POLICE FORCE
POLICE SERVICE

CARE AND CONTROL IN BRITAIN

Edited by Mike Stephens
and Saul Becker

Police Force, Police Service

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MACMILLAN

First published 1994 by
THE MACMILLAN PRESS LTD
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 2XS
and London
Companies and representatives
throughout the world

ISBN 0–333–57483–4 hardcover
ISBN 0–333–57484–2 paperback

A catalogue record for this book is available
from the British Library.

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2
03 02 01 00 99 98 97 96 95

Printed in Hong Kong

For Hayley, Christopher, Lauren, and Carys

Thomas and Patrick

Gareth and Alexandra

and

For Jessica and Sophie

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Introduction: Force is Part of the Service

Saul Becker and Mike Stephens

This book takes us to the centre of the debate about care and control in the police service. The police face new and renewed challenges to their traditional modes of operation, posed amongst other things by a heightened public and media concern with lawlessness and wrongdoing, by the escalation in reported crime, and by an uncharacteristic assault on the police body politic from a government concerned to improve performance, quality and value for money in *all* publicly funded utilities (see, for example, Sinclair and Miller, 1984; Audit Commission, 1990; Home Office, 1993; Sheehy, 1993). A rehabilitation of the care/control debate is urgent – it is at the heart of the matter about the future direction of British policing. The ways in which policy makers, chief constables and rank and file officers address the critical balance between care and control, and engage with the policy and procedural issues, will have major implications for the shape, goals and legitimacy of the police service up to, and beyond, the millennium.

The Limits of Care and Control

It is widely assumed that the major function of the police is to maintain public order – a control function for which normally they alone are responsible. Holdaway (in Chapter 3) shows how the dominant occupational culture amongst the rank and file is certainly very much one of control and enforcement. This

views 'real' policing as paramilitary operations to quell disorder and as patrol and specialist work related to crime detection. At the other extreme is the *service function* – the general, often run-of-the-mill, non-crime-related tasks that the police must carry out and which are normally considered to be of low status because these activities rarely constitute 'real' police work. Walker (in Chapter 2) shows how the control ethos is constructed and reinforced through a military–bureaucratic organisational structure. In practice, however, much of this control function is targeted on some of the most marginalised and powerless groups in society. Disturbingly, as Reiner suggests in Chapter 1, control has often been characterised by the use of excessive force and by the abuse or misuse of power. To an extent, this has heralded a crisis of legitimacy for the police, especially among certain groups and communities, whose trust and support for the service has become minimal at very best, and at worst openly hostile. As Holdaway (in Chapter 3) comments in relation to the experience of black people: 'control, an occupational and cultural feature of policing, and racial prejudice and discrimination, which are structural features of society, intermingle to provide a framework within which an encounter between a police officer and a black youth is conducted'. A 1992 Home Office study shows that Afro-Caribbeans are fifty per cent more likely to be stopped in their vehicles than white people and nearly four times more likely to be stopped on foot (Southgate and Crisp, 1992).

The caring functions of the police on the other hand are infrequently discussed and analysed in police texts, despite evidence from activity studies which show that police officers spend more time on service than on crime control, and that this side of their work is popular amongst much of the public (Shapland and Vagg, 1988; Southgate and Crisp, 1992). Recently, however, the police – in particular, the more newly appointed chief constables – have increasingly emphasised the caring nature of their contemporary role. The *Statement of Common Purpose and Values* by the Metropolitan Police, a core part of its programme to improve the quality of the capital's police service, describes the need for officers to provide 'protection and reassurance to Londoners, and to be compassionate, courteous and patient'. Many police forces throughout the country

have dropped the word 'force' and have assumed the mantle of 'service', with all the concomitant trappings of corporate identity and image. But, as Holdaway suggests in Chapter 3, this concern for service expressed by chief constables is not universally welcomed: 'Their ideas are in tension and conflict with the ranks' view that places direct crime control by the police and force rather than persuasion centre stage'. Moreover, the organisational structure is still very much one which supports the ethos of control. As a number of contributors to this volume show, the power of the organisational structure and of the police subculture, and their respective influence on the shape of British policing, should not be underestimated.

But neither should we underestimate the power of rhetoric and image in bringing about change. In Chapter 1 Reiner reminds us that the traditional image of the British police officer (the avuncular bobby on the beat) is 'one of a citizen in uniform working within the consensus of the community, relying on popular backing rather than force'. Today, as we have already indicated, chief constables are also attempting to reconstruct police legitimacy through service rather than through force and control. This may have arisen as a consequence of the crisis of legitimacy referred to above – the increasingly frequent image displayed on our screens and in our papers of the police officer as inefficient, even corrupt and criminal – not to be trusted or given support by the public at large. Over time, an emphasis on service, and an accompanying shift in rhetoric and language, may lead to fundamental changes in the direction, identity and image of the police, and, longer term, to changes in what the public *expects* from *its* police service, and the degree to which the public will lend its support. In particular, the police service is attempting to gain greater legitimacy and respect amongst the Asian and black communities. This is no easy task given many of the incidents which are reported concerning police treatment of black people. As Holdaway shows in Chapter 3, the occupational culture of rank and file officers very much views black people with suspicion, and as individuals who require control, and sometimes suppression. Stephens shows in Chapter 7 how this may have led to a disproportionate number of Afro-Caribbean people being detained by the police under mental health legislation. In an effort to address some of

these issues, and to make the service more representative of the society and communities it serves, the police have been keen to recruit black officers to the ranks. But again, the power of the subculture, with its racist banter, has worked against effective recruitment, and against the retention of black officers who do join the service. Holdaway (in Chapter 3) suggests that some black officers are forced to resign because of the culture and language of many of their colleagues. Oakley (in Chapter 4) argues that training initiatives can be one important way to bring about better community and race relations. He suggests that the new emphasis on service and care 'transforms the status within policing of "community relations", which moves from a peripheral concern to being central to the policing role'.

Care through Control

By tracing the changing image of the police through television fiction, Reiner (in Chapter 1) charts the changing politics of police legitimation. It is, he argues, a dialectical progression, from *Dixon of Dock Green* (the symbol of the police as carers) through *The Sweeney* (the police as controllers) to *The Bill* (the synthesis of care and control). But Reiner also reminds us that to see care and control as polar extremes is too simplistic: control is not pursued simply to control; often hidden behind the function of control is care and protection – care for the innocent bystander and victims of crime: 'The fundamental motive of *The Sweeney* is concern for innocent victims, and a drive to care for them against the depredations of the villains who prey on them'. Consequently, force is part of the service: 'The police provide the service of protecting the public by the appropriate use of legitimate force'. And, as Holdaway confirms: 'Although care and service can amount to the exercise of control this is not always the case. The complexity of policing means that in many situations officers take action that at first sight appears to be based on control but in fact is established on service and care . . . care and service to others'.

How then are we to judge whether a particular police action is predominantly care or control? Holdaway suggests in Chapter 3 that 'the most careful analysis has to be made of the

meaning of situations and of related actions to police officers, victims of crime, complainants and others before the reasons for particular interventions and outcomes from them can be understood'. Whereas, for instance, paramilitary policing is essentially a control function with minimal elements of care, there are other police activities where the balance between control and care is more complex. Community policing in its various forms is one such example. But looked at from a civil libertarian perspective, some commentators have suggested that there are dangers in too close an overlap between these functions. Bennett (in Chapter 5) charts the recent developments in community policing. He expresses concern that because the dominant policing ethos amongst the rank and file is still one of control, innovative schemes such as community policing, which are usually 'bolted on' to the existing system, sit uncomfortably within that system and culture.

In some situations the caring function appears to be in the ascendancy, for example in police handling of victims (women who have been the subject of domestic violence and children who have been sexually abused) or of offenders who also require care or treatment (for example, the mentally ill or the juvenile offender). Edwards (in Chapter 6) argues that 'violence against women, and sexual assault perpetrated by male intimates are two areas of police work where these dual functions of care and control meet, sometimes in a manner complementary, while at other times they co-exist in conflict'. She adds: 'victims are often caught up in the conflicting efforts of the police both to care for them and to control offenders by bringing offenders to trial, at which the victim is expected to give evidence and to support the prosecution . . . In trying to care for victims and empower women, and at the same time control the sexual and violent offender, the police are faced with the difficulty of encouraging victims to prosecute and of enforcing the criminal law'. Edwards argues that prosecution and control ought to be pursued by the police regardless of the apparent wishes of the victim. Again, control is part of the *service*.

Another arena in which police functions of care and control are entwined is that of child sexual abuse. Fielding and Conroy (in Chapter 9) examine the work of police and social services in

child sexual abuse investigations. They confirm that whilst the police are generally regarded as agents of control, and social services as agents of care, this simple distinction fails to reflect the complex reality of the two organisations and their practice: 'There is much in their work and culture that runs against the grain of the stereotype . . . The practice of joint investigation better reconciled social services to control and made the police more alert to welfare considerations'. Nonetheless, Fielding and Conroy also express concern that whilst there was tangible movement away from their traditional posture, over time there was a tendency for both organisations to revert to customary concerns and practices – the police emphasising their role as controllers and social workers expressing their role as carers. This suggests that any movement by the police to develop legitimacy through service, rather than through control, may be slow and limited, especially if entrenched attitudes win the day. Fielding and Conroy suggest that 'the case of child protection suggests some of the practical challenges that face efforts to change the established balance of care and control in the police'.

A further group of people requiring control, but also sensitively applied care, is the mentally ill. Stephens (in Chapter 7) charts the ways in which people with mental health problems may come to the attention of the police. In particular, he outlines police use of section 136 of the 1983 Mental Health Act: 'When individuals are subject to police attention under section 136 there is the potential both for a controlling and a caring outcome'. By drawing on the lessons to be learnt from a crisis intervention service in Madison, USA, Stephens argues for the integration of the caring function into police dealings with the mentally ill in Britain. The use of section 136 can be an act of care through control: 'those individuals suspected of being mentally disordered may be removed from a public place to what is termed a place of safety in order to carry out an assessment of that person's condition or to make arrangements for that person's treatment'. Stephens suggests that police involvement in a crisis intervention service would allow for the proper assessment of people with mental illness, and reduce the chances of discrimination playing a significant role in the placement and treatment of the mentally ill, in particular, black people with mental illness. But control can also come through

care: 'The police's primary interest in social control is in no way undermined by the operation of a crisis intervention programme. Indeed, since an efficient programme relieves the police of many time-consuming duties, it actually allows them to focus more strongly on the preferred crime management aspects of their role'.

Holdaway, in Chapter 3, puts a similar argument. He suggests that control may well come through the service function, but that this may also have a backlash: 'police commitment to and involvement in youth work founded on service to the public may lead to a perceived and actual but unintended increase of the control of young people and feelings of distrust among them'. Thorpe in Chapter 8 looks in detail at this police involvement with young people, in particular their handling of juvenile offenders – another arena where the police must maintain a delicate balance between care and control. He suggests that the movement by the police into cautioning schemes, whereby offenders are diverted from prosecution 'was in both theory and practice a shift from control to care by choosing to involve police officers directly in the provision of services to youths'. Thorpe goes on to trace the development and rationale for police diversion work and focuses on the experience of the police service in Northamptonshire. He shows that the scheme was able to reduce significantly the numbers of juveniles facing prosecution, and reduce the use of care and custody. However, an unintended consequence of moving into a caring mode of operation may have been to 'net-widen', bringing into the system (of cautioning and diversion) juveniles who would otherwise have remained outside. Police officers, Thorpe argues, felt at ease in their work – whether one calls it care or control, justice or welfare: 'Once operational instructions relate to the achievement of specific tasks, which are to be performed in specific inter-agency settings, then the context determines the outcome. Since the Northamptonshire scheme was very much a police-inspired enterprise, then its success in a sense was guaranteed'.

In the past some authors have warned against the police moving too far down the road of service and care. Rather, the police should conduct their controlling and enforcement functions with greater effectiveness and fairness (see, for example,

Waddington, 1984). Walker (in Chapter 2) suggests that if either care or control is allowed to dominate in intra-organisational relations, 'then significant problems emerge in terms of the capacity of the organisation to co-ordinate and harmonise its collective efforts and to remain responsive to its public constituencies'. He argues for a 'closer equilibrium' between care and control functions so that 'each could check the excesses and supply the omissions of the other'. Oakley (in Chapter 4) suggests that police training needs to address the relationship between care and control: 'if the concept of service is to be at the centre of the policing role, then issues of "care" and their relationship to "control" need also to become far more central to police training, and to be firmly contextualised within a sound intellectual understanding of communities and "police-community relations"'.

In the final chapter, Stephens and Becker bring together the various threads and strands of the book. They argue that a great deal of the substance of police activity and policy, at a micro and macro level, is the provision of a *matrix* of control and care. Other professions are also involved in these tasks. Within the personal social services there is a traditional concern with care, coupled with essential controlling purposes. So, social work, probation, and other human service professions are, like the police, involved in *policing*. In many examples of police activity (and police policy) both functions are taking place simultaneously. In other instances one role is more dominant than the other. Stephens and Becker argue that there are philosophical and pragmatic reasons for the interlinking of care and control in police work. Citizens have the right to security: security from crime, from violence and from the fear of crime. The police role is not just one of combating crime, but about ensuring decent minimum standards of security – a caring *and* controlling function. The law itself, by defining the boundaries and rules for (legal/illegal) behaviour, is also a mechanism for the care *and* control of citizens. Caring can extend control rather than be its polar extreme. Stephens and Becker suggest that the police may wish to strive for greater legitimation through the caring function, but that first they will have to tackle complex issues concerned with identity, organisation and image. The police need to promote an image of strength through caring: caring is