

If there has been one dominant theme to the language of police management in the 1990s, it is that 'the way forward' lies in the scaling down of traditional 'reactive' or 'demand-led' policing, and the adoption of a more forward-looking, reflective approach characterised by the setting of clear objectives, systematic collection and analysis of information, planned use of resources, and monitoring of outcomes.

# POP, ILP and partnership

Mike Maguire analyses some of the trends in styles of policing in Britain.

This has been expressed over the years in a succession of catch-phrases and acronyms - policing by objectives (PBO), management by objectives (MBO), crime management, proactive policing, intelligence-led policing (ILP), focused patrolling, strategic policing, zero tolerance policing, and problem-oriented policing (POP), to name but a few. It is also central to the thinking behind the forthcoming Crime and Disorder Act, in which police will work in close partnership with local councils and other agencies to carry out 'crime audits' and to develop and implement formal 'community safety strategies'.

While the more cynical among operational police officers tend to view such developments as merely 'flavours of the month', the product of a managerial culture which overvalues (and rewards the creators of) hastily devised 'new

initiatives', there is little doubt that the cumulative effect of such developments has already been considerable, and may have major long-term implications for the nature of policing in Britain.

## Problem-oriented policing

Two of the approaches currently dominating policy in several forces are POP and ILP. 'Problem-oriented policing' was conceived by an American academic, Herman Goldstein, in the late 1970s. It has since had widespread influence in the USA and has been adopted particularly enthusiastically in Britain by Thames Valley and Leicestershire Constabularies.

The basic idea is that police officers seek to identify recurring or ongoing 'problems' (rather than merely responding to individual incidents) and then devise strategies to 'solve' them. In the most radical form of the model, the problems are identified and solutions devised not by managers, but by basic grade officers, who are expected to analyse patterns of calls from the public and to work in collaboration with local residents and non-police agencies. Importantly, too, the 'problems' tackled are by no means restricted to criminal or disorderly behaviour.

'Intelligence-led policing' has been even more influential, involving major organisational change in several forces, most radically in Kent. The model demands a considerable investment of resources in the collection, storage and analysis of intelligence (with much emphasis placed upon the cultivation of informants and the use of surveillance), the aim being to target particularly active groups of offenders or significant patterns of criminal behaviour and to set up operations to 'strike' at the most opportune moment, ideally 'taking out' the whole criminal enterprise at once.

Increasingly, local councils and other agencies are involved as 'partners', their powers being used in some cases as an alternative to criminal prosecution in order to 'disrupt' criminal groups (for example, through eviction orders). Again, the model can be applied in a purely preventive manner, and to problems other than crime. One price of this redeployment of

resources, however, is that many individual crimes reported to the police are not investigated thoroughly, including a huge proportion dealt with over the telephone rather than a visit to the scene: this could result, in the long term, in great victim dissatisfaction and/or reluctance to report offences.

## Teething troubles

Evaluations of both ILP and POP indicate that they face many practical and organisational obstacles, including negative attitudes from some local police managers, frequent diversion of officers into reactive duties, and a lack of training and administrative support (see Maguire and John 1995; Amey *et al* 1996; Leigh *et al* 1996). In most forces, too, the approach tends to be followed only by particular units, rather than across the board.

This may lead one to the conclusion that such initiatives are of only marginal importance and impact, victims of organisational inertia and of the volume of short-term demands on police time. Nevertheless, the tide is clearly running with the information-based, proactive approach that they represent, and it is important to envisage and reflect upon a likely future in which a very significant proportion of all police work involves carefully researched and planned (and often joint) operations to 'solve problems' or to 'take out' or 'disrupt' groups engaged in criminal or 'anti-social' behaviour.

People's instinctive views on the desirability of such a shift in policing style are likely to differ sharply. On the one hand, there are strong arguments for more 'rational' and 'effective' use of limited and expensive police resources, and for strategies to prevent repetitive criminal behaviour in particular 'hot spots'. On the other hand, there are legitimate concerns about the processes by which certain people or activities may become defined as a 'problem' and others not; about the sharing of previously confidential information between agencies with different roles (and which collected that information for different purposes); and about the potential blurring of boundaries between 'criminal' and 'anti-social' behaviour and between



what have and have not traditionally been 'police matters'.

### Potential dangers

However benevolent the aims of individual managers, police forces remain powerful and potentially repressive organisations: wisely, for the most part, they have avoided excessive community intervention, especially in matters of morality or lifestyle. Nevertheless, approaches like POP and ILP, especially when combined with the new partnerships and information-sharing systems to be developed under the Crime and Disorder Act, create extremely potent tools which many officers will find tempting to use to break with this tradition. Groups with strong voices in the community are also likely to demand more vociferously that the police 'deal with' people whose way of life they find annoying or disturbing, even if the latter are not engaged in clearly criminal behaviour. The danger of intolerance and over-zealousness spilling over into serious abuses of civil liberties is a real one, as spelled out cogently by a group of distinguished academics in a recent critique of the proposed 'Anti-social Behaviour Order' (Ashworth *et al* 1998).

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### A slow revolution

In sum, despite the common experience of police officers that many 'strategic' and 'proactive' initiatives are short-lived and make much less impact in practice than on paper, the past fifteen years have nevertheless seen a cumulative change in the police organisation of major proportions - one, indeed, which may eventually come to be seen as the beginning of a slow revolution.

There are features of this change which are obviously to be welcomed, and it has the potential for a significant boost in the effectiveness of crime control across the UK. Equally, though, it contains the risk of creating a dangerously repressive form of social control, in which unpopular minorities and individuals, and easily visible annoying behaviour, become the subject of continuous surveillance and over-intensive policing: at the same time, less easily observed and less vociferously condemned (but no less 'anti-social') activities such as white collar crime and domestic violence, may receive even less police attention than at present. The challenge to police managers (and their partners in other agencies) is to involve the public genuinely in debate and decisions about where to focus proactive

activity, without at the same time falling into the trap of following a blindly populist approach to social control.

*Mike Maguire is Professor of Criminology & Criminal Justice at Cardiff University.*

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