

'The Crime and Disorder Act has created strategic partnerships throughout the country so that all those who can tackle local crime and disorder issues, do so systematically and publicly' (Home Office, 1998). Does the evidence support this assertion?

Introduction

The first section will examine the history behind the Crime and Disorder Act in order that the legislation is put into a political and sociological context. Influential documents that have contributed to the development of the Act will feature in the research, this will include the Scarman Report the Morgan Report as well as a number of influential government documents, and academic literature. The essay will then go on to critically assess the level of the strategic approach which came to define the 'Partnership'.

The author will then examine the evidence to support the assertion that the process was 'systematic' and was indeed carried out 'publicly'. Within the body of the essay, examples of successful implementations of the strategy as well as areas where it has not been so successful will be highlighted. Published empirical research as well as government policies and documents form the basis of the material to support the author's argument.

The essay will then review the impact of the latest legislation which has increased the statutory members of the Partnership from the original quorum of the police and local authority. The writer will then conclude with a summary of the main findings and points towards what is believed to be the key issues that have emerged as a result of the research. The writer suggests that through tracing the historical roots that led to the establishment of Community Safety Partnerships that real progress has been made; this is despite limitations within the current system.

History

The author suggests from research carried out, that developments within the field of community consultation were the precursors that culminated with the legislation that created modern community safety partnerships. Early work that led to an increase in greater consultation and multi-agency partnerships included the introduction of Crime Prevention Departments within police forces as recommended in the Cornish Committee (1965) which had a partnership philosophy as its central theme.

Scarman (1981: 93) reinforces the above recommendation when he refers to the Police Act 1964 stating that the duty of a Police Authority is '*to secure the maintenance of an adequate and efficient police force for the area*'. He later reminds the Police Authority that it is their duty to exercise the powers given to them under the Act stating '*...there can be no doubt that in our society a police force which does not consult locally, will fail to be efficient*'.

When considering the issue of community consultation within his reports on the Brixton riots Scarman (1981: 95) '*...I recommend even more strongly that Police Authorities and Chief Officers of Police should act at once, if they have not already, under the existing statutory powers. But, I believe the imposition by statute of a duty would ensure the task was accomplished. I so recommend*'.

Clearly Scarman was not convinced that reliance upon a somewhat ambiguous requirement within the Police Act of 1964 was going to be effective and even less optimistic that his interpretation in relation the duty of a police authority being consistently applied across England and Wales. Scarman went on to observe that consultation could not rely upon voluntary mechanisms, but must be backed by law. Legislation was later introduced based upon his recommendations and Police and Community Liaison Groups emerged as a legal requirement.

Later came Home Office Circular 8/84 which began with the opening paragraph '*...Every individual citizen and all those agencies whose policies and practices can influence the extent of crime should make their contribution. Preventing crime is a task for the whole community.*'

The circular endorsed a situational model of crime prevention which provided the first real basic framework to encourage partnership working. This methodology of crime prevention came to dominate the criminological landscape for the next 13 years under the rule of the Conservative government. Although working in partnership was encouraged, this failed to flourish for a number of reasons; this would include suspicion of working with the police and the police being reticent with providing crime data to external agencies after a century of concealment. The result was that evidence of productive partnership activities existed only in small pockets around the country, for instance in Wigan; elsewhere it was the status-quo that mainly reigned.

A working group later presented a report at the standing conference on crime prevention in 1991, this was called '*Safer Communities: The local delivery of crime prevention through the Partnership Approach*' otherwise known as '*The Morgan Report*'. This was a seminal publication that advanced the notion of partnership working and importantly recognised the need to place the key players in the field of community safety together, embraced under a statutory requirement. The police and local authorities were to become the responsible authorities within local crime and disorder reduction partnerships; although this would take another seven years and a change of government.

'...the Working Group recommends that in the longer term local authorities, working in conjunction with the police should have clear statutory responsibility for the development and stimulation of community safety and crime prevention programmes, and for the progressing at a local level a multi-agency approach to community safety.'

Morgan (1991: 29)

Morgan felt that the term 'crime prevention' was interpreted too narrowly '*... and this reinforces the view that this is solely the responsibility of the police. On the other hand 'community safety' is open to wider interpretation and could encourage wider participation from all sections of the community in the fight against crime*'.

Morgan (1991: 13)

The logic for this recommendation is sound, however with the benefit of hindsight, the writer suggests that perhaps it would have been beneficial to have actually defined what was meant by the term 'community safety'.

The term 'community safety' is an implicit key component within the essay question, as the strategic partnerships which emerged in 1998 were set up as crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRP) with a responsibility for proposing and delivering a community safety strategy. Wiles and Pease (2000: 21) recognised that what was meant by 'community safety' was never really defined at the outset, and as a result CDRP's were left with little guidance.

After the first attempts at developing and implementing strategies for the 1999 – 2002 period, a review concerning their effectiveness and key lessons learnt was carried out by the Audit Commission. Considering that the Government targeted an additional £8.7 billion for community safety and related issues for this period, this was a crucial and necessary step to take if this new era of partnership working was to survive and thrive.

'The term 'community safety' is seen as being concerned with people, communities and organisations including families, victims and risk groups, as well as with attempting to reduce particular types of crime and the fear of crime. Community safety should be seen as the legitimate concern of the all in the local community.'

Audit Commission (2002: 2)

The key findings carried out in this report for CDRP's were that there was a need to improve organisational leadership making community safety core business; focused priorities that linked in with Government targets including the engagement of local communities and lastly, capacity building making best use of resources with a performance management focus. Many of the CDRP's were found to have excessive numbers of key priorities and in order to give focus, were directed to reduce these at the 2002-2005 strategy to around six key priorities.

‘All those who can tackle local crime and disorder issues’

The phrase suggests that the membership of a crime and disorder reduction partnership should embrace a wide spectrum of relevant agencies who could contribute towards reducing crime and disorder within the local context.

A key principle of the Government's police reform programme in 2001 was the need to build a healthy civil society. The white paper noted that reducing crime and the fear of crime required more effective partnership working between the police and other agencies:

“The police alone cannot win the fight against crime and disorder. It requires a co-ordinated response by the community as a whole. Local authorities, schools, health services, the voluntary and private sectors, and individuals all have to work in partnership with the police to develop and implement local crime and disorder reduction strategies.”

Home Office (2001: 84)

Upon the recommendations made by the Morgan report the two main agencies given the statutory responsibility for developing the strategies and stimulating community safety and crime prevention programmes were the police and local authority. Partner organisations are required to work in co-operation with education and probation and health authorities and invite co-operation of a range of private, voluntary, other public and community groups including the community itself.

In accordance with the Morgan report's recommendations, the work of the CDRP's has been assessed and evaluated.

‘Local partnerships have not made an obvious impact on community safety between 1999 and 2000. The Government and regulators need to work with the partner agencies to maximise their impact and to make neighbourhoods safer for local people.’

Audit Commission: (2002: 1)

A major inhibitor for joined-up activities amongst the CDRP's was in relation to funding, a factor that was raised within the Morgan report. The Government provided new streams of money to support and encourage partnership work through the 'Partnership Development Fund'; this helped to nurture the partnership and its activities.

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 as amended by the Police Reform Act 2002 (section 97) increased the number of responsible authorities from just the police and local authority to also include Fire authorities, Police authorities, Health authorities in Wales, and Primary care trusts in England. These ceased to be 'cooperating bodies' and became 'responsible authorities' on 30 April 2004.

Apart from being influential and important members of local partnerships, who can make significant contributions to the 3 year strategy, the new responsible authorities also included members who held the purse-strings of those agencies. This enabled the CDRP to have members who had the power to make decisions about financial contributions on behalf of their respective agencies, thus allowing a more effective and responsive partnership.

This much needed change has brought together a powerful cartel of agencies on a statutory footing enhancing the 'potential' of the partnership to deliver the 3 years strategy. The writer of this essay recognizes that this conforms to recommendations from the 2002 Audit Commission report but observes that little has been done to attract 'all those who can tackle crime and disorder issues'. For instance, there is little evidence that charitable organizations has been encouraged and supported, nor indeed the financially powerful business sector. Crawford (1998: 188) refers to '*an ideology of a 'corporate community' investment*' where the indirect benefits for a business and its employees can be had and at the same time making improvements to the local community. Lastly little has been done to actively involve the local community within the CDRP despite Government rhetoric advocating their engagement. In the Home Office briefing note 10/00 recommendations were made for partnerships to identify 'ring fenced' grants for community groups if they were involved within the delivery of the strategy; four years later this remains a recommendation, implemented by few partnerships

‘...do so systematically and publicly’

Systematically has been defined as ‘purposefully regular; methodical’ and publicly as ‘in a manner accessible to or observable by the public; openly’. The evidence strongly supports the argument that the Government has acted in a systematic way and as such have fashioned the methodology that the partnerships have adopted in order to discharge their responsibilities. The following references support the assertion made by the writer.

‘Without prejudice to any other obligation imposed upon it, it shall be the duty of each authority...to exercise its various functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area.’

Home Office (2003: 66)

Here the Government uses legislation for the requirement of the mainstreaming of preventative work within the full range of local authority services as well as the police, joint authorities, Broads authority and National Park authority. Failure to comply with section 17 leaves the relevant authority open to a legal challenge within the courts by individuals or groups of people by way of civil litigation. As yet there have been no challenges alleging a breach of this legislation, despite having been in existence for around 6 years; this suggests either there have been no problems, that perhaps the public are not aware of the ‘safeguard’ it provides, or more cynically, that lawyers have not yet discovered how to best commercially exploit the opportunities it may present.

There is now a requirement that each CDRP carry out an assessment of their performance with an emphasis on outcomes, and that this is forwarded to the relevant Government Office. This process applied to all CDRP’s; however, it is a mandatory requirement within the 94 areas in the highest crime quartiles to continue the process on an annual basis. The Home Office Regional Directors may, if they feel a concern with the performance of a partnership request that a self assessment is carried out; all

other partnerships are free to decide whether to carry out an annual assessment or continue with working on implementing existing improvement plans.

Through this process the Government are able to exercise a number of functions from the centre that directly impact upon the methodology employed by the partnerships. The main benefit is that they are able to place controls on the quality of performance by the partnerships and facilitate interventions to improve service delivery. Through the Regional Directors they 'manage' partnerships as the 3 year strategic plans are required to be submitted through the Directors as well as the self-assessments on their own performance.

By ensuring that strategies conform to Government policies and key performance indicators as well as mirroring local basic command units own strategy which, itself conforms to the objectives of the Home Secretary, a level of corporate approach is applied that ensures that all those engaged, are 'systematically' pulling in the same direction. A new full-time post of Community Safety Officer has emerged that has allowed a more coordinated and joined up approach to partnership working and who understands the disparate policies and strategies in existence between the statutory membership of the CDRP.

In compliance with the recommendations under the Morgan report, funding has been made available by the Government 'to promote partnership working and to help the frontline deliver crime and disorder reductions locally'.

<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/crimereductionprogramme32.htm> (accessed 6th October 2004). Since 1999 an additional £8.7 billion has been targeted for community safety and related issues, this has been available within all of the 376 existing partnerships (Audit Commission 2002: 1). Once more, the spending of that money has to be agreed by the police and the local crime and disorder reduction partnership, and then approved by the director of the regional government office who ensures that it is compliant with the Government's objectives.

Although the above is quoted to support the argument that the partnerships work in a systematic way, a counter argument suggests that all is not as methodical and transparent as it appears. The suggestion within the essay question that strategic

partnerships have been created is factually correct, it is whether the processes that allow them to be strategic are working, that is open to interpretation.

There are a number of grey areas where confusion and lack of clarity appears; for instance as well as a CDRP there are also local strategic partnerships (LSP), regeneration partnerships i.e. New Deal for Communities, Single Regeneration Budget, as well as Neighbourhood Management Committees. All of these have responsibilities that overlap with the CDRP. Then there are various strategies that exist, community strategies, public service agreements and neighbourhood renewal strategies. The theory is that each of the strategies should complement and align each other, but because there are a variety of strategies the writer argues that they appear to compete with each other and when there are overlaps, who is ultimately 'accountable' for failure? If duplication is taking place, then perhaps partnerships could not be described as 'systematic'.

'The overall improvement agenda to reduce crime and disorder in Norfolk is ambitious but also complex involving a number of strategic plans which are not yet integrated and so there is a risk of duplication of effort and resources and of gaps in provision not being identified.'

Audit Commission (2004: 6)

Within the membership of the LSP there appears many of the same organisations that sit within the CDRP, the police, local authority, health, education etcetera, although there is a naturally a greater emphasis upon business and this community is frequently a greater player within the LSP than the CDRP. The problems arise when there is a conflict of priorities between the two groups, there are no national objective mechanisms available to arbitrate, so each CDRP with its LSP creates its own rational subjective decision making process.

A further more tangible aspect of lack of a systematic behaviour is evidenced in the poor level of exchange of information between the partnerships (Hough and Tilly (1997: 17), Audit Commission (2001: 14) and (2004: 7). If partnerships are still working within silo's citing difficulties due to the Data Protection Act and Coldicott Guardian rules at the expense of section 115 Crime and Disorder Act 1998 (which

encourages the exchange of data between the CDRP), then partnerships will need to trust each other more or will forever be constrained.

Having examined the evidence, including the limitations and lack of corporate approach, the writer believes that crime and disorder is in the main tackled in a 'systematic' manner by most of the 376 partnerships in England and Wales. The Government have put into place much of the legislation and guidance to facilitate a structured and methodical approach; however this is sometimes at odds with other more imbedded legislation.

Publicly

Under section 6 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act each of the CDRP's are required to consult with the community, analyse that data and draw up a local strategy that puts into place activities and interventions that respond to the needs of the community; every 3 months they are required to provide an update as to what they have achieved and annually evaluate and amend the strategy. A new strategy is produced every three years.

Methods of contact with the community include questionnaires, market research and the internet to name but a few. On face value, it would seem that with all the consultation that takes place that the work of the CDRP would be very public, as representative samples of the community are represented within that process. Therefore, it would seem that '*...those that tackle local crime and disorder issues, do so systematically and publicly*'.

The Government has recognised the problem with poor public communication and has made attempts to support and guide partnerships by providing information, notably on the internet; for example within the crime reduction web site good use is made within the learning zone

http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/comm_strat/sts4p10.htm.

The writer asks “*Why did the Government feel it so important to include the word ‘publicly’*”? This is an important element if the essay question is to be answered; if the purpose is defined by the writer (in the absence of any other definition), then the evidence can be objectively analysed.

The purpose of tackling crime and disorder ‘*publicly*’ must be so that the local community which is served by the CDRP becomes aware of the work that is being carried out; be aware of the impact that work has made; and be aware of the work that is planned to be carried out in the future. All of these activities are intended to contribute to improving the overall quality of life of the local community; the effort must not be invisible. The community need to be kept informed because if communication fails, people are guided and influenced by perceptions irrespective of how well a partnership may perform.

There is plenty of evidence to support the above statement, this is probably best illustrated within the findings of the now annual British Crime Survey. *‘Although crime fell between 1995 and 1997 according to police recorded crime and BCS, only 9% of people are aware of this.’*

Home Office (1998: 1)

‘One-quarter of respondents believed that crime had risen ‘a lot’, and a third felt that crime had risen ‘a little’ over the previous two years. This is despite the total number of crimes recorded by the BCS falling by 12% between 1999 and 2000.’

Home Office Statistical Bulletin: (2001: 33)

There is evidence to support the assertion that partnerships do indeed operate publicly, for instance they are required to publish the results of their audits and resultant community safety strategies, the strategy can always be found on the internet within the local authority web page. The weakness here is that a member of the community is required to actively locate this information as it is not served on a platter. When published within free local authority magazines, the problem can become compounded as the strategy may be seen by the reader as the ‘property’ of the local authority and the ‘partnership’ is diluted and the CDRP is perceived as no more than a department within the council.

The writer suggests that the problem with 'publicly' may be two-fold, the first relates to 'advertising' what it actually does, the second relates to 'marketing' what the partnership actually is.

'...the CDRPs are working hard to raise their local profile but overall the people of Norfolk lack awareness of the role and aims of their CDRP's. This can create difficulties in engaging local people in identifying and solving local problems. It also means that opportunities to reassure the public are missed...'

Audit Commission (2004: 18)

Conclusion

There have been notable successes within the field of community safety as delivered by the local CDRP's especially where reductions in crime and fear of crime have taken place. The Audit Commission has also identified a number of areas where partnerships need to improve and develop their performance. This is all part of a healthy learning process; the use of comparable CDRP areas has also contributed towards disseminating good practice.

There has been a huge academic interest in the field of community safety which has materialised since 1998 and this too has had a positive effect on the development of the partnerships, even when the findings are not complementary.

What the writer would like to give greater recognition and attention to within the conclusion, is the fact that the Crime and Disorder Act is really a new phenomenon only being in existence for just six years. The strategic plans were first produced in 1999 and at the writing of this essay, work is currently ongoing to produce the strategy for 2005-2008, this is only the third attempt at such a new activity. A new post of community safety officer has emerged to develop and coordinate partnership activity as well as a level of expertise to give consistency and continuity to the process.

The durability and sustainability of the CDRP's has been supported by massive Government investment of billions of pounds, on-line help has been provided through the internet, training through NACRO and Crime Concern as well as legislation to drive through optional and vague Government requirements. All of this has contributed towards a more systematic approach to delivering the tools to allow the partnerships to tackle local crime and disorder.

From the early days in the late 1990's when CDRP's were new and unseen, they are now beginning to appear more markedly upon the local community map. Cooperation between partners, joint objectives and not least, a statutory requirement to work together, is gradually beginning to erode the years of isolation and mistrust that has festered and served the community badly and inefficiently. Perhaps reduction in crime and disorder is not yet mainstreamed or systematic, the author suggests though, that maybe it is slowly but surely filtering through.

A final observation by the writer is that the whole process has perhaps been systematic, from the periods of consultation to the era of partnership working. Partnership work is evolutionary, it can never rest but must move with the times and be mindful of the social conscience. It may never be seamless, it may occasionally be joined-up but it will forever be alive, for those that have been touched by it must pursue the vision of James Morgan, if for no other reason that 'it just makes sense'.

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