

# WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Sir Denis O'Connor CBE QPM  
September 11<sup>th</sup> 2012, Policy Exchange

## Valedictory Lecture: “The Importance of a Plan to Win”

**“We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.”**

*from Little Gidding (V) by T.S. Eliot*

Thank you for the opportunity to speak this evening about British Policing, which is at once imperfect and extraordinary – extraordinary enough to impress the world, if not perfect in the view of all of us here, all of the time!

‘In the midst of austerity and budget cuts, it might seem as though the police should batten down the hatches and weather the storm as best they can, as opposed to thinking up new plans and considering their purpose and direction; but the opposite is true. The fact that the police now have to do more with less means it is precisely the time to discuss the plan for policing, and to seek clarity - not only about what is happening to the police, but about what we want from policing – and, crucially, how to achieve it.

Let me illustrate: A few weeks ago on a warm Friday evening, as I stood on a landing of an inner city estate with police officers who had just recovered a baseball bat from the third ‘domestic’ incident of the shift, an able officer said: “Sorry about this boss, we will get some proper crime jobs before we finish”. The three domestic incidents had arisen from a manager worried about a female employee who had not been at work for nearly two weeks; a neighbour reporting a man who had rushed into the street, naked and distressed and knocking his wife over *en route*; and this case - a mum unable to manage the behaviour of her 19-year-old son when he was suffering from drug-induced psychosis.

In responding to these incidents, the officers had shown ingenuity in dealing with cultural issues and with the absence or delay in other services. They had also had to cope with the shortcomings of their organisation’s infrastructure, in that any previous information on these cases wasn’t immediately available to them.

I felt moved and said, “Don’t worry, you are doing exactly what we need from you, you are intervening to stop crime!” But another officer said, “We have only had one ‘result’” (meaning the arrest of the 19 year old for criminal damage, made in order to protect his mum). These officers deserve greater clarity than that about what constitutes a policing win – and so do all of us.

My central argument tonight is that the British Police Service was born from a world-class idea: preventive policing. This is not the same thing as catching crooks – it’s more. Prevention means that the ‘result’ of policing is deterring or managing offenders, victims and locations so that it is much harder to commit crime or so that crime looks like a much less attractive option

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Preventive policing has ebbed and flowed over my 40 plus years in the Service. It now needs to be nurtured (despite the cutbacks): otherwise, history will repeat itself, and we will be looking not at reform but decline. Fortunately there are opportunities to help preventive policing to develop: through providing clarity about the policing mission; ensuring that police forces are organised for prevention, not just reaction; and supporting the greatest source of productivity in policing - individual constables.

### **The Rise and ‘Fall’ of Preventive Policing**

When I first joined the Service as a constable, the previously effective approach of preventive, beat-based policing was being traded in for something that promised ‘better policing’ in the face of challenges around cost, communications and mobility (sound familiar?). The justification was ‘efficiency.’

The first things I learnt, off by heart from the 1968 version of the *Metropolitan Police Instruction Book*, were the same words that featured in the very first police book of instructions in 1829:

**“The primary object of an efficient police is the prevention of crime: the next that of detection and punishment of offenders if crime is committed.”<sup>1</sup>**

On my first night duty in Limehouse, it was made crystal clear that I would have to account for any crime that occurred on that shift. This was an extension of a clear-cut and somewhat fierce tradition dating back to at least 1867 where Police Orders record the example of a PC Norgrove, who was required to resign for:

**“Neglect of duty in not preventing nor discovering that three larcenies had been committed on his beat on two successive nights; also not patrolling his beat for an hour, and found asleep”!<sup>2</sup>**

In my time, there was a ‘Book 92’, where I had to provide a reason for being in the police station. The clarity of the justification was striking: you need to get out and know your ground - and you couldn’t do that stuck in the police station. The time of the constable was directly controlled, with the system geared around ‘supporting’ the officer so he or she could get behind what was happening and exercise crime control in a piece of territory. The accountability ‘to the patch’ was immediate. I never forgot this (and will return to it in my conclusion).

But the winds of change were blowing. A Home Office Working Party report published in 1967<sup>3</sup> had concluded that:

**“There is clearly much of value in this concept of the beat system but we think it also embodies an idealisation from the past which, in the**

---

<sup>1</sup> Metropolitan Police (1969) *Instruction Book*, London: Metropolitan Police

<sup>2</sup> With thanks to Neil Paterson of the Metropolitan Police Heritage Centre – discovered in Police Orders 1860-67

<sup>3</sup> Home Office (1967) *Police Manpower, Equipment and Efficiency: reports of three working parties*, London: HMSO

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

**conditions of modern society and, given the chronic shortage of police manpower, [are] unfortunately no longer attainable.”**

This reflects not just the economics of policing in the Sixties, but also the remorseless rise in the number of emergency calls: from around 35,000<sup>4</sup> here in London in 1954, to something over 400,000 in 1968<sup>5</sup> (as an aside, the total was more than 2 million last year).<sup>6</sup>

The report continued by noting that:

**“...the system fails to exploit the advantages of modern equipment, (radios and cars)... we think that the case for a very early change to more flexible systems of policing in many areas of the country becomes unanswerable.”<sup>7</sup>**

(No one, by the way, bothered to address the question: 'What are the additional demands imposed by increased ownership of that modern equipment or are there any problems which might be causing more people to call the police?')

Fundamentally, the report failed to acknowledge that individually accountable, beat-based constables might have a key role in preventing crime - and so, that its proposals to take officers off the beat were legitimising the removal of a crime 'suppressor'.

The transition that followed was called Unit Beat Policing, which in the '70s and early '80s focused heavily on officers in cars. The police machine switched from crime control in local areas to responding rapidly and becoming highly reactive to the latest incidents and events. Suffice it to say, they were more successful in dealing with calls than crime!

Unit Beat Policing went untested until random police patrolling was assessed and found not to 'prevent crime' all on its own. But nobody listened then – and we have difficulty listening to the evidence now, something I will also come back to later.

### **The Return of Preventive Policing**

In the years that followed there were a variety of attempts to change parts of the police: externally, through public inquiries; and internally, through **targeted policing initiatives**.

The beginning of a recovery was Intelligence Led Policing in the 1990s, which was pioneered by Chief Constable David Phillips (now Sir David) in Kent. This focused effort on opportunities to disrupt offenders who have a disproportionate effect on crime. We knew then for instance, and it is still the case today, that less than half of

---

<sup>4</sup> Scott, Sir H (1954) *Scotland Yard*, London: Andre Deutsch

<sup>5</sup> Metropolitan Police (1969) *Commissioner of Police for the Metropolis: Report for the year 1968*, London: HMSO

<sup>6</sup> Metropolitan Police (2011) *Commissioner's Annual Report to the Metropolitan Police Authority 2010/11*, London: Metropolitan Police

<sup>7</sup> Home Office (1967) *Police Manpower, Equipment and Efficiency: reports of three working parties*, London: HMSO

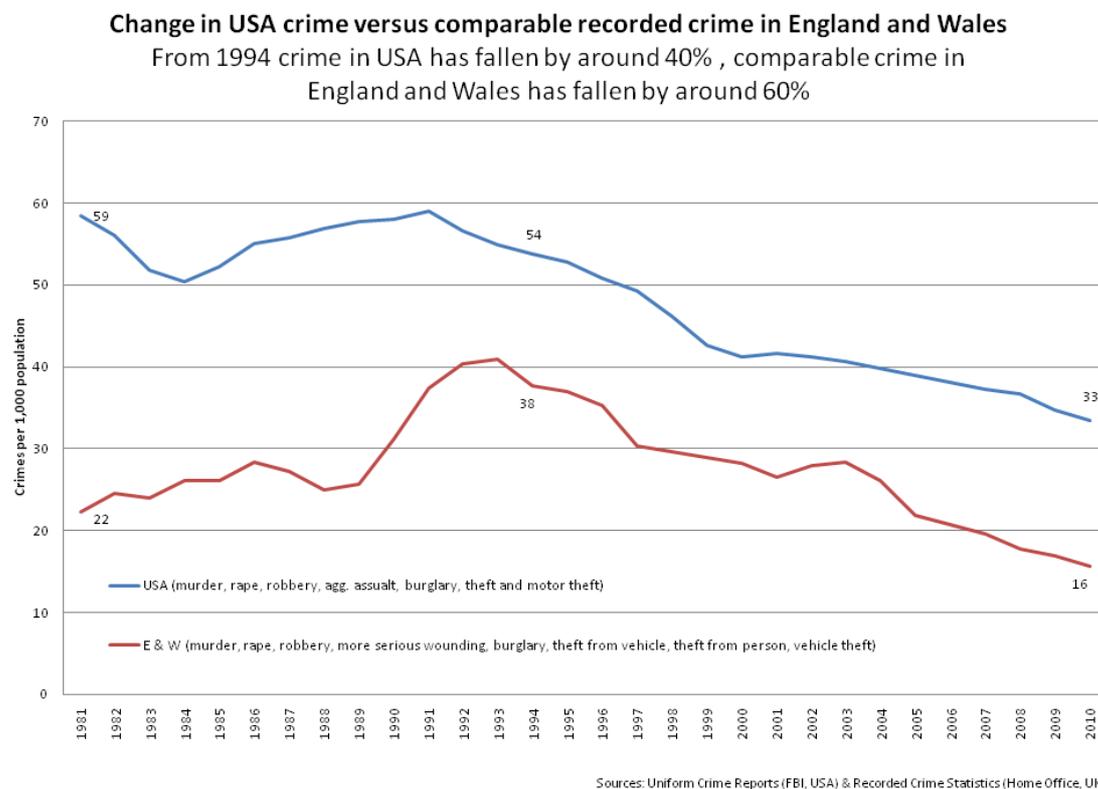
## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

one percent of the population commit over 10% of all crimes.<sup>8</sup> It was accompanied progressively by Compstat-style performance management (most often associated with Bill Bratton in New York), which sought to get on top of crime trends quickly, by monitoring, analysis and follow up. (This can be effective if, in parallel, the police are getting underneath the crime problems that present themselves.)

Neighbourhood Policing, which I with the help of other Chief Officers promoted, arose in the Noughties. It came about because of the 'reassurance gap' – that is, the fact that although recorded crime was by then falling sharply in this country, the public didn't believe it.

Neighbourhood Policing worked on the premise that when people think about their safety they prioritise their homes (and the area around their homes). It had a problem-oriented, preventive approach at its heart. Research showed that when constables targeted crime and symptoms of crime in their local area it not only raised public confidence but reduced crime across eight trial forces.<sup>9</sup>

And there is more. For example, good work on homicide reduction has taken the number of offences down to figures last seen in 1983. Some, like the Commissioner of the Metropolis, Bernard Hogan-Howe (whilst in Merseyside), used these and other methods in combination to achieve remarkable reductions in crime. Indeed, during this period the fall in crime in the UK mirrors what was achieved in the USA since the Nineties.



<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Justice (2012) *Proven reoffending* <http://www.justice.gov.uk/statistics/reoffending/proven-re-offending>

<sup>9</sup> Tuffin R. Morris, J. Poole, A. (2006) *Home Office Research Study 296 An evaluation of the impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme*. London: Home Office

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

The key motivation here was a belief by some police leaders that there was a better way, a will to find the means to win on crime and on giving the public confidence in their own security. This led to a rethink of some of the fundamentals of police operations. Instead of simply reacting speedily and recording crime, the police needed to become intent on intercepting it, and those responsible for it. Those involved in these efforts sought in different ways to rethink the logistics of getting ahead of crime in particular circumstances: for example, by targeting a crime-prone street corner in part of a ward where incivility was rife, in a way that would be noticed by the public.

The ‘new’ preventive policing was based on constables targeting offenders, victims and locations. It couldn’t be restricted to predominantly **guarding the streets** by single beat constables, as was the case previously. Not just because of the increase of calls to people’s homes, but because expectations changed: from the 1980s, people expected to be **protected** in their homes. The police responded by changing how they handled domestic incidents, like child protection, domestic violence and hate crime.

These changes personalise prevention, require specialist responses and come at a cost. They also mean that the police have moved from public to private settings to resolve problems. This capacity to adapt to changing public expectations is a positive: but an expansive approach to the mission cannot endure. Consider for instance social media and the digital space, and how much police time could be spent investigating cyber bullying. Limits need to be set – the commitment cannot be absolute prevention.

The reason why it is critical to seek clarity on the policing mission now is that the great majority of newly elected Police and Crime Commissioners will have to set budgets (and so decide on priorities) within ten weeks of being in office, in circumstances which see the number of non-frontline and frontline staff reducing.

The value of a targeted preventive approach is not simply nostalgic: where successful, it affords the real possibility of fewer victims and reduced demand. In other words, achieving more for less. But more than that – the character of police interventions underpinned by a preventive philosophy is ever mindful of the need to win public support. To be clear, ‘being preventive’ in these terms is not simply about target hardening<sup>10</sup> of car parks and so on, but importantly also about *social* prevention, about mobilising support so that victims or local communities can take back ground.<sup>11</sup> Prevention can be short-term and disruptive – for instance, the police van parked near a problem shopping mall – or longer term interventions around kids *en route* to criminality.

Any diagnostic of the current challenges in policing makes a ‘preventive’ guiding policy the one to beat. Of course this does not mean that there are no other approaches. Nor am I saying that police numbers don’t count. They do - but, as the research highlights, the way they are used counts hugely. And that’s what I want to discuss now.

---

<sup>10</sup> Df. “making the objects of crime less vulnerable” – p225, Clarke, R. V. (1983) ‘Situational crime prevention: its theoretical basis and practical scope’, *Crime and Justice*, 4, 225-256.

<sup>11</sup> Innes, M. Roberts, C. Innes, H. Lowe, T. Lakhani, S. (2011) *Assessing the Effects of Prevent Policing, A report to the Association of Chief Police Officers*. Cardiff: UPSi

# WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

## Planning to Succeed?

An analysis of the current batch of the policing plans developed by police authorities shows that prevention does not often feature centre-forward, as this word cloud of their intentions shows [slide].

This lack of stated focus on prevention would matter less if more progress had been made in the last 20 years to embed it into the infrastructure of police systems; but the fact is, the movement didn't go far enough or fast enough, and sometimes approaches were well intentioned but ineffective.<sup>12</sup> There are a number of steps we could take to aid the process, which would also enable the Police Service to be moving in a positive and purposeful direction, rather than 'making the best' of the cuts.

These steps include providing **clarity on the mission**, and thinking again about whether **the design around constables'** work enables them to be productive, and about whether core **knowledge about 'what works'** in preventing crime is being exploited.

## Clarity of mission

You'll remember that summer evening late turn I described at the start of this speech, and the officer who saw attending domestic incidents as not 'proper crime jobs'. This lack of clarity around the policing mission is a recurring issue.

One Chief Officer put it to me some time ago that his force spent only 18% of their time on crime. This would be remarkable if it were true! But recent research carried out by HMIC indicates that it's not true if you move beyond the Home Office Counting Rules on what qualifies as crime, to the public definition of it - which includes anti-social behaviour.<sup>13</sup>

In an initial HMIC study of six forces, crime and ASB accounted for 45% of incidents. Those which were *potential* crimes or ASB represented another 55%. Therefore, a total of 90% of calls were to crimes, anti-social behaviour or to an incident which had the potential to be a crime!<sup>14</sup> It has been received wisdom for some years that the calls for help are about more than crime. True, but the quantitative analysis which this study makes possible shows they are overwhelmingly crime related.

The absence of clarity doesn't help officers or the public –it's time to move on! Officers need to understand that the overwhelming majority of these calls *are* about preventing crime.

## Designing-in prevention

We won't return to having an officer on foot on every beat, who is held responsible for any crime that occurs; so how can frontline officers be made preventive? There is a 'design' issue at play here, which is evident if one looks at the task of the late turn,

---

<sup>12</sup> O'Connor, L. (2012) "Effective Collaborations between Police and Schools: Have lessons been learnt?" *Policing*, 4 (2), 135-138

<sup>13</sup> HMIC (2010) *Stop the Rot*, London: HMIC

<sup>14</sup> HMIC (2012) assessment for the Home Secretary "Taking Time to Prevent Crime – A Scoping Study for Discussion" – Currently unpublished

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

inner city shift officers. Imagine if, instead of accepting current functionality to support the front line to ‘respond’, we enabled them to spot any patterns and opportunities to prevent re-occurrences.

To effect this change, we would need to ask some questions:

- Does police education and training emphasise prevention? The answer is no: it is the focus of only one of the 190 modules in initial training.<sup>15</sup> In short, training does not prepare constables well for prevention. Rather, they are expected to acquire that along the way.
- Do police call systems automatically pick up any patterns (in terms of repeat names, addresses, telephone numbers) from, for example, the calls about domestic incidents I mentioned earlier? The answer from our most recent work on ASB<sup>16</sup> is that just nine forces can automatically flag up if a new call is from a name, address or telephone number which has been used to contact them before. At the other end of the scale, 10 forces can’t spot repeat calls from any of these points of reference.
- Was the police intelligence system able to provide near real-time intelligence to those officers? Answer: not yet, although some forces (Greater Manchester Police and the MPS) are experimenting with intelligence ‘hubs’ as well as ‘Grip and Pace’ arrangements which get nearer to this.<sup>17</sup>
- Are police forces just using analysis based on maps of what’s already happened, or carrying out predictive mapping (like one Greater Manchester Police team in Trafford and now another in West Yorkshire – North West Leeds)?<sup>18</sup>
- Do the IT systems allow constables to work away from the station, making good use of their time? In some cases, yes - and forces are experimenting with technology; but for many officers, including the ones I was with, this is not part of their routine. Does the IT bend around the constable, or is it the reverse?
- Do forces know where their officers are, so that their time can be well used, whether on foot or in cars? With some notable exceptions, even when tracking systems exist to do this, they are not being used effectively.
- And by the way – are the police plugged into accountable partnerships with other organisations, or rather those which are long on strategy papers and short on action?<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> Source: NPIA Police Initial Training syllabus content

<sup>16</sup> HMIC (2012) *A Step in The Right Direction: the policing of anti-social behaviour* London: HMIC

<sup>17</sup> “‘Grip and Pace rooms’ or ‘hubs’ are centres where senior officers have daily conferences with key staff, armed with the latest intelligence and data to coordinate police activities and ensure all the right resources are being used in the right places at the right times.” <http://content.met.police.uk/News/New-policing-model-to-see-extra-officers-in-neighbourhood-teams/1400007507237/1257246741786>

<sup>18</sup> Fielding, M. Jones, V. (2012) “Disrupting the optimal forager’: predictive risk mapping and domestic burglary reduction in Trafford, Greater Manchester.” *International Journal of Police Science & Management* Vol 14 :1

<sup>19</sup> Innes, M. Weston, N. (2010) *Rethinking the policing of anti-social behaviour* London: HMIC

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Still not convinced of the potential to design in prevention, to get ahead, protect the public, and reduce upstream demand? How about if I tell you that 73% of reported domestic violence incidents, 51% of vandalism incidents, and 30% of burglaries are repeat incidents.<sup>20</sup> As for ASB, 68% of our very large sample of victims surveyed earlier in the year were repeat victims, with 26% suffering on more than occasions, and 15% on more than 10.<sup>21</sup> From the '60s to the present day, analysis shows that less than 5% of a city's area accounts for at least 20% and as much as 50% of crime. There is scope for targeted prevention here...

### Knowledge about 'what works'

Core knowledge of what works to prevent crime is available **now**. It is generated from good research and is making a real difference to the targeting of repeat victims, offenders and locations, to making homes and public places safer, to tackling the local priorities identified by the public, and much more.

However, it is not as widely applied as you would expect. I agree with Professor Stanko that it is time for the "fiefdoms and individual interests of police leaders [to be] subsumed under a common way of working". You might call it professionalism. Of course, the same applies to academics who over-specialise in one issue or one message.

There needs to be agreement about core knowledge and, following a series of requests from PCC candidates, HMIC hope to publish a set of frequently asked questions on what works in crime. This information has been accredited internationally and will shortly be available on the HMIC website.

But within the limitations of the infrastructure lies an opportunity to improve the proposed College of Policing and innovative forces, even as reductions are being made or considered. The question 'How will this decision help officers to prevent crime?' should be rigorously applied. It is worth noting that I do not see 'technology' as a panacea here: it can help as part of a considered design around constables – but this will require a different focus.

### Conclusion

The whole point of a valedictory is that it is the single occasion on which a professional can be indulged. For me, this has meant speaking of harnessing a bias towards preventive policing that has helped me march forward and be part of changing the police, whilst being capable of critiquing proposals that don't measure up.

Clarity of mission is always important. When this is in place the organisation, the system, can be built to embed the idea or approach deep in the infrastructure, and accountability can be clear, with credit given to those doing the right thing.

---

<sup>20</sup> Home Office (2011) British Crime Survey Page 53, Online at <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/science-research-statistics/research-statistics/crime-research/hosb1011/hosb1011?view=Binary>,

<sup>21</sup> Innes, M. Weston, N. (2010) *Rethinking the policing of anti-social behaviour* London: HMIC

## WRITTEN SPEECH – CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Imagine though the possibilities of providing opportunities for preventive policing in productivity terms if applied to over 100,000<sup>22</sup> officers in frontline roles – it could be huge. But police organisations need to be orientated to enable prevention; that's where PCCs and chief officers can make a big difference. I believe there is a compelling argument to move from a predominantly reactive approach not just to incidents, but also to the way police organisations are built and operate. We must embed this basic principle – **the primary object of an efficient police force is the prevention of crime.**

This is where I remind my listeners of how I started this speech. Those officers I accompanied were responding to calls for help, but were hard pressed to identify 'what the problem was'. They had little support to help them do so, and little at their fingertips for follow up later. How much better the response to the domestic violence incident might have been if the police knew they could refer the mother to a 24-hour on-call service, to help her cope with her son's mental illness. If we want officers to be preventive, and for there to be value-added policing, best we gear up for it – not the reverse.

We can harness our information better **now**, we can make better use of the evidence on 'what works', and we can demand that those first-class officers I saw on that Friday evening move from being experts at 'getting by' to being Advanced Policing Practitioners, properly supported to, as the Queen's Policing Medal has it, 'Guard my People.'<sup>23</sup>

Sir Denis O'Connor, CBE, QPM  
11<sup>th</sup> September 2012

---

<sup>22</sup> HMIC (2012) *Valuing the Police – One Year On* London: HMIC

<sup>23</sup> Citation on the Queens Policing Medal