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The impact of austerity measures on the resourcing of football policing and applications for football banning orders in England & Wales

5th Policing and Society Conference, University of Akureyri, October 2022

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Research background



Volume 15, Issue 2
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JOURNAL ARTICLE

Assessing the UK Football Policing Unit Funding of Football Banning Orders in Times of Policing Austerity

Richard Hester ✉

Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice, Volume 15, Issue 2, June 2021, Pages
1188–1201, <https://doi.org/10.1093/police/paaa015>

Published: 05 June 2020

Background in football policing with Thames Valley Police, England as a Dedicated Football Officer (DFO), wanted to research the football banning order process

Aspects of this were published in 2020 in: *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice*

This presentation focuses on the austerity aspects from this research

Data was gathered between November 2018 and April 2019

DFOs & Police Spotters

DFO:

- Manage information and intelligence related to football events
- Key link between the police, football club and supporters
- Collate evidence in support of football banning orders (FBOs)

Police football spotters:

- Collect live information and intelligence at football events
- Gather evidence in support of FBOs
- Engage with the supporter community



College of Policing (2020)



UKFPU, FBOs and Funding Arrangements

The UK Football Policing Unit (UKFPU) are Home Office funded, also accountable to NPCC

- Coordination, intelligence & support for police forces
- Funding for FBOs

FBOs can be applied following conviction or complaint by a police force (Football Spectators Act 1989; Football Disorder Act 2000)

Police forces bid for UKFPU funding for banning order activities, such as post match investigations



Existing literature

Austerity

- In October 2010, the government announced a 20% cut in police funding from 2011 to 2015 (HMIC, 2013).
- Between 2010 and 2018 police officer numbers in UK dropped by approximately 21,000.
- The impact of austerity on policing is complex to determine (Brogden and Ellison, 2012, p. 64)
- Austerity should be regarded as an opportunity for the police to streamline and increase efficiency (Smith, 2016)
- According to the national strategic lead for football policing, Mark Roberts: “resources are being stretched to the limits” (Kopczyk, 2018)



Existing literature

FBOs

- Criticisms of FBOs being too draconian and disproportionate (Hopkins & Hamilton-Smith, 2014, p. 223; James & Pearson, 2015)
- UKFPU funding creates target driven culture (Hopkins, 2014; Hester, 2021)

Football policing

- Body of work which advocates for a more liaison based approach, utilising more specialist resources (see Stott, West & Radburn, 2018; Stott, Pearson & West, 2019)

Methods

Table 1: Representation of clubs and leagues by participants

Police force area	Participant	Number of clubs and leagues	Average arrests per season (last four seasons)
Police force 1 Smaller rural force	DFO 1	Two clubs in league 2	3
Police force 2 Large urban force	DFO 3	One club in premier league One club in football conference	28
Police force 3	DFO 4	One club in premier league	57
Medium sized semi-rural force with large urban areas	DFO 5	One club in league 1 Two clubs in football conference	
Police force 4 Large semi-rural force with large urban areas	DFO 6	Two clubs in league 1	14
Police force 5 Large urban force	DFO 7	One club in premier league Three clubs in championship Two clubs in league 1	197

From: Hester (2021) *Assessing the UK Football Policing Unit Funding of Football Banning Orders in Times of Policing Austerity*

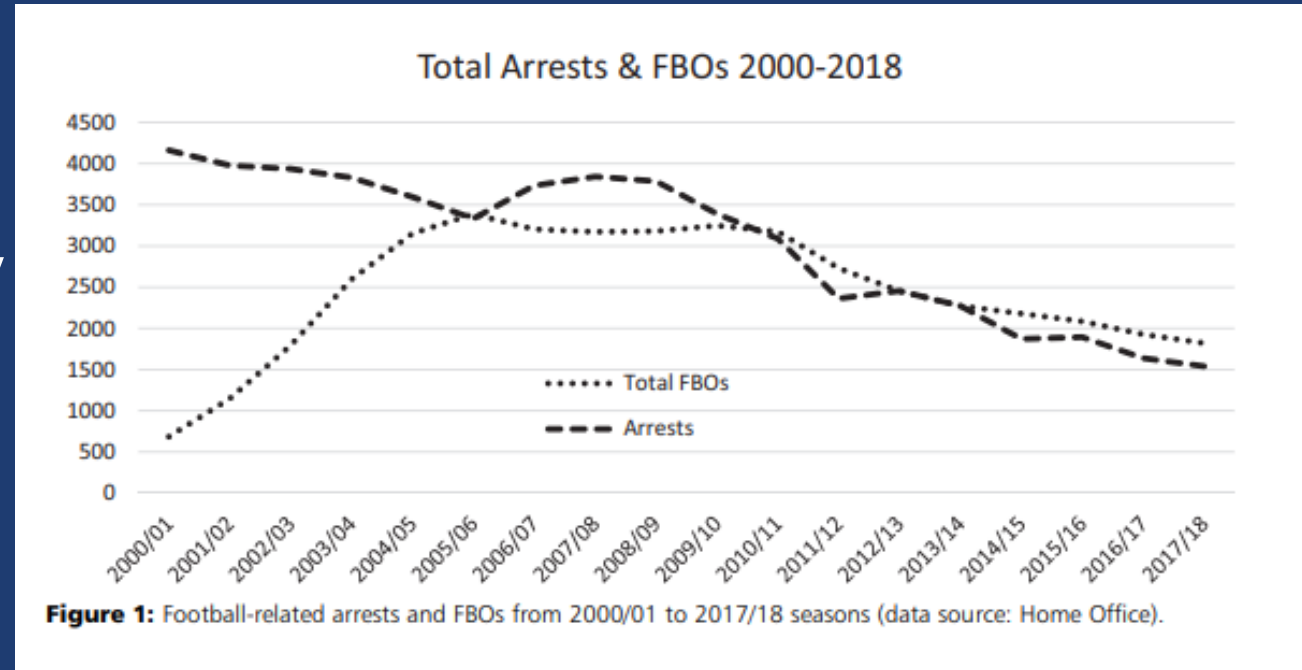
- Recruitment of participants can be problematic, with a complex ‘insider-outsider’ dichotomy to be navigated (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009)
- 7 DFO participants across 5 interviews. Covered all leagues from Premiership to National South, so as representative as possible.
- Anonymisation, so no adverse implications for clubs or police forces.
- Interviews transcribed and thematically analysed – austerity was a clear emergent theme



Findings – arrest figures

The number of football related arrests and FBOs in England and Wales has fallen since the introduction of austerity measures in 2010

Anecdotally, this is caused by fewer officers being deployed to football policing, therefore fewer arrests and FBOs are possible (Hester, 2021)



From: Hester (2021) *Assessing the UK Football Policing Unit Funding of Football Banning Orders in Times of Policing Austerity*



Findings – police resourcing

“I struggle for spotters. Morale on area is very low. Officer numbers are very low, so I get push back from area commanders saying no you can’t have them”. (DFO 6)

- Lack of specialist resources does not support a liaison based approach
- Participants indicated that spotters can be effective in reducing disorder:

“What we’re doing is preventing it, putting spotters in the right location...so look at the disorder figures, what have we had?” (DFO 6)

- DFOs were concerned that if they did an effective job in preventing disorder, it led to questions about the necessity of their job role



Findings – UKFPU funding

“I would never give someone a banning order just because we were getting funding. Would it make me look a bit deeper into them to see if I can find more? Absolutely!” (DFO 3)

- Supports research that target driven culture is evident in police approach to FBOs (Hopkins, 2014; Hester, 2021)
- Helps to justify DFO’s job role



Findings – UKFPU funding

[Speaking about youth projects]

“It’s very against the Home Office drive to ban everyone because they don’t come out with a banning order, so we don’t get funding for it. It’s our own pride in not criminalising that generation, it’s about education rather than punishment.” (DFO 7)

- Demonstrates a shift to more diversionary policing approaches
- More difficult to quantify and therefore justify in the DFO role



Findings – plural policing

[Speaking about a youth who had been caught with pyrotechnics at a fixture]
“The police budgets are going to get tighter and tighter...So we had a flare...got him, bang to rights, ‘oh we’re not going to deal with him because he’s 15, you can deal with him”. (DFO 3)

- This could have a positive effect if clubs take more responsibility for managing low level behaviour issues
- However, both clubs and police forces need to be engaged in this process
- It was evident that nationally not all clubs and police forces have effective working relationships

Summary



- Resources for football policing have been decreasing over the past decade in England and Wales
 - Reduced arrests and FBOs
- Challenges in resourcing football with spotters due to resourcing pressures
- Spotters can provide an effective resource at reducing disorder, when combined with a liaison based approach
- Funding for FBOs adds complication to the policing of football
- Lack of resources has left football clubs dealing with low level offending



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Questions?

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