

**From ‘Community’ to ‘Neighbourhood’ Policing:
Police Community Support Officers and the ‘Police Extended Family’ in London**

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Abstract

Community policing lacks a coherent definition. Despite this, the term has been used as a rhetorical device to support nostalgic and state-centric models of policing. These models are increasingly challenged by diversity. Government has responded to this challenge by advocating an 'extended family' model of policing. This paper explores the role of Police Community Support Officers in the 'extended family' model. It draws upon research carried out on PCSOs in London between October 2002 and December 2003. The paper consists of four sections. The first considers the extent of PCSO integration within the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). The second looks at the impact of PCSO recruitment on the goal of diversifying the MPS workforce. Section Three considers public attitudes towards PCSOs in London. The final section considers PCSOs in a national context, focusing on two issues: the relationship between PCSO policy implementation and the 'evidence-base' used to justify it; and the future role of PCSOs in 'neighbourhood policing', the latest incarnation of community policing.

Introduction. Community Policing: Reality and Rhetoric

It is widely accepted in 'Anglo-American' policing systems that the future lies in community policing. Yet, paradoxically, the term 'community policing' has lacked any coherent definition. Bennett (1994), commenting on this state of affairs, suggests that there have been a variety of efforts to elucidate the term, including attempts to identify proactive programmes that benefit the community (such as police liaison committees or community constables); attempts to identify the 'essence' of community policing programmes (such as foot patrol or decentralised command); and attempts to extract key concepts from academic analyses of community policing initiatives (such as police-public partnerships and non-crime problem-solving). Yet, despite giving some rudimentary shape to community policing, these efforts leave fundamental questions unresolved. For example, is foot patrol a necessary component of community policing? Does any instance of decentralised command constitute evidence of community policing?

To argue that community policing has lacked a coherent definition is, however, only partly of the story. For if the term is considered as a rhetorical device (Klockars 1991), rather than as a substantive policy, the situation changes. In the past, debates about community policing have been predicated on a view of community as the embodiment, or potential embodiment, of shared sentiments. This point is well-demonstrated in Mastrofski's (1991) discussion of community policing in the USA where powerful metaphors evoke an imagined past in which society was deemed to be less conflict-ridden and impersonal than it is today. Community police rhetoric demands that the 'natural' mechanisms of social control that allegedly underpinned

this imagined past be mobilised in the present. The problem is that this image of shared community sentiments is both a poor representation of the past and an even worse predictor of the future. Though well aware of this fact, the police have remained trapped within a paradox of their own making: 'As long as community-as-consensus is perceived as a prerequisite of governance, police will be burdened with the necessity of fabricating one where it does not exist' (Mastrofski, 1992, p. 527). Until quite recently, then, community policing has been driven by a rhetoric aimed at (re) consolidating or (re) constructing communities deemed either to be homogeneous or to have the potential for homogeneity. As one author has described it: 'Like tourism and heritage, community policing is preoccupied with the reconstruction of nostalgia' (Johnston 1997: 195).

There is also a second aspect to this rhetoric. In this case the focus is on security governance (Johnston and Shearing 2003) or, more specifically, on the question of who governs policing? Here the rhetoric supports a model of security governance in which the public (state) police lay claim to sovereignty over community policing while simultaneously devolving some of its tasks to others:-

Community policing is an umbrella term describing a broad 'family' of initiatives through which police have sought to re-invent themselves and, by so doing, keep control of the steering of security governance while broadening the range of capacities, agents and knowledges engaged in its rowing (Johnston and Shearing 2003, pp. 73-4)

The dualistic view of community policing just described – part nostalgic and part state-centric - is now under increased challenge, one major source of which is the growing impact of 'diversity' on communities. This poses three problems for the police. First, cultural and ethnic diversity renders the traditional 'homogenising'

rhetoric of community policing more and more redundant. Second, culturally and ethnically diverse communities are no longer satisfied to be policed by an organisation whose membership is primarily white and male. Third, growing diversity or ‘pluralisation’ (Johnston 2003) in security provision – evidenced by the increased involvement of municipal, commercial and other non-state bodies in street-level policing - challenges police claims to sovereignty.

This last issue is particularly important for the discussion that follows. In recent years a number of senior police officers have addressed the impact of pluralisation on uniformed policing in our towns and cities to pose the question ‘who should govern street patrol’? Out of this debate four distinct models of security governance have emerged (see Johnston 2003): that police should maintain the governing status quo, doing more street level policing but doing it more effectively than hitherto; that police should accept the reality of pluralisation but, having done so, should secure oversight of its coordination and regulation; that police should compete with commercial and municipal providers thereby seeking to secure ‘in-house’ governance of street-level policing; and that police should accept pluralisation, devolve certain functions to the private sector and concede any automatic claim to sovereignty.

Of late, the third of these models, now encapsulated in the idea of the ‘police extended family’, has become official Government policy. Some years ago, its originator, Sir Ian Blair¹, expressed concern that policing in London might become ‘Balkanized’ due to local boroughs setting up their own police forces or deciding to buy police services from private companies. Blair’s solution was to propose the

¹ Then Deputy Commissioner and now Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police Service

recruitment of uniformed auxiliaries dedicated to the provision of street patrol, a solution which he believed would enable police sovereignty over community policing to be reconsolidated:

By giving such staff the Met badge of excellence, by ensuring that they work under the direction and control of constables, by offering an auxiliary service with powers, we will be able to persuade local authorities and others to spend their money on this kind of service, rather than on schemes without Met backing, without Met intelligence, without Met standards and without Met-based powers (Blair 2002: 31).

This new auxiliary body, called 'Police Community Support Officers' (PCSOs), was introduced into the service by the Police Reform Act (2002). PCSOs are uniformed civilian staff² who possess limited powers (such as the power to issue fixed penalty notices for certain offences). At present, there are about 4,000 PCSOs operating in England and Wales, 1200 of whom work for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This number will increase substantially in the future, the Government having pledged support for the recruitment of a further 20,000 PCSOs over the next three years (HM Government 2004). PCSOs are tasked to undertake visible street patrol and to contribute to the reduction of low level crime and disorder, thus enhancing levels of public reassurance. In London, the PCSO initiative was also seen as an opportunity to diversify the recruitment profile of the MPS, thereby making it more representative of the communities it polices.

This paper draws upon research carried out in two MPS boroughs (Westminster and Camden) between October 2002 and December 2003. Auxiliaries first became operational in London during September 2002 when 'Security PCSOs' were attached to the Charing Cross and Belgravia police stations in Westminster for the purpose of

² Towards the end of the research the terminology used to describe civilians employed by the police changed. All such employees are now called 'police staff'. However, the word 'civilians' is retained in this paper since it was used in gathering and analysing survey data.

carrying out anti-terrorist patrols. During 2002-3 'Community PCSOs', charged with providing visible patrol in communities and 'Transport PCSOs', charged with policing the City's transport routes, were introduced on a London-wide basis.³

The paper consists of four sections, the first three of which draw upon evidence from the MPS study. Section One considers the extent of PCSO integration within the MPS. This is a critical issue since, if police sovereignty is to be realised through the 'extended family' project, PCSOs must be well-integrated with their newly adopted 'brothers' and 'sisters'. Section Two looks at the impact of PCSO recruitment on the goal of diversifying the MPS workforce. Section Three considers public attitudes towards PCSOs in Westminster and Camden. The final section considers PCSOs in a national context, focusing on two issues: the relationship between PCSO policy implementation and the 'evidence-base' used to justify it; and their future role in 'neighbourhood policing'.

1. The extent of PCSO integration within the MPS

This section draws upon fifty semi-structured interviews undertaken with police officers and PCSOs at police stations in Westminster and Camden; a workplace survey administered to police, civil staff and PCSOs at the Charing Cross and Belgravia police stations in Westminster, first in December 2002 and again in September 2003; and observation of PCSOs and police officers in Westminster and

³ The research examined 'Security PCSOs' in Westminster and 'Community PCSOs' in Camden. The author is grateful to Dr. Roger Donaldson, Ms. Deborah Jones and Dr. Tom Williamson for their valuable contributions to this research. The views expressed in the present paper are the sole responsibility of the author.

Camden. One thing the reader should be aware of in this section is that implementation of the PCSO scheme ran far less smoothly in Westminster than it did in Camden. This was due to a number of factors including hasty programme implementation in Westminster and the consequent difficulties posed by having to absorb around 200 PCSOs at the Charing Cross and Belgravia police stations over a short period. In this section we consider several issues relating to successful integration including effective communication, organisational support, acceptance by colleagues and the adequacy of supervision

How effectively was information regarding PCSOs disseminated? Survey and interview evidence showed that a majority of staff felt information was communicated badly. One PC put it as follows:

No-one ... told us about their role and responsibilities. It became evident that my immediate management didn't know what you could use them for. We didn't know what you could use them for. They [PCSOs] certainly didn't know what they could do.

Indeed, more than a year after their introduction in the two Westminster police stations, only a minority of police and civilian respondents – including a shrinking minority in Charing Cross – felt that they had a clear idea of the PCSO role.

What of wider organisational support? In both runs of the Westminster survey around two-fifths of police and civil staff agreed with the statement 'At my police station MPS support for PCSOs has been good', while between one-quarter and one-third disagreed. Though a substantial majority of PCSOs (more than four-fifths at both stations) had agreed with the statement in the first survey, the proportion agreeing in

the second survey fell to less than three quarters at Charing Cross and to less than one-third at Belgravia.

In a related question more than a half of police/civilians and more than four-fifths of PCSOs at Charing Cross gave an affirmative response in both surveys to the statement 'At my police station support for PCSOs from team colleagues has been good'. At Belgravia, however, the second survey showed a marked reduction in affirmative responses from both police/civilians and PCSOs alike. In this survey less than half of PCSOs agreed with the statement and as many police/civilians disagreed as agreed with it. Amongst all categories of Belgravia staff, then, there was a view that support for PCSOs from team colleagues had reduced in the period between the two surveys.

Respondents were also asked about the acceptance of PCSOs within the 'police team'

Table 1 goes here

In the first survey a substantial majority of PCSOs and a significant minority of police officers and civilians believed PCSOs to be fully accepted as team members. In the later survey, with the exception of police and civilians at CX, there had been a marked reduction in affirmative responses. These figures would seem to suggest a growing alienation between PCSOs and their team colleagues. However, Table 1 should be interpreted with caution. For one thing, the high levels of affirmative answers given by PCSOs in the earlier survey are probably related to unrealistic expectations on their part about the working environment they had just entered. Subsequent reductions in affirmative answers given by PCSOs should therefore be

interpreted in this light. Furthermore, in view of the challenges the two stations had faced in absorbing 200 new personnel into the workforce within a short period of time, the fact that around half of PCSOs at both locations still felt fully part of the team could be considered a mark of success rather than a measure of failure. Thus, while Table 1 suggests the need for much more integrative work at both stations, it need not necessarily justify undue pessimism regarding future prospects

One factor in integration is effective supervision. In Camden, a decision had been made that PCSOs would be attached to Sector Teams and allocated a dedicated supervising Sergeant. This proved to be an effective decision since supervisors could easily identify and make plans to meet the short and long needs of PCSOs. By contrast, the repeated influx of large numbers of PCSOs into Westminster, combined with the acute shortage of sergeants in the Borough, posed major problems with comments such as 'I have found it difficult to put names to faces and get to grips with their shoulder-numbers' being commonplace. As a result supervision at Charing Cross and Belgravia was frequently delegated to Acting Sergeants, many of whom had only just completed their own probation: what one interviewee described as 'the blind leading the blind'. Being 'high maintenance', a phrase that was put to us repeatedly, PCSOs require sustained help if they are to remain effective and accountable for their actions. It is, therefore, a matter of concern that in an internal MPS survey administered to PCSOs at Belgravia Police Station during November 2003 - fourteen months after initial deployment - almost three-quarters claimed never to have patrolled with a supervising officer and around a half described the level of supervision received as 'poor'.

Obviously, integration is a long-term project. Our research showed that during the first sixteen months progress was mixed. In Camden our observations and interviews showed that good progress was being made in integrating the Borough's thirty PCSO. By contrast, the two Westminster stations had struggled to absorb around 200 PCSOs within a restricted time scale. Here, the research revealed serious shortcomings in communication and supervision. Despite that, however, around half of PCSOs still claimed to feel part of the 'police team'.

2. Diversifying MPS recruitment?

By 2009, police organisations in England and Wales are expected to have an ethnic composition proportional to that of the local population they serve. With a quarter of the London population defined as minority ethnic, the MPS will be particularly hard-pressed to reach this target. In 1992, only 3.3% of its officers were from visible minority ethnic groups (Rowe 2004). By 2004 the proportion had risen to 6.3% (MPS 2004b) though the 2009 target is likely to remain problematic given the organisation's recurrent failure to recruit and retain officers from this pool. In this context PCSO recruitment is important for two reasons. First, it adds directly to the diversity of the MPS workforce as a whole. Second, it adds indirectly to the diversity of the police component within that workforce since a significant number of PCSOs will apply to become regular officers.⁴

⁴ When asked about their main reason for wanting to become a PCSO, 47% of PCSO respondents in our staff survey answered that they saw the job as 'a stepping stone to the regular police'.

This section draws upon data from two sources: qualitative data obtained from observation of and interviews with police and PCSOs; and quantitative data obtained from an analysis of 2025 PCSO recruitment applications spanning the year 1st April 2002-31st March 2003.

The first question to be asked is how far the MPS has been able to meet the targets specified in its *Priorities for Excellence 2003-4* (MPS 2004a)⁵:-

- 29% women PCSO recruits as a percentage of all PCSO recruits
- 25% minority ethnic PCSO recruits as a percentage of all PCSO recruits

In the sample two thirds of applications (66%) came from males and around one-quarter (26%) from females, the remaining 8% failing to specify their gender.

Analysis by ethnicity was complicated by the MPS's decision to change the coding system used to identify the ethnic origin of applicants during the course of the year.

Originally, the system employed a six-fold classification based broadly upon the outward appearance ('IC Code') of the individual. Of the 2025 applicants in the sample, 1040 were so classified. The remaining 985 applicants were categorised according to a more complex, 16-fold, classification system, the aim of which was to capture ethnic diversity more accurately.

By combining these two categorisations - and removing from the calculation some 450 applicants who failed to specify their ethnicity – 56% were found to be 'white' and 44% from 'minority ethnic' groups. In due course, 430 applicants (21% of the

⁵ The author is aware that, in carrying out this exercise, categories (such as 'white' and 'minority ethnic') have been used below which subvert the diversity agenda.

total) were recruited as PCSOs of whom 3% were male and 26% female. Following the removal of those (10%) who failed to specify their ethnic group, the remaining 386 recruits could be divided into 65% 'white' and 35% 'minority ethnic'.

Overall, then, our quantitative evidence shows that the PCSO selection and recruitment process proved successful in attracting groups currently underrepresented in the MPS. The 25% target for minority ethnic recruitment was easily surpassed by the 35% figure achieved in the sample, while the 29% target for female recruitment fell only 4 percentage points short. However, the picture is rather more complex than it might first appear.

This can be illustrated by an example. Those processed under the earlier 'IC Code'-based system were found to have a much higher chance of recruitment (29%) than those processed under the revised system (13%). Indeed, 'white' applicants' chances were almost doubled under the revised codes, while those of 'minority ethnic' applicants were slightly *more* than doubled. There are two possible explanations for this pattern. One is that the quality of applicants declined substantially a few months after the recruitment process began. While theoretically possible, this explanation seems unlikely and we found no evidence to support it. The other is that the changed pattern arose from organisational factors: factors that can only be understood by a consideration of qualitative evidence.

Our qualitative data revealed a number of organisational problems arising in respect of the selection, recruitment, training, integration, supervision and deployment of PCSOs. These impacted on all PCSOs but their effect was probably greatest on those

from minority ethnic backgrounds. Without doubt, the single factor having the most negative impact was the speed with which the programme was implemented. This caused a number of problems including a systemic failure to collect and collate management information on PCSOs and a tendency – particularly in Westminster – for PCSOs to be ‘dumped’ at short notice on the unprepared and unsuspecting officers tasked to look after them.

However, its effects were especially marked in three areas. First, the three-week training programme proved to be poor at inculcating the values, attitudes and standards of a disciplined, uniformed organisation. Consequently, a small minority of PCSOs failed to understand the behavioural standards expected of them by turning in late for shifts, failing to report sick, failing to wear the proper uniform and complaining about beat assignments.

A second issue concerned whether, in the context of rapid implementation, organisational demands to admit large numbers of PCSOs led to a lowering of entry standards during the early stages of recruitment. There was certainly strong evidence to support this view and one respondent, closely involved with the PCSO initiative, affirmed that opinion:-

Yes, I think early on there was some pressure ... Nobody has ever said ‘we are going to lower standards here’. What happens is that people sort of internalise the assumption, so they do what they *think* the system wants them to do

A third factor was the quality and quantity of institutional support provided to PCSOs – something we have already alluded to in respect of supervision. However, such support was not only lacking in respect of supervision. The centrally delivered (three

week) training programme was supposed to be supplemented by further borough-based provision. In reality, such provision was patchy. Our evidence showed that reliefs were often left to sort out the provision of borough-based training, the result being a lack of any standardized practice across or between boroughs.

The impact of these factors may be summed up as follows. Reduced entry standards during the initial stages of recruitment caused some PCSOs – both white and minority ethnic – to be recruited who were unsuited to the role. Inadequate support structures, including shortcomings in training and supervision, exacerbated this situation.

Minority ethnic PCSOs were more disadvantaged than their white counterparts in this regard. On the one hand, they had the greatest need for institutional support. Some, for example, had clear language and communication problems that needed to be addressed. On the other hand, they were more visible – and thus more easily isolated ‘as problems’- within an organisation unused to integrating minority ethnic personnel.

Overall, then, our quantitative and qualitative evidence gives two ‘pictures’, each of which reveals an element of ‘truth’. The MPS *has* succeeded in using the PCSO initiative to broaden its ethnic and gender base:-

We have recruited from communities (e.g. Bengalis in Tower Hamlets) who have never been attracted to the police. We did some consultancy ... some wanted to check [the job] out ... *others felt there were cultural barriers to becoming a police officer that did not apply to becoming a PCSO* (PCSO Programme Manager. Author’s emphasis added)

However, it remains poor at providing necessary support. At one point, during 2003, a third of all minority ethnic PCSOs at Belgravia Police Station were on disciplinary charges. The Black Police Association, far from branding this an act of direct racism,

claimed, rightly in our view, that ‘positive discrimination’ had been applied during the early stages of the recruitment and selection process. In other words, faced with demands for the recruitment of large numbers of minority ethnic PCSOs, the MPS first appointed a number who were ill-suited to the job then, having done so, failed to provide the institutional support that might have helped to bring them up to standard. Finally, when their behaviour did – as, inevitably, it would - fall short of the required standard, the organisation subjected them to discipline.

3. Public attitudes towards PCSOs

What is the public’s attitude towards PCSOs? This is an important question given that they are seen by Government as central to ‘reassurance policing’ - the attempt to enhance public reassurance by the provision of visible street patrol. This section draws upon the results of a survey administered to residents and business people in Camden and Westminster during October 2003.⁶

Before summarising these results it is important to emphasise that Westminster’s 200 ‘Security PCSOs’ are deployed on anti-terrorist patrol. For that reason their primary task is to look out for suspicious parcels, vehicles and individuals and to seek information from, and give information to, the public. By contrast, Camden’s thirty ‘Community PCSOs’ are deployed on a much wider range of community duties including crime prevention (e.g. leafleting premises); liaising with the local authority (e.g. in respect of illegal traders) and helping to disrupt local drugs markets (e.g. by

⁶ Questionnaires were distributed to 1300 residents and business people in the Covent Garden area during October 2003. This area was chosen because it included respondents from both Camden and Westminster boroughs. The 312 returned questionnaires produced a response rate of 24%.

checking out drug caches). These role differences, combined with the implementation problems experienced in Westminster, might lead us to expect Camden PCSOs to be better received within their communities than those in Westminster. That expectation is confirmed by our survey results.

PCSOs are, undoubtedly, providing visible uniformed presence on the streets. Around four-fifths of respondents in both boroughs were aware of them, two-thirds of those from Westminster and three-quarters of those from Camden having become aware as a result of seeing them on the streets. Around a quarter of respondents in each borough had had direct contact with PCSOs, a majority of whom (two-thirds in Westminster, three-quarters in Camden) declared the experience satisfactory. Overall, a substantial majority (three-quarters in Westminster and almost nine-tenths in Camden) thought the employment of PCSOs to be 'a good idea'.

Table 2 shows that seven-tenths of people in Camden, compared to just over half of those in Westminster, felt 'more reassured' by the presence of PCSOs.

Table 2 goes here

Similar results were found in respect of fear of crime, 71% of respondents in Camden and 53% of those in Westminster claiming that the work of PCSOs had helped to reduce their fear of crime 'a lot' or 'a little'.

Table 3 goes here

Views about the ability of PCSOs to meet local people's needs were somewhat polarised. Slightly less than one-third of Camden respondents and around one-quarter of those from Westminster 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement 'PCSOs are responding well to the needs of local people in this area'. However, while almost one-third of Westminster respondents 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with the statement, this applied to only 7% of those from Camden. Here, two-fifths gave 'Don't Know' answers, suggesting that, as yet, they had not made their minds up on the issue.

Table 4 shows that more than a half of Camden respondents, compared with only one-fifth of those from Westminster, 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement that 'PCSOs provide an effective way of meeting the public's demand for a greater police presence on the street'.

Table 4 goes here

On the basis of this, it seems possible that the comparatively small group of Community PCSOs in Camden is better able to meet local demands for a greater police presence on the street than the substantial larger body of Security PCSOs in Westminster. Evidence from the MPS's quarterly, borough-based, Public Attitude Surveys (MPS, 2002(a) and (b); 2003 (a) and (b)) offered some tentative support for this conclusion. One of the questions asked in these surveys is how satisfied people are with the number of police on foot patrol in their borough? In surveys covering the period April 2002 to September 2003, respondents in Westminster expressed no

increase in levels of satisfaction. By contrast, satisfaction levels in Camden rose from 18% to 33% in the quarter following initial PCSO deployment, an increase that was sustained into the following quarter. However, this evidence needs to be treated with extreme caution – not least because of the absence of base-line data - and further longitudinal research on the extent to which PCSOs can help to meet public demands for a greater police presence on the streets is required.

Finally people were asked to comment on two statements regarding the accessibility of PCSOs and their capacity to provide a link between the police and the public.

Table 5 goes here

As before, there are striking differences between the boroughs. More than two-thirds (67%) of Camden respondents compared to one fifth (19%) of those in Westminster believe PCSOs are valued because of their public accessibility. Moreover, almost two-thirds (63%) of Camden respondents, compared to around one fifth (18%) of those in Westminster, thought PCSOs provided an important link between the local community and the police. As in the previous examples, and subject to the same caveats, these responses might suggest that Community PCSOs in Camden are better integrated with and, therefore, more highly valued by the public than are Security PCSOs in Westminster.

4. From ‘Community’ to ‘Neighbourhood’ Policing

In this final section we consider two issues: the relationship between PCSO policy implementation and the ‘evidence-base’ used to justify it; and their future role of PCSOs in ‘neighbourhood policing’.

We have already discussed the consequences of rapid programme implementation at the research sites. Related to this was a surprising absence of systems for collecting data on key issues. Thus, for example, despite claims that the deployment of PCSOs would release regular officers to undertake tasks more suited to their skills, the organisation failed to collect data that would have enabled the claim to be tested. There is a danger that this combination of problems – pressure for rapid policy implementation combined with failure to collect data by which to monitor its effects – might be more widespread. A recent Inspectorate report on modernisation within the police service drew attention to a paucity of data in several areas, one of which concerned the example to which we have just referred: ‘the release of officers [through civilianisation] to operational duties in many forces is taken as given and is not adequately monitored’ (HMIC 2004: 81).

While it is understandable that evidence on new initiatives takes time to compile, paucity of reliable data seems to have provided no barrier to further Government policy reform. The Serious Organised Crime and Police Bill published in November 2004 proposes new PCSO powers (see Home Office 2004c and 2004d). These include new powers to direct traffic, to deter begging, to search detained persons for dangerous articles or items that may be used to assist escape, and to search for alcohol and tobacco and deal with drug related anti-social behaviour. The difficulty

with these proposals is two-fold. First, we have very limited information about the impact of *existing* PCSO powers, the only published research to date relating to their powers of detention (Singer 2004).⁷ Second, and more seriously, we have no information about whether an extension of PCSO powers will contribute to or detract from their capacity to engage effectively with communities. As Crawford *et. al.* recently put it: ‘The availability of formal and coercive legal powers may reduce their application of powers of persuasion and negotiation, which ultimately are the PCSO’s most potent means of inducing compliance’ (Crawford *et. al.* 2004: 81).

This tendency to formulate policy without prior evidential support is by no means restricted to the question of PCSO powers. By providing a visible uniformed presence on the streets, PCSOs are central to ‘reassurance policing’, something to which the Government is heavily committed. Evidence from our own research suggests that PCSOs *can* play an important role in reassurance. Yet, many questions about reassurance remain unresolved. For example, if people are reassured by PCSOs does this mean they are able to discriminate between PCSO uniforms and those worn by regular police, private security guards, traffic wardens, or neighbourhood wardens? In our survey more than half of Camden respondents, compared to around one-fifth of those in Westminster, claimed to be able to make such discriminations. However, while this difference can be explained in a number of ways – the better integration of Community PCSOs in Camden, the inherent limitations of the Security PCSO role, the sheer number of uniformed organisations operating in Westminster – the fact that people *claim* a capacity to differentiate does not necessarily mean they possess one.

⁷ This evaluation was carried out in six pilot forces and concluded that ‘80 per cent of the cases evaluated were associated with a very positive endorsement of the power’. It also noted ‘the absence of any adverse effect on either the CSO or the detainee when the power to detain [was] exercised’ (Singer 2004: 9).

Indeed, during interviews with PCSOs, police and members of the public we became convinced that there is much confusion about PCSO uniforms. Research on the mechanisms whereby people recognise or misrecognise PCSO uniforms is, therefore, urgently needed if ‘visibility, as a factor in reassurance, is to be understood.’⁸

Of course, reassurance, involves more than mere visibility. Yet, as the Inspectorate report mentioned earlier states, there are severe evidential shortcomings in this area as well: ‘Most of this evidence [on reassurance] is ... anecdotal and the picture will not become clear until independent evaluation schemes have been completed...’ (HMIC 2004: 142). Indeed, this conclusion may be over-optimistic. The Forward to a recent Home Office Research Study aimed at ‘clarifying the reassurance challenge’ notes the extent of the problem:

In spite of the term’s popularity, there remains no agreed and consistently applied definition of the concept of reassurance. Instead it has come to mean a number of different things to policy makers, practitioners and academics alike (Singer in Dalglish and Myhill 2004: i)

Overall, then, the deployment of PCSOs is predicated on a model of reassurance policing that, as yet, lacks any substantial evidential base. The research agenda that would provide that evidence is most clearly – if somewhat ironically - articulated in the *interim* national evaluation report. (Home Office 2004b: 10-11).

Finally, what of the future role of PCSOs in community policing? Perhaps not surprisingly, community policing has, once again, been re-invented – this time in the guise of ‘neighbourhood policing’, something which is a component part of the

⁸ Crawford *et. al.* (2004) carried out an analysis of uniform recognition in W. Yorkshire presenting subjects with laminated cards. Levels of recognition ‘varied significantly’. Although 59% (in Leeds) and almost two-thirds (in Bradford) were able to recognise PCSO uniforms, a fifth of respondents remained confused as to the identity of PCSOs. Cooke (2004 – see also this volume) has carried out the only major empirical study of people’s recognition of police and security uniforms in the UK

Government's wide-ranging programme of police reform (for details see www.policereform.gov.uk/). Neighbourhood policing is defined as a locally responsive style of policing which will be applied to many parts of England and Wales – though especially in high crime areas - by 2008. The precise details of what constitutes neighbourhood policing are, as yet, unclear since, by definition, it implies a localised, and thereby, non-standardised approach. Operationally, however, it involves dedicated 'neighbourhood policing teams'. In the MPS, where the model has been applied across all boroughs, such teams (called 'safer neighbourhood teams' – see www.met.police.uk/saferneighbourhoods/) consist usually of one sergeant two constables and four PCSOs (or, in larger teams, some pro-rata combination of the same). Somewhat speciously – since, as we have argued previously, there has never been an accepted definition of community policing and the term has, in any case, undergone constant re-invention – the Government insists that this new development should not be confused with old-style community policing. Neighbourhood policing teams are committed to proactive and partnership-based activities:

They will take an intelligence-led, proactive, problem-solving approach to enable them to focus on and tackle specific local issues. They will involve their local community in establishing and negotiating priorities for action and in identifying and implementing solutions. They will ensure a two-way flow of information with the community to build trust and co-operation to help them deal more effectively with crime and anti-social behaviour. Police and their partners providing useful and meaningful information on how a community is being policed will encourage and empower individuals to work with the police, feeding community intelligence into crime prevention, detection and reduction (Home Office 2004a: 7).

Whether this ‘extended family’ model of community policing will work remains to be seen.⁹ The three main issues discussed in this paper will all be significant in determining the outcome. First, neighbourhood policing teams will need to be well-integrated if they are to function effectively. In particular, effective working will require a difficult combination of role-specificity and operational flexibility within teams, something that police organisations have traditionally found problematic. An observation from the interim national evaluation of PCSO indicates the possibility of future tension and resistance:

The evidence regarding pairing CSOs with other officers is mixed. None of the forces responding to the RDS survey (October 2004) report deploying CSOs in mixed patrols with fully sworn police officers. However, the recent report on rostering (Accenture, 2004) reports some evidence of joint CSO-officer patrols. The report reveals that forces have very different views regarding mixed patrols. While some felt it gave CSOs more protection and credibility, others thought it inappropriate since CSOs and officers have different responsibilities, and these would be blurred if there were joint patrols (Home Office 2004b: 8).

Second, there is the question of diversity in its broadest sense. The concept of community policing – with all its homogenizing implications – sits uncomfortably within a discourse of diversity. By contrast, neighbourhood policing, encapsulates diversity as, ideally, it involves three things: localised and non-standardised service provision; delivery of services by an organisation with an ‘extended’ membership broadly representative of the neighbourhood being policed; and the involvement of local partners agencies that participate fully in decisions. However, the extent to which such diverse aspirations can be made to conform with the centralizing tendencies of the police reform programme remains to be seen.

⁹ Going back to our earlier discussion, one immediate concern is that while bids to the Neighbourhood Policing Fund are imminent in February 2004, the evidence-base for assessing them remains in a state of development.

Finally, there is the question of whether the various publics – including the local authorities - who engage with neighbourhood policing will ‘buy into’ the ‘extended family’ model. In short, will neighbourhood policing secure police sovereignty over security governance? This question will probably be decided by two things: the police’s capacity to deliver on reassurance; and the states capacity to coordinate and control the increasingly complex model of service delivery laid out in the recent White Paper (Home Office 2004a: see especially 22 and 52).

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Tables

Table 1. 'At my police station PCSOs are fully accepted as part of the police team'.

%	Agree or Strongly Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree		Don't Know	
	Dec 2002	Sep 2003	Dec 2002	Sep 2003	Dec 2002	Sep 2003	Dec 2002	Sep 2003
AB police/civilians	49	22	22	27	25	37	5	14
CX police/civilians	37	32	28	27	22	38	14	3
AB PCSOs	93	47	5	24	2	29	0	0
CX PCSOs	85	57	4	23	8	20	4	0

Table 2. Does the presence of PCSOs on the streets of Westminster make you feel

- More reassured about your safety?
- Neither more nor less reassured about your safety?
- Less reassured about your safety?

%	Westminster	Camden
More reassured	52	70
Neither more nor less reassured	46	29
Less reassured	1	1
Don't know	1	0

Table 3. How much do you feel the work of PCSOs in the area has helped to reduce your fear of crime?

%	Westminster	Camden
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A lot	18	22
A little	35	49
Not at all	40	29

Table 4. PCSOs and the public's demand for police presence

%	1 = Strongly agree		2 = Agree	
	Camden	Westminster	Camden	Westminster
'Community Support Officers provide an effective way of meeting the public's demand for a greater police presence on the street'.	13	8	41	13

Table 5. PCSOs, the public and the police.

%	1 = Strongly agree		2 = Agree	
	Camden	Westminster	Camden	Westminster
'People value Community Support Officers because, when patrolling the streets on foot, they are directly accessible to the public'.	24	2	43	17
'Community Support Officers provide an important link between the local community and the police'.	19	2	44	16