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Home Office Research Study 264

The Reducing Burglary Initiative: investigating burglary

Jessica Jacobson, Lee Maitland and Mike Hough

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Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate
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The Reducing Burglary Initiative

In 1998 the Home Office announced the Crime Reduction Programme. The programme was intended to develop and implement an integrated approach to reducing crime and making communities safer. The Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI), launched in 1999, was one of the first parts of this programme to commence.

The aims of the RBI are to:

- reduce burglary nationally by targeting areas with the worst domestic burglary problems;
- evaluate the cost effectiveness of the different approaches; and
- find out what works best where.

Two hundred and forty seven burglary reduction projects have been funded, covering over 2.1million households that suffered around 110,000 burglaries a year. Three distraction burglary projects have also been funded.

The RBI Evaluation

Three consortia of universities have intensively evaluated the first round of 63 RBI projects. A further five projects from subsequent rounds of the RBI (rounds two and three) are also being evaluated.

This report grew out of an evaluation of three RBI sites where improving police investigative performance was a key strategy. Prior research in this area has focussed on specific investigative methods and organisational/procedural aspects of investigation. In contrast, this study seeks to explore the nature of the investigative process with respect to burglary and to develop general principles for effective investigation. Though the report draws its lessons from three burglary projects, the findings have significant policy and practice implications for the investigation of volume crime generally.

The report is part of a series of studies examining burglary reduction practice being published during 2002/03. It is being published alongside two other reports: 'Planning for

partnership', and 'Pushing back the boundaries: New techniques for assessing the impact of burglary schemes'. Also to be published is a report on the overall impact and cost-effectiveness of Round 1 of the RBI. Other themes to be covered in this series are:

- the delivery of burglary reduction projects;
- publicity and awareness of burglary reduction schemes; and
- the use of an undercover operation as a means to reduce burglary.

Previously published RBI reports

Early lessons from the RBI have already been published in the following reports, which are available from www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pubsintro1.html

Tilley N, Pease K, Hough M and Brown R (1999) 'Burglary Prevention: Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme' Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 1, London: Home Office

Curtin L, Tilley N, Owen M and Pease K (2001) 'Developing Crime Reduction Plans: Some Examples from the Reducing Burglary Initiative' Crime Reduction Research Series Paper 7, London: Home Office

Hedderman C and Williams C (2001) 'Making Partnership Work: Emerging Findings from the Reducing Burglary Initiative' Briefing Note 1/01, London: Home Office

Johnson S and Loxley C (2001) 'Installing Alley-gates: Practical Lessons from Burglary Prevention Projects' Briefing Note 2/01, London: Home Office

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The authors

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Executive summary

Though the number of domestic burglaries committed in England and Wales has fallen in recent years, reversing the trend of the 1980s and early 1990s, the overall level of incidents of domestic burglary remains high, as does public concern about the crime. The proportion of burglary offences detected by the police has traditionally been low, and remains so. Only 12 *per cent* of recorded burglaries were detected in the year 2001-02.

This study considers ways in which burglaries can be investigated more effectively. It examines the policing of burglary in three areas: Oxford, Chiltern Vale and Coventry. The research grew out of Home Office evaluations of burglary Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) in the three sites.

The research involved a review of the data gathered as part of the local SDP evaluation, and the collection of further information on police enforcement practices and recent burglary investigations. This latter phase of the research was a qualitative exercise, which comprised the following elements:

- examination of case studies of burglary investigations;
- focus groups and semi-structured interviews with police officers involved in the investigation of burglary; and
- observation of investigative work.

Aims of the study

The study has two main aims:

- to explore the nature of the investigative process with respect to burglary: that is, to identify the main components of investigation, and to consider how the process can best be conceptualised; and
- to use these findings to develop general principles for the effective investigation of burglary.

In addressing the above aims, this report seeks to fill a gap in the existing literature on burglary investigation. For the most part, previous research has focused on the specific elements and

practices of investigation, and on the merits or otherwise of competing approaches. In contrast, this research has developed an understanding of *investigation as a general process*, and has sought to identify the *underlying principles* that can optimise the effectiveness of this process.

Thus, at a time when police enforcement activities are coming under increasing scrutiny, the findings reported upon here should assist policy-makers and senior managers in the police to put the core principles of effective investigation at the heart of whatever specific strategies or approaches are promoted. Moreover, by focusing on principles – which can get obscured behind a preoccupation with the structures or management of investigative work – this study tackles issues relevant not simply to the investigation of burglary but to the investigation of all volume crime.

Thanks to its process perspective on investigation, this report complements the recent work of the National Criminal Intelligence Service in designing the National Intelligence Model (NIM), and that of the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) in producing its Investigation of Volume Crime Manual (2002). By developing a holistic but detailed account of what the investigation of burglary necessarily entails, in terms of ‘on the ground’ policing work, this study provides a context for the strategic and procedural prescriptions contained in both the NIM and the ACPO manual.

The nature of the investigative process

The research produced two major findings about the nature of burglary investigations. The first is that the investigative process tends to be highly complex; the second is that ‘reactive’ investigative work is usually tightly bound up with ‘proactive’ work.

Complexity

The study found that the investigation of burglary was very often a complex and multi-dimensional process. Police enquiries relating to one offence are likely to be intertwined with investigations of related burglaries or other offences. Sometimes these linked offences may have only a single suspect, but equally groups of suspects may be involved in some or all of them. At any point in an investigation, moreover, criminal activities that have occurred at very different times and in different places may come into view.

Given the high levels of public concern about burglary and its low detection rate, there has long been a desire within both the police and central government to increase the

effectiveness of investigative work and to impose tighter managerial controls upon it. However, the recognition of the complexity and diversity of the investigative process points to the inherent difficulty of developing strategic models to guide working practices and staffing structures for the investigation of burglary. It is clear that simple, linear characterisations of the investigative process can be of little value to the efforts to enhance effectiveness.

If it is to be useful, a model of burglary investigation should be fluid and dynamic. Any such model should, at its most basic level, present an understanding of the investigation of burglary as a process of building:

- a) networks of communication between individuals and agencies, linking:
- b) items of information about individual offences; and
- c) items of information about individual offenders.

The interrelationship between proactive and reactive policing

Part of the complexity of the investigative process lies in the fact that the focus of police attention may constantly shift between an individual offence, other offences, a particular suspect, and possibly other suspects. Most burglary investigations, it appears, combine some elements of reactive work – that is, work based on enquiries into individual offences – with elements of proactive work – that is, the targeting of specific offenders through the use of intelligence and/or crime analysis.

Hence a successful investigation may be one in which a piece of reactive work – for example, obtaining a witness description of a suspect – provides the impetus for what then becomes a wider operation targeting a known local offender and his associates. Conversely, a pre-existing proactive operation may finally bear fruit when evidence that emerges from a crime scene (through reactive policing) proves sufficient for an arrest and charge.

Indeed, proactive policing is often not simply intertwined with but *dependent* on reactive work, since the latter generally provides the leads and evidence that can be used in detaining a targeted offender. At the same time, good reactive work in a sense depends on proactivity, as the police may respond to individual incidents most thoroughly and effectively when operating within a broad proactive framework. For example, the standard of reporting of burglaries by uniformed staff may be improved where the initial investigations of individual burglaries are seen as integral elements of a wider process of disrupting criminals and preventing crime, rather than being treated as isolated, largely administrative tasks.

The close interrelationship between proactive and reactive approaches to the investigation of burglary suggests that the somewhat one-sided emphasis on the value of proactive policing that runs through much recent debate and guidance on policing policy may be unhelpful. Accordingly, assumptions about the inherent superiority of proactivity should be replaced by an understanding of proactive and reactive policing as complementary rather than competing. Such a perspective may help to erode cultural resistance to proactive work within the police, and assist the development of mechanisms for integrating fully the two approaches.

General principles for effective investigation

Taking into account the multi-layered nature of burglary investigation, and the interconnectedness of proactive and reactive work, three broad principles for effective investigative work can be identified. These are:

- Routine
- Simplicity
- Flexibility.

Routine

To emphasise the importance of routine to the investigation of burglary at the same time as highlighting the complexity and diversity of the process may seem a little contradictory. In fact, it is precisely because investigation tends to be fluid and open-ended that it is important to carry out key elements of the process within set parameters, so as to enhance accountability and ensure some degree of consistency in actions undertaken.

The part of burglary investigation that can most easily be routinised is the initial stage: that is, from the point that the police are first notified of the offence through to attendance (if required) by scenes of crime officers. Officers interviewed for this study were aware of the importance of routine in early investigation, and attempts had been made to standardise procedures in all the field-work sites. Implementation of the procedures, however, was often problematic. It is clear, therefore, that having systematic procedures enshrined in policy is not enough: the policy will not work in practice without adequate communication, training, supervision and resourcing of staff.

Following initial investigation, the process of allocating offences for further investigation – or ‘crime screening’ – must also be systematic. The benefits of a systematic process of crime screening are not simply that the activities of investigating officers are most likely to be

focused on appropriate cases. In addition, accountability for the investigation of individual cases should be enhanced, as should a sense of ownership of investigative work among those responsible for it.

The importance of routine relates also to the process of information exchange among police officers. Whether this takes place by means of verbal, written or electronic briefings, it is crucial that information about local offences and intelligence about offenders is pooled among all officers with responsibility for investigation. Electronic databases should ensure that officers can immediately retrieve the information they require – which in turn demands that this information is entered accurately, routinely and promptly on the relevant databases, and that officers have access to them and knowledge of how to use them. Additionally, systems should be in place for routine communication between the police and other agencies (such as the courts, prison service and probation service) to ensure that information about suspects and offenders – such as bail conditions, compliance with community sentences, and prison releases – is received by the police.

Routine: recommendations

- The activities that must be carried out in the initial investigation of a burglary should be clearly defined, fully communicated to all relevant officers, and properly supervised.
- Systems for crime screening should be clear-cut and transparent, to ensure consistency and accountability in the allocation of individual cases of further investigation.
- Systems of verbal, written and electronic briefings should be in place to ensure a constant flow of relevant information between officers involved – in all ways – in the investigation of burglaries.
- Information on offences, suspects and offenders must be routinely, promptly and accurately entered on electronic databases that are user-friendly: that is, physically accessible and not overly complex.
- There is a need for routinised inter-agency communication about offenders and suspects – for example, relating to prison releases – and systems to ensure that information received by the police from other agencies is promptly disseminated among relevant officers.
- Officers need to have a clear idea of their information needs as they relate to their particular working roles – and officers should be adequately trained to ensure they routinely make best use of available information sources.

Simplicity

While the investigation of burglary tends to be a complex process, investigative work can be most effective when police officers respond in relatively *simple* ways to the situations and chains of events on which their enquiries are focused. In particular, given the lack of sophistication of most prolific burglars, basic investigative actions may often prove highly rewarding. These might include, for example, the following up of known routes of disposal of stolen property; or making additional efforts to contact potential witnesses over and above any initial house-to-house enquiries carried out at the scene.

The principle of simplicity can usefully be applied to communication between police officers. The findings of this study indicate that informal, direct communication between officers can play a vital part in investigative work. The advantage of this kind of communication – both within and between departments – is that it potentially allows the most relevant information on a given issue to be quickly and clearly exchanged between the officers for whom it has most significance. By definition, the nature and extent of informal communication cannot be determined by policy; but certain working arrangements can promote it: for example, keeping office doors open and locating particular offices in close proximity to each other can play an important part.

Evidence from the fieldwork sites suggests that simple forms of crime analysis can produce positive results. This may involve little more than plotting recent offences on a map to see if they may have been committed by the same individual or group, and reviewing intelligence on known offenders who may be in the area. In some respects, sophisticated, electronic crime analysis systems may appear slow and cumbersome in comparison to the kinds of simple analysis carried out manually or in the minds of officers, and often enhanced through informal consultation with colleagues.

Simple responses to burglary should nevertheless be *informed* responses. However simple they may be, actions taken by the police need to be knowledge-based: that is, based on generalised criminological knowledge of the kinds of police activities that can be expected to yield results, styles and methods of offending, and patterns of victimisation, as well as on specific knowledge of local offences and offenders.

Simplicity: Recommendations

- It is important to consider the possible utility of undertaking certain simple and quick investigative actions (such as following up known routes of stolen property) over and above the minimum required of every investigation.

- Informal communication, which allows information to be conveyed quickly, simply and directly between officers, can play a vital part in investigative work. Efforts should be made to encourage such communication and to encourage cross-departmental sharing of information more generally. Informal communication should though occur within a context of properly implemented, formal briefings.
- Simple methods of crime analysis can be effective in the investigation of burglary – such as plotting offences on a map, or manually recording details of offences in a form that permits officers easily to review the information.
- The potential value of more sophisticated methods of crime analysis should nevertheless not be overlooked. Simple analysis should be viewed as a process on which more complex analytical work can build, as required.

Flexibility

The principle of flexibility refers to the critical importance of gathering, recording, communicating and acting upon available information in a way that is *responsive* to investigative opportunities as and when these present themselves. The need for flexibility goes hand-in-hand with a need for rapidity, as the police response must usually be quick as well as flexible if it is to have any pay-off.

There can be no clearer illustration of the importance of flexibility and rapidity than when the police receive a report of a burglary that is in progress. An immediate response to such a report is crucial, given that a significant proportion of primary burglary detections result from burglars being caught in the act or very shortly thereafter. Arriving quickly at the scene of a burglary reported as in progress can prove rewarding even if the offender has by then made his escape, as there may be immediate avenues of enquiry that can fruitfully be explored.

The principle of flexibility relates closely to the issue of access to information. Rapid dissemination and retrieval of information ensures that investigating officers have access to the specific facts or intelligence they need, whenever they need them. Due to the multitude of demands on the time and attention of officers, valuable opportunities for detection may be lost if certain items of information become available after a critical point in the investigation has passed. The importance of rapid dissemination and retrieval of information is illustrated by several of the case studies examined for this research, in which officers were able to act on very recent information in pressing charges for burglary against suspects who had just been arrested for other offences.

A flexible and rapid response to what proves to be a pivotal moment in an investigation – such as the arrest of a suspect in relation to an apparently unrelated offence, a coincidental sighting of a known offender, or an unexpected indication by a suspect being interviewed that he is prepared to co-operate with the police – can be the prime determinant of success. A certain randomness or unpredictability may thus characterise many aspects of an investigation. This points, perhaps, to the inherent limitations of an entirely routinised approach to the investigation of burglary, but it by no means undermines the need for elements of routine within the investigative process.

Flexibility: recommendations

- The resourcing of departments involved in the investigation of burglary should take into account the fact that successful investigation often depends on the capacity of officers to respond immediately and flexibly to random events.
- A rapid and flexible response to a burglary in progress is important not only because this offers the opportunity of catching the offender at the scene, but also because immediate avenues of enquiry may be available even if the offender has made his escape prior to the arrival of the police.
- Rapid dissemination and retrieval of information about offences is often crucial, as this helps links between recent offences to be identified. Hence information about offences must be promptly entered on to databases, and officers must be willing and able to access up-to-date information from any available source (such as crime and control logs of calls from the public).
- Suspects may react in unpredictable and inconsistent ways to police interviews; officers must therefore have the skills and motivation to respond appropriately to any indication by a suspect that he is prepared to co-operate.

The number of domestic burglaries committed in England and Wales has fallen sharply since the mid-1990s. However, the most recent Home Office figures suggest that this downward trend is slowing, and levels of public concern about burglary remain high¹. Anxiety about domestic burglary is doubtless connected to the fact that it 'conjures up many frightening and disturbing images – of violent strangers in the night, ransacked rooms, fouling of property and sexual assault' (Maguire, 1982: 164).

The proportion of burglary offences detected by the police has traditionally been low. This continues to be the case, despite recent rapid advances in communications technology and forensic science, and the considerable efforts that have been put into improving the management of investigative work over the past two decades. Home Office statistics show that only 12 per cent of residential and non-residential burglaries were detected in the year 2001-02². The detection rate for all property crime (including burglary) is only a little higher, at 16 per cent. This compares with a detection rate of 23 per cent for recorded crime as a whole (Home Office, 2001b).

Against this background of high levels of concern about residential burglary (henceforth referred to simply as 'burglary'), and low detection rates, this study considers ways of improving the effectiveness of burglary investigation. This has been undertaken by means of an empirical study of investigations of burglary in three policing areas – namely: Oxford, Chiltern Vale and Coventry – together with a review of relevant literature on criminal investigation.

1 Findings of the British Crime Survey (BCS) of 2001-02 indicate that 3.5 per cent of all households in England and Wales had at least one burglary or attempted burglary over the previous 12 months, which amounts to a total of 991,000 burglaries (including attempts). The BCS also reports that that 22 per cent of respondents thought it very or fairly likely that they would have their home burgled over the following year (Home Office, 2002).

2 There are various categories of detected offences: that is those which have resulted in a charge, summons or caution, those (whether or not previously recorded) which have been taken into consideration (TIC) by the courts following an admission by the perpetrator, and those in relation to which no further action has been taken, because, for example, the perpetrator is under the age of criminal responsibility.

Aims of the study

This study has two primary aims:

1. To look at what the investigation of burglary necessitates, and how the process can best be conceptualised.
2. On the basis of the findings regarding the nature of investigative process, to identify general principles for effective investigation of burglary.

In addressing these two aims, it is intended that the study will help to fill a gap in the existing literature on investigating burglary. For the most part, previous research and related policy literature have focused on the different elements of investigation, in order to assess the outcomes associated with alternative practices. In contrast, this research has sought to develop an overarching view of investigation as a process, and thereby to gain insight into how the effectiveness of the process can be optimised.

Thanks to its process perspective on burglary investigation, this study provides a context for aspects of the National Intelligence Model (NIM) recently developed by the National Criminal Intelligence Service on behalf of the ACPO Crime Committee (NCIS, 2000), and currently being implemented by police forces across England and Wales. The NIM seeks to integrate investigation and the use of intelligence within the broader policing enterprise, and proposes a clear set of organisational structures for developing investigative strategy and tactics.

By describing and analysing the ways in which the detective process links offenders to offences, this study provides a complementary analysis to that contained within the NIM. It is designed to help those working at a policy or strategic level to understand how detection actually works in 'real life', and hence to recognise the functionality and implications of the structures and processes developed under the NIM.

At the same time as helping to locate the NIM within the context of day-to-day policing, the findings of this study also provide a framework within which to understand the detailed prescriptions for investigative work contained within the ACPO Investigation of Volume Crime Manual (ACPO, 2002). The manual is intended to assist front-line policing staff to fulfil their duties with respect to volume crime investigations. These specific duties, however, cannot or should not be viewed in isolation from each other or from the wider process of investigation itself. The findings of this study, presented over the course of this report, illustrate in vivid detail how the many different components of the investigative process come together.

The focus on burglary

For the purposes of this study, domestic burglary has been treated as a single crime type. This is not, however, meant to imply that all offences are the same. There is considerable variation in the *modus operandi* (or MOs) of burglaries and consequently in the meaning of an offence for its victim. Burglars themselves vary in their more general offending behaviour – in accordance with their age and experience, the extent to which they specialise in burglary as opposed to other offences, the nature of any drugs problem, and their tendency to commit local and opportunist burglaries or to travel further afield and plan their offences³. Patterns of victimisation also vary widely between households with different characteristics and between different kinds of areas. As noted by Mawby (2002), past research from national to local studies have found repeat victimisation to be a common feature of burglary.

There are many implications of the variations in patterns of offending and victimisation for the process of investigation. For example, the identification of a series of offences may be dependent on the recognition of specific MOs; the emergence of burglary ‘hot-spots’ may indicate links with known local offenders; frequent revictimisation may point to the presence of certain highly prolific offenders. The tracing of patterns and variations should thus always be an integral part of the investigative process, whatever specific form this process takes.

While this study is primarily focused on burglary, many of the issues to be discussed here have a bearing on the investigation of crime more generally. In particular, there are many parallels between the investigation of burglary, as discussed in this report, and the investigation of other volume crimes – suggesting that the nature of the process is broadly similar, as are the principles for effective investigative work. Indeed, individual burglary investigations may frequently overlap with investigations of other offences, and especially other property crimes, since many burglars do not confine themselves to burglary⁴.

The investigation of very serious crime, on the other hand, raises many issues that cannot be addressed on these pages. Nevertheless, the investigation of burglary is like the investigation of all crime in that it is, at its core, a process of ‘linking ... evidence from the scene with information about likely offenders’ (Audit Commission, 1993: 35).

3 Previous research, as reviewed by Mawby (2001), suggests that the majority of burglars tend to operate close to home. As noted by Maguire (1982), a minority of burglars are prepared to travel to very wealthy areas to steal high-value property, and have relatively sophisticated methods. In the fieldwork sites, local burglars were the primary focus of police activity – with the exception of a single extremely prosperous locality within one of the sites, which was targeted by travelling burglars.

4 Mawby’s review of the literature on burglar characteristics (2001) found there to be a general consensus that burglars tend also to commit other offences of various kinds.

Thinking at a higher level of generality still, any criminal investigation can be regarded as a process of 'reconstructing the past', and hence as a variant of the kinds of inquiry conducted by all scientists and social scientists who are concerned with the past (Osterburg and Ward, 2000).

The fieldwork

The three sites in which the fieldwork was carried out varied in terms of their geography and demographics, their burglary rates and, to a certain extent, their approaches to burglary investigation. Of the three policing areas, Oxford had the highest burglary rate over the years 1999-2001 (see Table 1.1 for figures)⁵. Appendix A contains a brief description of the policing of burglary in each of the three areas.

Table 1.1: Burglary rates in the field-work sites, 1999-2001

	Burglary rate: offences per 1000 households			
	Oxford	Chiltern Vale	Coventry	National average
April 99-Mar 00	50	24	20	22
April 00-Mar 01	37	18	16	20

The empirical research conducted for this study grew out of Home Office evaluations of burglary Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) that were implemented within the policing areas of Oxford, Chiltern Vale and Coventry and funded as part of the Home Office Reducing Burglary Initiative⁶. The SDP evaluations were carried out from late 1999 to early 2001, and involved the collection of data on burglary and other acquisitive crimes, and the analysis of the range of initiatives introduced under the projects. The evaluative work on the enforcement aspects of the SDPs provided initial insights into the issues that became central to this study.

These early insights were built upon through fieldwork conducted over the period of February to December 2001 in the three policing areas. This was a qualitative exercise, which comprised the following elements:

5 One of the criteria for funding of burglary SDPs was that the burglary rate within the SDP target area should be at least twice the national average. Clearly, the burglary rate of each target area was not necessarily reflected in the burglary rate of the wider policing area.

6 The SDPs, which included both crime prevention and enforcement elements, were focused on 'target areas' that were smaller than the policing areas in which they were located.

- case study reviews;
- focus groups with police officers;
- semi-structured interviews with police officers; and
- observational exercises.

See Appendix B for details on these fieldwork activities.

Outline of the report

The fieldwork conducted for this study produced two major findings about the nature of burglary investigations. The first of these, which is discussed in Chapter 2 of this report, is that the process of investigation tends to be highly complex and, in a sense, 'messy': that is, it tends to be a fluid and open-ended process, made up of many different interlinking and overlapping elements.

The second major finding, presented in Chapter 3, concerns the inter-relationship between what are commonly referred to as 'proactive' and 'reactive' investigative activities. Part of the complexity of the investigative process lies in the fact that its focus tends to be constantly shifting between an individual offence, other offences, a particular suspect, and possibly other suspects. Hence it can be seen that 'reactive' work carried out in relation to one or more offences often becomes tightly bound up with 'proactive', or offender-based, investigative work.

Taking into account this multi-layered nature of burglary investigation, and insights offered by the burglary case study reviews and other fieldwork findings, the report moves on to consider what general principles should guide the investigative process. Chapter 4 looks at the first of three principles to be elaborated: namely, *routine*. It is argued that there must be systematic and well-defined procedures for the initial investigation of offences, the allocation of cases for further investigation, and the sharing of information about offences and offenders. Precisely because investigation tends to be fluid and open-ended, it becomes all the more important that key elements of the process are carried out within set parameters, so as to enhance accountability and ensure consistency in actions undertaken.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the principle of *simplicity*. It is suggested here that while the process of investigation as a whole tends to be complex, the specific steps that officers need to take in order to achieve results are often straightforward. For example, much can be gained from informal, discussion between officers about a suspect; basic analysis of crime

patterns; and simple investigative actions such as following up possible routes of disposal of stolen property. However, to emphasise simplicity is not to overlook the importance of adopting a knowledge-based approach to investigation.

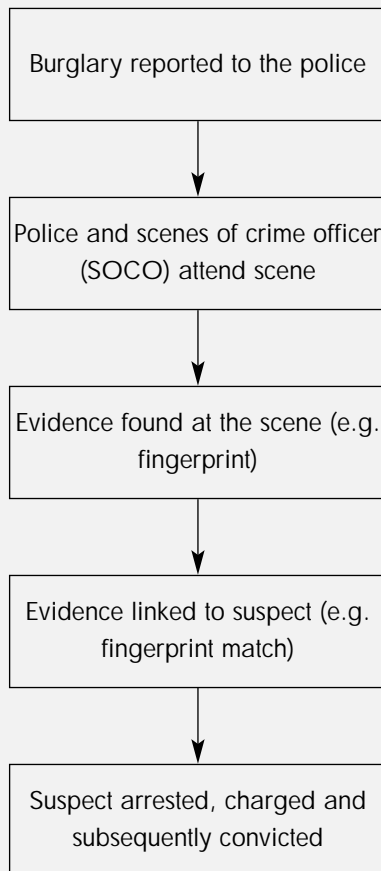
Chapter 6 develops the third principle: *flexibility*. At any stage of a burglary investigation, certain pieces of information may come to light that will have a major bearing on its outcome. In many cases, this information may emerge in an unpredictable manner – and it may perhaps appear to be the product of sheer chance rather than strenuous investigative effort. If full advantage is to be taken of any such pivotal moment in an investigation, the police must be able to respond flexibly and rapidly to it: that is, to record, communicate and act upon the information appropriately and without delay.

Chapter 7 concludes the report by bringing together some of the key issues raised and presenting a series of recommendations for enhancing the effectiveness of burglary investigation.

The process of investigation

A straightforward burglary investigation might involve the elements in Figure 2.1. Here, an offence is reported to the police, which leads to evidence being found at the scene, which is connected to a suspect who is then arrested, charged and convicted. These are the bare bones of the process summarised by the Audit Commission (1993) as the linking of evidence from the scene to information about an offender.

Figure 2.1: Straightforward burglary investigation



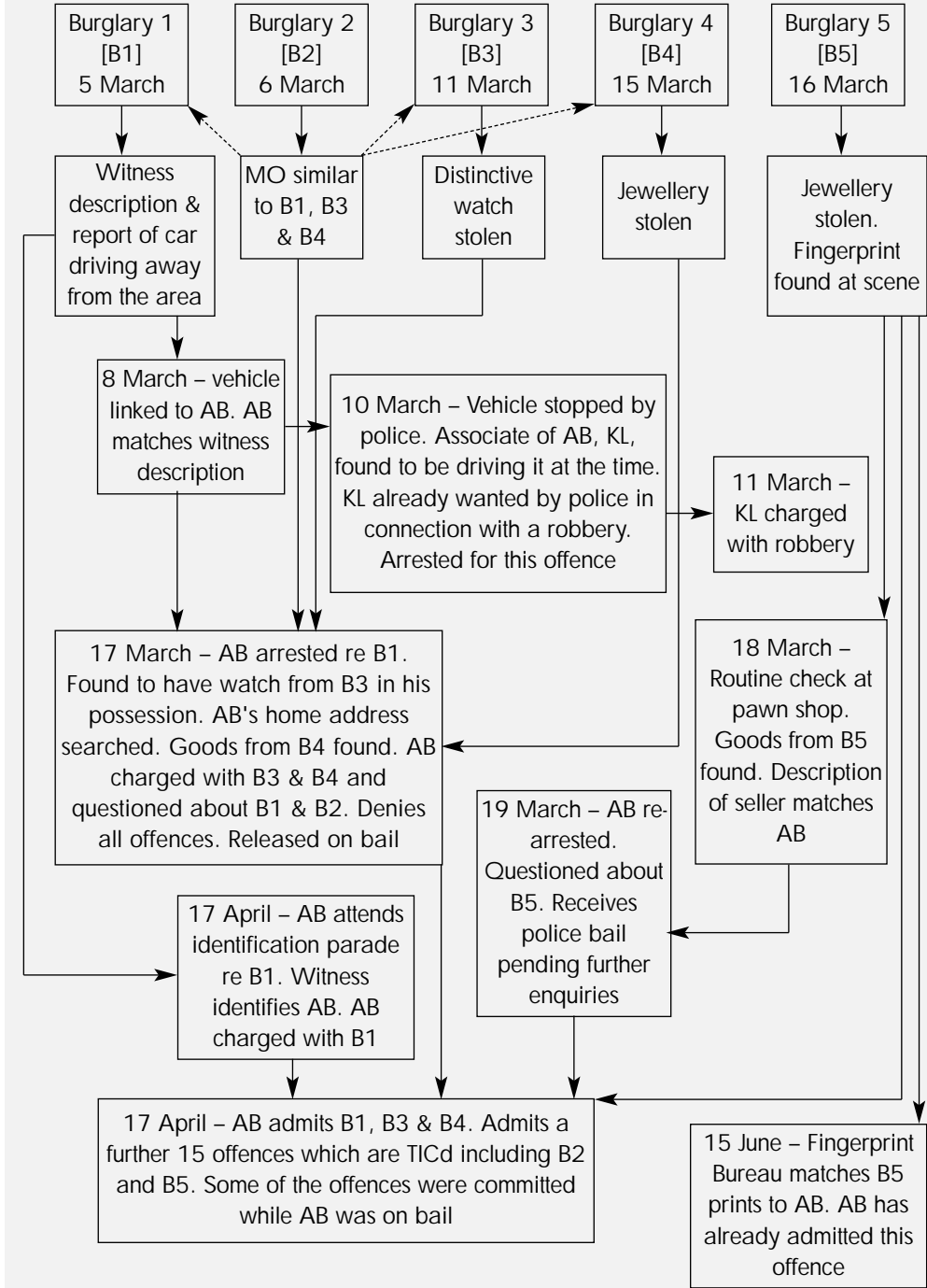
In practice, this simple chain of events tends to occur as one part of a much wider network of events. For example, a single offence may lead to the arrest of a suspect who is then linked to several more offences through separate evidence and through apparent connections between the offences themselves. The suspect may first deny all the offences but subsequently admit to some of them and then to others that the police had not yet associated with him, in the hope that most will be taken into consideration (TIC) by the courts. A number of offences may be committed while he is on bail for those with which he was previously charged⁷. Furthermore, in pursuing this investigation the police may come into contact with criminal associates of this particular offender.

A diagrammatic representation of this kind of complex process is provided in Figure 2.2, which outlines a hypothetical case. This diagram also shows that the focus of an investigation may move back and forth through time, as attention shifts between an offence committed on a given date and offences committed prior to and after that date. Furthermore, again as in Figure 2.2, the investigation of a set of offences associated with a particular suspect may overlap with investigations into other kinds of crimes – possibly carried out in other areas and hence being dealt with by other police forces. Thus it is clear that investigation tends not to be a uni-linear process but frequently has several dimensions and layers.

The social context within which a set of offences and their investigation take place can add further dimensions to the investigative process. For example, an investigation of burglaries carried out in a crime 'hot-spot' with high levels of repeat victimisation may bring into focus a number of local, prolific offenders and a range of crime types. In contrast, an investigation of a series of high-value burglaries carried out in a prosperous area may bring the investigating officers into contact with detectives in neighbouring forces who are seeking the same travelling burglar and associates.

7 Several of the police officers interviewed for this study spoke about the tendency of some burglars to 'go on a spree' of burgling after being charged and released on bail, since at this point they may believe that they are facing prison in any case and therefore have little to lose. This view appeared to be based largely on anecdotal evidence. A Home Office evaluation of a bail project (Morgan and Henderson, 1998) looked at the extent of offending on bail. This found that in 1993 and 1994, 29 per cent of defendants charged with burglary and granted court bail were convicted for further offences committed while on bail.

Figure 2.2: Complex burglary investigation



The case studies described in Box 2.1 and Box 2.2 illustrate the multi-faceted nature of burglary investigation. The first example is the case of a known, highly prolific burglar who was arrested for burglary following an arrest for shoplifting and the discovery of stolen property at his address. The second concerns three individuals who were arrested in relation to the theft of a large quantity of property, after a witness reported seeing the property being unloaded from a vehicle.

Box 2.1: Denials and admissions by offender Sam P-

In the autumn of 2001, Middleton detectives were aware that 20-year-old Sam P., who had previous convictions for burglary, shoplifting and other offences, was living in a hostel in the city. It was observed that the number of burglaries in the area around the hostel had started to rise. On 24 October 2001, Sam was arrested for shoplifting. Because he was a known burglar, a Detective Constable (DC) – who learnt of his arrest through a routine check of the computerised custody records – requested a search of his room at the hostel. This was undertaken that evening, and various items were recovered.

While the shoplifting offence was being dealt with, consultation between DCs in different teams led to a decision to arrest Sam for a burglary committed on 21 October [B.1], in the course of which the intruder had confronted the elderly female householder while she was in her bath. Sam's appearance seemed to match the description given by the aggrieved; however, he denied the offence.

Sam was remanded in custody, and the following day (25 October) was given police bail with respect to B.1 (this case was subsequently dropped due to lack of evidence). Before being released, he was arrested for a burglary committed on 23 October [B.2], from which – it had just been established – property had been taken similar to items found in his room the previous evening. Later that day, this property was positively identified by the aggrieved (who was elsewhere in Britain at the time, but made a statement to local police about unique markings on two videotapes that had been taken). Sam denied the offence.

While dealing with matters relating to B.2, officers noted a report of an attempted burglary on 23 October [B.3]. This was linked to Sam on the grounds of a witness description and the *modus operandi* (MO), which was similar to that of B.2. Moreover, Sam had been limping when arrested, and the suspect from B.3 had been seen to jump from a first-floor window. Sam was questioned about B.3, but denied it and was never charged with the offence.

At 1 pm on 25 October Sam was charged with B.2. While being fingerprinted, he began to talk about his severe crack addiction, and said he needed help. When told that he might be able to receive a Drug Treatment and Testing Order (DTTO) in lieu of a prison sentence for burglary, if he showed willingness to address his criminal behaviour, Sam stated that he wanted to confess to all his 'jobs'.

Two officers immediately took him on a 'drive around', so that he could point to properties he had burgled. On the drive, and subsequently in interview at the police station, he admitted to a total of 18 burglaries, most of which dated from earlier that year. He continued to deny B.1, B.2 and B.3, but admitted to an earlier burglary [B.4] at the address of B.3. Sam was charged with B. 4, and requested that the others he had admitted be taken into consideration (TIC'd). He was remanded in custody, and while in custody later admitted to approximately 50 burglaries he had committed in a different police area within the same force.

In December 2001, Sam was sentenced to an 18-month DTTO, having pleaded guilty to B.4 and a handling charge with respect to B.2. However, within two weeks of starting the DTTO he was required to leave the residential treatment centre because he had entered into a relationship with a female resident. He was placed in a bail hostel in Middleton while a place at another residential service was sought. The police were not informed, and learnt that Sam had left the initial centre only when an officer saw him by chance in the city. Over the following week the police stop-checked him twice.

On 2 January a burglary [B.5] was reported from an address which, it was noted by a DC, had been among Sam's TICs. The officer asked staff at Sam's bail hostel to search his room; two mobile phones taken during the burglary were found. Sam was arrested and charged with B.5; he denied it and was granted bail by the Magistrates' Court on condition that he could be found a place at a drug rehabilitation centre outside Middleton. At the time of the case study research Sam was on remand, awaiting a rehabilitation place, and a decision by the courts about the outstanding period of his DTTO.

Box 2.2: Suspects Don L-, Mark M- and Sally P-

Don L-, a prolific burglar known to Tryton police, was released from prison on licence in March. By the end of the month the police were looking for him as he was believed to have breached his licence.

On the morning of 5 April, the police received a report about a vehicle seen in suspicious circumstances the previous evening. Three males had been seen unloading a large amount of property from the vehicle into an address in H— Road in Tryton; they then left in the vehicle and returned a little later with more property.

This particular vehicle had been linked by police intelligence to Don a few days before. The address in H- Road was known to the police as a drugs den, and as the home of Sally P-. The police also had intelligence that Mark M-, a local offender, was currently staying there, and that he was an associate of Don. The witness's (admittedly not detailed) description of two of the men unloading property appeared to match Don and Mark.

At about 1 pm on 5 April, officers set out to arrest Don, and found him driving the vehicle close to H- Road. He was arrested for breaching his licence, and returned to prison. Officers searched the H- Road address and came across what was, in their own words, 'like a scene from Pickfords Removals'. Many items were recovered which – from details on bank documents – were traced to an address which the police then visited and found to have been burgled. (The offence had not yet been reported as the occupant was on holiday.) Sally, as the householder of the H- Road property, was arrested for handling stolen goods, which she denied.

The aggrieved formally identified the stolen items on 12 April, on his return from holiday. Mark and Don (the latter having been produced from prison) were subsequently arrested for the burglary, and denied it. Don admitted to owning the vehicle mentioned above, but said he had lent it to a friend on the evening of 4 April.

Investigation of the burglary continued over the following months. No forensic evidence from the scene was found, but Don's, Mark's and Sally's fingerprints were found on much of the stolen property, as was Mark's blood. In the meantime, both the male suspects received prison sentences for previous offences: Don (in May) for burglary, and Mark (in July) for taking a vehicle without consent.

On 29 December – by which time it appeared that no further evidence from the burglary would be forthcoming – the police charged Don and Mark with burglary/handling, which they continued to deny. Sally was charged with handling; she now admitted to having known that the property was from a burglary, and said it had been brought to her home by two men whom she would not name. At the time of the case study research, the case was yet to go to trial.

To a large extent, the complexity of the process of investigating burglary and other volume crime results from the multiplicity of offenders and offending. That is, any such investigation may concern several offenders (whether working together or loosely associated with each other) and, because much offending is highly prolific, several or many offences. In contrast, a serious crime investigation may entail the identification of a single offender in relation to a single offence.

Conceptualising investigation

Over the course of the past two decades, the police service of England and Wales has embraced a series of reforms carried out with a view to improving efficiency, effectiveness and accountability. Police investigative activities have come under particular scrutiny over this time, and – in the light of the poor detection rates associated with many offences, including burglary – efforts have been made to impose tighter managerial control over investigation and to introduce more structured and streamlined procedures. The 1993 Audit Commission report *Helping with Enquiries: Tackling Crime Effectively* has played an important part in focusing attention on the need for ‘police managers to secure maximum benefit from available resources by addressing inefficiency in the management and deployment of officers in the investigation of crime (Audit Commission, 1993: 22).

The findings of this study with regard to the inherent complexity, and what might also be called the ‘messiness’, of the investigative process point to some of the difficulties associated with the attempt to move ‘towards a quality-driven formalisation of investigative techniques’ that could ensure the actions of investigators ‘were prescribed, focused and comprehensively carried out’ (Gill *et al.*, 1998). Certainly, the findings of the fieldwork demonstrate the fundamental importance of clarity, consistency and routine in the investigation of burglary (as will be discussed in Chapter 4). However, it is clear also that the multi-dimensional and complex nature of investigation means that it is not possible to develop a single, step-by-step model of burglary investigation that can be applied in all cases. Indeed, to seek to impose a highly simplified model upon the multi-layered reality would run the risk of constraining the very activities that can possibly lead to positive outcomes for the police.

If it is not helpful to conceptualise burglary investigation as a uni-linear chain of possible actions, it may nevertheless be possible to develop more fluid and dynamic models of the process. The efforts of policy-makers and senior managers in the police to improve effectiveness and efficiency in the investigation of burglary (and indeed of other crimes) will perhaps have the greatest value if they are based on an understanding of investigation as a process of building:

- a) networks of communication between individuals and agencies, linking:
- b) items of information about individual offences, and
- c) items of information about individual offenders.

Possible components of these networks are presented in Figure 2.3. This diagram demonstrates the extremely wide range of individuals, agencies, and kinds of information that can play a part in a burglary investigation. For example, information about a suspect may emanate not only from police records and those of the prison or probation service, but also from witnesses, victims, and the suspect's associates, relatives and employers. This information may concern not only identifying features of the suspect (such as physical appearance or fingerprints), but also his criminal history, general circumstances, and typical activities. Similarly, information about offences can be of many different kinds and in many different forms, and can come from many different sources.

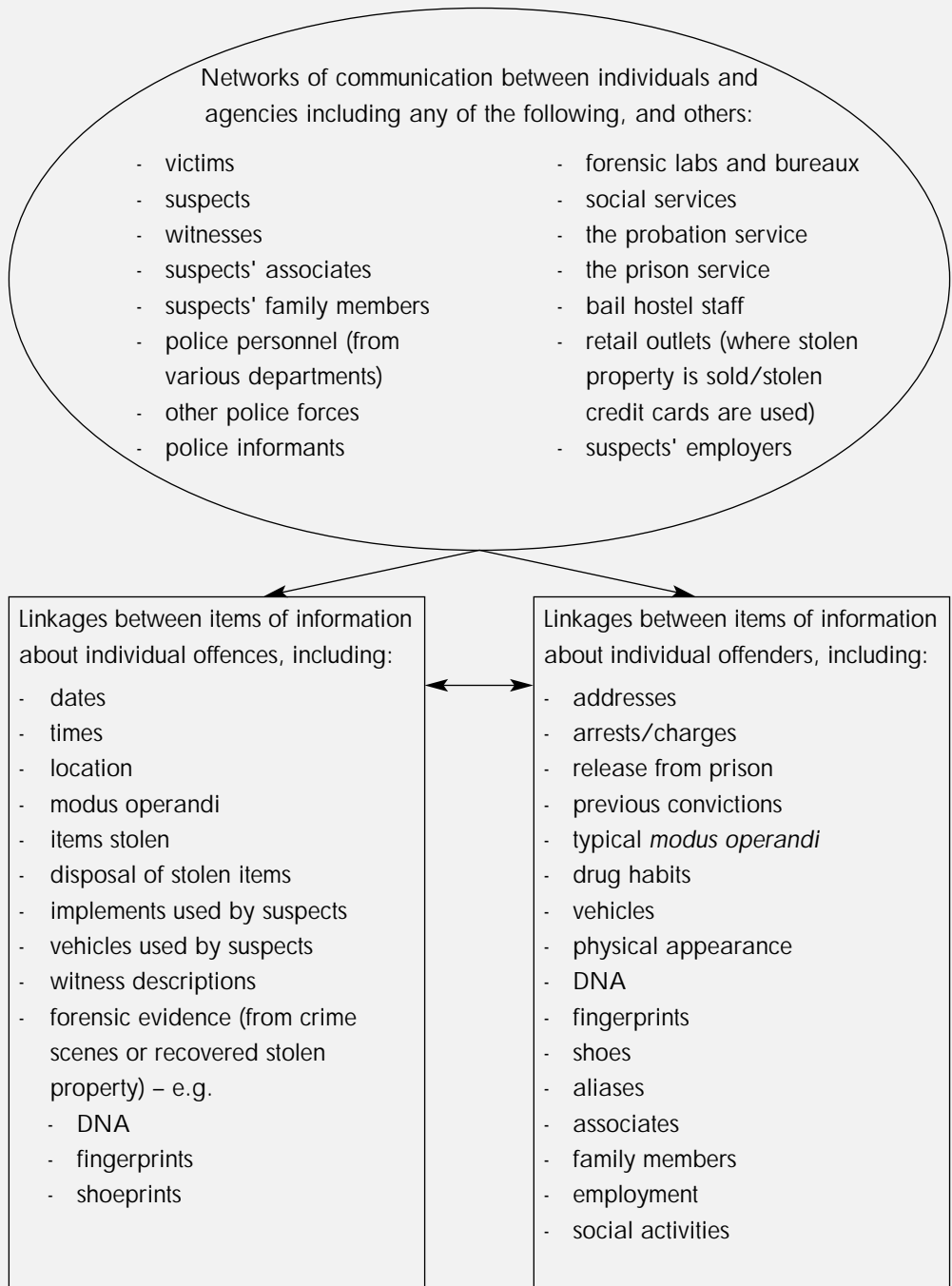
The 'human factor'

The complexity and multi-dimensionality of the process of investigation stems from the fact that investigating burglary is, ultimately, about investigating the actions of individuals. It is therefore a matter of dealing with the randomness and vast diversity of human reality. What is more, given that many burglars lead chaotic lives – particularly the substantial number who have drug problems⁸ – this 'human factor' in investigative work may often be especially difficult to define. For example, neither the specific offending behaviours of burglars, nor (as will be further discussed in Chapter 6) their responses to apprehension by the police may be easily predicted. Cromwell *et al.*, reporting on the findings of their study of burglars, point to the 'here-and-now orientation' of most burglars, and particularly those who are using drugs. In committing their offences, they tend not to engage in careful planning but to work opportunistically and to seek 'satisfactory target choices, not optimal ones' (1991: 89)⁹.

8 Mawby (2001) reports that previous research in both Britain and the USA, particularly from the past fifteen years, has found a close connection between drug misuse and burglary. The large majority of suspects in the cases examined for this study were believed by the police to have drug problems.

9 Cromwell *et al.* thus propose a 'limited rationality explanation of burglary', in place of 'the economic model of crime that relies on the concept of maximization of outcomes'.

Figure 2.3: Components of burglary investigation



The 'human factor' in an investigation concerns not only the offender but extends also to the victims. The case described in Box 2.3, below, may not be typical, but illustrates clearly that police dealings with victims and witnesses can at times throw up unexpected issues and problems.

Box 2.3: Victim Jane S-

At 8 pm on 3 May 2001, Jane S- called the police to report a burglary at her home. The police attended, and took statements from Jane and her sister, Sheila.

Sheila explained that she and her boyfriend had visited Jane's home that afternoon. Jane was out, but there were two young Asian men there, carrying furniture out of the house. One of them said he was a friend of Jane's, and that she had sold him the furniture. As he spoke about Jane in such a way as to suggest that he knew her well, Sheila saw nothing suspicious in this, and she gave him some advice about how to fit through the front door a coffee table he was struggling with. Her boyfriend helped the two men put the table and some other items in their van, which they then drove away.

Sheila then found that the lock on the front door of the house was broken. She made contact with Jane, and told her what she had seen. Jane said she had not sold her furniture to anyone, and immediately returned to her house, from where she called the police. Jane told the police that she believed the young man who had spoken to Sheila to be an acquaintance of hers, Yunus K- – based on Sheila's description of him, and the fact that he knew certain details about her.

Yunus was subsequently arrested by the police on suspicion of the burglary, and given bail pending an identification parade. Before the parade was held, however, Sheila rang the police to say that she would not attend, because she had fallen out with her sister and had no wish to help her. Her boyfriend also would not co-operate; and as no other witnesses had had a good view of the suspects, and there was no forensic evidence, the case was taken no further.

The DC who dealt with this case learnt that Jane was well-known locally for having large numbers of people, including children, drinking in her home – some of whom she would sometimes accuse of damaging the property or stealing items. She was frequently in contact with the police, reporting incidents of various kinds. She also appeared to have difficulties with her son, aged nine, who was believed to have started fires in the house on more than one occasion. The officer was of the opinion that the above incident was thus part of a pattern of chaotic and damaging relations between Jane and her wide circle of acquaintances.

The case of Jane S- reveals a little about the nature of 'multiple victimization' – a subject explored in greater depth by Genn. Genn notes that traditional surveys of crime victimization, because of their focus on discrete events, fail to capture the process of victimization experienced by those individuals living 'on the margins of English urban society' for whom 'violence, abuse and petty theft are an integral part of ... day-to-day existence' (1988: 91)¹⁰.

Consideration of the 'human factor' in burglary investigation also brings into focus the issue of partnership. As should be clear from the preceding discussion, the problem of burglary has various aspects and is closely related to other problems; hence it demands a range of responses from a range of different agencies if it is to be tackled successfully.

¹⁰ Genn conducted an ethnographic study of multiple victimization, which focused on one particular woman ('Maureen') and her family. The study found that the police are a part of [Maureen's] life and perform diverse functions for (and against) her and her family. 'They are mediators, friends and enemies. They defuse explosive situations and they are called in to help in times of trouble. They also interfere in Maureen's life and are perceived as persecuting the children of the household' (1988: 95).

The drive to proactivity

Much research on the investigation of crime has found that 'in most primary detections, the offender's identity is plain from the outset: victims or witnesses can say who did it, or else the offender is detained at the scene of the crime or is clearly implicated in some other way' (Hough, 1987: 72). What this means, as Steer points out, is that for the most part the detection of crime does not result from 'what the public would perceive as real detective ability' (Steer, 1980: 71).

Research dating back to the 1970s (for example, the work of Greenwood *et al.*, 1977, in the USA) has shown this to be true for the detection of burglaries as for other crimes: burglars who are arrested and charged tend to be apprehended at the scene of the burglary, or to be identified by a victim or witness. For example, a study by Coupe and Griffiths (1996) looked at a sample of 256 cases of burglary which had resulted in primary detections. They found that in 43 per cent of these cases the offender was arrested at or near the scene, and in 34 per cent the principal method of detection was the questioning of witnesses (victims or neighbours) at the scene. Hence in only 23 per cent of cases were detections achieved in the absence of almost immediate indications of the offender.

Similarly, Burrows (1986) found that in only 18 per cent of 219 cases of primary detection did arrests follow police enquiries lasting more than 24 hours when there were no direct leads from the scene. Burrows concludes that the poor results associated with lengthier enquiries did not necessarily reflect a lack of commitment to such enquiries. Rather, he argues that his study 'provides no support for the assumption that the chance of a burglary being cleared up is determined simply by the ability of the police to put sufficient time into its investigation' (1986: 77).

The crucial importance of immediate action and information in the detection of crime helps to explain the particularly low clear-up rate associated with burglary. As noted by Maguire (1982), by the time a burglary is reported the offender is usually well away from the scene of the crime¹¹, and offenders are not usually known to the victims and so cannot be identified if seen. Mawby contrasts burglary with other offences: 'Unlike violent offences, there is rarely an available witness to name or describe the perpetrator, and unlike drug offences the

¹¹ Coupe and Griffiths (1996) found that only 10 per cent of burglaries in the study area were reported to the police as 'in progress'.

identification of an offence does not almost inevitably bring with it the identification of a suspect' (2001: 167-8). In the absence of witnesses, forensic evidence can potentially play an important part in pointing to an offender, but is found at a small minority of burglary scenes¹².

The limitations of investigative work based on enquiries at individual crime scenes – that is, traditional 'reactive' policing – have been widely recognised. They led the Home Office, the Audit Commission and senior managers in the police to place an increasingly heavy emphasis on a 'proactive' approach to the policing of burglary and other crimes. Proactive work targets prolific criminals through the use of intelligence and crime pattern analysis (cf. Audit Commission, 1993). Typical strategies of proactive policing, as described by Maguire and Norris, include:

"Engineering frequent checks, stops and searches of prolific offenders in the hope of catching them with evidence of criminal offences; the use of surveillance or informants to obtain intelligence about their activities; and, whenever they are in detention or in custody, obtaining as many admissions from them as possible" (1992: 8-9)¹³.

This move to proactivity was of course closely linked to the other changes to policing practices and management which – as discussed above – were introduced over the past two decades with the intention of producing a more effective and efficient police service (Innes, 2000). However, research on the subject suggests that the extent of proactive, or what is often called 'intelligence-led', policing remains limited in many police forces.

According to Maguire and Norris (1992), for example, divisional detectives commonly found that the pressures of work arising from administrative tasks together with the numbers of offences that demanded immediate response left little time for genuine proactive policing. Maguire and John's study of proactive work in various police forces (1995) found that where there was no major organisational reform to support proactivity, officers were easily diverted by reactive demands, and a certain amount of 'cultural' resistance to new working practices also inhibited proactivity. Reviewing the British literature of the 1980s and 1990s, Heaton (2000) reinforces Maguire and John's message that effective proactive policing demands organisational change rather than the simple addition of proactive units to existing structures.

12 Coupe and Griffiths (1996) report that forensic evidence was found and tested at only 9 per cent of all burglary scenes visited by SOCO in the study area (however, they note that this figure may be an under-estimate). In only 6 per cent of the detected cases studied by these researchers was the use of forensic evidence the principal method of detection.

13 It should be noted that since April 1999 admissions from offenders serving prison sentences have not been classed as detections under Home Office counting rules – other than in cases where there is sufficient evidence for a charge to be laid, in addition to an admission. However, offences that are admitted by offenders after charge but prior to conviction, and are asked to be taken into consideration (TIC), are included within detections.

The interconnectedness of proactive and reactive work

The case studies in this project reveal that proactive approaches to investigation tend to be tightly bound up with reactive work. In other words, proactive and reactive policing appear to be not so much alternative methods as part and parcel of the same process. What often happens in an investigation is that the focus of police attention and activity constantly shifts between a past offence or offences and the suspect or suspects associated with them.

Proactive and reactive investigative work can perhaps most usefully be regarded as the two ends of a spectrum. At the 'extreme' proactive end, for example, an investigation might start when the police learn from an informant that a particular offender is currently active. A surveillance operation might then lead to the offender being arrested while committing a crime – before any prior offences are specifically identified with him. At the 'extreme' reactive end of the spectrum, the investigation of an individual offence might result in the arrest and charge of a suspect, without any attempts being made to link him to other offences. In contrast to these scenarios of 'pure' proactive and reactive work, however, the large majority of investigations – particularly of crimes such as burglary which tend to be committed by prolific offenders – fall at some point between the two ends of the spectrum, and thus combine elements of both.

A successful investigation may therefore be one in which a piece of reactive work – for example, obtaining a witness description of a suspect – provides the impetus for what then becomes a wider operation targeting a known local offender. Or, conversely, where a pre-existing proactive operation finally bears fruit, with evidence emerging from a crime scene that is sufficient for an arrest and charge. The cases described in Boxes 3.1 and 3.2, below, illustrate the interplay between proactive and reactive investigative work.

Box 3.1: *Young offender Steven L-*

Between 2 and 30 September 2001, 11 burglaries with similar MOs had been reported in the S- area of Tryton. All were 'creeper burglaries', involving entry through insecure windows or doors while the occupants were asleep¹⁴, and the theft of small items such as mobile telephones. Fingerprints were recovered from the points of entry at some of the scenes.

¹⁴ 'Creper burglary' is a term typically used by the police in this and other forces to describe an offence carried out while the occupant is at home.

Detectives had no idea about possible suspects, and hence decided to mount foot patrols of the S- area between the hours of 11 pm and 3 am. On the first night of patrolling (1 October), officers stopped and searched five young people who were seen at the end of an alley. As they were carrying screwdrivers and gloves, the youngsters were arrested for 'going equipped'.

From interviews with the suspects the following day, police learnt that their ring-leader was 16-year-old Steven L., who had one previous conviction for burglary dating back 18 months and was currently in the care of social services. He denied having committed any of the recent burglaries, and was released on police bail having provided a set of elimination fingerprints.

From 4 to 13 October six similar offences were reported in the S- area. During this period, Steven was arrested for three of the local burglaries on the basis of witness descriptions of the suspect. He denied these offences and was bailed pending an identity parade. On 13 October he was arrested again, as fingerprint matches came back for four of the S- area offences, which he nevertheless denied. He was charged on 14 October and given conditional bail. Two days later he was arrested yet again, after a plastic bag containing items taken from a burglary on 24 September was found in the garden of a house in which he had previously stayed.

When interviewed about the latter offence he admitted to the other four for which he had already been charged, and to a further 13 which he asked to be TIC'd. He co-operated fully with the police: for example, indicating places (mostly in woodland) where he had left stolen property. He was released on bail pending sentence.

From late December, police again began to receive reports of 'creeper burglaries' in the S- area. In mid-January, the victim of one of the burglaries reported that he had confronted Steven, who he had known to be a burglar, and persuaded him to return what he had stolen. Steven was arrested for this offence on 19 January, denied it, and was released on police bail into the care of social services (pending further investigation). The police learnt (through intelligence) two days later that Steven was sleeping rough, and believed him to be responsible for the theft of some food from a day centre near to where he was thought to be sleeping. At the time of the case study research, officers were looking for Steven.

Box 3.2: Targeting suspect Paul S-

Paul S-, a 29-year-old heroin user, was known to the police in Tryton. He had previous convictions for theft of motor vehicles, shoplifting and burglary. In the autumn of 2001 police noticed that burglaries in a specific area of Tryton were increasing, and were linked to Paul by a DC on the grounds that the MO, the targeted area and the types of goods stolen were similar to those associated with Paul's previous burglary convictions. However, Paul was initially discounted as a suspect because he was believed to be serving a prison sentence. Enquiries with the prison service then revealed that Paul had in fact been released.

In September 2001 a burglary occurred (B.1) and a witness provided a description of the suspect which appeared to match Paul. One aspect of the description was that the suspect was said to have a ponytail, and the DC recalled that Paul had had a ponytail when he had dealt with him three or four years previously. He contacted the prison service to ask if Paul had had a ponytail when in prison, and learnt that he had. The police had no address for Paul, but established that he was still with a girlfriend known to them as a heroin user.

Paul was arrested at his girlfriend's address in early October, on suspicion of B.1. His property was searched and goods seized, including a watch believed to have come from another burglary (B.2). Paul was interviewed about B.1 and B.2, and charged with the latter, which he denied (the former was taken no further). He was released on bail, and the DC then began to research all burglaries in the area to see if some could be linked to Paul.

Two weeks later Paul was arrested on suspicion of a burglary (B.3) from which there was fingerprint evidence. He denied the offence, and was charged and released on conditional bail. Over the following weeks the number of burglaries in the area in which Paul was thought to operate subsided, and then began to rise again.

On 3 December, DCs asked patrol officers to check if Paul was complying with his bail conditions, and found that he was breaching his 7 pm to 8 am curfew. He was arrested and charged with breach of his bail conditions (which he admitted), and items were found on his person that were thought to have come from a burglary committed earlier that day (B.4). Paul denied B.4, stating that he had bought these items that morning from a man in the street. He was charged and remanded in custody.

Shortly thereafter, Paul was arrested for a further two burglaries (B.5 and B. 6 – committed on 30 November and 2 December) on the basis of witness descriptions of the suspect. Following identification parades, at which he was identified, he was charged with these offences. At the time of the case study research, the police were hoping that he would change his pleas to guilty and request TICs with respect to other offences. He was believed to be responsible for up to 40 recent offences in the area.

The close interrelationship between proactive and reactive investigative work seems to be taken for granted by police officers directly involved in the investigation of burglary. From the focus groups for officers, organised as part of this study, it emerged that the kind of intelligence-led, offender-focused work that is described as 'proactive' in the research literature is in fact often regarded by officers simply as an important dimension of 'reactive' work. The officers in the focus groups themselves used the term 'proactive' in other ways: in some cases, to refer mainly to preventive work such as target-hardening and high visibility patrolling and, in other cases, to refer specifically to surveillance work (rather than to offender-focused investigative activity in general). That there is confusion within the police generally over the very definition of proactivity was stressed by one of the officers, who commented:

Proactive is the most over-used and most misunderstood word in the police service. Now, I've caught myself using it lots of times, thinking – what do you really mean by proactive? It's over-used, misunderstood and can cover any number of contingencies, really.

Interdependence

It should be clear from the preceding discussion that, in the investigation of burglary, proactive work (using the term, as in much research literature, to refer to offender-based investigation) is in general not simply intertwined with but is in fact *dependent* on reactive work. This is because reactive work generally provides the leads and evidence to be used in detaining the targeted offenders – as well as, very often, the rationale for targeting the offenders in the first instance.

At the same time, good reactive work in a sense depends on proactivity, since the police may respond to individual incidents most thoroughly and effectively when operating within a broad proactive framework. In all three fieldwork sites, officers commented on the fact that the initial reporting of burglaries by uniformed staff was often poor. It was frequently argued that one of the causes of this was the tendency for reporting to be carried out as if it was an isolated, largely administrative task. This suggests that problems of poor reporting might at least partially be overcome if the initial investigations of individual burglaries are seen as

crucial and integral elements of a wider process of disrupting criminals and preventing crime. (The subject of police reporting of burglary offences will be further considered in Chapter 4).

Public service is an important element of reactive police work, in that officers necessarily deal closely with victims and, in some cases, witnesses in responding to burglary offences. This again highlights the interdependence of reactive and proactive work, since the kinds of information that may be forthcoming from the victim or witness of an offence can prove valuable not only to the investigation of that specific crime, but also to any subsequent or ongoing proactive investigation¹⁵. Most broadly, 'satisfying victims can assist good relations with the public', and, in turn, promote the flow of intelligence from the public to the police (Gill *et al.*, 1996: 1). The satisfaction of victims can depend on various factors, including the manner of officers dealing with the offence, their promptness and thoroughness in responding to it, the outcome of the investigation, and the recovery of stolen property (Coupe and Griffiths, 1996).

There is undoubtedly a close relationship between proactive investigative work and crime prevention. (The latter is also commonly included within the umbrella term 'proactive policing' – both in the research literature and, as noted above, by officers themselves.) In relation to the policing of burglary, Bridgeman and Taylor-Browne observe that 'the distinction between proactive and preventive work becomes blurred when, for example, aspects of crime pattern analysis and repeat victimisation measures are included' (1996: 27). This point is made also by Maguire and John, who describe an integrated and holistic approach to proactive policing (adopted by one of the forces they studied) which was explicitly

not restricted to operations against individual offenders, but ... embrace[d] the broader aims of crime prevention and reduction. To this end, a 'Crime Reduction Officer' was attached to the Intelligence Unit, with a brief, aided by the crime analyst, to identify current or likely future crime problems in the area and to devise preventive or 'disruptive' strategies to tackle them (1995: 45).

The integration of reactive and proactive policing?

As has been mentioned above, Maguire and John's study found that organisational reform is required in order to enhance substantially the role of proactive policing. Wider recognition – on the part of senior managers and policy-makers – of the interrelationship between proactive

¹⁵ A national evaluation of the police interviewing model PEACE found some serious weaknesses in police interviewing of victims and witnesses. The police interviews were typically characterised as displaying poor rapport and being driven by closed or leading questions. This suggests that a great deal of potential intelligence is being lost (Clarke and Milne, 2002).

and reactive investigative work, and indeed between investigation and crime reduction, may make this process of reform easier to achieve. In line with this, simplistic assumptions about the inherent superiority of proactive over reactive policing should be avoided.

In other words, enhancing proactivity should not be regarded or presented as a matter of introducing entirely new ways of working, or rejecting the core components of 'traditional' reactive police work. Rather, it should be seen as a shift in emphasis which places increasing weight on the proactive aspects of police investigations and, simultaneously, on those elements of reactive policing on which successful proactive work depends. Accordingly, one of the main challenges of organisational reform should be to identify and establish mechanisms by which reactive policing can most productively feed into, rather than divert attention away from, the targeting of prolific offenders.

This kind of understanding of proactive and reactive approaches as complementary rather than competing should help to diminish any cultural resistance to change within the police – since it ties in closely with officers' own perceptions of what the process of investigating crime necessarily entails. Obviously, given the existence of alternative definitions of the very term 'proactivity' within the police, such developments demand greater conceptual clarity and perhaps the evolution of more precise concepts and terms.

The development and implementation of the National Intelligence Model indicates that strategic thinking within the police is indeed moving on from the reactive-proactive dichotomy. (Whether this is true also of policy debate on policing is less clear.) The NIM does not explicitly address the relationship between reactive and proactive policing, but running through it is the assumption that effective policing is dependent on the thorough integration of intelligence-led, proactive work within all dimensions of policing activity. For example, the concept of the 'tactical tasking and co-ordination group' is a core component of the model. This meeting is expected to be held weekly or fortnightly and to be attended by the intelligence manager, crime analysts and middle managers with operational responsibilities. Among other roles, it should monitor and encourage progress on the following four dimensions of police activity, which clearly bring together reactive and proactive work:

- targeting offenders in line with the priorities of the control strategy
- the management of crime and disorder hot spots
- the investigation of crimes and incidents which can be shown to be linked into 'series'
- the application of the range of 'preventative measures' such as CCTV and lighting schemes or community action initiatives (NCIS, 2000: 14).

This chapter and the two that follow develop and consider three general principles that should guide the investigation of burglary: namely routine, simplicity and flexibility. These principles are derived from careful analysis of the case study investigations, and the interviewed officers' own assessments of what works well – and badly – in an investigation. Most importantly, they build on the recognition that the investigation of burglary is necessarily a complex, multi-layered process involving a constant interplay between reactive and proactive work.

The importance of routine

Precisely because investigation tends to be complex and messy, the adoption of systematic procedures with respect to key elements of the process is vital. Without elements of routine, the risks are that investigative work will lack accountability and ownership, and that there will be many inconsistencies in the kinds and extent of tasks carried out. Hence the organisation and management of burglary investigation must strike a difficult balance between establishing clear parameters for key investigative activities, and granting investigating officers sufficient flexibility and independence.

This chapter discusses the broad issue of routine as it relates to certain aspects of burglary investigation. In particular, the focus will be on initial investigative procedures; the process of allocating cases for further investigation; mechanisms for pooling information about offences and offenders within the police; and systems of communication between the police and other agencies.

Initial investigative work

The part of burglary investigation that can most easily be routinised is the initial stage: that is, from the point that the police are first notified of the offence through to attendance (if required) by scenes of crime officers (SOCOs). The handling of an initial call about an offence from a member of the public is itself part of the investigative process and thus

call takers, whether police officers or civilians working in communications centres, crime desks or enquiry desks, must have the availability to obtain all relevant information in a professional and courteous manner ..., and they must be able to record details accurately in the prescribed format (ACPO, 2002: 15).

Once the police have been notified of a burglary, there are a range of relatively straightforward and standard operational procedures that can be carried out in every case¹⁶. The details of these procedures vary between forces and between policing areas within forces; but whatever the local policy is, there should be clarity on the following issues:

- the maximum period within which a burglary should be attended after the police have been informed of the offence;
- which officers initially attend the scene: for example, uniformed reactive staff, dedicated burglary officers, detectives¹⁷;
- whether a statement is routinely taken from the victim during the initial visit to the scene;
- the time-scale and extent of house-to-house enquiries to be carried out by the reporting officer;
- the process by which details of stolen property are recorded (for example, a property list may be left for the victim to complete);
- the procedure for obtaining and submitting elimination fingerprints; and
- whether SOCOs are routinely requested to attend every dwelling burglary, or only where certain criteria are met.

Officers interviewed for this study were aware of the importance of routine in early investigation, and attempts had been made to standardise procedures in all the field-work sites. The implementation of these, however, appeared to be somewhat problematic. In particular it was suggested that the officers responsible for carrying out the initial scene visits (for the most part, uniformed, reactive staff) often completed their duties inadequately: that is, they typically failed to undertake some of the prescribed tasks (such as house-to-house enquiries), recorded only the most sketchy of details on the standard reporting forms or 'burglary packs', or recorded details inaccurately. The risks inherent in this can hardly be overstated: given that immediate leads from burglary scenes tend to be the most valuable source of detections, poor reporting can have very negative repercussions. This point is stressed by Gill *et al.*, whose study found that 'the most significant contributory factor to a

16 See the ACPO investigation manual for an outline of the actions that should be taken by the first officer who attends a crime scene (ACPO, 2002).

17 The Audit Commission (1993) argues that the initial visit to a burglary should ideally be carried out by a specialist scene visit officer or detective, to avoid the duplication of effort that results when several visits are paid to the same scene by different officers. Following from the Audit Commission suggestions, Taylor and Hirst (1995) examine the effectiveness of using specialists to carry out burglary scene visits.

successful [burglary] investigation is the first investigator's crime report. The quality of the actions taken and recorded bears greatly upon the successful resolution of a case' (1998: 15).

These problems appear to stem partly from the fact that crime reporting is sometimes treated as a task that is isolated from the broader investigative work of the police. Problems with reporting are apparently also caused by the severe time pressures on officers, who tend to be pushed by command and control centres to complete each task as quickly as possible, so that they can move on to the next one. This latter problem demonstrates the difficulties that can arise when different performance measures employed by a particular force, or different demands made on officers, effectively contradict each other in the context of limited staffing resources. In this case, the expectation that officers undertake a range of tasks at each crime scene is undermined by the demand for prompt responses to calls for attendance. It is thus vital that force policy with respect to crime reporting is informed by a holistic view of the work involved: that is, that the various elements of the system are treated as integrated rather than independent parts.

The shortcomings associated with the reporting of burglaries illustrate that, in itself, having appropriate systematic procedures enshrined in policy is not enough. For these procedures to be implemented, staff must be fully aware of what they are and have the necessary training to be able to carry them out properly; working practices must be organised in such a way that officers have sufficient time to do what is required of them; and systems for thorough supervision and review of reporting officers' work must be in place¹⁸.

Crime screening

Crime screening is the process by which serious cases are allocated to CID officers, less serious (or straightforward) cases go to uniformed officers, and cases with a low chance of detection are placed on file. Crime screening ensures that costly detective effort is 'concentrated on cases which are very important or where there is a likelihood but not a certainty of success' (Sinclair and Miller, 1984: 27). It is a practice that has emerged out of 'economic stringency, and the growing understanding that investigative performance is not simply a product of the resources made available to this task' (Burrows and Tarling, 1987: 248)¹⁹.

18 In an effort to minimise inconsistencies in the reporting of burglaries, in March 2001 Chiltern Vale police appointed a civilian to 'audit' the burglary packs produced by reporting officers. The auditor ensures that all the necessary details from each burglary scene are on file, and returns any pack he deems to be incomplete to the reporting officer.

19 It is interesting to note that Gill *et al.* favour the term 'crime allocation' over 'crime screening', on the grounds that 'crime should be assessed and allocated the most appropriate form of investigation, not screened in or out of the investigative process' (1996: 2). These researchers emphasise the concept of 'static investigation', which 'enables investigations to continue beyond the point when active enquiries have cases and facilitates the integration of information on crimes from all incidents' (1996: 20).

The process of crime screening as applied to the investigation of burglary is known to vary widely between policing areas. Indeed, the details of the practice differed between the three fieldwork sites (see Appendix A); in all three, however, dwelling burglary cases that were believed to offer some chance of detection tended to go to CID officers. Non-dwelling burglaries, in contrast, were generally investigated by uniformed officers.

Among the three sites, the process of crime screening in Oxford appeared to be the most systematic. Here, all packs resulting from initial visits to burglary scenes were routinely and quickly passed to the area's dedicated burglary team. One of the officers in the team with responsibility for the relevant geographic area of Oxford would then examine the burglary pack, and it would be filed only once the officer had decided that there was no more that could be done with it at that time. Given the regular briefings and communication between members of the burglary team, this decision would be taken in the context of a general awareness of any patterns in current offences.

In both Chiltern Vale and Coventry, in contrast, there appeared to be less scope for detailed case-by-case assessment. This was probably a consequence of the time pressures on officers. Coventry did not have a burglary team and lacked its full complement of CID officers. Chiltern Vale did have a burglary team but it was evidently under-resourced; here, therefore, cases for which there were no obvious leads tended to be filed without first being examined by the team.

The benefits of a more systematic process of crime screening are not simply that the activities of investigating officers are most likely to be focused on appropriate cases. In addition, accountability for the investigation of individual cases should be enhanced, as should a sense of ownership of investigative work among those responsible for it. A systematic process should also ensure that broad force policies on the prioritisation of offences for investigation are reflected in the practices of officers. As pointed out by Stockdale and Gresham, however, the process of crime screening is inevitably shaped by a variety of factors: 'The criteria which determine the extent of an investigation need to be explicit and consistent, but their application will reflect individual circumstances, local community priorities and resource levels' (1995: 62).

Pooling information

The need for information

Successful investigation of burglary often depends on officers having an overview of what is happening within the geographical area for which they have responsibility. With respect to the investigation of volume crime generally, the ACPO manual notes that:

Officers should be mindful of the need to research other crimes occurring in the same area, including the modus operandi, point of entry and exit, escape routes, time and day of offence, stolen/damaged property, recovered and abandoned property, descriptions and details of any suspects and vehicles used etc. Scene linking can lead to the development of the offender's profile to alert other officers who may know, suspect, or sight the offenders when they visit similar crimes or carrying out general patrol duties. It may also be possible to task informants ... to ascertain the identity of an offender (2002: 29).

Basic information on burglary offences in a given area can be most easily brought together if a single individual has responsibility for attending most of the scenes. This was the practice in one part of the Chiltern Vale policing area, where a dedicated burglary officer – a Police Constable – carried out the reporting of most offences. In Coventry, during the period of the SDP, a civilian 'scene assessor' was employed to visit all burglary scenes approximately one day after the initial report was taken. The role of the scene assessor was to talk in more detail to victims, and thereby gather any further information about the offences that might have come to light since the original police visit. Both the Chiltern Vale burglary officer and Coventry scene assessor were in a position to draw initial inferences about links between offences, which they could then pass on to investigating officers; in so doing, they were perceived by their colleagues to be providing valuable contributions to the investigation process²⁰.

In most areas, the number of offences to be reported and the consequent demands on staff time are such that it is not feasible to have a single officer visit most burglary scenes. The use of dedicated officers to visit crime scenes might, however, be worth considering in particular contexts: for example, if there is a need to identify series of offences in order to tackle an emerging burglary 'hot-spot'.

Successful investigation of burglary depends not only on the pooling of information about offences, but also on the availability of intelligence about offenders. Where officers have shared knowledge about offenders' typical MOs, their appearance, where they are living, with whom they associate and so on, they are well placed to link offences to individuals. In many cases, useful intelligence about offenders may emerge primarily through effective communication with other agencies – as will be further considered below.

²⁰ To the disappointment of many officers in Coventry, the scene assessor post was discontinued at the end of the SDP, as no alternative funding for it was available.

The pooling of information among police officers clearly demands an openness that does not necessarily come easily. Policing research has frequently found that open exchange of information is hindered by various aspects of police culture. Cope (2002), for example, notes that within the police the holding of information is closely associated with power, with the result that there is little sharing of primary information. Similarly, P. Gill observes that:

In policing, where information is the pre-eminent means to status, the tendency of officers to keep information to themselves has been well-established and represents a central challenge for attempts to establish more formal and corporate systems of intelligence (2000: 164).

Systems of information exchange

Notwithstanding any existing cultural barriers to information exchange, in all three fieldwork sites it was evident that formal systems of briefings – that is, routine verbal, written and intranet briefings – ensured that there was a constant flow of information relevant to the investigation of burglary. Exactly how these systems operated varied according to the policing structures in place; but in each site efforts were made to ensure full and regular communication between uniformed officers, CID officers, intelligence departments, crime analysts and SOCOs. For example, normal practice in Oxford – which worked well, according to officers – was that the burglary team had a full briefing at 8.15 am every morning to discuss all burglaries over the past 24 hours. Once a week, the team met with SOCOs, area intelligence and source management to discuss the past week's offences, burglary figures, and the release of offenders from custody. Additionally, every Friday the burglary team sergeant produced a document summarising the team's activities over the past week, to be distributed to all Oxford officers by email or in hard copy.

Complementing the briefing systems, each of the fieldwork sites had its own electronic databases from which information of various kinds could be accessed by officers involved in burglary investigation. Effective investigation clearly depends on information being entered accurately, routinely and promptly on the relevant databases, as well as on individual officers' knowledge of precisely which information is available where, and the ease with which they can access it. Hence the systems must be user-friendly, and officers trained to use them. There were some concerns in one or two of the fieldwork sites that the complexity of the respective information systems limited their usefulness to officers. In particular, officers who had not been fully trained, or generally lacked confidence in using computers, were thought to face difficulties because custody records, intelligence reports,

individual offence reports, and crime and control logs (not to mention the more sophisticated systems used by crime analysts) generally had to be accessed through different systems²¹.

Notwithstanding the crucial importance to successful burglary investigation of regular information exchange and access to electronic information systems, the potential problem of information overload within the police should not be overlooked. Ideally, information systems should be geared to communicating information of the appropriate level of detail to the appropriate groups of investigating officers – whether these officers are defined in terms of their geographic area of responsibility or the crime type (such as burglary) in which they specialise. Berry (2000) has pointed out that in the police service vast quantities of information tend to be distributed without an assessment of precisely who needs it and for what purposes, which results in much wastage of time and resources. With increasing computerisation this problem can only become more severe, as is noted by Ericson and Haggerty, writing of the Canadian police service:

Communication technology fosters the production of more knowledge. The new knowledge produced is often useful to the police ..., but there is also a lot of knowledge that is of tangential or dubious value (1997: 418).

The solution to information overload, notes Berry (2000), is for officers to identify their *information needs*, with reference not only to the kind of information they require, but also its depth and detail, level of accuracy, frequency, speed, and format.

Inter-agency communication

Some of the case study investigations examined for this project pointed to the importance of information exchange *between* policing areas and police forces in addition to more localised communication. For example, some offenders who were being targeted were simultaneously committing burglaries in more than one police area, and hence the police investigations benefited from co-ordination between the different areas. In other cases, co-operation between forces in different parts of the country was required, as offenders were already on bail for offences committed elsewhere at the time they came to the attention of local officers. In one case, information was acquired from another force about an offender's previous burglary convictions, which was then used in pressing charges on the basis of similar fact evidence.

²¹ Other research, such as that of Stockdale and Gresham (1995) has pointed to ongoing problems associated with the use of information technology in police forces, and the need for greater standardisation of systems between and within forces and better training provision for officers.

In addition to communication between policing areas and police forces, information exchange between the police and other agencies can also play a vital part in burglary investigation, as a range of agencies may have dealings with a particular suspect or offender. Systems should thus be in place to ensure that certain kinds of information are routinely and formally passed between agencies.

Over the course of the fieldwork, the researchers came across several examples of apparent breakdowns in communication between the probation and prison services and the police. Most notably, perhaps, in at least two cases – those described in Box 3.2 and Box 4.1 – investigative work was hindered by the fact that the police officers involved lacked information about prison releases. In both cases, a possible suspect was initially discounted because he was wrongly believed to be in custody.

The police in all the three fieldwork sites were, however, confident that communication between themselves and the prison service had improved, such that they were now routinely being informed of prison releases. In West Midlands Police, for example, there was a new system under which this information went directly to the Community Safety Bureau (CSB) in the relevant Operational Command Unit (such as Coventry) as well as to force headquarters. Of course, to make the most of information on prison releases, systems of *internal* communication within the police – as discussed above – must ensure that it is passed on to the relevant departments or officers. Hence, in Coventry, information about prison releases was passed from the CSB to the local intelligence officer in the relevant sector, who would enter it in the briefing system.

Box 4.1: Prolific burglar Simon E-

In early 2000 the police in Senham identified similarities between burglaries being committed in a specific area of the city. In each case, the offender used a small stone to break glass in windows adjacent to front door latches; the burgled properties tended to be well-presented end-of-terrace houses; the breaks occurred during the day; and similar property was stolen.

Liaison between the CID, intelligence, and SOCOs took place. A possible suspect by the name of Simon E- was suggested on the basis that the MO of the current series seemed to match the MO of burglaries for which he had previously been convicted in Senham. (Simon was 29 years old and had 20 previous convictions for 44 offences.) However, Senham police were of the belief that he was currently serving out a prison sentence, and his name was therefore discounted.

Several days later a DC who had previously dealt with Simon saw him by chance in the city centre. The officer submitted an intelligence log stating that Simon was out of prison; this fact was then noted by the officers who had been dealing with the offences described above. Simon was subsequently arrested and charged with several of the burglaries on fingerprint evidence. He was eventually convicted of three burglaries, with 16 burglaries and five attempted burglaries TIC'd.

In Coventry, efforts had also recently been made to improve communication between the local magistrates' court and the police. The CSB were now informed daily by fax of every suspect who had been given conditional bail by the court. On the basis of this information, shift officers were tasked to visit every suspected burglar who had been conditionally bailed, to check for compliance with the conditions.

Failures to inform the police of prison releases were not the only examples of serious communication breakdown contained in the case studies reviewed for this project. In the case of Sam P., as described in Box 2.1, the probation service did not tell the police that this highly prolific burglar had been discharged from his DTTO for breaching its conditions, and placed in a bail hostel. Similarly, in the case of Graeme T- (see Box 4.2), the police were on two occasions not informed by probation staff that this suspect had left his bail hostel in breach of his bail conditions. Such cases, which highlight the prolific and persistent nature of much offending, point to the crucial importance of inter-agency co-operation in managing and reviewing the behaviour of suspects *after arrest* – for example, through rigorous enforcement of bail conditions and community sentences.

Box 4.2: Breaches of bail conditions by suspected burglar Graeme T-

In Middleton in early October 2001, 28-year-old Graeme T- was arrested and charged with burglary and possession of an offensive weapon. Although the police requested a remand in custody, he was bailed by magistrates to a drug treatment centre outside Middleton. On 20 October, a few days after entering the centre, he was discharged because he had breached his bail conditions by going out the day before to meet and go drinking with friends.

On being discharged, Graeme was allowed to leave the centre alone. According to staff at the centre, they had informed the probation service of Graeme's discharge, and expected probation to pass on this information to the police. Probation staff, however, subsequently stated that they had not received any such message. Whatever the cause of this breakdown in communication, the result was that the police did not know that Graeme had been discharged from the centre until they learnt through intelligence the next day that he was back in Middleton. Had they been informed promptly, they would have sought to arrest him for breaching his bail conditions prior to his departure from the centre.

Having been located through intelligence, within two days of leaving the centre Graeme was arrested and charged with breaching his bail conditions and a further burglary. He was subsequently bailed to another drug treatment centre. On 16 November, after having spent two weeks at the centre, he breached his bail conditions by walking out; again the police were not informed of this. Ten days later he was re-arrested and then charged with breaching his bail conditions and with burgling a pub on 18 November.

The importance of inter-agency communication about offenders and suspects illustrates that partnership working can be a crucial aspect of investigative work as well as other aspects of crime reduction. What is more, this is an example of how partnership can play a concrete and highly functional role – in contrast to many situations in which the concept of partnership is somewhat abstract or is associated more with strategic or policy discussions than with the daily operations of agencies. However, the examples of communication *breakdown* between agencies in the fieldwork sites point to the fact that establishing systems for inter-agency information exchange can be difficult. At a pragmatic level, simple carelessness or inaccurate recording of information can have major repercussions; and, at a more fundamental level, concerns about how information will be used by other agencies can hinder communication and cause severe tensions between supposed partners (see, for example, HMIC, 2000; Phillips *et al.*, 2002).

It has been argued above that the process of investigating burglary tends to be complex, as a consequence of, in essence, the multiplicity of offences and multiplicity of offenders that must be dealt with. Perhaps paradoxically, the findings of this study suggest that *simplicity* should nevertheless be one of the principles that guide the police response to burglary offences.

Simple responses to burglary should nevertheless be *informed* responses. However simple they may be, actions taken by the police need to be knowledge-based – that is, based on generalised criminological knowledge of the kinds of police activities that can be expected to yield results, styles and methods of offending, and patterns of victimisation²², as well as on specific knowledge of local offences and offenders.

In advocating simplicity – or, more precisely, ‘informed simplicity’ – the intention here is to stress that the police can often achieve positive results by taking relatively straightforward steps in terms of analysis and investigation. Simplicity is about ensuring that the basic, core elements of an investigation are carried out, and are carried out properly. If the basics are done well, an investigation may well come to a speedy and successful conclusion; or, in the absence of a successful outcome, any further or subsequent investigative work will have a solid grounding on which to build.

Simple investigative work can achieve results because few burglars are highly sophisticated in their methods. As many of the officers interviewed for this study pointed out, burglars tend to be opportunistic offenders, who are very often committing crime in order to fund drug habits, and frequently do not make much effort to, or are physically and mentally not able to, hide their tracks effectively. In the words of one of the police participants in a focus group:

Burglars are not clever people – mostly they're desperate people, just desperate to get their next fix, and so it shouldn't be beyond us to put an end to their [offences] after two or three.

This chapter will discuss, in turn, the principle of simplicity in relation to investigative actions, informal communication, and crime analysis.

²² See Ekblom (2002) for a discussion of the obstacles that stand in the way of the transfer of criminological knowledge to mainstream policing practice.

Investigative actions

As discussed in the previous chapter, there are certain procedures that should, as a minimum, be carried out as standard in the initial stage of a burglary investigation. Beyond these actions, if any additional steps are to be taken by investigating officers, relatively simple avenues of enquiry may often prove rewarding.

This is not to suggest that every case should be pursued beyond the initial investigative stage. Rather, the argument here is that in some cases – which should be identified through a system of crime screening – officers may find it worthwhile to undertake certain quick and easy actions over and above the minimum required of every investigation. Moreover, given the interdependence of reactive and proactive work, even if these actions fail to produce immediate results, they might generate useful intelligence that can be used in subsequent targeting of offenders.

Tracing stolen property

An example of the kind of simple investigative action that can be highly productive is the following up of known routes of disposal of stolen property. Coupe and Griffiths (1996) point out that although property was stolen in 87 per cent of the cases of burglary they examined, it ‘rarely featured as the key factor in solving a case’, and suggest that greater use of stolen property as a means of detecting burglaries could be beneficial. Osterburg and Ward note the importance of recording details of all items stolen in a burglary, including those that were perhaps overlooked when the initial crime report was taken, since ‘in even the smallest burglary there is likely to be something taken that has a number or mark that individualises it for identification purposes’ (2000: 525). Stolen property that is subsequently recovered ‘may provide the link that helps solve the case’ (2000: 516)²³. Ideally, efforts to trace stolen property should be linked with multi-agency strategies to disrupt local markets in stolen goods, such as those described by Sutton *et al.* (2001). (This provides another example of the potential role of partnership in investigative work.)

Among the fieldwork sites of this study, Oxford appeared to be the most committed to tracing stolen property: for example by contacting second-hand shops to which local offenders were known to bring certain kinds of stolen items. The example presented in Box 5.1, involving police visits to a pawnshop frequently used to dispose of stolen jewellery, illustrates the potential of this approach.

²³ The ACPO manual on investigating volume crime (2002) also emphasises the importance of recording full details of stolen property and tracing these items.

Box 5.1: Tracing jewellery stolen by Tim P-

About £10,000-worth of jewellery was stolen from a house in Middleton on 3 October, 2001 (B.1). On 4 October, as part of their investigation, detectives visited a local pawnshop with the victim, who identified as her own some items that had been pawned the day before. (These officers routinely call the pawnbroker when jewellery is stolen, to enquire about recent transactions.) The shop's records showed that the items had been pawned by a woman giving her name as Sandra K, and CCTV footage showed that she had been accompanied by a male, identified by a shop employee as Tim P.

On 5 October Sandra was arrested and made a full statement – telling officers that Tim, a friend of a friend, had asked her to pawn the jewellery on his behalf, as he had reached his limit in the shop. She also said that he had come back to her the following day (4 October) with more jewellery to pawn, and again they had visited the shop together (very shortly after the police had paid their own visit to the shop, it transpired). Sandra was released without charge.

Tim was also arrested on 5 October, having been found by the police (through intelligence) in a taxi. That evening he was charged with B.1, and made no comment in interview. The Fingerprint Bureau was asked to check his fingerprints against prints found at the scene of B.1 and at the scene of another local burglary, committed on 31 September (B.2). On 16 October fingerprint matches came back for both offences. Tim admitted to having carried out B.2 when arrested for it on 21 October.

In response to Sandra's comment that she had visited the pawnshop on a second occasion with Tim (on 4 October), police subsequently went back to the pawnshop and seized its records and video footage of this visit. The jewellery pawned on this occasion was later traced to a burglary committed on the morning of 4 October (B.3), which Tim admitted and asked to be TIC'd along with 17 other burglaries.

Identifying suspects

Some investigative actions can quickly reveal a suspect's identity. For example, a careful or extensive effort to contact potential witnesses may be productive, given that, as Osterburg and Ward point out, 'although conventional wisdom holds that there are few witnesses to burglaries, in reality there are likely to be many more than we would expect' (2000: 515). They suggest (as does the ACPO investigation manual) that attempts to locate witnesses to a burglary should not be limited to neighbours, but should extend also to others who might have been at the scene around the time of the offence: such as postmen, delivery men or utility meter readers.

In addition to speaking to possible witnesses, other simple actions can help to identify a suspect. In the case study in Box 4.1, the offender was identified following a visit paid by the detective to the local post office – an obvious first step in response to two closely related burglaries.

Box 5.2: 'Postman' burglar Patrick G-

In the morning of 2 May 2001, a resident of Middleton heard his post arrive and, immediately afterwards, the window in his front porch being smashed. He ran to the front door, and saw that his door keys were missing from the porch windowsill. He went outside, where he saw the postman get on to his bicycle and cycle off. The resident reported the incident to the police as a burglary (B.1).

The police later received a report from another Middleton resident of an attempted burglary (B.2). It emerged that this had occurred 50 minutes after B.1, in the same area of the city. On this occasion, the aggrieved had heard some loud bangs on his front door; when he went to investigate he discovered his post lying on the doormat and that the front door was open and its handle broken. He saw the postman outside, who said that he had seen two youths running away from the house shortly after he had delivered the post.

The Middleton DC assigned to the two offences immediately linked them because of the timings, locations and the fact that a postman was seen at both. He decided that his first task was to interview the post office manager to obtain details of who was delivering post in that area. It transpired that the postman, Patrick G-, had recently been employed by the post office on a temporary basis. The DC recognised the name Patrick G-, and on returning to the police station established (through a search of the intelligence database) that he had previous convictions for burglary.

Patrick was arrested on 8 May, and subsequently charged with both B.1 and B.2 (which he denied) and with obtaining pecuniary advantage by deception. This latter charge related to a failure by Patrick to disclose his previous convictions when applying through an employment agency for the temporary post office job. Patrick ultimately pleaded guilty to B.1 and the deception offence, and received a 15-month prison sentence.

In the course of some investigations, a breakthrough may result from what is apparently an intuitive link made by an officer between an offence and a possible suspect. In the case of Micky D-, for example (as presented in Box 5.3), an officer's 'hunch' that property found in the possession of a known burglar might have come from a particular burglary proved invaluable.

What is often interpreted by detectives as 'intuition' may in fact be more accurately described as an immediate insight borne out of previous experience and knowledge.

Box 5.3: *Distraction burglary suspect Micky D-*

On 24 September 2001, a Middleton DC dealt with a 93-year-old woman who had reported a burglary. She was extremely confused, and unable to say what items had been taken. She did comment, however, that she believed a man who had called on her socially had stolen her property. Because of her level of confusion, the DC felt there was little chance of making progress with this case.

Three days later, the DC learnt that Micky D- had just been arrested for drink driving, and had been found with a large amount of property in his car, including a wall mirror, china plates, and various ornaments. 56-year-old Micky was known to the police as he had many past convictions for burglary, including distraction burglary, dating back to 1958.

Acting, in his own words, 'on a hunch', the detective took the property found in Micky's car to the address of the elderly burglary victim. Her daughters were visiting her at the time, and were able to identify most of the property as her own. Micky was arrested and charged with burglary, which he denied. However, he admitted having visited the victim, and claimed that she had freely given him the property found in his car. At the time of the case study research, this case was yet to go to trial.

Informal communication

The principle of simplicity can usefully be applied to communication between police officers. The findings of the empirical research conducted for this study indicate that informal, direct communication between officers can play a vital part in investigative work. The advantage of this kind of communication – which is usually verbal and face-to-face, but can also be by telephone or email – is that it potentially allows the most relevant information on a given issue to be quickly and clearly exchanged between the officers for whom it has most significance. Informal communication can be equally important *within* departments (for example, when members of a burglary team discuss cases they are dealing with) and *between* departments (for example, when information about a particular suspect is passed between CID and uniformed officers, or between intelligence officers and sector CID).

Past research has also highlighted the role of informal communication in investigative work: the findings of Gill *et al.* (1998), for example, point to the importance of consultation with colleagues in the process of burglary investigation. As part of a study by P. Gill (2000), officers from Merseyside were asked how they receive information on targets and crime patterns. The results, according to Gill, confirmed previous research findings that information received informally from colleagues tends to be the most useful.

The importance of informal communication was repeatedly stressed by officers interviewed for this study. Many stated a preference for verbal over written communication on account of its brevity, directness and clarity – as in the following remark by a member of the Oxford burglary team:

You can't communicate through paper or computer systems. You communicate better through people, and that's what it comes down to ... It's not the same if you get handed a piece of paper – you ain't gonna read it, are you?

Despite officers' concerns about information overload, and some apparent tendencies to disregard written material, it is clear that informal communication is not a substitute for more formalised methods of information exchange. Rather, the former should work best within a context of properly implemented formal (written and verbal) briefings – as discussed above – which can ensure that key individuals and items of information do not fall outside the loop of informal consultations. It should also be noted that informal, person-to-person information exchange has little value if it is not acted upon. Where useful information is produced through casual discussions among officers about targets or offences, this information should either feed into investigative activity, or be disseminated further through more formal mechanisms.

By definition, the nature and extent of informal communication cannot be determined by policy. However, different working arrangements can promote or inhibit it, and should take account of the kinds of cultural barriers to information exchange that can hinder informal just as much as formal communication. P. Gill writes of the significance of 'spatial' means by which the flow of information can be encouraged within the police. He notes that it can be beneficial to locate the intelligence unit 'where least effort is required on the part of uniformed patrol officers and detectives to use it, for example, on their way to the canteen' (2000: 164). This point was made by officers involved in this project's focus groups – for example:

"It starts with wedging the door open, basically ... [so that] people can come in [to the burglary team office], but just as importantly the officers from that team or squad get out as well and spread the word."

Another participant remarked that 'a flight of stairs, even a door, is a barrier [to communication]'.

More fundamentally, perhaps, informal communication also depends on management and working practices that help to break down social barriers between departments. As noted by Maguire and Norris (1992), past research has often found that barriers exist between CID and uniformed officers. Cope (2002) observes that civilian staff including crime analysts can be isolated from their police colleagues.

Crime analysis

The increasing emphasis placed on proactive policing in recent years has led to a great deal of interest in local crime analysis. The aim of local crime analysis is, broadly speaking, to develop a detailed understanding of local patterns of crime in order to enhance the police response to them (Read and Oldfield, 1995). As defined by HMIC, crime analysis seeks to 'marry together the various strands of offender profiling, linking of series of crimes, analysis of trends and "hotspots" together with traditional target-hardening crime prevention methods to provide an overall intelligence-driven response' (1998: 4). The growing interest in crime analysis has led to the appointment of dedicated crime analysts by police forces, and the development of a range of computer packages to be used in mapping and analysing offences and the locations and activities of offenders.

Crime analysis may have a particular part to play in the investigation of burglary. Osterburg and Ward note that 'the successful conclusion of a case will frequently depend on the investigator's ability to handle a large amount of seemingly unrelated pieces of information in an analytical way'. They argue that there are various features of burglary investigations that 'lend themselves to crime analysis', including the fact that many burglars are known to the police, have previous convictions, operate within a specific area, commit a large number of crimes, and leave behind 'distinguishing marks' such as type of property taken or the kind of search undertaken (2000: 526).

It is therefore to be expected that various crime analysis software packages have been developed for specific application to burglary. The burglary SDPs located in Chiltern Vale and Coventry both made use of such packages – known as InvestigAide in the former and the Cleveland System in the latter. These were intended to assist the detection of burglaries by matching offences to possible suspects, essentially by analysing the MOs of the offences and linking them to the MOs of known local burglars.

In both sites, however, the crime analysis packages proved to be of limited use, and were ultimately abandoned. The major problem in both cases seemed to be that the burglary MOs were not sufficiently differentiated for the offences to be linked with any degree of certainty to individual burglars (seemingly contradicting the assertion of Osterburg and Ward about the 'distinguishing marks' associated with burglary offences)²⁴. There were, additionally, problems with the implementation of the system in Chiltern Vale – most notably arising from the fact that it required the recording of a large amount of additional data from burglary scenes by the reporting officers, who frequently did not have enough time, or indeed the necessary motivation, to do so.

The scope of simple analysis

The difficulties faced in both Chiltern Vale and Coventry with respect to the crime analysis packages indicate that careful consideration needs to be given to the precise levels of analysis appropriate to the detection of burglary. In all three fieldwork sites, moreover, police officers' general comments about burglary investigations indicated that they broadly favoured simple modes of analysis over the apparently more sophisticated techniques offered by the InvestigAide, Cleveland and other systems employed by the crime analysts.

The evidence from the fieldwork sites suggests that simple analysis – which can take various forms – can indeed produce good results. In many cases, this may involve little more than plotting recent offences on a map to see if they are likely to have been, or could have been, committed by the same individual or group; and consulting intelligence on known offenders who may be in the area and their MOs. This is the kind of process that yielded results in the examples described in Boxes 3.2 and 4.1. The assertion that more complex crime analysis techniques are not required in order to identify a series of offences was strongly made by a detective in one of the sites, who at the time of this research was working on a series of burglaries committed in a particular area. When asked if the series had initially been identified by a crime analyst, she replied sharply, 'I have a maths degree and can spot a series myself – quicker than the analyst'.

Among members of the Oxford burglary team, a basic tool used in analysing offences was the burglary handbook. Each officer had a handbook, in which he manually entered details (taken from crime reports) of every offence he dealt with, together with any additional comments about the case based on his own knowledge or expectations. These books were

²⁴ This potential pitfall of crime analysis systems which target offenders has been noted by Read and Oldfield, who argue that 'with high volume crime, while there may be some MOs that are sufficiently uncommon to provide an obvious link between offences and known offenders, in many cases the MO, or at least the way the MO is recorded, is likely to be so common as to make case linking through this variable alone impossible' (1995: 14).

frequently consulted by officers, who found them to be a useful and quick source of reference to past offences, and hence an aid to spotting possible connections between crimes.

Another example of simple analysis was provided by the work of the Coventry scene assessor. A Detective Chief Inspector in Coventry commented in interview on the scene assessor's capacity to identify crime patterns in 'real time' as he drew his own inferences from the scenes he would visit one after another. This process of analysis was regarded as all the more productive when combined with information and suggestions provided by local intelligence officers and SOCOs.

Electronic crime analysis systems such as InvestigAide and the Cleveland System can appear slow and cumbersome in comparison to the kinds of simple analysis carried out manually or in the minds of officers, and often enhanced through informal consultation with colleagues. Two focus group participants were particularly critical of what they regard as slow, formal crime analysis:

If your system links up 20 or 30 burglaries as a series, then as an area you've failed. Because 20 or 30 down the road, it might be another 20 or 30 until you've actually got on top of it. Somebody somewhere should have seen that.

...My experience of IT systems is that they look beautiful, with all the colours, and it's got this and that, and man seen with a dog and all the rest of it, but you're 30 burglaries into [the series] then, and you want to identify it when you've had three...

Beyond simple analysis

The simple forms of crime analysis apparently favoured by many officers in the case study sites may certainly have an important part to play in the process of burglary investigation. This is not to suggest, however, that the more sophisticated analytical tools cannot also be of value. Simple analysis should perhaps best be seen as an important first stage in a great deal of investigative work, on which more extensive analytical work can build wherever necessary.

Moreover, simple analysis can itself be problematic if there is over-dependence on it. Cope, in her study of intelligence work within two police forces, distinguishes between information produced by crime analysts and the kinds of 'experiential knowledge' on which the police rely and which they acquire through their daily work. This experiential knowledge is generally not recorded in any systematic fashion, but is stored only in officers' heads. As Cope points out,

The difficulty with experiential knowledge is that if it is not passed on so that it can be reviewed but is used to make decision about targeting police activity, it can lead to policing-led intelligence, undermining the intelligence-led process (2002: 24).

The reservations voiced by officers about some of the work undertaken by crime analysts, and the difficulties encountered in using the InvestigAide and Cleveland systems, do not suggest that the potential value of crime analysis should be dismissed. The difficulties point to problems that are commonly associated with the use and implementation of systems of analysis rather to any inherent weakness in crime analysis as an investigative tool. According to Cope, these problems include the poor quality of information with which crime analysts often have to work; police officers' lack of understanding of the process of crime analysis and how it can support operational policing; the conflicting demands made on analysts, one result of which is that they often provide descriptive rather than genuinely analytical products; and the lack of acceptance of and recognition for analysts within police culture²⁵.

The impact of new systems of crime analysis may be limited by the kinds of cultural constraints which shape the use of all forms of new information technology within the police. Australian research by Chan on information technology in policing found that although 'officers are beginning to appreciate the value of using technology-generated information for tactical and strategic purposes', policing continues to be dominated by 'traditional policing styles and values' (2000: 156). Chan observed that those who designed new information technology systems tended to view their potential application very differently to those who used them:

"Users of the technology, even the more advanced ones, expected it to make their work easier and more efficient, without their having to change existing policing and management styles. Architects of the systems, on the other hand, have intended the organization to move towards a more sophisticated mode of information usage – for resource management, tactical policing, strategic planning and policy decisions" (2000: 157).

It will be interesting to see to what extent the implementation of the National Intelligence Model helps police forces to overcome the barriers to optimal use of intelligence and crime analysis highlighted by researchers such as Cope and Chan. It is to be hoped that by providing a framework within which intelligence work can be directed and its products utilised, the NIM will help to achieve a greater synthesis between the work of crime analysts and the activities – including the basic analytical activities – of operational police officers.

²⁵ Cope argues that analysts' lack of recognition is partly to do with their civilian status but, more fundamentally, also stems from the fact that police officers and analysts have very different approaches to understanding crime. As noted above, police officers tend to acquire and rely on grounded, contextual 'experiential knowledge'; in contrast, crime data are 'de-contextualised and sometimes de-personalised' by the process of crime analysis: a process which should be 'reliable, verifiable and generalisable' (2002: 23).

The meaning of flexibility

The principle of flexibility refers to the need, over the course of a burglary investigation, to respond effectively to the emergence of any piece of information that can help to identify, locate or apprehend a suspect. The need for flexibility goes hand-in-hand with a need for rapidity, since the police response must usually be quick as well as flexible, if it is to have any pay-off. The need for flexibility and rapidity follows from the fact that so much offending is prolific: in other words, given the large numbers of offences that many burglars commit over the course of days, weeks and months (note, for example, the rate of offending by Steven L., described in Box 3.1), it is crucial that the investigative process is primarily concerned with halting offending behaviour as quickly as possible. There are dangers in viewing the purpose of investigation as being simply to achieve an end result – that is, the conviction of the offender – at some distant point in time.

This emphasis on flexibility follows from the recognition of investigation as a complex and multi-layered process. If investigation was a straightforward, uni-linear process the activities of the officers could more easily be planned and organised in advance. In reality, the unpredictability and randomness of events are such that officers must be able to react purposefully to the immediate demands of any set of circumstances, whatever the nature of those demands and whenever and however they arise.

The ability to respond flexibly and rapidly clearly depends not only on the motivation and skills of the individual officer, but also on adequate resourcing. As a participant in one of this study's focus groups said:

It's about having the resources available, and clearly if you have a burglary team then you have a collective pool of officers that you can redirect from what they're doing to whatever the intelligence suggests you ought to do.

To acknowledge the importance of flexible and rapid police actions is not to question the significance of routine. Rather, as has been suggested elsewhere in this report, the argument here is that the effectiveness of burglary investigation is likely to be enhanced when it is carried out within certain clear parameters. These parameters must nevertheless leave scope for discretion in how officers deal with the immediacy of any given situation. Hence a

balance must be struck between routine and flexibility, just as one must also be struck between recognising the complexity of investigation and valuing simple police responses.

The issue of flexibility has a bearing on almost all aspects of burglary investigation. It is to be discussed in this chapter with regard to the following topics: first, the police response to burglaries in progress; secondly, the importance of access to information; and, thirdly, the randomness of burglary investigation.

Before moving on to these issues, however, it should be noted that in all three fieldwork sites officers were evidently often frustrated when delays in systems beyond their control impeded investigative work. Most notably, there were many concerns about the length of time it typically took for fingerprint and DNA checks to be carried out by forensic services. When a fingerprint or DNA trace was found at the scene of a burglary, it would usually take many months for a match to be found if there was no named suspect to start with. If the suspect was a prolific offender who was not apprehended by other means over this period, this kind of delay could have a great cost: that is, the cost (of all kinds) associated with the commission of a large number of offences. According to the research interviews with officers, even the process of carrying out DNA or fingerprint checks against a named suspect could sometimes take several weeks or even longer – unless the detectives involved made strenuous efforts to speed up the process by pushing the forensic departments. However, it was recognised also that lengthy delays could arise at the police end of the process: that is, in the actioning of the results of forensic tests.

Delays in forensic work, combined with poor communication between departments, sometimes resulted in target packages being produced long after the offender had been charged and convicted for the offence in question, or had requested that it be TIC'd. Such occurrences clearly amounted to an serious waste of valuable staff time.

Burglaries in progress

There can be no clearer illustration of the importance of flexibility and rapidity than when the police receive a report of a burglary that is in progress. An immediate response to such a report is crucial, given that a significant number of primary burglary detections result from burglars being caught in the act or very shortly thereafter. This point is not disputed by police forces; but the work of Coupe and Griffiths (1996) suggests that improvements to the police response, in terms of its rapidity and the numbers of officers involved, could increase the numbers of burglars caught in the act. (They found, however, that other factors also determine the proportion of 'in

progress' detections, including the behaviour of the offender and the characteristics of the local environment.) As mentioned above, Coupe and Griffiths found that in 43 per cent of the detected cases they studied the offender was arrested at or near the scene, but this represented only 10 per cent of the burglaries reported as in progress. They also point out that the apprehension of burglars in the act is a highly cost-effective method of detection²⁶.

It should be noted that arriving quickly at the scene of a burglary reported as in progress can prove rewarding even if the offender has by then made his escape – as there may be immediate avenues of enquiry to be explored. The case presented in Box 6.1, below, provides a good illustration of this: here, the offender was no longer at the scene of the burglary by the time the first police officers arrived, but was shortly thereafter traced to a nearby bail hostel. This case also illustrates the speed with which many offenders are able to dispose of their stolen goods: by the time the officers had arrived at the bail hostel, 25 minutes after the burglary had been committed, the offender had already got rid of the video recorder he had taken. Where offenders act so quickly, speed and versatility in the police response can produce results.

Box 6.1: Luck and skill in locating burglar Jim J-

In the summer of 2001 two DCs were on their way to visit a victim of a distraction burglary. While driving through Senham they were informed, by the police control centre, of a burglary in progress. The DCs made their way to the scene, and were the first to arrive. By this time, however, the offender had made his escape with a stolen video recorder (VCR).

The two DCs decided to visit some local bail hostels on the off-chance that the offender might have been staying at one of these, and would therefore have brought the VCR back there. At the second hostel they visited – at which they arrived 25 minutes after the burglary had been committed – a member of staff said that a resident by the name of Jim J- had just come in carrying a VCR. The hostel CCTV footage was checked by the police, and indeed showed Jim bringing in what appeared to be a VCR, and handing it to another resident. The latter's room was searched, but there was no sign of the VCR, and Jim and the other resident had left the hostel.

Jim was found by the police the following day and was arrested on suspicion of the burglary, which he admitted. The VCR was recovered from a second-hand shop to which Jim had taken it. He subsequently admitted to a further 22 burglaries, and is currently serving a two-year sentence for burglary.

²⁶ A study by Blake and Coupe (2001) further explores the potential for arresting more burglars in the act.

The ACPO volume crime investigation manual observes that 'where offenders have been disturbed before completing an offence, they are likely to attempt another offence shortly afterwards' (2002: 18). This points to the importance of conducting thorough searches, by whatever means possible, of the area in which the attempted offence took place. In addition, all available information about the attempt – such as details of any suspects or vehicles sighted – should be conveyed to other officers attending local crime scenes.

Access to information

As has been discussed and illustrated above, the process of investigating burglary is a process of linking items of information about offences and items of information about offenders. Given the vast numbers of offences and offenders that are dealt with by officers, it is easy for crucial linkages to remain buried or to be overlooked. But when information that connects certain individuals and certain events is gathered, recorded, and communicated quickly, the chances are increased that these connections will come to light. It is equally important that officers are proactive in seeking to retrieve relevant data from all available sources, and not only those that are most obvious such as the main crimes or intelligence databases. Rapid dissemination and retrieval of information ensures that officers have access to the specific facts or intelligence they need over the course of an investigation, as and when they need them. Conversely, due to the multitude of demands on the time and attention of officers, valuable opportunities for detection may be lost if certain items of information become available only after the relevant avenue of enquiry has been explored.

Hence early attendance at burglary scenes is important so that details of the offences can be gathered, recorded and entered on to the relevant databases with minimum delay. In reality, the availability of officers generally determines the speed with which the initial visit is carried out: in Chiltern Vale, for example, officers said in interview that because of staff shortages burglaries were sometimes attended two or three days after the event. Nevertheless, in this area it was expected that the details taken during the initial visit would be entered on the offences database within 24 hours of the report being taken²⁷. In Oxford, efforts had been

27 Ericson and Haggerty (1997), conducting research on Canadian police organisations, found that in some areas laptops were used by officers 'in the field'. These enabled the officers to transmit crime reports electronically as soon as they had completed them at crime scenes – thereby ensuring that the information was almost immediately made available to their colleagues. However, some problems were encountered in the implementation of this system: for example, some of the officers were not computer literate, and some found the computers difficult to carry and use, especially on foot patrol. In one police area studied by Ericson and Haggerty, a 'voice-entry occurrence report system' was being introduced: that is, patrol officers were being issued with mobile telephones to call in their crime reports to trained clerks. It was hoped that this would improve the quality of reports taken, and it could be expected also to speed up the dissemination of information. At the time of the field-work undertaken for this study, the introduction of a similar system for crime reporting was being considered in Thames Valley Police.

made to speed up the process by which initial crime reports made their way to the desks of the relevant members of the burglary team, with the result that the officers generally received the reports within one or two days of the initial visit to the scene.

Access to information about offences is not solely a matter of burglary reports being entered on to the crimes database, and the efficient allocation of cases to investigating officers. In Oxford and the other fieldwork sites, officers did not simply wait to receive the completed burglary pack for information about recent offences. If they needed to find out about any very recent burglaries which had not yet been recorded by a uniformed officer – for example, if a suspect arrested for another offence had property in his possession that was believed to be stolen but could not be traced to a reported burglary – they would access the command and control database to search the logs of calls from the public. (This reiterates the importance of competent handling and recording of calls to the police, mentioned in Chapter 4.) These were the circumstances under which Edward P- came to be charged with burglary, as described below in Box 6.2.

In addition to the case of Edward P-, several other case studies examined for this project provided examples of officers acting on very recent information in pressing charges for burglary against suspects arrested for other offences. Sam P-, for example (Box 2.1), was being questioned about one offence when property that had been found at his home address was traced to another burglary that had been committed two days before. And when Paul S- (Box 3.2) was arrested for breaching his bail conditions, he was found to have property on his person that, it was quickly established, had come from a burglary carried out earlier that day.

The case of Chris W. (Box 6.3) provides a different kind of example of how officers' rapid retrieval of information about offences can play a crucial part in an investigation. Here, details obtained from the Police National Computer relating to a stolen vehicle helped to link the target of an ongoing surveillance operation to a recent burglary.

Box 6.2: Burglary of cash by Edward P-

In a suburb of Senham, at about 9.30 pm on 14 April 2001, a known burglar by the name of Edward P- was seen acting suspiciously by two police officers on routine patrol. They stopped to speak to him, and according to the witness statement of one of them, the following exchange took place:

PC: Hello, Edward isn't it?

EP: Yeah, there's a load of money in there [in the holdall he was carrying] but I've just got it for selling my motorbike.

PC: Oh right, how much is there then?

EP: Well, there's got to be a hundred or so in one jar, er –

PC: Edward P- I am arresting you on suspicion of burglary. [Caution.]

EP: But I just sold my motorbike.

The officers could see several jars of coins in Edward's holdall, and found that the pockets of his jeans were also crammed with coins. On their return to the station, the officers searched the crime database for details of any recent burglary from which jars of coins had been taken, but did not find any such offence listed. The next morning, however, a search of the command and control records produced details of just such a burglary committed between 6.30 pm and 11.05 pm the previous evening.

Edward was interviewed about the offence on 15 April, and admitted to it. He was then questioned about various other burglaries that had recently been carried out in the area, which he denied. He was charged with the initial burglary, remanded in custody, and subsequently admitted to 11 similar offences, which he asked to be TIC'd.

Box 6.3: *Surveillance operation against Chris W-*

On 2 September 2001 the police in Tryton had been notified by the prison service that Chris W-, a prolific burglar, had been released from prison. Shortly after Chris's release the burglaries in an area of Tryton associated with him went up from 20 to 73 in a week.

As the police strongly suspected that Chris was committing burglaries, a decision was taken to launch a surveillance operation against him. On 19 September, the force surveillance team followed him from his home address to a nearby hospital car park, where he was seen to break into a car. Unfortunately for Chris, the car failed to start. He was then followed to another car park, where he successfully stole a car. He drove this vehicle to his home address, where he got into another vehicle that was parked there.

The police immediately ran Police National Computer checks on this third vehicle, and discovered that it was flagged as having been reported stolen on 16 September. Additionally, about 30 minutes after it had been stolen, an independent witness had reported seeing it in the vicinity of a burglary.

Once the police had these details relating to the third car, they decided to arrest Chris on the three vehicle offences: that is, two vehicle thefts and one attempted vehicle theft. Uniformed officers were called in to make the arrest, which they did after Chris had crashed the car he was driving and attempted to escape on foot. He was then charged and remanded in custody. He was later arrested for the above burglary, and given 'technical bail' (as he was already in custody) pending the results of an examination of forensic evidence found at the scene. At the time of the case study research, this investigation was not complete.

Randomness

In any burglary investigation, a seemingly chance or random event – for example, a coincidental sighting of a possible suspect, or an arrest of a suspect in relation to an entirely unrelated matter – might prove to be critical. If the police are able to respond quickly and robustly to any such happy occurrence, thereby ‘making their own luck’ as many would describe it, they may find that it produces a much-needed breakthrough. Osterburg and Ward, writing about criminal investigation in general, describe ‘the unknown factor of chance and the way experienced investigators can interpret and deliberately exploit it, thereby opening up new knowledge and discovery’ (2000: 360).

In the case of Micky D- (Box 5.3), who was found with stolen property in his car after being arrested for drink driving, the subsequent burglary charge can be said to have originated in the observation by two uniformed officers on routine patrol that a vehicle was being driven erratically. A combination of good fortune and sound reasoning (and quick action) by detectives led to the arrest and ultimate conviction of Jim J- for burglary, who (as described in Box 6.1) was found to have taken a stolen video recorder to a bail hostel visited by the officers. Again, luck as well as good policing played a part in the arrest of Edward P- on suspicion of burglary (see Box 6.2), which resulted from his chance encounter with officers on night patrol shortly after he had committed the offence.

In the case described in Box 6.4, below, two convictions for handling stolen goods came about after the victim of a burglary happened to see his own car on the road nine days after it had been taken by the burglar.

A certain randomness or unpredictability may characterise not only the different events around which a burglary investigation is built, but also the reactions of suspects who have been arrested or charged – particularly since many are likely to be struggling with drug addictions, and to be leading chaotic lives. (This brings the discussion back to the ‘human factor’ of investigative work, considered in Chapter 2) Officers should thus be sufficiently ready and alert to take full advantage of the situation when a suspect indicates at any point or in any way that he may be prepared to co-operate. For officers, this is partly a matter of developing the kinds of ‘people skills’ that are often seen as crucial to being a good detective. It is also a matter of being prepared to take immediate action in response to anything helpful that is said by a suspect.

Box 6.4: Vehicle burglar Ryan D-

A house in Senham was burgled on 22 March 2001 between the hours of 1.20 am and 7.45 am. Among other items, the burglar took the keys to the occupant's car, and then stole the vehicle which was parked at the front of the house.

At around 3 pm nine days later, the victim, Mr S-, was driving in a hire car along a main road when he saw his own vehicle pull out in front of him, with a male driver and two passengers (a female and a young child). Mr S- called the police from his mobile phone; the police told him to keep following the car, and directed a mobile unit to the area.

Mr S- followed the stolen vehicle to a retail park, where it was parked and the occupants got out. As they were heading towards one of the shops, the police arrived and spoke to Mr S-, who pointed out the vehicle and driver. The officers arrested the driver on suspicion of theft of motor vehicle; in reply to the caution he responded 'I borrowed it off a mate'. Officers spoke also to his female companion, who said that she had known him only a few days, and was not detained. The keys to the vehicle were returned to Mr S-, who then drove it home.

The suspect was 30-year-old Ryan D-, who was already known to the police and had previous convictions for burglary, motor vehicle theft and other offences. His arrest in the retail park led to his being charged with B.1 and a burglary of 28 March (B.2) from which property had been taken that was found in Mr S-'s vehicle. He was also charged with three other recent burglaries on the basis of similar fact evidence (relating to his previous convictions for burglary); however, these cases were later dropped. Ryan ultimately pleaded guilty to handling charges with respect to B.1 and B.2, and on 3 October 2001 was sentenced to two terms of 18 months imprisonment, to be served concurrently.

The case of Sam P- (Box 2.1) provides an example of a detective successfully encouraging and quickly building upon a suspect's sudden inclination to co-operate with the police. After denying three burglaries about which he had been questioned, Sam began to talk about his severe addiction to crack cocaine when being fingerprinted by the (apparently sympathetically-minded) detective, and indicated his willingness to admit to past offences in an effort to obtain treatment for the addiction. At this point, the detective and a colleague immediately took him on a 'drive around', during which he admitted to 18 burglaries. However, he displayed what was described by the investigator as a certain 'stubbornness' in continuing to deny the offences about which he had originally been questioned – including one at an address which he admitted to having burgled on a prior occasion.

The interviews conducted with Micky D- (Box 5.3) also revealed a marked inconsistency or unpredictability in the suspect's responses. Micky initially denied all knowledge of the burglary about which he was being questioned, and from which property had been found in his car. Later, however, he admitted to knowing the victim of the offence, and claimed that she had freely given him the property when he had visited her home. In the view of the detective who dealt with the case, Micky was observing a kind of 'code' according to which he would not make any direct admissions to the police; however, because he was finding it difficult to cope with life on the outside after many years in prison, he consciously or subconsciously wanted to be convicted for the offence and return to prison, and was therefore 'doing his best to help us [the police]'.

Understanding investigation

This report presents a process perspective on the investigation of burglary. It is argued that the investigation of burglary (and indeed of other volume crime) should be seen as a complex and multi-layered process. Enquiries relating to one offence will most probably be intertwined with investigations of several or many other offences – of the same or different kinds. Additionally, it is likely that any one investigation will focus on the activities of several suspects rather than a single individual. The focus of an investigation may, moreover, shift between criminal activities that have occurred at different points in time and in different places. In summary, it can be said that the complexity of the investigation of burglary derives from the multiplicity of offences and multiplicity of offenders.

Given the high volume of burglary offences and levels of public concern about burglary, and the low detection rate associated with this crime, there has long been a desire within both the police and central government to increase the effectiveness of investigative work, and to impose tighter management controls upon it. However, the recognition of the complexity of the investigative process raises questions about how policy-makers and senior police managers might best develop strategic models to guide working practices and staffing structures for the investigation of burglary. It is clear that simplistic, step-by-step characterisations of what investigation does, or ideally should, entail can be of little value to the process of enhancing effectiveness.

If it is to be useful, a model of burglary investigation needs to be fluid and dynamic. Any such model should, at its most basic level, present an understanding of the investigation of burglary as a process of building:

- a) networks of communication between individuals and agencies, linking:
- b) items of information about individual offences; and
- c) items of information about individual offenders.

The interconnectedness of proactive and reactive policing of burglary has been highlighted in this report. Most burglary investigations, it appears, combine some elements of reactive work – that is, work based on enquiries into individual offences – with elements of proactive work – that is, the targeting of specific offenders through the use of intelligence and/or

crime analysis. Indeed, proactive policing is often, in a sense, dependent on reactive work, since the latter generally provides the leads and evidence that are used in detaining a targeted offender. Good reactive work can, similarly, be said to be dependent on proactivity, as the police may respond to individual incidents most thoroughly and effectively when they are operating within a broad proactive framework.

Over the past two decades, policy-makers and senior police officers have placed ever-greater weight on the importance of proactive policing – believing that greater commitment to proactivity by operational police officers should produce improved detection rates. The findings of this study suggest that – notwithstanding the evident value of much intelligence-led, targeted policing – it is simplistic to assume that the proactive approach is inherently superior.

In the place of what has been a somewhat one-sided emphasis on proactivity, in recent debate and guidance on policing policy, there should thus be wider recognition of the ways in which proactive and reactive policing support and feed into each other. Previous research has found that the move towards proactive policing has often been inhibited both by cultural barriers within the police and by the fact that vast reactive workloads tend to distract officers from proactive work. It is suggested here that an understanding of proactive and reactive policing as complementary rather than competing should help to erode cultural resistance to proactivity, and assist the development of mechanisms for integrating fully the two approaches. This process may be aided by the implementation of the National Intelligence Model in police forces across England and Wales, which provides a framework for the integration of the use of intelligence within the broader policing enterprise.

Recommendations

The latter part of this report has identified and discussed three general principles for burglary investigation: that is, the principles of routine, simplicity and flexibility. These principles emerge out of an understanding of the investigative process as complex and multi-dimensional, and as a process which, in most cases, encompasses elements of both proactive and reactive policing.

Routine

To emphasise the importance of routine to the investigation of burglary at the same time as highlighting the intrinsically complex and ‘messy’ nature of the investigative process may seem slightly contradictory. In fact, the argument presented here is that precisely because investigative work tends to have so many different, interlocking layers and dimensions, the

adoption of systematic procedures with respect to certain elements of the process becomes all the more important.

- The activities that, as a minimum, must be carried out in the initial investigation of a burglary should be clearly defined. These minimum requirements must be fully communicated to all officers likely to be involved in the reporting and initial investigation of burglaries.
- Initial investigative work will be properly carried out only if the officers involved:
 - a) receive adequate training in the relevant procedures;
 - b) are allowed sufficient time to carry out the prescribed tasks in each case;
 - c) receive the support of managers in carrying out these duties; and
 - d) are subject to thorough supervision.
- The reporting of burglaries should not be treated as an isolated, largely administrative task, but should be regarded as an integral and crucial part of the wider process of disrupting criminals and preventing crime.
- Systems for crime screening should be clear-cut and transparent, to ensure consistency and accountability in the allocation of individual cases for further investigation.
- The crime screening process should entail a detailed assessment of the characteristics of each case, and be implemented in the context of a general awareness of patterns of offending in the local area, to ensure that possible links between burglaries are noted and explored.
- The use of dedicated officers to attend the scenes of burglaries should be considered, as this allows information on different offences to be pooled and reviewed at an early stage of the investigative process. This working arrangement, however, may not be feasible in many contexts, given scarce resources and the large volume of offences that are dealt with by officers.
- Systems of verbal, written and electronic briefings should be in place to ensure a constant flow of *relevant* information between officers involved – in all ways – in the investigation of burglaries.

- Information on offences, suspects and offenders must be routinely, promptly and accurately entered on electronic databases that are user-friendly – that is, physically accessible to officers (for example through networked computers) and not overly complex. All officers should receive training on how to make maximum use of the available databases.
- Individual officers should identify their *information needs*, as these relate to the specific roles they play with respect to the investigation of burglary: that is, the information they require to carry out their tasks most effectively, and their own capacity to acquire information that may be of value to colleagues. A clear understanding of information needs should help to avoid the potential problem of information overload.
- There is a need for systematic inter-agency communication about offenders and suspects – for example, relating to prison releases, bail conditions imposed by courts, and the discharge of suspects from bail hostels. Information of this kind received by the police from other agencies must be promptly disseminated among relevant officers.

Simplicity

Like routine, the principle of simplicity provides a striking counterbalance to the conceptualisation of burglary investigation as a complex process. It is proposed that investigative work can be most effective when police officers respond in relatively simple ways to the complicated situations and chains of events on which their enquiries are focused. In particular, given the lack of sophistication of most prolific burglars, in some circumstances relatively basic and easy investigative actions (over and above those undertaken routinely as part of an initial investigation) may prove rewarding. Simple responses to burglary should nevertheless be *informed*: that is, they should be based on both specific and generalised knowledge about the offences and offending behaviours that are being tackled.

- As part of the crime screening process, with respect to each individual case it is important to consider the possible utility of undertaking certain simple and quick investigative actions (such as following up known routes of disposal of stolen property) over and above the minimum required of every investigation.
- Informal communication, which allows information to be conveyed quickly, simply and directly between officers, can play a vital part in investigative work. The encouragement of informal information exchange – both within and between police departments – should, however, occur within a context of properly

implemented, formal briefings. Also, the importance of *acting upon* information communicated informally must be recognised.

- If informal communication within a police force is to be optimised, certain cultural changes may be required. Officers must come to regard information as being of value only to the extent that it can be shared. In addition, effort should be made to introduce working practices that can help to erode barriers between different departments (such as CID and uniformed units) which tend to hamper co-operation.
- Informal communication and the associated cultural changes may be promoted through alterations to the physical working arrangements of various police departments. For example, locating particular departments in close proximity to each other, keeping office doors open, and the sharing of office space, can play a part in this.
- It should be recognised that simple methods of crime analysis undertaken by police officers can be effective in the investigation of burglary – such as plotting individual offences on a map, or manually recording details of recent offences in a form that permits officers frequently to review the available information.
- Notwithstanding the value of simple analytical tools and processes, the potential value of more sophisticated methods of crime analysis should not be overlooked. Simple analysis should be viewed as a process on which more complex analytical work can build, as an investigation progresses.

Flexibility

The principle of flexibility, which is closely related to that of rapidity, has a bearing on all aspects of investigative work. As elaborated in the context of this report, this refers to the critical importance of responding quickly and in an appropriate manner to any event or the emergence of any piece of information that can help to identify, locate or apprehend a suspect. The emphasis on flexibility follows from the recognition of investigation as a complex and multi-layered process. Because an investigation can develop in any one or more of a number of different directions, at any point in the process, it is vital that the officers involved have the capacity to focus and refocus their attention on the critical issues, whenever and however they arise. Moreover, the randomness and unpredictability of investigative work is such that a flexible and rapid response to a seemingly chance happening can prove to be a pivotal moment in an investigation.

- The resourcing of police units or departments involved in the investigation of burglary should take fully into account the fact that successful investigation often depends on the capacity of officers to respond immediately and flexibly to random or unpredictable events.
- The importance of a rapid and flexible response to a burglary reported as in progress should never be under-estimated, not only because this offers the opportunity of catching the offender at the scene, but also because immediate avenues of enquiry may be available even if the offender has made his escape prior to the arrival of the police.
- Early attendance at the scene of a burglary (not reported as in progress) is often vital, as is rapid dissemination of information about the offence. Hence information acquired by the reporting officer must be inputted on the relevant database as soon as possible, and the file quickly passed on to officers responsible for any further investigative work. As well as ensuring that the investigation of the individual offence maintains its momentum, this kind of prompt action should help any links with other recent offences to be identified.
- In dealing with suspects who have been arrested, officers need to be aware of any recent crimes with which they may be connected. Officers should thus be ready and able to access up-to-date information from any available source (for example, crime and control logs of calls from the public) about recent offences or other occurrences.
- Suspects who are being interviewed by the police may react in unexpected or highly inconsistent ways to questioning. It is therefore important that officers have the necessary skills, motivation and time to act immediately in response to any apparent indication by a suspect that he is prepared to co-operate with the police.
- Lengthy delays in conducting tests on forensic evidence found at burglary scenes can result in lost opportunities for apprehending active and prolific offenders. Thought must therefore be given to the ways in which officers may be able to work around or minimise these delays (for example, by making direct requests to laboratories for preliminary test results). Communication between the police and forensic departments should be improved, so as to avoid unnecessary work being carried out on forensic materials, for example, when a suspect has already admitted to the offence in question.

Oxford

Oxford Police Area is situated within the Thames Valley Police Force. The Oxford police are responsible for policing the city and those suburbs which lie within the surrounding ringroad. About 400 staff (including about 75 civilians) work at the area's two police stations. According to the 1991 census, which excluded much of the student population, the city has a population of approximately 110,000. Including students, the population is estimated by Oxford City Council to be about 145,000.

Both uniformed officers and the members of a dedicated burglary team are involved in the investigation of burglaries in Oxford. The initial visit to a burglary scene is usually undertaken by uniformed officers, who enter details of the offence, including *modus operandi* (MO), in the crime report form. They will also conduct house-to-house enquiries and complete a schedule of stolen property. A statement from the aggrieved is not taken at this stage unless a suspect was seen or a suspicious vehicle sighted. Scenes of crime officers (SOCOs) are then routinely requested to attend the scene, in order to conduct a forensic examination.

The crime report is forwarded by the reporting officer directly to the burglary team, which comprises a sergeant and eight (detective and police) constables who have responsibility for different areas of the city. The team sergeant reviews the report and notes key points, and details are entered on to the offences database by the team's administrator or the crime desk. The report is then allocated to the officer in the team who has geographic responsibility for the area in which the burglary occurred. On receiving the report, the burglary team officer reviews it, records key points in his personal record book, and conducts further investigation as deemed necessary. This might include re-visiting the scene, looking for connections with other offences, and identifying and interviewing possible suspects.

Chiltern Vale

Chiltern Vale is a diverse police area located, like Oxford, within the Thames Valley police force. It encompasses a number of urban centres including High Wycombe and Amersham as well as the surrounding areas of farmland and villages. The population of the area is a little under 300,000. About 280 police officers and 70 civilian staff work in the eight stations located within Chiltern Vale. (The considerably higher ratio of local residents to police officers in Chiltern Vale as compared to Oxford is largely due to the higher crime rate in Oxford and the large number of visitors to the city.)

As in Oxford, the initial police response to burglary is generally attendance at the scene by a uniformed officer, who completes the standard crime report form – a copy of which is then forwarded to the crime desk so that details can be entered on to the offences database. In addition to compiling the crime report, the reporting officer should take a statement from the aggrieved and any witnesses, complete the schedule of stolen property, carry out house-to-house enquiries, determine whether a SOCO visit is required, and receive the SOCO report.

On completion of the initial investigation, the 'burglary pack' containing the report and additional items (such as the stolen property schedule) is checked by the local area sergeant, and by an officer appointed by Chiltern Vale specifically to 'audit' such packs. If there are indications of a possible suspect, or a vehicle has been sighted, the file will usually then go to the Chiltern Vale burglary team, which comprises a sergeant and seven detective constables, for further investigation. In the absence of any leads, a pack will be filed pending the emergence of further information.

Coventry

Coventry is situated within West Midlands Police. The force is divided into 21 operational command units (OCUs), of which one, known as the M1 OCU, encompasses most of Coventry. This OCU is made up of four sectors which cover the city centre and three outlying areas of the city. The area has a population of approximately 140,000. Just under 400 staff, of whom almost 300 are police officers, work at the OCU's two police stations.

The initial investigation of burglary in Coventry is broadly similar to that in Oxford and Chiltern Vale. A burglary is initially attended by a uniformed officer who compiles the crime report, conducts house-to-house enquiries and completes the schedule of stolen property. A witness statement is not taken from the aggrieved at this stage, unless a suspect or vehicle was seen. SOCOs are almost invariably requested to attend domestic burglaries. The crime report is inputted into the offences database by the crime handling centre within 24 hours of initial scene attendance.

Unlike Oxford and Chiltern Vale, Coventry does not have a burglary team. Hence, when the initial investigation is complete, the report is passed to the detective assigned to the relevant sector or, if he is not available, to a member of Coventry police's 'core CID'. The detective who receives the report carries out further enquiries if these seem appropriate – for example, if there has been a witness description, a vehicle sighting, or the use of a stolen credit card. In the absence of any evidence from the scene or elsewhere, the case is filed.

Case study reviews

The review of case files was the primary component of the research reported here. Officers in each site were asked to identify recent burglary investigations in which they had been involved, and around ten cases were identified in this way in each site. Paperwork relating to each of these cases, including burglary reports and case summaries, were examined by the researchers; and interviews with the officer in the case (OIC) – usually a detective constable – were conducted in order to gain a personal account of the relevant events.

The cases were diverse: some involved the investigation of a single burglary; others involved analysing local series of offences; a few involved surveillance work; most were cleared up but some went unsolved. Taken as a whole, therefore, they provided insight into a wide range of police activities associated with the investigation of burglary. The selection of the cases by the officers themselves (rather than through some form of systematic or random sampling process) was consistent with the qualitative, exploratory nature of the research.

Fourteen of the cases reviewed for this study are used over the course of this report to exemplify the points raised. All these cases have been fully anonymised.

Focus groups

Between February and July 2001 nine focus groups took place across the three fieldwork sites. Participants in the groups included uniformed officers, CID officers and SOCOs of various ranks. The aim of the focus groups was to explore the investigative methods adopted in relation to burglary in each of the research sites, and to identify what the officers perceived to be the stronger and weaker aspects of the process.

Two further focus groups were held at South Bank University at the conclusion of the fieldwork. These groups involved officers of constable to chief inspector rank from the three research sites, representing intelligence units, uniformed staff and CID. These groups were held in order to obtain feedback on the research team's preliminary conclusions.

Semi-structured interviews

In addition to the interviews conducted with each OIC from the case studies, the researchers carried out 24 semi-structured interviews with police personnel from a range of ranks and departments in the three sites. Respondents included intelligence officers, SOCOs, burglary team sergeants and crime analysts. Like the focus groups conducted at the three sites, the interviews focused on the general processes of burglary investigation adopted in each area, and the apparent strengths and weaknesses of investigative work.

Observational exercises

In order to gain further insight into the day-to-day work of officers, two of the researchers spent five days observing the activities of the Oxford burglary team, and 'shadowed' officers engaged in the reporting of burglaries in Oxford and Chiltern Vale.

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