

School of Law

FACULTY OF EDUCATION, SOCIAL SCIENCE & LAW



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# 'Private Security Patrols: Back to the Future?'

**Responding to Anti-Social Behaviour: Insights from Research for Policy and Practice**

19<sup>th</sup> July, 2012

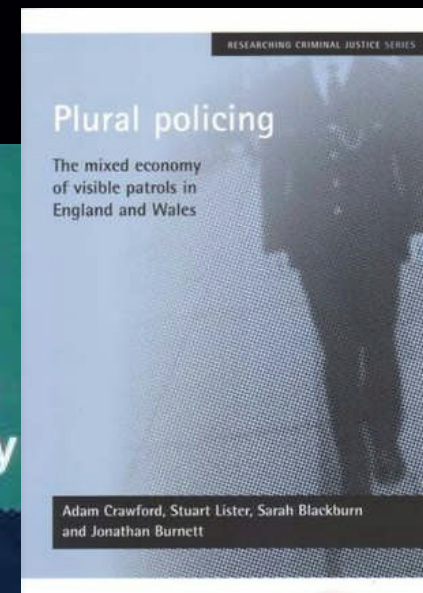
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# 'Private' security patrols in 'public' places



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# Recent Context: Private policing returns to the limelight



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# Keeping patrol within the police?



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‘There has been considerable public debate regarding the private sector becoming involved in policing and **all parties agree that private sector industries should not be involved in the routine patrols of public open space.** We are concerned that this proposal crosses this line. We do not think that the public would be happy with private company employees patrolling the streets wearing body armour and camera equipment.’



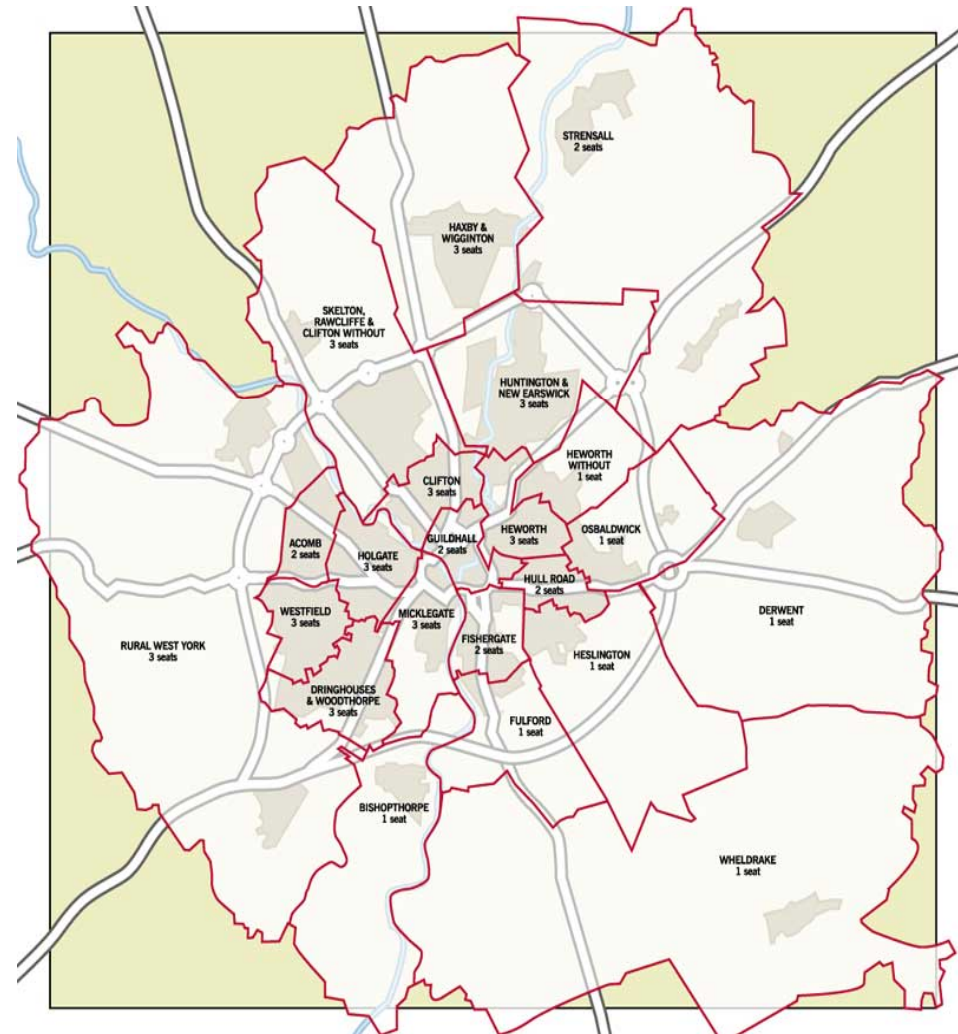
**(Sir Peter Fahy)**

# Private security patrols in residential areas: The York experience



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- In 1999, SRB funding used to purchase patrols for one localised area of York
- By 2003, 16 of 22 council wards were separately funding, on a rolling annual basis, patrols (via devolved community budgeting)
- By 2007, the number of participating wards had reduced to 11, by 2011 only two were funding the patrols





# Nature of the scheme



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- Each day 'community rangers' carried out two x 30-minute patrols, per ward, between 5pm and 12am
- Pre-determined routes, double-crewed, vehicle-based, with on-board video capability
- Est. a free-phone, helpline number for 'participating' residents
- Provided monthly activity analysis (e.g. no. of calls received, incidents observed, police requests to attend)



# What did patrolling officers do?



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‘I analysed a monthly batch of monitoring reports from [security company] and over 80% of their service is being directed towards young people and anti-social behaviour. Now...that raises lots of issues and one of them is a training issue about how they actually deal with young people.

‘But it’s quite apparent that the majority of their service is being directed towards anti social behaviour. And use of the 0800 number and residents reporting incidents to [the security company], in the majority of cases they related to anti-social behaviour.’ (Community Safety Manager, York City Council)

# The Decline (I): Set-up to fail?



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- ‘...what you’ve got is a service which has developed without any real clear terms of reference. Nobody actually had any idea what they expected to get out of it, other than this additional private security patrol was going to solve anti-social behaviour wasn’t it.
- ‘So you’re in a very difficult position now because, on the one hand, it hasn’t achieved what people thought it would because of course anti-social behaviour hasn’t gone away, young kids are still being young kids playing on a night doing whatever they’re doing, so therefore in the eyes of the community well it’s not actually achieving anything. But then on the other hand it quite clearly isn’t necessarily all down to [the security company’s] inability to deliver. It might simply be that they didn’t have a clear remit of what they were there to do in the first place and that’s never been documented.’ (Community Safety Director, York CC)



## The Decline (II): Other factors



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- Failure to deliver against resident's expectations that patrols would address 'the problem'
- Perceived decline in level of service (e.g. consultation, accessibility, visibility) and emergence of accountability deficits, accentuated by changes in the contracted provider
- Sizeable reduction in devolved community ward budgets
- Failure to develop durable and robust partnership relations with local police, plus (circa. 2004>) market entrance of Police Community Support Officers

# Observations on activities of private security patrols (I)



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- Like police patrols - the presence of security patrols could antagonise conflict and escalate crime and disorder
- The more security patrols were reactively geared towards responding to community demands on ASB the more difficult it became to meet contracted deployment schedules
- Difficult for patrols to garner the types of knowledge/relations helpful to addressing ASB, since officers mostly remained in vehicles and, moreover, were often seen as adversaries
- Key tactic (when security officers did exit vehicles) was to move groups of young people elsewhere, raising concerns over displacement, safety and stigmatisation

# Observations on activities of private security patrols (II)



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- Difficult for patrols to generate problem-solving approaches to ASB problems, since they had limited means of leveraging in wider support / interventions of public authorities
- Although (in public) police welcomed the patrols as ‘additional eyes and ears on the ground’ – in reality the partnership was haphazard, fragile and shallow
- Some perceptions that police were ‘passing the buck’ by routinely requesting security patrols attend incidents of ASB
- Security company was reticent about its officers attending court to give evidence in ASB cases (i.e. ‘dead’ use of time)



## Closing remarks



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- The presence of private security patrols in public and quasi-public places raises questions over how best to harness the activities of 'private' actors to further the collective interest
- Establishing good (strategic and operational) working relations with police and community safety partners offers a route to securing this outcome
- Responsibility for governance & oversight of private patrol providers might rest with Police & Crime Commissioners
- A caveat to the 'participatory budgeting' agenda (to local democracy?) > subjecting public's demands for security, policing and order to rationale dialogue