

National Standards, Local Delivery: Police Reform in England and Wales¹

Trevor Jones

Cardiff University
Cardiff School of Social Sciences

Arie van Sluis

Erasmus University Rotterdam
Faculty of Social Sciences

Abstract

The system of police governance in England and Wales has been subject to a process of centralization for many decades. This development has accelerated in recent years, to the extent that although the de jure organization of policing remains based on local provincial forces, some commentators now feel that there is de facto national police force. In this paper, we outline the main contours of the institutional governance of policing in England and Wales, and discuss the main aspects of centralization that have occurred in recent decades. Although the overall picture of centralization is clear, a number of countervailing tendencies are visible that suggest the possibility of enhanced local influence. The paper concludes with a discussion of the future prospects for police organization and governance in England & Wales.

1 Introduction

In 2006 central government attempted unsuccessfully to radically re-engineer policing in England and Wales by reducing the 43 police forces to a small number of strategic police forces. An earlier report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary (HMIC) in 2004, called *Closing the Gap*, had claimed that the current 43 police force structure was no longer 'fit for purpose' and, in the interests of efficiency and effectiveness of policing,

¹ The focus of this paper is upon policing in England and Wales, rather than the United Kingdom as a whole, which includes two other policing jurisdictions in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. Whilst some of the reform trends are similar in Scottish and Northern Irish policing, there are important differences which we do not have the space to cover in this paper.

should change. The Home Secretary proposed the creation of a limited number of strategic police forces. A central argument underpinning these proposals was the issue of performance, and the government claimed that smaller forces were not capable of delivering 'security and protective services' effectively (O'Connor 2005). Following these proposals, the Home Secretary set out an extremely short timescale for the reorganization. Police authorities and forces were required to consult with their publics and develop proposals, in collaboration with neighboring force areas, for mergers that would meet the Home Secretary's requirements. Failing this, merger would be imposed from the centre. Considerable time and resources were devoted to the preparation work for merger – an estimated £10 billion pounds. Whilst some police authorities and chief constables strongly resisted the proposals from the outset, in some parts of the country there was more support for the idea of mergers and a number of initial proposals were put forward (Tregidga 2006). The proposals quickly became mired in great political controversy, although it was events outside of the field of policing that were eventually to derail them. The Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, for whom the restructuring had become something of a personal crusade, was sacked following a number of scandals in the prison service and replaced with John Reid. Within a short period of time, Reid announced that the restructuring proposals were to be postponed indefinitely. According to Godfrey, the then Home Secretary Clarke had wrongfully handled this reform as a technical exercise, largely ignoring the whole political and public dimension to the argument. 'The project was derailed as the result of police authorities, the resistance of a minority of chief constables, the support of members of both Houses of Parliament, of all parties and none, the backing of national commentators in the media and in academia, the reaction of local communities and stakeholders throughout the country and the fortunate coming to a premature end of the ministerial career of Charles Clarke' (Godfrey 2007: 75). The whole controversy over force restructuring and its outcome showed the existence of strong resistance against (powerful) tendencies to further centralize the organization of policing, not to mention the even stronger opposition to the idea of a national police force. The debate also demonstrated the resilience of the existing police system, and a peculiar attachment to local-

ism in British policing. But it made also visible the divergent and sometimes contradictory tendencies that exist in British policing.

The main aims of this paper are to give an overview of the current organization and structure of policing in England and Wales, to describe and analyze the most significant shifts that have taken place in the police system during in recent decades, and to explore the dynamics that gave rise to these shifts. In particular we will focus on changes in the organization of the police, on police governance and accountability and the centralizing and counter-vailing tendencies against centralization that can be distinguished within policing. Our central question is as follows: “What shifts have taken place in policing in England & Wales with regard to the work of the police, the organization of the police and the democratic control over the police, and how are these shifts to be assessed? The main body of the paper is divided into five sections, the first of which describes briefly the organizational structure of the police in England and Wales. The second section deals with the governance structure of the police. Section 3 provides an examination of the main themes within recent attempts to reform the police, focusing in particular on four aspects: modernization and professionalization, centralization, police performance management, and localism. In Section 4 we try to explain the dynamics behind the police reforms and assess their meaning. In the fifth and final section we draw the conclusions and we explore future prospects for policing in England and Wales.

2 The organization and the structure of policing in England and Wales

Regional police forces

In England & Wales, outside of the capital city, there are 41 provincial police forces, most usually covering a single county although some cover two or more county areas. In addition, there are two police forces covering London (the Metropolitan Police and the City of London Police). Police forces vary in terms of size, ranging from the largest force, the Metropolitan Police, with over 30,000 officers, to the smallest provincial force (Warwickshire) with about 1,000 officers. Recent years have seen substantial increases in police officers numbers such that the total num-

ber of police officers in England & Wales reached a record high of over 143,000 by March 2006 (Clegg and Kirwan 2006). However, numbers have dropped slightly since this time, and a major review of policing commissioned by the government has suggested that police officer numbers could be reduced by more imaginative staffing policies in the future (Flanagan 2008). The typical structure of a police force involves a headquarters (encompassing the strategic management of the force plus managerial and support departments) plus a number of local territorial units delivering operational policing in particular geographical areas of the force. The standard term for these territorial policing units is 'Basic Command Units' (BCUs). Each police force is headed by a Chief Constable, with a Deputy Chief Constable and one or more Assistant Chief Constables, who make up the Chief Officer Team (COT) – the senior strategic management body for the police force (Loveday and McClory 2007). The Chief Officer Team performs a number of roles including, corporate and strategic leadership, setting the budget in conjunction with the local police authority (see below), monitoring force performance, and promoting conformity with national policing objectives and plans.

BCUs and neighborhood teams

Each force is divided into a number of geographical units with their own officers and police staff, their own headquarters and their own mini 'command team'. The senior officer in charge – usually a Chief Superintendent – will report to the Chief Constable for policing matters in his or her BCU area. The total number of BCUs in England & Wales is 228. The average BCU now serves a population of 230,000 and includes over 420 police officers and 157 civilian staff. There is significant variation in the size of BCUs across the country, ranging from under 100 to over 1000 police officers, covering populations from 4,000 to 300,000 residents, but the general trend is towards larger units (Loveday 2006). The very significant responsibilities that lie with the BCU commanders for policing of their areas is not matched by a lot of room to move. BCU commanders remain quite tightly controlled by force HQ, with only limited budgetary powers themselves (for matters such as overtime and office equipment) (Loveday and McClory 2007). A recent development is the creation of neighborhood policing teams based on 'wards' (sub-units of

smaller areas covered by local government). These teams work closely with local communities (Home Office 2005a). Their aim is to provide citizens with access to local policing services through a named point of contact, an opportunity to exert influence over policing priorities in their neighborhood, facilitate the effective development and implementation of joint action to reduce crime and disorder with key partners and the public, and to provide clear accountability and feedback to local people about what is being done in their area. By the end of 2008, all local areas had a local team consisting of police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), possibly together with Special Constables, local authority wardens, volunteers and partners. PCSOs are a new 'patrol' rank in the police service intended to provide a 'second tier' of policing², established by the Police Reform Act of 2002. These are primarily patrol ranks that require a more limited amount of training and police powers, and also attract lower rates of pay. However, they are playing an increasing role in the delivery of front-line policing service in local neighborhoods. In some police forces, for example Warwickshire, there has been a move to abolish BCUs so that there is no intermediary level between HQ and neighborhood teams.

Police agencies at the national level

Besides regional police forces there are police agencies on the national level, like the Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA). This is a kind of hybrid agency, working as a policing body but specializing in covert and intelligence-gathering activity. SOCA is a non-departmental public body (NDPB), not a police force, and its staff is civilian not police officers, although they have considerable designated powers. As a NDPB it is governed by a Board with a majority of non-executive members and, unlike the majority of police forces is answerable directly to the Home Secretary rather than to a Police Authority.

² In terms of training, functions and legal powers, PCSOs are comparable to the Dutch *politie-surveillanten*.

3 Democratic steering and control of the police: The tripartite structure

Police governance in England & Wales is characterized by a ‘tripartite’ (or three-way) structure that divides responsibility for and democratic control over the police between the Home Secretary, police authorities and chief constables. This structure reflects the need for checks and balances in the governance of the police, a combination of local, national and professional interests, and attempts to achieve a workable balance between them. This system is supposed to prevent direct political interference in policing and avoids giving any single organization power over the entire police service. (<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/about/?view=Standard>)

Home Office

The Home Office provides the majority of funding for police forces, and has overall responsibility as overseer and coordinator of the police. The Home Secretary is a senior member of the national cabinet and always an elected Member of Parliament. For a number of years there has been a junior minister (or Under Secretary of State) with specific responsibility for policing, who ultimately answers to the Home Secretary. The Home Secretary holds the Home Office police grant and allocates it to the police authorities, according to a complicated formula, which includes a variable intended to reflect relative local need. Policing in England and Wales is funded by a combination of national and local taxation. In all, central government provides between 80-85 per cent, with local authority council tax meeting the remainder. Since the coming into effect of the Police Reform Act 2002 the Home Secretary also monitors police performance and the progress that has been made with the implementation of the 3 year National Policing Plan.

Police Authority

The second element of the tripartite structure is the police authority that makes sure that local force operate efficiently and effectively and that the local police are accountable for what they do to the local community, and that citizens have a say in how they are policed. A police authority is an independent body made up of local people. There is a police authority for each local police

force, 43 in all in England and Wales. All police authorities are members of the Association of Police Authorities. Most police authorities have 17 members: 9 local councilors appointed by the local council and 8 independent members selected following local advertisements, at least one of whom must be a magistrate. The Metropolitan Police Authority has 23 members because of London's size. The police authority sets the strategic direction for the force and holds the chief constable to account on behalf of the local community. The Police Authority publishes a 3 year plan and a 1 year plan which tells local people what they can expect from their police service and reports back at the end of the year. The police authorities hold the police budget and decide how much council tax should be raised for policing. They also appoint and dismiss the chief constable and senior police officers and oversee complaints against the police and disciplines senior officers. Police authorities have to consult with local people (for example, by using focus groups or public opinion surveys) to find out what they want from their local police and set local policing priorities and targets for achievement based on what local people say matters to them. They monitor the policing of the local area, and how well the police perform against the targets set by the authority. Finally, they are required to promote 'best value' from their local police, in their capacity of Best Value Authority. (see <http://www.apa.police.uk/APA/About+Police+Authorities>)

Chief Constable

The third component of the tripartite structure is the chief constable, who has responsibility for the direction and control of the regional force. Delivering policing services is the job of the chief constable. S/he is the professional head of the police force and is responsible for management. S/he is operationally independent but ultimately accountable to the police authority and the Home Office. S/he draws up the annual policing plan that regulates operational police work. S/he may deviate from the policing plan on operational grounds, but has to account for these actions afterwards.

Other important actors in the governance of the police

- *Police Inspection: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC)* This agency now carries much weight in the governance of the police. In the past the HMIC- inspections were – by comparison with contemporary standards – rather lacking in ‘bite’ and hidden from public scrutiny. Since the 1980s, the inspection process has been standardized and strengthened and HMIC-reports were published from 1988 onwards. These reports are very influential. HMIC reports have focused more and more on the extent to which local forces are complying with national policy guidelines.
- *The Audit Commission* has since the mid-1980s subjected a number of areas of policing to increasing scrutiny, and in particular applied private sector organizational and management principles to the police service. A key part of this influence has been via the publication of a series of highly influential *Police Papers* promoting ‘value for money’ and improved performance across a wide range of policing topics, including core police functions such as crime investigation.
- *Police Standards Unit (PSU)* The Police Standards Unit (PSU) was established in 2001 and subsumed in 2006 under a new Police and Crime Standards Directorate in the Home Office. PSU had the authority to directly intervene to promote improvements in ‘under-performing’ police force areas. PSU has stimulated the development of standards for good police work and for best practices and supervised the spread and implementation of these practices.
- *Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO)* Since the late 1980s the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has become a key actor in the British police system. ACPO has transformed itself into an effective policy-making and lobbying body. ACPO has become a collective ‘national’ voice on policing issues (Savage et al. 1996) and it has become one of the most important influences on contemporary policing in Britain. The other police staff associations like the Police Federation – which represents lower-ranking officers and the Superintendents’ Association (representing middle-ranking management officers above the rank of inspector but below the ranks of chief constable and assistant chief constable) have had less influence than ACPO, but have nevertheless

played an important part in the growing visibility of the police in 'political' debates.

- *Association of Police Authorities (APA)* Partly in response to criticism of their lack of influence, police authorities in England & Wales established a national representative organization in 1997. During recent years, police authorities have, via this association, attempted to influence debates about policing at the national level (Savage et al. 1996: 40) noted that the APA 'has embarked on a program to make the [local police authorities] full, active and even "equal partners" in the tripartite framework'. The APA is involved in consultation with central government and the police staff associations, acts as a forum for sharing good practice and disseminating other information between police authorities, and had undertaken and published independent research on subjects such as police stop and search policies, public consultation and new forms of accountability.
- *Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships' (CDRPs)* On the local level Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships' (CDRPs) have become important actors, Since the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 there is a statutory duty upon local authorities for crime and disorder reduction, and required the establishment of local multi-agency 'Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships' (CDRPs) in England ('Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Wales). Under the Act, 'responsible authorities' have a statutory duty to work with other local agencies and organizations to develop and implement strategies to tackle crime and disorder including anti-social and other behavior adversely affecting the local environment as well as the misuse of drugs in their area. In 2007, the Home Office introduced national standards for CDRPs/CSPs, along with national performance measures and the replacement of crime and disorder audits with 'local strategic assessments' (Home Office 2007a). National performance targets for partnerships have more recently been combined with policing performance assessment (see below).

4 Recent themes in police reform in England & Wales

In the long-term development of the British police system four important changes can be pointed out. First, a managerial renewal aimed at the increase of professionalism especially in the deployment of specialized and qualified personnel and in the management of the police. Second, and probably most important, the gradual centralization of the authority over the police, the growing influence of the Home Office and accompanying shifts in balance in the tripartite structure that governs the British police. Third, the increasing focus on police performance and the management of police performance. Fourth, a changed vision of police work, which sees policing as co-production between a range of agencies, to be carried out in partnership at the local level.

4.1 *Modernization and professionalization of the police*

A central theme in police reform programs in England & Wales has involved attempts to reconfigure the organization of the police workforce to become more like standard private sector employers, rather than a public service organized along quasi-military lines. Police organizations should be streamlined and managed in a more businesslike manner, like has been the case in many other domains of the public sector. Police forces were re-engineered to reduce costs and 'to get more out of less'. In this 'new managerialism' we see traces of New Public Management, especially in the employment of civilians, the increase of specialism's - particularly in crime control - and in the management structure.

Civilianization

An influential development in the organization of police staffing has occurred over a longer period, and involved the increasing 'civilianization' of police posts. About a third of staff employed by police forces in England and Wales is now accounted for by 'civilian' staff. The significant drive to 'civilianization' began during the 1980s (Jones et al. 1994). The Home Office encouraged forces to recruit civilian staff into such specialist functions as financial management, legal services, personnel, research and analysis, and forensic services (Mawby and Wright 2003). Whilst the initial drive to civilianisation was applied to 'non-core' polic-

ing tasks, such as administrative support functions, human resources, and financial management specialists, recent years have seen this extend into 'core' policing functions. For example, forces have seen the employment of civilian investigative assistants and detention officers. The Police Reform Act of 2002 established a new 'patrol' rank in the police service, the 'Police Community Support Officer' (see below). The use of a mix of police staff – including those with and without police powers and training – is likely to be a central focus of important future reforms.

Specialism and professionalism in crime control

In the field of crime control in particular, professionalism has accelerated in recent decades. The progress of knowledge development and hence of specialization has been enormous. Investigation became an increasingly specialized function with specific training, courses, scientific and technical support, and organizational structures. Whilst the police have had demonstrable success in dealing with more serious criminal activities, volume crimes such as burglary and car crime have seen falling detection rates, high acquittal rates, and 'leakage' or 'attrition' at key points in the investigative process. Such problems have been put down partly to a decline in the investigative skills, knowledge and experience of frontline officers, exacerbated by shortcomings in supervision and quality control (see Criminal Justice Service 2001, Audit Commission 2002T and O'Dowd 2002). In response to this, a number of forces have introduced 'Volume Crime Management' (VCM) Units, encouraged by ACPO (Maguire and Jones 2005).

Police management and the management structure

Another area in which professionalism has appeared is the management of police organizations. The Audit Commission was a key body in the development and promotion of standard 'performance measures' as a basis for comparison between forces. But the Audit Commission reports also have been a key factor in promoting the import of private sector business management structures and techniques into the police service, by criticizing the traditional hierarchical management structures based on a militaristic rank structure as inefficient and not providing 'value

for money'. The move to generalist BCUs and the abolition of the intermediate division level arose from an Audit Commission report (Audit Commission 1991). This flattening of structures was intended to produce increased management efficiency through more direct lines of management to and from headquarters, the removal of a tier of management that could be re-deployed to frontline policing duties, as well as giving greater discretion and resource allocation power to local commanders. In addition, it was suggested that such reforms would provide gains in terms of accountability, with local BCU commanders much more in tune with the wishes of the communities that they police. A report by the Audit Commission in 2001 noted that 'police forces vary considerably in the extent to which they have devolved financial responsibility to BCUs' (Audit Commission 2001: 12). In fact, the Commission found that the proportion of revenue expenditure of each force that is delegated to BCU commanders varies between 5% and 70%.

4.2 *Centralization*

Although there remains considerable rhetorical and emotional investment in 'locally-organized' policing in England & Wales, in practice there has been a long-term trend towards the growing influence of central bodies (Jones 2003, Newburn 2003). This can be supported with a number of examples. Since 1945 increasing centralization has seen the amalgamation of forces in England & Wales, and their reduction from almost 200 in 1945 to their current number of 43. The trend has been consistently towards fewer and bigger forces. In the aftermath of the 1964 Police Act there was a very substantial period of consolidation, and the number of forces was reduced to its current level in 1974. Both the chief constables and the police authorities have sought to represent their interests on the national level, thereby acknowledging and catering to the importance of 'the centre'. ACPO has become a very influential actor on the national scene. In terms of national co-ordination of policing, this has been one of the most significant developments in the post-war period. As a by-product of Home Office centralizing tendencies police forces have been subjected to growing external scrutiny by national bodies concerned with their performance and effectiveness, such as Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), the Audit Commissions and the former Police Standards Unit (PSU).

HMIC, the Audit Commission and PSU are widely recognized to have played an important role in promoting standard approaches between police forces and as such has been an important element in increasing centralization of policing in England & Wales (Collier 2006). Another aspect of centralization concerns the increased ability of forces to work across boundaries in support of each other (like the former Regional Crime Squads) and the establishment and development of national policing bodies. Growing awareness of the problem of transnational and organized crime problems that cross national borders, and the need to liaise effectively with international policing organizations such as Europol and Interpol, provided a major impetus towards the development of new formal national policing bodies like the Serious and Organized Crime Agency.

Growing Home Office influence

The above mentioned tendencies toward centralization cannot rightfully be understood without taking into consideration the growing influence of the Home Office over the police, that has grown substantially over the past 20 years and which saw an acceleration of a longer term trend throughout the 20th century. This long-term trend towards the growing influence of central government control over policing, the expansion of the power of the Home Office over local policing, has been one of the most striking developments within the British police system has been the long-term trend (Jones 2003, Newburn, 2003). This development is marked by a huge increase in the number (and specificity) of Home Office policy directives or 'circulars' (Reiner 1991, Jones 2003). The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 (PCMA) allowed the Home Office for the first to set down national 'Key Performance Objectives' for all police forces in England and Wales (Jones and Newburn 1997). Collier qualifies the PMCA as a watershed in the reform of police accountability nationally (Collier, 2000, p. 11). The Police Reform Act 2002 introduced the annual publication of a 3 year National Policing Plan which is the framework for local policing Local policing plans, drawn up by local chiefs' constable and their local police authorities, must comply with and support the National Plans. Police authorities and chief officers have to engage with and consult their local communities to identify how far national and local priorities should be reflected in forces' plans and what the appro-

priate local targets should be. The aim is: 'policing delivered locally within a set of clear minimum national standards'.

In 2004 the Home Office published a 'white paper' (a first draft of planned legislation) called *Building Communities, Beating Crime, A better police service for the 21st century*. The then Home Secretary announced the second stage of police reform. "The Government's overall approach is based on: having a clear national direction and strategic framework for policing which enables police forces to be responsive to particular local needs but which also ensures that communities across the country enjoy core national standards of policing". Government sees the police as one work force. But at the heart of the reform are the community-police relations that would require a reassurance style of policing. This citizen focus should result in reassurance amongst the public and greater confidence in the police and to a readiness to cooperate with the police. According to MacLaughlin (2006) the traditional notion of policing by consent would be replaced by policing by active co-operation. This white paper is paralleled by another strategic document on the organization of crime fighting, titled *Cutting Crime, a new Partnership 2008-2011*. The Home Secretary points to a changing relationship between the national and the local:

"Underpinning all of this will be a new, mature relationship between the Government and delivery partners – services will be less subject to direct central control, allowing professionals much greater flexibility in how they work" (2008, p. 2).

The second National Policing Plan, which extends over the period 2005-2008, is less prescriptive than the first and more strategic in its outlook; it no longer includes specific targets but rather five 'strategic outcomes' reflecting priorities that are shared broadly. The key priorities are the reduction of overall crime, to provide a citizen-focused police service which responds to the needs of communities and individuals, especially victims and witnesses, and inspires public confidence in the police, particularly among minority ethnic communities; to take action with partners to increase sanction detection rates and target prolific and other priority offenders; to reduce people's concerns about crime, and anti-social behaviour and disorder, and; to combat serious and organized crime, within and across force boundaries."(p. 23). According to the National Policing Plan these priorities are "simpler (with many fewer sub-targets), higher level

and firmly focused on overall outcomes, leaving more flexibility for frontline services to respond to local needs and priorities. The targets should also allow for greater consistency in locally-set targets agreed between police forces and their key delivery partners.

In the most recent Green Paper (a government discussion paper containing proposals for future legislation) the Home Office progresses further down this road (Home Office 2008). The key phrase is: “freedom to deliver locally and Government’s support them nationally” (p. 65). (..) “Decisions need to be taken at the right level “(p 66). There is but one national top-down target, the improvement of public confidence in the ability of the police to reduce crime. It is (..) “less reliance on top down targets than in the past, a greater role for local people and police authorities, a sharper role for the inspectorate, and a more strategic one for the Home Office. The result will be a system where delivery of the Government’s Public Service Agreements on crime, terrorism, justice, drugs and alcohol will be secured with more local ownership of change, less micro-management and a system that is more strongly focused on public confidence”.

This short exploration of only a few relevant policy plans for the police out of many shows a trend away from detailed top-down Home Office interference with police practice and toward a more distant and moderate role for the Home Office with more elbowroom for tailor made solutions at the local level.

4.3 Police performance management

Since the early 1990s most of the focus of police reform has been upon improving police performance, by subjecting the police to an increasingly rigorous performance management framework and by the routine use of performance indicators and targets. The preoccupation with organizational size has also to do with performance, because of the view that ‘bigger should be better’. Although such reforms came relatively late to policing (when compared to other public services such as transport, health and education), they have increasingly shaped the way the policing are doing their work and the way the police are organized, especially in crime –oriented areas of police work.

The roots of the concern with police performance go back to the early 1980s, when the then Conservative government began to apply market disciplines to a range of public services. In the

nineties the Audit Commission also published for the first time a framework of standard 'performance indicators' for the police service (Audit Commission 1995). The emphasis on police performance gathered pace during the 1990s, when successive government reform proposals aimed at promoting efficient and effective service delivery (Walker 2000: 98). These policy trends have been further encouraged by Labour administrations since 1997 (Collier 2006).

The national 'Key Performance Objectives' (KPOs) that were introduced in the Police and Magistrates Court Act 1994 were to be measured by 'Key Performance Indicators' (KPIs). A further emphasis on performance effectiveness was applied as part of the 'Best Value' program for local government that required all local police authorities in England and Wales to make arrangements to secure 'continuous improvement' in the way policing is delivered within their force area. Chief constables and police authorities must work together to ensure improvements in service delivery. In 2001 the Police Standards Unit was established. The Police Reform Act 2002 introduced an even more detailed performance management framework, with an attendant raft of performance objectives and targets. These substantive policies to promote performance improvement were accompanied by an ever more strident rhetoric on the part of government ministers expressing frustration at levels of police performance and the need for more radical reform.

Performance measurement

Between 2004 and 2008, performance indicators for the police were organized within the annually-published Policing Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF). In total, then, the PPAF consists of 23 qualitative baseline 'assessments' alongside 32 quantitative performance indicators. In PPAF comparisons of performance were made between groups of 'most similar forces' over the last year. In this way forces which are performing better or worse relative to similar forces could be identified. For each performance area, four 'delivery' grades are possible: excellent, good, fair or poor. Another assessment was based by comparing the performance of a force in one year to that achieved by the same force in the previous year. For each performance area, three 'direction' grades were possible: improved, stable, or deteriorated.

One of the problems with police performance measures, outlined above, was that many of the indicators used to judge police effectiveness are influenced by the activities of a range of other bodies. Indeed, 'partnership' work in crime reduction has been a key feature of government policy, especially since the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. Therefore, PPAF was replaced by a newer and broader framework of performance assessment called 'Assessments of Policing and Community Safety' (APACS), from April 2008 on. This is a new performance assessment framework for policing and community safety. It is a simplified framework with a reduced number of measures by which the police and others are evaluated with regard to their effectiveness on crime and community safety. The framework cover policing and community safety issues in a balanced way which focuses better on the most serious crimes and criminals. In July 2006 the PSU was subsumed under a new Police and Crime Standards Directorate (PCSD) in the Home Office because of the increasing emphasis placed on partnership working to deliver community safety.

4.4 Localism in policing

Centralization in the British police system, although strong, is in recent years countered by other tendencies, that focus on the locally-organized character of policing, generally labeled as 'new localism' (MacLaughlin 2007). As Savage (2007: 203) puts it: "British policing, as well as being pushed 'upwards' by centrally driven forces towards greater standardization and consistency of purpose, which the National Policing Plan and the Police Standards Unit would help deliver, was also being pulled 'downwards' to become more responsive to local needs and priorities, more accountable to local communities, and more engaged with those communities." There has been increasing governmental recognition that the police are but one part of a broader network of institutions with a role to play in promoting community safety. Government gradually became to recognize that policing itself is increasingly delivered by diverse networks of public, private and voluntary providers, as well as the public police. These developments provide some openings for the reinvigoration of local influences. In 2005, the government introduced the 'Neighbourhood Policing' programme to develop neighborhood policing teams that work closely with local communities (Home Office

2005a). By the end of 2008, all local areas had a local team consisting of police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), possibly together with Special Constables, local authority wardens, volunteers and partners. The aim is to provide citizens with access to local policing services through a named point of contact, an opportunity to exert influence over policing priorities in their neighborhood, facilitate the effective development and implementation of joint action to reduce crime and disorder with key partners and the public, and to provide clear accountability and feedback to local people about what is being done in their area. The Home Office Green Paper of 2008 contains some new proposals for empowerment of citizens with regard to the police and for strengthening the local accountability of policing, for example the direct election of members of local police authorities. Another proposal is that neighborhood policing will be integrated into a broader neighborhood management approach.

In part, these reforms are designed to address what has been perceived as a growing 'reassurance gap' (Crawford 2003). Despite very significant drops in crime, as recorded both by reports to the police and in victimization surveys, public perceptions of rising crime and disorder along with 'fear of crime' remain stubbornly high.

5 Assessing police reforms

It is rather difficult to assess the impact of police reform in England and Wales, given the breadth, depth and variable impact of reform programmes. It is more appropriate to think in terms of different waves of reform that together have resulted in significant changes in the British police system over the years.

Waves in police reform

In the reform of the police system several different waves can be distinguished, starting in the early 1980s. Centralization in the authority over the police and intensified planning and control by central government were an important part of the agenda of successive conservative governments. The first round of reforms can be seen as 'managerial renewals'. In combination with steering concepts from New Public Management that already had had a huge impact in other parts of the public sector, the foundations

were laid for radical reforms of the police that so far had been protected from radical reform. The increasingly rigorous police performance management framework – largely centrally driven – had its roots in these initial moves towards promoting efficiency and effectiveness in policing during the 1980s and 1990s.

In the second stage, under New Labour, the conservative agenda with police reform was taken over and developed further. Labour governments since 1997 have accelerated the process of attempted ‘micro management’ of public services, including policing, from the centre. But government has gradually become sensitive to criticisms that the drive for centrally-developed performance targets may have contributed to a lack of local ownership of policing, and a sense that policing is becoming more distant from local communities. The grip of the centre closed off the policymaking process to locally expressed policing priorities. The public desire was for the return of the local ‘bobby’ (patrol officers on foot) and the reopening of police stations, keeping the streets and neighbourhoods free of petty crime and antisocial behaviour (McLaughlin 2007, 479). So, a local dimension was added to police reform. The law abiding citizen had been (re)discovered. This was the beginning of a trend towards a more locally oriented and locally accountable police, but still in combination with a continued focus on the improvement of police performance and target steering.

In the third stage local policing has been strengthened by the introduction and nation-wide implementation and revitalization of community policing, in combination with a broader approach of safety on the local level, as coproduction, in which the police actively seek partnerships with other actors. The local policing of everyday crime and disorder is increasingly integrated within a broader community safety strategy and viewed as delivered by a range of bodies, both inside and outside of the police. More relevance and significance are being attached to a strong civil society that produces public safety and for which the commitment of citizens and organization is indispensable. On this model, the police are considered a last resort.

The impact of performance management

The driving force behind the dominant long-term process of centralization has been the overwhelming political concern with police performance. Performance management regimes have had a

massive impact on policing in England & Wales over the past 20 years or so. But police performance measurement is not without difficulties. Besides problems with validity and reliability it raises concerns about partiality. The inherent complexity of police work is reduced to only the more measurable elements to be included in performance frameworks. A related point here concerns the fact that policing is increasingly undertaken in partnership with a range of agencies and organizations, and performance measures focused only on the police element will fail to recognize this. Some authors have argued that – as a result of police performance management – policing in England & Wales has experienced a number of negative developments. These include a simplistic focus on enforcement and arrests, rather than more complex (but less measurable) problem-solving, with resulting negative effects on relationships with the publics that the police serve (Fitzgerald et al. 2002). Much of the focus of police reform in England & Wales since the early 1990s has been upon improving police performance in crime-oriented areas of work, a development reinforced by official discourse about the key role of the police being to ‘catch criminals’ (Home Office 1993). Crime and law and order had become politicized, partly due to underperformance. The emphasis has been on demonstrable improvements in statistical performance indicators (such as ‘sanctioned detections’, ‘offences brought to justice’, ‘detection rates’ etc). This has in part refocused policing – and reinforced the wider public image of policing – back towards crime-oriented activities (Fitzgerald et al. 2002). Other critics too have noted the tendency of performance measures to encourage a disproportionate police focus on relatively minor – but easy to solve – crimes such as minor thefts between schoolchildren or very minor assaults, to the detriment of more complex cases where it is comparatively difficult to demonstrate a positive ‘result’ (such as domestic violence) (Chatterton 2008). Finally, increasing concern has been expressed about the level of effort and resources being devoted to the ‘performance of performance’ (Talbot 2000). On this view, far too much police activity is wasted on the rituals of target-meeting – sometimes involving imaginative ways of manipulating the figures – rather than focusing on achieving real improvements in service delivery.

Despite these criticisms, there can be no doubt that performance measurement in recent years has shown significant im-

provement. Performance measures are more comprehensive than ever before and make a real attempt to cover the more complex and 'difficult to measure' aspects of policing. They include both quantitative and qualitative elements, and have been refined considerably to address some of the criticisms of earlier measures. Genuine attempts have been made to compare 'like with like' with the development of 'most similar forces' groups, which marked a welcome move away from the misleading idea of national 'league performance tables'. Recent years have allowed locally-decided priorities to be included in the performance assessment, so that the focus is not entirely on nationally-set targets and measures. There appears to have been also a genuine attempt to reduce the total volume of performance indicators. Finally, an effort has been made to include performance assessment of policing within the broader assessment of community safety partnerships, thereby reflecting the new concern with the local dimension of policing.

Force size and performance

According to government reform proposals, as for example in the HMIC report 'Closing the Gap', there should be a positive relation between force size and performance (O, Connor, 2005). The HMIC saw as the best possible option the establishment of a few, large strategic forces for the problems facing policing in England & Wales, because forces of a particular size are more likely to be 'fit for purpose' in the delivery of protective services. This conclusion attracted serious criticisms from social scientists like Lawrence (2005) and Loveday and his colleagues from the think tank Policy Exchange, who have been persistently criticizing the centralization in control over the police for many years. They have questioned the empirical basis with 'Closing the Gap'. Based on research they convincingly concluded (Loveday, 2006, p. 36) that: 'The size of a force has no direct bearing on how well it prevents crime, detects crime, or pleases the public'.

Police reform and the governance of the police

The attempt in 2006 by government to introduce radical structural reforms of the police failed because of the opposition of local police authorities, the high projected costs of reorganization, and political crises in other parts of the criminal justice system

which eventually combined to scupper the plans for reorganization. As an unintended result the existing decentralized police structure emerged stronger than ever before from this debate. According to Godfrey: "The balance of power within the tripartite structure has been shifted by the events of the last twelve months., Police Authorities, police forces and local communities are more visible to the Home Office than they were a year ago and the mergers debate has helped to establish their presence as a key element in the constitutional settlement of policing , capable of seizing the agenda and using their democratic legitimacy and community credentials to subvert a program supported by other elements in the structure"(2007, p. 76).

Despite the failure to bring about major organizational restructuring, central government in England and Wales has been very successful in the past decades in substantially reshaping the police system. Due to these changes in the course of time, shifts have occurred in the existing system of governance structure of democratic control over the police. New actors have appeared on the scene, like ACPO that has been a crucial part of the centralization of decision-making power about policing. ACPO is enormous influential, and is has formed an important block to radical reforms in recent years. Overall, the balance of power has shifted in the tripartite structure in the favour of the Home Office and national agencies like HMIC. These actors have become very powerful, because of the dominant trend of centralization and policing in England & Wales. Other actors also play important roles.

In recent years, police authorities have been catching up, primarily because they were given some extra roles and powers under recent reforms. But, on balance, it appears that they are still very much the 'junior partners' in the tripartite system. The Association of Police Authorities also remains a junior partner in the national policing policy network. Nevertheless, it has undoubtedly been a source of some influence by providing a national voice for police authorities, despite it being entirely incorporated into the central government dominated framework of discourse that emphasizes crime reduction targets and performance management. Chief constables have seen their professional autonomy restricted through national targets and national standards. Thus, they too have seen their influence diminish somewhat. Police chiefs are no longer seen as 'operationally independent', but as

‘operationally responsible’. Police activities are influenced by local police plans, published by the police authority, that also include decisions about priorities. Police activities are also influenced by national priorities. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, remain an important potential source of countervailing influence to the dominant centralizing tendencies of recent decades. But they are not an effective source of localization of control over policing and community safety, and they are increasingly monitored by central government and required to conform to national standards. They have to operate within a clear *national* framework of priorities and targets. The same statement can be made about neighbourhood policing. On the surface it appears to offer something of a counterpoint to the hitherto dominant centralizing tendency in British policing. But at the same time it is embedded in a national program and monitored by the National Police Improvement Agency.

So, there are developments that provide a potential source of countervailing influence to the dominant tendencies toward more centralization of control and authority over the police. These also contain some potential for a more integrated and localized community safety approach involving the police. But these emergent elements of localization are at an early stage of development, at least compared to the continuing influence of centralizing tendencies. At the same time there remains a democratic deficit in the local accountability of the police, despite new government proposals in the most recent Green Paper to close this gap.

6 Conclusions

In the past twenty years the British police system has witnessed acceleration in policy development and an accumulation of plans and initiatives aimed at reforming the police. Overall, the police system has undergone major changes, following changes in other domains of the public sector, as a response to declining public confidence in the police, which has been partly related to concerns about ‘performance’ that failed to meet public and political expectations. The most important feature of Home Office led centralization has been the rigorous performance management framework developed since the early 1980s. The police reforms in England & Wales aim to strengthen the steering of the police

at the national as well as the local level and to increase their coherence. The key theme seems to be: national framework, local delivery. National standards act as strategic framework for tailor made local police services, as part of a broader reform agenda. More value for money and improvement of police performance go along with a strong citizen focus, an orientation on the law abiding citizen and a revitalization of community policing. These have been the central threads in police reform in the past decades, but they were not all present from the beginning of the recent programmes of police reform. The next few years will in all probability see momentous decisions regarding the structure and organization of policing in England & Wales. Although the recent attempt at major restructuring into a smaller number of strategic forces did not succeed, the forces that led to its appearance on the policy agenda have not gone away. It should not be forgotten that the majority of chief constables were broadly supportive of the proposed restructuring. After the fiasco in 2005, we are unlikely to witness another high profile 'one-off' attempt by central government to reorganize policing in England & Wales along the lines suggested in the HMIC report (O'Connor 2005). The potential costs – financial and political – of this radical approach are simply too high. However, it would be reasonable to expect that the government will try, in a more subtle and gradualist way, to encourage police forces to merge into larger structures, where a strong 'business case' for such a merger can be identified (Flanagan 2008). We will probably see the emergence of a gradually restructured system (via voluntary mergers, perhaps with incentives from central government) rather than the centrally-imposed system attempted in 2005. There are still good arguments to be made in support of larger police structures, despite the poor and somewhat rushed case made out in the original HMIC report. As well as the prospective economies of scale and standardization of organizational records, IT systems, personnel policies etc, there remain real concerns about the capability of smaller forces to deal with more serious forms of organized crime, major enquiries and large scale public emergencies. Such changes would not necessarily erode local democratic accountability, given the rather weak influence that police authorities currently have over policing (and their relative invisibility to the public that they are supposed to represent). Indeed, there may even be improvements in democratic accountability and local

responsiveness that arise from restructuring. This would require two key developments; a) a more extensive delegation than has occurred to date of policy-making and budgetary decision-making powers to local BCU commanders, and b) improved local accountability structures along the lines of some recent suggestions from influential commentators on policing. Something significant is likely to happen with local accountability - it may be that police authorities will be reformed to become directly elected bodies, or it may be that we see the introduction of an even more radical idea (initially suggested by the Conservatives) - US style elected police commissioners (or elected mayors with a statutory control over policing policy and to whom local police chiefs will be subservient). This will be a major culture shock for British policing if it comes to pass, but given past experience it would not be a huge surprise if ACPO successfully opposed such reforms. The future will probably see a development of a complex mix of both continued centralization and enhanced localization. We appear to be seeing the emergence of a bifurcated policing system, in which control of the policing of 'major' serious and cross-border crime is increasingly centralized and controlled by national organizations (and/or larger strategic forces), and the local policing of more minor crime and disorder is increasingly delivered by more responsive local partnerships in which the public police are but one element (see Savage 2007).

References

- Ashby, D. (2005) Policing Neighbourhoods: Exploring the Geographies of Crime, Policing and Performance Assessment. *Policing and Society* 15(4) pp. 413-447
- Audit Commission (1991) Reviewing the Organization of Provincial Police Forces. Police Paper No. 5. London: Audit Commission
- Audit Commission (2002) Routes to Justice: Improving the Pathways of Offenders Through the Criminal Justice System. London: Audit Commission
- Chatterton, M. (2008) Losing the Detectives: Views from the Frontline. London: Police Federation.

- Clegg, M. and Kirwan, S. (2006) Police Service Strength, England and Wales, 31st March 2006. Home Office Statistical Bulletin 13/06. London: Home Office
- Collier, P.M. (2006), "In search of purpose and priorities: police performance indicators in England and Wales", *Public Money and Management*, No.June, pp.165-71.
- Crawford, Adam (2003), The pattern of policing in the UK: policing beyond the police. In: Tim Newburn (ed.) *Handbook of Policing*, Willan Publishing, Devon
- Criminal Justice Service (2001) *Narrowing the Justice Gap*. London: Home Office
- Fitzgerald, M. et al. (2002) *Policing for London*. Willan: Cullompton.
- Flanagan, R. (2008) The review of policing, Interim report. Home Office Home Office September
- Godfrey, John (2007) None of the Above: Lessons to be Learnt from the Police Force Structures Debate, *The Police Journal*, Volume 80, Issue 1, pps. 55-78
- Home Office (2003) 'Policing: Building Safer Communities Together'. London, Home Office
- Home Office (2005a) *Neighbourhood Policing: Your Police, Your Community, Our Commitment*. London: Home Office
- Home Office (2008) *Green Paper: From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together*". London, Home Office (http://files.homeoffice.gov.uk/police/policing_green_paper.pdf)
- Jones, T., Newburn, T., and Smith, D.J. (1994) *Democracy and Policing*, London: Policy Studies Institute
- Jones, T. and Newburn, T. (1997) *Policing After the Act: Police Governance After the Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994*. London: Policy Studies Institute
- Jones, T. (2003) *The Governance and Accountability of Policing*. In T. Newburn (ed) *The Handbook of Policing*. Cullompton: Willan

- Lawrence, A. (2005) A statistically-based opinion on the issue 'does size matter?' sought by the West Mercia Police Authority in connection with the HMIC review Closing the Gap.
- Leadership academy for policing, Bramshill, Centrex, 2006
- Levi, M. (2003) Organized and Financial Crime. In T. Newburn (ed) *The Handbook of Policing*. Cullompton: Willan
- Loveday, B. (2006) *Size isn't everything: Restructuring policing in England & Wales*. London: Policy Exchange
- Loveday, B. and McClory, J. (2007) *Fitting the Bill: Local Policing for the 21st Century*. London: Policy Exchange
- Mawby, R. and Wright, A. (2003) The police organization. In T. Newburn (ed) *The Handbook of Policing*. Cullompton: Willan
- McLaughlin, E. (2007) *The New Policing*. London, SAGE
- Newburn, T. (2003), "Policing since 1945", in Newburn, T. (Eds), *Handbook of Policing*, Willan Publishing, Portland, OR.
- O'Connor, D. (2005) 'Closing the Gap': A Review of the Fitness for Purpose of the Current Structure of Policing in England and Wales. London: HMIC
- O'Dowd D. (2002) *Policing Bureaucracy Taskforce: Tackling Police Bureaucracy*. London: Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary
- Reiner, R. (1991) *Chief Constables*, Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Savage, S., Charman, S. and Cope, S. (1996) Police Governance, the Association of Chief Police Officers and Constitutional Change, *Public Policy and Administration*, 11:2, pp. 92-106
- Savage, Stephen P. (2007) Give and Take: The Bifurcation of Police Reform in Britain. In: *The Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology*, vol 40, nummer 3, pp. 313–334
- Talbot, C. (2000) Performing 'Performance': A Comedy in Five Acts, *Public Money and Management*, October-December, pp. 63-68

Tregidga. J. (2006) Restructuring Policing in Wales. Unpublished MSc. Dissertation, University of Cardiff