

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A National Instruction on sector policing will shortly be issued by South African Police Service National Commissioner, Jackie Selebi. This monograph examines the new sector policing policy for South Africa and reflects on the experience of sector policing in London. The Final Draft of the South African Police Service's National Instruction on Sector Policing (2003) makes the connection between sector policing and the philosophy of community policing very clear—sector policing is described as a “practical manifestation” of community policing. Key elements of sector policing are its local geographic focus, problem-solving methodologies and community consultation.

The idea of sector policing was imported to South Africa from abroad, probably at about the time the democratic transition took place, and undoubtedly as a result of a South African police officer taking a donor-funded trip abroad. The 1998 White Paper on Safety and Security contains the first reference in an official policy document to the concept of sector policing, defining it as a style of policing which:

entails the division of areas into smaller managerial sectors and the assignment of police officers to these areas on a full time basis. These police officers regularly patrol their own sector and are able to identify problems and seek appropriate solutions. Sector policing encourages constant contact with members of local communities.

In its gestation phase in South Africa, between 1998 and 2003, the notion of ‘sector policing’ was interpreted and used to suit a variety of different policy purposes, much as the term ‘community policing’ had been during the preceding decade. The concept of sector policing survived the internal dynamic between community-based, social crime prevention and the highly visible search-and-seizure type policing characterised by Operation Crackdown. In the process, however, sector policing lost much of its meaning. It has become associated with a diverse set of policing goals, from increased community involvement to reduced response time to emergency calls. Sector policing is also often referred to in relation to improved service delivery and to mod-

ernisation and acceptance of the South African Police Service (SAPS) in the globalising world.

Implementation of the sector policing instruction will see each SAPS station dividing its geographic area into smaller sectors, and dedicating staff to work intensively in those sectors. The “sector managers” will be required to build sector-based community consultation groups and to regularly conduct community profiling exercises in their sectors. In South Africa, because of personnel constraints in the SAPS, sector policing will rely heavily on Police Reservists (members of the public who do voluntary duty to assist the police), who may be specifically dedicated to sector policing duties, in both rural and urban areas. This is a reflection of the fact that in its design, the sector policing policy also had to take into account some specifically rural challenges.

Sector policing was implemented in London in the early 1990s, and the monograph uses a case study of sector policing in Holloway (an area of North London) conducted between 1991 and 1993 to identify useful lessons for South Africa. The United Kingdom (UK) research found that sector policing had ceased to exist in London within a decade of its implementation. The death knell was the introduction of another policing model—borough policing—in 1999, but many problems with sector policing had already been evident prior to that time. Key lessons for South Africa include:

- difficulties in establishing sectors, defining communities, and ensuring representivity in community consultations;
- sector policing was unpopular inside the police organisation because it challenged some of the core beliefs, values and practices in the ‘occupational culture’ of operational police officials;
- insufficient resources and inadequate communication from the top of the police organisation made it unlikely that sector policing would succeed;
- government’s target-setting approaches (both before and after the new Labour government came to power in 1997) attempted to generate better arrest figures and rapid response data. Police resources became increasingly focused on dealing with the traditional priorities of crime fighting and incident response, rather than on the key aspects of community policing or sector policing, which were seen as ‘soft’ and difficult to measure.

Research into the impact of sector policing elsewhere in Britain (outside London) also found that there was no consistent evidence of changes in police practice as a result of sector-based problem-oriented policing; and that the introduction of the new style of policing did not have a marked impact on public perceptions of the police. The London experience raises a number of questions for sector policing in South Africa:

- How can sector boundaries be drawn in a way that balances the requirements of organisational and administrative efficiency, representivity and the need to foster closer links between the police, other key roleplayers and the public at local level?
- Under what conditions will sector crime forums be able to act both as a broadly representative forum for the expression of public concerns about crime and a mechanism for co-ordinating the response to those concerns across a range of agencies?
- How can the police provide information about local crime and safety problems to sector crime forums in a comprehensive yet comprehensible and useable form? How can agreement be reached on the priority crime and safety problems in a given area, instead of relying on the police's definition of the 'real' problems?
- What can be done to influence the internal organisational culture of the SAPS positively towards sector policing? How can SAPS reward structures and performance measures be adjusted to reflect the goals of sector policing, and to valuing collaborative problem-solving work at least as highly as more traditional short term and arrest-focused approaches to policing?
- How can supervision, discipline and accountability be maintained when police officials are delegated to work more independently at sector level? How can control be maintained when the sector policing model rests on such a high degree of reservist (volunteer) participation?

How these questions and others like them are answered in practice will determine whether sector policing will work under South African conditions.