



Leadership from bottom to top: Chicago's model for community policing



Apex Scotland Annual Lecture

SIGNET LIBRARY
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Foreword

My remarks on community policing were delivered at the 2007 Apex Lecture, which was held in the historic Signet Library in Edinburgh. This wonderful venue brought together leaders of Scotland's criminal justice community and others. I was visiting Scotland at the invitation of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research, a joint research venture of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and 12 universities. As I learned, Apex and the Institute both are dedicated to monitoring and evaluation in their areas of responsibility, strengthening the evidence base on which policy and practice are based. This fitted well with my discussion of the largest community policing experiment in America, which was based on a 13-year evaluation of its effectiveness. The audience was large and participants asked excellent questions. Scotland is well served by the awareness and mutual respect that cross-institutional collaborations of this sort engender.

Professor Wesley Skogan

Introduction

Joining me on the platform this evening are two distinguished Chief Constables – Peter Wilson from Fife and David Strang from Lothian and Borders, who is also an Apex Board member, as well as our Chief Executive, Bernadette Monaghan, and of course, our speaker, Professor Wesley Skogan.

It is my very great pleasure to welcome you all here this evening for what will be the fifth Apex Scotland Annual Lecture since we re-launched the event in 2003.

As you all know, our Lecture is intended to offer a platform for debate about any aspect of our criminal justice system as it currently operates and might develop in the future.

That it is firmly established as a key event in the criminal justice calendar is evident from the fact that so many of you – key players from all sectors of criminal justice, law, the judiciary and beyond – have come along tonight. Many more would have liked to attend, but were unable to do so. As in previous years however, we will be publishing the Lecture, and we will ensure that you all receive a copy.

Each year we have been fortunate to secure a very high calibre of speaker, and this year is no exception. It is, however, an exception in that, for the first time, tonight's Lecture will focus on the topic of policing, and it will be given by an international expert. We are delighted to be hosting it in partnership with SIPR – the Scottish Institute for Policing Research. We have very much enjoyed working with the SIPR team – Peter Wilson, Nick Fyfe, Tim Heilbronn and Lyn Mitchell – in planning and organising this event.

I would like to take this opportunity to say a few words about Apex.

Since I joined the Board in December 2001, I have watched this organisation grow from strength to strength. This has been possible, I believe, by the continued support and goodwill of our partners. It is also due to our hardworking and committed staff, who are our biggest asset.

The patience and respect they show in working to address the employability needs of vulnerable and often difficult people was recognised in a recent management review by the Scottish Executive, which concluded: "The clients we met spoke extremely positively of the organisation, where other organisations had failed them".

Sincere thanks to all our partners and staff.

Sam Muir, Apex Board member

SIPR

The Scottish Institute
for Policing Research

The establishment of the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) in November 2006 marked the end of a sustained discussion between the police service in Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council and Scotland's university community.

The initiative had been born out of the recognition that, notwithstanding that democratic policing had been in existence in Scotland for around 200 years, there was little documented evidence of research into policing styles and practice. Over the past 30 years or so, 'research' had been largely limited to references to new technologies, and to a lesser extent, to the examination of issues concerned with new legislation. It was only in rare circumstances such as the Hamilton Child Safety initiative in the 1990s, popularly referred to as the 'Curfew', that proper research had been commissioned.

SIPR is a jointly funded initiative between Scotland's police forces, the Scottish Funding Council and a collaboration of 12 of Scotland's universities, under the tremendous leadership of our Director, Nick Fyfe.

As we approach our first anniversary, we have much to be pleased about. Three networks have been established to address the general themes of police and community relations, evidence and investigation, and police organisation. One of the main aims of the Institute is to grow capacity, and we have already seen the appointment of post doctoral research assistants, and PhD lectureships, addressing particular areas of research relevant to policing. The Institute's website (www.sipr.ac.uk) is being developed to include the profiles of the principal researchers at the collaborating universities, together with those of police staff involved in research. The process of appointing police practitioner fellowships is in the early stages,

while future planning of a graduate school is under discussion. Applications have also been submitted to participate in international research.

The police service is keen to promote the research programme and to take the benefits of the findings back into the workforce. Accordingly, we have identified that the formal link with the service should be through the ACPOS performance management business area. Knowledge transfer underpins the activity of the Institute. A seminar series based upon the work of the networks has already commenced, and tonight's lecture by Professor Skogan precedes the first annual SIPR conference at the Pollock Halls Conference Centre.

I am enormously grateful to the APEX Board for its generosity in allowing the Institute to share its annual lecture for a jointly organised opportunity to bring Professor Skogan to Scotland. This allows us to further raise the profile of the Institute in Scotland and internationally. At this time in Scotland's history, this feels like excellent timing.

Peter Wilson

Chief Constable, Fife Constabulary

Honorary Secretary of the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland

Lecture

Today I will discuss some of the fundamentals of Chicago's community policing programme and the 13-year evaluation that we conducted to monitor its implementation and effectiveness. Chicago's programme officially began in April of 1993, after a surprisingly short development period during which senior department managers, outside consultants and staff from the mayor's office crafted a plan for the city. Then, over the next two years, they refined the programme by testing and reworking it in several test areas. For police purposes, Chicago is divided into 280 small police beats, which are grouped into 25 districts, and the experiment was carried out in five of them, over a two-year period. The planners took a flexible, "maybe we can make it work and maybe we have to reformulate it" approach, getting it off the ground rapidly rather than taking years to over-plan it. This gave us evaluators a very valuable period during which police in most of the city were conducting their business as usual. In the prototype districts, by contrast, police had some extra resources and a great deal of management attention and extra training. There they reorganised themselves in a way that eventually the entire city would emulate. My first book on policing in Chicago took advantage of differences in what happened in these prototype districts and elsewhere, to document the impact of the programme.

The first components of Chicago's programme is one that every successful community policing programme, which is to decentralise and devolve responsibility down in the organisation, closer to where police meet the public and the work gets done. In Chicago, this meant breathing new life into the 280 small beats. The department created what are called "beat teams". These are groups of about nine officers who, in the main, provide staffing for a beat car that is assigned to an area 24-by-7. Of course, other officers occasionally get dispatched to handle work overloads, but the goal of the computerised dispatching system is to keep the beat cars busy answering calls from their area.

As you might note, this indicates that Chicago chose not to go the special unit route. Many American and UK cities have tried to staff their community policing programmes with officers who are released from the

routines of "real" police work, but that almost inevitably leads to trouble. One liability of special units is that officers are constantly being siphoned off for other, seemingly more pressing duties, and Chicago knew from its investigations that was a difficulty they wanted to avoid. Another was that special units can lead to morale problems. In Fort Worth, Texas, for example, special community policing officers came to be known as "empty holster guys," and were dismissed by the rest of the force. In other cities, what they do is known as "wave and smile policing," and NOP – Neighbourhood Orient Policing – comes to be known as "Nobody On Patrol". So, by organising teams that would spend their time answering calls like everyone else, only just in one neighbourhood, Chicago hoped to avoid the morale and organisational problems that plague special units. This strategy also avoided a charge that had come up in other cities, that taking officers away from patrol would put the community at risk. In Chicago, beat teams do police work most of the time. The 911 emergency call system manages their workload, a) so that they answer calls that come from their beat, and b) so that they're not fully occupied, and have other things that they can also do during the course of their tour. The teams work under a beat sergeant, who is responsible for quarterly meetings at which they talk about what's up, and make plans for the next quarter.

At the same time, Chicago changed to fixed work shifts, moving away from a rotating shift pattern which used to be very common in the United States. Before, over the course of several months, officers would work their way all around the clock. But to build stable relationships with the public you need stable shift assignments.

The next key development was to provide vehicles for public involvement in the programme. In many American cities, public involvement consists of a committee of the great and the good that meets occasionally with the chief of police. It is a bit exciting for them; they get special, behind the scenes tours, some crime statistics and crime maps, and they feel like "insiders". But they meet once a quarter, and nothing apparently happens, except that they have an interesting chat.

Instead, Chicago chose to develop a system to fit the devolution of responsibility in the organisation down to beats, and what they came up with is one of the most unique aspects of the city's programme. Police and civic leaders come from all over the world to see beat meetings in action. The meetings are to be held each month, and on average, they actually meet about ten times a year. Each has a regular schedule – for example, the first Tuesday of the month – and they meet in the same location each time. They are held in venues like church basements and social halls and in park buildings, and it is the responsibility of the beat sergeant to secure a location where they can meet regularly. An average of five police officers attend. Most are members of the beat team, and several officers who are off duty at the time of the meetings are paid overtime to be there. The beat sergeant is typically there, and often specialists from niches in the department such as the gang unit are there because of special concerns expressed by local residents. But the key is that most of the officers work in the beat, driving around and answering calls, and they are the very people who are likely to show up at participants' doorsteps if they call the emergency number. These officers have direct responsibility for dealing with the concerns that come up during the meetings as well.

The average meeting lasts about 70 minutes, and the officers have been trained to follow the same general agenda. First, there is a presentation and discussion of crime patterns. When you arrive at the meeting there is always a "welcome table" where you sign in and pick up information packets. Attendees typically get a crime map, and if the last meeting turned out to focus on aggravated assault, there'll be a map of all the assaults in the beat in the last 30 days. There is a standard analytic report called a "Top Ten List", which provides information about the ten most frequent crimes in this beat during the last month. Often there will be summary reports about arrests in the area and a crime prevention brochure or two. These materials will be available in English, Spanish and Polish, which is the next most requested foreign language in Chicago.

Turnout at these meetings has been solid and very stable. It varies with the weather – we have serious

weather in Chicago, as you may have heard – and September is our best month; that's when you should visit, and it is also the peak month for participation. Initially there was concern that, after a while, attendance would fade, when the novelty of trundling down to your local church social hall and meeting with the police wore off. However, turnout has been running at a steady 65,000 to 67,000 attendees per year. Between 1993 and 2003, there were just over 600,000 participants in the meetings.

The city-wide surveys we conduct show that community policing and beat meetings are very widely known. Recognition is highest among African Americans, and in fact it's in African American neighbourhoods where the programme has had its most success. As we tracked it, recognition went up steadily over time. In our last survey, 87% of African Americans knew about the programme. Some of this is doubtless due to the tremendous marketing campaign that went on to get the public to come to the meetings and to keep them informed about what they needed to know to be active participants. The programme is advertised using mass mailings, flyers and signs posted in the subway. Churches insert little flyers about local meetings in their weekly bulletins, and Chicago schoolchildren come home from with information attached to their report cards. In one district, the commanders arranged to have pizzas delivered with a map and a beat meeting schedule stapled to the box. Spanish-language radio is used very extensively to reach out to Chicago's Hispanic community.

In 1995 and 1996, about 12,000 neighbourhood residents went through a three-weekend training cycle to learn about neighbourhood problem solving from their end, and to learn about how they could become involved in community policing. Of course, police officers need the most training. Policing a human services operation; you hire, train, supervise your people in order to get what you want to happen. So, for example, officers and sergeants needed to learn about how to run a meeting. The department made a wonderful training video that played out a "beat meeting from hell". Everything goes wrong. An obstreperous heckler appears, as does a confused

senior citizen. The remainder of the session consists of officers and trainers talking about how they would have handled the situations that emerged.

Who is it that attends beat meetings? To find out, we conducted rounds of observational studies in 1995, 1998 and 2002. Each time, we attended about 300 meetings, to observe what went on and survey the residents and police who attend. We found that people who come are not a particularly representative slice of the population. This is something that every organiser of a community policing programme has to worry about. Compared with the population of their beat, the meetings over-represent homeowners, more educated people, long-term residents, senior citizens, people no longer in work, married households and families without any children living at home. In short, it is better off and more established members of the community, with time on their hands, who learn about, and take advantage of, these opportunities to influence policing in their neighbourhood.

However, although they look different from their neighbours, it turns out that, on many dimensions, those who attend adequately represent the concerns of their neighbours. We assessed this by comparing the priority problems reported by beat meeting participants with the same measures in surveys of the general public, neighbourhood by neighbourhood. It turns out that beat meetings, by and large, do reflect the distribution of concerns in the community. Participants are more concerned than their immediate neighbours about crime and other problems – that is an important reason why they show up. But, on many measures, they do a pretty good job of reflecting community priorities. Why is this the case? I think that small is beautiful. Even though participants were more likely to own their home, for example, beats are small, and everyone is still shopping at the same grocery store, walking past the same school and catching a bus at the same stop. They are sharing all the visible problems in their community regardless of differences in their backgrounds.

Importantly, this turns out not to be true for some things that we hope could be represented at beat meetings. One of these is residents' views of the

quality of police service in their community. Ironically, it is people's views of policing that are least well represented at the meetings. Why is that? The principal reason is the demographic mismatch that I described. That is, demographic mismatches pile up in ways that make the meetings more police-friendly. One culprit is older residents. There is a very strong age gradient in the relationship between age and people's perceptions of the police; the older you are, the more positive you tend to be, by a very sharp margin.

The second important factor that confounds the representativeness of the meetings is race. Whites who attend beat meetings in Chicago pretty much share the views of the white population in general – they both like the police. But it turns out that African Americans who come to the beat meetings are much more positive about the police than are their neighbours. These differential racial gaps in assessments of the quality of policing ensure that beat meetings don't clearly represent the concerns of the public about the effectiveness with which they are doing their job.

One interesting factor we have tracked is the congruence between the views of participants and those of the police officers who attend the meetings and work in the area. Police also fill out questionnaires at the meetings, and we have found that their perceptions of neighbourhood problems parallel those of residents to a surprising degree. Police are a little less interested in graffiti than are residents; residents are a little bit more concerned about junk and trash in the streets and alleys. But by-and-large, the priorities of the two groups resemble each other. This may be because of the repeated dialogue they engage in with participants at the meetings, but I think it is also because the turf orientation adopted by the department has brought them much closer to the problems that they, too, see as they patrol a fixed area. Now, instead of driving all over town to wherever the computer sends them to next, they stay on "their" beat.

A third aspect of Chicago's programme is inter-agency co-operation in problem solving. A key feature of community policing in Chicago is that it is not the police department's programme, it is the city's programme. In fact, if community policing is just the

police department's programme, it is at risk of failing. Without the support of the rest of the municipal service infrastructure, it's not going to be able to carry the freight.

Chicago's model, instead, requires the active participation of many agencies: the people who tow abandoned cars and poison rats in the alleys, and the city workers who paint out graffiti. The reasons for this are threefold. First, politicians and civic leaders who run Chicago have bought 100 percent into what is known as the "broken windows" theory of crime. They believe that you can tackle some big problems by taking care of small things, as a recent police chief put it. In Chicago, tackling abandoned buildings, cars, graffiti and illegal dumping is seen as crime prevention. Fixing the broken windows is one of Chicago's approaches to crime.

Second, the city has this model because it fits the mayor's "clean and green" agenda. Chicago, like many cities, is trying to compete in the global marketplace for corporate headquarters, tourists, conventions and high-tech start-ups, and how things look is very much a factor in that marketplace. Plus the mayor loves trees.

Finally, those who planned the programme knew that when people turned up at beat meetings to voice their concerns they were not going to make fine bureaucratic distinctions about who is responsible for what. If their problem is loose garbage in the alleys, they're going to stand up and complain about it. Planners knew that they had to have an affirmative response when rats in the alley came up. If they stood there and said, "Ah, yeah, it's terrible, but that's not police business," no-one would come back next month. Beat meetings were instead structured to pay off, without respect for bureaucratic silos. Even before they began, the co-ordination of a broad range of services became very much part of Chicago's programme.

To make this happen, a system was developed that opened a special "window" that officers could easily go to for service. At the meetings, participants' complaints get translated to service request forms. Every night, the districts fax these forms downtown, where they are entered into a computer and allocated to the various

departments. Each type of service has a required service time, and the clock starts to tick as soon as it goes in the computer. The mayor also has special auditors who make sure that fallen street signs have actually been put back up, that streetlights that were out have fresh bulbs, and graffiti gets cleaned up or painted over. In Chicago, if you have a problem and come to a beat meeting, you can get it fixed. One reason for high and stable participation in the meetings is that things happen as a result. We see this in our surveys, in which over 80 percent of participants report they have seen changes take place in their neighbourhood because of things that go on at the meetings. There is pay-off from linking the meetings to services. And over time, this process has actually remade Chicago's service delivery system, enhancing its responsiveness, which was another of the mayor's goals.

The results can be seen in the data. As part of the evaluation, we track the distribution of services in Chicago. We want to see what the impact of beat meetings has been on the service delivery process. Two very frequent services that we have tracked closely are graffiti clean-ups and towing abandoned cars. When the programme started there were reputedly (no one really knew the number) more than 10,000 abandoned cars on the streets of Chicago, and getting them cleaned up was one of the big first priorities of the programme.

I will spare you the complicated statistics, but our analysis of beat meeting and service delivery data found a short list of factors that were important in determining which beats got more of what service. One important factor was resident priorities. This was measured by our city-wide surveys, aggregated to the beat level to make neighbourhood data. In areas where problems were of substantial concern, the service delivery rate was higher. At the same time, there was an additional effect of the priorities of the people who came to beat meetings; where they were concerned, the service delivery was even higher. In addition, in beats with a high turnout rate, there were more services, evidence that the "squeaky wheel gets greased". Finally, this is Chicago, so supporting the mayor is important. Controlling for everything else,

the most important determinant of service delivery rates was the percentage of the vote that went for the incumbent mayor. This is absolutely normal in American politics, and people would be astonished if that was not true, especially because this is Chicago.

What are the challenges facing the programme in the future? The first question is, can community policing survive COMPSTAT? COMPSTAT is a hardnosed, data-driven management accountability that began in New York City. Like many cities, Chicago adopted its own versions of COMPSTAT in 2001. The problem is that what matters in data-driven management is what's measured. In COMPSTAT management meetings, which feature huge charts thrown up on high-tech LCD screens, the top brass ask commanders, "Well, what are you doing about this drug market and what are you doing about those shootings?" The data in the department's computers are about crime, arrests, response times and crashes on the way to calls. That's what is measured, and that's what's important in this kind of accountability regime. This inevitably pushes resources away from community policing and in the direction of the traditional responsibilities of the organisation. District commanders complain that things that they think are important, that they have been fostering with the community, simply disappear from view when they are in the hot seat.

Our evaluation team has been putting some pressure on the department about this, and it has incorporated some community policing-type measures into the review process. District commanders, for example, are closely questioned about service request rates, and beat meeting turnout is an issue that they can be called on the carpet to account for. But most of the data available to analysts at headquarters focuses on traditional activities, and they inevitably become paramount.

The second question is, can community policing survive the end of great crime drop of the end of the 20th century? Like many American cities, crime in Chicago peaked in 1991, and then began a long slide down. This freed up resources, took shootings and violent crime off the political agenda and gave departments breathing room in which to re-engage

with the community. Between 1991 and 2006, any crime with a gun in Chicago declined by 67 percent. This was a very noticeable decline, to say the least, and the biggest declines have been in African American neighbourhoods where problems were worst to begin with. But now there's a hint of a turnaround in the United States. Nationwide, the crime rate has stopped dropping, and in a number of visible cities it's begun to creep up again. Chicago's crime count has simply flattened, not crept up, but pressure from the media and from community groups in areas where the crime problem looks worse, further threatens the resources devoted to community policing.

The third question I don't know the answer to is, can Chicago's programme survive a new mayor? We've been through a number of police chiefs, and we are in the process of picking another, so I know that community policing can survive this transition. Chicago's programme is very firmly rooted in its politics and culture, and it is truly the city's programme. People run for public office with the fact that they are a community policing activist on their campaign resume. This involvement is a big plus in neighbourhood politics. Chicagoans know their beat number, they know where their beat meetings are, and it would be very difficult to dislodge the programme politically. It could be starved for resources, but I think no politician could find it feasible to announce that they were no longer going to be a 100 percent behind the programme. We will find out someday if this is true, when our mayor-for-life finally retires, but in many cities, turnover among chiefs of police and mayors has been a real testing point for how firmly community policing is rooted in the civic culture.

Our final problem in Chicago is what to do about our new immigrants. Community policing has failed to engage with Chicago's burgeoning Latino community. Chicago is divided into three great tribes: we are a simple place, populated by whites, African Americans and Hispanics, the latter almost completely from Mexico. The Latino fraction of the population is the only part that's growing. The white population dropped by 13 per cent between 1990 and 2000, and the black population is stable. Latino neighbourhoods

are overflowing, schools there are overcrowded, and that's where the city's future lies. Community policing has been unable to successfully penetrate the large and growing barrios that have emerged in Chicago, places where you can live your entire life speaking only Spanish. Two thirds of the city's Latinos live in majority-Latino beats, and that proportion has been growing. They have become more concentrated over time, as their numbers have grown through immigration and natural growth. Finding ways to respond to this, and to engage with this community, is perhaps the city's largest challenge in this new century.





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