Police funding and the police workforce

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The challenges faced by the police service in E&W in recent years have been considerable...

- 2010-11 to 2014-15 real spending on police fell by 14% (central grants by 20% - but local police precept levied on council tax base increased).

- Since 2015, the central police grant is maintained in cash terms (but continues to fall in real terms) and local precepts are capped.

- Peak number of police officers in E&W 2009: 143,800; by 2017: 123,100 (-14%). Police staff (i.e. non-officers) have fallen at a faster rate. Total workforce now <200,000.

- Given non-severance of police officers, recruitment frozen for much of post-2009 period. Recruitment (applicant numbers) has always been healthy but now local shortages of specialists are emerging (PRRB, 2nd Report, 2016)

But the police service has also been the subject of other major reforms in this period.....

- Introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners (2012).

- Winsor Review (2011, 2012) recommended major changes to remuneration structure, entry standards and levels, career structure, pay-setting machinery etc. – mostly being implemented.

- New 'career average' pension from 2015 for new accruals + increased normal retirement age.

- The College of Policing was established 2012 to oversee training, development and skills and which in 2017:
  - Recommended degree-level standard entry requirements for police officers and upgrading to comparable level of skills of existing officers.

- A new strategy for 'digital policing' – new interfaces with public, updating IT, enhanced response to e-crime etc.

- And much much more, such as (1) merging all Scottish police forces into Police Scotland in 2013...(2) a continued attempt to reform the funding formula determining grants to police forces in E&W, etc etc.

As a result of which…

- Police forces are having to work harder with fewer resources…
  - Has this affected performance in the short run? In the medium term?

- Police forces are trying to respond to developments in crime and to other demands on their time…
  - Different skills are required?
  - A different structure of the workforce?

- Some economic questions:
  - Can we link past 'performance' to resources?
  - What are the drivers of police recruitment & retention?
  - In particular, 'number of applicants per vacancy' is not a valid measure – can we examine the drivers of a more 'professional' police service?

Number of police officers

Source: Disney and Simpson, Police Workforce and Funding in England and Wales, IFS BN#208, May 2017 (1)

Figure 1. Number of police officers in England and Wales (full-time equivalent) 1996 – 2016
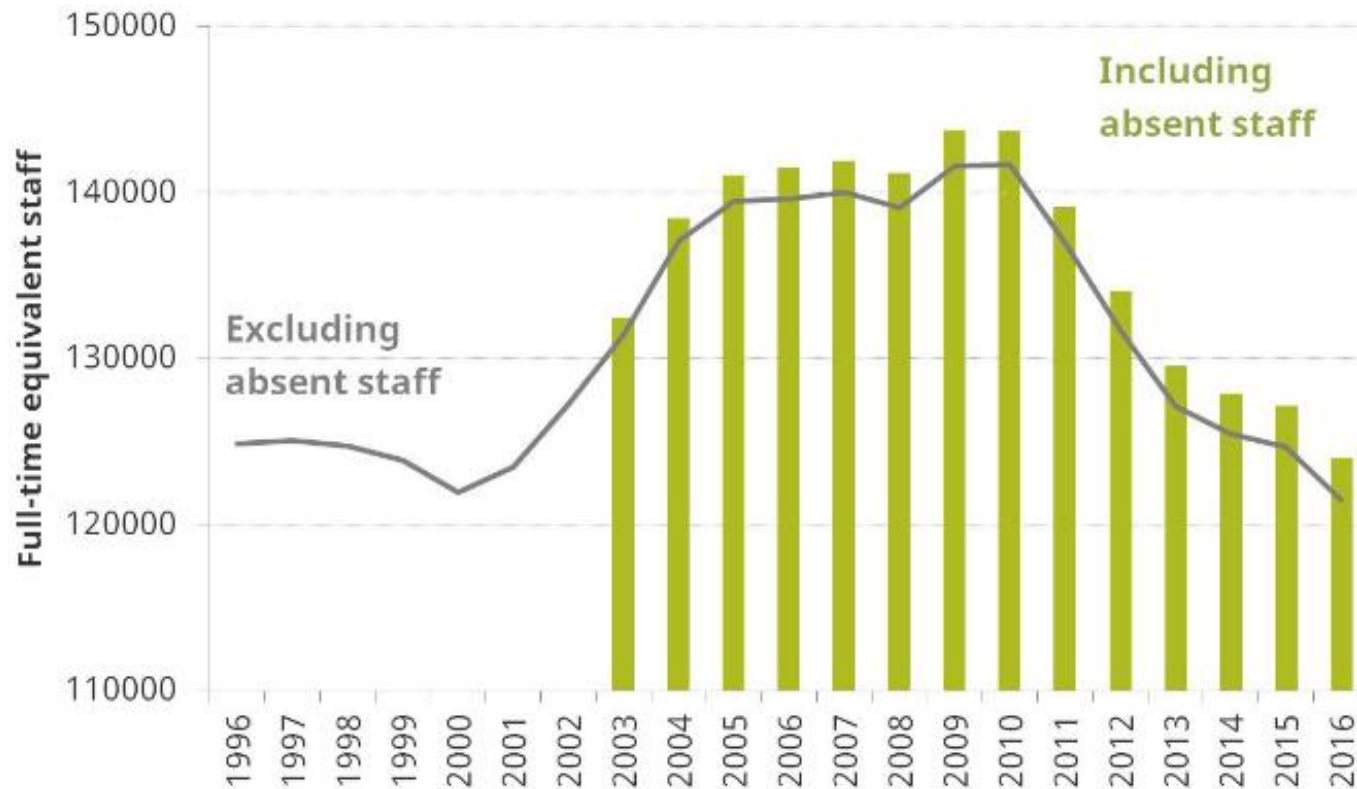
Source: Home Office, Police workforce England and Wales statistics, March 2016. Tables H3 and S1.

Trends in crime (recorded and self-reported) + clear-up rate

Source: Disney and Simpson, Police Workforce and Funding in England and Wales, IFS BN#208, May 2017 (2) (Crime Survey of England & Wales; ex-BCS)

## Figure 3. Patterns of crime in England and Wales 2002 to 2016
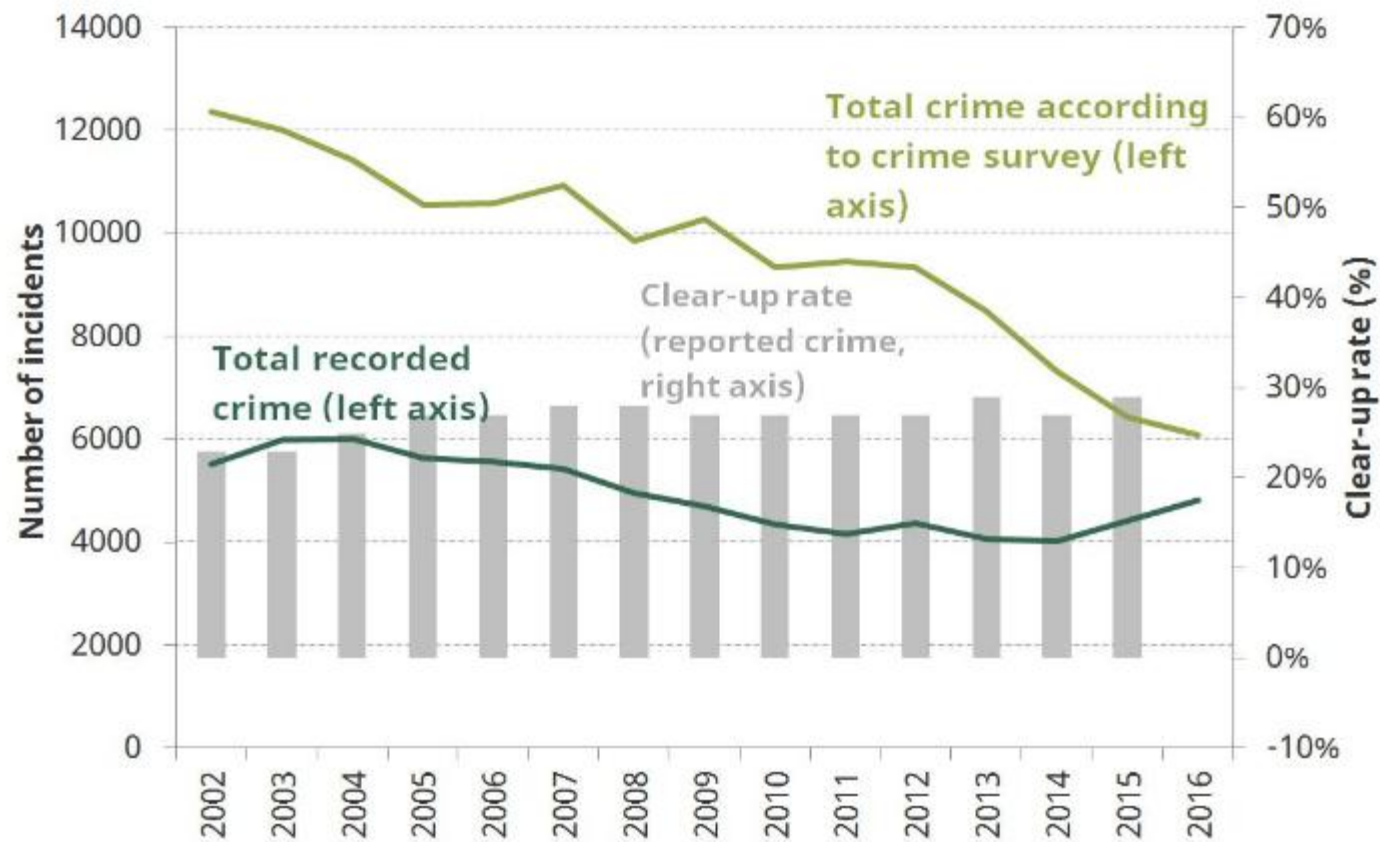
HMIC PEEL scores 2015/16 by police force v budget cuts

Source: Disney and Simpson, Police Workforce and Funding in England and Wales, IFS BN#208, May 2017 (3) (PEEL = HMIC assessment of performance)

Figure 4. Correlation between budget cuts 2009-10 to 2016-17 and police force PEEL scores averaged across 2015 and 2016, for England and Wales
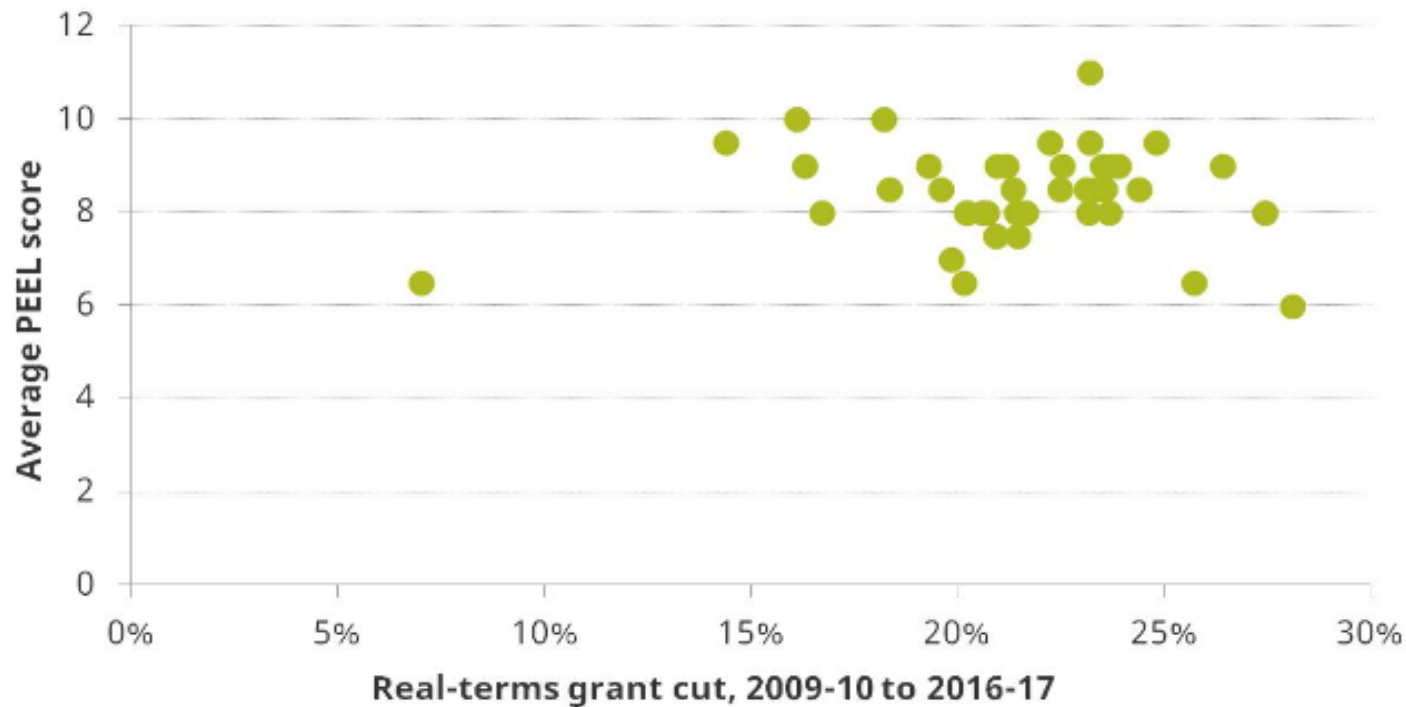
Note: Budget is defined as total grants (general and specific) from central government to police force authorities. Excludes precept revenues, draw down from reserves and other revenues. Average PEEL scores used are an aggregate measure which give equal weight to the 3 criteria used in PEEL assessment, and are an average of scores received in 2015-16 and 2016-17. A higher score indicates better performance. Graph does not include the Metropolitan police or City of London police force.

What conclusions can we draw…?

- Budget cuts may have induced 'forced efficiency', but….

- Some forces have reached crisis and rebalancing the funding formula may not be enough.

- 'Traditional crime' (e.g. car theft, burglary) may be over-reflected in these indicators.

- Police struggling to deal effectively with 'new' crime – e.g. sexual harassment (physical & online), 'white collar crime', e-crime etc.

- Much of police time is spent on non-crime (non 'public good') aspects e.g. domestic disputes, mental health, homelessness, alcoholism, runaway children etc.

- Social service/local government cuts spillover onto police service.

- Constant political demands for 'more bobbies on the beat' (©Jeremy Corbyn)

The police workforce

- What police officers do (relative to police staff)

- Qualitative barriers to recruiting high quality officers:

  – Perceptions of the police service as a career

  – The recruitment process (1st stage screening; pass standards)

- What characteristics score highest in police hiring assessment?

- Improving applicant quality: is it pay, nature of policing, skill factors?

What police officers v staff *do* *(Source: Winsor (2012)*
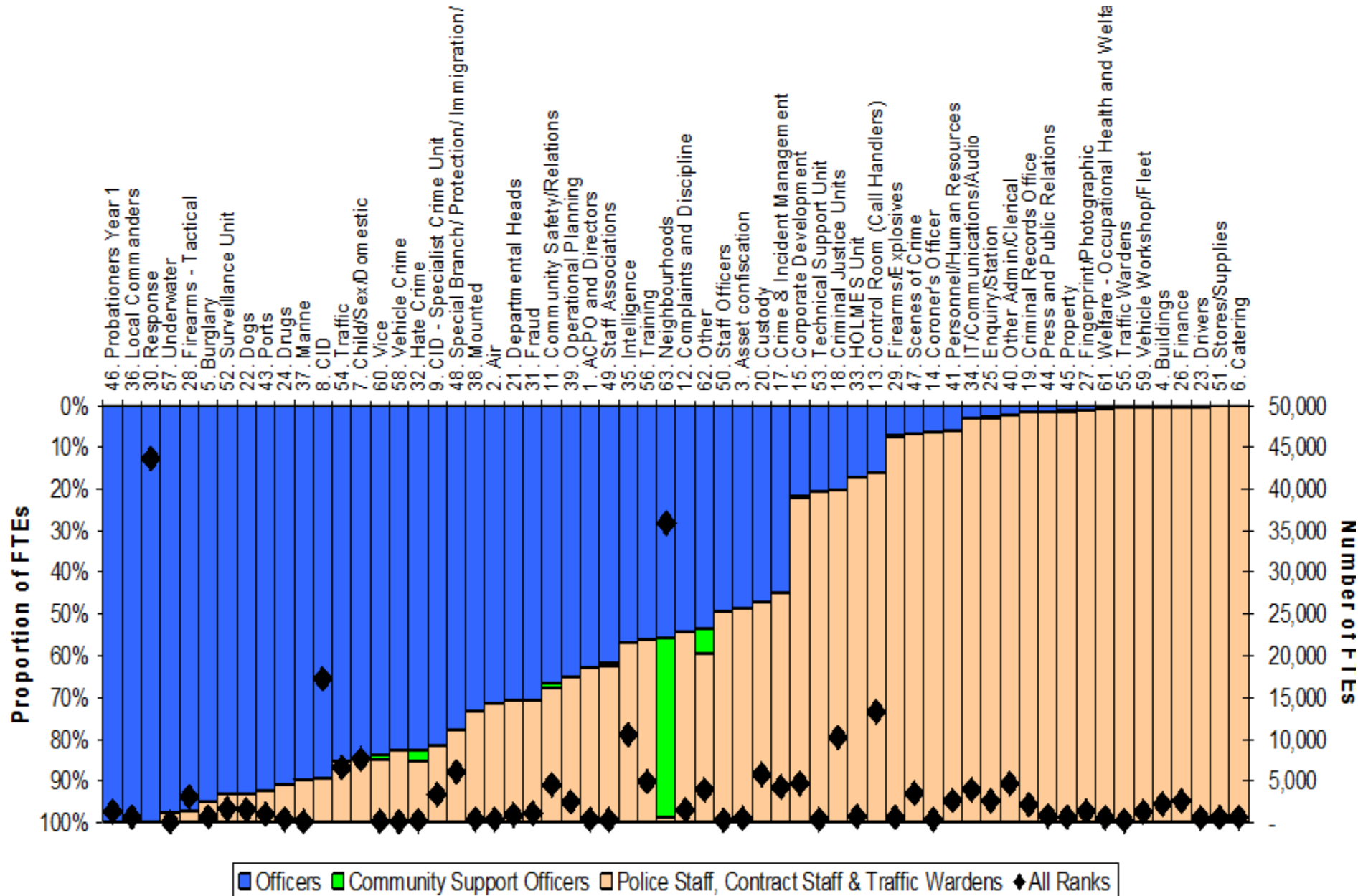
What police officers & staff do...

- There are few tasks that are wholly officers or wholly staff

- Staff are cheaper than officers

- Some functions could clearly be contracted out e.g firearms training, piloting helicopters etc.

- It's not clear why 'fraud', 'sex crime and vice', 'domestic' etc is best dealt with by officers v trained civilian staff.

- Part of rationale for police officer 'pay premium' (and also early normal retirement age) is 'full deployability'.

- But many officers on 'restricted duties' receive the pay premium...

- And why not specialist roles e.g e-crime?

The recruitment process 1

(Source: Winsor (2012) Figure 3.1)

A typical police recruitment process

Candidate applies to a police force. Forces are likely to apply a practical sift at this point to manage the number of applications.

Candidate submits the standard national application form and receives a unique registration number.

Initial sift to ensure candidate meets eligibility criteria. Competency based questionnaire assessed against national standards.

Successful candidate is eligible for appointment for one year. Exceptionally a force can extend this by an additional 12 months.

Police force sends eligible candidate to Police SEARCH assessment centre.

Candidate takes job-related fitness test.

Candidate's background and references checked.

Candidates attend medical and eye tests.

Police force may apply additional criteria such as overall assessment centre mark, success at competency interview or additional skills.

3 attempts

Candidate offered a post as a probationary police officer and starts basic training.

Source: based on information from the National Policing Improvement Agency

The recruitment process (2) Stage 1

Cited by Crawford and Disney: Wage regulation and the quality of police officer recruits, https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7937

HMSO (2012) ('The Winsor Review') noted:

"Candidates must apply to a police force using a standard application form. Given the number of potential applicants, forces will generally apply a practical sift of potential applicants before deciding those who are to be given an application form as a first stage in the recruitment process. This can involve requiring potential applicants to attend a familiarisation event... Other forces may simply limit the number of forms that are printed... [One force] had a small number of police vacancies, and decided to limit the number of printed application forms to 500. The first 500 people who telephoned the force on an appointed day received the forms..." (*ibid*, p.77)

The recruitment process (3) – Who applies?

Winsor (2012) Chapter 3

3.1.61 A Home Office report on recruitment was published in 2000 as part of its work to increase police recruitment from black and minority ethnic communities following the Macpherson report. The Home Office's report considered attitudes in black and minority ethnic communities towards a career in the police[80]. The report found more similarities than differences between ethnic communities and age groups. Most respondents believed that, when choosing a job, career prospects and colleagues were more important than pay. Whilst some saw policing as an attractive career, offering challenges, excitement, financial security and respect within the community, this tended to be outweighed by the perceived drawbacks[81]. These included a belief that racism, and sexism in the case of women, would be experienced from both colleagues and the public, and that individuals would feel isolated within a white culture. Concerns were also expressed about the potential dangers of the role, and there were reported fears of negative reactions from friends and family. There were also concerns about community pressure to decide "where their loyalties were"[82] and a view that black and minority ethnic officers had fewer opportunities for promotion. Personal safety was also a concern.

3.1.103 For too long, the police service has recruited the great majority of its officers from too narrow a stratum of society, and formal intellectual attainment has played too little a part in recruitment. The qualities required of a police officer are many, and include courage, self-control, maturity, judgment, the ability to deal with people and objectively to assess a situation, as well as intelligence. These qualities must be found in every police officer in sufficient measure; a predominance of one at the expense of others is insufficient.

Recruitment: Stage 2: The SEARCH process

- Is a more robust component of the process: all candidates must satisfy a common national standard in a variety of exercises and testing frameworks to become a police officer.

- Nevertheless, as Winsor argued, the pass thresholds are low in some tests e.g. 44% for 'written communication'.

- Low pass thresholds to encourage better 'mix' of candidates (e.g. ethnically?). But **signalling theory** suggests this might discourage better quality applicants.

- Crawford and Disney (*Wage regulation and the quality of police officer recruits, https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/7937*) uses all the data on candidates submitted to the SEARCH process over a 4 year period matched to local area conditions e.g. local average wages and local (dis)amenities of police work.

Findings from Disney and Crawford *op.cit*

- **In SEARCH assessment**:
  - Women perform better than men (but 67% of candidates put forward are men – in 1 police force c.80%)
  - 'A' level candidates perform much better than GCSE-level.
  - Graduates perform better than 'A' level candidates but performance gap is narrower (selection).
  - Experience (esp. in police service e.g. as PCSO) helps.

- **Local area conditions**:
  - Shifting from highest to lowest outside wage-paying area would only improve average test score by 4 ppt.
  - But shifting from highest to lowest area by incidence of violent crime would increase average test score by considerably more.

Inferences on pay and recruitment

- Pay of police relative to local outside options has implications for quality of recruits.

- But other aspects of policing e.g. 'police culture', fear of own and public safety, i.e. non-pecuniary aspects, are more significant 'drivers' of who applies to be a police officer.

- (This finding is common to other studies of public sector workers)

- Selection on qualification?

  - The cut-off seems to be 'A' level plus rather than degree.

  - But this likely arises from self-selection of applicants.

  - Locality matters to quality of applicants.

- Re-assessing 'full deployability' and recruitment of specialists for specialist tasks?

Conclusions

- So far, no clear evidence that cuts to funding and to numbers of police officer/staff have deleterious effects on 'outputs'.

- This is unlikely to continue. And hinders police's capacity to deal with many new challenges (changing nature of crime, non-crime activities of police).

- This makes police officers (including senior officers) more unhappy as evidenced by PRRB reports.

- Pay is important but not the biggest barrier to recruitment.

- To improve the 'professionalism' of the police may involve changes in (a) recruitment procedures (b) task allocations in police service (c) growth of specialisms which may require more flexible pay structure.