

Still Plodding Along?

The police response to the changing profile of crime in England and Wales

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Abstract

This paper will consider the new demands placed on police forces arising from the dramatic increase in cases of fraud and cybercrime. It will assess the ability –or current inability -of the police to respond to this development. The paper will therefore be directed towards the growing requirement for substantial internal police reform that goes well beyond anything contemplated heretofore. The paper will draw on the recent and important HMIC PEEL Review of police efficiency which has for the first time raised the question of identifying not just police capacity but also police force capability. It is evident that while police forces are able to quickly identify police capacity [ranks and police numbers] they experience great difficulty in relation to capabilities. This in fact links in with the police response to the ‘new’ forms of crime which is now replacing acquisitive crime. The paper will seek to identify current police responses to this development and also highlight its inadequacy.

Keywords: Fraud, Cybercrime, Policing, Police culture, Crime survey 2016

Introduction

The recent Office of National Statistics [ONS] 2016 Survey of Crime in England and Wales has demonstrated new challenges confronting the police in a changing criminal environment within which the police will have to operate. The report highlighted a significant change in our understanding of the profile of crime and victimisation in England and Wales. For the first time the full impact of fraud and cybercrime has been fully estimated [ONS 2016]. It was to be discovered within the 2016 survey that an estimated 5.8million fraud cases and cybercrimes were committed in the previous year which pushed up the overall crime figures to over 12 million offences [Ford 2016]. While there may have been 5.8 million such crimes in previous years we did not know about them. Now we do: and the police and other law enforcement will have to react to this changed understanding of the business demand on their services.

While [traditional] volume crime had continued to fall [burglary, robbery, theft et al] this had, in fact, been more than matched by the rate of victimisation involving online fraud and cybercrime. This was far greater than had previously been recognised [Ford 2016]. It appears that UK residents are now 20 times more likely to be victims of fraud than robbery and 10 times more likely to experience fraud than theft from the person. In what appears to be an ineluctable expansion in the sale and use of new technology, a new volume crime profile has now replaced that with which the police have traditionally wrestled. As has been argued by one ONS official in relation to the nature and size of the problem:

‘To put the scale of the threat from these offences in context, estimates of the number of fraud and computer incidents are similar in magnitude to the combined total of all other offences measured by the survey’ [Quoted in Ford 2016].

Characteristics identifiable within this new crime profile may also have potentially significant consequences for police services. This is because identifiable patterns of current victimisation appear to put into reverse established assumptions surrounding crime victims. Unlike earlier types of volume crime, fraud and cybercrime can now make residents in rural areas more vulnerable than urban city dwellers while in terms of age group, the middle aged are more likely to be victims than any other age group. Additionally those in managerial and professional positions are at far greater risk of victimisation than either manual workers or the unemployed [ONS 2016].

In terms of victimisation this development represents an abrupt change from earlier patterns of victimisation. To the extent that the pattern of victimisation has, in terms of social class changed then this can also be expected to generate new demands on the

police service. Traditionally members of the middle class as users of public services have, for example, proved to be much more vociferous in their demands for service than other social groups [Costa-Font J and Zigante V [2016] .

For these reasons it is evident that the changing profile of crime must impact of the police service. As a result how that service responds to new and increasing demand could be seen as the single most critical problem confronting the police organisation. How it responds and the extent to which under its current configuration it is able to do so constitute an immediate challenge. Yet here the police organisational culture cannot be ignored. Traditionally it has acted as a strong buffer to change. However in its current structure the police service appears unlikely to provide the degree of employment flexibility to respond to new demands placed upon it.

Policing Past and Policing Futures

The ONS Crime Survey has generated considerable publicity but it is also evident that fraud has an established contemporary history. It is the case that over the last decade the nature and size of the problem has been regularly recorded. From at least the 1980s the growing threat of fraud has been the subject of debate within the public sector, most notably within local government but also the NHS where fraud investigation has been undertaken for many years [Button et al 2014].

It is however apparent that the fraud threat has been long recognised by many public authorities. This does not appear to have extended, however, to the police service. In a critical analysis of the police response to fraud, researchers were to discover that over the past 20 years studies had identified a significant decline in specialist police resources dedicated to investigating fraud or economic crime .In the 1980s police forces supported 588 Fraud Squad Officers but this had fallen by 2006 to an estimated 416 police officers in fraud squads. [Button et al 2014].

Interestingly the decline in the number of fraud squad officers occurred in a period of substantial increases in police numbers [Berman 2012]. Most recent research data collected on police officer numbers specialising in fraud indicates that when aggregated nationally the number of police officers engaged in investigating fraud standing at 624.3 officers represented approximately 0.27% of all police personnel [Button et al 2014:8]. Recent evidence suggests that against a background of reduced police funding police forces have in the Midlands and London metropolitan areas sought to cut back or close down both investment in fraud squads and also regional economic crime units [loveday 2015].

Given the recognised fact that fraud and cybercrime had assumed an increasing salience over the last decades this might be thought surprising. Indeed the 2015 ONS survey was to highlight the size of the problem when it estimated in that years' survey there were more than 5 million incidents of fraud which had occurred in England and Wales [BBC News 2016].

Explanations for the low investment in fraud investigation undertaken by police forces were to be provided within the Fraud Review Team Final Report of 2006 [Fraud Review Team: 2006]. The report only reinforced an earlier perception that there was a lack of interest within the police with fraud and that fraud appeared to be all too often at the bottom of police priorities [Fraud Review Team 2006]. As one chief officer was to argue:

'The investigation of fraud is extremely expensive in terms of hours spent obtaining statements and preparing a prosecution case. Our strategy [under the Crime and Disorder Act] identifies priority areas and police resources are directed to those priority areas. Fraud is not one of them' [Fraud Review Team 2006 quoted in Button et al 2014].

A perception that fraud constituted an element of 'victimless' crime may have contributed to downplaying its importance and its impact on victims. Also fraud did not form part of the official crime survey until 2015. Neither was it seen as a priority by the police or politicians. In terms of performance management and performance measurement which dominated policing activity over three decades, fraud was never identified as a target or measurable offence either.

Current status of online crime within the police service

The low priority accorded fraud and computer crime may have explained the Metropolitan Police Commissioners' interesting response to a demand that the police should do more in response to 'on line fraud'. A demand that the banks should refund losses from fraudulent activity arising from on-line banking, led to the Commissioner to place the blame on the bank account holders, the victims. He argued that the system rewarded 'bad behaviour' among the public for being lax about internet security. He suggested that the banks should consider no longer refunding some on-line fraud victims who had, he argued, brought the problem on themselves [Peachey 2016:1].

The consumer group Which? was to argue that in reality the burden of protection should lie with the banks They had after all, encouraged on-line banking to cut costs. A Which? executive was to argue:

'When we investigated last year we found that too often that the banks were dragging their feet when dealing with fraud. The priority should be for banks to better protect their customers rather than trying to shift blame onto the victims of fraud' [Peachey 2016:2].

Other critics of the Commissioner were to ask if either the banks or the police could protect society from this type of crime and questioned if 'they had the competence to deal with the ever increasing sophistication of this kind of fraud.' [Peachey 2016:3].

The police response only reflected a view that white collar crime was a 'second level priority' and one that could make potentially great demands on police resources at a time when budgets were being cut and sustaining 'visible policing' was proving to be ever more problematic [Collinson 2016] This position has been difficult to sustain in face of the fast changing nature of offending. As argued by the Director of the National Crime Agency the criminal environment has undergone a sea -change in recent decades. This transformation will accelerate as technologies become more sophisticated and public access to them increases. As the Director General argued:

'The chances of being a victim of a burglary, a vehicle crime or a street robbery are all much lower than they have ever been before. All those were crimes that effectively happened on the street, so they could be dealt with by the visible police officer responding. There is now a much greater likelihood of you becoming a victim within your own home through your computer. The great developments in technology have enabled offenders to behave in different ways. Whether it is cybercrime, fraud, money laundering or the explosion of child sexual exploitation, there has been a fundamental change' [Sylvester and Thomson 2016].

The re- assessment of the changing profile of crime has been recognised by the Chief HMIC. He has suggested that 'bobbies on the beat' are increasingly 'old fashioned' in an internet age. Sir Tom Winsor has argued that:

'The probabilities of a police officer actually walking past a burglary in progress are pretty low. A great deal of crime is not now taking place on our streets. The perpetrator feels safer because he or she is sitting in front of a computer rather than breaking in somewhere' [Sylvester and Thomson 2016].

The view of CHMIC as to the new configuration of criminal activity has been reflected elsewhere. One commentator has noted how crime has 'moved on' away from 'volume offences' to cybercrime which is now seen as being both much safer to commit and also much more lucrative 'than its real world counterpart' [Naughton 2015]. As has been argued however the police response has raised concern, not least among police officers

who believe that cybercrime has been at alarming levels for some time and none of whom appear confident that the law enforcement system could deal with it. As the same commentator adds:

‘These views are corroborated by the experiences of the 5% of UK internet users who have been the victims of various kinds of cybercrime-identity theft, phishing scams, card fraud and malware attacks. They report that a variety of responses –almost none of them helpful-from the local police to whom they turn for help’ [Naughton 2015].

Explanations for this negative response included ‘bureaucratic inertia, lack of technical knowledge and a shortage of resources which means that cybercrime receives lower priority than other more urgent responsibilities. Or more simply the fact that officers cannot be bothered to do anything than go through the motions’ [Naughton 2015].

The spiralling problem of fraud and cybercrime and the response by local police forces to it has become all the more remarkable as the level and extent of recorded victimisation has increased. As the 2016 ONS figures on the level of online shopping scams, virus attacks, theft of bank details and other online offences demonstrate, the true scale of this type of victimisation is in fact much higher than that identified within the initial ONS estimate in 2015 and which put the annual figure at 3.8million offences or 40% of all crimes [Travis 2016].

In 2016 the ONS concluded that the total stood at 5.8million offences and consisted of 3.8million fraud offences, which included 2.5million incidents of bank and credit card fraud and 2million computer misuse offences which included 1.4million virus attacks. It was argued that the remaining 600,000 estimated offences related to unauthorised access [hacking] in to personal information, social media or other online accounts [Travis 2016].

Fraud and Cybercrime: Responding to Victimisation

Earlier perceptions surrounding ‘white collar crime’ often identified this type of criminal activity as ‘victimless crime’ [Loeb 2016]. However current trends suggest that this classification has long since ceased to have any ready application [Loeb 2016]. In the UK the official response to the growing crisis in fraud and cyber victimisation has proved to be less than successful. While government extolled the apparent success in reducing volume acquisitive crime insufficient attention was directed to the problem of fraud even though academic research had highlighted the extent of the problem [City of London Research Report 2015]. As recent ONS data has demonstrated, a decline in recorded crime has been matched by a disturbing rise in fraud and cybercrime. This development

also reflects a deeper reality. This is that cybercrime is both a much safer and a more lucrative activity than its real world counterpart. As has been argued in relation to cybercrime:

‘The rewards are much greater and the risk of being caught and convicted are vanishingly small. If you are a rational criminal why would you bother mugging people, breaking into houses, stealing cars and all the other crimes that ‘old style’ criminals commit and that ‘old style’ cops are good at catching them doing?’ [Naughton 2015].

The police response has however suggested an indifference to the problem of ‘online crime’ which did not conform to traditional patterns of crime and victimisation. This was to be noted in the 2015 report by HMIC which revealed the failure of police forces to adequately appreciate the changing patterns of victimisation. Commenting that modern technology was an integral part of people’s lives and that the police service must respond accordingly HMIC was to question police perceptions of online victimisation [HMIC 2015: Para 1.13]. HMIC was to discover that the police were frequently ‘dismissive’ of online crime victims and often failed to act in response to victim complaints. This appeared to reflect an assessment among police that online offences were ‘just kids on Facebook’ and that there was little the police could do in response. HMIC stressed that:

‘The essential point to remember is that the gravity of the offence and its impact on the victim is not lessened because it is carried out ‘online’ and that attitudes demonstrated by police officers to these offences showed a ‘worrying lack of understanding both of the threat and risk to the victim and as a consequence, a failure positively to support them’ [Barrett 2015].

HMIC drew attention to the police approach to online financial crimes. One victim of financial crime who reportedly lost £60,000 in a ‘boiler room’ shares fraud was to state that he had ‘no contact whatsoever from his local police force after reporting the crime’ [Barrett 2015]. This non –response on the part of the police may have been linked to a curious recording system significantly undermined the investigation of fraud and cyber-crime at local level by police forces.

No Further ‘Action Fraud’

In 2008 the National Fraud Authority was established to respond to cases of fraud and was tasked with working with Victim Support in providing support for victims of fraud. Although closed down in 2014 one element to the work of the NFA remained Action Fraud, to which victims of fraud could make contact to report their case. Information

about the offence would be thereafter forwarded by AF to the NF Intelligence Bureau run by the City of London Police.

Action Fraud also ended the ability of victims to report fraud by calling an emergency police number or by visiting a police station. Instead victims had to give details online or telephone a call centre initially run the private company Broadcasting Support Services [bss] Subsequently going into administration bss was replaced a second private sector American company Concentrix This had already established a questionable reputation while working for HMRC [Owen The Independent 20/10/15].

One feature of the work of Action Fraud has been the failure to provide any effective support to victims of fraud. In 2013 a complaint from Police and Crime Commissioners to government raised concerns about the way that Action Fraud did not give victims support , refused to update them on any progress with their case and also failed to pass on more than half the cases received by them to the police [Beckforthed 2013]. Where victims of fraud did report the offence to the police they automatically referred the case to Action Fraud or requested the victims to do so themselves. This was largely because the police did not have either the resources or the expertise to solve online crime [Beckforthed 2013].

The experience of victims of the support offered by Action Fraud has proved to be entirely unsatisfactory. Where victims report crime to the police they in turn refer the case to Action Fraud usually by way of an Action Fraud business card. Thereafter victims are unlikely to hear much more about their case unless the sum of money lost meets a criteria judged appropriate for subsequent investigation. Very few cases reach this criteria and in the absence of action on the part of either the police or Action Fraud many victims it is reported 'feel let down' as perhaps they might, if only because currently 'most online crime is now never reported, investigated or solved' [Beckforthed 2013].

While Action Fraud has a primary responsibility for recording online and other fraud it is clear that victim expectations of its role go beyond any recognition of this function. Yet the experience of victims of interaction with this organisation leads them to question how seriously their victimisation was taken by public authorities. Evidence of this has been recorded elsewhere:

'One victim of fraud rang the hotline after being swindled out of £2,000 by a bogus landlord. She stated later that: 'Action Fraud was not as helpful as I thought they would be. I was constantly ringing them up to find out what was happening and they would not tell me anything'.

In another case a victim swindled out of £3,000 for air flights to visit her dying father reported that: 'Action Fraud told her to go to the small claims court and when she tried to explain her situation a call centre operator hung up on her' [Quoted in Beckforthed 2013]. In the absence of any police intervention victims of fraud appear to be dependent on the void which currently characterises national fraud investigation undertaken, since the demise in 2014 of the NFA, by the combined if not coordinated efforts of the NCA, Home Office and City of London Police.

Identifying challenges to contemporary police service delivery

The fast changing nature of criminal activity suggests that significant re-engineering of the police service may be needed if it is to be able to respond to the growth of online crime effectively. Here the recent publication of an influential report by HMIC on Police Efficiency may provide a useful basis for approaching what could prove to be a painful but necessary internal reorganisation of police services.

In its 2015 Report [HMIC 2015] the Inspectorate identified a number of current limitations within police forces which curtail their ability to plan for future demand and redirect resources in response to this. In developing a new and important distinction between police 'capacity' and police 'capability' HMIC have adopted a novel and challenging approach to evaluating effectiveness within police forces.

HMIC were to note that the police service needed to improve its understanding of demand for its services, particularly future demand along with the capability of its workforce. While most forces had understood current demand for their service 'there was much further to go in their assessing demand from under-reported, hidden crimes or newer crime types such as cybercrime' [HMIC 2015:6]. The report was to comment critically on the fact that most forces had a weak understanding of future demand. They reacted to current demand but few had effective assessments of how demand was likely to change [HMIC 2015:7].

This negative evaluation of police engagement with change was to be linked by HMIC to the changing profile of crime. In a highly prescient summary of future challenges it was to comment that:

'Even if measured crime does continue to fall, the police service will face new and emerging crime types, increasingly sophisticated criminals, and increasing expectations from the public about the quality of service they receive' [HMIC 2015:8].

The Report went on to also note that:

'HMIC found that most forces were unable to demonstrate meaningful understanding of future demand –even the best forces had got little further than an overall threat assessment that established or specified likely trends in serious and organised crime, an indication of what were frequently referred to as 'emerging crime types' such as cybercrime and child sexual exploitation, as well as likely demographic changes' [HMIC 2015:21].

The need for planning for future and changing demand appears to have entirely eluded most police forces. They were, HMIC was to discover, primarily engaged in seeking to protect existing staff levels along with historically well- established functions. It found that forces appeared to be driven by the need to cut spending. Almost all forces were planning for the future by working out the maximum size of the workforce they could afford and creating an operating model to fit –rather than designing the force to meet likely future demand at a cost they could afford. This essentially static approach to planning meant continuing to police with a pool of available officers. It also meant being unprepared for future changes in the nature and size of demand while also failing to improve capability.

Current police commitment to capacity over capability

As a means of providing a universal yardstick of effective future resource management HMIC have place great emphasis on the need for forces to distinguish between capacity and capability in identifying police strengths and weaknesses. It discovered that police forces were able to identify police capacity [numbers, costs ranks of officers and police staff]. This strength was unfortunately found not to extend to police capability [workforce skills].

While all forces understand their capacity in knowing the numbers ranks and costs of officers even here forces' had not developed a way of defining the number of officers a force might need to police a specified level of demand to a 'specified standard of service' [HMIC 2015:33]. This lack of analysis may merely reflect the nature of incremental growth to which in the past police establishment was subject. Also there was never any real need for managers to match resource inputs to any defined outputs.

More worrying was the discovery that police forces almost universally were unable to provide an effective breakdown of their own workforce capability in understanding 'what their people can do and what skills they have and need to have' [Loveday 2015:2]. The

evident failure by police to develop any appropriate capability and force –wide capability profile was to be highlighted within the Inspectorate report. As was to be argued:

‘In contrast to their understanding of capacity HMIC found that forces have a weak understanding of capability. Few forces had audited what skills their workforce had beyond a small number of accredited roles such as senior investigative officers [SIOs], firearms officers or public order officers. They could not describe accurately what the current strengths or weaknesses were in their skills, either across the whole workforce or by rank or grade’ [HMIC 2015:33].

This interesting black hole in organisational self -evaluation could be explained in a number of ways. First, as HMIC was to comment, there was no sense that forces had developed a centre of excellence on change management as most change programmes were led by senior officers or external consultants [HMIC 2105:23]. Second, in response to the 2010 Comprehensive Spending Review most forces moved to reduce spending rather than seeking out efficiency savings through transforming how they operated. Most forces reduced their capacity without appreciating the effect of doing so on their capability.

Cutting costs was to be usually undertaken by eliminating support and other staff to protect police officer numbers who ‘provided better value for money’. [HMIC 2015:31]. This was to be compounded by the revelation that in the race to cut costs the training and development departments had been amongst the first areas that were reduced significantly ‘to save money’ [HMIC 2015:33].

It could not, therefore, be a matter of great surprise that most police forces showed a commitment to capacity over capability. Yet there may have been additional factors which were in retrospect highly relevant to this outcome. These were to be reflected in which staff were or were not confronted with reductions in staffing levels.

Limitations to police force re-engineering and organisational change

The police service has undertaken change management but this has been limited in both application and extent. Thus the 2002 Police Reform Act was to introduce PCSOs given limited powers to help extend visible policing within street patrol and local neighbourhood policing strategies. Professionally derided early on by the Police Federation as representing little more than ‘plastic policemen’ the police organisational culture was to prove particularly unamenable to what might be seen as a limited initiative designed to increase overall police capacity.

Yet the response of most police forces to the 2010 Spending Review proved to be almost uniform as the 20% cuts were to be focused directly at PCSO numbers within police forces. Thus within the MPS there was to be a fall of 49.09% in PCSO numbers and elsewhere reductions of over a third of PCSOs were to be undertaken [Unison 2013; Unison2016:3]. One immediate consequence of this was to be a significant impact on neighbourhood policing as PCSO numbers fell and with over 60% of staff reporting cuts in staff or resources [Unison 2016:5].

In response to additional planned cuts to police spending further reductions in PCSO numbers were to be actively contemplated by most forces. In the MPS this was to take the form of the complete removal of all PCSOs from the service [Loveday 2015:2]. A very similar response was to be recorded within Devon and Cornwall Constabulary where chief officers planned the entire removal of all non-sworn officers in response to budget cuts [Loveday 2015:2].

It was apparent that these decisions were made to protect capacity. Very little thought was given to capability. Within the MPS it was to be discovered that operational police were very largely dependent on intelligence coming up from PCSOs and which was provided by these officers on a 'daily basis'. Plans to eliminate PCSOs in the capital would therefore have seriously undermined the intelligence platform of the entire MPS [Loveday and Smith 2015]. The reduction in support staff and cuts either implemented or contemplated at this time raised questions about the motivation of senior managers prepared to contemplate these outcomes.

Local neighbourhood policing began to break down as PCSO numbers dwindled and sworn officers were called back to fill back office jobs previously undertaken by civilian staff [Unison 2013]. One chief officer was to refer to the increasing 'officerisation' of police forces as sworn officers moved back from front line duties and where workforce modernisation had 'gone into reverse' [Loveday 2015:2]. As noted in their attempt to protect capacity chief officers appeared to have undermined force capability. This was precisely the opposite outcome which might have been expected within HMIC.

Police organisational culture as a barrier to reform

It has also become apparent that implementing change programmes within the police service may be confronted by a strong organisational culture. Organisational cultures will impinge on any re-engineering strategy and they also often exercise a highly significant influence on what can be achieved.

Recent examples of cultural resistance to internal change are of such significance that they raise questions about how the police organisation begins to respond to the changing profile of crime. Recently the introduction of direct entry to the police service at high and intermediate level ranks has been made to improve calibre and widen officer recruitment [Smith 2015]. This programme serves as a useful indicator of the problems that may confront those planning change management in the police service.

This initiative provided opportunities for senior managers outside of the service to apply for direct entry at senior rank. The response proved to be overwhelming with some 800 applications being initially received [College of Policing, 2015]. Yet as Smith has demonstrated the number of applicants was to be reduced ultimately to just eight actually embarking on the initial training programme [Smith 2016 forthcoming]. This proved to be a very high attrition rate. It may have reflected the standards set at successive interview boards for applicants. These appeared to be interviewed for potential chief officer roles rather than for superintendent rank which only increased the attrition rate [Beckley quoted in Smith 2015].

Interaction with serving senior officers may also have raised doubts as to their future role within the police service [Smith 2016 forthcoming]. This was despite the fact that within the initial selection, evidence of bias towards applicants who both demonstrated greater knowledge of the police service (and of its culture) and had contact with police personnel, was to be clearly identified [Stubbs G 2016]. It suggested a process of self-selection was undertaken within the initial sifting process, one that appears to apply, moreover, across the entire police selection process [Stubbs 2016]. As currently constituted therefore future selection of police personnel may not be best served by established mechanisms. These too will need to be subject to significant re-engineering.

The Shape of Things to Come

Some indication of the nature and extent of change which the police service of the future will need to contemplate has arisen from recent experience within the National Crime Agency [NCA]. Established to deal with national, serious and organised crime the NCA was to originally recruit personnel from existing operational detective officers within the police service.

Yet as the NCA role expanded it became evident that these officers had proved to be increasingly redundant as the Agency was confronted by ever more complex investigations. In response to the Chair's reference to the high turnover of staff within the NCA, its Director General was, in oral evidence to the Home Affairs Committee, to state that:

‘The reason that we have needed people to leave –who are mostly exceptionally good people-is that we had too many senior people who were probably of my generation in law enforcement –and law enforcement and crime have changed. We need more crime fighters who are digitally hugely competent, more people who can write code and more people who are expert in how banks operate –so we need different skills’ [HAC Oral Evidence 2015 Q39p9].

While releasing numerous senior police officers the NCA had however been engaged in directly recruiting ‘hundreds of people who had joined as trainee investigators and trainee intelligence officers’ in order to shift the workforce ‘to be the contemporary workforce that was needed’ [HAC 2015 Q40p10].

For the NCA, recruiting ‘highly qualified code writers and engineers’ is not seen as problematic. However retaining them in face of competition from the private sector was proving increasingly difficult. As a result it was important to establish for direct entrants ‘careers based on the intellectual and professional challenge of tackling the most difficult cyber criminals and people who would exploit children while also ‘keeping the public safe’ [HAC Oral Evidence 2015 Q66p16].

The need for police forces to respond to the avalanche of fraud offences and cybercrime has been evidenced by the current President of the Superintendents Association [PSAEW]. He has argued that the primary feature for change to enable the police service to begin to respond to the new crime profile centres on ‘flexibility’ in terms of recruitment and also of those recruited [Thomas 2016:1]. Such is the nature of the fraud and cyber problem that the police will need, he argues, to consider the skills mix of its people to ensure it is able to deal effectively with the developing threat. He notes:

‘The traditional skills that have served policing well through successive generations are not the only ones that will be required in the future’ and future recruitment might target people in their late teens or early 20’s as a means of tackling fraud investigation[Thomas 2016].

This suggested that police forces may well need to recruit cybercrime and financial experts from outside policing and whose skills can be immediately utilised rather than ‘relying on the traditional model of training someone to be a police officer first of all and then going on to train them to be an expert in cyber -crime, money laundering or fraud’. Much more emphasis might be placed on private sector capabilities, where these could be bought in by the police service [Thomas 2016:2].

As a move to direct entry this might be challenged within the police organisational culture. Yet it will be seen as a significant advance on the recruitment of local 'volunteers' a proposal endorsed by the then Home Secretary, Theresa May. These 'volunteers' it is envisaged would be able to exercise police powers without any measurable degree of accountability. This appeared a simple solution to a complex problem, but in reality it would give to the volunteer significant 'powers over their neighbours and others in the community' [Weinfass 2016].

If implemented this could create potentially highly dangerous hostages to fortune. Yet as a response to a belated recognition of the threat of fraud cybercrime it was entirely symptomatic of the limited horizons that currently characterise the official response to the problem. While a Home Office Joint Fraud Taskforce and a Police Reform and Transformation Board [PRTB] have been created, it is difficult to ascertain how much impact either can be expected to make on what is a fast moving and increasingly global crime threat [Button and Cross 2016 forthcoming]. Here, establishing working parties or official committees although a traditional response to newly identified problems, might not provide the degree of reassurance for which members of the public [and therefore potential victims of crime] might expect to see.

Conclusion

This paper provides an assessment of the impact of the new profile of crime and the police response to it. Many critical issues remain to be addressed. These would include whether the police service can to begin to effectively deal with the problem of fraud and cybercrime when they are also confronted with multiple pressures ranging from the threat of terrorist attack through to child sexual exploitation and the growing problem of the mentally challenged in the community [Muir 2016]. All these bear down heavily on both police resources and personnel.

Nor can recent initiatives undertaken by a number of police forces in response to the growing crisis of fraud and cybercrime be overlooked. Despite critical publicity directed at it, Commissioner the MPS has made a major step forward with Operation Falcon. Established in 2015 the Metropolitan Police Cyber Crime Unit [MPCCU] aims to tackle the most serious incidents of cybercrime. It now works in close partnership with the NCA and seeks to proactively target cybercrime criminals and fraudsters by 'focusing on stemming the harm caused by the most prolific Organised Crime Groups' [Operation Falcon website 2016].

Yet the work of MPCCU will only extend to the most serious cases. This must mean the majority of fraud and cybercrime offences will not be investigated. Here a further

question arises. Given the nature and extent of the problem can the police service be expected to realistically deal with this changing crime profile. This could extend to a recent initiative taken by the City of London police where in future the police will hire private law firms to target cybercriminals and fraudsters in order to deal more effectively with fraud. This is estimated to cost £193 billion a year and is now claimed to be 'overwhelming the police and criminal justice system' [Dodd 2016].

Academic commentators have argued in response for the creation of a National Fraud Authority to which these offences could be channelled [Button et al 2015]. This solution could marginalise the police service from what is now a major pattern of criminal activity. This could put the police in a secondary role when also confronted by high public expectation along with increasing rates of victimisation. Arguably the police service cannot opt out of responding to what is now serious threat to public wellbeing.

How the police service responds to these challenges remains a matter of speculation. Yet the same problem has been replicated within the private sector. Ironically, one major auditing company, PwC, has recently made the decision in response to increasing cybersecurity concerns, to employ more than one thousand technical specialists including 200 hundred graduates to address the problem, [Independent 2016]. Yet for the police service there must be a suspicion that the organisational culture could stall engagement with a highly critical threat. The need for leadership to implement a strategy to deal with the problem of the new crime profile in England and Wales is well established. It could also be seen as the biggest challenge yet to confront the police service of England and Wales.

END

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