Policing performance: The impact of performance measures and targets on police forces in England and Wales*

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ABSTRACT

This paper considers the impact of performance management and the application of targets on public services, particularly the police service. It identifies the unintended consequences of targets on the delivery of service and notes that in 1999 HMIC were to raise serious doubts as to the value of this management approach for public policing in England and Wales. It considers the impact of ‘micro-management’ on services that performance management ultimately represents. It goes on to reassess the purported attractions of performance management and presents an alternative in terms of a more holistic and local management approach based on a ‘systems’ application which highlights the value of local feedback as a driver for service delivery. It challenges the highly centralised and mechanistic orientation which performance management, as pursued by New Labour, now represents. It concludes by arguing that a ‘systems approach’ would fit well within the planned roll-out of the new Neighbourhood Policing strategy while also providing a sound platform for the Basic Command Unit reform proposals recently identified by an influential police association.

INTRODUCTION

A recent HMIC report dealing with the performance of Nottinghamshire Police has once again highlighted a continuing commitment by Government to use its powers of intervention to improve performance both in the police and other public services. Underperformance identified within this police force has now created a potential threat to all of its chief officers. As the HMIC’s report makes clear, in the absence of evidence of clear improvement of police service over the next six months, the jobs of both the chief constable and that of his
most senior colleagues would be at risk (Foggo, 2005).

Nottinghamshire’s experience has to date proved to be the most serious challenge thrown down by the Home Office in relation to underperformance identified by the Home Secretary. It follows on from the Police Reform Act 2002 which gave the Home Secretary significantly greater powers in relation to individual forces and their chief officers.

The continued commitment on the part of New Labour to performance measures for public services remains central to its policy programme. In recent months Government Ministers have highlighted the centrality of this management approach to public services. The Secretary for Health, Patricia Hewitt was to state at the 2005 summer BMA conference that, despite deep concern about the impact of performance targets on hospital care, she would not ‘resile’ from the use of targets, stating that they were ‘helping to achieve much needed improvements in services’ (Hoggart, 2005).

Elsewhere, in her capacity as Minister for Police, Hazel Blears at the Home Office was to applaud the success of police and local authorities on the number of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) initiated by them. With 3,600 ASBOs initiated over an 18-month period to June 2005 they were, she stated, coming close to reaching the national target of 5,000 set by her department (Loveday, 2005b).

The commitment to performance targets represents a serious problem for police forces as they now determine much of the daily operational work of individual police officers. This has not gone unnoticed among those delivering police service and has led to one officer commenting that now:

Front-line officers are focusing their efforts on work that meets the targets set against them as opposed to the needs of the public which offers no kudos to the officer (Morris, 2005).

This issue is closely associated to wider concerns as to the impact of ever-increasing use of performance management techniques across public services. Although the use of performance measures was to have been initiated by earlier Conservative Governments in the 1980s and 1990s it has been the comprehensive application of such measures and targets to all public services by New Labour since its first election success in 1997 that is of more immediate interest.

This has been sustained by the Prime Minister’s Public Service Delivery Unit and also reflected in an unusually close personal interest taken by the Prime Minister in the performance of public services particularly that of the police in relation to crime rates. This has been now almost institutionalised by the regular quarterly meeting at Downing Street to determine whether Public Service Agreements (PSAs) have been met and over which the Prime Minister personally presides. Inevitably this has placed enormous pressure on both Ministers and civil servants to achieve results (Loveday, 2005a). Centrally determined performance targets have assumed, as a result, overwhelming significance for every public service manager. Along with this has gone closer targeting of service delivery and the use thereafter of audit regimes to monitor public service ‘success’. Monitoring performance now constitutes a major element of performance management and has as a function experienced a period of relentless expansion (Hetherington, 2004).

**IMPROVING POLICE PERFORMANCE**

While police services were to be encouraged by way of Home Office Circular 114/83 to improve efficiency, economy and effectiveness, there was to be no significant attempt by the centre to reform police
practice until the early 1990s when in quick succession the Major Government introduced a police reform programme which was to encompass the 1992 White Paper on Police Reform and the 1993 Sheehy Inquiry into Police Responsibilities and Rewards. The radical structural proposals presented within both the White Paper and final Sheehy Report were, however, to be significantly diluted as the Conservative Government held back from the reform programme it had earlier heralded as essential to improve police services.

In place of major reform, police services were instead made subject to an increasing range of performance measures which were to be formalised within the Police and Magistrates Courts Act 1994. This provided the Home Secretary with the power to determine national police priorities. These would be published thereafter within every ‘Local Police Plan’ produced by the police authority and chief officer.

The same legislation was to also sever links between the police service and local authority as police authorities became free-standing corporate bodies. These highly significant developments were to alter the relationship between police forces and the Home Office radically. It also gave a statutory power to the Home Secretary to determine police priorities and, in effect, direct police services.

The Conservative legacy for policing, as enshrined within the 1994 Act was, in retrospect, to establish an important precedent and springboard for intervention by successor administrations. This has indeed proved to be the case and was to be consolidated with New Labour’s Police Reform Act 2002. This legislation provided the Home Secretary with powers to set national police priorities, remove chief officers and directly intervene in the management of local police services. This would be conducted under the banner of ‘improving police performance’. These powers were to be fully exercised by David Blunkett as Home Secretary in conjunction with Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) and the Police Standards Unit (PSU). The opportunity for intervention was to arise from an inspection process of all Basic Command Units (BCUs) which was conducted by HMIC between 2002 and 2004. This major inspection also identified ‘failing BCUs’ which, following the Police Reform Act 2002, were now subject to individual ‘performance’ inspection. Where critical reports alleging poor performance were received from HMIC, direct intervention from the Home Office would quickly follow. This could also lead to the sudden removal of local BCU commanders deemed by the centre as responsible for identified ‘under performance’.

The overt intervention from the Home Office into BCU performance only reflected the pressure now exerted by the Prime Minister’s Public Service Delivery Unit and the impact of PSAs. This has led to detailed assessment of individual BCU performance and also to the creation of ‘hit lists’ of poorly performing BCUs within the Home Office. Currently an inspection of the performance of over 200 BCUs has been completed by HMIC, details of which are circulated to the weekly meetings of the Police Performance Steering Group within the Home Office (Loveday, 2005a).

**POLICE PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT**

The salience of police performance management has been reinforced within HMIC which has applied increasingly sophisticated ‘police performance monitors’ for police forces and BCUs (Home Office, 2003a). The monitors, established within the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF), are set in place to enable chief officers and others to ask questions about performance variations between forces and
across police force areas. The use of ‘spider-grams’ encourages comparisons of performance between what are judged to be similar forces rather than against a national average. This allows for, it is argued, the big variations in socio-economic and demographic make-up that are found within police force areas. Poor performance identified by HMIC on the spider-gram initially can lead to a letter from the Inspectorate to the relevant chief constable. Thereafter, if performance fails to improve, then direct intervention by way of the PSU will be likely as, for example, recently demonstrated with Nottinghamshire Police. It is perhaps of no surprise to learn that currently, the primary aim of every chief officer in the country is ‘not to receive a letter from HMIC’ (Loveday, 2005a).

Key national priorities for the police service are now regularly identified within National Policing Plans (Home Office, 2003b). Priorities now range from requiring police to provide a ‘citizen-focused service’ to reducing volume crime and combating ‘serious and organised crime both across and within police force boundaries’ (Home Office, 2003b, 3.2). All of these priorities impinge on local policing to the extent that these and the attendant PSAs will override local priorities. Some evidence of the extent to which the nationalisation of policing (and community safety) has taken place has been demonstrated in relation to anti-social behaviour and disorder. Here the National Policing Plan gives precise guidance to police forces in terms of their response to this problem. It requires that all ‘local policing plans’ should examine deployment of resources to tackle anti-social behaviour and also the development of police ‘strategies, policies and protocols’ to encourage this (Home Office, 2003b). However, the same National Policing Plan was also to identify the need to tackle ‘organised crime’ which was also central to the Government’s overall crime reduction strategy. Use of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) highlighted the need to respond to serious and organised crime ‘including drug supply’. This it was argued operated across force boundaries and was therefore a ‘key priority for all forces’ (Home Office, 2003b, 4:24).

As National Policing Plans demonstrate, national priorities now effectively determine police force activity. These are, as with other public services, thereafter policed by extensive audit and inspection regimes. In 2003-06 police force priorities were, for example, to encompass reductions in volume crime; alcohol related crime; drug related crime; gun crime; serious and organised crime and terrorism (Home Office, 2003b, 4.38). Further evidence of central determination of police priorities was provided by Home Office guidance identified within its Practical Guide to Performance Measurement (Home Office, 2004). Within the Guide, the first question that police forces are, for example, required to ask of themselves when setting force priorities is ‘what are the national priorities?’.

**BCU experience of centrally set priorities and targets**

Some indication of the impact of the performance regime developed by the centre was to be highlighted by a survey of BCU commanders conducted on behalf of the Police Superintendents Association in 2003 (BRMB, 2003). As was to be discovered for these officers, ‘performance’ was seen to relate to targets and the collection of quantitative data on crime statistics, complaints, sickness rates, charge and caution rates (BRMB, 83). Yet the data required did not refer to quality of service, while the use of national indicators proved to be not sufficiently discriminating to allow for the impact on policing of the local environment. This was seen as a serious weakness as insufficient allowance was made for levels of deprivation in the local community for
which the BCU was responsible. The survey was to note that frequently there could be a significant difference between national targets and local need:

Commanders could find national targets frustrating especially if Home Office priorities did not match local needs. An example would be the push toward street crime when this was not an issue in the BCU and where resources that were needed for tackling burglaries had to be diverted into street crime (BRMB, 97).

Where national priorities did match BCU crime problems, directing additional resources to these could enable the commander to present the BCU as ‘performing well’. Nevertheless, one recurring comment arising from the survey was the high salience accorded within nationally set priorities to ‘reduce crime rates’. Currently the target for all BCUs for 2005/08 has been set at a 15 per cent reduction in crime although the target is higher for high crime areas. Yet the problem for many BCU commanders has proved to be how already low recorded crime rates can be reduced by the target figure set by the centre. As was to be argued:

Commanders in low crime areas were particularly perplexed over the judgement that they were poorly performing if they failed to reduce what were already low crime rates which could be a very challenging task (BRMB, 98).

Concern was to be also expressed over the frequent speed with which government priorities could change. This could be particularly frustrating for those responsible for their implementation. It was felt that a much smaller number of priorities set locally for a four- to five-year period and over which they had some control was more likely to be of value. This was to be linked to the not infrequent problem of national targets not always being aligned with local Crime Reduction and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) priorities where preference was given to national targets ‘in spite of the emphasis placed on CDRP and local strategies’ (BRMB, 98). While the specific problem of target setting has been overcome by ensuring that all local CDRP priorities reflect those set nationally this has come at some cost to local delivery of community safety (Loveday, 2006).

Additional problems in the use of nationally set performance indicators related to the extent that they were relevant to local BCU needs. Recent Home Office focus on ‘volume crime’ including burglary, robbery and vehicle crime for example were not problems that extended to all BCUs. Yet the emphasis given to volume crime in the National Policing Plan had meant that much bigger problems of fear of crime and anti-social behaviour could not be adequately addressed. A final problem identified within the 2003 survey was what was seen as being the rather naïve and exaggerated perception held by the centre as to what local police commanders could actually achieve in terms of reducing crime. This was not helped by the fact that they usually did not have control over all the factors influencing performance particularly that of control of the local police budget (BRMB, 2003, 83).

THE IMPACT OF PERFORMANCE TARGETS

The pronounced increase in public spending and investment in public services embarked upon by New Labour must be acknowledged. Currently involving a 3.3 per cent rise per year in spending in real terms over the years 2004 to 2006, it is estimated that in money terms this translates to around £60 billions in spending all of which is directed at key priorities of health,
education, personal social services, transport, housing and criminal justice (CIPD, 2003). Yet this major increase in spending comes with many strings attached. Resulting increases in performance and service are a matter of immediate concern to the Government which requires evidence of improvements within all public services. This, and the Prime Minister’s personal commitment to their use, mean that centrally set performance targets remain a basic element to the Government’s strategy and also why the Public Service Delivery Unit can exercise such comprehensive influence.

Yet because central Government departments and their civil servants are immediately responsible for individual service performance, the management orientation is ‘top-down’. Here managing-up, through the bureaucratic hierarchy is paramount, not the development of a mechanism to encourage ‘delivery down to service deliverers’ (CIPD, 2003, 4). The direct result has been a further proliferation of centrally set targets to measure performance. With these targets has gone a much more intrusive use of regulators and auditing regimes to ensure service conformity. This proliferation of targets has been directly challenged within the same CIPD Report where it is suggested:

It is hard to calculate the number of targets that the public sector is subject to. At national level the PSAs that departments and agencies conclude with the Treasury comprise around 125, on the Delivery Unit’s own admission. The NHS alone has at least 60. These are subdivided into many more at the point of delivery. One estimate is that local government has more than 600 targets to meet (CIPD, 5).

The widespread use of performance targets has been matched by a major expansion of audit and inspection regimes for public services involved an annual spend of £600 million (Hetherington, 2004). Yet the real issue surrounding this audit regime is the way it sustains ‘highly specified, centrally determined targets and standards enforced by close monitoring (CIPD, 5). Performance compliance represents in effect the implementation of a ‘neo-Taylorian’ management approach. This is symptomatic of the mass production systems within which management is separated from work and employees ‘have little scope for initiative and no margin for error’. Here all focus is directed to management targets rather than customer or citizen needs. Within this regime customer choice is tightly constrained and ‘becomes what the target setter says it is’. These features, it is argued, would appear to be best applied to ‘low trust, low discretion and low ambition organisations’ (CIPD, 5).

Within the command and control system that performance targeting brings, there are further dangers that may threaten standards of service. As argued by Caulkin (2004) this system of management can be expected to bring the application in practice of ever stricter performance measures. Yet as the targets become ever tighter they damage both innovation and trust within the service they are designed to improve (Caulkin). A performance regime, he adds, where underperformance is identified can generate a vicious circle of further surveillance and monitoring which inevitably invites yet further monitoring or direct intervention. This can ironically lead to a situation where performance management can effectively undermine if not destroy performance (Caulkin). As has been argued in relation to public services which are often best described as complex human activity systems, these cannot be managed by crude performance targets:

These bend them out of shape and make implementers ‘look the wrong way’ – at
the targets rather than the needs of their clientele. Nor can they be managed by reductionist command and control methods because of the many unintended consequences (Caulkin, 2002).

**Performance targets and unintended consequences**

The comprehensive application of performance targets across the public sector has also had a significant impact on the role and purpose of management within the sector. It has become clear that the need to achieve centrally set targets is now the major driver for managers and service deliverers. Yet this may be at the cost of improving the effectiveness of public services (Loveday, 2005b). This is because the commitment to improved performance can generate often perverse consequences for the service subject to such control.

This issue has been explored recently by the Audit Commission (2003). In its 2003 Report it was to comment critically on the number of targets set for public services and also on the ‘time boundaries’ set for achieving these targets. The latter were seen as being far too narrow and had the perverse effect of encouraging what the Audit Commission was to describe as ‘gaming’ within which the management objective became one of achieving set targets at the cost of any improvement to service effectiveness (Audit Commission, 15). Yet, as the same report was to note, while appropriate time boundaries were seen as being important, they were ‘politically difficult to negotiate as yearly targets were favoured by Government that wanted publicly identifiable results for electoral reasons’ (Audit Commission, 15). One result of the use of performance targets has been the widespread application of gaming strategies within most public services to achieve central targets.

Within the Education sector, for example, the need for head teachers to secure their position within national school league tables in terms of examination results can encourage school exclusions while condoning truancies where academic resources are seen best targeted at the academically able. In this environment low achieving pupils may not be excluded but rather are ‘just not counted’ (Loveday, Button, Fletcher, & Blackbourn, 2004). The rising incidence of reprimands of teaching staff accused of ‘improving’ SAT examination results in order to achieve set targets is now also well established (Loveday, 2005b).

In the Health Service, as a direct result of the number of performance targets to which it is subject, ‘gaming’ has now become a central management tool. It is commonplace for local mangers to manipulate hospital waiting lists. In the North Bristol Health Trust it was to be learned that ‘gaming’ could take extreme forms. Here it was discovered that:

The local Royal United hospital had achieved a ‘one star’ until it transpired that, to hit its ‘maximum four hour wait in casualty’ target it was hiding patients in ambulances. Frenchay and Southmead, part of the North Bristol Trust also clocked up the largest recorded debt in NHS history (nearly £50 million) claiming it spent the money on agency staff in order to hit central targets’ (Hammond, 2004).

Elsewhere the Department of Health was forced to undertake investigations in East Sussex over identified ‘irregularities in the recording of waiting times’, the result of a local Hospital Trust commitment to hitting targets. The Trust, earlier lauded by Ministers for improving from zero stars to two stars in 2002 was, it was noted ‘to fall back to zero stars in 2004’ (Carvel, 2004). In its 2005 Report the Healthcare Commission was to identify the performance of hospitals in relation to a number of specific targets among which was ‘patient waiting time in A
and E wards’. It recorded that all hospital trusts had met the target of 90 per cent of patients waiting less than four hours (Womack, 2005). The Healthcare Commission did not report the ‘gaming’ of the Trusts to achieve that target. This was to be highlighted by a member of the BMA earlier in 2005 who challenged the need for this target which potentially threatened the welfare of patients rather than helping them. One consequence of the A and E four-hour waiting time had been to swamp many other wards with cases for which they were not equipped to deal. This was because ‘A and E’ departments throughout the country were now ‘transferring many cases on to other wards without proper assessment of need in order to meet the 4-hour target’ (Loveday, 2005b).

One further danger which can be directly linked to performance targets and the highly political context within which they are used, has also been identified within the health service:

Within this politicised system, the money goes to ‘sexy’ areas that grab headlines. We may have cut surgery waiting lists but if you are old, mentally ill or have an unfashionable illness, the outlook can be grim (Hammond, 2004).

**Policing Integrity**

The problems attendant on gaming, the direct result of ‘performance target setting’ have also extended to the police service. This has taken a number of forms but in large part conforms to ‘gaming’ strategies now comprehensively played by other public services. This was evidenced most recently in an interesting example arising within Surrey Police. Here it was alleged that to boost response times to calls for emergency police service, bogus calls were made by members of Surrey Police to improve the figures. When targets were missed, it was claimed, members of the police force were told to improve results by themselves making emergency calls on mobile telephones (*The Times*, 1/7/2005).

Nor is this an isolated example. In what might be viewed, in terms of past police practice, as an interesting case of déjà vu, officers from Greater Manchester police were recently found guilty by an internal tribunal of ‘lying to boost crime detection rates’. Ironically the police deception was to come to light as the force, impressed by Stockport division’s success in crime fighting, looked at its work in some detail to ‘see what lessons could be learned’ (Carter, 2004). They were to discover that high crime clear-up rates had in fact been achieved by ‘encouraging’ criminals while on remand to admit to other offences. It was noted that:

On one occasion, a criminal was able to see his new baby for the first time. He is alleged to have unwittingly signed documents in which he admitted to hundreds of offences he had not committed. Another man on remand was taken out of prison and allowed to see his girlfriend. He allegedly confessed to 200 crimes he did not commit (Carter).

The Greater Manchester case is instructive. Although this particular practice in clearing crime within police forces does have a substantial and well-documented lineage, it was to be the subject of a major ACPO initiative within which the encouragement of ethical crime recording and detection practices was central. It is, however, clear that the demands of performance targets may challenge the best laid plans if only because BCU commanders will seek to avoid the threat of being classified as ‘failing’.

Interestingly HMIC, which now acts as a central government agent in ‘policing performance’, itself highlighted earlier the very
dangers that performance management could generate for the police service. In its Thematic on Police Integrity (HMIC, 1999) HMIC noted that the ‘increasingly aggressive and demonstrable performance culture’ was a major factor affecting the integrity in the service. It noted that questionnaire replies from chief constables had highlighted the performance culture as ‘a cause for lapses in integrity’ and that a number of police forces had a tendency to ‘trawl the margins for detections’ (Police Review, 1999). The Report also noted that while crime-recording systems were ‘generally satisfactory’ there were still pockets of unethical crime recording that had to be eradicated to ‘ensure the public had confidence in police performance figures’ (Police Review).

Concern about performance culture expressed by HMIC may now be more difficult to address as the full panoply of targets, inspection and audit continues to expand, engulfing the police as other public services. The problem of integrity can of course be linked to the very nature of performance targets. Many years ago commentators on managerial behaviour identified the problems linked to performance ‘goal setting’ within organisations. As was argued, goal setting could not be expected to improve motivation but it would give the individual a ‘much clearer idea of where to direct his [sic] effort’. It worked because it helped to ‘define the task for the individual rather than stimulate greater effort’ (Campbell et al., 1970, 377–383). Within the private sector targets like earlier organisational goals can serve to simplify and direct the work process. However this approach can be potentially dangerous within complex public services where citizen–customer perceptions are seen as paramount.

The use of performance targets may also lead to the reification of ‘command and control’ management systems. Ironically it was from this that the police service was in the process of trying to escape. As has been argued, the modernising approach involved in moving the police from a hierarchic, military command and control model to one that is customer-facing and problem-solving orientated always presented a major challenge (CIPD, 2003, 21). But this has now been made more difficult when the use of targets has re-established a command and control model albeit this time encouraged from the centre. A more profitable, but much more challenging approach would be to attempt to measure ‘outcomes’ of police activity rather than rely on the highly mechanistic management of performance (CIPD, 21).

A further irony of its commitment to performance management arises from the Government’s earlier objective which was to establish a ‘joined-up approach’ to public service delivery. This commitment was to find its earliest manifestation in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 within which community safety and crime reduction strategies were to be developed locally in ‘partnership’. Yet its commitment to driving up performance within public services has meant that the Government has created formidable barriers to the ability of local services to develop such partnerships. The identification of performance targets for individual services effectively ends the development of partnership work (Loveday, 2005b). As has been argued by Caulkin, the Government continues to pursue a ‘reductionist approach’ by ‘breaking down problems into component parts and then attempting to solve them in a linear fashion’ (Caulkin, 2004). One result of this is that individual service targets become paramount, not partnership priorities.

A SYSTEMS APPROACH

One potential solution to the problem now confronting Government would be to recognise that public services are ‘complex
human activity systems’ that are not likely to be effectively managed by the application of crude performance targets or the use of command and control methods. (Caulkin, 2004, 2). Unlike performance management a ‘systems’ approach stresses the fundamental interconnectedness of services and recognises that incremental service improvements require not targets but long-term learning processes and ‘where success is judged by service users not governments’ (Caulkin, 2). A similar conclusion has been reached by Seddon who has argued that despite the Government’s ‘armies of auditors’ directed at public services, it has no way of really knowing what levels of service are being achieved. Rather than identifying levels of service it measures activities and functions such as service response times or hospital waiting lists (Caulkin, 2004). Yet as Caulkin (2004) argues:

This is the opposite of joined-up management since the measures do not relate to overall purpose they cannot help providers to improve.

In moving away from traditional command and control styles of management there is a further case for ending the current reliance on the application of performance targets. This reflects the fact that performance management undermines both trust and autonomy within organisations that are subject to it (CIPD, 2003). The issues of trust and autonomy have a continuing application within complex human activity systems where the delivery of face-to-face service can depend on discretionary behaviour that employers may find hard to specify and monitor. This might for instance include among service staff ‘friendliness of response, willingness to listen or to suggest alternatives, or internally to share knowledge with colleagues’ (CIPD, 22). These are, it is argued, all aspects of performance that cannot be commanded by the employer, only given by the employee (CIPD, 22).

In place of the command and control approach there is a growing case for developing within a systems approach a ‘high performance model’ for public services. Here the dynamism for high performance is not imposed externally but is generated from within the organisation. As has been argued, there is a need for public sector managers to develop their own approaches to improving quality and service levels which, if encouraged, would also help turn ‘the rhetoric of localism and autonomy into reality’ (Emmott, 2003).

**Systems application**

The development of a ‘systems approach’ to public service management would allow for local managerial discretion, autonomy and the re-establishment of trust. An example of a systems approach has most recently been developed within the context of new ‘neighbourhood policing’ strategies to which most police forces have now signed up. In developing their ‘Citizen Focus Process Model’, Smith and Alderson (2005) have, for example, established a framework for ‘Effective Future Policing’ which is directed to service delivery within a Partnership and Neighbourhood Policing context. The Citizen Focus Process Model highlights the importance of the local environment for effective future policing. It also provides, within a systems approach, a local feedback mechanism that in turn generates additional inputs in to the Citizen Focus Process (Smith and Alderson). This model emphasises the significance of local environments to policing while also encouraging an assessment of outcomes rather than outputs (Smith and Alderson).

A ‘systems model’ such as that identified by Smith and Alderson (2005) would currently fit well within the new horizons for local policing now identified by a major police association. The Police Superintendents Association has, for example,
unequivocally stated that, within the Partnership arrangements established by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, effective local policing depends most critically on shared boundaries with local authorities (Police Superintendents Association, 2004, 4). The same Association has also argued for delegated budgets to the BCU and for the local authority to be closely involved in the selection and appointment of local police commanders (Police Superintendents Association, 6). In this context ‘going local’ would bring a number of benefits. Currently entirely absent within externally generated police performance regimes is any sense of perceived ownership of performance measures as applied to the police organisation. Along with that is a perception that the measures often lack local relevance. This could be expected to be quickly remedied by the development of local policing within a systems model.

CONCLUSION
All of this might suggest the need for a further re-examination of the determinants of effective local policing. Here the measures of performance developed over a decade ago by Bayley (1994) could prove to be of some value. Bayley’s ‘hard and direct’ police indicators encompass crime rates and criminal victimisations but extend well beyond that to include (local) ‘real estate values’, ‘public utilisation of common space’, ‘commercial activity’ and the ‘number of community problems solved’. The development and implementation of performance measures around matters of immediate local concern would also be built on effective local partnership arrangements. It would also be based on an assessment of ‘outcomes’ of police activity in relation to partner services, rather than the simplistic measurement of police ‘outputs’.

For a systems approach to policing to develop, much will inevitably depend on decisions taken by Government. Currently the power relationship between centre and local service providers established over the last 20 years does not currently appear amenable to change. A high performance public service model based on autonomy and trust requires the Government to relinquish control of local services. But, as has been argued, one clear feature of the Government’s approach is that it shows a remarkable consistency in ‘not letting go’ of local services (CIPD, 2003, 27). It is clear that real improvement in service delivery within both the police and other public services will be only likely to occur as a consequence of Government ‘switching off centrally set targets’. Unfortunately the evidence to date suggests that relinquishing control of local services does not form a part of New Labour’s political vocabulary. Indeed in its third term of office there is every expectation that the Government could prove to be yet more intrusive as it continues to pursue its commitment to ‘driving up’ performance within public services.

NOTE
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