



College of
Policing

Working together
to share knowledge

Effective implementation of problem-oriented policing

Guidelines

Consultation

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Summary of guidelines

These evidence-based guidelines support the effective implementation of problem-oriented policing. They set out the actions that chief officers and other policing leaders should take to embed a sustainable problem-oriented policing approach in their organisation. These guidelines complement the [Neighbourhood policing guidelines](#), which include problem-solving as a key component. They also provide practical advice and supporting resources. These guidelines do not cover the effectiveness of specific problem-solving models, such as SARA (scanning, analysis, response, assessment).

Research evidence shows that problem-oriented policing is an effective strategy for reducing crime and disorder¹. Despite this evidence base, forces appear to find it challenging to implement sustainable problem-oriented policing. For example, inspections by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS), as well as peer reviews by the national Problem Solving and Demand Reduction Programme, have consistently found a mixed picture on how far problem-oriented policing has been embedded in forces.

To help forces embed sustainable problem-oriented policing, the guidelines cover the following areas:

- governance
- organisational infrastructure and capability
- partnerships

The supporting information that follows each guideline includes a brief summary of the evidence² and explains what the guideline might mean in practice. It also

¹ 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).

² Information about different types of evidence is included in the section 'How evidence-based are these guidelines?'.

provides practical suggestions to help implementation. These suggestions will be supported by other products that will be available alongside these guidelines.

Guidelines for chief officers

1. Organisational governance

Chief officers should ensure that organisational strategies include governance and performance processes that can drive problem-oriented policing in their force.

Essential elements include:

- identifying and empowering senior leaders to drive and deliver problem-oriented policing across the force
- ensuring that force strategies support problem-solving across all force functions, not just neighbourhood policing
- developing formal structures and processes to record, monitor, review and reward problem-solving activity

2. Organisational infrastructure and capability

Chief officers should ensure that officers, staff and volunteers have the organisational support (infrastructure) to deliver problem-oriented policing, as well as the relevant knowledge and skills (capability).

Essential elements include:

- providing specialist problem-solving and analytical support and advice, which should be available and accessible to all members of the force
- providing data and systems that facilitate problem-solving, which should be available and accessible to all members of the force
- providing opportunities to access and share good practice at force, regional, national and international levels
- ensuring that officers, staff and volunteers have access to learning and continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities related to problem-oriented policing
- providing clear, simple and accessible guidance

3. Partnerships

Chief officers should engage with relevant partners, communities and stakeholders at a strategic level to encourage their involvement in problem-solving.

This engagement should include:

- encouraging a shared approach to problem-solving – for example, exploring joint learning and CPD opportunities, as well as using shared problem-solving terminology, tools and methods
- facilitating the sharing of information to identify, inform and tackle problems
- jointly defining and prioritising problems, and encouraging collaborative working throughout the problem-solving process

Introduction

What are these guidelines for?

These evidence-based guidelines support the effective implementation and embedding of sustainable problem-oriented policing and partnership problem-solving.

Who are these guidelines for?

These guidelines are aimed at chief officers responsible for developing and implementing organisational strategy, and for facilitating and motivating specific ways of working. They are also relevant to all officers, staff and volunteers who are involved in identifying, designing and implementing responses to crime and disorder problems, as well as other recurring issues.

Who developed these guidelines?

These guidelines were developed collaboratively by a College of Policing development team and the College Guideline Committee, which consisted of frontline practitioners, subject matter experts and academics. The role of the Guideline Committee was to agree and finalise the scope, to consider academic and practitioner evidence, and to draft the guidelines, taking into account the views of stakeholders.

What is the difference between problem-solving and problem-oriented policing?

For the purpose of these guidelines, problem-solving refers to the steps and processes that individuals follow in order to work through a problem and the response. SARA is the problem-solving model most commonly used in policing. Problem-solving can be applied to any issue that has an impact on policing and/or the community. Problem-oriented policing refers to the strategy and infrastructure that is required to enable problem-solving to flourish across the organisation.

How evidence-based are these guidelines?

The guidelines and supporting resources are informed by research evidence that was drawn from a primary research study conducted as part of the national Problem Solving and Demand Reduction Programme in 2019³. Secondary data sources include a rapid evidence assessment⁴ (REA) carried out by the College as part of the development of the neighbourhood policing guidelines, as well as the most recent systematic review and meta-analysis⁵ looking at problem-oriented policing. They also reflect insights and practice examples gathered through discussions with 45 participants from 22 forces, as well as peer visits to forces. This is referred to throughout the guidelines as practitioner evidence.

Supporting resources

The guidelines include links to resources that will support chief officers and other policing leaders to implement these guidelines. The College will continue to develop these resources and to provide other forms of support.

³ 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).

⁴ Colover S and Quinton P. (2018). [**Neighbourhood policing: impact and implementation. Summary from a rapid evidence assessment**](#). College of Policing.

⁵ Sidebottom A and others. (2020). [**Problem-oriented policing in England and Wales 2019**](#). Problem Solving and Crime Reduction Programme.

Guidelines for chief officers

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- developing formal structures and processes to record, monitor, review and reward problem-solving activity

Evidence summary

Evidence suggests that sustained problem-solving activity across a force is driven by clear, visible and consistent support from senior leaders who champion problem-solving. Evidence indicates that effective leadership emphasises the importance of problem-oriented policing and reinforces any decisions for staff to participate in problem-solving activity over time. In order to incentivise problem-oriented policing, evidence suggests that effective strategic and operational governance structures are required. These structures should demonstrate the applicability and potential benefit of problem-solving to all areas of force activity and demand, not just within neighbourhood policing.

In relation to governance, evidence suggests that chief officers should establish formal structures that enable:

- the recording and monitoring of problem-solving activity, to ensure that problem-solving activity is taking place
- quality assurance, to ensure that problem-solving activity is being applied correctly
- regular assessment and monitoring of the impact of problem-solving activity

- the capturing and sharing of learning, to influence and inform future problem-solving activity
- successful problem-solving activity to be rewarded

Problem-oriented policing is an effective policing strategy for reducing crime and disorder, and for improving public confidence.

Chief officers have a critical role in the successful implementation of problem-oriented policing throughout their organisation, as they set the force's operating environment and priorities.

Ensuring that governance processes and structures incentivise problem-oriented policing, both at the strategic and at the operational level, supports effective implementation. Incorporating problem-oriented policing into a force-wide strategy, rather than just limiting it to neighbourhood policing, provides an opportunity to set the direction and articulate how the organisation intends to make problem-solving a core policing activity.

Reflecting problem-oriented policing in force strategies

When incorporating problem-oriented policing into an existing or new force strategy, you will need to consider:

- the overarching aim and desired outcomes of problem-oriented policing activity within the force
- what you need to be good at to deliver problem-oriented policing, including enabling factors
- how resources will be configured and deployed to meet the strategy's aims and objectives

The strategy should also be accompanied by an implementation plan to help embed the required changes across the organisation. Assessing your force's readiness for problem-oriented policing, as well as identifying any barriers that need to be tackled, will help to inform the plan. The self-assessment tool in the 'Implementing and sustaining problem-oriented policing' guide can help you do this (see the supporting resources below). By ensuring that your senior leaders have a good understanding and appreciation of problem-oriented policing and its benefits, this will help with

effective implementation and with recognising how the approach can be aligned with other police strategies.

Force practice examples

One force holds several meetings and reviews with senior leaders to ensure the effective governance and leadership of problem-solving. These include:

- a fortnightly meeting with the senior leadership team on neighbourhood policing
- weekly partnership meetings chaired by a chief inspector to provide a 'fresh eyes' approach to the problem, which helps to tailor and focus responses
- a live-time problem-solving event held at strategic level
- weekly reports sent to chief superintendents regarding high-level problem-solving issues

The College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) can assist with knowledge-sharing online events and practice exchanges between forces to help develop suitable strategies and implementation plans.

Forces should explore building on experiences of problem-solving in neighbourhood policing and other areas (if applicable), in order to see what opportunities are available to widen problem-solving activity across the force. This provides an opportunity to reflect on the force's current problem-solving activity, and to identify and assess factors that may encourage or inhibit wider implementation of problem-solving.

Forces should decide what is proportionate for different priorities, functions and levels of the organisation. For example, problem-solving can be applied to specialist operations and criminal investigation (eg, creating dedicated teams to help with high-demand problems, such as persons missing from home), as well as to back-office functions (such as fleet or Human Resources). Any learning from the wider application of problem-solving can also feed into, and enhance, current and established areas of problem-solving.

The College of Policing has also produced specific advice and guidance on applying problem-solving in order to reduce crime that can lead to homicide ([The Homicide Prevention Framework](#)).

Governance

A strategic lead should be accountable for delivery of the strategy and should drive implementation. Ideally, this should be as a member of the chief officer team. Having a strategic lead for problem-oriented policing will demonstrate commitment to the approach and will allow them to take ownership for:

- promoting the benefits of problem-solving (both internally and externally)
- balancing the demands of embedding problem-oriented policing with other national initiatives and priorities
- helping to create a strong problem-solving identity and ethos across the organisation – for example, allocating ownership of problem-solving plans to senior staff and management in different departments
- establishing and resourcing new infrastructure to support problem-solving across the force
- incorporating problem-solving into recruitment and promotion processes
- leading communication campaigns on problem-solving in force

The strategic lead should also consider developing a governance structure that can help them with the above. For example, this may involve appointing tactical and operational leads in different parts of the organisation with responsibility for delivering components of the strategy and implementation plan, and for ensuring that problem-solving activity takes place across the force.

Performance

To ensure accountability and to understand the impact of problem-solving, forces should consider how they will record, monitor and review problem-solving activity.

Problem-solving plans (PSPs) can help to achieve this aim. Forces should consider:

- the development of a PSP template that can help promote a consistent approach across the force
- criteria for when problem-solving activity meets a threshold that requires a PSP
- whether different types of PSP are required for different circumstances and audiences (for example, broad PSPs aimed at entrenched or priority problems and light PSPs for wider use across the organisation)

- what platform is used to store and access PSPs
- the training that is required to ensure that staff know when and how to develop and submit PSPs

PSPs also provide an opportunity to include guidance and aides-memoires that can help officers and staff to approach problem-solving.

Considerations for monitoring and reviewing problem-solving activity include the following.

- Who reviews PSPs (for example, a supervisor or problem-solving tactical advisor) and how does this feed into the force performance approach?
- When are reviews conducted (for example, at fixed points – such as every 28 days – or variable and dependent on the problem)?
- How are problems resolved or escalated through the monitoring and review process?
- How is learning on the problem-solving process, as well as interventions and outcomes, captured and made available for future use?

Rewarding good problem-solving activity can incentivise and increase the uptake of problem-solving across the force. Forces should consider developing mechanisms for identifying, acknowledging and rewarding good practice. They should also encourage the submission of good problem-solving practice to the Tilley awards. This provides an opportunity to celebrate and share good practice at regional and national levels.

Force practice examples

Examples of problem-solving performance principles that forces have implemented include:

- using IT systems to monitor the progress of problem-solving activity and carry out quality assurance
- reporting progress of problem-solving activity at local performance boards

Supporting resources

- **Implementing and sustaining problem-oriented policing: A guide**
 - p 9: Opposition to problem-oriented policing and ways of responding
 - p 23: Preparedness for problem-oriented policing: a self-assessment tool
- **Neighbourhood policing guidelines and supporting information**
- **Homicide Prevention Framework**
- **Competency and Values Framework**
- **Cost benefit model**
- **NPCC National Policing Prevention Strategy**

2. Organisational infrastructure and capability

Chief officers should ensure that officers, staff and volunteers have the organisational support (infrastructure) to deliver problem-oriented policing, as well as the relevant knowledge and skills (capability).

Essential elements include:

- providing specialist problem-solving and analytical support and advice, which should be available and accessible to all members of the force
- providing data and systems that facilitate problem-solving, which should be available and accessible to all members of the force
- providing opportunities to access and share good practice at force, regional, national and international levels
- ensuring that officers, staff and volunteers have access to learning and CPD opportunities related to problem-oriented policing
- providing clear, simple and accessible guidance

Evidence summary

Evidence highlights the importance of ensuring that officers, staff and volunteers have the capabilities to deliver and support a problem-oriented approach.

Providing specialist support and tools, as well as access to subject matter and practitioner experts who provide continuous feedback on problem-solving activity, will assist effective implementation and can help to push problem-solving beyond neighbourhood policing teams.

Effective problem-solving is shown to be more evident where officers staff and volunteers have access to suitable analytical, data and systems support.

Dedicated problem-solving systems can help to enable analysis and identify good practice. Accessible training, guidance and examples of good practice are also required by staff to ensure effective problem-solving.

Chief officers should consider a multi-faceted approach to developing infrastructure and capability that best meets the requirements of their force. They should reflect on their force's ability to develop and/or align problem-solving skills, practice and processes, in order to successfully address their force's priorities and everyday

business. Incorporating problem-oriented policing into force strategies will guide decision making in this area.

Infrastructure

Identifiable problem-solving tactical leads, advisors and analysts who understand how problem-solving works for the organisation – including the benefits associated with problem-oriented policing – can help officers, staff and volunteers to problem-solve effectively. Specifically, they can:

- support officers and staff in applying problem-solving to a diverse range of functions and issues
- help to coordinate and prioritise problem-solving activity across the force
- monitor problem-solving activity to ensure that it is taking place, is effective and is evidence-based
- capture learning and ensure that it is available and accessible for future problem-solving
- contribute to incentivising activity and to sharing experiences and practice

Forces should also ensure that appropriate analytical support is available to help problem-solving specialists – as well as other officers and staff – to maximise the use of information sources and data, in order to inform all components of SARA.

Force practice examples

One force is implementing specialist problem-solving teams that work with frontline officers and staff. These teams provide bespoke assistance to practitioners, either with applying the problem-solving methodology in practice, or with extracting and analysing data.

Easy-to-use systems should be in place to inform and record problem-solving activity. Forces should consider how data from multiple sources (inside and outside of policing) can be accessed and used by officers and staff to inform problem-solving. This can include automated data reports (for example, in relation to crime and incident rates involving repeat victims, offenders and locations), in addition to proactively using different data sources. Consideration should also be given to

developing a data strategy (what data sources are available), as well as a knowledge strategy (how data is used), in order to help problem-solving activity.

Force practice examples

Several forces are using locally developed analytical or off-the-shelf intelligence applications to produce routine analysis that shows officers and staff where, when and for whom high-demand problems are occurring. These approaches are helpful even when basic and not live, as they still allow practitioners to work independently without outside expert help and to concentrate problem-solving activity.

Capability

Effective learning and CPD are needed to ensure that officers and staff understand, and can deliver, high-quality problem-solving.

Forces should consider developing blended approaches to learning and CPD. For example:

- providing brief inputs (one or two hours) that are suitable for all on basic problem-solving methods, delivered by senior champions or tactical advisors
- incorporating problem-solving into established training courses
- bite-size online inputs
- problem-solving workshops aimed at various levels of the organisation (for example, newly promoted sergeants, supervisors and senior leaders)
- learning events that focus on practical examples of using problem-solving approaches outside of the traditional neighbourhood policing issues
- refresher and ongoing CPD opportunities for all officers and staff to reflect effective problem-solving in the force

Chief officers should ensure that their officers, staff and volunteers have access to simple and clear guidance on how and when to problem-solve. Guidance should combine problem-solving approaches with practical examples of good problem-solving activity. Guidance should be applicable, meaningful and proportionate to all officers and staff across the organisation. Different products may be required for different audiences and departments in the organisation. Guidance can be made

available as a bespoke product (for example, a beginners' guide to problem-solving) or incorporated into existing products and processes (such as advice on problem-solving being included within the PSP). Forces should consider making use of – or adapting – existing guidance that relates to problem-solving, rather than developing new products.

Forces should consider methods for ensuring that guidance and practice can be shared across the organisation. This may require establishing force repositories (systems) and/or networks (force leads, specialists and other interested parties).

Problem-solving advice and practice is also available and accessible at a regional and/or national level. Some of these national resources – for example, the College of Policing practice bank and the problem-solving community on Knowledge Hub – can also be used to share practice beyond the force. Officers and staff should be able to make use of force, regional and national resources to access and share problem-solving practice.

Supporting resources

- [**Problem solving: Learning and development interim practice advice**](#)
- [**Implementing and sustaining problem-oriented policing: A guide**](#)
- [**Neighbourhood policing guidelines and supporting information**](#)
- [**Crime reduction toolkit: Problem-oriented policing**](#)
- [**Center for Problem-Oriented Policing**](#)

3. Partnerships

Chief officers should engage with relevant partners, communities and stakeholders at a strategic level to encourage their involvement in problem-solving.

This engagement should include:

- encouraging a shared approach to problem-solving – for example, exploring joint learning and CPD opportunities, as well as using shared problem-solving terminology, tools and methods
- facilitating the sharing of information to identify, inform and tackle problems
- jointly defining and prioritising problems, and encouraging collaborative working throughout the problem-solving process

Evidence summary

Evidence highlights that partnership working is important to problem-solving. Aligning priorities with partners can improve cooperation and reduce potential duplication of activity. Working with partners may also increase capacity for problem-solving, may provide access to alternative solutions and may enable non-crime issues to be passed on to the most suitable agency.

Public involvement in identifying and defining problems is also key to successful neighbourhood policing programmes.

Senior leaders can support effective problem-solving by working with partners at a strategic level to facilitate and support problem-solving. This may include aligning priorities, clarifying roles and responsibilities, and agreeing data-sharing protocols to protect vulnerable people. Chief officers should establish strategic and collaborative partnerships to accomplish shared objectives, both across forces and outside the police service. Stakeholder mapping helps to identify the most appropriate partners who can help to resolve specific problems. In most successful problem-solving, partners are not limited to statutory partners and agencies. Partners will often include the private and voluntary sectors, academics, individuals and community groups. Identifying the partners who are necessary to deliver a sustainable change is a critical element of the process.

Without effective data sharing between partners, it will be more difficult to develop the detailed problem specifications that are needed for effective problem-solving, based on multiple data sources. It is important that senior leaders understand the roles, responsibilities and priorities of partners. Senior leaders should work with partners to develop systems and protocols to share data securely, and should help partners to overcome any barriers to implementing these systems and protocols.

Mapping partner data sources and agreeing data sharing arrangements, including making police data sources available to others where possible, should facilitate timely access. This should also encourage a consistent approach to problem-solving across all partners.

Joint training, workshops and conferences on processes and activity are likely to help facilitate effective partnership working. Joint award ceremonies may also be effective in encouraging, and learning from, good practice.

In order to build and maintain effective working relationships with partners, forces should consider how they provide consistent communication channels and representation in groups. This could include providing single points of contact and ensuring that effective handovers are carried out when staff move posts. Some forces have found that police staff, who tend to stay longer in post, can provide this consistency. Chief officers should also consider working with local universities and academics to support them in evaluating problem-solving activity, including cost-benefit analysis. Forces should be aware that partners may focus on different approaches to problem-solving (for example, the public health approach and/or asset-based management approach). In these circumstances, problem-oriented policing strategies and processes can complement other models and other approaches that are also based on a specific model.

Supporting resources

- [National Problem Solving Conference](#)
- [Public health approach](#)
- [Asset-based management approach](#)

About the College

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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.

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