

**'KEEPING THE FAMILY TOGETHER'. POLICE COMMUNITY SUPPORT
OFFICERS AND THE 'POLICE EXTENDED FAMILY' IN LONDON.**

By

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ABSTRACT

The Police Reform Act (2002) introduced Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) into the service for the first time. PCSOs are uniformed staff who work under the direction and control of the chief officer and who possess certain limited powers. The introduction of PCSOs has to be considered in the context of debates about security governance since proponents see the initiative as a means of reconsolidating police sovereignty over policing. Obviously, in order for this sovereign project to be feasible, PCSOs have to be integrated successfully into their newly adopted 'family'. This paper is concerned with a number of organisational issues relating to the PCSO integration.. It draws upon research into PCSOs carried out in two London boroughs (Westminster and Camden) between October 2002 and December 2003.

KEYWORDS

Police Community Support Officers; Police Extended Family; Police Reform; Police Modernisation; Metropolitan Police Service.

INTRODUCTION

The Police Reform Act (2002) introduced Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) into the service for the first time. PCSOs are uniformed staff who work under the direction and control of the chief officer and who possess certain limited powers (such as the power to issue fixed penalty notices for certain offences). Currently, there are about 4,000 PCSOs operating in England and Wales, 1,200 of whom work for the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). This number will increase substantially in the near future, the Government's recent Spending Review 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 thereby enhancing levels of public reassurance. They first became operational in September 2002 when the MPS deployed 'Security PCSOs' in Westminster to carry out anti-terrorist patrols. Soon after, '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.

The introduction of PCSOs has to be considered in the context of debates about police organisational change (Bradley, Walker and Wilkie 1986; Chan 1996; 1997; Manning 1977; 1979; Punch 1983; Wood 2004) and security governance (Johnston 2003; Johnston and Shearing 2003; Shearing and Wood 2003; Wood, Dupont and Font forthcoming), two issues which, though apparently unrelated, are inextricably linked.

Some years ago the MPS's then Deputy Commissioner, Sir Ian Blair, expressed concern that policing in London might become 'Balkanized' due to local boroughs choosing to set up their own police forces or deciding to buy police services from private companies. In Blair's view, the deployment of PCSOs provided a solution to this problem, enabling police sovereignty over 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).

Obviously, in order for this sovereign project to be feasible, PCSOs have to be integrated successfully into their newly adopted 'family'. This paper is concerned with a number of organisational issues relating to the PCSO integration. It draws upon research into PCSOs carried out in two MPS boroughs (Westminster and Camden) between October 2002 and December 2003. Sources of data include fifty, taped, semi-structured interviews undertaken with police officers and PCSOs at police stations in both boroughs; two workplace surveys administered to police, police staff and PCSOs at Charing Cross (CX) and Belgravia (AB) police stations in Westminster²; an analysis of 2025 PCSO recruitment applications processed during the calendar year 1st April 2002 – 31st March 2003; and observation of PCSOs and police officers in Westminster and Camden. It also draws upon internal police documentation including the results of an MPS survey administered to PCSOs at Belgravia Police Station.

The paper is in three sections. The first draws primarily on data from the two Westminster-based workplace surveys. The second comments on three important

organisational issues: PCSO training, supervision and diversity. The third considers what implications the research has for questions of security governance and police organisational change.

1. THE WESTMINSTER STAFF SURVEYS

This section draws primarily upon data from the two Westminster Staff Surveys. It examines a number of issues including what motivates PCSOs to join the service? Whether information about their deployment is communicated effectively to colleagues? What institutional and team support PCSOs receive? How far they are accepted by and integrated within the organisation? What impact their deployment has on station morale? How police and PCSOs perceive the quality of PCSO recruits? And what expectations police and PCSOs have regarding the likely impact of PCSOs on the street? AB and CX provided the obvious places to administer the surveys since they had the earliest and largest intakes of PCSOs in the MPS. However, because of the speed of implementation and the numbers deployed, progress of the scheme in Westminster was far from smooth – something which is reflected in the survey findings. Thus, while some of the problems revealed in this section are generic, some relate specifically to Westminster and should not necessarily be seen as general features of the scheme itself. Indeed, the more controlled deployment of thirty PCSOs in Camden produced far fewer difficulties.

Motivations For and Concerns About Becoming a PCSO

The survey contained two questions aimed at gaining an insight into the motivations and concerns of people at the point they decided to become PCSOs. The first question asked respondents their main reason for wanting to become PCSOs at the time they joined. In

both runs of the survey the most common answer given by respondents was that they saw the job as ‘a stepping stone to the regular police’. Interestingly, however, the proportions giving this answer were higher in December 2002 (50% at AB and 70% at CX) than in September 2003 (39% at CX and 29% at AB). One possible reason for this is that a proportion of those in the first survey who aspired to become regular police officers might have either negotiated that process successfully or failed to do so. In other words some might have become regular police – in which case they would not have answered the question second time around – while others, having failed to do so, might have been led to ‘redefine’ their original aspiration.

Respondents were also asked to outline the *main* concern they had about becoming a PCSO at the time of joining. Despite instructions to the contrary, a significant number provided multiple, rather than single, responses to this question. In view of that, Table 1 contains data aggregated from both surveys. Despite its methodological limitations, the pattern presented here is broadly indicative of people’s concerns. Indeed, similar views were expressed to us in interviews.

Table 1 goes here

Crucially, over one third of responses to this question expressed concern about organisational acceptance (‘how police and civilian colleagues would react to me’) rather than about matters of personal safety or external acceptance.

Communication of Information about PCSOs.

A striking feature of the PCSO initiative was the speed of its deployment, something which ruled out early planning and created a number of operational and organisational problems. One of these concerned communication. The survey asked several questions about the adequacy of the information given to colleagues regarding the deployment of PCSOs. The first of these asked police and non-PCSO civilian staff to comment on the statement that 'The MPS has kept me well-informed about the reasons for employing PCSOs in London'. In December 2002 only 15% of staff at Belgravia (AB) and 17% of staff at Charing Cross (CX) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement. When the same question was asked nine months later the percentage 'agreeing' or 'strongly agreeing' had reduced slightly (14% at AB and 15% at CX). Respondents were also asked to comment on the statement that 'The MPS has kept me well-informed about the reasons for employing Security PCSOs in Westminster'. In December 2002 around one third (30% in AB and 38% in CX) 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement. Nine months later that figure had been reduced to around a quarter in both stations (26% in AB and 27% in CX). Interviews carried out at AB and CX confirmed that the great majority of respondents felt that information about the introduction of PCSOs had been communicated badly. The following comments were typical

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 (PC AB)

What were our aims? Nobody really knew. When we were posted on to the teams it was a question of 'Well, what do we do with them'? (PCSO CX)

Indeed, more than a year after their introduction to the borough, only a minority of police and civilian respondents – including a shrinking minority in CX - felt that they had a clear idea of the role of PCSOs in Westminster.

Table 2 goes here

Organisational Support for PCSOs

The survey asked personnel to respond to the statement ‘At my police station’ MPS support for PCSOs has been good’. The police and civilian view was consistent across the two surveys with around two-fifths ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’ with the statement and between one-quarter and one-third ‘disagreeing’ or ‘strongly disagreeing’. However, the response from PCSOs was markedly different. In the first survey a substantial majority (95% at AB and 85% at CX) ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ with the statement. Nine months later the figure had reduced significantly at CX (71% ‘agreeing’ or ‘strongly agreeing’) and had fallen dramatically at AB (where only 29% ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ and 35% ‘disagreed’ or ‘strongly disagreed’).

Though almost half of police and civil staff believed that institutional support for PCSOs had been good, interviews with police officers carried out around five months after initial deployment revealed concern about particular aspects of that support. One major concern was that PCSOs were handicapped by a lack of officer safety training and equipment. Indeed, several respondents felt that, such was level of the shortcoming in this area, that a PCSO was likely to be injured in the future. An Inspector put the problem into context:

They are part of the police family and though not police officers they do have a role to play ... the police officer's role is around confrontation and problem-solving. So they can't – if they are in the police family – shy away from that responsibility. Our duty, I guess, is to ensure that we somehow put a limit on what we expect their level of confrontation to be and make sure they are trained to do that ... [including] officer safety training ... It's a bit of a suck it and see thing.

However, many officers felt that the appropriate balance had not yet been achieved, one sergeant's comment summing up the views of others: 'they [PCSOs] were very poorly supported by the firm [in respect of officer safety training and equipment]'. The significant fall in the proportion of PCSOs feeling that institutional support had been 'good' over the two surveys is probably a result of their increased awareness of and exposure to these problems.

Acceptance and Integration of PCSOs

Next respondents were asked about the support PCSOs received from team colleagues.

Table 3 goes here

At CX more than a half of police/civilians and more than four-fifths of PCSOs gave an affirmative response to the statement in both surveys. At AB, however, the later survey showed a marked reduction in affirmative responses from both police/civilians and PCSOs alike. In this case less than half of PCSOs 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' with the statement and as many police/civilians 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed' with it as 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed'. The results therefore show that amongst all categories of AB staff 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 4 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. Nine months later, with the exception of police and civilians at CX, there had been a marked reduction in affirmative responses. At face value, these figures would seem to suggest a growing alienation between PCSOs and their team colleagues. However, Table 4 should be interpreted with a degree of caution. First, the high levels of affirmative answers given by PCSOs in the December 2002 survey are likely to be the product of 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. Second, in view of the problems CX and AB faced in absorbing 200 new personnel into the workforce, the fact that around half of PCSOs at both stations *still* felt fully part of the team might be considered a mark of success rather than a measure of failure. Undoubtedly, as the table suggests, much more integrative work needed to be done at both stations, but it does not necessarily justify unduly pessimistic conclusions about the prospects of further integration.

Evidence from an internal MPS survey of PCSOs undertaken at AB during November 2003 would seem to confirm that conclusion. While a third of PCSOs thought there was still 'scope for improvement', 43% described their level of integration with police officers as 'very good', a figure comparable to the 47% who expressed the view

that PCSOs at AB were 'fully accepted as part of the police team' in the September survey (see Table 4 above). In the same internal survey more than four-fifths of PCSOs at AB felt that the level of integration had improved over time. Nevertheless, almost three-quarters of PCSOs still felt that the police officers on their teams could do more to increase the level of integration by 'gaining a better understanding of the role of the PCSO' and by 'making efforts to be more friendly/supportive'. Thus, while improvements had undoubtedly occurred, cultural and structural obstacles remained. Two comments made by respondents in the September survey confirmed this point. The first, from a PCSO at CX, pointed to continuing divisions within the workforce at the station, despite the good efforts of supervisors: 'When called upon the PCs come to PCSOs help straight away. But at the station it is still us and them ... The Police Sergeants have tried to pull the team together but it's a two tier system'. The second, from a Police Inspector at CX, pointed to the structural problems posed by the sudden arrival of 16 PCSOs on his relief

My team dynamics were quickly thrown into disarray. I regularly paraded 3-4 PCs with 16 PCSOs. This imbalance is improving with time but due to the inability to fully integrate early on we still, unfortunately, manage a team of Constables and a team of PCSOs.

Morale

The deployment of PCSOs on security patrols in Westminster had a number of implications for morale. On the one hand, the morale of the PCs released from the tedium of security patrols was enhanced. On the other hand, PCs, Sergeants and Inspectors repeatedly said they spent large amounts of time dealing with disciplinary and other day-to-day problems associated with PCSOs, a point to which I return later. Thus, any benefit

in police officer time and morale accruing to the deployment of PCSOs on security patrols may well have been counter-balanced by the costs associated with day to day problem solving.

The tedium of undertaking security patrols also posed problems for the morale of PCSOs, not least because many felt they had been misled at recruitment regarding the role they would undertake. One supervising officer said

They bought into something that they did not really want. They are bored with doing security patrols. They thought they would be working in the wider community. Some are already looking to be CAD Controllers [or] First Aid, Trainers.

In the survey PCSOs were asked whether the work they were doing conformed with the expectations they held, after training, of what it would be like. While there was relatively little dissonance between the expectation and the reality of work experienced by PCSOs at CX, the situation at AB – where security patrols were at their most tedious - was very different. In December 2002 more than four-fifths of PCSOs at AB had believed their work to conform with the expectations they had of it after training. Nine months later, less than one-third felt that to be the case. Subsequently, various steps were taken to deal with problems of PCSO boredom in Westminster such as deploying them at film premiers and at the ‘postcard sites’ frequented by tourists. Following the introduction of around a dozen Community PCSOs into the borough towards the end of the research, the possibility of the Community PCSOs role being ‘shared around’ was discussed. However, by fudging the specificity and skill requirements of the two roles, the likelihood was that this solution would merely generate ambiguity and confusion.

Questions about morale were also included in the internal survey of PCSOs administered at AB in November 2003. A majority of respondents indicated that an improvement had occurred in their morale since initial deployment. More than four-fifths of PCSOs declared themselves to be 'happy in the job'. Three-quarters stated that their 'morale at the moment' was either excellent or good', only 19% considering it to be 'low'. However, when asked about the general morale of their PCSO colleagues, respondents were much more cautious, only 10% declaring it to be 'good', 29% considering it 'satisfactory' and 43% regarding it as 'low'. Not surprisingly, when PCSOs were asked to list aspects of the work which they liked least common responses included 'the repetitive nature of security patrols', 'station security at DP (Paddington)' and 'the provision of security at New Scotland Yard'. Aspects of the work they liked most included joint patrols, engaging with the homeless, gathering intelligence, combating anti-social behaviour, mobile patrols, providing public reassurance and crime prevention. Most of the responses in this category related to tasks in which PCSOs engage with or assist the public.

Perceived Quality of PCSOs

There was a marked change in the way staff perceived the quality of PCSO recruits between the two surveys. In December 2002 around a quarter of the personnel at each station agreed or strongly agreed that 'the quality of staff recruited as PCSOs has been good', while around two-fifths disagreed or strongly disagreed. In the second survey more than two thirds of personnel at each station disagreed or strongly disagreed that the quality of PCSO recruits was good, a further fifth opting to 'neither agree nor disagree'.

Indeed, the proportions giving an affirmative answer to this question fell to only 11% at CX and 5% at AB.

Interestingly, a relationship was noticeable between the rank of respondents and their assessment of the quality of PCSOs. In the December 2002 survey around one half of PCs rated PCSOs poorly while Sergeants and Inspectors consistently rated them more highly. This pattern was repeated in the later survey. Table 5 aggregates the responses from both surveys to confirm that there is a consistent relationship between the respondent's rank and the assessment made. Interestingly, Police Inspectors ranked the quality of PCSOs more highly than PCSOs did themselves.

Table 5 goes here

During the course of interviews, police were asked to estimate what proportion of PCSOs might be capable of becoming regular police officers – given that almost a half of all PCSOs gave that as their main reason for joining. While estimates of the proportion of PCSOs capable of becoming regulars varied from 'between 5% and 10%' to 'as high as 90%' most interviewees – even those who rated PCSO's as generally 'poor' – believed that around a quarter were capable of making the transition. This issue is reconsidered later in the context of minority ethnic PCSOs seeking such transfer.

Anticipated Impact of PCSOs

In interviews police constable's views about PCSOs were, inevitably, linked to ideas about their perceived impact on officer workload. Many resented having to take statements on behalf of PCSOs – something which generated extra work for them – and

felt that the latter should be able to report crime directly, rather than have to summon a police officer in order to do so. They also feared that PCSOs might be inclined to over-report trivial offences, thereby generating jobs that only PCs would be able to deal with. Evidence on this was scanty, though one senior officer said

I did expect a lot more silly calls coming in here - [such as] ‘there’s two people pushing and shoving in Whitehall’ – that we would never have known about or allocated a resource to. Actually, it hasn’t happened

Table 6 examined the perceived impact of PCSOs on police officer workload.

Table 6 goes here

Predictably, in both surveys more than 90% of PCSOs agreed with this statement. At CX slightly more than two-fifths of police/civilian respondents gave affirmative answers in the September survey - only slightly fewer than in December - while at AB there was a substantial increase in the proportion of police/civilians giving affirmative responses in the later survey (61% compared to 35% previously). Overall, then, a significant majority of police officers and a substantial majority of PCSOs believed that introduction of PCSOs in Westminster reduced some of the police’s routine workload and released police officers to work on other duties.

Finally, respondents were asked whether they felt the deployment of PCSOs would help to raise the level of public reassurance in Westminster. Table 7 provides a breakdown of answers from both December and September surveys according to police station.

Table 7 goes here

Table 7 shows only a slight reduction in the proportion of affirmative responses given over the course of the two surveys. Placing the responses to this question alongside those contained in Tables 5 and 6 would indicate that while many respondents had reservations about the quality of PCSOs, the majority considered them able both to release police officers from mundane duties and to help enhance levels of public reassurance.

2. ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

This Section supplements the previous one by focusing on three particular organisational issues relating to PCSOs: their training, their supervision, and their diverse composition.

Training

At the time of the research PCSOs undertook a three week training course before undergoing further, borough-based, training. The decision to allocate three weeks initial training reflected both financial constraints and the limited legal powers which would be exercised by PCSOs. A consultant's review commissioned by the MPS in summer 2003 concluded that the training programme was of too short a duration and that, in certain key respects, its content did 'not appear to be sufficient for purpose' (Bellos 2003. 12.10).

This view was endorsed by the interviewees. One recurring concern was the inadequacy of training in relation to PCSO powers. An Inspector expressed it as follows:

We bodged our way through confusing instructions, attempting to comply with poorly thought out plans to allow individual officers to become authorised to issue tickets for offences that weren't even enacted at the time.

Various other shortcomings were noted in respect of training. First, since the course lacked assessment, there was a limited evidence-base upon which judgments could be made about the competence of individual trainees. This would be likely to pose difficulties in the event of the MPS wishing to discipline or dismiss a PCSO. It could also raise liability issues should a PCSO or a member of the public be injured or put at risk as a result of a PCSO's failure to act 'competently'. A second problem concerned the lack of support for supervisors. Not only would they have benefited from training in the powers, roles and responsibilities of PCSOs. They also required guidance on how they, as police, officers should deal with discipline and personnel issues arising amongst PCSOs who, as 'police staff', were subject to civil staff procedures.

A third issue concerned diversity training. Bellos (2003) notes that, while the training addressed equality and diversity issues in some detail, it did so in a 'theoretical academic format' rather than focusing on 'desired outcomes based on realistic scenarios that relate to the ways that PCSOs must undertake their duties and roles' (Bellos 2003: 12.6). Training observations carried out during this research confirmed that point. The students observed in one session had either failed to read or failed to understand the workbook on human rights – an impenetrable legalistic document – that had been sent out as pre-course material. Failure to provide PCSOs with appropriate knowledge about diversity - and with the associated skills that they might use on the streets and in the police station when confronting issues of diversity – created some problems. The following comment was made by a local authority warden regarding the initial arrival of PCSOs on the streets of Camden, the other site covered by the research:

We kind of got the impression that they had been chucked in at the deep end ... that they hadn't had the training that they could have had ... When they first

started ... their language out on the streets for this day and age ... It just wasn't 'PC', the things they were calling people. We brought it to the attention of the Sector Team and it has been addressed. We don't have these issues now.

Though this example relates to matters on the street, an issue of equal concern is how effectively training addressed the use of inappropriate language or the taking of inappropriate action *inside* the organisation. During the research some incidents were reported in which PCSOs had allegedly used racist language. Bellos (2003) cites one such case in which the alleged perpetrator, when asked why he had committed the offence, stated that he had understood the diversity training, but thought it related only to interactions with members of the public not to interactions with colleagues!

Fourthly, one measure of the effectiveness of a training programme is its capacity to inculcate the values, attitudes and standards of conduct appropriate to a disciplined organisation. The initial training programme had serious shortcomings in this regard. Soon after the commencement of the research, police officers began to relate disciplinary problems concerning PCSOs to the research team. At first, these were taken with 'a pinch of salt' – the product of disgruntled police officers complaining about the latest disruption to the status quo. However, it soon became apparent that a small minority of PCSOs were turning in late for shifts, failing to report sick, failing to wear the proper uniform, complaining about beat assignments and the like. Inspectors and sergeants reported that they were spending considerable amounts of time resolving relatively minor breaches of discipline committed by a small number of people. On occasions, when carrying out patrol observations, incidents of low level misconduct, such as PCSOs taking unauthorized coffee breaks were observed. In one instance, an argument was observed in a Camden police station between two minority ethnic PCSOs after one

refused to go out on patrol with the other. Each demanded to see a personal representative. Two and-a-half hours later, when the representative could not be found, they were placed at opposite ends of the front counter. They remained working there for a week while the matter was resolved.

The critical point to be made here is that a minority of PCSOs did not so much lack discipline as fail to understand how a disciplined organisation, such as the police, works. This issue was not addressed at initial training. Two comments are particularly apt in this regard

There was no discipline [in the training course], a lack of respect [towards instructors] which set a bad precedent for people entering a disciplined organisation (PCSO)

Because [training] was so short, they still have the values and beliefs they had in whatever jobs they were doing before. With policemen you go to Hendon for 18 weeks and somehow, subconsciously, you implant the values and beliefs that police officers ... must have. When they come out of Hendon, most know what's right and what's wrong: where the lines are. The PCSOs ... are desperately trying to learn the right and wrong ways of doing things (Police Inspector)

Supervision

In Camden, a decision was made that PCSOs should be attached to Sector Teams and allocated a dedicated supervising Sergeant. This proved to be an effective decision as supervisors were able to identify the short and long term needs of PCSOs and make plans to meet them. Much early emphasis was also placed on debriefs. As a supervising sergeant from Holborn Police Station put it:

I want to know what they have done, what problems they have had, where they have been and who they have seen. For one thing, it shows that you are interested in what they have done... and it gives them the opportunity to ask questions that they might not otherwise ask

By contrast, the repeated influx of large numbers of PCSOs into AB and CX posed major problems for supervision and appraisal. Comments such as ‘I am supervising thirty this afternoon ... it’s impossible’; ‘supervision really is just head-counting’; and ‘I have found it difficult to put names to faces and get to grips with their shoulder numbers’ were commonplace. The lack of available sergeants at these stations led to supervision being delegated to Acting Sergeants, many of whom had also only just completed probation: as one respondent put it, a case of ‘the blind leading the blind’. Where possible, routine oversight of PCSOs was undertaken by PCs, many of whom were still probationers. Moreover, it was not only PCSOs who went unsupervised but also PCs:

There aren’t enough PCs to do mentoring. When they came here it was shown on the duties that a PC would be ‘walking’ a PCSO but in reality it never materialised because the PC had been posted elsewhere ... if you as a supervisor have twenty PCSOs and five PCs plus the paperwork you have very little time to check all of your personnel. It is the PCs who get neglected . (Acting Sergeant)

Being ‘high maintenance’ - a phrase that was used repeatedly by supervisors - PCSOs require sustained help if they are to be effective and remain accountable for their actions. For this reason it is a matter of concern that in the Belgravia Survey almost three-quarters of PCSOs claimed never to have patrolled with a supervising officer and around a half described the level of supervision received as ‘poor’.

Not surprisingly, as a result of the pressure of numbers, there were difficulties with the PCSO appraisal system at both AB and CX. By May 2003 only about 30% of the 3-6 month appraisal forms at AB had been completed. AT CX the situation was even worse, over half of PCSOs waiting to receive a 3-6 month appraisal and 30% still not having had the 0-3 month appraisal. Under the appraisal scheme, PCSOs are marked as

'2', '3' or '4' (4, the lowest score, being used to 'flag' problem PCSOs). In the light of continued supervision problems, the MPS 'considered it reasonable' that the vast majority of PCSOs were being scored at '3'. However, this statement is open to two interpretations: either that, in the light of limited supervision, PCSOs have done well to achieve a score of '3; or, that in the light of limited supervision, minimal thought and effort is being put into appraisal. Neither situation is very satisfactory. Later in the year, with a change of management at AB, the situation had improved significantly. More than half of respondents in the Belgravia Survey stated that they had been assessed at the correct intervals and by October only 28 PCSO appraisals were recorded as overdue (Belgravia Monthly Management Report October 2003, p. 18). However, in the Belgravia Survey four fifths of respondents also said that the reporting officer had never patrolled with them and almost three-quarters thought the appraisal system poor.

Diversity

Though PCSO recruitment is linked to the 'public reassurance' agenda contained within the police reform programme (HMIC 2004; Home Office 2004a) in London it is also linked to a second agenda – the drive to make police organisations more truly representative of the diverse communities they serve (Home Office 2003). This agenda is particularly crucial for the MPS, given the organisation's repeated failure to attract recruits from London's diverse communities. An analysis of 2025 PCSO applications processed during the year 1st April 2002 to 31st March 2003 revealed considerable success in tackling this problem (Johnston forthcoming). This study showed that the 25% target for minority ethnic PCSO recruitment outlined in *Priorities for Excellence 2003-4*

(MPS 2004) was surpassed (with a figure of 35% in the sample) while the 29% target for female PCSO recruitment was almost met (with a figure of 26% in the sample). In addition, the median age of PCSO recruits (around 34 years) was significantly higher than that for regular police officers thus providing the organisation with a new (mature) range of skills and life experiences.

However, diversity is not only a matter of quantitative 'head counts' (Bellos 2004). It has also to be considered in an organisational context. There is strong evidence to suggest that rapid implementation led to a relaxation - albeit an unofficial one - of PCSO entry standards during the early stages of recruitment (Johnston forthcoming). This view was widely held by officers involved in the process, one summing it up as follows:

Yes, I think early on there was 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 (Member PCSO Project Team) .

One consequence of this process was the recruitment of a small number of PCSOs – both white and minority ethnic - who were, clearly, unsuited to the role. For example, one concern expressed by some police officers in Westminster was the inability of a few PCSOs – notably some of those whose first language was not English – to communicate effectively over the radio. This, it was rightly suggested, posed hazards for the public, the PCSO and the PCSO's colleagues alike. What is striking about this example is not merely that the organisation recruited individuals unable to communicate at the minimum standard laid down in the PCSO role specification, but that, having done so, it offered those concerned no institutional support to address the problem. The situation 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 ill-suited to the role. Poor support structures, including the shortcomings in supervision and training described earlier, exacerbated this situation. Minority ethnic PCSOs were doubly disadvantaged in this regard. On the one hand, some were in need of significant institutional support. On the other hand, all were highly ‘visible’ – and thus more easily defined as ‘problems’ – in an organisation unused to integrating minority ethnic personnel. The result was the plethora of ‘disciplinary’ referred to previously when, at one stage, a third of all minority ethnic PCSOs at AB were on disciplinary charges.³

A number of lessons may be drawn from this discussion of diversity. First, it is important that mechanisms are put in place to identify and exploit the skills and abilities that individual PCSOs bring to the organisation. This is not merely an issue about ethnic and linguistic diversity. The skills and experiences that mature recruits possess also need to be identified and recognised by the organisation. As one senior officer said

One of the bits of feedback that we have had recently from the PCSOs is that it would be ideal ... if the PCs took into account their age and their previous life experiences ... Street duties teams have come in and said to the PCSOs, ‘Get the kettle on then,’ ... they are talking to highly experienced and competent people and we do not really do our best at recognizing that.

Second, it is crucial that minority ethnic PCSOs *as a group* are not labelled a potential problem by members of the organisation already sensitized to the real difficulties that a small number of *individual* PCSOs may be experiencing. In a situation where relatively large numbers of minority ethnic personnel are entering the organisation for the first time, this is a danger that needs to be anticipated and neutralised. Third, there is the issue of minority ethnic PCSOs who aspire to become regular police officers. There is already

evidence to suggest that they are doing less well than their white colleagues in the ‘fast track’ process that leads to recruitment. The danger is that a particularly unbalanced form of two-tier policing might emerge over time in which a predominantly white, male, regular police service works alongside a body of PCSOs made up, disproportionately, of female and minority ethnic personnel. In this situation the MPS may need to maintain a ‘balancing act’. On the one hand, it may want to provide some additional institutional support for minority ethnic PCSOs wishing to enter the regular police service. On the other hand, by so doing, it will not want to denigrate the crucial role that the ethnic minority PCSO – more visible and more accessible to the public than the regular police officer - can play in the community.

3. WIDER CONCERNS

At this point it is important to place these findings in the context of wider concerns. In order to do this, I return to my earlier claim that an understanding of the full implications of the PCSO initiative requires an exploration of the link between two, seemingly unconnected, areas of debate: on the one hand debates about police organisational change; and on the other hand debates about security governance. This issue can best be introduced through further consideration of the ‘extended family’ analogy.

Though the analogy of the ‘extended family’ has been central to recent debate about the future direction of police reform in England and Wales the term remains surprisingly ambiguous. Sometimes, for example, as for the purposes of this paper, the extended model is used to refer to the integration of different roles and specialisms *within* the police. Such an intra-organisational view may be found in the recent White Paper

We have already done much to develop the extended police family. We have, for example, developed good practice in the recruitment and management of volunteers. Police officers are now increasingly supported by community support officers (CSOs), special constables and police staff such as scenes of crimes officers, investigators, communications centre staff and case handlers in criminal justice units. (Home Office 2004a: 81-2)

On other occasions, however, those employing the analogy invoke a wider, inter-organisational, field of security.

The term ‘extended policing family’ is one that is becoming more common since the Police Reform Act 2002. Whilst there is no universally agreed definition of this term, it is commonly understood to include police officers, special constables, CSOs, local authority wardens and private sector security patrols (HMIC 2004: para 7.6. p. 138)

To add to the confusion these two views are sometimes conflated. Thus, having invoked an inter-organisational notion of the ‘wider *policing* family’, the White Paper proceeds to conceive its membership - ‘special constables and police support volunteers’ (Home Office 2004: 87) – exclusively in intra-organisational (*police*) terms. That same ambiguity is replicated in the proposals for neighbourhood-based delivery of security services. Here the White Paper tells us in successive sentences that neighbourhood policing teams will involve officers, CSOs, specials, volunteers and local authority wardens; and that they will comprise only ‘fully trained officers ... working with CSOs’ (Home Office 2004a: 7).

The ambiguous character of the ‘extended family’ analogy is no mere accident. Such ambiguity has to be understood in the context of an on-going debate within senior police circles about who should govern ‘community policing’ (now re-cast as ‘neighbourhood policing’) under conditions of security pluralisation? Though several

solutions have been proposed, it is Sir Ian Blair's intra-organisational version of the 'extended family' model that has, for the moment, gained Home Office approval. This version tries to apply an exclusively 'in-house' solution (the deployment of PCSOs) to a problem which has significant inter-organisational dimensions (including how to govern the discrete nodes that constitute security pluralisation). Predictably, the solution contains several inherent flaws – not least that uncertainty about its future funding may eventually rekindle the same controversies about police accountability that dominated British local politics during the 1980s (see Johnston 2003).

This proposed solution to security pluralisation - effectively a major programme of auxiliarisation - diversifies the police workforce and, by so doing, produces an ironic consequence: enhanced plurality within the police. In effect, the plan is to resolve the dangers apparently residing in plurality at the inter-organisational level by instituting plurality at the intra-organisational level. Now whatever the inherent difficulties of this solution, its endorsement by government confirms that auxiliarisation *will* comprise a key strand of state policing policy for the foreseeable future. For that reason the intra-organisational dimension has to be taken seriously in debates about security governance.

So far, writers on security governance have focused almost exclusively on the inter-organisational dimension: the question of how best to govern relations between discrete security nodes in order to bring about effective, just and democratic outcomes (Bayley and Shearing 1996; Johnston and Shearing 2003; Wood 2004; Wood *et. al.* forthcoming). However, in order fully to explore the dynamics of nodal governance in any given security context, it is also necessary to explore relations *within*, as well as between, discrete security nodes. Though there is insufficient space to develop that

argument here, two things may be said. First, this observation applies not just to the internal dynamics of police organisations but to those of all security nodes. Second, intra-organisational analysis is likely to show that the internal cohesiveness (the integration) of security nodes varies according to given conditions. This, in turn, suggests the need for further conceptual work to be carried out on the constituent properties of nodes. Here, several theoretical questions immediately arise, such as what conditions have to pertain in order for a node to be able to ‘act’ in accordance with its objectives? And how is internal resistance to action to be conceptualized within the nodal framework?

The insistence that we should be mindful of intra-organisational factors when exploring the future role of police organisations in security governance suggests that auxiliarisation needs to be taken seriously. This is particularly so in an environment dominated by ‘police reform’. A particularly important question arising from this paper is what implications the deployment of a rapidly expanding cadre of PCSO auxiliaries might have for police reform, in general, and for the better policing of Britain’s diverse communities, in particular?

The inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence (Macpherson 1999) was crucial in shaping the policy agenda about how to police Britain’s diverse communities more justly and more effectively. Indeed, Bowling (1999) has suggested that the Inquiry’s seventy recommendations were, arguably, the most sweeping set of proposals in the history of British policing. The Macpherson Report was significant not only because it had a major impact on police policy and practice, but also because it placed the thorny question of police culture back on the reform agenda. Commentators on police culture

have usually considered it in a negative light. Indeed, in Charman's (2004) research only two out of twenty-five statements describing the attributes of police culture were judged to be positive. Of particular concern in the aftermath of the Lawrence Inquiry was the question of how racial prejudice in police culture (see Reiner 2000: 98-100) was related to entrenched structures of 'institutionalised racism'. Recently, however, certain assumptions about the supposedly entrenched nature of police culture have rightly been challenged. These include the view that police culture is unchanging (Chan 1997); that it is passively absorbed by officers (Shearing and Ericson 1991); and that it is monolithic (Chan 1997; Reiner 2000; Waddington 1999).

These criticisms are important because they suggest, contrary to some traditional views, that it may be possible to subject police culture to a degree of meaningful reform. Given that possibility, it is reasonable to ask whether the recruitment of substantial numbers of female and – most notably in the MPS - minority ethnic PCSOs could have any remedial impact on the cultural values and associated operational practices of an organisation composed traditionally of male, white recruits?⁴ In short, might auxiliaryisation, by diversifying the composition of the police, have any positive implications for bringing about more sensitive policing within diverse communities?

Such a question might seem naïve. After all, previous research has questioned the impact of demographic factors on police cultural typologies. For example, commentators in both Britain (Holdaway 1996) and North America (Sherman 1983) have drawn attention to the fact that black police officers are as likely to hold negative stereotypes about sections of the black community as are white officers; and there is no evidence of significant differences in policing styles between male and female officers (Reiner 2000).

Also, there is an abundant literature on the extent to which probationers, special constables and others come to be assimilated into traditional ‘canteen culture’ by their more experienced peers (Gill and Mawby 1990; Jones 1980; Young 1990). On the other hand, the very size and scope of the auxiliarisation programme might be expected to constitute a force for change, not least in an organisational environment where issues of diversity are already on the policy agenda. The simple fact is that, in due course, PCSOs will not only comprise around 20 per cent of all police personnel – rather more if Police Federation suspicions about PCSO recruitment compromising future numbers of sworn police are to be believed - they will also constitute the ‘public face of street-level policing’: the only ‘police’ with whom most members of the public are likely to have regular face-to-face contact in the future. In that sense, auxiliarisation will have an impact, whether for better or worse, on both police and public.

Reiner suggests that meaningful change in police culture demands ‘a reshaping of the basic character of the police’s role as a result of wider social transformation’ (Reiner 2000: 106). Being conceived as a response to the problems of security pluralisation and being connected to much wider programmes of auxiliarisation within public sector organisations, the PCSO initiative is certainly ‘the result of a wider social transformation’. Whether the initiative contributes to, or is part of, a reshaping of the police’s role is, however, more open to debate. The deployment of PCSOs within neighbourhood policing teams⁵ certainly offers genuine potential for street-level policing to undergo significant change. Here the aim is to deliver localised policing, using intelligence-led methods, while remaining sensitive to the needs of diverse neighbourhoods. In that regard – and notwithstanding rightful claims that the wider field

of security governance, rather than the narrow field of police, offers the best prospects for cultural reform (Wood 2004) – the neighbourhood model does have the potential to facilitate the development of persuasive and less-punitive policing measures, such as those more commonly associated with the institutions of civil society.

Unfortunately the prospect that the deployment of PCSOs might facilitate and encourage less-confrontational forms of street-level compliance are already being undermined by official policy. The discussion document on ‘modernising police powers’ (Home Office 2004b) proposed that PCSOs be given new powers to direct traffic, to enforce byelaws, to deal with begging and to search persons they have detained. Furthermore, at the Police Federation Conference in May 2005, the Home Secretary would not rule out the prospect of extending PCSO powers even further. The problem with these proposals is two-fold. First, we have very little information about how PCSO’s use the limited powers they *already* possess. Second, and more seriously, it is very likely that an extension of PCSO powers will detract from their capacity to exercise non-coercive compliance. 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).

It is too early to say whether the deployment of a large cadre of demographically diverse PCSOs can help to facilitate the better policing of Britain’s diverse communities. As yet, there is no empirical information on how they have engaged with some of the more negative aspects of police culture: on whether they have assimilated these aspects, adapted to them, or resisted their seductions. The point is merely that this ‘solution’ to

the problem of security pluralisation engenders a reconfiguration of the police organisation that – with appropriate direction and support - is at least compatible with some of the objectives of a progressive reform agenda. For that prospect to be realised, however, the various police governance agendas need to be ‘joined up’. As yet, there is little evidence of this happening. A striking feature of this research was that while the MPS is committed both to implementing the post Macpherson diversity reforms and to diversifying police recruitment through the PCSO initiative, there is little sign of the two agendas being connected. Should that continue to be the case, the result will be another missed opportunity.

*Table 1. What was your main concern about becoming a PCSO at the time you joined?
(Please tick one box only)*

	%
Concern about my personal safety	19
Concern arising from negative media coverage of PCSOs	15
Concern about how police and civilian colleagues would react to me	34
Concern about how the public would react to me	16
Other concerns	3
I had no concerns	13

Table 2. 'From the information I have been given by the MPS I have a clear idea of the role of Security PCSOs in Westminster'.

%	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	28	38	29	29	41	21	2	2
CX police/civilians	44	34	21	32	33	34	2	0

Table 3. 'At my police station support for PCSOs from team colleagues has been good'.

%	Agree or Strongly Agree		Neither Agree Nor Disagree		Disagree or Strongly Disagree		Don't Know	
	Dec	Sep	Dec	Sep	Dec	Sep	Dec	Sep

	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003	2002	2003
AB police/civilians	69	38	14	21	10	38	7	12
CX police/civilians	56	58	23	15	14	24	7	2
AB PCSOs	92	47	5	35	0	18	3	0
CX PCSOs	84	89	12	11	4	8	0	0

Table 4. '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 5. 'So far, the quality of staff recruited as PCSOs has been good'. (Answers by rank of respondent).

%	All	Police Constables	Civilians (Police Staff)	Police Sergeants	Police Inspectors	PCSOs
Agree or strongly agree	19	7	14	26	53	31
Neither						

agree nor disagree	26	24	26	26	31	28
Disagree or strongly disagree	52	64	54	45	16	39
Don't know	4	5	5	4	1	3

Table 6. 'The introduction of PCSOs in Westminster reduces some of the police's routine workload thus releasing officers to work on other duties'.

%	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	35	61	17	7	43	24	5	7
CX police/civilians	49	43	19	17	30	39	2	1
AB PCSOs	95	94	0	6	5	0	0	0
CX PCSOs	92	93	8	3	0	4	0	0

Table 7. 'PCSOs will help to raise the level of public reassurance in Westminster'.

%	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 (all respondents)	60	55	18	17	16	26	5	2
CX (all respondents)	58	53	17	21	23	20	2	5

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² The surveys were administered in December 2002 (3 months after initial deployment) and September 2003 (a year after initial deployment) to PCSOs, PCs, Sergeants, Relief Inspectors and relevant police staff. The first survey resulted in 213 returns (36% response rate) and the second 135 returns (25% response rate). Westminster was chosen because it had, by far, the largest allocation of PCSOs. (NB The term 'civil staff', rather than 'police staff', is used in the research, the latter term having been adopted by police organisations in England and Wales only after the commencement of the research).

³ Significantly, the Black Police Association was critical not of these charges having been made – on the contrary, the Association believed all to have been justified – but of the fact that a small number of unsuitable candidates had been recruited in the first place.

⁴ The potential impact of PCSO age (and consequent life experience) on police culture should also not be discounted. The age profile of PCSO recruits is substantially ‘older’ than that of regular police. In the sample 36% of PCSO recruits were aged under 30; 34% were aged 30-40; and 28% were aged over 40.

⁵ In the MPS, where neighbourhood policing has been applied across all boroughs, such teams usually consist of one sergeant, two constables and four PCSOs (or, in larger teams, some pro-rate combination of the same).