

Public Order and Public Safety (POPS) Policing

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Overview

This report addresses a range of issues relevant to Public Order and Public Safety policing (POPS). It explores the processes through, and extent to which, 'knowledge led' approaches can be developed and enhanced both locally and nationally. It discusses the importance of a conflict reduction strategy, which may enhance *efficiency* by reducing demand upon resource over time. It also explores the way in which policing can improve *effectiveness* through augmenting capacity for differentiation and proportionality through a strategic focus on facilitation of rights and providing tactical options before coercion. In so doing the aim of this project is to assist in augmenting police *legitimacy* by enhancing public trust and confidence.

Key Findings nationally

- Nationally Police Liaison Teams (PLTs) describe delivering very positive outcomes through their capacity to: build relationships of trust with protesters; improve command decision-making; enhance proportionality; construct and maintain police legitimacy and facilitate 'self-regulation' in crowds. The result appears to be less confrontation, fewer arrests, and less demand on resources.
- There is a common experience among PLTs of colleagues not adequately understanding or being hostile to their role and deploying them inappropriately. In particular it is only the resilience of PLTs to resist demands from colleagues to perform 'intelligence' functions that has kept the role intact.

Implications nationally

- There is a desire to see PLT more formally embedded at a national level, preferably with leadership under the NPCC national portfolio.
- We suggest there needs to be: a nationally coordinated Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) to assist PLTs to defend the integrity of the role; a coordinated investment so PLTs are properly and adequately resourced; clarity developed about the necessary competencies and a coherent programme of recruitment to the role. Respectively, PLTs need to reflect the diversity of the communities they police and a national expertise register developed.
- Formal training needs to be (re)developed so PLTs, public order commanders and tactical advisors have a clearer and consensual understanding of the role and theory

Key Findings locally

- PLT experiences in West Yorkshire reflect the national picture set out above. PLTs are now embedded within force but findings suggest the importance of further advancing a liaison-based approach to POPS policing.
- Relatively small PLTs are achieving significant outcomes. As such there is a 'capability gap', particularly within football, where there is considerable potential and opportunity for WYP to pioneer a wider 'liaison based' POPS capacity.
- However, there is a requirement to address force strategy, training and resourcing, as merely "bolting" PLTs onto match day policing is likely to be relatively ineffective

Implications Locally

- There is scope for WYP/OPCC to lead nationally through developing the concept of 'Event Police' in the football context, leading grant applications and provisioning training through Carr Gate / University of Leeds.
- Any change that is introduced needs to be properly managed to create internal and external legitimacy.

Introduction

The study represents one strand of an ESRC funded Knowledge Exchange Opportunities Scheme project that sought to explore innovative models of research co-production and knowledge translation. The project was a collaboration between a team of researchers at the University of Leeds and West Yorkshire Police (WYP) together with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire (OPCCWY).

Since 2009 POPS policing nationally has undergone major reforms in terms of policy (ACPO, 2010). Key drivers for these changes have been recognition of: a) the centrality of the Human Rights Act (1998) as the primary legal framework for policing protests; b) the Elaborated Social Identity model as the theoretical basis for understanding crowd psychology and behaviour. PLTs are one of the important tactical developments arising from these policy reforms. PLTs use non-coercive dialogue as a basis for conflict de-escalation, through building trust and confidence with crowd participants, facilitating their lawful goals, promoting better information flow, police legitimacy and problem solving capability. PLTs first appeared in April 2011 and have now been adopted by around three quarters of UK police forces. A PLT unit was developed by WYP in August 2013 when they were deployed for the first time, and with good effect, during a national EDL demonstration in Bradford.

Despite these innovations in protest policing there is as yet little systematic evaluation at a national level of the nature, outcomes and experiences of PLTs. Additionally, notwithstanding the conceptual, policy and operational concentration on policing protests the vast bulk of POPS demand for most urban police forces within the UK actually occurs in relationship to policing football. For example, during the three seasons between 2011 and 2014 WYP deployed 18,326 police officers to football related public order operations. Moreover, football operations have led to extremely negative outcomes for WYP in terms of undermining public trust and confidence. In particular, in July 2013 on the basis of complaints by members of the public the force was required to initiate a formal external enquiry by Northumbria Police concerning the POPS

operation surrounding a fixture between Huddersfield Town and Hull City. As a result in September 2013 WYP Chief Constable issued a formal and high profile public apology.

There is some evidence that PLTs are effective because they enhance police capability for what has been referred to as '*liaison based*' POPS operations (Stott et al, 2013). Nonetheless, given their ubiquity there is now a requirement for systematic evidence based analysis of PLT deployments, experiences and impacts at a national level. Moreover, despite their apparent benefits PLTs are not routinely deployed during football POPS operations, either within West Yorkshire or anywhere else nationally.

Consequently, this strand of the project concentrated on: a) examining the nature of football POPS operations in West Yorkshire and the associated impact of PLT deployments; b) drawing out a clearer understanding of the generic issues confronting PLT policing at a local and national level; c) further embedding an 'evidence based' or 'knowledge led' approach to POPS policing in and beyond West Yorkshire.

Methods and Data Collection

The study utilised a series of workshops, training events, focus groups and field-based observations. The first two workshops delivered in November 2014 provided advanced training to 34 PLTs within West Yorkshire Police. During both of these events an open-ended questionnaire was distributed asking the Police Liaison Officers (PLOs) to briefly describe their positive and negative experiences and what they would like to see change in relationship to their deployments. Subsequently, between January and March 2015 four semi-structured observations were undertaken of the policing operations surrounding football fixtures at Bradford City, Huddersfield Town and Leeds United. Each observations involved academics and police officers, including the force's Head of Public Order Training. In March 2015 football 'spotters' from across the three clubs were brought together to discuss a range of issues relevant to the research. This primary data was supplemented with secondary data gathered in late 2013 and throughout 2014 during earlier knowledge co-

production projects in West Yorkshire, which included the planning and implementation of operation Woolfox – the policing operation surrounding a National EDL demonstration in Batley in August 2014. The earlier collaboration also included four observations at fixtures exploring the use of PLTs conducted as part of a Masters dissertation funded by WYP, which included a focus group with PLTs regarding their deployments. In total we draw data from 10 field observations of football policing operations of which four used PLTs (West, 2014). Finally, in order to explore the national picture a ‘*National PLT Conference*’ was held at the University of Leeds in partnership with the College of Policing on the 26th and 27th March 2015. The conference attracted 85 delegates from twenty-seven different police forces and included academics from four additional Universities. The format of the event allowed for presentations on day one from eight police forces from across the UK on their experiences of PLT policing. On day two the delegates broke into eight syndicates, each tasked to discuss the positive and negative aspects of PLT experience. The syndicates were then required to report back in plenary on key negatives and positives relating to organisation, skills and training, deployments and approach.

PLTs: the National Picture.

On the basis of the national conference it was evident that PLTs are delivering very positive outcomes, primarily through their capacity to build relationships of trust and confidence with protesters. These processes and outcomes are enabling PLTs to understand the perspective of crowd participants and create channels of communication with them. In turn these are assisting operational commanders to generate dynamic risk assessments that improve decision-making and, as one group expressed it, not only solve emerging problems among protestors but also to “*prevent Silver from acting disproportionately*”. These processes appear to be helping to construct and maintain perceptions of police legitimacy among crowd participants, in turn facilitating a culture of ‘self-regulation’ in within their organisations about what happens to that information, leaving PLTs exposed to negative pressures, risks and compromised integrity. PLTs also experience significant issues with their PSU

crowds. The result appears to be less confrontation, fewer arrests, and importantly less resource and time spent dealing with the events themselves as well as the negative effects that arise as a consequence of ‘disorder’.

Beyond these positives the conference was also able to explore some of the underlying difficulties. There is a common experience among PLTs of public order commanders and other colleagues not adequately understanding their role and therefore deploying them inappropriately. This is particularly important because of the fragility of the trust and confidence PLOs often have worked so hard to construct being undermined because of an inappropriate tactical response from the public order commander. Because of their effectiveness PLTs are also finding themselves an increasingly stretched resource, where they are being progressively relied upon as the primary tactic. But there is often a lack of formal investment in the role by their organisation and therefore poor integration into the operational planning. This is leading to situations where PLTs are forced to constantly give up rest days, become overstretched, exhausted and are unable to operate effectively. There are also other welfare and organisational issues that emerge from the close bonds that are formed with protestors and hostility experienced from colleagues.

One of the central concerns revolves around a perception of PLTs as ‘intelligence’ gatherers. On the one hand this perception comes from colleagues who try to task them as a form of *Forward Intelligence Officer*. At times it is only the resilience of PLTs to resist these demands that has kept the role intact. This is particularly important because on the other hand there is a perception among protestors that PLTs are really just an insidious form of deceptive police surveillance. The central issue being their privileged position of trust and confidence with protestors, brought about through their non-repressive non-surveillance liaison role, leads to improved quality of ‘information’. However, there is then an absence of transparent and consistent policy colleagues and feel at times their effectiveness at communication simply reinforces a lack of engagement, and mistrust toward them, from their peers creating a ‘silo’ mentality.

PLTs: the WYP perspective.

Our research suggests the WYP approach to football POPS is of a high standard but could be developed in a number of areas. In particular, force strategy for football does not reflect Authorised Professional Practice (APP) and sits in stark contrast to strategic developments by the force in relation to the policing of protest, where there is a clear focus on the facilitation of rights. As James and Pearson (2015) assert jurisprudence does suggest that football fans enjoy the same rights of assembly, association and expression as those who engage in political protest. There are also evident weaknesses in the intelligence driving threat and risk assessments. Moreover, while the approach to planning is generally resilient and efficient there were situations of 'over' and 'under' resourcing. For example, on one operation 6 PSU's (150 officers) were deployed to police 200 away fans, where there was no obvious sign of underlying risk. In contrast, 4 PSUs were used to police 4000 away fans where there were significant signs of risk and where 'disorder' did occur. Moreover, throughout and across our observations there was an overwhelming focus on the policing of 'away' fans, where it was 'home' fans that were representing greatest and ongoing risk. Our research also indicates that currently WYP football policing operations have limited capacity for dialogue with 'risk' fans beyond that partially but inconsistently delivered by football 'spotters'.

In this respect our research suggests that PLTs can play a beneficial role in football in terms of: adding depth and quality to 'risk' assessment; improving command decision making; enhancing police capacity for dialogue, communication with and 'self-regulation' among 'risk' fans; assisting the avoidance of 'disorder' and police coercion. But our research also suggests that while PLTs do have clear operational benefits various 'internal' issues limit their effectiveness. Problems were identified in terms of: a) resistance and hostility to change among colleagues; b) lack of structural investment / inclusion and c) inappropriate

deployment of the resource. In this respect our examination of PLT experience across protest and football events within West Yorkshire reflected the national picture. PLTs described how they provided improved dialogue and communication, which enhanced cooperation from influential figures in crowds. This improved the quality of 'information' or 'intelligence', which increased situational awareness among command teams and impacted positively on proportionality. This empowered police legitimacy and capacity to prevent 'disorder'. However, PLTs described how there was poor overall management by some commanders. They also described a lack of competency for the role among some PLOs and experienced negative reactions from many PSU colleagues. For example, 87% of WYP PLTs reported experiencing hostility from PSUs and 47% described inappropriate, ineffective or counterproductive tasking by public order commanders.

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