

# PHYSICAL SECURITY AND WHY IT MATTERS

Paula Mathers examines the impact of manned security in residential areas

**T**he drive to redefine our own territory and protect our own neighbourhood boundaries seems to be being felt by all income levels throughout all communities. Since the eighties, gated communities (possibly seen as an overly dramatic form of residential boundary) have been seen popping up across the UK. Fear of crime has become an influencing factor in most aspects of our daily lives. In addition to the constant calls for increased amounts of public funds and new initiatives to help prevent and combat criminal activity, the private sector's role in crime prevention is booming. In the United States alone, the number of security guards doubled in the nineties, and since 9/11 has continued to grow to far surpass the number of serving police.

Until recently, policing had become closely associated with the police force alone.

The police were seen as our protectors, guardians of law and preventers of disorder. They were always seen as providers of one universal service, regardless of

## THE WORK OF PRIVATE SECURITY OFFICERS CAN SOMETIMES BE FRAUGHT WITH DANGER

what we require. However, as a result of government cuts, their numbers, and therefore the level of service they can provide has decreased significantly. As a result, there has been a division of labour in the security provision. The public sector is no longer the one that determines what kind of security is required and it is no longer the sole provider of policing.

### TAKING CONTROL

Local authorities seem to be increasingly aware of, and responding to, concerns over safety within housing communities. One response has been to invest in additional policing or patrolling dedicated to specific residential areas. It has become expected behaviour for organisations to take control of their own policing needs by selecting their own private security

providers. Alongside this, many local authorities and resident's committees are beginning to acknowledge that if they want a visible policing presence in their area, they have to pay for it with manned guarding. Manned guarding and residential patrols are small groups of professional security guards that patrol neighbourhoods, look for signs of crime, help the residents where/if necessary and share their findings/information with the police. They work in similar ways to neighbourhood watches but with training and insurances to help guide and protect them. The work of security officers can sometimes be fraught with danger; perpetrators are often drunk or out of control, and aggression can easily escalate. Although security officers may need to use restraining tactics, if a situation starts to escalate, officers will always call the police. However, having security patrols in an area actually works as a deterrent, so these incidents aren't likely to occur often.



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### The rise of private security has been linked to policing budget cuts

In 2010, *The Guardian* newspaper reported that patrolling in residential areas was already on the increase due to police force cuts. Funding shortages have meant huge reductions in the numbers of police, raising serious questions about community safety and the increase in burglaries across the country. These patrols have proven to be incredibly effective. One example on the positive impact of private security patrols is highlighted by Peter Davies, Assistant Chief Constable for Lincolnshire Police who keenly emphasises his productive partnerships with private security contractors that conduct security patrols in Bristol. Since the area brought in private security patrols, antisocial behaviour incidents have reduced by over 50 percent.

Private security employment has accelerated since 1970, and since shortly after this time crime rates have been trending down per number of population. This trend is also shown in the United States. In the US, as with the UK, private citizens have responded to the fear of crime by investing increasing amounts of their own time and money in crime prevention. The trend has continued, and shows that private sector responses to crime, such as security patrols has contributed significantly to dramatic reduction in crime rates. B Benson gave evidence to his claims when he conducted a study in 2000 examining the activities and consequences of the private security force in Starrett City, Brooklyn. This city of approximately 20,000 residents showed only 6.57 crimes per 1,000 population compared with the city (which had no security patrols) that showed 49.86 crimes per 100 people. This trend is recorded in every other area that employs private security.

As global risk and public insecurity combine with, and inform us of more localised anxieties about anti-social and criminal behaviour within residential neighbourhoods, fear of crime has emerged as a major issue of public concern. As a result, public

demand for a visible and reassuring police presence has dramatically spiralled. At the same time, redundancies, organisational restructuring and advances in technology have served to withdraw police from a locally tied presence. This has resulted in a "reassurance deficit" and has encouraged local authorities, housing associations and resident's groups to take responsibility for arranging their own security provisions.

### PROVIDING REASSURANCE

One reaction to this has been the evolution of a composite market for visible forms of patrol that look to provide public reassurance. Local policing is becoming increasingly organised and delivered through an abundance of purchaser and provider arrangements. As a result, new forms of "additional" policing have developed including subcontracted police and Police Community Support Officers, municipal guards, neighbourhood and street wardens, as well as private security guards and citizens' patrols. Commonly referred to as "the extended policing family", together, these additional forms of visible policing patrols offer a positive and sensible response to the public's quest for symbols of order and authority.

With increased public awareness, threats of terrorism, and public sector budget cuts set to continue for the foreseeable future, the need for manned guarding in residential areas is only going to increase. Sadly, these budget cuts also mean that residents will be expected to put their hand in their own pockets to pay for the service; a shame when we all pay council tax, which should already more than cover the cost. However, when local security firms can provide us with patrols for as little as £1.50 per adult per year, (costing based on a 12,000 population town) is the peace of mind it provides really going to have that much of an impact on our pockets? ●