



Arrested Development

Unlocking change in the police service

SUMMARY

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CRIME

PUBLIC SERVICES



About ippr

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About the author

Rick Muir is a Senior Research Fellow at ippr. His research focuses on the themes of democracy, citizenship and public services. His previous publications for ippr include *A New Beat: Options for more accountable policing* (with Guy Lodge), *Pubs and Places: The social value of community pubs*, *The Power of Belonging: Identity, citizenship and community cohesion* (with Ben Rogers) and *Sticking Together: Social capital and local government* (ed, with Halima Kahn). He has a doctorate in Politics from Oxford University and was formerly a local councillor in Oxford.

Executive summary

The police are unique in having avoided major reform under both Labour and Conservative governments. This report argues that with funding set to be cut and with the police facing new challenges, the time has come for radical reform to the police service in England and Wales.

There are two main arguments for reform:

1. The world has changed.

Society has changed in a number of important ways, increasing the range of demands on the police and requiring them, in turn, to change the way they work.

These changes include a transformation in the kinds of roles the police are expected to perform, the emergence of new kinds of criminal activity that require a different response and higher expectations of public services generally.

2. Labour's policing strategy, based on increased spending on the police alongside performance targets set from Whitehall, is no longer sustainable.

Although it can claim credit for a significant fall in crime over the last decade, Labour's approach to managing the police service over the last 10 years now needs to change. The Government's policing strategy has been to spend more money on the police (increasing the number of police officers to record levels) and to drive up performance through the use of centrally imposed targets. This approach cannot continue: there is no more money to spend and the target regime reduced the ability of police forces to respond to changing local demands.

Moreover, while crime has fallen, police performance on a number of key measures has not improved: importantly, the number of detections per officer has fallen and public satisfaction with the police is lower than it was before Labour came to power. If the police are to deal with new challenges and prevent crime from rising again, they will need to change the way they work.

Areas for reform

There are four priority areas for reform:

- We need to better equip the police workforce to deal with new challenges, involving changes to how the police are paid, how they are recruited, the roles they perform and the way they are managed.
- We need to integrate information systems and processes across forces.
- We need to improve the quality of the relationship between the police service and the citizen. This requires changes to the way officers are trained, the further embedding of neighbourhood policing, greater public access to police data and

more use of social media to open up new lines of communication and collaboration between the police and the citizen.

- We need to tackle an excessively bureaucratic and process-driven organisational culture. This means greater professional autonomy for officers, a problem-solving approach taken to crime and more space for innovation at the frontline.

None of these reforms can be progressed unless we tackle a wider set of problems that are caused by the way the police service is governed, organised and held to account.

The governance of the police service causes four major problems:

- It inhibits the capacity of the police to deal with local crime locally and to tackle serious and organised crime at the regional and national level.
- It does not deliver value for money, producing far too much overlap and duplication.
- It confuses lines of accountability, with a weak system of local accountability leading Whitehall to micro-manage police forces in a way that reduces responsiveness.
- It blocks change and reform by empowering internal stakeholders, who are able to rely on sufficient public sympathy to shield themselves from the pressure to change.

This final problem is the most significant. It means that despite three decades of change across the public services, the police, almost uniquely, were able to defend themselves from the public service reform agendas of both Labour and Conservative governments.

As a result of powerful stakeholders blocking reform the Government has had to spend more money on an unreformed system which could be working in a much more productive way by doing things differently. The fact that we are now entering a period of fiscal restraint means that finding a way to unlock reform has become ever more urgent.

Our argument is that unless the governance system itself is transformed, any substantive programme of reform will suffer the same fate as those that preceded it: opposition within different parts of the service followed by a government 'U-turn' for fear of a politically costly conflict with the police. The first reform priority therefore has to be to design a system of governance that is more coherent and less fragmented and that empowers local and national leaders to deliver change in the public interest.

Conclusions

A new system of governance is needed for the police service in England and Wales that will do four things:

- Enhance police flexibility locally while improving capacity regionally and at the centre
- Reduce waste and inefficiency
- Strengthen accountability
- Facilitate change and reform throughout the service.

Our recommended key changes are presented in the box below.

Key proposed changes to the governance of policing

- All local crime priorities should be set at the local level, most importantly by strengthening the role of elected local government. Priorities would be set at three different levels:
 - Reformed police authorities made up of senior councillors would set the budgets and priorities for each police force and hold chief constables to account for performance.
 - Local authorities would directly commission key police services from their respective Basic Command Units.
 - Local neighbourhood policing meetings would set the priorities for each neighbourhood policing team.
- A National Policing Agency (NPA) should be established by merging the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) with those parts of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) that currently coordinate or deliver national policing services. The NPA would have powers to ensure that complex and serious criminal activity that crosses force borders was being effectively tackled through collaboration and to improve the efficiency of service delivery by forces.

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This report is the most recent output from ippr's *Future of Policing* programme. Previous publications include *The New Bill: Reforming the police workforce* by Tom Gash (ippr, 2007) and *A New beat: Options for more accountable policing* by Rick Muir and Guy Lodge (ippr, 2008). **Both are available to download free at www.ippr.org/publicationsandreports.**

ippr also hosted the *Fitting the Bill* conference in June 2009 on the future of policing. This was generously sponsored by the National Policing Improvement Agency, the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities.