Comparing two different styles of policing

This essay will examine the difference between these two styles of policing and try and ascertain which is better for the community.

" Community policing is an oxymoron, for if the police could serve the whole community there would be little point in having a police force at all" fn 1

However for the purposes of this essay community policing will have the meaning which is ascribed to it by the Home Office. It is seen as a key and permanent element of reforms to make the police service more citizen focused. The aim is to build a more responsive, locally accountable and citizen-focused police service through a programme to transform policing at a local level to meet the needs of communities.

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The notion of zero tolerance policing was inspired by the apparent success of the approach taken in NY, and a variation of it-confident policing-pursued by DCI Mallon in Hartlepool as well as others within the UK. The notion of zero tolerance policing is based upon the " broken window theory" and the conviction that the best way to tackle serious crime is to tackle disorder in which policies such as the community safety order, parental responsibility order, composite offence and final warning all have a role to play. It is arguable that this policy adopts a social exclusion rather than inclusion policy approach towards community safety.

The result may be that healthy urban futures are established but not necessarily all inhabitants will benefit. Crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour and nuisance may all be particularly unpleasant but it is not clear if placing

such a strong emphasis upon criminalisation and enforcement is the best way of tackling the problems contributing to and created by those behaviours. It leaves very little space for more constructive actions and even where it is possible to do so, they take place on terms which strengthen the criminalisation of the discourse of social policy so that the measures end up being more about containment and control within the community.

In 1996 the London Metropolitan Police carried out a zero tolerance initiative in partnership with the Transport Police, City of London Police and local authority councils. This initiative involved active confrontational measures to deal with homeless beggars, drug dealers, prostitutes and pimps who were congregating at the St Pancreas Railway Station. The result of the action was the temporary displacement of the undesirables to adjoining neighbourhoods until the control measures were withdrawn. The benefits included over 400 arrests of drug dealers and a raising of the quality of life for people in the area (Leigh et al 1998; 73)

A recent Home Office Study of policing styles noted that Cleveland Police responsible for Middlesborough remain convinced that zero tolerance is compatible with community policing in a problem orientated policing form. Cleveland police viewed it as a " short term prelude to the implementation of longer term measures in high crime areas where fear of, and intimidation by a minority of residents is having a detrimental effect" (Leigh et al 1998, 26 and Romeanes 1998). The statutory enforcement powers for zero tolerance are contained within the Crime and Disorder Act with its emphasis on taking back control over unruly neighbourhoods and so it is not unreasonable or unlikely that the Home Office would give the initiative a qualified

endorsement although it chooses to term it " order maintenance" (Jordan 1998 72).

Zero tolerance style of policing is popular with a majority of the public who se the police as being tough on crime. In July 2003 an ICM Poll for the think-tank Reform questioned public support for zero tolerance comprising a highly visible policing on the streets bearing down heavily on anti social behaviour and vandalism. 83% thought that this would be a good idea, with over 50% thinking it would be a very good idea. Does Safer Neighbourhood Policing Help p 62-63

Zero Tolerance does have the negative repercussions of souring police community relations and can antagonise racial tensions in neighbourhoods.

This is in conflict with the philosophy and practice of community policing which depends upon strong support from the public and discretion from police officers, proactive policing, problem solving and an intimate knowledge of the neighbourhood in which the police are operating, acquiring intelligence and building trust.

Officers viewed discretion as an important part of community policing. A firearms officer was outside a school monitoring traffic and flagged down a middle aged man who was not wearing a seat belt. He managed to resist the temptation " to alienate the police service further by scoring 5 easy points" and after some advice, he let the man proceed on his way. A few months later the firearms officer found himself in an unoccupied house where a gun had been found in very suspicious circumstances. The same man as in the seat belt incident approached him and provided invaluable information which

saved many hours of police investigation. The officer maintained that the man assisted him because he had dealt with him leniently in the seat belt incident and the officer wondered if the man would have assisted had he not used his discretion in the earlier incident? The officer said that police should be left to use their common sense on the streets. Cited in The Public and Police by Harriet Sergeant page 52

Is the answer for the two concepts to sit side by side?

It would appear that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive and there is a need for both within certain communities.

A police system based on consensus and working in and with the community seems the better option for the community as a whole. This method allows the community to be involved in the law enforcement process and encourages the community to be involved in its own safety by the informal policing of its on neighbourhood, collecting intelligence on suspected trouble makers to assist the police. Community policing allows the community to be a partner with the police in crime reduction and as such are more receptive to police initiatives.

Zero tolerance should be used selectively in reducing certain types of deviant behaviour such as anti social behaviour and also for knife and carrying weapons, but its success is limited to selected areas. Its use should be limited to a short sharp approach and it should also be seen as a short term policy rather than overall police policy. It has been shown that a tactic of the targeting of repeat offenders and victims, a high level police visibility in some crime hot spots, and problem orientated strategies and police

initiatives have worked. Zero tolerance style of policing can impact on human rights and liberties but it is popular with most members of the law abiding community and politicians as it demonstrates that the state is seen to be tough on crime.

Of course whatever is the better option for the community depends on whether you look at the community as a whole or a particular section. If one block of flats is being terrorised by anti social behaviour and zero tolerant tactics are adopted to deal with it, it will not be considered beneficial to the whole community if the perpetrators are merely dispersed to a neighbouring block within the same community.

What is best for the community can also be said to be the eradication of crime in the first place, so that the causes are addressed (community policing) rather than the symptons (zero tolerance).

It would appear that there is a place for a zero tolerance approach within community policing itself particularly if the community is kept informed of the police approach so that it is included in adopting the policy.

So although it may be seen to some members of the community as the better style of policing overall it is better to have the community policing system which is a softly softly approach to law enforcement underpinning the relationship between the police and the community.