

An observational study of response and neighbourhood officers

Fiona Mclean and Joe Hillier
Research, Analysis and Information
and Ipsos MORI

national **AGENCY** POLICING

© NPIA (National Policing Improvement Agency) September 2011.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, modified, amended, stored in any retrieval system or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior written permission of NPIA (National Policing Improvement Agency) or its representative.

For enquires about this document, please contact Fiona Mclean
(Fiona.mclean@npia.pnn.police.uk).

The views in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the NPIA (nor do they reflect NPIA policy).

Executive Summary

- Public facing work in the community accounted for approximately forty-four per cent of the observed response and neighbourhood officers' time, including responding to incidents and taking statements, foot patrol and community engagement.
- Administrative activity, mainly paper or computer-based work required after incidents or to build case files for court, amounted to twenty-seven per cent of officer time – around 2.5 hours per shift. Another twenty-seven per cent was spent in the custody suite or at court, in training, briefings or meetings, travelling or on breaks. Observers had not recorded codes for officer activity for the remaining two per cent of their time.
- Observers felt there was an opportunity for greater efficiency in over half the shifts observed (56%; 108 shifts) and noted more issues during response shifts than neighbourhood shifts. Overall, initiatives that impact on the response function appear to have more potential to increase police efficiency.

Background

Reducing the bureaucratic burden on frontline police officers has been a recurring theme in the context of increasing efficiency. The drive for efficiency in policing has been given new impetus by the 2010 October Spending Review. The Home Office Business Plan 2011-15 included as Coalition priorities cutting police bureaucracy and improving value for money. The current study was carried out to provide police stakeholders with an up-to-date indication on how officers spend their time, to identify likely sources of inefficiency and bureaucracy in frontline policing and potential areas for improvement.

Methods

The research involved the direct observation of 194 shifts of uniformed frontline police officers in neighbourhood or response teams in two forces during June and July 2010. A team of observers were used and data both quantitative and qualitative were recorded by the observers on a standard data collection form designed for this research. The forces chosen were a convenience sample but within that the observations covered a random sample of early, late and night

shifts and all days of the week. In addition, interviews were conducted to provide contextual information. Analyses of these data were used to:

- provide an independent, up-to-date indication of how uniformed officers spent their time in two forces over a two month period;
- diagnose where there may be greatest scope for improvement in terms of the volume of efficiency problems; and
- allow the service to assess where there might be continued scope for efficiency relative to earlier studies.

The findings are not representative of the annual picture for all police forces in England and Wales. However, by comparing their experience with the description and carrying out similar smaller scale observational work, forces could diagnose whether and where they might have potential for greater efficiency.

Key findings

Overview

- Public-facing work in the community accounted for just under half of the observed officers' time (44%). Administrative activity amounted to just over a quarter (27%) of their time – around 2.5 hours per shift - with the same amount (27%) spent on other supporting activity. Observers had not recorded codes for officer activity for the remaining two per cent of their time.
- The majority of shifts observed (142 shifts) were single-crewed with thirty-nine per cent of response shifts being double-crewed. Similar previous research found seventy-eight per cent of mobile patrols to be double-crewed.
- Despite the many changes to policing that have happened in recent years, many of the efficiency issues raised in this study have been repeatedly mentioned over the past twenty years.
- Comments from the observers, who were usually not from police backgrounds, praised officers' hard work and dedication, making note of them starting early to catch up on emails and working through meal breaks.

Neighbourhood and response officer roles

There appeared to be clear differences in the activities undertaken by officers in neighbourhood and response roles overall.

- Neighbourhood officers spent more time on community work (32%) than response officers (13%), whereas response officers spent more time dealing with incidents (23%) than neighbourhood officers (10%).
- Around half of neighbourhood officers' time was spent on community work or engaging with the public in some way.
- The amount of time spent just patrolling (for both neighbourhood and response officers) appears to have increased since earlier studies, which may indicate that neighbourhood policing initiatives have had an impact on how officers spend their time and that the introduction of Police Community Support Officers has not reduced officer focus on patrol.
- Neighbourhood officers spent significantly more time on foot patrol than response officers in the current study (12% of neighbourhood officers' time, compared to 5% overall). While this figure might appear low at first glance, it is only one part of these officers' work in the community. Research has found improving public perception of the police requires not just visible presence but also engagement with the public and problem-solving to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour (Tuffin et al., 2006).

Dealing with incidents

- The number of incidents response officers dealt with on average was 5.2 per shift and this was fairly constant across shifts and weekdays/weekends, varying only between 4.9 on night shifts and 5.6 on late shifts and 5.4 at weekends. Early late and night shifts varied both within forces and between forces involved in the study, but roughly ran between 0700-1600 early, 1500-0000 late, and 2200-0700 night
- In fifty per cent of shifts observed the number of incidents dealt with by response officers ranged between two and six incidents (the median average being four incidents). So the same proportion of response officers' shifts involved dealing with less than two incidents as involved dealing with more than six.
- Response officers often reported being very busy at peak times, but little evidence of greater time spent on dealing with incidents or of more incidents

being attended at peak times was observed during the sample months; busy shifts may remain in the memory longer than quiet shifts.

Time spent outside

On average each officer observed spent fifty-six per cent of their shift outside the station, which corresponds to the findings of an earlier study (PA Consulting 2001).

- In the current study, there appeared to be no important differences between the observed amount of time spent outside depending on the role the officer performed and the shift (early, late and night).
- The current study did not find that neighbourhood officers spent any more time outside than response officers, although the focus of their work while outside was different.
- Despite the many initiatives that have been implemented in recent years to free up officer time, the Flanagan Review (Flanagan 2008) suggested there have been changes to policing which have had the opposite affect. That aside, the consistency of the time spent outside with earlier figures and across roles suggests that there may be cultural factors that influence how officers spend their time and that may be worth further investigation.

Administration and paperwork

- The proportion of time spent on administration (27% overall) was very similar for officers based in rural and urban areas, and for neighbourhood and response officers. The average amount of time per shift devoted to administration across all locations and for both officer roles was consistently around 2.5 hours. The consistency of the amount of time spent on administration suggests that officers may sometimes use administration and paperwork to structure their time.
- Analysis of time spent specifically on paperwork (excluding phone calls, for example) found that on average each officer observed spent twenty-one per cent of shift time on paperwork – approximately an hour and three quarters. Response officers appeared to spend more time per shift on paperwork than neighbourhood officers.

Custody

- Custody tasks were infrequently observed during this study, but officers were recorded to have spent an average of 74 minutes inside on custody related tasks following arrest.
- The average time spent inside following an arrest was just over two and a half hours (159 minutes) which included some administration relating to the arrest, initial prisoner processing and interviewing of the arrestee. Although not directly comparable, it appeared to be a lower figure than the three and a half hours spent inside on average following an arrest found by the 2001 "Diary of a Police Officer" study.

Efficiency issues

- During the current study, observers were asked to identify when they felt there was an efficiency issue with the task the officer was undertaking. From the data:
 - On average, more efficiency issues were identified by observers on shifts observing response officers and in rural areas than were observed on neighbourhood and urban shifts.
 - Nine per cent of all tasks observed were coded as having an efficiency issue rising to nineteen per cent for custody tasks. Observers' comments suggested that in over a third of cases, officers were required to wait during custody tasks, most often for a sergeant to begin the booking in process. Officers also perceived the custody process as being one with potential for greater efficiency.
 - Of all the shifts observed over half (56%; 108 shifts) had at least one task where the observer felt there was an efficiency issue.
 - A third of the efficiency issues identified related to 'Administration' tasks.
- Of those tasks coded as having an efficiency issue by observers, the smallest proportion related to the category of 'Community work' which included patrol, checks and stops, intelligence gathering, and informal and formal visits.
- Where observers identified potential efficiency issues relating to 'Dealing with incidents', many involved multiple units turning up at the same incident or turning up and no incident being found.
- In-line with efficiency issues identified by observers, officers identified duplication of entry into multiple systems and overly bureaucratic forms and

processes as causes of inefficiency. The most problematic examples of forms and processes identified by officers were: domestic violence risk assessment, child at risk forms, missing persons processes, threats to kill forms, and ASB referral forms. A lack of trust and discretion afforded officers was felt by the officers interviewed to be an underlying factor in increasing the level of bureaucracy or paperwork.

- When officers were asked about their perceptions of 'efficiency' the issues they identified were often intrinsically linked with perceptions of their own key roles.
 - Neighbourhood officers tended to gauge and discuss efficiencies in terms of the time spent patrolling their areas. Factors which allowed them to spend more time patrolling tended to be seen as enabling greater efficiency, whilst anything that prevented them from spending more time on patrol was perceived as a barrier, or an example of inefficient use of time. Even examples of activity such as updating community websites were described as inefficient use of neighbourhood officers' time.
 - Response officers made similar points, focusing on direct response to incidents and progressing through caseload as their core functions. For these officers (and their supervisors), there was a sense that anything they perceived as preventing them from being able to focus on these two activities (for example, having to guard a crime scene) was an inefficient use of their time.
- Abstractions were specifically mentioned by neighbourhood officers. They felt that abstractions not only decreased their visibility within the community, but could also mean that they would have to spend extra time just trying to catch up on the issues that arose in their absence. As they were not on their own area or following up their own caseloads, this time out of the station was seen by some as time being used inefficiently.

Improving efficiency

- Technology and equipment was felt by officers to be one of the key ways in which efficiency could be improved – particularly mobile technology. Those within the observation study who were already using mobile data devices (a small sample) felt that there was scope to improve the technology currently being used.

- Involvement of frontline officers in the development of new policies and initiatives was mentioned as a way of improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Conclusions and implications

The observation data in the current study suggests some aspects of policing may have changed in recent years owing to initiatives to increase efficiency and improve reassurance. The proportion of single-crewed shifts appeared greater in the observations than in earlier research, as did the proportion of time spent on foot patrol. The clear focus of neighbourhood officers was to provide a visible presence to reassure the public, and any activities that removed them from their local area were generally viewed negatively.

In other areas there appeared to have been less change. Some of the same issues were at the heart of activities felt to be inefficient as have been identified in numerous studies over the past 20 years – for example, overly bureaucratic paperwork systems, custody processes, and lack of compatibility between IT systems requiring multiple entry of data. Despite initiatives to free up officer time, such as workforce modernisation, officers on the shifts observed (on average) appeared to spend a similar proportion of time outside in public as in earlier research. Previous reports have identified changes in society and policing in recent years that have increased the bureaucracy of processes, which may be a factor in the time still spent inside the station. Transforming these changes may require a cultural shift. In addition, police culture is known to have a significant impact on practices. The consistency of the time spent inside and on administration across roles and shifts observed in this study suggests that there may be cultural factors impeding efficiency that are worth further investigation.

Technology was highlighted as having the potential to greatly improve efficiency particularly through mobile devices and greater compatibility of systems. Improvements in officer administration / support systems also have the potential to remove some of the minor frustrations of frontline officers by reducing the time spent trying to access computers, equipment, information and work through infrequently used, unfamiliar administrative systems. Custody processing, despite improvements, still appears to involve a lengthy time

following arrest, often including periods of waiting. Both officers and observers highlighted custody as an area where efficiency improvements were possible.

The observation data and the focus groups and interviews suggested there was potential to streamline processes and reduce inefficient use of time. A higher proportion of efficiency issues were identified on response shifts, which may relate to a number of factors:

- they spent more time on paperwork than neighbourhood officers;
- they spent more time on custody processes;
- they were less able to manage their own time and were deployed by controllers who could not accurately predict what resources would be required at a scene;
- the role of response officer seemed prone to greater variability in workload.

Overall, initiatives that impact on the response officer role would seem to have potential to increase police efficiency. Further examination of the qualitative data collected in this study might identify other opportunities for efficiency gains. A new sample of shifts, randomly selected from across the country would be required to determine whether the issues identified in this study are nationally representative.

Acknowledgements

NPIA would like to thank Ipsos MORI for their help and assistance in the development of the project. We would also like to thank the chief constables of the two participating forces, those in the forces who provided support and data, and all the frontline officers and supervisory officers who were involved in the observations and interviews. Thanks to the following people who have been involved in peer reviewing this report: Rachel Tuffin, David Mann, Rob C Mawby, Nathanael Bevan, Nerys Thomas, and Chris Kershaw. Finally, the authors would like to thank NPIA Chief Executive Officer Nick Gargan for supporting the research and Bethan Page-Jones for commissioning the work.

Contents

Executive Summary	3
Acknowledgements	11
Contents	12

Chapters

Background	13
Aims and Objectives	15
Methods	16
Structure of the Report	18
A typical day – how do officers spend their time?	19
Efficiency Issues	45
Conclusions and Implications	67
Bibliography	74

Appendices

Appendix A – Methods	76
Appendix B – Statistical Analysis	86
Appendix C – Results Tables	89
Appendix D – Incident Analysis	89
Appendix E – Diary tool	90
Appendix F – Statistical results table	91

Background

The Government consultation paper "Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people" (Home Office 2010) outlined the Government's intention to free up police from bureaucracy by replacing bureaucratic accountability with democratic accountability and through trusting the police to use their professional judgement. It also highlighted that forthcoming budget cuts will mean value for money will have to drive everything the police do. The requirement for efficiency in policing has been given new impetus by the 2010 October Spending Review¹, which outlined the likely scale of these budgetary constraints. Subsequently, the Home Office Business Plan 2011-15² included as Coalition priorities, cutting police bureaucracy and improving value for money.

The need to improve the efficiency of policing has driven much recent work. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) in 2010, for example, examined national demand management and the availability of officers and PCSOs for neighbourhood and response duties (HMIC 2010). HMIC estimate that after specialist roles and the numbers of shifts required to cover a 24/7 period are taken into account, around eleven per cent of officers are available for neighbourhood and response duties. The study did not examine in detail how to maximise the efficiency and effectiveness of officers once they are on duty, however, and so is of limited use in assessing how to increase efficiency and value for money in an operational setting.

Identifying where there is potential to streamline processes and remove barriers to efficient working requires an understanding of day-to-day policing activities, systems and processes. It is important to know not just what resources are available but also what they do when they are available. Relatively little quantitative data is available on how frontline officers spend their time when on duty. The most recent standalone look at officers' day to day activities was carried out in 2001, when the Home Office commissioned PA Consulting to

¹ Available on http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spend_index.htm (visited 12.08.2011)

² Available on <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/publications/about-us/corporate-publications/business-plan-2011-15/business-plan?view=Binary> (visited 12.08.2011)

deliver the “Diary of a Police Officer” study – designed to identify efficiency issues preventing officers from spending time on visible patrol (PA Consulting 2010). The study used ‘diaries’ (or ‘activity analysis’) completed by 378 uniformed officers in 7 Basic Command Units around the country to produce a snapshot of activity and gain a fuller understanding of what was involved in a ‘typical’ shift. Alongside the activity analysis, interviews with officers were conducted to provide more insight into the barriers that prevented officers from spending more time on the beat.

Between 2003/04 and 2007/08, the Home Office required forces to conduct an activity analysis sample of two weeks each year during which officers would record their activity every 15 minutes into pre-coded categories. While, like the “Diary of a Police Officer” research, this exercise continued to provide a self assessment by officers of the proportion of time spent on certain pre-defined activities, the fact that these data provided neither context nor a breakdown of tasks within overall activities meant they could not be used to identify sources of inefficiency. In addition, both the activity analysis and the original “Diary” study relied upon officers’ own perceptions of how they were spending their time, without any external observation to validate their data.

In recent years the processes and practices of policing have changed significantly, with such innovations as neighbourhood policing and workforce modernisation programmes leading to the introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and other new police staff roles. In addition, the Flanagan Review recognised that the role of the police service has widened (Flanagan 2008). Policing now manages a diverse range of issues, including counter terrorism and civil emergencies, child protection, the management of sex offenders in the community, the prevention of anti-social behaviour, and community policing. Public expectations are felt to have grown and policy requirements to have expanded; there has been a greater emphasis on performance management; and the use of technology has increased. All these factors combine to mean that the way in which officers spend their time on duty may have changed since the 2001 “Diary” study and national activity analysis. While many of the fundamental issues affecting policing remain the same as

those faced fifty years ago (see e.g. Banton 1964), data are required to identify scope for increasing the efficiency of policing in this new landscape.

Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of the current study is to provide an up-to-date indication of how officers spend their time when on duty, in order to diagnose where it might be of benefit to focus cost effectiveness work in the future.

In contrast to the HMIC study mentioned earlier (HMIC 2010), the current research does not examine the availability of officers for response and neighbourhood shifts but rather explores how they spend their time when they are actually on duty in those roles. The role of Police Constable (PC) is the focus for this study as it is clear from earlier reports that the increasing complexity of police work has had a consequent impact on related bureaucracy and paperwork, and the limited powers of PCSOs mean that police officers bear the brunt of that bureaucracy (Berry 2010; Flanagan 2008).

The focus of the “Diary of a police officer” report in 2001 (PA Consulting 2001) prior to the introduction of neighbourhood policing was on increasing public reassurance through improving the visible presence of officers on the street, particularly patrolling. However, the focus of the current study was on improving efficiency of neighbourhood and response police officers (not including PCSOs) more broadly, and on identifying where there is potential to design leaner, more streamlined systems and significantly improve efficiency.

In summary, external observation of neighbourhood and response officers on shifts would:

- provide an independent, up-to-date indication of how uniformed officers spent their time in two forces over a two month period;
- diagnose where there may be greatest scope for improvement in terms of the volume of efficiency problems, where appropriate distinguishing this from officers’ perceptions of the most frequently-reported problems; and

- allow the service to assess where there might be continued scope for efficiency relative to previous research and analysis (including the 2001 “Diary” study), taking into account the use of observation compared to officer diaries.

The findings should be understood as diagnostic information identifying key areas to focus on that could provide efficiency improvements, not as a nationally representative picture of officer activity. The overall view of how officers spent their time provided by the “Diary of a Police Officer” in 2001 and national activity analysis was fairly consistent over several years and across forces, which might increase confidence that findings can be generalised. However, the current study involved only two forces, and differed from previous studies in that it used observers rather than the officers’ self-completed activity analysis used in the previous work.

Methods

The research employed both observations of uniformed frontline police officers undertaking their usual shifts and interviews and focus groups with officers and their supervisors. The observations and fieldwork took place during June and July 2010 in 4 BCU areas across two forces. The research company IPSOS Mori were commissioned to carry out the majority of the fieldwork and focus groups.

The areas were pre-selected by the NPIA through convenience sampling to allow comparisons, where appropriate, between urban and rural areas across the forces. The observations were split equally between the four sites with 194 shifts in total observed. Although the forces were selected through convenience sampling, the sampling of the shifts was constructed to ensure that at each site it provided representative coverage of activity across:

- neighbourhood teams and response teams;
- early, late and night shifts; and
- days of the week.

Within this structure shifts to be observed were selected randomly. Full details of research methods are included as Appendix A.

Observations

One of the most difficult aspects of observational studies is turning the observations themselves into data that can be analysed. Any data collection tool or form is to some extent a compromise between allowing observers to record the observations in their own way and imposing a structure to ensure that particular sorts of information are recorded, can be recorded quickly and easily in a fieldwork context, and are recorded in a standard format.

In the current study, a paper-based data collection form was designed for the observers to use which included a mix of tick boxes, pre-coded data collection boxes, and free text areas to record the activities observed. As the observers were numerous and not knowledgeable about the police environment, it was felt that it would be helpful to put some structure around what data was expected to be recorded and how particular circumstances should be coded. Training was provided to the observers on how to record the activities they would observe. Research was undertaken beforehand to ensure that the coding was appropriate, and piloting was carried out in an additional force.

Although pre-coding of data ensures that a more consistent set of data is recorded, inevitably with many observers it was possible that there would be different levels of understanding and different interpretations of the coding applied. Another issue that could cause errors in such a data collection exercise was the fact that the durations of activities taking place as part of a larger 'main' task ('subtasks') were separately recorded and might not always sum to the total of the main task time – due to, for example, their being completed concurrently. Such observer error makes the data on sub-tasks less reliable than that of the main tasks. Consequently these data have been used with care in the report and any likely errors highlighted. A data-cleansing process was designed to ensure that any basic errors in the recording of the data were identified and corrected prior to analysis. For full details see Appendix A.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Sampling

Recruitment for both the discussion groups and in-depth interviews was carried out using a convenience sampling approach by police contacts within the four BCU areas to minimise police set-up time. Within each BCU, two groups (1 x response and 1 x neighbourhood officers) and three supervisory officers (sergeant grade or above) were asked to take part in the fieldwork. Fieldwork was carried out across the four BCU areas during July 2010.

A total of 52 frontline officers across the four BCU areas took part in discussion groups. All the discussion groups were held either at police stations or at training venues and lasted between 60 and 90 minutes.

In addition to the group discussions, in-depth interviews were carried out with a total of 12 supervisory and senior officers within the four BCU areas. These were carried out either by telephone or face-to-face, as was most convenient for each supervisory officer. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes.

Discussion guides and analysis

Discussion guides were used by researchers to facilitate discussion in both the groups and individual interviews. These documents outlined the key themes and prompts to be used in discussions with officers and supervisory officers, covering the necessary topics. The discussion guides were informed by analysis of the observation data and by issues that were identified in previous research. The qualitative research focussed on officers' perspectives and opinions and was analysed thematically. Where appropriate, findings from the two data sources have been compared.

Structure of the report

The first section provides a picture of how neighbourhood and response officers spend their time and how the differences in their roles impact on their activities. The second section highlights potential sources of inefficiency and greater efficiency. The final section sets out the conclusions and possible implications.

A typical day - how do officers spend their time?

This section provides a picture of how neighbourhood and response officers spent their time during the observed shifts, and how differences in their roles influenced their activities.

Overview

Overall, 194 shifts were observed, resulting in 3,815 tasks and 110,089 minutes of activity on which all calculations have been based unless otherwise stated.

Table 1 below provides a summary breakdown of the shifts observed. The number of response shifts observed is higher than neighbourhood shifts owing to the fact that only response officers cover night shifts.³ This difference has been accounted for in any analysis of the data presented. The average shift length from the observation data is approximately 570 minutes^{4,5}, equating to almost nine and a half hours.

Table 1 – Summary of observations

	Urban	Rural	Response	N'bourhood	All
Shifts observed	99	95	117	77	194
Tasks observed	1,862	1,952	2,358	1,456	3,814
Minutes observed	55,182	54,907	68,610	41,479	110,089

The roles of neighbourhood and response officers tend to differ in many respects. Neighbourhood officers are usually more dedicated to a particular local area and their activities revolve around resolving local problems and increasing local confidence in the police. In contrast, response officers work across areas and are more reactive, with many of their activities being directed and coordinated by the control room. This difference in role is reflected in the percentage of time these types of officer spent on different activities.

³ Early late and night shifts varied both within forces and between forces involved in the study but roughly ran between 0700-1600 early, 1500-0000 late, and 2200-0700 night.

⁴ See Summary Results tables, Appendix C

⁵ Shift length varied both within and across forces.

Table 2 below shows a summary of how the time was spent. Eight main categories were used by the observers to code the activity they observed in order to quantify the different types of activity undertaken. Transforming a flow of activity into codes that can be analysed is difficult and, however well defined the activity codes, where one activity ends and another starts is still down to the interpretation of the observer.

Table 2 – Time spent on main tasks for neighbourhood and response officers as a proportion of total time observed

Main task category ⁺ (n=mins observed)	All observations (n=110,089)	Neighbourhood (n=41,479)	Response (n=68,610)	Total number of tasks
'Public-facing'⁺⁺				
Community Work	20% (22,206)	32% (13,310)	13% (8,896)	644
Dealing with Incidents	18% (19,752)	10% (4,136)	23% (15,616)	796
Post Incident Work	6% (6,421)	4% (1,697)	7% (4,724)	210
Total 'public-facing'	44% (48,379)	46% (19,143)	43% (29,236)	1,650
'Supporting Activity'⁺⁺				
Administration	27% (29,391)	26% (10,882)	27% (18,509)	839
Travel	9% (9,946)	9% (3,517)	9% (6,429)	581
Other Activities	9% (10,108)	11% (4,640)	8% (5,468)	370
Briefing/meeting	5% (5,775)	4% (1,753)	6% (4,022)	227
Custody	3% (3,655)	2% (863)	4% (2,792)	83
Total 'Supp. Activity'	53% (58,875)	52% (21,655)	54% (37,220)	2,100
Not recorded (mins)	2,835	681	2,154	64
Total time (mins)	110,089	41,479	68,610	3,814

⁺ An explanation of what types of activity are included in each of the main task categories used is provided in Appendix A

⁺⁺ This is a broad-brush estimate of the types of work that are public-facing. It is possible that some of the activities in the 'Supporting Activity' categories also involve dealing with members of the public.

Responding to incidents and carrying out follow up activity such as interviewing and taking statements accounted for twenty-four per cent of officer time, while

patrol and other community work, including engagement and intelligence gathering, accounted for twenty per cent of officer time. Officers spent roughly the same proportion of time (27%) on administration as they did on other supporting activity (27%) which included travel, briefings and meetings and custody. Observers had not recorded codes for officer activity for the remaining two per cent of their time. On average, meal breaks and personal time accounted for less than half an hour per shift (24 minutes).

As would be expected, since their roles are different, neighbourhood officers spent a significantly⁶ greater proportion of their time (32%) on community work compared to response officers (13%). Role also affected the amount of time spent on the category 'Dealing with incidents' where, as expected, response officers spent a significantly⁷ greater proportion of their time (23%) on this issue than neighbourhood officers (10%).

The proportion of time spent on administration (27%) was very similar across locations and officer role. The average amount of shift time devoted to administrative tasks was two and a half hours, during an average length of shift of nine and a half hours.⁸ Administration in this study was defined as including for example, case-file building, incident linked paperwork, personal administration, and appraisals.

Start of shift

During focus groups, officers described some routines they would typically go through at the start of their shift, but noted these could change depending on the circumstances. Most officers, both response and neighbourhood, reported starting every day with a briefing to catch up with the incidents and intelligence from the previous shift. The observation data shows that on average, briefings and meetings took around 26 minutes per occasion. Handover meetings specifically, tended to last an average of 24 minutes. Officers in the discussions noted that they believed briefings could often be made shorter whilst still conveying the key points. Some response officers reported that during the

⁶ See Statistical results table, Appendix F

⁷ See Statistical results table, Appendix F

⁸ See Summary results table, Appendix C

briefing, they would be given three or four jobs from the previous shift to deal with, and these would be handled on top of the calls that came through during the day. Many of the officers said that they would often come in earlier to go through their emails and assess their workload before the start of the briefing.

End of shift

Most officers we spoke to said that they would try to return to their station slightly ahead of the end of shift to complete the necessary paperwork from the incidents they had been dealing with that day. However, response officers noted that this depended on the nature of the incidents they picked up during the course of their shift. Response officers in one BCU stated that, whilst they knew when their shift would start, they would not have a clear idea of when they would finish. Picking up an incident late on could mean that their day was extended by several hours.

Overrunning shifts

The observations carried out with frontline officers showed that whilst over-running shifts do occur, it is only in a minority of cases – with between one in eight and one in nine shifts⁹ over-running their intended timings. Data provided by observer time-sheets indicates that shifts are more likely to overrun for response officers (approximately 13% of their shifts) than for neighbourhood officers (approximately 9% of their shifts). Where a shift overrun occurred, its average length for response officers was 1.7 hours and 1.4 hours for neighbourhood officers. However, the 'half-hour rule' states that the first half-hour of unplanned/casual overtime is unpaid. A recent Home Office study found that in 37 forces (97%) unplanned overtime is meant to be authorised before the end of previous duty (i.e. before the overtime commences; Brasnett et al. 2010). However, in 17 forces (45%) authorisation could also take place during the overtime or after it had been completed. In the majority of forces, authorisation for unplanned overtime was given either verbally or electronically. The current study did not collect data as to whether officers whose shifts overran in this way claimed for overtime or, if they did, how this was authorised.

⁹ Figures based on anecdotal reports of shift times from observers, so should be treated with caution

Distribution of time inside and outside the station

Across the shifts observed, the officers spent an average of fifty-six per cent of their time outside the station and forty-two per cent inside (2% was uncoded). These findings are similar to those found by the 2001 “Diary of a Police Officer” study (PA Consulting 2001), when fifty-seven per cent of time was found to be spent outside on average, ranging from fifty per cent on early shift to sixty-six per cent on night shift. See Table 3 below.

Table 3– Proportion of time spent inside and outside the station

Observation type (n=mins observed)	In (n=46,045)	Out (n=61,936)	Uncoded (n=2,108)
Neighbourhood	41% (n= 17,032)	58% (n=24,094)	1% (n=353)
Response	42% (n=29,013)	55% (n=37,842)	3% (n=1,755)
Rural	43% (n=23,673)	54% (n=29,737)	3% (n=1,497)
Urban	41% (n=22,372)	58% (n=32,199)	1% (n=611)
‘Weekend’⁺	39% (n=9,504)	59% (n=15,363)	3% (n=880)
‘Weekday’⁺	43% (n=36,541)	55% (n=46,573)	2% (n=1,228)
Early shift	40% (n=17,724)	58% (n=26,124)	2% (n=928)
Late shift	45% (n=20,052)	53% (n=23,900)	2% (n=910)
Night shift	40% (n=8,269)	58% (n=11,912)	1% (n=270)
Total (n=110,089)	42%	56%	2%

⁺Weekend shifts were defined as Friday-late (approx. 1500-2200), Friday-night (approx. 2200-0700), Saturday-early (approx. 0700-1500), Saturday-late (approx. 1500-2200), Saturday-night (approx. 2200-0700). Weekday hours were the remaining shifts.

Although the proportion of time spent outside ranged from fifty-five per cent for response officers to fifty-nine per cent for neighbourhood officers, statistical testing showed that this difference was not significant¹⁰.

Within the discussion groups, response officers across a number of BCUs noted relatively little of their time was being spent out of the station, with a lot of time being assigned to making enquiries or writing up their cases inside the station. Whilst this may reflect differing circumstances, the observational findings suggest that officers' perceptions of the amount of time they spent in the station may sometimes be over-estimated. Neighbourhood officers perceived variations across shifts, noting that the amount of time spent in the station could vary depending on which shift they were on, with later shifts and weekends in particular requiring more high visibility patrols, whilst weekdays offered more time to complete tasks such as paperwork.

You wouldn't spend all day on a Friday late shift doing paperwork in the station because you know you've got to dedicate that time to... high visible patrols.

Neighbourhood officer

However, the observational data showed no significant difference between the time spent outside on weekends compared to weekdays for all officers.¹¹ In contrast, in the 2001 "Diary" study, significant differences by shift and between weekday and weekend shifts were found.¹²

Single/double-crewing¹³

The majority of shifts observed were single-crewed, with double-crewing occurring twenty-seven per cent of the time (52 shifts), see Table 4 below. This

¹⁰ See Statistical results table, Appendix F

¹¹ $T = -0.345$, $df = 2,256$, sig (2 tailed) = 0.730

¹² See Statistical results table, Appendix F

¹³ Single-crewing is when an officer completes their shifts alone. Double-crewing is when an officer completes their shift with another officer in partnership. For the purpose of this study, any shift where time was spent in partnership with another officer (e.g. if double-crewing occurred on patrol tasks but no other) was counted as a double-crewed shift.

figure suggests a different picture from that found by the 2001 “Diary” study, where half of all foot patrols and seventy-eight per cent of mobile patrols were double-crewed, and the proportion of double-crewed patrols on early shifts was seventy-nine per cent.

The amount of double crewing observed in the present study varied between locations and shift times. Night shifts were exclusively staffed by response officers, and there was a high level of double-crewing on these shifts. Roughly a quarter of response officer shifts were double-crewed during early and late shifts, and this rose to almost three-quarters during the night shift. The majority of double-crewing overall occurred with response officers (39% of shifts compared to 8% for neighbourhood officers).

Table 4 – Double-crewing observed⁺

	% of shifts Single- crewed (number)	% of shifts double-crewed (number)	% missing values (number)
<u>BCU</u>			
Rural 1	80% (37)	13% (6)	7% (3)
Rural 2	63% (31)	3% (16)	4% (2)
Urban 1	57% (28)	37% (18)	9% (3)
Urban 2	72% (36)	24% (12)	4% (2)
<u>Shift type</u>			
Early	82% (65)	17% (13)	1% (1)
Late	73% (58)	17% (13)	10% (8)
Night	25% (9)	72% (26)	3% (1)
Total (194)	68% (132)	27% (52)	5% (10)

⁺ Values may not total 100% due to rounding

Time spent outside the station

When officer time spent outside the station was analysed (see Table 5 below), the largest proportion of time outside (35%) was spent on either community work or responding to incidents (30%). There were differences between the work patterns displayed by response officers and neighbourhood officers. As might be expected, the observations indicated that response officers spent

significantly more of their time responding to incidents and neighbourhood officers spent significantly more time doing community work. Response officers observed spent significantly more time in custody and doing post incident work.

Table 5 – Officer time spent outside: proportion of total outside time observed spent on main tasks⁺

Main task category (n=mins observed)	All (n=61,936)	Neighbourhood (n=24,094)	Response (n=37,842)
Community work	35% (n=21,553)	53% (n=12,724)	23% (n=8,829)
Responding to incidents	30% (n=18,681)	16% (n=3,896)	39% (n=14,785)
Travel	16% (n=9,946)	15% (n=3,517)	17% (n=6,429)
Post incident work	7% (n=4,529)	5% (n=1,077)	9% (n=3,452)
Other activities	7% (n=4,265)	9% (n=2,108)	6% (n=2,157)
Custody	2% (n=1,331)	<1% (n=138)	3% (n=1,193)
Meetings / briefings	1% (n=695)	1% (n=293)	1% (n=402)
Administration	1% (n=572)	1% (n=221)	1% (n=351)
Unknown (coder error)	1% (n=364)	<1% (n=120)	1% (n=244)

⁺Columns may not total 100% due to rounding

Community work

The 'Community work' category in the current study included patrol, both on foot and in a vehicle, intelligence gathering out in the community, formal and informal visits and other activities within the community. The time spent on the separate elements that make up this category can be quantified in their own right, and patrol (one of these elements) is discussed in detail below.

'Community work' as a whole took up an average of twenty per cent of all the officers' observed time with this being higher for neighbourhood officers (32%) than for response officers (19%; see Table 2 above). However, the difference was more marked when looking at just the time spent outside. Table 5 above shows that over half of all neighbourhood officer time spent outside was taken up with 'Community work', a significantly higher figure than for response officers (23%) which was appropriate to their roles. Of the tasks where observers identified an efficiency issue, the lowest proportion (6%) were coded as community work. This result suggests observers felt that 'Community work' was the area with least potential for improving efficiency.

Patrol

Patrolling, particularly on foot, is considered important by the public (Bradley 1998). Table 6 below, presents the proportions of officer time that observers specifically coded as patrolling in rural and urban areas for neighbourhood and response officers. It should be noted that times given are indicative because, as described in the methods section, in coding activity it may not always be clear when one activity ends and another starts. In other cases it may be possible to code an activity in two ways (e.g. one person's intelligence gathering might be another's patrol).

The figures from the present study show that twelve per cent of time was spent overall on patrol, with five per cent of time spent on foot patrol.

Table 6 – Proportion of officer time spent on patrols⁺

Group observed (n=mins observed)	Foot Patrol	Vehicle patrol	Total % spent on patrol
<u>Neighbourhood</u>			
Urban (n=20,995)	12% (n=2,528)	6% (n=1,194)	18%
Rural (n=20,484)	12% (n=2,439)	7% (n=1,324)	18%
Total (n=41,479)	12% (n=4,967)	6% (n=2,518)	18%
<u>Response</u>			
Urban (n=34,187)	2% (n=504)	9% (n=3,018)	10%
Rural (n=34,423)	<1% (n=90)	6% (n=2,101)	6%
Total (n=68,610)	1% (n=594)	8% (n=5,119)	8%
Total (n=110,089)	5% (n=5,561)	7% (n=7,637)	12%

⁺ Patrol data use subtask timings which are less reliable, hence figures are approximate.

The 2001 “Diary” study reported around seventeen per cent of police officer time was spent on patrol. While this figure appears greater than that found in the current study, it included travelling between pre-planned tasks. If time spent on travel in the current study (9% of all time) was combined with time spent on patrol, the roughly comparable figure would be twenty-one per cent of time spent patrolling – suggesting the current study found that slightly more time was spent on patrol overall compared with 2001.

While the time spent on patrol appears to be a relatively small proportion of officer time, patrol should not be considered in isolation. Previous studies have found that visibility is only one of three factors needed to deliver improvement in public perceptions and experiences of local policing; community engagement and problem-solving to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour are also required (e.g. Quinton & Morris 2008; Tuffin et al. 2006). Time spent outside on community

work includes formal and informal visits and intelligence gathering within the community, while attending incidents and post-incident activity also involve contact with members of the public. These elements take the proportion of time spent on public-facing engagement activities up to, for example, almost half (46%) of neighbourhood officers' time.

Whereas the 2001 "Diary" study reported that most patrolling was done in a vehicle, with only 1% undertaken on foot, the current study found that the proportions of time spent on foot and mobile patrol were similar. When the data is examined in more detail, it can be seen that the amount of time spent patrolling by neighbourhood officers was significantly higher overall (18%) than that spent patrolling by response officer (8%), reflecting role differences. The majority of neighbourhood patrol was undertaken on foot, which again was a very different pattern to that identified in the 2001 study. For response officers, patterns of patrolling also differed between urban and rural locations, with slightly more time spent by officers in urban locations on patrol compared to those in rural locations.¹⁴

This possible increase in the time spent on foot patrol may be linked to the focus on Neighbourhood Policing in recent years. A national Neighbourhood Policing Programme was introduced in 2005 following an evaluated trial in 16 wards which demonstrated the potential positive impact on public confidence of neighbourhood policing teams. Neighbourhood policing activities implemented locally included, for example, carrying out targeted foot patrol, holding meetings and/or using more proactive engagement methods to find out what local residents thought, and using a range of enforcement and prevention techniques to reduce crime and disorder problems in the local area (Quinton & Morris 2008). In 2008 HMIC reported that:

"Over the past three years the Neighbourhood Policing programme has moved through planning to implementation... Significantly, there are now approximately 16,000 police community support officers and 13,000 police constables and sergeants dedicated to Neighbourhood Policing.

¹⁴ See Statistical results table, Appendix F

Together they form around 3,600 Neighbourhood Policing teams, providing a named police contact in every neighbourhood area across England and Wales.” (HMIC 2008)

The principles of neighbourhood policing include an emphasis on targeted foot patrol and community engagement, so an increase in these activities might be expected. Such an increase should be understood in the context of the additional impact of PCSOs. PCSOs were introduced largely to provide visibility through the patrol function and so although patrolling and visibility would be expected to increase with the implementation of neighbourhood policing teams, it is not necessarily full police officers who would be providing the additional patrol time. While PCSOs increase the visibility of policing through foot patrol, PCs exercise a wider range of powers (such as the power of arrest). With that comes the bureaucracy associated with accountability and criminal justice processes. The current study suggests that neighbourhood officers are achieving an increase in patrolling and community engagement in addition to exercising their wider range of powers and responsibilities.

Dealing with incidents

Eighteen per cent of the total time observed was spent 'Dealing with incidents', with more time spent in this way by response officers (23%) than by neighbourhood officers (10%), reflecting the difference in their roles and remits. This difference was even more marked when time spent outside was examined separately with thirty-nine per cent of response officers' outside time spent on 'Dealing with incidents' compared to just sixteen per cent of neighbourhood officers (See Tables 2 and 5).

The amount of time spent on 'Dealing with incidents' varied slightly by shift, with an increase observed on night shifts. The observation findings were supported by analysis of incident data over the study period, which indicated that overall demand patterns also showed peaks on late shifts and in urban areas at weekends, with the lowest number of recorded incidents being during night shift (See Appendix D). Focus groups conducted as part of this study suggested that officers felt that they were particularly busy at peak demand periods. Their perception was supported to some extent by the average time spent per shift on

'dealing with incidents' at weekends being slightly higher than for weekdays although the highest proportion of time spent on this task appears to be on night shifts (see Table 7 below).

Table 7 - Officer time spent on 'Dealing with incidents'

Observation type	Time (mins)	No. of shifts	Average time per shift (mins)
Neighbourhood	4,136	77	54
Response	15,616	117	134
Early	7,149	79	91
Late	8,021	79	102
Night	4,582	36	127
Weekdays	14,122	141	100
Weekends	5,630	53	106
Total	19,752	194	102

The average time spent on 'Dealing with incidents' each time it was observed was 25 minutes, although incidents would probably generate further tasks such as paperwork (coded under 'Administration'), statement-taking ('Post-incident work'), or even custody processing if an arrest was involved.

It is largely the responsibility of response officers to attend incidents. In focus groups, response officers described some days as so busy they went straight from one incident to the next. To get a clearer picture of the numbers of incidents officers attended and how that varied through the week and times of day, an analysis of the tasks coded as 'attending incidents' was undertaken. The observational data showed that the average number of incidents attended varied only slightly depending on whether officers were working in an urban or rural area, the day of the week, and shift (see Table 8 below).

Table 8 – Average (mean) number of incidents attended by response officers

	Early	Late	Night	Weekday ⁺	Weekend ⁺	Total
Urban	6.0	5.9	4.7	5.3	5.9	5.5
Rural	4.5	5.4	5.1	5.1	4.9	5.0
Total	5.2	5.6	4.9	5.2	5.4	5.2

⁺Weekend shifts were defined as Friday-late (approx. 1500-2200), Friday-night (approx. 2200-0700), Saturday-early (approx. 0700-1500), Saturday-late (approx. 1500-2200), Saturday-night (approx. 2200-0700). Weekday hours were the remaining shifts.

The observational data suggest that a response officer attended an average (mean) of 5.2 incidents per shift, varying most between rural early shifts (4.5 incidents) to urban early shifts (6 incidents). This average masks a range from zero to fifteen incidents attended on shifts recorded by observers. On eighty-four per cent of shifts, response officers attended between one and eight incidents, and on a small number of shifts a very high number of incidents were attended. Examining the data relating to these shifts revealed some potential over-recording of incidents by two observers. Since possible outliers and recording anomalies would tend to bias the ‘mean’ average value, further analysis is based on the median and inter-quartile range.

The median number of incidents attended was four, and for half of all response shifts between two and six incidents were attended. Hence, on twenty-five per cent of shifts response officers attended less than two incidents or more than six incidents.

A common experience of observers was that if a shift was relatively quiet, officers described them as unusual and referred to extremely busy shifts they had experienced in the recent past as more representative - a typical quote on a quiet day being, “You should have been here yesterday/on Saturday/last week”. This is a phenomenon that has been noted in many previous research reports. As far back as 1964, for example, Banton stated:

“It is remarkable how frequently I have been assured by officers I have been accompanying on patrol... that it has been an unusually quiet night;

either the laws of chance do not apply to patrol work or the busy shifts impress themselves on the patrolmen's [sic] mind so strongly that all other ones seem to fall below standard." (Banton 1964)

The distribution of incidents observed in the current study suggests officers were as likely to experience a relatively quiet shift as a relatively busy one. A possible explanation of the qualitative results and observers' experiences in this light is that very busy shifts are more memorable and, hence, were reported more.

Across shifts and days of the week the median number of incidents attended appeared from the current study to be around four. Whether this is an appropriate number of an officer to deal with and not feel over or under-worked would require further investigation. However, it could be used as a starting point when matching resources to demand. Ensuring that resources match demand as closely as possible is one way to maximise efficiency and to ensure officers do not suffer from peaks and lows of activity.

Post-incident work

'Post-incident work', a category which includes interviewing/taking statements (from victims/witnesses/suspects) and victim assurance, took up only six per cent of shift time across all the observations but significantly more of response officers' time (7%) compared to neighbourhood officers (4%), as might be expected considering their different roles. Much of this time (71%) was spent outside the station.

Several issues relating to victim engagement emerged from the focus groups and interviews, although it is difficult to quantify their impact from the data. Whilst the observations suggested explicit 'Victim/witness assurance' was not an activity which absorbed a great deal of officer time (with only 535 minutes of this activity recorded in total across the 194 shifts), it might have been recorded under other activity codes. For example, victim contact and assurance might have occurred while an officer was working on a case file (coded as 'Administration'). Nevertheless, frontline officers in some of the focus groups spoke specifically about difficulties with making repeat contact with victims in

cases they were working on. Some felt that their changing shift patterns made it much more difficult to make regular contact with victims in ongoing cases.

There [are] some people out there that work and can only see you in the afternoons, so out of your ten days there's only two shifts where you can see them.

Response officer

Often, officers felt like they were making contact when the case itself had not progressed any further. In such circumstances, they felt it may be better to update victims further down the line when actual progress had been made:

That's what [sergeants] are asking us to do every week, 'right then, ring up to say you've failed'...ring them up and tell them you've failed again, ring them up to tell them you've repeatedly failed.

Response officer

Travel

Travel accounted for nine per cent of all time observed, with each occurrence of travel lasting an average of 17 minutes. On a shift of average length, this would mean about 50 minutes per shift taken up with travel. There appeared to be little difference in the total shift time spent on travel between response and neighbourhood officers or more surprisingly between officers based in urban and rural areas (with slightly more urban-based officer time being spent on travel; see Table 9). There was also little difference between total shift time spent on travel for the shift times (early, late, night) and for weekends/weekdays.

Table 9 – Proportion of time spent on travel

Observation type	% total observed time (110,089 mins) spent travelling	Total observed time on travel (mins)
Response	9%	6,429
Neighbourhood	9%	3,517
Urban	9%	5,077
Rural	9%	4,869
All	9%	9,946

The longest total travel time recorded for a task was 90 minutes during an early shift, and involved driving from a station to the force Headquarters in order to get Fixed Penalty Notices signed and then travelling back to the station.

Time Spent Inside the Station

What do officers do when they are inside the station? The observation data for the time spent inside suggests that tasks coded as 'Administration' account for the bulk of the time (63%), with the rest of the inside time being spent on a range of activities including briefings/meetings (11%), Custody (5%) and Other activities (13%), which include meal breaks, covering other duties and training (See Table 10 below).

Table 10 - Proportion of time spent inside the station by task⁺

Main task category (n=mins observed)	All (n=46,045)	Neighbourhood (n=7,032)	Response (n=29,013)
Administration	63% (n=28,819)	63% (n=10,661)	63% (n=18,158)
Community work	1% (n=653)	3% (n=586)	<1% (n=67)
Dealing with incidents⁺⁺	2% (n=1,006)	1% (n=240)	3% (n=766)
Post-incident work	4% (n=1,892)	4% (n=620)	4% (n=1,272)
Other activities	13% (n=5,783)	15% (n=2,532)	11% (n=3251)
Custody	5% (n=2,324)	4% (n=725)	6% (n=1,599)
Meetings / briefings	11% (n=5,042)	8% (n=1,422)	13% (n=3,620)
Unknown (coder error)	1% (n=376)	2% (n=181)	1% (n=195)

⁺ Columns may not total 100% due to rounding

⁺⁺ From the verbatim comments, the tasks referred to here appear to be a continuation of response to an incident. As noted above, coding is down to the individual observer on the day, but it is possible that these could have been coded in other ways by different observers – for example, as 'Post-incident work'.

Administration

The 'Administration' category in the observation exercise was intended to capture a range of activities that might loosely be called 'paperwork' or 'bureaucracy' and includes case-file building, other incident-linked administration, non-incident-linked paperwork, personal administration, and staff appraisals. Typically, an officer would check what tasks had been allocated to them and if any appointments had been made on their behalf; read and reply to emails related to incidents, issues or cases he/she was dealing with; make phone calls or enquiries about these cases; discuss details with supervisors; update incident records or other files on the computer; put together paperwork

required for a case to go to court; and read through internal memos and circulars.

It was, however, difficult for observers to always understand the nature of the administrative tasks in which officers were engaged. Consequently, Table 11 below is a very rough estimate of the type of administration recorded. The bulk of the time appears to have been spent on incident-linked and case-file paperwork.

Table 11 – Type of administration undertaken

Administrative task	No. of observations	Mins	% Sub Task time⁺
Incident linked	387	11,429	41%
Case file	225	6,561	23%
Personal work admin	212	4,159	15%
Non-incident linked	116	2,265	8%
Discussion	130	1,100	4%
Request/gather info	24	202	1%
Making enquiries	25	171	1%
Link with other org	19	148	1%
Staff appraisals/PDRs	7	112	<1%
Request other support	7	58	<1%
Other	53	489	2%
Waiting	23	1,372	5%
Total⁺⁺	1,228	28,066	

⁺May not total 100% due to rounding

⁺⁺ Note: A total of 28 minutes has been excluded owing to errors in coding

As described before, across all observations the 'Administration' code accounts for the greatest percentage of time (27%). With the average shift length from the observation data being approximately 570 minutes, this equates to an average of 2.5 hours of shift time devoted to administrative tasks. This is consistent across officer roles and locations.

Although it was expected that most of the paperwork (including computer-based paperwork) would be undertaken during tasks coded as 'Administration', a separate tally of the number of minutes actually spent on paperwork was kept as it was recognised that administration could also include telephone calls and discussions and that paperwork may well be completed during other tasks such as 'Custody'. Table 12 below presents the amount of minutes that observers recorded were spent on paperwork by neighbourhood and response officers.

Table 12 – All time spent on paperwork

Officers	Paperwork minutes	% total time spent on paperwork (n=mins observed)	Total paperwork occurrences observed	Average duration of paperwork task
Neighbourhood	6,886	17% (n=41,479)	394	18 mins
Response	14,358	21% (n=68,610)	625	23 mins
All	21,244	19% (n=110,089)	1,019	21 mins

Overall, thirty per cent of all time observed was spent on paperwork, with neighbourhood officers spending less time on paperwork (17% of total time observed) than response officers (21% of total time observed).¹⁵ The bulk of the paperwork was completed during tasks coded as 'Administration' (70%), but seven per cent was undertaken as part of 'Dealing with incidents' and nine per cent as part of 'Post-incident work' (See Table 13 below). The average duration of a paperwork task was 21 minutes, with this being higher (23 minutes) for response officers than for neighbourhood officers (18 minutes). This appears to support response officers' views from the focus groups that they were more heavily-burdened with paperwork as a result of responding to incidents.

¹⁵ Where observed differences between time spent on paperwork between response and neighbourhood officers were significant at the 90% confidence level $t = -1.653$ $df = 164$ sig 2-tailed (0.1). See Appendix F for full details

Table 13 – Time spent on paperwork during different task codes

Task category	Minutes observed on paperwork	No. of paperwork tasks observed	Average duration of paperwork	% total task time spent on paperwork
Administration	14,951	592	25 mins	51%
Dealing with incidents	1,575	121	13 mins	8%
Post-incident work	1,979	110	18 mins	31%

Custody

Although arrests themselves account for a small proportion of the overall time observed (68 arrests accounting for 909 minutes - 8% of total time observed), they can mean a great deal of time thereafter dealing with the offender and with the associated paperwork. For an example of the activities that often followed an arrest see Case Study 1 below.

Case Study 1⁺

Shift 103 – Neighbourhood officer, late shift, Thursday, urban BCU⁺⁺

(The shift officially started at 13.00)

12:45 – 12:50 catching up on emails

12:50 – 13:00 self-briefing

13:00 – 13:13 self-briefing; catching up on recent local crimes

13:13 – 13:15 arranging a 'Pub Watch' meeting

13:15 – 13:25 admin - case file building relating to earlier arrests

13:25 – 14:20 foot patrol

14:20 – 15:15 admin - case file building

15:15 – 15:30 walk to 'Pub Watch' meeting

15:30 – 16:10 'Pub Watch' meeting

16:10 – 16:15 walk back

16:15 – 16:25 admin - case file building

16:25 – 16:48 asked to take van to pick up shoplifter – no van so waited

16:48 – 17:10 pick up and arrest shoplifter

17:10 – 17:48 booking shoplifter into custody

17:48 – 18:10 admin - updating files re shoplifter

18:10 – 18:22 out of station to pick up evidence related to shoplifter

18:22 – 18:35 admin - updating files re shoplifter

18:35 – 18:39 check to see if shoplifter's solicitor has arrived

18:39 – 19:29 back to case building re shoplifter

19:29 – 19:49 interview shoplifter

19:49 – 20:00 interview stopped wait while solicitor talks to shoplifter

20:00 – 20:20 back to interview

20:20 – 20:30 interview terminates; discuss with inspector how to proceed

20:30 – 20:45 admin - case building re shoplifter

⁺ Some observer comments have been paraphrased for clarity

⁺⁺ Shaded area represents arrest and subsequent activity

The highlighted times are those relating to the arrest and follow up work from a shoplifter. In this case, apart from a 12 minute trip out to pick up evidence relating to the arrest, the rest of the time is spent inside dealing with the

interview and case file paperwork following from the arrest (around 4 hours in total).

On average, following an arrest officers spent 159 minutes (2.7 hours) inside the station completing associated tasks (such as paperwork related to the incident), including 74 minutes in custody processing. This can be compared to the 2001 "Diary of a Police Officer" study, which reported an average of 3.5 hours in station following an arrest – with the initial prisoner processing taking just over an hour, and fingerprinting, photographing, criminal record checks, and prisoner person searches taking a further 20-30 minutes each.

In the current study, the category 'Custody' was used for recording the booking-in of prisoners, the undertaking of custody duties (including when abstracted to cover custody), and the interviewing of detainees. From all the shifts observed, only three per cent of time was spent on 'Custody' tasks, and only two per cent (83 tasks) of all tasks observed were 'Custody' tasks. Whilst custody-related tasks do not happen frequently, they are time-consuming – taking 45 minutes on average. This figure is potentially lower than the 'true' average since it includes those accompanying arresting officers (i.e. officers accompanying colleagues into custody but who have not made an arrest, and then may not stay to complete the process). For those who have actually made an arrest, the average time spent in custody was 74 minutes. The results therefore suggest that initial prisoner processing took a similar length of time in 2010 as in 2001, but the additional parts of the process have become less time-consuming.

The reduction in time spent on average inside the station following arrest found by the current study is likely to have been influenced by developments in workforce modernisation that have increased the use of police staff in prisoner processing. The Police Reform Act 2002 introduced a number of additional police staff roles where specific powers can be designated. One example is the role of detention officer, and HMIC found that by 2004 sixteen forces had already employed staff in this role (HMIC 2004). By March 2010 there were 3,809 designated officers (Sigurdsson & Dhani 2010), and although it is not possible to tell if all of these are undertaking roles in custody it is likely that many are. Many custody facilities also use police staff as fingerprint officers. Despite these

changes, and the apparent fall in average time spent inside following arrest since 2001, neighbourhood and response officers in the focus groups and interviews felt that post-arrest processes could still be time-consuming. For example, arresting someone early in their shift could mean the rest of the day being spent handling that one incident.

That's it, you're off the street for the next six, seven hours. You're pretty much written off for the entire day.

Neighbourhood officer

Efficiency issues

This section will look at the areas identified by both observers and officers as those with potential for efficiency improvements. All frontline officers taking part in the research clearly felt that there was a degree of inefficiency in the way that their time was being used at present, and both response and neighbourhood officers as well as supervisors, provided examples of what they felt constituted inefficient use of time.

Overview

Throughout the quantitative data collection, observers were asked to identify and describe any efficiency issues related to the task officers were undertaking. When these results are examined by type of officer role observed and type of location, it can be seen that a higher proportion of efficiency issues were recorded on average for response shifts compared to neighbourhood, and in rural areas compared to urban (see Table 14 below).

Table 14 – Efficiency issues by officer role and location type

Location	Neighbourhood (77 shifts)	Response (117)	Total
Rural (95 shifts)	65	143	208 (2.2 per shift)
Urban (99 shifts)	36	99	135 (1.4 per shift)
Total	101 (1.3 per shift)	242 (2.1 per shift)	343 (1.8 per shift)

Of the 3,814 tasks recorded in total during the observations, 343 (9%) were highlighted by the observers as having an efficiency issue. Fifty-five per cent of all shifts observed had at least one task highlighted. Table 15 below shows the breakdown of the categories of tasks where the efficiency issues were seen.

Table 15 – Tasks identified as having an efficiency issue

Main task	Number of tasks coded as 'Efficiency issue'	% of total main tasks observed by category	% of all efficiency issues identified (n=343)
Administration (n=839)	101	12%	30%
Dealing with incidents (n=796)	80	10%	23%
Travel (n=581)	42	7%	12%
Community work (n=644)	27	4%	8%
Other activities (n=370)	32	9%	9%
Meetings / Briefings (n=227)	11	5%	3%
Post-incident work (n=210)	30	14%	9%
Custody (n=83)	16	19%	5%
Unknown (coder error) (n=64)	4	8%	1%
Total	343		100%

Of all the efficiency issues identified, the highest proportion related to the categories 'Administration' and 'Dealing with incidents'. However, when examined in relation to their recorded numbers, the categories with the highest proportion of the tasks identified as having an efficiency issue were 'Custody' (19% of tasks) and 'Post-incident work' (14% of tasks) have. 'Community work' had the lowest proportion of tasks where observers felt there was an efficiency issue, indicating that perhaps this is the type of activity with least potential for increased efficiency.

Custody

Officers taking part in the qualitative research felt that the process of booking someone into custody was one of the most time-consuming activities for both neighbourhood and response officers, and flagged this as an area where efficiency may be improved. Completing the necessary paperwork and updating the relevant computer systems, waiting with the detainee whilst the custody sergeant authorises the detention, obtaining DNA or fingerprints, and registering property, can contribute to a lengthy booking-in process. However, in addition to the process itself, in thirty-five per cent (29 tasks) of the tasks recorded as custody-related the observer's verbatim comments mentioned waiting or delays. Most of these related to waiting either prior to booking-in or related to the booking-in process itself.

The 2001 "Diary of a Police Officer" study identified that there were a number of circumstances where efficiency was compromised by officers having to wait around in custody, for example "bottlenecks in waiting for custody sergeants to carry out initial booking in". Frontline officers in the focus groups in the current study said that waiting for an appropriate adult if a suspect was a minor could further increase time spent waiting in custody, as could the lack of custody sergeants. Supervisory officer highlighted the time spent liaising with, and waiting for feedback from, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) as an area which currently took up a lot of time for frontline officers. They gave specific examples of situations where their officers were left waiting on hold just to speak to someone when phoning the CPS. This inefficiency was echoed by the frontline officers themselves.

In each case you're wasting money faxing the documents off to CPS... [sergeants] should be able to make the decisions... like we were before CPS made the decisions.

Supervisory officer

Responding to incidents and post-incident activity

Observers recorded twenty-three per cent of efficiency issues as relating to 'Dealing with incidents' tasks. Observers' verbatim comments for these tasks

suggest the potential to improve deployment of resources. The most frequent reasons for suggesting there was an efficiency issue when dealing with an incident were:

- On attending the location, there was no incident to be dealt with;
- Other resources were already deployed; or
- The incident itself required waiting for other resources or equipment to arrive.

In some cases, observers' comments suggested that officers had waited in police cars while another officer dealt with the incident, which indicated some potential issues with double-crewing.

In the focus groups, response officers cited victim engagement to be a particularly inefficient use of time in cases where the victim did not wish to be contacted. Examples of such situations included minor offences such as anti-social behaviour or fights between young groups of friends where the victim often did not want to press charges. This issue was also mentioned by one supervisory officer, who felt there was a need for restorative justice measures to be used to a greater extent in such cases. In keeping with this, neighbourhood officers in one BCU and response officers in another were positive about the influence that the introduction of restorative justice had on policing in their areas. They mentioned that it had worked particularly well in allowing victims to have their say in the handling of a minor incident. Some officers gave the example of young people breaking a person's fence. They argued that the incident could be quickly closed through restorative justice, as the victim could decide that they were happy to be repaid by having the perpetrators fix the fence themselves (i.e. with minimal police intervention).

Waiting

The data collection form had a specific code for 'Waiting', with context details provided by observers. Overall the 'Waiting' code was recorded in 168 instances. In the cases where a reason was provided, 34 of the periods of waiting related to the custody booking-in process as described above. Twenty instances related

to waiting for vehicles – either for area cars to become available, transport for prisoners, traffic cars, vehicle recovery trucks, or lifts back to the station. On a further 24 occasions, officers were waiting for a colleague or another officer. Other instances included officers waiting at scenes of incidents (for information from PNC, for equipment such as breathalyser machines to turn up, for joiners to come and board up premises, and for a vet to kill an injured animal) and at hospitals (for those involved in incidents to be treated and for medical professionals to attend). Within the station, officers waited for faxes, phone calls and emails to come through, for access to computer terminals, for meetings with colleagues and supervisors, and for solicitors and suspects to arrive.

It seems inevitable with a service that deals with such a variety of incidents and that has to liaise with a wide range of professions that periods of waiting will occur, especially when scarce resources are required. However, there are areas where work could be targeted to achieve efficiency gains. Evidence of the frequency of waiting during custody processing tends to emphasise that relatively high levels of potential efficiency issues were identified in custody, which may be possible to address. In addition, improved understanding of the sorts of transport issues that occur may provide ideas for potential efficiency improvements.

Administration

Officers in the focus groups often used the term ‘bureaucracy’ in relation to aspects of their job that concerned the completion of paperwork and updating internal databases, as well as contacting victims and liaising with partner agencies (‘Administration’). The over-arching feeling amongst officers and supervisors was that levels of bureaucracy had continued to worsen. Some issues mentioned included technical problems with the computer systems, lengthy forms, waiting for use of a computer, and waiting for phone calls from the CPS. The key factors that officers and supervisors identified, however, were duplication and trust and discretion. These were also identified in observers’ verbatim comments. Indeed, for all the efficiency issues identified by observers on administration tasks the most frequent reason given was ‘duplication’.

Because of this apparent importance, the current report examines these areas in more detail below.

Duplication

Both response and neighbourhood officers mentioned unnecessary duplication of information across multiple police files for the same incident as a problem. This duplication of information across systems was felt to be exacerbated by the fact that different systems did not link together in an intuitive manner. For example, officers reported that they were unable to copy and paste forms between systems. In such circumstances, it was felt that it would be useful to have a template in place and for all the forms to be formatted in the same manner. An example of the extent of duplication was provided by one sergeant.

Very often the officers will write the statement out and then they'll write the same thing in their pocket book, they'll write the same thing on a computer report, they'll write the same thing on something else to speak to the Crown Prosecution Service... You can have examples of where they've spent time doing four or five updates of various documents, which is basically the same information.

Supervisory officer

Officers highlighted certain types of case where they felt duplication of paperwork was a particular issue. For instance, cases involving a missing person reportedly would often lead to frontline officers logging information that was already recorded by the response officer who picked up the call. Missing Person reports were also identified by observers in their verbatim comments as being very time-consuming, for example:

The new Missing Persons law means that a report has to be filed¹⁶ for every missing person who could be simply a teenager who doesn't want

¹⁶ The Guidance on the "Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons" (ACPO 2005) recommends that officers taking the initial report of a missing person should undertake a risk identification process and gather information using the national reporting form – missing person investigation.

to come home. If the teenager returns home voluntarily, all the work completed is obsolete and no longer needed. This happened on this shift. The officer spent a lot of time pursuing enquiries about the missing teenager, including writing up a very lengthy and time consuming report, circulating details etc. The teenager turned up later thus making all that work unnecessary.

Observer verbatim comment

Other examples given by officers in focus groups included anti-social behaviour incidents, where the same information would need to be recorded in their pocket book and an anti-social behaviour referral form. Depending on the situation, there might be additional forms that had to be completed for each individual involved. Also, a number of frontline and supervisory officers expressed concern about the time it took to complete the risk assessment process for domestic violence incidents. They believed that recent changes meant the form had become more complex, moving from a brief tick box form to a much longer form with additional text fields to complete. Cases involving a threat to kill were also highlighted as problematic as were situations where a '*Children at Risk*' report needed to be completed. In the case of the latter, officers believed that there could be occasions when completing the form seemed to add no value, such as an unrelated incidence of burglary as described below:

With the Children at Risk report, they are good when you've got children that are at risk, but when you're going to someone who's had a burglary... just because their children are there, you have to submit a report when you've got no concerns over their welfare.

Neighbourhood officer

Supervisory officers felt that in order to help alleviate the burden of paperwork, there was a need to simplify the risk assessment process and to more carefully consider which circumstances required these assessments. They expressed the opinion that national incidents can have an impact by creating a 'knee-jerk' response which increases risk assessment in local areas. Supervisors highlighted the need to balance concerns over the risks involved in incidents against the

benefits of allowing officers more discretion to approach each incident on its particular merits.

The sheer amount of risk assessing that is now required... has all stemmed from single incidents that have happened nationally where people have knee jerked in their reaction and decided to create a bit more bureaucracy.

Supervisory officer

A further frustration of officers concerning the current duplication of paperwork across computer systems related to partnership working. The process of providing agencies such as the local council with information was seen as an inefficient use of officers' time, given that this had already been logged on police systems. Some officers expressed the belief that, rather than being used for knowledge-sharing purposes, some of this information provision took place solely for monitoring and auditing purposes. Such duplication was especially frustrating for frontline officers in cases where it seemed unlikely that any incident would actually materialise out of the situation.

[The reason for duplication is] just so that person in the council or somewhere else can see that we've done our job properly.

Neighbourhood officer

This bureaucracy was felt to have an operational impact. Both neighbourhood and response officers said that administrative processes relating to specific crimes (such as the need to fill out risk assessments and paperwork for certain offences) combined with more general issues such as the perception of time consuming custody processes, would often influence how they then approached their day-to-day tasks. In the most extreme cases, there were examples where officers said they had to think twice about making an arrest, given the amount of time all the processes around dealing with the one incident could take.

Officers themselves, rightly or wrongly... they'll make a snap decision... on how much they're actually going to progress that investigation... what has

to be done to cover your ass and what you can do to write that job off to get rid of it.

Response officer

Trust and discretion

A lack of discretion afforded officers emerged as a strong theme when bureaucracy was being discussed in focus groups and interviews, being seen as an underlying factor in some of the systems that caused inefficiencies in officers' activities. Officers felt they frequently had to explain what they were doing which encouraged more paperwork and lengthier processes and that individual incidents were often escalated upwards when it was not necessary. Officers felt an increasing blame culture meant that there was a greater need to 'cover themselves' and this in turn meant a reduction in discretionary powers.

The issue of discretion was linked to this, with officers feeling that they were not trusted to make independent decisions. This was experienced particularly keenly in relation to performance monitoring. It was highlighted by one supervisory officer that, due to the relative autonomy of a neighbourhood officers role, a high degree of trust needed to be placed in those officers to do their job. However, in focus groups, officers themselves suggested that the current system of performance monitoring and targets helped to create an overwhelming sense of a lack of trust in them, since they were required to 'cover their backs' to prove how each moment of their time was being spent. This perceived lack of trust was also mentioned by some supervisory officers, who felt that the degree of monitoring and number of performance targets was also an indication that as supervisors they were not trusted to manage their officers.

They've got certain targets and certain things that have been looked at historically or they've got to achieve your 80% target of being out on the beat so you've got to fill in the abstraction database everyday...it's proof...you're not trusting the staff that they're actually doing that, you're not trusting us to be able to manage those staff.

Supervisory officer

Frontline officers echoed the concerns of supervisory officers that some of the systems in place to monitor performance were overly bureaucratic.

The issue of trust and discretion was raised in the Flanagan report as one of the significant drivers of bureaucratic processes (Flanagan 2008). It advocated increased discretion with increased accountability through more active supervision. This is a deep-rooted issue that requires, as Flanagan pointed out, an enhanced approach to professional development so that police officers and staff can use greater professional judgement and take greater risks in decision making.

Travel

From the data on the tasks identified by observers as having an efficiency issue, nine per cent of travel tasks were highlighted. Many of these related to the transporting of equipment, paperwork, medications, evidence or officers to other locations or to pick up other vehicles or officers – tasks for which fully trained officers were not really required. The total amount of travel time identified as an efficiency issue during the 194 shifts observed equated to over 17 hours.

Perceptions of role and remit

The focus groups indicated that officers' attitudes towards 'efficiency' were linked to their perceptions of their own key roles (i.e. as response officers and as neighbourhood officers).

Response officers' views

Response officers felt that their role could be extremely varied and largely unpredictable. While acknowledging that their remit was wider than just responding to incidents, they tended to see this and related activity as their core role. These officers (and their supervisors) consequently felt that anything they perceived as preventing them from being able to respond to incidents in their area or to progress through their caseload account (for example, having to guard a crime scene) was an inefficient use of their time.

Response officers expressed the view that there was not a clear enough definition of what did and did not come under the umbrella of their work, and

that where their remit ended and what then became the responsibility of other teams was sometimes ambiguous (as will be discussed below). Reportedly, this often meant they picked up jobs that fell outside other units' remits, and reduced the time when they were available to respond to incidents in their designated area and manage their caseloads. Officers felt this was inefficient use of their time. These beliefs are not recent phenomena and have been identified in previous studies. For example, Chatterton and Bingham (2006) found that response officers felt they were "required to do the work no-one else wants and are the 'pool' from which officers are always taken to staff new initiatives".

Neighbourhood officers' views

A key aspect of a neighbourhood officer's role described by both officers and supervisors was the need to ensure public confidence in the local area. To achieve this, supervisors placed major emphasis on high levels of visibility, which they felt also enabled officers to develop greater knowledge of the issues affecting their local areas.

If you're out of the nick... it don't matter what you're doing, you're still visible to somebody.

Neighbourhood officer

Officers tended to also emphasise their role in proactive work, and so their focus was not just on being seen and patrolling.

Their core role is about engaging with the communities. It's about problem solving. If there's a problem in a certain area it is working with partners to resolve that issue and to keep that confidence up with the public.

Supervisory officer

However, when asked their views about time spent on different activities, both supervisors and officers tended to cite anything that kept officers off their allocated patrol as inefficient use of their time. For example, in one BCU neighbourhood officers were required to update a website aimed at informing

the public about how they spend their time. Officers felt this then meant that they were not spending this time on patrol, and that their visibility was therefore reduced.

Now I spend an hour a day less on the beat to come in and update my computer.

Neighbourhood officer

Other perceived sources of inefficiency and efficiency

From the qualitative work, a number of issues were raised by officers as sources of inefficiency or potential sources of greater efficiency:

- Control room
- Abstractions
- Specialist teams/roles
- Technology and equipment
- Development of new processes and policies

The control room

A degree of concern was expressed by some response officers about control room staff and the way they communicated incidents to response officers. Some supervisory officers also raised this issue, believing their officers might not be given the required information before responding to an incident, or might be forced to attend a situation that could have been handled over the phone. A number of supervisory officers felt that such 'inefficiencies' resulted from the fact that some staff in the control room might not understand the practicalities of how response officers work. Neighbourhood officers in one BCU also expressed reservations over the effectiveness of their control room.

Abstractions

Abstractions (the removal of officers from their core role to perform other policing duties) were mentioned as a particular issue by neighbourhood officers across the groups when discussing the use of their time. Although not discussed by most of the response officers, it was raised in a couple of instances. It should

be noted that officers appeared to have varying definitions of 'abstractions', with some officers considering certain tasks as abstracting them from their duties that in other groups were perceived to be a part of their core role. For example, response officers in one BCU mentioned having to deal with missing persons as an 'abstraction'. In contrast, the impression given by response officers in another BCU was that the processes around dealing with missing persons was part of their job, albeit a time-consuming one. Examples given by most neighbourhood officers of the abstractions they faced included providing a presence at local shows or festivals, and having to cover the custody sergeant role.

Abstractions were perceived as having a number of negative implications on officer efficiency, with 'efficiency' again typically discussed in terms of time spent on an officer's own patrol. As well as decreasing their visibility within the community, some neighbourhood officers said that being abstracted could also mean that they would have to spend extra time just trying to catch up on the issues that arose in their absence. As they were not on their own patrol or following up their own caseloads, this time out of the station was seen by some as time being used inefficiently.

I'm on 'Lates' over the weekend, the following weekend I'm on 'Days', [then] four core days I'm at [a public event], so that means there's eight days I won't be on my beat at all.

Neighbourhood officer

There was some discussion about specialist teams and the use of abstractions to 'prop up' these functions when resources within such teams were low. This appeared to encourage both negative perception towards specialist police teams, delays and a view that some inefficiencies in other areas (including for other frontline officers) were caused by officers abstracted to specialist teams not having the requisite experience to carry out the role effectively.

So you could come in and be jailer tomorrow, but if you don't do jailer every day of the week and you haven't done it for a year you're a fish out of water, the poor custody skipper's going, 'you're crap, what are you doing in here?'

Neighbourhood officer

Supervisory officers with neighbourhood teams also spoke of their concerns around abstractions. Some expressed particular feelings of frustration, as well as a sense of worthlessness in their role, when they kept losing staff to support response teams.

My function... is obviously not deemed to be important, so they strip my resources away and give them to someone else... very disheartening, really.

Supervisory officer

Specialist teams and roles

In addition to the link with abstractions, specialist teams and their relation to frontline officers were also mentioned across the focus groups and interviews in relation to other aspects of efficiency. Whilst officers clearly saw the purpose and benefits of the specialist police officer teams and units that were in place, some noted how the actions of these teams can have a detrimental impact on their own efficiency. There was a perception that specialist police teams, such as the Criminal Investigation Department (CID), had very specific remits and might often refuse work as a result. Frontline officers (particularly response officers) reported that they could often find themselves picking up tasks that they considered would sit better with other specialist teams, such as CID or fraud investigation, and such tasks were therefore examples of inefficient use of their own time. This issue is linked back to response officers feeling that their remits were often very wide.

We're effectively the only unit that doesn't say no, or are not allowed to say no.

Response officer

Use of police staff

Officers were largely positive towards the use of police staff. In some instances, officers felt strongly enough about this to suggest that the use of police staff for certain tasks in other BCUs could be extended to include their own BCU. Officers tended to believe that a lot of what they considered to be the more bureaucratic elements of their job (typically those requiring most administrative work) could be done by police staff instead, thereby freeing police to attend to their core role. For example, it was felt that tasks such as vehicle inventories did not require police powers and therefore could be carried out by police staff. Again, perceptions of the use of police staff reflected the way that officers defined 'efficient' and 'inefficient' use of their own time. Any method or tool that might increase the amount of time they may have to respond to incidents or patrol local neighbourhoods was perceived as a potential efficiency saving.

They'll then have civilian investigators who will investigate, do all the follow up enquiry statements, etc, and deal with the job through file processing, charging, going to court etc, all, everything else so that frontline officer fills in his template and he walks back out on the street and starts afresh on a new job, he doesn't have any follow up enquiries on that one.

Response Officer

Further examples of particular processes that officers felt could be efficiently carried out by police staff included: custody processing and booking in, interviewing, follow up calls to victims, initial evidence collecting, vehicle inventories, and making initial enquiries in some missing person's cases (for example attending the address, doing the initial report, and enquiring with friends about whereabouts).

Officers felt that having staff specialising in certain roles could improve quality, since these staff would have more time to focus on the tasks at hand. However, there were issues that were perceived to limit the effectiveness of these specialist support staff in freeing-up police time. Response officers in particular

noted the working hours of these staff as a barrier to their effectiveness (i.e. less shift working, more regular hours), whilst others noted that there were advantages to having the same officers cover all aspects of an investigation in terms of the wider experience and knowledge they could gain.

They're not 24 hours, they don't work predominantly the weekend shifts when we need them, when you've got the vast majority of prisoners in.

Response Officer

Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) were often mentioned as being a very useful resource by neighbourhood officers. Again, the positive views tended to be driven primarily by the association with freeing up police time, although participants also acknowledged that PCSOs could bring benefits in terms of gathering community intelligence and also fulfilling reassurance roles to victims.

[Some] of the jobs on the normal beat are just offering reassurances, and PCSOs are great to have in such cases – handing out leaflets and things like that.

Neighbourhood officer

Equipment

Lack of equipment was a factor which officers felt led to inefficient use of time. Officers who worked in rural areas reported particular frustrations with local shortages of equipment and facilities which meant that they sometimes had to spend a significant amount of time travelling to other stations to access what they needed to do their job. There was also a feeling that sometimes resources were spread too thinly. For example, neighbourhood officers in one BCU noted that officers had to share one car between six or seven people.

Resolving such issues reportedly led to officers taking personal responsibility to bridge the gap between what they required and what was available. A response officer in one BCU, for example, described having to pay for crucial equipment themselves.

Someone got assaulted and then I called up for someone to bring me a camera up from the station... there was nothing. So I couldn't take any photos of any injuries, and then I got it in the neck the next day, 'why haven't they taken any pictures of the injuries for evidential purposes?' So in the end I went and spent 50 quid and went and bought my own camera.

Response officer

One supervisory officer highlighted that not only did a lack of equipment and facilities cause inefficiency by preventing officers performing certain aspects of their role, it also meant additional time spent by supervisors trying to resolve issues.

I spend hours just sending emails and ringing people saying that you promised us this, like we needed some more lockers, because they didn't have enough lockers for the staff but, and it took months and months and months to get that resolved.

Supervisory officer

Technology

Use of technology was one of the main areas of focus for suggestions for improving efficiency. Indeed, a disparity (as noted by frontline and supervisory officers alike) between different forces' use of technology led to some officers expressing frustration that other officers were better equipped.

Nevertheless, officer training and the choice of technology were seen to be factors that could potentially limit the effectiveness of new equipment or systems. Some supervisory staff and officers, for example, highlighted how some officers could struggle with computer systems in general, either because they were not familiar with or comfortable using computers or because they considered the available computer systems difficult to use or time-consuming (e.g. due to the amount of duplication of entry required across systems). Officers noted how the introduction of some systems, such as a crime

management system adopted by one BCU, had actually led to more lengthy processes for officers.

People have introduced computer systems to try and reduce the amount of paperwork, but actually it was a lot quicker to fill the form in before we had the computers...a lot of what's been done with IT is quite self-defeating.

Supervisory officer

A specific technology mentioned across the groups was mobile data. All officers seemed to agree that mobile data and (particularly response officers) in-car technology could mean less need to return to the station and hence improve their efficiency. However, the current availability and use of mobile data devices varied, reflecting the various stages in the roll out of this technology across forces. Only nineteen per cent (37 shifts) of the observed shifts used mobile data – around a third (31 shifts) of observed shifts in one force, compared to just 6 shifts in the other. In the focus groups, neighbourhood officers from one BCU reported already using Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs), whilst officers from most other areas had anecdotal evidence of the effectiveness of mobile technology, and a few officers had some more limited experience of using it. In the areas where there was limited provision of technology, in particular availability of PDAs, officers felt that having such devices could give them remote access to various police databases and systems, again negating the need to return to the station.

Taking statements, I'm much quicker at typing than I am writing, so if you can take a laptop into someone's house type out the statement then and there, and get them to sign it on a little pad thing like you have in custody it just speeds everything up.

Response officer

However, in one force where neighbourhood officers already had experience of using PDAs a lot of the feedback about these devices in their current form was negative. Issues included difficulty getting reception, units malfunctioning, and

battery life not lasting for an entire shift. Some officers also expressed a reluctance to use PDAs when on patrol in case it gave the impression to the public that they were using mobile phones and not working. In general, it was felt that the technology on offer at the moment did not go far enough in negating the need to return to the station to access systems. Officers found the devices unsuitable for writing full reports and slow to load certain applications.

Therefore, while it was felt that extending mobile technology across forces was one of the key areas for suggested improvements, it was felt that PDAs should either be modernised to make them easier to use, or replaced with alternatives. Suggestions included issuing BlackBerrys and laptops that would enable officers to conduct more work on patrol and provide a faster channel of communication. Having laptops was also perceived to lead to less duplication of work, as officers could type statements up as they heard them rather than later on at the station.

In addition to allowing officers more time on the street, it was felt that certain types of technology could be beneficial in other ways, such as increasing response times. One example was given of a police force not in the present study having satellite navigation in cars linked to the control centre. Anecdotally, this system enabled improved tasking coordination, and decreased time taken to get to a scene. While officers in the current study had no direct experience of this specific technology, they noted that they could see the benefits of increased integration of systems and extension of appropriate technology throughout and between forces.

I'll refer back to [force worked in previously] but they were quite forward thinking, when I was on traffic the proactive cars had a device called Lantern, which was a single fingerprint, put your thumb on there and it had links to the *NAFIS* database... [and] the immigration fingerprint database.

Response officer

Development of new processes and policies

Both response and neighbourhood officers expressed scepticism about most new policies or initiatives that had been introduced, whether at a force or national level. They felt that 'new' policy was often simply a rebranding of old schemes, and often fell short of achieving its aims. The general feeling was that new policies tended to lead to more work, rather than reducing the burden on frontline officers, and did nothing to improve efficiency. As highlighted by Case Study 2 below, such policies were sometimes seen to be inappropriate for local circumstances.

Case Study 2: Unintended consequences of policy

In one BCU area, neighbourhood officers mentioned the introduction of a policy that involved the allocation of set hours for when they had to be out on patrol. These officers felt the inflexibility this introduced to their working day had a number of consequences relating to inefficient time use, including:

- Being on patrol during hours where the impact on public reassurance was perceived to be minimal;
- Not being on patrol at key times to provide a crime deterrent; and
- Being unable to deal with paperwork responsibilities at less busy times

The compulsory hours for being outside on patrol were not related to the particular hours that officers felt were those when the individuals they needed to target were likely to be around.

One officer, for example, asked why he had to patrol "At 8 o'clock in the morning when the people I'm interested in, the people I want to disrupt doing what they're doing, are out and about at 11 o'clock? When theoretically according to [the policy] I'm allowed to come in and do my paperwork".
(Neighbourhood officer)

The case study suggests that the particular hours for compulsory patrol may have been selected to coincide with times when the maximum number of members of the public were likely to be out and, hence, benefit from a visible presence. The officers themselves clearly felt that other periods of time would be more beneficial in their particular areas, but had not been consulted or allowed to tailor the policy. The lack of involvement of frontline officers in developing new policy, initiatives and processes was cited more generally as a key reason for their failure.

The only people that really know the easiest way to streamline processes are the people that deal with it.

Response officer

Too often we don't involve the actual users of the process in designing the solution, so it's all done on perception.

Supervisory officer

Conclusions and implications

The current study, which is not a nationally representative picture of the police service, suggests that in the forces observed some of the general sources of inefficiency and bureaucracy remained the same in 2010 as they had been in previous years. However, there are specific aspects of policing (such as a reduced amount of single-crewing, increase in time spent on community work, and reduction in the time spent inside the station following an arrest) that may have changed in recent years.

Neighbourhood policing

This study observed that around half of neighbourhood officers' time was spent explicitly on community work or engaging with the public in some way. The amount of time spent just patrolling for both neighbourhood and response officers appears to have increased since 2001, with neighbourhood officers spending significantly more time patrolling than response officers. While the proportion of time spent on patrol may still be seen as being relatively low, evidence from previous studies suggests that patrolling is only one aspect of effective community work. For example, improving the public perception of the police is influenced not just by visible presence but by engagement with the public, problem solving, and targeted foot patrol – patrol without problem solving is unlikely to be effective (Tuffin et al. 2006).

The amount of time spent on certain activities by neighbourhood officers and response officers was very different. Neighbourhood officers, for example, spent significantly more time on community work. This suggests that the neighbourhood policing initiatives of the past few years have had an impact on the role and activities of frontline officers. Focus groups suggested that neighbourhood officers were very aware of the priority of maintaining visibility to the community, and considered anything that took them away from activities within their area to be an efficiency issue.

Response policing

On average, despite the officers' own perceptions, it did not appear that the number of incidents that response officers handled at 'peak' times¹⁷ varied greatly from the slower times, ranging from 4.9 to 5.6 incidents per shift. While the averages mask variability in the number of incidents dealt with on a shift (ranging from 0 to 15), the most common range was between 2 and 6 incidents per shift (comprising 50% of all response shifts). The remaining officers were split between dealing with less than 2 incidents (25%) and more than 6 incidents (25%). The disparity between officers' impressions and number of incidents actually observed supports research conducted in the United States, which concluded that officers' perceptions of the average number of response calls they attended per shift were sometimes over-estimated and included calls where they had attended as back up unnecessarily (Kessler 1993). The perception of officers that they frequently experienced very busy shifts may possibly be a result of these shifts being more memorable. Looking at an English police force, Loftus (2010) found that 'the prospect of action' often caused a heavy police response. Hence, the perception of increased activity at certain times might be in part due to greater numbers of officers attending incidents than at times when fewer are available which may have negative operational effects.

The variation in numbers of incidents attended by officers may be to some extent inevitable owing to the unpredictable nature of policing and factors which affect availability of resources such as illness and court appearances. However, when trying to maximise efficiency it is important to analyse both demand and resource availability and ensure that any local patterns of abstractions are also taken into account in deployment patterns.

It was not possible from this study to determine the numbers of units attending incidents. However, over-attending was raised by observers as a potential efficiency issue, which suggests there might have been potential to improve deployment (e.g. through supervision).

¹⁷ As measured in total number of incidents attended in the BCU overall.

A higher proportion of efficiency issues per shift was identified for response shifts compared to neighbourhood shifts, which may relate to a number of factors:

- Response officers spend more time on paperwork than neighbourhood officers;
- They also spend more time on custody processes;
- They had less opportunity to manage their own time and were deployed by controllers who could not accurately predict what resources would be required at a scene; and
- The role of response officer seemed prone to greater variability in workload than that of neighbourhood officer.

While these factors may be to some degree inevitable, they appear to indicate potential to further improve processes, deployment and resourcing patterns. Overall, initiatives which focus on the response officer role appear to have most potential for impact on efficiency in frontline policing. Further examination of the qualitative data collected in the current study might identify other opportunities for efficiency.

Paperwork and bureaucracy

Reducing paperwork and bureaucracy have been the focus of numerous reports and studies in the past 20 years, ranging from the Masefield Scrutiny (Home Office 1995) to the recent 'Reducing Bureaucracy in Policing' (Berry 2010). The drive to reduce bureaucracy is rooted in an attempt to increase the time officers spend outside, visible to the public, or on 'operational' duties. The current study suggests that the time spent outside by officers appears to have changed little overall in the past decade, averaging fifty-six per cent compared to fifty-seven per cent in 2001 (PA Consulting). Officers appeared to be spending nearly half their shifts inside the station on average, and nineteen per cent of their time specifically filling-in paperwork. The perceptions of officers in focus groups that they spend more time outside at weekends and peak times was not supported by the observation data.

Time spent inside generally corresponded to the start and end of shifts. It is reasonable to expect that officers would want to start their shift with a catch-up on paperwork and emails and finish the day dealing with paperwork that has arisen during the shift. Response officers were found to do slightly more paperwork on average than neighbourhood officers which is consistent with their role in responding to incidents which tends to generate case files, incident reports, and other incident-related bureaucracy. However, the amount of time coded as 'Administration' was consistent across officer roles, locations and times of day at around twenty-seven per cent of a shift (two and a half hours on average). This result might indicate that neighbourhood officers conducted more non-paperwork administration specific to their role than response officers – for example, community engagement activity. Results are also suggestive of a common, underlying cause of administration, which will be discussed further below.

There may always be a necessary level of paperwork associated with policing, as it is a crucial part of the accountability process. Indeed, Flanagan (2008) recognised 'good' and 'bad' bureaucracy. However, two main causes of inefficiency around bureaucracy and paperwork were raised by officers in the current study: overly long forms (generally risk assessments) and duplication of entry of data. A lack of trust in officers and a related lack of discretion afforded to officers were highlighted as underlying factors in increasing bureaucracy. Lack of trust meant that officers were not free to judge whether completion of paperwork was appropriate. Bureaucracy was, hence, seen as a form of monitoring that took up officers' time. This inefficiency was compounded by supervisors having to check and approve the forms and reports produced by officers. Flanagan identified that, in increasing accountability and professionalising the police in recent years, the "use of processes has become disproportionate". This trend is also recognised in a study by Chatterton and Bingham (2006) where officers described how they felt that:

"the drive to reduce bureaucracy is being offset [by such requirements] as the new standards for crime recording and incident reporting. Also greater accountability and the drive for performance have led response officers to

make an even greater investment in paperwork and to spend a greater proportion of their time on it.”

Many of the issues identified by officers in the current study echoed those raised in reports twenty years ago, despite initiatives in the past decade (such as workforce modernisation) which have sought to drive down bureaucracy and to free up officer time. The fact that officers are still spending nearly half their time inside indicates that, while these initiatives may have had an impact, there have been other, counter-productive factors at work. For example, many studies have indicated the importance that police culture plays in “shaping everyday decisions and practices” (Loftus 2009). Loftus (2009) has argued that there are “remarkable continuities and inertia within police values, assumptions and practices”, and that “Although there have been important developments within policing contexts, these have not been matched by decisive transformations in rank and file culture”. It may be that there are cultural factors in the use of paperwork and administration to manage officer time that could merit further investigation.

The current study suggests further factors that might increase the burden of paperwork and administration in spite of anti-bureaucracy initiatives. Officers’ ability to complete paperwork in a timely fashion was limited by shifts which did not correspond with office hours. Reportedly, such shifts meant that often officers could not obtain information or hold meetings for more than a week after the need arose. Equipment and technology often exacerbated problems with administration and paperwork. Lack of, or technical difficulties with, basic office equipment meant delays in completing tasks – for example, officers having to go to different buildings or rooms for fax machines or having to wait for access to computers. Many of these small frustrations have the potential to be addressed by better office systems.

Officers interviewed in the current study felt that technology could lower the administrative burden on them. Reducing the need to enter data into multiple systems was frequently mentioned as a way of improving efficiency, both through the use of mobile data devices and through greater compatibility of existing systems. Where mobile data was already being used, however, it was

felt that the currently available technology was not adequate to resolve these issues – although the current study provides a very limited snapshot of the situation. The NPIA's Mobile Information Programme, which oversees the roll-out of mobile data devices nationally, is subject to a separate NPIA evaluation which examines the issues raised in the current study in greater detail.

Custody processing

Although custody tasks were infrequently observed during the current study (only 2% of all tasks), a surprising number were identified as having efficiency issues. The average length of a custody task was 45 minutes and, from the observers' comments, over a third of the custody tasks observed involved the officers waiting around at some point. The most frequent reason for waiting was that custody sergeants were not available to start the booking-in process.

Overall, a reduction in the average time spent inside the station following an arrest was observed compared to the 2001 "Diary of a Police Officer" study (from three and a half hours to just under two and three quarter hours).

However, there still appears to be room for improvement. Further investigation of waiting times and the reasons for the waiting may provide information on how to improve the streamlining of this process.

Role and remit

One of the themes that emerged from the focus groups was that when thinking about efficiency issues officers tended to concentrate on what they considered to be their core role. Any activity or duty that took them away from this role was often considered as having a negative efficiency impact. The influence of the neighbourhood policing initiative is evident in that neighbourhood officers very much viewed their core role as being visible in their local area. Yet this perception of visibility tended to be limited to patrol, and did not encompass wider engagement activity such as updating neighbourhood websites and attending local festivals. Likewise, response officers saw their core role as responding to incidents. Anything that kept them from that duty, however apparently worthy or useful, was again considered to have an efficiency impact.

The strong link officers perceived between core role and efficiency is something that should be examined further, as it raises issues around what officers should be doing, how roles are defined, and the perceptions officers have of the relationship between their core roles and wider police work. The understanding of the benefits of a wider range of engagement activities, such as through websites, may not have been sufficiently explained to officers undertaking this type of activity. Greater clarity about the potential impact of such engagement activities might reduce officer frustration.

Implications

The current study, being a snapshot of time in four opportunistically-chosen BCUs, is not a nationally representative picture of the police service. Therefore, findings cannot be generalised across England and Wales. A new random sample of shifts, selected from across the country and the year, would be required to determine whether the issues identified are representative on a national scale. However, the analysis provides an indicative picture of how neighbourhood and response officers in the BCUs observed in 2010 spent their time, and the nature of the issues they faced. Forces could diagnose whether and where they might have potential for greater efficiency by comparing their experience with the description provided by the current study and carrying out similar smaller scale observational work.¹⁸

Areas where there might be particular benefits in examining are:

- The response function
- The use of technology
- Tasking and coordination
- The purpose and practical impact of bureaucracy

¹⁸ The NPIA has prepared suggestions on how to go about such observational work, for example as part of continuous improvement activity. Contact the authors for details.

Bibliography

Banton, M. (1964). *The Policeman in the Community*. London: Tavistock.

Berry, J. (2010). *Reducing Bureaucracy in Policing – The Final Report*. London: Home Office.

Bradley, R. (1998). *Public Expectations and Perceptions of Policing (Police Research Series Paper 96)*. London: Home Office.

Brasnett, L., Evans-Sinclair, M., and Gottschalk, E. (2010). *Understanding Police Overtime*. London: Home Office.

Centrex (2005). *ACPO Guidance on the Management, Recording and Investigation of Missing Persons*. Hampshire: Centrex.

Chatterton, M. and Bingham, E. (2006). *24/7 Response policing in the modern police organisation – views from the front*. Police Federation of England and Wales.

Flanagan, Sir R. (2007). *The Review of Policing: Final report*. London: Home Office.

Kessler, D.A. (1993). Integrating calls for service with community and problem-oriented policing: a case study. *Crime and Delinquency*, vol. 39, 4, pp. 485-508.

Loftus, B. (2009). Police occupational culture: classic themes, altered times. *Policing and Society*, vol. 20, 1, pp. 1-22.

HMIC (2008). *Serving neighbourhoods and individuals – a thematic report on neighbourhood policing and developing citizen focus policing*. Available from http://www.hmic.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocument/thematics/THM_20081101.pdf (visited 12.08.2011).

HMIC (2004). Modernising the Police Service – A thematic inspection of workforce modernisation. Available at http://www.hmic.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocument/thematics/thm_20040630.pdf (visited 12.08.2011).

HMIC (2008). Serving neighbourhoods and individuals – a thematic report on neighbourhood policing and developing citizen focus policing. Available at http://www.hmic.gov.uk/SiteCollectionDocument/thematics/thm_2008.pdf (visited 12.08.2011).

Home Office (1995). Efficiency Scrutiny: Administrative Burdens on the Police in the Context of the Criminal Justice System (The Masefield Report). Joint publication: Home Office, Lord Chancellor's Department, Crown Prosecution Service, and Police Service Scrutiny.

Home Office (2010). Policing in the 21ST Century: reconnecting the police and the public. London: Home Office.

PA Consulting (2001). Diary of a Police Officer (Home Office Research Report 149). London: Home Office.

Quinton, P. and Morris, J. (2008) Neighbourhood Policing: the impact of piloting and early national implementation, Home Office online report 01/08 London: Home Office.

Sigurdsson, J. and Dhani, A. (2010). Police Service Strength (Statistical Bulletin 14/10). London: Home Office .

Tuffin, R., Morris, J., and Poole, A. (2006). An Evaluation of the Impact of the National Reassurance Policing Programme. London: Home Office.

Appendix A – Methods

Four Basic Command Unit (BCU) areas from two forces in England and Wales were identified to take part in this research. These areas were pre-selected by the NPIA through convenience sampling to allow comparisons, where appropriate, between urban and rural areas across two forces. Both the forces chosen were similar in size, with between 2,000 and 4,000 officers, and fairly rural, with a small number of large towns or cities within their area. In both forces, a BCU covering one of the larger urban areas and a BCU that was predominantly rural were chosen. These BCUs were selected to give the best match in characteristics as possible within the two forces.

Interviews and Focus Groups

Recruitment

Recruitment for both the discussion groups and in-depth interviews was carried out using a convenience sampling approach by senior police contacts within the four BCU areas. Given the pressures on police resources, the approach ensured flexibility and minimised police set-up time. Each senior contact was provided with a specification in terms of police roles and numbers needed. Within each BCU, two groups (1 x response and 1 x neighbourhood officers) and three supervisory officers (sergeant grade or above) were requested to take part in the fieldwork. Groups and interviews were then organised around dates that were suitable for all those involved. Fieldwork was carried out across the four BCU areas between 7th and 19th July 2010.

It should be noted that, given the methodology used for recruitment of participants for both the groups and in-depth interviews, senior officers within each of the BCU areas are aware of who took part in the research. However, throughout the report every effort has been made to ensure participant anonymity.

Discussion groups

A combination of groups and mini-groups were used to carry out research with frontline officers. All the discussion groups were held either at police stations or at training venues and lasted between 60-90 minutes. No participants were

incentivised for their contribution. A breakdown of participant numbers is provided in the Table A1 below.

Table A1 - breakdown of discussion groups

BCU	Response officers	Neighbourhood officers
Urban 1	1 x group Total participants: 8	1 x group Total participants: 4 ⁺
Rural 1	2 x groups Total participants: 6	2 x groups Total participants: 7
Urban 2	1 x group Total participants: 8	1 x group Total participants: 7
Rural 2	1 x group Total participants: 7	1 x group Total participants: 5

⁺The number of participants in this group was low due to a couple of officers attending incidents at the time of the discussion

In-depth interviews

In addition to the group discussions, in-depth interviews were carried out with supervisory officers within the four BCU areas (see Table A2 below). These were carried out either by telephone or face-to-face. The decision on which of these formats the interview took was based upon what was most convenient to each supervisory officer. A further breakdown is provided in the table below.

Interviews lasted between 30-60 minutes and no participants were incentivised for their contribution.

Table A2 - breakdown of in-depth interviews

Type of officer	Number of interviews
Supervisory officers (neighbourhood)	6
Supervisory officers (response)	5
Other, more senior officers	1

Research tools

Discussion guides were used by researchers to facilitate discussion in both the groups and individual interviews. These documents outlined the key themes and prompts to be used in discussions with officers and supervisory officers, covering the necessary topics. The discussion guides were informed by analysis of the observation data and from issues that were identified in previous research. These discussion guides are included in the appendices of this report.

Interviews and groups were recorded with respondents' permission and then transcribed. In addition, note takers attended each of the discussion groups. In a minority of cases, permission was not given to record and therefore analysis of these groups/ interviews was conducted using detailed notes made during and after the group/ interview.

Interpretation of the data

The qualitative research was undertaken in order to facilitate greater understanding of officers' perceptions of how they use their time and where efficiencies might be made. It is intended to complement the quantitative observations and provide further insight and illustration. Whilst the quantitative research involved interviewers recording what they observed during shifts, the qualitative research focussed on officers' perspectives and opinions. Where appropriate, in this report findings from the two elements have been compared when similar issues are covered by both strands of research.

It should be noted that the qualitative aspect of this research is not designed to be statistically representative of officers' views, but to be illustrative and exploratory. As a result, claims cannot be made about the extent to which conclusions may be applied to the wider population of frontline officers as a whole. Verbatim quotes are used throughout the report to illustrate particular bodies of opinion, but these should not be taken to represent the opinions of all officers who participated in the research.

Observations

Selection of shifts for observation

Records of all the shifts being undertaken at each BCU, over the selected fieldwork period, were sent to Ipsos MORI and a sample of these shifts was selected for observation. Prior to shift selection, the shift details sent by BCU contacts were edited so that they included only shifts that were to be undertaken by Police Constables and not those by other grades of officer, such as PCSOs and Police Sergeants. Similarly, shifts that were to be undertaken by Officers on bicycles were removed since these were considered to be impractical to observe.

At the outset of the project the aim was to undertake 200 observations in total across the 4 selected BCUs. In order to get a sufficient sample it was estimated that 10 observations were needed for each of the five shift categories (two neighbourhood officer and three response officer shift categories), in each of the four BCUs. This requirement was based on an estimate of likely confidence intervals (CIs) at the 95% level, which have been estimated through analysis of data from the previous Diary of a Police Officer research (PA Consulting 2001).

In order to select shifts for observation, the edited shift details were stratified by Officer type, shift time and date / day of shift, and then shifts were selected using a one-in-N approach. The resulting samples were then checked to ensure that each block of 10 shifts selected included those that were taking place across all days of the week, to ensure that the finished sample would not be unduly skewed towards shifts being undertaken during the week or towards the weekend. In the final sample at least one observation in each block of 10 was carried out on each day of the week, with the remaining shifts selected in line with the pattern of shifts in the original file sent by the BCU (see Table A3 below). The final sample was also checked in order to make sure that any one officer was not observed on more than two occasions.

Table A3 – Breakdown of intended observations

		Force 1		Force 2	
		BCU urban 1	BCU rural 1	BCU urban 2	BCU rural 2
Response officers	Early	10	10	10	10
	Late	10	10	10	10
	Night	10	10	10	10
Neighbourhood officers⁺	Early	10	10	10	10
	Late	10	10	10	10
Total		50	50	50	50

⁺ In the forces involved in the current study, neighbourhood officers did not undertake night shifts

While efforts were made to observe the shifts which were originally selected, amendments were made during the fieldwork period where it was necessary for officers to change their working patterns at the last minute and where it would not be appropriate for shifts to be observed (this could be due to events beyond their control such as the need to attend court hearings, for example). During the fieldwork period the Ipsos MORI project team were in regular contact with staff at the BCUs so that shifts could be replaced when officers were not going to be able to attend pre-planned observations. When this occurred efforts were made to ensure that replacement shifts replicated the specification of the shift which had been replaced in terms of the day and time of the shift and officer type to be observed.

Design of the observational ‘diary’

During the shifts, observers were asked to record the tasks undertaken by police officers and the time taken to perform these tasks on a pre-prepared ‘diary’. The diary was developed following pilot observations conducted by Ipsos MORI and NPIA researchers. The diary asked observers to code tasks according to a list of

broad activities which officers were most likely to undertake during their shifts (e.g. administration tasks) and the sub-tasks associated with these (the more specific activities that an officer might undertake to complete parts of their work, such as case file building). This design was intended to facilitate quick and accurate descriptions of what officers were doing. The diary also made allowances for observers to record 'Other' tasks which were not pre-coded and specify what the officer was doing in a free-text field. Observers were also required to enter the length of time that it took officers to complete particular tasks.

Other information about the shift and details regarding the context in which activities were undertaken were also collected in the diary. In terms of contextual information, observers were required to code whether tasks were undertaken in or out of the station, or if any incidents to which officers were called were criminal or potentially criminal, non-criminal, or associated with anti-social behaviour or traffic. Observers also coded if the outcome of the call to an incident remained as expected or changed (either when arriving or en route to the incident) and whether the activity was self-tasked or generated by another means such as through a report from a member of the public or through a formal briefing.¹⁹

Since a key aim of the research was to ascertain where efficiency savings might be generated, observers were also asked to record on the diary where they felt that tasks undertaken involved some sort of efficiency issue and to code the length of time which was spent undertaking paperwork as part of an activity.

More general information regarding the shift which was collected via the diary included whether the shift was 'double-crewed', and the length of service and gender of the officer observed.

¹⁹ This information was used to contextualise the time figures and the observer comments, and to provide an extra assurance that the shifts observed were representative of all kinds of police activity. It has not been explicitly reported in this paper.

The final observational diary is attached in Appendix E. The diary main task codes were defined as follows (further details may be found in the observational diary tool itself):

- **Administration** – Administrative tasks, e.g. case-file building, incident-linked administration, staff appraisals / PDRs
- **Briefings / meetings** – Such as shift handovers or intelligence briefings
- **Custody** – Tasks completed in or around the custody suite
- **Attending / dealing with incidents** – Such as responding to an incident, making an arrest, questioning individuals at the scene
- **Community work** – Includes patrolling, community meetings, scene guarding, informal visits, answering enquiries from a member of the public and intelligence gathering in the community.
- **Travel** – Travel to the station, appointment, transporting evidence, etc.
- **Post-incident work** – Such as interviewing / taking a statement, victim / witness assurance
- **Other Activities** – Includes court duties, training, breaks, covering other duties, etc.

Processing, presentation and interpretation of data

Completed observational diaries were scanned and the data collated for editing / verification. Data was manually verified so that any errors or inconsistencies were removed before data analysis (see Data Cleansing and Error Checking sections below).

In relation to the interpretation of the data in this report, it should be remembered that a sample of shifts, rather than all the shifts undertaken across the BCUs, were observed. All results should be regarded as indicative rather than generalisable (see Appendix B). Data is unweighted.

Throughout the report differences were highlighted by key sub-groups:

- **Officer type** – shifts with response officers (those officers who are part of a Targeted Patrol Team) and those with community officers (those officers which are part of a neighbourhood team);
- **Shift type** – early, late and night shifts;
- **BCU location** – shifts occurring in urban and rural locations.

Both statistically significant differences between these sub-groups and indicative findings are highlighted throughout the report. Where findings are based on small numbers, the actual amount of observations is included in tables and in the text.

Data Cleansing

The data was cleansed in two stages:

- 1) The post-scanning data cleanse, completed by Ipsos MORI
- 2) The pre-analysis data cleanse, completed by NPIA

1) Post-scanning

The paper interview diaries were entered into the database via scanning equipment. Where the scanner fails to recognise the data entered into particular fields, errors can be generated. Ipsos MORI undertook a post-scanning cleanse to correct any such errors. This focused on:

- Checking for blank cells / missing data
- Identifying values outside the given ranges for variables
- Checking time values matched shift types i.e. shifts coded 'early' had times that corresponded to early shift hours
- Checking sub-task codes corresponded to the main task codes

Where a correction was possible by referring to the data in the original diary, the correction was made. Where it was not possible to assign a corrected value, a missing data value was entered.

2) Pre-analysis

Once the database had been received from Ipsos MORI, a further data cleansing process was conducted. Basic descriptive statistics were run and these were used to complete a set of checks for likely recording or scanning errors.

- The number of different types of shift (i.e. early/late/night, response/neighbourhood officer, etc.) were checked against the known shifts observed and any errors identified and corrected or coded as missing data
- Outliers were identified in the durations of tasks:
 - Any task duration of longer than 401 minutes was identified and coded as missing data (it was assumed, given the remaining activity times for these shifts, that any such duration was the result of a scanning or observer error)
 - Any paperwork duration that was longer than the main task duration was coded as missing data

In addition to this automated cleansing, manual verification was completed by reading verbatim comments about the shifts provided by observers and back-checking these against the codes they used. Although no observations were omitted as a result of this process, error rate estimates were made.

Observer error

Before the observations, several steps were taken to ensure observer accuracy in using the observation tool:

- Each observer was given training concerning use of the tool. This included an overview of the project, examples of how to code particular situations, and an opportunity to ask questions of the research team from NPIA and Ipsos MORI.
- Each observer was an employee of Ipsos MORI or the NPIA both of whom require a minimum education/skills level. Hence, competence is ensured by these organisations' recruitment processes.
- Each observer was afforded the opportunity to contact the research team from NPIA and Ipsos MORI following their shift if they found any coding particularly challenging.

Because it was possible to remove recording errors via data cleansing as described above, observer error checking focused primarily on how they coded main activities and related sub tasks, comparing coding with verbatim comments. It was not possible to randomly select a sample of coding across the observations, test these for errors, and make error estimates based on this sample because:

- The associated comments were not always of sufficient detail
- The potential for errors on particular tasks might not be independent (as shift/task conditions might make errors more or less likely) so error rate confidence interval calculations would be unlikely to be accurate
- It was not possible to decisively specify whether it was the coding or the verbatim comments that were the source of error

Nevertheless, it was possible in some cases to compare the coding against the comments and make some rough conclusions about the accuracy of observer coding.

Where it was possible to check for observer errors, a high level of apparent accuracy on the main task coding was noted. Sub-tasks, however, seemed to be less reliable. On a few occasions, where the main task had been noted apparently accurately, the number or category of sub-tasks recorded did not match the verbatim comments. Errors may have been due to uncertainty with the observation tool, the speed with which tasks were completed or required following taking up a particular duty (leading to mistakes in coding), or observers' unfamiliarity with local policing practices. In conjunction with the missing time duration compared to main activity time (as noted in the Methods section of the main report), this resulted in the sub-task codes being used sparingly in analysis for the present report.

Appendix B – Statistical Analysis

Significance testing in the report

The structure of a sample determines whether statistics based on that sample can be used to estimate parameters of the overall population – i.e. the sample must accurately represent the population in order that we can make inferences from it. In the present study, as noted in Appendix A, the sample was (as far as possible²⁰) randomly selected from the population of officers in the four BCUs observed, stratified by officer role, shift time and location. Hence, the sample is representative of this population of officers during the time period observed. Significance tests are therefore intended to guide understanding of the magnitude of differences observed between officers/shifts/locations in the specific context of the present study. Results should not be generalised to other time periods, BCUs, or forces, although they may (in conjunction with qualitative results) provide an indication of areas for other forces to examine in order to make efficiency gains.

Issues arising from the data

The observation exercise produced a set of time-based measures, in particular the time spent on particular activities or tasks by neighbourhood and response officers. There are a two data issues that complicate statistical testing:

- The data deviated from a normal distribution (skewness);
- The individual tasks were not independent of each other within a shift.

An explanation is provided below of how both of these problems have been addressed.

Distribution of data

Inspection of the observation data in the present study suggested that it was skewed compared to the classic normal distribution. 'Skewness' of data can lead to misleading results when applying statistical tests. The arithmetic mean, for example, becomes less representative of a sample's 'average' value. Given that

²⁰ There were 5 reported substitutions of the police officer selected for observation with another officer who was available at the time due to officer illness and abstractions.

summaries of the data needed to reflect the volume of cases, where appropriate this report used the total pooled time observed spent on particular tasks (i.e. for all officers) to calculate an 'average' proportion of time spent rather than looking at mean values per officer.

'Skewness' of data also affects significance testing. The Shapiro-Wilks test of normality confirmed that the sample data were sufficiently skewed to potentially bias statistical tests used to compare the groups observed in the present study. In order to resolve this issue, the data was logarithmically transformed for analysis.

Independence of tasks

Clearly, as shifts progress particular tasks will be more likely to lead on from others (e.g. completing an arrest would often lead to visiting custody). Because of this non-independence of tasks, it is generally not possible to compare task durations within shifts. Instead, the present study compared shifts, assuming that each officer shift was independent of the others.

Appendix C – Results tables

Table C1 – Breakdown of task durations (minutes)

Activity	All	SNT	TPT	Early	Late	Night	Urban	Rural	Wk'end	Wk'day	In	Out	Missing
Admin	29,391	10,882	18,509	11,461	13,026	4,904	14,719	14,672	7,409	21,982	28,819	572	0
Briefings	5,775	1,753	4,022	2,575	1,836	1,364	2,738	3,037	1,456	4,319	5,042	695	38
Custody	3,655	863	2,732	1,070	1,677	908	1,941	1,714	987	2,668	2,324	931	0
Incident	19,752	4,136	15,616	7,149	8,021	4,582	10,378	9,374	5,630	14,122	1,006	18,681	65
Com. work	22,206	13,310	8,896	9,165	8,532	4,509	10,650	11,556	6,978	15,228	2,324	1,331	0
Travel	10,096	3,582	6,514	4,049	4,562	1,485	5,180	4,916	2,344	7,752	150	9,946	0
P-inc. work	6,421	1,697	4,724	3,603	2,287	531	3,569	2,852	1,824	4,597	1,892	4,529	0
Other	10,108	4,640	5,468	4,259	4,011	1,838	4,843	5,265	2,841	7,267	5,783	4,265	60
Uncoded	2,685	616	2,069	1,445	910	330	1,164	1,521	1,154	1,531	376	364	1,945
Total	110,089	41,479	68,550	44,776	44,862	20,451	55,182	54,907	30,623	79,466	47,716	41,314	2,108

Table C2 – Breakdown of shifts

	SNT	TPT	Urban	Rural	Weekend	Weekday	All
Shifts	77	117	99	95	53	141	194
Minutes observed	41,479	68,610	55,182	54,907	30,833	79,256	110,089

Appendix D – Incident analysis

Chart 1: All incidents responded to during the study period, urban areas

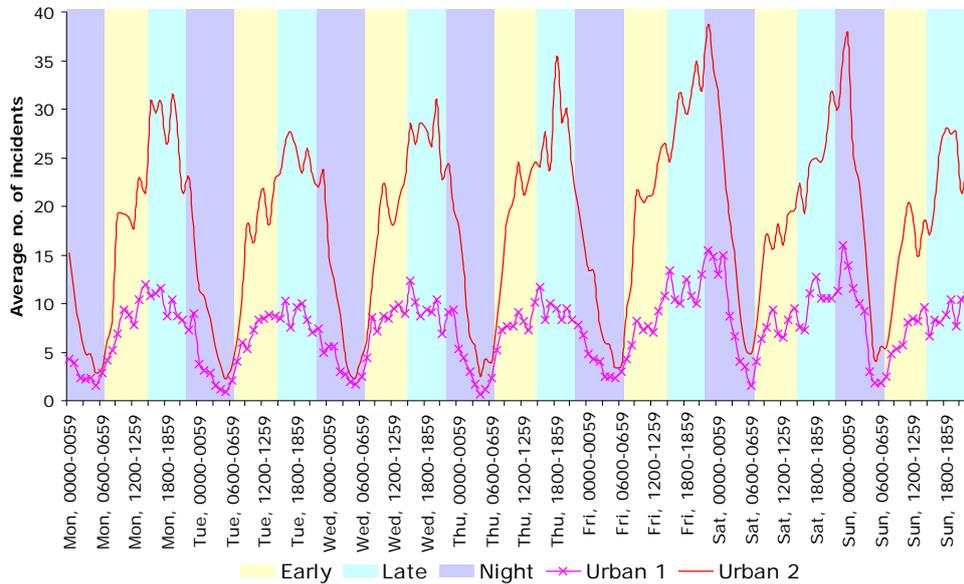
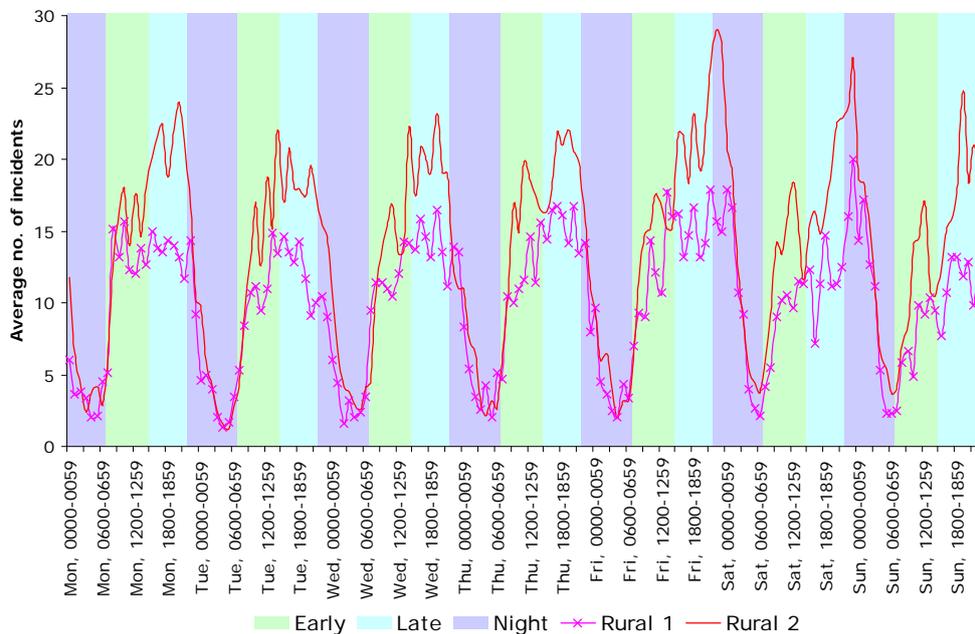


Chart 2: All incidents responded to during the study period, rural areas



Note: Urban 1 and Rural 1 study period was 02.06.2010-15.07.2010; Urban 2 and Rural 2 study period was 24.06.2010-30.07.2010. Some shifts overlap, so shift colour boundaries should be taken to be indicative. 'Average' incidents = mean incidents.

Appendix E – ‘Diary’ tool

Time Period (24 hour clock)	In/Out of station		Activity		Duration of sub task (minutes)	Initial Incident Type	Outcome (and code if 4)		Context		Detailed information on the task What were the details of the task? Clarify the context/activity? Provide as much detail as possible	MD	PW (number of minutes)	EI
			Main Task Code	Sub Task Code			1. Task as original		1. Self tasked					
	2. Non criminal	3. ASB					(a)Community/Team targets	(b)Other						
Main activity start time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> Main activity end time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Main activity start time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> Main activity end time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Main activity start time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> Main activity end time <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/> : <input type="text"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	minutes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Task	Code	Task	Code	Task	Code	Task	Code	Task	Code	Task	Code
Admin	1	Booking in	A	Community work	5	To station	A	Personal (non-work) activities	C	Universal codes	
Case file building	A	Custody duties (specify)	B	Checks/stops	A	To appointment	B	Meeting with other CJ agency	D	Request/gather info - specify	AA
Other Incident-linked admin-specify	B	Interviewing detainees	C	Foot patrol	B	Transporting evidence/other (specify)	C	Cover other duties	E	Request other support - specify	BB
Non-incident linked paperwork - specify	C	Attending/dealing with incident	4	Formal community visits/meetings	C	Post Incident Work	7	Special operations (inc. formal visits)	F	Discussion with colleague	CC
Personal work admin (e.g. emails)-specify	D	Responding/travelling to incident	A	Informal visits/stop-off	D	Interview victim/witness/suspect	A	Training	G	Link with other organisation - specify	DD
Completing staff appraisals/PDRs	E	Arrest	B	Information enquiries from MOP	E	Returning property	B			Making enquiries – specify	EE
Briefings/Meetings	2	Intelligence gathering/establishing background	C	Intelligence-gathering	F	Taking statement from witness/victim	C			Other (specify)	FF
Handover	A	Formal warning (e.g. issue fixed penalty)	D	Outstanding warrants	G	Victim/witness assurance	D			Probationer tutoring/training	GG
Special Ops	B	Informal warning/order maintenance	E	Scene guarding/security	H	Other activities	8			Supervisory role	HH
Standard	C	Pursuit/give chase	F	Vehicle patrol	I	Court duties/escort	A			Support other Force	JJ
Custody	3	Search (of person/property)	G	Travel	6	Meal / other breaks	B			Waiting (specify for whom)	KK

Appendix F

Statistical testing results⁺

Group 1	Group 2	Variable	Mean 1 ⁺⁺	Mean 2 ⁺⁺	T	DF	95% CI (mean difference)	
							Lower	Upper
SNT officers	TPT officers	Time spent on community work	95.8	26.8	8.5	180	1.1 ^{***}	4.8 ^{***}
SNT officers	TPT officers	Time spent dealing with incidents	20.1	93.7	-6.4	115	1.8 ^{***}	6.1 ^{***}
Weekend shifts (all)	Weekday shifts (all)	Time spent out of station	295.8	283.3	0.4	192	0.8	0.8
Weekend shifts (SNT)	Weekday shifts (SNT)	Time spent out of station	292.3	297.4	-0.2	75	0.2	0.2
Weekend shifts (TPT)	Weekday shifts (TPT)	Time spent out of station	298.2	272.7	0.5	115	-0.2	0.5
SNT officers	TPT officers	Time spent on paperwork	71.9	94.7	-1.7	164	0.6 [*]	1.1 [*]

* Significant to 90% confidence level

** Significant to 95% confidence level

*** Significant to 99% confidence level

⁺Statistical testing utilised the following transformation: Log10 (1+variable)

⁺⁺Summary statistics have been back-transformed to report in original scale