

Paying Twice

Harriet Sergeant

A huge gap exists between the policing we want and the policing we get. I saw this for myself last summer. Fifty neighbours had gathered in my sitting room to hear the pitch of a firm providing security patrols for local communities. It is not easy to round up neighbours in London. It is even more difficult to persuade them to pay £1,000 a year for a service they already pay for in taxes. In the space of an hour and a half my neighbours, many of whom had never met before, agreed to do just that. The issue that galvanised us was crime and the lack of police interest.

Was my own experience of crime typical, I wondered? A few years ago, my parents – who live less than twenty minutes away – were mugged outside their own front door by three men. My mother had her hands slashed with a knife and my father was punched in the face and knocked unconscious.

Meanwhile, my home in Westminster was broken into by a thief who stole my handbag and my cleaner was mugged at the front gate. More recently, there have been several attempts to break into my home, numerous thefts, too many incidents of car vandalism to recall, and a nasty moment with a man who followed me from my home and threatened me.

The Home Office is adamant where the problem lies. It is not crime but the public's fear of crime that is the issue. The Home Office White Paper published in March last year, 'Respect and Responsibility: taking a stand against anti-social behaviour', correctly points out that anti-social behaviour and disorder makes people 'even more afraid of crime' and offers a range of measures to tackle this. It also repeats an assertion from other Home Office publications that crime is 'still low', that it is 'historically low' and that therefore the 'real' problem is not crime itself but the public's irrational fear of crime. 'Since 1997 overall crime has dropped by over a quarter and some crimes, such a burglary and vehicle theft, by a third or more. Despite this many people perceive that levels of crime are high.'

That is because levels of crime are high compared to the past. In 1972 there were 8,900 robberies in the whole of England and Wales. In 2001/2 there were 6,500 in the London Borough of Lambeth alone.

What to do with a public that fails to recognize the achievements of the police

Special issue:

Residents of crime-ridden areas now have to pay private security firms to make up for the deficiencies of the police



Harriet Sergeant

and the Home Office? It is always safe to blame newspapers. According to the Home Office's latest volume on police recorded crime and the findings of the British Crime Survey, *Crime in England and Wales 2002/2003*, worry about crime 'is associated with' newspaper readership. Twice the number of tabloid readers are very worried about being mugged than readers of a national broadsheet. But this is not quite as irrational as the Home Office makes out. Between 1999 and 2003 the tabloid readers of Lambeth suffered 18,563 robberies. The *Guardian*-reading, Home Office official in Richmond, however, put up with just 1,040 robberies.

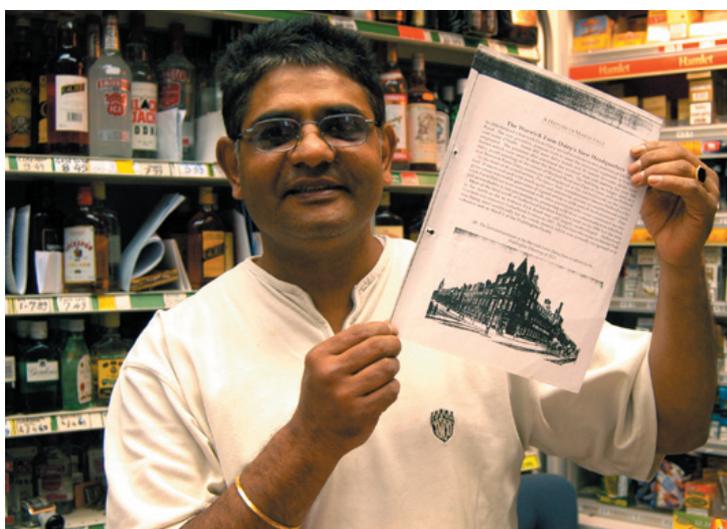
Are my neighbours irrational about crime? Is it just a question of changing our newspaper? To find out I asked twenty households who had joined the scheme about their experience of crime. At least that was my intention. By household sixteen I decided this had to be an unbalanced survey. The households who had signed up had obviously done so because they had suffered more crime than most. So four of the households are not in the scheme. Nor can I claim they were scientifically selected. They happen to be the first four neighbours who rang up or bumped into me on the street.

Here are the results and what we did about it. One thing became clear. It is the Home Office that should be changing its newspaper. Even the tabloids fail to prepare you for the amount of crime experienced in one block of a supposedly, quiet, residential area of London.

Our neighbourhood consists of leafy streets of mostly white stucco houses surrounded on four sides by council

estates. We used to be a red light district owned by the Church Commissioners. In the last ten years house prices have tripled. New arrivals are wealthy and can afford the annual £1,000 our security costs. Many long-term residents find it a burden.

Ten years ago burglaries were, as my next-door neighbour explained, 'our greatest fear'. He had £15,000 of jewellery and antiques taken in the middle of the day. The flat below on the ground floor was robbed half-a-dozen times. Then people installed alarms, better locks and security gates. The result has been a reduction in burglaries. In the last three years, only three of my neighbours were burgled – all walk-in thefts.



Photograph of the nineteenth century dairy that used to be where the shop now is

The fall in numbers has not convinced anyone that the police are doing a better job or that criminals have ceased to exist. The thieves are still out there. We know they will take advantage of a window left open on a hot day, a credulous nanny or a front door not double-locked whose latch they can flick open by angling a stick through the letterbox. I lost a handbag that way. Flats owned by housing co-operatives who have failed to install security are still broken into time and time again. We put falling numbers down to our own vigilance, inconvenience and expense.

Unfortunately no one can take similar precautions out on the street. There we must rely on the police. And it is there that crime has taken off. In the last three years the inhabitants of the twenty households in my survey have suffered 17 muggings and assaults – 7 on women and 10 on children under sixteen. In the same period three houses have been broken into and two cars stolen. Petty theft and criminal damage to cars has become so commonplace that no one counts up any more, let alone reports it to the police.

Civitas Review

Daniel Deme, Editor

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Nothing is safe in our front gardens. My two favourite stone pots went. A neighbour had her weeping cherry tree dug up and removed. Even the wood shredder belonging to a tree surgeon got stolen while he was working in my garden. He stared at the large, empty spot it had occupied on the roadside. 'I never imagined anyone would take that,' he said.

One particular crime proved the catalyst for our meeting. Imogen (not her real name – the case is *sub judice*), an attractive young mother, was helping her eighteen-month-old son out of his car seat. Suddenly she was yanked backwards. One man held her in an arm lock, another punched her throat repeatedly while a third pulled off her watches and wedding ring. 'It was terrifying. I could not breathe and passed out.' It happened so quickly that no one saw anything. Three other women in the neighbourhood (not included in my survey) were attacked in a similar, brutal fashion.

Imogen's reaction was to canvass the sixty households in the block and set up our security service. She admits it was her sense of 'total insecurity' that pushed her. 'I have never seen a policeman around here.'

Another woman, who lives five doors down from me and has been attacked twice, remarked on the new security guard patrolling our area: 'Its good to see them walk past but it's a terrible comment on the police. They do not appear to be concerned about anything that is not life threatening.'

A man accosted her as she stood outside her basement, 'It was a very unpleasant experience.' She told the man to go away or she would call her husband. 'Why don't you then,' he jeered. She realized he had been watching the house and knew her husband was away and she was alone.

She managed to get up the steps, into the house and turned to slam the security door. He rushed after her, reaching through the bars. By this time she was so angry, she picked up a wine bottle and came towards him. He paused then shrugged and left, 'He knew I had lost my temper and would have done anything.'

Another evening she was again alone in the house when she heard a noise. She hurried into a front room and discovered sixteen panes of glass with holes like bullet holes. Youngsters had picked up

gravel in her garden and, 'we don't know what they used,' hurled it with such force, 'that if I had been standing there I would have been injured terribly.'

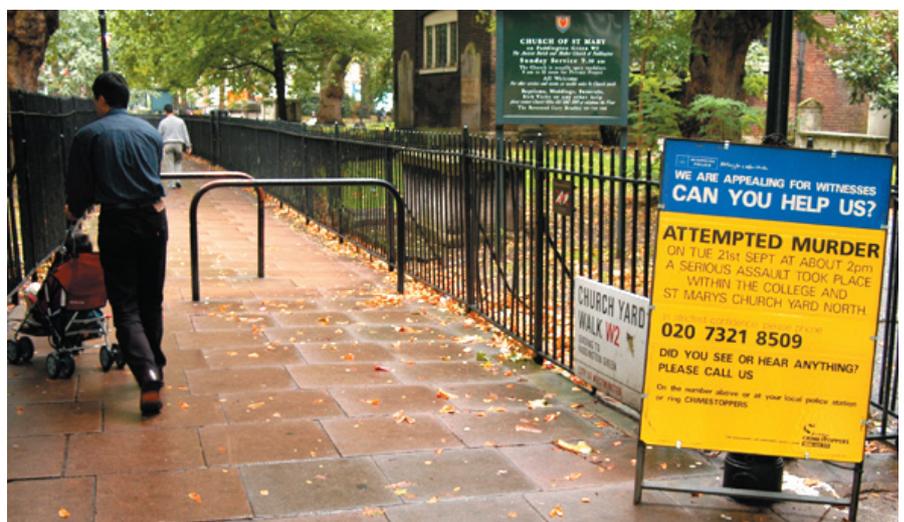
'Nasty little beggars,' remarked the police. My neighbour explained, 'They were sympathetic but I had not been murdered. So that was that.'

Apart from women, the other category of victim is young boys between 11 and 16. The households in my survey reported 11 attacks on young boys by gangs of slightly older boys from the nearby estates.

A thirteen-year-old was skate-boarding by the church at the end of our road when a gang surrounded him and snatched the skateboard. His mother found him slouched on the pavement, his head in his hands. 'I was just furious,' she remarked. She stormed into the estate, a few streets away, accosted a group of older boys and demanded the return of her son's skateboard. Somewhat astonished, they told her to return in half an hour. When she did, they handed over the skateboard, now broken in half. 'They were sort of apologetic.'

Meanwhile her son, concerned at the disappearance of his mother, had flagged down a police car. The police caught up with the mother and asked if she and her son wanted to press charges. Together they drove around and picked up one of the ringleaders. The boy made a statement but the solicitor of the ringleader refused to let his client take part in an ID parade. Nothing further happened.

My neighbour, who is not part of the security scheme, ('It is just too expensive,') told me, 'My son has changed his behaviour. He has stopped playing outside. He has stopped skateboarding. Instead he has taken up martial arts to boost his confidence.'



Two minutes from Paddington Green Police Station at two pm

Two thirteen-year-old boys were returning from the cinema through a small park when a gang from the estate chased them. One got away and found a police car. Breathlessly he begged for help. The police showed little interest, 'That's just kids stuff,' they said.

Meanwhile the other boy was on the ground surrounded by the gang who were taunting him. An older much tougher boy whom he knew by sight but to whom he had never spoken was passing by. He glanced at the prostrate youth. 'He's all right,' he said to the gang, 'leave him alone.' Afterwards he explained to the boy that one of the gang had a knife.



Some victims are followed right from the tube station

A fifteen-year-old girl and her thirteen-year-old brother were threatened on the way to the library. A gang surrounded them and asked for the time. 'They were intimidating and we could see what they were about,' remarked the girl. As they were a 'weedy lot' she punched the leader in the face and the rest ran away.

This was a rare triumph. On another occasion her brother got punched in the face. 'He did not want to talk about it,' said his mother. Her children also spoke of the drug dealing that went on outside our local tube station and the muggers who followed women home from there. 'My children notice and are the victims because they are the ones out on the street. It makes me so angry. They are the most vulnerable and it is all happening to them. I just want to pack up and take them away somewhere safe.'

An American neighbour had a similar reaction after her fifteen-year-old son was attacked by three boys in hoods threatened with a knife then punched in the face. 'It was very humiliating, very difficult. He came home and fell apart.' She explained, 'Our kids are real targets. They are white and well spoken.'

She found the police, 'sympathetic' but it was 'only lip-service'. They go away and nothing happens. She talked

to other mothers at school whose sons had similar experiences. 'How come people are so complacent about the stuff happening to our kids on the street? Getting beaten up is not a rite of passage that I find acceptable. A first kiss should be a rite of passage.' She enjoyed London but found it hard to live 'with this insecurity. Inside of me I rage.'

How do the experiences of my neighbours fit the picture of falling crime figures presented by the Home Office? The answer is they do not. They are an example of the fact that, as with immigration and the NHS, good, independent data is hard to come by. Home Office statisticians and the Office for National Statistics lack full autonomy. The Government is anxious to claim that it has crime under control. Many if not all statistical reports are still being submitted to ministers for approval of their content and the timing of their release. Then the actual numbers of crimes that take place is anybody's guess. In 2001, depending on whether you prefer police figures (unreliable because of police under-recording), the British Crime Survey or various Home Office research studies, the figure ranged from 13 million to 60 million crimes. This huge disparity explains how the government can tell us crime is falling while it continues to blight my neighbourhood

The government is keen for people to rely on the British Crime Survey, described in the 2001/2002 report by David Blunkett as the 'most accurate measure ever'. It questioned 40,000 people on their experience of crime over that year and shows that crime is coming down. It excludes, however, murder, sexual offences, crimes against commercial premises (shop lifting for example) and, most significantly for my neighbourhood, crimes against people under the age of 16. In other words, according the 'most accurate measure ever', 10 out of the 17 crimes in my neighbourhood did not happen.

'How can we decide a strategy when all the government's energies are directed at creating illusions?'

How can we have a proper debate about crime if no one knows which crimes are being committed and in what numbers? How can we decide a strategy when all the government's energies are directed at creating an illusion?

Car crime is as regular in our street as dog fouling. A footballer and his girl friend recently moved in. Within two weeks their cars had been attacked four times. All the wheels were removed from his car, 'That cost £8,000.' Then thieves stole her car.

Within the hour police had traced it through her car's tracking system. In the same spot they also recovered eight other stolen cars from the same manufacturer. Interestingly none of the cars were registered on the manufacturer's computer as owning a tracker. Neither was her car – 'I had installed my tracker later.' Someone at the car manufacturer had sold the list of which cars lacked a tracker to a gang who were stealing them to order for clients abroad.

The discovery of her car did not mean my neighbour got it back. The police left the car in the garage over the weekend in order to catch the gang. By the time she did get it, 'it was a totally transformed car.' The police then held onto it for a further two months. 'It took the garage six months to get it back to what it was,' she went on, 'I am livid with the police.'

The case appears to be floundering because of its international ramifications. 'I ring all the time but no progress.' A few days previously someone had dragged a key along the side of her car, 'I don't bother to let the police know. They are totally uninterested in minor car crime.'

It is not just the wealthy with flash cars that attract attention. The one Disabled Parking spot in our road is relentlessly picked upon. It is used by an elderly lady whose husband suffers from Alzheimer's. Recently she bought a new car. She had not had it a week before the hubcaps were removed and a window broken. She said sadly, 'It's only a boring little Ford.' She is keen on the scheme but can ill afford the cost. Her rich neighbour, a single man, has refused to join, preferring to donate the money to charity. 'But then he's a man,' she commented, 'he's not likely to get attacked.' She joined because she felt 'it is a community thing and we are a community.'

We are also a community under siege. My survey revealed we attract serious criminals from outside the area who remain unknown. However, those who commit the petty crimes are no mystery to us. We know it is groups of boys from the nearby estates who go around in hoods. We know them. They know us. The police know them. Our security guard knows them. They pass by regularly. Residents complained they found their presence 'intimidating'. My cleaning lady saw one boy break into a car. He glares at her when he passes in the street and once even threatened her if she spoke out.

She is not alone. Neighbour after neighbour complained, 'It's the blatancy of it that gets me. They break into cars in broad daylight as you look at them. They simply don't care.' Or as another remarked, 'They try every car door in full view as if they had nothing to fear.' Another recalled

watching two lads case a car for half an hour, 'We knew what they were going to do. They were blatant. We even got a photo of them.' They called the police who proved unenthusiastic. 'Apparently the paper work takes so much time, it prevents the police doing something more important!'

Another neighbour said, 'How much crime are we ready to accept? You have to feel safe walking down your own street. To many people that is the breaking point.'

It is a breaking point that my neighbourhood has reached. The problem is simple: crime and the lack of police. 'I can't remember,' said one woman, summing up the comments of nearly everyone I interviewed, 'when I last saw a policeman.'

Forty years ago things were different. A retired doctor recalled she first moved to our neighbourhood in the 1960s. The bobby on his beat passed four times in twenty-four hours. At night when she could not sleep, she heard him in the early hours rattling the door handles of the shops opposite, checking they were locked. He even lived in the neighbourhood.



A row of beautiful mansions in a state of decay

The lack of police on the street has meant that security is the capital's new growth industry. As one man who runs a security firm in north London remarked, 'We are growing fast and taking on a street every other month. I personally find it very offensive that people do not feel secure in their own homes. We aim to be proactive. We stop crime happening in the first place.'

Hiring a security guard is not straightforward. Our first company went bust and our scheme would not still be running but for Imogen's perseverance and determination, not to mention the extra money she puts in to subsidise

those neighbours who benefit from the scheme but have not yet joined.

Yauheni, the young man who patrols our streets, enjoys no more powers than the ordinary person. He can make a citizen's arrest and hold the criminal until the arrival of the police – obviously a lot easier if you are six foot six, fit and good at self-defence. Though ours is from Belarus, most of the guards have been in the Israeli army or police force and are here for a short time to save money. They are vetted and provided with four different types of training over a two-day course. Walking the street alone, in bad weather, night after night, it is difficult to retain and motivate them.

So what exactly can a young man with two days training on about £6 an hour achieve? A great deal, it turns out.

The Nine Principles of Good Policing, composed by the first Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police, were based on the General Instructions published by Sir Robert Peel in 1829 and distributed to every member of the Metropolitan Police (see p. 12.).

The first principle described the prevention of crime as the most important duty of the police. It is not responding to crime or catching the criminal but stopping the crime happening in the first place, an aim the present Metropolitan Police appear to have forgotten. This is what Yauheni in his Day-Glo jacket achieves.

His incident report for each month shows he is not popular. When he encounters a group of boys loitering around, he approaches them and says good evening. 'Fuck off,' they shouted at the beginning, 'Why are you looking at us?' But they go away.



Asaf Cohen, the head of our security company, points out that 95% of criminals study the area first. Yauheni's report for February details a number of incidents where he has

approached parked cars with two or more men inside. When they see him taking down their registration number, they drive off. 'If we see you around again, we'll kill you,' threatened one in the first month. The criminals are still coming but his presence deters them from committing a crime. Police when they patrol walk in pairs, deep in conversation. Yauheni walks on his own. He has nothing to do but notice what is going on around him.

When our patrol started in July 2003, the guard reported an incident every few nights. In the last three months we have barely had one. There is still some car vandalism and a visitor was mugged for his mobile – but these incidents occurred when Yauheni was not on duty.

Imogen sends out monthly reports which mean that we all hear about every incident of crime or vandalism in the neighbourhood. Crucially, we know when to be on the alert and what to watch out for.

If a security guard can stop crime, what would a policeman on the beat achieve? And why, despite paying taxes, do we not have one? A Borough Commander of the Met and former Divisional Commander of my area tells me; 'The reality is that the lone police officer walking down the street is not the best use of the individual to fight crime. My main problem is fear of crime rather than crime itself.'

But 17 assaults on members of 20 households hardly fits his description or our area as 'not a crime hotspot'. No wonder there is what Sir Ian Blair, Deputy Commissioner of the Met, recently described as 'a success gap' – that is, a gap between 'what we say we are delivering and what the public think we are delivering.'

The Borough Commander reeled off the figures for Westminster. Crime is down 9% from the year before – 'That means 6,889 people have not become victims.' Street crime is down 53.7%. 'We are just not getting across a true picture of what is happening in society,' he complained. How many muggings did I think took place in Westminster every day – two hundred thousand live in the borough, one million travel in every day? 'Just seven!' he said, triumphantly.

Yet the public's fear of crime is not reducing in line with any actual decrease. The chief reason – apart from our own experiences – is lack of visible policing. So, why not get them back on the beat?

Putting an officer on the streets, the Commander insisted, 'is not the best use of public money.' Even if he did enjoy infinite resources, he would not be interested in deploying

‘hundreds of police standing on every street corner.’ He went on, ‘The root cause of the problem is that fear of crime is totally out of kilter with crime itself.’

The Superintendent in charge of our local police station agreed. Our area is ‘a low crime area.’ And his policing, ‘was what the majority of the public wants.’ The last three years, the period I had covered in my survey, had seen ‘reduction on reduction.’

He too did not complain about resources. He had 317 officers to police our ward and ‘loads’ of special units to call in at any time. Why, in that case, as one neighbour remarked, did we see more police helicopters hovering over our gardens than policemen walk the street?

The Superintendent like the Borough Commander was adamant that a cop on every street corner was not the answer because ‘in the long term it does not stop crime.’ Or as the Borough Commander put it, ‘We are so focused on reducing crime that we don’t have the officers to patrol.’

Both men are obviously able and dedicated. They fail, however, to grasp a disturbing fact. To my neighbours the police are part of the problem – not the solution. The police judge themselves by the number of arrests made. We judge the police by the absence of crime. It is a fundamental difference

Police are either not interested or unable to deal with low-level crime. Most of all they do not take it seriously. As one constable remarked to a neighbour after his car radio was stolen, ‘In a couple of years those young boys will discover girls and stop it.’

A retired man, a member of the Conservative party and a natural supporter of law and order, said firmly, ‘the police don’t regard petty crime as crime.’ He reported his car stolen to the police. ‘Bad luck,’ was their only response. One evening he saw three youths smash the window of a local shop and rip out the till. He called the police who turned up immediately and caught the boys. My neigh-



The Edgware Road Estate

bour offered to be a witness, ‘not a light undertaking’, as he remarked, but heard no more. The next time he saw five louts smash a telephone box, he just kept walking. He went on, ‘The police’s job is to identify crime, encourage people to report it and then keep them informed.’ Their failure to do this is adding up to, ‘a massive lack of public confidence.’

He was not alone. Most of my neighbours have become so disillusioned with the police that they have stopped reporting crime. My next-

door neighbour had all her jewellery stolen by a walk-in burglar. A witness saw the whole thing and identified the thief. The police actually found the man but proceeded no further because of a ‘technicality.’ An American neighbour had her children’s bicycles stolen in front of a witness. My neighbour called the police who took the witness’s statement. ‘Do you think they police did anything? No one gave me a crime number. No one telephoned me about it. Where petty thieving is concerned, they do nothing. What is wrong with this institution?’

The Christmas Eve before last six cars in a row had their tyres slashed outside my front door. As we gathered together on the pavement, not one of us thought to call the police.

‘To my neighbours the police are part of the problem - not the solution.’

The one time I rang the police was at 2 a.m. when the next-door alarm went off. The house belongs to an elderly couple whose alarm is not linked to the police station. Despite this, the operator refused to send out a car. Meanwhile my then husband and our neighbour on the other side had gone to investigate. My husband was in his underpants and a pair of gumboots. My neighbour, a retired ballet dancer, wore a magnificent dressing gown, and carried a baseball bat. ‘You don’t need to bother,’ I told the operator, ‘We’ll sort them out ourselves.’ For the first time her voice sharpened with concern, ‘You can’t do that,’ she said, ‘I will send a car straightaway.’

At least I got a response. One woman whose daughter's school bag was stolen from the back of their car with all her school work, house keys and wallet went to report the theft at the local police station in St John's Wood. She was astonished to find it closed at 3 p.m. 'The hours on the door said 9-5 but the station was dark.' She was informed that the person at the station was sick, which is why the police station was closed. 'I finally understand now why we all had to hire private security – not only are there no policemen on the streets but there are none now in the station either. I am outraged at the lack of local policing.'

The police are judged by the number of arrests they make. This is of secondary concern to us. We hired a security guard because we want crime stopped before it happens. Principle Nine of the Nine Principles of policing urges police to recognise 'always' that the test of police efficiency 'is the absence of crime and disorder' and not 'the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.'

We want petty crime taken seriously. We are made to feel this is a frivolous request distracting police from bigger and more important business. I was told that if the police attend to petty crime, serious crime would explode. In fact our wants are far from irrelevant. They are the basis of the crime initiatives taken with such startling success in the USA.

Bill Bratton, the legendary police chief who has turned around five police institutions including the New York Police Department, took as his starting point the petty crime that is currently ignored by our police. In the 1970s American police, like those in this country, had been taken off the beat and put into patrol cars. They were measured on response time and clear-up rates. This proved 'a slippery slope' which, taken with certain social factors, ended in the 'collapse' of policing and loss of control of the streets. By the 1980s, 'We had lost the intimacy of the officer on his patch. Victimless crimes destroyed neighbourhoods and our sense of comfort. People were frightened by what they were exposed to every day.'¹

Bill Bratton shares the belief of the 19th century Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police that, 'The first priority of the public is not for the police to catch the mugger but to prevent the crime in the first place.' George Kelling, author of *Broken Windows* and the academic who worked with Bill Bratton, stated that it is vital that 'the police line up their priorities with their citizens.'²

It also makes for better policing. The police I spoke to saw petty crime and serious crime as two separate issues. Petty crime is a distraction from dealing with real criminals. The American experience has proved different. When Bill

Bratton took over the New York transit police in 1990, the police started arresting everyone who had not paid their fare. The result proved startling. One out of every seven fare dodgers was wanted for a serious crime. One out of every 21 carried a weapon. George Kelling points out it is the same with car crime, 'You think bad guys become good guys when they get behind the wheel?' Major criminals and, incidentally, terrorists, commit petty crime 'and that's how you catch them. Check out who is parked illegally on that disabled parking space!'

It is not just that our policing and crime levels are, according to Bill Bratton, 'ten years behind US trends.' Quality of service is also an issue. In crimes against individuals, initially the police scored highly. Mothers described the kindness and sensitivity of policemen to their sons who had been mugged. Police reacted quickly, turning up in a car and driving them around to spot the perpetrator. Imogen had nothing but praise for the police that arrived after her attack. It was only afterwards that the attention and effort seemed to tail off.



'There is no money left on these premises overnight'

One woman described her experience in the police station after her son had his skateboard stolen. They arrived at 4.30pm and did not leave until after 9pm. 'I have never seen such a long-winded and inefficient process. Everything had to be taken down by hand. My son was offered nothing to eat. He was cold and hungry.' Later she was told the case did not proceed to court because

of a ‘technicality’. She went on, ‘If the officer who interviewed us had anything to do with it, I am not surprised.’

When her son was attacked again, she refused to let him go to the police station and make a statement. ‘You want anything, you come to us,’ she told them. She never heard from them again.

Imogen, who was strangled until she fell unconscious in front of her small son, said, ‘The police took it seriously because of the level of brutality and because there was a child involved.’ She was kept updated by a detective but when she moved to the murder squad Imogen heard no more. A policeman spent three hours taking her statement. The computer kept crashing. He told Imogen he would finish it off then drop it around. ‘Seven months later he rang and asked me to come in and sign it. I was really shocked. I thought he had done it long before.’ Another detective made an appointment then never turned up or rang to apologise. ‘Frankly it has been a very frustrating process and a total shambles.’



‘Born free, taxed to death.’

Police, like other state providers such as the NHS, set targets that measure quantity. Measuring quality is more of a challenge.

Kent police are working together with psychologists from Surrey University after the Police Project Team discovered that over a third of reports following an incident were sub-standard. The project manager, Sergeant Mark Pearson, said that these reports were, ‘no use to us,’ he said, ‘a waste of the police officer’s time and a waste of time putting on the computer.’

The project devised a five-point system for each police officer to follow. At the same time local commanders read each report and, according to the five-point system, awarded it ‘enhancement’ points or ‘penalty’ points. In a year the number of sub-standard reports fell from 37% to 0.8%.

‘The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.’

Conviction rates rose and so did customer satisfaction because police spent more time talking to the victim and witnesses in order to get the necessary information. ‘Just a simple five-point system achieved this!’ said Sergeant Pearson.

The local commanders discussed how best to reward this success. Did the best teams want a bonus? They turned this down, afraid it might be divisive. What about a contribution to the tea fund? This also was refused.

Those who had always done a good job were delighted to receive recognition. The team who had started bottom but finished top took pride in learning how ‘to put craft back into policing’. All they wanted, they insisted, was to be ‘verbally recognised’ by management. ‘People,’ said Sergeant Pearson in surprise, ‘are just happy to be praised.’

My neighbours and my local police force are unlikely to benefit. The Kent project is restricted to Kent police force and financed for just one year.

The overall emotion amongst my neighbours is a sense of powerlessness. We have no power to control what affects our everyday lives. We have no power to set local priorities. Various forums for consultation with the police exist but they are self-selecting and do not represent a governance mechanism.

In less than two years and without an increase in his budget, Bill Bratton turned New York into the safest largest city in the USA. Between 1994 and 1996 felony crime fell by 39%; murders, 50%; and theft, 35%. Polls reported that public confidence in the NYPD soared from 37% to 73%. Even the police were happier. Internal surveys revealed job satisfaction increased dramatically.³ So why can it not be done here?

It is impossible to bring about change until the reality that disfigures ordinary lives stares those responsible for polic-

ing and the judiciary in the face. Before tackling Boston Police District 4, Bratton had the police meet the public in schoolrooms and civic centres. The police began the meeting, like the Met's Borough Commander, with an impressive array of statistics. They were doing a splendid job tracking down serious criminals. Then ordinary citizens were invited to voice their concerns.



Yauheni with some of the residents he protects

visceral feeling of powerlessness' and an appetite 'for radical change'. Any mayor who canvassed on law and order would, said its director James Morris, get an instant response. But not one has.

The police claim they are making progress. The Met is introducing the Safer Neighbourhoods scheme which involves policing each division with a team of at least six who will target the issues that cause 'most fear'. It's a step. But because the Met believes fear is more of a problem than crime itself, one wonders how enthusiastically this will be pursued.

Meanwhile, in our area of falling crime, two men armed with handguns and knives broke into a house five minutes walk away from our street where the family were sitting down to supper. A resident from two streets away has just contacted us. His wife has been attacked for the third time in a year.

The first time a brick was hurled through her car window while she was parking. Recently she was thrown to the ground by two men as she walked towards her home. Now her husband wants to set up a security scheme in their neighbourhood. So it goes on.

As the *Harvard Business Review* points out, 'A huge perception gap came to light.' Few people felt in any danger from these crimes. They were more troubled by the sort of petty theft and intimidation that disfigures my neighbourhood. The town meeting quickly led to a complete overhaul of the police priorities for District 4.⁴

In the UK this has not happened. The 'huge perception gap' between my neighbours and the police is there for all to see. These are law-abiding, middle class and natural supporters of the police. If this is the reaction of my neighbours, what must it be like on the estates? And what about in the countryside, where policing levels are even lower? But the police, the Home Office and the judiciary remain insulated from public opinion. How many of them use public transport, take small children to the park or play outside on a skateboard? The police commissioner for my area has not been elected by my community. His pay, job and pension do not rely on giving us the kind of policing we want.

'Mind the Gap', an independent civic initiative that has been holding London-wide discussion groups, reveals that my neighbourhood is not alone. It found a 'real

Photo: M. Pope ©

The overall emotion amongst my neighbours is a sense of powerlessness. We have no power to control what affects our everyday lives.'

Bill Bratton found when he took over New York transit in 1990 that none of its senior officers rode the subway. They commuted to work and travelled around in cars provided by the city. He insisted that all transit officials ride the subway to work, to meetings and at night. It was for many staff the first time in years to share the every day experience of the ordinary citizen. They could not deny the need for change.

Maybe its time to give our politicians, mayoral candidates, top lawyers and police commissioners a skate board – and tell them to go play outside.⁵

A ten minute walk away things are no better in my local shopping street. The Indian chemist who is also the representative of the local traders association told Hugh Fraser, a local journalist: ‘We are very concerned. Crime has grown to be a serious issue for all businesses in the area. Gangs are hitting stores even in broad daylight.’

In this typical London street, no longer than three hundred metres, with its Victorian pub and small shops owned by a variety of nationalities, I was astonished to discover two very different gangs operating. Every shop complained of at least one incident in the last few months. Gangs from the local estate stole a TV from the local pub, smashed open the florist with a garbage bin, smashed the window of the wine shop and helped themselves to goods in the newsagent, the chemist and the supermarket. The chemist went on: ‘They are quite aggressive and do it openly.’ One filled up a whole trolley. ‘I ran out of the shop to tackle him but he had two friends so I didn’t go further.’



A local shopkeeper

‘Crime! I don’t know where to start,’ exclaimed the elderly Lebanese florist, throwing up his hands. Families from the local estate arrive with bags, pick up the pots of bulbs and flowers arranged outside and walk off. When he calls the police, the gangs come back and threaten to kill him. A month before a woman from the estate stopped by and asked for a glass of water. The next night she broke in and took £450. The florist handed over a video of the robbery to the police. ‘That was a month ago and I have not heard anything since.’

The chemist had the same problem. He had given the police seven videos of incidents, ‘at £3 a shot’ but heard nothing. ‘They get lost in the system. The police don’t think its worth the bother.’ He went on, ‘You try ringing the police station when you want help with two thugs

helping themselves to your merchandise. You have to wait 15 to 20 minutes and by that time they are back home with a can of beer. That’s happened so many times.’ While police told him they were too busy with major crime, his rates had risen in ten years from £900 per annum to £11,000. So, after three robberies in the last six months, had his insurance premiums. ‘A certain amount should come back to us, at least for our own protection.’

Across the street, members of a family from the estate sit beneath the cash machine of the local bank, drink beer, shout abuse and defecate in the street. Nearly every morning it is impossible to get cash out until a call from the engineer because people have stuffed paper clips and match sticks in and broken the machine.

Sid, the owner of my local Deli, had a different complaint. In the café next door a gang speaking Arabic had turned two of the best tables into their headquarters from which to deal drugs and organise prostitutes. We went next door and ordered a coffee. A group of men in gold chains had indeed monopolised the window tables. Each had two mobile phones into which they were constantly talking. One wore a T shirt inscribed with ‘Does My Belly Look Big In This?’ Occasionally one walked over to the white van parked opposite and conferred with a young, good looking man in a Versace T shirt. Another got up to move his people carrier. ‘He’s even got a child seat in the back,’ snorted Sid. He claimed he saw about twelve different men during the day driving around girls, delivering drugs ‘and once I saw a big bag of fake passports falling out of the van.’

The owner of the coffee shop did not want them there. He would tell them to go away ‘but they are back in a few days’ and he was too scared to do more. They had fights with other gangs trying to move into the area. One had been running for his life when he smacked into a group of school children coming out of the newsagents. ‘We are worried there is going to be a shooting or a knifing.’

There seemed to be an extraordinary level of criminal activity in such a small shopping street. Where were the police? Sid shrugged, ‘The local police are never here. We get different people assigned to walk the beat for the day but it is not seen as a crime hot spot. The police do not seem to realize that people want something done.’ Suddenly we noticed a warden ticketing the people carrier, ‘If only the police were as effective,’ said Sid gloomily.

The Nine Principles of Policing

1. To prevent crime and disorder, as an alternative to their repression by military force and severity of legal punishment.
2. To recognise always that the power of the police to fulfil their duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.
3. To recognise always that to secure and maintain the respect and approval of the public means also the securing of the willing co-operation of the public in the task of securing observance of laws.
4. To recognise always that the extent to which the co-operation of the public can be secured diminishes proportionately the necessity of the use of physical force and compulsion for achieving police objectives.
5. To seek and preserve public favour, not by pandering to public opinion; but by constantly demonstrating absolutely impartial service to law, in complete independence of policy, and without regard to the justice or injustice of the substance of individual laws, by ready offering of individual service and friendship to all members of the public without regard to their wealth and social standing, by ready exercise of courtesy and friendly good humour; and by ready offering of individual sacrifice in protecting and preserving life.
6. To use physical force only when the exercise of persuasion, advice and warning is found to be insufficient to obtain public co-operation to an extent necessary to secure observance of law to restore order, and to use only the minimum degree of physical force which is necessary on any particular occasion for achieving a police objective.
7. To maintain at all times a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police. The police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interest of community welfare and existence.
8. To recognise always the need for strict adherence to police-executive functions, and to refrain from even seeming to usurp the powers of the judiciary or avenging individuals or the State, and of authoritatively judging guilt and punishing the guilty.
9. To recognise always that the test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, and not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with them.

Drawn up by Charles Rowan and Richard Mayne, first and joint Commissioners of the Metropolitan Police. They were taken from the 'General Instructions', first published in 1829 and issued to every member of the Metropolitan Police.



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Notes

1. Bill Bratton at his seminar at the Athenaeum Club on the 8th December 2003.
2. George Kelling at a Civitas seminar on the 2nd July 2003.
3. W.C. Kim and R. Mauborgne, 'Tipping Point Leadership', *Harvard Business Review*, April 2003, p. 61.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
5. This essay is a slightly expanded version of two articles which were published in the *Daily Telegraph* on 3 April and 5 April, 2004. Reproduced by kind permission.

CIVITAS: Institute for the Study of Civil Society
77 Great Peter Street
London SW1P 2EZ
Phone: +44 (0)20 7799 6677
Fax: +44 (0)20 7799 6688
Email: info@civitas.org.uk