

18

Feature



Photography: Police Federation/Shutterstock Inc.

# Policing

Officers claim forces are so driven by Home Office targets that they are forced to manipulate the figures to fit the crime. Targets have distorted policing locally, put officers of all ranks in the service under considerable pressure and left many feeling frustrated at having to police by numbers and not by crime. Tina Orr Munro reports

It's known as gaming. The vast majority of police officers are heavily involved in it, but few, if any, find it entertaining and most genuinely believe it is damaging to policing.

Gaming, as defined in a briefing by the Audit Commission on targets in the public sector, is where 'managers and professionals change the way they deliver services in a way that improves the performance of the indicator while not achieving improvement in services delivered to the user'.

The practice was highlighted at this year's Police Federation conference, with stories of children being slapped with a penalty notice for throwing buns at a bus because it counts as a sanction detection and enables a force to hit its target.

Sanction detections cover crimes resulting in an offender being charged, summoned, or cautioned. It includes offences taken into consideration, receiving a fixed penalty notice or a formal warning for cannabis possession. Forces have recognised that one of the easiest ways to achieve a sanction detection, which is a performance indicator, is to give out a penalty notice and they have developed various ways to help achieve this.

One North Wales division awards 'points' to officers depending on how they deal with a crime. A Penalty Notice

for Disorder scores 20 points compared to submitting intelligence for which you receive 'nil points'. Sanction detections score five points if accompanied by an arrest and officers must get four a month to reach their target.

In Essex, an inspector sets the number of sanction detections they expect their officers, including probationers, to attain each week.

**“In some forces, bonuses are paid to BCU commanders who achieve performance indicators and in one force at least, commanders can financially reward junior officers who achieve the best results.”**

Sue Kelly, chairman of Essex Police Federation, says young officers in particular are feeling the pressure to deliver. “We get them coming to us in such a state. They feel under threat, discretion has been removed.”

In some forces, bonuses are paid to BCU commanders who achieve performance indicators and in one force at

# by numbers

19  
Feature

least, commanders can financially reward junior officers who achieve the best results, according to one officer who spoke to *Police* magazine.

North Wales Police saw overall sanction detection rates increasing by five per cent over the last two years. In Essex, the figure has risen by nearly six percent.

Nationally, the sanction detection rate has gone up by three per cent, according to the Home Office.

In the unremitting drive to hit targets, the fixed and penalty notices system is now being further abused as management exert further pressure on those below them to perform.

Penalty notices are being used by some forces to manipulate their figures to meet various targets. In Kent, an officer said a district commander told officers not to issue tickets for threatening behaviour because they were affecting his violent crime figures as threatening behaviour is classified statistically as someone glassing another person.

Neil Marsh, a detective with South Yorkshire Police and federation representative, says this is just the tip the iceberg with 'huge swathes' of police support staff employed to reclassify crimes to satisfy performance indicators. He says it does not just apply to penalty notices.

"In some areas of my force, officers cannot crime a burglary even when it is obvious one has occurred. All the paperwork is completed to do so and then it is sent to a specific Burglary Unit whose responsibility it is to reduce the number of burglaries and to increase their detection rates. It means not all burglaries are crimed as such. It isn't just my force, the problem is national."

**"At conference, John Reid congratulated us for reducing crime. I have been in CID virtually all my service and crime has not reduced. It is out of control."**

DC Marsh says although forces appear to be doing well with crime falling, the figures are a misrepresentation of what is really happening on the ground.

"At conference, John Reid congratulated us for reducing crime. I have been in CID virtually all my service and crime has not reduced. It is out of control.

"The worry is, these figures could be used to justify not increasing the numbers of officers on the street," he says.

**“Officers are forced to go after easy targets at the expense of more serious offences such as persistent offending and level 2 crime because they are ‘tied up dealing with the trivia.’”**



Photography: Shutterstock Inc.

Simon Reed, chairman of the Federation’s legislation committee, says the target setting culture has skewed policing.

He says officers are forced to go after easy targets at the expense of more serious offences such as persistent offending and level 2 crime because they are ‘tied up dealing with the trivia’.

“We are creating crime to detect crime, so we can prove we are dealing with crime.”

He says all officers are frustrated, including BCU commanders who have to cope with targets that aren’t relevant.

He says there is an increasing recognition that there is a problem.

“We need to compile more locally based statistics as crime varies from street to street, let alone area to area.”

Mr Reed says some senior figures are beginning to examine the issue, but for at least one officer, gaming is no joke and there is really only one solution.

“Performance indicators do not work in policing and should be binned,” adds DC Marsh.