

The Cumberland Lodge 27th Annual Police Conference

## Hitting the Target, Missing the Point?

Friday April 25th to Sunday April 27th 2008

### Conference Report

#### **Conference Description**

Central Government, in the last decade, has directed its focus on performance management of local services. The Police Service, in common with other public sector organisations, has been subject to central target setting, key performance indicators and an intervention regime.

The positive impact of targets includes the creation of common objectives, and the opportunity for comparison. Government would point to improvement in key performance areas. The downside may be a narrowing of view about what the public service is there to provide, with the targets set becoming ends in themselves. Figures can be presented in the most flattering light, with the counting of things taking precedence over the quality of service that underpins the targets. The priorities of local people may be overridden by the central target regime. What will be the impact of the proposed re-grouping of targets? This conference will provide the opportunity to examine the theory and practice of using targets.

The test for any Government in the future will be the extent to which it can devolve accountability to the public which is demanding it. Public Service Provision risks, however, becoming skewed towards meeting narrowly drawn central targets while the public feels no safer. How, therefore, can targets be further improved and more finely tuned? Should they be abolished completely or is there a need for greater emphasis on the need for leadership that finds real benefit in targets while continuing to see the customer as central? The Police Service, as with other public sector organisations, stands at this crossroads.

#### **Introduction**

It was in order to discuss this pressing agenda that some sixty six persons gathered at Cumberland Lodge in late April 2008 for the annual Police conference. The Service holds many conferences for this level of personnel. What makes this particular annual gathering unique (perhaps) is that it also encourages representatives from other sectors to attend, as well as providing a forum for the discussion of police service issues from an ethical and philosophical standpoint. In that sense it fulfils the particular mission of Cumberland Lodge.

This year's theme was no different. Target culture has been at the heart of public life for almost a decade, and it seemed opportune to the organising committee that this annual meeting give proper consideration to it.

The nineteen speakers came from the Police Service itself, as well as those government organisations whose job it is to oversee and scrutinize it. Also represented were other public service bodies or academics, all of whom had insights to offer on the culture and its effects within their own areas of responsibility.

Speakers representing the Police Service included **Roger Baker**, the Chief Constable of Essex; **Jan Berry**, the Chair of the Police Federation of England and Wales; **Peter Neyroud**, a former Chief Constable and now the Chief Executive of the National Policing Improvement Agency; Sergeant **Dan Stoddart** of Hertfordshire Police, and **Sir Norman Bettison**, the Chief Constable of West Yorkshire. Each brought individual insight on target setting, and the effects that it had made, both positive and negative, on that part of the Police Service which they represented.

Alongside them others with connections to the Service, such as **Kate Flannery** from Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and **Louise Casey**, the Head of Crime and Communities Review in the Cabinet Office, were able to reflect on target culture from the position of seeing its effects set at the heart of government policy. It was particularly stimulating, therefore, to have a senior civil servant present as a speaker in **Sir John Gieve**, now Deputy Governor of the Bank of England but at the Home Office in the era when targets, especially in the shape of the then newly introduced Public Service Agreements, were finding their first audience. To hear at first hand of the philosophical and strategic thinking that lay behind the introduction of targets was of genuine interest to the Conference, and he had a receptive and generous hearing. **Tom Thomas**, the Director of his own Consultancy, was the most unequivocal in defence of target culture, and he gave a detailed and graphically informed presentation on what the culture has to offer both private business and public agencies.

This is not to say, of course, that the debate was without its critics, as it is hoped the remainder of this Report will make clear. **Thomas Docherty**, Professor and Head of the Department of English at Warwick University, gave an impassioned critique of target setting both as it found expression within his own world of higher education but also as it translated into other areas of public life. That *cri de coeur* was taken up in varying degrees by **Barry Loveday**, Reader in Criminal Justice Administration at Portsmouth University, and **Simon Caulkin**, a writer on management for the *Observer* newspaper. A more nuanced account of targets within academia was given by **Drummond Bone**, Vice Chancellor of Liverpool University.

Two other aspects of the Conference deserve mention. One of the most stimulating sessions consisted of six "mini" reflections on the ways in which targets impact on the life of very different institutions. Each speaker, representing either an agency within the Police Service, a local hospital trust, a large secondary school which had once found itself subject to special measures, and a significant and prosperous multinational corporation, gave invaluable insights on the ways in which target setting functioned within their own contexts. The picture presented was not uniform (how could it be otherwise?) and also not beyond criticism. It was the fact of these presentations, however, coupled with the opportunity to reflect at length upon them in small group discussion that led to an impressive final plenary centred on Q and A addressed to these particular speakers. What was especially useful to the Conference by means of this session was the opportunity it gave for all participants to realize areas of common ground.

It is to a fuller consideration of the many themes presented at the conference that this report now turns. What follows below, however, is a short summary of those themes and ideas for those who may wish to have this to hand before the much fuller explication.

### **In Summary**

The case for the prosecution in target culture is extensive. At its worst it results in the worst kind of managerialism, with its consequent abdication of personal responsibility. It can also damage morale and professionalism, prevent the possibility of learning on the back of mistakes made and result in ever greater bureaucracy. It can also derail an organisation from its true purpose, cause it to focus on obvious as opposed to pivotal (not so obvious) problem areas and lead to many situations where the "law of unintended consequences" prevails. It demands quick results when these are often not available and where development over time makes more sense for an organisation. It also ignores the particular and the local when it is precisely these factors that are

of most interest to "end users" of services. Targets are always on the move. Achieve one and another comes into play; aim for one, and you risk missing another. There is always present the difficulties associated with a "one size fits all" methodology which is administered from the "top down".

What, then, of the case for the defence? Target culture works best when simple formulae and procedures are adhered to. These include the ability for an organisation to decide what its core business is going to be, to then measure it in such a way that incentivizes people to realize it, to keep it simple and to communicate strategy well and often. It is also the case that it can provide focus, accountability and the more efficient use of resources when implemented well.

How might the Police Service make the best use of the culture? It could begin with paying attention to local, particular and historical circumstances in the formulation of its policy. A corollary of this would be the place of local leadership and culture. The need for common methodologies across different agencies with whom the Police work would also assist in the creation of more coherent policies; ones that centred on the implementation of strategic partnerships rather than contractual targets, the former having a greater relational element to them. The philosophy underpinning "joint visible branding" has much to offer here.

What does this mean "on the ground"? It means calling the Service back to doing what it does well. Simple reassurances to the public (such as keeping the local patrol officer) often enable that same public to then trust the Service on more complicated, less easily explained, issues. Policies based on the concept of "outside-in", where the Service faces its customers (the general public), asks what it is that it may best need and then readjusts its internal organisation in order to meet it, offer a way forward that may, in its turn, create the kind of "benevolent circles" that enables society to keep order. All of this suggests a return to, or re-invigoration of, common sense policing, where the local BCU and the bobby on the beat are given proper credence and place.

### **Plenary One - Explaining the Target Culture**

The first session set the scene in seeking to explain the target culture, and this was enabled by a senior civil servant with a particular brief for the Police Service. At the same time she made it clear that she was speaking in a personal capacity. The Royal Commission of 1962 on the role of the Police claimed that its aim was the "maintenance of the Queen's Peace". That somewhat straightforward description has now been expanded to include a series of "performance aims", all of which are subject to centrally set targets. Evidence of success in this regard, however, is not forthcoming. Targets seem to suggest that The Police is doing its job well when it comes to reducing the sheer volume of crime, but not at all when it comes to identifying and managing the serious risks posed by terrorism; "level 2/3 crime responses" and, at the other extreme, local crime problem solving. The measures for serious crime risk often appear odd, one such example being measuring organized serious crime groups existing within each 10,000 of the population. When it comes to local crime figures individual incidents are often not dealt with (through mediation for example) before getting passed into the Criminal Justice system. Reports on other target measures for the Service, including those for quality of delivery (with a focus on the "customer") and better use of resources suggest a tentative, mixed response so far. Overriding all, of course, is the simple fact that in setting one kind of target you automatically run the risk of missing another, an instance of which would be the seeming incompatibility of having a Service which has both high visibility in the public eye as well as able to make best use of its available resources.

In spite of this, there is a general consensus that targets can help to improve performance as long as they focus on the right outcomes. This would include their ability to convey what is most important, to provide a focus for effort, to promote the accountability of personnel and to "stretch" them to secure the necessary improvements. Difficulties arise precisely because this is

often not the case, and targets are not set appropriately for individuals and organisations. They can all too easily “demoralise through failure”, as well as encourage a kind of complacency, as when, for example, a target is met in advance of the specified time frame originally given for it and those responsible then “sit back” on the basis of having done what was required of them.

Alongside these particular difficulties are those associated with a culture that ignores the operating context (applying a set response time of 10 minutes to answer emergencies, for example, without taking into account the exact nature, urban or rural, of the context within which a particular service operates) and squeezing out any possibility for personal discretion on the part of officers. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that there is greater enthusiasm for targets the closer one is to the central authorities that set them, who in their turn are unable to see clearly how both calibration and context have their part to play if negative outcomes are to be avoided.

What therefore might be done in order to save the best of target culture? There has to be a renewed emphasis on local leadership and culture, and the framing of a culture that moves away from fear, defensiveness, competition and parochialism as features, to one that centres on the use of foresight, the willingness to learn from situations, understanding variation in contexts and accentuating a proper accountability that doesn't begin on the back foot every time. Consider the following example of how figures can be misconstrued. One Police authority discovered that every March witnessed an increase in its Criminal Damage Reports. Further investigation discovered that much of this was due to the Local Authority's desire, every February, to ensure that its budget for the Year was completely used, and consequently encouraging its housing tenants to report on such damage as a means to spend resources accordingly. This is the kind of local disparity, discovered only through local investigation of an issue, that a centrally set target is unable to take into account.

What is called for is allowance for those “on the ground” to use their own analytical abilities to draw upon their own knowledge of a situation and to frame responses accordingly. While target culture remains wedded to negative approaches (“who's dragging us down?”, “what's the quick fix?”) it will not be able to respond to a more positive agenda; one that seeks and sets long term and educational priorities as its norm.

The second speaker approached the issues from the perspective of one concerned with target culture in higher education. Taking as his cue the title of Hannah Arendt's book, *The Banality of Evil*, he made the point that the truly pernicious in society is often banal. It is often the banal in life that gets an easy hold on the public imagination. Target culture, it was argued, damages our society in two contrasting ways; as something that militates against individual responsibility and as part of political process. With respect to the first, targets (invariably administered by groups rather than individuals) become difficult to ascribe responsibility for. Groups and individuals have very different logics and the psychology of a crowd, for example, is one which has difficulty in accepting responsibility for its actions. Hence targets fail because no-one can, neither needs be, responsible for them. With respect to political process, targets simply become a management tool and often result in the worst kind of managerialism; the phenomenon whereby managerial tools designed for purposes beyond themselves become ends in themselves. They become excuses for bad management by allowing the poor manager to abdicate responsibility for actual management while setting up a system that on paper appears to make it work.

The speaker cited two examples of how this works to the detriment of his own institutional life. The first was that of a Vice Chancellor who, rather than make a decision on the hiring of a new member of staff within a particular department (one that is badly needed) will instead make recourse to that department's budget for the year in order to see if this is financially possible, with the budget supplying the target that has to be adhered to come what may.

The second example comes from government policy in higher education. The present government had made it a mantra of its thinking in this area that universities aim at enrolling 50% of all 18-25 year olds in higher education. This figure is odd, and is hardly precise. Why 50%? The short, (some might think cynical) answer is that it is easily associated in the public mind in ways that a more accurate figure (38% for example) would never be. Yet when this particular target was missed, it was revised so that it now referred to 50% of the population as a whole. When this target was also missed, it then became a measure that referred to 50% of the population having followed "part of a university course" and, in its turn, a population that has had "some experience of a university setting".

The problem is this. Targets, once set, cannot be allowed to fail, however ludicrous their constant redefinition turns out to be. The problem, however, is that in order to meet these targets in their various guises the higher education sector has to change its essential nature and purpose, only to its and everyone's eventual detriment. Higher Education is now regarded as a business first and foremost, with students continually referred to as "customers" rather than as citizens whose education is shaping them in very particular ways, not necessarily for easy statistical measurement.

Target culture is at the heart of bad management. Its emphasis on record keeping as a key concern of its process means that the specificity of any set of circumstances is lost to a form of mathematics. Any individual knows that 1 and 1 equals 2; that is a mathematical formula. But if that kind of thinking is applied to two individuals from literature, say Romeo and Juliet (who are also 1 and 1 who equal 2 but in a very different sense), it fails to take into account that they are so much more. They are members of extended families, of a wider society, and of clans with histories and grievances that govern internal behaviour. A simple target, governed by mathematical formulae, can supply no proper perspective on this set of circumstances. It is incapable of taking into account any sense of the moral nuance and complexity of institutional life.

Too much modern management begins and ends here, with a target culture unable to manage people properly and to deal well with facts on the ground. All that happens thereafter is the inevitable story of the delegation of blame, encouraging a process that begins in negativity (the avoidance of blame accruing to me) rather than seeking the positive goals of allowing the institution to find its own proper footing. All that targets then do is to discourage us from doing what we are meant to. In as far as this is the case, all institutions, including the Police, should dispose of them with immediate effect and rediscover their own sense of purpose in forms that take the local, historical, realities seriously once again.

### **Plenary Two - Why Targets are Necessary**

There was no ambiguity about this second session. Both speakers set out to give very different accounts as to why target culture makes sense. The first spoke both as a senior civil servant and as one who was instrumental in the creation of Public Service Agreements. He argued that targets made most sense when one considered what had preceded them in the public sector in the previous 30 or so years. The 1970s, having witnessed the breakdown of the post-war consensus in this country, left government with seemingly nothing more to do than to manage decline. With the establishment of a market based economy in the 1980s and 1990s, however, there was a perceived need both to improve public services and to be more answerable to the public that was paying for them.

By 2001 targets had become the most obvious means to drive change in the public sector, in spite of the fact that they very often didn't constitute the kind of comprehensive culture that had been envisaged. The creation of Public Service Agreements led to the idea that every department in government had to have some form of central contract, in large measure (it is true) to avoid the appearance of overspend on budgets. There was some truth in the various charges laid against them that they were something of a "mixed bag", that they were often misplaced (hospital waiting

lists being one such example, with their inability to distinguish between different kinds of lists) and that they created a mismatch between a Whitehall bureaucracy coming to terms with the new culture for itself while the operations for which it was responsible already possessed a target culture in some instances.

Having said all that, the speaker was in no doubt as to the advantages that target setting had created. These included a greater degree of focus in central government, a marked growth in accountability, some increase in efficiency (although there was genuine ambivalence on this point) and certainly a better distribution of resources. In their obvious concentration on outcomes, they also allow the public to see at work a phenomenon that it understands all too well as "end users" of services.

Target culture is, finally, of untold advantage to the internal life of organisations. It permits a level of professional decision making which is independent of government, allowing the organisation to get on with the job of reaching the target after central administration has set it. It also creates a positive sense of purpose and a realistic measure of what constitutes success. Last, but by no means least, it serves as an obvious counterweight to political pressure of any kind. Individual politicians and governments move on, but targets often remain in place beyond the natural shelf life of any single administration.

The second speaker, the chief executive of his own management consultancy, gave a highly detailed presentation of how to develop a programme that could optimize the differing requirements of policy makers and those charged with the responsibility of delivery. In asking a primary question ("what is the point that one is aiming at?") what becomes clear is that any point is always an ever shifting target. The demands of a group or society for improved services etc results in that improvement, subject to the idiosyncrasies of that particular society. The situation that then pertains creates further demands for yet more improvement, thus creating in its wake an ever moving target. There are, therefore, diverse ways of getting to the point and diverse points to be reached.

Given, also, the simple fact that the point to be reached is the responsibility often of a plethora of agencies, all of whom have a stake in it, there appears to be a pressing need to find some joined up solution that allows all parties to do their jobs effectively. Working, therefore, from the 2001 Government FABRIC initiative, which set four key targets for all public service organisations (to include a coherent set of performance measures; a culture of ownership and accountability; performance review and motivational reinforcement) the speaker developed his own idea of "policy push"; a more sophisticated version of "top down" practices that creates a greater degree of connection between resources "pushed" into the system at one end and the outcomes that are looked for at the other.

Problems arise, however, because things are never that simple. Such a seemingly straightforward model doesn't, prima facie, take into account the fact that, in seeking to work across a series of agencies, the target aimed for necessarily becomes ever more complicated. There is, for example, the need to see that such government initiatives have at their core a "whole life" long term perspective, which is exactly the kind of thing that target culture often cannot allow for very easily. Multi agency initiatives also often demand a "form of recalibration" of the target, given that the involvement of many groups of necessity changes the target as well as creating a culture where synergistic benefits (an example being the way in which a Department of Transport initiative on walking and cycling etc has to link into Department of Health initiatives on reducing obesity etc) are taken seriously.

Any properly integrated system, however, has to take account of what the speaker referred to as the concept of "Demand Pull", the other end of the process whereby those responsible for delivering services, necessarily linked into what other agencies have to do, can then seek the best

possible forms of linkage in order to ensure the best possible delivery. It is precisely here that he also felt that present government policy was failing in not having created this kind of common methodology. It was an outline of such methodologies, usually in the form of various software programmes, which formed the final parts of his presentation. The main focus of the presentation, that any "point" aimed for is invariably progressive and that management of systems requires a common methodology if it is to "keep up", was, however, appreciated by the conference.

### **Plenary Three - Leadership and Targets**

The first session of the second day set out to investigate the impact of target culture on models of leadership. A leading Vice Chancellor of a Russell Group University was the first to speak, and presented a rather nuanced account of the culture; applauding it where it enabled real development, and criticizing it where it was used merely for the sake of giving the appearance of "something being done". He began by citing a piece of research that demonstrated the advantages of a university education in keeping crime rates down. Graduates are less likely to commit crime, and less likely statistically to be the victims of crime, yet nowhere does this set of facts drive government policy on crime statistics (in producing more graduates, for example), nor in the realm of health policy where the same general advantages hold true. This is what can make targets so deceptive.

What kinds of targets, therefore, are most useful to a university? The speaker outlined four. It must decide, first and foremost what kind of business it is in; it must then provide means of measurement that best incentivise people to realize it; it must keep things simple, and it must repeat its "mantras" often so that everyone gets the message.

Within the speaker's own institution a decision was made after six months of consultation that it would henceforth be in the business of research and in seeking to widen participation. Even here, however, government criteria for increasing university entry to social groups not normally associated with tertiary education have proved capable of misinterpretation. An early criterion used was that of allocating places on applicants' postcodes, with a bias in favour of those from socially disadvantaged areas. The speaker, however, lives in a postcode area which is regarded as being precisely that, while enjoying a standard of living that would be regarded as beyond the means of many others. It would also mean that his children would be privileged in their own applications for university places when their social status would seem to make this unnecessary. Another example of this kind of discrepancy was given. The speaker's institution has very good schools of medical and veterinary science, both disciplines that appeal to typically middle class students. Admitting students to study for these disciplines also means "skewing" the student base even more if more general participation is desired from social groups that do not traditionally have experience in the forms of education deemed necessary for this kind of study to be undertaken.

Another set of examples came from the Key Performance Indicators that had been agreed by the University's Council as benchmarks to measure its success or otherwise. One of these indicators is also one adopted by nearly all higher education institutions; that of "student experience, teaching and learning". The problem, however, is that two institutions (Oxford and Warwick) refuse to take part in the review process that determines how good universities are in addressing this set of criteria, and the process itself is administered by the Student Unions, some of which may have a political axe to grind in portraying their institution in a particular light. As a means to determine the success of the university, therefore, it appears somewhat deficient. Another KPI (that of Research Income generated) can prove misleading when one remembers that this is often subject to year on year changes in the commissioning budgets of external agencies, when a large grant missing one year may well be reinstated for the following.

Target culture, therefore, appears to be as much a moveable feast as anything else. Nevertheless, the speaker remained in favour of using targets if and only if they were germane to whatever

business the institution had set itself to do, and as long as they retained simplicity and easy communicability.

The second speaker in this session, being the business development director for a large private sector contractor, addressed the issue of leadership in target setting from the perspective of measuring two very different types of contract. The first, based purely on simple "inputs" (an example being one that delivers personnel to a job within strictly defined time limits, and with no concern for the quality of service provided therein) was a mark of the "awful days" of Compulsory Competitive Tendering. In the speaker's opinion too much of this approach to business between the public and private sectors is still in evidence in contracts for the delivery of services from the latter to the former. It is marked by a reluctance to do any more than the minimum, and often results in a situation where each party is concerned with nothing more than maximum advantage for itself, whether that be the delivery of services at greatest profit or the obtaining of services at greatest saving. On the other hand the second form of contract, being concerned with "outputs", has a much greater relational element to it. Now the focus is no longer on mere delivery of a basic service, but on how well that service is performing and what might be done in order to improve its efficiency. This requires an ongoing conversation between both parties so as to achieve what is in the best interests of all. The move from the first kind of contract to the second is the move from what might best be termed "contractual targets" to "strategic partnering". The language of both, of course, says it all.

The modern tendency to see all members of society as constituting a set of customers when it comes to public services of any kind provided the basis for the set of arguments advocated by the third speaker within this session. As a Chief Constable on the verge of retirement he was speaking as one such "customer", about to experience what the Service had to offer from the other side of the fence. In the speaker's view, the Police serve the public best when it attends to the simple things as a priority. The public isn't generally concerned about targets and statistics, but it also desires reassurance if crime and disorder is high. An obsession with such targets can often result in them becoming ends in themselves and, if the central relationship between central government, the Service and the "customer" is not addressed, there will then be an inevitable loss of trust and confidence. At the heart of this is the continued role of the "Sworn Officer"; a form of policing which, at an annual cost of £40,000 per head, is under threat. Statistical evidence suggests that the Service is performing much better than many other public and third sector organisations, but if it fails to do the simple things well (such as the retention of "bobbies on the beat") then such facts count for very little.

What, therefore, might be done in order to address these perceptions? The request was for a form of policing that returned it to "face to face" encounter, through the willingness to attend all crime incidents (the speaker gave an average figure of 350 incidents per day with which his force had to deal) rather than the mere issuing of incident receipts, and a reversal of the policy that has encouraged the closing of local police stations at those times when members of the general public would value them open, with the corresponding ability to "walk in off the street". As long as the public receives these simple reassurances, it is then prepared to trust what the Service is doing about more serious crime and the steps that it is taking in the area of public protection.

Good leadership, therefore, centres (as with the first speaker in this session) on knowing what your core business is and on pursuing it with proper vigour. For the Police that means the issues created by "volume crime" and social behaviour. Centrally driven targets have an important role to play in this, but only if the Service is enabled, and is willing itself, to deliver key, simple priorities, as outlined above. All the more interesting, therefore, was the speaker's willingness to give credence to one central policy initiative (being the Assessments of Policing and Community Safety-APACS) which he felt had the potential to be a successful policy for the Service. Given the policy's aim to communicate data, analysis and assessments in ways that do justice to both practitioners and public, it also embodies the kind of definition for the Service that it needs if it is to win back

confidence. Coupled with this is the fact that the initiative also supports a balanced regime of accountability, taking into account a proper distribution of responsibilities and collaborations across local, regional and national partners. All of this points to a set of target indicators that probably fulfill what is asked of them, while also expressive of that return to simplicity that would mark a renewed confidence in what good policing has to offer.

#### **Plenary Four - What are the Alternatives to Imposed Targets?**

This fourth session turned its attention to those methodologies that sought ways of achieving what targets aim for but without much of the difficulty (political and practical) that the culture often brings in its wake. To this end it heard from three individuals working in sectors outside of the Police Service, the first of whom was the Chief Executive for the Council of one of our largest cities.

The heart of what she offered centred on partnership between the various agencies working for the good of a large city. She began with the observation that partnership agreements of the kind that she wished to advocate also and often exacerbated target culture through their tendency to multiply an already overextended list of such things. Nevertheless, and in spite of this, such arrangements also offer the best chance of finding local solutions to local problems. It is the case that very different agencies confront similar problems. Consider, for example, the fact that a safer environment in the mind of the public is unconsciously associated with a cleaner environment. If the agencies responsible for public hygiene can deliver this, then the benefits that accrue to other agencies (such as the Police) are not to be dismissed. At the same time, however, such partnership arrangements need to recognize the mantra oft repeated in the conference; that one size doesn't fit all. City crime figures may have violence and drink as motivating factors, while country authorities have to deal with nothing more seemingly harmful than the number of bikes that are stolen. Add into this set of criteria the fact of very different population profiles (the difference between homogenous and diverse population sets, etc) as well as age profiles, one then has the making of a more complicated set of relationships.

When one adds into the equation the fact that we have too many performance regimes, one has a situation that seemingly militates against cross sector partnerships. The speaker was particularly unconfident about the benefits that were meant to accrue from Local Area Agreements and Local Strategic Partnerships, both representative of a move towards ever greater regime organisation. Having said that, however, it is also the case that many of the targets are similar across agencies, and with a little work it is not necessarily too difficult for common ground to be achieved. The key remains the willingness for partnership working; an awareness that intelligence needs to be shared across agencies and that all are working "on the ground" for the same public good. Much could be done to improve this, including (and perhaps controversially) the possibility of "joint visible branding" which does result in an awareness on the part of the public that things are actually improving.

The speaker finished the presentation by giving an example of such partnership working on the basis of her own experience. It was a deceptively simple policy to reduce city centre violence centred on bars and other drinking places, and involved the removal of glasses and their replacement with toughened poly glasses. The benefits for a number of agencies was obvious, but such a simple expedient might never have been discovered had it not been for the willingness of all parties to seek cross agency initiatives.

The second speaker within this plenary, a university criminologist, carried some of these arguments in a slightly different direction. Making the point (once again) that there is real disillusion with a centrally driven target culture (with so called performance indicators all too easily transmuted into targets), we are seemingly left with the doctrine of "deliverology" as the guiding principle for the public services. What the doctrine achieves, however, is the inevitable destruction of personal judgement in decision making coupled with the encouragement of "gaming" within

services. Both of these consequences only serve to undermine the original aim of making things better. One has only to look at the "horror stories" emanating from the NHS in recent years, especially with the farce over patient waiting lists, to see what might be the fate of other public service bodies.

What, however, is the alternative? It was here that the speaker advocated a move towards local delivery of services (not unlike that of the first speaker in this session), with its concomitant benefits in using local discretion focused on local needs and priorities. There is a theoretical set of principles to underpin this, based on the work of an American systems analyst, David Easton, whose own systems model seeks to "embrace" the particular and local environment within which the various public services work. This would result, of course, in taking seriously local factors as more determinative in shaping outputs than any amount of centrally imposed priorities, these being subject to change too often at whim.

In policing terms this could lead to greater devolution of responsibilities to a local level, something akin to the present Basic (or "Borough" in Metropolitan terminology) Command Unit, with local commanders given the power to set their own budgets and employment profile for the command area. It would also allow for greater feedback from the local community to its police force, as well as overcoming the kind of disengagement that has characterised local policing for far too long. It might also allow the police to have once again a leadership role lost under the orthodoxies of managerialism. When a recent (2007) Taxpayers Alliance survey reveals that more than 80% of local residents are unable to put a name to any police officer operating in their area, perhaps it is time for the mantra of "national performance indicators" to be replaced by that of "neighbourhood" once again.

The third speaker in this session was no more complimentary about target culture than his immediate predecessor. As a journalist writing on business matters for one of the quality Sunday newspapers, he saw targets as no more than a return to a form of central planning on behalf of government, the criticism being (as so often already voiced during the conference) that they represent the worst of aspects of managerialism. The "baleful effects" on people's behaviour were legion. Consider, for example, the introduction of the new GP Contract. In asking GPs to achieve a number of seemingly arbitrary targets (a certain number of blood pressure tests to be conducted, say) the profession had, by default, become responsible to government rather than to its patients. It had also led to obvious self-interest, as targets to be met often worked in opposition to the proper needs of patients, the consequence of which (perhaps only to be expected) was the profession being attacked by patient interest groups for precisely this. The same has been true of school league table culture, where pupils have often been encouraged to sit for "easier" examination subjects as a means to increase the school's standing in results leagues. The desire to meet one set of targets often results in others bypassed completely. To take another example for the field of healthcare, the final Report on the death of ninety patients at Maidstone Hospital through the spread of the C Difficile virus was in large measure due to the hospital's desire to meet targets for "patient through-put" in A and E departments, while ignoring its requirement to keep the hospital clean.

In the opinion of the speaker, therefore, targets destroy accountability to customers and to systems. They also damage professional morale and judgement, subvert the integrity of statistics, prevent organisations from learning on the basis of experience and mistakes made and, finally, result in ever increasing levels of bureaucracy. What therefore, is the alternative?

The speaker proposed a model for future organisational structure that was not dissimilar to other proposals already advocated in the conference, essentially built upon a rejection of a "top-down" model to one based upon the principle of "outside-in". This means a model of "doing business" within any organisation that begins with "facing the customer", asking oneself what it is that s(he) wants, then addressing whether or not you have the means to offer it and, if not, redesigning

your capacity to do so accordingly. What one then has is something akin to "customer pull" rather than "organisational push".

How might this work in practice? The speaker gave one example from his knowledge of the Police Service. A local officer, having become aware that the most significant concern within his neighbourhood was that of youth disorder, gave significant time and resources to dealing with it. The consequences, aside from seeing an obvious drop in that disorder, was the creation of a "benevolent circle" within the community that led to increased co-operation with the Service on other issues that affected its life. This is such an obvious basis for policy that it would appear to be beyond comment, but the fact remains that such straightforward responses to problem solving are often destroyed by a culture that sees the issues as lying elsewhere, and invariably never with the communities that are most affected by them.

### **Plenary Five - Are Targets Masters or Servants?**

Six individuals, representing both the Police Service and public and private sector organisations, gave ten-minute presentations as the prelude to small group discussion, with a final plenary gathering to feed back significant conversation points. The idea was to compare and contrast how target culture worked, or failed to do so, within a variety of professions; the overall aim being to see if any kind of common mind was possible on the vexed question of the culture as servant or master.

The answer, as one might expect, was the usual set of ambivalences, with those responsible for target setting invariably supportive of the system (albeit with caveats) and those having to deal with the culture from the sharp end invariably more critical.

The first speaker in this session, the chief officer of a Police trade union, spoke critically of the culture, arguing first that it had all but destroyed the good traditions of common sense policing, which at its heart allowed police personnel to use their own discretion in tackling incidents and issues. There was now too much concentration on mere quantity of delivery as opposed to the quality of what was being delivered (too many "counters" rather than "doers") and the place and role of the traditional constable had been denigrated to the extent that it was no longer considered an integral part of the Service. A further, unintended, consequence of this culture was the "criminalisation of middle England", which had returned the aim with interest in an increased animosity towards the Service and its personnel. Finally, and echoing the criticism of earlier contributions at the conference, this speaker also lamented the seemingly increased promotion of a form of central planning in developing the Service, especially as that impacted on our unwritten constitution and its historical aversion to the concentration of too much power in the hands of any one individual or agency. Target culture had all but destroyed these constitutional realities.

The second speaker was the manager of a large general hospital, having worked in the same institution for twenty one years. She was in favour of targets set for internal performance, especially as they impacted upon patient services, but recognized that they often had unintended consequences that only succeeded in achieving the very opposite of their original intention. One such example came from the successful policy of reducing waiting times in Accident and Emergency Departments so that all patients should be seen within four hours. The speaker's hospital had complied with this target to the extent that by 2004 only 3% of all such patients had more than a four hour wait. The unintended consequence of this success, however, was that more patients now accessed care directly at the hospital rather than waiting for a referral through their GP, thus increasing the pressure on A and E Departments directly. The speaker was also ambivalent about the government's introduction of an 18 week target from referral to completion of treatment for all patients; a target that her own hospital met for 95% of its patients but which she accepted was very difficult to meet, especially when the NHS information technology structure was so poor. It was also the case, in her opinion, that the creation of "fixed sessions" for various hospital departments, a consequence of the culture in its desire to create more unified responses

to patient care, had resulted in an inflexibility of response within an environment that needed precisely that when one considered the obvious fact that patients are variously different.

The head teacher of a local secondary school in special measures was the third speaker in the session. An advocate for target culture, he nevertheless recognized its constraints when it came to distinguishing between internal standards and targets met as the measure of what constitutes a good school. The example of school exclusions was cited in this context, where central government uses the number of permanent pupil exclusions as a measure of a school's success or failure and the speaker wished to use such exclusions as an indicator of the school's adherence to internal standards and expectations, so that the mark of a good school might be precisely its willingness to exclude disruptive pupils. Another centrally imposed marker of success has been the number of pupils gaining five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE, with a school that has 30% or less of its student body achieving that mark now classified as "failing". The speaker made the point that for many parents of his pupils it was far more important that their children were safe and happy at school than that they got the best possible exam results. The school's willingness to meet the targets set by its stakeholders, such as parents, was of far greater importance than anything that might be deemed necessary by central authority.

The conference then heard from the Head of Talent Development at a major telecommunications company. He was eloquent on the positive aspects of target setting, given that it is a significant part, explicitly or unconsciously, of all organisations. At the same time, however, targets can have such a deleterious effect to the extent that not only do they act as masters within an organisation but may also serve to derail it from its true purpose. They can do this in three ways, the first being the most obvious when (as the conference had heard many times) they are nothing more than a tool to manage people and the second when they focus on what is obvious within an organisation's life rather than what may be more pivotal. An example of practice in another organisation was cited to illustrate this latter issue, where a major intercontinental parcel delivery company discovered that its increasing inability to meet its flight departure slots lay not at the airport, as one might imagine, but farther back at the point where parcels were collected from clients who were invariably behind in having them ready for collection, thus delaying the delivery personnel. This was the pivot point that created the problem. If one had centred on the obvious (the site of operation at the airport) this finding would have been missed; yet too often this is precisely what target culture suggests as the way forward. The most interesting example, however, of the way in which targets can derail an organisation was by means of a version of the law of unintended consequences. The speaker gave an example of this from his own working environment. A policy of reducing the amount of waiting time that customers spent "in line" for an executive in his organisation's call centre to answer their call, led to those same executives aiming to deal with calls as quickly as possible so as to pass on to the next in line. The unintended consequence of this policy was an increase in the number of customers having to call back in order to have their query dealt with again, thus also increasing the number of calls to be processed as quickly as possible. As this policy continues so too does the customer's satisfaction decline, leading in time to her seeking another provider. The consequence of this for the corporation becomes an unmotivated staff as it increasingly loses custom, resulting in increased levels of absenteeism and stress. As the speaker emphasised on the back of this example, an emotionally engaged workforce is the consequence of the right kind of "people strategy"; one more likely to hit its targets and one, ironically, least likely to need them.

The quantitative nature of target culture came under scrutiny from the fifth speaker, a former Chief Constable and now the Chief Executive of a Service agency centred on police improvement and performance. He began in an unusual fashion, by citing the example of an eighteenth century magistrate and statistician, Patrick Colquhoun, the founder of among other things the first ever River Police force and the author of statistical treatises aiming to improve various aspects of national life. One of these, published in 1797, was entitled "A Treatise on the Police of the Metropolis" which advocated the idea that policing was a science and, in utilitarian fashion, might

be pressed into the service of the national political economy. At the heart of this thesis was the further idea that the poor in particular were a criminal class who simply needed to be controlled. The importance of this set of ideas lay in the fact that, as a statistician, Colquhoun regarded data as a means to read the world. This is not that far removed from the modern development of targets culture, also centred on the use of data. The problem, of course, is that how one reads the data necessarily sets the aims of the targets, and it is in this sense that they often act as a series of "refractive mirrors". Targets can be used as means to enable management to improve performance; as a means for external organisations to hold the Police to account, and as a means to help the citizen to understand the Service and thereby to feel more confident. With regard to this latter, however, all the evidence seems to suggest that it is personal experience of the Service that creates a greater or lesser sense of trust in what it does, and that a target culture that aims at the purely quantitative (as that operating within the Service appears to do) and centred on outputs is one that misses the kinds of qualitative targets that the public is interested in. This latter form of target setting, which gives time to individual experience, is more likely to create the kinds of results that the culture seeks. A culture that centres on standards for the Service while also having at its heart a concern for the way in which the public sees things has to be the way forward, as opposed to one that is predicated on simple demonstration of sheer quantity, or "stuff produced". This has been said many times already in the course of this report.

"No statistic ever exists in a vacuum" might well serve as a summary of the final presentation in this plenary, given by a staff sergeant working in the intervention unit of a local BCU. He told a "tale of two statistics", centred on the issuing of disorder notices within his area to weekend drinkers who urinated in the street. These notices carried an immediate £80.00 fine, and were an obvious means for those officers on the ground to meet the centrally set targets for the number to be issued in any one time period. The policy was soon adopted by other BCUs in the Constabulary and, over time, led to a sharp decline in that kind of drink fuelled behaviour. The difficulty, however, came with the fact that in EC Crime Statistics the number of such notices issued by any one European Police Force also forms part of the indices for violent crime within that Force. It was not long, therefore, before the speaker's own area gained the reputation for being one of the 50 most violent cities in Europe; a representation that was obviously wide of the mark. Needless to say, the policy of issuing disorder notices for such misdemeanours was dropped! In spite of this experience the speaker was content to give a place to target setting as long as it was used in full knowledge that no one size fits all (given that the problems and issues facing individual borough units vary so considerably) and that the Service is, and never will be, a business in competition with other businesses, and where very particular ideas of targets can thereby be misapplied.

### **Plenary Six - Lessons From Sport**

The after-dinner session allowed the conference to breathe a little after the somewhat metaphorically rich menu that it had enjoyed to this point, while also remaining focused on the theme. With the sponsorship of O2, Sir Clive Woodward, the former manager of the 2003 World Cup winning England rugby team, gave an insightful presentation on how the ground was laid over many years for that eventual triumph, and how a national team that had never quite achieved all that it was capable of in previous tournaments was brought to the point where it could do precisely that. It is not possible within this report to outline the exact methodology that was used, but two pointers germane to the theme of the conference may be highlighted.

The first of these was the obvious need for preparation over a significant period of time. A number of years passed between Clive Woodward's appointment as manager and that success in Sydney, and the necessary preparation had to be made. This is a factor that, perhaps, target culture doesn't take seriously enough with its need (often driven by political expediency) to demonstrate results as quickly as possible, even if those results are consequently misleading. At the heart of this, of course, is a certain "mission to explain", and that also takes time. The second pointer is connected in some respects with this first, and has to do with the ability, in that often overused phrase, to "think outside the box". The conference heard at first hand of the unusual techniques

that Woodward had introduced into the England training regime, one example being the distribution of laptops to all members of the squad as a means to encourage them in the use of computer materials and diagnostic methods, as well as learning to think differently about the possibilities open to them on the field of play by seeing how a "game plan" might be considered. A second example involved the employment of a vision coach in order to train players in better use of peripheral vision; the ability to see aspects of a game that would ordinarily be missed because of a concentration on that visual area of the game for which you are individually responsible. An illustration of this was Matt Dawson's alerting of the referee to the fact that Australian players were in serious danger of putting themselves offside around the loose ruck that had formed as the prelude to Wilkinson's match winning drop goal. Everyone knew that the attempt was coming, and yards mattered to the Australians if they were to "close Wilkinson down". Dawson's ability to see that, and therefore to take action to make them hesitate even for a mere second by informing on them to the referee, is a quintessential example of this newly learned behaviour.

The lessons for target culture appear obvious. There is little point in creating targets for organisations unless you also allow the ability and freedom for those charged with them to "think differently" about their use and to have the time to implement them properly. This is an understanding that appears to be rare to date within too many public sector organisations.

### **Plenary Seven - So what does this mean to the people we serve?**

This question, of course, addresses the real point of any target culture; the public that the organisation purports to serve. This is no less true for the Police, and to address it the conference heard from a speaker at the heart of the Civil Service, responsible for a major review of the place and understanding of crime within public perceptions. Using some of the findings of that review as the platform for her subsequent remarks, the speaker made the somewhat astonishing point that perceptions of crime amongst the general public tend towards the negative; that up to a third of all people remain fearful of crime, and believe that it is on the increase when statistics demonstrate precisely the opposite. No amount of evidence to the contrary serves to convince otherwise. The fact that we now have in this country a tougher sentencing policy than ever before; that there is greater neighbourhood policing and new powers given to the police to deal with trouble as they find it; that you are less likely to be a victim of crime today than at any point in the history of this country - all this means nothing to a public that remains fearful about crime and disinclined (approximately one third of all respondents) to believe that crime has actually fallen over the last ten years. A further consequence of this is that, once this belief becomes entrenched, that same public is disinclined to take at face value other statistics on crime that happen to be true. Examples of these include the fact that only 20% of all respondents believe that crime is falling; that 47% do not believe that there are more police on the job than ever before; that 83% continue to believe that violent crime is on the increase, and only 23% that persistent offenders are subject to stricter penalties. The clinching statistic among them all, however, is the belief of some 80% of the public that the perpetrators of crime are more carefully looked after than their victims.

Here lies a significant problem for the Service, even when the same review can claim that 50% of the population has an increased confidence in it and what it is doing. How do you get beyond this basic, visceral, perception that things simply are not getting better and, to all intents and purposes, are getting worse? The speaker had no direct recommendations to make on this point, other than to suggest that a significant shift in the language about crime and criminals might begin the process of disabusing the public of its misplaced set of perceptions. A particular set of examples was cited in evidence of this. The public is never likely to believe otherwise about crime while the Criminal Justice system refers to community sentencing imposed on offenders with the language of "payback hours" and while those serving such sentences are dressed in costume not dissimilar to innocent local authority workers going about their business in keeping local facilities in working order. It is right and proper that central government should talk about crime and set targets for its reduction. No sensible individual would vote for a political party without ambitions

for society, and targets are often the only means to express those ambitions. If, however, those targets are constructed in such a way that the public is not allowed to “see something happen”, then all involved have lost their way and the people are not, and never will be, served.

All of this was music to the ears of the final speaker at the conference, a senior police officer charged with the responsibility of gathering some general themes from the previous three days. Beginning from a slightly self deprecating standpoint, as being one who had tended to see target culture as a phenomenon that creates at its worst either disciples or doom mongers, the conference had demonstrated the need for, if not the actual existence already, of something much more nuanced. Outlining briefly the variety of opinions on offer during the previous 48-hours, from those who were unequivocal disciples to those equally unequivocal in their disbelief, with a broad range of sceptics and agnostics in the middle ground who accepted at some level the validity of target culture, the speaker was able to present some conclusions as the basis for a way forward. These were three-fold. They included the need for forms of management that avoided the worst excesses of managerialism, this latter phenomenon having been accepted as bad news all round. This means new understandings of leadership which are, after all, nothing new to any public service that really does seek to serve the public interest. Alongside this would be future policy that seeks fewer but better targets for the Service so that it avoids all the negative impacts of a culture that becomes focused on the means as the end aimed for. A final aspect, echoing the main theme of the previous speaker, would be the redesign of a Service around the needs of the public first and foremost. In all of this, the speaker had most time for the contribution made by the senior academic present at the conference, a Vice Chancellor charged with the responsibility of enabling his institution to realise all of its potential in the Knowledge Economy; know what business you’re in, keep it simple, and provide all and any means to incentivize those who work with you to realise those ambitions.

### **Andrew Taylor**

Acting Director, Cumberland Lodge Conference Programme  
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### **Postscript - Reflections on a Sermon:**

It might strike some as odd that a Report on a Police Service Conference should end with allusion to a sermon. It was preached in the Royal Chapel at the Service of Matins that followed on immediately after the session described above. As the majority of those attending the Conference also attended Chapel that morning (it being the final formal event) it may be appropriate to reflect a little upon what was preached, especially as part of it was pertinent to the theme of the Conference.

The preacher was the Dean of Windsor; his theme the fact that this particular day was Rogation Sunday, the annual occasion in the Church Calendar not only of praying for a successful harvest later in the year (a christianisation of what was originally a Roman ceremony) but also in later Christian use the “beating of the bounds”, the marking out of the parish boundaries as a geographical space, both as a reminder of their integrity and also of our roots in the land. Walking with neighbours and others around the boundaries of the parish in this way was also a potent reminder of our essential inter-connectedness; the fact that we simply can’t do without one another.

The Dean remarked on the fact that seventeenth century Puritanism had regarded these ceremonies with hostility, as expressive of frivolous and "worldly" ceremony that had little to do with proper religion. Not so the Christian spiritual writer and poet, George Herbert, who praised the ceremony as the very essence of community, an opportunity once a year for the parish to come together and, in walking, renew its corporate life. Hostilities were forgotten and friendships renewed. In "The Country Parson", one of his greatest works, Herbert writes of the duty of the parish priest to encourage these walks in the following words:

".....he exacts of all to be present at the perambulation, and those that withdraw, and sever themselves from it, he mislikes, and reproveth as uncharitable, and unneighbourly.....Nay, he is so farre from condemning such assemblies, that he rather procures them to be often, as knowing that absence breeds strangeness, but presence love."

It needs to be said at this point that no attempt was made in the sermon to apply this principle to the work of the Police Service. The preacher could hardly do that, given that he had no idea who was present in the congregation that morning. What follows, therefore, represents the sentiments and thoughts of the author alone in having been present throughout the Conference and also in hearing this sermon preached.

In this last clause there might be a summary of all that is missing in a target culture that, in its correctly motivated attempts to improve performance and accountability, has also missed the larger point; that any publicly financed institution exists to serve its public. This point was made many times during the course of the weekend, as the Service grappled with the inevitability of a way of doing things that brought many benefits but which also ran the risk of increased alienation from the very people whose improved life was its ultimate purpose. Time and time again reference was made to the fact that the personal nature of the Service, its willingness to meet with people on their own turf when they had need of it, was under threat from a performance culture that appeared to place statistics and targets above those primary duties; that the Service's "absence" was creating the danger of its increased "strangeness". One doesn't have to be a card carrying religionist of any kind to understand that it is always "presence" to and for other people that creates the best possibilities for "love", whether that be the building of community, the engagement of those who feel disengaged from the mainstream or the simple protection of those who feel, or are actually under, threat.

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