CHAPTER 2

ELEMENTS OF SECTOR POLICING

If the community orientation of sector policing in Britain reflected the dominant philosophy of policing current at the time, its key elements were based on a decade and more of innovation in policing both in Britain and across the Atlantic in North America. The origins of four of these elements will be considered, beginning with the most immediately distinctive feature of sector policing—the idea that identified teams of officials should be responsible for relatively small, clearly demarcated, geographical areas.

Geographical responsibility

The often-idealised image of the police officer patrolling a patch of ground which he or she knows well (and where he or she is well known to local people) encapsulated in the mystical figure of the 'bobby on the beat' dates back far into the history of policing in Britain. But it was not until the 1960s, and the introduction of 'unit beat policing' (UBP), that it was first acknowledged as desirable that small teams of officers should take responsibility for meeting as many of the needs of a particular area as possible. Research found that, in practice, the multi-functional teams of detectives, patrol and beat officers seldom worked effectively as teams, and UBPs reliance on motorised patrolling was later blamed for distancing the police from the public and encouraging elitist attitudes and behaviour.[22]

Another policing initiative based on geographical responsibility took place in the United States after riots affected several cities in the 1960s. Known as team policing (TP), the initiative was intended to achieve "geographic stability" in patrol coverage by assigning teams of officers to small neighbourhoods on a permanent basis.[23] It was also designed to promote communication between team members and the people they served in order to promote co-operative peacekeeping and the identification of local problems. As with UBP, the team policing experiment was not entirely successful. Middle managers resented losing control of team members to more junior officers, patrol styles proved difficult to change, and positive relationships with the public hard to

build and maintain across areas that remained too large for officers to develop the necessary local knowledge. In several cities, team policing was scarcely implemented at all.

Further patrol experiments in Britain in the early 1980s also yielded mixed results.[24] The most influential and thoroughly evaluated of these was the programme of neighbourhood policing (NP) implemented in parts of London and the nearby county of Surrey.[25] The programme elements of neighbourhood policing are remarkably similar to those of sector policing and included the assignment of geographical responsibility to teams of officers, the alignment of duty rosters with the demand for police services, community consultation and improved operational information systems.

But yet again, both internal and external evaluations of NP made disappointing reading. Geographical responsibility was implemented only in certain places and did not lead to improved levels of interaction with the public beyond the membership of a small minority of well organised community groups already favourably disposed towards the police. 'Shop-floor' feeling was that many more officers were needed than were currently available if neighbourhood-based teams were to be sufficiently robust to deal with all the needs of their areas without compromising their own safety. Changing rosters to ensure that more officers were on duty at peak times such as weekend evenings was unpopular and fiercely resisted.

Discouraging though these findings were, both the police forces involved in the neighbourhood policing experiment—London's Metropolitan Police and the Surrey Constabulary—remained confident that some form of geographically responsible policing was the way ahead. Having successfully established neighbourhood-based police teams in two areas of the county, Surrey Constabulary extended what became known as total geographic policing or TGP across the force in September 1989. In London, between 1987 when neighbourhood policing was wound down, and 1991 when sector policing was introduced, the use of small teams to take responsibility for specific areas was limited to large public housing schemes where crime rates tended to be high and relations between police and public poor. In 1988, only 200 officers (less than 1% of the force's total strength) were deployed on these 'estates policing' (EP) teams.[26] However, three years later, the Commissioner reported that they had achieved both significant reductions in crime and notable improvements in residents' quality of life. The principles of estates policing would therefore form a vital ingredient in a new style of sector policing.

While these more ambitious experiments in geographically responsible policing were taking place, a rather different breed of neighbourhood officer, much closer to the ideal of the 'bobby on the beat', was also hard at work in forces across the country. Known generically as 'community constables' (but also as home, permanent, resident or area beat officers), and charged with getting to know their beats and building close relationships with local people, their areas of responsibility tended to be smaller than those allocated to teams of officers. But even with this degree of geographical responsibility, research studies found that many community constables lacked a sense of purpose in their work, limited their contacts to 'respectable', police-friendly people and had little sense of local values, problems or priorities.[27]

To sum up, the research available prior to the introduction of sector policing in London in the early 1990s suggested that although the assignment of some form of geographical responsibility might be a *necessary* condition for increased interaction between police and public, it was not necessarily *sufficient* to ensure that more (and better) contacts actually took place. Even when one or two police officers were permanently deployed on quite small geographical areas, they tended neither to spend enough time on those areas, nor devote sufficient attention to interacting with all sections of the local population, to absorb complex communal values and become attuned to (perhaps conflicting) local priorities.

Problem-solving

Geographic responsibility is closely linked to another element of sector policing—the early identification and solution of local problems. The discussion above shows how geographical responsibility alone may not ensure that the police can identify local problems clearly. But where does the vision of police work as problem-solving come from?

This question is refreshingly easy to answer since problem-solving or, to be more accurate, 'problem-oriented policing', is so closely identified with the work of one man, the American police scholar, Herman Goldstein.[28] Goldstein argues that instead of seeing 'crimefighting' or 'order maintenance' as the goal of policing, and law enforcement as the means of achieving them, the main units of police business consist of a wider range of substantive community problems that manifest themselves in clusters of "similar, related or recurring incidents". According to Goldstein, the job of the police is to identify and analyse these problems with a view to developing and evaluating "tailor-made" solutions.[29]

As Goldstein conceived it, problem-oriented policing (widely known by the acronym POP) represents a radical departure from conventional thinking about what policing is all about, how police departments are organised, and how they work. For Goldstein, POP is not simply a goal or technique of community policing. Strictly interpreted, community policing sets out to address a general problem of poor police-community relations; and although the community and the police must tackle substantive problems, problem-solving itself is no more than a means of bringing police and public closer together. With POP however, the position is reversed: resolving local problems is the overall objective and working with the community only one way of achieving it.

Experience of POP before the introduction of sector policing in London had been distinctly limited. Probably the most famous trial of Goldstein's ideas took place in Newport News, Virginia, in the United States and gave rise to the four stage SARA (scanning, analysis, response and assessment) approach to the process of problem-solving.[30] On fairly limited evidence, the Newport News initiative was judged a success and several other police departments across the US took up the idea of POP with enthusiasm.

Early attempts to implement POP in Britain produced ambiguous results with one study of an attempt to make community constables more 'problem-focused' in their work coming to the gloomy conclusion that "time and again…the existing structure [of the police organisation] dictated the response to the problem, not what was known (or knowable) about the problem".[31] Rather than "looking to the community to define the problems that should be of concern to the police" as Goldstein urged, "scanning" for problems has generally been done by police officers using their own knowledge and experience, or by studying management information on reported crime and/or calls for service:[32]

> In the absence of citizen input, police identification of 'problems' leans to police crime-fighter preferences, traditionally targeting out-of-favour groups. Even when citizen participation occurs, the problem identification process is biased towards the organized, articulate segments of the community.[33]

Community consultation

The origins of the third key element in sector policing—community consultation—are also fairly easy to trace. They lie in a patchwork of informal community-police liaison committees that existed across London in the 1970s. The most

famous of these covered the Brixton area of south London, and Lord Scarman lamented its collapse in his report on the riots that took place in the area in 1981. His response was to recommend that the existing voluntary arrangements should be replaced by formal consultative machinery backed with the force of statute law. This recommendation was accepted by the Thatcher government, and Section 106(1) of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act of 1984 eventually required that arrangements should be made in every police area for "obtaining the views of people in that area about matters concerning the policing of the area and for obtaining their co-operation with the police in preventing crime".[34]

In London, the duty to make these arrangements was imposed on the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis, and each of the 32 boroughs into which the city was divided was expected to establish a police-community consultative group. Establishing these groups proved both difficult and politically controversial at a time when several local authorities across London controlled by the opposition Labour Party were locked in a bitter dispute with Mrs Thatcher's Conservative government about the accountability of the Metropolitan Police.[35]

By the early 1990s however, formal arrangements for police consultation with communities were in place across more or less the whole of England and Wales. A South African Police Board delegation[36] visited London in late 1993 as guests of the British government to study, inter alia, the British model for police-community consultation. The London model was subsequently used as a template for establishing community police forums in South Africa. A senior Metropolitan Police officer on secondment to South Africa (as part of donor assistance to the National Peace Accord) passed on documents concerning police-community consultative groups (PCCGs) in London to the negotiators on police reform at CODESA. As a direct result of this input, Community Police Forums were included in South Africa's Interim Constitution which came into effect in April 1994.

However, by the early 1990s a substantial amount of research had been undertaken on the new bodies (mainly, it has to be said, outside London) suggesting that their influence on police policy and practice had been at most, minimal, and at worst, non-existent.[37]

Government guidance had indicated that they ought to be "as representative as possible of the community".[38] Yet an internal review later found that most consultative groups were dominated by "people well used to committees: professional and middle-class white people, most of whom are in the 40-plus age

range".[39] A study undertaken for the police staff associations found that any correspondence between the views of consultative group members and the people they were supposed to represent was purely coincidental. The leading researcher in the field concluded that they operated in the administrative "stratosphere" far removed from the very localised problems that concern most ordinary citizens.[40] And this in turn was reflected in what the same researcher has graphically described as the "dog shit syndrome".[41] Restricted by members' very limited knowledge and experience of crime, most consultative groups were absorbed with routine complaints about quality-of-life issues such as litter, parking, and dog-fouled pavements that the better-informed police officers involved in consultation found difficult to take seriously.[42]

In short, the model of community consultation adopted in the guidance for sector policing in London (and in the design of South Africa's community police forums) had, by 1992, already proved less than successful as a means of identifying local problems and mobilising public support for police efforts to resolve them. What remained to be seen was whether similar mechanisms operating closer to the ground at 'sector' level would be any more effective.

Managerialism and consumerism

The fourth and last of the core elements of sector policing was both a theme informing its implementation, and a distinctive way of managing the police. It had two aspects:

- The first aspect was a series of managerial reforms or (to use the terms of the CAMPS formula mentioned earlier) adaptations of the organisation of policing. These included the devolution of authority for operational decision making down to sector level wherever possible, and making the most efficient use of resources by matching the availability of police personnel to periods of peak demand for police services such as weekend evenings.

- The second and less immediately obvious aspect of the changes, was the promotion of the idea that citizens ought to be seen as consumers of policing to whom a suitably high quality service should be provided.

The roots of this 'new managerialism' in public services can be found—at least in Britain—in recurring public expenditure crises, the free market ideology of successive Conservative governments in the 1980s and—in the case of the

police—in growing evidence that increased spending did not necessarily lead to lower levels of recorded crime.[43] The need for much stricter financial discipline was first impressed on the police in a landmark circular from the government department responsible for the service in 1983.[44] This circular ushered in a period punctuated by 'value for money' initiatives, to which the police responded with increasing reluctance.

When John Major succeeded Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister, he sought to put a more positive political gloss on his predecessor's concerns by stressing the need for 'consumers' to be provided with high quality public services. By the time this second wave of consumer-friendly managerialism was launched with the publication of a *Citizen's Charter*, the police were already moving to ensure that, as one influential senior officer put it, "Consumerism, public expectation, and ultimately public satisfaction, rather than the cost effectiveness of the 80s, will be the watchwords of the 90s."[45] With its emphasis on identifying and satisfying the needs of the consumer, as well as adopting a more rational and efficient approach to meeting the demand for police services, sector policing was very much in tune with current thinking, both in the police and across the public services more generally.

Indeed, the inspiration for a new style of policing that could be at once "consistent" across London yet "flexible enough to take account of local needs"[46] seems to have sprung directly from a distinctly managerial source—a report prepared for the Metropolitan Police by a firm of corporate identity consultants, Wolff Olins.[47] In response to this report, the then Commissioner, Sir Peter Imbert, established a change programme known as PLUS and committed his organisation to "an accepted…style of policing which can be adjusted to local conditions, making the best use of the people and time available".[48] The task of translating this commitment into a new style of policing became component four of the PLUS programme and a team entrusted with re-examining the deployment of front line police officers eventually reported towards the end of 1990.

The principles of the new policing style that was to become sector policing were approved by senior managers in November of that year. Although work continued on the details for some time thereafter, the Commissioner clearly signalled that the traditional pattern of deployment was about to end. Instead of similar numbers of operational officers policing a whole command unit (or division) over three eight hour shifts irrespective of predictable fluctuations in workload, dedicated teams of officers would be given round-the-clock responsibility for smaller areas (or sectors). Managers would be freed to match the availability of staff more closely with the demand for their services.[49]