Relational continuity in community policing: Insights from a human-centred design perspective

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Abstract Community policing prioritises building positive relationships between police officers and local communities. The approach focuses on working with communities to identify and address the causes of crime and disorder, rather than just reacting to calls for service. Officer's continuity in community policing has been a concern, with calls for greater consistency in the posting of officers to local neighbourhoods. Through the *Cutting Crime Impact* (CCI) project, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) identified that when community police officers leave their post, knowledge and relationships they've built with the community are lost. This jeopardises citizens' trust and perceptions of the police. To preserve the important connections that community policing officers build in their neighbourhoods, GMP adopted a human-centred design approach to research and develop a novel handover protocol. This work has enabled development of a conceptual framework for 'relational continuity' in community policing, inspired by research into therapeutic relationships in health care disciplines.

Introduction

Community policing is a philosophy and strategy that prioritizes building positive relationships between police officers and members of local communities. Community policing is delivered by police officers assigned to a specific community or neighbourhood. Community policing is about fostering citizens' trust and confidence in policing (Longstaff *et al.*, 2015; Carter and Fox, 2019).

Much has been written about the procedures and practices required to deliver community policing, and about the difficulties of delivering community policing within the UK context. However, despite a focus on the long-term, the maintenance of community relationships in community policing has been widely overlooked in both academic literature and in government and policing reports. As it stands, we know very little about how police forces ensure long-term, sustainable commitment to the

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strategic goals of community policing. Taking the longer-term view is routine in the medical sector, which employs the concept of *relational continuity*. This is defined as:

> A therapeutic relationship between a patient and one or more providers that spans various healthcare events and results in accumulated knowledge of the patient and care consistent with the patient's needs.
>
> (Haggerty *et al.*, 2007, p. 240)

This paper introduces the concept of relational continuity in the context of community policing, reviewing the existing evidence on the topic and integrating it with findings of research carried out in Greater Manchester (UK). As part of the EU-funded *Cutting Crime Impact* (CCI) project, Greater Manchester Police (GMP) undertook research into community policing, using qualitative techniques including shadowing, interviews and observations, to identify issues and needs in relation to community policing in Greater Manchester. The consequences of a lack of continuity in community policing roles emerged as a key theme in the research. The high level of staff changes was identified as a significant obstacle to community policing effectively achieving its strategic aims.

This paper addresses a gap in the understanding of community policing, conceptualizing relational continuity in the context of policing practice. The authors can find no published articles to date that apply the concept of 'relational continuity' to community policing. This paper contributes to the literature on the benefits of community policing, and on the value of community policing in achieving strategic policing objectives (Mastrofski *et al.*, 2007; Longstaff *et al.*, 2015; Bayerl *et al.*, 2017; Higgins, 2018; Innes *et al.,* 2020a,b).

Community policing and its strategic goals

It is difficult to present a single definition of community policing, due to the variety of ways in which it is implemented across the world (Cordner, 1997; Scheider *et al.*, 2009; Kappeler and Gaines, 2012). Nevertheless, the common purpose of community

policing is to foster citizens' trust and sense of police legitimacy (Carter and Fox, 2019). Trust and legitimacy are key aspects of *policing by consent* (Home Office, 2012), and therefore a strategic activity.

From this strategic perspective, community policing is proactive, preventative, and problem-oriented (Cordner, 1997). This distinguishes it from response-oriented policing the priorities of which are dictated by reactive, 'crime-fighting' imperatives (Scheider *et al.*, 2009; Longstaff *et al.*, 2015). Community policing can be said to embody a number of interrelated characteristics, including:

- *Active engagement with citizens*: This enables collaborative relationships, for which trust is a precondition (Scheider *et al.*, 2009; Spalek, 2010; Carter and Fox, 2019). Police-citizen relationships are long-term strategies that enable the police to identify and gain intelligence about local security issues.
- *A visible police presence*: Combined with active engagement, a visible police presence in geographically defined territories (i.e. neighbourhoods) supports development of knowledge and intelligence on the local area, its residents and their concerns in order to address and (when possible) prevent them.
- *A prevention orientation*: This is core to community policing and is achieved through the adoption of problem-solving techniques and partnership-working with local non-police agencies (Scheider *et al.*, 2009).
- *A police agenda driven by the local context*: Identified local problems and concerns inform the police agenda, which is thereby shaped by citizens' priorities (Carter and Fox, 2019).

Community policing has a defined territorial scope and mandate (Gstrein *et al.*, 2019). Community police officers should have long-term assignments to a specific neighbourhood, allowing them to build working relationships with community members, become familiar with the area's geography and security issues, and work effectively in partnership with local agencies to address these. The approach is necessarily decentralized and organized at the neighbourhood level, and thus akin to a *community*

of place (Bell, 2016; McKnight *et al*., 2016). That is, a community of people bound together by the location in which they reside, work, visit, or otherwise spend a sustained portion of their time with community police officers and their managers responsible for solving problems in their local area (Cordner, 1997). Implicitly, community policing represents a sustained commitment to a neighbourhood by a police organization, as evidenced through the continued engagement of individual officers.

For citizens to be willing to work with the police, their trust and confidence in policing is required. To achieve this strategic goal, the *quality* of routine encounters between citizens and the police becomes critical (Longstaff *et al*., 2015). Seeing regular police patrols and being kept informed about police activities are both associated with citizens holding more positive opinions of police effectiveness and with better community engagement (Bradford *et al*., 2009; Innes *et al*., 2020b). Real community engagement becomes as much about *how* something is done as about *what* is done (Longstaff *et al*., 2015).

The trust of citizens, together with officers' personal knowledge and experience of their neighbourhood, benefit from familiarity and relationships being allowed to develop over time. *Familiarity* refers to the feeling elicited by seeing, and being able to engage with, the same officers patrolling the same area over a long period of time (Cowell and Kringen, 2016).

Familiarity increases police accessibility: citizens become familiar with the police officers assigned to their area, and the latter become a stable point of reference for the local communities (Crawford *et al*., 2003). For this to happen, police officers need to be dedicated to a certain neighbourhood on a permanent basis, ensuring a high degree of continuity of their presence and involvement within the local area (Wakefield, 2007). However, this is threatened by community police officer redeployment and reductions in their numbers. This may be due to spiralling demand for response policing and political pressure to provide short-term results (Longstaff *et al*., 2015).

The UK context

Commonly referred to as *neighbourhood policing* in the UK, community policing is considered the cornerstone of the British policing system (HMIC, 2014). Since 2010, however, the UK policing landscape has been dominated by austerity and significant cuts in public spending (Davey *et al*., 2019; Innes *et al*., 2020a). This has dramatically impacted policing budgets and led to reduced allocation of officers to neighbourhood policing (HMIC, 2014; Higgins, 2018). In 2014, midway through this *age of austerity* (Cameron, 2009), a government report expressed growing concern at the reduction of neighbourhood policing roles and consequent erosion of core functions, such as crime prevention and community engagement (HMIC, 2014). Continued cuts combined with a significant increase in demand (Higgins, 2018) had trapped policing in a vicious circle where resources for long-term, strategic objectives were sacrificed to short-term, reactive goals (Sindall and Sturgis, 2013; Longstaff *et al*., 2015). A reduced number of officers, together with their short-term deployment and frequent movement between force areas, continues to undermine efforts to forge long-term relationships through community policing.

Cutting crime impact research in Greater Manchester

As part of the EU-funded CCI project, research was undertaken into the delivery of community policing by Greater Manchester Police (GMP). GMP is the fourth largest UK police force responsible for policing the metropolitan area of Greater Manchester in the northwest of England.

Cutting crime impact was an international research and innovation project coordinated by the University of Salford (UK) and funded through the European Commission's Horizon 2020 Security Research programme (October 2018–December 2021). CCI involved six law enforcement agencies (LEAs), as well as a number of research and consultancy organizations. The project aimed to enable police and relevant authorities to prevent crime and reduce its impact by supporting partner LEAs in researching and developing design solutions (so-called 'Tools') in four focus areas. One of these CCI focus areas was community policing (see https://www.cuttingcrimeimpact.eu).

Projects funded under the European Security Research programme have commonly adopted a technology-led approach to solution development (Davey and Wootton, 2017b). To some extent, this reflects the techno-centric nature of the programme and its development (Csernatoni, 2021). The European Commission refers to one limitation of this approach in the more recent Horizon Europe funding programme, suggesting '... a key challenge remains in improving the uptake of innovation' (European Commission, 2022, p. 175). The authors suggest that this may be due to such technology-driven projects not appropriately considering human 'end-user' attitudes, perspectives and values.

In contrast to other EU-funded security projects, CCI Tools were developed using a human-centred design approach (Giacomin, 2017; Davey and Wootton, 2017a). This bottom-up process called for research to be conducted to understand the requirements, needs and contexts of each LEA in relation to their chosen focus area. Findings were then analysed to reframe problems, generate insight and define appropriate solutions to identified challenges.

Human-centred design focuses on the human actors within a given problem context, taking into consideration their whole experience and maintaining their involvement throughout the definition, prototyping, and development of potential design solutions (Davey and Wootton, 2017a). The approach is both creative and evidence-based, utilizing qualitative research methods to understand the context in which end-users and stakeholders operate. Design researchers aim to interact and empathize with human subjects, to gain deep understanding and insight into their roles, needs and requirements (Giacomin, 2017).

CCI research methodology

To begin with, LEA partners undertook 'requirements capture' (Cooper *et al.*, 1998), a research process for understanding the context and potential issues around a design problem in the case of GMP, community policing. The activity of requirements capture constitutes the initial stage of the human-centred design 'discover' process and comprises three activities: information gathering, information transformation, and requirements generation (Cooper *et al.*, 1998). During the information gathering phase, data was collected from different sources using a variety of qualitative research methods including: (i) observation/shadowing of police officers and staff on various shifts; (ii) semi-structured interviews with police officers, citizens, and GMP partners; (iii) meetings with GMP staff and senior officers; and (iv) visits and discussion with non-police stakeholders in the communities. Data was collected from multiple stakeholders, including community police officers (Neighbourhood Beat Officers or NBOs), Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs), citizens and other GMP partner organizations, to identify user needs and potential issues impacting delivery of community policing.

The requirements capture findings discussed in this paper were collected by GMP over a period of 5 months. Findings were subsequently analyzed with the intent of transforming them into knowledge (Cooper *et al.*, 1998) and to allow scope for 'abstracting' the problems identified. The whole CCI consortium was brought together for a CCI *DesignLab*, at which LEA partners shared their requirements capture findings with the wider consortium. Working in teams, partners collaborated to creatively abstract from the gathered knowledge, reframing the problems identified, generating new insight, and prototyping potential solution concepts.

The options that emerged from the CCI DesignLab were reviewed and potential concept directions for development of each of the CCI Tools selected by the relevant LEA. Each LEA then began working to design and develop their tool, following iterative cycles of designing and prototype testing with end-users and stakeholders.

Research findings: challenges to community policing in Greater Manchester

Analysis of the GMP requirements capture research findings identified a number of themes, which are outlined below.

Familiarity

The research suggests that, in Greater Manchester, *familiarity* is an attribute highly valued by citizens and GMP partners alike, being particularly strong in the so-called *community hubs*. These are usually community centres attended regularly, if not daily, by GMP community policing officers (NBOs and PCSOs) as well as other council and charity workers and community groups. Such community hubs provide an informal setting where citizens can approach the police and other support services. The routine presence of police officers and staff in these hubs improves the perceived approachability of the police and increases citizens' reporting of non-urgent problems.

> It's really complicated to contact the police for non-urgent matters. The 111[1] [telephone] line is terrible and a lot of people do not use it. For this reason, being co-located in a community hub with PCSOs and NBOs is fundamental. Sometimes, when there's an issue, I don't call the police — I will go straight to S. [PCSO's name] and I'll try to solve this issue with her and the community.
>
> Outreach officer, 2019

Far from breeding contempt, *familiarity* is positively linked not only to citizens' propensity to reach out to police officers, but also to improving police officers' ability to identify and solve problems within the community (Cowell and Kringen, 2016). In their implementation guidelines for foot patrolling, Cowell and Kringen (2016, p. 33) stress the importance of fostering familiarity through the development of a long-term foot patrol strategy that ensures '…the opportunity to develop in-depth relationships with members of the community'. Such in-depth relationships with citizens require trust to function effectively for the benefit of both police officers and local community members.

Trust

The effectiveness of relationship building in community policing relies on the presence of '*personalized trust*' between a police officer and citizens or partners (Spalek, 2010, p. 798). The research explored relationships between GMP and communities that historically have low levels of trust in policing. Interviews and discussions with citizens and GMP partners revealed that, for some such communities, including but not limited to ethnic minorities, police presence can itself be a source of feelings of insecurity. However, as identified by Spalek (2010), showing the right attitude can help build contingent trust. This then needs to evolve into implicit trust through an officer's continuous presence, which helps develop mutual knowledge and understanding.

> Some people see the police as the enemy. You need continuity and consistency. You need to build relationships. And this happens to me as a councillor. […] I build a connection, and when there is an issue, if there is trust, we can work together. And [that's how] people start to trust the police. […] It takes a long time to build trust — but it takes so little to destroy it.
>
> Councillor, 2019

Building this level of trust with communities requires commitment over time (Innes *et al.*, 2020b). For community police officers, continuity in a neighbourhood provides the opportunity to develop a more complete understanding of the people living in the area, their culture and the dynamics between different groups. At the same time, such insight naturally contributes to relationship building with community members. The need for continuity applies not only to police interactions with hard-to-reach communities, but also with state-citizen relationships more broadly. For example, research into the work of UK council wardens suggests that moving wardens from one location

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[1] UK police telephone number for reporting non-emergency incidents.

to another can undermine relationships and trust (Crawford *et al.*, 2005). Evidence collected through the CCI research in Greater Manchester is consistent with these findings.

Perceptions of commitment

When asked about the difficulties of working with the police, several GMP partners reported that the police can find it difficult to work on long-term projects because they are often called away to respond to emergency incidents. Immediate, short-term priorities may prevent officers from being able to consistently engage with long-term initiatives. Unfortunately, this may be interpreted as a lack of commitment, negatively impacting the building of strategic relationships with both community members and police partner organizations.

> Police talks and workshops are all good but don't work as a long term strategy. Good relationships are what works in the long term and what really has an impact.
> Secondary school teacher, 2019

Commitment is required both at the local policing level and the senior level. Clear and consistent leadership is particularly important for partnership-working (Peaslee, 2009), and the turnover of senior officers committed to community policing can be problematic. A Superintendent in Greater Manchester emphasizes this issue:

> I like to engage with the community, there is so much going on out there and my staff does not always know this. […] That is what I do, as a Superintendent. During my one-to-ones with the inspectors, I take them to visit these partners in the community [...] so they know that they are there and that they have to engage with them. Because you don't learn it [community policing], you need to see it; you need to see what's out there — all the opportunities in the community. As a Superintendent, I set the tone. But if I move on, I don't know who is going to replace me…
> Superintendent, 2019

The problem of ensuring senior officers are equally com mitted to the goals of community policing is reflected in the literature on public sector senior management.

> When new police chiefs and mayors come into office, they want to do new things. They want to make their own mark. They often have little interest in picking up the unfinished projects of the people they replaced.
> (Skogan, 2004, p. 167)

Unfortunately, this can result in partnership projects or neighbourhood initiatives being suddenly abandoned and forgotten when a new manager, with a different mind-set from their predecessor, takes the reins.

Consistency

From one neighbourhood to another, community policing can look very different, depending on the community policing officers and staff delivering it. Officers build their own connections, establish personal knowledge with particular people, and have differing understandings of how their work should be delivered. As a result, community policing in each area is not only shaped by local priorities, but also by officers' individual preferences, knowledge, networks, and delivery 'style'. When an officer leaves, community policing within their area is very often reshaped by the newly appointed officer, who may approach their new role with a different mind-set and without any knowledge of the work previously carried out by their predecessor.

> My biggest frustration with GMP is the staff turnover. There has to be a minimum standard to be a PCSO or NBO. GMP just sticks people in the community — but maybe their attitude is counter-productive and negatively affects years and years of relationship building. We spent many years building good relationships between the community, the council and the police, and people expect that we maintain the same level of support and engagement.

> But if GMP keeps shifting roles around and changing things…
>
> Community Safety Manager (non-GMP), 2019

Not surprisingly, staff changes were found to be a major cause of frustration for many GMP partners interviewed during the CCI research.

The CCI research findings show that the individual preferences and personalities of different community policing officers and staff significantly affect the way community policing is delivered at the frontline. This includes the sort of engagement strategies that are in place and consequently the strength of the networks and relationships established between police and local citizens.

It was found that community policing roles are filled by people with very different skills, mindsets, and attitudes towards their job. Many PCSOs and NBOs are dedicated to community policing, demonstrating a strong sense of ownership, and finding their community policing work personally rewarding. As one Police Community Support Officer states:

> I am glad I ripped up the application to become a police officer […] Police [response] officers do quick fixing. I work on long-term solutions.
>
> PCSO, 2019

However, in some cases, community policing is staffed by officers that appear unsuited to the role. Those who lack the required interpersonal skills or do not embrace key aspects of the community policing philosophy particularly non-enforcement tasks such as community engagement.

> Yes, maybe I **should** do more community engagement, too… But you know, I am a police officer — I like to go after the bad guys, investigate drug dealing, etc…
>
> Neighbourhood Beat Officer, 2019

> Some PCSOs don't have the right attitude — they do not like engagement… And [with regards to] the recruitment of PCSOs and NBOs — they should be

> looking for the right personality traits.
>
> Local Councillor, 2019

Developing a tool to support community policing in Greater Manchester

In the CCI project, the results of in-depth requirements capture research were used to reframe and more clearly define problems facing each partner LEA. In the case of GMP, the problem was reframed to focus on the human participants within the policing system those responsible for the delivery of community policing in Greater Manchester.

Framing the problem for GMP

PCSOs and NBOs often work within the same beat for several years. During this time, they establish key connections with people and partner organizations within the neighbourhood and acquire unique knowledge of their beat area. They know the neighbourhood's people; its problems; its resources; and its dynamics valuable information that cannot be found in official documents or databases.

The problem is, when a PCSO or NBO retires, is redeployed to another area or moves to another police role, this unique resource of local knowledge and relationships leaves with them. Research revealed that the movement of PCSOs and NBOs out of their beat area is a source of frustration for local communities and GMP partner organizations alike. Furthermore, it negatively impacts citizens' trust and perception of GMP. As a result, citizens feel let down, partners feel frustrated and ultimately, the valuable work of PCSOs and NBOs in building ongoing, trusting relationships with local communities and partners is jeopardized.

Several measures that could be adopted to address this problem were identified, including improved recruitment programmes, targeted job incentives and formal handover protocols.

The solution: GMP community connect

GMP designed and developed *Community Connect*—a handover protocol designed for frontline community policing officers and staff (NBOs

and PCSOs) (Cutting Crime Impact, 2021). Community Connect aims to prevent the loss of important knowledge and contacts by: (i) ensuring a face-to-face handover takes place between leaving officers and newly appointed officers; and (ii) promoting the involvement of key partners and citizens in the process. In addition, the implementation of the Community Connect protocol highlights the importance GMP senior police management places on maintaining good community relationships and signifies the potential strategic cost to the force of the hasty redeployment of community policing staff.

The Community Connect protocol comprises three components:

1. The *Community Map*: A simple document that the leaving officer must complete with key information and contacts in their neighbourhood area.
2. The *Briefing Day*: A face-to-face meeting and joint walk around the area involving the leaving officer and the new officer in post, or another PCSO or NBO in the team. Key contacts in the neighbourhood would also be visited and introduced during the walkaround.
3. The *Social Media Handover Notification*: Explaining how the handover should be communicated to the community and partners in a timely manner via relevant social media channels.

The Briefing Day is an important element in the Community Connect process. As identified by the CCI research, the physical presence of officers in the community and good quality face-to-face interaction are key to relationship building and trust. During the joint walkaround, the new officer has the opportunity to be introduced to relevant partners and community members in the neighbourhood and inform them about the upcoming handover. The face-to-face involvement of key contacts in the handover process is crucial as it aims to preserve and sustain the important connections that community policing teams build in their neighbourhoods.

Formal handover protocols like Community Connect are a suitable and practical strategy that police forces can adopt to ensure the continuity of

key relationships, reducing the loss of invaluable local knowledge and preserving the beneficial connections established with local citizens and partners. To be effective, such initiatives should be embedded within policing procedures or strategies, which recognize the importance of continuity. This requires a strategic, senior-level and long-term commitment to the goals of community policing that coordinates efforts, commits resources and embeds them within clear organizational policies and procedures.

Discussion: the concept of *continuity* in community policing

The need for continuity of police officer deployment in neighbourhood policing was highlighted in several UK government reports published towards the end of the 2010s. During this period, public investment in community policing was substantial (Casey, 2008; Flanagan, 2008; Home Office, 2008). An independent review commissioned by the Home Secretary in 2008, identified staff continuity as a factor contributing to successful delivery of neighbourhood policing (Flanagan, 2008). Indeed, Casey's (2008) *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime* review found:

> …a very strong call, particularly in public events held during the review, for greater consistency in the posting of police officers to local neighbourhoods.
> (Casey, 2008, p. 28)

The 2008 Home Office Policing Green Paper pledged to not only minimize neighbourhood policing staff turnover, but also ensure that 80 percent of a Neighbourhood Police Team's time was spent on visible patrol and engagement work in their assigned local area (Home Office, 2008). However, after this brief 2008 appearance, the topic of officer continuity and staff turnover in neighbourhood policing vanished from government reports and the policing agenda.

This paper has discussed evidence indicating a positive link between continuity and the successful delivery of community policing. Continuity, in terms of the length of time a particular community policing officer works in the same area, provides multiple benefits:

i. It elicits *familiarity* (Cowell and Kringen, 2016).

ii. It increases police accessibility to citizens (Crawford *et al.,* 2003).

iii. It facilitates partnership-working (Peaslee, 2009; Turley *et al.*, 2012) and relationship building between the police, their delivery partners and citizens (Crawford *et al.,* 2005; Innes *et al.,* 2020b) by aiding the development of *personalized trust* (Spalek *et al.,* 2011).

The literature corroborates that when employees leave their job, they take with them the knowledge and personal connections they have developed. Consequently, staff turnover presents a persistent problem for organizations. To minimize the risk of losing access to vital knowledge and networks, organizations need to better understand not only the consequences of staff turnover, but also its main causes (Urbancová and Linhartová, 2011).

Fostering continuity

Previous research (Crawford *et al.*, 2005; Myhill, 2006) has suggested that staff turnover in community policing might be reduced by:

i. Assigning greater professional status to community policing.

ii. Recruiting the right type of person for the job (e.g. in terms of interpersonal skills, attitudes, and motivation).

iii. Providing better career and skills development opportunities as an incentive for officers to remain in post in the same local area for longer periods of time.

Assigning greater professional status to community policing   Specific features of community policing play an important role in staff retention. This includes the perceived status of community policing within police organizations and the career opportunities it offers to police officers. There is strong evidence from the UK and elsewhere suggesting that community policing roles lack the professional status of other roles and

are often perceived as a form of *second-class* police work (Irving *et al.,* 1989; Bennett and Lupton, 1992; Sadd and Grinc, 1994; Long *et al.*, 2002; Weisburd *et al.*, 2002; Myhill, 2006; Mastrofski *et al.*, 2007; Topping, 2008; Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015; Cosgrove, 2016; O'Neill, 2019; Skogan *et al.*, 2019; De Camargo, 2020).

Within police forces, reactive policing is still widely regarded as *real police work* (Myhill, 2006; Mastrofski *et al.*, 2007). This widely held perception is only reinforced by short-termist police performance indicators. These tend to consider only the immediate advantages of particular actions, and overly focus on quantifiable, crime incident-based targets, rather than longer-term, less easily quantified, strategic goals (Cosgrove and Ramshaw, 2015).

Some researchers attribute officers' perception of community policing as being of low professional status to its high staff turnover and problems with staff discontinuity (Cosgrove, 2016; Higgings, 2018; O'Neill, 2019). Community policing officers are aware of such perceptions within police organizational culture and believe their colleagues and managers do not value community policing as *real* police work. This serves to encourage community policing staff to transfer to other policing units undertaking more traditional, enforcement-style roles. Despite this, community policing officers who believe in and are committed to this important policing approach perceive their jobs as rewarding (Higgins, 2018).

Recruiting the right type of person for the job   Community policing provides many opportunities for officers to demonstrate personal initiative and to engage in long-term projects that offer the potential for real impact on citizens' lives (ibid). Nevertheless, its low professional status results in many officers treating community policing as merely a low rung on their career ladder allowing them to broaden their policing resumé and facilitating their progression to higher status policing roles (ibid). As Higgins argues:

> … neighbourhood roles were seen as an attractive option for those looking to build experience and evidence for promotion applications. While this could

inject energy into delivery, it could also lead to short tenures and a lack of much needed continuity, as ambitious individuals gained promotion or moved on to seek broader experience.

(Higgins, 2018, p.59)

The CCI research confirms community policing as a complex job requiring officers with particular skills and personality traits. For the right individual, community policing can offer a fulfilling role that cultivates their long-term commitment. Sometimes, however, community policing staff and officers do not possess the right profile for the job: due to their skills and competences, but also attitude and personality. The selection and training of PCSOs and NBOs is not always effective in attracting candidates with the skills and attitudes best suited to community policing an approach for which relationship building, approachability and preventative work are key. In this regard, the authors note that the Lisbon Municipal Police in Portugal already assesses the psychological profile of candidates being recruited to their community policing roles (Davey *et al.*, 2019). The approach in Lisbon is particularly interesting as community policing officers' profiles and training needs are identified through a process of consultation involving both citizens and police partners (Davey *et al.,* 2019). Their training strategy is focused on developing community police officers' social and technical skills to enable them to work better with citizens and partners. Getting the right type of person for the job is essential to ensure effective delivery and increased levels of job satisfaction. The authors recommend that police recruitment for community policing posts (NBOs and PCSOs) should consider candidates' personality types, prioritizing those who can demonstrate the skills suited to this strategic policing approach.

Providing better career and skills development opportunities   The issue of status within the police organization is particularly relevant to UK Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). This category of officer does not have the same policing powers as a regular UK police officer. They are tasked specifically with community policing

work, such as engagement with local communities, problem-solving, patrolling, and reassurance. Unlike other community policing roles, the PCSO cannot access career progression opportunities within the police. According to Cosgrove and Ramshaw (2015), this explains why so many PCSOs aspire to become *regular* police officers, rather than committing the remainder of their career to their community policing role.

Opportunities for promotions appear to be a determining factor of both well-being at work and intention to leave the police (Boag-Munroe *et al.,* 2017). Boag-Munroe *et al.* (2017) found that officers who have limited promotion prospects are more likely to leave the police service. However, when it comes to ensuring continuity of community policing posts, promotions can be a double-edged sword. Those police officers who wish to progress their career and are promoted to the role of Sergeant or Inspector will almost always have to leave their post as a result of their promotion.

Thankfully, some officers do join community policing with the intent of sticking with it. Research in the UK (Ramshaw, 2013) found that community policing is often chosen as a later career move by experienced police officers. Many officers in the UK start their career as response officers and move to neighbourhood policing because they want to achieve a '…sense of meaning and fulfilment at work as well as the opportunity to stretch skills and abilities and work with greater levels of independence and responsibility'. (Ramshaw, 2013; p. 470).

The complexity of continuity

A common feature of the literature on community policing is the conceptualizing of 'continuity' exclusively in terms of staff turnover (i.e. officers choosing to change roles or leave the police altogether). Police forces face the challenge of delivering good community policing in an environment in which staff turnover is a persistent factor. Adding to this challenge, however, is community policing officers being redeployed to other roles by police managers in an effort to meet short-term goals in a short-staffed, underfunded, target-driven policing culture. Nonetheless, conceptualizing *continuity* in the

community policing context as merely a function of staff turnover is, the authors suggest, overly simplistic. Instead, continuity should be understood as the result of police organizational staffing and resource management systems, which impact the consistency and citizens' and partners' experience of community policing over time.

Police staffing and resource management systems impact three aspects of community policing: its strategic management; the organizational processes and procedures it employs; and its frontline delivery.

1. *Strategic management*: This is the domain of senior police leaders and managers, who are responsible for 'setting the tone' for community policing as a strategic policing priority. They ensure that community policing priorities are clearly defined and integrated within the organization's policing plans. They can also impact the perceived value and status of community policing within the wider operational policing culture.

2. *Organizational processes and procedures*: These include recruitment of community policing roles; the provision of appropriate training and professional development opportunities; the implementation of handover protocols (like GMP *Community Connect*, described earlier); the adequate allocation of resources; and the protection of community policing resources from unnecessary redeployment.

3. *Frontline delivery*: This relates to the police officers and staff responsible for actively engaging with local communities, building local knowledge and connections, and developing trust relationships and familiarity within their neighbourhood. Frontline community police officers and staff must conform to their force's community policing strategy and engagement plan (developed by senior police managers).

Collectively, the operation of these three systemic elements will demonstrate a police force's commitment to the strategic goals of community policing. Continuity in community policing cannot be achieved by simply preventing staff turnover an unrealistic goal. Rather, continuity is the result of the strategic coordination of procedures, resources and effort at all levels of the organization. The key word is *strategic* continuity in community policing requires a shift from short-term, tactical thinking to a more strategic mind-set. Continuity in this context also requires a shift in understanding from it solely relating to issues of organizational management, to understanding that continuity places human-interpersonal relationships at the heart of policing.

Relational continuity: a core component of community policing?

Based on evidence discussed so far, interpersonal relationships (and their continuity over time) are core to successful community policing. This insight inspired the authors to explore similar concepts in other areas of professional practice that depend on the quality of interpersonal relationships.

In health disciplines (including midwifery, palliative care, nursing, and medicine) the concept of *relational continuity* is used to emphasize the human-interpersonal component of care relationships and, importantly, its impact on the outcome of care interventions in different health settings (Sandall *et al.*, 2009; Leap *et al.*, 2010). In the literature, relational continuity has been associated with better health outcomes (Saultz and Albedaiwi, 2004; Dumont *et al.*, 2005; Sandall *et al.*, 2009; Leap *et al.*, 2010) and higher levels of patient satisfaction (Pandhi *et al.*, 2008; Scrymgeour *et al.*, 2013; Engamba *et al.*, 2019).

Evidence on the benefits of continuity in community policing is predominantly anecdotal and rather sparse (Wakefield, 2007; Casey, 2008; Flanagan, 2008; Turley *et al.*, 2012; Cowell and Kringen, 2016). Such evidence comes from studies in which continuity is addressed in the context of staff *employment continuity*—an organizational management issue rather than *relational continuity*—a human-interpersonal issue. With regard to the successful implementation of community policing, the concept of relational continuity currently lacks adequate conceptualization and systematic investigation.

In the healthcare domain, relational continuity has two main components:

1. *Longitudinal continuity*: Which refers to being able to see the same practitioner(s) over time.
2. *Interpersonal continuity*: Which refers to a dimension of personal trust, responsibility and confidence in the relationship between a patient and health practitioner(s) (Saultz and Albedaiwi, 2004; Engamba *et al.,* 2019).

Both the longitudinal and interpersonal components are essential for true relational continuity (Murphy and Salisbury, 2020). Interpersonal continuity, in particular, has been described as having a positive impact on patients' sense of security (von Bültzingslöwen *et al.*, 2006). According to von Bültzingslöwen *et al.* (2006, p. 213–16), a patient's sense of security has four main foundations:

1. *A feeling of coherence*: The fact that a practitioner knows the patient's health history, adopts a holistic approach and notices changes in health status.
2. *Confidence in care*: Linked to having access to skilled practitioners who take responsibility for the patient's care.
3. *A trusting relationship*: In which the patient is met with empathy and understanding, feels that they are allowed to cooperate and participate in their own care.
4. *Accessibility*: The patient knowing when and how a practitioner can be accessed.

The authors suggest that there are clear parallels between the concept of continuity in healthcare described above, and its operationalization in the community policing realm. We suggest the concepts of coherence, confidence, trusting relationships, and accessibility, coupled with a longitudinal approach, can usefully be harnessed in the effective delivery of community policing. Indeed, the concept of relational continuity might be adapted to the community policing context, as follows:

1. *A feeling of coherence*: The fact that a police officer knows the history of a neighbourhood

and its people, adopts a holistic approach and notices early indicators of crime and social problems.
2. *Confidence in policing*: Linked to having access to appropriately skilled officers who take responsibility for the community's policing.
3. *A trusting relationship*: In which the citizen is met with empathy and understanding by the officer, and is encouraged to cooperate and participate in their own safety and security
4. *Accessibility*: The citizen knowing when and how a community officer can be easily accessed (e.g. regular foot patrolling; regular beat; regular attendance at community location).

Conclusion: Community policing—a human-centred approach to policing

In adopting a human-centred design approach, CCI research focused on the vital role played by community policing officers within their local communities. The project enabled the research, design, and development of a practical solution to sustain important relationships between police officers, local delivery partners and citizens—the GMP *Community Connect* tool. As well as supporting improved delivery, the tool raises awareness of community policing's strategic role in addressing a number of policing priorities. In addition, the tool[2] can be adapted for use by other police organizations.

In-depth field research and insights generated through collaborative results analysis and problem-framing workshops, have enabled researchers to better conceptualize the web of human relationships within community policing. As well as a practical tool now in use by a major UK police service, CCI research has resulted in a new, conceptual framework for *relational continuity* in the context of community policing. The authors plan to undertake additional human-centred design research to further explore the dimensions of relational continuity to support improvement of

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[2] Available at www.cuttingcrimeimpact.eu/toolkits/community-connect/gmp/.

the delivery and impact of community policing strategies.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors note there are no competing interests to declare.

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