BARRY LOVEDAY
Reader in Criminal Justice Administration, Portsmouth University

WORKFORCE MODERNISATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR THE POLICE SERVICE IN ENGLAND AND WALES
EVALUATING HMIC, 2004 THEMATIC: *MODERNISING THE POLICE SERVICE**

This article critically evaluates proposals made within HMIC's 2004 Thematic on modernising the police service. It identifies the significance of these by reference to the more general framework of New Labour's commitment to modernising public services and the implications of this for the police service. It contrasts the response on the part of the police service to the current modernisation programme with that of police associations to the earlier Sheehy Inquiry and Posen Review in the early 1990s. The article assesses the role and status of civilian staff in the police service and draws on comparative data collected by HMIC on the use of such staff in police services around the world. It draws attention to the current use of 'sworn' and 'non-sworn' officers in a number of police forces abroad which may well provide some insight into the future structure of police services planned for England and Wales. The article thereafter considers the modernisation programme that is currently being piloted within Surrey Police. It considers the potential impact of recent party political competition over police numbers, particularly in relation to any planned reduction in police establishment occasioned by full implementation of Workforce Modernisation within police forces.

Introduction

The third election victory for Blair's New Labour Party in 2005 has set the scene for what is likely to prove to be the introduction of the most significant reform of public services since the 1980s. One public service that can expect to experience the impact of this reform programme is the police service. Already committed to a major expansion of civilian 'Community Support Officers' the government may also be ready to oversee a major reorganisation in the management and delivery of this service. Confronting management and service problems which currently characterise

this service will not be unwelcome. Recent evidence suggests that there is significant consensus across the party divide as to the potential value of reforming police structures and management. One commentator, identifying elements of public service reform that could expect to receive cross-bench agreement and which would never be reversed, has argued that:

> Sooner or later, government must take on the police. Our police service is in a serious mess: along with lawyers and doctors it is among the last unreconstructed unionised workforces with all the Spanish practices which accompany that corrupt state. A tornado should blow through the management and structure of the police and their terms and conditions of employment. (Parris, 2005)

Any reform programme undertaken by New Labour in its third term could, however, only replicate that pursued much earlier by Conservative governments a decade ago and which were to end in failure. In the 1990s the Sheehy and Posen Inquiries raised fundamental questions as to the purpose and function of policing in contemporary Britain (Sheehy, 1993; Home Office, 1995). In both cases, however, for both political and bureaucratic reasons reform was not to be achieved. The Sheehy proposals related to the introduction across the board of performance pay and fixed contracts for all police officers but were ultimately to be limited to only chief officers. These, ironically, were to benefit very substantially from new contractual fixed-term arrangements implemented by the Major Government. It was not subsequently clear, as demonstrated by the Bichard Inquiry into the corporate failure of a police force, that chief officer performance necessarily improved in proportion to increased remuneration (Bichard, 2004).

The Posen Review was to be successfully derailed by ACPO, whose members were able significantly to circumscribe the planned removal of police functions to alternative providers. This Inquiry's final recommendation that responsibility for policing 'wide-loads' on Britain's motorways could cease to be only a police responsibility merely served to highlight both the extent of its failure and the kind of influence that could be exercised by a major police bureaucracy. Given this earlier experience there might therefore be grounds for some reservations as to the likely success of the most recent reform proposals announced by New Labour.

Workforce Modernisation and Police Staff

Although past experience suggests that implementation of police reform could generate significant internal resistance, it is evident that there is also a growing recognition of the need for change within the police service. In what has proved to be a little publicised report, HMIC in its Thematic *Modernising the Police Service* has recently outlined a set of proposals that together can be expected in the long term to have a very significant impact on the internal structure and management of the police service (HMIC, 2004). They are also likely to provide a firm basis upon which the government will be able to develop its own plans for police reform.

In contrast to earlier reform proposals, however, those of HMIC are not immediately directed at the role of police officers but relate much more to the ever-expanding role of civilian staff in the police service, along with the increasing movement towards functional specialisation within that service. As such the Thematic represents the first serious attempt to consider fundamental change to the role and status of civilian or 'police staff' in the service. In doing so it reflects both the modernisation programme undertaken across public services by New Labour and the fact that the police are in need of significant Human Resources (HR) reform.

While the public profile of police staff remains rather limited, recent data on numbers of police staff employed and the nature of their employment only demonstrate their centrality in the delivery of policing services to the public in the UK. With over 70,000 police staff currently employed within local police forces, their responsibilities extend from corporate administration, through police control rooms, enquiry desk staff, custody suites and fingerprinting to SOCO and police intelligence. Many more police staff are responsible for the work of criminal justice units, case preparation and liaison with the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) (Pertile, 2005).

In addition to this, the expanding role of Community Support Officers (CSOs) now means that 'police staff' are taking responsibility for an ever-increasing range of 'operational' policing roles, a development that New Labour intends to sustain under the aegis of its extended police family concept with its plan to increase the number of CSOs employed by police forces to 24,000 by 2008. Some evidence of the nature and speed of change which the police service is now about to undergo has recently been provided within the Serious and Organised Crime Act 2005, which, for example, civilianises the custody sergeant

role in police stations, a crucial function within the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE 1984).

Although the civilianisation of the custody sergeant function was to be contested on the part of the Police Federation, there are a number of drivers for change that currently work to undermine such resistance. These in part extend from a failure on the part of the police service to identify what it considers constitute core police functions to ever-increasing demands from the public for more police services. It is also evident, however, that pressure to control public expenditure permeates police reform as much as it does other public sector modernisation. In the case of the police, historically high pay rates achieved under the Thatcher Government have ultimately served to make policing a high-cost service.

This alone meant that Conservative Party election plans to employ an additional 40,000 police officers were never likely to be realisable. However, it did make New Labour's plans to expand the lower-cost Community Support Officers much more attractive. Other drivers of change, however, would include the greater focus on service delivery performance and the need to ensure optimum employment of the workforce. Additionally, public dissatisfaction with policing, particularly the absence of visible policing in many areas, has also made the implementation of reform much more likely. Initial results, for instance, of the use of CSOs for visible patrol have proved to be overwhelmingly positive among the public (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J). This suggests that the future dynamic of police reform can be expected to embrace a much wider use of civilian police staff.

Comparative Data on Use of Civilian Police Staff

Although the use of civilian 'non-sworn staff' has a long history in American police departments, their role has largely been confined to non-operational duties with some limited front-line deployment. There is evidence that tensions between police officers and non-sworn staff have arisen where the latter have been given responsibilities that were seen as being 'police operational' (HMIC, 2004: 88–9). Similarly, significant problems have arisen in relation to the supervision by non-sworn personnel of police officers. Those police departments with high levels of union membership appear to have experienced greatest difficulty with any expansion of non-sworn officer duties into the operational arena.

In addition to this, across Europe it was to be discovered that in most police forces civilian staff functions were confined very

largely to administrative duties and rarely, if at all, strayed into operational policing. In France the National Police had been slow to move towards employing civilian support staff while the Gendarmerie continued to retain a policy of 'self-sufficiency' for most tasks, including those of police drivers and police vehicle mechanics (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J). This limited role given to police staff was to be more than balanced, however, by the rapid expansion of local municipal police forces in many French towns and cities over the last 10 years. While municipal police exercise limited powers, together the municipal police now constitute a third police arm in France and are made immediately accountable to the local mayor (Loveday, 1999).

The most advanced use of police staff within operational police forces was to be found in New Zealand and Australia. Here reform programmes had fundamentally altered the relationship between police officers and police staff. In New Zealand the 1989 Police Amendment Act made the Police Commissioner the employer of all police staff who are also able to exercise police powers. Equally significantly, appointments made to the police service may be to either sworn or non-sworn posts but the determination of posting is based on the experience and qualifications of the candidates. Pay has been equalised to ensure that personnel are paid equally for doing the same job (HMIC, 2004: 45).

In Australia the Federal Police have fully integrated police officers and police staff. Decisions concerning appointments are made on the basis of what are considered to be the appropriate skills. Within the Federal Police, posts and also management responsibilities can and do alternate between sworn and non-sworn officers. Within this system non-sworn personnel can expect both to take on operational duties and exercise a management function over sworn officers (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J). By moving towards functional specialisation the Australian Federal Police have already implemented a system that links police powers to specific responsibilities which are then assumed by the post-holder while exercising those duties. Additionally, both selection and promotion are based on expertise demonstrated by the applicant rather than police powers held by an individual officer. The determination of function and career progression therefore is ultimately based on competencies and accreditation programmes provided internally to all employees (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J).

The antipodean experience of police reform clearly provides some interesting examples of a move towards unification of

sworn and non-sworn officers within the police service. It also demonstrates that greater and more effective use can be made of all personnel where a unified employment system is implemented. There is, however, a further strand that may impact on pressure for internal management reform. Thus across a number of public services the wider use of support staff has become a common feature. In the prison service the privatisation of many prisons and the development of contractural accountability has led to the employment of significant numbers of non-unionised prison staff that may have served to improve the quality of service within them (Home Affairs Committee, 1996–1997).

Legal services are increasingly provided by paralegals, one of the fastest-growing sectors within the legal field. In the education and health services the roles of assistant teacher and assistant nurse have experienced substantial expansion in recent years. Within probation, prior to the arrival of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS), assistant probation officers have also been given a much wider role within that service. Similarly, the fire service, following the Bain Review, has been subject to a range of new management initiatives that for the first time have given a degree of equality between fire-fighters and volunteer fire officers (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J). While there has been some debate as to the extent to which these developments represent either 'empowerment' of personnel or their deprofessionalisation, it is the case that rigid demarcations in terms of function and status that have traditionally characterised public services are increasingly difficult to either sustain or defend.

This issue becomes more salient as the crisis surrounding a declining national workforce grows. As recruitment of personnel becomes more competitive, maximising the value of those employed within specific public services becomes much more significant. It is this, for example, that drives reform initiatives within the health service, where nurses can be expected in future to exercise many more responsibilities than those which once pertained only to doctors (HMIC, 2004: Appendix J). A similar pressure to make the greatest use of police personnel within the government's modernisation framework suggests that a basic reassessment of civilian staff functions is now necessary.

The Current Police Malaise
Now commonly recognised that police forces could no longer successfully operate without civilian staff, these currently constitute around a third of all police personnel employed by local police forces in England and Wales. It is also the case, however,

that, other than at the top of the hierarchy, civilian staff enjoy neither the pay nor status of sworn officers. This is partly the result of their recruitment particularly in the 1980s when, in response to successive efficiency drives, police forces were encouraged to employ civilian staff because they were much cheaper to employ than police officers. Since then, however, the number and nature of police staff responsibilities have grown but that has not been reflected in either staff pay rates or the status afforded to them within the police service.

The failure (or refusal) to recognise the importance of the role played by police staff can be identified, for example, in the way many forces continue to head up specialist departments with non-qualified police officers. This may reflect a continuing cultural problem exhibited up to the most senior of police ranks concerning the role and status of police staff. This can encompass a marked reluctance to expand the role of civilian staff, a feature demonstrated most recently by the outgoing Metropolitan Commissioner Sir John Stevens's comments concerning employment of civilian staff in which he was to comment critically both on the role of CSOs and the future numbers of civilians likely to be employed (Loveday, 2005).

Antipathy to police staff exhibited at this level can be expected to be quickly picked up further down the police hierarchy and may explain the frequency with which HMIC was to identify negative perceptions among police officers of police staff, which they concluded continued to be 'significant' (HMIC, 2004: 60). Moreover, despite attempts to move towards greater integration of police and police staff, the institutionalised advantages accorded to police officers have served to undermine these initiatives fatally. These institutionalised advantages relate very largely to better pay rates, better training and better development opportunities that are automatically accorded to police officers but certainly would also extend to career progression often mapped out for police officers but usually denied to police staff.

As HMIC was to discover, the problems surrounding the work and the conditions and status of civilian staff had not been seriously addressed by police managers. There was indeed little evidence among police forces that they were responding to problems surrounding the cultural divide which can characterise the relationship between police officers and police staff. The evident failure of senior police managers actively to deal with this may have explained at least in part the results of a Unison survey conducted among police staff in 2002. The survey results

were to highlight widespread cases of bullying of police staff, a perception among police staff that they were generally under-valued within the police force, and that police staff expected to continue to experience an unequal status in comparison with police officers and were more likely often to be given much higher work-loads (Unison, 2002). There was only 'limited evidence' that police forces were in any way responding to these issues (HMIC, 2004: 59).

The lack of response to the problems experienced by police staff, however, may have only reflected a more serious failure by senior police management. This was made evident by the absence within local management of any attempt to develop a strategic framework for ongoing and future civilianisation. It also extended to a failure to evaluate the impact of civilianisation of police posts in order to help determine 'what worked' and why. This failure was indeed merely a further reflection on the part of police managers who did not track the progress of released police officers where these had been released by civil-ianisation (HMIC, 2004: 81–2). One consequence of this lack of evaluation of the civilianisation process has been an inability on the part of police managers to be able to provide any information on the impact of this process or any espoused efficiency gains achieved by embracing it. This failure, however, may only serve to highlight the nature of employment of civilian staff partic-ularly in the 1980s.

As with the recruitment of police officers, the employment of civilian staff was very largely incremental. Yearly bids for increased manpower to the Home Office were to be matched by bids to the local police authority for increases in civilian staff. Indeed, during the 1980s it became evident that a necessary element in any successful bid for increased police establishment would be linked to further civilianisation of police posts. One consequence of this may have been that civilian numbers rose not because of any intrinsic management commitment to this process but because it was seen as a means to increasing police establishment, which continued to remain the primary objective of this exercise.

The incremental growth of police and civilian staff also meant that there was never any attempt on the part of police managers to identify what constituted 'core numbers' of staff for a range of services. Nor were police officers released by this process or tracked to determine whether they did, in fact, return to 'front-line policing duties'. There was indeed more than a suspicion that many released officers were often soon able to find

fresh employment within specialist support service departments and as a result never did assume front–line policing responsibilities (Loveday, 1993).

The limited status accorded to police staff by police managers, of course, may have only mirrored a view of their role shared at the highest level within the police service. It is interesting to note that up to 2004, and despite the importance attached to them by the Home Office, HMIC Annual Reviews of police forces did not include the work of police staff. Within its reviews efficiency and effectiveness were linked solely to police establishments and did not extend to police staff. As argued by a former chief constable:

> It is ironic that although civilianisation has been greatly encouraged by government and HMIC and has led to civilians filling a significant number of key operational posts, when police establishments are discussed they are always very insultingly ignored. (O'Byrne, 2001: 126)

The low status accorded to police staff has received further confirmation with the recent application of the Police Performance Assessment Framework (PPAF) which is designed to monitor and evaluate police performance and effectiveness. This relatively advanced management system devised by the Home Office does not include police support staff within its remit despite these staff being responsible for an increasing number of front-line operational duties.

The Looming Crisis in Policing

One important outcome of the 2004 HMIC Thematic on police modernisation has proved to be a recognition of the need to identify core police duties that require the use of attested police officers. To date no police force or police association has been able or willing to clarify what constitute core policing roles. Indeed, against a backdrop of increased inroads of civilian staff into what previously had been police functions it is somewhat surprising that, even to date, no serious attempt has been made by senior police management to address this increasingly challenging issue.

This problem was to be confronted within research conducted by HMIC. It was to discover, for example, that there was no consistency whatsoever in the role and functions given to police staff across police forces. This often meant that functions deemed 'operational' in one force could be made the responsibility of police staff in another. This clearly undermined any claim

as to that function being one that could be carried out only by attested police officers.

The absence of any rationale in the determination of police or police staff functions unearthed by HMIC among police forces could present one of the greatest challenges to police managers. Wide variations in the mix of police officers and police staff in a number of functional areas were to be discovered. As was noted within the Thematic:

> The most dramatic disparity was found in crime and incident management units where 72% of personnel were police officers – but this varied between 24% and 99%. In Headquarters Intelligence Units 57% of the workforce consisted of police officers but this varied between 21% and 83%. Wide variations with no logical rationale to explain them were also to be found in call handling and control rooms, public reception and enquiry offices, custody suites, criminal justice units and scientific support. (HMIC, 2004: 6.7)

The absence of any consistent application of police staff to functions within local police forces has inevitably generated a number of questions about the role of police officers equal to those raised about police staff. It is evidently the case that in many functions police staff may be equally able to fulfil tasks that were once seen as the sole preserve of police officers. As a result a key issue will need to be addressed by police managers requiring them to clarify what number of police officers are needed to deliver an effective operational service. This would extend to defining and specifying a 'level of operational resilience' that would be linked to core policing functions (HMIC, 2004: 98–9).

Currently it is not known what the core number of police might be to establish a level of resilience. As was to be noted in the same Thematic, although some nine police forces had attempted to identify core police numbers they had usually done so not by way of 'scientific, objective or independent managerial technique' but by the use of 'professional judgement' (i.e. guesswork) as the 'defining factor' (HMIC, 2004: 98).

The current challenge has been identified by at least one police association. Thus the Police Superintendents' Association has most recently argued for a more rational approach to the determination of police force and Basic Command Unit (BCU) boundaries than has pertained in the past. It argues that while in the past police-establishment has been used as the primary

yardstick, this has ultimately proved to be very unhelpful. It argues instead for a bottom-up approach based on the amalgamation of neighbourhood policing units.

Also significant here, the Police Superintendents' Association argues that there is a need to identify 'core roles' which are linked to police core functions when establishing units of policing. Core functions identified embrace the prevention and detection of crime and disorder, and public reassurance and partnership problem solving. None of these functions will necessarily be the monopoly of attested police officers but would be functions shared within the extended police family (Police Superintendents' Association, 2004: 7).

The need for clarification of what constitutes core policing functions that can be made the responsibility of attested officers has been made more difficult by the steady expansion in the employment of police staff and the range of duties given to them. As mentioned above, at present many currently fulfil operational roles that were once the preserve of police officers. The evident failure of police managers to develop and implement an overall strategy for civilianisation is likely ultimately to lead to the demise of the 'omni-competent cop' by way of specialisation that will be open to both sworn and non-sworn personnel.

Responding to the Challenge

One consequence of civilian staff expansion has been the police crisis generated as a result of the increasing difficulty in identifying core police functions that are made the sole preserve of police officers. This suggests that there is a need to fundamentally reassess the framework of policing and the role of those employed within the police service. Clear recognition of this can be found within HMIC's 2004 Thematic, which also identifies a future structure for policing that would for the first time address many of the managerial problems surrounding the police–police staff relationship. It is also the case that the same Thematic could provide a spring-board for modernisation of the police service about which the government remains intent.

In what might be seen as a radical departure from traditional police indifference to the problem of civilian staff, HMIC argues for the unification of police personnel and for the introduction of a National Pay Framework for all staff. The immediate aim will be to end the variations in police staff pay: a reflection of local police force and police authority arrangements – by standardising pay across all police forces and linking pay to function. In addition it recommends that there is a need to develop police

staff career structures which might begin to offer the same opportunities for career advancement that is on offer to attested officers. It also recommends that many of the training programmes within Centrex, particularly training for high-potential staff, should be opened up to police staff. Currently these are not open to police staff despite the fact that four of the 10 modules on the High Potential Development Programme 'are not police officer specific' (HMIC, 2004: 109).

These short-term objectives are matched, however, by recommendations that in the long term could serve to fundamentally change the way the police service is constituted and operates. Accepting the proposals of Skills for Justice, HMIC recommends that the long-term aim should be to develop a career structure for all staff employed by police forces. This will entail the adoption of professional and accreditation programmes; the acceptance and implementation of an integrated 'people management model'; and the creation of a Police Licensing and Accreditation Board which will be given immediate responsibility for all professional career development. Taken together these would begin to provide career pathways for all staff and would also encourage the development of a more integrated system of employment where staff would be able to move into and out of 'warranted posts'.

The introduction of warranted posts would bring to the UK police service the kind of integrated model successfully developed in both New Zealand and Australia. As a result police powers and their exercise would in future go with the post not the officer. To support and sustain the warranted post system all police staff would be linked to a modular concept of career development. It would be a concept not dissimilar to that which now pertains in other public services. A primary aim would therefore be to identify competencies and move towards a system of qualification and accreditation. By introducing a modular approach this would allow for both lateral and vertical career development. The advantages of this would be that the whole range of police functions would be opened up to all police employees. One further benefit of the modular concept and competency-based approach would be that all police staff would be able to move for career development between police forces and other criminal justice organisations (HMIC, 2004: 176).

Introducing a Flexible Employment Framework
Ending the rigid demarcation of personnel which now characterises the police service would bring about significant benefits. To

encourage a unified approach to employees a new framework has been identified by HMIC. This more flexible framework would oversee the continuous development of all personnel and would also ease transfer between roles. However, it would also encourage greater specialisation and identify clear police powers that would be attached to specific roles, reflecting high skills and specialisation within them. Where specialisation is encouraged, this can be expected to make the recruitment of 'police staff' with specialist skills to identifiable operational policing tasks much easier.

One immediate casualty of the adoption of this employment framework would be Police Regulations that would need to be reviewed with a view to termination. The employment framework recommended by HMIC would, it contests, begin for the first time to establish policing as a professional operation. It notes that in the past the police service has often failed to achieve any recognition as a professional service. Indeed, where the 'high ground' of professional status has been attempted this has often been challenged most vociferously by serving police officers. In reference to professional status, HMIC argues that:

> Policing struggles to achieve recognition as a profession when most staff are still managed in ways that would earn them the label 'blue collar' in other fields. A tightly regulated employment framework that sets remuneration only by hours of labour and years of service rather than by level of skill required or complexity of responsibility is surely no longer fit for purpose and needs to be reviewed. (HMIC, 2004: 122)

A Radical Change Programme
Building on the police reform programme, HMIC argues that the introduction of multiple points of entry into the police service would begin to attract high-quality graduates when this was linked to the professionalisation of the police. Professional qualifications and accredited training within their relevant fields of expertise would also facilitate the recruitment and retention of highly qualified personnel in the police service. The Change Programme envisages the introduction of common conditions of service; standard pension rights; professional registration and development; specialisation and streaming; clear pathways for all staff and the opportunity to move between warranted and non-warranted posts.

One result of the move towards a modernised police service would be the introduction of a full 'mixed economy of staffing'

which would fit well within the extended police family concept. A flexible workforce created through the modernisation process could expect to consist of fully warranted officers; non-warranted police staff; police staff exercising police powers; contracted staff; street wardens; accredited private sector organisations; and volunteers (HMIC, 2004: 166–7).

Specialisation encouraged by this radical deregulation of employment would therefore become a central feature of future police work. Functional specialisations that could be quickly identified would include emergency response to incidents; patrol and community policing; investigative response; specialist crime and Level 2 policing (cross-border crime); specialist support services and strategic management development (HMIC, 2004: 174–5). It is intended that within each specialisation there will be flexibility to allow for both lateral and vertical career development.

Most recently the case for the kind of flexible framework developed by HMIC has been made within the Metropolitan Police Service. Here it is argued that the future aim should be to establish a service with a range of powers that match specialisms (Gower, 2005). This would be immediately reflected in relation to community support officers who can be granted limited powers of enforcement relevant to their jobs. Similarly the direct recruitment of people with accountancy and auditing skills into the police force at the rank of 'investigator' specialising in the investigation of business fraud is also seen as being highly beneficial (Gower, 2005).

Community Support Officers and Street Wardens

Further evidence of the need for radical change has been provided by the introduction of community support officers. Although this development was to be challenged by the Police Federation as 'policing on the cheap', the overall impact of the use of CSOs has proved to be very positive. HMIC was to note that the CSO role had actually provided high-visibility presence often in areas that before had rarely witnessed a police presence of any kind. Moreover, the CSOs had also been able to break down barriers within community groups 'in a way that police officers have found difficult' (HMIC, 2004: 144). Evidence from a number of police forces had demonstrated that they had been able to facilitate dialogue with minority ethnic groups and that their popularity was due to their engaging with them during the course of their visible community patrolling role.

There have been other specific gains from the introduction of CSOs, however. These relate almost entirely to the composition of those joining this service. Thus the number of women and minority ethnic groups in the police service (particularly in London) has risen dramatically since the inception of the CSO. In March 2003 10.8% of CSOs were drawn from ethnic minorities compared with just 2.9% serving as members of the police service. At that time 36% of CSOs were female, which compared very favourably with female representation in the police service standing nationally at 19% in March 2003 (HMIC, 2004: 149).

The arrival and immediate success of CSOs has been matched, of course, by that of local authority street wardens. It is noticeable that along with a visible street presence both CSOs and wardens have also been instrumental in generating local intelligence within the area in which they work, upon which the police have been subsequently able to act (Pertile, 2005). Visible patrol presence in 'hot spot areas' can also be expected to impact positively on fear of crime among residents, particularly when much daily patrol time can be targeted at these areas (Pertile, 2005). Regular contact with a variety of local services based on continuity of function also generates much more information about local problems to which the police can be expected to respond.

Regular contact with schools, community centres, housing officers and residential homes can create a knowledge base upon which the police can act with some confidence (Pertile, 2005). Moreover, the regularity with which CSOs and street wardens patrol and are visible on many social housing estates, and as a result are not perceived as anything 'unusual', means that they can often engage with groups of youths and glean more information from them than would otherwise be possible with a uniformed police officer presence (Pertile, 2005).

Evidence from the Field
The potential benefits from the modernisation process have been recently identified within one police force. A recent evaluation of the Surrey Police Workforce Modernisation Programme suggests that it has much to offer other police forces around the country. Based on the introduction of a 'mixed-economy' workforce, the modernisation programme focuses on developing highly skilled and well-paid police constables who are made responsible for managing mixed-economy teams consisting of trained police staff and an administrative assistant. In Surrey 26 police constables have been replaced by five mixed-economy teams and one constable (Police Professional, 2005: 10). Each team is made

up of one constable, three investigative assistants and one administrative assistant. Experience suggests that these are providing 'powerful evidence' that the chief officer ought to reduce police officer numbers and increase the 'overall head count'. This can be expected to increase the number of service delivery hours provided to the public substantially (Police Professional, 2005: 10).

In Surrey it was to be noted that while this county had the lowest crime rate in the country this had not helped increase public confidence. Since the introduction of mixed-economy teams, Surrey was now, however, seeing a 'huge change' in public confidence in quality of service from the mixed economy of police staff 'whether they are sworn staff or police staff technicians' (Police Professional, 2005: 10).

The results of the Surrey Programme suggest that if it were to be introduced force-wide the number of police officers employed by Surrey would fall dramatically by around 35% from an establishment of 2,000 to one of just 1,300. However, while police officer establishment would fall, the overall head count would increase significantly, rising by around 1,000, that is from 4,000 to 5,000 personnel. The current Chief Constable argues that this development, where much greater use is made of the skills base of all police personnel, only reflects a wider movement in public services to disaggregate tasks and to direct highly trained staff to the most complex problems while making much greater use of assistant staff personnel to deal with less complex and more routine matters.

In Surrey an analysis of 700 reported crimes was to demonstrate the current problem of the mismatch of skills. It found that only 10%–20% of crime incidents required the skill of a detective, while 60% involved taking statements or handling property. Nearly a third of the cases analysed appeared to require only 'personnel assistant type skills' (Police Professional, 2005: 11). The use of investigative assistants within the mixed-economy teams, however, had also significantly reduced the average time taken to deal with cases. With 'average volume crime', investigation time has now fallen from 26 to 11 days while detection rates have risen by 14%. A similar picture has arisen within Neighbourhood Policing where mixed teams made up of one police officer, three Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and an administrative assistant have resulted in what are described as 'steep increases in public confidence' in the county (Police Professional, 2005: 11).

A recent report involving the non-response of Devon and Cornwall police to an emergency call in what became a fatal incident might suggest that there is a clear need for some police forces to seriously assess the potential gains from mixed-economy teams as developed by Surrey Police (Morris, 2005).

Conclusion

There is much to recommend the proposals laid out by HMIC in its 2004 Thematic. The move towards professionalising the police service could bring significant benefits, not least that of encouraging higher standards of service delivery to the public. Evidence from Surrey where the modernisation programme is being piloted suggests that there are already concrete gains to be made from the 'mixed-economy teams' led by fewer but better paid professional police officers. It is clear, however, that these proposals are likely to generate significant opposition, not least from the Police Federation which has already questioned much of the earlier and current civilianisation programme. This has most recently been evidenced in the Federation's response to the introduction of CSOs, which it interprets as a direct threat to attested police officers and a clear method of de-professionalising their role. The Federation might look back to the 1990s and its overwhelming success achieved in conjunction with other police associations in sinking the earlier Sheehy Inquiry proposals for the police service.

Yet it is apparent that the modernisation programme, extending across all public services and to which the government remains committed, represents a far greater challenge to the police service than Sheehy ever did. Nor is it certain that all police associations will automatically oppose the proposed modernisation programme. It is clear, for example, that the Police Superintendents' Association may well identify advantages in reform where that increases the professional status of those working within the police service. A more positive view of the modernisation programme is likely to be held by many chief officers. Many of the reforms now contemplated would, for example, enable them to effectively manage the service for the first time.

However, the biggest challenge to the police modernisation programme may arise from not police opposition but party politics. Thus much of the programme will depend on an early review and the quick demise of the Crime Fighting Fund (CFF). This funding stream is designed to maximise the number of police officers employed by forces. One consequence of this is

that the CFF now acts as a major disincentive to civilianising police posts and increasing police staff numbers. Indeed, an irony of the CFF has proved to be the removal of police officers from front-line duties to internal administrative roles as departing police staff are not replaced. HMIC has argued strongly for the need to move the emphasis from maximising police officers alone to 'enabling chief officers to ensure the optimum mix of staff in support of effective service delivery' (HMIC, 2004: 13).

Yet the real challenge is the extent to which the current government remains committed to sustaining the inter-party contest over police numbers. Total police establishment continues to be one of the single most important virility tests for both major political parties. As the 2005 General Election was to demonstrate, increasing police numbers to put more officers on to the streets was again targeted by the Conservative Party as a priority. Indeed, in his capacity as Shadow Home Secretary, Oliver Letwin was to commit his party to an increase of 40,000 police officers for England and Wales (dubbed 'Oliver's Army' by *Police Review* at the time). While this proposal was never likely to be either sustainable or implementable, it does serve to highlight the ongoing party-political significance of police establishment.

Indeed, police numbers and the politics that surround this were most recently reflected in party-political reactions to the Surrey Modernisation Programme. If adopted nationally the Surrey Programme would see the number of police officers employed across all forces decrease from its current record high of 140,000 to just over 90,000 (Police Professional, 2005: 11). In ascertaining the views of leading politicians to this proposal it was discovered that the current Home Secretary refused to commit himself to a wider implementation of the Surrey Programme while the Conservative Shadow Home Affairs Minister was to describe it as 'misguided', arguing that the priority should be not to cut police numbers but to increase them (Police Professional, 2005: 11).

The potential *impasse* arising from the continuing commitment on the part of both major political parties to police establishment raises further issues. While evidence suggests that a much greater investment in the use of police staff can be expected to be highly productive and has the support of many senior police officers, the political cost to the government of withdrawing from the police numbers competition could prove to be significant.

Yet, if the modernisation programme across public services, to which the Prime Minister remains committed, is to be implemented then addressing the immediate challenge of reducing police establishment while expanding police staff numbers can be seen as the first big test of political intent. Implementation of the modernisation process, however, will require the New Labour leadership to jump a big political barrier which ironically it has itself helped to create. How New Labour in its third term of office negotiates this evident challenge is likely to prove a matter of immediate professional and public interest. It may also provide an effective measure of its ability and commitment to manage the modernisation programme successfully across all public services.

Note

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