



SWEDISH NATIONAL
AUDIT OFFICE

Summary

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Putting out fires

– the work of the Swedish Police Authority on special events targeting serious crime

Summary

Serious crime, such as shootings and bombings, is a major problem in Sweden that is increasingly spreading beyond the big cities. In order to combat such crime, the Swedish Police Authority can decide on special events, which means that the operations are managed according to a special procedure, enabling the rapid mobilisation of resources and expertise. However, there are problem indications that show deficiencies in the Swedish Police Authority's work with special events. The Swedish National Audit Office (Swedish NAO) has therefore audited whether special events are an effective management approach for combating serious crime.

The results of the audit

The Swedish NAO's overall conclusion is that special events can be an effective way of heading efforts in the initial hours or days after a serious crime has been committed. However, the Swedish NAO considers that special events that last longer than this do more harm than good because they often involve transferring resources, which has adverse implications in the local police districts that need to provide resources. The Swedish NAO therefore considers that combating serious crime should not be done through lengthy special events.

The audit shows that the Swedish Police Authority cannot account for either the total number of special events or the number of special events targeting serious crime, or the total additional cost thereof. Furthermore, there is no information in

the administrative system of the Swedish Police Authority on how long the special events lasted, how many full-time equivalents were involved and from which parts of the authority resources were mobilised. Moreover, it is not possible either to determine which police actions or investigative measures have been performed within the bounds of the special event. The Swedish NAO's assessment is that it is not currently possible to measure whether special events targeting serious crime are effective.

The Swedish NAO's review and compilation of special events show that serious crime was the third most common reason for deciding on a special event during the period 2015–2021. For over half of these events (53.5 per cent), it is not possible to trace any additional costs. For other events, the additional costs are SEK 116 million. According to the Swedish Police Authority, reasons for the lack of traceability are that the police regions do not always record additional costs for special events, and deficiencies in the Swedish Police Authority's systems, which impede sound economising of state funds.

The Swedish Police Authority has developed a handbook and guidelines that facilitate implementation of special events, but there are no clear criteria for decisions to initiate a special event. The audit shows that it is important that the Swedish Police Authority makes well-balanced judgements, both ahead of a potential decision on a special event, and during the time that it lasts, to ensure that resources are used efficiently. Almost one third of the local police district heads in the Swedish National Audit Office's questionnaire survey find that special events targeting serious crime could largely have been dealt with by the line operations instead, using clearer management and governance.

The local police districts that have to provide resources are severely affected by lengthy resource transfers in connection with special events targeting serious crime. Crime prevention activities are cancelled and cooperation with external actors is down-graded, which makes it more difficult to detect and prevent the new recruitment of youths into serious crime. It makes it more difficult for the police to tackle serious crime locally and to be visible in the local community, which can lead to citizens feeling increasingly unsafe. Heightened case balances also have an adverse impact on citizens as they have to wait longer for incidents they have reported to the police to be dealt with.

Finally, the audit shows that the Swedish Police Authority rarely follows up on or evaluates its work within the bounds of special events. There is no system for disseminating knowledge, and insofar as new knowledge is disseminated, it is mainly verbal and on the initiative of the individual employee. The Swedish NAO considers that follow-up, evaluation and dissemination of knowledge are of tremendous importance for harnessing know-how and experience and for

improving conditions for implementing good examples in the regular line operations.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the audit, the Swedish National Audit Office makes the following recommendations to the Swedish Police Authority:

- Develop criteria as a basis for deciding if a situation should be addressed within the bounds of a regional or a national special event.
- Prepare a national status report that can be used as a basis ahead of decisions on transferring resources. The status report should be updated regularly and shared as necessary.
- Develop the documentation on special events to enable continuous monitoring of the number, scope, costs, resource mobility and required police actions and investigative measures.
- Monitor and evaluate special events. The supporting materials should be documented and provide information on any success factors or risks associated with special events that can enhance efforts going forward.
- Ensure that knowledge and experience of special events is systematically disseminated to all relevant parts of the organisation.