Title: *The angered versus the endangered: PCCs, roads policing, and the challenges of assessing and representing 'public opinion'*

Abstract:

Part of the rationale for introducing elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) was a suggestion that the police and public needed to be 'reconnected', with the public more readily able to shape the type of policing they wished to receive. Apparently underpinning this intention was a perception that a single public view about policing priorities could, and would, make itself apparent to PCCs. This paper considers how PCCs assess their public mandate by focussing on an often *contested* policing activity – roads policing. It considers why this particular issue is particularly likely to be understood by PCCs as a contested topic and, furthermore, how PCCs go about accessing and representing diverse views within this 'consumer-led' approach to the provision of policing.

Introduction: PCCs and the challenge of representation

The concept of an elected Police and Crime Commissioner was, in large part, meant to address a perceived 'democratic deficit' which had seen the supposed disconnecting of the police from the public (McLaughlin 2005:241). PCCs were to contribute to a reconnection between the police and the people (Lister 2013:240) who had apparently become alienated by remote, centralised, one-size-fits-all policing (McLaughlin 2005:241). The version of democratic policing proposed by the coalition government assured potential voters that '"your voice" will be heard' (Turner 2014:17), clearly prioritising a *responsive* model of *participatory* democracy, 'facilitating public input into shaping policing priorities, and ensuring that the police are held to account for their effectiveness at pursuing these priorities' (ibid). The PCC model is, furthermore, premised on an understanding of policing as 'a business-like service which must be responsive to its consumers and efficient and effective at addressing their concerns' (ibid: 17) with PCCs responsible for 'representing and engaging with all those who live and work in the communities in their force area and identifying their policing needs' (2010:11). However, concerns have been raised about the way in which PCCs can, and should, go about identifying what their electorate's policing needs and desires are (Brain 2014). Furthermore, it has been suggested that some policing activities may split the electorate, and present a challenge to a PCC trying to find 'a' public view to represent (Wells 2016).

Naturally, awareness of what consumers want necessitates a process whereby those consumers can be asked what it is that they want 'their' police, and 'their' PCC, to do. Equally naturally for a government concerned with localism and a less intrusive central state, the Police Reform and

Social Responsibility Act (2011) avoided being prescriptive about how PCCs should go about finding this out, other than to say that their task included 'obtaining the views of the community on policing' (PRSE 2011:12). As a result, some authors were concerned that PCCs may not devote much time or energy to communicating with their public (Brain 2014:46-7) once they had put together a vote-winning manifesto, but the signs from the first tenure of PCCs are that considerable efforts have been, and are continually being, made to assess exactly what the electorate wants them to do. Raine describes the efforts made by his sample of nine PCCs to access local people's views, including:

> a circuit of public appearances, making presentations and answering questions at public meetings, arranging regular 'surgeries' in local communities, and 'pitching up' in market squares on Saturday mornings to meet shoppers, just as they had done during their election campaigns. Each had also begun a round of attendances at county, district and parish/town council meetings and had accepted a variety of invitations to speak at meetings of other community bodies such as Women's Institutes, Rotary, and Volunteer Centres. (Raine 2015: 117)

This was supplemented by a very significant amount of direct communication received by the various Offices of PCCs, whether by email, letter or phone call (ibid: 118). Therefore, as Erkkila suggests, there appear to have been plenty of 'opportunities for citizens to be involved in "deliberation" on policing issues of local concern' (2007, cited in Raine and Keasey 2012:217). Notable here, is the use of the word 'local'. The introduction of PCCs was couched within narratives of 'local discretion', 'empowerment' (Brain 2014: 47), 'localism' and 'the neighbourly society' (ibid: 41), through which 'democratic citizens' would be 'connected to and engaged in the local governance of public services' (Lister 2013: 241). No longer, then, were the public to accept standardised policies and performance indicators that failed to reflect the local character and concerns of where they lived. Each PCC operates for a particular constabulary area, and as such their very existence contains a reminder of the local basis of their operations – they are representatives of a defined geographic area and its people. As Lister notes, however, this is underpinned by a presumption that 'a' PCC can represent 'the' view of 'an' electorate – even where "the jurisdiction of some PCCs covers two if not three entire counties!" (Lister 2013:241). As Turner suggests, it is a model where:

> [t]he presence of choice is emphasised whilst the potential for conflict is not: the citizen is reimagined as the consumer of policing services who has a legitimate right to make demands of the police, without being required to acknowledge the rights, needs and demands of other groups which may conflict with their own preferences. Policing is, therefore, represented as a non-political activity – a matter of protecting "goodies" from "baddies". (Turner 2014: 17)

Whilst PCCs may find that some 'real' crime types (burglary, violence, drug-related offending perhaps) elicit a fairly unified response from their potential electorate, this research engages with one particular topic about which 'a' public opinion may not be readily discernible by PCCs, and which thus presents a representational challenge.

PCCs and roads policing

Whilst the topic of Police and Crime Commissioners is one that is receiving increasing amounts of academic attention, little has been written about the way in which PCCs respond to, or represent particular aspects of the policing function. The growing body of research in this area has, legitimately, focused on issues relating to the establishment of these new posts, such as accountability (Raine 2016), governance (Baker 2013), operational independence (Wells 2015), relationships with Chief Constables (Davies and Johnson 2016) or analysis of the elections themselves (Johnson and Pattie 2014) which can be predicted or forecast early on, rather than the way in which PCCs have engaged with, for example, burglary, race issues or terrorism. This is perhaps a consequence of the relative newness of the concept of the PCC, with more detailed observations about the impact of their introduction at a practical level perhaps needing time to emerge. However, it is by no means certain that all policing priorities or activities will be represented equally, or in familiar ways. Some have observed that issues such as public order policing, or terrorism, may fare less well in arrangements designed to encourage voters to think locally when they think about the policing priorities they support (Raine and Keasey 2012; Lister and Rowe 2014). Roads policing, historically somewhat neglected within policing studies, has been proposed as a potentially illuminating case study for a particular policing area within the new accountability arrangements (Wells 2016). This paper, therefore, intends to advance the existing contribution in this area by testing the findings of desk-based research (ibid) through analysis of interviews with PCCs themselves. It seeks to explore the contribution of roads policing (or 'traffic') as a case study of the challenges of representational democracy.

As suggested elsewhere (Wells 2016), the subject of roads policing might offer challenges to PCCs given recent controversies about the use of automated technology to enforce speed limits particularly, whilst PCCs might be concerned about their electoral mandate in respect of policing that constructs their voting population as potential offenders *as well as* potential victims (in a way that most policing does not). Indeed, as Poulter and McKenna have suggested:

> Law enforcement can present authorities with a dilemma. Suppose that the majority of the population break a law. What mandate do authorities have for imposing on the majority of the people that they represent, a law that the majority break? (2007:388).

Roads policing certainly thrusts this issue onto the PCC's radar in a, perhaps, unique way. This potential for conflict has been identified via desk-top research (Wells 2016) where three PCCs demonstrated a careful handling of the topic when it confronted them. It was, however, also considered that PCCs might be faced with public demands *for* roads policing that could not be met, particularly in the current financial climate, and when competing against issues such as terrorism, child sexual exploitation, or cybercrime. It must also be recognised, however, that the media has been a significant 'player' in the roads policing context in recent years (Wells 2012, Poulter and McKenna 2007) and that analysis of PCCs *public* pronouncements on subjects such as speed limit enforcement (such as featured in Wells 2016) might not reflect the reality of what was going on behind the scenes (though it does reflect what they are willing to go on record, publically, as saying on the subject). As such, roads policing potentially problematizes the notion of a PCC representing a singular, accessible, local, public opinion, as unproblematically assumed in central government promotion of the PCC concept.

The following sections therefore draw on empirical data to consider the ways in which PCCs have set about ascertaining their public mandate on an issue with the potential to split public opinion. In doing so, it considers the significance of their own methodologies for finding out their mandate, and the implications of these for the 'type' of concern which gets heard. Firstly, however, the methodology for the study itself is explained.

Methodology

Previous research in this area (Wells 2016) and drawing mostly on sources from 2013 (only a year or so after PCCs were elected) revealed evidence of the extent of PCC interest in the presumed views of their electorates. The work questioned if 'as their time in office lengthens, PCCs [would be] able to act with more confidence in respect of the views of their electorate as directly communicated to them, rather than having to rely in part on the views that appear in the media' (2016: 287). It was further speculated that '[t]he invitation to think locally that underpins the PCC approach may well manifest in community demands for *more* roads policing, if the electorate thinks of themselves primarily in the role of resident rather than in their role as driver' (ibid: 287-88). The research presented below advances these discussions in that it: engages with the topic at the end of 2014; focuses on a larger sample of PCCs; and draws on interviews with PCCs (rather than offering an interpretation of their comments in the media). It also considers in more depth why issues of inappropriate road use, amongst others, may feature highly in the kinds of concerns that PCCs witness, and what this tells us about the consequences of asking policing consumers what kind of service they want to receive. Whilst it does not speak directly to representatives of communities themselves, it does explore what powerful figures in policing understand to be the views of those communities – views which may well form part of their decision making processes.

Although the data presented here is drawn largely from interviews with PCCs, it emerges from a project in which 11 Chief Constables and 11 Police and Crime Commissioners[1], from 11 police areas in England were interviewed separately but in matched pairs[2] during late 2014 by the author. All PCCS and Chief Constables in England and Wales were approached to take part in a research project on PCCs engagement with roads policing, with the areas where both individuals had responded positively selected for interview. Participants are referenced simply by the initials PCC or CC to indicate their role, and a number relating to that allocated randomly to their force area during the research. Interviews lasted between 50 and 90 minutes. Interviews took place at the office of one or both interviewees (some PCCs and Chief Constables were co-located and some arranged to be at the same venue for the purposes of the interview) or, in three cases, by telephone. All were recorded and transcribed. Whilst this discussion focuses primarily on the data derived from interviews with PCCs, the views of Chief Constables are included where illuminating to the argument.

---

[1] In three cases, a nominated deputy was interviewed for either the Chief Constable ('DCC' or 'ACC') or PCC ('APCC;). One Chief Executive (PCCCE) for a PCC also stepped in at the last minute when the PCC was called away on other business.
[2] The particular challenges posed by the new accountability relationship between PCCs and Chief Constables are discussed elsewhere, in Wells, 2015

Whilst this is, clearly, a self-selecting sample, this is the only realistic approach to securing participants. It is therefore simply noted that this only a sample and that there may be bias due to self-selection. However, it is felt that the selection offered a good opportunity to speak to some of the most powerful policing figures in the country, and that it did offer a good variety of geographical areas, force arrangements, political backgrounds etc[3].

Ascertaining a 'public view' about roads policing

Whilst Lister (2013) has queried the extent to which any disconnection from policing ever really occurred, the new accountability arrangements certainly appear to have focused a PCC's mind on what it is that their electorate says are important to them. Much as Raine (2015) has described, subsequent to their election, the PCCs who participated in this research had clearly made considerable efforts to go out into communities, meet local groups, and speak to a range of geographically- or interest-based organisations. Indeed, the participants in this research frequently described meetings that had taken place in Parish or Community Halls, in high streets, at 'meet-and-greets', at fairs, events and even in people's homes. As such, they had clearly prioritised this approach to understanding their electorate's needs. Additionally, the public voice was heard via copious amounts of correspondence received at the offices of the PCC, via postal mail, email, and social media.

All PCCs were asked to what degree and in what ways roads policing was on their radar. All agreed that it was a feature of their face-to-face encounters and received correspondence. However, whilst its importance to their electorate was clear, there was less clarity about what action the public felt that their PCC should press for in relation to roads policing, in order to play their part in 'fixing a supposed broken relationship between the police and the public' (Brain 2014: 46-7). The following two sections briefly present characterisations of the diverse views which PCCs reported when asked about their understanding of the public's stance on the policing of roads. As will become apparent, the topics of speeding and parking were, in the case of many PCCs, taken to be synonymous with the topic of roads policing, and some interviewees segued from the broader topic to these more specific issues seemingly unconsciously. At no point was roads policing equated with intelligence gathering, or to preventing organised crime or terrorism - the broader contribution foregrounded in the NPCC strategy in this area (NPCC 2015). With that in mind, the following sections are divided into those amongst the electorate who declared themselves *in favour of* (often specific kinds of) roads policing - 'the endangered'- and those *opposed to* existing levels of (often specific kinds of) roads policing - 'the angered'.

The Angered

Many PCCs were very aware of individuals who fitted the profile of the voter-driver apparently imagined by the PCCs in Wells (2016). Opposition, where apparent, was still very much about

---

[3] Some Chiefs involved pre-dated their PCCs. Some had been appointed by their PCCs. Some PCCs had received considerable media coverage, some had been more low-key. Some covered mostly rural forces, some more urban. Some PCCs were independent, some were politically aligned. Some were co-located with their Chief, some were not. Some PCCs has been police officers or previously members of the Police Authority, whilst others had previously been employed in a variety of other positions.

the use of speed cameras to enforce speed limits – the particular roads policing activity that so preoccupied the PCCs in that research:

> Now, when you look at public reaction to that, it's like - I wouldn't say a 50/50 split on this; I would say probably an 80/20 split, where 80% of the public want speeding enforced, 20% don't…But a very noisy 20%, yes indeed…Increasing the number of people you're going to catch speeding can be a difficult conversation to have, especially with a hostile media. (PCC6)

> This is a really, really, dangerous subject. And you have to be really careful about firing the public up, because the public *are* the offenders. They are multiple offenders in the lower end of the scale of criminality. In a public meeting I [will be] thinking 'I've got to be really careful how I play this' because they are the offenders, the voters, the mass public of [Area 1] are the offenders. You can't say that about burglary, you can't say that about child abuse. (PCC1)

As the second quote makes clear, the unusual role of the audience member as both (potential) voter and (potential) offender was key to the challenge that speed limit enforcement (in particular) was seen to pose to PCCs. The expansion of speed camera usage, under the National Safety Camera Programme (NSCP), was seen to have had a considerable legacy. Some areas reported an issue with particularly passionate opposition, and most had experienced numerous Freedom of Information requests (FOIs) for data on speed camera operation, many in relation to the persistent perception that speed cameras were being used to generate income:

> The speed camera/cash cow issue for a PCC is walking on eggshells and quite frankly does distract me. In the last month I probably spent 4 or 5 working days dealing with that issue. (PCC1)

> There's a perception by members of the public about 'are the speed cameras a cash cow for the Police or the local authorities, government, or whoever?' So there needs to be that balance, and I think part of our role is to try to reassure people as much as possible. (APCC2)

> I've been at meetings when, people say 'aren't these cameras just to get money' …I think it's done damage, don't get me wrong. (PCC4)

Whilst opposition was considered to have declined in recent years, all (PCCs and Chief Constables) agreed that they were aware of past tensions and controversies, around speed limit enforcement particularly, which meant that the issue still required delicate handling.

The endangered

Running counter to the apparent presumptions of the PCCs studied in Wells (2016), a strong theme of the interviews was public demand *for* roads policing, primarily in the form of speed limit enforcement:

I have a whole range of complaints about other things, but a good proportion are about speeding. We get messages every day and we have to deal with them all. But I would say, potentially, 10% of our letters are about speeding… normally complaining about the Police who do nothing about the speeding… The other one, which won't surprise you [is] parking outside schools (APCC2)

I don't get a mail bag that's full of that [roads policing issues generally] but feedback from the meetings that I go to around the county at village halls and so forth: speeding is THE ONE. (PCC11)

I would say we get a steady stream of correspondence and requests from local areas to say, "Please come and do something about speeding, rat runs and those great big lorries going to that estate that's being built". That's the steady stream that comes through all the time. (PCC3)

We looked for a priority from the people. What is it that people are most interested in? And speeding was a key issue for the local population. They want people not to speed. (PCCCE5)

Poulter and McKenna suggest that the hostile national-media led coverage of issues like speed cameras may, previously, have obscured local demand for action (2006:384-5). The following example of a PCC reflecting with 'surprise' on the strength of feeling in favour of action to tackle road safety issues suggests that, whilst this feeling may have been present previously, it had not (until now) found an outlet that could contribute towards its *effective* prioritisation as a community safety issue:

Everyone has got an opinion on roads, haven't they? I was surprised by the passion behind it actually…the passion around safety of young people on the roads… They wanted someone to care about it, someone to take it seriously, someone to speak up on their behalf. (PCC7)

Speeding is also something that has, recently, had a high enforcement profile, with the police visibly involved in attempting to tackle the problem. Some PCCs implied that the public viewed their existence as a fresh opportunity for obtaining the enforcement that communities knew existed 'out there', having experienced it themselves outside their communities or seen it via the media:

It's never about roads policing specifically it's about the impact of things happening or not happening… I think very few people would say 'this is a roads policing issue' but there are a number of members of the public who feel that their quality of life is not as high as it could be because of the impact of speeding traffic. (PCC10)

I was at a parish council meeting last Monday, and there was a prepared statement from the Chair, absolutely lambasting the Police for lack of action; "They keep promising this. Nothing ever happens". And they do, they get quite animated, some of these people… I think these are the things that impact on local people, and they get totally frustrated, because they see no-one dealing with it. They were just fed up of

the speeding and nothing being done, and she was asking XXX, as the PCC, "Can you do something about it?" (APCC2)

For some drivers (the 'angered'), the NSCP's legacy is one of continued over-policing, whilst for other individuals it signifies a potential solution (speed limit enforcement) that is being denied to them, and thus represents under-policing. Speed limit enforcement, as demanded protection and as resisted persecution, therefore still dominated the PCCs engagement with roads policing issues and, for some PCCs, the cautious approach of PCCs evidenced in Wells (2016) may therefore be understandable.

Accounting for diverse views

Whilst it is acknowledged that the data drawn upon here can only reveal what PCCs and Chief Constables understood to be their publics' views, it does seem legitimate to credit those observations with some value, and it is therefore interesting to speculate on why those diverse views (as evidenced in Poulter and McKenna 2007, and Wells, 2012) exist. This is particularly the case given that, as is explored in the final section of this paper, PCCs are in a position of having to in some way weigh-up and prioritise some demands above others.

1: The importance of perspective

Many of those contacting their PCC in some way or another motivated by the issue of speed, referenced their victim or offender status in their approaches to PCCs or the police, and it was that experience that, PCCs and Chief Constables believed, was what caused them to seek redress and made this an 'eggshell issue' (PCC1) for PCCs:

> They are not clamouring for speed enforcement, unless they are affected. They are either offenders or victims. And that's really sad actually but you know what that's the truth… You'd be surprised how many FOI requests we get – people who break the law and then become campaigners, and suddenly I get an FOI because 'on the AXXX there was a camera – why?'. (PCC1)

> I think it will always be important because the vast majority of the public have in some way, shape or form engaged with roads policing, haven't they? Whether they drive, cycle, pedestrian, people engage, whether they've got people parked outside their houses, etc. So I think it will always be important. (CC4)

> [Enforcement] is one of those issues that won't go away. It seems to motivate or energise people to *want it* or to *complain about it.* (APCC2)

Some Chief Constables also observed this inconsistency in what 'communities' actually seemed to want (according to those members of the community that they encountered):

> When you talk to people about roads policing, their hackles rise naturally, don't they, in that most people have got a story? If it's not them, it's family, friends, associates - of injustice in relation to, "I was stopped, speeding, but I was only just

over." Etc. But communities come to him [PCC] and say, "Actually, speeding is an issue throughout our villages. We'd like to see you being there." (CC1)

There's absolutely two streams that you can go down in relation to public support for roads policing. Actually, when you talk to members of the public about priorities, they often mention road policing priorities as amongst their priorities. In which case, if the public mention it, it has to be a priority for policing. But secondly, if they get caught speeding, then it's "Haven't the police got anything better to do other than catch people speeding?" (CC4)

Perspective and experience were clearly seen as being very important in terms of determining whether an individual was supportive of, or opposed to, speed limit enforcement. The vast majority of the sample were able to identify some examples of what they saw as hypocrisy amongst the communities who were demanding action:

Once the community does get involved it allows it to start taking some responsibility for it and of course very often the ones that are speeding in the village are the ones that live in the village. (PCC10)

I would say that it is interesting whether they want more enforcement because actually when you do the enforcement you find that it is people who live in the village that are speeding in it. (PCCCE5)

Significantly, others noted that this hypocrisy was not only *between* different members of 'communities' (who could understandably hold different views to other members), but was present *within* individuals themselves.

There's people who are the offenders and those who are the victims. Everybody thinks they're the other one. Actually the public are both of them because they want *you* booked for speeding, *me* booked for speeding but of course *they* never do it. They want them to go slowly through their village but they want to go through other peoples' villages fast... People get incredibly angry about what happens and then they do it somewhere else. (PCC7)

[O]ne of the first ones they did, it was the Chair of the Parish Council who was caught speeding. Yes, it brings a wry smile, but no satisfaction, because actually I don't want them speeding either. But it shows that it is all about perspective. (CC2)

The numerous references to local campaigns catching local residents (and even members of the groups campaigning for action) can potentially be explained by drivers' optimism bias about their own ability to drive at speed, but negative attitudes towards speeding by the vast majority of drivers that (research suggests) they are likely to perceive as 'worse than average' and worse than themselves (Svenson 1981; Delhomme 1991). Therefore, as I have observed elsewhere (Wells, 2008:809), when drivers are asked for their views on road traffic law enforcement it may be relevant whether drivers are encouraged to consider their own driving, or that of others. Drivers maintain an optimism bias that may allow them to support enforcement against others whilst believing their own offending is safe, meaning that it is significant whether surveys,

consultations (or, indeed, PCCs) ask about the enforcement of speed limits for *other* people, or *in relation to their own behaviour*. Whether a policing solution is either sought, or resisted, appears to partly depend on the person's 'master status' when engaging with, or being asked to engage with, the issue of road safety. Further support for the significance of perspective comes from the observation of PCC3 below, who noted that there was little appetite (as far as he was aware) for increased policing of motorways:

> I don't have people beating on my door saying, "We want more cops out of the motorways, or RPUs." We don't. But going to parish councils of an evening… they quite often say, "We're fed up with our village being used as a rat run. Why can't you get more of your people out here, measuring speed?". (PCC3)

The motorway, clearly, is not a road with a resident population clamouring for their protection from speeding drivers and is, instead, 'populated' by people occupying the role of 'driver'. Hence, and using the analysis proposed above, we would not expect that to be an area where enforcement was demanded. Further to this, the PCC (PCC1) who gave the most examples of encounters with opponents of speed enforcement operated in an area with a very high tourist population – a high number of transitory, temporary, mobile individuals who (the preceding analysis suggests) would be most likely to adopt an oppositional stance, as also detected by the Chief Constable, below:

> People don't like speeding through their village, but we became also a dirty word because everybody *who came to* [area XX] would say, "How many speed cameras have you got!? There's hundreds of them!" (CC4 emphasis added)

Both PCC1s, and CC4s areas were also known to have a particularly high level of enforcement, boosting the number of people identifying with the 'offender' role in relation to that geographic region.

Whether encountering individuals convinced that speed limit enforcement was somehow unfair, or individuals who believed the *absence* of enforcement was unfair, PCCs can be seen as responding to a sense of frustration born out of a perception of unmet need in relation to what have traditionally been seen as low-level problems. Both 'sides' are understood by PCCs and Chiefs to be dissatisfied with the service they are receiving from 'their' police and have chosen to 'reconnect' with the police via requests to their PCC intended to alter the police's approach to what might be considered minor offences. That public, whether demanding or opposing police intervention in road safety issues, certainly sees itself as 'consumers' entitled to dictate the type of policing they receive. They have, seemingly, understood that the PCC is the person to whom their representations should be made, suggesting that the invitation to engage with the process of determining policing priorities has been accepted. The issue of roads policing flags up, however, that the PCCs task is complicated by the fact that the world cannot always be divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies' (Turner 2014:17) and that there will not always be a consensus about what activity is deemed desirable as a means for the public to 'reconnect' with policing.

2: Who asks, what they ask and where they ask it

Whilst inappropriate road use was a significant feature of public requests for action from their PCC, it was often one part of a longer list of local (perhaps indeed parochial) issues that came to a PCC's attention. It is perhaps significant that, in the following examples, two PCCs frame their observations within a language of physically reaching out to their publics - *'everywhere I go'* and *'when we go to meetings'*:

> There's a lot of low lying stuff, such as the parking, the fly-tipping, the dog fouling, which again, these are all the complaints that people - when we go to meetings. We deal with murders, rapes, and what are they interested in? The dog fouling, the parking, the fly-tipping. (APCC2)

> The thing that I hear most is anti-social behaviour [ASB]. Far and away, the thing that pisses most people off is the fact that their evenings are blighted by (typically) young people. Sometimes it's the couple next door, who smoke marijuana and play very loud music all night. But ASB. (PCC3)

> I'll tell you what, to be perfectly honest it's groups of people, everywhere I go - parking, parking on the pavement, speeding, lorries exceeding the limit, antisocial driving, is everywhere you go. It's on everybody's mind. If you go to every village and say what worries them, wherever it is, that's there. (PCC7)

Rather than the national concerns of terrorism, or organised crime, or core crime issues (that, perhaps, the public assumes will always secure a police response), it should not be surprising that it was 'quality of life' issues that were most frequently brought to a PCC's attention when they were out and about in 'their' communities. It is likely that the local focus, and the 'out and about' approach to accessing 'public opinion' described by PCCs, has revealed a new level of concern that some PCCs were initially unaware of (Wells 2016). Anti-social behaviour and quality of life offences tap into broader anxieties about the world and also 'signal to users of a location either an absent, weakened or fragile local social order' (Innes 2004:341). Such disorder is 'regularly encountered and thus assumes significance when contrasted to more serious yet rare crimes' (ibid: 348), becoming 'more meaningful, in the lives of many people than the experiences of serious or even more "ordinary" criminality' (Jackson and Bradford 2009: 510):

> When I'm talking to a public audience, I use a pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are armed robberies, assault, CSE, human trafficking. They won't affect anybody sat in the audience. When you get down the bottom of the pyramid; parking, dog poo, litter, stuff like speeding, they all start nodding. It's quality of life, but in policing terms, low level. (PCC6)

The immediate space, the local, the community, may logically be represented (to a PCC asking specifically about policing concerns) as an area of incivility, of the inappropriate use of spaces that have to be shared and of which the road is just one example. In terms of immediate and 'real' threats to a sense of personal safety, anti-social or illegal driving behaviours are understandably top of the list (as Poulter and McKenna 2007, also found) as representative of wider quality of life concerns perhaps, but also as a genuine threat to safety. Dog fouling and litter may offend, but they do not contain the potential to immediately kill or injure in the way that a car perceived as being driven too fast does.

It can therefore be suggested that the method via which PCCs seek to ascertain public opinion is likely to impact on the responses that they receive. It is possible that the new accountability mechanism represented by the PCC actually encourages *locally*-inspired concerns to surface. Presumably, many of the participants who have responded to the calls for input from their PCC are those that feel they have something to report, and are those that are – at the moment of being asked – within those shared spaces. Indeed many of the reported anxieties are potentially those that will have been witnessed or recalled on the complainant's route to meeting with their PCC. Furthermore, participating PCCs reported that, on the whole, supporters of speed limit enforcement reached them via their appearances at public meetings, whilst opponents were more likely to have written letters or emails. The physical location in which people are asked questions (such as, in this case, 'what can your PCC do for you?') is, as Herzog suggests, more than a question of logistics (2005:27) and 'should not be viewed solely as a technical question' (ibid:28). Whilst Herzog's discussion foregrounds the impact in relation to power and positioning, an impact upon the actual data collected is also highlighted. By conducting their research in community halls and meeting rooms PCCs may have (consciously or unconsciously) encouraged their publics to think locally and raise local issues of threat to their 'defensible spaces' (Newman 1972) – issues that are present, visible and immediate to the contexts in which they are being asked 'what can your PCC do for you?'. Whilst this cannot be proven from the data collected in this study, it is an avenue of exploration which merits further attention.

Clearly, in engaging with their PCC the public is being asked to conceptualise itself in local, rather than national terms, and to consider how it would like to receive police services as a population of potential victims. The following quote nicely illustrates the coming together of the concerns and suggestions explored above:

> Road safety is very high on people's agendas in their local community. What they are talking about is the safety of 'me and my children and family in my local road in the near vicinity of my house'. If you asked them to say what are the main national issues that are the most important it probably wouldn't feature. When you talk about the local community it most definitely does feature. (PCC9)

As often observed, quality of life issues regularly feature in surveys and audits of public policing priorities, alongside threats such as burglary and violent crime (Poulter and McKenna 2007). The PCC may simply be a more direct conduit of those concerns to policing decision makers, as many have found themselves being asked to address concerns that would not necessarily have featured heavily in a Home Secretary's list of preferred priorities for a POLICE and CRIME commissioner. Traffic issues have, clearly, animated members of the public - but not perhaps in the way that the PCCs in Wells (2016) anticipated, and this may be a result of the shift away from the centralised targets relating to volume crime of the past, towards a locally-focused, locally-informed consultation and delivery mechanism for public concerns.

The PCCs' challenge: Representing and addressing an uncertain mandate

Lister and Rowe have observed, in relation to PCCs' attempts to engage with their electorates, that 'there are recurring questions over how the results of…consultations are interpreted and

thereafter translated into practice' (2014:13). This paper now makes some tentative steps towards an understanding of that process, by looking at the way in which PCCs attempt to respond to what they hear about roads policing-related issues.

Raine and Keasey observe that an effective relationship between Commissioner and public 'is likely to centre on public confidence in policing and what might be done to improve it' (2012: 129). Clearly, in the case of roads policing, and the issue of speeding motorists particularly, identifying what might be done to satisfy 'the community' is not a straightforward task, and there may not be a single set of actions that can satisfy one community without alienating another. As PCC1 neatly summarises (below), roads policing issues challenge the basic model of consumer choice at the heart of the PCC model. This model is, as Turner has suggested, based on the premise that the world is neatly divided into 'goodies' and 'baddies' (2014: 17), with the former entitled to specify the kinds of protection they would like from the latter:

> 414 houses, but 414 *thousand* cars go up and down that road a year. Don't they have a say too? So that's the interesting thing. Who has the say on road safety in an area is it the people who live there? Because their children walk that road every day? Or is the people who drive it? (PCC1)

The roads policing example is particularly illustrative of this assumed dichotomisation; we would not expect a PCC to be concerned about the acceptability of an anti-burglary operation to burglars, but the offending driver *is* able to occupy a space within the category of 'potential voter' as envisaged by a PCC and thus must have their viewpoint acknowledged. In an effort to both assess and evidence support, PCC1 required his public to produce petitions in support of their demands:

> What I always say to the public is…'if this is that big an issue and you've got 200 houses in your road I want to see a petition with XX%[4] of those signatures on it, so you give me a [percentage of total] signatory petition and I'll fight your corner.' (PCC1)

Of course, such an approach is biased in favour of the kind of fixed, resident community that can produce a petition, and against the transient, anonymous population that may constitute the main source of objections – drivers. Similarly, PCC10 was keen to see support quantified in an area, before pushing for a response:

> I wouldn't say it has been the solution to everything but it has been quite successful: basically you've got to get ten people in an area to say "there is a problem and we want to do something about it". It's about getting the community to show is it really an important issue or not? And if of course you don't get ten people signing up then that suggests that it isn't, in that locality, a huge issue. (PCC10)

---

[4] The precise way of working out what this PCC consider to evidence a representative figure has been removed to prevent it from being used to identify the respondent. It is, however, more than half of the population.

What both approaches offer a PCC is the opportunity to push for an intervention with confidence that it is supported by a reasonable number of his or her potential resident voters. This is likely to be attractive to a PCC concerned with the essentially fickle nature of their electorate:

> It's really interesting how [getting caught] changes the public perception….So I do get involved in road safety, but *I make sure that the public care* because the biggest issue with road safety is that someone gets done for speeding and becomes suddenly a lifelong campaigner against [enforcement]. And that neutralises it. (PCC1, emphasis added)

The compromise stance on enforcement adopted by the Chief Constable in the second case study explored in Wells (2016) is, therefore, an understandable one for a PCC concerned about re-election. In that case study, the Chief Constable (having been asked by his PCC "to come up with an enforcement plan which demonstrated the force is listening to the concerns of the public" (Ipswich Star 2013)) described a policy whereby enforcement would only take place in areas of public concern (where it had been invited) with the rest of the network receiving 'advisory' or 'educational' alternatives. As suggested earlier, PCCs were aware of a specificity in the locations where enforcement was being demanded (in certain communities, not on motorways). The following section specifically explores one particularly localised 'treatment' which emerged from the research as appealing to many of the key actors, partly it might be suggested, because of the compromise it offers.

The Community Speedwatch opportunity

The popularity of Community Speedwatch with PCCs (mentioned in all twenty-two interviews) was a striking aspect of this research. Community Speedwatch, whilst not being in any sense the only response to roads policing mentioned, is worth exploring because it had clear appeal to both PCCs and Chiefs – appeal which may result from its potential to offer a compromise to the two audiences discussed above. This scheme involves local police-trained volunteers using monitoring equipment to identify speeding motorists in their communities, then passing the details of offending vehicles to the police. The police either issue warning/educational letters to the registered keepers of those vehicles or (where the same details are supplied multiple times) visit the homes of repeat offenders to deliver further warnings[5]. In some areas the scheme has been introduced by PCCs, in others it has been police-led, and in some the scheme predated or existed outside of direct support from either actor. Whatever its provenance, the scheme was clearly viewed as offering a range of different benefits to different actors in different areas. For PCCs it was seen as a route through which concerned residents could be empowered by being provided with speed monitoring equipment. As such, the scheme could give the vocal 'endangered' the sense that their PCC has responded meaningfully to their communicated sense of vulnerability:

---

[5] In some areas there is theoretically the potential to ramp up the response to include prosecution, but this remains an untested extension of the normal scheme which is, basically, advisory.

The [Director of the Safer Roads Partnership said] "We've tried this in the past. Don't like it." We said, "It doesn't matter what you don't like. The people want Community Speedwatch." I don't think they said it really worked, but I think it does work. The local community, they're feeling empowered. They've been allowed to do something about that particular problem and a lot of people, these people who regularly complain, are really interested'. (APCC2)

Missing from this endorsement, and indeed from much discussion of the scheme in interviews and more broadly in online local coverage, is the sense that its effectiveness can (and indeed should) be measured in terms of reduced speeding, or speed-related incidents. Instead, the scheme appears to be valued for its ability to turn the PCC into an enabler of empowerment. It satisfies a demand for action, whether or not that action ultimately solves the underlying issue. The following Chief Constable (from the same area as the APCC quoted above) has slightly more concrete hopes for the same scheme ('changing behaviour'), though these too appear as subsidiary benefits to the sense of being empowered:

It just does what it needs to do. Which is a bit of self-help and people like to do that. Plus there's a bit of awareness raising with the community and hopefully a few people getting to know and actually changing their own behaviours. It should work. (CC2)

The idea of 'self-help' is also clearly attractive in an era when all resources are keenly fought over, but when the pressures of public accountability are increasing. For the following PCC and Chief Constable, Community Speedwatch is attractive because it allows community demands to be turned back onto that community, and to contribute to a sense that all problems are not simply to be handed to the PCC or police to resolve.

It's sort of fallen out, hasn't it, but the Big Society thing; "Well, let's do something for ourselves, not always be reliant on other people". (PCC1)

I think it's a really complex narrative behind it, but certainly it is not uncommon to go to a public meeting and they say, "You're not doing enough about...". That's why you see the rise of voluntary Speedwatches. (CC3)

To some Chief Constables, then, the scheme offers a way of responding to community concerns (concerns that their PCC was potentially demanding that they respond to) in a way that puts little, if any, strain on scarce resources[6].

Community Speedwatch therefore ticks a variety of boxes. Firstly, the creation of a group of volunteers constitutes clear evidence that the action from the PCC will be welcomed. Secondly, it allows a response to be provided with very little resource commitment from either the PCC or the police force and, thirdly, there is little danger of alienating those that relate more to the position of the 'angered' (above), because the 'punishment' is likely to be of little consequence to drivers. Also in its favour as a response in the era of the PCC is the fact that it can be applied in a very *local* way. It can be 'given' to communities where concern appears to be high, but need not trouble the majority of drivers on routes and in communities where no, or little, demand is

---

[6] The particular challenges posed by the new accountability relationship between PCCs and Chief Constables are discussed elsewhere, in Wells, 2015

in evidence. In that sense it is a good compromise for an individual concerned with showing that they are responding to local concerns, but wary of committing to potentially alienating general interventions. However, whilst it can also be deployed directly by a PCC without intruding on the Chief Constable's operational responsibility, it does not really represent the kind of strategic-level input that PCCs were supposed to offer. Indeed this is probably part of its appeal, as it allows a PCC to avoid blanket policies and practices that may alienate as much as they attract, but such local activities do raise questions of inequity, as only those with the resources, time and energy to get themselves onto the PCCs radar and to sustain a community-led initiative are likely to feel that they have 'had their voice heard'. Despite these risks, Community Speedwatch is a logical choice for both PCCs and Chief Constables who are engaged in a complex accountability relationship with each other and with a public that has been encouraged to make its policing wants and needs heard, and to expect that they will be addressed – even when those wants and needs may conflict with those of other members of their communities.

Conclusion

Rather than just test out the findings of Wells (2016) empirically, this paper advances discussion in this area by exploring *why* PCCs may be experiencing different demand than they expected, what that demand might actually look like, and begins to suggest ways in which PCCs go about managing that. This is presented as a case study in the challenges facing PCCs in their roles as conduits of 'public opinion' or 'consumer demand' in a new, and increasingly participatory, democratic accountability structure – in this case where a singular 'opinion' and a homogenous 'demand' are not in evidence. Whilst the data collected cannot be assumed to be an entirely accurate representation of the public's 'real' views, what PCCs and Chief Constables reported is confirmed in other research (for example the apparently contradictory survey findings report in Wells (2012:3), and the recurrent presence of road safety issues in public consultations evidenced in Poulter and McKenna 2007). Some consequences of these findings are suggested below.

By favouring an approach of going out and asking local people about their policing needs, it is possible that a PCC encourages the foregrounding of 'potential victim' status in respect of locally observable and experienced quality of life issues. Whilst these may not be the types of offences that the government expected to be prioritised, the response of communities has been a logical one given the context in which they are being asked, and the significance attached to 'signal crimes' within geographical communities. Research by Jackson and Bradford (2009) would suggest that, actually, an approach that hears and appears to value the significance of quality of life concerns is a sensible approach to take for a PCC concerned with levels of legitimacy for themselves and consent for their force. They note that it is 'more day-to-day issues of neighbourhood stability and breakdown [that] come to the fore when people evaluate police performance' (2009:510).

It does appear that, during the second wave of PCC elections in May 2016, roads policing has received a slightly different coverage. For example, one of the candidates for the West Mercia position listed speed enforcement as one of his top priorities if he were to become PCC, citing speeding as "the issue of most widespread public concern" in his area and favouring 20mph

limits (Raine 2016). In Hertfordshire, whilst the first Police and Crime Plan promised to address road traffic collisions in "innovative ways" rather than "just using more enforcement activity" (OPCC Hertfordshire 2015), by mid-2016 the first of the same 'PCC's Road Safety Fund' grants was approved – for more speed cameras (OPCC Hertfordshire 2016). Finally, in Cheshire, a shift in focus could be detected between the start of the incumbent's first tenure, and their manifesto for re-election. The earlier commitment to tackle the roads-based offending of a more criminal 'other' - travelling criminals, drug and drink driving (OPCC Cheshire 2013) was replaced by a pledge to "enhance[e] Cheshire's Roads Policing Unit with technology to address speeding and careless driving" (Liverpool Echo 2016). In the latter two cases, it appears that time has taught PCCs that the reality of public attitudes to roads policing is not, perhaps, as they (and the PCCs in Wells 2016) expected. Both now claim to support interventions and activity that they appear to have been cautious about earlier in their tenure – presumably because their experience of public consultations has caused them to rethink what best demonstrates that they are listening to their electorates.

It may therefore be that as the second tenure progresses, we see greater coverage of roads policing issues (in the limited sense in which they were understood by the PCCs here) and of quality of life issues more broadly. It is not clear how Chief Constables would or should respond if that indeed becomes the case – after all it is not necessarily the case that the public should actually get the policing that it says that it wants. It is also not clear that, by demanding responses to lower level quality of life issues, the public are sanctioning the diversion of resources from areas such as burglary, violent crime, terrorism or CSE – rather, they may just be asking for 'more' policing. The fact that the message (in relation to this one policing case study at least) challenges the dominating national picture of recent years does suggest that the local flavour of public concerns may become more audible in this system – in some ways achieving the 'localism' that was desired. Such views were, seemingly, denied an *effective* conduit in more centralised times. Whilst many Chief Constables were unsurprised at the significance that the public attached to traffic and other quality of life offences, within the PCC system they may in future find it more difficult to argue that these are low priority issues for the police.

PCCs were set the challenge of 'obtaining the views of the community on policing' (PRSE 2011:12). In this case, clearly, there are multiple views and multiple communities who all see the PCC as a solution to perceived under- (or indeed over-) policing. The challenge for the PCCs in this sample was less about accessing those views, but deciding which they were confident enough to represent. There are potential parallels in other areas of policing practice, for example in racially diverse communities, or in relation to the interests of young people. In the latter case, the use of public space by young people may be represented as problematic per se, and a PCC may have to tread a careful path if they are to appease one section of the community without alienating another[7]. The research conducted here demonstrates that inappropriate road use is just one of a number of what are often intra-community issues that PCCs are finding themselves expected to solve – issues that often arise between groups of 'law-abiding' people, rather than more traditional and representationally simple clashes between 'goodies' and 'baddies' (Turner 2014:17). 'Enabling' and 'empowering' Community Speedwatch schemes have

---

[7] Although as Millie and Bullock note, this a population by definition excluded from the democratic process via which PCCs obtain their mandate (2012:17).

emerged as one apparently attractive solution for PCCs and Chief Constables with their respective concerns of representation and resourcing.

The findings presented here are of significance both to the wider specialism of roads policing, and to the study of PCCs. In terms of lessons for roads policing, a significant point is that this research is not just demonstrating out-and-out support for roads policing, but a very specific local demand for some types of roads policing. Even within this relatively positive representation of speed limit enforcement, however, we see PCC reluctance to tackle, or demand Chief Constables tackle, anything other than locally identified problems where support is clearly in evidence. There was no evidence that acknowledged local support for action against speeding drivers was being translated into confident PCC demands for force-wide enforcement. This runs counter to the intention that a PCC should keep their input at the level of strategy-making, and suggests that fears about their 'interference' (Lister 2013) in operational decisions may have some foundation. Other research (Wells 2015) suggests that when PCCs have been personally approached about issues, around election time, and where pledges have previously been made on certain issues, PCCs are particularly likely to pressure their Chief Constables for action. In the case of the latter context, the 'loudest voices' (Lister and Rowe 2014:13) in the places where the PCCs go in order to feel and look 'connected' may get heard particularly well in the new arrangements.

The paper's significance for considerations of the role of the PCC is in terms of the observations that their approach to canvassing the opinions of their potential voters means that they are increasingly being challenged to take action in respect of local issues that may represent an extension of the policing brief. In straightened economic times, and with the major challenges of CSE, terrorism and cybercrime (ironically issues that transcend 'local' force-level policing in many cases), PCCs may have to be cautious that they do not create a demand that cannot be satisfied when they 'reconnect' with the consumers of police services by asking them what kind of policing they would like to receive.

Bibliography

Baker, S. (2013), '*Has the introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners provided accountability to local people?: a Case Study in Hampshire and IOW'.* MSc dissertation, University of Portsmouth. Available at http://eprints.port.ac.uk/14493/ [accessed 13.03.16]

Brain, T. (2014), 'Police and crime commissioners: the first twelve months' *Safer Communities*, 13/1: 40--50.

Davies, M., and Johnson, J. (2016), 'Navigating the One-on-One Model of Accountability: Lessons for Police and Crime Commissioners and Chief Constables through the Lens of Principal–Agent Theory', *Policing,* (advance access 2016)

Delhomme, P. (1991), 'Comparing one's Driving with Others: Assessment of Abilities and Frequency of Offences. Evidence for a Superior Conformity or Self bias?'. *Accident Analysis and Prevention*, 23: 493--508.

Herzog, H. (2005), 'On Home Turf: Interview Location and Its Social Meaning', *Qualitative Sociology.* 28/1: 25—47.

Home Office. (2010), 'Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people', London: HMSO

Innes, M. (2004), 'Signal crimes and signal disorders: notes on deviance as communicative action', *The British Journal of Sociology,* 55/3: 335—355.

Jackson, J., and Bradford, B. (2009), 'Crime, policing and social order: on the expressive nature of public confidence in policing', *The British Journal of Sociology.* 60/3: 493—521.

Johnson, R., and Pattie, C. (2014), 'Electing Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales, 2012, as Second-order elections', *Representation.* 50/2*:* 217—229.

Lister, S. (2013), 'The New Politics of the Police: Police and Crime Commissioners and the 'Operational Independence' of the Police', *Policing.* 7/3: 239--247.

Lister, S., & Rowe, M. (2014), 'Electing Police and Crime Commissioners in England and Wales: Prospecting for the Democratisation of Policing', *Policing and Society: An international journal.* 1: 1--20.

Liverpool Echo. (2016, April 5th), 'Conservative Cheshire police and crime commissioner candidate launches manifesto in Widnes' available at http://www.liverpoolecho.co.uk/news/local-news/conservative-cheshire-police-crime-commissioner-11136764 [accessed 05.04.2106]

McLaughlin, E. (2005), 'Forcing the issue: new labour, new localism and the democratic renewal of police accountability', *The Howard journal of criminal justice.* 44/5: 473—489.

Millie, A., and Bullock, K. (2012), 'Re-imagining policing post-austerity', *British Academy Review.* 19: 16--18.

National Police Chiefs' Council. (2015), 'Policing the Roads in Partnership: A 5 year Strategy 2015 – 2020', NPCC.

Newman, O. (1972), *Defensible space: crime prevention through urban design.* Macmillan: New York

OPCC Cheshire (2013), 'Police and Crime Plan for Cheshire 2013-16' available at http://www.cheshire-pcc.gov.uk/Document-Library/Police--Crime-Plans/Police-and-Crime-Plan-2013-2016.pdf [accessed 20.05.16]

OPCC Hertfordshire, (2015), 'Everybody's Business, 2015-2020:The Police and Crime Plan for Hertfordshire' available at http://www.hertspcp.org.uk/Papers/2015-06-11/Item%209%20-%20PCC%20draft%20Police%20and%20Crime%20Plan.pdf [accessed 20.05.16].

OPCC Hertfordshire, (2016), 'First Road Safety Fund bid approved' available at http://www.hertscommissioner.org/2016-04-first-road-safety-fund-bid-approved [accessed 20.05.16].

Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act. (2011), London: HMSO.

Poulter, D., and McKenna, F. (2007), 'Is speeding a "real" antisocial behavior? A comparison with other antisocial behaviors', *Accident Analysis and Prevention.* 39: 384—389.

Raine, J. (2015), 'Electocracy with Accountabilities? The Novel Governance Model of Police and Crime Commissioners', in Lister, S., and Rowe, M. (eds). *Accountability of Policing.* Oxford: Routledge, 111—131.

Raine, J. (2016), 'Key Policy Pledges' available at https://johnraineforpcc.org/key-policy-pledges/ [accessed 13.05.16]

Raine, J., and Keasey, P. (2012), 'From Police Authorities to Police and Crime Commissioners: Might Policing become more Publicly Accountable?', *International Journal of Emergency Services*. 1/2 : 122—134.

Svenson, O. (1981), 'Are We All More Skilful and Less Risky than our Fellow Drivers?', *Acta Psychologica*. 47: 143--148.

Turner, L. (2014), 'PCCs, neo-liberal hegemony and democratic policing*', Safer Communities.* 13/1: 13—21.

Wells.H (2008), **'**The Techno-Fix versus the Fair Cop: Procedural (in)justice and automated speed limit enforcement'**,** *British Journal of Criminology*. 48/6: 798—817.

Wells, H. (2012), *The Fast and the Furious: Drivers, Speed Cameras and Control in a Risk Society.* Surrey: Ashgate.

Wells, H (2015), 'Grey areas and fine lines: Negotiating Operational Independence in the Era of the Police and Crime Commissioner', *Safer Communities*. 14/4: 193—202.

Wells, H (2016), 'PCCs, Roads Policing and the Dilemmas of Increased Democratic Accountability', *British Journal of Criminology.* 56/2: 274--292.