This chapter focuses on three interrelated issues in the context of the 43 constabularies in England and Wales: first, the different definitions of the policy process both *per se* and specifically in police research; secondly, the formal players involved in the determination of policy at different stages of this process; the third task is to evaluate the role of institutionalised power and authority in managing the conflicts and contradictions which characterise relations between policy-makers at different levels.

By concentrating on these three themes the responses of policy-makers to poverty and the corresponding social problems are explored. In the late twentieth century crucial changes occurred in the political culture, and there was a significant change in the way in which social problems were explained. Discussions about these matters have impacted at different points of the police policy process. Although the focus is on policing, it is argued that this activity needs to be located in relation to other service providers in the public, private and voluntary sectors, particularly the welfare state.

**Unravelling key themes in policy**

The preceding chapters synthesised the respective contributions of social scientists and public commentators towards understanding poverty and crime. How do these issues fit into the context of police policy-making? How do ideas and policy-makers interact to produce change or inertia? What are the policy implications of the processes at work in the police service, which sustain or suppress the everyday ‘popular convictions’ (Gramsci, 1971: 377) that constitute behavioural and structural interpretations of poverty? Are there any continuities linking élite-type
groups at the top of the policy-making machinery with the ‘occupa-
tional culture’ of ‘street-level bureaucrats’ at lower levels? Such processes
cannot be reconstructed in their entirety but some patterns can be iden-
tified.

Before outlining the ways in which structural and behavioural
perspectives on poverty impact on policy-makers’ thinking, the policy
process in the police service is examined (Ham and Hill, 1993; Hog-
wood and Gunn, 1981, 1984). The meaning of police policy has been
subjected to some sociological study, but compared to work on other
police-related matters this is negligible. Likewise, police-work has been
under-researched by those specifically analysing the policy process.

It is demonstrated that there are a diversity of values which are part of
a project initially introduced by the neo-liberals, aiming to restructure
and reconstitute the state and civil society in modern societies. Since
the 1980s this thinking has fundamentally transformed the nature of
the public services in British society (Clarke et al., 1994). The macro
economic and political ideologies of the New Right and neo-liberals led
to a reappraisal of the role of police. One emergent trend is the move-
ment away from the police as a force to a service provider. The impact
of these changing values at a macro level on operational ideologies at a
micro level, is patchy, largely because government rhetoric is at odds
with certain aspects of the police culture, particularly the culture of
police chiefs. The ideologies promoting market forces may be used to
dispute structural versions of the ‘underclass’ held by these officers, but
sustain the behavioural ones identified amongst the rank and file who
are engaged in thief-taking.

Police policy – methodological and theoretical issues

With some notable exceptions (Grimshaw and Jefferson, 1987; Jones
et al., 1994; Savage et al., 1996; Savage and Charman, 1996), there is a
lamentable lack of writing about policy-making in the police service.
This reflects the perennial problem of studying and trying to gain access
to élite-type groups in general as well as in the police service (Giddens,
1974; Reiner, 1991). Rock (1990: 2) sheds some light on these problems
in his observation that ‘Sociology is necessarily a description of the
more public features of the social world.’ Much of policing is conducted
in relatively public domains, but the more politicised aspects are
worked out secretly behind the scenes in private arenas. It is useful to
compare the non-work settings, where important players engage in
resolving disputes and conflicts in order to reach a consensus, to a ‘club’.