



Home Office

BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Police Research Series
Paper 149

Diary of a Police Officer

PA Consulting Group

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*The views expressed in this report are those of the
authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office
(nor do they reflect Government policy)*

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Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC Unit) is part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. The PRC Unit carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction.

The Police Research Series presents research material on crime prevention and detection as well as police management and organisation issues.

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Foreword

Public reassurance has become an increasingly significant item on the agenda of policing practices and policies. One key issue in allaying public concerns is the visibility of police officers, particularly on the beat. Such reassurance policing is not just a question of increased police numbers but also of utilising the time of existing officers more efficiently so that they spend the maximum time possible on patrol.

In August 2001, the Home Office commissioned PA Consulting Group to undertake a study in order to gain a fuller understanding of what is involved in the 'typical' shift of a police officer and what are the barriers that prevent police officers from spending more time on the beat. The study involved police officers from seven police Basic Command Units across England and Wales recording the activities they were engaged in throughout their shift. Of these officers, over seventy of them were interviewed directly after their shifts in order to gain a more detailed understanding of the pattern of demands on their time.

The study aimed to identify ways to reduce officers' time away from the beat, particularly by reducing or eliminating those tasks performed by officers that could be done by civilians, outside agencies, or by better use of technology. Its recommendations will be major elements in consideration of police reform.

Many of the officers interviewed in the study expressed frustration at the way they were prevented from doing their jobs by what they felt were bureaucratic, time-wasting activities. Ultimately, therefore, the success of any reforms that increase the visibility of officers will improve not just public reassurance but also police morale.

Lawrence Singer

Head of Policing Group

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Thames Valley Police (Milton Keynes)

West Midlands Police (West Bromwich)

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The authors

The PA Consulting Group authors who worked on this project were Jim Knox and Stephen McDonald.

Jim Knox is a Partner of PA Consulting Group.

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Executive summary

In August 2001, the Home Office commissioned PA Consulting to undertake a study with the aim of gaining a fuller understanding of what is involved in the 'typical' shift of a police officer and to identify ways to free-up officers' time so that they can perform more reassurance policing.

The study involved police officers across England and Wales recording the activities they were engaged in throughout their shift. Some 378 'diaries' were properly completed. We also spoke to over 70 police officers to gain a more detailed understanding of the pattern of demands on their time and what prevents them doing more reassurance policing.

Because of the time constraints involved this is a limited study, although its findings are broadly backed up by analysis of other data such as local activity analysis.

Our findings

We found that police officers are spending almost as much time in the police station (43.1 per cent of their time) as they are on the streets. For five hours a day, over 50 per cent of the officers on a shift are in the station. The study also found that:

- Most time out of the police station is spent dealing with incidents and making enquiries. Only around 17% of police officer time is spent on reassurance patrol.
- When on patrol, most is conducted from a car, in part because officers need to be able to respond rapidly to priority incidents. Although the size of the sample means the results from this study should not be extrapolated, it appears that foot patrol is a rarity.
- On patrol officers are often 'double crewed', particularly at night, rather than deployed singly. A shortage of vehicles and health and safety considerations in part explain the extent of double crewed patrols, but custom and practice play their part as well. The visibility of the police diminishes.
- Officers are more able to get out of the police station at night, with officers on the night shift spending two-thirds of their time out in the community – but at a time when fewer people see them – so the reassurance impact is less.
- There is no evidence that 'community beat officers' spend more time on the beat than police officers who are assigned to a sector.

** i.e. removing officers from normal duties to undertake other work.*

There are a range of factors which compound the lack of reassurance policing; abstractions*, sickness and training mean that many reliefs are down to a bare minimum. Available officers are needed to react to incidents and reassurance patrol is pared down. Community beat officers get drafted in to routine response policing duties. Many of the incidents absorbing police time are not really the responsibility of the police at all.

But what accounts for the time operational officers spend in the police station? The two main culprits are the time taken to process prisoners and prepare prosecutions, and the other paperwork which the police must produce. Arresting someone – no matter whether they are a petty criminal or a serious offender – keeps officers off the beat for an average of 3.5 hours – often for far longer. At busy times there are bottlenecks in custody and frequent delays in carrying out finger-printing, photographing and criminal record checks. Delays are generally the same for a simple shop-lift as for a much more serious matter. Where a solicitor, appropriate adult or interpreter is required, this can trigger a further wait of on average an hour. If CCTV or an identity parade is involved further substantial delays can ensue.

Other paperwork includes crime reports, intelligence reports, forms to log recovered property, missing person details, information required for special force initiatives as well as paperwork connected with the shift administration and the officer in question. Often one event (e.g. a crime) can trigger the recording of the same information on multiple separate records. Where forms are available electronically, little officer time is actually saved because the IT system applications are mostly antiquated and do not talk to each other.

Despite these frustrations we found a great deal of commitment amongst police officers. They wanted to spend more time on patrol and to have more time to deal with victims. At the same time, many officers interviewed felt undervalued and one described their situation in the following terms: “We are the pool from which the best are taken to become specialists and where failed specialists are sent back to. Support units within the force treat us like they are the customer, and not the other way round. We end up doing too many tasks... for which you simply do not need police powers and training to be able to do.”

Where might the answer lie?

In a limited study of this nature it has only been possible to point to where solutions to increasing reassurance policing might lie, rather than analyse in detail all possible options. Of course, one option is to employ more police officers, but unless there is a change in the pattern of activity, this is not cost-effective. On the basis of our

results, to get one more officer permanently out on patrol would require employing an additional five officers. More dedicated use of special constables, or similar, dedicated to reassurance policing is another option. We are aware that this is already under consideration. Instead, in this study we have focused on how to free-up the time of existing police officers. In this report we group possible ways to do this under three headings:

- Ensuring that police time is not consumed on activities which are properly the responsibility of other agencies, or which could be done better by someone else (section 4).
- Exploiting fully the opportunities for support staff to undertake duties (section 5).
- Enabling the police to do their job more effectively (section 6).

We do not repeat each possible solution here – but instead emphasise what we think are the most important areas that require early progress.

Using police officers for policing not paperwork

Using more support staff is not a new idea. Making civilianisation work for police officers is the key to successfully freeing officers to get on with what they do best. But substituting a police officer with support staff will have limited value if they only work nine-to-five and only do a limited set of duties. Nor will support staff be cost-effective in some functions (such as prisoner processing) if they cannot undertake other useful support tasks during quiet times.

There was a widespread feeling amongst the officers we interviewed that they deserved better support. Around the clock support is one requirement, but not the only one. When there is a shortage of support staff it is operational police who tend to cover, not other support staff. A significant extension of civilianisation will only achieve benefits if implemented differently. What is needed is flexible staff, trained to perform the full range of administrative tasks in support of a police officer, and to be available for extended hours.

More widespread use of support staff (in a broad sense including specials or traffic wardens) outside the station could also release significant amounts of police time. This could extend to preserving scenes of crime, marshalling the public at major incidents and taking basic statements.

Enabling the police to work more effectively within the community

We spend some time in section 6 discussing the limitations placed on the police by weaknesses in their own information management. A lot could be achieved using relatively low-tech solutions, or by starting from first principles and eliminating the need to record information where it is not clearly needed.

Going further, applying new mobile technology will allow the police to complete much of their paperwork more quickly and in the community. It is readily feasible to put laptops in patrol cars and offer police officers on foot patrol hand-held devices that will allow them to work productively outside of the station while also providing reassurance by their visibility. Already forces are experimenting with the technology, but the major challenge is not the mobile element but the task of knitting it with the patchwork of existing systems within the force. There is a danger that much of the potential of the new IT will be squandered because these issues are not properly understood and tackled. Alternatively, lack of knowledge about the full cost-benefit equation will deter others.

We think that it would not be unrealistic to 'e-enable' the police within a three-year period but action is required now to understand the full range of costs and benefits, and to make a convincing case for change.

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1. Introduction

Objectives

In August 2001, the Home Office, on behalf of the Home Secretary, retained PA Consulting to undertake a study into the 'Diary of a Police Officer'.

The initial aim of the study was to gain a fuller understanding of what is involved in the 'typical' shift of a police officer.

Over the years there has been much interest in capturing information on 'what police officers do' for both management and resource allocation decisions. Ministers are again focusing on police effectiveness and this study is seen as important in terms of identifying the impediments and frustrations that restrict police officers from 'getting on with the job'.

The ultimate aim of the study, therefore, is to identify ways to free-up police officers' time so that they can become more engaged in 'reassurance policing'.

The term 'reassurance policing' is a broad term which, for the purposes of this report, is defined to mean any sectoral policing activity that is visible within the community. It is the visibility of the policing effort that provides the reassurance. Hence, reassurance policing includes patrols – either directed or uncommitted, mobile or on foot – as well as visible policing of incidents.

Reassurance policing is designed to address not only crime, but the fear of crime. While the efficacy of reassurance policing is beyond the study brief, survey results support a widely held view that the public feel safer when they see more police¹.

There is also some evidence to support the view that reassurance policing can actually reduce crime through deterrence. This was the finding at West Bromwich. In December 2000, six officers were allocated to provide an intense foot patrol presence in the town centre. It led to a clear reduction in the number of offences compared to the equivalent period a year earlier, particularly for street robberies and purse thefts. At Brighton we were advised that increased weekend patrols had reduced disorder-related incidents in a saturation policing initiative over the busy summer period¹.

Scope

The study was restricted to uniformed police officers engaged in operational policing at the sectoral – or territorial – level.

¹ We are aware that there is an active debate about the efficacy of reassurance policing versus, say, crime detection or crime reduction techniques (see, for example, Problem-Oriented Policing Conference papers, Leicestershire, 2001).

INTRODUCTION

The study was conducted applying standard surveying techniques. However, within the time frame and resources available, the results should be considered as representative rather than statistically significant.

The study contained itself to looking at ways to provide more reassurance policing within the existing police resources and not at increasing those resources per se.

The focus of the study was on identifying common themes across police forces, not a comparison of experience between forces; although, it is acknowledged that issues specific to a particular force, or particular basic command units, can dominate police officers' perceptions. Unless we consider these specific issues as instructive, we have disregarded them for the purposes of this report.

Approach

The study was undertaken within a tight time frame (August – September 2001). Nevertheless, with the co-operation of the police forces involved we were still able to amass a considerable amount of primary data through our field-work.

This field-work was based on a 'diary' (see Appendix A) which was completed by officers engaged in operational and community beat policing in seven basic command units throughout England and Wales. The diary covers the activities performed by police officers in the normal course of their duties. Participants tracked their activities for the selected shift in 15-minute slots. All police officers on selected shifts were asked to complete the diary.

Completion rates were high, with a total response of over 400 diaries filled in, of which 378 were of sufficient quality to be included for analysis.

The breakdown of diaries is set out in Table 1.

Following each selected shift, two officers were nominated for interview by a member of the study team, where the diary entries were scrutinised to provide a qualitative understanding of the shift. At interview, the police officers were also asked to offer their views on the impediments and frustrations affecting their job; 72 interviews were conducted in all.

Interviews were also held with supervisory police officers – sergeants, inspectors, chief inspectors, superintendents and chief superintendents; 20 interviews were conducted in all.

Table 1: Distribution of diary responses

Police force and division	Number of diaries completed
Sussex Police – Brighton	41
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary – Totnes	25
Lancashire Constabulary – Lancaster	37
Metropolitan Police Service – Camden	107
North Wales Police – Rhyl	18
Thames Valley Police – Milton Keynes	66
West Midlands Police – West Bromich	84

The study team supplemented the information gained through the diaries and interviews with direct observation within police stations and on patrol.

The field-work programme is set out in Appendix B.

The study team further supplemented the field-work with activity analyses available within the participating forces.

Structure of the report

In section 2 we combine the information gathered through the diaries and the subsequent interviews to paint a picture of a typical early, late and night shift.

In section 3 we summarise the quantitative results from the diaries.

Sections 2 and 3 highlight the limited amount of reassurance policing. If the quantum of resource for policing is constrained, which despite recent budget increases it is, there are essentially only three ways to increase reassurance policing:

Release resource by ensuring that the police are not having to carry out activities which should really be the responsibility of another public agency or a private body. This is considered in section 4: ***What should the police be responsible for?***

Allow operational police to focus more on the reassurance role by enabling support staff to take on other functions that currently draw on their time. This is considered in section 5: ***Who within the police service should do what?***

Enable operational officers to do their job more efficiently. This is considered in section 6: ***How should police officers be doing the work?***

Finally, in section 7, we explore what else could be done to improve policing, based on our observations.

In a study of this nature we are constrained to the extent in which we can make definitive recommendations because we have not been able to examine the specific costs and benefits of implementing various solutions in different forces. However, what we do hope to do is suggest to Ministers where, in part, the solution might lie, and where more intensive work could be done to examine the potential of various options set out in this report.

2. A day in the life of the 'typical' police officer

In this section we combine the information gathered through the diaries and the subsequent interviews to paint a picture of a 'typical day' – involving the experiences from an early, late and night shift.

Early shift

Our full shift has not materialised because two are off sick, one is on light duties because she is pregnant and one has been pulled off to support increased anti-terrorist coverage. We are at minimum staffing levels.

We start the shift with 30 minutes self-briefing off the crime reporting system. As usual we have to wade through a lot of detail on minor incidents. The system is slow but at least it hasn't crashed today. It has been a busy night and we therefore have to take over open jobs from the night shift.

Three prisoners taken into custody overnight for fighting have now sobered up and we take over the processing responsibility. One prisoner wants to press ABH charges against the other and, as there is a conflict of interest, different solicitors have to be called to represent both parties. As one is a 17-year-old and estranged from his family we need to contact Social Services for an 'appropriate adult'. As there were several incidents overnight, the cells are full and officers are queuing with their prisoners to use the fingerprinting and photographic facilities. I also wait for the custody sergeant to complete the initial processing enquiries that were impossible last night because the prisoners were too intoxicated. The processing takes three and a half hours, including a total of two hours waiting time.

I have enquiries to do for three open cases from my night shift including some door-to-door enquiries about a burglary. Two cases have already gone to a not guilty plea. The Criminal Justice Unit is short staffed and has asked me to take my own witness statements and chase forensics.

Within 45 minutes I am called off my enquiries to attend a shoplifting. This is a major store where we regularly attend. The store detective is holding the accused in a back office. I take a statement and the prisoner to the station. Initial enquiries and transport take 45 minutes.

I wait for half an hour before the custody sergeant is available. The prisoner admits he has shoplifted and does not ask for a solicitor so the processing is relatively speedy (30 minutes). He is bailed, leaving me to get on with the paperwork for the case. This requires getting a crime number from our crime bureau and filling out the crime report, entering details on our criminal intelligence system and logging a form

for our special shoplifting initiative. In all it takes me an hour and a half. The offender was apprehended for stealing a sandwich and a can of coke.

I use my last half hour on shift to call forensics and update my pocket book and personal activities log.

Late shift

After an initial briefing for half an hour I am called straight to a reported robbery in the town centre. The victim is a confused elderly lady whose bag has been snatched. I try to calm her down and take a statement but she is in a too disturbed state. A shopkeeper gives a statement describing the suspect. I drive the victim to her sheltered housing and contact the support staff there to tell them to check on her during the day. I would like to spend more time with the victim but know I have to get the enquiries paperwork done before the end of my shift. I return to the scene of the incident to take a full statement from the shopkeeper. The incident has taken an hour to deal with.

Back at the station I file a crime report, fill out the monitoring form for street robberies and try and grab some lunch. As usual I am left hanging on the phone for 20 minutes before anyone answers at the crime bureau to give me a crime number. The Robbery Squad won't take over the case until I have made all the initial enquiries and even then they might claim not to have the time. Consequently, it is difficult to get on with the paperwork while I'm hanging on the phone.

The crime reporting system is electronic but I have to wait my turn until a terminal is free. It takes 20 minutes for me to log through to all the screens. I'm not the fastest typist so it usually takes me longer. In all, the reporting for the robbery takes me about an hour and a half, partly because I've had to enter the same information several times.

I go on mobile patrol after 15 minutes responding to an alarm which, as usual, proves to be false. This wastes 15 minutes.

I stop a driver on suspicion of drinking but the breathalyser kit in my car doesn't work so I have to wait 10 minutes for a colleague to attend with an new kit. The driver proves just below the limit.

It's getting towards closing time and so the town centre is starting to get busy. I patrol the High Street where the pubs are concentrated. After half an hour I am called back to the station. As a WPC I am asked to attend the searching of a female

prisoner. WPCs are often called to the custody suite to attend searches. If a juvenile girl is taken into custody a WPC is also required to be present. I am concerned to get back out on the street, as the pubs are pouring out and a couple of my colleagues are in strife. Unfortunately, though, I'm stuck in the custody suite for 45 minutes.

When I am able to get away, I am immediately called to assist in locating a missing 12-year-old. Because he is a 12-year-old he is a priority case. He is well known to the police as this is the third time this month he has run away from his foster home. I spend the next 45 minutes filling in the missing persons form. Despite the frequency of the event, it is not possible to transfer over information from the existing documentation. Nevertheless, for the next hour I look round several areas of town known to me where he hangs out with groups of friends but can't find him. It is frustrating to know that even if I were to find him, with the local authority seeming to do little to resolve the situation, he will abscond again.

I return to the station at the end of my shift in time for the hand-over briefing, which takes about half an hour.

Night shift

I arrive at work early to allow myself an extra 15 minutes briefing. I regularly do this as there simply isn't enough time during the shift to come up to speed before you have to hit the road. I wouldn't mind, but it's the school holidays, so my children were playing in the garden most of the morning, which meant I didn't get a lot of sleep.

It is Friday night, which means the operational priority is to provide a strong presence in the town centre. We are two officers above minimum staffing level, although a third of our officers are probationers and, therefore, aren't qualified as response drivers, so we are actually down on the number of 'crews'.

My first call is to assist Traffic at an accident which is obstructing a major thoroughfare. A colleague accompanies the driver suspected of causing the accident to hospital. Another colleague is taking statements from witnesses. I guard the scene. I spend four hours at the scene while other emergency services attend and the vehicles are towed away. It's pretty boring work. I hear a few calls for assistance back in town, and feel pretty bad about not being able to help.

As soon as I become free, I am called to a fight outside a club. A young man has been 'glassed'. We take three prisoners, calm the situation down and get contact details for witnesses. This takes 45 minutes. One officer stays at the scene to take witness statements.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE 'TYPICAL' POLICE OFFICER

We transport the prisoners back to the station. They are too drunk to allow full prisoner processing to take place. The custody sergeant logs what information she can. Four officers are in attendance in the waiting area of the cells preventing a fight between the prisoners. The full prisoner processing will take place in the morning but we still end up spending 45 minutes in the custody suite.

While back at the station, I take the opportunity to take my break for half an hour and then, as the clubs are now closed, take the quiet period to catch up on some paperwork for half an hour.

At 4.30 am I go out on patrol. I have a micro-beat allocated under our sectoral policing policy but I feel like I only get a chance to see it at this time of day when there is no one around to talk to anyway. I respond to an alarm in my area which proves to be false.

I return to the station at the end of my shift for a hand-over briefing.

3. Analysis of the diaries

Some 378 diaries were completed by uniformed officers across England and Wales as part of this study, and which form the basis for the analysis in this section.

Of the diary responses 45% were from the early shift (e.g. 7.00 am to 4.00 pm), 27% from the late shift (e.g. 4.00 pm to 12.00 am) and 28% from the night shift (e.g. 10.00 pm to 7.00 am). 19% of respondents were women police officers.

The combined experience of the police officers we interviewed is impressive, with over 3,000 years of policing between them. On average, our respondents had spent 8.4 years in the force.

Our sample confirmed the widely held assumption that uniformed officers tend to be either at the beginning of their careers or long-term “career bobbies”. The majority of officers in the sample (54%) were relatively new to the force with up to five years’ experience only. Including probationers with under one year’s experience who were excluded from our sample, the proportion would be even higher. 13% of officers had between six and ten years experience and a third of officers had 11 or more years’ service.

Key findings

Police officers are spending an average of 43% of their time in the police station, during which they are providing no visible reassurance to the community. Although officers on night shift are spending a substantially higher percentage of their time (66%) outside the station, this is at a time of day when the reassurance impact will be low.

For five hours a day less than half of the shift are active outside the station (based on a 32 officer sample per shift). Over 75% of available officers are outside the police station for only four hours a day.

Of the time spent outside the station, 30% was on patrol while 41% was spent responding to incidents. Time spent on patrol varied relatively little between shifts, ranging from 14% on the late shift to 19% on night shift. However, there was significant variation in the amount of time spent responding to incidents, ranging from 19% on the early shift to 34% on the late shift and 31% on night shift. This does not appear to be justified by the pattern of incident occurrence, which shows a peak at 18.00 hours and a significant drop after 12.00 midnight.² Further research is necessary to relate rates of police incident response to incident occurrence.

² *Audit Commission (1996), Streetwise, pp.29.*

Police officers return to the station on average 1.7 times before the end of their shift.

Paperwork and administration remain the major occupation in the police station. Of time spent in the station, 41% was spent on preparing prosecution files, individual or general paperwork.

If an officer is involved in taking a prisoner into custody this takes an average of three and a half hours. In addition, if a solicitor, appropriate adult or other representative needs to be called the average wait is just over one hour.

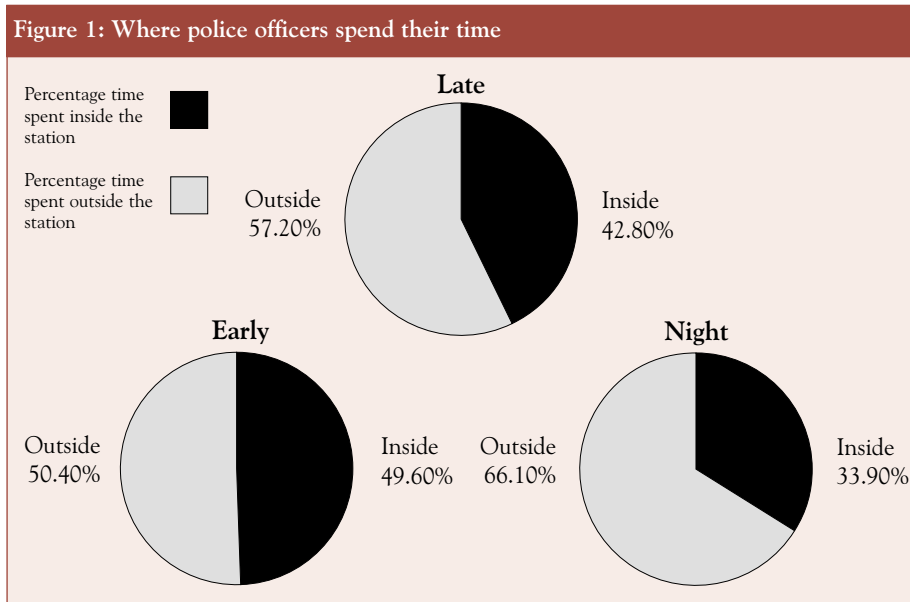
A number of activities, though not frequently required, were time-consuming for those officers who were involved, for example identification parades took an average of four and a half hours. Cover duties and potentially non-criminal investigations such as missing persons and sudden deaths enquiries were similarly time-consuming where they occurred.

Where officers spend their time

In total, 57% of officers' time was spent outside the station; 56% in the community (1% was with other criminal justice agencies). 66% of time was spent outside the station on night shift which compares to only 50% on early shift. Three-quarters of officers available are outside the station for only four hours in the day. For five hours a day over 50% of the shift are in the police station.

Where police officers spent their time by shift is illustrated in Figure 1, which shows a significant variation in time spent in and outside the police station between shifts. Police officers appear to spend less time in the community during business hours – when the courts are open, and other agencies are operating and the public is more likely to be available for enquiries.

Police officers' confinement to the police station has been highlighted by the study. We found that police officers return to the police station on average 1.7 times. This means, as police officers typically commence and conclude their shift at their police station, they are returning to the police station – often to complete paperwork – throughout the shift. In some cases, we observed police officers coming and going on a frequent basis, with the frequency affected by the ease of access to the police station (e.g. at Lancaster, where the area covered is quite small, the police station is in the centre of town, and getting around is generally quite easy). The tendency to return to the police station does seem to be influenced by the time of day; the later the shift the greater the number of return visits – the average number of returns



increases from 1.61 for an early shift to 1.81 for a night shift. This result suggests, as you would expect, that the number of trips to and from the police station and the length of time spent in the police station are inversely related.

Our sample does not highlight significant time spent dealing with the criminal justice system, notably by police officers in court (0.6% of the total time in this sample). However, for the seven officers who did report attending court, it consumed a third of their time, suggesting that when police are required to attend court it has a significant impact on their ability to perform other tasks. This implication was the feedback we received from police officers in interview.

For each relief a sample of diaries has also been mapped to provide aggregate officer usage maps of time spent inside and outside the police station.³ For each 15-minute slot during a shift these maps represent the number of officers who showed themselves as engaged in activities inside or outside the police station.

The maps are at Figure 2.

The maps show that more than three-quarters of available officers are outside the station for only four hours in the day. Two of these hours are between 23.00 and 01.00 hours. Over most of the day a presence of between 25 and 75% of officers is maintained outside the station.

³ Due to time constraints the sample for this analysis is limited to 32 officers per shift. This is a random sample of officers working the standard three shift pattern from across all seven forces surveyed.

For five hours in every 24, half or more of the shift are in the police station. These times are concentrated at the beginning and end of shifts and between 17.00 and 18.00. Even between 6.00 and 7.00 am, when two shifts are on duty in our sample, the maximum number of officers out of the station is 24 – less than half of those available.

As an analytical tool, officer usage mapping provides the potential to manage time spent on activities over the shift and relate it to incidence occurrence and operational priorities.

What police officers spend their time doing

Attending incidents was the most time-consuming activity, ranging from 18% on early shift to 31% on late shift.

Time spent on patrol accounted for 17% of average officer time, ranging from 14% on the late shift to 19% on night shift.

Of the total time spent in the police station, 41% of police officer time is spent on paperwork.

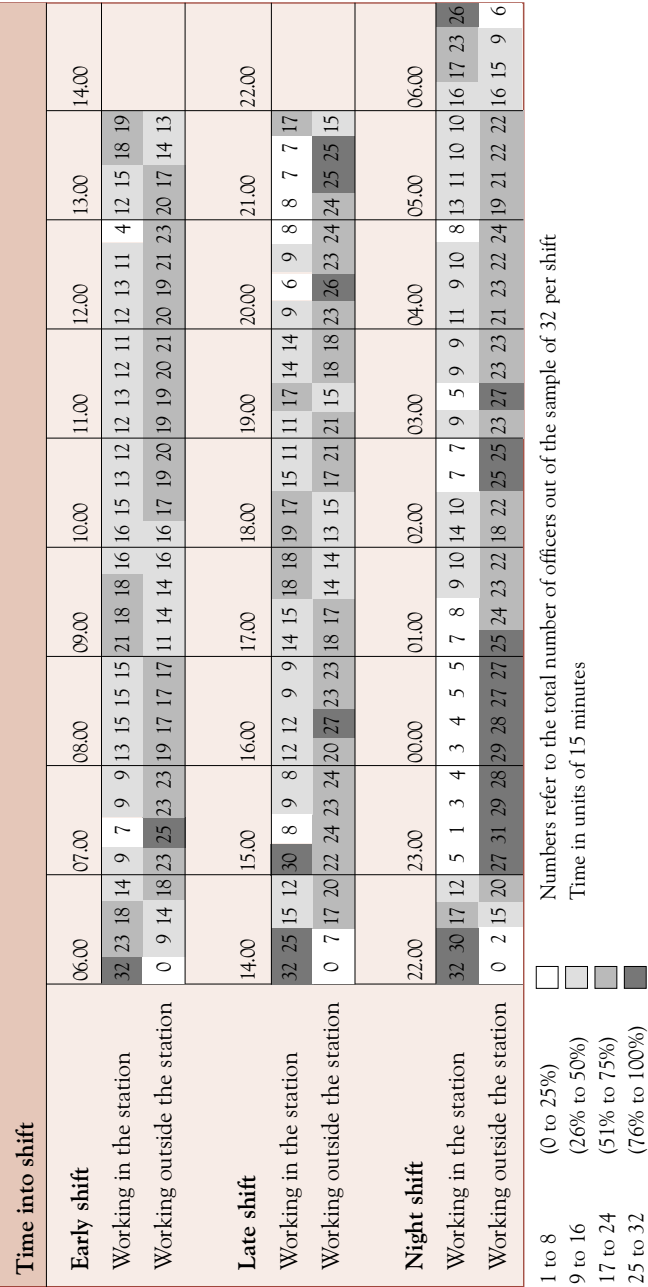
Two-thirds of the alarm calls in our sample were false. Many police officers we interviewed stated that the typical number of false alarms was much higher.

The breakdown of average time spent per activity is set out in Table 2.

Averages can disguise the range of time-consuming activities which do not show up because only a few police officers surveyed were engaged in such activities.

- If an officer was involved in prisoner processing the full range of activities took an average of just under three hours. The initial prisoner processing, i.e. waiting for the custody officer to book a prisoner, took an average of just over one hour. Interviewing the prisoner again took just over one hour. In addition, fingerprinting, photographing, criminal records checks and prisoner person searches took an average of between 20 and 30 minutes each. Where a solicitor, appropriate adult or other representative was requested an average wait of just over one hour was the norm.
- Where officers were involved in arranging identification parades this took an average of just under four and a half hours

Figure 2: Aggregate officer usage mapping



ANALYSIS OF THE DIARIES

- Where officers were required to cover the front desk, custody facility, or crime desk it took an average of two to three hours. If officers were required to cover the control room it took six and a half hours, on average
- Missing persons enquiries took an average of an hour and three quarters where officers were involved
- Sudden deaths took an average of two and a half hours where officers were involved.

Activity	% of respondent time
Working inside the police station	
Relief management	7.0%
Prisoner processing	5.7%
Prosecution, file and enquiries	6.2%
Cover duties	3.5%
Dealing with public	1.2%
Individual administration	0.5%
Station based training	0.7%
Break	5.1%
Other	13.1%
Working within the community	
Community support	1.7%
Patrol (including uncommitted patrol and travelling between pre-planned tasks)	17.0%
Attending incidents	23.3%
Crime related	9.0%
Other duties	3.3%
Policing events	0.5%
Break taken outside station	0.3%
Other work in the community	1.0%
Working with the criminal justice system	
Within the police force (other than own police station)	0.2%
At court	0.6%

4. What should the police be responsible for?

Agency of last resort

Key to releasing officers to spend more time on operational policing outside the station is an assessment of the appropriateness of officers continuing to perform a range of functions that currently fall to them; for example, filling gaps in service provision for other agencies and being expected to respond to non-criminal community disputes. One officer in the Met summarised the impact:

“The problem with the police service at the moment is that we are asked to do too much that really doesn’t concern us.”

Because of the round the clock cover they provide and the fact that they are perceived as the agency of last resort, the police are frequently involved in resolving incidents or situations that should be the responsibility of other public agencies or, indeed, private organisations.

Non-criminal incidents

Our research suggests that police officers become involved in dealing with a wide range of activities which essentially have little to do with their primary purpose. This may be the result of the following:

- Limits to the powers of other agencies to intervene. For example, if psychiatric patients are deemed to have ‘untreatable personality disorders’, the psychiatric establishment has no powers to confine them pending a formal determination by a GP, social worker and psychiatrist. In this case they will refuse to take an individual into a psychiatric ward but the individual may be behaving in a manner requiring intervention which then falls to the police. Social workers do not have the powers to intervene physically when children or young people who have gone missing and are found by the police try to run off on leaving the station. The result is that after a protracted process to find and process the individual they can run off again the moment they leave the station.
- Inadequacies of other agencies. For example, the police may be called in to deal with noisy neighbours despite the fact that they have no legal powers to intervene because local authorities may not be fielding adequate Noise Prevention Teams from their environmental health departments.

Missing persons enquiries fall to the police even when this is a recurrent issue with an individual disappearing from ‘secure units’ that are not really secured by the relevant service provider. During one of our visits a number of officers were busy searching for a 12-year-old who was in local authority care and who absconded on a

frequent, often weekly, basis. The local authority had not taken action to find a resolution to the child's problems that were resulting in the disappearances.

Many officers described regular and time-consuming searches for individuals who had run away from psychiatric wards which were meant to be secure. In practice many wards are not fully secured or allow patients an hour a day out of the ward without supervision, even where there is a clear likelihood that they will not return.

- Providing security back-up to other agencies or individuals. For example, mental health teams frequently require officers to attend when interviewing patients. The police also attend the vast majority of 999 calls even where one of the other emergency services is required.
- Unclear responsibilities for certain incidents. For example, a suspicious death will frequently trigger a range of activities from contacting relatives to caring for pets and property. Currently these tasks are performed by police officers. Similarly the police are also responsible for dealing with stray dogs, wounded pets and lost property.
- Miscellaneous public assistance. Analysis of police incident logs and interviews with officers reveal that the police get asked to help with a variety of requests from the public which have little to do with crime and disorder. These may range from queries about MOT and vehicle excise rules, civil disputes over property, what to do when someone has locked themselves out and concerns about minor nuisance. While this might be considered as part of reassurance policing, often those most prepared to place such demands on the police are the least vulnerable. In practice, the police screen out a large number of questionable claims on their time but our research suggested that more could be done to assist this.

In summary, there are a number of activities that arguably could and should be dealt with by someone other than the police. Making a change is not as simple as it sounds, but could be achieved with a mixture of public education, better task management and clearer definition of boundaries with other agencies. However, it does require widespread understanding of why the police should not become involved. The police rely on community support to be effective, and this could be damaged should they be perceived as withdrawing from certain service provision. We discuss some specific ideas later in this section.

Private sector 'externalising' costs onto police

A related question is the respective responsibilities of the police and private organisations where commercial activity generates crime and disorder related incidents that fall to the police to deal with. The issue is to what extent should a private body reimburse the police for the cost of the activity and according to what principles? Policing football matches and concerts, or investigating intruder alarms are all substantial drains on police resources. Should the police be compensated to some extent for these calls on their resource (where a commercial organisation is benefiting from them), allowing the proceeds to be ploughed back into more policing?

There are established precedents for the cost of policing being met by commercial organisations. The cost of the British Transport Police is wholly borne by the railway industry and football clubs pay for in-ground policing (although not outside). The issue is where the boundary should lie. Various considerations are relevant, such as the impact of the activity on police resources, the degree to which policing need can be directly attributable to the commercial activity and ability of a commercial enterprise to pay. These are issues of principle that we are aware are being considered by Government in connection with the additional policing outside of football grounds.

It would be inappropriate in a study of this nature to pass comment on the issues of principle. However, we highlight two areas below where there would seem to be a case for considering a greater contribution from the private sector: intruder alarms and dealing with shoplifters.

Possible solutions

Police officer time may be released for high visibility operational policing by changes to the demands on their time, either by substituting other agencies or support staff, or by changing the requirements on officers within the police force or from the public. Recommendations to this end are set out below.

A. Deter false alarms

Intruder alarms are false in over 95% cases. In many force areas there are no schemes in place to deter repeated false alarms or incentivise proper use and maintenance. It seems reasonable to ask a firm which has an arrangement with the police for immediate response to an alarm to pay a charge where that alarm is activated inappropriately (for example, because the equipment is at fault or an employee has inadvertently set it off).

B. Consider transferring responsibility for prosecuting certain shoplifting offences to shops

This suggestion is controversial but recognises that dealing with a shoplifter by arrest and charge can take an officer the best part of a shift. We noted earlier the time following arrest spent processing the prisoner and arranging a caution or preparing prosecution papers. In many cases the defendant has already been detained by a store detective and admitted the offence. There are various options for reducing the burden on the police of this high volume crime⁴. One option would be for the police simply to attend the store to ensure reliable identification of the shoplifter and to establish that the offender freely admits the offence and that other relevant conditions are met (e.g. that the amounts involved are under a given threshold). It could then be incumbent on the store to prosecute the offender privately or, for selected registered stores, to initiate court proceedings via the CPS. Essentially, the preparatory work would be passed back to the commercial organisation rather than borne by the police.

⁴ We are aware that Thames Valley Police is running the Milton Keynes Retail Theft Initiative which involves a juvenile arrested on suspicion of shoplifting being interviewed on the shop premises in order to assess their suitability for schemes aimed at diverting them from prosecution. The Home Office is exploring the appropriateness of this scheme.

C. Commercial organisations take on a greater share of the costs associated with policing events and premises

In addition to the suggestions above, further scrutiny should be given to the instances where commercial organisations should reimburse the police where the former's profit-making activity has generated a need for policing (e.g. outside football grounds on match day).

D. Clearly define the responsibility of public agencies

Our research suggests that the boundaries between the police and other agencies need tighter definition. Consideration might be given to:

- Hospitals being required to ensure that secure wards are actually 'secured' and carry the cost of apprehending any absconding patients
- Social Services to generate action plans to resolve repeat absconding by children and young people
- Local authorities carrying the cost of police attendance at environmental health incidents.

A renegotiation of responsibilities across the police and other public service providers will also require a reconsideration of the powers vested in different public agencies and the hours of cover that they provide. Other agencies should have explicit targets or Service Level Agreements in relation to the services they provide to the police, for example target times to provide an appropriate adult.

E. Consider the scope for outsourcing certain functions

These include some elements of missing persons enquiries, lost property, dealing with lost and injured dogs and other pets, and returning property used in criminal enquiries to owners. Specialist non-government organisations such as Shelter and the RSPCA could be invited to tender for the provision of relevant services.

F. Better manage public expectations on the police

Any changes to the role of the police will require careful handling of public expectations.

- In partnership with local authorities and other agencies an information campaign should aim to promote a better understanding of current police activity and open a debate on the future of the police role.
- The police should examine how current call handling processes can better screen out (perhaps by more direct links to other agencies or other telephone information sources) requests that are not really their responsibility.
- Consideration of how existing channels, such as UK-Online, or potentially new channels could head off unnecessary calls on the police in the first instance.

5. Who within the police service should do what?

According to the diary analysis operational police officers currently spend 43% of their time in the police station. Many of the officers we interviewed identified numerous tasks which they felt did not need either their powers and/or their training to discharge. In this section we discuss the scope for greater civilianisation, examining police roles both in and outside the station.

What ties up police in the station?

Our research identified the station-bound activities that consumed most police constable time. Many of these activities could be done by support staff altogether, or could be done more expeditiously by officers with better support.

Prisoner Processing

Taking a prisoner into custody was estimated by officers to take a minimum of two hours and up to eight hours in extreme circumstances. As one officer stated:

“The problem is if you arrest someone, you are in the police station for the rest of the shift and probably half of the next one.”

Delays occur at several stages in the process (average time from our diary exercise in brackets):

- bottlenecks in waiting for custody sergeants to carry out initial booking in (over an hour);
- waiting for equipment to become available to perform processing activities, for example fingerprinting, photographing and PNC checks (around an hour);
- waiting for appropriate adults, solicitors, interpreters or others to attend (an hour and ten minutes); and
- conducting an interview (around an hour, some of which is likely to be waiting for a room to become available).

Officers currently attend during all stages and perform fingerprinting, photographic and other documentation, and carry out the interview. If a solicitor or appropriate adult is needed they may stay with the defendant until one arrives (or even collect them where the need arises). Even if they are able to do other jobs in the meantime, such as paperwork, they are unable to leave the station.

In addition to the standard requirements of prisoner processing, where prisoners are classed as vulnerable because they have attempted suicide in the past or state that they are at risk of self-harm, a one-to-one suicide watch is required. In West Bromwich in February – March 2001, an inspector calculated that the equivalent of around 80 shifts were abstracted in conducting suicide watches.

While civilian custody assistants are employed by many forces, their role is restricted to such functions as serving meals. Extending the civilian role in taking prisoners into custody would be welcomed by officers, many of whom pointed to the extensive use of reception teams in the USA. The idea of prisoner processing units has been explored in some forces but to make it work cost-efficiently (even with support staff) requires flexibility because prisoners seldom arrive into custody evenly throughout the day.

It was pointed out to us that a possible added benefit of prisoner processing units is the more co-operative attitude to be expected from suspects where a civilian or different officer carries out the prisoner interview and processing. Arrest often generates hostility between the suspect and the officer concerned and a change of personnel could have benefits in defusing this hostility.

Prosecution paperwork and enquiries

The preparation of prosecution files takes place in two stages. The introduction of the Narey reforms means that now the initial file preparation for the first court hearing only needs to include a basic summary of events and key statements. In the event of a not guilty plea being entered a full file will then be prepared including schedules of all materials and interviews with all witnesses.

In many areas Criminal Justice Units take on the majority of tasks involved in the preparation of prosecution files for not guilty pleas, although the requirements placed on police officers involved in the case vary from force to force. Some forces use support staff to do the bulk of case building – extending to the taking of basic statements in straightforward cases. Other forces require the responsible officer to do nearly all of the work. The concern is that by handing responsibility to support staff, officers become deskilled, by losing sight of what evidence needs to be assembled to secure a conviction. This is a difficult issue, which we do not propose to resolve here. However, at a minimum there is no justification for officers taking on secretarial duties; yet we found examples where officers were forced to transcribe tapes because typists were in short supply. Moreover, we would ask whether there are not some routine high volume cases, such as shoplifting, where the deskilling risk in handing over case preparation to support staff is insignificant.

Other reporting requirements

Our diary analysis suggested that other (non-prosecution file) paperwork accounted for nearly 12% of officer time. Much of this consisted of filing crime reports, missing person forms or details required by force intelligence or other squads. Some of this activity is effectively wasted time because of the inadequacy of police IT systems (see section 6, page 29). However, we wonder whether officers are simply being asked to report too much.

Unlike the standard Manual of Guidance on prosecution files, there is a lack of rationalisation and standardisation of reporting requirements for crimes, missing persons or other incidents. Officers complain both of the volume of reporting and the frequent changes to the forms they are required to complete.

In one force we counted 105 different forms in regular use. As one officer stated: "We're a reporting organisation, no longer a proactive force."

Support staff are generally not involved in crime reporting or reporting for force-based initiatives.

We are sceptical of the claim that paperwork could be swept away at a stroke. However, we found numerous examples where the information requested was seemingly superfluous or where a 'belt and braces' approach was the likely rationale. For example, we also found that crime reports were required to contain considerable detail even in cases where the chance of clear-up was negligible.

Finally, where paperwork remains necessary, it must be asked how much of it could be done by support staff. This relates to the potential for involving support staff (which might be extended to include special constables, traffic wardens etc.) in other activities such as missing person enquiries (see section 4, page 15).

In our view there is a case for auditing police paperwork burdens in the light of business processes.

CCTV

Viewing CCTV evidence to find the tape extracts relevant to the prosecution case, though not a frequent occurrence, was shown through the diary analysis to take around an hour when it did occur. In some force areas it is standard practice for the camera owners to present the police with the relevant video extract. Where this is not the case, finding the right tape extract can be time-consuming.

Front desk and other duties

This is an area where civilianisation has already helped to free up officer time but where it has been done in a way that does not wholly fit with the demands of modern policing. Covering duties – including front desks, command and control rooms, crime desks and gaoling – consumed around 3% of officer time, on average. A key part of the problem is that while support staff have been contracted to undertake a role, then this is often only for the duration of a normal working week. However, many of the functions are required on a 24 hour /seven days a week basis, with officers required to cover outside business hours. Even during business hours police officers may need to fill in while support staff take breaks or are on leave. More officer time could be released if support staff were employed on a shift basis and/or on terms which allowed them to work on different functions when required.

Officer briefing

Briefing is a necessary, but time-consuming process. Self-briefing can effectively halve the amount of officer time taken up in exchanging information at hand over. Several forces already have IT based self-briefing systems. However, officers criticised the systems for the undigested form in which information is produced and the lack of prioritisation of information.

Many of these problems could be easily overcome with readily available IT solutions.

Intelligence, community safety and Crime Prevention Units

Numerous police officers are employed in roles such as crime analysis, advice on offender behaviour, property security, and so on. They are increasingly clustered into dedicated units – providing the information needed to be able to take a more proactive intelligence-led approach. These are important functions. However, there may be further scope here to civilianise certain of them. Certain roles (such as analysis of crime data) can – and increasingly are – being undertaken by support staff. However, the experience of some non-government organisations dedicated to community safety shows that police training is not a pre-requisite for developing expertise in these areas. On the other hand, it is understood that there are recruitment and retention problems with high calibre civilian intelligence that may delimit the degree of civilianisation in this area.

Summary

There are numerous functions within police stations where civilianisation could be extended. The Government is considering how the legal position can be changed to provide further momentum (for example, in custody suites). But this is only part of

the issue. Civilianisation needs to be done in a way that provides a genuine around the clock service that properly supports the operational police officer. Moreover, those employed need to be more flexible – perhaps being able and prepared to work on the same day doing crime analysis, staffing the front desk and helping out in the custody suite. The flexibility issue is important because without it certain civilianisation options will not be cost-effective. For example, it is unlikely that prisoner-processing units would be viable in most places given that they are needed only for a few hours a night on specific days of the week. The real key is to create multi-role civilian posts that are able to provide some cover outside of the normal working day.

What ties up police outside the station?

Our analysis has identified how certain activities currently carried out within the police station could be re-organised to allow operational officers to spend more time in the community. However, there are also activities currently performed outside the police station which do not necessarily need to be carried out by fully trained police officers (although some additional powers may be required). If uniformed officers could be relieved of these duties there may be more opportunity to carry out reassurance policing. We therefore wonder whether certain of the functions often carried out by uniformed officers outside the station could be done by support staff, including special constables, or potentially other groups such as traffic wardens. The key areas where support staff could be used are noted here.

Guarding

Officers are frequently busy guarding crime scenes, incidents or prisoners in hospital. A number of graphic examples were provided through our interviews of situations where police involvement was not readily justified.

Officers we spoke to described how they had been taken out guarding a milk float! The driver had been affected by an epileptic fit. He refused to get in an ambulance because he was concerned that the float or its load would be stolen. Officers waited at the scene for an hour and a half before the dairy came to pick up the vehicle.

Marshalling

Some major incidents require the public to be marshalled away from an area for their own safety. For example, in one force we visited, a man with a suspected firearm had been spotted on a train and the railway station needed to be sealed off. This accounted for about half of the shift of nearly all officers on the relief. However, some were doing little more than redirecting traffic and pedestrians. As it transpired, the gun was a toy.

Missing Persons

Missing person enquiries accounted for nearly 3% of officer time. We consider below how to tackle instances where people are not really ‘missing’ and whether another agency could take on the role of tracing missing persons in all cases except where the victim is vulnerable. However, were the police to be involved, there are basic tasks of collecting relevant information which need not involve a police officer.

Statement Taking

While we recognise that transferring prosecution file preparation (see section 5, page 21) to support staff/special constables could lead to deskilling, there is also an argument that sometimes pressure on officers means that statements will not get taken down appropriately in all cases (especially when an officer is working night shift and witnesses cannot be readily contacted) unless there is someone who can help out.

Summary

It is reported that the Government is considering expanding the number of special constables or enabling traffic wardens and others to undertake some functions currently undertaken by the police. Our research has identified at least four areas where this resource could release significant amounts of operational police officer time.

Possible solutions

G. Extend civilianisation

A range of responsibilities are currently being performed by police officers which could be fully civilianised. Opportunities for increasing the scope of civilianisation (or utilising officers on restricted duties) within police stations include:

- Covering the front desk, analytical functions for criminal intelligence, suicide watch and preparing prosecution paperwork. Many police forces already have criminal justice units which take on the role of full file preparation where a not guilty plea is entered, but in a number of forces officers are still required to perform such basic tasks as transcribing interviews on a regular basis.
- Prisoner processing units would take the charging and prisoner processing functions away from the responsible officer, allowing them to return to operational duties more swiftly.

A change in management culture and funding regimes is necessary to expose the false economy of engaging trained police officers in tasks that do not require their skills.

H. Use support staff more flexibly

Employ support staff more flexibly outside standard office hours and with the capacity to multi-skill so that they can contribute to a more flexible police response to changing and unpredictable demand.

To ensure that this is cost-effective, terms and conditions would need to be reviewed.

I. Standardise crime reporting

Crime and other reporting in forces should be subject to audit, to rationalise and standardise requirements. This could be facilitated by establishing national standards (which could also have the benefit of enabling transfer of information across forces).

J. Reduce reporting requirements

Existing reporting arrangements should be subject to review. New requirements to support specialist initiatives should be kept to a minimum – with a limit to the number of initiatives running at any one time – and the reasons for the information requirements being imposed and when they are no longer required should be clearly communicated.

K. Improve self-briefing systems

There are clear advantages to self-briefing systems both in terms of efficiency and the autonomy they provide to officers. However, systems clearly need improving to streamline and improve the quality of the self-briefing process.

L. Scheduling court appearances

Officers often attend court without being called or wait for several hours before giving evidence. Officers required to give evidence could be placed on duties close to court on relevant hearing days and phoned or paged at short notice if evidence is required.

6. How should police officers be doing the work?

In this section we consider how more reassurance policing could be delivered by enabling operational police to do their job more effectively and efficiently. We focus on working practices and the use of IT.

Again we stress a limited study such as this cannot detail all problems facing the service, let alone all the solutions. However, our survey does highlight some of the issues that need to be addressed.

Working practices

We identified three areas of practice that if addressed could help the police ensure greater visibility. These are:

- allocating resources to patrol;
- round the clock support from civilian staff; and
- individual time management.

Patrol

Our research showed that half of all foot patrols and 78% of mobile patrols were undertaken by officers in pairs ('double crewing'). The percentage of double crewed patrols was 79% on the early shift (i.e. during daylight hours).

The issue of single and double strength patrols has been debated for some time. There are situations where single patrol would mean increased risk to officer safety, or affect their likely productivity on the job.

Our research suggests that while double patrol will continue to be appropriate in many cases, there is likely to be scope to extend single crewing in many forces. In particular:

- In some circumstances lack of vehicles means that single crewing is not an option, even where risks are low.
- The volume of double crewing in daylight hours – coupled with the remarks of some of the officers interviewed – suggests that pairing operational officers is in part as much determined by custom and practice as by assessed need.

Our research also found that foot patrol was the exception rather than the rule. Just over 1% of officers' time was spent on foot patrol against just under 16% on mobile

patrol. The main reason given for this was that resource pressures made it difficult to respond rapidly to incidents unless those officers on patrol were mobile.

In the event of an increase in single crewing, it is essential that officers should be provided with the equipment necessary for their safe and effective operation. For example, one force in our study still did not use quick cuffs as standard and we understand not all forces issue officers with their own body armour.

Availability of support services

A second area where we observe a probable need for changes in working practices is in the deployment of support staff. On many occasions officers were doing administrative work which could have been done by support staff because the latter only worked on weekdays and nine-to-five. In some forces, specialist units (for example, providing intelligence) were unavailable outside the 'normal' working week, meaning that operational officers did not receive timely information at peak times.

In our view, much greater consideration needs to be given to how operational officers can receive the necessary support to help them operate with maximum efficiency and effectiveness whenever they are on duty. In the words of one officer:

“We have all these staff in the intelligence unit but when it comes to one of our busiest periods they do not provide the up-to-date information we need”

Clearly this is related to the issue of flexibility of support staff employed by the police as discussed in section 5.

Individual working practices

There were a number of good practices we observed that could, if employed more consistently, release time for operational officers:

- More use of appointments – scheduled at a quiet time in the shift – whereby individuals visit the station. This reduces the number of nugatory visits made by officers dropping round to an address on the off chance that someone is around.
- Saving paperwork to the beginning and end of the shift to minimise unnecessary journeys back to the office (although, ideally paperwork could be conducted outside of the police station – see our comments below).
- Better time management by officers, for example to exploit quiet times for file preparation.

- Taking more breaks outside of the station, where officers are visible to the community.
- A study of shift patterns to identify which ones allow for maximal public presence at key times for reassurance policing.

Possible solutions

The issues handled are essentially ones of management. They do not require ‘big ticket’ solutions. It is a question of chief officers ensuring that the issues are given priority and that better management practices are cascaded down to all levels, with a credible method of ensuring that the desired change in practice is taking place.

Information technology

Current situation

Information technology should enable operational officers to do their job more efficiently and effectively. With the exception of information held on the Police National Computer and the NAFIS fingerprint system, police information technology is characterised by a patchwork of different local systems of varying age and efficacy. Apart from the two national systems, the principal local IT systems that have most impact on the work of individual officers are in terms of:

- processing prisoners in custody;
- preparing prosecution files;
- filing crime reports;
- logging intelligence;
- self-briefing at start of shift;
- managing forward commitments;
- command and control; and
- standard word processing packages to process correspondence for enquiries.

At present the current arrangements for police IT exhibit five characteristics:

- There is little standardisation of approach across forces. Despite the efforts of PITO to encourage standardisation around effective IT solutions, many forces are reliant upon their own dated legacy systems.
- There is little integration between systems within a single force (this means that individual officers may have to key in the same items of information on multiple occasions).
- There is little integration between police systems and those of other criminal justice agencies.
- Much IT within police forces is not portable – meaning that officers invariably need to return to the police station in order to use equipment.
- There is limited hardware available – which means that officers often have to queue to use computers.

Given the goal of increasing police visibility, recent advances in portable computing and mobile communications could be exploited to enable officers to complete basic administrative tasks without returning to the station. More ambitiously, they could contribute to the police becoming more effective by allowing more real time information to be delivered to them as they need it when working in the community.

What this means for individual officers

IT can and should help operational officers to be more effective and efficient. Our study suggested that too often the potential of IT was not being exploited, and in some cases was acting as a brake on performance, by creating bottlenecks, duplication of information or requiring officers to return to the police station. We discuss how these issues arise from the perspective of individual officers below.

Efficacy of systems

We have noted elsewhere in this report the large amount of paperwork that might be generated by a single policing event. In practice, much of this paperwork is converted onto IT systems at some point. However, in some forces IT is used more as an ‘electronic filing cabinet’, rather than as an aid to entering and using vital information. The frustration for officers is compounded when the systems fail to ‘talk to’ each other:

“The biggest frustration I find is having to enter the same information onto different systems. For example, you can quite often find yourself entering many of the same details for crimes, offenders and victims for custody records, prosecution files and crime reports. There is no facility for the information to be transferred automatically between systems. You have to log into each system afresh, and what is more, things are not made any easier by the fact that the systems each have a different look and feel.”

Some forces are operating systems that are quite simply antiquated. Younger officers – who frequently use computers and the internet outside of their job – were quickest to point out the deficiencies of police IT.

The sorts of deficiencies pointed out were common to many relatively old IT systems. They relate to the presentation of information in a non-intuitive manner; the slowness with which it takes systems to display a new screen; and the absence of menus to guide those using the system and highlight when an incorrect entry is made. Intelligence systems frequently present information in an unprioritised and chaotic manner. Officers complain of spending time tabbing through a large number of screens of irrelevant information to get to facts necessary for self-briefing.

“These [reasons] are more than just irritating. They genuinely slow you down.”

Availability of systems

A more mundane problem is that of the availability of systems. It was difficult in a study of this scope to identify how frequent an issue this was, but problems certainly do occur. The most common of these were:

- A small number of terminals/access points: At times officers may have to wait for a free terminal. This includes a perceived shortage in facilities for viewing CCTV.
- Slowness in displaying up-to-date data: Some systems used did not update data in real time but only when a specific user logged off the system or when records were updated overnight. This had – it was suggested – resulted in genuine problems, for example, in providing cover for officers with court commitments. This caused administrative problems which wasted time down the line.
- Systems prone to fault: In one force we visited the command and control system failed for an entire shift, which meant that police officers had to take time out to ferry their command and control operators to a neighbouring facility.

In making these points we do not presume that the immediate replacement of systems which exhibit these characteristics would always provide best value for money. Nevertheless, there was a strong view amongst many constables and most senior officers that some of the legacy systems in use meant that the police were often being unnecessarily tied down at the station.

Capability

Officers need to be appropriately trained to use the systems at their disposal. While most younger officers we interviewed were relatively comfortable in using IT, several older officers found that they struggled. Understandably, they would have preferred to off-load the task to others:

“I don’t see how it makes sense for me to sit here tapping at a terminal with two fingers when I could hand over the relevant details of my pocket book to a typist who could input it five times as fast.”

We do not advocate that support staff should be used simply because some police officers struggle to use IT systems. However, some officers commented that while they had received sufficient training to use systems at a very basic level, finding out how to use systems to their full capacity was reliant on officers’ personal initiative. In a number of instances a higher level of basic training might have appreciably added to efficiency. This could extend to keyboard skills, how to use systems or even good practice in the use of email.

“I try and catch up on my emails every day. We get a lot of general emails, but it is often hard to see from the title – if they have one – that they really apply to me. Each one I have to open and read wastes time.”

These issues are not peculiar to the police. However, this does not mean they are insignificant.

Portability

None of the forces we visited had computing systems which could be used when officers were out on the beat. Some officers themselves made the suggestion that they might be given laptops on which they could do basic work in the car – thus retaining visibility – which they could then download on return to the station.

“It would be much easier if we had laptops. At the moment we write it all down on paper and go back to the station to input the information. If we had the equipment (laptops) we could do it in the back of the car when a colleague was making enquiries or, who knows, even at a local café. That way we cut down the work and are more accessible to the public.”

However, we also found instances where even more basic solutions would free-up officer time. For example, one force had processes allowing officers to phone through details for crime reports to support staff who would then enter them on the crime reporting system. This should have reduced trips back to the station specifically for this purpose. However, officers were unwilling to use police radios for this purpose (in case they needed to receive incoming messages) and were reluctant to ask victims for permission to use their telephone. Therefore, they often punctuated their shifts by returning to the police station simply to call the appropriate support unit. In the words of one officer:

“It seems bizarre to me. If we had more mobile ‘phones we would be able to avoid a fair number of trips back to the station.”

Possible solutions

Before we discuss these options further we note that initiatives for an integrated custody and case preparation system have already been under consideration. This would allow single entry of an offender’s details at the custody stage and remove the massive duplication of effort resulting at various stages of case file preparation and at court. The case preparation element was intended to be the platform for a joined-up criminal justice application, which would have significant benefits right across the criminal justice system.

The original contracts for custody and case preparation modules were let in 1997/8 but by 2000 it became clear that they were unlikely to be delivered. A new project team is working on the issue, together with the supplier, and it is hoped that case preparation may be available towards the end of 2001 and custody early in 2002. However, once these systems are available it will, under current arrangements, take many years (if ever) before they are adopted across most or all forces. This is because some individual forces may feel unable to afford to adopt the new systems rapidly, or may regard the benefit over their existing systems to be marginal to the cost involved.

We cannot here deal with the full range of arguments as to whether forces should or could be directed to take on new systems where it is in the interest of the criminal

justice system as a whole. The point we make is that the history of national IT initiatives in the police is not encouraging, and that energy should be given to a number of more rapid improvements while the national picture is being resolved.

M. Undertake a feasibility study to identify the right mobile solution

The need for officers to return to the station to enter reports is a major drain on police time. With most police systems computerised, a major goal of the service should be to exploit laptops or hand-held devices to allow crime reporting and work on prosecution files to take place out of the station.

This goal would involve providing access when on patrol to data held on PNC or local intelligence systems. Some forces have begun to develop solutions in this area. For operational police the goal should be to make the patrol car a mobile extension of the police station, enabling more time to be spent in the community. The technology already exists (for example, technology for mobile PNC terminals in police cars has already been piloted). The key challenge is to work out how to expand this capability quickly and affordably across all forces, avoiding the problems that have bedevilled police IT projects in the past. As a start, we recommend that the Home Office commission a feasibility study to look into the mobile technology options available to the police, leading to a demonstrator and a business case identifying the costs and benefits of extending the technology widely.

N. Make greater use of the internet

The internet could be used in at least two ways to provide benefits to operational police officers:

- Reducing demand levels in communications centre by making answers available to frequently asked questions and by providing links to other agency sites such as health, education, victim support and the other emergency services.
- Extending the current facility for on-line crime notification.

O. Video parades

We have already noted how long it takes to arrange identity parades. We are aware that the Home Office is aware of the problems faced by forces in arranging live ID parades⁵. Video parades provide an alternative and have been piloted in West Yorkshire using the VIPER system. Similar facilities are being developed in other areas including the Metropolitan and Greater Manchester regions. For video parades ID suites hold 20-second clips of volunteers on a database. Suspects are filmed and

⁵ The procedures for identification are set out in the Police and Criminal Evidence Act Code of Practice. Any changes to procedures therefore involve amendments to that Code. The Home Office is considering significant changes to witness identification procedures: to bring greater flexibility to the process, to reduce delays in arranging identification parades and to find suitable parade members, while at the same time ensuring that the suspect is safeguarded against mistaken identification. The Home Office is looking at the current hierarchy of identification procedures and raising the profile of video identification so that it is clear that the suspect may be offered either an identity parade or a video identification depending on which is the most suitable and practicable. The Home Office is also actively discussing with ACPO how to apply the different systems, including VIPER, more broadly among police forces. The Home Office has also commissioned research on video identification of robbery suspects, which is due for release in October.

then allowed to choose the line up from other profiles on the database. Witnesses are then shown the whole clip with the suspect's clip inserted. Advantages include:

- Cost savings – images can be used as often as necessary without the need to pay volunteers by appearance.
- Increased reliability as video parades do not depend on a number of different parties appearing at the same time in the same place.
- Increased convenience as parades can be taken to witnesses and filming volunteers outside work or school hours will be an easier one-off exercise than frequently assembling volunteers for specific parades.
- Increased speed as it is much faster to put together a video parade than assemble all the parties that need to attend for a physical parade.
- Research⁶ – while still subject to scrutiny – indicates that video parades may be more reliable in making a positive identification of a suspect and reducing the number of false identifications.

The costs and benefits of video parades should be further evaluated and if positive this approach should be adopted more widely.

P. Undertake an IT audit to ensure best use of existing technology

Although more glamorous solutions have been suggested to the problems of police IT (some of which we discuss above), we believe that the immediate emphasis should be on finding easy ways to leverage existing IT capacity. Many forces might usefully start with a rapid audit of how IT is used and the value derived by operational officers. Such an audit might examine:

- The use made of data currently recorded on information systems and consider whether the value of this information justifies the cost of its collection. For example, could more streamlined crime reports be filed for particular types of crime which are straightforward and which are by their nature unlikely to be prioritised for investigation?
- Whether it is cost-effective for police officers to input current volumes of data – or whether part of this burden should be given to support staff – perhaps receiving the basic information over the radio/by telephone from mobile officers.

⁶ Valentine, T. & Heaton, P. (1999). *An evaluation of the fairness of police line-ups and video identifications*. *Applied Cognitive Psychology*, 13, S59-S72.

HOW SHOULD POLICE OFFICERS BE DOING THE WORK?

- Whether 'patch and mend' solutions to legacy systems could improve usability for officers – and in particular reduce the volume of keying in currently required.
- The number and distribution of terminals.
- The extent to which police officers, and staff supporting them, could benefit from coaching in their basic IT skills to enable them to use existing systems more rapidly and effectively.

7. What else can be done to improve operational policing?

While not strictly within the scope of our investigations, a number of observations were made in the course of this study that impact upon the effectiveness of operational policing and, therefore, deserve mention.

The question of additional resources

It was evident that several of the reliefs we studied were operating at near minimum strength. Clearly one way to increase reassurance policing is to increase the number of officers. This is an expensive option – not least because our study reveals that, unless there is a change in the pattern of police activity, perhaps only 20% of this extra resource would be devoted to additional patrol.

Another option would be to employ special constables, or a similar resource, to provide reassurance policing directed at the times it is most needed. We understand this is being considered already.

Our focus has been on where extra reassurance might be obtained by using existing police resources differently.

Commitment

The study team were struck by the commitment and compassion of many of the police officers we interviewed. A number of recent recruits cited their reasons for joining the force as “to help people” while a number of longer serving officers cited helping people as the source of greatest job satisfaction.

Police officers often commented that their “greatest frustration” was the fact that they didn’t have the time to spend with the victims of crime. One police officer said that he was leaving operational policing after 15 years because he felt no longer able to provide the level of public service he felt the position required.

Measures that would free police officers from many station-based responsibilities are therefore likely to be popular with police and public alike.

Status and morale

There is a perception that ‘plain clothes’ officers look down on ‘uniformed officers’. Some operational police believe they are valued less within the service than others, particularly those in specialist functions such as CID, traffic, etc. Jobs in specialist squads are regarded as the way to career advancement, while returning to uniform from specialist service is considered a demotion.

One officer summed the situation up when he said that there were only four reasons for being on the beat:

“Probation – because the beat is where you have to start out your career

Promotion – because you have to be seen to have done your time on a difficult patch

Punishment – because you have been seen to fail at specialist duties

What is left is the professional police officer – dedicated to operational policing.”

In addition, at one Basic Command Unit we surveyed, ‘abstractions’ to staff specialist functions regularly deplete shifts by 10-20%. At another basic command unit, one officer complained that it was only ever the uniformed police that were required to cover exceptional events – dragging them away from scheduled weekends off, while the ‘suits’ simply did nine-to-five regardless.

This perception may ultimately have a number of consequences for quality of service by:

- lowering morale;
- over-stretching the reliefs: several stations we observed had minimum levels of cover. In order to provide a response capability there was little scope for a community presence or foot patrol; and
- impacting on the learning capacity of junior officers (as more experienced uniformed officers are in short supply).

The solution to this problem lies in a number of areas. In a study of this nature we cannot make definitive recommendations but merely point to areas for further consideration.

Clearly, the option of a shift allowance is one option. There are few compensations for the disruptive shift patterns and high stress levels of the public-facing role involved in operational policing. However, there are also other measures that might be taken. Forces might think more creatively about drawing on experienced officers in specialist squads to temporarily bolster depleted reliefs. Such ‘two way traffic’ could send a powerful message to the uniformed officers and help keep squads in touch with the issues facing the police.

The nature of the shift system is also an important element that can impact morale. In some forces senior management may reinforce rhetoric about the importance of

operational policing with initiatives to improve the life of ordinary police officers (e.g. rationalising paperwork etc).

In addition, a number of long-serving police officers commented on the fact that their job had become more difficult over the years as the attitude of the public had hardened towards the police service. Police officers were also concerned that they felt they didn't have the confidence of the Government. One officer summed up a common view:

“If we don't have the respect of the Government, then we cannot expect the respect of the public.”

While pointing out the need for change will inevitably lead to defensiveness in some quarters, there are clearly great sensitivities amongst uniformed officers that need to be addressed.

'Initiative' overload

Not all change initiatives are unwelcome in the police. Some central initiatives particularly regarding the streamlining of the initial prosecution file have already sought to reduce the burden of unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy and improve clarity as to what is expected. One officer commented “MGs (Manual of Guidance) were brilliant when they first came in because you knew what you had to do.”

On the other hand, many local initiatives – perhaps at the instigation of specialist squads or a new chief superintendent wanting to make their mark – have been resented by operational police officers. This is particularly the case where it spawns additional paperwork.

At one force surveyed, an alcohol initiative requires forms to be filled in for all arrested individuals saying when they last had a drink, how much alcohol was consumed, where and with whom. In the same force, if a student is arrested a form requires details of the college or university, course of study, tutors and stage of studies reached. At another force, a new initiative requires all domestic incidents to be reported. This meant in one instance, where a neighbour complained about the noise, a police officer having to fill out a form to report about a mother shouting at her daughter to come in for her tea!

In addition, the tightening of accountability has led to a proliferation of documentation and checks. From the perspective of operational officers, these are

frequently perceived as burdensome while the justification for such procedures has not been effectively communicated.

We also noted a common concern among officers of increased liability under the Human Rights Act. It is worth noting one mixed metaphor that summarised a frequent sentiment:

“You spend your whole life trying to cover your back.”

The words ‘initiative overload’ have become over-used. However, in the policing context there is a genuine issue here. At the very least there is a need to think through how best to communicate initiatives, what needs to be prioritised and how any reporting requirement can be kept to a minimum. In the words of one officer:

“Managerial priorities for operational policing are not being communicated effectively to front line officers who perceive themselves to be constantly fire-fighting or responding to the latest fad.”

Possible solutions

Q. Improve the status of operational policing

Consideration should be given to:

- Requiring all officers to return to operational policing from time-to-time rather than progressing from one specialist function to the next.
- Requiring specialist officers to spend regular periods on operational duties, e.g. through a requirement to assist with exceptional operational demands. This would not only provide operational relief, it would reduce the personal pressures on officers – reducing the need to drag them away from scheduled weekends off, for example. This is a factor affecting morale. At the same time, a case could be made that returning specialist police officers to operational policing would help break down the cultural rift between ‘uniformed’ and ‘plain clothes’ police.
- Undertaking reviews of staff allocation to ensure that officer numbers on specialist squads are justified by work volumes.

R. Use officers’ time effectively

Police officers’ time allocation should maximise time spent outside the station in operational policing. Suggested initiatives to achieve better time allocation are:

WHAT ELSE CAN BE DONE TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL POLICING?

- A study of shift patterns to identify which ones allow for maximal public presence at key times for reassurance policing.
- Greater use of appointments in the police station in dealing with the public. For example, Lancaster run an 'arrest by appointment' policy for some crimes where suspects attend at an appointed time. This allows better planning in the use of the custody suite and facilities.
- Time management training for officers where needed and active provision of in-station support to ensure time management is effective.

S. Rationalise the administrative requirements on officers

Current police documentation systems do not ensure that reporting is effective and minimalised.

- Internal police reporting should be subject to a Narey-style approach to reduce, rationalise and standardise requirements. Existing reporting should be subject to review. Requirements to support specialist initiatives should be kept to a minimum – with a limit to the number of initiatives running at any one time and clear communication about the reasons for the information requirements being imposed and when they are no longer required.

Appendix A: Diary Example

Police Officer Activities Diary

Unit No.

Date:

Time:

Name:

Police Station No.

Length of Service:

Community Unit:

	1st hour	2nd hour	3rd hour	4th hour	5th hour	6th hour	7th hour	8th hour	9th hour	10th hour	11th hour	12th hour
Working in/on Police Station												
1.1 Relief Management												
A. Receiving prisoners into custody												
B. Hand-over/relief at end of shift												
C. Meeting on completed jobs from previous shift												
D. Planning												
E. Receiving/organised meetings												
F. Receiving supervision												
1.2 General Justice Enforcement												
A. Receiving prisoners into custody												
B. Regular patrolling requests												
C. Photographing suspects												
D. Drawing criminal reports												
E. Interviewing suspects/witnesses												
F. Preparing prosecution file												
G. Contacting/allowing for appropriate additional witnesses/evidence												
H. Mapping/conditioning parcels												
I. Making C/P reports												
J. Drawing suspect statements												
1.3 Street Duties												
A. Covering beat duty												
B. Patrol over watch												
C. Covering other beats/help duty												
D. Staying												
1.4 Working with Public												
A. Advice to public												
B. Lost property												
C. Information and sign												
1.5 FURTHER ACTIVITIES OF POLICE OFFICERS WORKING IN/on POLICE STATION												
1.6 Status Based Training												
1.7 Break												
1.8 Other												
A. Other administration												
B. Other non-administration (please specify)												
Working Outside/on Police Station												
2.1 Community Support												
A. Victim Liaison and Support												
B. Providing crime prevention advice/Neighbourhood Watch												
C. Making referrals												
D. Receiving Partnership linkings												
E. Advice to public												
2.2 Public or other concerned persons or groups or other organisations												
A. For <input type="checkbox"/> Please tick where as patrol/with other officers												
B. Public <input type="checkbox"/> Please tick where as patrol/with other officers												
2.3 Intervening Incidents												
A. Disturb												
B. Public order (including nuisance)												
C. Domestic dispute												
D. Road obstruction												
E. Traffic/obstruction incidents												
F. Accidents												
G. Alcohol/Drug <input type="checkbox"/> Please tick if/where alone												
H. Suspicious activities												
I. Other groups/individuals												
2.4 Drive Patrol												
A. Surveillance												
B. Taking statements/enquiry												
C. Receiving identification parade volunteers												
D. Road operations												
E. Public order												
F. Public assistance												
G. Taking a person(s) into custody												
2.5 Other Duties												
A. Receiving enquirers												
B. Making person enquiry												
C. Issuing fines												
2.6 Taking Events												
A. Sporting												
B. Other (please specify)												
2.7 Breaks from public station												
A. Other work in the community (please specify)												
Working with Criminal Justice Agencies												
3.1 Yorkshire Police Force (other than our own police station)												
A. Working Force/Station/DCU headquarters												
B. Working Force Working Party												
C. Delivering prisoners from other Police Stations/Station/Force												
3.2 At Court												
A. Magistrates Court												
B. Crown Court												
C. Inquest												
D. Other (please specify)												

Appendix B: Field-work programme

The field-work was conducted between August 21 and September 15 2001.

The field-work comprised structured interviews with operational police officers coming off shift. The interviewer took them through their diaries to gain an in-depth understanding of the activities performed during the shift.

The officers were then asked a series of general questions to elicit the tactical issues they confronted in their jobs.

The interviews were complemented by a series of further interviews with more senior officers (Duty Sergeants, Inspectors, Chief Inspectors, Superintendents and Chief Superintendents). These interviews allowed the study team to explore more strategic staffing issues.

In addition, the study team members observed police officers on duty.

The interview profile is tabled below.

Interview profile					
Police force (location)	Interviews with police officers	Early shift	Late shift	Night shift	Interviews with senior officers
Devon and Cornwall Constabulary (Totnes)	5	1	2	2	1
Lancashire Constabulary (Lancaster)	12	5	3	4	4
Metropolitan Police Service (Camden)	13	5	4	4	2
North Wales Police (Rhyl)	9	2	4	3	3
Sussex police (Brighton)	8	2	2	4	2
Thames Valley Police (Milton Keynes)	12	4	4	4	4
West Midlands Police (West Bromich)	13	5	4	4	4
Total	72	24	23	25	20

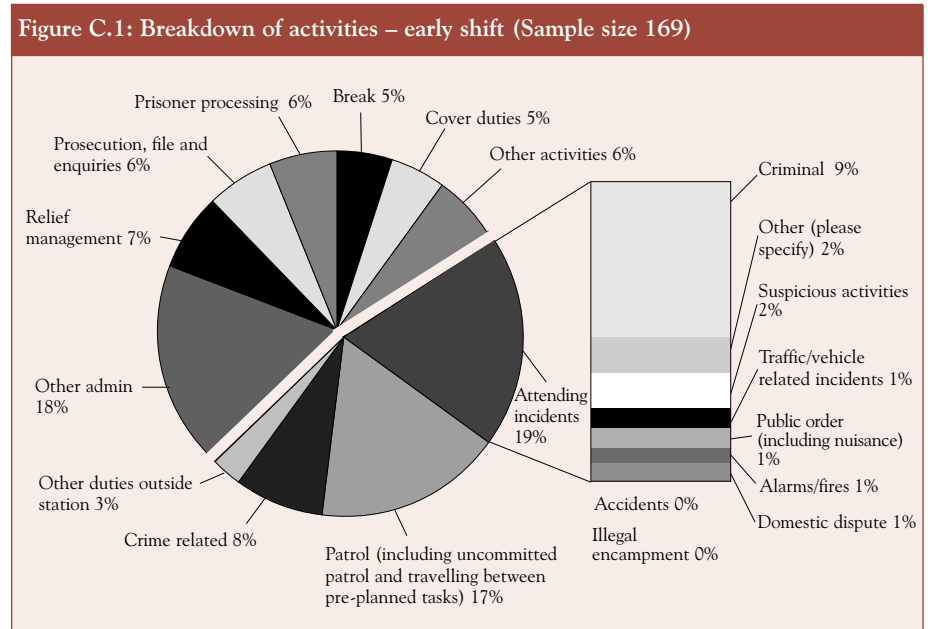
Appendix C: Quantitative results by shift and time of week

The breakdown of activities by shift is illustrated in Figures C.1 – C.3. Activities conducted outside the station are illustrated on the diagrams by lowered pie sections. Please note that differences to the graphs showing totals inside and outside the station are accounted for by the use of the ‘Other Activities’ category. In the diagrams below this includes a range of duties performed both in and outside the police station.

The difference in activity between shifts suggests that there is considerable variation between the standard scenarios for different shifts.

The administrative and prosecution enquiry burden is concentrated in the early shift with ‘Other Administration’ and ‘Prosecution File and Enquiries’ accounting for 25% of time compared to 17% on late and 16% on nights. In part this reflects that most enquiries can only be made in daytime.

Incidents are attended most frequently at night: 31% of time spent on attending incidents compared to 19% on early shift and 23% on late shift.



Most patrol is performed on night duty (19%) and least on late (14%).

The late shift was the peak time for planned crime-related activities such as house searches and surveillance, 12% of time compared to 8% for both the early and night shifts.

Figure C.2: Breakdown of activities – late shift (Sample size 101)

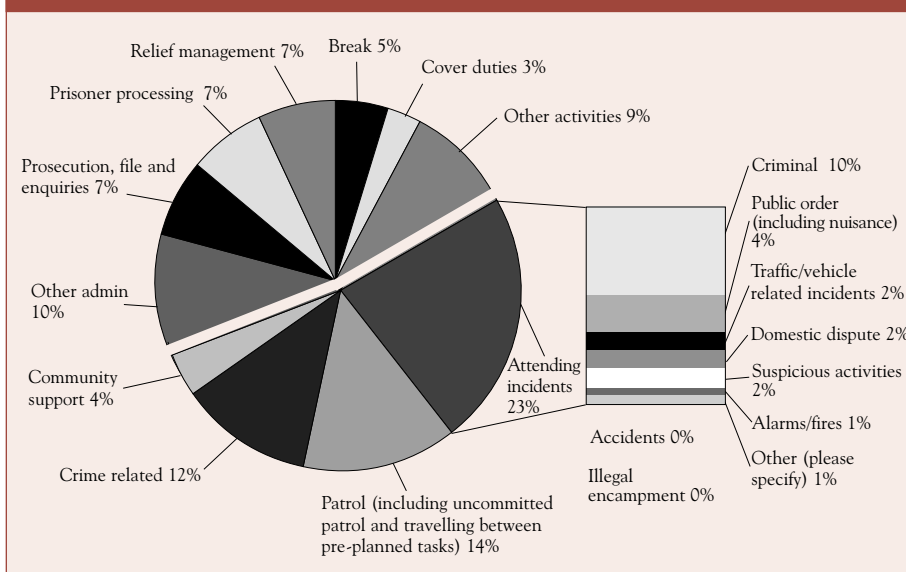
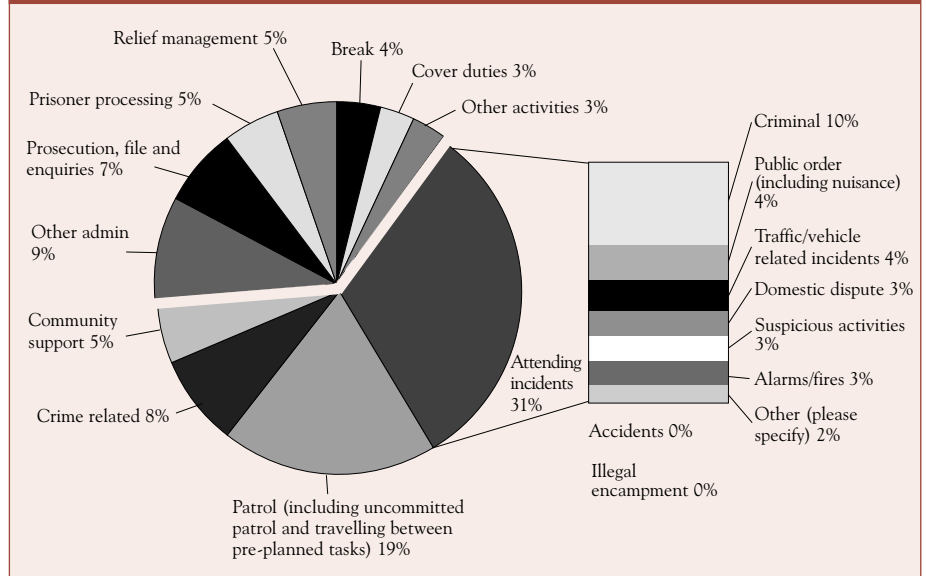


Figure C.3: Breakdown of activities – Night shifts (Sample size 107)



The breakdown of activities between weekday shifts (Monday – Thursday) and weekend shifts (Friday – Sunday) is illustrated below. Significantly more time was spent on patrol at the weekend than on weekdays – 20% at the weekend against 13% during the week. The amount of time spent dealing with incidents was identical at 23per cent, which is a counter-intuitive finding given the anecdotally higher occurrence of many types of incident at the weekend.

Figure C.4: Breakdown of activities – weekday shift (Sample size 154)

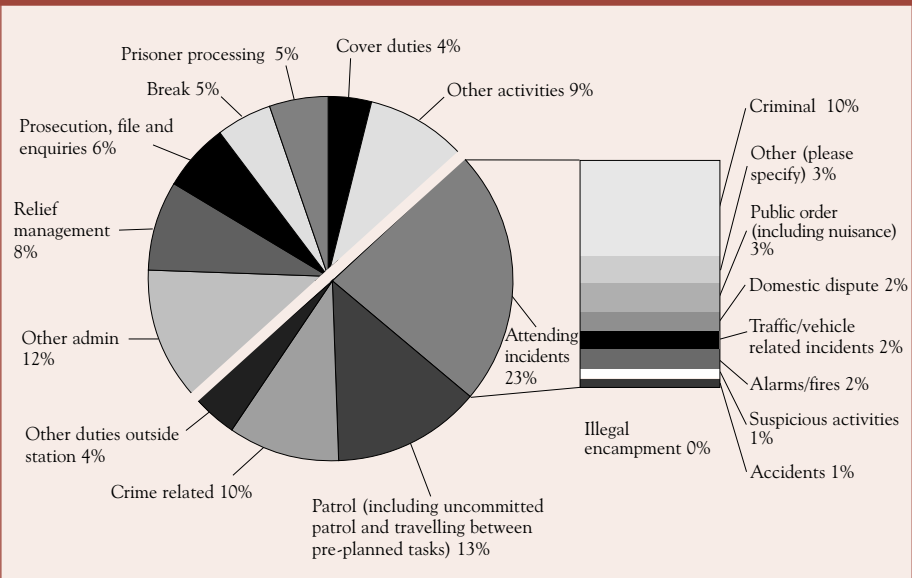
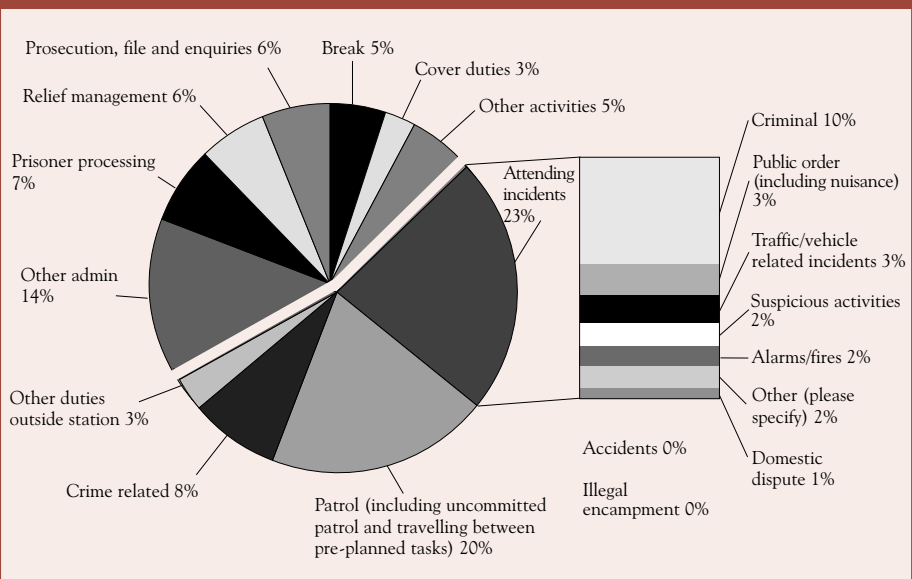


Figure C.5: Breakdown of activities – weekend shift (Sample size 224)



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