



Open Research Online

The Open University's repository of research publications and other research outputs

Governance of policing and cultural codes: interpreting and responding to policy directives

Journal Item

How to cite:

Westmarland, Louise (2016). Governance of policing and cultural codes: interpreting and responding to policy directives. *Global Crime*, 17(3-4) pp. 352–369.

For guidance on citations see [FAQs](#).

© 2016 The Author(s)

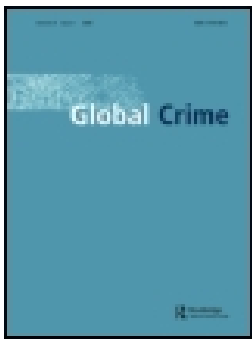
Version: Version of Record

Link(s) to article on publisher's website:

<http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1080/17440572.2016.1179630>

Copyright and Moral Rights for the articles on this site are retained by the individual authors and/or other copyright owners. For more information on Open Research Online's data [policy](#) on reuse of materials please consult the policies page.

oro.open.ac.uk



Governance of policing and cultural codes: interpreting and responding to policy directives

Louise Westmarland

To cite this article: Louise Westmarland (2016): Governance of policing and cultural codes: interpreting and responding to policy directives, Global Crime, DOI: [10.1080/17440572.2016.1179630](https://doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2016.1179630)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17440572.2016.1179630>



© 2016 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 16 Jun 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 55



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

Governance of policing and cultural codes: interpreting and responding to policy directives

Louise Westmarland*

Faculty of Social Sciences, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

In terms of governance, British policing seems to arise from a history of local traditions influenced more recently by centralist managerial demands. A creeping process of privatisation has led social scientists to argue that patterns of governance in British policing are changing in several directions. This has included the way police officers not only are challenged, but also challenge these changing modes of governance in terms of ethical codes of behaviour. There is evidence that police officers, as meaningful actors, have made attempts to diverge from these strictures and have forged their own ways, via their cultural knowledge and practices, to 'do policing', rather than relying upon codes of practice or rules and regulations.

Keywords: governance; police culture; commodification; citizen-consumer; cop culture; cop code of ethics; College of Policing

Introduction

This paper focusses on the meanings in action of British police officers by analysing ways in which ideas and cultural beliefs inform policies and practices. In the exploration of these meanings, some of the ways in which policing practices lead to the resistance of the imposition of policies at the local level are analysed. These meanings can be seen to take various forms and to encompass local traditions of resistance at different levels in the organisation. In terms of policy resistance, this can be seen at an executive board room as senior officers manoeuvre and circumvent governmental directives. At the front line, policing-level resistance can be seen as officers use occupational cultural beliefs to practice policing as they see fit. Their beliefs about what policing's practical concerns should be, as opposed to the top-down policy directives, illustrate the way this resistance can be effective, and potentially disruptive.

The discussion that follows draws upon two sources of empirical evidence from studies that examined aspects of the governance of British policing from April 2003 to May 2005 and from August 2012 to May 2013. The issues and concerns raised in each study reflect two contrasting aspects of separate attempts to implement cultural change. The evidence is analysed via two case studies, each of which is drawn from a larger project. In both cases, the ways local traditions lead to policy directives being interpreted and implemented are compared. The evidence also illustrates how policies designed by the central government are resisted, undermined and circumvented at a local level.

*Email: Louise.westmarland@open.ac.uk

In the first case study, policing and the rise of citizen-consumerism are taken as an example of governance as a top-down, state-instigated process. In the first example, the process of governance is enacted upon the police force as an organisation but resisted by individuals. In the second case study, governance is enacted upon individuals, by way of a code of moral conduct, but resisted by the organisation, through the processes of occupational culture. The first study is about consumers as part of the enactment of policing and the second is focussed upon the police as a 'professionalising' occupation. The two different studies, conducted 7 years apart, reflect on how governance in name and deed has changed and evolved. They also illustrate the ways governance is enacted via the channels of command and how this has diversified and become more sophisticated in the seven years between the two studies. There is also some consideration of how consumerist ideals have led to the creation of a 'College of Policing' in the UK recently and the ways in which this is a form of governance and how it may be resisted locally.

Case study 1

The first case study reflects upon a project conducted between 2003 and 2005 by the author with colleagues.¹ It draws upon a large, publicly funded study in the UK on the ways in which the rise of 'consumerism' could be identified in public services.² The issues of governance that the first section of the paper discusses are around what has been termed the 'commodification' of the police. This is partly about the way policing in the UK underwent a form of privatisation, and yet the functionality, governance and control were retained by the State. This confusing and seemingly contradictory position can be explained by saying that the British police underwent a period of 'marketisation'. It was not a sudden or totally unexpected change, however, as it had been building from an Inquiry and subsequent report published in 1991.³ The discussions resulting from the Inquiry's report were mostly halted or avoided by objections and negotiations pursued by police staff associations and union representatives, but some minor changes to police front-line duties did ensue.

The more significant policy changes that were posited some six years later, in 1997 with the newly elected Blair 'New Labour' Government, which will be discussed in this paper, can be seen to have their roots in that earlier Inquiry. One of the common themes that tie them together is the question around the elite specialism of the police. The issue that was always raised, at least implicitly, was around the supposed unique ability of the police to carry out certain tasks and activities. The move to make the police more 'commercial' led to discussions about the value of the police, both in a monetary and a symbolic sense and in terms of what could be contracted out. In practical terms, this was not only about saving funds for the public purse, as police officers had become increasingly expensive, but also about the extent to which a 'civilian' could do the same job as a sworn police officer.

Implementation

At this time in the UK, one aspect of the changing landscape was the move from the police as leaders in the crime-fighting arena to discussions about what the police actually *do*. This debate was framed by the Blair Government as a progressive move to give 'power to the people'. No longer would the police alone decide on local priorities, or be the experts on community affairs in their area. Now the police would respond to what the local populace thought were the policing priorities for their area, and strenuous efforts would be made to elicit these concerns. Of course this led to consternation amongst the

local police forces who were now faced with a challenge to their ‘we know best’ attitudes, and the way they worked to the rule of law.

The study from which this case study is drawn was designed to look at the way such ‘choices’ were being offered to the populous by the Blair Government, which saw itself as the modernising force of British public services. It was inspired by New Labour’s discovery of the so-called ‘citizen-consumer’ and the way in which this figure seemed to represent the modernisation and reform of public services. As Clarke et al. noted,⁴ it was seen as a distinctive way of addressing – and directing – the changing relationships between publics and public services. The study also asked questions about legitimacy, accountability and value for money⁵ by exploring a number of deeper issues that underlie the identities of users and public service providers.

Unlike other public services, for police officers, crime victims and suspects, the issue was not only about which service provider to choose, or the inability to do so, but whether to become a customer at all. As the notion of ‘choice’ became one of New Labour’s drivers prior to the 2005 election, the problem for public services in general, especially for the police, was that in an ideal world few people choose to use their services.⁶ It is difficult to think of many positive outcomes following interactions with the police, as few burglaries, robberies or car thefts result in returned property or similarly satisfactory outcomes. Sometimes victims of crime describe obtaining ‘justice’ as a positive part of the judicial process, but overall it is often an elusive outcome. Furthermore, given policing’s mandate to ‘uphold the law’, the idea that they should hand over some choice and control (and hence power) to the populace they police is particularly problematic.

Policing as customer care – from scumbags to consumers?

As explained above, some of these issues have been explored previously as analyses of interactions between the police and the public by focussing on authoritarian behaviour, brutality and illegal discrimination.⁷ As Goldstein has argued, the debate about how the police operate has also been the subject of the ‘rise’ of managerialism in recent years.⁸ To illustrate his ‘means versus ends’ argument, he uses the example of a transport company whose targets were designed to satisfy managerial demands (making the buses run on time) but led to the drivers realising the only way to make it work was not to stop to pick up passengers. He argues that policing has had to cope with the same dilemma – how to meet targets whilst focussing on serving the customers’ needs adequately. The study discussed here concentrated on the police as service providers and examined the changes the police have had to accommodate as a result of pressure to be more ‘customer-friendly’ or ‘consumer-oriented’ and discusses the way these ‘customers’, who might sometimes have been referred to as ‘scumbags’ or ‘scroates’, are now ‘service users’. As a result, the police have not only been subjected to the pressures of managerialism, ‘to make them more business-like’, but also been discursively represented as ‘deliverers of a professional service (rather than a force)’.⁹

The study investigated to what extent the police were now ‘consumer-driven’ or ‘customer-friendly’ at the front line and in their Association of Chief Police Officers’ (ACPO) boardrooms by interviewing and surveying senior and front-line staff, and a range of their publics. The discussion that follows also explores tensions arising from the ‘consumerist imperative’, such as government-led demands for police services to become more ‘business-like’. So although senior police officers have, for some years, been encouraged to make financial decisions based on a ‘business case’, they were now being expected to regard themselves as marketplace providers, in a much more

'customer'-focussed sense than previously. As numerous commentators have argued, it is clear that the police, in common with other public service providers in the UK throughout the 1990s, have experienced increasing pressure from various sources to be more 'customer-friendly'.¹⁰ Heward noted in 1994 that senior police officers at an ACPO conference were comparing themselves to 'supermarket bosses' and discussing analogies of the inadvisability of stocking goods for which there is no demand.¹¹ Following that, in 2002, a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary summarised the problems of reassuring the public was entitled '*Open All Hours*', echoing local corner shop customer service imagery.¹² These demands and attempts of and by the police to be more customer-aware, however, can be set against existing research that shows the public have no dislike or animosity towards the police until they have some reason to be in contact with them and that 'personal contact is the most important determinant of satisfaction'.¹³ It might be noted that the police are not simply seen as 'helping' or 'caring', but also have an enforcement role.

Results

Consumerism in practice

Questionnaires sent out to front-line police officers focussed on four aspects of consumerism: challenge, responsabilisation choice and inequality. These were chosen as a result of analysing literature on consumerism, particularly upon commentaries remarking on the rise of interest in consumerism in social and public policy and public services.¹⁴ As Table 1 suggests, New Town officers were more likely to strongly disagree that they welcome members of the public coming forward with ideas. Many officers (an average of 40% across the two towns) said they agreed with this sentiment and although the results were ambivalent regarding the community's confidence in them to get on with the job themselves, the willingness to be challenged, either agreed or strongly agreed that; 'Despite the shift towards community involvement, in the end the police have to rely on their own judgement', with 86% in Old Town and 73% in New Town checking these boxes.

Responsibility

For the police officers answering questions 7 and 8, there was again ambivalence about whether people were aware of their responsibilities as well as rights, and whether people had to be responsible for their own safety; in the Old Town, they said they agreed that the public are now expected to take some responsibility (76% Old Town, 63% New Town); although when they were asked whether people do take responsibility for their own safety, 78% of Old Town and 75% of New Town front-line respondents said they expect to leave it all to the police.

Table 1. Years in current location.

	<1	1–2	3–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	>20
Force 1	11.8%	19.6%	37.3%	20.6%	4.9%	1%	4.9%
Force 2	5.5%	21.8%	21.8%	25.5%	10%	4.5%	5.5%
Force 3	11.4%	14.3%	28.6%	28.2%	9.1%	1.6%	6.2%

Choice

A minority of the police officers who were surveyed agreed or strongly agreed that 'Giving the public a greater say would improve the service we provide' (6% Old Town, 25% New Town), and 54% of Old Town and 33% of New Town respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement. In response to a question about improving efficiency by giving the public a greater say in how resources are deployed, this was disagreed upon by 54% in the Old Town and 33% in the New Town. About 40% were neutral in each of these two questions.

It is perhaps with regard to choice that the idea of consumerism in the delivery of policing was most clearly rejected by front-line police officers. To varying degrees, it was possible to say that officers were suggesting that the introduction of choice into the delivery of policing would not, in their opinion, improve the service they provide (question 9), would not make them more responsive to the needs of the public (question 11), but would make them less efficient (question 10) and prevent them from providing what the public really need (question 12). Whilst officers in both towns clearly rejected the notion of choice, this rejection was more pronounced among the officers of Old Town.

Inequality

For the police respondents, the picture on inequality was a mixed one. On the whole, officers did not think that listening to the voices of the community would result in new inequalities. This is particularly true in the 'New Town', where only a minority of officers thought that listening to the views of the community and giving the public a greater say will benefit certain sections of the community (questions 14 and 16). Officers in the 'Old Town' were not so sure of this, with just over half suggesting that listening to members of the community will mean concentrating resources on those who shout the loudest (question 14). One of the most striking differences between 'Old Town' and 'New Town' was a belief that the views of all sections of society should be central to policing, with officers from 'Old Town' firmly rejecting this idea.

Taken as a whole, results from the police respondents offered a less than resounding endorsement of moves towards a more consumer-focussed police service and suggest, when looked at in conjunction with the strategic interviews, a disjunction between the pronouncements of senior police officers and those who have a more front-line role, as the following section, where these interviews are analysed, suggests.

Conceptualising consumerism

As mentioned above, Heward has observed that for the past 20 years there has been an increasingly important priority for the police to recognise consumerist ideas of service for the police. As a result of these priorities, and despite claiming to have 'more targets than William Tell',¹⁵ chiefs of police have had an interest in becoming in touch with their 'softer' service duties¹⁶ whilst aiming to become more organisationally streamlined and efficient.¹⁷ For the project under discussion here, therefore, it seemed important to ask senior strategically placed officers, one of whom mentioned casually the breakfast meeting he had enjoyed 'that very morning' with Tony Blair, the current Prime Minister, about consumerism. We wondered whether they were aware of consumerist imperatives, to what extent they were under any pressure to change or conform to such pressures and whether this had made any difference to the way they operated or presided over policy changes. In

the interviews, as an introductory question, senior police officers were asked about the way they had incorporated any 'consumerist imperatives' into their strategies. All were clear about the meaning of the term but were less sure that it was being used, or was potentially useful for their organisation. As one explained;

... in some ways, we're trying to open up the debate about looking at the public as consumers and having an understanding of what their needs are, and then in return for that being able to move from being what I describe as an ill-informed community to an informed community, then you can actually have some logic to your debate with them. (New Town Police:1/2)

Another explained that although the 'more senior people within the organisation' would 'appreciate' it, but

... we don't use the term 'consumer' or 'consumerism', but we all have our own ideas of what it means, and to me, as a senior police officer, as the Divisional Commander, I do see our key partners, and the community, as people who consume the services that we can provide. (Old Town Police 1/3)

Another senior officer from New Town explained the difficulties with viewing some of their users as consumers, however, stating that

Interestingly ... if we're talking about certain sets of consumers, if we're talking about those that don't, wouldn't want to engage, i.e. the offenders that we deal with, our service has to be lawful, everything we do has to be lawful and so we've concentrated very much on that element of it whereas now we're starting to look at adding quality to that ... (New Town Police 2/2)

The first of the New Town Officers quoted above (1/2) followed up with another remark emphasising the importance of this, saying,

... and for me the only thing is ... you know ... what is our core business and how do we crack on with getting things done and there may well be things within this world of changing use of consumerism that are very fundamental to how we police and that therefore become quite systemic and not just another flavour as it were. (New Town Police 1/2)

So whilst the strategic interviewees, as might be expected, were broadly in favour of becoming more 'consumer'-oriented, when pushed to explain what this might mean, most preferred to talk about their 'customers' or in some cases 'members of the public' or 'the community'. A general theme that was raised by the interviewers was about what becoming a 'consumer' or 'customer' would mean in terms of police service provision. As one of the New Town officers explained,

I think the thing is for me is that the public as a rule have to take the service that they get – they can't say 'I don't actually like the way New Town Police do this so I'm going to phone through to get West Town Police to come and do it because on such and such scales they deal with my type of incident in a far better way'. (New Town Police 1/2)

An Old Town police officer made a remark about the suggestions members of the public might put forward at public meetings about what they want from the police.

Ah, marketing. My view of marketing, I don't know what the technical view is – my view is matching what people need with what you can deliver ... and if ... what they actually need

isn't quite what you want to deliver, try and influence either the way that you deliver or the way that they perceive their needs match up. (Old Town Police 3/3)

Another officer from Old Town was explaining his reservations with consumerist ideas and describing his service as something similar to a 'business' model,

... in business it is all about people, don't get me wrong, I'm sure that business people have very good contacts with people they've built up over the years, or even friends, but I think the difficulty with our customers is that some of them can be quite difficult individuals, some of them are very difficult to satisfy and you may disagree with some of them ... (Old Town Police 2/3)

When asked by the interviewer whether this was because of a lack of a cash relationship with the users, he went on to explain:

I think we've got a far bigger duty to our customers than that, I mean ... it is difficult in our job because ... if someone wants to make a complaint, but if I was in Marks and Spencers' it is easier to give them vouchers, £60 worth of vouchers and then they go away and say 'thank you very much' and are happy, you know, whereas sometimes I have to say 'OK, I appreciate how upset you are about the way the officers dealt with that, but actually they are actually complying with the law, but we are sorry if it causes distress'. (Old Town Police 2/3)

Another Old Town officer made a similar point about the 'customers' who come through the door:

But the community, most definitely, they demand things of me, essentially to reduce crime and disorder, so they are my customer, and I need to deliver that. But in a different way, the offender who comes in through the door to the custody office, even though they have lost their liberty, they are still a customer ... (Old Town Police 1/3)

This concept of the unwilling customer was taken up by most of the interviewees, with one of the New Town Officers in a discussion about the difference between public services such as the police and private business, stating:

I think too, that the difference for us in some ways with Tesco's is, you know is that we have some people who are not customers by choice. (New Town Police 1/2)

Adding that in terms of changes in attitudes of the rank and file towards these people, that:

They will use the word customer ... but almost in a sarcastic way ... Most of them. Most police officers are aware that there's something happening out there, that people are less tolerant of a poor service, so they do refer to them as customers but it's not, I wouldn't say it's (conversation interrupted) ... (New Town Police 1/2)

This senior officer, in common with the first interviewee from Old Town who said that he thought it would only be 'senior people within the organisation' who would be conversant with the term 'consumer', is aware that front-line staff might not embrace the concept of the consuming public. This observation was shown to be accurate, as the questionnaire data from the front-line police staff illustrated. Although there were some differences between Old Town and New Town responses, in general, officers working in both forces were unsold on consumerism as a means of enhancing the policing product. 'Out there' on the streets, therefore, little effect appears to have been felt, although this varied across the

range of front-line police officers and the other public services we investigated, depending on the particular role in which the person was involved.

Case study 2

The second case study looks at governance from a different angle, in that the attempt to regulate and control was focussed on the police officer as an individual actor. From around 2012, in the UK, a number of high-profile scandals concerning the police meant that the Home Secretary, Teresa May, was called to appear in Parliament to answer questions and to make a statement, in early 2013, that some action would ensue. The sort of issues she was referring to included senior officers allegedly selling information to the press, accepting goods and services from inappropriate sources and in some cases being seen to lie or fabricate evidence on oath. One of these cases became high-profile because it involved allegations that a government minister had called a police officer a ‘pleb’,¹⁸ and the denial of this term of abuse led to the prosecution and imprisonment of one officer and disciplinary matters being raised against others. The British public were encouraged, by media sources, to be shocked and dismayed by the idea that police officers might not tell the truth, and that if they were prepared to do so against a powerful government minister, questions were raised as to how they would act towards an ‘ordinary’ member of the public.

Partly as a result of these problems, in early 2014, the UK Government, via a newly established ‘College of Policing’, published an extensive list of rules and regulations under the title of ‘Code of Ethics’.¹⁹ It was proclaimed that the Code would be a central part of the newly created College of Policing, which aspired to the ‘Royal’ status of staff associations they said they emulated, such as the Royal College of Physicians, Royal College of Nurses and other occupations they saw as being on a parallel with policing. A draft version of the Code was circulated and comments from interested parties invited, but the final document varied little from it, and the central tenets of it are reproduced below.²⁰

The College of Policing’s Code of Conduct for police officers in England and Wales is based on a series of ‘principles and standards of professional behaviour’. Ten ‘standards’ of professional policing were identified, which are as follows²¹:

- Honesty and integrity
- Authority, respect and courtesy
- Equality and diversity
- Use of force
- Orders and instructions
- Work and responsibilities
- Confidentiality
- Fitness for work
- Conduct
- Challenging and reporting improper conduct

The document also includes a further nine ‘principles’ of policing.²² These were derived from the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life, but with the addition of ‘fairness’ and ‘respect’:

- Accountability
- Fairness

- Honesty
- Integrity
- Leadership
- Objectivity
- Openness
- Respect
- Selflessness

Ethical codes are often seen as an attempt to provide guidance in ambiguous situations for officers working in isolated and often ‘heat-of-the-moment’ situations. In terms of governance, one of the central problems in terms of shaping conduct is that police discretion, the ability to make decisions in these difficult situations, is difficult to regulate, predict and classify. The way codes of conduct have to have certain ambiguities also leads to difficulties. In most cases, for instance, officers are asked to use their discretion ethically, to uphold the law and to behave in an honourable and professional manner. The interpretation of these codes is problematic, because they require individuals to reflect on their actions in the light of institutionally expressed moral principles, and it remains very difficult to train officers to behave in certain ways or to ‘do the right thing’ in a given situation.²³ Furthermore, in terms of governance, it might be asked whether it is possible to control and manipulate an individual’s personal morals and beliefs.

This case study draws upon research on police ethics and integrity using a survey conducted across three UK police forces in 2012. The study used scenario-based questionnaires to elicit views about the seriousness of certain police behaviours and to ask whether officers would report colleagues’ misdemeanours. The discussion uses these responses as a starting point to think about the ways in which police culture has been viewed in the past as part of the ‘problem’ of and resulting ills of police corruption whilst codes of ethics are seen as ‘the cure’. The survey findings suggest that despite regarding some of the behaviours as ‘serious’, respondents said they would be unwilling to report their colleagues’ misdemeanours.

The survey

The survey was in the form of a paper questionnaire consisting of 11 scenarios that officers had to rate in terms of policy violation, seriousness and whether they would report the behaviour described. An abbreviated version is shown in [Table 2](#), below. Questionnaires were sent to each police force in person or by post and distributed at shift briefings. Each had an individual prepaid envelope in which to place the completed questionnaire, and this was then returned directly to the named lead researcher for analysis. The total return rate varied from force to force and is slightly misleading at the individual force level (see [Table 3](#) below), but in total 520 questionnaires were received from the main study and 275 from the pilot. In addition to the scenarios, officers were asked to complete a range of questions about the number of years of service, their gender and rank (either supervisor or non-supervisor) and their current work role. The substantial number of responses enabled a computer statistical system (SPSS) to be used to analyse the findings. The pilot study responses were not included in these analyses as they had been completed a number of years previously and may no longer be considered valid.

Table 2. The scenarios.

Scenario	Rank
A police officer runs an off-duty private business that sells and installs security devices. He has not asked permission from the Force.	10
A supervisor authorises a day off in exchange for body work on his personal car. Officers were asked to rate the supervisor's behaviour.	8
A well-liked officer receives gifts such as food and alcohol on occasions such as Christmas.	11
An officer accepts a couple of free drinks from the owner of a bar that is serving drinks after the legal hour rather than report the offence.	6
An officer accepts unsolicited items of small value (cigarettes, free meals) whilst on duty, being careful not to abuse the generosity of the gift giver.	9
An officer agrees to accept a personal gift for half of the amount of the fine in exchange for not issuing a summons to a speeding motorist.	3
An officer finds a lost wallet that contains the equivalent of a full day's pay. The officer turns in the wallet, but takes the money.	2
An officer refers owners of vehicles damaged in an accident to a local body shop and receives 5% of the repair bill for each referral.	5
An officer takes a watch worth about two days' pay from a burgled jewellery shop prior to other officers arriving on the scene.	1
At 2 AM, an officer comes across a car in a ditch. The officer realises the driver is intoxicated and an off-duty police officer. He brings the off-duty officer home instead of reporting the accident.	4
Officers chase a suspect for two streets before wrestling him to the ground. Once under control, the officers punch the suspect a couple times as a punishment for fleeing and resisting.	7

Note: 11 is least serious, 1 is most serious; $n = 520$.

Table 3. Number of surveys.

	Responded	Distributed	Return rate
Force 1	102	750	13.6%
Force 2	110	1500	7.3%
Force 3	308	750	41.1%

Size of sample (main survey only)

As with all paper surveys, one of the problems for this analysis is that the response rate relies on all of the questionnaires delivered to the force, being placed in the hands of officers who could choose whether or not to respond. In the case of Force 2, for example, a large metropolitan force, the rate was very low, but this is because large numbers of questionnaires were delivered, but we could not determine how many were actually distributed or discarded by the officers.

Composition of sample

At the end of the questionnaire, officers were asked to circle a box indicating how long they had served as a police officer (Table 4) and how many years they had been in their current role or location. The sample had a broad range of officers with varying years of service, adequate for the analysis, and showed that a significant proportion of officers had been in their current location for a fairly short period of time. The following tables illustrate the composition of the 520 officers who responded to the questionnaire.

Table 4. Years as a police officer.

	<1	1–2	3–5	6–10	11–15	16–20	>20
Force 1	1%	5.9%	21.6%	30.4%	9.8%	6.9%	23.5%
Force 2	0%	10.9%	17.3%	29.1%	12.7%	9.2%	17.3%
Force 3	0%	.6%	7.1%	24.4%	15.9%	14.3%	37%

Table 5. Gender.

	Male	Female
Force 1	60.8%	29.4%
Force 2	52.7%	34.5%
Force 3	65.6%	27.3%

Officers were asked to indicate their gender, and it was found that the sample composition was broadly representative of women officers (see Table 5). At the time of the study, average numbers of women nationally in England and Wales was 26.3% of the total workforce.²⁴

The survey asked about supervisory roles (see Table 5) because one of the scenarios involved the assessment of actions by a supervisor. In terms of whether certain actions would be reported, it might be expected that these officers would be more likely to report rule breaking as part of their role, but perhaps less likely to observe such behaviour.

Findings from case study 2

One of the findings of the study reveals that officers seem uncertain of the rules and regulations covering their behaviour, especially at the less serious end of the spectrum. In other words, officers were not clear about the bending of rules covering ‘minor’ offences such as working in their spare time or accepting free drinks or small gifts. Where officers were certain that behaviour was against force policy or rules, even in cases they thought were ‘serious,’ they were surprisingly unwilling or unlikely to report it, although this varied by force area and years of service. Officers thought misdemeanours such as hitting a suspect or covering up for a drink-driving colleague who caused an accident were less serious behaviours than stealing property, such as a watch, or cash from a lost wallet. The following table provides a summary of the scenarios, although in the survey they were more detailed. Table 2 shows the ranking the respondents assigned to each scenario, with 11 being the least serious.

As might be expected, the highest levels of reporting were associated with the behaviours they thought were most serious. One of these was taking money from a found wallet. As Table 7 shows, almost all respondents thought it was serious or very serious, and in Force 3 (the small rural force) 95% said they would report it. Only 80% of

Table 6. Supervisory role.

	Non-supervisor	Supervisor
Force 1	69.6%	29.4%
Force 2	70.9%	23.6%
Force 3	61.7%	35.7%

Table 7. Seriousness and reporting.

	Considered the behaviour serious	Definitely would report
Q11. Officer takes money from a lost wallet		
Force 1	99%	84%
Force 2	100%	80%
Force 3	99%	95%

Table 8. Years as officer and reporting.

	Years as officer	% Would report
Q10. Officer uses excessive force on fleeing suspect		
Force 1:	5 or Less	59%
	6–15	65%
	>15	81%
Force 2:	5 or Less	48%
	6–15	62%
	>15	79%
Force 3:	5 or Less	88%
	6–15	86%
	>15	82%

Force 2 – a force with metropolitan centre and large cities and conurbations – said they would definitely report this behaviour.

In scenario 10, officers were asked their opinion about colleagues who give a suspect, caught after trying to run away, a couple of punches in the stomach. In Force 2, officers with less than 5 years of service were the most unlikely to say they would report this behaviour. In terms of the accepted academic wisdom on police cultural beliefs, this might seem unusual, as ‘cynics’ or ‘uniform carriers’²⁵ would normally be expected to be older, longer-serving officers who had ‘seen it all before’ (see Table 8).

Governance of policing – a cultural issue?

The two case studies illustrate differing issues around governance. The first was around New Labour’s public services reform agenda, where the police needed to be brought into line with the ‘modern’ world. Britain was seen as having become a ‘consumer society’ in which a proliferation of goods and services enabled a wide variety of wants and needs to be satisfied.²⁶ In the second, an attempt was seen to govern the individual via a call to uphold personal morals or ethical principles. As both case studies have illustrated, the governance of policing, especially at a local level, is not easily achieved. The British police have always had a culture of individual responsibility – as ‘blue coated workers’ to the population they serve, and as local organisations to locally elected elites. This has not always included an explicit mandate to act ethically. As a national organisation with diverse local needs and practices, government policy-makers have struggled to gain or retain control of policing in many ways for many years. Furthermore, at a local level, police managers have struggled to find ways to implement high-level directives, as seen in Case Study 1, which do not reflect local priorities.

The attempt by national leaders to implement cultural change – either in terms of consumerism or codes of ethics –, seems doomed to fail as a result of the strength and diversity of occupational culture. In both case studies, it seemed that this element of the equation was underestimated or forgotten. Governance depends on and is defined by the control of organisational culture, not only of practices. An example is seen in the second case study, presented in this paper, where a code of ethics is proposed by the College of Policing, but little thought is given to its complexity, or acceptability. The aim is for professionalisation on par with surgeons, nurses and doctors, yet signing up to the Code, whilst centrally organised by the Home Office, is locally implemented, relying on individual officers to comply.

The second reason codes of ethics and attempts to commercialise the police may be doomed to fail is because they take no account of street cultures of policing. They do not incorporate understandings of police culture as it is operationalised in everyday life. For example, an alternative code of ethics, based on Reiner's original 'rites and rules',²⁷ would include the following in a 'Cop Culture' Code of Ethics.

Reiner's rites and rules

- Sense of mission
- Cynicism/pessimism
- Suspicion
- Isolation/solidarity

*The 'cop culture' code of ethics*²⁸

Sense of mission

- (1) We exist primarily to catch the 'bad guys' and lock them up.
- (2) We see the hurt victims' experience and want to rebalance the unfair 'justice' system.
- (3) We want to make society a better, safer place for the 'decent' people.

Cynicism/pessimism

- (1) We fight with one hand tied behind our back as criminals don't have a code of ethics.
- (2) Critics don't realise the difficult and unpalatable issues we have to confront every day – but we've seen it all before.
- (3) Everyone (including the bosses) is on the take in some way, bending the rules or just doesn't care.

Suspicion

- (1) Off-duty, in social situations, do not tell anyone you are a cop until you are sure of who they are.
- (2) Most people can be assessed as either 'good and upstanding citizens' or 'police property' fairly easily.
- (3) Quite often people who are trusting and 'innocent' are likely to be taken advantage of, so as a cop, be wary and streetwise.

Solidarity

- (1) Don't tell on your mates and never grass to the bosses.
- (2) On the streets it's 'us and them' and we're the biggest gang in town and we always have to win.

- (3) If someone breaks the code, even unintentionally, they are not to be trusted again until they prove themselves to be sorry, make amends and prove their loyalty.
- (4) The ‘blue code’ of inclusivity/silence/trust does not normally extend to police support staff, special constables or former colleagues who are now supervisors, or those employed in ‘cushy’ desk-bound roles as they might have become influenced by the ‘management’s’ culture.

Discussion

Whilst there are some methodological ambiguities in these data and their analysis – small sample groups, effects of survey questionnaires, lack of a representative sample and so on, as well as the difficulties of Deutscher’s ‘what we say/what we do’ effect,²⁹ – this paper has attempted to draw out some interesting comparisons about the governance of policing. The sometimes contradictory demands of successive governments in the UK have created a situation where the police have to promote themselves as ‘customer-oriented’, and if they are unable to provide the required service then the consumer might start to demand the right to purchase it elsewhere. As Loader explains, this is one of the arguments raised by Heward³⁰ in his chapter about how the police have changed during the 1990s, learning to present themselves as ‘deliverers of a professional service (rather than a force) and of “the public” as “consumers” of that service’.³¹ Loader claims³² that this is the result of ‘successive Conservative (or, more accurately, neo-liberal) governments bent on restructuring what they believed to be an inefficient monopoly supplier, improperly exempt from the rigours of the market; and of police managerial elites seeking ways to arrest a decline in levels of public support for the police’.³³

The data suggest that government demands for the police to be more ‘consumer’-aware and citizen demand-led have varying levels of effect upon senior officers and some front-line staff involved in community policing roles. At the same time, the effect on the ‘cynical uniform carriers’³⁴ seems to be minimal, as we might expect. One of the problems with notions of consumer-citizenship is that it assumes that all ‘customers’ will have reasonably equal access to resources and wish to be part of a ‘community’.³⁵ These encounters show how priorities would be set and how the changes were to be implemented were not necessarily in any way related to central government aims, but were heavily influenced by locally implemented objectives. During the study, there were examples where local officers were told to carry out audits of local priorities. A major force-wide project involving all local community groups took place, across a wide swathe of the south-east of England. A senior officer took 6 months to oversee and in some cases attend these meetings. There were three priorities identified as a result of these meetings in one of the local cities where the research for this case study was conducted and these were: car parking, dog excrement and bonfires. None of these citizen priorities were considered ‘police matters’, and so they were replaced (by the local police) with drugs, car crime and anti-social behaviour.

Conclusions

The project that the first case study this paper discusses was set up to look at three public services, health, social care and policing, but here has focussed exclusively on the police. As a ‘service’, policing differs from health or social care in that many ‘customers’ are often unwilling users. Although people do not choose to be ill or infirm, at least contact

with health or social care professionals may bring a positive outcome. Calling the police, or being called upon by them, is rarely an enriching experience or a lifestyle choice. In the study where the 'public' in two socially and geographically diverse cities were asked what they thought of their local public police services, it was discovered that rather than people taking the local police commanders at their word, and expecting them to take their priorities as the ones they would implement, many of the 'citizen-consumers' that were interviewed and surveyed were highly sceptical. This scepticism was echoed by the police officers we interviewed, who included all ranks, from deputy chief officers of large metropolitan forces to front-line officers, responsible for implementing change. They were scathing about the extent to which giving people more choice would help, and dismissive of expecting local people to take more responsibility for preventing crime.

It is also clear that police culture and entrenched values are much more difficult to change at the front-line than in the boardroom, as the senior officers who were quoted earlier indicated. At the front line, demands for officers to be customer-led and 'consumer-friendly' are much more difficult to implement than creating a policy that simply fits with new government thinking. As literature describing this problem suggests, cultural hurdles exist that pose dilemmas without obvious solutions.³⁶ There are a number of unresolved tensions identified in this paper around making public services more 'business-like' for consumers. There are complicated relationships between policy and practice in the police and other public services. Public service reform, and specifically police reform of recent years, has not really resolved where the consumer is placed in relationships between the public and their service providers. As the data analysed in this paper illustrates, the role of 'customer' is even more problematic, especially in police subcultural terms. At the same time, the debate about whether the citizen-consumer will ever be an important aspect of these relationships is ongoing and provides a forum for numerous ongoing analyses of the police public service role and the associated problems that continue to trouble police, policing and their publics.

In terms of the second case study, the issue of the role of a code of ethics is just beginning in some senses, and yet has perennial aspects. Whilst the concern for police to act 'ethically' and with integrity has been discussed since its inception, the way this is now attempting to be codified by the UK Government, via the Home Office through its 'College of Policing', will not be resolved, with tensions and resistances being manifest. One of the problems that emerges is how to govern the soul or the moral compass of individual police officers using a seemingly blunt instrument of control. One of the central issues seems to be who should decide whose morals are lacking and how to manage this when senior officers are also committing offences against the Code of Ethics. Personal morals also present a problem for governance, because it is difficult to peer inside the self of another, to view what an officer feels or believes was the motivation behind a particular action or behaviour. Further, as the 'alternative' cop culture code, suggested above, seems much more powerful than any form of governance associated with the organisation's own ethical code, which was created without front-line input, then imposed from the top of the organisation, it is difficult to see how it will have an effect.

In terms of local traditions of resistance, the accounts of the diverse ways police officers of various ranks have responded to elite policy directives is interesting in terms of police culture and ethics. Meaningful practices and the ways in which the police on the ground enact policing in ways they find effective not only for their own ends but also due to a belief that they are working for the good of society as 'they know best' is an interesting take on the governance of security at a local level. It suggests, as many other studies and theorists have argued, that without the acceptance of the rank and file, the elite will have little control over individual actions of front-

line police officers, who will interpret policy directives by imparting their own local flavour into the mix.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council, the Arts and Humanities Research Council [grant number RES-143-25-0008] and the Mellon Foundation.

Notes

1. The research team for a study called 'Creating Citizen-Consumers: Changing Identifications and Relationships'. The study was funded by the Cultures of Consumption research programme – a joint initiative of the Economic and Social Research Council and the Arts and Humanities Research Council (RES-143-25-0008). The project was based in the Department of Social Policy and Criminology at the Open University, and ran from April 2003 to May 2005. The project explored the views of managers, staff and users of three public services (policing, health and social care) about reforms intended to promote a more consumerist relationship between public services and the people who used them.
2. Clarke et al., *Creating Citizen*.
3. The Posen Inquiry.
4. Clarke et al., *Creating Citizen*.
5. Loader, "Consumer Culture and the Commodification"; Waddington, *Policing Citizens*; and Newburn, "Doing Policing."
6. See Clarke, Smith, and Vidler, "The Indeterminacy of Choice."
7. Uildriks and van Mastrigt, *Policing Police Violence*; and Westmarland, "Policing Integrity."
8. As Goldstein has argued, the debate about how the police operate has also been the subject of the 'rise', of managerialism in recent years (2005).
9. Loader, "Consumer Culture and the Commodification," 375–6.
10. Such as Newburn, "Doing Policing"; and Innes, "Why 'Soft' Policing is Hard."
11. Heward noted in 1994 that senior police officers at an ACPO conference were comparing themselves to 'supermarket bosses' and discussing analogies of the inadvisability of stocking goods for which there is no demand.
12. Following that, in 2002, a report by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary summarised the problems of reassuring the public was entitled '*Open All Hours*', echoing local corner shop customer service imagery.
13. Dowler, "Media Influence on Citizen Attitudes," 237.
14. See, for example, Shaw and Aldridge.
15. Senior police officer, personal communication with author, 2004.
16. Innes, "Why 'Soft' Policing is Hard".
17. Goldstein, "Improving Policing."
18. A government minister had called a police officer a 'pleb'.
19. 'College of Policing' published an extensive list of rules and regulations under the title of 'Code of Ethics'.
20. Adapted from Westmarland, Rowe, and Hougham, "Getting Behind the Blue Curtain."
21. Ten 'standards' of professional policing were identified, College of Policing, 1.
22. College of Policing, 15. These were derived from the Nolan Committee on Standards in Public Life, but with the addition of 'fairness' and 'respect'.
23. Author et al., 2014.
24. The average number of women nationally in England and Wales is 26.2% of the total workforce, according to UK Home Office statistics for 2011 in Home Office (2015, p. 12).

25. In terms of the accepted wisdom on police cultural beliefs, this might seem unusual, as 'cynics' or 'uniform carriers', such as in Robert Reiner's work (2000), would normally be expected to be older, longer-serving officers who had 'seen it all', in the metaphorical sense.
26. Clarke et al.
27. Reiner's original 'rites and rules'.
28. Developed by the author of this paper.
29. Deutscher 'What we say, what we do' 1973.
30. Heward 1994.
31. As Loader explains, this is one of the arguments raised by Heward in his chapter about how the police have changed during the 1990s, learning to present themselves as 'deliverers of a professional service (rather than a force) and "the public" as "consumers" of that service' 1999, 376.
32. Loader claims in an earlier study, in 1996, 14–22.
33. Loader claims in another study that this is the result of 'successive Conservative (or, more accurately, neo-liberal) governments bent on restructuring what they believed to be an inefficient monopoly supplier, improperly exempt from the rigours of the market; and of police managerial elites seeking ways to arrest a decline in levels of public support for the police', 376.
34. Robert Reiner, *The Politics of the Police*.
35. Walklate, *Trust and the Problem of Community*, 2000.
36. Author 2005.

Notes on contributor

Dr Louise Westmarland is Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the Open University. Her research interests include gender and policing, ethics and integrity, research methods and domestic homicide investigations.

References

- Bevir, M. "The Construction of Governance." In *Governance, Consumers and Citizens: Agency and Resistance in Contemporary Politics*, edited by M. Bevir and F. Trentmann, 25–48. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- Clarke, J., J. Newman, N. Smith, and L. Westmarland. *Creating Citizen – Consumers. Changing Publics and Changing Public Services*. London: Sage, 2007.
- Clarke, J., N. Smith, and E. Vidler. "The Indeterminacy of Choice: Political, Policy and Organisational Dilemmas". *Social Policy and Society* 5, no. 3 (2006), 1–10
- Crawford, A. "The Pattern of Policing in the UK: Policing Beyond the Police." In *Handbook of Policing*, edited by T. Newburn. Cullompton, Devon: Willan, 2003.
- Crawford, A. "Reassurance Policing: Feeling is Believing." In *Transformations in Policing*, edited by A. Henry and D. J. Smith. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006.
- Crawford, A., and S. Lister. "Additional Security Patrols in Residential Areas: Notes From the Marketplace." *Policing and Society* 16 (2006): 164–188. doi:10.1080/10439460600662189.
- Crawford, A., S. Lister, and D. Wall. *Great Expectations: Contracted Community Policing in New Earswick*. York: The Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2003.
- Deutscher, I. *What We Say/What We Do: Sentiments and Acts*. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1973.
- Dowler, K. "Media Influence on Citizen Attitudes toward Police Effectiveness." *Policing and Society* 12, no. 3 (2002): 227–238. doi:10.1080/10439460290032369.
- Edwards, T. *Contradictions of Consumption: Concepts, Practices and Politics in Consumer Society*. London: Sage, 2000.
- Goldstein, H. "Improving Policing: A Problem-Orientated Approach." In *Policing: Key Readings*, edited by T. Newburn, 392–411. Devon: Willan Publishing, 2005.
- Heward, T. "Retailing the Police: Corporate Identity and the Met." In *The Authority of the Consumer*, edited by R. Keat, N. Whiteley, and N. Abercrombie. London: Routledge, 1994.
- Home Office. 2015. "Police Workforce England and Wales 31 March 2015." *Home Office Statistical Bulletin 0215*. Home Office, London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2015/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2015>.

- Innes, M. "Why 'Soft' Policing is Hard: On the Curious Development of Reassurance Policing, How it became Neighbourhood Policing and What This Signifies about the Politics of Police Reform." *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 15 (2005): 156–169. doi:10.1002/casp.818.
- Loader, I. "Consumer Culture and the Commodification of Policing and Security." *Sociology* 33, no. 2 (1999): 373–392. doi:10.1177/S003803859900022X.
- Newburn, T. "Doing Policing." In *Handbook of Policing*, edited by T. Newburn. Cullompton, Devon: Willan, 2003.
- Rowe, M., L. Westmarland and C. Hougham. "Getting Behind the Blue Curtain." In *Accountability of Policing*, edited by M. Rowe and S. Lister, 69–85. London: Routledge, 2016. ISBN 978-0-415-71533-1.
- Uildriks, N., and H. van Mastrigt. *Policing Police Violence*. Boston: Kluwer Law, 1991.
- Waddington, P. A. J. *Policing Citizens*. London: UCL Press, 1999.
- Walklate, S. "Trust and the Problem of Community in the Inner City." In *Crime, Risk and Insecurity*, edited by T. Hope and R. Sparks. London: Routledge, 2000.
- Westmarland, L. *Gender and Policing: Sex, Power and Police Culture*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan, 2001.
- Westmarland, L. "Policing Integrity: Britain's Thin Blue Line." In *The Contours of Police Integrity*, edited by C. B. Klockars, M. Habersfeld and S. Kutnjak Ivkovich, 75–94. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004. ISBN 0761925864
- Westmarland, L., and Smith, N. "From Scumbags to Consumers: Customer Service and the Commodification of Policing." Unpublished paper presented at the British Criminological Society annual conference, Portsmouth, July 2004.