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Given government budget cuts, there is a lot to be said for 'total policing', championed by Bernard Hogan-Howe, Met commissioner, says Martin Innes

Totally joined up policing

With the appointment of Bernard Hogan-Howe as the new Met commissioner, some public commentary has focused on the style of policing he will pursue, reflecting on the 'total policing' he embraced during his tenure as chief constable of Merseyside Police.

I first used the term total policing in 2003 in my book *Understanding social control* – but what is it? What are its principles and implications? And, how does it link with the general direction of current police reform?

In theory

The police service is called upon to perform several distinct, but inter-related, functions; it is not possible to describe what police officers do by focusing on just one aspect of the role. Rather, we need to acknowledge that officers reassure the public, collect intelligence, control crime and manage public order.

An alternative view of policing functions advocates increasing specialisation of policing tasks and assigning them to specialist officers and/or agencies.

Total policing maintains that, instead of police officers being fixed specialist assets, they should be flexible and able to deliver most policing services to the public at the point of contact, rather than having to pass enquiries and incidents to colleagues in other departments. This would achieve greater integration and connectivity between specialisms than recently has been the norm.

So rather than neighbourhood police officers dealing with anti-social behaviour issues, response officers responding to 999 calls and detectives getting involved only with serious crime, the approach would require officers on duty to be able to deal with whatever came their way. The issue is that this runs contrary to how policing has been evolving over the past decade.

One of the most important recent trends in policing has been an increasing willingness among officers to see their roles as involving specialist expertise, knowledge and skills. It is now common to hear an officer say 'I do response', 'I am in public protection' or 'I do neighbourhoods'.

The whole social organisation of police officers and the way services are delivered and experienced by the public has been predicated upon this model of officers specialising around

distinct policing disciplines. There has been a tacit acceptance at all levels of the police service that it is not possible to construct a viable policing model around the notion of the 'omnipotent' constable. Total policing challenges such assumptions.

In so doing it might prove to be the right idea at the right time; given the scale of the reductions in the service's central government budget, policing will have to be smaller, smarter and sharper in future, and total policing seems to fit the bill.

In practice

The Universities' Police Science Institute at Cardiff University and South Wales Police have been experimenting with our own version of total policing. The aim has been to try to connect and integrate better the work of neighbourhood policing teams and that of other, more specialist officers who tackle serious organised crime.

The programme has tried to systematically identify the public's neighbourhood security needs and policing priorities. Based on 4,200

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in-depth interviews with members of the public, we identified areas of Cardiff where drugs-related issues were principal drivers of public concern. These were not in areas of the city necessarily identified by the force's existing criminal intelligence. Other forces have used this approach on a localised basis but this project aimed to deploy it 'at scale' across the South Wales Police area.

Responding to these publicly identified concerns, covert police assets have been deployed under the auspices of Operation Michigan to identify the main players in local drugs markets. Test purchase officers were placed in the local area to map the market dynamics and dealers and covert officers filmed them.

The footage was then given to neighbourhood policing officers who, using their street knowledge, were able to identify and name many of the individuals concerned.

The police operation then entered an enforcement phase resulting in:

- 184 people arrested for Class A drug supply. Of these, 110 were

identified from the covert deployments. The 74 other arrests came from overt disruptions and community intelligence;

- prison sentences totalling 200 years being set by the courts;

- 6kg of heroin, crack and cocaine seized;

- a 36 per cent reduction in serious acquisitive crime in the target areas;

- a 25 per cent reduction in anti-social behaviour.

More informal feedback from local communities also provided important insights into the potential benefits of these ways of working. For example, some of the people arrested and sentenced had previously been seen as 'untouchable' and beyond the reach of the police.

In operation

Operation Michigan and the work feeding into it illuminated how neighbourhood policing and more specialist policing assets can be joined up to deliver interventions with a bigger impact. It showed how a structured process of working with the local community can be used to identify problems, and how carefully using specialist policing assets can enhance the impact of police action in ways that are visible and meaningful to citizens. This builds public confidence and can reduce street crime.

Using police assets locally in this way seems to have been missing from the national Serious Organised Crime Agency's toolkit. This approach also shows people do care about serious organised crime issues. This example suggests ordinary citizens may pick up on and detect symptoms of organised criminality but it requires a degree of police expertise to interpret symptoms and to connect them to their cause.

In an age of austerity where there are going to be fewer police officers and more demand, it is important to think about how policing is organised and what different modes of organisation can deliver. It is tempting to dismiss ideas such as total policing but such ideas might help to challenge some of the received wisdom about how policing has to be delivered, and inspire radical thinking about how policing is configured for the future. ■

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