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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Policing built environment crime risks: the role of police in CPTED in New South Wales, Australia*

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ABSTRACT

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) is now routinely adopted in many parts of the world. The role assumed by police in CPTED practices has however received limited academic attention. Through an analysis of available documentation and interviews with local government planners from 10 Sydney councils, this article provides a (partial) understanding of the historical and contemporary roles police have played in the development and implementation of CPTED guidelines in New South Wales (NSW), Australia. It is argued that the NSW Police Force was a pivotal driver of the introduction of planning guidelines to ensure crime risks are considered when new developments are being planned. However, the ongoing contribution of police appears to have waned, largely due to administrative, practical and operational realities. These findings have relevance for ongoing CPTED practice and the work of specialist policing roles more generally.

KEYWORDS

CPTED; development applications; planning; crime prevention; crime prevention officers; NSW Police Force; Australia

Introduction

Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) has been defined as 'the proper design and effective use of the built environment' which 'can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life' (Crowe, 2000, p. 46). Given that 'designing for less crime [is] just as easy as designing for more' (Felson & Boba, 2010, p. 147; Jacobs, 1961; Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 2014), it is unsurprising that CPTED has gained increasing acceptance around the world in recent decades (Atlas, 2010; Cozens, Saville, & Hillier, 2005; Foster, Giles-Corti, & Knuiaman, 2011; Minnery & Lim, 2005; Robinson, 2013). The successful inclusion of CPTED elements within the built environment however necessarily involves the coordination among many different professionals and stakeholders (Zahm, 2011). Thus, a vital area of inquiry lies in understanding how conceptual and practical issues have impacted cross-disciplinary participation within the implementation of CPTED principles.

While CPTED is considered predominately to be within the purview of built environment and related professional disciplines, there are obvious benefits to the police if CPTED is achieved (i.e. reductions in some forms of crime). Further, Zahm (2011) has observed that in practice CPTED is often considered the responsibility of the police, and can even be seen to fall within their professional scope. Consequently, the police have a strong vested interest in CPTED and its application. Particularly in

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the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), the police have contributed extensively to the increasing significance of CPTED policy (Fisher & Piracha, 2012). Despite these benefits to and interests of the police, limited attention has previously been given to the role of the police in CPTED practice (as noted by Schneider & Kitchen, 2007; Wootton, Marselle, Davey, Armitage, & Monchuk, 2009 in the United Kingdom). To begin to address this gap, this paper sought to explore how the police had been involved in the use of CPTED as part of the development application process.

Focusing on the crime risk assessments within proposed development applications, this study firstly explores the political and practical context for the emergence of the current CPTED guidelines in NSW. Highlighting similar resource pressures that have emerged in other international contexts and in light of the broad legislative language guiding this process, this study works to provide greater clarity into the role assumed by the police and the interaction between the police and councils responsible for approving development applications. Acknowledging the importance of understanding the impacts of this policy context, this study also reiterates that these pressures may result in the reduced capacity to include crime prevention considerations into the design of the built environment (Hirschfield, Armitage, Ekblom, & Roach, 2013).

Drawing upon a series of semi-structured interviews with local government planners, this study also provides a series of unique insights into how the police have contributed to the identification and assessment of crime risks. Understanding that the long-term relationships between the police and local council planning professionals are particularly vital, this paper presents that while the police have considerable expertise that can benefit a review of crime risks presented by proposed developments, the low priority placed of this type of work results in variable standards of this process across sites. Utilising the critical perspective provided by these interviews, this paper also identifies the importance of maintaining councils' confidence in the police to respond in a timely manner to any requests for comments on a development application. Potential structural barriers to fostering productive long-term relationships within police forces are then presented, and suggestions for improving working relationships between councils and planning authorities are finally discussed.

Background

CPTED commonly includes a series of design techniques, which Cozens et al. (2005) identify as follows: surveillance, access control, territoriality, activity support, image/maintenance and target hardening. Historically, however these broad areas have been vaguely defined in many cases, leading to wasted time, efforts and crime prevention opportunities (Ekblom, 2011). Practically, the inclusion of CPTED within the built environment has taken the form of specific CPTED design guidelines, training courses, security rating systems and the assessments of proposed developments for crime risks. These processes are often structurally altered over time however, requiring the adaptation of all stakeholders.

Internationally, legislative changes and economic pressures have often been the source of structural alterations in the inclusion of CPTED considerations. Legislative changes such as the Localism Act of 2011 in the UK, which reduced funding and required the police to take on broader geographic domains within these processes, for example, may result in the reduced capacity to include crime prevention considerations into the design of the built environment (Hirschfield et al., 2013). As similar resource constraints are also evident in NSW, the recent experiences in this state are of particular interest internationally to police forces facing internal personnel and resource pressures and inform current insights into how this process developed. Given the importance legislative and economic pressures, this study firstly explores the political and practical context for the emergence of the current CPTED guidelines in NSW.

NSW police and the emergence of CPTED practice

During the 1990s, there were a number of key developments involving the police in NSW that saw increasing attention dedicated to preventing crime, including through the manipulation of the built

environment. Specifically, these developments included the creation of a community safety management plan by the NSW Police Service (as it was then known); an Industrial Relations Commission Inquiry into the Transport and Delivery of Cash and other Valuables Industry following the killing of cash-in-transit officers and subsequent industrial disputes; the design of the Sydney Olympic venues; and the development of CPTED guidelines (amongst others). Each of these key developments had implications for the role played by the police in CPTED and will be briefly considered below.

As noted by Kelpczarek (2002), the NSW Police Service prepared a community safety management plan in the early 1990s that contained reference to the ‘Safer by Design’ programme. This programme involved review of project designs and planning proposals on a voluntary basis and safety audits. In many respects these informal arrangements between the police, some councils and built environment professionals laid the foundations for later guidelines (which will be considered in more detail).

On 18 August 1995, the Minister for Industrial Relations, the Hon. J.W. Shaw, Q.C., M.L.C., requested that the Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales investigate and report on ‘the adequacy of Government regulation of occupational health and safety standards in the [security] industry’ (Industrial Relations Commission of NSW, 1997, pp. 1–2) following the shooting and death of a cash-in-transit security guard at a suburban Sydney shopping centre. Evidence given by Sergeant McCamley, the NSW Police Service representative, recommended:

that local councils ... be required to consider crime risk issues during the Development Approval process, and not merely on an ad hoc basis. In particular, he recommended [amongst other things] that the following approach be adopted with new shopping centre developments: Project planners/designers promote designs which maximise natural surveillance, access control, territorial reinforcement and activity management. (Industrial Relations Commission of NSW, 1997, p. 78)

At the conclusion of this reference, the Industrial Relations Commission made a recommendation commensurate with Sergeant McCamley’s evidence, which ultimately led to the development of CPTED guidelines in NSW.

Amidst these developments, the NSW Police Service underwent a restructure in which Local Area Commands were developed as separate geographically defined policing areas. A crime prevention officer (CPO) was recruited and appointed in each of the Local Area Commands. These officers were and continue to be responsible for supporting the various local crime prevention activities, including assisting in designing out crime, and coordinating community policing activities.

Parallel to these policy and governmental developments, significant effort was being invested in preparing for the Sydney Olympic Games. Part of this preparation involved designing and building venues for the Games. CPTED was part of this picture, as noted by Superintendent McKinnon (Commander, Olympic Security Command Centre, NSW Police Service): ‘CPTED principles have to be part of the **initial** brief to all parties concerned in design, construction and provision of services’ (1998, p. 3, emphasis in original).

In 2000, the year of the Sydney Olympics, the Deputy Premier and Minister for the then Department of Urban Affairs and Planning announced that ‘The NSW Government is moving to reduce crime by encouraging “design safety” in buildings and public places’ (Kelpczarek, 2002, p. 4). This was achieved through the introduction of the Section 79c Guidelines in the Environmental Planning and Assessment Act (1979) in 2001. The first legislation of this kind in Australia, the s79c Guidelines were intended to ‘help councils identify crime risk and minimise opportunities for crime through the appropriate assessment of development proposals’ (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001, p. 1). Emphasising that NSW ‘councils have an obligation to ensure that a development provides safety and security to users and the community’ (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001, p. 2), the ‘guidelines can be used to justify:

- Modification of the development to minimise the risk of crime; or
- Refusal of the development on the grounds that crime risk cannot be appropriately minimised’ (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001, p. 2).

These Guidelines were supported by the development and delivery of *Safer by Design* course by the NSW Police Service from May 2001. This training, which continues to be offered by the NSW Police Force, covers the following topics:

- Criminology and crime prevention.
- Historical applications of CPTED.
- Identifying crime risk in architectural plans and drawings.
- Lighting, fear and crime.
- Crime risk management and CPTED applications.
- Councils, planning and design safety.

While the 'obligation to ensure that a development provides safety and security to users and the community' ultimately rests with local governments within NSW, it is clear that the NSW Police Force contributed extensively to the increasing significance of CPTED policy in NSW (Fisher & Piracha, 2012). Despite this contribution, there has been little analysis of either the role assumed by the police subsequent to the introduction of the NSW CPTED Guidelines or the interaction between the police and councils responsible for approving development applications. To address this gap, interviews were conducted with local government planners, whose roles include judging whether to modify or refuse a development due to crime risks. In analysing planners' perception of their partnership with the police, this study provides a unique perspective that is critical to understanding how the police have been involved in this process.

Research methodology

The data for this article were collected via a series of semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants representing 10 local councils from the Sydney metropolitan region of NSW. Particularly for the purposes of this study, these key informants were questioned with regard to how the police were involved in the development application process. A more complete presentation of the methods used for this project can also be found in Clancey, Fisher, and Rutherford (2014).

This study involved a stratified random sample of the 43 Sydney councils that comprise the Sydney Metropolitan region of NSW. Out of the total of 68,025 development application that were assessed in NSW between 1 July 2010 to 30 June 2011, 35,784 (52.6%) of these applications were assessed in these three LGA regions (NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2012). Out of these 35,784 development applications, 34,433 (96.22%) of these applications were approved (NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2012). A stratified random sample was selected in order to reduce opportunities for sampling bias (Kalton, 1983). Due to the varying number of councils that comprise each of the strata for this study, disproportionate stratification was deemed necessary in order enable variation in each of the regions (Kalton, 1983). This sampling process captured the following numbers of councils by category:

- 4 from the 21 Sydney Inner councils,
- 4 from the 17 Sydney Outer councils and
- 2 from the 5 Sydney Surrounds.¹

Only one council, from the Sydney Inner region, declined to participate in the study. To maintain the sample size, an alternative Sydney Inner council was randomly selected, and staff there accepted this invitation to participate.

The semi-structured interview questions utilised by this study focused on council procedures to assess crime risks, relationships with the local police and their involvement in identifying crime risks in proposed development, and CPTED training provided to planning staff. The face-to-face interviews were all conducted between November 2012 and April 2013, with 9 of the 10 being conducted by 2 researchers concurrently. Each interview was conducted at a council building to reduce inconvenience to the interviewees. The range of interview duration was 23–51 min, with a 34-min average.

All interviews were digitally recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim. The data gathered from these interviews were then systematically coded and analysed using a two-tiered approach. The first layer of analysis utilised the data produced by the more structured questions that were employed in each interview regarding the respondent's professional background, how the development application process operated within their LGA, and how the police had been involved in this process. This information was systematically recorded, and these findings were cross-checked in all cases in order to ensure the reliability of these measures. The second tier of the analysis was thematic in nature, and primarily concerned the ideal function of theories of CPTED within the development application process, the nature of the police influences on crime risk assessment reports and the Development Control Plans that had been developed. The responses of the 10 interviewees were then thematically compared to each other in order to discern the nature of any differences in the development application processes that had been employed by each council, in order to better provide a context for the varying importance that the police played within these processes. All responses below have had all information that would allow for the identification of participating councils removed. In order to maintain the anonymity of each participant and to allow the differentiation of their perspectives, each respondent was generated a key informant code (e.g. KI 1).

Findings

In line with the scope of this article, the following findings relate specifically to the role that the police have played in assessing development applications, as described by planners representing the 10 Sydney councils. This research explored key features of the roles that the police played within the development application process, including whether such arrangements were formalised, what triggered police involvement in reviewing specific applications, and the nature and type of input that the police provided.

Memoranda of understanding

Interactions between the police and council planners often were guided by official documents that had been previously agreed upon by both agencies. The s79c Guidelines specify that 'Councils and local police should identify the types of development which will require a crime risk assessment, and prepare a consultation protocol' (2001, p. 2). Usually taking the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), all interviewees were asked specifically about how these documents helped to define relationships with the local police for the purposes of assessing crime risks. Across the 10 interviews, 8 respondents identified that they had a formal MoU with the relevant LAC (or LACs for Key Informant 4), while the remaining 2 responded that informal arrangements sufficed for determining when development applications were sent to the police for review. Even in cases where there was not a formal MoU (KI 2; 5), it was evident that the liaison process was not necessarily less formal in nature;

We don't have a formal memorandum, but we do have a pretty good relationship with the local control people. And we do refer quite a number ... well, not quite a number, but a number of those sort of applications to the police ... They rang up and wanted to meet with us on site because there was a long arcade area that they were concerned about, and wanted to see the site with us and just discuss what was possible within the realms of a plan. And normally we get back then a written response from them asking if we could consider certain things within the proposal. (KI 2)

One respondent also indicated that MoUs needed to be fluid in nature and periodically updated in order to best suit the evolving interests of the development application process (KI 7). The emergence of new types of retail stores, particularly those that are open for 24 h, posed potential crime problems for design types that previously would not have warranted further review (KI 7). The majority of interviewees indicated that the MoU itself was often used as the minimum requirement; 'basically it tells us which applications we have to refer to the police' (KI 10). Further reinforcing the above point regarding the need for a dynamic relationship between the police and development application assessors, the MoU was also sometimes described as a practical impediment around which the parties needed to work:

This document, it is quite old. I mean, we're talking a decade old now. So I would probably say there's less reliance put on this document and more reliance put on the protocol and our liaising with the police. (KI 1)

A feature of the interaction between the police and councils is the nature of the contribution made by the police in assessing and commenting on crime risks of proposed developments. Some of the issues arising from this feature of the relationship between the police and councils are considered below.

Interactions between police and councils

These interviews revealed that the police were perceived as an integral part of the development application process, and every respondent identified that his or her council engaged in some form of liaison with the NSW Police Force. Respondents described the role of the police in this process to be both the source of knowledge concerning crime and an important stakeholder within the community. All interviewees further asserted that the relationships between councils and the police were at the heart of many efforts by councils to address potential crime risks arising from proposed development applications.

Regarding the nature of the liaison process with the police, interviewees described both formal and informal processes that were often dependent upon the individual officer holding the role of CPO, and the length of his or her relationship with the council. It was also evident in many cases that the process of liaising with the police, as well as the form of the police feedback, varied over time based on these two factors:

Well, we had certainly built a relationship with him, and got to know what things he saw as important. And we'd sometime highlight to him what we thought might be issues, and that sort of thing ... I think that's changed over time too. Initially we would have been getting a formal ... Well, probably it was still in the form of an email, but a formal response. Often if there's no real issue, we'll just get that verbally, but there's nothing really of concern. (KI 3)

Many respondents identified an officer's experience in the role as a great strength of this process, as well as a potential source of conflict between council development application reviewers and the police. Key Informant 1 noted that one of the most valuable assets that officers could have in this process is experience with balancing the priorities of the planning process, such as the interaction with other design features and the time-sensitive nature of the process. Key Informant 2 noted that in some instances where the development assessors, the police and other stakeholders did not agree on an issue, the ability to go back and forth to negotiate was vital to resolving difficult design issues. Further, respondents portrayed the ability to compromise on design elements to maintain all priorities as vital to the functioning of this process in the long term (KI 2; 7). This concern with compromise occurred only when the police commented on specific design features or made specific design requests however.

The review process

It was apparent across the interviews that the development application review process varied markedly across LGAs and different categories of development types as well. Despite this, a number of clear themes were evident across the interviews regarding the roles that the police played in this process, as well as the consequences of these actions. In nearly all cases, when discussing what prompted the referral of particular designs to the police, respondents described certain design features or development types rather than any specific relationship to crime itself. Respondents identified that the input of the police was particularly necessary when the development application concerned commercial buildings such as hotels and retail premises (KI 4; 8), large developments (KI 2; 4; 8), developments with multiple purposes (KI 8) or with complicated designs (KI 6; 7). Beyond the specific type of development, three respondents indicated that the decision to send an application for review by the police was determined on a 'case-by-case' basis (KI 2; 3; 10). While the examples discussed by these three respondents were in line with the s79c guidelines and the CPTED principles, only one of these respondents specifically referred to the CPTED principles as a reason to get police feedback on a design.

Across the interviews, respondents indicated that the review process was a successful method for incorporating CPTED in the development application process, especially given the lack of specific training within the sampled councils (KI 8; 10). Further, by incorporating the police via this process, the police were able to comment on other concerns that weren't directly related to CPTED. For example, the request for feedback sometimes included requests for comments on traffic and road issues adjacent to the development (KI 3). Particularly when the police had previously encountered the developer or development type before, the feedback provided by the police often went beyond what was requested. Given the breadth of competing demands and in some cases the lack of leverage to enforce proposed changes (KI 1), outsourcing this responsibility to the police appeared to be successful and resource efficient at achieving these goals as well:

[The current] system works well and we welcome comments from the police, especially with people that we don't know about or developments that we're not cognisant of issues. So they do have hands on experience in a specific area about the implications of a development which we welcome. (KI 8)

This experience was not however shared by all of the respondents, with some suggesting that the comments provided by the police were often generic and contained little information regarding the specific proposed development. In some cases, this negative experience extended only to part of the feedback documents provided by the police (KI 7), and only those respondents who liaised with the police through more formal processes cited this issue. Respondents often mentioned this criticism in conjunction with describing the individual officer's level of experience in the role and ability to balance crime prevention with other competing design interests. This frustration was also linked to the lack of training that the police officers held within the fields of architecture and planning. Some respondents revealed situations that had clear solutions according to the principles of CPTED, yet were not compatible with the design priorities of the development application assessors:

In terms of their usefulness, I suppose it's a flaw of any specialised field, that they are very narrowly based on crime prevention principles and elevate that to the highest level in their minds for their referral, which is the same with every referral that we receive, but it means that their comments are taken with a grain of salt and when they're competing with other interests they're often of a lesser priority than others. (KI 5)

And what the police actually wanted wasn't design-wise possible. Or I guess it was possible, but it was going to be a big difficulty and a redesign of it, but we were able to modify some of the entrance and exit areas, to be provided with a much safer sort of area as part of the proposal. (KI 2)

While development application assessors placed the identification of CPTED issues in the hands of the police, the councils retained the responsibility for incorporating the suggested changes. Particularly when the feedback was provided informally, in a manner that was too general, or more or less uniform across development applications, development assessors reported that they incorporated and utilised the police feedback in whatever way they deemed best. While in every case it was reported that the feedback was taken seriously and incorporated wherever possible, respondents viewed design concerns as being within the domain of the development assessor. As such, it appears that within the sample, the police feedback regarding CPTED and crime knowledge was used primarily to identify design issues that could then be solved internally;

If we have any doubt, we flick it off to the local area police who have like a crime guidance officer and he would – particularly in commercial areas – he would look at it and say 'Well look hang on there are some issues that you may need to look at.' We'd do like an external referral and he'd make comments and we'd consider those comments as part of the assessment and either draft conditions or ask for amendments to the application to occur. (KI 9)

Beyond the nature of the feedback provided, respondents also identified an issue with the amount of time taken to provide comments on development applications. Though one respondent noted that the speed of replies to be an asset, (KI 10), others found that the delays associated with this process created additional challenges:

It is a little bit tricky because there is only one person and with the yield of development applications we have, quite often we're chasing the police to get the comment. Comments are great. Getting them out of the police is sometimes a little frustrating ... We've had a situation where we'll be waiting four to maybe even five months to get a response because [name of officer] or the crime prevention officer will be on annual leave and there is no one that can do the job. (KI 1)

Given that councils have come under increasing pressure in recent years to meet statutory timeframes for reviewing development applications (see NSW Department of Planning, 2007; Ruming, 2011), delays in getting responses from the police will obviously test the relationships between the police and the respective council.

Research conducted into the role of Architectural Liaison Officers (ALOs) in the United Kingdom has also identified issues associated with them not being replaced if they are on sick leave (Wootton et al., 2009). Further, as part of subsequent policy changes, the number of ALOs dropped from 347 in January 2009 to 196 in June 2012 (Hirschfield et al., 2013). As part of the Localism Act of 2011, regional planning was abolished in favour of more localised structures as part of the Neighbourhood Development Plans and Neighbourhood Development Orders. Hirschfield et al. (2013) present that there may be benefits to this new strategy such as greater local control over planning, however they contend that this new policy risks restricting the ability for many communities to incorporate evidence-based crime prevention strategies into the design of the built environment. Although prior to 2011 there were often multiple ALOs working across a single police force area in the UK and thus greater potential likelihood that their work might be covered by their colleagues, the influence of the Localism Act suggests that structurally this process may be becoming more in line with that experienced in NSW. As such, the experiences of NSW may be informative for contexts such as the UK, and help provide insights as to how to provide effective and practical service when structural capabilities have been further diminished.

Taken together the responses provided by the interviewees suggest that councils do involve the police in reviewing generally small numbers (about 12 per year on average in this sample, see Clancey et al. (2014) for a discussion of the volume of development applications reviewed) of development applications that are considered to pose crime risks due to the nature or management of the proposed development (or redevelopment). The nature of the relationships and practices vary, with some respondents providing glowing reviews, while others expressed concerns about the timeliness and usefulness of the information provided by the police. While these findings shed some light on police/council liaison, similar research would ideally be conducted with the police CPOs to test the findings arising from interviews with council planning staff.

Discussion

Structurally, the police in NSW have played a central role in gaining recognition for CPTED within planning and architecture guidance. Some of their direct contributions to CPTED guidance and practice in NSW include the development of the Safer by Design course and programme in 1993; evidence given to the NSW Industrial Relations Commission Inquiry in 1995; deployment of CPOs trained in Safer by Design; and the ongoing delivery of the police-developed course to local government and other built environment professionals. This work and associated CPTED advocacy resulted in the development of the section 79c guidelines, and according to interviewees, successfully brought CPTED into the considerations of the development assessment process. Since this time, the police in NSW have further been involved in reviewing development applications and commenting on potential crime risks associated with proposed developments.

Since the introduction of the Guidelines in 2001, there has been little analysis of the role played by the police in their implementation, and this article has specifically sought to explore the contribution that the police have made in this area. While this analysis took into account only the perspectives of planning staff and further research incorporating the views of the police is required to investigate this process more thoroughly, it is clear that the police assume an important but limited role in reviewing development applications. Across the interviews, respondents indicated that councils relied on the police to identify potential issues that might pose future crime risks within a proposed design and to provide intelligence and data to make informed design judgements. Concordantly, the contributions that the police have made appear to be both valued and instrumental towards meeting planning goals within the existing development application process.

This influence over planning and design issues however was revealed to be somewhat limited. Interviewees estimated that generally, councils referred only around 12 development applications per year to the police for their review. Compared to the average of 832 development applications that are processed by each council annually,² this small subset can be argued to reflect the low priority given to crime risks in the majority of cases. Councils must consider a host of competing priorities (see Clancey et al., 2014 for a discussion of some of these priorities), and practitioners are often incorrectly assumed to know the meaning of key CPTED concepts (Ekblom, 2011). In addition to the lack of clarity and guidance provided for navigating these issue and the resulting transferability and inconsistency problems (Gibson & Johnson, 2013; Johnson, Gibson, & McCabe, 2014), these factors may also be partially responsible for relegating the importance of considerations of crime risks. Practical challenges associated with the referral of development applications also partially explain the relatively low number and rate of referrals. CPOs are the officers who are generally responsible for reviewing development applications, and special arrangements associated with their roles affect their ability to complete the review process in a timely manner. Similar to the findings of Wootton et al. (2009), part-time employment, professional leave and competition with other duties are some of the practical challenges that hinder swift attention to development applications. Given the pressure, councils are under to process development applications quickly (NSW Department of Planning, 2007; Ruming, 2011), it was evident in these interviews that delays in receiving comments from the police act as a disincentive to refer future development applications. As such, these findings suggest that providing resources directed at ensuring timely and consistent responses to requests from external stakeholders may increase both the quantity of requests for police involvement along with the ability of these organisations to incorporate these suggestions.

Another potential barrier to councils involving the police in this process is the nature of the feedback that the police provided after reviewing the development application. It was suggested that comments could be more accurately described as intelligence about an applicant, rather than verifiable concerns about the crime risks posed by the proposed development, and thus could not be considered in the review of a development application. The existing planning laws outline what factors can be considered in the process (Department of Urban Affairs and Planning, 2001), and interviewees reported that the police comments often strayed outside of these legislative parameters. Moreover, in many cases respondents reported that comments received from the police were generic, with little or no direct relevance to the proposed development. These practices in particular discouraged greater outreach to the police in reviewing development applications. As such, greater efforts should be made to ensure that the data provided are both necessary to justify design changes and consistent with the specific requirements outlined by the legislation. Further, these interviews display how important it is for the police to avoid providing only generic advice, potentially turning what could be a coherent regulatory process into little more than a symbolic gesture (Lee, Clancey, & Fisher, 2014). Regardless of the perceived need for the particular development in question, it appears that these instances serve to undermine the trust and value placed in this police involvement in the design process. Consequently, this study suggests that greater priority should be allocated to ensure that the police who are tasked with specialised roles are able to prioritise these tasks within police organisations.

Despite these criticisms, a number of interviewees highlighted the existence of strong and positive relationships with their local CPOs and valued their comments on proposed developments. This was often linked to the longevity of an officer in the CPO role and the presence of informal feedback mechanisms. These characteristics helped to foster a relationship in which both parties came to better understand the issues and challenges of each role within this process. However, where there is high turnover of CPOs, when CPOs are on extended leave and not replaced, or when they fail to understand the deadlines facing councils, these relationships can break down. Although staff turnover is unavoidable within any large organisation, ameliorating these impacts particularly in specialised roles would assist in the maintenance of the long-term relationships with external stakeholders.

While it is clear that individual officers and the NSW Police Force overall have been instrumental in many aspects of the development and implementation of CPTED practice in NSW, there remain

opportunities for improvement. One interviewee recommended improved guidance to CPOs regarding the parameters of the comments that they are permitted to provide on development applications. Similarly, measures to improve retention of CPOs and their substitution if they take professional leave would increase councils' confidence in them to respond in a timely manner to any requests for comments on a development application. Further, the police Local Area Commands and individual councils could revisit the development of Memoranda of Understanding to ensure that expectations of both parties are clearly documented and all relevant personnel within both organisations are familiar with the contents. Greater promotion of resources like Safer by Design course amongst councils and other stakeholders might also help to encourage greater external participation.

Beyond these recommendations, there is some merit in reflecting on the wider utility of police engagement in this work. The police have considerable relevant knowledge that can benefit a review of crime risks presented by proposed developments. However, some of the organisational and operational requirements placed on the police and the low priority of this type of work result in variable standards of this process across sites. Furthermore, this domain raises questions about the training, knowledge and support systems available to ensure that the police are adequately equipped to read architectural plans, understand diverse architectural and building features, and sustain sufficient competence to provide meaningful input into the development application review process. Rather than expecting CPOs to undertake this work, perhaps there would be greater merit in having a centralised specialist unit to review major, high-risk developments. This proposed unit, which could be replicated for other specialised police roles, could liaise with their local police colleagues to ensure the provision of appropriate local input, while retaining responsibility for completing all necessary reviews within relevant legislative timeframes.

While specifically focusing on the role the police have played in the emergence and practice of CPTED in NSW, these findings have broader relevance to debates about 'third-party' (Mazerolle & Ransley, 2005) and other forms of policing through partnerships, and specialisation of particular functions.

Conclusions

Specialised policing positions have been widely employed to provide targeted resources to address issues that require specific knowledge and skills such as national defence, transportation, international border protection, health and commerce across the globe (Crawford, 2012). Certainly not unique to the present context, these specialised roles enable officers to carry out specific tasks more effectively than officers who have been trained in a wider range of skills and to build lasting relationships with the external partners necessary to implement many initiatives (Flanagan, 2008), or so the argument in favour of specialisation goes.

While there is clearly merit in having specialised officers tasked with crime prevention who have completed the Safer by Design course (or any equivalent training) and worked with local councils to assess crime risks of proposed developments, there are practical impediments that restrict the efficacy of this work within any context. In the case of the ALOs in the United Kingdom, this can be as simple as not having the relevant equipment or office space to view architectural plans (Wootton et al., 2009). In the case of the NSW CPOs, competing priorities, leave entitlements and other operational duties undermine their ability as (generally) single operatives to meet timeframes imposed by councils to review development applications. Consequently, any discussion of specialised roles within police forces needs to be understood within their particular resource and organisational contexts and demands.

Similarly, these findings raise questions about the 'extended policing family' (Crawford & Lister, 2006) and policing through partnerships. Fleming (2006) has discussed the need for trust for effective partnerships, while Gilling (2005) highlights various important ingredients for partnerships, including a mission and purpose, access to data and resources, strong leadership and durability. The modest findings from this research raise questions about the utility of the current arrangements in establishing and maintaining trust between the police and councils when MoUs are not routinely updated and when timeframes are not met. Moreover, in the absence of any review of the NSW CPTED

Guidelines (see Clancey, Lee, & Fisher, 2012) and the seemingly low priority given to CPTED in the assessment of development applications (Clancey et al., 2014), little has been done to refresh these arrangements. Given the reliance on single CPOs to respond to council requests and to maintain relationships, there is obviously limited durability of police/council relationships. While this will be a source of some disappointment for CPTED advocates, it will be welcomed by those that have cautioned against 'neoliberal urbanism' (Coleman, 2004) and the role of CPTED as a 'strategic, neo-liberal form of governance' (Parnaby, 2007). It will also add to the cautionary commentaries heralding some form of highly 'joined-up' approach to policing and crime prevention.

Notes

1. These three council categories were selected because of the volume of development applications that each of these regions receives, as well as their geographic proximity. Out of the total of 68,025 development applications that were assessed in NSW between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2011, 35,784 (52.6%) were assessed in these three regions (NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2012). Out of these 35,784 development applications, 34,433 (96.22%) were approved (NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2012).
2. 35,784 development applications were reviewed across the 43 LGAs that were contained within the sampling frame in 2011 (NSW Department of Planning and Infrastructure, 2012).

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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