



College of  
**Policing**

Working together  
to share knowledge

# Problem-oriented policing

Effective implementation of problem solving

Scope of practice guidelines

January 2021

# Scope of practice guidelines

## 1. Title

Problem-oriented policing: Effective implementation of problem solving.

## 2. Overall approach

College of Policing guidelines are developed by bringing together a committee of frontline practitioners with subject matter experts and academic researchers to develop guidelines for policing based on evidence. The committee considers systematically gathered evidence and practitioner experience in developing the guidelines, which are subject to public consultation before being finalised and released by the College.

## 3. Focus

Problem-oriented policing (POP), also known as problem solving, is an approach to tackling crime and disorder that involves a structured process of identifying a specific problem, through analysis to understand the problem, the creation of a tailored response and an assessment of the impact of the response.<sup>1</sup> There is a large body of evidence that has consistently shown that problem solving is effective in reducing a variety of types of crime and disorder in a range of contexts. Despite this evidence and widespread positive attitudes towards problem solving among police forces in England and Wales, research suggests that implementing POP across police forces is still a considerable challenge, particularly outside of the context of neighbourhood policing.

Therefore, the guidelines will seek to:

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<sup>1</sup> Goldstein H. (1990). 'Excellence in Problem-Oriented Policing'. In: Sidebottom A and others. (2020). 'Problem-Oriented Policing in England and Wales 2019' [internet]. Available from [discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10094764/1/Problem-Oriented%20Policing%20in%20England%20and%20Wales.pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10094764/1/Problem-Oriented%20Policing%20in%20England%20and%20Wales.pdf) [Accessed 16 December 2020].

- set out the actions required to effectively implement problem solving throughout policing
- set out the actions required by senior leaders to embed and enable problem solving

The actions needed for effective collaboration and engagement with partners, support agencies and other organisations will be considered in the development of the guidelines. However, these College-owned policing guidelines will not set out requirements for other organisations or consider broader national policy on the responsibility of different organisations.

These guidelines will complement the problem solving guidance found within the [neighbourhood policing guidelines](#) which sets out the essential elements of problem solving. This new set of guidelines will focus on its implementation across policing.

## 4. Intended audience

The guidelines are likely to be relevant to all officers, staff and volunteers involved in identifying, designing and implementing responses to crime and disorder problems. But, the primary audiences are likely to be: senior leaders, responsible for setting organisational strategy and driving performance, and officers and staff responsible for facilitating and motivating specific ways of working. These guidelines are aimed at:

- senior leaders who are responsible for setting organisational strategy and driving performance
- officers and staff responsible for facilitating and motivating specific ways of working; these could include, supervisors and those responsible for process and policy development

## 5. Context

### 5.1 College 'perennial policing challenges' analysis

The College has carried out research that identified 10 recurring 'perennial challenges' in policing. These are areas in which improvement in policing may be required with a need to focus on longer term problem solving and prevention was

identified as one of these challenges. The research identified multiple underlying system-wide issues contributing to the challenge. These include the prioritisation of short term reactive policing, a lack of structured problem solving by frontline officers, limited assessment of the impact of specific interventions and strategies, and challenges in sharing information across partners.

## 5.2 HMICFRS

Using findings from recent inspections, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) have noted that demand for policing services is currently increasing, placing pressure on resources. They consider that increasing the emphasis on preventing crime and building community relationships would provide opportunities to reduce demand.<sup>2</sup> Concerns involving problem solving were a consistent theme across the PEEL reports, especially in relation to how effective police forces were at preventing crime.<sup>3</sup> The application of problem solving techniques such as SARA (scanning, analysis, response and assessment) was seen as a crucial factor in reducing and solving crime. However, HMICFRS found that the application and understanding of problem solving by officers and staff was inconsistent. They also found that despite senior leaders stating their desire to be a preventative force, access to analysts, knowledge and training of officers and the prioritising of resources to deal with reactive demand acted as barriers to this.

## 5.3 Policing Vision

The National Police Chiefs' Council's (NPCC) Policing Vision 2025 sets out the need to develop a professional workforce prepared with the skills and capabilities necessary for policing in the 21st century. It sets out a 'need to ensure policing is

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<sup>2</sup> HMICFRS. (2020). 'State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2019' [internet]. [Available from justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-policing-2019.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-policing-2019.pdf) [Accessed January 2020].

<sup>3</sup> See, for example: HMICFRS. (2020). 'PEEL spotlight report: Diverging under pressure' [internet]. Available from [justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-spotlight-report-diverging-under-pressure-2018-19-overview.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/peel-spotlight-report-diverging-under-pressure-2018-19-overview.pdf) [Accessed 18 December 2020]. HMICRS. (2019). 'State of Policing: The Annual Assessment of Policing in England and Wales 2018' [internet]. Available from [justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-policing-2018.pdf](https://www.justiceinspectors.gov.uk/hmicfrs/wp-content/uploads/state-of-policing-2018.pdf) [Accessed 18 December 2020].

increasingly focused on proactive preventative activity as opposed to reacting to crime once it has occurred'.<sup>4</sup>

## 5.4 Current evidence base

A systematic review of 'The Effects of Problem-Oriented Policing on Crime and Disorder' was completed as part of the national Problem Solving and Demand Reduction Programme (PSDRP). This review updated the findings of the original POP systematic review<sup>5</sup> by synthesising the findings of published and unpublished evaluations of POP to December 2018 and analysed the effectiveness of problem solving in relation to reducing crime and disorder.<sup>6</sup> While this systematic review recognised that problem solving still required more rigorous evaluations, it found that problem solving was an effective approach to reducing a variety of types of crime and disorder.

The PSDRP also commissioned a mixed methods study to understand the extent and quality of problem solving in England and Wales and to identify obstacles and enablers to implementation.<sup>7</sup> The research suggested that a problem solving approach would help improve policing practices and to manage demands within the police service. However, the evidence also found that there were considerable challenges and barriers towards the successful implementation of problem solving and as a result it was not used consistently in contemporary policing. The research also found that successful implementation relied on commitment from senior leaders.

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<sup>4</sup> NPCC. (2014). 'Policing Vision 2025' [internet]. Available from [npcc.police.uk/documents/Policing%20Vision.pdf](https://npcc.police.uk/documents/Policing%20Vision.pdf) [Accessed 8 January 2021]. NPCC. (2015). 'National policing crime prevention strategy' [internet]. Available from [npcc.police.uk/documents/crime/2016/Final%20A4%20National%20Policing%20Crime%20Prevention%20Strategy.pdf](https://npcc.police.uk/documents/crime/2016/Final%20A4%20National%20Policing%20Crime%20Prevention%20Strategy.pdf) [Accessed 3 February 2021].

<sup>5</sup> Weisburd D and others. (2010). 'Is problem-oriented policing effective in reducing crime and disorder? Findings from a Campbell systematic review. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 9(1), pp 139-172.

<sup>6</sup> Hinkle JC and others. (2020). 'Problem-oriented policing for reducing crime and disorder: An updated systematic review and meta-analysis'. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 16(2).

<sup>7</sup> Sidebottom A and others. (2020). 'Problem-Oriented Policing in England and Wales 2019' [internet]. Available from [discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10094764/1/Problem-Oriented%20Policing%20in%20England%20and%20Wales.pdf](https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10094764/1/Problem-Oriented%20Policing%20in%20England%20and%20Wales.pdf) [Accessed 16 December 2020].

## 5.5 Existing national standards, guidance and advice

National guidance on problem solving is found in the neighbourhood policing guidelines. The guidelines provide a framework for frontline officers, staff, volunteers, supervisors and senior leaders to implement structured problem solving to deal with local priorities and collaborate with partners. Guidance is also provided on the SARA model which supports successful problem solving.

The PSDRP, College and NPCC have published a range of practice advice to support frontline officers, staff and senior leaders to implement, embed and sustain problem solving throughout policing and deliver individuals and forces with problem solving related information.<sup>8</sup>

The Policing Education and Qualification Framework and National Policing Curriculum also provide for learning and development in relation to problem solving.

## 6. Need for the guidelines

POP is one of the most extensively researched policing strategies and has been demonstrated to reduce a variety of types of crime and disorder and a range of problems beyond crime and disorder, for example, in relation to missing persons and mental health issues.<sup>9</sup> Consistent application of problem solving approaches across policing may support forces to reduce demand, particularly sources of repeat demand.

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<sup>8</sup> See, for example: College of Policing. (2019). 'Problem solving: learning and development interim practice advice' [internet]. Available from [profdev.college.police.uk/guidance-resource/problem-solving-learning-and-development-interim-practice-advice/problem-solving-practice-advice-v1-0/](https://profdev.college.police.uk/guidance-resource/problem-solving-learning-and-development-interim-practice-advice/problem-solving-practice-advice-v1-0/) [Accessed 3 February 2021]. Sidebottom A and others. (2020). 'Successful police problem-solving: A practice guide' [internet]. Available from [whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Problem-solving\\_practitioner\\_guide.pdf](https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Problem-solving_practitioner_guide.pdf) [Assessed 3 February 2021]. Sidebottom A and others. (2020). 'Implementing and sustaining problem-orientated policing: A guide' [internet]. Available from [whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Problem-solving\\_implementation\\_guide.pdf](https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Problem-solving_implementation_guide.pdf) [Assessed 3 February 2021].

<sup>9</sup> See, for example: Quinet K. (2012). 'Missing Persons' [Internet]. Available from [popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/problems/pdfs/missing\\_persons.pdf](https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/sites/default/files/problems/pdfs/missing_persons.pdf) [Accessed 5 February 2020]. Cordner G. (2006). 'People with Mental Illness' [internet]. Available from [popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/people\\_with\\_mental\\_illness.pdf](https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/people_with_mental_illness.pdf) [Accessed 5 February 2020].

Despite evidence indicating its effectiveness and widespread understanding of and positive attitudes towards problem solving among police forces in England and Wales, research indicates that implementing problem solving in a comprehensive and sustained way across police forces is still a considerable challenge.

## 7. Evidence gathering to inform the guidelines

The guidelines will primarily draw on the research undertaken as part of the PSDRP described in section 5.4. This will be supplemented by a search to ascertain whether there is additional recent research that can support the development of the guidelines.

Additional information will also be gathered to update understanding of the current policing context in light of the rapidly changing policing environment and any implications of the COVID-19 outbreak. This evidence will be gathered both by desk research and engagement with policing practitioners and other stakeholders.

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## **About the College**

We're the professional body for the police service in England and Wales.

Working together with everyone in policing, we share the skills and knowledge officers and staff need to prevent crime and keep people safe.

We set the standards in policing to build and preserve public trust and we help those in policing develop the expertise needed to meet the demands of today and prepare for the challenges of the future.

**[college.police.uk](https://college.police.uk)**