Awkward customers? Policing in a consumer age.

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In this chapter we explore the problematic relationship between the consumerist orientation of New Labour's approach to public service reform and the organization of the police as guardians of law and order. Police reform has always been a contentious issue, often provoking resistance and recalcitrance within the police service itself. In this case, the reform process creates potential tensions between the remit of serving the public and the responsibility of exercising legal authority. We draw on empirical work in two English urban settings to consider how both police and public view ideas of a consumer/customer orientation in policing to examine the unsettled relationships between publics and police. We give particular attention to how local communities may be engaged in the process of policing through more or less institutionalised notions of 'voice'. In the context of this book, we draw attention to how both members of the public and police officers may be seen as 'subversive' citizens but may be subverting very different aspects of policy. As we indicate in the following section, practices of subversion – resistance, recalcitrance, negotiation and translation – take place within a complex field of forces. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the problematic relationship between publics, politics and power in policing.

Resisting reform

Policing has not been immune to the significant policy discourses of consumerism and choice that have shaped public service reform in the UK in the early 21st century. The longer history of police reform demonstrates a range of barriers to new policies and their implementation. The response of police officers to reform has involved an expansive repertoire of resistances: forms of occupational recalcitrance, the skilled mobilization of public and political opinion, the judicious translation of policy into

practice and, as we will see, a thorough going organizational scepticism about 'reform' in all its guises. Equally, this history of police shows that it is not only the street level or 'blue coated' bureaucrats who can effectively block new policies and ways of working. Senior officers acting in defence of their jobs or their rank, status and titles have also been significant forces in shaping the course of reform. For example, a review of police organisational structures in 1993 (the Sheehy Inquiry) proposed a flattening out of the senior rank structure, but resistance to it was 'swift, well-orchestrated and effective' (Leishman et al 1996). Similarly, the aftermath of the London terrorist activities in 2005 and the threat of organised crime produced proposals for the merging of smaller forces, but again this was resisted and finally abandoned. In a different way, the Metropolitan police have eroded constraints on stop and search practices, intended to limit the racist use of discretionary powers (see Travis, 2008). Lower down the rank structure the methods of resistance and recalcitrance might be less public, but no less effective. Front line staff often view attempts to change their organisation as trends and fashions that come around again in a slightly changed form. They are sceptical about bursts of political enthusiasm for police reform, or about the innovations put forward by 'new high-flying senior officers' who are 'merely ships that pass in the night on their journeys to even more glorious ports of call' (Young 1993: 84).

There are complex relations between these different levels and forms of resistance with the police service and processes of policy and organisational reform (see Skogan 2007 for a fuller discussion). In this chapter we explore ways in which customer/consumer orientated policies have been inflected through different organisational and occupational discourses. We trace how these policy initiatives and organisational responses construct engagements with publics who bring a diverse expectations and identifications to their encounters with the police.. We borrow from our book on public service reform a framing device (Fig. 1) that distinguishes some of the different relations and dynamics that might be at stake (see also Clarke and Newman, 2008).

Figure 1: Alignments of reform and resistance

Governmental

Occupational   Organizational

Public
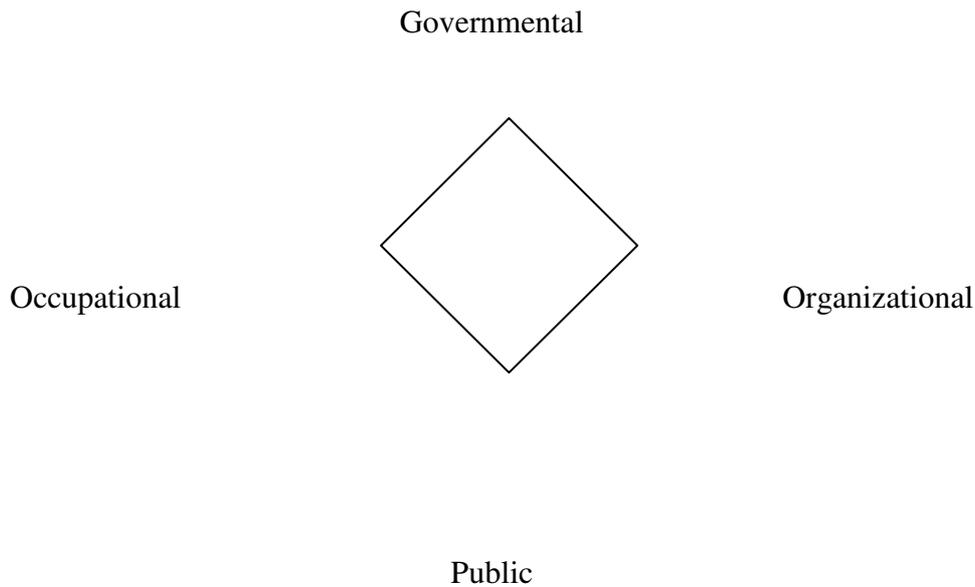
Rather than the conventional hierarchical/linear model of policy formation and implementation, the model here points to different potential alignments of alliance and antagonism. This diamond allows us to see that governmental reform initiatives might be separate from the demand and desires of different publics. Indeed, we can see how publics might be engaged, solicited and represented by all three of the other points. Governments claim to embody the (democratically expressed) public will; organizations claim to know what the public wants (especially through surveys, consultations etc); while the occupation (front line officers, especially) claim to know the public by virtue of face to face encounters. Each of these claims may be deployed to legitimate particular orientations, strategies and practices. The diamond allows us to think about how governmental reform programmes may bear differently on the organization, the occupation and the supposed beneficiaries (the public). But it also makes it possible to see the dynamics *within* policing where organizational pressures may be different from, or even in tension with, occupational ones. For example, there have been recurrent ambitions to enhance managerial control over the processes and practices of policing or to reform the 'canteen culture' of front line officers.

Serving the public?

As part of New Labour's public service reform programme, the police needed to be brought into line with the 'modern' world. The conception of modernity was an important theme in New Labour discourse and in terms of public services. Britain was

seen as having become a 'consumer society' in which a proliferation of goods and services enabled a wide variety of wants and needs to be satisfied:

> Thirty years ago the one size fits all of the 1940s was still in the ascendant. Public services were monolithic. The public were supposed to be truly grateful for what they were about to receive. People had little say and precious little choice. Today we live in a quite different world. We live in a consumer age. People demand services tailor made to their individual needs. Ours is the informed and enquiring society. People expect choice and demand quality (Milburn, 2002)

Elsewhere we have explored the importance of the different institutional formations and trajectories of specific public services (Clarke et al., 2007). Nowhere is this more significant than for policing. Whereas services such as the NHS have received largely positive public support, for at least the past thirty years policing has undergone a crisis of confidence. From the mid-1970s, policing has been marked by an increasingly fraught relationship with at least some of its publics. In the 70s, high profile miscarriages of justice cases shook public belief in the 'British bobby' as they discovered that officers had routinely lied, beaten and tortured to obtain false confessions, in cases such as the Birmingham Six (Blom Cooper, 1997). Confidence declined further in the 1980s when officers were denounced as (individually and institutionally) racist, and, perhaps worse in the eyes of some sections of the public and press, seemed unable to contain public disorder such as the Brixton riots. By the 1990s, the police had been viewed by some as political puppets for their role in the miners' strike and other disputes, and were experiencing a series of high profile sex discrimination cases, including allegations of sexual assault and psychological brutality towards women serving in the police. They were also seen as failing to support women who reported being raped or suffering domestic assault. In these different ways, policing encountered an increasingly differentiated and difficult public whose deference to police authority could not be taken for granted. In this public, lines of political and social fracture became both a focus of policing (from Irish republicanism to industrial relations) and a focus for complaint, challenge and conflict (particularly around divisions of race, ethnicity, gender and sexuality). The police came to embody a particular version of the crisis of social order in the UK and were

in the front line of conflicting attempts to challenge, rearrange and restore that order (Hall et al., 1978).

Demands for police 'modernization' began under Conservative governments during the 1980s and 1990s but were dominated by 'managerial' rather than 'consumerist' imperatives. This focus changed with the arrival of New Labour who shifted focus to more participatory, more consumerist and more community-centred principles of modernisation. This coincided with changing orientations among senior police officers. According to observers who were analysing their media presentational style (e.g., Heward, 1994), by the mid 1990s senior officers were adopting new strategies and public rhetorics. He reported a move from demanding ever more public disorder and riot control weapons towards senior officers talking about wanting to improve customer care. The symbolic move from 'force' to 'service' had begun and its tactics included rebranding the police as developing a more consultative, less authoritative (or authoritarian) style of public policing. The impetus to change, then, came both from senior levels with the police and from government reform programmes. Both pointed to a change in the image *and* style of policing. The rhetoric of change which talked about 'giving the public what they want' has been developing since then and has culminated most recently in the rolling out of a national programme of 'neighbourhood policing'. As Prime Minister announced in his foreword to the Strategic Policing Plan (2004-2008):

> Firstly, we want to revive the idea of community policing, but for a modern world. That means a big increase in uniformed patrols on our streets but linked to 21st century technology to make sure they have the biggest possible impact on crime and the public's fear of crime…And we'll give local communities a real say in deciding the priorities for the new neighbourhood policing teams. (Home Office, 2004: foreword)

Appealing to the idea of 'community' and the public's apparently insatiable desire for more uniforms on the street, the Strategic Plan had a number of characteristics that might be seen as promoting 'choice'. In terms of confidence building, and giving the public what it wants, community policing promises a locally controlled, accountable service. This was powerfully articulated in the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act and has

continued as a central theme in policing policy since then (see, for example, Flanagan, 2008). Home Office guidance to local forces and front line staff stated that community policing would provide a dedicated team for each neighbourhood to work with the community, 'intelligence led' targeting of community concerns, and 'joint action and problem solving' with local partners to improve community quality of life (ACPO Centrex 2006: 4). As we have argued elsewhere, policing develops a multiple conception of the public in the development of a customer/consumer orientation. There is a strong emphasis on a 'customer care' culture in interactions with members of the public, while the community is evoked as a sort of 'collective consumer' endowed with some forms of both choice and voice. As we will see, this creates a complicated terrain for processes of negotiation, translation and resistance.

Our research explored New Labour's attempts to modernise public services building upon the previous Conservative Governments' reforms, including managerialism, fiscal retrenchment, privatisation, decentralisation, and marketisation (Clarke and Newman 1997). For the police this had included the use of targets to assess and quantify performance, which threatened traditional habits of working and 'easing': core elements of occupational culture. The police, then, shared in many of the tendencies of public service reform over the last three decades but they experienced them in distinctive ways because of the particular structure, culture and functions of the service. In our study, we focussed on four aspects of the citizen - consumer relationship through our questionnaires, interviews and focus groups: challenge, choice, responsibility and inequality. Because of the centrality of 'authority' to the policing role, we give particular attention here to the issues of choice and challenge. How can an authoritative public institution – charged with maintaining order – adapt to demands for choice and the possibility of challenge from the public it serves?

Keeping a distance?

We begin from questions of choice and challenge because the idea of choice seems far from what the public police can provide, and challenge is what policing has traditionally suppressed, even in democratic societies. The police are typically viewed in a Hobbesian way, expected to uphold the law in the 'war' when one set of men fight another (Hearn 1992). Such institutionalised and embodied authority finds

challenge difficult to contemplate – and it is often seen as potentially subversive. It has been taken for granted that 'law-abiding' or 'upstanding' members of the public would not contemplate challenging police authority and the Rule of Law. It can be seen as a personal affront to authority, as the following front line officer observes:

> …the younger generations, the youths will confront me. They will say to me that – they can be quite rude and aggressive and say 'you can't do that to me, I know my rights'. (Newtown police front line staff 05)

When another front line officer from Newtown was asked whether he was willing to be challenged he replied:

> Yeah. One of the biggest things they tell us is, um, if you make a decision, that's fine as long as you can justify the reason for why you made that decision. So if someone on the street wants to challenge my decision that's fine, they can do that, it's not gonna change it. (Newtown police front line staff 01)

Being challenged can be tolerated as long as it is framed – and contained – within the parameters of these officers' authoritative view of the police role. Their authority is based both on their knowledge of 'law' and their decisive embodiment of it: they are the law in practice. Equally, we found that police view the idea of choice with scepticism about how it might work in practice. There were claims of inappropriate comparisons, and inapplicability when they are confronted with notions of consumerism, or a service catering to the desires of a 'customer'.

> We are all things to all people and it is a job unlike no other job. Er, so to try and, er, make it too business orientated you're gonna lose the whole principle of what policing's about. But to give you an example where we do – and I start – started to think about offering choice, er, is – and I've got to say before I go on and lose the thought, because of those things that takes our opportunity to give choice away because tomorrow, if another organisation decides to go on strike, with the best will in the world we need to respond like no other organisation responds. We don't have the choice, we have to respond urgently

and rapidly and be very professional at it. So we can't offer any choices when we're doing that because we have to respond to things such as the riots that happened at the prison, such as – do you understand what I mean? (Oldtown front line police staff 02)

Resistance to such consumerist ideas was widespread among both front line and senior officers. Their responses combined scepticism about policies (condemned as either the latest fashion or simply unrealistic); doubts about politics (hyperactive governments) and a desire to defend key features of public service in policing from erosion (see Clarke et al 2007). One of the justifications for this combination of scepticism and resistance can be found in the notion of the 'awkward', 'difficult' or 'slippery customer'. Indeed, the managers we interviewed suggested that many officers would use the terms of consumerism sarcastically – mocking the language of consumer, choice and customer centredness. However, another senior officer observed that changes were becoming visible:

So whereas a few years ago we might have said we don't have customers, we are the police force, and that is what we do - we police the streets and keep order, we did not necessarily look upon people as providing a service to them and that they consumed our service'. (Newtown police senior 01 in Clarke et al ibid: 89)

Senior officers wondered how to get this 'public service' message across to their staff, given the tensions it creates with occupational cultural notions of a 'thin blue line' upholding the law, preventing chaos and stopping the 'dangerous classes' taking control. From such a starting point, the notion that they should 'hand over' control regarding priorities and resources contravened many deeply held cultural expectations of serving police officers:

I think it depends when you join. I mean, for me, I have never got my head round this customer idea and I never will do. They're not customers out there. For me they're just members of the public, you know. And if I was using the police service or whatever or any other service – or any like official body I

wouldn't think of myself as a customer, I'd hate that. Um, no, it's just members of the public, you know…(Oldtown front line staff 01)

Here established occupational conceptions of the process and relationships of policing combine with a 'citizen' view of the world of public services more generally in refusing the consumer/customer model of service relationships. Elsewhere scepticism about the consumer/business model of reform abounded:

Er, but I still think the organisation of policing is very difficult. If you want to treat policing like business, er, which previous Home Secretaries have done, er, then it's fraught with danger because it is such an unusual job and there – it's not a job you can negotiate, we need to police the streets otherwise we've got anarchy. So it's a constant thing seven days a week, three hundred and sixty-five days a year, twenty-four hours a day. It never ever – you can never ever not be there. You know, it's unlike no other job. We don't make money, it's a total loss. From a business perspective you throw money at policing, you don't get it back. … You can adopt business principles at time and put them in to policing but I don't think you can – as some of them, try and run the police service like a typical business because it will fail (Oldtown police front line staff 02)

However, one officer articulated a rather different view of the relationship between policing, the public and forms of chopice:

Um, I don't think the majority of the public are interested. I really don't think they're bothered. You know, I think if they, you know, I think most people's lives aren't touched too much by crime and disorder and I think so long as they can just phone somebody up they don't really care who it is. So long as somebody can solve their problem… The switched on ones will go to their MPs, you know…or they'll go to the police complaints authority or they might phone up a department of the local authority, you know. Actually, I suppose they have got a lot of choices of the people they can speak to try and get things done actually when you think about it. But unless you sat down and thought about it

no you probably would think your options are limited. But there are – for those that want it they do have choices. (Oldtown front line staff 01)

This turns to a much broader conception of choice – in terms of who has the social or cultural capital to make connections and thus expand their possibilities of choice (discussed more extensively in Clarke et al, 2007). But if choice is a limited concept in relation to the individual user of police services, then how has it been articulated in relation to the 'collective consumers': local communities? A beat inspector from Oldtown explained how important community feedback and opinion had now become, not least because it now formed part of his career appraisal (and hence promotion) system. He explained that the police now survey public views and hold public meetings to invite feedback:

> And we ask those kind of questions now, it's not all centred around, er, you know, we're doing great for crime and feeding back to them in crime, which is quite clearly important to them. What we've now gotta say is 'you tell us what are the problems, you tell us how you think we're doing, you tell us how you think we can do it better'. So we're trying to listen more and respond more to local concerns. (Oldtown front line staff 02)

User led policing?

Our decision to investigate choice and challenge in terms of the delivery of police services was partly a result of New Labour's claims about being the 'People's Champion' in providing public services that were consumer-led:

> All four principles [national standards, devolution, flexibility, choice] have one goal – to put the consumer first. We are making the public services user-led, not producer or bureaucracy led, allowing for greater freedom and incentives for services to develop as users want. (Tony Blair, Speech to Public Sector Workers at the British Library, London 16 October 2001).

As we have indicated this puts a particular strain on the integral formation of knowledge and power in policing, given the officer as the authoritative embodiment

of the Law (and order). Meanwhile Sir Ian Blair, then Metropolitan Police Commissioner, had argued that a "culture war" was taking place about what the police should do and how: "I think we are in a culture war: what is this service for, how does it deliver its service. Is it customer shaped?" (quoted in *The Guardian*, 05/07/2005). What were the outcomes of this 'culture war'? In what ways was policing being reshaped in 'user-led' ways? The beat inspector from Oldtown quoted above explained how his local community are offered 'choices' and are encouraged to challenge police officers at meetings if they are unhappy with what is decided. He identified the central role of a local action plan, drawn up in consultation with the public and officers from the local authority to establish policing priorities:

> So it could be robbery, it could be burglary, it could be anti-social behaviour which is the big issue for most people in most cities. So that's very high on our agenda, linked to juvenile nuisance cos it's in their face day in day out. That's what affects people's quality of life and that's what wears people down. So that's what's important to the community. And what we do is we draft that up and we present that to the local community for them to rubber stamp that action plan. We go to a forum called Community Committee Group which is chaired by a member of the local community. Er, it has a constitution, it can draw officers and call upon officers from a number of agencies to come and they're answerable to that forum as to what is happening in their area, why things aren't as they are or why things are as they are. And what we said is the emphasis of that plan is 'over to you.' You say – if you're happy with the police to be doing this in the next three years you say. If you're not happy then there's dialogue and there's negotiation. And that plan is set to police that area how they want it to be policed. So we're already doing that, we've been doing that for five years. (Oldtown front line police staff 02)

This points to some of the characteristic ambiguities of new sites and forms of public governance (Newman and Clarke, 2009). Consultation, negotiation and dialogue jostle uncomfortably alongside the 'rubber stamp' by the community forum. Exactly how power is being redrawn in such settings is difficult to see. But such priority setting and planning clearly requires the participation of communities and publics, however elusive or attenuated their power might be. This more active view of

engagement was reflected in the members of the public that we surveyed and interviewed about using police services. In contrast to the ambivalence of some front line police, the public we encountered were largely in favour of choice and challenging the police. They viewed it as something potentially positive in their current relationships, even where they claimed to be satisfied with local policing. Hardly anyone claimed to believe that the 'police know best' and should be left to make the decisions. Where trust and satisfaction were expressed, they seemed to have been hard won or were 'co-produced'. One of the residents' groups where we held a focus group told us that they had for some time been operating a system such as the one to be introduced countrywide called 'Neighbourhood Policing' which meant they had the local sergeant's mobile phone number

> All I've got to do is ring the sergeant up and I get him, unless he is in a meeting, he'll see me immediately and…we'll discuss what went on and he'll 'go on the swim', that's what they call it, and he will find out what went on.
> Int: That sounds like you have got a good relationship with the police.
> We've got a fantastic relationship with them. (Resident A, Oldtown police focus group 1)

The group were clear that they had invested time and effort in building a sustained engagement with the local police that resulted in them being taken very seriously when they raised issues or complaints:

> The reason we know the chief inspector and stuff is because we go to the actual police meetings and it's very rare we call the police because we have no need to call them. One time I came home and my windows were covered in mud, not just mine, the whole street and my next door neighbour had run the police and no one came and we were at a meeting that night praising the police, but the next day I went in the police station and the sergeant said 'I know what you're here about' and the chief inspector actually rollicked every police officer that was on duty that night because he went past the police station and they were all in and we've had a fantastic response ever since. (Resident A, Oldtown police focus group 1)

As the power of this group illustrates, having local officers 'rollicked' for not looking after the estate is part of the process of bending of police resources to their demands, perhaps to the exclusion of other parts of the town, and to the needs of the 'problem' families that have been displaced from the estate. Their combination of multiple roles - as consumers of police services, able to make demands, and as public spirited 'citizens' (being the 'people who go to police meetings') - confers upon them a certain power and status to demand (and apparently receive) police time and resources. In contrast, a residents group in Newtown was less positive and had a number of individual examples of a lack of response or following up of problems they had raised. For this resident, police consultation processes were a source of frustration:

> I wanted to say that, the police surgeries they are a joke because for those few hours, they are all standing there and they talk to you like they've got this service that they are providing you with and a couple of times I've challenged them on a political front…They keep pushing it back on us…They talk as if they are there but they are not. Even if you get through to them on the phone they don't provide the service people in this country need. (Resident A; Newtown police focus group 1)

This respondent contradicts what the officers quoted above have said about consultation and engagement. But perhaps her comments reveal the subtext of the officers' words: that they can listen and take views into account, but are not always willing to implement the public's choices. We encountered another group of residents who were also less than satisfied customers. One elderly woman recounted a story of years of low level abuse culminating in her being threatened with a gun, As a result she wrote a letter to Tony Blair (then Prime Minister) leading to a visit from the local Chief Superintendent. Afterwards she was reasonably satisfied in that the people were prosecuted, but the residents group as a whole were still not happy because before she complained 'to the top', nothing had happened.

> That was the only reason he came out. He wasn't even aware that that Margaret was getting abuse, because his officers hadn't passed on a *minor*

thing like that. Nothing was got done until she went to the top. (Resident A Oldtown Focus group 2)

Similarly resident B, a former shop owner, had a similar experience of inaction, and unsatisfactory responses by senior officers.

I'm going back a few years but what happened to me made me realise that you cannot depend on the police. I still have that reservation, …I had a store and one Sunday, I wasn't in and they said the people were taking the beer, and there is nothing you can do. So a police lady came, ' I'll go and see them on Tuesday'. They were in a flat round the corner, they could have got the evidence. So I closed that shop that day, because I felt I could not rely on the police. They took away all my support. I wrote to the Chief Constable, and he said – I'm sorry. SORRY! So, me, I do not depend on the police, that might sound awful, but it is only because of the experiences I've had that made me like that.

Another resident in the group was more positive:

C: See my experience of the police is different to these two because of what I am and what I do. When I phone the police they come out and do pretty much what I ask them to do.

Int: Because?

C: Because I am the chairman of the residents committee and I talk to their bosses as well, but would I get the same treatment if I was just a member of the public.

This more powerful sense of engagement was also visible in a Newtown focus group involving a local parish councillor and two women who had set up a residents group. During the focus group the parish councillor explained how the action had changed relations between police and the local community:

Parish Councillor: What they [the two women] did was set up a residents action group because they perceived nothing was being done for the estate. They started to get people to tell them what was being done, but more important than that they started to get people to listen to them and do what is was they wanted…

Int : so how do you tell people what you are doing?

PC: a newsletter, public meetings, this building is a one stop shop that people can come in. it is not that the council doesn't do anything, it is that there are some pretty awful residents who just don't want to learn.

Resident A : when we first opened the complaints on the first day and there were loads, it was bin bags and cars. But there has been loads of money gone into it, but you've got one or two recalcitrant families and the kids, that won't learn and just don't want to learn. …

PC: the parish council, in response to the residents, put aside a budget of £4000 a year, which goes straight to the police inspector and that pays for overtime when we've got a problem that we think needs addressing.

Resident A: we get more than that back.

PC: yes, we get more than that back, because we put something in.

 Resident A: yes, it is because we put something in. We work with them you know.

PC: yes we work with them and if we say there is a brothel starting in X, Y and Z then they will target it. ….We don't always see them, but they are there.

Int : So I suppose what you are saying is that you have quite a lot of power and control over the police. I mean in the nicest possible way.

PC: (talking over others) – we have input, not control.

Resident A: it is not control, it is co-operation.

Resident A : we bought them mountain bikes because at one point area beat officers had to patrol from the [main road] to the motorway on foot, that is a hell of a long way. (Newtown focus group 2)

So the 'pretty awful families who just won't learn' are presumably, as in the Oldtown estate, identified and ASBO-ed or moved on to another estate. The power to claim the right to demand what you want from the police and the system more generally can be viewed as, variously, people power, community action, democracy in action or alternatively the abuse of social and cultural capital given the inequalities that are apparent in these discussions. The power of money to 'buy' police services in the last example may be seen in terms of 'choice', resulting in the residents having a version of control and authority over the police. But is this the version of a customer culture or 'having a real say' that the Blairs had in mind?

The People's Police?

The residents quoted above see themselves as exercising power through combinations of voice, money, cooperation and consultation. But how do the police see such changes towards user-led services?

Um, again it depends what they're asking. I mean just recently we were contacted quite a lot by some members of the … Parish Council for my beat area, saying there was constant problems outside one of the local shop centres on and off. And in the end they plagued us so much about it, cos we went up there did mobile patrols, you know, um, what do you call it – when you pass by and have a look, didn't see anything notable. In the end we went up there with a mobile CCTV and watched for two evenings and gave them a complete report back on it. Um, as it was we didn't see anything. So I guess we can be pressured in to responding to people if they're demanding something that they see as a problem. We try to do what it is they want as best we can, yeah.

Int: Those initiatives. I mean what's the feeling among – for want of a better word, frontline police officers about the kind of things that come down from above with regards to customer focus, consumerism, what kind of –

Well, we usually say to each other 'well yeah it's a nice idea but it's never gonna happen'. The people that are at the top are under a lot of pressure to, um, meet the government's targets and they have to fight for their part of the budget to get to finance their own force at the top. So they are – they want to pull the right strings and say the right things to, um, get the money that they need to function well. And, um, as I say, our Chief Constable at the moment is all for area beat officers and yes, he says, the focus is gonna move more towards community policing cos that's the way forward! Well, the people that have been in service for 20 odd years in my department say 'yeah and it won't make any difference to us cos nothing's gonna change at this end of the chain'. (Newtown front line police 05)

Perhaps the police and their publics are involved in the co-production of a form of policing that keeps both sides satisfied: the public feeling they have wrested some control from a powerful or indifferent organisation, and the police feeling they have given some ground, perhaps just enough to be able to tick any relevant boxes on their individual and corporate appraisal forms. However, the place of 'community' in these changes is problematic in part because it is unclear as to who is represented in these processes (Hughes, 2007; Mooney and Neal, 2009). The groups we talked to were clear that without communal mobilisation, and political involvement in some cases, 'nothing would happen' regarding the troublesome families and individuals who were the motivating force behind their mobilisation. Nevertheless, the community based, neighbourhood focussed, model suffers from another difficulty: local communities may contain many different identities, tensions, and antagonisms.

Questions of power and agency are central to these processes of reform and resistance – but they do not align in any simple or singular way. We have tried to show how both senior and front line police officers have tried to resist, translate or bend government initiatives, although not necessarily in the same direction. Senior officers

may have organisational concerns and objectives that differ from those of the occupational culture of 'ordinary coppers'. Equally both the organisational and occupational dynamics may be resisted, subverted or exploited by groups within the public to shape the priorities and practices of local policing. The Flanagan report (2008) indicates how such local involvement is both a focus of desire and anxiety in police reform. The participation of citizens, customers and communities is avidly sought, but such localism is always vulnerable to tipping over into 'politics' or the pursuit of specific 'interests' (see Clarke, 2009). The encounters between governmental, organizational, occupational and public imperatives are thus profoundly unstable. Governments, police forces and front line officers each make claims to know 'what the public wants' – and to be able to see how best it should be served. These sit uncomfortably alongside claims by parts of the public to know what it wants – and their demands to be served differently.

One senior officer addressed the challenge of the police having to engage more fully with communities, while holding onto the power and authority that came from their professional knowledge. This officer moved beyond the 'we know best' approach of conventional professional paternalism, to think this emerging 'demand led' process. He offered a more 'dialogic' view of relations between public and police in which he sought to

> ….open up the debate about looking at the public as consumers and having an understanding of what their needs are, and then in return for that being able to move from what I describe as an ill-informed community to an informed community, then you can actually have some logic to your debate with them (Newtown senior police officer 02).

This is a powerful expression of the ambiguities of power and agency that we have been tracing. Is it a cynical engagement – such that informed communities know what the police want them to know (and can thus approve police priorities)? Is it a view of the political and social dangers of ill-informed communities making regressive demands of the police? Or is it a view of dialogic engagement as a learning process that reshapes both the police and the public?

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