake in their own community policing efforts.
-  The researchers conclude that, given the uneven co-ordination, weak accountability and segmented regulation of policing, oversight arrangements are needed that incorporate all security providers at both local and regional levels, to ensure fair competition, appropriate standards and safeguard the public interest as well as more effective joint working.

Background

Growing anxieties about crime and anti-social behaviour have encouraged residents groups, housing associations, local authorities and property developers to look to supplementary forms of security, including visible patrols. It has become acceptable for groups to take control of their own policing needs and to select the providers. In some residential areas, a range of diverse personnel engages in low level policing activities. This range includes privately contracted sworn police and community support officers, neighbourhood wardens, voluntary citizens, neighbourhood watch patrols and private security guards. The purchase of additional reassurance through visible figures of authority is a major new dynamic in community safety across the UK.

Recent policy initiatives

In recent years a number of important policy and legislative developments have shaped the mixed economy of patrolling.

- *The Police and Magistrates Court Act 1994* allows the police to charge more widely for goods and services, including the contracting out of police officer time. Ways of generating income have developed very unevenly across forces in England and Wales, in large part dependent upon local opportunities and the attitudes of senior officers.
- *The Neighbourhood Wardens programme*, launched by government in 2000, aims to offer a semi-official presence in residential areas to improve quality of life and the local environment. The programme helped establish warden schemes across the country through funding, guidance and advice. Numerous schemes are now operating, independently of government funding.
- *The Private Security Industry Act 2001* seeks to regulate the industry by introducing a licensing scheme for private security officers and their managers. Licences will be granted only after a full criminal record check has been issued and suitable training undertaken. Licensing is not expected to begin before the end of 2004.
- *The Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001* authorises the use of fixed penalty notices by police for a range of disorder offences.
- *The Police Reform Act 2002* introduces the new civilian role of community support officer (CSO). Without the full powers or training of a sworn police officer, CSOs seek to provide public reassurance by being dedicated to patrol and can issue fixed penalty notices. The Act also enables chief police officers to establish and maintain schemes that accredit suitably skilled and trained non-police employees able to undertake specified support functions, and authorised to issue penalty notices for disorder. Accredited community safety officers may be local authority, housing association or private security employees.
- *The Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003* extends powers to issue fixed penalty notices with regard to anti-social behaviour for CSOs, local authority officers and

accredited persons. It also enables penalty notices for disorder to be issued to 16- to 17-year-olds.

Survey findings

Over half the housing associations and departments surveyed in the Yorkshire and Humberside region (57 per cent) said that they had become significantly or a lot more concerned with crime and disorder issues in recent years. The principal reasons for this were residents' demands and increased fear of crime (identified by 47 per cent and 45 per cent respectively). Nearly a third also identified a limited police presence as an influential factor. Over half indicated that responding to residents' demands for a visible policing presence was an important aspect of their social responsibility.

Two-thirds of police divisional commanders and finance directors in the region said that generating income through the provision of additional policing was important. All those surveyed agreed that responding to public demands for a patrolling presence is one of the most difficult challenges facing policing today, 60 per cent agreeing strongly. Whereas nearly half agreed that the police have established valuable and productive relationships with council-run patrols and warden schemes, less than one in ten agreed that this held true for private security patrols. Three-quarters agreed that the police need to co-ordinate better and accredit the work of other providers of security and patrols.

A national survey of manned private security companies found they identified 'residential areas' as the area of greatest potential growth across the sector over the next five years. The main activities of private security companies providing residential patrols related to responding to alarms and residents' calls, providing patrol reports to contractors, providing information to the police and monitoring empty properties. Respondents identified communication skills as the most important skills required of a private security officer engaged in residential patrols. Two-thirds of firms said that their patrol officers received between 24 and 48 hours training.

Security firms' views on relations with local police revealed that:

- Over half (55 per cent) said that they were well received by local police; 16 per cent said their reception was mixed; and 11 per cent not well received.
- 64 per cent described the level of co-operation with the local police as good; 19 per cent said it was not very good; and 17 per cent poor.
- 67 per cent said that co-operation was variable; 19 per cent said it was quite consistent; and 12 per cent very consistent.
- 64 per cent agreed that national licensing would improve relations with the police; 13 per cent disagreed.

Respondents also identified a number of concerns about the impact of national licensing: 94 per cent agreed that it would increase costs and 74 per cent

agreed that it would concentrate market activity across a smaller number of companies. Over two-thirds (68 per cent) said they would consider applying to the local police for accreditation so as to enhance their status and competitive commercial position.

Different schemes

Initiatives in the Yorkshire and Humberside region demonstrate the diversity of approaches taken to the provision of a visible reassuring presence. This is influenced by different sources of funding, including central government programmes (such as the New Deal for Communities fund, neighbourhood wardens programme and Single Regeneration Budget), local authority and housing association sources, and private financing as well as a combination of these. Different central government departments have been involved in funding initiatives, notably the Home Office and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The priorities of funding sources and government departments differ significantly, influencing the nature of local practices.

Across the region, local markets in patrol have developed differently, resulting in some forms of policing personnel being more visible in some areas than others. The main factors influencing this uneven development include:

- Variations in the approach of senior police managers toward the delivery of patrol, engagement with the private security sector and work with neighbourhood wardens.
- The uneven manner in which local authorities have responded to public anxieties about crime and the requirements of partnership working.
- Variations in local responses towards central government funding regimes.

The diversity of schemes reflects, in part, the different policing problems and the approaches adopted by divergent patrol personnel. For some schemes, responding directly to crime incidents as they arise or targeting 'hot spots' of crime are a priority. For others, community engagement and social cohesion or addressing the local environment are more pressing priorities. Initiatives also exhibit differing styles of policing and approaches to reassurance, often in a combination of enforcement, patrol and problem-solving through partnerships.

- *Neighbourhood warden* schemes tend to emphasise work with residents and environmental improvements as ways of revitalising neighbourhoods. Generally, neighbourhood wardens are more concerned with problem-solving and regeneration than with law enforcement or overt policing, albeit that these are understood to be inter-related. They work well in areas where there is a low level of trust or confidence in the local police and where the police find it difficult to get information from residents about crime matters.
- *Contracted CSO* initiatives emphasise patrols and provide reassurance through increased visibility. Patrols are conducted on foot allowing greater

interaction with the public. They work well where public reassurance is a central issue.

- *Contracted sworn police officer* schemes tend to work best where the full skills and powers of a police officer are likely to be needed. They may draw upon officers' capacity to enforce the law. This can involve work in partnership with other agencies where police officers' powers are supplemented by those of others.
- *Special constables* provide an alternative police resource that works alongside sworn police officers. They have full police powers but are generally unpaid.
- *Private security patrols* commonly emphasise reassurance and information gathering. Patrols tend to be vehicle-based and periodic. Generally, there is greater reliance on technology, such as mobile CCTV cameras. They work best where residents' reassurance is a key concern.
- *Civilian patrols* tend to exist where local residents are well organised, collective solidarity is high and police cover is traditionally low, notably in rural areas.

Some police officers still feel that they alone should provide patrols and that others hinder them, rather than seeing the policing efforts of others as a resource to be harnessed in furthering community safety. By contrast, greater mutual understanding and trust are a prerequisite if the local delivery of policing is to become a more joined-up endeavour.

Community engagement

The initiatives studied all highlighted the importance of engaging with local residents, exploiting their knowledge about local crime and disorder problems and providing them with a stake in their own community policing efforts. Good community consultation at both strategic and operational levels was important in establishing and maintaining community engagement. Structured community feedback could help avoid problems escalating. Non-traditional methods of consultation helped elicit feedback from otherwise hard-to-reach groups within communities.

Some of the practical ways of engaging local communities included:

- providing residents with accurate and understandable data on local crime and policing activities;
- informing residents about the local personnel, as well as about the initiative, its realistic aims and limitations, through meetings, newsletters and leaflets;
- providing an accessible operational base from which patrol officers work, preferably in conjunction with other local service providers in a 'one-stop shop';
- enabling residents to provide confidential information to patrol personnel on problems, 'hot spots' and potential solutions, such as a well-publicised dedicated telephone number or 'tasking box';

- organising activities that seek to involve the community alongside policing personnel, such as 'community clear-up' days and other events with younger people;
- involving personnel in key activities with vulnerable groups, such as victim support and witness assistance programmes.

Experiences suggest that additional visible patrols in residential areas:

- raise expectations over the nature and quality of service provision;
- heighten demands for greater local ownership of the policing resource;
- enhance the demand for direct accountability to individual residents;
- give residents a greater investment in their local policing.

Locally-tied additional policing arrangements also raise wider implications for public accountability, for which few mechanisms currently exist. They may serve to displace crime and anti-social behaviour to neighbouring areas or may increase the fear of crime in surrounding localities. Where police officers have been used for private contracts this may have an adverse impact on the capacity of the force adequately to replace them.

Future prospects

The research suggests that the market for additional patrols in residential areas will become increasingly competitive among members of the extended policing family.

It is anticipated that national licensing and regulation of private security will increase the cost of hiring commercial security personnel. Meanwhile, the introduction of CSOs has reduced the cost of uniformed police personnel, thus allowing the police to compete more effectively within this growing market. The future of wardens is more uncertain as central funding will end over the next year. Some police forces are approaching local authorities and offering to recruit neighbourhood wardens as CSOs. Whilst potentially attractive in terms of co-ordination and joint working, this risks transforming the work of wardens and undermining their wider, non-policing roles.

Conclusions and practice implications

The role of the police as both accreditor and competitor places them in an ambiguous position and raises potential conflicts of interests. Given the uneven co-ordination, weak accountability and segmented regulation of policing, the researchers conclude that oversight arrangements are needed that incorporate the full range of providers at both local and regional levels, to ensure fair competition, appropriate standards and safeguard the public interest. Greater

mutual understanding and trust are also prerequisite if the local delivery of policing is to become a more joined-up endeavour.

The researchers suggest the following measures:

- Greater engagement between local crime and disorder reduction partnerships and the private sector, to improve both provision and oversight of the extended policing family.
- The establishment of regional policing boards with responsibility for regulating and co-ordinating service delivery across the extended policing family. Such boards could play a major role in enhancing community safety efforts and encouraging best practice. Boards might also provide an element of democratic accountability where regional assemblies are to be established.
- The establishment of information sharing protocols between members of the extended policing family.
- Joint tasking to ensure a clearer division of local policing endeavours and reduce duplication.
- Structured briefing and tasking to ensure intelligence-led patrolling and the effective targeting of insecurity 'hot spots'.

About the project

The research was carried out over an 18-month period in Yorkshire and Humberside. The study entailed a national survey of private security firms and regional surveys of local housing authorities and police forces. Data was gathered from a selection of different initiatives within the region. These were visited, documentation collected and interviews conducted with key stakeholders involved in the implementation and management of the schemes. Interviews were also conducted with key national contributors to policy and practice debates, including senior police officers, regulatory officials and representatives from the security industry.

How to get further information

The full report, **The extended policing family: Visible patrols in residential areas** by Adam Crawford and Stuart Lister, is published by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (ISBN 1 85935 187 5, price £15.95).