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COPS AND CUSTOMERS: CONSUMERISM AND THE DEMAND FOR POLICE SERVICES. IS THE CUSTOMER ALWAYS RIGHT?

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Research has drawn attention to the incorporation of localised political elites and a new 'urban officer class' into police consultation processes. The resulting corporatist-style bodies mediate a range of political and economic tensions in the development of local policing priorities. Most research on this issue has focussed upon formal police consultation processes (PCCs) and multi-agency initiatives. Here, however, we examine the extent to which a rather wider section of 'the community' shares this essentially 'local corporatist' approach to police policy making. More specifically, in the light of an increasing application of consumerist approaches to public service management, the article attempts to assess the extent to which public attitudes to policing display an increasingly individual and consumerist ideology. The article discusses some possible implications of this.

KEY WORDS: Consumerism and policing; consultation processes; public attitudes; police priorities; accountability and legitimacy

INTRODUCTION

There was once a joke which suggested the police were the only service agency where it could be confidently predicted that the customer was always wrong. Whether or not this was ever true, the growing pressure upon police managers to consult more extensively with local residents regarding police service priorities has rather changed things. New legislation, new forms of audit and management accountability, the rise of 'consumer responsiveness,' performance indicators and a new 'service' culture (Reiner 1992; Jones *et al.*, 1994) have increasingly

required the Police to consult more extensively with local populations about service priorities.

These issues have prompted a renewed debate about precisely what defines "good policing" (Norris and Norris 1993), and about what all this consultative, performance audit, and consumer satisfaction surveying actually achieves. Police Consultative Committees have been a particular focal point for much research aimed at answering this latter question (Morgan 1992) and recent work by Hughes (1994) has neatly characterised the contrasting perspectives (radical left criminology, left realism and sceptical pluralism) which have largely dominated the commentary on PCCs and issues of legitimacy and accountability in local police service planning. However, as Hughes tries to demonstrate,

> "the battle for hegemony over local policing is not as firmly in the hands of an all-powerful ideology of post-Thatcherite authoritarianism... there is evidence of countervailing forces at work in the local politics of policing... [and although] notions of the citizen and the consumer have been appropriated by Thatcherism, they are also being reappropriated by subjects in a more collectivist manner" (Hughes 1994, p. 268).

At the centre of these new 'local corporatist' and typically 'multi-agency' consultative processes are representatives of new 'localised' political elites and the rising new 'officer classes' from a range of statutory and non-statutory agencies. Hughes asks whether, out of this peculiar blend of managerialism and localism, there is any likelihood of a form of social democratic corporatism emerging which will permit an effective democratic influence over the determination of local policing strategies and priorities (Hughes 1994, p. 269). He concludes with a cautious optimism.

However, the majority of research undertaken thus far has focussed upon the semi-institutionalised PCCs or 'multi-agency' groupings themselves where 'agency' or organisational interests might be expected to predominate to some extent. Yet as consultative arrangements become colonised by organised interests – often with an institutional base in local service agencies – and local corporatist networks establish themselves, (Crawford 1994) what happens to genuine local community (residents, citizens, service users) interests? To what extent are these diffuse and often contradictory 'community' interests safely left in the hands (or, more properly, on the desks) of agency custodians and stakeholders? Indeed, whatever

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happened to the community accountability which, for rather too long, has served as the fig leaf behind which much of this consultative activity flourished?

Although, for obvious reasons, a centre of attention, PCCs are not the only form of consultative activity. The police, and others on their behalf, now go in for a wide range of consumer surveying. The analysis reported here examines a consultative survey undertaken on behalf of s. 106 consultative committee which was intended to inform the drafting of a Police divisional service plan. There is no doubt that the exercise was fraught with unresolved difficulties and the results obtained rather problematic. Notwithstanding this, however, the results presented a fairly clear picture of the attitudes and preferred policing priorities of a certain, albeit self-selecting but nevertheless influential, section of the local population. Not 'the community' perhaps, but certainly a community. Accepting this, the survey offered an opportunity to gauge the extent to which the core discourses of modern policing – managerialism, prioritisation, consumerism, community centredness – had percolated down into popular attitudes. Examining the data and commentaries emerging from the survey as components of a (possibly shifting) ideology provided an opportunity to ask how new policing initiatives and consultative processes connect with a wider ideological and political context. While the results are drawn from a small local survey, the issues emerging allow us to re-visit important debates about contrasting notions of accountability and legitimacy or legitimation in modern 'community' policing.

ASSERTIVE CITIZENS OR WORRIED CONSUMERS?

Alongside the Citizen's Charter initiatives of recent years a number of new questions have come to the fore. Partly as a result of these policy-driven changes, we have also witnessed the emergence of an increasingly sceptical and also more assertive public now more inclined to demand their right to a share of the services that their taxes help finance. Indeed, as Butler has noted, this is precisely the way in which the Citizen's Charter would have the public – the tax-paying customers of the police – view it (Butler 1992). With crime and fear of crime running at hitherto unknown levels, prompting the emergence

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of new insecurities, then the enthusiasm with which police managers have sought new ways of coping with this growing demand becomes understandable. Facing apparently infinite, and sometimes incompatible, demands with finite resources, the new service culture required new methods of discovering what the public 'really wanted' and new ways of delivering it (B. Johnson 1991; Skogan 1996). It also generated a range of specialist initiatives, such as the 'contact patrols' experiment, designed to rebuild public confidence and reduce fear of crime by encouraging more regular encounters between the public and the police, (Bennett 1990) or attempts at the proactive targetting of community beat officers (Chatterton 1993) or 'menu policing,' sectorisation, or 'problem centred policing,' and so on.

Few public services have faced so much pressure as the police to render themselves more accountable to local people. A whole range of initiatives from neighbourhood watch to large scale inter-agency initiatives, have not only exposed police decision-making to wider audiences but also typically acted to channel more demands towards the police. Important questions follow from this, amongst the most pressing being: What is being requested of the police? Where are the requests coming from and who is making them? And, finally, in view of the broader concerns about public confidence in the police, how are the police responding to these new demands?

Taking Reiner's point that "consumerism has rapidly become the keynote of all agendas for reform in public services," (Reiner 1992a, p. 266) this article questions the significance of the new 'consumer agenda' in relation to police service planning. Considering this new consumer culture, Dennison was in no doubt about the culture shift required of the police in order to embrace it. The point about customers, he noted, was that they had choices, they wanted to see direct benefits but dealt mainly in perceptions and tended not to perceive things in the same way as service providers. Other companies operating in the consumer market-place may *manufacture* simple products but what they usually *market* is 'hope'. By the same token the police perform a number of discrete 'policing tasks' but what the public appear to want above all is security, 'peace of mind' (Dennison 1993). More impossibly still, many members of the public want what they perceive to be 'traditional' law and order. It is no accident that our recent 'moral crusades' about violence and community

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fragmentation, family values and the need for discipline hark back to the 1950s.

It is less simple now, citizens demand more but customers wish to pay less for it. The political economy of policing is differently established. The dilemmas multiply, not every 'customer' may desire the same policing services and not every citizen desires it at any cost. Visible police presence may have little impact upon rates of offending; effective task performance may have no impact upon the public's general sense of (in)security. Flexibility and accountability will be essential but may generate further demands and additional dissatisfactions. Finally, as in the market-place, customers are seldom equal. Those with more resources may feel inclined to demand a higher standard of service.

As many commentators have noted, the real 'prize' at stake in the consumer culture and behind the new consultative initiatives is not just a certificate of efficiency, a 'Charter Mark' or even a favourable report from the Audit Commission. On the contrary the longer term goal is the rebuilding of public confidence and the attempted resurrection of 'policing by consent,' (Johnson 1987; Woodcock 1991) or 'compliance policing' (Hirst 1991). Not everyone, Reiner included, appears confident that in the present context these goals are necessarily achievable, (Reiner 1991; 1992b). As Johnson noted (1991, p. 209) striving to remain responsive to increased consumer demands in a context of tight resource constraints could lead to a 'spiral of decline' rather than a virtuous circle. Still, born out of the failures of confrontation policing, the establishment of consultative arrangements, while never likely to bring accountability, perform (for police and allied public service managers) a potentially valuable mediating and legitimating role.

SAMPLING LOCAL OPINION

In Brighton, a local authority initiated 'Police and Public Safety' Sub-Committee of the Council has, since 1986–87, satisfied the Sussex Police obligations in Brighton under s.106 of PACE. The politics of the Sub-Committee itself are themselves interesting, though not directly the subject of this analysis. Suffice it to say that the Sub-Committee, while

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comprised of many of the customary key players from relatively organised community interests has usually more closely resembled the active and potentially challenging PCC described by Hughes in 'Shoeton' as opposed to the more passive and amateur police led PCCs found elsewhere (Hughes 1994). On the whole the sub-committee did not contain the local public sector 'officer class,' these were more likely to be found engaged in a range of more specific multi-agency initiatives around the town.

However, the recognition that the sub-committee did not fully represent local interests prompted the Police and the Borough Council to undertake a survey in an effort to obtain a wider and more representative picture of the public's priorities for their police service. Furthermore, the sub-committee was seeking to expand and develop its community safety strategy and a wider picture of local public priorities was thought necessary prior to undertaking the development work.

The survey was drafted and distributed by the Council's community development staff. Questionnaires went to representatives of approximately 400 community organisations and 'active' Neighbourhood Watch schemes in the Brighton area and a version of it was printed in the Council's own free newspaper. A total of 247 questionnaires were returned though the sampling clearly raised many issues. The survey respondents were, by definition, a largely self-selecting group, defined to some extent by their 'law and order' preoccupations. These preoccupations usually translate as concerns about law and order problems and it may be that these concerns are untypical of those of the broader population.

The sample of respondents was rather unrepresentative in other respects being concentrated in the more settled, owner-occupied residential areas. There were relatively less responses from the town centre areas, areas with high concentrations of private-rental accommodation or areas of public sector housing. Age was also a relevant factor, 51% of the respondents were aged 55 or over and less than 5% aged under 25. These findings would seem to correspond to the existing research on the social character of NW scheme members which suggests that NW schemes are more likely to be found in areas of owner-occupied housing, (Husain 1990; Loveday 1994) their members being much more likely to be middle-aged or over than the general adult population (Donnison *et al.*, 1986). Finally, 57% of the sample was male, 36%

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female and the remaining 7% of returns were completed by more than one member of a household. Research clearly suggests that age and gender are strongly related to increasing levels of fear and concern about crime and personal victimisation, moreover levels of fear which are not reflected in the *actual* rates of victimisation (Mayhew *et al.*, 1992; Hough 1995). The picture with respect to women is rather more complicated in view of the significant evidence of under-reporting of crimes against women (Edwards 1994).

The great irony of the survey is that it tapped into a section of the local populace that was, as a whole, rather less representative of the community as a whole than the committee which had undertaken it. While the academic "stereotyped and patronising view" (Hughes 1994) of the 'active citizens' who are recruited into police partnership activities was not generally true of the sub-committee, it was much more true of the survey respondents. Respondents were generally accepting of a singular notion of the 'community interest' and, with one important exception, typically pro-police.

People's underlying perceptions of risk and vulnerability coloured the responses they had to particular questions. Not surprisingly, older people often conveyed opinions which pointed to a loss of confidence and an increased sense of vulnerability. Their comments suggested some unease about the loss of 'traditional' values and forms of security and a degree of uncertainty about the ability of the police to deliver the kind of community policing they felt necessary. Such reactions are often common amongst older people but may have relatively little to do with a person's direct experience of crime or actual risk of victimisation. Research by Shapland *et al.*, on policing in Sussex (Shapland *et al.*, 1990) demonstrated that older people had rather less frequent contacts with the police but some of them appear rather more willing to respond to consultation surveys. A particular difficulty arises when trying to derive conclusions from such findings about preferred policing priorities, for a number of the – perhaps rather fictional – characteristics of a supposed golden age of 'community policing' (Weatheritt 1983; Woodcock 1991; Reiner 1992) are precisely the reasons for many people's continued adherence to it.

"*I do miss the Police patrols on the streets and would like to see the old Police Boxes back.*"

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"I wish today's police were more approachable and less officious, more like they were in the 1960s."

"They should get the police out and doing what they are really paid for, protecting the public and property. Crime seemed to go up when the Police went into their panda cars and stopped walking the beat."

Such references to past practices and former conditions strongly suggest that far more is at stake than shifting police priorities. The comments reveal a traditional and seemingly deep-rooted commitment to policing as a means of achieving and delivering 'law and order' which is rather by-passed by more contemporary managerialist concerns. Yet if some of the older policing practices, whose loss is regretted by older people, seem of questionable effectiveness to some contemporary police managers, they are nonetheless symbolic of a time when the present generation of older people felt more in control, part of their communities and altogether less vulnerable to criminal victimisation. In drawing attention to this we do not seek to belittle the problem, just to redefine it. The distinction has to be made between crime management policies and policies to allay the fear of crime (Bennett 1994). If our interpretation of the survey data is correct, it points clearly to the need for a strong strategic commitment to be given to a notion of 'reassurance policing.' It is not uncommon to see police commentators making precisely the same point (for example, Hirst 1991, p. 187).

"Police ought to do more to make themselves known to local people, so becoming more of a friend than a policeman."

"I sometimes feel that, living out here on the estates, we are the forgotten people."

"They should employ some decent-sized officers, not dwarfs. Let's have a show of muscle on the streets to get back to proper effective policing."

COMMUNITY BEAT POLICING

A large majority (85%) clearly wanted the police to increase their commitment to local beat policing. This highly familiar public commitment to routine, 'community service' policing is demonstrably strong (for example, Shapland and Vagg 1988). The following comments make this abundantly clear.

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"We appreciate very much the work of the local beat constable and would like to see an increase in this area."

"There is no substitute for local beat police officers working with the community and with community organisations."

Some respondents took the argument further, suggesting that the local beat officers' close community links were an important aspect of local police accountability. As one respondent expressed it,

"Like other public services, the police need to be more accountable to strengthen the trust of local people. They should be building community links with a partnership style."

For others, it was more than just a question of accountability, for trust and good community links were seen as central to police effectiveness. Concerns such as these have come increasingly to the fore in recent months as the Home Office review of policing tasks, and the Audit Commission Report on effective criminal investigation, (Audit Commission 1990; 1993) has raised questions about the balance of policing activities. Community policing may not be easily expressed in terms of standardised performance indicators, but it is undeniably popular with the public and, if for this reason alone, cannot be overlooked in a customer-sensitive police service.

"A police force needs to be in touch with the needs of a local community and flexible enough to react in appropriate ways. They can only really do this if they know their communities."

SPECIFIED POLICING PRIORITIES: THE RESEARCH FINDINGS

The policing priorities indicated by the survey reflect the patterns of interest representation within the sample. They raise the difficult problem of how to strike an appropriate balance between competing priorities. In particular, between the policing needs of 'unpopular' priorities compared with other more 'popular' though individually perhaps less serious priorities.

It is hard to see some of the issues raised by respondents as police priorities (problems with dogs, cars parked on grass verges etc.) but these localised demands, sometimes referred to as a 'broken windows' set of expectations, (Reiner 1991) reflect the concerns of particular people in particular contexts. That such concerns are directed, towards

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the police might suggest something about contemporary perceptions of the police. When all else fails the police are an 'authority' which people expect to deliver solutions to community problems. Accountability is only part of the process, the means to an end. The *end* is the problem solved. As we have seen, customers want results.

There are many intriguing ambiguities in popular attitudes to policing, an activity renowned for its wide-ranging 'streetwise discretion.' Indeed, many members of the public would like it to remain just so. But we are now witnessing an important shift from 'traditional' to more responsive and bureaucratic modes of policing (Reiner 1992a). At the same time the police are probably under a closer 'democratic' scrutiny than ever before being required to steer a careful path between local accountability, effective response and 'service' delivery in a context where local communities seem less capable of dealing with their own problems.

Respondents were asked to identify the three main priorities which they felt the police ought to devote more time and resources to, firstly, in their immediate neighbourhood and, secondly, across the town as a whole. Four clear-cut neighbourhood priorities emerged. The first two, burglary and vandalism have an obvious significance at the residential and community level. Burglary strikes at the heart of one's personal and domestic security, whilst vandalism points to a more generic problem of social malaise (Matthews 1992). The third general factor, 'fear or insecurity' is, almost by definition, a community-centred issue covering, as it does, those people who described themselves as feeling 'unsafe' in their own neighbourhood or homes or generally fearful of crime. In terms of seriousness, perhaps traffic and parking problems are a surprise inclusion in the top four neighbourhood concerns but residential neighbourhoods will contain a large number of cars and the way these are driven, or where they are parked, can be the source of some considerable local friction.

The factors which came low on the neighbourhood priority list are clear cut. Sexual offences received a low rating whilst racial harassment and domestic violence hardly registered at all. The reasons for this lie in the characteristics of the sample. More pointedly, this suggests the operation of a particularly selective conception of community or neighbourhood interests giving priority to certain traditional, even patriarchal, values – security, property, privacy and

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family. In this context, sexual and racial harassment remain minority concerns and domestic violence a private matter. However, only a small number of surveys were returned from residential areas in which violence featured significantly. In part this explains the low rating given to violence as a neighbourhood concern compared with the prominence given to 'aggressive youth' and violence in the priorities for the town as a whole.

A different set of concerns emerged for Brighton as a whole. Top priority in the town centre was a general sense of fear or insecurity, followed by concerns about violence and disorder, aggressive begging, traffic problems and illegal parking and burglary.

The fact that the general 'fear of crime' category assumed such prominence reflects the idea that town centres can be unsafe places to be. It may be that this general 'fear of crime' response reflects some people's direct experiences of the town centre incidents but their views may well have been informed only by second-hand reports – and this could be very significant.

Recalling the age distribution of the respondents it is clear that people over 55 are heavily overrepresented. In a related piece of work on Brighton's CCTV system we discovered that a sample of town centre users significantly overrepresented the under 40 age group (Squires and Measor 1996). It is a fairly straight-forward fact, town centre users are, on average, a younger cross section of the population. Yet the most enthusiastic supporters of the CCTV scheme were older people who seldom came to the town centre – in part because of their heightened fearfulness and its allegedly 'unsafe' reputation. By virtue of this they had only rarely witnessed any criminal activity and had scarcely ever been victims of town centre offences. In short, they were a group of people not unlike the typical respondents to our present survey: older, more fearful, infrequent visitors. None of this is to belittle their fears, which may be quite genuine but, as we have said earlier, it calls for a different kind of policing response specifically addressing public fears.

TARGETING THE OFFENCES OF GREATEST CONCERN?

In general, respondents appeared very willing to suggest additional priorities but reluctant to remove any. The basis upon which they

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reached their decisions is unclear, but it may be that 'instinct', or prejudice played a part. The fact that, on the whole, people were willing to make these kinds of judgements is interesting, the precise ways in which they did so, especially so. The low priority given to 'hate crimes' – crimes of prejudice or assaults upon minority ethnic groups, lesbians or gay men and domestic violence is a direct reflection of the wider problems concerning the unrepresentative character of participation in consultative processes.

A central issue thrown up by the survey concerns the apparently lost sense of community which many people, especially older people, believe the police may be equipped to do something about. Yet the particular predicament of some groups of people is precisely their somewhat ambiguous status in relation to 'traditional' conceptions of community. One way or another, 'community' as traditionally conceived may afford them little sense of collective support – black people are seen as outsiders, gay people may define themselves by their 'alternative' lifestyles, whilst women are – typically – subjected to domestic violence in private. A similar point applies but for different reasons in relation to juvenile males.

Most of all, respondents wanted more police attention to the problem of groups of aggressive or intimidatory young men. Male adolescents have always provided the criminal justice system with its richest supply of clients (Newburn and Stanko 1994). Not surprisingly, delinquent male adolescents have often come to have a more ambiguous relation to notions of 'community', not least because their illegal activities are quite frequently directed against the more traditional community interests. In the 1990s these established and increasingly 'owner-occupied' community interests are likely to include older people, the members of Neighbourhood Watch schemes and the kinds of people who respond to surveys about the 'fear of crime'.

URGING THE POLICE TO DO LESS

Respondents were asked whether they felt there were any areas of police activity which ought to be given a lower priority. Around 40% of the respondents were able to suggest some activities for reduced priority. The top three 'burdens' were identified as 'paperwork',

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'traffic policing' and, way out on top, dealing with demonstrations and other 'events', with 40 respondents specifically mentioning the dispute at the Port of Shoreham regarding the policing of demonstrators protesting against live animal exports.

Paperwork is typically perceived as a diversion from the police's 'real job'. In this sense the 'client' or 'customer' of the 'paperwork' is not the community but management, or bureaucratic and legal authority, the CPS, the Courts, and the Home Office. Members of the community perceive no obvious and tangible benefits from police paperwork, hence they do not value the activity.

"Something should be done to cut out a lot of the paperwork they have to do, so that they can get on with their real job on the streets."

Communities therefore appear to hold policing accountable in terms of its outcomes, whilst abdicating a responsibility for its legal and constitutional aspects: that is to say, for policing as a component of a system of criminal justice.

PROTESTS AND DEMONSTRATIONS: COMMUNITY VERSUS POLICING?

The survey period was rather atypical in that, for a number of weeks, the issue of live animal exports from the port of Shoreham had dominated local discussion of policing issues. Most accounts suggested that violence was far from being a dominant feature of the event although a number of our respondents were concerned by what they had witnessed or heard about Shoreham.

"I saw some of the police at Shoreham and they were a disgrace... Is this what we pay our taxes for?"

"Two-hundred plus police spending six to eight hours a day guarding cattle trucks? Clearly nonsense. What's more, Brighton people shouldn't be expected to pay for this."

Whilst Shoreham was fairly untypical of policing in the Brighton area, it certainly concentrated people's minds on an aspect of policing that might, at another time, have been rather overlooked. As a 'public order' incident, Shoreham was itself fairly untypical. The demonstrators at Shoreham enjoyed fairly widespread popular support. The

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organised protest was, by and large, local, peaceful, respectable and articulate – even, for want of a better phrase, 'middle class'. If the Shoreham protest had not enjoyed these characteristics we would have lacked an opportunity to consider the implications when community, consent and policing do not neatly intersect. When demonstrators or protesters represent a less popular 'cause,' or when 'community interests' are presumed to be threatened by 'outsiders,' then disquiet about police tactics may be rather more muted. Indeed, in the latter situations the community may be pressing for a rather more forceful application of police powers, for instance in seeking the rapid removal of travellers' camps or the expulsion of street beggars.

When people proposed a lower priority be given to policing 'events' and demonstrations they were saying that they did not want 'their' local police to be taken away to police 'outside' events. Nor, as at Shoreham and in relation to Party Conferences, did they want to pay for it. If this attitude suggests a implied sense of community 'ownership' of local police resources, moving towards a 'consumerist' model of policing services, tied to established community interests where a version 'consumer sovereignty' prevails, then the consequences can be quite problematic. The old joke about the police's customers always being wrong is now turned on its head. The consumerist model of 'accountable' policing suggests that the customers – the community, or dominant community interests – are always right and 'outsiders' or submerged community interests always wrong. Rather intriguingly, in an article in 1991, Alan Eastwood (as chair of the Police Federation) argued that the absence of a community's proprietorial feelings about 'its' police force could be problematic (Eastwood 1991, p. 271). What he meant is clear, though in reality it is somewhat more complex. Invariably those sections of a community experiencing 'proprietorial' feelings about 'their' local police are unlikely to have been the same groups as those in whom the police themselves took a uniquely 'proprietorial' interest (See Reiner 1991).

One respondent to the Brighton survey articulated rather more than a proprietorial interest by directly questioning the role of the survey in the development of policing priorities:

"*Hopefully this survey is not just another attempt at paying lip service to a* fee-paying *public already disenchanted with policing in Brighton.*"

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Another commented,

"Living out here we hardly ever see a policeman (sic.) *I sometimes think we ought to get a rebate from Sussex."*

Disgruntled 'fee-paying' customers indeed. Such essentially 'consumerist' attitudes coincide very neatly with the language of 'active citizenship' which was promoted by a number of 'commentators and politicians' during the late 1980s. Amongst the advocates of this idea, John Patten MP had urged that, "the first instinct of the active citizen, should not be to make a claim upon the state." By the same token, perhaps never calling or, better, never needing the police may be emerging as the basis for advancing a demand for some kind of 'no claims bonus' from the Police Authority.

Research by Jones *et al.*, strongly suggests that the introduction of local consultation committees has enhanced the articulation of a consumerist perspective in relation to policing services. As we have suggested here this may have certain important consequences. Concluding a piece of work on police consultative arrangements Stratta notes that, "in terms of social status and where they lived, members of consultative committees were in no way representative... committees tended to be composed of members whose social characteristics, in terms of age, sex, socio-economic group, ethnic background, and income, were totally atypical of the victims and offenders with whom the police have most contact" (Stratta 1990 p. 545). Insofar as this demonstrates a lack of fit between 'representatives' (or in our case, survey respondents) and the wider public, then it certainly raises deeper questions about what is being achieved through the processes of community consultation and community-centred policing. There is no doubt that in the development of local policing plans an important range of issues need clarifying. There is evidence that robust community representatives and well-organised consultative partners are capable of far more than relatively passive acceptance of the police line but it is doubtful whether the incipient language of consumerism offers the most positive or creative discourse for the advancement of a community interest in policing.

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CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This analysis has been based upon a small consultative exercise conducted in a locality which has taken seriously the issue of local police accountability and, over a decade, has developed a number of inter-locking approaches to public consultation about policing and public safety issues. It is not being claimed that the consultative exercise examined here is either typical of this authority's broader efforts or of other police consultative processes in the UK. Rather the objective has been to illustrate certain dilemmas of the emerging consumerist consultative model which all police/community consultative processes may share to some extent.

The major issues arising from this discussion concern notions of community and accountability. We have found community to mean several things although existing modes of local consultation may not grasp all of these definitions. The version of community we have identified is, without doubt, a dominant model not without some effective pull in many police consultation exercises. But this model is at best inadequate and, at worst, rather misleading. It fails to represent everyone satisfactorily and it risks distorting policing priorities around particular sets of interests. An effective response might be, in the first instance, a rather more genuinely representative consultation process (Johnson 1987).

A second, though related, set of dilemmas present themselves in connection with the emerging consumerist model of policing. Accountability, by a strange twist, has served as the thin end of the consumerist wedge. These issues connect directly with the language of 'active citizenship' and 'rights charterism' which have been prominent recently. As Johnson argues, consumers tend to demand their rights, sometimes to the exclusion of wider social values. Consumers of policing services want their own streets patrolled, 'those troublemakers' removed, and so on (Johnson 1991). Dilemmas may occur in partnership schemes where communities are encouraged to 'own' the policing strategy and, perhaps, therefore, also the police. Prevailing community interests may be very familiar. Frequently they only reflect back certain already-dominant policing values which, as Bright suggests, tend to be typified, "by a victim centred, defensive approach to crime prevention which emphasises citizen action, opportunity reduction and the need to protect the

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community from offenders who are seen as outsiders. It focusses mainly upon property theft, 'incivilities' and fear of crime and tends not to address crimes such as domestic violence, child abuse and racial harassment" (Bright 1991). In effect we need to pay more attention to the process of community consultation and not just to the outcomes.

The wider communities hardly share the 'corporate' perspective identified in some of the existing research discussed earlier and largely tend to articulate a demand for more policing services of a 'traditional' kind directed at the resolution of immediate neighbourhood difficulties. It is hard to see some of these issues as policing priorities at all. Still, as one respondent commented generally in relation to the survey:

"I don't know what you mean, 'police priorities', surely the police should deal with all these things and enforce the law properly. Isn't that what we pay them for?"

While it might be a sign of strength that a community identifies and presses its demands – as rights, the related tendency to present these in a largely exclusive form and cloaked in the individualised language of consumerism rather limits their progressive democratic appeal.

Some commentators have argued that the top-down character of much 'community consultation' implies that consultative processes serve as a means of allowing greater police infiltration of local communities (Gordon 1984). On the other hand, research by Morgan *et al.*, on police consultative committees, found little evidence of any "insidious police penetration" of the community (Morgan 1992, p. 180). In fact the issues are more complex and involved. In the present context the most important feature of consultation processes may be their role in "mobilising support for the police amongst the middle and respectable working classes," (Brake and Hale 1992) whilst mediating between conflicting pressures and helping redistribute political and financial responsibility for the emerging generation of community safety strategies. As a microcosm of residential interests within the police divisional locality the consultative committees may represent a closer alliance of certain 'community interests' and policing interests. In some accounts this may be seen as a form of community co-option to the police standpoint, (Morgan 1992, p. 182) whereas in other versions it might imply the selective articulation of certain community interests, to the detriment of others.

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In a consumerist and increasingly service-oriented police culture, the ability of certain interest groups to influence the selection of policing priorities can be very problematic. This aspect of multi-agency work has led Crawford to interpret a number of formal initiatives in this area from a corporatist perspective. The advantage of this approach lies precisely in its emphasis upon power relations, social process and selective interest representation (Crawford 1994). As we have seen consultative processes modelled upon consumer surveys may distort community preferences. Consumers are not equal and the vociferous, well-resourced or well-connected may predominate. Alternatively, corporatist processes of consultation may only selectively represent the predominant interests of a wider community – while purporting to do otherwise.

Reiner concluded his discussion of consultative processes by noting how police managers "rapidly latched onto" the language of consumerism, "as a way of founding a new ethic of service to revive their flagging status, and a way of circumventing the more political forms of accountability which once threatened" (Reiner 1992, p. 266). It may be that, in by-passing the more overt forms of political accountability, local police managers have achieved a greater control over the consultative process. However, their negotiating skills are likely to be fully tested when seeking to achieve a balance between the competing demands of different sections of consumer opinion and the selective articulation of group interests through more formalised consultative arrangements. There are still more ways to get it wrong than get it right.

Public enthusiasm for certain forms of community policing and for certain types of local accountability show no signs of waning, though one lesson from this analysis would be that, in a pluralist society, the forms of accountability should be many and varied and balances will need to be struck. Strategies need to be developed which are capable of addressing not only the specific problems of crime and fear of crime but also for managing demands upon policing resources emerging through processes of fairly selective interest representation. So in laying claim to 'their' police and wishing to see them visibly patrolling 'their streets,' communities will need to be alert to and sympathetic of the needs of those disparate groups whose interests – even as individual customers – may not be best served by visible police presence and rapid responses alone.

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