

# TAKING PREVENTION SERIOUSLY: THE CASE FOR A CRIME AND HARM PREVENTION SYSTEM

Rick Muir

# About the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales

Launched by the Police Foundation in September 2019, the *Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales* sets out to examine how crime, fear of crime and other threats to public safety are changing and assess the ability of the police to meet these challenges, as part of a wider strategic response. This far-reaching independent review, the first of its kind in many years, is being chaired by Sir Michael Barber and guided by an Advisory Board of former senior police officers, politicians and leading academics.

The overall aim of the Review is to set the long-term strategic vision for English and Welsh policing. It will conclude in autumn 2021 with a final report presenting substantial recommendations for a modern service capable of meeting the challenges of the 21st century.

More specifically, the Review will consider:

- What the police mission should be, looking in particular at the public's expectations of the police.
- The capabilities and resources the police service needs to achieve this mission.
- The future police workforce, including the roles, responsibilities, skills and knowledge of police officers and staff.
- How the police service should be structured and held to account, locally, regionally and nationally.
- How the police service should work with other sectors to deal with complex social problems.
- How much funding the police service requires and how this should be allocated.

More information about the Review can be found at: <http://www.policingreview.org.uk>

The Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales is being generously funded by the Dawes Trust, Deloitte, CGI, Mark43 and the City of London Corporation.

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## About the Insight Papers

This is the third in a series of Insight Papers, authored or commissioned by the Police Foundation, to inform the deliberations of the Strategic Review. The content of these papers does not represent the Review's final conclusions or recommendations but provides an input and a stimulus for discussion, based on research and analysis by the Police Foundation and external contributors.

## About the Police Foundation

The Police Foundation is the only independent think tank focused exclusively on improving policing and developing knowledge and understanding of policing and crime reduction. Its mission is to generate evidence and develop ideas which deliver better policing and a safer society. It does this by producing trusted, impartial research and by working with the police and their partners to create change.

Rick Muir is Director of the Police Foundation

# INTRODUCTION

Few would argue with the notion that ‘prevention is better than cure’. Politicians of all parties agree on the importance of preventing social problems escalating into crises or becoming entrenched in ways that cause ongoing misery and entail costly management by the state. One would struggle to find a police force, health service or local authority strategic document that does not call for more effort to be focused on preventative work.

And yet despite this growing consensus on the need for a preventative approach, public services remain overwhelmingly oriented towards meeting acute need. For example, we spend just £5 billion a year on public health services aimed at preventing illness compared to a total National Health Service (NHS) budget of £160 billion, most of which is spent on treating people once they are sick (Kings Fund 2020a, 2020b).

In relation to public safety there have long been calls for a more preventative approach. Government crime reduction strategies have repeatedly emphasised the importance of prevention (Prime Minister’s Strategy Unit, 2007; Home Office, 2016; Crawford and Evans, 2012). Calls for a greater push on prevention have grown louder in recent years as the police have been faced with a growing number of so-called ‘wicked issues’, such as mental health crises or the criminal exploitation of vulnerable children, to which police officers can only ever provide a provisional solution (such as an arrest, a calming influence or a referral to another agency). Faced with this growth in complex demand, police leaders have regularly stated that “we cannot arrest our way” out of these problems. Rather these ‘wicked issues’ are thought to require early action and extensive collaboration between public agencies.

Moreover there is a strong evidence base behind taking a preventative approach to crime (Ross 2013). The large falls in burglary and vehicle theft over the last twenty years were mainly the result of improved security measures, rather than action by the police or the courts (Farrell et al. 2008).

Despite these rhetorical commitments and this evidence base, this paper argues that far too little is being done to prevent crime and wider harm. Most of the state’s direct interventions to make the public safe and secure are reactive rather than preventative in nature. We spend £19 billion a year on policing and criminal justice, most of which is spent on responding to calls for assistance, investigating crimes, apprehending suspects, bringing suspects before the courts and then managing those convicted in prison or in the community.<sup>1</sup> While, as we shall see, some of that reactive work can have a preventative effect, very little of that money is spent on direct or strategically organised preventative work.

The purpose of this paper is to make the case for much greater investment and coordination in the prevention of crime and wider harms. Before outlining how the paper does this, it is worth making two preliminary points.

## Scope

I should be clear at the outset about the scope of the problems I am describing when discussing prevention. This paper is intended as a contribution to the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales and so focuses on preventing those problems that otherwise become police business.

These include crime, disorder, antisocial behaviour and other matters that tend to trigger a demand for policing. I do not cover all public safety related harms, which might also include medical emergencies and house fires, for example.

## Direct and indirect preventative work

It is also important at this stage to make clear that when I claim that the state is not investing sufficiently in preventing crime and wider harms I am talking about *direct* as opposed to *indirect* prevention.

There are two senses in which the state might be argued to invest *indirectly* in prevention in relation

<sup>1</sup> The £19 billion figure includes the combined budget for the police (£9.8 billion) and the Ministry of Justice (£9.5 billion) in 2020/21 (HM Treasury, 2020; Home Office, 2020).

to crime and public safety. First, the operation of the criminal justice system may have the effect of preventing crime, such as by deterring potential offenders or taking convicted offenders off the streets by putting them in prison. However, as I shall discuss in Section 6 below, these preventative *effects* of the criminal justice system are largely indirect byproducts of activities undertaken for other reasons (such as the need to bring an offender to justice).

The second way in which the state might be understood to invest in prevention is that very many of the state's activities outside of the realms of policing and criminal justice have a preventative impact on crime and wider harms. One might argue, for example, that social security expenditure or spending on schools and nurseries all prevent crime because they ameliorate some of the social conditions in which crime would otherwise flourish. One might argue on that basis that the state does in fact spend a lot of money on preventing crime. However, again, these preventative effects are indirect byproducts of activities undertaken for other reasons.

My claim is not, then, that the state does nothing to prevent crime and wider harm, but rather that it engages in far too little *direct* preventative work in the arena of public safety. This means that very many opportunities are being missed to prevent crime and to keep people safe.

## Structure of the paper

What would it take to shift our approach to crime and wider harms firmly in a preventative direction? That is the question that this paper seeks to answer. It does so as a contribution to the ongoing work of the Strategic Review of Policing in England and Wales, which is looking at what kind of police service we will require to meet the challenges of the twenty first century. It has long been clear that before the Review can think properly about the role of the police in responding to those challenges, it needs to consider what role society as a whole (including

non-policing public agencies, the private sector and local communities) should play in promoting public safety and security. It is also clear that the area where wider society can play the most significant role is in preventing crime and other forms of harm from occurring in the first place. Once the Review has determined what preventative role this wider spectrum of actors should play, it can then be clearer about what should be expected of the police (Strategic Review of Policing, 2020).

The paper goes about addressing this question in the following way:

- It starts by setting out the rationale for a shift to prevention in relation to crime and other threats to public safety.
- It sets out what we understand by prevention, breaking this down into different types of preventative activity.
- It applies that framework to three areas of crime and sketches out what such a preventative approach might look like in relation to each. These case studies are pension and investment scams, online child sexual exploitation and serious violence. These examples are by no means exhaustive but are intended to illustrate what a more systemic preventative approach would entail in practice.
- It makes the case that, stepping back from each of those examples, what is really needed is a much more explicit and institutionally anchored system of crime and harm prevention.
- It describes what a crime and harm prevention system might look like in practice.
- It turns finally to what role we should expect the police to play as a part of that wider system.

The paper does not represent the Review's final word on these issues but is intended rather as a provocation for public discussion, which can help frame the Review's thinking prior to the production of its final report.

# WHY PREVENTION IS BETTER THAN CURE

The case for prevention makes intuitive sense. It is better to stop a bad thing from happening in the first place than to deal with the deleterious effects afterwards. Not only does this make intuitive sense, there is also a strong evidence base showing that preventative measures can reduce harm at the individual and population levels in a way that is superior to later interventions and achieves wider economic and social benefits.

We set out this case below focusing on three different policy spheres in which there is convincing evidence that preventative action makes sense: early intervention with children and young people, public health and crime.

## Early intervention with children and young people

Sometimes people talk of ‘early intervention’ as if it were synonymous with prevention. However early intervention is a subset of the wider concept of prevention, which as we shall see below also encompasses interventions later in the lifecycle and sometimes ameliorative interventions after harmful behaviour has become embedded.

There is a strong evidence base showing that action in the early years of a child’s life helps to avoid harms later in life. For example, research has shown that a child’s healthy physical development can be promoted by providing breast feeding support or smoking cessation assistance to mothers during pregnancy. Regular home visits from nurses starting in the first year of a child’s life have been shown to be effective at providing parents with the skills to support their child’s cognitive development, with a longer-term impact on educational outcomes. Good quality early years provision, offered alongside parental support, can help close cognitive development gaps between richer and poorer children, with lasting benefits. Early support for parents to deal with a child’s behavioural problems has been shown to have benefits into adolescence. During the early years, interventions working with

parents who are at risk of having attachment difficulties can improve their children’s attachment security and lead to fewer behavioural problems at school (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).

Not only do these forms of early intervention have intrinsic benefits (improving children’s health, wellbeing and educational attainment), they generate wider economic gains. The Department for Education has estimated that individuals who achieve five or more good GCSEs (as their highest qualification) have lifetime productivity gains worth around £100,000 on average, compared to those with qualifications below this level. Studies have found that if the educational attainment of UK students matched those of Finland, the country’s long-term economic growth rate would increase by around half of one percentage point, generating greater prosperity and more funding for public services (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).

Investment in early intervention can also reduce the costs to the public purse that are incurred when things go wrong. The Early Intervention Foundation estimates that the costs of ‘late intervention’ for children and young people come to £17 billion a year across England and Wales (at 2016/17 prices). These late costs include for example the costs of children taken into care, the costs to the NHS of youth alcohol and substance misuse and the costs of youth offending to the criminal justice system (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).

## Public health

Another policy area where there is a strong evidence base for the value of preventative work is public health. Long term health conditions lead to hundreds of thousands of premature deaths every year. And yet such diseases are largely preventable through lifestyle changes, such as stopping smoking, doing more exercise, eating healthier food and drinking less alcohol (Owen et al., 2011). Every year the NHS spends £10 billion treating people with diabetes, £2 billion a year on treating smoking related disease

and £1.7 billion on dealing with the consequences of alcohol misuse (NHS England, 2014; Owen et al, 2011; House of Lords, 2017). In total 70 per cent of the NHS budget is spent on treating long term chronic conditions such as heart disease, lung disease, strokes and diabetes (NHS England, 2014).

Despite the huge costs incurred from treating such preventable diseases only four per cent of the NHS budget is spent on preventative public health measures (although this is slightly higher than the European average of 2.8 per cent) (Owen et al, 2011; WHO, 2014).

There is a wealth of evidence showing that it is more effective and less costly to tackle such diseases through prevention rather than through medical treatment. For example, studies have shown that the decline in deaths from coronary heart disease in recent years was caused by tackling risk factors such as high blood pressure, smoking and high cholesterol rather than by treating the consequences of the disease. A reduction in these risk factors accounts for between 50 and 70 per cent of the decline in global coronary heart disease mortality, with medical treatment contributing approximately between 25 and 50 per cent (WHO, 2014).

Research has repeatedly demonstrated the cost effectiveness of often very simple public health interventions, compared with the costs of treating and managing disease. Owen et al. (2011) looked at the 200 public health interventions approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE), from smoking cessation programmes to schemes that promote physical activity and found that their cost per QALY (Quality Adjusted Life Year) was generally very low. 30 of these interventions were cost saving and a further 141 were estimated to cost less than £20,000 per QALY, which NICE deems to be cost effective.

Looking globally, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has found that interventions targeting the environmental and social determinants of health, those that build resilience in terms of mental health and violence, those that promote healthy lifestyles and those that promote screening and vaccination are cost effective and provide returns on investment both in the short and long term. Interventions in areas such as mental health promotion, healthy employment, road safety and promoting safe

active transport can produce very quick returns on investment (WHO, 2014).

## Crime

A third policy area where there is strong evidence for the efficacy of prevention is crime. Politicians of all parties have perhaps naturally tended to ascribe the big falls in crime of the last twenty years to the impact of their policing and penal policies, such as the recruitment of more police officers and the introduction of tougher sentences. And yet the evidence shows that crime fell across all industrialised nations over roughly the same period, despite these nations having very different approaches to policing and criminal justice.

Between 1995 and 2019 the number of burglaries in England and Wales fell by 74 per cent (Strategic Review of Policing, 2020). Similarly, in the US the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) found that recorded burglary victimisation rates fell from 11 per cent of households in 1973 to under three per cent in 2003. There were similar falls in domestic burglary across all industrialised countries (Ross, 2013).

Tseloni et al. (2017) show that the cause of this drop was improved home security. There were rapid increases in the prevalence of security measures over this period (improved locks, burglar alarms, lighting, cameras etc). Homes without security were much more likely to be burgled and the decline in burglary was in forced rather than unforced entry (Tseloni et al., 2017). The increase in the number of attempted but failed entries alongside the drop in burglaries is also supportive of this 'security hypothesis' (Ross, 2013).

There is a similar story with the fall in car crime. Vehicle related theft in England and Wales fell by 79.5 per cent between 1995 and 2019, according to the Crime Survey for England and Wales (Strategic Review of Policing, 2020). In the US car theft in 2011 had fallen to its lowest level since 1967 (Ross, 2013). Between 2003 and 2016 car theft in France fell by 43.5 per cent and between 2003 and 2018 car theft in Germany fell by 54 per cent (Strategic Review of Policing, 2020).

The cause of this decline in vehicle theft across industrialised countries was again not tougher



sentences or aggressive policing tactics, but rather the introduction of improved security measures by the car manufacturers, including immobilisers, intruder alarms, central locking, better keys and tougher doors, windows and boots. The trend in ‘twocking’ that drove car theft in the 1980s and 90s went into sharp reverse as vehicles that were relatively easy to steal became much more difficult to penetrate (Ross, 2013). It is interesting to note that a recent increase in car theft has been concentrated in high value vehicles that have keyless entry and can be penetrated using remote technology (Harding, 2020). This shows how crime rates tend to respond quite quickly to changes in product security.

## Why so little focus on prevention?

So, the case for prioritising prevention is compelling. Why, then, is there so little focus prevention, both by the state and by other actors? There are a number of interconnected reasons.

First, in a democracy with regular election cycles there is a natural tendency towards **political short termism**. In order to show voters tangible results, political leaders are incentivised to focus on addressing acute problems of high public concern. The need to achieve ‘quick wins’ and to be seen to respond to the latest crisis crowds out the space and funding available for preventative measures whose costs are paid upfront and whose benefits may only be realised long after the current class of politicians has moved on. Short time horizons are entrenched as a result of the way public funds are allocated to services. For example, police forces only know their funding settlement on an annual basis, which makes longer term planning very difficult.

Second, **policy making is fragmented** into different government departments and this creates barriers to preventative action. Specifically, it means that the benefits from adopting a preventative policy often do not accrue to those who invest in it. So, for example, there is evidence that investment in early years education can reduce the likelihood of a child getting involved in crime in adolescence. In this case the costs of the preventative measures fall to the education department, while the benefits in terms of reduced costs accrue to the home and justice departments. This fragmentation means there are few

financial incentives for government departments to make preventative investments.

Third, although preventative action can lead to reductions in costs on public services, **it may not necessarily lead to ‘cashable savings’** (immediate reductions in what local providers, commissioners or central government need to spend on providing services). For example, improved educational attainment and reduced school exclusions may not necessarily lead to cashable savings in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs). PRUs would still need to lease buildings and pay their staff even if they had fewer students. Only if demand reduced very significantly would providers be able to realise savings by closing PRUs for example.

With a service like policing it seems unlikely that a reduction in demand of one type would enable cashable savings, such as through reductions in the numbers of police officers, simply because there is so much unmet demand (both reported and unreported) that the police would still be expected to deal with.

As the Early Intervention Foundation states: *‘In order for direct financial savings to occur, changes in demand need to be sizeable and sustained; newly freed-up capacity must not be immediately spent in meeting previously unmet demand; and commissioners must take the decision to remove costs out of the system, for example by decommissioning services. Often, this does not happen.’* (Early Intervention Foundation, 2018).

Nevertheless, while reducing the costs of late intervention may not lead to cash savings, such an outcome could enable public services to better manage existing demands and focus on the most important work. So, for example, a reduction in the number of missing persons cases the police currently respond to, would free up officer and staff time which could be focused on investigating crime, undertaking proactive operations or indeed providing more time for learning and development.

Fourth, **the evidence base for interventions may not be strong** and research in areas such as early childhood intervention can take a long time to bear fruit. These gaps in the evidence base can make it hard to convince policymakers that funding will be worthwhile.

Fifth, **taking preventative action can involve costs for social and economic actors that they would rather avoid**. This is particularly the case with increased regulation, which may be required to ensure that businesses take steps to prevent crime or other harms. For example, some of the steps necessary to reduce the risk of fraud may require that banks and other providers of financial services introduce extra processes that can slow down transactions and may be inconvenient to the consumer. From a policy perspective, these costs have to be weighed against the costs of inaction which for some people may be catastrophic.

Finally, specifically in relation to crime, our traditional attachment to **ideas about human agency and responsibility** no doubt also play a role in the state's under investment in preventative measures. There is a powerful human instinct to hold an individual who has committed a crime responsible for it. It is that instinct that has arguably led us to locate the state's response to crime within the criminal justice system, whose role is to make people accountable for the crimes they have committed. A commitment to crime prevention is certainly not incompatible with the punishment of individual offenders but there are tensions between the pursuit of justice and the demands of prevention.

So, for example, it is now widely accepted that for lower level criminal offences, certainly first-time offences by children and young people, it is better to divert the offender to a social intervention that may be more likely to prevent future crimes than to see them charged with an offence which may suck them into a lifetime of interactions with the criminal justice system. The focus in such cases is on preventing re-occurrence rather than on holding the individual to account. However, public support for such approaches tends to fall away the older the offender, the greater the impact on the victim and the more responsible for their actions we deem the offender to be.

Nevertheless, there is no reason why this has to be an 'either/or' choice between pursuing justice and preventing future harm. As we shall see, it is perfectly possible to do a lot more to prevent future crimes, while also securing justice for victims.

So, there are political and financial disincentives to the instigation of preventative programmes by the state and other actors. Nonetheless, the case for the relative efficacy of prevention remains strong and I now turn to what more we might do to prevent crime and wider harm.



# A PREVENTION FRAMEWORK

Before we look at the potential value and possible outline of a crime and harm prevention system, we need to break down the general concept of prevention down into different types of activity. There are a number of existing prevention typologies that are of assistance here.

First, we might make use of the three-tiered model of public health intervention, within which: *primary prevention* refers to efforts to prevent problems occurring in the first place; *secondary prevention* involves intervening early when a problem starts to emerge, to prevent it becoming established; and *tertiary prevention* is about making sure ongoing problems are well managed to avoid crises and reduce harmful consequences.

Brantingham and Faust's (1976) application of this model to crime prevention equates primary prevention with modifying criminogenic conditions in the physical and social environment, secondary prevention with early intervention in relation to those in 'criminogenic circumstances' and tertiary prevention with reducing recidivism. However, this may not be the only way in which the framework might be applied to crime and other public safety matters.

A second typology, put forward by Tonry and Farrington (1995), categorises crime prevention efforts into four types: *developmental* approaches, such as early intervention; *community* prevention activities such as strengthening social capital and 'collective efficacy' as a protective against crime and disorder; *situational prevention* which focuses on reducing opportunities and increasing risks; and *criminal justice* mechanisms including incapacitation, individual deterrence and rehabilitation, initiated through law enforcement.

Finally, it is worth briefly mentioning three more 'operational' frameworks currently in circulation. First, the government's Modern Crime Prevention Strategy (Home Office, 2016) describes work around 'six key drivers' of crime: *opportunity* (which appears to map relatively cleanly onto *situational prevention*), *character* (which - despite the questionable terminology - appears to roughly equate to

*developmental* early intervention), *criminal justice effectiveness* (specifically through incapacitation, deterrence, rehabilitation and, perhaps most interestingly, legitimacy) and then three further categories: *profit*, *drugs* and *alcohol* (which appear mainly to imply specific areas of situational/law enforcement focus).

Second, the National Police Crime Prevention Strategy puts its own spin on the public health framework, distinguishing between *primary* (in this case meaning situational/problem solving), *secondary* (targeted early intervention, drugs treatment and support for 'Troubled Families' - all explicitly 'with partners') and *tertiary* (proactive criminal justice targeting of offenders, especially those in organised crime groups (OCGs), and appropriate post-arrest/conviction interventions).

And finally, the UK's CONTEST (counter terrorism) strategy which (rather confusingly) narrows its *Prevent* strand to countering radical ideologies, while proactive (criminal justice) investigation is labelled *Pursue* and situational target hardening comes under the heading of *Protect*. In addition to these (all of which could fit within a broader formulation of 'prevention') CONTEST includes a fourth P: *Prepare*, which relates to the area of harm mitigation.

None of these typologies is perfect and they tend to overlap. In each of them there are examples of preventative action which cross the boundaries between 'idealised' categories. For the purposes of this paper we use the public health framework for thinking about prevention in relation to crime and wider harm. This is, first, because the other leading academic contender (the Tonry and Farrington framework) while being more tightly focused on the types of preventative action that have been used to tackle crime, uses more specific categories drawn from preventative activities currently undertaken, but which may become less relevant as society changes. So, for example, it is not clear where efforts to tackle crime on the internet fit within its categories of situational and community prevention. The public health framework uses more capacious categories (primary, secondary and tertiary) which are more flexible.

Second, and this is a pragmatic consideration, the current popularity of ‘public health approaches’ in particular to violent crime, means that the language of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention have entered the policing and wider public safety lexicon. In part through the work of the International Conference on Law Enforcement and Public Health (LEPH) and the Policing, Health and Social Care Consensus there is now an ongoing dialogue between the worlds of public health and law enforcement and a common language has

developed for discussing these questions (PHSC Consensus, 2018). It makes sense to see if we can organise our thinking about public safety prevention using categorises with which practitioners and policymakers are familiar.

In the following section we use this public health framework to explore how a more radically preventative approach could be taken to three contemporary crime challenges: fraud (specifically pension and investment scams), online child sexual abuse and knife crime.

# PREVENTION CASE STUDIES

So, what would a more radically preventative approach to crime and wider harm look like in practice? In this section we take three contemporary crime challenges and, after briefly describing their main characteristics, set out what could be done at the three prevention stages (primary, secondary and tertiary) to reduce their incidence and impact.

## Pension and investment scams

Pension scams encompass a range of methods through which people are tricked into transferring and/or investing their pension into inappropriate or non-existent investment products so that their money can be taken from them.

Following the announcement of the new Pension Freedoms in 2014 and the substantial relaxation of the rules that govern the way in which pension savings are turned into a retirement income, we have seen growth in different kinds of scam. Increasingly people have been encouraged to transfer or decumulate their pension in a way that harms them financially but benefits those providing the arrangement. There has also been an increase in individuals induced to transfer from defined benefit to defined contribution pension schemes where they are then vulnerable to victimisation. In some cases, the eventual destination of the pension monies is outside of a pension, meaning there are increasing overlaps with investment scams (Skidmore, 2020).

Pension and investment scams vary from lawful but unethical behaviour, such as encouraging people to invest their money in complex schemes with exorbitant charges, through to criminal fraud, such as by encouraging savers to invest in a fake scheme and then simply stealing the funds.

Police Foundation research shows that the financial losses are so great to victims from pension and investment scams that these are among the most harmful types of fraud (Skidmore et al, 2018). Unlike other common frauds, such as credit card fraud, with pension scams there is normally no way for victims to get their money back, leaving many people in financial

ruin as they approach retirement. In 2018, 180 victims reported a pension fraud to the police and experienced on average losses of £82,000. These figures are however dwarfed by an estimate of £4 billion in losses to pension scams in a single year based on figures reported by the pensions industry (Skidmore, 2020).

As with other types of fraud, the number of offences and the losses caused to victims are vast compared to the scale of the law enforcement response. Despite there being over three million frauds committed every year in England and Wales, making it the most commonly experienced type of crime, only around one sixth of those offences are reported to the police via Action Fraud, and of the minority of frauds reported only around one fifth of those are passed on to local police forces for investigation. In 2017/18 there were just 8,313 fraud cases that resulted in a criminal justice outcome, representing just three per cent of reported cases (Skidmore et al, 2018).

Given the scale of pension scams and the very low chance that offenders will be caught by the police, it seems that the most viable strategy for tackling this is to prevent these frauds from happening in the first place. What would a prevention strategy look like that would aim to radically drive down the number of people scammed out of their pension savings and reduce the harm caused?

### Primary prevention

Primary preventative action would seek to prevent pension scams from happening in the first place, focusing on reducing the opportunities to commit these kinds of fraud. The entry points which enable scams need to be systematically closed down.<sup>2</sup> For example, investment scams are openly promoted on the internet via Google and other websites. Legislation could make it clear that platforms such as Google bear legal liability for the financial promotions they pass on, at least to the same degree as traditional publishers. This would mean that an online publisher would have to ensure that any financial promotion they communicate has been approved by an authorised person.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to Mark Taber, a prominent campaigner and commentator on the issue of pension and investment scams, whose thoughts on preventing scams at the gateway have informed this section.

Another way of reducing the opportunities to commit scams would be to remove the exemption that exists in law enabling unauthorised persons to issue unapproved financial promotions to consumers if those consumers are classified as 'high net worth' or 'sophisticated'. This exemption currently enables a whole range of vulnerable people to be targeted.

Even without new laws the banks could do much more to prevent scams. For instance, under Anti Money Laundering rules, banks could refuse to allow people to open bank accounts in false names that closely mimic the names of organisations they are seeking to impersonate. Banks could also do more screening for suspicious transactions to prevent customers transferring funds to known or suspected fraudsters. Banks could do more to identify and seek to proactively protect vulnerable customers. All of this would be encouraged if there was stronger enforcement action by the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA).

There is also a need to tackle the provision of unlawful advice by so-called 'introducers' who operate outside the FCA regulated financial advice sector but are unlawfully providing advice in ways that are imperceptible to the consumer. Regulation could be tightened such that 'introducers' can only generate leads for authorised professionals. The FCA should also take a much more proactive approach to identifying and taking enforcement action against unauthorised advisers (Skidmore, 2020).

In short, the closing down of regulatory loopholes that are being exploited by those committing scams, alongside much more proactive enforcement by the regulator, would make it much harder to commit pension and investment scams.

## Secondary prevention

Secondary prevention of pension and investment scams focuses on taking early action once a scam is in progress. One of the most important ways of doing this would be to require pension holders to take third party independent advice from the Money and Pensions Advice Service (MPAS) before being permitted to transfer their funds. When the 2014 Pension Freedoms were introduced it was envisaged that most people would take such impartial advice

before transferring their funds, however only a small minority of savers currently do so.

A further secondary measure would be to enable pension companies to block a request by a customer to transfer their funds, where red flags have been raised indicating a likely scam. The current approach of providing a warning, often merely by letter, is insufficient, particularly given that those committing scams generally prime customers into thinking that their existing pension provider will resist the transfer. Police Foundation research has found that the majority of savers persist in transferring their funds even when red flags have been raised and a warning of a likely scam issued (Skidmore, 2020).<sup>3</sup> In these cases consumers need their interests protected while the risk they are exposing themselves to is explained.

## Tertiary prevention

Once someone has become a victim of a pension or investment scam it is important to seek to minimise the harm caused. One way of doing this would be to prevent 'double victimisation', which occurs with pension liberation fraud cases, where a victim has been tricked into believing that they can transfer funds prematurely without incurring substantial tax liabilities. The approach of HMRC is currently uncompromising, discouraging victims from reporting scams and, for those who do, resulting in them being hit with an enormous tax bill on top of their losses to fraud (Skidmore, 2020).

Scams could more easily be identified and disrupted if there was more sharing of information, both within the pension industry and between the industry, regulators and law enforcement. The majority of pension companies collate information on suspected scams, but they do not routinely or systematically share this information with their competitors nor with regulators or law enforcement. A shared intelligence database controlled by a public or trusted third party body would enable faster action to be taken against suspected scams and facilitate a more coordinated response by all parties. That public or third party body could also work to overcome the cultural reluctance to share data, often due to a mistaken belief that customers details cannot be shared under data protection laws.

<sup>3</sup> The government and the Work Pensions Committee are supportive of this reform, a recommendation from a recent Police Foundation report (Skidmore, 2020). At the time of writing legislation is before parliament.

Finally, the harm caused by scams could be mitigated somewhat by the provision of better victim support to those who have been defrauded. Given the complex nature of pension and investment fraud, simply referring victims to generic local victim support services is inadequate. Victims require specialist advice in order to navigate a complex landscape of pension providers, regulators and law enforcement. The National Economic Crime Victims Care Unit (NECVCU) currently provides such advice to fraud victims and identifies those who may be vulnerable and require extra help. Its services should be rolled out and made available to all qualifying fraud victims across the country (Skidmore, 2020).

## Conclusion

Preventing pension and investment scams, as with preventing other types of fraud, is not cost free. It will inevitably involve increased regulation and therefore more friction points for consumers, slowing down some transactions. However, as a society we face a choice between consumer convenience and consumer protection, and arguably with an asset as significant as someone's pension, it is better to err on the side of protecting the public from potentially catastrophic loss.

## Online child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse (CSA) involves forcing or enticing a child or young person to take part in sexual activities. These activities may involve physical contact, but they may also include non-contact activities, often online, such as involving children in looking at, or involving them in the production of, sexual images, watching sexual activities, encouraging children to behave in sexually inappropriate ways, or grooming a child in preparation for abuse (HM Government, 2018).

The internet has vastly increased the opportunities and lowered the risks for those who wish to engage in CSA. Prior to the internet there was very limited opportunity to view abusive imagery of children because of the low availability of hard copy Child Sexual Abuse Material (CSAM). With the ubiquity of the internet the opportunity to access and share CSAM has increased enormously, with CSAM pervading the open web, in part due to the ease with which media can now be accessed and shared online. Offending is to some extent the product of the

online environment itself, not only in providing greater opportunities to those already motivated to offend, but also in drawing in those who would not otherwise have offended.

The volumes speak for themselves. In 2019, the US based National Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) received over 150,000 reports of CSAM from the public and 16.9 million from companies (NCMEC, 2019). Between April and September 2019, Facebook (incorporating Instagram and WhatsApp) took action to address 18.3 million suspected sexual images of children (Facebook, 2021). The UK-based Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has seen year-on-year increases in the volume of websites that host CSAM, identifying 132,676 URLs in 2019, an increase of 324 per cent since 2014 (IWF, 2020).

Globally in 2018, there were 2.88 million online accounts registered with the most harmful CSA dark web sites (NCA, 2019) and the NCA estimates there are 250,000 offenders in the UK accessing CSAM on the dark web (NCA, 2020).

Alongside the proliferation of CSAM there has been increased reporting of child sexual offences to the police. In 2019-20 there were over 57,548 recorded child sexual abuse offences in England and Wales, more than double the volume recorded in 2013-14 (ONS 2020). These figures are driven by increased reporting and greater proactivity, but they also reflect the rise of online offending. For example, police recorded 'take, make or distribute' CSAM offences increased from a monthly average of 187 in 2014 to 1264 in 2018 (Skidmore and Aitkenhead, forthcoming). There has also been a large increase in reported sexual grooming offences, which increased by over 400 per cent between 2016-17 and 2019-20, most likely as a result of the introduction of the Sexual Communications Act in 2017 (Skidmore and Aitkenhead, forthcoming).

Given these volumes there are limits to what law enforcement alone can do to tackle online CSA. Of course, the police and the National Crime Agency should pursue those committing online CSA, but inevitably they will have to ration their resources and focus on the most serious offenders, particularly those involved in contact abuse. There is frustration in policing about the amount of time currently taken up dealing with less serious offending (for example,



people viewing CSAM on the internet but with no intention to commit contact abuse) and a view that what is required is greater effort to prevent such people viewing CSAM in the first place (Skidmore and Aitkenhead, forthcoming).

If we were to radically ramp up our efforts to prevent online child sexual abuse, what would such a strategy look like? To do this we would need to focus on three areas of work: making the digital environment more hostile to these offenders and creating more safe spaces for children and young people; providing children, young people and parents with the knowledge and skills to safely navigate the online environment; and work to change the behaviour of CSA offenders. Primary, secondary and tertiary preventative interventions can be crafted in each of these spheres.

### Primary prevention

Primary prevention in the context of online CSA involves, first, action to design out CSA in digital spaces and, second, provide children and parents with the knowledge and skills to safely navigate the internet.

First, the digital environment needs to be redesigned so to reduce the opportunities to offend. One way of doing this would be through the use of identity authentication and age verification software. This enables the creation of safe spaces in which access rights can be readily monitored and controlled, separating users by age group. It also informs user choices by means of a trust-rating system to reflect the level of identity authentication completed by others on the platform. Finally, it introduces a deterrent in being able to attribute online deviance to real-world identities, enabling a law enforcement response when appropriate.

Mandatory identity verification is difficult to enforce, especially for websites run by non-UK companies. The UK government tried to introduce such a system for pornographic websites but eventually dropped the plans (Burgess, 2019). In place of mandating verification there is an emerging market in social media and online communication products for children and young people that are designed and marketed under the principles of online safety, including more rigorous checks of user identities, restricted access permissions based on age,

and more stringent terms and conditions that are proactively monitored and enforced. It has been suggested an industry 'kitemark' could be introduced on this basis to help guide consumer choice towards online spaces that offer assurances of safety (Justice, 2019).

Second, much more could be done in schools and in the home to provide children, young people and parents with the knowledge and skills required to stay safe online. So, for example, friendships are now increasingly formed and developed in online spaces such as social media and gaming sites, rendering conventional notions of a 'stranger' more ambiguous (Davidson et al., 2009). Research has highlighted widespread misapprehensions among children and young people about the true nature of online offending and exploitation which impairs ability to identify and avert risk (Smallbone and Wortley, 2017; Webster et al., 2012). One approach to tackling this issue is to educate children on patterns in digital communications that signal risk, as well as understanding techniques already in use by children and young people who are less vulnerable to grooming or abuse.

Research also shows that children are safer online when there is effective monitoring and protection from parents (Whittle et al., 2013; Wildsmith et al., 2013). Monitoring is inherently difficult for parents due to the private nature of online spaces. Despite their central preventative role, there are concerns that many parents lack the required knowledge of the technology, the kind of sites inhabited by their children, the nature of the risks, the prevention techniques and the places where they can access information and support. Moreover, technology and online social trends continuously evolve, and there is a real challenge in keeping abreast of these changes. An online CSA prevention strategy delivered through schools will therefore need to provide updated learning materials to parents, as well as to children and young people.

### Secondary prevention

Secondary interventions in the context of online CSA will be directed, first, towards those at risk of offending (or in the early stages of offending) and, second, towards children and young people who are deemed to be particularly vulnerable to abuse.



The digital environment could be designed to deter those in the early stages of what could be an escalation towards viewing online CSAM. For example, warnings and pop ups could be deployed to deter those browsing risky sites, or sites that are known gateways into CSAM. There is also the potential for more targeted diversionary communications on URLs in open and dark web spaces that are known to contain CSAM, for example posting support links and diversionary information. It is known that many offenders start with risky browsing of gateway sites and that many can be deterred from going further and will engage with support before their behaviour escalates (Skidmore and Aitkenhead, forthcoming).

Technology can also enable web companies to intervene early to prevent online CSA. For example, the UK government has supported the development of word and speech pattern recognition software that can identify possible grooming interactions and then enable a direct intervention by moderators or law enforcement. There is also now technology that can identify CSAM on livestream media, in other words, finding children engaging in sexual activity online in real time, again creating a possibility for early intervention.

As well as providing a universal education in the safe navigation of the internet, schools can help provide children and young people with the knowledge and skills to identify harmful behaviour. Given the private nature of online spaces, children and young people will always to some degree police these spaces themselves, and it is important to provide them with the information and tools to do so effectively.

### Tertiary prevention

Once CSA offending has taken place it is important to act to mitigate harm and prevent future victimisation. One way of doing this within the digital environment is by companies taking a proactive approach to surveillance of their sites to ensure illicit content is detected and taken down quickly. There are automated tools that facilitate this kind of surveillance. For example, PhotoDNA is software that is now being used to apply a digital fingerprint to each indecent image that has been detected, thereby facilitating automated searches for all known images.

Industry-funded bodies such as the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) also play a key role in receiving reports, proactively searching images with a known digital signature and flagging CSAM to web companies to facilitate detection and removal.

More recently, image recognition software has been developed by platforms to automate searches for otherwise unknown nude images or even more specifically, nude images of a child (Davis, 2018).

Much more could be done to work with offenders to change their behaviour, obviously through offender management programmes in prison or in the community but also with offenders who may not have been detected by law enforcement but who themselves come forward seeking help.

The work of charities like the Lucy Faithfull Foundation is central to diverting individuals from online offending, mostly by providing a helpline which allows a caller to remain anonymous whilst directing them to online self-help treatment programmes. The helpline provides an outlet for many who would otherwise have no-one else to discuss this matter with and has a focus on education and building personal coping skills to help them manage their own behaviour. As with other charities such as StopSO and the Safer Living Foundation, there is scope to provide more intensive therapeutic intervention to those who need it, though an individual may need to forego their anonymity to access these services. There are indications that these interventions have value in preventing future offending (Beier et al., 2015; Finkelhor, 2009; Mokros and Banse, 2019) though some are calling for more robust evaluation to support an expansion of these services (Justice, 2019).

The Dunkelfeld service in Germany is an example of an intervention that offers support to individuals, many of whom have committed offences but have not been detected by law enforcement. Most commonly these men have engaged with CSAM online, although a minority have perpetrated a contact offence. The focus seldom deviates from the treatment of the individuals, with strict confidentiality rules prohibiting practitioners from reporting to the police or other organisations, one that can only be breached when an individual discloses a real and imminent risk to a specific child. This encourages engagement with the service and facilitates more

openness and engagement with treatment. In addition to therapy they can also be prescribed suppressant medication to help control their behaviour (Beier et al., 2009).

## Conclusion

Online CSA has exploded in recent years, caused by vast new opportunities for the sexual abuse of children on the internet. Sadly, there will likely always be a proportion of the adult population who have a sexual interest in children. However, despite the explosion in online CSA offending, there is a growing evidence base showing how it can be prevented.

First, the digital environment needs to be more actively designed to reduce the opportunities for CSA and to increase the risk for offenders, and on the flip side to provide more protected spaces for children and young people. Few would argue with the introduction of more pop-up warnings and signposts to divert the large number of less determined offenders. Measures such as identity authentication and age verification may encounter greater resistance by those who wish to preserve online anonymity. There is a public policy choice here between defending the liberty of the internet user and promoting safety online.

Second, more could be done in schools to provide children and young people with the skills and knowledge to safely navigate the online environment, to recognise the signs of harmful behaviour by others and to know what to do to report their concerns. Parents also need to become more competent guardians in what can be a bewildering and constantly changing online environment.

Third, as well as reducing the opportunities to offend, more could be done to directly change the attitudes and behaviour of CSA offenders. A great many of these offenders can be safely dealt with outside the criminal justice system, in particular in non-contact abuse cases where offenders are worried about their own behaviour and want to change. Given the seriousness of CSA, these moves will not be uncontroversial, but they are necessary if we are to successfully reduce the level of offending.

## Knife crime

In recent years we have seen an increase in serious and weapon-enabled violence in England and

Wales, particularly that involving knives (NCA, 2019; NCA 2020; Hales et al., 2020). Overall, it should be stressed that violent crime has fallen in the last twenty years. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) shows that levels of violence have fallen from an estimated 4.5 million incidents in 1995 to less than 1.25 million in 2019.

However, police crime records and NHS data show a marked increase in levels of serious violence, particularly violence involving knives, since 2015. Knife homicides, most notably of younger male victims, have also increased over the same period. (ONS, 2020a; NHS Digital, 2019b).

There is known to be a link between this increase in knife crime and changes in illicit drug markets. Drug use can lead to violence directly through the psychoactive effects of some drugs like crack cocaine or it can do so indirectly by causing people to commit crimes such as robbery to feed a habit or as a result of competition between those selling drugs (Hales et al. 2020; Home Office 2018).

The evidence points to a clear link between the recent rise in weapon-enabled violence and changes in illicit drugs markets. Between 2014-15 and 2016-17 the share of homicides where either victim or suspect was a known drugs user or dealer increased from 50 per cent to 57 per cent (Home Office, 2018).

The drugs economy has seen changes on recent years that seem to be linked to the increase in knife crime. First, there has been an increase in the supply and purity of crack cocaine (owing to increased cultivation in Colombia since 2013), which has contributed to increased demand (Home Office, 2018).

These changes have sat alongside a change in the modus operandi of the organised crime groups selling drugs in England and Wales. Most significantly we have seen the rise of the so-called 'county lines' model in which drug selling groups in the big cities, possibly driven by excess supply, have sought to sell directly into markets in towns and provincial areas (Hales et al., 2020). The link between the county lines model and the increase in serious violence is supported by the fact that knife crime has increased across the whole country, with some particularly large increases outside the large metropolitan areas (Home Office, 2018).

Another dimension of the increase in knife crime is the younger age of both perpetrators and victims. As the numbers of offences have increased the proportion of offenders under the age of 21 has also increased. NHS data shows that the proportion of episodes involving sharp instruments and a victim under the age of 18 has also increased (Home Office, 2018). Again, there is a link back to the county lines model, through which organised crime groups are known to have increasingly exploited vulnerable children to run drugs in small towns and provincial areas.

The government has responded to this increase with both increased disruption and enforcement activity by the police and a renewed focus on prevention coordinated through 18 new Violence Reduction Units (VRU) operating at police force area level in locations that are deemed to have the biggest problem. The VRUs are in the early stages of putting in place a more coordinated approach to violence prevention, taking their inspiration from the pioneering work of the Glasgow Violence Reduction Unit, and with a clear emphasis on a 'public health approach'.

So, what should a knife crime prevention strategy look like? The ideas suggested below are neither original (many of them are being tried in different parts of the country) nor exhaustive, but they are brought together here to illustrate what a more systemic approach to serious violence prevention could look like.

### Primary prevention

The causes of serious violence are multiple and complex and so primary interventions will be wide ranging and often their connection to the problem of violence will be remote rather than proximate. Moreover, many of these interventions will not be intended to reduce violence and will be undertaken for other reasons, such as to improve educational outcomes or tackle challenging behaviour among children or adolescents.

There are initiatives that tackle the many risk factors at the level of the individual victim or offender. So, for example, we know that looked after children are widely recognised as being at disproportionate risk of being groomed and exploited as part of county lines activity (Caluori et al., 2020). There has been an increase in recent years in the number of looked after children from urban local authorities being placed in unregulated care

settings hundreds of miles from home, often due to a shortage of local placements. It is known that these children are at particular risk of going missing frequently and are highly vulnerable to exploitation by organised crime groups (Caluori et al., 2020).

Addressing this problem in part means addressing a care system that is simply not working. More local care placements should be provided for vulnerable adolescents and we should no longer be using unregulated care homes for looked after children. The local authority in which a child lives should take responsibility for the safeguarding of children placed in their area, rather than seeing responsibility being passed around between agencies and different local authorities (Caluori, 2020).

It is known that children who have been excluded from mainstream education are also vulnerable to county lines exploitation (Home Office, 2018). In 2017-18 permanent school exclusions reached their highest level since 2008-09. It has been argued that funding reductions have made it harder to provide the early interventions necessary to tackle challenging behaviour in school. There have also been concerns that the accountability framework for schools creates incentives for schools to exclude (Perraudin and McIntyre, 2018). Reducing the number of school exclusions is a good thing to do in and of itself, but it also ought to be part of a strategy aimed at reducing the opportunities for the criminal exploitation of children.

Any long-term strategy aimed at addressing knife crime has to look at the problem of drugs. The link between illicit drugs markets and this kind of violence is clear and the truth is that for every child who is rescued from county lines exploitation, another will quickly be recruited into what is a lucrative trade. There is not the space here to do justice to the issue of drugs policy. One might tackle the demand for drugs by increasing the availability of treatment. Or one might clamp down on supply through more enforcement activity by the police and at the border. Or one might look at whether more radical change, such as the legalisation of drugs, might 'pull the rug' from under the criminal networks involved. These options require public debate. What is clear however is that a sustainable strategy to tackle the problem of county lines and serious violence cannot avoid the role of illicit drugs markets.

## Secondary prevention

Secondary prevention in the context of weapon enabled violence involves intervening early when violence either has or is likely to occur and seeking to minimise its consequences. Such interventions are often most successful at so-called ‘teachable moments’ when a victim or offender encounters public agencies and an opportunity exists to divert them away from the environment that has contributed to the violence.

So, for example, interventions can be made when a victim has been injured and is in the emergency department. The organisation Redthread for instance works in major trauma centres in London to engage with young people who have been stabbed, shot or otherwise wounded and tries to help them avoid any repetition in the future (Home Office, 2018).

Another such ‘teachable moment’ is when a suspect has been brought into police custody. There are a growing number of diversion programmes operating in custody suites around the country which seek to avoid young people cycling through the ‘revolving door’ of the criminal justice system. For example, the DIVERT programme in London has had success in getting hundreds of young people referred on to employment and other programmes and has been shown to have an impact on reoffending (Home Office, 2018).

## Tertiary prevention

Longer term and ongoing preventative work can be undertaken with offenders in custodial and community settings. For example, youth offending teams (YOTs) in Wales have developed an Enhanced Case Management (ECM) model to introduce trauma informed practice into their work with young offenders. These have targeted young people whose offending is prolific and who have complex needs, including having experienced multiple adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), drug and alcohol misuse issues and experience of domestic abuse and self-harm. The approach has been reported to lead to improved resilience to chaotic family life, improved self-confidence, emotion regulation and fortitude. There was also a successful reduction in reoffending rates (Home Office, 2018).

In prison there are examples of intensive personal support being provided to those young people most

at risk of violence, including the provision of support workers and the use of Enhanced Support Units (ESUs). These ESUs provide intensive rehabilitation work in a therapeutic environment for those who pose significant risk, require specialist input, and for whom mainstream behaviour management approaches are not working and not likely to be effective (Home Office, 2018).

## Conclusion

Preventing knife crime and all forms of serious violence is complex simply because of the large number of factors involved. Nonetheless there is a growing evidence base that serious violence can be successfully prevented. Measures range from developmental approaches starting in the early years of children’s lives through to the exploitation of teachable moments when things have gone wrong. They range from measures that are targeted and tailored to individuals and families through to policy changes that shape the wider context in which violence takes place. Some of these measures are intended to tackle violent crime, while others are about achieving some other social purpose but may have an indirect impact on violence. Given the complex range of drivers involved and the uncertainty around what may cause violence at the individual level, it makes sense to take a ‘whole system’ approach.

## Conclusion

The point of these three case studies is not to recommend particular initiatives. It is rather to illustrate the opportunities that exist to take a preventative approach to crime and wider harm, many of which are currently being missed. Public policy aimed at tackling crime tends to focus on the response of the police and the criminal justice system. But by the time the police and the courts get involved the harm has already been caused and we are left bearing the costs of late interventions to tackle entrenched problems. Because of this focus on responding when things go wrong, we are missing a whole range of earlier opportunities to prevent harm.

The key insight to be drawn from these three examples is that not enough is being done to prevent crime and wider harms and that is because no one is responsible for doing so. We have clear

roles and responsibilities in relation to responding to emergencies, investigating crimes, safeguarding those in acute need, bringing suspects before the courts and so on. But no one owns the task of prevention.

What is required if we are to move prevention to the heart of our public safety efforts is a much more *systemic* approach. We now turn to what a crime and harm prevention system might look like.



# A CRIME AND HARM PREVENTION SYSTEM

So far in this paper I have described the value of preventing social problems as opposed to intervening later when harm has already been caused and the barriers to resolution have become entrenched. At the same time, I have shown that in the arena of public safety most of our direct interventions tend to come after harm has already occurred.

I have also shown how countless opportunities for preventing crime are not being taken up. The state does indirectly (and we might even say accidentally) prevent crime and harm through social spending, but much more could be done. What we lack in the public safety arena is any proper ownership of the prevention task. No one is responsible for preventing crime and many of the other threats to public safety. We have a policing system and a criminal justice system, but we lack an explicit and institutionally anchored crime and harm prevention system, with clear lines of accountability, defined roles and responsibilities, budgets, priorities and supportive infrastructures.

This section sets out what a crime and harm prevention system might look like. First, I describe three other policy areas where preventative systems have long been established, with an evidenced impact in terms of reduced harm. These are aviation safety, health and safety at work and public health. Second, I describe what the main characteristics of a crime and harm prevention system would be, map out what this might look like in practice, in terms of institutions and relationships, and explain how this would compare to existing arrangements.

## Examples of prevention systems in other sectors

### Aviation safety

As a society our approach to crime contrasts markedly with our approach to aviation safety. Whereas with crime the main focus of our activities

is on holding offenders to account after a crime has occurred, through the efforts of the police and the wider criminal justice system, with aviation safety the approach is the reverse. No one wants to see any planes crash resulting at a stroke in the deaths of hundreds of passengers. As a result the focus of air safety efforts is not on accountability after an accident has occurred but is rather on preventing flight failures through regulation, technical improvement and education.

In the UK, air safety is promoted by the Civil Aviation Authority (CAA) which was established in 1972 as an independent regulator of the aviation industry. The CAA is not funded from the public purse but derives its income from charges to those it provides services to and regulates. The CAA's functions are to promote the highest possible safety standards in the airline industry, protect the interests of consumers (such as by running ATOL, the customer protection scheme), manage the impact of flying on the environment and ensure security risks are properly managed. Obviously given the international nature of travel there is a high degree of harmonisation of standards across the world, under the auspices of the International Civil Aviation Organisation and within Europe, the European Aviation Safety Agency (CAA, 2021).<sup>4</sup>

The investigation of air accidents sits separately with the Air Accidents Investigations Branch (AAIB). Their investigators use data from the aircraft and air traffic control and interviews with those involved to come to a conclusion as to the cause of any accident. These results are published and the AAIB can make recommendations to the CAA, aircraft manufacturers or other organisations to look into issues in more detail or make changes. It is noteworthy that the AAIB tends to take a 'no blame' approach to its investigations in order to promote honesty and openness about what went wrong so that adjustments can be made to prevent reoccurrence (The Police Foundation, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> The UK has now left the European Aviation Safety Agency under the terms of the Brexit agreement between the EU and the UK government, with many of its functions now being transferred to the CAA.



The results of this regulatory system overall are impressive. Air travel is extremely safe. There is an average of one fatality for every 287 million passengers carried by UK airlines. This can be compared with a one in 19 million chance of being struck and killed by lightning in the UK or a one in 17,000 chance of being killed in a road accident (CAA, 2021).

## Health and safety at work

At almost the same time as the Civil Aviation Authority was established so was the Health and Safety Executive (HSE), founded by the 1974 Safety at Work etc Act. The HSE's mission is to prevent work related death, injury and ill health. To achieve this, it provides advice and guidance to business and workers, investigates possible breaches of the law, promotes research and training and proposes health and safety regulations to the government.

Health and safety regulation and enforcement is split between the HSE which leads on national policy and local authorities who are generally responsible for inspection and enforcement in retail, wholesale distribution and warehousing, hotel and catering premises, offices, and the consumer/leisure industries. The HSE has a Local Authority Unit (LAU) which provides support to councils in the performance of their health and safety functions, promoting consistency and providing guidance.

The HSE focuses its work on those sectors where the risks to health and safety are high, for example where work is intrinsically hazardous or where a sector's health and safety record is poor. For example, it has in recent years focused on reducing occupational asthma by targeting the vehicle repair industry. Exposure to chemicals in the paints used in car repair is a common cause of asthma. The HSE has worked with the industry to train workers in how to safely spray paint and to monitor risk, leading to a reduction in exposure (HSE, 2016).

It is worth emphasising that the HSE largely focuses its work at the point where there is most leverage, with the employers who hold most of the power to effect change.

The HSE also has a horizon scanning function to look out for and anticipate future risks so that preventative steps can be taken. For example, over the past decade the HSE has been working with industry and

academia to set standards for the safe introduction of hydrogen-powered, fuel-cell electric vehicles and the development of a safe refuelling infrastructure (HSE, 2016).

The results of this work are impressive. Since 1981 the rate of fatal injury has fallen in the UK from 2.1 per 100,000 workers to 0.34 per 100,000. In 2017 there were just 0.52 fatal injuries at work per 100,000 employees in the UK, compared to 0.93 in Italy, 1.7 in Spain and three in France (HSE, 2021 <https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/european/index.htm>). In 2017 the UK was ranked five out of 29 European countries for the lowest number of fatal injuries in the workplace. The percentage of workers reporting an accident at work resulting in sick leave in the last twelve months was just 1.35 per cent in the UK, compared to 1.8 per cent in Spain and three per cent in France.

## Public health

The state has long intervened to improve public health, from the sanitation improvements of the Victorian period through to the Covid-19 vaccination programmes of the present day. Public health policy has generally been seen to be successful at dealing with a range of previous common and lethal infectious diseases, although the coronavirus pandemic has revealed infectious disease to be an ongoing and evolving challenge. There has been less success at preventing chronic diseases linked to unhealthy lifestyles that are now, outside of the pandemic, the major causes of premature death in the UK.

When the NHS was founded, public health services were located in local government, but in the 1970s they were moved into the NHS as a way of protecting their funding. Local councils were left with environmental health functions but little else. The 1998 Acheson report recommended the return of the old local Medical Officers for Health (to be called Directors of Public Health), located in local authorities, although this was not taken up and the system continued to be highly fragmented, with no single body responsible for public health improvement (Elwell-Sutton et al., 2020).

In 2012 the Health and Social Care Act created a more unified public health system including:

- A new national body, Public Health England, bringing together 70 existing bodies into one organisation, aimed at achieving greater planning and coordination.
- Several regional PHE teams.
- Most public health functions were moved out of the NHS and placed back under unitary or upper tier local authorities under 134 Directors of Public Health, as independent advocates for local population health.

Following these reforms the PHE was responsible for promoting public health and advising government, protecting the nation from public health hazards, preparing for and responding to public health emergencies, identifying future public health challenges, sharing evidence and expertise on how to improve population health, supporting local authorities and the NHS to provide health and social care services and develop the public health workforce and researching, collecting and analysing data to improve understanding of public health challenges (PHE, 2020).

In the middle of the pandemic the government announced the abolition of PHE, a move that has been much criticised within the health sector. The reason for abolition was mainly to put the responsibility for infectious disease control under the auspices of a more specialist body, the new UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). Nonetheless there are concerns about the impact of this move in terms of disruption, loss of expert staff, the return to a more fragmented system and the impact on the broader public health agenda beyond infectious disease control (Elwell-Sutton et al., 2020).

Most public health functions and most of the resources now lie at local authority level, which in principle makes sense: councils can shape policies that are appropriate to local population needs, and local authorities have responsibility for many of the levers that affect public health, such as parks and leisure, housing, transport, education, planning and so forth.

However, the Health Foundation argues that decentralised models require strong support from the centre, particularly in terms of sharing information, providing evidence-based guidance, defining minimum service levels and helping to hold local

bodies to account. The Health Foundation notes that most high-income countries have a national flagship agency with responsibility for public health, which works alongside regional and local agencies (Elwell-Sutton et al., 2020).

Regardless of its evolving shape and characteristics, it is clear that at least in relation to public health a system oriented towards the prevention of illness exists, with a budget, defined roles and responsibilities and established lines of accountability. This contrasts markedly with the sphere of public safety.

### Lessons for public safety

The UK's experience in aviation safety, health and safety in the workplace and public health show the value of having a system that works to prevent accidents and illness. Such a system means that in each of these sectors there is a set of organisations and relationships that provide an institutional anchor around which preventative approaches can be developed. Moreover, it is clear who owns the problem of air and workplace accident and more general illness prevention and is accountable for outcomes. So, if the number of air accidents or workplace fatalities increased, we would want to know what the CAA or the HSE were going to do make air travel and work safer.

When we turn to crime and other public safety threats there is no such system nor any real ownership of prevention. Instead, most of the resource and the accountability in relation to crime is vested downstream in the police and the criminal justice system. We know that the police are accountable for responding to calls for assistance, investigating crimes and catching criminals and that the justice system is responsible for holding individuals to account for crimes they have committed. It is not clear who is responsible for preventing crimes from happening in the first place. While the police have the greatest ownership of the crime problem, they are not largely accountable for nor equipped to prevent crime from happening in the first place.

There is however a great opportunity here for Britain to become a world leader in crime and harm prevention, just as we have a world class record in preventing accidents at work and in the air. We are already home to some of the best research

institutions focused on crime prevention, notably the Jill Dando Institute at UCL, as well as being a world leader in evidence-based policing research, particularly with the work of the Cambridge Centre for Evidence-Based Policing. The Dawes Centre for Future Crime, based at UCL, is already doing ground-breaking work scoping out the criminogenic potential of future products and technologies. This existing academic research base means that there is an opportunity for Britain to establish a crime and harm prevention system that is truly world class.

We now turn to what such a system should look like in practice.

## The characteristics of a crime and harm prevention system<sup>5</sup>

The core challenge in making a shift to a more preventative approach to crime and public safety is to make sure that there is clear ownership of the problem at all levels, which is currently lacking.

### 1. A national crime and harm prevention strategy

Tackling crime and wider harms requires a truly cross-government approach. There is therefore a need for a cross-departmental strategy for crime and harm prevention that mobilises work across the whole of government. There is currently a Modern Crime Prevention strategy, owned by the Home Office, but it is largely aspirational and as one senior police leader told the author ‘it isn’t a strategy’ because it contains no delivery plan. Instead, a strategy is required that focuses the government’s work on priority areas, sets outcomes, articulates how those outcomes will be achieved and by whom. This strategy ought to make explicit what roles and responsibilities different actors are expected to play. Rather than the strategy being the responsibility of a single minister in a particular department it would make sense for this to be a cross government effort, directly driven by No 10 and with the authority of the Prime Minister behind it.

### 2. A single national organisation should have responsibility for leading and coordinating crime and wider harm prevention work across England and Wales.

The evidence from other sectors shows that it is important to have a flagship agency that owns the problem and is responsible for coordinating crime and harm prevention activity to ensure that strategic aims are delivered.

There are two policy options here:

- We could establish a new non-departmental public body, akin to the HSE or the CAA, which would have ownership of crime and harm prevention nationally.
- We could vest these responsibilities within an existing body, presumably within the policing family of institutions.

The advantages of a dedicated crime and harm prevention agency would be that it would prioritise this work and bring about a focus that is likely to be lacking if these tasks were added to the portfolio of an existing agency. There are also advantages to this not being a policing institution. Part of the point of such a body is that all sectors of society should play their part in crime prevention and that crime control should not be seen as simply a ‘police problem’.

However, we would have to consider how a new agency would work across what is already quite a cluttered national landscape in relation to crime and policing. The Strategic Review will no doubt wish to consider these matters for its final report.

Whether or not a new agency is established, the national organisation with responsibility for crime and harm prevention would perform the following functions:

- In an annual report to parliament, provide an independent assessment of the state of crime and related harms and the preventative measures required to tackle them.
- Provide strategic advice to the government on the policies required to improve public safety.

<sup>5</sup> An alternative title for this system would be a Public Safety System, which some cities in the US are now adopting as part of initiatives to ‘defund’ the police or at least curtail police expenditures in favour of more preventative approaches. The challenge with using public safety as the core concept, is that on most definitions, public safety ranges much wider than crime and the kinds of harms we expect the police to deal with. It includes for example house fires, road safety and medical emergencies, all of which have existing policy frameworks oriented towards prevention. Crime and harm prevention, while remaining quite a capacious category, is therefore more focused than public safety-related prevention.

- Rather like the Health and Safety Executive, establish national level partnerships in those industries and sectors where concerns are highest, and ensure these partnerships are sustained and effective, with their own preventative strategies.
- Lead on developing and maintaining key international relationships, such as with the US based tech companies, to ensure ongoing dialogue, data sharing and joint work.
- Lead in particular on cross-government work regarding online safety and making the internet a safer space.
- Oversee strategic communications around crime prevention so that the public receive consistent messages in areas where behaviour change is required.
- Like the HSE carry out horizon scanning, in part through its relationships with industry and sectoral groups, to understand for example what new products and technologies are in development and what their criminogenic impact might be. This should lead to something analogous to an 'early warning system' and prompt earlier intervention to ensure crime is designed out at source.
- Provide a research function that would work with universities and practitioner groups to support primary research, systematic reviews, evaluations and practice guidance. This would develop the evidence base around effective interventions and share findings in a way that is useful to practitioners.
- Provide a data and analytics function providing updated information on trends in crime and other threats.
- Provide leadership, advice and support from the centre to the other actors in the system.
- Develop a strategy for planning and training those who work in preventative roles or whose work has a bearing on prevention.
- Share learning around effective practice and local innovations so that the whole system can learn and improve.

### 3. A duty to prevent

In order to catalyse preventative action throughout society it is worth considering whether an extended statutory duty to prevent crime (and possibly some other defined harms) is required. Under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act a number of public bodies including local authorities and the police already have a duty to do all they reasonably can to prevent crime.

It is worth considering whether a general 'duty to prevent crime' might be introduced across the private sector. This would reflect the 'polluter pays' principle: those whose products and services are currently creating opportunities for crime would be asked to invest upfront in designing crime out at source. This was successfully achieved with the car manufacturers in the 1980s and 90s, who were eventually persuaded to invest in improved security measures. Rather than this constituting a major cost to business, in many ways this effort spurred greater innovation as companies competed to demonstrate the security of their vehicles.

Companies will of course be concerned about the potential liabilities and whether a broader duty to prevent crime would be proportionate. However, it is worth pointing to the example of the 2010 Bribery Act which introduced a duty on commercial organisations to prevent bribery. Companies have a defence under the act if they have implemented adequate policies and processes to prevent bribery. Despite initial criticism from business groups, the House of Lords Select Committee on the Bribery Act 2010 recently concluded that the legislation is operating very effectively (House of Lords Select Committee on the Bribery Act 2010, 2019). Importantly rather than taking firms straight to court, prosecutors have used Deferred Prosecution Agreements (DPAs) which mean that prosecutions can be suspended and ultimately avoided if companies implement policies agreed with the Serious Fraud Office. Rather than leading to an avalanche of prosecutions the Act, combined with DPAs, has created an important tool to ensure that anti-bribery procedures are implemented (Given and Kerr, 2018).

An alternative to a general duty might be a sector by sector approach. The government's Online Safety Bill will, if passed, introduce a new 'duty of care' which social media companies will have to fulfil

towards internet users, which will be overseen by the communications regulator Ofcom. Companies will be held to account for tackling a defined set of online harms, ranging from illegal activity and content to behaviours which are harmful but not necessarily illegal. Companies will be able to fulfil their duty of care by complying with statutory codes of practice published by Ofcom.

It is worth considering whether this duty of care ought to be extended beyond the social media companies to other industries, for example financial services, to prevent fraud and other forms of economic crime.

### A refocused local partnership landscape

The experience of other sectors shows that while a national lead organisation is essential, it is also vital that there are local arrangements making clear who is responsible for preventing crime and harm in each area.

There is already a patchwork of prevention-oriented partnership bodies at the local level across England and Wales, some of which perform a strategic role (such as Violence Reduction Units and Community Safety Partnerships) and some of which are operational, in particular in the area of safeguarding where there is an alphabet soup of multi-agency arrangements. Box 1 describes how these bodies emerged from four different waves of partnership working over the last twenty years.

Whereas at the national level the prevention landscape can be described as containing underdeveloped and ad hoc partnership arrangements in some areas alongside huge gaps in others, at the local level the landscape is cluttered by arrangements that are the legacy of previous government agendas. In particular, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are a legacy of the Labour government's focus on volume acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour and have struggled to remain relevant as they lost funding and political clout following the introduction of elected police and crime commissioners.

The local level is also complicated by the existence of non-conterminous local boundaries, multiple tiers of local government and the development of the devolution agenda, focused mainly on economic development, transport and skills, but in some

areas such as Greater Manchester with a growing responsibility for public service provision.

What we do not want to create locally is parallel or overlapping structures with a public safety remit, but rather have local responsibility for crime prevention anchored in existing local actors either with their hands on the relevant levers or with proximity to and relationships with those who do.

There are two levels at which local crime and harm prevention responsibilities might be clarified and capabilities strengthened:

- The crime prevention work coordinated by Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) could be strengthened by widening the remit of Violence Reduction Units to include all local crime (and potentially other harms that require a police response) and spreading these to all police force areas (the VRUs are limited to 18 areas at present).
- Community Safety Partnerships could be given a renewed focus, and more money, moving beyond their traditional volume crime and antisocial behaviour agenda to ensure they are dealing with the full spectrum of challenges.

It could be that a local system could operate at both levels, headed by something akin to a local Director of Crime and Harm Prevention, who could be appointed by the PCC (as VRU Directors are currently) and who would operate as an independent senior advocate for this agenda throughout their area. They would work as part of a wider network in a similar fashion to local Directors of Public Health.



## Box 1. Four waves of collaboration

We can broadly identify four waves of collaborative working with a preventative focus since the turn of the millennium. First, there was the development of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, later Community Safety Partnerships, following the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. These for the first time created a duty on agencies other than the police, particularly local councils, to play a role in promoting what was then generally called 'community safety'. These had a principal focus on tackling local volume crime (such as burglary, vehicle theft and night time economy related violence) and antisocial behaviour. Arguably they have struggled to remain relevant as the policing agenda has shifted towards crimes that take place in the private sphere and on the internet, as well as dealing with the increasingly salient questions regarding the safeguarding of vulnerable people. Moreover, while these partnerships remain formally part of the statutory landscape locally, they have been marginalised as budgets and powers were handed to Police and Crime Commissioners, and as austerity has meant that partners no longer had the resources to dedicate to prevention agendas that remain marginal to their core service delivery roles.

Second, a set of new operational partnerships have been established in the safeguarding arena, including:

- Multi-Agency public protection arrangements or MAPPA through which the police, probation and prison services work together with other agencies to assess and manage violent and sexual offenders in order to protect the public from harm.
- MARACs, or multi-agency risk assessment conferences, where information is shared on the highest risk domestic abuse cases between representatives of local police, probation, health, child protection, housing practitioners, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs) and other specialists from the statutory and voluntary sectors.
- MASHs, or Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hubs: multi-agency teams which identify risks to vulnerable adults and children.

Third, beyond the public safety sphere, but relevant to it, we saw the development in the late 2000s of a push for 'whole place' approaches to tackling complex or wicked issues. Under the last Labour government this was explored through the development of its 'Total Place' agenda which sought to look at whether public expenditure might be better organised around towns, cities or city regions rather than around departmental, professional and service delivery silos. This was later expanded under the Coalition and later single party Conservative governments through the devolution agenda, handing greater budgetary control and flexibility to local city regional mayors, most radically in Greater Manchester but in a more limited way elsewhere. This devolution agenda remains an asymmetric one around the country and it is not clear how it ought to co-exist with other overlapping governance structures, including the existence since 2012 of police and crime commissioners.

Finally, we have seen the emergence more recently of a focus on the need for a 'public health approach' (PHA) to the problem of violent crime. The recent rise in knife crime across England and Wales led to government funding for collaborative work to prevent serious violence. Taking inspiration from successful efforts in Glasgow to tackle gang related violence under the auspices of what is now the Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, we have seen the establishment of 18 new Violence Reduction Units across England and Wales. Some of these VRUs clearly see their role as expanding way beyond the problem of serious violence and are advocating for a PHA to be taken to a wider range of issues, including for example domestic violence. It seems clear that the push within policing, in particular, for a more proactive approach to tackling crime has found a home in the nascent VRU landscape.

However, it is not clear how these new arrangements at force level ought to relate to the CSP landscape at local authority level. Nor do VRUs cover all force areas.



## 5. Resources

Most of the investment in preventing crime and harm under this system would be made by the private sector. Through a general duty to prevent crime, businesses would have to invest upfront in making sure that their products and services were secure.

However, in order to leverage that private sector effort there will be a need for some investment from the government. This is likely to be an ongoing revenue requirement given that we should not expect these efforts to reduce demand on policing and free up monies from the police budget. There is simply too much latent and unmet demand facing police forces for this to result in cashable savings. Put simply they will always have more to do.

So, what kind of public spending commitment might we be looking for? Just to provide an illustration, if we were to follow the example of the public health system of allocating four per cent of the current public safety budget to prevention, that would generate a budget of £760 million. Not all of that of course would need to be new money, given the existing crime prevention funding allocated to PCCs, for example.

The funding for this preventative work would evolve depending on future political priorities. The important point here is not the amount of money invested, but rather the creation of a dedicated funding stream, anchored in a set of independent institutions, that can start the work of shifting the whole system toward a more preventative approach.

## 6. How the crime and harm prevention system should relate to other policy spheres

It is important to note that a crime and harm prevention system of the kind I have described will need to operate alongside other policy spheres, such as local government, public health, education, business and culture. A more explicit system would not itself deliver most of the activities that would contribute to the prevention of crime and harm. Rather the network of crime and harm prevention bodies, locally and nationally, would primarily be focused on the strategic coordination of prevention efforts and would then work in partnership with organisations in other sectors to deliver initiatives and projects.

## Conclusion

To achieve a shift towards the prevention of crime and wider harm what is needed above all is the establishment of a much more explicit prevention system, working across government nationally and embedded into existing local bodies. This would involve a new cross- departmental strategy, a lead national body with a clear mission to prevent crime and harm, a new 'duty to prevent' that could extend existing duties on public agencies and business sectors, and a repurposed landscape of local actors with a focus on preventing crime and other threats to public safety in their areas. In our final section we turn to what all of this means for the role of the police.

# THE ROLE OF THE POLICE IN PREVENTION

In this paper I have argued that our approach to tackling crime and promoting public safety has until now placed too much emphasis on the activities of the police and the criminal justice system. Most of the money spent directly by the state on crime control goes into responding to reported incidents, investigating crimes, prosecuting suspects and then managing offenders in prison or in the community. Our approach to crime is overwhelmingly reactive rather than preventative.

I have made the case that we need instead to do much more to prevent crime and that most of those activities will be undertaken, not by the police or the criminal justice system, but by a full spectrum of other actors in society. A crime and harm prevention system should be established in which it is clear who is responsible for preventing crime and wider harms.

But what role should the police play as part of that wider system? It is to this question I now turn. However, before exploring the role of the police in prevention specifically I set out some necessary preliminary thoughts on the role of the police in general.

## The role of the police

As Ian Loader argued in a previous Insight Paper (Loader, 2020) to inform the Strategic Review of Policing, there are two dominant perspectives on the role of the police. One of these is superficially attractive but easily dismissed. The other is in many ways substantively superior, but is nevertheless still open to challenge, in particular in terms of what limits we might want to place around the police role.

First, there is the view that the police exist to fight crime. The former Prime Minister, then Home Secretary, Theresa May famously articulated this position, arguing that the police ought to have ‘just one objective: to cut crime.’ (Loader, 2020). In focus groups with members of the public the Police Foundation found that this focus on crime, particularly serious crime, remains at the core of the public’s perception of the police role and the kinds of

task the public think they should prioritise (Higgins, 2019). The popularity of this view explains why politicians periodically return to it, often as part of a wider call for the police to get back to basics.

Clearly tackling crime, at least in the sense of investigating reported offences and catching criminals, is central to policing. Nonetheless to make crime fighting the only major objective or even to privilege it is to misunderstand the police role. The police have always done a lot more than crime detection. They look for missing children, they deal with antisocial behaviour, they direct traffic, they investigate road accidents, they respond to calls for help related to mental health problems, and so on. In 2015 the College of Policing undertook an analysis of the composition of demand on the police and reported that 83 per cent of calls to police command and control centres were regarding non crime incidents (College of Policing, 2015). Even if some of those were in some way crime-related, such as reports of suspicious activity, nonetheless it is clear that the public expect the police to do much more than address crime.

So, if crime fighting is not the core police function, what is? The criminologist Egon Bittner (1970) put his finger on the common denominator when he wrote that:

*“The role of the police is to address all sorts of human problems when and insofar as their solutions do or may possibly require the use of force at the point of their occurrence. This lends homogeneity to such diverse procedures as catching a criminal, driving the mayor to the airport, evicting a drunken person from a bar, directing traffic, crowd control, taking care of lost children, administering medical first aid, and separating fighting relatives.”*

When one considers all of the different matters we expect the police to respond to it is hard to get away from Bittner’s conclusion: that at the core of the police role is the utility that their coercive powers may bring to bear on a situation. It is in the end their lawful coercive powers that make the police unique among professions and state institutions. The police are thus best seen as general managers of order, or

keepers of the peace, whose last resort powers of lawful force mean they can be deployed to impose 'provisional solutions' in the face of all manner of threats to the safety of the public (Loader, 2020).

It is their unique powers, most obviously their power to arrest and detain citizens, that explains why the police in almost any modern society have a core role as first responders. Given that many of the incidents that trigger a 999 call are likely to involve a risk of imminent harm it seems inconceivable that a generalist first response agency should not have the power to use lawful force as a last resort. This is why social work and health professionals often request a police presence even to deal with a matter that is more properly within their professional remit. The very presence of a police officer, with the powers that only they possess, can help to de-escalate a situation.

Two qualifications ought to be noted at this point. First, while the enforcement powers of the police are at the core of the Bittnerian view, it would be a mistake to limit the police role to enforcement. Of course, in most cases it is the mere possibility of the use of force, the simple presence of a warranted officer, that does the work in terms of generating a 'provisional solution' to an immediate problem. But if we narrow the police function to only those situations in which force may potentially be required there is a danger of undermining public goodwill towards the police and the very legitimacy of the police as an institution.

For example, most community policing activities, such as holding community meetings to discuss matters of concern or being visible and accessible in the street to answer questions from passers-by, do not require even the theoretical use of police powers. But community policing is widely regarded as essential so that the police can understand the context in which they operate, thereby enabling them to carry out their work more effectively and legitimately. Community policing can also play a role in cultivating the conditions in which they can ultimately use their coercive powers as a last resort but in a way that is informed by a background of local, discussion, debate, dialogue and mutual understanding.

Viewing the police as 'Batman', swooping down in emergencies to impose order or make arrests and execute warrants, runs the risk of the police

becoming detached from the communities they serve and ultimately less effective in their work. So, even though it makes sense to start with Bittner, it quickly seems necessary to build out from there to a more expansive conception of the police role.

The second qualification to the Bittnerian perspective relates to the role of the police in crime detection, which is in many ways the most popularly resonant dimension of police work. If the ability to use non-negotiable force is at the core of the police role, it ought to be noted that many of the tasks involved in investigating crime do not require the use of warranted police powers. While at some stage it may be necessary to execute a warrant on an address or to make an arrest, lots of other tasks within the investigatory process (interviewing witnesses, securing evidence, supporting victims etc) can in principle be carried out by staff without the powers of a police officer.

The degree to which police officers need to monopolise the detection function is an important issue and one to which the Strategic Review will return. However, for the purposes of this paper it suffices to note that even if parts of the process can be carried out by persons without warranted powers, it may nonetheless still make sense on grounds of coherence and efficiency for the police as an organisation to largely own the detection function, given that inevitably police powers will be required at certain points. For example, it may be necessary to begin an investigative process (securing the scene, identifying evidence, witnesses etc) at point of first arrival and thus it makes good sense to attach these capabilities to the first responder.

So, as Ian Loader explains, the 'general order managers' view of the police role is widely taken to be substantively superior to the crime fighter conception and this is generally the view held by 'the adults in the room' whether they are police professionals or academic observers of policing (Loader 2020).

Nevertheless, as Loader also argues, there remains a very real challenge with the view of the police as principally order managers and that is that it imposes very few limits on the police role. In recent years we have seen the police become responsible for a wider range of matters, in some cases because of legislative change (as with public

protection requirements for example) and in other cases because austerity affecting other services has led to more crisis demand to which the police as the generalist 24/7 response agency have had to respond (Strategic Review of Policing, 2020).

So, while a generalist remit seems desirable, it is inherently vulnerable to 'mission creep' and the generation of unrealistic expectations. In reality this means police agencies have to ration their response to the demands placed upon them, generally focusing most of their efforts on the highest harm incidents.

Moreover, as Loader argues:

*"Advocates of order maintenance policing are typically seeking to promote some more expansive and proactive conception of police work. This may involve close engagement with local communities or collaboration with other agencies to get to the root of crime problems, addressing what a recent report advocating public health approaches to policing called 'the causes of the causes'."*

While Bittner's original conception of the police role was essentially a reactive one, it is open to being developed into a more expansive preventative role for the police. Loader warns that this contains two risks. One is that the police end up taking on roles for which they are not properly trained. For example, no one can be content with a situation in which the police have ended up being the principal agency for responding to mental health crises.

A second risk is that of 'ambient policing':

*"a form of policing that becomes intrusively pervasive across much of social life....The risk here is of making security the lens through which social problems are identified, defined and acted upon. The worry is that the police frame starts to intrude upon and re-shape areas of public life and policy (housing, education, public health) where it has no legitimate business" (Loader, 2020).*

So, while one can sympathise with the desire of many police professionals to work further 'upstream', to tackle the 'causes of the causes', there are good reasons for wanting to put some limits around what could otherwise be an expansionary preventative project that takes policing into areas of life where its competencies are not aligned and, worse, where police involvement may actually cause harm.

Having set out some preliminary thoughts on the role of the police in general I now turn to the role of the police in prevention.

## The role of the police in prevention

The police have always had a role in prevention. Indeed, one of the motivations for establishing professional policing in the first half of the 19th century was to deter people from committing crimes in the first place (Critchley, 1967). In the early days of police work the regular (and no doubt at times tedious) patrolling of a regular beat by uniformed officers was intended to prevent crime by creating a deterrent effect. I return to this aspect of the police role below.

Nonetheless beyond that largely deterrence focused preventative role, most police work, as it has evolved since, has taken a more reactive form. The two largest categories of modern police work are their work as generalist first responders and their work in investigating crimes, both of which are about reacting to harm rather than preventing it. 'Crime prevention work' in the modern policing lexicon has largely been relegated to the provision of preventative advice to residents, often through the neighbourhood policing function. In other words, it has come to be seen as marginal to day-to-day police business, with some specialist exceptions which I set out below.

One might argue that this is no bad thing: crime and wider harm should largely be prevented by other actors in society (businesses, regulators, parents, schools etc), as I have articulated earlier in this paper. The police should stay out of it, otherwise they will end up straying into areas of work that are beyond their core competency. Nonetheless, while I am clear that the police, in light of their unique powers, are mainly a responsive agency I do think they have a role to play in prevention.

### The preventative impact of the routine use of police powers

In the routine use of their powers the police are normally in a reactive posture: in making an arrest, interviewing a suspect or bringing a suspect before the courts, the police are responding to crimes that have already been committed. Nevertheless, even in their use of these core powers the police might be seen to generate preventative effects.

Note that in what follows I am not making any empirical claims about the preventative efficacy of

the use of police powers, but I am making the more limited point that *at least in theory* the use of these powers may, in some cases, have preventative effects.

For example, by investigating crimes, arresting offenders and collecting and preparing evidence, the police can begin a process leading to the *incapacitation* of individuals who, if not imprisoned, monitored or supervised would pose a threat to public safety.

Moreover, these processes might provide an entry point for *rehabilitation*, potentially including the use of *restorative* processes. Whether they do lead to rehabilitation is much disputed and given the stubbornness of reoffending rates there are reasons to be sceptical. Nevertheless at least in theory there is a preventative logic at work here.

The use of police criminal justice powers might also have a *general deterrent* effect: potential offenders may decide that the risk of apprehension and/or the severity of sanction is too great and refrain from criminal/harmful activities. As I described above that was in large part the intention when the first professional police officers were employed in the 1830s and 40s: that their presence on the street would deter would-be criminals (Critchley, 1967). I should note that the actual deterrent effect of police enforcement is much disputed.

It is worth mentioning that the possession of lawful coercive power is likely to have a preventative effect well beyond the arena of crime. Indeed, a whole raft of order maintenance functions carried out by the police are clearly buttressed by the persuasive impact of police powers. These functions include managing large crowds, policing protests, protecting public figures and managing the aftermath of critical incidents.

Building out even further, at a more societal level, enacting criminal justice processes may help to reinforce *public trust in 'the rule of law'*, thus interrupting cycles of revenge and retaliation that can precipitate violence, vigilantism, disorder and fear. Fair and consistent enforcement of laws might also play an important role in *establishing norms and pre-dispositions towards pro-social behaviour*. The logic here is that enforcing laws sends a clear message about how people should behave and doing so fairly

and consistently shows people they have a stake in society and may encourage them to act positively towards it.

I reiterate I am not here making empirical claims. In many cases the use of criminal justice powers might lead to more harm rather than less. While each of these mechanisms has potential preventative value in limited sets of circumstances (i.e. each may have an impact on some offenders/potential offenders, specific crime types, and a subset of public safety threats) there will be much that is unresponsive to any of them. My point is only that there is in theory a case for seeing the police even in the largely responsive and routine use of their powers as playing a preventative role.

### The proactive use of police powers to prevent crime and harm

The police can and do use their criminal justice powers in a more proactive way to prevent crime. We can see this in two areas of contemporary police specialism, in particular. In the arena of public protection the police are involved in managing prolific offenders and safeguarding victims in the community, generally in partnership with social services, the voluntary sector and other bodies. This should be seen as an important form of tertiary prevention: managing entrenched problems to ameliorate their harmful effects.

In counter-terrorism policing too there is a predominant preventative orientation. The whole point of this work is to engage in surveillance and intelligence gathering to identify potential terrorists and terrorist plots before they take place. Indeed, the police and the security services are often criticised in the aftermath of terrorist incidents for failing to prevent them, particularly when the suspect was known to them.

More widely there has been the rise of 'intelligence-led policing' which centres on the proactive use of police powers to prevent crime. As Tilley (2008) states:

*"Intelligence-led policing draws on the notion that the police can and do know a great deal about offending patterns. Intelligence-led policing involves effectively sourcing, assembling and analysing 'intelligence' about criminals and their activities better to disrupt their offending, by targeting enforcement and patrol where it can be expected to yield the highest dividends."*



This rise of intelligence-led policing (formalised with the adoption of the National Intelligence Model in 2000) has been linked with the use of police powers to disrupt criminal activity and thereby prevent crime, particularly in the realm of serious and organised crime.

Two other major schools of thought in contemporary policing also have a strong preventative dimension that can involve the proactive use of police powers. Problem-oriented policing (focusing on resolving problems rather than reacting to incidents) and evidence-based policing (using scientifically validated empirical evidence to inform police tactics and strategies) have both led to changes in policing activity that involves the use of enforcement in a proactive way to prevent crime. So, for example, the focus of police patrols on crime hotspots can be seen as an effort to maximise the deterrent effect of police powers.

So, police powers do not just have an indirect preventative effect. There is also a direct core preventative role for the police in skilfully optimising the preventative efficacy of their powers.

### The broader police role in prevention

It is however possible to see a broader role for the police in prevention that does not rest on the use of enforcement powers.

For example, community policing activity is widely regarded as crucial in sustaining public support for the police and in generating vital intelligence. Policing that is distant from communities is less likely to be trusted and less likely to be effective. Once the police engage in community policing activities, they are likely to encounter demands from the public to take action (including working with others) to prevent particular problems in the local area. If the police are to retain public confidence it then becomes important for them to act on public concerns, whether or not this involves the use of police powers. Indeed, this is where problem-oriented policing comes into its own and provides the police with the tools to take proactive steps to tackle issues of local concern, whether directly themselves or in partnership with others.

Intelligence-led policing is also very likely to create opportunities for preventative action that does not rely on the use of police powers. So, for example,

once the dynamics of a street crime problem are understood, rather than (or in addition to) mounting operations to catch offenders, or instigating hotspot patrols to provide targeted deterrence, it may well prove considerably more beneficial (particularly in the longer term) to seek to 'design out' the problem by implementing any number of situational interventions (installing CCTV, physical access barriers, improving natural surveillance, providing warning signs etc.).

But where in this 'build-out' from a relatively narrow to a more expansive understanding of the police role in prevention is the point of over-reach? Returning to our earlier concerns, are there parts of this preventative spectrum where police, precisely because of their unique capacity impose criminal justice sanctions, simply should not venture? We should also be alert to the question of police *over-stretch*; given limited resources and bearing in mind opportunity costs, where is it most appropriate and efficacious for police to be focusing their effort, and what is best left for others?

### The limits to the preventative role of the police

There are a number of ways one might put limits around the police role in prevention. One way of doing this would simply to be clear about who else in the preventative system should take the lead in dealing with particular matters, particularly where a specialist agency exists whose competency is better suited to the particular challenge at hand.

Another way of limiting the police role would be to limit police prevention simply to those activities that require the use of police powers. So, that would include all of those mainly reactive criminal justice and order maintenance activities described above as having preventative effects, but would exclude the wider pallet of preventative work just described: community policing activity that helps to gather intelligence and situational crime prevention work that can prevent identified problems from reoccurring.

However, to rule out any police role in such work is excessive and counter-productive. First, it may be expedient for the police to do some of these things, simply because they are the agency to whom local crime problems are reported and who naturally can then take the lead in, for example, instigating a situational crime prevention solution.



Second, in playing a preventative role beyond scenarios in which police powers may be necessary, the police can help build community trust and confidence. The police as ‘public helpers, fixers and sorters’ is arguably one of the key building blocks for police legitimacy.

A better approach to putting some boundaries around the police role in prevention might be to be clear that to the extent that we expect the police to directly undertake preventative work they should focus on *symptoms*, not *causes*. Herman Goldstein gets close to this when he says:

*“Many of the problems coming to the attention of the police become their responsibility because no other means has been found to solve them. They are the residual problems of society. It follows that expecting the police to solve or eliminate them is expecting too much. It is more realistic to aim at reducing their volume, preventing repetition, alleviating suffering, and minimizing the other adverse effects they produce”.*

The police can do preventative work but the work they do will be located ‘downstream’ rather than ‘upstream’. A formulation like this allows the police to do more than simply react fire brigade style to the symptoms of societal disfunction incident by incident, but also grounds the police role firmly in alleviating actually manifesting symptoms, rather than setting them on a grand upstream mission to seek out and address the *causes of the causes*. In other words, it asks police to act as symptom *managers* not just handlers.

This approach appears to have the benefit of encouraging innovative, informed police proactivity, rather than just ‘fire-fighting’, while putting significant police involvement in ‘social re-engineering’ projects well out of scope: police should accept that there are residual societal problems beyond their remit and do their best to mitigate and minimise their consequences.

To return to the public health framework, the preventative role for the police I have articulated here could be summarised as follows:

- The police should very often lead on tertiary prevention, which is concerned with minimising the impact of problems that have become entrenched.
- The police should work in partnership with other actors when it comes to secondary prevention

which focuses on nipping problems in the bud before they get much worse.

- The police should not be taking the lead and should rarely directly deliver primary prevention (preventing problems from occurring in the first place). However, through the data they collect and the witness they bear they can play a role in highlighting the range of social problems that the rest of the system ought to be addressing. In addition, they can play an important role in supporting or facilitating primary interventions, such as by triaging cases in custody suites and making appropriate referrals.

## Conclusion

In this paper I have argued that we need a proper crime and harm prevention system, led from the top of government, that will catalyse preventative action throughout society, by public services, regulators, businesses, community organisations and families. The police will play a role in this system and in this chapter I have described what that role might look like.

At their core the police are mainly a reactive institution, whose backstop possession of the power to use lawful force, makes them uniquely capable of imposing provisional solutions to all sorts of harmful incidents. This is a critical social function and it is hard to see anyone other than the police performing it effectively.

Nonetheless the police can and should also act to prevent crime and wider harm. They can do this *indirectly* through their role in the criminal justice system, which can have a deterrent effect, can prevent offenders from continuing to offend and more widely may promote respect for the rule of law. However, the police can also *directly* deploy their criminal justice powers in evidence-based ways that should prevent future crimes, such as focusing patrols and enforcement activity in high crime hot spots.

The police can also play a role in prevention beyond the use of their criminal justice powers. Community policing activities are widely regarded as being a key building block for effective and legitimate policing and part of those activities may include working with the public and other agencies on problem-oriented prevention projects. Neighbourhood police officers being proactive in tackling local crime or

harm problems, working with community groups and other public agencies, can be a powerful catalyst for action that has benefits in terms of crimes and harm prevented, but also in terms of strengthening the relationship between the public and the police.

However I am clear that that the police role in prevention should be focused downstream on

nipping problems in the bud before they get out of hand and managing ongoing issue to ameliorate their harmful effects. The police should rarely be involved in delivering primary prevention, but they should play a role in making appropriate referrals to other parts of the system and in calling society's attention to problems that require a wider response.

# CONCLUSION

There is an opportunity for Britain to become a world leader in crime and harm prevention. We already possess first class research institutions focused on understanding the drivers of crime. If this knowledge base were combined with a more systemic approach to prevention across the government the gains could be considerable.

There are vast opportunities to prevent crime and harm that are simply not being taken up because no one owns the prevention task. There are plenty of ad hoc sector by sector initiatives and there is a rather cluttered local landscape of partnership bodies that play a role in crime prevention but which lack resource and focus. What is needed is a much more explicit and robust system focused on preventing crime and harm, with clear roles and responsibilities and lines of accountability. Britain has already shown itself to be a world leader in preventing aviation accidents and accidents and illness at work by taking just such a preventative approach.

This crime and harm prevention system would be guided by a clear strategy, led and coordinated by a national agency, supported by a re-purposed set of prevention arrangements locally and backed up by new duties to encourage all actors in society to play their part. The system would follow a 'polluter pays' principle, meaning that those whose products and services may generate crime and harm will be asked to take action upfront to minimise the risks.

The police form a part of this system, leading and partnering on downstream preventative work where appropriate.

The positions articulated in this paper will be contested. Some in policing will worry that this approach dilutes their ownership of the crime problem. However, I believe that the development of a more systemic approach to crime and harm prevention will be of great assistance to the police. By delivering better targeted preventative interventions we can expect to see reductions in crime and other forms of demand that currently have the police 'run ragged'. By being clearer about roles and responsibilities this approach should help the police avoid 'mission creep' and bring greater focus to their mission.

There will also be resistance to some of the measures that will need to be taken to prevent crime and wider harm. There may be new checks and processes in consumer transactions. Industry will have to think more carefully about the criminogenic potential of new products. Some internet freedoms could be curtailed. All of these matters should rightly be the subject of public debate, in which the gains in terms of safety must be weighed against any losses in terms of, for example, customer convenience or internet freedom.

Whatever decisions are made about particular measures, the most important message from this paper is that we need to get serious about crime and harm prevention. Getting serious means establishing a system whose singular focus should be on preventing crime and harm and creating the conditions for a safer society.

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