

## Community policing in Northern Ireland: a resistance narrative

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Policing in stable democratic societies is predominantly concerned with the implementation and practice of the globally accepted philosophy of *community policing*. However, the subtle complexities of Northern Ireland's transitional landscape present acute problems for the community policing concept, both as a vehicle for police reform and as a tool for increasing the co-production of security through improved community interaction with the police. This article will examine the current position of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and their *Policing with the Community* policy. Providing an overview of contextual and contemporary developments, it will assess the efficacy with which the PSNI have realised community policing, as espoused in Patten Recommendation 44. It concludes by determining the role and extent of community engagement with policing in Northern Ireland and the resistances and contestations to the implementation of the *community policing* in a post-conflict society.

**Keywords:** Police Service of Northern Ireland; community policing; community engagement; policing Patten Report

### Introduction

In the context of Northern Ireland, policing policy and practice is undoubtedly no stranger to change (McGloin 2003). From the Report of the Hunt Committee (Northern Ireland Parliament 1969) through to the Independent Commission on Policing for Northern Ireland (1999) (the 'Patten Report'), the continual processes of police reform and reconstruction now reflects a significant proportion of the often contested 'change dialectic' (O'Rawe 2003). Thus, with the germane issues of police reform often generating as much controversy as police activity, policing has become entwined into the socio-political discourse of Northern Ireland, to the extent that 'implicitly, bargaining about policing became meta-bargaining as to the nature of the conflict ...' (Campbell *et al.* 2003: 342). It also remains a fact in Northern Ireland that the rule of law (and by extension policing) has also been inextricably tied to the dominant political agendas over the last thirty years (Dickson 2000). It has therefore generated a consensus 'that if policing can somehow be 'got right' many of the other pieces of the jigsaw will slot into place' (O'Rawe and Moore 2001: 181).

The Patten Report, as the most significant and complex blueprint for police reform in the world, may be conceptualised as an end to the incremental and politically nuanced 'tinkering' to policing, and the beginning of a substantial, inclusive and permanently

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This paper will present a theoretical and practical examination of the post-Patten vision of community policing, as delivered by the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

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acceptable change process (Office of the Oversight Commissioner 2006: 1, NIPB and PSNI 2007b). It cannot be ignored that the Patten Report was 'gutted' and 'diluted' in terms of the translation of recommendations into legislative form under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (Hillyard and Tomlinson 2000, Shearing 2000, McEvoy *et al.* 2002). Indeed, such was the extent of this prophylactic process that the Patten package consolidated 'ownership of the change in the very bodies that had been responsible for policing prior to the Patten Report' (O'Rawe 2003: 1047). However, the vast majority of the 175 recommendations have now been completed, as confirmed in the Oversight Commissioner's final report published in May 2007 (Office of the Oversight Commissioner 2007). Thus, when combined with the 1070 recommendations generated by the concomitant policing structures and bodies (including the Northern Ireland Policing Board, NIPB, District Policing Partnerships, DPPs and Police Ombudsman) which the Deputy Chief Constable claims to have passed his desk, it is impossible to argue against the weight of change momentum (Leighton, quoted at 'Policing the Future', NIPB and PSNI 2007b). Indeed, the successful transition and reform of policing has translated into a new found political acceptability. With Sinn Fein not only accepting the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) for the first time in their history, but also taking their seats on the NIPB and DPPs, it has undoubtedly engendered political change with the establishment of the new Assembly (*Belfast Telegraph* 2007a, *Belfast Telegraph* 2007d).

Examining the PSNI in more detail, beyond the contested nature of Patten reforms *per se*, it is vital to explore their organisational sensibilities and rationale, which form part of the drive towards becoming acceptable to all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. In this context, it is interesting to note Moxon-Browne (1983: 28), who indicated that 'to seek a solution to the Northern Ireland problem is to pursue a mirage in the desert: a better ploy would be to irrigate the desert until the landscape looks more interesting'. Borne out of the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, the Patten Report may be viewed as part of the wider peace process and as 'The commitment to a fresh start ... the opportunity to take best practice from elsewhere and lead the way in overcoming some of the toughest challenges of modern policing' (Patten Report 199: para 1.5). Therefore, conceptualising Patten as the irrigating mechanism in more detail, its role may be further elucidated by consideration of the reform process into two 'streams'.

The first stream, which has arguably reached its natural denouement, is the reform to the systems of policing, from badges to human rights training, as espoused in the end of the Oversight Commissioner's term of office (Kempa and Shearing 2005). The second, related to the idea of organisational rationale, is 'concerned with broader questions around the governance of security, or, 'policing' broadly conceived' (Kempa and Shearing 2005: 5). It is to this second stream, and the underlying Patten Recommendation 44 which states 'Policing with the community should be the core function of the police service ...' (Patten Report 1999: para 7.9) that the remainder of this paper will focus upon. On one level, the discourse will consider police practices to extract meaning from underlying political trends and their implications for future police practice (Kempa *et al.* 1999: 197). On the other, it will examine the PSNI's shift towards a community policing philosophy as part of its reform process, insofar as 'the police have ... the capacity to tell us something about the normative ordering of society ...' (Ellison and Martin 2000: 694).

Thus, this paper will argue a number of general points in relation to the reforms of Patten through examples of community policing practice. Firstly, it will demonstrate that the impressive proposals with regard to 'policing with the community' have ignored the deep-rooted divisions which have characterised the transitional landscape of Northern Ireland. Secondly, it is contended that the exigencies of those divisions continue to

dominate the concerns of the PSNI to the extent that the 'radical' second stream of Patten has yet to be realised, thereby rendering community policing as a 'new' means of legitimising 'old' policing problems in Northern Ireland. And finally, it is argued that the institutional inertia of the PSNI with regard to practice and innovation in community policing serves only to perpetuate the societal resistances to policing in the Province. Here, through the practice of using 'safe' strategies of community engagement, it will be argued that the PSNI undertake community policing which represents 'more of the same' rather than any significant, new departure in terms of expanding community interaction.

### **Police reform, institutional inertia and post-conflict policing during political transition**

Having emerged out of 30 years of protracted, internal armed conflict, Northern Ireland has arguably reached its most 'stable' period in recent history (cf. Campbell 2000). With the Independent Monitoring Commission (IMC) indicating that Northern Ireland has now reached an advanced stage of 'normalisation' (IMC 2007), the transition from conflict to peace has progressed significantly since the publication of the Patten Report, culminating in the restoration of devolved power (*Belfast Telegraph* 2007c). However, Northern Ireland is still in a stage of what may be termed 'positive peace', or merely the removal of cultural and structural violence (Holen and Eide 2000), still far removed from the conventional meaning of a peaceful, integrated environment conducive to the implementation of community policing principles.

Indeed, it is only eight years into the post-Patten era that the new, inclusive political will to support the generic notions of community policing has begun to gather momentum, outside of the traditional relationships of police–public confrontation which tend to dominate transitional societies (Ruteere and Pommerolle 2003). It is therefore against this backdrop, combined with Northern Ireland's (still) highly segregated and divided society that community policing will be considered (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006). On one hand, framing policing in the context of a conflicted democracy will help to conceptualise some of the theoretical and practical considerations of implementing a community policing model in a post-conflict society. On the other, it will further understanding of whether community policing is indeed a concerted effort by the PSNI to mobilise, integrate and govern police–community relations under this globally accepted policing practice (Weatheritt 1988, Groenewald and Peake 2004, Clarke 2006).

The community policing concept has been covered extensively in both the academic and practitioner literature over the past 30 years (Greene and Mastrofski 1988, Rosenbaum 1994, Mastrofski *et al.* 1995, Brogden 1999). Suffice to say, any attempt to comprehensively disseminate this vast body of work would be futile in such a short space. However, there are a number of important points to be considered, especially when the importance of community policing is heightened in context of police reform as a tool for conflict management (Groenewald and Peake 2004).

In its broad sense, community policing is an amorphous concept. With foundations in early 1970s America, it has come to represent everything from an organisational philosophy to a style of law enforcement (Albritton 1995, Oliver and Bartgis 1998, Roberg *et al.* 2005). It is further underpinned by the Peelian conceptions of policing and Westphalian notions of community and state (Crawford 1995, Shearing 1996). Thus, based on the homogenising connotations of 'community', it is premised 'in folk-mythic conceptions of the community as sharing a unified value system. It presumes a high degree of consensus at a time when communities are more diverse than ever' (Fielding 2005: 460).

In our ever diversifying society, the pursuit of the community policing chimera is a self-justifying process (Waddington 2007). With the staged death of traditional, reactive policing (Kappeler and Kraska 1998), it has been replaced by the allure of decentralised, expansive, problem-oriented, cooperative, community-based policing (Dixon 2004). Promising an increase in effective, democratic, community-anchored policing (Loader 2000), it simultaneously limits public expectations about state-centred provision of security and citizen safety (Goldsmith 2003), while maintaining a police-centric autonomy, based on both claimed expertise and a monopoly on the use of force (Bittner 1974, O'Shea 2000).

The PSNI's commitment to community policing, under the rubric of 'policing with the community', is a clear derivative of this global policing concept. Indeed, its popular appeal has enabled such a concept to gain considerable currency in modern policing practice, highlighted by its import and export on a transnational basis (Van der Spuy 2000, Brogden and Nijhar 2005). It is not, however, a totally foreign concept to policing in Northern Ireland, strictly limited to the period of post-Patten reforms. Flanked by up to 16 members of the British Army, former members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) did venture to undertake what may be conceived as beat patrol in contentious areas (Hamilton *et al.* 1995). Though how the PSNI approach this policing with the community philosophy and practice is no less simplified in the new era of relative peace in Northern Ireland. As argued by Mulcahy (1999: 278), 'in the aftermath of a . . . conflict, peace itself can constitute a crisis to the extent that it undermines the policies, practices and assumptions ingrained and institutionalised over the years'. Therefore, with the potential uncertainty of both police and public roles in the post-conflict transitional space, it raises the need for the clarity of community policing principles, and certainty of equitable delivery by the PSNI to new levels of importance (Ryan 2007). As recognised by Jarman (2002), such an issue is particularly salient with regard to reducing the disconnection between the PSNI and working-class communities (both Protestant and Catholic) in Northern Ireland. This is undoubtedly vital in the drive towards aligning 'local standards of conduct and acceptable enforcement' as part of the community policing philosophy (Skolnick and Bayley 1990 cited Jesilow and Parsons 2000: 170). Such a context also increases the importance of policing, based in the realities of communal segregation and police legitimacy in Northern Ireland, to reducing the delivery gap, insofar as community policing tends to work least well where it is most required (Webb and Katz 1997).

The PSNI's 'policing with the community' philosophy is distilled into five distinct categories: Accountability; Empowerment; Problem Solving; Partnership; and Service Delivery (PSNI 2002). While none of the categories are mutually exclusive, the intention of this article is to briefly examine each area of the PSNI's 'policing with the community' philosophy, while offering a critical appraisal of each area in the context of community involvement with the police. From this perspective, it will then be possible to examine the resistances to community policing in Northern Ireland in light of the arguments put forward.

### ***Accountability: notional or normative?***

At a basic level, the accountability discourse tends to rest upon the much vaunted *legal* accountability of the PSNI to the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, and to the NIPB for training, budgetary and human rights issues (Dixon and O'Brien 2003, Mulcahy 2006). However, the reality of accountability for community policing policy and practice is somewhat of a vexed question, despite the fact that lax accountability structures and the days of 'policing on a blank check' are a fact of the past (Tomlinson 2000). Questions must

be asked with regard to how the PSNI may be held to account for implementing such a philosophy and practice with no strict legal definition, or accurately quantifiable outcomes beyond the police-centric performance indicators (Brooks 2006). And also important in the context of police reform is the question of how the police can be held to account for the reform to a community policing approach in relation to policing standards characteristic of former practice.

Under the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, police officers are obliged to 'carry out their functions with the aim (a) of securing the support of the local community, and (b) of acting in cooperation with the local community'. Under Part V of the 2000 Act, as enacted by the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000 (Commencement No. 5) Order 2003, the NIPB and the Chief Constable must also have regard to carrying out their functions with a combination of economy, effectiveness and efficiency. This is despite the fact that such an approach in itself as 'Best Value' and target-oriented, may be in conflict with community policing principles (McLaughlin *et al.* 2001, Fletcher 2005, Berry 2007).

Beyond these basic accountability structures and mechanisms, the DPPs have a statutory monitoring remit under Part III of the 2000 Act to consult, identify, monitor, engage and act within the community in accordance with the objectives of the policing plan. To digress slightly, the DPPs were established under Part III of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act of 2000 as part of the new institutional accountability and oversight infrastructure created through the reforms to policing under Patten. Playing a significant role in one of the most farsighted police governance structures in the world, the DPPs are a vital part of 'policing with the community' in Northern Ireland. As a tool for the police to reach out and engage with communities, as well as a platform from which the public may voice their concerns and hold the police to local account, the DPPs, as part of Patten's vision have far outstripped any previous efforts to engage with communities in Northern Ireland, or indeed the UK. However, there are many underlying tensions with regard to the DPPs and community engagement (not necessarily attributable to the PSNI), to which attention shall now turn in the evaluation of whether DPPs actually ensure 'that policing is at the heart of the community . . . Accountability to local communities and transparency are central to the operation of DPPs' (NIPB 2007b: 6).

At present, DPPs are far from the representative forums for plural debate upon policing matters for local catchments of civil society in Northern Ireland. As yet, Sinn Féin, as Northern Ireland's largest nationalist/republican party have only just taken their seats on the NIPB and DPPs, nearly five years after their creation. Thus, a significant proportion of the nationalist/republican community has been divorced from the policing debate (willingly or not) by their absence from the less than stringent DPP *monitoring* rather than accountability function (Mulcahy 2006). Even those nationalists from the more moderate Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP) who have taken their seats on the NIPB and DPPs have sustained an ongoing campaign of intimidation, harassment, assault and bombings in recent years (*Belfast Telegraph* 2007b). Indeed, some of the newly appointed Sinn Féin DPP members have been publicly issued with death threats by dissident republicans (*Belfast Telegraph* 2007e).

While there may be implicit barriers to participation in the NIPB and DPPs for the nationalist/republican community, for the Protestant majority who are involved in holding the police to some form of account, further problems underline the tenuous relationship between public involvement and police accountability at the community level. Based on a recent Freedom of Information request by the *Belfast Telegraph* (Northern Ireland's national newspaper) an appalling public attendance record at DPP meetings was uncovered, despite running costs spiralling to approximately £12m (*Belfast Telegraph*

2006). With 268 out of 300 meetings between May 2003 and March 2006 with less than 20 members of the public in attendance, far from acting as ‘an excellent sounding board . . . providing a useful channel of communication between the police service and the community’ (Police Federation for Northern Ireland Chairman 2004 cited Mulcahy 2006: 174), the DPPs have come to mirror the now dated Community Police Liason Committees (CPLCs). Derived from the logic of the Scarman Report (1981), the unrepresentative nature of the CPLCs (Walker 1990) has arguably been reenacted, albeit in a different form. While such problems resonate more closely with the political transition rather than policing reforms *per se*, as succinctly captured, ‘one person described DPP meetings as “talking shops” staged managed to avoid controversy . . . while a CPLC member stated that he declined an offer to join a DPP on the basis that it stood for everything . . . [they] worked against as a community activist: it was disempowering people . . .’ (Mulcahy 2006: 175). Thus, it is clear that community policing in this sense has been tempered by the politics of managing the symbolic value of accountability, even if at the perceived expense of maintaining the biased relationships of the past.

With the promulgation of such limited accountability in place of a truly democratic one with regard to policing issues (at least in the short term) (Brogden 2006), it is clear that the rhetoric of transparency and accountability for policing through the DPPs has been characterised by what may be perceived as a self-justifying, police-centred ‘closed shop’ for a significant Protestant majority over the last five years. With the average age of DPP membership standing at 48 (personal communication, telephone conversation with Northern Ireland Policing Board staff), and having been dominated by middle class Protestant males, it is unsurprising that one DPP manager at the recent ‘Policing the Future’ conference (NIPB and PSNI 2007b) attempted to justify the use of Orange Order Halls as a legitimate setting in which to hold inclusive DPP meetings for the whole community.

This apparent lack of openness and vision in the DPP structure (not subject to any meaningful legal redress) with regard to accountability has been demonstrated by the uncertain role of DPP members in exercising their function. To digress slightly, a recent report by the Criminal Justice Inspectorate for Northern Ireland (CJINI) highlighted the often overlapping and conflicting functions of the DPPs and community safety partnerships (CSPs) (CJINI 2006b). The latter receives funding directly from the Community Safety Unit (a branch of the Northern Ireland Office) with regard to tackling community safety issues under the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, while the DPPs receive nothing. This is despite identifying often similar policing and community safety issues.

Thus, recent government attention has turned to the possibility of amalgamating both the DPPs and CSPs, not only to resolve tensions between the bodies, but increase efficiency and synergy. Returning to the role of DPP members, at a recent consultation for the DPPs (NIPB 2007a) held in relation to the ongoing Review of Public Administration (RPA) (see [www.rpani.gov.uk](http://www.rpani.gov.uk)) restructuring in Northern Ireland, the majority of members wished to see an amalgamation of the two bodies. With such a potential shift clearly outside the remit of Patten’s vision for DPPs to monitor and hold the PSNI independently to account, such a ‘civil service’ solution to policing problems may have a detrimental impact on the future for the accountability of the PSNI at the community level because of the potential to add another layer of bureaucracy between the already distant relations of the police and the public. Any such move would also ignore the inherent problems of promoting accountable policing across Northern Ireland’s divided society, demonstrating the institutional inertia of both the police and the state to effectively deal with the problems of segregation in relation to the police function. Thus, with the monitoring role of the DPPs reduced to little

more than an unrepresentative consultative forum, it is a stark example of the incompatibility of dominant political trends with the future of police practice mandated by Patten (Kempa *et al.* 1999, Mulcahy 2006).

Finally, developing the debate on policing and the RPA (as part of the governments drive to reduce public expenditure) the issue of police–community accountability may suffer a further blow. Within the context of RPA and in line with section 14 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, the number of District Command Units will be reduced in conjunction with the new council boundaries, from 26 to approximately 7–12. There is, however, no current evidence in the literature that supports the contention that the regionalisation of police services improves either their efficiency or effectiveness (Lithopoulous and Rigakos 2005). Combined with the fact the RPA may in fact force members of the PSNI to regress to basic (reactive law enforcement) functions in the face of complex institutional realignment, an issue raised by a member of the PSNI at the ‘Policing the Future’ conference (NIPB and PSNI 2007b), accountability may be little more than notional for the foreseeable future. And with the DPP-to-population ratio dropping dramatically from approximately 1:65,000 to 1:213,000 following RPA, it will further reduce the capacity of the PSNI to be equally accountable to diverse groups with differing social needs, within the new artificially defined boundaries (Bradley 1998). In this respect, the adoption of community policing in Northern Ireland then becomes a ‘new’ means of representing accountability within a framework of legitimacy issues, obfuscated with the financial and political concerns of governmental administration.

### ***Empowerment: empowering the police or the community?***

Turning attention to another of the ‘policing with the community’ substrates, empowerment is arguably the most critical aspect of the community policing philosophy. As a referent around which both the police and the public may be organised, ‘the beauty of empowerment is that it appears to reject the logics of patronising dependency . . . Subjects are to do the work themselves, not in the name of conformity, but to make them free’ (Rose 2000: 334). Though as shall be highlighted, empowerment, as envisaged by the PSNI through joint ownerships of crime between the police and community (PSNI 2002), raises a number of issues with regard to the institutional inertia of the PSNI in terms of community policing objectives.

An initial theoretical enquiry firstly raises questions as to whether empowering communities on the basis of crime is ‘the appropriate vehicle around which to regenerate communities’ (Nelken 1985: 239). Indeed, with ‘social cohesion’ as a key organisational goal of the police discourse, at least under the 2003–2006 National Policing Plan for England and Wales (Joyce 2006), there is still a remarkable lack of definition and clarity as to what may be expected of the ‘empowered’ community (Buerger 1994). Thus, with little competition to the community policing ideology and its assumptions of empowerment, the police retain the power to shift the context and forums that ultimately effect change at the community level (Braithwaite 2004), creating the illusion of community empowerment under the guise of public ‘involvement’.

Examining empowerment in specific relation to the PSNI function, at the grassroots neighbourhood level, officers ‘should be empowered to determine their own local priorities and set their own objectives within the overall policing plan . . .’ (PSNI 2002: 12). Commensurate with such a goal was Patten’s model of decentralised policing, to devolve authority and autonomy down the ranks, within the police organisation. But with no explicit provision in Patten or the legislation to deliver this aim (Tomlinson 2000), it has

been argued that more attention is paid to the correction of police–community relations than to active, neighbourhood level empowerment of police officers in determining their own priorities (Kempa and Shearing 2005). It must also be noted that PSNI officers are not immune from the potential pitfalls of self-empowerment in the lower ranks associated with community policing. A lack of willingness to take unnecessary risks outside daily routines, scepticism about community policing objectives (Skogan 2006) and the potential resistance of dominant police culture (Chan 2003) may all combine to reduce the efficacy of community policing, whereby ‘employees, whether labourers or professional, tend to oppose changes that affect their jobs, and police officers are no exception’ (Ellison 2006: 13).

Looking towards the empowerment of the community in Northern Ireland, the objectives of the PSNI are unambiguous insofar as ‘the community should ... be empowered to identify problems in their areas and play a part in the solution together with police and other agencies’ (PSNI 2002: 12). However, on top of suffering from many of the problems associated with involving communities in crime prevention generally (cf. Grinc 1994), the government’s continued refusal to trust or accept the work of the highly developed voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland has further limited the potential capacity for communities to empower themselves through such a medium (McEvoy *et al.* 2002). Such a position was evidenced in the recent CJINI inspection report on Loyalist restorative justice schemes, which apparently ‘approves’ their role in contributing to the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour, yet adopts an ‘arms length’ approach. With resistance to primary funding of the schemes from any the statutory criminal justice agencies, there is a recognition, yet implicit mistrust by the government and police, of such work at the community level in tackling crime (CJINI 2007), a clear demonstration of the institutional inertia restricting potentially innovative pathways for community policing practice.

Espoused in Patten Recommendation 32, the government’s lack of commitment to fully empowering local communities was made clear. The recommendation indicating that local councils should be enabled to raise 3 pence in the pound for *policing* purposes (which could have been distributed to voluntary and community sector groups within communities) was the only recommendation never to be enacted in legislation. Here, the deliberate limitation of the capacity for community empowerment on policing issues in the context of local security governance is stark, whereby the police monopoly on security is maintained at the expense of Patten’s all encompassing vision of community policing (Johnston and Shearing 2003).

As recently identified by the CJINI, Northern Ireland has approximately 4500 registered voluntary and community sector groups (CJINI 2006a). The CJINI was unable to accurately detail their contribution to the criminal justice system, and less so policing. Though even if a small proportion could make a viable contribution to policing, in whatever form, the potential benefits for both police and community empowerment could be vast. But with the continual apathy by the police and government to effectively intervene in the non-state policing arena (Kempa and Shearing 2005), there is an undoubted failure to capitalise upon their potential social utility to both reduce crime and empower local people. And with such limited potential for capacity building at the community level, political empowerment is also reduced insofar as ‘community organisations can serve as a legitimating entity for political leaders who wish to tackle police issues’ (Bass 2000: 150). Thus, any rhetoric relating to empowerment clearly disguises the unwillingness of the PSNI to relinquish power to the community as envisaged by Patten.

Despite the restrictions identified which limit the empowerment of the community through voluntary and community sector groups, they do play a limited role in managing community safety issues in Northern Ireland (CJINI 2006a). With key positions occupied by the main groups in some of the CSPs throughout Northern Ireland, 'in the absence of a devolved government the voluntary and community sector has had a marked influence on the development of criminal justice policy' (CJINI 2006a: vii). Though beyond this observation, how much of their work contributes to effective policing practice remains far from clear.

Outside the 'talking shops' of DPP meetings (Mulcahy 2006) and the statutory body dominance of CSPs (CJINI 2006b), community groups may obtain funding for crime reduction initiatives through their local DCU from the Policing with the Community Fund (CJINI 2006a). Set up to allow District Commanders to involve such groups within the overall objectives of the policing plan, it may appear an astute method of police and community empowerment. However, underneath such a simplistic method, lie complex problems which conflict with the open and inclusive nature of empowerment underpinning the community policing ideal.

Firstly, through such funding channels, local community problems are shaped through the lens of macro-level police performance indicators, in adherence with the policing plan objectives. Secondly, the funding may therefore be allocated by the PSNI to suit the available community-based assistance to their own priorities, disempowering communities by subsuming local needs to PSNI goals and objectives. Thirdly, because the funding can only be provided within the remit of the overall policing plan objectives, it may only be afforded to communities or groups in cases where the District Commander feels it would be justified under the rigours of DPP and NIPB scrutiny. Fourthly, funding may be limited to that of groups who are perceived as not politically contentious. The implication for community policing is that where the PSNI control funding for communities through such methods, it may allow the police to maintain relationships which reflect safe and trusted channels. Thus, for those at the periphery of society (and indeed many Republican and Loyalist groupings), it may create barriers for those willing to foster new relationships where community policing activity is attuned to the familiarity of the past rather than innovative practice for the future.

Finally, to compound the omnipresent nature of complex social issues which surround even the most benign policing problems in Northern Ireland, for those groups and communities who do receive funding, there are difficulties which still resonate with police legitimacy issues. From data relating to the Policing with Community Fund, received under a Freedom of Information request (on file with author), there is clearly conflict between the empowerment of some groups by the PSNI to reduce crime, and the social acceptability of such cooperation. Apparent from the information, almost 15% of schemes which received funding had their identities concealed under section 38(1)(a) and (b) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which states (on the grounds of health and safety) 'Information is exempt if its disclosure under this Act would, or would be likely to (a) endanger the physical or mental health of any individual, or (b) endanger the safety of any individual'. Empowerment 'on the quiet' is clearly for some, the only way to help reduce crime in areas where the legitimacy of the police is contested and the informality of alternative security governance fails to represent adequately the concerns of those on the margins.

In overview, police and community empowerment towards effectively realising policing with the community objectives in Northern Ireland still has many bridges to cross. Empowerment can only be effective where dependency is replaced by self-help (Rose 2000). On one hand, empowerment in Northern Ireland is somewhat of a Sisyphian task insofar

as it involves engaging with communities who have been stridently opposed to working with the police in the past. Indeed, this is a crucial dilemma which resonates with all aspects of community policing in Northern Ireland. On the other hand, until the police and government fully accept Northern Ireland's vibrant civil society as a unique feature of the conflict, empowerment will merely remain notional. This is especially pertinent in view of the need for relationships in the community policing context 'to build upon community strengths rather than being viewed as competing or challenging loci of power of influence' (O'Mahony *et al.* 2000: 126). In this regard, empowerment of the community by the PSNI is therefore something to be treated with suspicion, a legacy of the transition where security concerns override community policing principles.

***Problem solving: whose problems, whose solutions?***

At a general level, problem solving may be considered a 'process of studying crime and disorder issues, usually in geographically defined areas, so that responses can be identified and implemented to address the causes of those issues' (PSNI 2002: 10). It is clear that the community policing philosophy plays a pivotal role in such a process by amalgamating a combination of police expertise and community knowledge in striving towards community-oriented solutions. However, in the new risk society (Ericson and Haggerty 1997) and the apparent drive towards an ultimate state of Cartesian criminology, problem solving has become decidedly insidious. By allowing the police to indulge in the criminal engineering of social problems, often outside their mandate and expertise, it 'encourages the false belief that all complex local problems can be solved under the arbitrary label of criminality' (Broden 2006: 15).

A consequence of such police centrism is that all problems identified by police management are identified as police problems to which there are police solutions (Fielding and Innes 2006: 136–7). Thus, the public can at best expect to have their role in the problem-solving process with the police reduced to a residual input function. With the powerful requirements of the audit society (Power 1999) to make tangible the subtle qualitative and subjective value judgements of police work it requires that 'boundaries and distinctions have to be put in place and spaces have to be visualised, mapped and represented via surveys, audits . . . and so on. New experts emerge who operationalise these techniques, who construct theories and conceptualisations . . .' (Rose 1999 cited McLaughlin 2002: 95). Therefore, in what may be conceptualised as a merger of Brodeur's (1983) 'high' (technology based) and 'low' (community-based) policing, an examination of the shift in the PSNI's problem-solving capacities in relation to the public may be developed.

The essence of 'traditional' problem solving under the community policing label is based on the Peelian vision of the police as the public and the public as the police (Shearing 1996). But with the realisation of the late modern risk society (Garland 2001) in which new technologies seek to implement actuarial regimes (Simon 1988), the local social and moral economies of 'low' policing (Brewer 2001) have now been enveloped by the prospective and profitable pursuit of 'high' policing risk management strategies.

A positive point to note at this stage is that problem-solving technologies, which identify specific problems down to the finest levels of granularity (Ashby 2005) help to effectively realise one of the key tenets of community policing: it differentiates and discriminates against those who suffer most, taking account of relative social problems (Broden 2002). Therefore, police resources may be targeted more efficiently and effectively with regard to those problems identified.

Though in light of the police centrism which has been shown to dominate the problem-solving discourse thus far, it may come at a price. The public and local communities are now used as information sources rather than being involved in the problem-solving process. A case in point was highlighted by Professor Martin Innes at a recent DPP training session on reassurance policing (NIPB, PSNI and CSU, 2007). As part of the National Reassurance Policing Programme (Home Office 2005), innovative thinking to combine problem-solving approaches, neighbourhood policing and identification of signal crimes (Innes 2004, 2005, 2006) have been aligned within a singular problem-solving model. But in relation to the use of the public as information sources, Professor Innes identified one more key component – ‘Neighbourhood Sentinels’. This ‘new’ phraseology is ultimately adopted to identify key public figures with significant local contextual knowledge about local crime and disorder. But within the context of Northern Ireland, this rationalisation of community involvement in problem solving to ‘key’ individuals suffers from two distinct impediments, which shall now be explored.

Firstly, ‘neighbourhood sentinels’ are by no means a new departure of innovative police thinking. For years, the former RUC and PSNI have effectively used such information sources, commonly known as ‘community activists’ in both the ‘high’ and ‘low’ policing conceptions. Northern Ireland’s conflict has generated significant numbers of community activists, with these potential ‘sentinels’ numerous throughout many communities. However, the issue of police legitimacy demarcates an explicit limitation to police and community security co-production in many areas within the problem-solving context. Contrary to O’Rawe’s (2003) assertion that policing must be owned by all, engagement by such community members in the problem-solving process is largely governed by willingness to engage with the police (based on sectarian division), rather than necessity, especially with regard to solving low level community policing issues. With such a dilemma having consolidated ownership of the police–community problem-solving process in the hands of the Protestant majority over the years, community policing in this regard has merely served to replicate the inequalities which existed prior to Patten.

Secondly, even where there is effective use of community activists by the PSNI, it is often far removed from the cosy conceptions of community policing envisaged by Patten to solve low level crime and disorder. As identified by Jarman (2002, 2006), their use is often limited to conflict management and public order situations within the wider peace building process (Jesilow and Parson 2000). This not only bolsters the argument against the relevance of community policing tactics in transitional societies (Brogden 2005), but also demonstrates that the public order concerns, which continue to dominate many sections of Northern Ireland’s society (Shirlow and Murtagh 2006) will require an altogether different ‘problem-solving’ process, outside the community policing ‘panacea’ (Brogden 2004).

It is clear that within this problem-solving context, its applicability as part of the community policing philosophy encounters a number of impediments within the Province. Though in light of recent political developments and republican acceptance of policing, the traditionally ‘passive’ cooperation of the police with ‘willing’ communities should now give way for proactive problem solving with the whole community. In this respect, the politics of transition may be seen to have engendered at least part of the ‘solution’ to the difficulties of problem solving as part of community policing paradigm in Northern Ireland.

### ***Partnership: vexed relations?***

In practical terms, partnership may be conceptualised as the logical extension of the problem-solving process, insofar as ‘partnership should be broadly representative of the

community as this is crucial if the police service to be provided really reflects local needs and concerns. This should be seen as a cooperative effort to facilitate problem solving' (PSNI 2002: 8). Indeed, it has been recognised that the past 30 years has served as a period of significant 'pluralisation' of policing (Bayley and Shearing 1996, Loader 2000). Thus, an increasing number of auspices and providers seek to promote security (often in partnership) within everyday contexts, across a wide variety of networks and outside the remit of the public police (Shearing 2001, Dupont 2004). Though whether partnership is truly a cooperative PSNI effort, or whether it is just another buzzword for increasing police bureaucracy in Northern Ireland (O'Rawe 2003), will be explored in the following section.

At a basic level, the generally acknowledged plural nature of security provision (Crawford 2006) does not automatically connote the community policing objective of collaborative and egalitarian relations between police and non-police entities (Wood and Marks 2006). The resistance to the 'threat' of bodies other than the police in Northern Ireland who may aspire to power and influence in the field of security (Stenson 1993), is an implicit feature of official government discourse. In this respect, it has been argued that the Northern Ireland Office should 'overcome its chronic distrust of the community and get up to speed with the idea that modern government requires *real* partnership between state and civil society ...' (Gormally 2003: 14).

Indeed, the distrust of 'real' partnership at the government policy level may have translated into policing at the operational level, with the partnerships in the community policing context acting as little more than mechanisms for the furtherance of government-based public interest objectives regarding crime and control (Shearing and Wood 2003). Thus, with the multiplication of bodies authorised to deliver (in partnership) government objectives in the field of security (Rose and Miller 1992), 'community policing remains, at its most discursive and practical levels, the intellectual property of the public police and as such has reinforced their authority as a central directing auspice with the nodal field of security governance' (Shearing and Wood 2003: 208).

As already alluded to in the previous sections, the existing structures for partnership between the public and the PSNI arguably operate on a response deficit, with a clear gap between the preferences of the community and the actions of the police (Crawford 1995). However, an interesting example of the PSNI's attempt to furnish a partnership with the community in Northern Ireland may be evidenced in relation to neighbourhood watch. Launched in 2004, 'Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Watch' is a partnership between the PSNI, NIPB, Community Safety Unit of the Northern Ireland Office and the local community. Though in light of data obtained under a Freedom of Information request to the PSNI (on file with author) such a scheme, despite its inherent problems, encounters further obstacles bound to the socio-political dynamics of Northern Ireland (Fleming 2005).

Initial examination of the data would suggest a positive public uptake of such a partnership opportunity with the PSNI to reduce crime and increase community safety. And with approximately 17,000 households in Northern Ireland now part of the scheme, it has undoubtedly been popular since its inception in 2004. But when scrutinised more closely, the figures suggest a partnership between the police and community that falls somewhat short of facilitating cooperation and problem solving. From the data, the vast majority of schemes are based in predominantly Protestant areas, with no registered or accredited schemes in a key area traditionally opposed to policing, namely the West Belfast district command area. In this context, such a partnership approach then merely reflects the lingering issues of continued social segregation and police legitimacy, although arguably outside the control of the PSNI. With such impediments to partnership seemingly ingrained into the fabric of Northern Ireland's communities, the continued pursuit of this

community policing approach on one hand only serves to demonstrate the PSNI's inability to adapt and pursue partnership strategies outside the comfort zone of the status quo. Though on the other, it clearly demonstrates the inherent inability of certain communities to see beyond their own socio-political myopia. Thus, the implication for the partnership approach for both the police and certain communities is that with one eye on the past, it may be easier to maintain traditional, polemic relationships rather than taking a leap of faith and put resources into forging partnerships anew.

### *Service delivery: awkward customers?*

The final area of the PSNI's policing with the community strategy is that of service delivery, which 'must reflect the concept that the police exist to serve the community . . . to enable the delivery of a professional, community-centred service that is effective, efficient, appropriate and accountable' (PSNI 2002: 8). Despite such promising aims in the PSNI's public relations armoury, the reality of their service delivery is however, more complex and nuanced than simply catching more criminals and a friendly 'bobby on the beat'.

The PSNI, a service with one of the highest police-to-population ratios in the Western world, should arguably have the resources and manpower to deliver an effective service to all sections of the community in Northern Ireland according to its own guiding principles. However, in an interview with a senior PSNI officer, it was perceived that the reduced numbers of police officers (as recommended by Patten) has actually had the effect of limiting the capacity of the police to undertake community policing, reducing PSNI's role to one of response policing (interview conducted 25/4/07). Thus, there appears to be at least some organisational belief within quarters of the PSNI that Patten's vision of community policing may not be fully realisable within the present context of Northern Ireland's transition. And when combined with the fiscal constraints of modern government policy on policing (McLaughlin et al. 2001, Ashby et al. 2007, Hepworth 2007) and the PSNI's legal obligation under Part V of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000, policing in Northern Ireland is not immune from the danger that 'the philosophy of economy, efficiency and effectiveness is forcing police managers to concentrate their resources upon the quantifiable aspects of police work . . .' (Joint Consultative Committee 1990 cited Bennett 1994: 109).

In the current climate of economic analysis, where policing has undergone a 'prospective reorientation towards actuarial calculation and risk reduction . . .' (Zedner 2006: 85), it may be noted that what cannot be measured, tends to be undervalued (Sprinks 2007). Thus, it appears we are now entering a new era of policing where political reforms appear to be in conflict with the principles of police-community cooperation. Indeed, measuring something that 'never was' as part of the subtle, qualitative aspects of community policing is difficult to quantify in any survey or performance indicator. With the public belief in social institutions such as the police based on respect rather than economy and efficiency as 'the kind of relationship articulated in a customer satisfaction survey' (Fielding 2005: 465), this reorientation may fail to adequately equate what the police deliver with the actual requirements of the community in a post-conflict society.

Developing this concept and the idea of customer satisfaction within the service delivery context of community policing, it may be argued that the 'learned societal fetish for safety' (Kappeler and Kraska 1998: 307) mandates the expansion of police powers into almost every aspect of social life. This has the subtle effect of creating what may be termed an 'autopoietic' system: that is, one in which 'self-referential, self-generative, recursive systems of communication . . . produce and reproduce themselves' (Black 2000: 602).

Espoused in crime surveys, police statistics and satisfaction surveys, the police constantly produce tangible and visible indicators, attuned to the public's fears and anxieties. But at the same time, the constant recourse to notions of community policing obviates the past (and to a lesser extent present) reality of policing in Northern Ireland insofar as 'the wholesome notion of community with what is inherently problematic social practice tends to elide the adversarial aspect of policing by implying that whatever is done is done in the interests, and with the consent, of "the people" . . . the fact that policing is usually done to someone, as well as on someone's behalf, is conveniently forgotten' (Dixon 2004: 252). Thus, in reference to the relatively recent nature of the conflict in the Province, merely improving the delivery of a policing service may not be enough to ameliorate community experiences of the past.

Such orientation towards public satisfaction, as a legitimization of police service delivery through results, also suffers from a number of problems within the more specific context of Northern Ireland's transitional society. As part of official discourse and organisational police memory in Northern Ireland, such surveys as measures of service delivery have been used to construct Northern Ireland not only as a low crime society, but also as a measure of police legitimacy (Brogden 2000, Ellison 2000, Mulcahy 2000). However, it must be remembered that public 'satisfaction' as articulated through such surveys, should not necessarily be assumed to represent the explicit, empirical actions and crime reduction strategies of the police. Within many republican and nationalist areas (and some loyalist), where police legitimacy is still contested, the *lack* of police presence and action may generate a high degree of satisfaction with the police, simply because of the reduced potential for situations of confrontation (Brogden 2000, Ellison 2000, Mulcahy 2000).

But within the rapidly changing context of Northern Ireland's policing discourse, service delivery remains far from a static concept, anchored in the problems segregation and legitimacy. As evidenced, the *de facto* positive officer attitudes in the PSNI towards the delivery of community policing bodes well for the future 'service delivery' of policing (McGinley and Gibbes 2006). Indeed, Sinn Fein's participation in policing governance structures may not only help to align community demands with police service delivery, but may also aid in mediating the socio-political impediments to the PSNI's significant service delivery efforts since Patten. The planned introduction of police-community support officers onto the streets of Northern Ireland in February 2008 is also significant within the service delivery concept of policing (cf. Crawford et al. 2005). This subtle, discursive shift towards a neighbourhood and reassurance style of policing as indicated by the latest policing plan (NIPB and PSNI 2007a), may indeed help to bridge the gap between the increasing complex nature of service delivery by the police, and the simple desires of the public for familiar faces and quick responses (Povey 2001: 168).

As indicated by Professor Martin Innes at a recent DPP training seminar, the 'trick' to service delivery is 'to promise little, but deliver a lot' (NIPB, PSNI and CSU, 2007). The PSNI have unquestionably promised *and* delivered much in the post-Patten era. Though whether their service delivery approach can keep pace with the reality of new social and political sensibilities, and cope with the delivery of effective policing to the new republican and nationalist 'customers' of the future, remains to be seen.

But implicit in the arguments set forth on service delivery within the community policing paradigm is the fact it cannot be based on externally dictated objectives and measurements, grounded in fiscal constraints and what the police think the 'average' citizen needs through aggregating surveys. This is especially so within Northern Ireland's transitional society, because where community policing is premised on such assumptions,

it merely becomes a proxy for policing directed at (rather than with) the community in the pursuit of government objectives.

## **Conclusion**

In summary, it is clear that the PSNI's 'policing with the community' philosophy, as part of the core of Patten suffers from many social, political and cultural impediments. Indeed, the intention of this paper has been to evidence some of the resistances to the implementation of community policing in Northern Ireland, which is equally important to assessing the successes in any critical account (Ferret 2004).

From the arguments put forward, the challenges posed by Northern Ireland as a transitional society have clearly served to limit the implementation of 'policing with the community'. As a consequence, while the PSNI have been radically transformed in the post-Patten era, the change to policing on the ground has been largely unaffected, and in many areas of the Province policing largely mirrors the reactive style of policing characteristic of the Troubles, albeit in a relative peace-time context.

In terms of ignoring the deep-rooted divisions of Northern Irish society, there has been an implicit failure by the PSNI (and the concomitant structures) to accept the complexities of policing in a transitional society (Brogden 2005). Indeed, the successful implementation of community policing cannot be argued when those complexities dictate that large sections of the Province still remain unsure about engaging with the PSNI. And while there is undoubtedly a strong case in relation to continuing progress on the police reform and political fronts, this does not appear to have translated successfully at the 'coalface' of police-community engagement. In this respect, both the police and the community still have many bridges to cross.

It may be seen that the institutional inertia of the PSNI has to varying degrees, limited each of the elements of 'policing with the community'. And in the face of the ever-present security threat in Northern Ireland (Marchant 2007), this paper has demonstrated the unwillingness of the PSNI to relinquish control to, and thereby effectively empower, the work of Northern Ireland's highly developed civil society, obviating the realisation of Patten's radical second 'stream'. In this context, community policing has become the 'new' means of legitimising 'old' policing problems – namely the problem of trusting various communities with the co-production of security beyond anything deeper and more meaningful that may upset the socio-political status quo (O'Rawe 2003).

Indeed, such institutional inertia serves only to play into the hands of those who advocate a managerialist, performance-oriented approach to police work. With community policing acting as little more than a proxy for performance management within Northern Ireland's post-conflict space, the subtle, discursive shift by the PSNI towards a neighbourhood/reassurance style of policing (NIPB and PSNI 2007a) is an implicit recognition of the incompatibility between Patten's vision of policing and the agenda of the PSNI in delivering results.

The Patten Report may have provided for one of the most robust and farsighted structures for police governance anywhere in the world (Ellison 2007). But as the arguments in this paper have demonstrated, the implementation of community policing in Northern Ireland's transitional society has (in some cases) only served to support the politics of police reform rather than effect meaningful change on the ground. Thus, from an objective viewpoint 'policing with the community' will continue to be constrained when the problems of political transition, institutional inertia and community resistances are allowed to dictate its implementation. Indeed, successful claims at community policing

cannot yet be made. This is especially clear when Patten's vision of policing may be supported by one community, yet across a peace divide in another, it must be conducted from the back of an armoured land rover where lethal force remains the ultimate (and necessary) expression of police power and legitimacy in the Province.

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