

‘Innovation and the Application of Knowledge for More Effective Policing’

N8 Policing Research Partnership

Policing the Night-Time Economy: Overcoming Barriers to Partnership Working

Policing the night-time economy (NTE) has become increasingly difficult since the onset of austerity. There has been a growing acceptance that the police can no longer work in isolation (West Yorkshire Police and Crime Commissioner, 2019). The governance of the NTE incorporates a range of personnel and organisations beyond the police, including door supervisors, marshals and volunteers, presenting a range of challenges and questions for how best to co-ordinate such collaborative efforts to tackle violence and crime linked to the NTE. This report highlights some of the key findings from a small-scale study of the governance of the NTE in Leeds based on seven interviews with those working in on the management of a safer city centre. This study sought to understand how multi-agency collaboration is used within Leeds City Centre to tackle alcohol-related violence.

Key findings:

- Austerity has significantly changed the way in which the night-time economy is governed and has increased the importance of collaboration between public and private sector organisations, voluntary and community groups as well as the general public.
- Constraints on police resources have led to a contraction of Neighbourhood Policing Teams. This carries important implications for collaborative working with other governance personnel, and in particular door supervisors.
- To overcome the challenges posed by austerity, outer-city officers are brought in to police the city centre NTE, however these officers are often ill-informed about the partnerships or organisations that operate on a daily basis to minimise disorder.
- Nightly, face-to-face briefings by the police to door supervisors and volunteers were perceived to provide an effective basis for collaboration and further strengthen professional relationships. An apparent reduction in these, following a shift towards technological alternatives, was cited by study participants as a cause for concern.
- Communication between licencing departments and frontline officers is critical to ensure the efficient solving of crimes that occur in the night-time economy.
- The Late-night Levy was not seen as a viable solution to the financial pressures placed on the police under the conditions of austerity. The current parameters of the levy were deemed as unworkable and the usefulness of the amendments suggested in parliament were questioned too.
- Given the proliferation of NTE governance personnel and the need for further collaboration, the potential for a Night-time Economy Coordinator was discussed as a possible means of improving networked and collaborative approaches to tackling crime and disorder within the city centre.

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Introduction:

Austerity has had a significant impact on public services across England and Wales and brought changes to the way in which crime and disorder is managed within cities (Mann et al., 2018). Funding for West Yorkshire Police (WYP) have been reduced by one third since 2010 (Burns-Williamson, 2018) leading to a substantial reduction in the number of officers employed, from 5,758 in 2010 to 5,137 in 2019 (Allen and Zayed, 2019). This has reduced the capacity to police disorder in city centres and developed an organisational willingness to collaborate with businesses and services (Police and Crime Committee, 2016; HMIC, 2013). The success of these efforts is demonstrated in the accreditation of the Purple Flag Award for excellence in managing the night-time economy (NTE), maintaining a safe and vibrant environment for all visitors (Leeds Bid, 2019). Accreditors of the award highlighted the excellent collaboration between organisations to minimise crime and disorder, and Leeds has maintained Purple Flag status for the last three years (ATCM, 2019).

Nonetheless, the reduction of the police footprint is consequential. In Leeds the decrease in arrests for minor offences (e.g. drunk and disorderly) has led to an increase in arrests for more serious offences, reflecting a broader shift from proactive to reactive policing (Russell, 2017). On average there are only 20 officers and PCSOs in the city centre on Friday and Saturday night, making it increasingly difficult to conduct early interventions (Leeds City Council, 2019c). A host of other individuals and organisations that contribute towards the governance of the NTE and thus it is critical that a networked approach is as efficient and effective as possible (Police and Crime Committee, 2016).

Reduction of NTP:

The reduction of police officers in West Yorkshire since 2010 has reduced the number of officers dedicated to managing disorder and crime within city centres (Burns-Williamson, 2018). WYP has responded firstly by developing partnership working between officers, licenced premises, door supervisors and key agencies (Sogaard, 2016), and secondly by deploying officers across Leeds to Leeds City Centre on Friday and Saturday nights under Operation Capital. It became apparent from the interviews that although this pooling of resources was viewed as necessary, it was believed to have led to a deterioration of positive working relationships between the officers and door supervisors. Positive working relationships between familiar persons fosters an element of trust and communication which is difficult to preserve when deploying different officers each weekend. Explaining the problems linked to resource pooling one interviewee explained, 'they don't know the city centre, they don't know the door staff, they don't know the managers of the licenced premises, it is not their patch. I'd go as far to say they don't particularly want to be there' (Participant 1). Another participant had a similar sentiment - 'they are coming into the city centre, more blind than they should be and they don't understand how the city centre works and how the partnerships come together to do things' (Participant 2). The belief that the frontline officers deployed under Operation Capital do not understand the inner workings of the city centre or the relationships between organisations that contribute to and facilitate governance of the NTE. There was therefore a belief among participants that the governance of the NTE was not as efficient as it could be, and the fluidity of partnership working could be improved particularly between key organisations such as

Safer Leeds, Leeds Watch (CCTV & Security Services), Businesses Against Crime in Leeds (BACIL), WYP, British Transport Police, Evening Ambassadors and door supervisors.

Shift to technological alternatives:

The lack of coordination may also be a result of the reduction of evening briefings. Previously, officers, door supervisors, volunteers and evening ambassadors could attend one of three evening briefings, where photos of problematic individuals were distributed and the events likely to cause added issues were discussed. One evening briefing has been reintroduced, but the tightening of Data Protection Act (2018) and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) has meant photos can no longer be distributed. Attendance of these meetings has not been re-established. Evening briefings can be accessed online through the BACIL website, including key information and photos. However, this reliance on technology has likely harmed relationships between key governance personnel and fostered a disjointed approach to managing disorder within the city centre (Cellan-Jones, 2011).

Disconnect between frontline officers and licencing departments:

This lack of connectivity is also apparent within WYP. The interviewees within the WYP licencing department stated that communication between front line officers and licencing personnel has deteriorated since the licencing department moved out of the Police Head Quarters in 2017. This delays investigation of some crimes, as one interviewee stated ‘... because with the shift patterns and workload it’s so difficult to get around, especially when the pubs and some of the clubs are only open at certain times and certain days, your shifts don’t fit’ (participant 3). Improved communication could speed up evidence gathering, as Licencing have close working relationships with many premises within the city centre. This lack of communication was discussed in the interview with two senior members of the WYP licencing department, and to address this issue one of the interviewees now attends induction days for new recruits to discuss the role of the licensing department.

Late-night Levy:

The Late-night Levy was introduced under the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 to alleviate the financial burden on the police. The Levy applies to all licenced premises operating between midnight and 6 AM, but was deemed ‘fundamentally flawed’ in 2013 (Leeds City Council, p.5). Six years on the levy still inspires great variation of opinion. Participants discussed potential changes to the Levy called for in the House of Commons Briefing Paper (Woodhouse, 2019), particularly removing the condition that the levy has to apply to the entire local authority. Although this was seen as necessary, some doubted whether a smaller catchment area (i.e. only the city centre) would raise enough funds to address the financial burden placed on the police. One participant did not believe it was necessary to increase the number of police present within the NTE, saying other forms of deterrence (i.e. marshals) were effective and cheaper than officers. Other participants identified the other levies and personnel currently active in the NTE that could be improved, reducing the need for a Late-night Levy. The Leeds Business Improvement District (BID) was mentioned in particular - this levy applies to both day and night-economies with a rateable value over £60k more than the Late-night Levy. Participants highlighted that the BID has a clear reinvestment interest in the day-time economy rather than the NTE and believed this could be improved to mitigate the need for a Late-night Levy.

Conclusion:

This research aimed to explore the effectiveness and quality of partnership working in Leeds City Centre NTE in an attempt to understand how alcohol-related violence and disorder is managed. Cuts to WYP's funding and staff numbers has meant the need for efficient partnership working is crucial. Although Leeds employs a range of organisations these often work in a disjointed manner which is likely hampering the success of strategies aimed at reducing disorder. It is clear from the research that there has been a reduction of coordination between frontline officers and other personnel, partly due to the deployment of outer-city officers under Operation Capital, the reduced use of face-to-face night-briefings, and WYP licencing department's move from the Police Head Quarters. As the research highlights, there is a clear need to promote a smarter and more efficient networked approach to disorder. Although the reduction of police officers was highlighted in all interviews there were varying opinions about the introduction of the Late-night Levy, making it hard to see how the levy could be successfully implement in the future. Although this study found room for improvement, it needs to be acknowledged that governance of the NTE in Leeds has been rather successful in recent years. Long term trends have indicated a substantial decrease in violence (Leeds City Council 2010; Leeds City Council, 2017). Furthermore, Leeds has been accredited with a Purple Flag Award for the third consecutive year indicating the continued effort to make the NTE a safe and vibrant environment for visitors (Leeds BID, 2019).

Of note, at the time of this study a reconfigured Safer Leeds: City Centre Partnership Board had formulated a community safety strategy and had initiated a review of 'on street' provision throughout the day.

Methodology:

This research project aimed to understand how strategic level governance is used to tackle alcohol-related violence and disorder within the Leeds City Centre. Seven interviews were conducted with individuals in strategic positions across Leeds City Council Licencing Department, West Yorkshire Police Licencing Department, Businesses Against Crime in Leeds (BACIL), Safer Leeds, and a licenced premise owner. This research was conducted in fulfilment of the researcher's MSc Criminal Justice and Criminology degree and was conformed to the University of Leeds ethical guidelines. Although this study focused on strategic level governance of the NTE in Leeds, it may have been useful to interview a larger number of frontline officers and operational personnel to understand how governance is coordinated and the perceived barriers to improvement.

Implications for Further Research:

It was clear from the interviews that there is room to increase the effectiveness of partnership working within the NTE of Leeds city centre. One participant identified the need for an NTE Coordinator, a single individual responsible for the leadership of all personnel operating in the NTE. The potential benefits and obstacles of this role could be assessed through discussions with frontline and strategic governance personnel. Second, wider researcher is needed on frontline officers' knowledge of partnership work within Leeds City Centre.

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