

POLICING WITH THE COMMUNITY

“The more a policeman is hindered from participating in the community the less he will understand public sentiment, the less well he will exercise his discretion, therefore the more are [people] likely to be irritated by his behaviour, the more will they treat him differently in social contacts, the more isolated will the police become. As their sympathy for members of the public declines further, hostility towards them increases, they become further isolated, and so on.”

Michael Banton¹

7.1 In the next few chapters we consider the style of policing, and we make recommendations for the sort of policing that we would hope to see in Northern Ireland in the future. Some of these recommendations, like those on accountability in the preceding chapter, could and should in our view be implemented now. But others will depend to a greater or lesser degree on how the security situation develops, and judgments will need to be made over the next few years as to when they should be introduced, or whether some should only be introduced in selected areas. This caution applies particularly to the recommendations in this chapter, and the next one on “Policing in a Peaceful Society”. The chapter after next, on public order policing, is predicated on the assumption that it will be some years before public order policing contingencies can be substantially relaxed.

“Community Policing”

7.2 We received many submissions, from all parts of the community and from elsewhere, which called for more “community policing”. The term has many definitions and has become somewhat devalued by frequent and indiscriminate use. We have called this chapter “Policing with the Community” because we believe this encapsulates better what most people want to see – the police participating in the community and responding to the needs of that community, and the community participating in its own policing and supporting the police. What we emphatically do not mean by “community policing” is vigilante groups policing neighbourhoods with baseball bats, or, at the other extreme, what the Philadelphia police chief, John Timoney, has described as “sitting around the trees, holding hands and singing Kumbaya”.

7.3 What we do mean is: the police working in partnership with the community; the community thereby participating in its own policing; and the two working together, mobilising resources to solve problems affecting public safety over the longer term rather than the police, alone, reacting short term to incidents as they occur. We explain in this chapter how this should work in practice (see box 2 for an example of policing in partnership with the clergy in the United States).

¹ Banton, M., “The Policeman in the Community”, Tavistock, London 1964

2 – POLICING IN PARTNERSHIP: THE CLERGY

A good example of successful partnership policing is the role of the clergy in some American cities. Santa Ana police, in Southern California, told us they could not have succeeded in reducing crime and disorder in the most difficult neighbourhoods in their jurisdiction without active engagement by the Catholic Church.

In Boston, a group of black ministers have formed a coalition to help bring peace to violent neighbourhoods, with a particular emphasis on youth. The clergy work with gang members, youths involved in drug trafficking, and victims of domestic violence. They offer advice and help over education and employment, healthcare and counselling, and over the past few years they have developed with the police a constructive and mutually-reinforcing partnership in place of what was once a detached and sometimes hostile relationship. The result is safer neighbourhoods, and more black and Latino youth seeking to join the police (see also Chapter 15).

Partnership

- 7.4** The arrangements we have proposed in the preceding chapter on accountability provide mechanisms whereby the community can express its concerns and priorities to the police and the police can explain and report on their conduct and performance. We have also encouraged close cooperation between these accountability mechanisms and other agencies involved in aspects of community safety. But partnership between the police and the community goes well beyond formal arrangements of this sort, and beyond the less formal Community and Police Liaison Committees which may exist at various local levels. Partnership is a matter of policing style, but it is also an attitude of mind, both for police officers and for the public. It is at least as much a matter of philosophy as it is one of method, and it amounts to a profound shift in police thinking and community thinking.
- 7.5** The present policing style of the RUC has been greatly distorted by the security situation, to the frustration of both police and public. Submissions from many serving and retired officers regretted the difficulty of providing a proper community policing service with the constraints imposed on them as a result of the threats to their security – fortified police stations, armoured vehicles, firearms, body armour and so on. Many members of the public called for more beat policing and for dedicated neighbourhood police officers functioning as part of the community.
- 7.6** We do not believe that the absence of community policing in many parts of Northern Ireland can be entirely justified as a consequence of the security situation, although we do accept that it explains a great deal. We have been impressed by the community policing service that some police officers have managed to provide, even in difficult areas, in spite of continuing security threats. One example is the Markets area of Belfast (see box 3), where a number of police officers have lost their lives over the years, most recently Constable Johnston Beacom in 1994, and yet Sergeant Stevie Jones and his team, patrolling on foot, have managed to build up a community policing presence which won Sergeant Jones an award as the United Kingdom's Community Police Officer of the Year in December 1998. We are convinced, from visiting the area ourselves and speaking to residents, police and community groups, that the success of the community police team there is attributable to their attitude towards the local community, to their patient hard work over a period of years, and to the response of the community to this style of policing. We believe that a similar

approach could be successful now in many other parts of Northern Ireland, if the police service were determined to pursue it.

3 – MARKETS NEIGHBOURHOOD POLICING PROJECT

Eight years ago a team of eight constables and one sergeant was set up in the predominantly nationalist/republican Markets area of Belfast. At that time there was virtually no support for the police, and paramilitary organizations conducted their own “patrols” in the area. Over the years the team built up support within the community and a climate of mutual trust and respect developed. The police now operate effectively, which has brought results in terms of both crime reduction and public order policing.

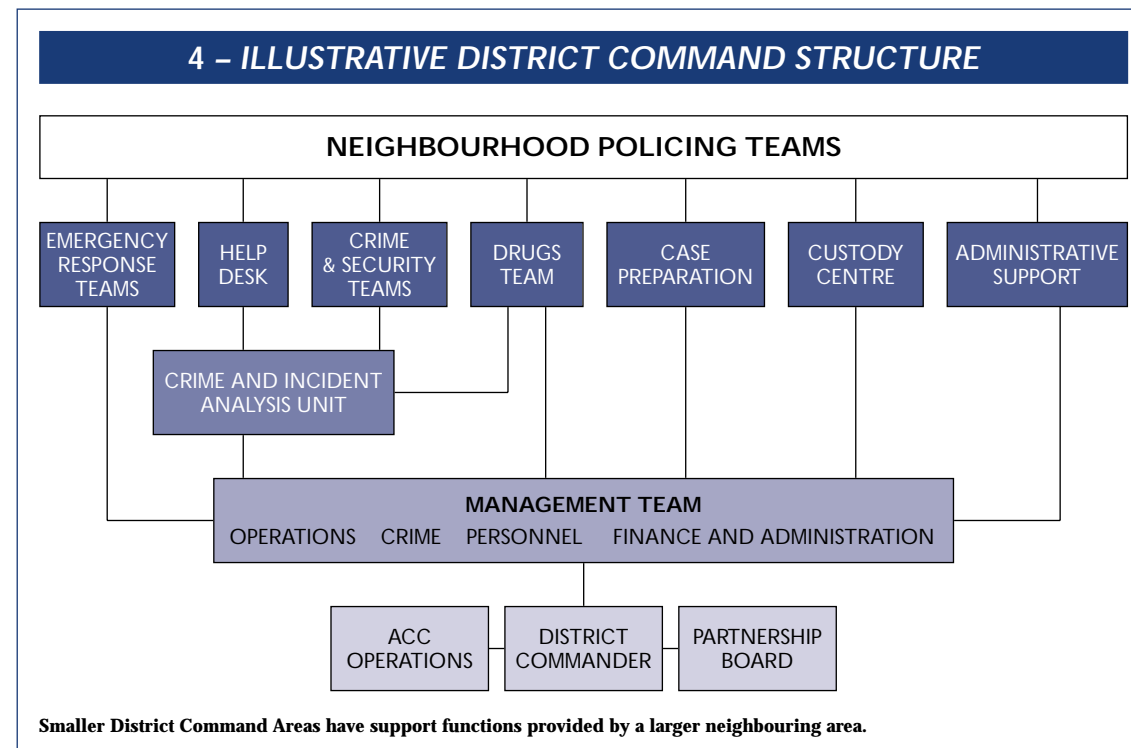
The elements of the team's success are common to successful community policing projects elsewhere in the world. They include:

- a dedicated policing team for a geographical area, with total responsibility for policing that area
- officers with communication, conflict resolution and problem-solving skills who remain with the team for several years
- respect for people of different backgrounds or political convictions
- empowerment of the team to determine policing priorities in partnership with the community
- foot patrolling as the predominant patrol method
- patient and determined development of community activities, including youth schemes and neighbourhood meetings
- recognition by senior police managers that the team's work is important and should not be disrupted by deployments for duties elsewhere
- skilful use of discretion over minor offences, while maintaining a vigorous enforcement regime against more serious offences.

7.7 As presently organized the police service is not well geared towards community partnership policing, but rather to a more reactive style of policing. This is reflected in the allocation of resources. For example, at Musgrave Street police station, which is the headquarters of the sub-division which includes the Markets area, of a total complement of 168 officers, only 25 are assigned to community duties while the great majority are assigned to response duties. The proportions are similar in sub-divisions all over Northern Ireland. Indeed, we learned that at some sub-divisions, neighbourhood policing teams have recently been reduced rather than augmented, in response to pressures on resources. At police headquarters the Community Affairs Branch is an office of eight staff within the department responsible for Operational Support, quite separate from the regional, divisional and sub-divisional commands. The term “Community Affairs” suggests to us that working with the community is seen as a specialist activity, and the way in which it is staffed and resourced suggests that it is at the margin of police work – a good thing to do if you can spare the officers and the time to do it, but not the main function of the police.

7.8 We believe that neighbourhood policing should be at the core of police work, and that the structure of the police service, the staffing arrangements and the deployment of resources should be organized accordingly. Box 4 shows how the district police command should be organized in

support of the neighbourhood police teams; the district headquarters and the specialist units exist to support the neighbourhood teams, rather than those teams being a minor unit of the district command. In chapter 12 we show how the entire police organisation should be structured so that it supports the officer teams working directly with the public. This would radically change the organization and the way it thinks about itself. It would define the interface between the individual citizen and the neighbourhood police officer as the prime focus of activity, to which the rest of the organization becomes a support system. An effective partnership between police and community means a more effective police service and a safer community. A police service that is not engaged with the community in a continuous way will find it hard to act effectively against crime or disorder in that community, because it will find it hard to know the community and get cooperation from it.



7.9 *We recommend that policing with the community should be the core function of the police service and the core function of every police station.* This has implications for the structure of the police, for management, for culture and for training, all of which we cover later in this report. This chapter looks at the components of community policing. Some police officers may express concern at such a radical shift in the organization of their resources but the Agreement of 1998, and the levels of resourcing available for policing in Northern Ireland, should together provide a unique opportunity to deliver truly effective locally-based policing in a way that would put Northern Ireland at the leading edge of such developments in the United Kingdom, Ireland and internationally. The opportunity needs to be grasped with courage and determination.

Dedicated Patrol Teams

7.10 Many submissions, from people of all sorts of backgrounds, emphasized the importance of having local police officers who knew the area and were known, by name, to the residents. This is a hallmark of successful neighbourhood policing projects throughout the United Kingdom and overseas. *We recommend that every neighbourhood (or rural area) should have a dedicated policing team with lead responsibility for policing its area.* Each team should be headed by a sergeant, or perhaps in some cases an inspector, as beat manager.

- 7.11** *We recommend that members of the policing team should serve at least three and preferably five years in the same neighbourhood, that they should wear their names clearly displayed on their uniforms, and that their uniforms should also bear the name of the locality for which they are responsible.*
- 7.12** Neighbourhood teams will form the core of policing in Northern Ireland and as such should constitute the foundation of police officers' careers. It is in this environment that officers will learn the core skills of communication, inter-personal skills, conflict resolution and problem-solving. *We recommend that all probationary police officers undertake the operational phases of their probationary training doing team policing in the community.*
- 7.13** *We further recommend that, where practicable, policing teams should patrol on foot.* William Bratton, formerly Commissioner of Police in both Boston and New York, has said of patrolling: "Driving around the streets is very different from walking on them. In a patrol car, the only time you talk to people is after a crime has occurred. You're not a fixture in people's lives. You're an authority, not a friend; an occasional presence, not a personality. You become them not us"². The American academic, George Kelling, calls it "stranger policing". Clearly it is not practicable for teams covering relatively large patrols in rural areas to do so on foot, but we would hope that they too could cover part of their beat on foot, or on bicycles, rather than using cars alone.
- 7.14** *We recommend that neighbourhood policing teams be empowered to determine their own local priorities and set their own objectives, within the overall Annual Policing Plan and in consultation with community representatives.* The beat manager and his/her team should organize their own community liaison mechanisms and, in partnership with schools, clubs, businesses and so on, they should decide on such matters as how to programme their patrols – whether, for example, to have a police presence outside schools when the children leave for home, or in dark car parks at the end of office hours. We believe that decisions taken in this way are much more likely to be responsive to local community needs than directions from senior ranks far removed from the neighbourhood. As the Police Federation said in their submission to us, "accountability to the community must start at the lowest possible level, ie. at the point of delivery of service to the individual members of the public".

Problem-solving

- 7.15** An integral element of successful community policing is problem-solving. The point here is that much traditional policing has been reactive – responding to specific incidents as they arise. In a problem-solving approach, such as the SARA (Scan-Analyse-Respond-Assess) method developed by the US academic Herman Goldstein with the Thames Valley Police, police first scan data on policing problems to identify patterns, then analyse those patterns to determine causes, then take action, where appropriate with other agencies, to respond to those causes and finally conduct an assessment of whether they have been successful. The objective of problem-solving policing is to solve problems permanently and not just provide a quick fix which will simply be followed by further calls about the same problem. To work such an approach effectively requires the police service as a whole to work in support of neighbourhood policing teams. The police must map problems as they occur, by type of problem, location, time of day, identity of complainants and identity/description of perpetrators. The Audit Commission observed in 1996 that few United Kingdom police services yet did this, and that North America was more advanced in these techniques³.

² Bratton, W., "Turnaround", Random House, New York 1998

³ "Tackling Patrol Effectively". Audit Commission, November 1996

- 7.16** *We recommend that the Northern Ireland police should, both at a service-wide level and at patrol team level, conduct crime pattern and complaint pattern analysis to provide an information-led, problem-solving approach to policing. This will have implications for information technology, which we address in a later chapter. We further recommend that all police officers be instructed in problem-solving techniques and encouraged to address the causes of problems as well as the consequences (the priority being to train beat managers and their teams); and that they be regularly appraised as to their performance in doing so.*
- 7.17** Problem-solving is not something that the police can do alone. Community partnerships and liaison are essential. If, for example, it is discovered that a prime cause of the petty crime or anti-social behaviour afflicting an area is that there are no facilities for young people in that area, the police beat manager will have to seek help from community leaders and groups to get the matter addressed. It may sometimes be necessary for beat managers to attend meetings of the District Policing Partnership Boards to discuss problems that are not easily resolved at a more local level, particularly if District Council or agency action or funding may be needed. DPPB members and other community leaders will also need to understand the problems confronting the police, *and we recommend that they too should be able to attend police training courses in problem-solving techniques.*

Help desks

- 7.18** Members of the public should know whom to call if they need police assistance. Many people may prefer to speak to an officer they know rather than a telephone voice they do not recognize or an answering machine. Beat managers should be encouraged to set up mechanisms whereby they or their team members can be contacted by area residents if they are needed. Help desks at police stations may be one way of doing this. Some police officers organize regular “surgeries” in their patrol areas. There are various ways of addressing this need, and managers should work out with their local community what suits them best. The community in turn needs to have a good understanding of what they can expect from the police, in the context of agreed local priorities. Not all 999 calls, for example, can receive the same immediate response; public and police need to be clear about how such calls should be prioritised.

Looking Ahead

- 7.19** Policing with the community is hard work. It requires huge adjustments on the part of the police service, as the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (who share the same antecedents as the RUC) have discovered and are still discovering. It is a very different type of policing from the reactive, security-focussed policing which most police officers in Northern Ireland have been accustomed to over the past decades (although it emphatically does not mean that police no longer need to be firm on enforcement – they do). It calls for new structures, new management practices and new training, all of which we address in later chapters. But if successfully implemented, community partnership policing will lead to a police service that is both more widely accepted by the community and more effective in securing the safety of the community. As we said at the start of this chapter, this is the way we should like to see policing go forward in Northern Ireland as a whole; but we recognize that the pace of change in some areas will depend on the security situation.