

Summary and conclusions

This report presents proposals concerning the management of policing, with the aim of increasing cost effectiveness. The proposals are based on a review of various documents concerning the objectives of police activities and the achievement of those objectives, and also on a review of international research into cost-effective policing. As part of the project, background papers on efficient police operation were commissioned from a number of Swedish and international researchers. This report is partly based on these background papers.¹

The report observes that interest in measuring the effects of police operations, particularly using quantitative indicators, has grown substantially in recent years. This is a positive development since assessments of public sector services are an important but neglected area. Such systematic analyses of tactics are a necessary instrument to operate successful and effective departments. In short, well executed assessments are essential for establishing relevant priorities, utilising and disseminating experience in different ways of operating, and developing and improving police activity.

The demand for goods produced in the public sector is always greater than the supply of resources. Police on the local and central levels need systematic knowledge on the extent of crime in order to establish priorities and make decisions on how resources should be allocated. Such knowledge must be based on various indicators that allow for data triangulation. It is, therefore, also necessary to use statistics based on crimes recorded by the police, as well as crime data from other sources. Also, by means of method triangulation, developments in different types of crime can be analyzed over time.

¹ The background papers are Holgersson and Knutsson (2010); Holmberg (2010); MacDonald and Ridgeway (2010); Neyroud (2010); Ransley, et al. (2010); Shepherd (2010); Sherman (2010); Weisburd and Telep (2010). All papers are available at ESO's homepage, www.eso.expertgrupp.se.

Carrying out such measurements and subjecting them to proper analysis requires skills that are largely lacking within police departments today.

Activities must be assessed using appropriate methods of measurement that address relevant questions. It is most likely that pointless measurements will meet with strong and justified opposition within the organisation. The regular evaluation of the efficiency of various branches of the public sector is also a matter of democracy, since citizens have a right know how their tax money is being spent.

This report is critical of certain objectives laid down for police tactics on central, as well as local, levels. It also questions some of the methods used to review the extent to which some of these objectives had been attained. Particular criticism is directed towards the use of the number of crimes reported to police as an indicator of how successful police are in their primary task, i.e. preventing crime. The main problem with using such measurements is that they are often poor indicators of the crime rate, as well as its fluctuations over time. Moreover, it is generally hard to establish a causal connection between variations in crime rates and changes in policing tactics. The crime rate is also affected by many factors unrelated to policing. It is therefore impossible to assess the extent to which policing affects the crime rate, unless all these other factors are kept constant. Furthermore, the use of new policing methods and extra operations in a particular area are often preceded by an increase in crime in that area. When assessing new methods and operations in relation to a drop in crime, it is thus important to differentiate between the effects of police operations and a naturally occurring regression to the mean, i.e. a return to a more normal crime rate that would have occurred regardless of police activities.

The report also criticizes a number of other quantitative objectives for the police, such as the number of breathalyser tests that should be carried out annually by each department. These breathalyser tests are administered in order to prevent drunk-driving offences and, by extension, reduce the number of injuries and fatalities on the road. The administration of breathalyser tests should thus be regarded as a means, rather than an end. There could be other, more effective and less costly methods of achieving these very same objectives. The fact that the number of breathalyser tests for each police department is decided at the

central level may, in practice, reduce the efficiency of policies that were instituted in order to save human lives. Mechanically sticking to the same crime prevention method in spite of variations in local conditions may lead to reduced efficiency, a waste of resources and, in the worst case, cheating.

Other measures of effectiveness, such as crime clearance rates, can be used to assess the efficiency of police investigation processes. However, these measures should be used in an appropriate way – preferably in combination with other measures – and users ought to be aware of the problems associated with them. The same is true of surveys related to perceptions of safety, as well as public satisfaction with police services. The report also proposes a number of methods for gauging the performance of individual police officers and units in terms of operational objectives.

Generally, the report suggests that the police should base their activities on science, and tried and tested experience to a much greater extent than in the past. Considerably better knowledge should be gained of international criminological research, particularly research on effective policing methods. Another key issue in this context is the introduction of a higher education program for police officers, which would, among other things, smooth the link between police activities and research. Police officers who receive higher education at an institution with research links should also, later in their working lives, be better able to interpret research results and thus use them to develop their work.

The report also proposes that all new operations within the police service, whether they involve crime prevention, criminal investigation or services provided to the public, should be systematically evaluated before being implemented on a large scale. This includes everything from organizational changes and changes in daily operations to the introduction of new technology. Evaluations should preferably be in the form of randomized experiments, but if this is not possible, other methods should be used, even if they give less reliable results. New operations and tactics used at the local and central levels, and evaluations of these should be documented and accessible through a searchable database, so that knowledge gained from them can be utilized by others. This is something that is noticeably lacking in the Swedish Police Service's current organisation. This deficiency means that resources are wasted, as past experience is not utilised. It is vital

that a structure that compiles results from different experiments in police operations is created. Such a structure should be amended continuously as new knowledge is added. For the proposed changes to be possible, police must change their attitude towards research, and researchers must change their view on cooperating with the police. Certain organizational and perhaps even legislative changes are also needed. However, it is a fundamental prerequisite that appropriate funds are earmarked for such activities so that they can only be used for research and evaluation.

There is currently extensive and rapidly growing international knowledge of both cost-effective and inefficient policing methods. An example of this is the new research findings on the effects of policing at 'hot spots', awarded the 2010 Stockholm Prize in Criminology, which indicate that there are strong crime control effects of reorganizing police patrols. The application and systematic development of this knowledge within the police community could help bring about the attainment of set goals, while remaining within the existing budget. However, it is not possible to transfer foreign experience directly into Swedish conditions. It is therefore necessary to first systematically test how different tactics work in Swedish conditions before implementing any permanent changes.

Experience has shown that major police reforms that are not based on well-established knowledge generally yield negative results.