

2016

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10026.1/5121>

Routledge

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Policing the Countryside in a Devolving UK

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Published in Donnermeyer, J (ed) (2016) Routledge International handbook of Rural
Criminology

Introduction

Rural policing in the UK is caught between demands for efficiency on one hand and a desire for greater community accountability on the other (Yarwood and Mawby 2011). Centripetal economic forces have driven the location of police resources towards centralised, urban locations but, at the same time, have been countered by demands for visibility and accountability (Yarwood 2003, 2008). Although crime rates are lower in the countryside, it is widely recognised that there is also a need take account of rurality in operational policing (Gardner and Yarwood 2000, Gilling 2011, Wooff 2015). Various partnerships have been deployed to reduce feelings of isolation, contribute to feelings of community and to prevent crimes, real or imagined, from threatening the way the countryside is lived, imagined and experienced by residents and visitors.

The multi-agency nature of these initiatives have raised questions about who is in charge of rural policing (Yarwood 2011) and what visions of rurality are being policed (Gilling 2011). In the past these have been answered by looking at the community level by, for example, considering the effectiveness of local crime partnerships (Lawton et al 2001, Yarwood 2010) but, to date, little consideration has been given to the ways that macro-level changes in police governance impact on rural areas. This

is perhaps surprising given the growing significance of devolution in the UK (Clifford and Morphet 2015) and the way it is impacting on the provision of services in the UK. Many UK-wide agencies, including the police, have been dismantled and replaced at the national or regional level (Shaw and MacKinnon 2011) and, at the same time, the state has also withdrawn from the responsibility of service provision, leaving it to be filled by the private and voluntary sector (Woolvin et al 2015).

In this chapter we consider the impact of these changes on rural policing in the UK. The chapter is divided into three parts. The first introduces devolution in the UK and outlines its effect on police forces. Following this we compare the effects of devolution on policing in England and Wales, where forty-three remain accountable to Westminster, and Scotland, which is policed by a single police force that is financed and answerable to Holyrood. We conclude by comparing and contrasting the impact of devolution on policing in England and Wales and Scotland.

Devolution in the UK

Devolution refers to changes in the legitimacy of governing bodies, the decentralisation of resources, and the decentralisation of authority (Donahue 1997). It has widely been viewed as a significant global trend (MacKinnon 2015), although its nature, form and pace varies considerably between different countries (Rodriguez-Pose and Gill 2003). Since the 1990s the process of devolution has been particularly significant to the United Kingdom¹ where a series of reforms have moved powers away from the UK's Parliament towards devolved national parliaments and

¹ The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland comprises of the four nations of England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Great Britain refers to England, Scotland and Wales.

assemblies. Following a referendum in 1997, the Scottish Parliament was established as the legislative body for Scotland with powers to govern most domestic policies. In the same year, the National Assembly of Wales (or Welsh Assembly) was established to administer Wales. It initially had little legislative power although direct law-making powers were granted to the Assembly following another referendum in 2011. The Northern Ireland Assembly was established in 1999 following the 1998 Good Friday agreement and is an elected, power-sharing assembly with legislative powers (MacKinnon 2015). There continues to be no national governance body for England.

As a consequence of these changes, policing has undergone significant reorganisation. In 2013, Police Scotland was established by the Scottish Parliament as a single, national force through the merger of the eight former territorial forces. In 2001, Northern Ireland's Royal Ulster Constabulary was re-named the Police Service of Northern Ireland and made accountable to the Northern Ireland Assembly, as part of wider reforms envisaged in the Good Friday Agreement. The Silk Commission (Silk 2014) argued for operational police powers to be devolved to the Welsh Assembly but, currently, the responsibility for policing in England and Wales resides in Westminster and is undertaken by forty-three forces whose territories have remained largely unchanged since their creation through the 1968 Police Act. In 2012 Police Authorities, which oversaw the work of each police force, were replaced by elected Police and Crime Commissioners with responsibility for overseeing budgets and holding Chief Constables accountable for their force. A degree of decentralisation has therefore occurred in English and Welsh policing.

Policing across the UK has also been devolved in cross-institutional ways to 'markets in one case, local communities in the other', a process referred to as 'multilateralization' (Bayley and Shearing 2001). Community-based forms of policing are widespread across the UK, as evidenced by Neighbourhood Watch Schemes and the growth of local crime prevention partnerships (Yarwood 2011). Although Mawby (2011) suggests that there has been little uptake of private security in rural areas, some of the most far-reaching forms of privatisation have been undertaken by a rural force. In 2012 the private security company G4S was contracted by Lincolnshire Police Force to design, build and run police stations and custody suites. Half of Lincolnshire's civilian staff were transferred to G4S and, as a result, the force has one of the lowest staff costs in England and Wales (£13.47 per head of population compared to £44.30 on average (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies 2015). Such moves, although controversial, illustrate Bayley and Shearing's (2001) point that governments 'are actively promoting the sharing of responsibility for policing with new institutions'.

The consequences of police devolution in all its forms have yet to be evaluated in rural places. For many years it has been argued that the centralisation of policing has stripped the countryside of staff and resources. It follows that de-centralisation may lead to more locally-sensitive forms of rural policing. Greater self-governance may be perceived as a chance to do things according to the will of local residents rather than according to the dictates of a bureaucrat working in an urban office. To begin considering these issues, this chapter continues by comparing the impacts of devolution on rural policing in Great Britain. Comparisons are made between rural policing in England and Wales, which remains under the control of Westminster but

is operationalised by forty-three territorial forces, and Scotland, where policing has been devolved to Holyrood but is undertaken by just one police force².

Rural Policing in England and Wales

Policing in England and Wales is the responsible to the UK Government in Westminster but the direction of local policing is determined by Police and Crime Commissioners³ (PCCs). PCCs have responsibility for appointing Chief Constables; holding them to account; providing a link between the police and local communities; overseeing crime reduction; ensuring value for money; setting local budgets and reporting annually on progress. PCCs are elected by public vote, allowing the public a say in the way that local policing is conducted (although the turn-out for their election was very low (between 10%-20%), with ten times more spoilt ballot papers than in other elections (Renwick 2012)). PCCs are required to set out their force's strategy through the publication of a Police and Crime Plan (PCPs) that outlines their force's priorities and how these will be evaluated. PCPs therefore offer territorial forces the opportunity to develop forms of policing that are sensitive to local geographies and concerns.

Consequently, rural forces have an opportunity to prioritise rural policing through the PCPs. While very few forces state that rural policing is one their key aims *per se*, rurality is deemed to be significant to the practices of many forces. Three key themes emerge. First, forces recognise that some crimes are unique to rural areas, such as:

² There is not space in this chapter to consider Northern Ireland given the sectarian complexities that cross-cut rural policing in the province. This is worthy of greater consideration elsewhere.

³ Except in London where the elected Mayor is responsible for policing

'hare coursing, metal theft and heritage crime' (The Police and Crime Plan for Lincolnshire April 2013 - March 2017: 6);

'theft of livestock, theft or damage of agricultural equipment, metal and fuel theft, damage to crops etc are real issues.' (Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole Police and Crime Plan April 2013 – March 2017: 30);

that require specific rural policing policies to combat them. Gloucestershire, for example, has trained some officers as Rural and Environmental Crime Liaison Officers (RECLOs) in addition to their normal duties and has operated mobile police stations for a number of years.

Second, a discourse pervades that rural areas suffer from the same crimes as urban areas, thus:

'drug and alcohol misuse, internet fraud/harassment, bullying and theft of mobile phones/computers affect young people across the four counties, even the most rural areas' (Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Plan 2013-2018: 8).

Isolation is frequently seen as exacerbating the fear of these crimes and impacting on the ways they can be policed effectively. DyfedPowys police highlights that 'geography is our big challenge' (Dyfed-Powys Police and Crime Plan 2013-2018: 8) and other forces, such as North Yorkshire, emphasis that they are required to police a very wide range of areas, from urban to rural.

Thirdly, and despite these issues, many forces emphasise that rural areas should be policed as well as urban ones. The following two forces aimed to:

'reduce by 50% the gap in solved crime rates that currently exists between rural and non-rural beats whilst improving existing solved crime rates in non-rural areas'. (Hampshire & Isle of Wight Police and Crime Plan 2013-2017: 12); and

'achieve maximum value for money across the organisation with resources prioritised towards frontline policing in both urban and rural areas' (North Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan 2013 – 2017: 5)

Often, though, terms such as 'balance' and 'appropriateness', rather than equality, are used. Thus Dorset's PCP discusses the need for 'neighbourhood policing that is appropriate for both rural and urban communities in Dorset' (Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole Police and Crime Plan April 2013 – March 2017: 15). This gives police forces some digression to use other methods, perhaps deemed appropriate but nevertheless cheaper, to tackle rural crime. Essex PCP refers to the use of Special Constables (unpaid police officers) to tackle rural crime. It notes funding will be used to 'create and equip two Special Constabulary Rural Crime teams, consisting of officers with a strong knowledge of rural communities, dedicated to tackling crime in our countryside' (Police and Crime Commission for Essex, Police and Crime Plan, an update and look forward 2014). It is unclear why regular, paid officers should not have as good knowledge of the countryside as their part-time counterparts! Table 1 illustrates that rural forces have less officers per head of population and higher proportions of Special Constables (unpaid, voluntary police officers) and Police

Community Support Officers (PCSO). The proportions are highest in ‘less’ and ‘middling’ rural forces and, as Cambridgeshire and Essex exemplify, it would appear that unpaid volunteers or cheaper staff are used to police the more isolated areas of these constabularies.

Rurality of Forces ⁴	No. of Forces	No. of FTE Constables	FTE Constables /100,000 Population, 2014	No. of PCSOs	PCSOs as a % of FTE constables	No of Specials	Specials as % of FTE constables	Crimes per 1000 population
<i>Most Rural</i>	4	5086	141	747	15	727	15	45
<i>Less Rural</i>	9	13826	139	1673	12	2348	17	49
<i>Middleing</i>	14	30801	138	3508	12	4973	16	57
<i>More Urban</i>	11	28219	157	3255	11	3500	12	58
<i>Most Urban</i>	5	49917	233	3091	7	6211	12	60
England and Wales	43	127849	175	12274	10	17759	14	61

Table 1: Staffing of police forces in England and Wales by rurality. Source: Aust and Simmons, 2002; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies 2015

This largely reflects that the police continue to be largely⁵ centrally funded through grants paid by the Home Office, the Department for Communities and Local Government or the Welsh Assembly Government⁶. Between October 2010 and March 2015 there was a 20% reduction in central government funding as part of the Coalition Government’s drive to cut public spending. A further 5% cut will occur in 2015/2016 with more cuts likely in the future.

⁴ Based on Aust and Simmons’ (2002) classification.

⁵ The remainder (about 20%) is locally raised through a precept paid by residents as part of their Council Taxes.

⁶ This included some consideration of sparsity. About a quarter of local police funding also comes from a precept of local council tax that is paid by residents to their local authorities

Rurality		Officers 2010	Officers 2014	Difference (%)	Constables /100,000 Population, 2014	
Most Rural	Dyfed-Powys	1487	1123	75	159	
	Lincolnshire	1457	1091	75	113	
	North Yorkshire	1835	1408	77	130	
	North Wales	1999	1464	73	162	
		6778	5086	75%	141	
Less Rural	Cambridgeshire	1816	1370	75	128	
	Cumbria	1542	1150	74	178	
	Devon & Cornwall	4437	3096	70	139	
	Durham	1870	1228	69	160	
	Gloucestershire	1675	1188	71	149	
	Norfolk	2072	1582	76	136	
	Suffolk	1541	1226	80	130	
	West Mercia	2991	1966	66	119	
	Wiltshire	1502	1020	68	112	
			19446	13826	71%	139
Middling	Avon and Somerset	4131	2800	68	135	
	Bedfordshire	1583	1019	64	123	
	Derbyshire	2564	1788	70	138	
	Dorset	1853	1217	66	122	
	Essex	4549	3196	70	141	
	Gwent	1806	1330	74	176	
	Hampshire	4690	3247	69	129	
	Humberside	2606	1701	65	137	
	Kent	4743	3268	69	144	
	Leicestershire	2891	2043	71	155	
	Northamptonshire	1715	1239	72	133	
	Sussex	4150	2805	68	129	
	Thames Valley	5571	4346	78	150	
	Warwickshire	1180	802	68	113	
		44032	30801	70%	138	
More Urban	Cheshire	2674	1925	72	142	
	Cleveland	2025	1382	68	193	
	Hertfordshire	2703	1927	72	129	
	Lancashire	4543	3074	68	159	
	Northumbria	5184	3646	70	206	
	Nottinghamshire	2972	2158	73	145	
	South Wales	3786	2861	76	172	
	South Yorkshire	3723	2722	73	160	
	Staffordshire	2660	1729	65	121	
	Surrey	2395	1938	80	132	
	West Yorkshire	7321	4857	66	170	
			39986	28219	70%	157
	Most Urban	Greater Manchester	9995	6997	70	201
City of London		1017	746	73		
Metropolitan		40575	30932	76	300	
Merseyside		5529	3954	72	222	
West Midlands		10980	7288	66	209	
		68096	49917	73%	233	
England and Wales		178311	127849	72%	211	

Table 2: Cuts to police officers 2010-2014 by rurality. Source: Aust and Simmons, 2002; Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies 2015

The impact of the budget cuts on police forces in England and Wales has been seismic. Amongst the many changes has been a 72% reduction in police officers with some of the highest losses occurring in the most rural forces (Table 2). It seems

likely that these cuts will be felt most in areas of neighbourhood policing and, by implication, rural areas where this style of policing is important.

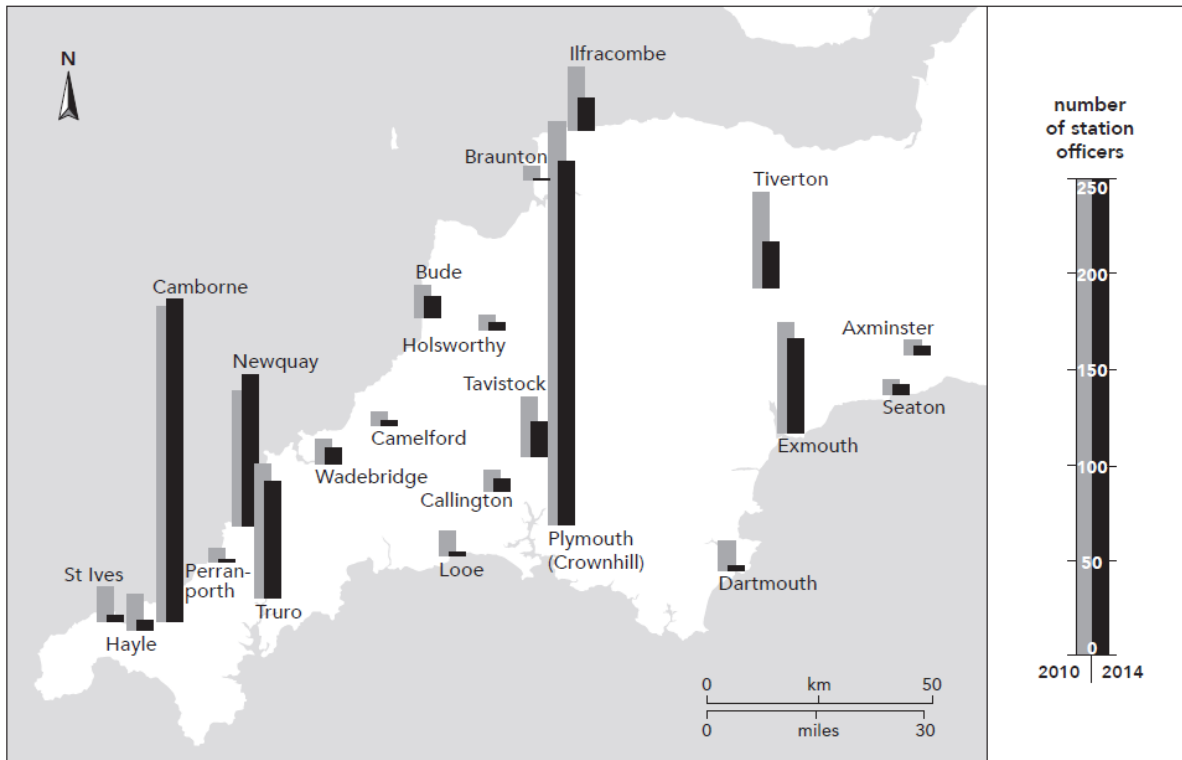


Figure 1: Losses of Office in Devon and Cornwall Police Force, Dec 2010 – Dec 2014. Source BBC <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-devon-32324634>

In November 2014 the Chief Constable of Lincolnshire Police Force wrote a letter to the Home Secretary expressing his concern at the scale of these cuts and noting, amongst other things, they would lead to the loss of policing functions, including the end of ‘meaningful community policing’, the ceasing of pro-active patrols and a lengthening of response times (Rhodes 2014). Lincolnshire is one of the most rural forces in the country (Aust and Simmons 2002) and it seems likely cuts to pro-active policing will be felt most keenly in more isolated areas. A recent government report

on the impacts of austerity (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabularies 2014) makes virtually no reference to rural policing but concedes that 'in a large rural area it may be appropriate for neighbourhood teams to be more mobile and to be sent to emergency calls' (p.116). The scene seems set for the large-scale withdrawal of visible, permanent policing from rural areas. Indeed evidence from Devon and Cornwall shows that losses of police officers have been highest in rural areas, while some urban ones have actually gained officers (Figure 1). So, although the PCC for North Yorkshire may urge her constituents to let her know if 'rural crime is not being taken seriously enough' (North Yorkshire Police and Crime Plan 2013 – 2017: 2), she may lack the resources to allay these concerns.

The delivery of policing in Policing in England and Wales is therefore rather like a Googly in that it appears to be decentralised but, more than ever, is determined by policy dictates from Westminster. Rather than devolving power, it is a classic example of 'governance from a distance' that utilises new governance structures to do the work of government (Garland 1996). In the case of policing, PCCs and PCPs appear to offer greater sensitivity to rural issues but in reality provide a convenient scapegoat for the non-delivery of policing to the countryside. In Scotland, however, despite devolution decentralising power from Westminster to Edinburgh, recent years have witnessed a large degree of centralisation in the way that policing is conducted.

Centralising forces: The introduction of Police Scotland

Devolution and the establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 have led to new geographies of policing in Scotland and important changes to the way that it is governed. In a move primarily designed to reduce the cost of policing, the *Police*

and Fire Reform Act (Scotland) 2012 (Scottish Government, 2012a) led to the formation of Police Scotland on 1st April 2013. This single, national force was the culmination of a long programme of creeping centralisation (Fyfe 2014). In the 1850s there were over ninety local police forces in Scotland, but as a result of local government reorganisation in 1975, the number of forces went from twenty-two to eight. These eight forces existed until the reforms in 2013. The impact of the single force on rural communities has yet to be fully understood, but with ninety-four percent of Scotland classed as rural by the Scottish Government's six-fold urban-rural policing definition, these areas should arguably be of great concern to the police (Scottish Government, 2010).

As well as geographical changes, forces underwent significant changes in governance. The 1967 Police (Scotland) Act introduced a tripartite arrangement, where the central government contributed fifty-one percent to the costs associated with policing, the local authority forty-nine percent and the Chief Constable of the local force making up the third part of the tripartite arrangement (Donnelly and Scott, 2010). Under this arrangement, the local authority retained a degree of power; through policing boards, made up of locally elected councillors, senior officers within the force were appointed and the policing boards had responsibility for the budget of their local force. The Chief Constable, although answerable to both local police boards and the Scottish Ministers, remained operationally independent and was able to make tactical and operational decisions relating to the way that the police are managed and deployed (Donnelly and Scott, 2010).

In the lead up to the formation of Police Scotland, the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1994 introduced thirty-two local councils. As Fyfe (2014) outlines, this led to a fragmentation of the governance of policing and meant that policing boards increasingly became seen as a 'rubber stamp', while the power between the Scottish Government and Chief Constables was also renegotiated. The Scottish Government gradually became more interventionist, with for example, the introduction in 2009 of the creation of the new Scottish Policing Board, which sought to create national strategic priorities across Scotland. As Fyfe (2011: 186) notes, this 'creeping centralism' laid much of the groundwork for the introduction of Police Scotland in 2013. The establishment of Police Scotland finally stripped the local government of its previous powers to hold the police to account and fund the police at the local level.

This has led to questions about the impact of cutting local councils out of the checks and balances placed on the national force (Fyfe and Scott, 2013). In rural locations, in particular, the responsiveness and distribution of power have become sharply focussed. There are challenges associated with the accountability of the new force, including the role that rural communities have in shaping Police Scotland. The style of policing implemented by the Chief Constable has also been criticised as a top-down, compliance based, target-driven model which has been unpopular in many rural communities, where it is seen as the urban style of policing (Audit Scotland, 2013).

Police Scotland's first Chief Constable, Stephen House, was the Chief Constable of the predominantly urban Strathclyde Police Force prior to taking up his current position. He has been under increasing pressure to make locally, context dependent policing decisions. This came to the fore in July 2014 when armed officers attended

a row outside McDonalds in Inverness (Candlish, 2014), causing concern in the local community⁷. Widespread criticism resulted in Police Scotland changing its policy in late 2014 relating to the routine arming of officers on patrol. The Chief Constable has since pledged that specialist armed police officers in Scotland would only be deployed to firearms incidents or where there was a threat to life, a pledge which has already come under fire (BBC, 2015). Remembering the importance of context and communication when policing in rural locations would help smooth the transition the single force.

Although crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) is far lower in rural and remote rural areas, policing the rural environment can be challenging. Police stations are often located away from communities due to scale of rural policing beats (Wooff, 2015; Yarwood and Mawby, 2011). However, as Wooff (2015) notes, it is important to consider the rural context when police respond to crime and ASB in rural locations in Scotland. Given that Police Scotland has only been in existence two years and is still in a period of transition, it is too early to draw any firm conclusions on the impact of a national force on rural policing. However, as Fyfe (2014: 502) notes, there are a range of issues that the introduction of Police Scotland raises in relation to democratic criteria that form the basis of the governance of policing, in particular, equity, service delivery, responsiveness, distribution of power, information, participation and redress (Jones, 2008).

⁷ Police officers in the UK do not routinely carry firearms and armed response teams are only deployed when life is deemed to be threatened.

Conclusions: divergent or different models of rural policing?

This chapter has focused on the devolved nature of policing across the UK against a backdrop of austerity, focusing on England and Wales and Scotland. Against this backdrop police forces across the UK are being required to make tough decisions about where and what to cut from the policing budget, with rural locations often facing the brunt of the austerity action. However, although devolution has played an important role in the way that policing is delivered in both countries, there are a number of differences between England and Wales and Scotland in the way that policing has changed.

First, in Scotland, power is increasingly concentrated centrally, with the Chief Constable, Government ministers and the Scottish Police Authority have responsibility for the direction and control and resource allocation of Police Scotland. The local councils have been stripped of much of their previous policing input (Fyfe, 2014). In contrast, England and Wales have removed many of the central Government targets and given responsibility to locally elected Police and Crime Commissioners. Secondly, policing reforms have engaged with different policy influences internationally. As Fyfe and Scott (2013) note, Scotland has looked to western and northern Europe to inform their policing changes, whilst England and Wales have engaged with a policing model more akin to that in the US. Thirdly, there are notable differences on paper at least, between the mission of Police Scotland and England and Welsh forces. In Scotland, the Police Reform Act introduced the mission that 'the main purpose of policing is to improve safety and well-being of persons, localities and communities', while the focus in England and

Wales has resolutely remained on crime reduction (Fyfe, 2014). Fourthly, the way the cuts are being implemented serves to be an important departure. In contrast to the police austerity measures in England and Wales that have seen large reductions in officer numbers in rural forces, the Outline Business Case for Police Scotland to maintain officer numbers above 17,234 officers (Fyfe and Henry, 2012). The introduction of the force has achieved savings of £72 million in its first year, yet with a commitment of not reducing police officer numbers, the majority of job losses have been from the civilian policing jobs. In England and Wales police officer number have fallen sharply, and crucially, most notably in rural locations.

Political devolution has already led to a complex shift in the governance and organisation of policing in the UK with important results for the re-structuring of local forces. Devolution, as former Secretary of State for Wales Ron Davies argued, is a process rather than event. As we write this, Britain goes to the polls and it seems likely that nationalist parties in the UK will have an influential role in a new (and in all likelihood) hung parliament. In 2014 Scotland voted against independence but it seems likely that there will be renewed calls and further referendums on the matter. Like many other public services in the UK, policing looks set to undergo continuing restructuring that will reflect wider political devolution. Against a backdrop of increasingly stringent austerity in policing budgets and the promise of increased devolution, it is important to monitor the impact police reorganisation on the daily practices of rural policing. On-going devolution offers scholars and practitioners opportunities to learn from the differentiated experience of rural policing north and south of the Scottish border and highlight examples of good practice that should be common to both.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to Tim Absalom of the GeoMapping Unit, Plymouth University for producing Figure 1.

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