

## **‘Innovation and the Application of Knowledge for More Effective Policing’ N8 Policing Research Partnership Catalyst Project**

### **POLICE JOINT WORKING: FROM ‘FIGHTING’ CRIME TO SAFEGUARDING AND VULNERABILITY**

This project explored police joint working in an age of austerity. The research provides an empirical evidence-base, which captures the ‘messy realities’ of joint working practices. With valuable contributions from project partners within Lancashire Constabulary and other subject matter experts, the project led to the development of the Policing Complex Adaptive Systems framework; a resource contributing insights into the personal, cultural and structural dimensions of working together, and valuable mechanisms for change. The research recommendations have been – and continue to be – embedded in practice.

### **KEY FINDINGS AND IMPACT**

- Joint working is often learnt by “trial and error”, with frontline requests for further accessible guidance. A number of mobile ‘apps’ have since been developed, which support joint working.
- The changing and diverse nature of services creates issues in knowing what support is available and how to access services. There are ongoing discussions to develop a community mapping system.
- Strong visions were not always translated into practice. Lancashire Constabulary recognised this issue and has made positive progress in narrowing the strategy-practice gap, as found in HMICFRS’ 2019 inspection.
- Consistent concerns regarding information technology. Opportunities have been identified to improve I.T., such as the development of integrated liquid logic, improved data sharing across partners through technological systems and investment in analytical products (e.g. Power Bi).
- Progress had been made in moving physically closer to other professionals but there had been less focus on developing mental proximity. Prevalent feelings of being overwhelmed by change and ethnography acting as a form of ‘surrogate supervision’ for police employees. The Constabulary continues to make positive progress in improving supervision arrangements. Plans are underway to implement a reflective supervision pilot, alongside the multi-agency trauma informed workforce development programme in Lancashire.

### **AUTHOR AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

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## **INTRODUCTION, BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT**

In an age of austerity, problems faced by police forces have become increasingly complicated and the cost of failure is high. A gradually ageing population (Government Office for Science, 2016; ONS, 2018), a rise in mental health related incidents (College of Policing, 2015) and the introduction of new crimes (e.g. coercive control) (Serious Crime Act, 2015) – alongside innumerable further changes – have compelled forces to strive harder to find ways of tackling changing demand. Crime has shifted online, police forces are expected to deal with crimes of today, as well as historic cases, and frontline officers are increasingly spending time, not just fighting crime, but safeguarding people across the whole life span. At the same time, financial constraints have prompted police forces to devise innovative, yet practical ways of complying with changing bureaucracy, whilst managing demand and maintaining effectiveness and efficiency; a situation which has contributed to a need for agencies to pool their reduced resources together. How can policing adapt to such evolving, complex and financially challenging demands? One response is joint working.

At least since the implementation of the Children Act 1989, joint working has been a recurrent theme in legislation and policy. Multi-agency working is viewed as a way to transform fragmented services into a more comprehensive, whole systems approach, that addresses the complex needs of individuals and families. Emphasis is placed on a need for professionals to work together to identify and find solutions to ‘wicked issues’ that traverse professional boundaries. Yet, serious case reviews have repeatedly exposed failings in inter-organisational communications.

To date, there has been little empirical research exploring police joint working following the 2008 recession, with existing studies lacking insights into the ‘messy realities’ of implementation or ‘natural’ talk ‘behind closed doors’, which is essential to understanding the challenges in joint working. This N8 research project aimed to address this gap. The research objectives were to:

- 1) identify the utility of police joint working as a solution to social problems;
- 2) investigate how joint work is accomplished using an ethnographic approach;
- 3) contribute to understanding how joint working dilemmas might be approach differently;
- 4) use the findings to develop recommendations, designed to support police joint working praxis.

## **METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH**

During this ethnographic study a broad spectrum of policing areas were observed, as follows: early action; vulnerable callers; immediate response, custody; neighbourhood; traffic; offender management; support unit; and child protection. Other organisations involved in the research were: education, probation, housing, social care, health, ambulance service, fire and rescue, alcohol and drugs services and domestic abuse and violence services. In total, 78 warranted police officers (ranked from police constables to chief superintendents), 21 police community support officers, 34 police civilian staff, 47 professionals from other statutory organisations; and 26 employees of the third sector were observed or spoken to. Fieldwork was conducted over 18-months, from 25<sup>th</sup> April 2017 until 30<sup>th</sup> October 2018, with a pilot week in March 2017.

During fieldwork, the researcher observed meetings, shadowed civilian police staff and warranted police officers, followed police operations and spent time ‘hanging-out’ in officers and rest rooms. Prolonged immersion enabled in-depth insights into front- and back-stage behaviours, perceptions and attitudes of frontline and strategic police employees. The data analysed comprised of fieldnotes, interview transcripts and documents relating to multi-agency working. Thematic analysis, supported by computer aided qualitative data analysis software (Atlas.ti), led to the development of the Policing Complex Adaptive Systems framework; a resource, which contributes a contextual understanding of attitudes and practices in relation to police joint working. Data analysis and synthesis facilitated exploration of innovative ideas, from the ‘bottom-up’, of how joint working challenges could be tackled.

### **FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND IMPACT**

The project findings raised significant recommendations for enabling a sustainable approach to police joint working. Since the fieldwork took place, the Constabulary have responded proactively by making a number of positive changes, which are reflected in HMICFRS’ 2019 inspection report.

#### *Sharing professional expertise*

- **Finding:** Joint working is often learnt by “trial and error” and “figuring it out”; frontline requests for an “instruction manual”.
- **Recommendation:** To develop a joint working manual, which documents ‘practice wisdom’, gained through experiential learning. The manual would need to be designed in consultation with police and other professionals to ascertain what practitioners would like to see in it, and where it would be most accessible (e.g. on intranet sites, via a mobile ‘app’ or in a hard paper version) so that the manual would be useful to those who would use it. **Impact:** The Constabulary have developed a number of mobile ‘apps’ on themes, such as child protection and mental health, which include joint working information, alongside national developments in Authorised Professional Practice guidance.

#### *Navigating changing services*

- **Finding:** The changing and diverse nature of services in different geographical areas creates issues for both professionals and members of the public, who were confused regarding which organisations were commissioned, who to contact and how to get help.
- **Recommendation:** To design a community mapping system, which would provide information and guidance about the availability of services and how to access support in a particular area. Similarly, to the aforementioned ‘manual’, the community mapping system would benefit from co-design with professionals and members of the public, in addition to regular updating. **Impact:** There are ongoing discussions, including work involving ‘Our Lancashire’, to develop a community mapping system.

#### *Bridging the strategy-practice gap*

- **Finding:** A divergence between strategy and practice; strong visions not always translated into practice.
- **Recommendation:** A ‘Think Joint Working’ initiative could be developed, by adopting a ‘Think Child’ approach, which considers how top-down policies and reform will impact on joint working to pre-empt and avoid some unintentional consequences. **Impact:** Lancashire Constabulary have made significant progress in their ‘Think Child’ campaign and focus on vulnerability, which the HMICFRS (2019) inspection recognised has translated into better child protection work, more streamlined processes, improved information sharing, more effective joint decision-making, the timely creation of protection plans to safeguard children and improvements in multi-agency early intervention and prevention activity.

### *Technological improvements*

- **Finding:** Prevalent concerns regarding information technology.
- **Recommendation:** A need for technical improvements, with systems designed around joint working and the needs of people on the ground. **Impact:** Opportunities have been identified to improve information technology systems, such as the development of integrated liquid logic, improved sharing of data across partners through technological systems and the investment in analytical products (e.g. Power Bi).

### *Developing reflective supervision*

- **Findings:** Progress in moving physically closer to other professionals (e.g. co-located office arrangements) but less focus on developing mental proximity. There were narratives of being overwhelmed by change 'churn' and ethnography was likened to a form of 'surrogate supervision'.
- **Recommendation:** A need for more consistent and regular supervision as the cornerstone to reflexive practice and a mechanism to develop mental proximity between police and other professionals, provide stability and support wellbeing, learning and performance. **Impact:** The Constabulary continues to make positive progress in improving supervision arrangements and practices, including additional detective sergeants, upskilling supervisors and greater consistency in supervision practices. Plans are currently underway to implement a reflective supervision pilot, alongside the multi-agency trauma informed workforce development programme, in Lancashire.

### **FUTURE RESEARCH AND IMPACT**

- Further research should explore developments in practices to facilitate mental proximity between police and other professionals, such as reflective supervision.
- The researcher, in collaboration with Professor Corinne May-Chahal and Lancashire Constabulary, has secured ESRC Impact Acceleration funding to further develop this area of work.
- Future research should also provide a national picture of reflective supervision in policing, exploring examples of 'best' practice, evaluating initiatives and identifying any areas for learning and development.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

If taken seriously, the findings and recommendations could present police forces nationally with opportunities to make realistic and valuable changes, not only to joint working but to the wider policing service. A key proposal is to raise the quality of internal and inter-agency reflective supervision, as currently occurs within and between other public services (e.g. social work and mental health). For effective supervision to be developed, careful thought needs to be given to bringing together the evidence-base, with practical considerations (e.g. resources and implementation plans), as well as the voices of police employees, to identify their underlying attitudes, perceptions and needs. Supervision holds the potential to provide a source of stability within the turbulent waters of societal change, including the challenges of policing and joint working. In the wake of a wellbeing focus in U.K. policing, the establishment of a reflective supervision model offers a valuable, safe and secure space to talk, analyse and challenge. It provides a way of sustaining channels of communication between frontline staff and managers, and a mechanism for circular feedback. Supervision offers an opportunity to promote the development of reflexivity, professional expertise and intuition; key elements for joint working and the professionalisation of policing.

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