

Cultivating community: growing a police, academic and community collaboration from the ground up.

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Outline



Background and collaboration



The projects



Police-academic working

Background and collaboration

About Boston

- Population of 66,900 (wider borough)
- Seven major languages
- 21 per cent of population EU nationals
- Named as least integrated town in England (Policy Exchange, 2016)
- High-profile violent crimes can mean threat perceptions out of kilter with real crime rates
- However, **perceptions matter** –real to people and affect public confidence in all institutions

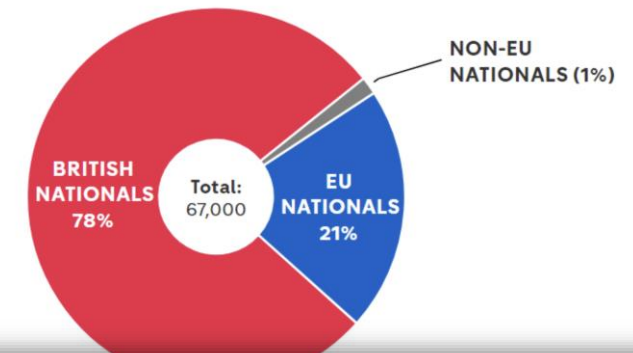
The violent heart of Boston

The Lincolnshire town is at war with itself

BY DEREK



Population in Boston, the most pro-Leave area of the UK

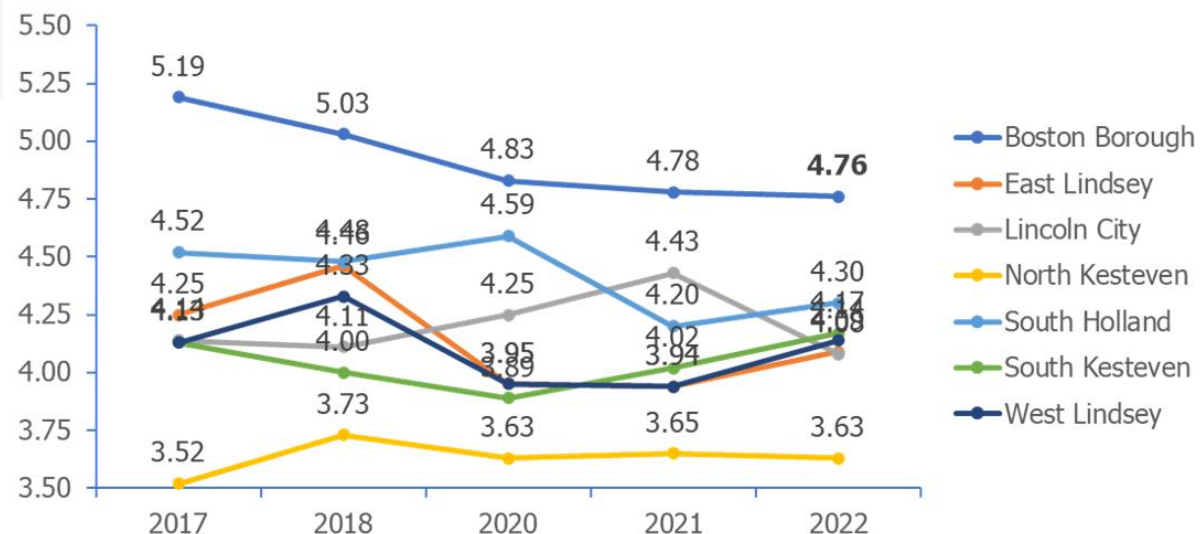


Boston in Lincolnshire is the 'most murderous' place in England and Wales, Home Office figures reveal

The northern port town has a murder and attempted murder rate of 15 per 100,000 people

Crime in Boston

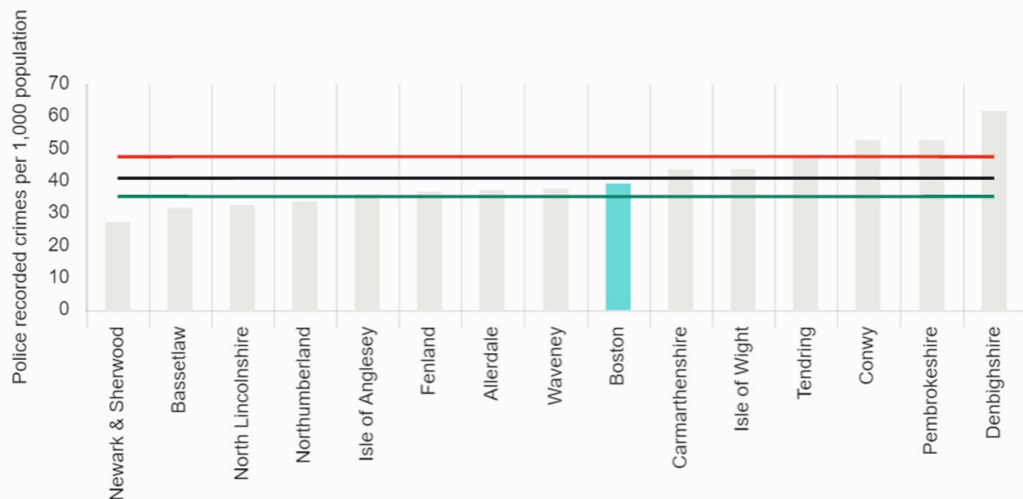
- Fear of crime in Boston significantly higher than elsewhere in Lincs
- Reality of crime rates comparable to other small rural towns



Fear of crime (Lincs OPCC, 2023)

Violence and sexual offences

Update



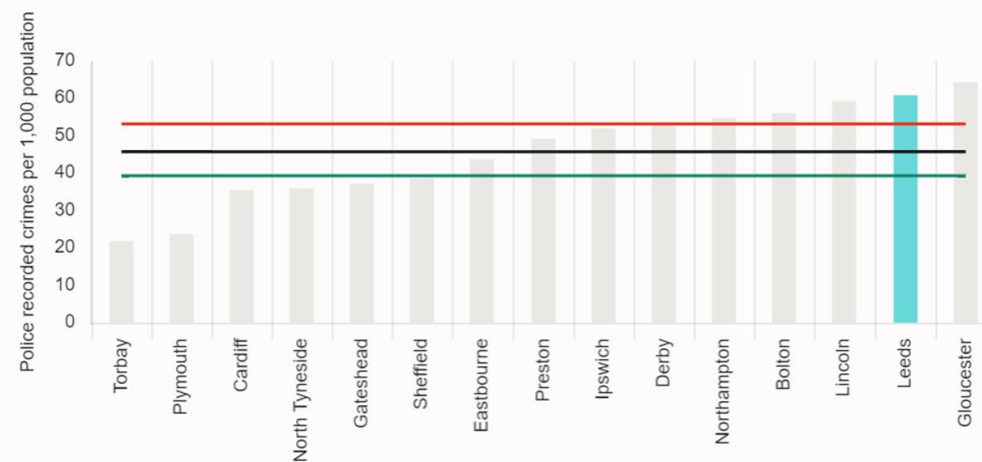
Lower bound

Most Similar Group average

Upper bound

Violence and sexual offences

Update



Lower bound

Most Similar Group average

Upper bound

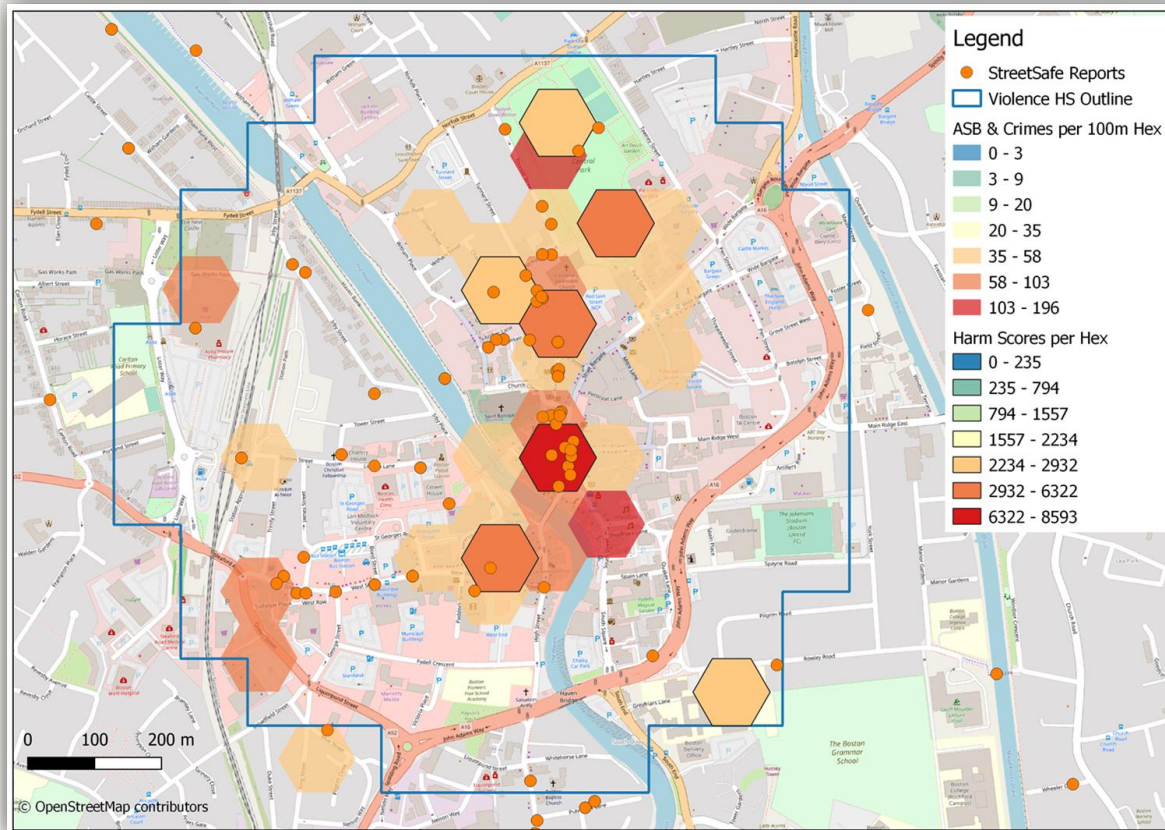
Cultivating community

- Small-scale work in progress – ongoing for a year
- Research **with** the police (Innes, 2010) – purpose is to inform practice
- **Collaboration first:** parameters always wobbly
- This directionality important in shaping relationships
- Emergent “community of practice” (Henry and Mackenzie, 2012)
- Driven by officer needs on the ground
- Also doughnuts



The projects

Operation Plotting - hotspots



- ♦ Analysis carried out over time and place with data drawn from police crime data, environmental visual assessments, and StreetSafe data combined with survey data.
- ♦ Four city centre hotspots identified:
 - ♦ Central Park
 - ♦ Marketplace
 - ♦ Red Lion Street
 - ♦ West Street

Survey

- Survey designed to capture respondents' perceptions, experiences, and concerns, of crime in the four hotspot locations
- Main authors police officers, with support and advice from researcher
- As well as making it available online, neighbourhoods team took survey out to residents face-to-face – aiming particularly at emergent communities
- Total of 1,029 people completed the survey either online or in person

Partnership

- ♦ University of Lincoln Policy Hub funded collaboration work, including regular engagement with Boston local policing team;
- ♦ Event in Boston to bring the local policing team together with statutory and non-statutory partners;
- ♦ An 'awayday' for Boston neighbourhoods team; and support to create outputs such as a 'how to' guide aimed at other teams



Focus groups and panel

- Series of focus groups being undertaken with local residents, to understand perceptions of crime, disorder and local policing
- BA small grant funding awarded to pilot community-led neighbourhood panel, based around identified hot spot
- Grant will also support programme of activities aimed at engaging wider community, building 'linking capital' via panel between residents and the police
- Series of open and walking workshops to be held in first half of 2024 to engage communities more actively in thinking about crime, disorder and community safety

Next steps

- Significant funding won by police partners from Serious Violence Fund – over £300,000 for CCTV, community wardens, community engagement officer, interactive display boards, and funding for improving street scene in partnership with local open prison
- Funding sought to work with local voluntary groups around better use of Central Park, one of the four spots identified by the local police
- More Policy Hub funding won to extend collaboration, including partners-first event next year
- Funding secured for arts-based impact work using Asset-Based Community Development ideas
- Expansion of collaboration-first approach to include police partners
- Spillover projects – e.g. looking at CHI and life course data

Police-academic working

“The police operate in a reality in which decisions must be made quickly, and issues of finance and efficiency can be as important as effectiveness. But academic policing research generally ignores these aspects of the police world, often delivering results long after they have relevance, and many times focusing on issues that police managers have little interest in.” (Weisburd and Neyroud, 2011, p. 5)

Collaborations

Institutionalised

- ♦ Increasingly typified by large-scale police/university agreements
- ♦ Collaboration-first approach at this level (Henry and Mackenzie, 2012)
- ♦ Can be reliant on personal commitment of senior officers and academics
- ♦ Top-down – lack of funding prospects can limit scope
- ♦ Often output-driven

Local approach

- ♦ Requires broad culture of openness to research and collaboration
- ♦ Small-scale, bottom-up
- ♦ Funding a bonus, not pre-requisite
- ♦ No targets for outputs
- ♦ Organic development
- ♦ Focus on particular context (Wood et al, 2017)

Requirements for success

- Trust, dialogue, keeping each other informed
- Reasonable expectations (Fleming, 2010)
- Timeliness (always a problem in academia...)
- Absence of academic ambivalence (Foster and Bailey, 2010)
- Value alignment: intellectual/pragmatist/humanist (Steinheider et al., 2012)
- Organisational blessing
- Strength in smallness
- Bacon sarnies do no harm



Issues



Small scale means little resilience: e.g. conflicting demands can badly affect timeliness



Upcoming challenges from staff turnover



No targets, no set outputs – doomed to success?



Collaboration-first approach **actively limits** professional distance

Conclusions and questions

Collaboration-first approach asks first: what are the requirements for us to work well together? Only then: what specific work will we do?

Police disempowered from research (Marks et al, 2010), not knowledge producers

Might institutional collaborations sometimes reinforce disempowerment, via hierarchies?

Importance of personalities recognised in PAR (ibid)

Agar (1996) says researchers should behave like professional strangers (quoted in Fleming, 2010); but genuine partnership requires trust, even friendship

Value to be had in focusing on the small – cultivating from the ground up

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