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**Local Initiative, Central Oversight, Provincial Perspective: Governing Police Forces
in Nineteenth-Century Leeds**

David Churchill

[This article is forthcoming in Historical Research.]

This article examines police administration as a branch of urban government, based on a case-study of Leeds between 1815 and 1900. Making extensive use of local government and police records, it takes a longer-term view of ‘reform’ than most existing studies, and privileges the more routine aspects of everyday governance. It thus provides an original exploration of central-local government relations, as well as conflict and negotiation between distinct bodies of self-government within the locality. Previous studies have rightly emphasised that urban police governance was primarily a local responsibility, yet this article also stresses the growing influence of central state oversight and an extra-local, provincial perspective, both of which modified the grip of localism on nineteenth-century government.

**Local Initiative, Central Oversight, Provincial Perspective: Governing Police Forces
in Nineteenth-Century Leeds¹**

David Churchill

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The governance of nineteenth-century police forces has long attracted scholarly attention. Many early accounts – habitually referred to as ‘Whiggish’ histories – tended to portray the provincial forces as ineffectual; lacking sufficient oversight from Whitehall, their potential was dashed under the more-or-less incompetent and corrupt leadership of unaccountable local magistrates and penny-pinching town councillors.² By contrast, subsequent police historians have offered a more nuanced picture, by demonstrating that local authorities were often instrumental in pioneering new forms of police organisation; rather than opposed to police reform per se, it is now recognised that local governors were anxious primarily to retain control over local forces (and the local resources they consumed). Furthermore, the reputation of the provincial police has been somewhat rehabilitated by these sympathetic scholars; provincial forces were often adequate responses to local problems, rather than pale imitations of the centrally-directed Metropolitan Police. In these respects, police historians have contributed to a broader reassessment of the nineteenth-century state, which emphasises the vitality of local

¹ I would like to thank Paul Lawrence and Ros Crone for their support during this research, and Chris Williams for providing valuable feedback on an earlier draft of this paper.

² See especially T.A. Critchley, *A History of the Police in England and Wales* (revised edition, 1978), pp.64-68, 90-92, 129-130.

governance and its capacity to adapt to changing times.³ This view is often (though not always) complemented by the contention that the Victorian state was above all a local state, and that central government intrusion into local affairs made only modest progress before the turn of the twentieth century.⁴ Thus, according to Philip Harling, ‘if it is in any sense accurate to talk about a late-Victorian “revolution in government”, this was emphatically a revolution carried out through local means, and chiefly for local reasons.’⁵

Despite its engagement with such wider historiography, much work on the history of police governance is undermined by excessive chronological or topical specificity. In particular, much of the literature remains preoccupied with the moment of reform. Historians have long been aware that the transition from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ police masked significant continuities in practice, and almost every local study has borne this point out.⁶ Given that such works call the short-term significance of reform into question,

³ For a cogent summary of this transition, see S. Devereaux, ‘The historiography of the English state during “the long eighteenth century”: part I – decentralised perspectives’, *History Compass*, vii (2009), pp.746-48. Prominent works in this field include: P. Mandler, ‘The making of the new poor law redivivus’, *Past and Present*, cxvii (1987), pp.131-157; D. Eastwood, *Governing Rural England: Tradition and Transformation in Local Government 1780-1840* (Oxford, 1994); D. Eastwood, *Government and Community in the English Provinces, 1700-1870* (Basingstoke, 1997), chapter 5; D. Philips and R.D. Storch, *Policing Provincial England, 1829-1856: the Politics of Reform* (1999), especially chapters 3 and 5.

⁴ Devereaux, ‘English state’, pp.749-751; P. Thane, ‘Government and society in England and Wales, 1750-1914’, in *The Cambridge Social History of Britain, 1750-1950*, ed. F.M.L. Thompson (3 vols., Cambridge, 1990), iii. pp.1-2; M. Goldsmith and J. Garrard, ‘Urban governance: some reflections’, in *Urban Governance: Britain and Beyond since 1750*, eds R.J. Morris and R.H. Trainor (Aldershot, 2000), pp.17-18; P. Harling, ‘The centrality of locality: the local state, local democracy, and local consciousness in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Journal of Victorian Culture*, ix (2004), pp.216-234; P. Harling, ‘The powers of the Victorian state’, in *Liberty and Authority in Victorian Britain*, ed. P. Mandler (Oxford, 2006), pp.43-47.

⁵ Harling, ‘Centrality of locality’, pp.217-18. The phrase ‘revolution in government’ refers to the debate which followed Oliver MacDonagh’s classic article: ‘The nineteenth-century revolution in government: a reappraisal’, *The Historical Journal*, i (1958), pp.52-67.

⁶ See E.C. Midwinter, *Social Administration in Lancashire 1830-1860: Poor Law, Public Health and Police* (Manchester, 1969), pp.151-52, 156-57; D. Philips, *Crime and Authority in Victorian England: the Black Country 1835-60* (1977), pp.59-61; J. Field, ‘Police, power and community in a provincial English town: Portsmouth, 1815-1875’, in *Policing and Punishment in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. V. Bailey (1981), pp.47-50; R. Swift, ‘Urban policing in early Victorian England, 1835-86: a reappraisal’, *History*, lxxiii (1988), pp.217-18. More broadly, see especially J. Styles, ‘The emergence of the police – explaining police reform in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England’, *The British Journal of Criminology*, xxvii (1987), pp.16-18.

it is surprising that few historians have analysed police administration over an extended period.⁷ Admittedly, recent studies of the police labour force have adopted a longer-term perspective, which is most welcome. However, for the historian of local government, these studies are unduly restrictive, dealing with the management of men rather than the governance of the police more broadly.⁸ As a result of these patterns of scholarship, much attention has been lavished upon rather obvious, organisational changes, at the expense of more subtle shifts in everyday governance.

The present article seeks to remedy this problem, by providing an analysis of police governance in a single locality (Leeds) over a rather longer period, from the formation of the night watch in 1815, to the turn of the twentieth century. One consequence of this extended scope is a necessarily selective analysis. What follows does not evaluate the ‘quality’ of urban governance and the social status of the political elite,⁹ nor does it assess how changes in administration impacted upon policing in practice.¹⁰ Instead, this article focuses on the balance of localism and centralisation in nineteenth-century police governance, drawing chiefly on the records of the Leeds Police and Watch

⁷ The term ‘reform’ has largely been applied narrowly to refer to the formation of the new police. Key studies include: D. Philips, “‘A new engine of power and authority’: the institutionalisation of law-enforcement in England 1780-1830”, in *Crime and the Law: The Social History of Crime in Western Europe since 1500*, eds V.A.C. Gatrell, B. Lenman and G. Parker (1980), pp.155-89; C. Emsley, ‘The Bedfordshire Police 1840-1856: a case study in the working of the Rural Constabulary Act’, *Midland History*, vii (1982), pp.73-92; Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*; C.A. Williams, ‘Expediency, authority and duplicity: reforming Sheffield’s police, 1832-40’, in *Urban Governance*, pp.115-127.

⁸ See especially H. Shpayer-Makov, *The Making of a Policeman: a Social History of a Labour Force in Metropolitan London, 1829-1914* (Aldershot, 2002); D. Taylor, *Policing the Victorian Town: the Development of the Police in Middlesbrough c.1840-1914* (Basingstoke, 2002), chapters 3 and 7.

⁹ Further on this theme, see E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (1973); D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: the Structure of Politics in Victorian Cities* (new edition, 1979), chapter 6; J. Garrard, *Leadership and Power in Victorian Industrial Towns 1830-80* (Manchester, 1983), chapters 2-3; R.H. Trainor, ‘The “decline” of British urban governance since 1850: a reassessment’, in *Urban Governance*, pp.28-46.

¹⁰ For an assessment of everyday policing in nineteenth-century Leeds, see D.C. Churchill, ‘Crime, policing and control in Leeds, c.1830-1890’ (unpublished PhD thesis, The Open University, 2012), chapter 3.

Committee. Of course, such local sources do not capture fully the role of the central state in police organisation; however, they do register points at which the decisions of central administrators impacted substantively on local affairs, as well as providing a fairly consistent evidential basis on which to assess changing patterns of police governance at the local level.

This article is divided into four parts. The first underlines the predominance of local governing elites in nineteenth-century police administration, by extending beyond the moment of reform to the mundane world of everyday police administration. The second further emphasises the importance of local self-government by analysing the relationship between centres and localities – first between Leeds and London, and then within the borough itself. By contrast, the remainder of the article highlights the limits of local autonomy. The third section argues that historians have rather underplayed the role of statute, and the central state more broadly, in shaping police administration in the localities. Furthermore, the final part interrogates the outlook of local governors themselves, by exploring connections with their counterparts elsewhere. This reveals that local authorities did not operate in a vacuum, and that exchange of information and expertise between boroughs allowed external conditions (besides purely local circumstances) to influence the form of local governing initiative.

The administration of police was primarily a local responsibility in the nineteenth century, and the initiative and inventiveness of local governors was the principal source

of innovation. Time and again, one sees local governors in Leeds anticipating subsequent reforming measures issuing from the centre. The most obvious example was the formation of the night watch in 1815, established by a private act of Parliament.¹¹ Amongst other things, this law created a body of ‘Watchmen or Patroles’, and empowered local magistrates to levy a watch rate to fund it. Within two years, the force comprised 38 night watchmen and 16 ‘patroles’.¹² Thus, twenty years prior to the first generalised borough police statute, Leeds had already equipped itself with a substantial preventative police force.

In the decades that followed, the borough magistrates responsible for police administration displayed a recurrent appetite for organisational reform. By the 1820s, they saw fit to hire additional salaried officers to help direct the day police in the winter months: an ‘Assistant Constable’ was appointed in 1826, and two more were in office by 1828.¹³ Following a shocking robbery upon the Mayor one evening in 1833, an additional force of ‘patroles’ was established to safeguard the streets at dusk, ensuring continual surveillance in the evening before the night watch took to their beats.¹⁴ Moreover, the justices recognised the need to make periodic additions to the force, to keep pace with rapid urbanisation and population growth. By 1836, the watch had grown substantially: 12 inspectors and 71 watchmen patrolled the streets for 34 weeks of the year, reduced to

¹¹ Leeds, Local & Family History Library (hereafter L.F.H.L.), L352 C791, Local Acts of Parliament for Leeds, 55th Geo.III A.D.1815 (‘An Act to amend and enlarge the Powers and Provisions of an Act of His present Majesty, for erecting a Court House and Prison for the Borough of Leeds, in the County of York, and other Purposes; to provide for the Expencc [sic] of the Prosecution of Felons in certain Cases; and to establish a Police and Nightly Watch in the Town, Borough, and Neighbourhood of Leeds aforesaid’).

¹² Directory, General and Commercial, of the Town and Borough of Leeds, for 1817 (Leeds, 1817), pp.13-14.

¹³ Leeds, West Yorkshire Archive Service (hereafter W.Y.A.S.), P36/C/3/1, Leeds magistrates’ minutes, 18 Dec. 1826; Report from the Select Committee on Criminal Commitments and Convictions (Parl. Papers 1828 (545), vi), p.69.

¹⁴ Leeds Patriot, 2 Feb. 1833; 9 Feb. 1833.

7 inspectors and 51 watchmen for the remainder.¹⁵ As David Philips has argued, the notion that local magistrates were generally opposed to early nineteenth-century police reform is clearly mistaken.¹⁶ In fact, such studied attention to police administration presents parallels with local magisterial initiative in other fields of early nineteenth-century social policy.¹⁷

Police governance remained a local responsibility following the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. In Leeds, effective control was transferred from the magistrates to the newly-established Town Council and its Watch Committee, which met weekly. As in many municipalities, the Leeds Council's first instinct was to limit increases in expenditure, due not least to the burden which lower middle-class voters shouldered under the rating system.¹⁸ This tended to stifle growth in police manpower, and even led to a decline in numbers in the mid-1840s, when retrenchment was coupled with abolitionist pressure from a vocal minority of Chartist councillors.¹⁹ However, despite this troubled local fiscal context, the fruits of day-to-day police administration provide evidence of continued local reforming initiative under the Watch Committee. One important aspect of such routine governance was the collection of information. Over time, the Committee increasingly yearned for intelligence concerning the urban crime problem. By 1850, it was common for the Committee to request periodic analyses of

¹⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LL2/1/4, Leeds Town Council minutes, 6 Apr. 1836, p.36.

¹⁶ D. Philips, 'A "weak" state? The English state, the magistracy and the reform of policing in the 1830s', *The English Historical Review*, cxix (2004), pp.889-891.

¹⁷ P. King, *Crime and the Law in England, 1750-1840: Remaking Justice from the Margins* (Cambridge, 2006), *passim*; Eastwood, *Governing Rural England*, pp.99-101.

¹⁸ M. Daunton, 'Taxation and representation in the Victorian city', in *Cities of Ideas: Civil Society and Urban Governance in Britain, 1800-2000: Essays in Honour of David Reeder*, ed. R. Colls and R. Rodger (Aldershot, 2004), p.37.

¹⁹ See further Churchill, pp.52-56.

crime and detection figures from the Chief Constable.²⁰ Shortly thereafter, such data was organised into routine quarterly reports, which by at least 1852 were presented as formal statistical reports.²¹

Additionally, the Watch Committee requested periodic updates on the police force itself, and the condition of its men. Councillors organised various enquiries in this area by sub-committee: for example, a report of 1848 gave a detailed overview of the state of the men in both the day and night police.²² Such enquiries frequently rested upon consultations with ‘experts’ within the police establishment, frequently the Chief Constable, yet occasionally others besides. Thus, in 1850, a report into infirmity contained detailed intelligence from the police surgeon, regarding the physical condition and various ailments of the twenty men under examination.²³ Furthermore, from the eighteen-sixties, the Watch Committee took an increasing interest in sources of instability within the police labour force.²⁴ An investigation in 1861 into the causes of resignations revealed that recent recruits were most at risk of leaving police service;²⁵ four years later, Chief Constable Bell’s return of absenteeism highlighted sickness and domestic necessities as the principal causes.²⁶ Over time, enquiries became increasingly sophisticated: in 1869, a sub-committee spent three months investigating ‘the state of crime and efficiency of the police’, eventually producing a highly detailed report,

²⁰ See Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, Leeds Watch Committee minutes, 28 Dec. 1849, pp.182-83; 27 Dec. 1850, p.314.

²¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 2 May 1851, pp.360-61; Leeds, L.L.F.H.L., L352.42 L517, Leeds Police Reports, 1852. The collection of criminal statistics started earlier in some other cities, including Sheffield and Birmingham: C.A. Williams, ‘Counting crimes or counting people: some implications of mid-nineteenth century British police returns’, *Crime, Histoire & Sociétés*, iv (2000), p.80; M. Weaver, ‘The new science of policing: crime and the Birmingham police force, 1839-1842’, *Albion*, xxvi (1994), p.306.

²² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 1 Aug. 1848, pp.29-31.

²³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 10 May 1850, pp.242-47; 24 May 1850, pp.248-254.

²⁴ Labour turnover was a central concern in nineteenth-century police thinking: Shpayer-Makov, pp.15-16.

²⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/6, 14 June 1861, especially pp.279-280.

²⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/7, 6 May 1864, p.272.

spanning eight pages, which included tables on diverse aspects of local crime and police organisation.²⁷ Such documents familiarised members of the Watch Committee with the condition and experiences of men in police service, and provided an empirical basis upon which to make alterations to pay and conditions of employment. More broadly, enquiries formed part of that growing mass of surveys, statistics and other data which oiled the wheels of nineteenth-century urban government.²⁸

The administrative burden of police governance continued to mount in the second half of the century, as a result of the expansion of the force both numerically and geographically.²⁹ Maintaining the efficiency of this enlarged operation required regular organisational fine-tuning by senior officers.³⁰ One significant reform came in 1869, when Chief Constable Wetherell reclassified the force into four separate divisions, each responsible for distinct territories. Previously, each outlying section was controlled by just one sergeant who, retiring early, often left the constables without direction during the night; by contrast, under the new scheme, each division had a superintendent and two inspectors, ensuring more adequate supervision of the men. Furthermore, Wetherell abandoned the 'defective' practice of parading the whole force at the Town Hall, which deprived 'important quarters of the town of police supervision' during reliefs. Organising reliefs within divisions thus promised to ensure 'a more constant watch' across the borough.³¹

²⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 19 Mar. 1869, pp.151-58.

²⁸ See J. Moore and R. Rodger, 'Who really ran the cities? Municipal knowledge and policy networks in British local government, 1832-1914', in *Who Ran the Cities? City Elites and Urban Power Structures in Europe and North America, 1750-1940*, eds R. Roth and R. Beachy (Aldershot, 2007), pp.56-59.

²⁹ Between 1857 and 1891, the Leeds Police grew from a force of 221 men to some 423: *Judicial Statistics* (Parl. Papers 1857-1892). On the geographical expansion of the force, see below, p.20.

³⁰ For earlier such developments in Portsmouth, see M. Ogborn, 'Ordering the city: surveillance, public space and the reform of urban policing in England 1835-1856', *Political Geography*, xii (1993), pp.514-15.

³¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 9 July 1869, pp.184-86; 19 Mar. 1869, p.154.

Despite such refinements, police expansion posed more systemic organisational challenges. In order to mobilise and co-ordinate the growing ranks of men now allocated to distinct divisions, more sophisticated bureaucratic practices and procedures were adopted, which have very rarely been the subject of historical analysis.³² In Leeds, both local and central observers highlighted the need to improve communication and information management within the force. In 1850, the secretary to the justices complained about the lack of a rigorous ‘plan of communication’ between Chief Constable Read and the detectives: ‘he frequently saw the Detective Force leave the Police office in a morning before the Chief Constable arrives [sic] there.’³³ Seven years later, upon his first visit to Leeds, Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary (HMIC) called attention to a general ‘want of system’ in the force.³⁴ Such criticisms demonstrate the naivety of early urban police administration.³⁵

Improvements in internal police administration were driven overwhelmingly by local reforming initiative. Resolving the key problem – how to ensure adequate communication of information within a growing force – was partly a matter of technology. Hence, in 1868, the Watch Committee approved the installation of telegraphic communications connecting the principal police offices. The significance of this measure is underlined by its cost, estimated at 831 pounds, approved despite councillors’ natural sensitivity to municipal expenditure.³⁶ The telegraph allowed

³² Though see C.A. Williams, *Police Control Systems in Britain, 1775-1975: from Parish Constable to National Computer* (Manchester, 2014). This book appeared after the present article was written.

³³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 1 Feb. 1850, p.199.

³⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 18 Dec. 1857, p.249.

³⁵ Though note too the context of Read’s declining health, discussed below, pp.23-24.

³⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 13 Dec. 1867, p.28; 21 Feb. 1868, p.48.

intelligence to be relayed more quickly and efficiently between the various stations,³⁷ and provides a clear example of how local councillors periodically took the lead in implementing new systems and procedures. Those accounts of police governance which focus largely on the transition from ‘old’ to ‘new’ police omit such important innovations.

Despite such substantial capital investment, improvements in police administration followed principally from new bureaucratic procedures, spearheaded by chief constables. From the eighteen-sixties onwards, such initiatives became a regular feature of internal, ‘general’ orders issued to senior officers and the rank-and-file. In 1876, Chief Constable Henderson instructed his superintendents that two ‘daily state’ forms – one detailing the condition of the divisional force, the other a list of significant occurrences in each district – should be sent to his office by ‘the bag arriving there at 9 o’clock each morning’. Enclosed with this order were ‘a number of copies of a form to be filled up in all cases where offences have been committed, and summons for which have to be applied for’.³⁸ Internal communication procedures were further revised and perfected over time. In 1886, to maximise the efficiency of information exchange, specific routes were issued by which the divisional dispatch bags were to be carried to the Town Hall: for example, the man in ‘A’ Division was to proceed along ‘Union Street; Lowerhead Row; Upperhead Row; Guildford Street and Park Lane.’ By this point, divisional dispatches were sent to and from the Town Hall four times a day, or twice

³⁷ The primary justification for this measure was to assist communication in responding to fires: see Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/2, Chief Constable’s letter book, 7 Jan. 1868, p.12.

³⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/4, Leeds Police general orders, 27 Jan. 1876, pp.41-42. Further on Henderson’s work in this area, see below, p.34.

daily on Sundays.³⁹ The mounting volume of paper required to ensure the police establishment functioned effectively also made its way down to the individual constable. In 1882, the men were each issued with a ‘memorandum book’, in which they would ‘carefully record...the names of persons whom they intend proceeding against [sic], with the offence, time, & where committed, and also for the purpose of taking a note of occurrences which it may appear necessary to do’.⁴⁰ The formation of new practices of internal communication was a vital adaptation to growth within the urban police establishment, and thus constituted an important component of local police governance in the second half of the nineteenth century.

While we may appreciate the merits of local initiative in police governance, central administrators for much of the nineteenth century failed to discern such causes for optimism. At the centre, the division of police governance between local authorities was frequently seen to have created a muddled patchwork of competing systems, and hence an irrational basis for police organisation. Such sentiments are commonly associated with Benthamite administrators such as Edwin Chadwick, whose own writings on police called for the establishment of a more coherent, national system under strict central supervision. However, such attitudes were not confined to utilitarian ideologues, but were the frequent result of a central-administrative perspective.⁴¹ By the mid-nineteenth

³⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/5, 16 Apr. 1886, p.206.

⁴⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/5, 3 Jan. 1882, p.10.

⁴¹ See especially D. Philips and R.D. Storch, ‘Whigs and coppers: the Grey ministry’s national police scheme, 1832’, *Historical Research*, lxvii (1994), pp.78-81.

century, the inadequacies of local police governance were commonly accepted. The Select Committee on Police in the early eighteen-fifties, after hearing evidence of parochialism in provincial policing, concluded that ‘the efficiency of all existing Police Forces is materially impaired by the want of co-operation between the Rural Constabulary and the Police under the control of the authority of boroughs’. Accordingly, they recommended the consolidation of smaller boroughs with the adjoining county forces, and that the police in the major cities be placed ‘under a similar system of management and control to that of the adjoining district or county’.⁴²

This centralising ideology of government produced successive threats to municipal independence in the mid-nineteenth century, which in turn prompted a sustained campaign of local opposition.⁴³ The Leeds elite – along with governors in other English boroughs – vigorously organised against a series of police bills following the Municipal Corporations Act (1835), up until the County and Borough Police Act (1856). In 1840, the Council formed a special committee to oppose the County Constabulary Bill. Several clauses touched upon cherished municipal privileges in police governance, especially clause eleven, which bound all boroughs to maintain levels of manpower determined by the county justices, and to adopt regulations and pay scales identical to the surrounding county forces. Further clauses, also the subject of dissent in Leeds, proposed

⁴² Second Report from the Select Committee on Police (Parl. Papers, 1852-53 (715), xxxvi), p.iv. Further on the Committee’s critique of local authorities, see C. Steedman, *Policing the Victorian Community: the Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80* (1984), pp.20-21; B.S. Godfrey, C.A. Williams and P. Lawrence, *History & Crime* (2008), pp.69-71. It should be noted that the will further to centralise control over provincial police forces diminished after 1856, and remained more-or-less dormant until the 20th century: see C.A. Williams, ‘Rotten boroughs: the crisis of urban policing and the decline of municipal independence 1914-64’, in *Police and Policing in the Twentieth Century*, ed. C.A. Williams (Aldershot, 2011), pp.5-7, 22. However, this in part reflected the significant measure of central oversight achieved by the mid-nineteenth century: see below, pp.20-27.

⁴³ By the mid-nineteenth century, ‘centralisation’ had emerged as an issue of political debate in its own right: see J. Innes, ‘Central government “interference”: changing conceptions, practices, and concerns, c.1700-1850’, in *Civil Society in British History: Ideas, Identities and Institutions*, ed. J. Harris (Oxford, 2003), pp.45-50, 59-60.

to consolidate smaller borough forces with the county police, and to place borough constables under effective command of the county chief constable.⁴⁴ The Bill was subsequently amended and passed, having abandoned these contentious provisions, and left the consolidation of county and borough forces at the discretion of local governors.⁴⁵

In the eighteen-fifties, a more serious and protracted struggle developed concerning the division of police governance between the centre and the localities.⁴⁶ In 1854, councillors in Leeds played their part in a successful campaign against the new Police Bill, which involved representatives from numerous boroughs. In February of that year, selected members of the Watch Committee reported their resolute opposition to the recommendations of the Select Committee on Police – including the abolition of smaller borough forces, and closer alignment of larger boroughs with the surrounding counties – and urged the Council to join with other corporations, ‘in a constitutional opposition to the proposed invasion of Municipal privileges’.⁴⁷ The Council enthusiastically accepted this proposition, and set aside £100 to campaign against the proposed legislation.⁴⁸ Just two months later, the Committee petitioned Parliament against the Bill, calling ‘all Friends to Local Government to give it the most strenuous opposition’.⁴⁹ The objection to the proposed amalgamation of small borough forces is also noteworthy: doubtless wary

⁴⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC75 (CH2), County Constabulary Bill Committee minutes, 13 May 1840; 23 May 1840; A Bill to amend the Act for the Establishment of County and District Constables (Parl. Papers 1840 (119), i), clauses 11-14.

⁴⁵ A Bill [as amended by the Committee] to amend the Act for the Establishment of County and District Constables (Parl. Papers 1840 (300), i), clause 15.

⁴⁶ Further accounts of this episode include Williams, ‘Rotten boroughs’, p.5; J. Hart, ‘The County and Borough Police Act, 1856’, *Public Administration*, xxxiv (1956), p.406; Critchley, pp.112-13, 116-17; Steedman, p.42; M. Ogborn, ‘Local power and state regulation in nineteenth-century Britain’, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, new series, xvii (1992), p.220.

⁴⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/4, 3 Feb. 1854, pp.225-9 (quotation at p.229).

⁴⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/4, 8 Feb. 1854, p.230.

⁴⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/4, 16 June 1854, pp.256-8 (quotation at p.256).

of any gradual erosion of municipal independence, the Leeds Committee would later continue to support causes specifically impacting on smaller municipalities.⁵⁰

At stake in this exchange were the jealously guarded privileges of local self-government, upon which the Police Bill constituted a substantive assault. The Watch Committee focused their complaints on several parts of the Bill: the consolidation of smaller boroughs with the counties; the power of the Home Office to vet officers appointed as Head (Chief) Constable; the right of Head Constables to hire and fire constables at will; and the establishment of a regime of central government inspection.⁵¹ Perhaps most obnoxious, however, were two further clauses: the first gave the Home Secretary sweeping powers to ‘make such general Regulations with respect to the Duties, Pay, Allowances, Clothing, Accoutrements, and Necessaries of Constables’; and the second authorised the Queen in Council to compel local authorities to appoint additional constables, wherever manpower was deemed ‘insufficient for the Protection of Property, or the Prevention and Detection of Crimes’.⁵² These provisions touched directly on control over the form and function of local police forces, and hence threatened to dilute the right of local authorities to manage their own affairs. On this occasion, the concerted opposition of the boroughs was sufficient to force the government to abandon the proposed reforms.

A similar struggle emerged between the central government and the boroughs in 1856, over the County and Borough Police Bill. The Watch Committee closely monitored

⁵⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/4, 23 Dec. 1853, pp.214-15. See also their support for the City of London, in a perceived attack upon their independence in police affairs: Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/7, 10 Apr. 1863, p.169.

⁵¹ A Bill to render more Effectual the Police in Counties and Boroughs in England and Wales (Parl. Papers 1854 (127), v), clauses 1, 18 and 25.

⁵² Bill to render more Effectual, clauses 21 and 22 respectively.

the Bill's progress, alerted other boroughs to its provisions,⁵³ and dispatched councillors, MPs and the Mayor to Westminster to voice their opposition.⁵⁴ This time, the government offered significant concessions, specifically regarding clause six, which (like the 1854 Bill) authorised the Home Secretary to make general regulations regarding police pay, equipment and so on.⁵⁵ This may have been sufficient to silence the Bill's critics: there is no record of further protest from the Leeds Committee following the amendments.⁵⁶ Yet the 1856 Act still invited unwelcome central state interference in local affairs, by implementing just such a system of government inspection which councillors had opposed in 1854. Inspection touched upon the core issue in this long series of contests between the centre and the localities: the viability of a specifically local conception of police efficiency.⁵⁷ Even in its modified form, the 1856 Act threatened to undermine such ideas, and did in fact establish a significant measure of central authority over local police forces.

This 'central-local' dynamic in police administration was replicated at lower levels of the governmental hierarchy. One deficiency of the historiography of central-local state relations is a tendency to view both centre and locality – but especially the latter – as homogeneous wholes in juxtaposition, rather than as sites of negotiation and conflict in themselves. By contrast, Chris Williams has persuasively argued that the

⁵³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 8 Feb. 1856, pp.49-50.

⁵⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 15 Feb. 1856, p.52; 7 Mar. 1856, p.56.

⁵⁵ Compare Police (Counties and Boroughs). A Bill to render more Effectual the Police in Counties and Boroughs in England and Wales (Parl. Papers 1856 (18), v), clause 6; and Police (Counties and Boroughs). A Bill [as amended in Committee] to render more Effectual the Police in Counties and Boroughs in England and Wales (Parl. Papers 1856 (71), v), clause 6.

⁵⁶ See also Ogborn, 'Local Power', p.220.

⁵⁷ Similar tensions between central and local notions of police efficiency in police reform had arisen late in the eighteenth century: see J. Styles, 'Sir John Fielding and the problem of criminal investigation in eighteenth-century England', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxxiii (1983), pp.148-49.

process of police reform was shaped at least as much by tensions within localities as between London and the provinces.⁵⁸ What follows examines tensions surrounding police governance within Leeds, and how such struggles shaped the process of police reform.

The borough of Leeds was not administered by a single system of government, but divided between multiple bodies of authority. Usually these bodies co-existed happily, yet there was also the potential for friction. This could take the form of political conflict over the various institutions of city government, as Derek Fraser has shown;⁵⁹ yet it could also divide the borough geographically, between competing units of local self-government. Such was the case in police administration in some early nineteenth-century boroughs, including Leeds, where no single police force covered the entirety of the borough.⁶⁰ Like many municipalities, Leeds encompassed not just the urbanised centre, but also a collection of satellite out-townships, and the tracts of open land between them. By 1851, the city's hinterland housed about two-fifths of the borough population,⁶¹ yet under the Municipal Corporations Act, the new police were essentially confined to the central township and its immediate environs.⁶² This arrangement perpetuated the geographical patchiness of police provision under the night watch, which was also a city-centre force. Only after 1856 did the borough come under a unified system of policing.

⁵⁸ C.A. Williams, 'Ideologies, structures, and contingencies: writing the history of British criminal justice since 1975', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique*, xiv (2008), p.64.

⁵⁹ He analysed the distribution of local political power in nineteenth-century cities between vestries, churchwardens, Poor Law unions, improvement commissions, highway surveyors and town councils: Fraser, *Urban Politics*, chapters 1-7.

⁶⁰ Beyond Leeds, see J. Hart, 'Reform of the Borough Police, 1835-1856', *The English Historical Review*, lxx (1955), p.420. This point is neglected by Miles Ogborn, who has asserted that the Municipal Corporations Act created 'inter-borough administrative uniformity' around 'a unitary local police authority': Ogborn, 'Ordering the city', p.511.

⁶¹ R. Baker, 'On the industrial and sanitary economy of the borough of Leeds, in 1858', *Journal of the Statistical Society of London*, xxi (1858), table A.

⁶² They did, however, render certain miscellaneous services to the out-townships, including attendance at elections, local 'feasts', and provision of detective services, where requested: see Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/2, 28 Mar. 1845, pp.231-32.

Between 1836 and 1856, this division of authority produced a dialogue between the Council and the out-townships concerning police provision. Thus, parallel to ‘central-local’ negotiation between London and the borough, there was also a ‘centre-periphery’ relation within the borough itself. From the perspective of central Leeds reformers, the exemption of the out-townships from the watch district was irrational; this view was itself grounded in the ‘migratory thesis’, which held that criminals would migrate from areas of high police concentration to localities with relatively sparse provision.⁶³ Thus in 1836, amidst much liberal enthusiasm for reform, the Leeds Times welcomed the new police as a ‘decided improvement upon that previously in operation’, and argued that ‘before long it will become absolutely necessary to extend it to the whole of the out-townships, where the thieves, who are so closely and so continuously watched in the town, will be driven to commit depredations’.⁶⁴ Such arguments proved influential amongst some residents on the periphery, especially in the more urban settlements: the Watch Committee soon received petitions from Hunslet and Headingley, calling for the extension of the police to encompass their townships (the latter specifically claimed that reform had forced delinquents out to the suburbs).⁶⁵ The eighteen-forties saw further such requests from both townships, as well as from Potternewton.⁶⁶

However, debate about the extension of the new police to the out-townships was by no means one-sided. Occasionally, outlying residents sought to harness municipal authority in a rather more flexible way. In 1850, for example, William Pawson of Farnley

⁶³ This idea was famously exploited by Edwin Chadwick, to argue for a nationwide police force under central government control: Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, pp.118-19.

⁶⁴ Leeds Times, 23 Apr. 1836, no page.

⁶⁵ Leeds Times, 24 Dec. 1836, p.8; *The Leeds Police 1836-1974*, ed. E.W. Clay (Leeds, 1974), pp.14-15. For the impact of the ‘migratory thesis’ on police reform debates elsewhere, see Emsley, ‘Bedfordshire Police’, pp.75-76; Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, pp.47-49, 145-46.

⁶⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/2, 18 Oct. 1844, pp.173-75; 21 May 1847, p.435; Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 9 June 1848, p.8.

wrote to the Watch Committee, requesting that eight local inhabitants be sworn in as police constables of the borough, in order to suppress ‘disorderly proceedings...on Sundays in Farnley wood and the neighbourhood’.⁶⁷ This application (rejected by the Committee) sought a piecemeal extension of municipal police authority to the township, yet very much on local residents’ own terms. Moreover, others remained downright suspicious of moves to extend the watch district.⁶⁸ In 1849, the Council resolved that the Watch Committee should formally consider the ‘desirability of watching the whole or some additional portion of the Borough and the advantages to be gained therefrom in the prevention of crime and the security which will be given to the inhabitants at large’.⁶⁹ This plan provides evidence characteristic of much ‘central’ governmental thinking in miniature, frustrated by the arbitrary patchwork of police provision on the margins. In a subsequent newspaper advertisement, the Committee called for petitions from those places which ‘wish to be watched’ (rather, from their ‘Rate payers only’),⁷⁰ yet the plan was abandoned within a few months in the face of firm opposition. Only Hunslet had written in support of the scheme, while (unsolicited) memorials against the proposal were received from Armley, Bramley, Chapel-Allerton and Potternewton, plus a second representation from Hunslet.⁷¹

⁶⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 5 Apr. 1850, p.234.

⁶⁸ An important context here was suburban grievances about their contribution to police expenses via the borough rate, given restrictions imposed under the Municipal Corporations Act on the size of the watch rate. The out-townships were thus forced to contribute to a police force from which they received few direct advantages. It was hoped that the 1839 Borough Watch Rates Act would remedy this problem, yet complaints continued into the 1840s: see Leeds Mercury, 5 October 1839, p.6; 13 May 1843, p.7; 4 January 1845, p.7.

⁶⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 1 Jan. 1849, pp.64-65.

⁷⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, p.90.

⁷¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, pp.89-90.

Two sources of opposition emerge from these documents: the lack of any demonstrable need for police reform, and concern about the consequent costs.⁷² The petition of Armley ratepayers – which attracted 431 signatures (equivalent to about one in fourteen inhabitants) – maintained that, ‘it would be of no public benefit to have the Police Force introduced into this Township. And further that the Rates are at present so heavy that any addition to them would be very injurious.’⁷³ Ratepayers in Bramley – who signed their memorial in far lesser numbers – similarly considered that ‘the police would be of no service to the Inhabitants of this Township’, and were clearly vexed by the question of expense:

we your Memorialists wish to inform the Council that at the present time the Pours [sic] Rates of this Township are 6^s/4^d in the pound and the Highway Rates are 1^s/8^d in the pound for the present year and that the greater portion of the Ratepayers will be unable to bear any additional rates being laid upon them.⁷⁴

Outlying residents had good reason to query the purpose of police reform. It is noteworthy that, both in the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-forties, support for extending the watch district came chiefly from the more urban settlements, principally Headingley (a middle-class residential suburb) and Hunslet (an industrial township almost continuous with the city). By contrast, the majority of townships retained a semi-rural character by mid-century. The logic of urban policing – of preventative, ‘beat’ patrol and the

⁷² These debates present parallels with the opposition of outlying townships in Lancashire to the extension of municipal boundaries: see Garrard, pp.94-100.

⁷³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, p.91.

⁷⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, p.95.

enforcement of street order – was less obviously applicable to such places, and so the rationale for extending the new police throughout the borough remained unclear at a local level.⁷⁵

However, out-township opposition to police reform also rested on pride in local self-government. Just as the boroughs clung tenaciously to rights of local control over policing in the eighteen-forties and eighteen-fifties, such tiny localities as the Leeds out-townships likewise defended their own traditions of self-government.⁷⁶ Besides being expensive and inappropriate, the Leeds Police was an alien force, the imposition of which symbolised a loss of local control. This is not to suggest that the out-township constituencies possessed some inherent unity: they experienced acute internal political divisions, especially over rating issues, which took shape according to particular local circumstances. However, as Robin Pearson argued, such local in-fighting was set aside when rates were imposed from outside, or when external agencies threatened to enforce political consolidation throughout the borough.⁷⁷

There are hints of such localist sentiments in the petitions. The inhabitants of Bramley underlined that the extension of the Leeds Police would offend local sensibilities, as an imposition: ‘your Memorialists...pray that no police may be sent into this Township.’⁷⁸ Perhaps there is a trace of it in the Chapel-Allerton petition too, which flatly rebuffed the notion of extension, ‘believing the same to be wholly unnecessary and uncalled for’.⁷⁹ The out-townships were not opposed to police innovation in principle; in

⁷⁵ R. Pearson, ‘The industrial suburbs of Leeds in the nineteenth century: community consciousness among the social classes’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Leeds, 1986), pp.354-56.

⁷⁶ See Pearson, pp.143-44.

⁷⁷ Pearson, pp.158-59. The out-townships likewise ‘stubbornly resisted’ incorporation into the Leeds Poor Law Union in the 1840s: Pearson, pp.162-63.

⁷⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, p.95, emphasis added.

⁷⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 30 Mar. 1849, p.96.

fact, there is evidence of township governments providing additional police resources of their own in the early nineteenth century. In Beeston, there were attempts to erect a lock-up in 1823,⁸⁰ and in the eighteen-fifties they even consulted on engaging the services of policemen employed in the city.⁸¹ By the eighteen-forties, the inhabitants of Wortley regularly elected a ‘Chief Constable’ – who presumably acted as a supervising officer – and late in 1855 they met to consider lighting and watching the township, for the ‘preservation of life and property’.⁸² The issue was not, then, blanket hostility to new forms of police, or casual disregard for the threat of crime; rather, the out-townships were determined to ensure adequate police provision, but strictly on their own terms. Such aspirations to local political control – both within the out-townships and on the part of the Town Council – came under mounting pressure from the eighteen-fifties, and the central state assumed an augmented role in the administration of local police forces.

As we have seen, several historians now portray the nineteenth century as a golden age of localism in government and politics. They argue correctly that their predecessors – captivated by ‘blue books’, government commissions, inspectorates and the like – exaggerated the impact and effectiveness of central reform in nineteenth-century social policy, and so the consequent erosion of local autonomy. However, the pendulum must not be allowed to swing too far the other way. Amongst police historians, there now seems little dispute that nineteenth-century administration was driven overwhelmingly by

⁸⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LO/BE, Beeston Township minutes, 17 Sep. 1823; 20 Oct. 1823.

⁸¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LO/BE, 12 July 1855.

⁸² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LL (WYAS3067), Wortley Township minutes, 22 May 1845; 6 Dec. 1855.

the locality, with minimal effective oversight from the centre.⁸³ However, much recent work rather obscures the evolving role of the central state in police governance over the course of the century. By contrast, from the perspective of Leeds, this section plots the central state's progressive shift from a facilitative to a supervisory function.

Prior to 1835, urban police arrangements were left entirely at the discretion of autonomous corporations. The role of the central state – principally via Parliament – was to facilitate local governing initiative. Parliament, of course, remained the ultimate source of all local governmental power,⁸⁴ and it allowed the effective exercise of such power through the provision of local acts. For instance, the foundation of the night watch in Leeds was made possible by the attainment of a local act (see above, p.4).⁸⁵ In this way, the central state provided the means by which local governors could implement police reforms on their own initiative. Admittedly, as John Prest has argued, the costs of the private bill system were often prohibitive, especially for smaller communities; hence the frequent resort to alternative legislative devices (permissive acts, 'model clauses' acts) by the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁶ Nonetheless, the Leeds example signals the accessibility of Parliament to large towns and cities, and the potential which private acts could unlock for those desirous of implementing major reforms to local police provision.

The facilitative role of the central state accounts for the complex landscape of police provision in the early nineteenth century. A combination of local initiative and delegation of central authority helped create a patchwork of provincial forces, operating

⁸³ Williams, 'Rotten boroughs', pp.6-7. See also below, n.97.

⁸⁴ P.J. Waller, *Town, City, and Nation: England 1850-1914* (Oxford, 1983), p.242; R.J. Morris, 'Governance: two centuries of urban growth', in *Urban Governance*, p.8.

⁸⁵ On the significance of local police acts in Cheltenham, see B. Jerrard, 'Early policing methods in Gloucestershire', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, c (1982), p.232.

⁸⁶ J.M. Prest, *Liberty and Locality: Parliament, Permissive Legislation and Ratepayers' Democracies in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford, 1990), pp.4-9, 23-24; see also Garrard, pp.101-102.

according to different systems and logics. It permitted the kind of division of local authority which developed within Leeds, as independent bodies of self-government maintained separate forms of police. In other words, it allowed the formation of precisely that chaos of local particularism which central administrators came increasingly to resent between the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-fifties. Hence, in the mid-nineteenth century, the role of the central state progressively mutated, as it increasingly sought to prescribe the form of local police forces and (within broad terms) how they were to be governed.

The first major consequence of this new approach was the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act. Besides overhauling the old, closed corporations and installing elected town councils, this measure obliged incorporated boroughs to establish their own police forces. In Leeds, the political consequences of this legislation were profound, allowing the liberal section of the urban elite to attain major local political power for the first time.⁸⁷ In this heady atmosphere of reform, the newly-elected councillors expressed considerable confidence in ‘the system of the Metropolitan Police’ to effect ‘a material diminution of both Crime and Expense’.⁸⁸ However, in reality, the practical impact of the 1835 Act on police provision was modest. True, the new force would now maintain full strength all year round, in contrast to the seasonal reduction in manpower under the night watch. Yet in terms of personnel, there was much continuity: most senior officers in the ‘new’ police were already in service prior to 1836, and it seems that the night watchmen were simply transferred over to the new police.⁸⁹ Despite the infant Watch Committee’s initial plans, the day and night forces were not permanently united into a single body until

⁸⁷ See D. Fraser, ‘Politics and society in the nineteenth century’, in *A History of Modern Leeds*, ed. D. Fraser (Manchester, 1980), pp.279-280; Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, pp.180-86.

⁸⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LL2/1/4, 6 Apr. 36, pp.36-37.

⁸⁹ See Leeds Times, 26 Mar. 1836, no page; D. Smith, ‘Leeds and its police force’ (unpublished typescript, 1952), appendix 6. Leeds Times, 19 Mar. 1836, no page, stated that the Watch would be left unaltered.

1859. In practice, as several historians have argued, police reform involved little more than dressing an old force in a new uniform.⁹⁰ Furthermore, as we have seen, subsequent legislation designed to exert greater central control over borough police forces foundered in the face of determined local resistance.

However, the eventual passing of one such statute – the 1856 County and Borough Police Act – did engineer a significant shift in the balance of power between central and local government. Historians have tended to minimise the immediate impact of this Act:⁹¹ most seem to regard the Act as a standardising measure, which simply established ‘new’ police forces in those areas still awaiting ‘reform’. Yet they have missed how the measure affected established borough forces, such as the Leeds Police. In this case, the Act required the extension of the force throughout the whole borough, including to those out-townships beyond the existing watch district. This change had two important consequences. Firstly, it necessitated a rapid enlargement of the force, in order to cover the new beats. By the close of 1856, the Leeds Police numbered 151 men; within three months, it had grown to 224, an increase of almost fifty per cent.⁹² Secondly, the expansion of the watch district called for an unprecedented round of station building: by March 1857, eleven bases had been constructed in the out-townships, resulting in an increase from six to fifteen stations across the borough.⁹³ The 1856 Act thus set new and extended parameters for policing in Leeds, which endured for the remainder of the century. Its impact in this locality may have been atypical, given that the acreage covered

⁹⁰ See above, n.6. See also Hart, ‘Reform’, pp.419-424; Critchley, pp.64-68; D.J.V. Jones, ‘The new police, crime and people in England and Wales, 1829-1888’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, fifth series, xxxiii (1983), pp.154-55; C. Emsley, *Policing and its Context, 1780-1870* (1983), pp.71-73.

⁹¹ Though note Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, pp.229-233, which portrays the measure as the death-knell of local experimentation in police provision, and Steedman, pp.26-27, which sees it as the foundation of subsequent professionalisation.

⁹² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 26 Dec. 1856, p.127; 27 Mar. 1857, p.161.

⁹³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 27 Mar. 1857, p.163; Leeds Police, appendix 2.

by the Leeds borough was so extensive.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, the Act did have a significant effect upon the urban police nationwide: between September 1856 and September 1857, 617 men joined the borough forces, accounting for about one-seventh of total recruitment in the provinces, at a time when many county forces were being founded.⁹⁵ Hence, it seems that historians have underestimated the significance of 1856 for established borough forces.⁹⁶

Another key consequence of the 1856 Act was the establishment of HMIC. Many who have studied the inspectorate have taken a rather dim view of its effectiveness. Philip Waller was particularly scathing, asserting that ‘government grants operated to perpetuate rather than weed out inefficiency’; Chris Williams’s view, that the inspectorate was ‘largely toothless’, was more typical. Most maintained that the lack of central reforming ambition, infrequency of inspections, and reluctance to trample on municipal privileges all served to preserve the status quo.⁹⁷ However, this position requires some modification. Firstly, given Victorian scruples about second-guessing local wisdom, the imposition of such a scheme was a significant development in the evolving relationship between central and local government. Moreover, the system of inspection brought renewed urgency to police administration, not just in small and plainly

⁹⁴ In 1838, Leeds (measuring 32 square miles) was almost three times the size of Birmingham (13 square miles): Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons*, p.182.

⁹⁵ Figures from Critchley, p.146.

⁹⁶ This analysis lends a measure of support to Eric Midwinter’s earlier assessment, that following the 1856 Act, ‘[m]any... boroughs underwent almost overnight repentance, and doubled and trebled their establishments within three or four years’: *Victorian Social Reform* (Harlow, 1968), p.57. See also Steedman, p.42.

⁹⁷ Waller, p.268; Williams, ‘Rotten boroughs’, p.5. See also Hart, ‘Police Act’, pp.408-416; A.A. Barrett, ‘The system of criminal justice in Cheshire, 1820-75’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Keele, 1996), pp.76-78; C. Emsley, *The English Police: a Political and Social History* (second edition, Harlow, 1996), p.54; Godfrey, Williams and Lawrence, pp.63-64. Although more nuanced in her discussion than most historians, Steedman discerns no fundamental change in relations between the centre and the boroughs under the new inspection regime: Steedman, pp.42-45. The system of government inspection has also been subject to general critique: see P.W.J. Bartrip, ‘British government inspection, 1832-1875: some observations’, *The Historical Journal* xxv (1982), pp.605-626.

‘inefficient’ boroughs, but also in such large and sophisticated forces as the Leeds Police.⁹⁸

In Leeds, HMIC’s criticisms carried substantial weight, and often resulted in additions to the police establishment. While the record of local reforming initiative was in many respects impressive, grants of additional manpower were usually modest, and it is in this area that HMIC’s influence was most tangible. The lever of power in this relationship was the government grant-in-aid, awarded to forces deemed ‘efficient’, which covered initially one-quarter and later (following the 1874 Police (Expenses) Act) one-half of labour costs.⁹⁹ Councillors were rudely introduced to the implications of central funding (and the threat of its suspension) in the early eighteen-sixties. In January 1863, the Home Secretary wrote to the Watch Committee, urging the councillors to enlarge the force in line with population growth; in February, the Committee duly resolved to appoint a further 28 men, bringing total force strength to 256.¹⁰⁰ Unsatisfied by this measure of progress, the Home Secretary again wrote to the Leeds authorities the following year, explicitly threatening to withhold the certificate of efficiency on grounds of insufficient manpower. Within six months, the Committee wrote to the Inspector of Constabulary, informing him that they had sanctioned a further increase of seven men.¹⁰¹

While such direct intervention was not repeated year-on-year, pressure was applied to local councillors periodically for the remainder of the century. For example, HMIC expressed concerns in 1875 that the force lacked sufficient men to cover its

⁹⁸ In fact, judging by the mediocre performance of many small boroughs, the inspectors may have been most effective in dealing with larger forces.

⁹⁹ Williams, ‘Rotten boroughs’, p.6.

¹⁰⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/7, 30 Jan. 1863, p.150; 6 Feb. 1863, p.151.

¹⁰¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/7, 8 Jan. 1864, p.238; 1 July 1864, p.286.

beats.¹⁰² A couple of months later, the Committee resolved to hire an additional 25 men, bringing the total strength up to 340.¹⁰³ Such complaints sometimes galvanised chief constables in their efforts to augment local police funding. Six years later, Chief Constable Nott-Bower called the Committee's attention to HMIC's concerns about force strength; following a sub-committee investigation, a further 25 men were again recruited, raising overall manpower to 400.¹⁰⁴ Normally, however, HMIC pursued a more subtle course. In particular, inspectors were eager to impress upon a naturally thrifty corporation the necessity of making small, regular additions to manpower. This was succinctly put by Lieutenant Colonel Woodford, upon his visit of 1865:

the Watch Committee should take into consideration the propriety and advantage of keeping pace with the increase of the population by small and gradual additions in the number of Constables, in order that the increased and constantly increasing acquirements may be met, and provided for as they arise, from time to time within the Borough.¹⁰⁵

Admittedly, it took some time for councillors to internalise such advice, yet the inspectors should nonetheless receive a measure of credit for the progressive expansion of the force in the second half of the century.¹⁰⁶

Two further case studies illustrate the influence which inspectors wielded, and the impact they had in the borough. The first highlights their oversight of senior appointments in the force. Chief Constable Read, who first assumed office as far back

¹⁰² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/11, 9 July 1875, pp.175-76.

¹⁰³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/11, 3 Sep. 1875, pp.190-91.

¹⁰⁴ Leeds Daily News, 19 Mar. 1881; 8 Apr. 1881; Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 8 Apr. 1881, p.259.

¹⁰⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/8, 26 May 1865, p.89.

¹⁰⁶ On this point, see Churchill, pp.61-64. Further, more optimistic appraisals of the inspectorate include H. Parris, 'The Home Office and the provincial police in England and Wales – 1856-1870', *Public Law* (1961), pp.238-242, 255; J. Pellew, *The Home Office 1848-1914: from clerks to bureaucrats* (1982), pp.135-36; J. Davis, 'Central government and the towns', in *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, ed. M. Daunton (3 vols., Cambridge, 2000), iii. pp.265-66.

1823, suffered increasingly from illness by mid-century, prompting much debate as to his suitability to continue in post. In 1848, sickness prevented him from attending work for as many as thirteen weeks,¹⁰⁷ while an enquiry in 1850 heard much damning evidence against him, with the secretary to the magistrates recounting how Read had fallen asleep while in court.¹⁰⁸ Following the latter episode, the Watch Committee resolved that ‘the retirement of Mr Read from the office of Chief Constable would conduce to the efficiency of the Police Force’.¹⁰⁹ However, he was not forced to resign, and continued to serve, only for ill health later to reassert itself, prompting further complaints from the magistrates in 1855.¹¹⁰

It was the inauguration of government inspection in 1857 which proved decisive for Read. After Woodford complained about the Chief Constable’s condition, the Watch Committee acknowledged he was quite ‘worn out by length of service’, and gave him three months’ notice to retire.¹¹¹ However, after the Council intervened to support the ailing officer, this order was rescinded.¹¹² In this confrontation between local councillors and the inspectorate, the latter eventually prevailed. Just over a year later, the Committee again resolved to retire Read¹¹³ – this time with permanent effect – shortly before receiving a letter from the Home Office expressing concern regarding his age and growing infirmity.¹¹⁴ Doubtless Read’s deteriorating condition played its part in this

¹⁰⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/2, 14 Jan. 1848, p.505.

¹⁰⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 1 Feb. 1850, pp.199-201.

¹⁰⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 1 Feb. 1850, p.194.

¹¹⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/3, 7 June 1850, p.257; LLC5/1/4, 27 Apr. 1855, pp.342-44.

¹¹¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 31 Aug. 1857, p.212. It is noteworthy in this connection that the rules governing appointments of Chief Constables under the 1856 Act stipulated that the candidate should be certified as medically fit to perform his duties: see D.S. Wall, *The Chief Constables of England and Wales: the Socio-Legal History of a Criminal Justice Elite* (Aldershot, 1998), p.90.

¹¹² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/5, 2 Oct. 1857, pp.224-25.

¹¹³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/6, 3 Dec. 1858, p.9.

¹¹⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/6, 10 Dec. 1858, p.10.

process, yet Woodford's intervention was surely crucial to securing his departure within eighteen months of the first inspection.

The second case, which concerns levels of police pay, demonstrates that HMIC remained a significant force in local police governance beyond the 1850s. To the central state, discrepancies in pay between local police forces – which were deemed to produce incentives for recruits of higher quality to join forces with higher rates of pay – were a longstanding complaint. The inspectorate selected police pay as a key priority in Leeds from the late 1860s.¹¹⁵ Captain Elgee recommended the introduction of a new 'merit class' in 1869, to be paid an extra shilling per week,¹¹⁶ and the following year he furnished a much fuller list of complaints, including the inadequate starting wage for sergeants, and the excessive stoppage in sick pay.¹¹⁷ The precise connection between such (regular) criticisms and actual pay rises is often unclear. However, in 1875, as well as pressing the Committee to recruit additional manpower, HMIC called for amendments to the pay scale. Within two months, the Committee issued a comprehensively new structure of police pay, affecting constables, sergeants, inspectors and superintendents.¹¹⁸

One further example illustrates the consolidation of central oversight after the augmentation of the government grant in the eighteen-seventies. In December 1879, Chief Constable J.W. Nott-Bower wrote to the Mayor and Watch Committee, calling for improved rates of pay for the five superintendents and the chief clerk of the police. By simultaneously charging the men rent on their houses – previously provided gratis by the Council – he argued that the borough would actually make a financial saving, as they

¹¹⁵ This may have reflected increased pay and improved conditions in the Metropolitan Police around this time: Shpayer-Makov, pp.173-74.

¹¹⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 27 May 1869, pp.173-74.

¹¹⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 8 Apr. 1870, p.250.

¹¹⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/11, 3 Sep. 1875, pp.190-91.

could reclaim half the cost of wages via the Treasury grant. Upon hearing his proposals, the Committee resolved to recommend such an increase,¹¹⁹ yet they later withdrew the issue from Council business after receiving a letter from the Home Office. This unsolicited intervention was prefaced by an explanation of the Home Secretary's interest in the matter: 'while he is anxious not to interfere unnecessarily with their [the Watch Committee's] Police arrangements it is his duty to endeavour to promote, as far as possible uniformity of management in the various Police Forces throughout the country.' He went on to recommend that the Committee adopt a still higher scale of pay for superintendents, 'which has been approved by the Secretary of State'.¹²⁰ There followed a sub-committee report on the matter, recommending rates of remuneration in line with this 'approved' Home Office scale,¹²¹ which was subsequently adopted by the Council.¹²²

This case demonstrates the power of the Home Office to intervene effectively in local police affairs. To a large authority such as Leeds, the financial cost of losing the government grant was unconscionable; hence, the recommendations of government inspectors – still more of the Home Secretary himself – had to be treated seriously. The potentially stark implications of this episode for relations between central and local government were not lost upon the Council. At a meeting of the Association of Municipal Corporations (established in the eighteen-seventies, in opposition to the centre's supervisory Local Government Board),¹²³ George Tatham, Mayor of Leeds, drew attention:

¹¹⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 12 Dec. 1879, pp.117-19.

¹²⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 4 Feb. 1880, pp.132-33.

¹²¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 27 Mar. 1880, pp.140-41.

¹²² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 31 Feb. 1880, pp.152-53.

¹²³ Moore and Rodger, pp.63-64.

to the question of the maintenance of the Police Force in in [sic] Boroughs and the tendency of the Government grant to substitute central for local authority. He pointed out that Governments of whatever party they might be were inclined to monopolise power to themselves and thus deprive so far as they were able, Municipal Authorities of their due share of control over their own affairs.

Tatham went on to recount the gradual growth of central state support for local police forces under the various statutes:

Consequently it was now the case in his own Borough that they were receiving from the Government something like £15,000 a year, towards the support of the Police Force. But one great disadvantage attending the current system was that the Government took upon themselves more than a fairly proportionate power in regulating both the numbers of the Police force and their actual pay and a hard and fast line was officially laid down as to the number to be employed.

The Mayor regretted that no consideration was taken of how ‘Communities differed’, nor that ‘the inhabitants and not the Government were naturally the best judges’ of such local peculiarities. In the finish, he was unable to carry the meeting on his ultimate purpose: ‘the abolition of the present system so that Municipal authorities might have their own police under their own control.’¹²⁴ Doubtless, incensed by recent developments, he had overstated his case; the record of inspection in Leeds evidenced periodic concessions from local governors, rather than a reign of unrelenting central tyranny. As in other areas of nineteenth-century social policy, central direction was deployed sparingly, and there remained local variation in the nature of police provision.¹²⁵ However, the judgement of John Barran, Liberal MP for the city, who wrote

¹²⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 16 Apr. 1880, pp.157-160.

¹²⁵ Compare with local implementation of the New Poor Law: F. Driver, *Power and Pauperism: the Workhouse System, 1834-1884* (Cambridge, 1993), especially chapter 3; S. King, *Poverty and Welfare in England, 1700-1850: a Regional Perspective* (Manchester, 2000), chapter 8; K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and*

to the Watch Committee about the matter, was surely very close to the mark: ‘the more Corporations accept from Government the less control they will have over the Police force’.¹²⁶ Police governance was still essentially a local responsibility, yet the balance of power vis-à-vis the central state certainly shifted, albeit subtly, after 1856.

Much of the foregoing material would seem to support the notion that police governance was overwhelmingly a local process. Although the 1856 Act imposed important checks on local discretion, police administration was still for the most part driven by governors grounded in their localities. However, few historians have commented upon the source of ideas about police organisation in the nineteenth century. The formerly orthodox view – that a distinct ‘metropolitan model’ of policing gradually diffused throughout the land – has long since fallen from favour.¹²⁷ Nowadays, historians are attentive to the variety of police systems adopted in the provinces – to historical alternatives to the new police.¹²⁸ However, it remains rather unclear how information about police organisation and practice circulated in the nineteenth century, in terms of both specific forms of police and everyday police governance (except of course via legislation, and HMIC). The remainder of this article argues that communication between the boroughs was a crucial aspect of nineteenth-century police administration, which deserves fuller investigation by

Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700-1950 (Cambridge, 2006), chapter 5.

¹²⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 16 Apr. 1880, p.161.

¹²⁷ See Emsley, *English Police*, chapter 3.

¹²⁸ Philips and Storch, *Policing Provincial England*, chapter 5; R.D. Storch, ‘Policing rural southern England before the police: opinion and practice, 1830-1856’, in *Policing and Prosecution in Britain 1750-1850*, eds D. Hay and F. Snyder (Oxford, 1989), pp.211-266; B.J. Davey, *Lawless and Immoral: Policing a Country Town, 1838-1857* (Leicester, 1983).

historians. Above all others, local governors administered police forces, yet they did so with an eye to developments elsewhere, beyond the bounds of the locality. Thus, against the backdrop of burgeoning inter-urban networks and the centralisation of governing institutions within cities,¹²⁹ a broader, provincial perspective came to inform the nature of local police provision.

In Leeds, the first clear indication of exchange of information and expertise with other boroughs came in 1834, on the eve of the Municipal Corporations Act. Local governing initiative was much in evidence here, as the magistrates conducted a searching investigation of the night watch, leading to sweeping changes in organisation. However, for present purposes, the most important aspect of this reorganisation was the source of its inspiration. The process was initiated by a report on police provision in Manchester and Liverpool, which apparently necessitated ‘an immediate inspection of all the Watchmen etc and discharging such as are considered inefficient’.¹³⁰ Furthermore, after the decision was taken to dispense with the incumbent head of the watch, letters were again dispatched to Manchester and Liverpool, in search of ‘a Person...possessing more general capabilities...than the Present Captain’.¹³¹ The man eventually appointed was William Heywood, who came directly from service in the night watch at Manchester.¹³² Hence, while this reform was piloted by local magistrates, it was also informed by conditions elsewhere. This exposes an important qualification to the current

¹²⁹ See L.H. Lees, ‘Urban Networks’, in *Cambridge Urban History*, iii. pp.73-75; R.J. Morris, ‘Civil society and the nature of urbanism: Britain, 1750-1850’, *Urban History*, xxv (1998), pp.293-94.

¹³⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., P36/C/3/1, 8 Nov. 1834.

¹³¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., P36/C/3/1, 27 Nov. 1834.

¹³² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., P36/C/3/1: 22 Dec. 1834.

historiographical preoccupation with governmental localism: the importance of extra-local perspective.¹³³

The sharing of information between boroughs was a recurring feature of nineteenth-century police governance. In discussions of police pay, the Watch Committee repeatedly analysed conditions in Leeds in comparison with other provincial towns. An 1865 sub-committee report concluded – with one minor exception – that ‘the pay of the men...is equal to that of other Police Forces’, yet ‘returns obtained from various large towns’ nonetheless motivated them to recommend additions to wages and leave entitlements for particular ranks.¹³⁴ Two years later, a memorial from 142 policemen calling for increases in pay prompted further augmentations, backed by a sub-committee enquiry which found wages in other large forces – including Manchester, Liverpool and the West Riding Constabulary – ‘much higher than Leeds’.¹³⁵ In 1875, following sweeping recommendations from HMIC regarding police manpower and pay, the Committee resolved to enquire into police conditions in other large towns.¹³⁶ In matters of pay, councillors were particularly anxious to keep abreast of levels of remuneration in other forces: in order to attract the recruits of the highest quality, they were convinced that wage rates in Leeds had to remain competitive. Hence, such comparisons could be used by others to persuade the Committee that additional expenditure was necessary. Chief Constable Nott-Bower’s appeal to augment superintendents’ pay in 1879 was thus supported by a list of remuneration scales in other cities: it showed that, even after the

¹³³ For similar enquiries from Manchester in the 1820s, see F. Dodsworth, ‘Masculinity as governance: police, public service and the embodiment of authority, c.1700-1850’, in *Public Men: Masculinity and Politics in Modern Britain*, ed. M. McCormack (Basingstoke, 2007), p.45. By contrast, the level of communication between unreformed corporations and London was apparently modest: Moore and Rodger, p.43.

¹³⁴ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/8, 28 Apr. 1865, p.81.

¹³⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/8, 7 June 1867, pp.285-87 (quotation at p.286).

¹³⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/11, 9 July 1875, pp.175-76.

proposed additions, Leeds would still rank behind Liverpool, Manchester, Salford, Bristol, Nottingham and Birmingham.¹³⁷

Nevertheless, communications with other municipalities extended to all manner of police concerns. In 1876, the Watch Committee ordered the Town Clerk to make enquiries at Birmingham, regarding their system of using ‘special inspectors’ to supervise licensed premises.¹³⁸ At the next meeting, the Clerk confirmed that a particular system was in operation in Birmingham, yet that no such special measures were in force in Manchester, Liverpool, Bristol or Nottingham, upon which the Committee resolved not to follow Birmingham’s example.¹³⁹ Three years later, following a deputation from local tradesmen complaining of the nuisance caused by betting men congregating in the streets, the Chief Constable was ordered to establish how such characters were regulated in Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham and other such towns.¹⁴⁰ He reported back on special powers granted to the police in these cities, as well as in Salford and Bristol, yet the Committee decided to trust the matter to the Chief Constable’s discretion.¹⁴¹ These examples substantiate David Barrie’s argument that British boroughs were more likely to look to each other for guidance on police administration, than to seek answers from London.¹⁴² In Leeds, investigations usually centred on what it perceived as its natural peers – such leading municipalities as Manchester, Liverpool and Birmingham. Hence, the growth of Whitehall and the system of government inspection did not centralise state

¹³⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 12 Dec. 1879, p.119.

¹³⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/11, 4 Feb. 1876, p.245.

¹³⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/12, 15 Dec. 1876, p.54.

¹⁴⁰ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 4 Apr. 1879, p.49.

¹⁴¹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13, 10 Apr. 1879, p.51.

¹⁴² D.G. Barrie, ‘A typology of British police: locating the Scottish municipal police model in its British context, 1800-35’, *The British Journal of Criminology*, 1 (2010), p.261.

information in the mid-nineteenth century;¹⁴³ instead, these contacts confirm the growth of governing expertise in the provinces, which – via municipal networks – channelled specialist knowledge in diverse fields of urban administration.¹⁴⁴ These networks were progressively formalised and extended after 1890, with the rise of professional associations, specialist publications and conferences allowing the exchange of information between cities on a national and international basis.¹⁴⁵

Such inter-urban governmental networks were supplemented by channels of communication between chief constables and outside authorities. A surviving letter book from Leeds indicates that Chief Constable Wetherell received enquiries relating to several subjects, on which interested parties from elsewhere sought his ‘expert’ opinion. For example, in 1868 he wrote to a correspondent in Wakefield, in reply to a letter ‘requesting me to furnish you with any opinion, as to the tendency of Beerhouses to foster and facilitate crime.’¹⁴⁶ That same year, he responded to Captain Palin (Chief Constable of Manchester), expressing regret that he was unable to obtain certain criminal statistics which Palin had requested, while also taking the opportunity to caution Palin as to the interpretation of such figures.¹⁴⁷ Such communications thus allowed for exchange, between separate local jurisdictions, of expertise and comparative data on police matters.

¹⁴³ Such is argued in Ogborn, ‘Local Power’, p.219; and D. Eastwood, ‘The state we were in: Parliament, centralisation and English state formation’, in *The State: Historical and Political Dimensions*, eds R. English and C. Townshend (1999), pp.33-35. Edward Higgs argues that the Victorian state’s collection of information served primarily to encourage local governors to act, rather than to usurp them: *The Information State in England: the Central Collection of Information on Citizens since 1500* (Basingstoke, 2004), chapter 4.

¹⁴⁴ See E.P. Hennock, ‘Central/Local government relations in England: an outline, 1800-1950’, *Urban History Yearbook* (1982), pp.42-43; Moore and Rodger, pp.64-65.

¹⁴⁵ See especially S. Ewen, ‘The internationalisation of fire protection: in pursuit of municipal networks in Edwardian Birmingham’, *Urban History*, xxxii (2005), pp.288-307; J.R. Griffiths, ‘Were there municipal networks in the British world c.1890-1939?’, *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, xxxviii (2009), pp.575-597.

¹⁴⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/2, p.37.

¹⁴⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/2, p.13.

There is also evidence of Wetherell sharing information regarding the day-to-day business of police administration with his colleagues elsewhere. In writing to the Chief Constable of Newcastle in 1870, he detailed procedures for internal information exchange within the Leeds Police, offering local practice as a model for reforms at Newcastle: ‘In order to prevent the evil complained of in your note, I direct the Superintendents and Inspectors to visit the sections at uncertain hours and occasionally to send the Sergeants the reverse way of a man’s beat...I have enclosed [for] you the form of my duty Book and also a form of report made by the Inspectors and Sergeants.’¹⁴⁸ This kind of guidance was clearly valued by Captain Parry, the Chief Constable of Nottingham, with whom Wetherell also shared details on books and forms: ‘I am glad you like the form of duty Book. It is new and was arranged specially for the divisional system, recently brought into operation in Leeds. I have enclosed [for] you forms which each sergeant of a section returns to the officer dismissing the men from duty.’¹⁴⁹ Thus, like town councillors, chief constables were active in seeking guidance on police administration from external sources.

This provincial perspective on urban police governance was further nurtured by the exchange of senior officers between boroughs. We have already noted Heywood’s move from Manchester to take command of the night watch at Leeds in 1834. Such transfers of experienced police officers redistributed police expertise between places, allowing men to transfer their knowledge of organisation and procedures from one locality to the next. In Leeds, this process accelerated in the second half of the century, as the rate of turnover of chief constables increased. Aside from Heywood’s abortive term in

¹⁴⁸ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/2, p.22.

¹⁴⁹ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/2, p.56.

1836-37, Edward Read headed the police establishment from 1823 to 1859; by contrast, over the following forty years, seven men held the office of Chief Constable. Furthermore, these men all came with experience of police administration elsewhere, commonly in another borough (see below, table 1).¹⁵⁰ There is no reason to think that Leeds was exceptional in this respect; David Wall's figures suggest that, by the late nineteenth century, borough chief constables increasingly came with experience of service in another force, usually a borough.¹⁵¹ Thus, the second half of the nineteenth century saw the formation of a cadre of 'expert' urban police chiefs, whose movement between boroughs provided a further means of disseminating governmental practices between the localities.¹⁵²

The potential impact of such exchanges of personnel can be glimpsed in William Henderson's brief tenure as Chief Constable. Henderson took up the post following an appointment at Manchester, and seems to have arrived with a particular concern to improve systems of communication within the Leeds Police. In March 1875 – just two months after arriving in the city – he ordered that all housebreaking intelligence received at the divisional stations be sent immediately to the detective department and, in more serious cases, to the Town Hall.¹⁵³ Just two months later, he instructed that reports be dispatched daily at 10am, 2pm and 6pm, 'except in the case of any serious report occurring between these hours or after 6pm when a special messenger should be sent to

¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, almost all applicants for the post in Leeds were already in police service elsewhere.

¹⁵¹ Wall, pp.129, 247-49.

¹⁵² Further on this theme, see Ewen, 'Internationalisation', pp.295-96; Griffiths, pp.582-84.

¹⁵³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/3, 5 Mar. 1875, pp.275-76.

Table 1: Chief Constables of Leeds, 1823-1899, showing years of service and preceding appointments.

Name	Years of Service (as Chief Constable)	Preceding Appointment
Edward Read	1823-1836, 1837-1859	Hatton Garden Police Office, London (Constable) ¹⁵⁴
William Heywood	1836-1837	Manchester Night Watch
Stephen English	1859-1861	Norwich Police (Chief Constable)
William Bell	1862-1866	Monmouthshire County Constabulary (Superintendent)
James Wetherell	1866-1874	Oldham Police (Chief Constable)
William Henderson	1875-1878	Manchester Police (Chief Inspector)
John Nott-Bower	1878-1881	Royal Irish Constabulary, Dublin (Sub-Inspector)
Arthur Nott-Bower	1881-1890	Nottingham Police (Chief Clerk)
Fred Webb	1890-1899	Wigan Police (Chief Constable)

Sources: Leeds Police, ed. Clay; Leeds Mercury.

the Town Hall with the report, or a telegram sent.¹⁵⁵ He regularly updated these procedural notices thereafter to enhance the rapidity and efficiency of information exchange: thus, night clerks at the divisional stations were instructed to copy reports of stolen property received from the detective department, to facilitate their distribution to

¹⁵⁴ See list of constables at Hatton Garden and notice of Read's resignation: The National Archives of the U.K., HO 60/1, police court entry books, 27 July 1821, p.21; 3 Apr. 1823, p.89.

¹⁵⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/3, 25 May 1875, p.293.

pawnbrokers first thing in the morning.¹⁵⁶ Henderson was clearly a stickler for paperwork; although one cannot be sure, the record of his tenure at Leeds would seem to indicate a broader basis of skills and expertise derived from his prior experience as a senior officer at Manchester.

The ‘shock of the new’ was a recurring theme in the appointment of outsiders to senior positions within the force. In 1900, following his decision radically to overhaul training for probationary constables, the Leeds Mercury commented that, ‘Major Tarry, the new Chief Constable of Leeds, is losing no time in reorganising the police force of the city.’¹⁵⁷ Similar effects were sometimes felt upon the appointment of outside candidates to lesser posts too. In 1885, the newly-recruited Detective Superintendent Gillespie (formerly Detective Sergeant at Manchester) issued a report to the Chief Constable, requesting the removal of two men from the Detective Department, and their replacement by more suitable candidates.¹⁵⁸ These episodes underscore the reforming potential of newcomers to the force, bringing with them the insight of police experience elsewhere. By contrast, the formation of expert dynasties in municipal services could nurture a pernicious aversion to change in local administration.¹⁵⁹

It bears highlighting in this respect that senior officers were granted increased discretionary authority in day-to-day police governance over the course of the century.¹⁶⁰ Routine operations were probably always under the direction of senior officers rather

¹⁵⁶ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/4, 17 Jan. 1877, p.106.

¹⁵⁷ Leeds Mercury, 7 Apr. 1900, p.5.

¹⁵⁸ His request was subsequently approved by the Watch Committee: Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/14, 6 Mar. 1885, pp.242-43.

¹⁵⁹ S. Ewen, ‘Chief officers and professional identities: the case of fire services in English municipal government, c.1870-1938’, *Historical Research*, lxxxi (2008), p.136.

¹⁶⁰ On the personal authority of Sheffield’s chief constables, see C.A. Williams, ‘Police and crime in Sheffield, 1818-1874’ (unpublished PhD thesis, University of Sheffield, 1998), pp.148-152, 196. Nevertheless, the discretion of chief constables was probably greatest in those smaller boroughs where watch committees met infrequently: see Barrett, pp.71-74.

than the Watch Committee: Chief Constable Read and Superintendent James were responsible for drawing up books of police beats in the 1840s and 1850s, suggesting that they were probably also responsible for planning patrols.¹⁶¹ However, as the century progressed, senior officers were granted increasing administrative discretion. At some point, the Watch Committee left the routine business of recruitment to the head of the force, but revoked these powers in 1868, after the size of the force had been allowed to swell under Chief Constable Wetherell's direction.¹⁶² In 1883, with a view to reducing manpower levels, the Watch Committee instructed Chief Constable A.B. Nott-Bower to cease further recruitment, which would suggest that chief constables were usually entrusted with the routine business of hiring by this point.¹⁶³

The gradual extension of such autonomy was common in the late nineteenth century, especially concerning the administration of discipline within the ranks.¹⁶⁴ In 1878 – significantly, at the suggestion of HMIC – the Watch Committee conferred upon the Chief Constable power to inflict fines of up to ten shillings for instances of misconduct.¹⁶⁵ By the 1880s, most sanctions were dispensed summarily by the Chief Constable: figures from the largest section of the force ('A' division) show that he took summary jurisdiction in 263 cases between March 1880 and February 1881, while the Committee heard just 22 incidents in the same period.¹⁶⁶ In 1886, the Committee

¹⁶¹ See Leeds, L.F.H.L., L352.4 L517, *An Account of the Two Divisions, Ten Sections and Seventy-Two Beats Taken by the Night Police of the Borough of Leeds* (Leeds, 1840); Leeds, Thoresby Society Library, *The Police Beats of the Borough of Leeds* (Leeds, 1851).

¹⁶² Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/9, 24 July 1868, p.89. See further Churchill, pp.61-62.

¹⁶³ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/14, 7 Dec. 1883, p.125.

¹⁶⁴ See S. Ewen, 'Managing police constables and firefighters: uniformed public services in English cities, c.1870-1930', *International Review of Social History*, li (2006), pp.55-56; M. Brogden, *The Police: Autonomy and Consent* (1982), pp.65-66, 70; Wall, pp.31-32.

¹⁶⁵ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/12, 5 Apr. 1878, pp.203-204.

¹⁶⁶ Data extracted respectively from Wakefield, W.Y.A.S., WYP/LE/A137/92, Leeds Police general orders ('A' division), and Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/13.

formalised this arrangement by officially handing full control to the Chief Constable in routine cases, and jointly agreeing to a standard, graded system of punishment for cases of police drunkenness.¹⁶⁷ Even superintendents were authorised to determine minor disciplinary matters, independently of the Chief Constable, by 1887.¹⁶⁸ The rationale for such delegation of authority by the Watch Committee is clear: tasked with running a growing and increasingly complex force, councillors surely welcomed release from the onerous burden of repeatedly hearing petty disciplinary cases. Thus, chief constables – who often brought an extra-local perspective to bear upon police administration – were entrusted with extended personal authority by the close of the nineteenth century.¹⁶⁹

This article has constructed a rather broader account of nineteenth-century police governance than that commonly found in the literature. Rather than focusing squarely on the transition from the ‘old’ to the ‘new’ police – the moment of reform – this article has conceived of reform as a protracted, on-going process, spanning the breadth of the nineteenth century. This has promoted several subjects – including the development of the police bureaucracy – to greater prominence. It has also highlighted the significance of the 1856 County and Borough Police Act. Viewed purely in terms of the arrival of the ‘new’ police, reform in Leeds was concluded early in 1836. Yet by conceptualising reform in a more expansive sense – like any other aspect of urban governance – it is plain to see that the force as constituted between the eighteen-thirties and eighteen-fifties was

¹⁶⁷ Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LLC5/1/14, 12 Feb. 1886, pp.325-26.

¹⁶⁸ See Leeds, W.Y.A.S., LC/Police/3/5, 21 May 1887, p.263.

¹⁶⁹ For parallels with fire chiefs, see Ewen, ‘Chief officers’, pp.136-38.

really a half-way house: between the 'old' day police and night watch of the unreformed Corporation, and the expanded and unified force which policed the borough from 1857.

This article has argued that the governance of nineteenth-century police forces was a complex product of three factors: local governmental initiative; central state oversight; and extra-local, provincial perspective. Throughout the nineteenth century – indeed, for much of the twentieth – police governance remained explicitly a local responsibility; local governmental activity remained the primary motor of reform. How effectively these men were able to communicate and organise hinged to a considerable extent on reforms implemented by the Watch Committee, and the efforts of chief constables to introduce more efficient information management procedures. By the end of the century, local police forces remained genuinely local; the rationale for enquiring into police administration elsewhere was that one might expect to learn of significant differences in organisation from one force to the next.

However, much of this essay has argued that the purchase of localism should not be exaggerated. There is currently a tendency in the literature to treat governmental localism in rather unproblematic terms.¹⁷⁰ Instead, this essay has demonstrated that, especially during the second half of the nineteenth century, localism in police governance was increasingly modulated by both external and internal developments. Externally, the 1856 Act made a stark impression upon local police provision, and the inspection regime it instituted subjected local governors to a combination of financial incentive and administrative scrutiny which they might periodically resist, but could not afford to ignore altogether. Additionally, the Act effectively silenced 'central-local' friction in

¹⁷⁰ This is related to the notion that the division of authority between central and local government is essentially a zero-sum game: for a critique, see Ogborn, 'Local power', p.216.

police governance within Leeds itself. Its passing thus marked a measured triumph for the central state, which secured a fair degree of oversight of provincial forces. Just as important, however, were internal developments within local governance, which promoted a more outward-looking approach amongst local authorities. An aspiration to keep pace with police provision elsewhere was evident by at least the 1830s, yet the swifter turnover of chief constables in the second half of the century institutionalised a new spirit of auto-critique and improvement within the police establishment. Additional local studies, also adopting an extended chronology, are needed to assess whether other cities followed a similar trajectory to Leeds; yet on the basis of this example – and the parallels elsewhere already noted – it seems that much existing work provides a simplistic analysis of local government. Greater attention must be paid to the reach of the central state and the influence of municipal networks, in order to arrive at a more balanced view of police governance and local political control in the nineteenth century.