Fit for Purpose: Working with the Community to Strengthen Policing in Victoria, Australia

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Victoria is the Australian police jurisdiction that has made community engagement most central to its operating philosophy. In 1999, it adopted Local Priority Policing (LPP) as a core operation principle. LPP focused on facilitating local input and community partnerships to strengthen the prevention and response capabilities of Victoria Police. Currently, a new *fit for purpose* service delivery model is being developed which builds on past experiences. This paper looks at the history of LPP and other community engagement programs in Victoria, and how the lessons learnt from this initiative are impacting on future strategic options for service delivery. It focuses on the urban areas in the state of Victoria and examines how the community has been adopted as partners in the battle against crime and disorder.

Introduction

Law enforcement agencies throughout the world have made 'community' central to their strategies (Findlay 2004; Skogan 2006). Whether it is through a commitment to a catch-all 'community policing' approach or because they use contemporary policing strategies that presuppose strong community links, law enforcement agencies are compelled to engage with the communities they operate in. Community engagement is the active dimension of all community policing efforts.

However, community engagement continues to operate in the context of the conundrum identified by Casey and Trofymowych (1999). Community engagement is a core element of contemporary policing, but there is also widespread dissatisfaction on the part of both police and community participants with its processes and the outcomes. In the last few years, important new initiatives in community engagement have been launched at the same time as evaluations continue to identify the weaknesses in the models used and in the implementation of existing programs (Myhill et al. 2003; Myhill 2006; Newburn and Jones 2002; Skogan 2006). Given that engagement is based on a series of contested concepts, such as *community*, *representation* and *participation* (Wilson

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1992), and that evaluations tend to focus primarily on subjective assessments by stakeholders, it is not surprising to find that there continues to be little consensus about the outcomes.

This paper focuses on community engagement in Victoria, Australia. Victoria is the smallest mainland state in Australia (only the island state of Tasmania is smaller). It is the most densely populated and urbanised, with a population of 5.1 million, of which 3.5 million live in the metropolitan area of Melbourne, the capital city. Victoria Police is the sole law enforcement agency for the entire state, with 11,000 uniformed officers and 2,100 civilian staff, working in some 330 police stations. Victoria Police was formally established in 1853, two years after the colony of Victoria separated from New South Wales.

It is important to note that the focus of the paper is on local-level engagement processes that involve a small locality, neighbourhood or suburb, or on those processes targeted at a specific social or minority group (immigrant communities, youth, gay and lesbian, etc.), particularly where this correlates in some way with locality (e.g. because of ethnic enclaves, or specific attempts to dialogue with local youth). In Australia, where all eight police agencies are relatively large organisations, there is a significant institutional distance between local-level and higher-level engagement and operational processes, such as a Police Board or agency-wide Ethnic Affairs office.

The paper provides a short background section to the theory and practice of community engagement and then examines a number of recent evaluations of engagement processes in Victoria. A final section looks at current trends in the development of a new *fit for purpose* service model based on the experience of the last decades. A general disclaimer is necessary from the very beginning of this paper: Victoria has a relatively low crime rate compared to other states in Australia but, as will be noted later this paper, drawing a cause-effect relationship between community engagement and crime rates is speculative at best.

Understanding Community Engagement

Community engagement refers to the processes used to promote external input into policing policy and strategy, involving individuals or organisations (Casey and

Trofymowych 1999). This is a deliberately broad definition, given that engagement can refer to a wide range of processes and activities that differ considerably in both the locus of control (i.e. by police or external stakeholders) and in the direction of the information flow. Community engagement abuts at one end to processes such as police public relations, that merely serve to communicate a police agenda and, at the other end, to independent community or citizens' initiatives, such as protest or vigilante activities, that are clearly outside police control. The range of possible community engagement activities and structures is often represented by continuums such as Arnstein's 'ladder of participation' (Arnstein 1969) that locates manipulation at the bottom of the ladder and citizen control at the top. Similarly, Davis and Bishop (2001) identify a range of engagement processes that include consultation, partnership and consumer control.

The term engagement is often used interchangeably with terms such as *liaison, relations, consultation, involvement*, *collaboration*, *participation* and *partnership*, with the later terms suggesting more equal relationships between police and external stakeholders (Myhill 2006). The use of any of these terms to describe external input into policing may seem to imply a deliberate choice to position activities along an engagement continuum, but the reality is somewhat more haphazard. Whichever term an agency uses to label its community-related processes, the reality is that 'poor' or 'thin' processes – even if they are labelled collaborations or partnerships – essentially become public relations exercises. In contrast, 'rich' processes can be the basis for real partnerships and effective joint governance of on-going projects or programs.

Moreover, it should be noted that, while community engagement implies non-government input from individuals, advocacy groups and community organisations, many of the processes discussed in this paper in fact include the participation of other government departments, such as social services, education, health and public safety, as well as from other tiers of government, particularly local governments. What is presented as community engagement is often, in effect, an inter-agency or inter-governmental coordination process and therefore the distinction between whole-of-government and community engagement processes may not always be clear.

There is a wide range of possible community engagement processes but most efforts tend to focus quickly on the single technique of consultative committees. Community consultative committees - variously called *patrol committees*, *customer councils, local safety committees*, etc. -- are by far the most common form of engagement

(Myhill et al. 2003; Skogan 2006; Ward 1995). Police community consultation committees vary greatly in their functioning between jurisdictions and between localities within the same jurisdiction, mostly within the following key parameters:

1. Coverage. Committees may cover local government areas, neighbourhoods or even a single shopping street or business precinct, or they may be focused on a specific target group such as youth or ethnic minorities.

2. Ownership/Control. The 'ownership' of the committee (in terms of who initiates, chairs, hosts, provides administrative support, etc.) may reside with the police or with other agencies. In the Australian context, local governments are taking an increasing role in crime prevention and they often initiate local liaison processes that become the primary means of engagement between police and the wider community.

3. Appointment/selection of members. Members of the committee may be appointed by controlling authorities or selected through a range of processes that may include elections.

4. Open versus closed participation. Attendance, voice and vote at the meetings may be restricted to appointed/selected members or may be open to the public.

5. Relationship to other processes. The committee may be a stand-alone process or may be connected to related activities such as Neighbourhood Watch and other crime prevention programs.

6. Focus of activities. The committees may have different primary foci, such as information exchange, development of local safety strategies, or the management of public safety and crime prevention programs.

Debates about the efficacy of these committees quickly dominate discussions about community engagement. Whichever format a committee takes, it must demonstrate its legitimacy as a valid process through its capacity to measure the pulse of public safety and crime concerns in the community and to translate these concerns into meaningful actions to address them. In order to achieve this, committees often employ a range of other engagement processes (surveys, town meetings) to gather additional input into their deliberations, and they often sponsor or manage projects that engage the police and community in joint problem solving.

Community Engagement in Policing

Whichever form it takes, community engagement is not, in itself, a process or practice separate from other more global policing developments such as *community policing*, *policing by consent* and the notion of a police *service* (as opposed to *force),* all of which imply dialogue with and legitimation by the communities and citizens policed (Findlay 2004). Community engagement is the basis of a range of strategies considered to be *social* and *preventive* responses to crime and disorder that are part of the *multilateralisation* of policing (Bayley and Shearing 2001). There has been a shift in our understanding of the governance of security, including the increased responsibility being transferred to third parties and to partnerships between a range of government and non-government organisations (Ransley and Mazerolle 2007). The new understanding is conceptualised by some as authors as *nodal governance* (RegNet 2006), which recognises the multiple *nodes* (clusters of stakeholders) that impact on crime control and prevention.

The rise of community engagement in policing has coincided with broader shifts in the relations between state and non-state institutions. The crisis of faith confronting both representative democracy and the Weberian notions of efficiency in the public service have led to a legitimation gap that Western democracies have sought to bridge through new public management and governance processes (Davis and Weller 2001). An integral part of these new processes is the increased emphasis on the role of community, civil society and citizens in both policy development and service delivery, which have resulted in profound changes in the way in which all public sector organisations operate. The notion of public agencies directly providing services has given way to approaches which seek greater stakeholder involvement in policy processes, more transparent accountability of public services and stronger public-private partnerships in service delivery. Internally within government there is also an increased emphasis on collaboration between agencies and whole-of-government approaches (Bayley and Shearing 2001; Fleming and Rhodes 2004).

Community engagement by the police has not been without its critics. As Casey and Trofymowych (1999) noted, criticisms of community engagement can be classified as ideological, structural or operational. Ideological critiques reject what they see as the tokenism of engagement processes such as consultation, with progressives claiming that it mainly serves to stifle dissent, while conservatives see it as pandering to special interests and diverting police from core policing tasks. Structural criticisms focus on the

difficulties of reaching the most marginalised sectors of society, on the uneven power relationships between police and those being engaged and on internal police procedures that do not necessarily reward engagement efforts. Operational criticism is focused on performance indicators and the difficulties of documenting the direct impact of engagement.

Do police themselves support community engagement? Yates et al. (1997) in a study on the level of support for various community policing strategies, including engagement, among officers in England and the USA, found significant support for a range of measures. However, their interpretation of the findings appear to be a case of seeing the glass as half full, given that the significant support they identify is expressed in the following terms: 'Well in excess of one third to one half of police officers popularly support the community policing philosophy' (Yates et al. 1997, p.113). Similarly, Gennaro et al. (2005) found that police middle managers were 'ambivalent' about community policing; they adopted the philosophy but appeared unwilling to make the organisational changes necessary to support it.

Local Priority Policing in Victoria

While police in Australia have tended to operate at some distance from the communities they serve they could not remain isolated from international changes in both policing and public management and so a range of community policing initiatives were begun in the mid-1980s. In 1986, Bayley noted that, while the then NSW Police Commissioner, John Avery, had called for the establishment of community consultative councils in his 1981 book, *Police, Force or Service*? (published three years before he became Commissioner) and a 1985 Commission of Inquiry into Victoria Police had recommended the establishment of local liaison committees, until then 'nothing along those lines [had] been created anywhere in Australia' (Bayley 1986, p. 22).

Victoria is the Australian police jurisdiction that has made community participation most central to its operating philosophy. In 1998, Victoria Police embarked on a major strategic realignment known as Local Priority Policing. The goal of Local Priority Policing was to ensure that the local community became an active participant in shaping police service priorities. As stated by the then Chief Commissioner, the first two of seven key characteristics of Local Priority Policing were:

1. The community significantly influences which services are provided;

2. Local service issues are the prime focus (Victoria Police 1999).

Local Priority Policing was implemented in three phases: Phase 1 was a State-wide Management Model that aligned the district-level operational boundaries to coincide with local government boundaries; Phase 2 was a Service Delivery Model that gave local managers more control over specialist services; and Phase 3 was a Community Consultation Model that established local community input structures (Victoria Police 2003).

As part of the Community Consultation Model, each District Inspector was responsible for the establishment of a Local Safety Committee (LSC) as the key local-level component of the Local Priority Policing strategy. The LSCs were established in 2000 as a means of identifying local crime and public safety issues, as a conduit for input by local agencies into policing initiatives, and as a forum for police to account for local strategies and practices. The LSCs were implemented against the background of the prior existence of an experimental Police Community Involvement Program, first established in 1981; Neighbourhood Watch, established in 1983; the expansion of the re-branded Police Community/Schools Involvement Program in 1989; and Police Community Consultation Committees (PCCC) established in 1991. The PCCCs are a network of community consultation structures first launched as the primary consultation mechanism under previous Victoria government crime prevention initiatives such as the Safer Cities and Shires program. There was also a wide array of previously established community safety committees and other community-based crime prevention programs that had been instituted by other public organisations such as local governments, social service agencies and non-government organisations.

The membership of LSCs comprises a range of appointed representatives from local government, from local offices of state-wide agencies and non-government organisations, and some community representatives. The LSCs were not intended as forums for grassroots community representation; instead, they are seen more as Local Government Area level management committees for local crime prevention and community safety activities (Victoria Police 2003, p.17). LSCs generally seek to involve senior staff from participating agencies and focus on strategic issues and high level inter-agency collaborations. A core task of the LSCs was the development of a Community Safety Plan. The aims of the LSC were:

1. identify and satisfy validated local community needs and expectations;

2. involve the public in shaping policing services and action plans;

3. develop effective partnerships with the community to prevent crime and improve community safety;

4. improve community perception of crime and public safety;

5. increase public confidence in the accountability, professionalism and integrity of police;

6. provide information on police decision making.

District Inspectors were given flexibility to implement LSCs according to local conditions and local experiences with previous consultation. As a result, in some Districts pre-existing community engagement structures took on LSC responsibilities and a range of different linkages were created between the new LSCs and existing PCCCs and Neighbourhood Watch. And while LSCs were to be the key component of the Community Consultation Model, District Inspectors were required to institute other mechanisms for engagement and for strengthening their knowledge of the local community, including the development of Community Profiles that documented the demographics and the security concerns of their districts.

While Victoria Police now appears to downplay the brand aspect of Local Priority Policing, it is still very much a core philosophy and its structures are still in place. The LSCs continue to be one of the current Chief Commissioner's flagship initiatives under the 2003-2008 five-year strategic plan known as *The Way Ahead* (Victoria Police 2003).

In recent years, four separate research projects have evaluated the LSCs, the PCCCs and the community governance of community safety and crime prevention programs. All four were based on survey techniques and focussed on assessments of the outcomes by current participants in the processes. Table 1 provides the details of the research projects.

Table 1: Research Projects on Community Engagement

Research Project (Bibliographic Reference)	Researchers	Focus and Aim
Evaluation of Community Consultation Model of Local Priority Policing (CMRD 2004).	Victoria Police. Internal evaluation by Corporate Management Review Division (CMRD).	Evaluated the Community Consultation component of Local Priority Policing; focused on the LSCs and directly related consultation and fact-finding activities.
Evaluation of Police Community Consultation Committees (PCCCs) (Martin Bonato and Associates 2003).	Crime Prevention Victoria (a division of the State Department of Justice) contract to private consultants Martin Bonato and Associates.	PCCCs and related activities.
Evaluation of community governance in crime prevention and community safety (Armstrong and Rutter 2002; Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2004; Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis 2005).	Crime Prevention Victoria and Victoria University, joint researchers. Funded by the Australian Research Council.	On-going evaluation that targeted a range of governance processes. Some of the research has ended up focusing on LSCs, although the ownership of the four committee that are the subject of the 2005 paper are attributed more to local government than to Victoria Police.
Evaluation of local government Community Safety Officers (CSOs) (Sutton, Dussuyer and Cherney 2003)	Crime Prevention Victoria and Melbourne University, joint researchers, Funded by the Australian Research Council.	Did not directly deal with the work of Victoria Police community engagement structures, but a 2003 paper from the project provided some assessment of these structures

Source: Casey and Mitchell (2007)

The combined findings of the four evaluations give a comprehensive picture of the operation of community engagement in Victoria. The evaluations of LSCs and PCCCs are considered first, given the overlap between these two police-initiated structures. Subsequently the evaluations of community governance structures are used to contrast the internal structures.

Evaluations of LSCs and PCCCs

Both evaluations highlighted that there is considerable variation in how LSCs and PCCCs operate and how they interact with other engagement mechanisms. As a result of these variations, LSCs and PCCCs were able to respond to local conditions and generally garner positive reviews. Those interviewed for the PCCC evaluation noted that when they were introduced by Victoria Police in 1991 they were an important and ground breaking initiative at the forefront of a shift to a community policing philosophy. The evaluation concluded that some PCCCs have strong, committed, active and long term membership that have been very productive with limited resources. The LSCs, established almost a decade after the first PCCCs, were seen as being able to fulfil a commitment to extend existing community engagement processes by building on the past experiences.

The LSC evaluation concluded that they have helped drive the wider community engagement initiatives and promote a wide range of community safety and crime prevention programs, as well as assisting in attracting funding. The two reports found that both PCCCs and LSCs had significantly enhanced relationships with other government departments, local government and organisations within the community. The LSC evaluation found that there was majority support within police ranks for the LSC initiative as a key component of community engagement. A conflation of a number of survey questions in the report indicated that some 50-55 per cent of officers considered LSCs to be very valuable or generally valuable; some 20-30 per cent considered the value limited by quality; 15 per cent considered them of little value; and no one considered them to be of no value.

But both reports also indicated that, despite the successes, there was also widespread concern about the functioning of community engagement. The signature phrase in relation to the PCCCs was:

> The supporters of PCCCs were able to identify many useful projects and initiatives but most PCCCs appear to have been limited by lack of sustained interest and funds or inability to increase the reach of the committee to incorporate the views of local communities with common interests or concerns. In an attempt to identify outputs and outcomes of PCCC the reviewer found a great deal of scepticism and inability to articulate significant outcomes, even from some PCCCs

regarded as model performers by their peers. (Martin Bonato and Associates 2003, p. 9).

The conclusion was that most PCCCs have not achieved sustained, effective consultation and information exchange with broad representation from local citizens. Most PCCCs had limited reach into the community due to a lack of time and resources, and the skills and knowledge on how to approach the wider community were sometimes lacking on committees. Some senior police did not believe PCCCs had a significant impact on their work; whilst some acknowledged the value of the interactions on committees and relationships built, the impacts were generally not considered substantial in terms of their own operational targets.

The subsequent introduction of LSCs somewhat complicated the situation for PCCCs. The evaluation of PCCCs found that their role was 'severely challenged' by the implementation of LSCs as many of the stated aims and objectives of the two committees were the same or similar, despite the theoretical division between the more grassroots focus of PCCCs and the focus of the LSCs on creating inter-agency forums of managers. In theory, LSCs are supported at the local level by a network of PCCCs and Neighbourhood Watch Groups, but it appears that, in practice, the connection is at best loose and there is no formal requirement for PCCCs to report to LSCs. According to the PCCC evaluation, 'there is a palpable divide between many LSCs and PCCCs leading to confusion and at times animosity and rivalry' (Martin Bonato and Associates 2003, p. v). Some PCCCs have been disbanded or absorbed into LSCs or other local structures and those that remain are not necessarily complying with requirements or expectations originally laid down for PCCCs. In some instances, however, the continued existence of PCCCs allow the replication of the LSC structure at a lower level so supervisory and frontline staff also have the opportunity to participate in community engagement structures.

There appeared to be a significant division of opinions about the relationship between the PCCCs and LSCs, with many of those surveyed seeing a complementary role but also many considering that the PCCCs are now redundant and should be disbanded. There was consensus that PCCCs need to be realigned within the newer and broader community safety and crime prevention infrastructure.

While LSCs were more an integral part of Local Priority Policing, they were still hampered by structural difficulties in the model and there were few mechanisms to link

community engagement with other operational process. The LSC evaluation found that Victoria Police internal cultures and current management processes such as COMPSTAT, continued to tie reward and recognition more to reactive crime-fighting approaches than to preventive approaches and to pursuing cross-agency synergies. There continued to be operational staff, particularly District Inspectors, who still had not embraced community engagement and/or did not have the skills or commitment to promote successful processes. Moreover, other government agencies were not always prepared to participate in the LSC process, sometimes because their boundaries were not aligned, or because it required a single agency representative to sit on multiple committees, or because they felt their expertise was not used.

Both the LSC and PCC evaluations identified key elements for successful engagement. For the LSCs, the most successful outcomes were observed in long established forums with mainly local government leadership, but there were also successful police-driven LSCs. Successful engagement appeared to emerge in response to pressing urban issues, such a drug problems or youth violence. Where such triggers did not exist there appeared to be less incentive to maintain the structures. The success of community engagement was also dependent on the commitment and capacities of key individuals, usually District Inspectors, and terms like 'enthusiasm', 'leadership', 'skill' and 'level of expertise' were used to identify success factors for individual LSCs. The report drew a distinction between 'reporting' and 'action' LSCs, with committees that helped create on-going crime-prevention activities being seen as more successful. For action-oriented LSCs, their capacity to obtain funding for initiatives was seen as the key to success. Similarly, the features of successful PCCCs included: strong leadership through a local 'champion'; a clear direction and a sense of purpose; representative membership and continuing attendance; effective chairing of meetings; the availability of resources to support the committees work; and a strong sense of having achieved results.

Both reports make recommendations for strengthening the work of the LSCs and PCCCs, which include the following:

1. The importance of local flexibility. The LSC evaluation recommended that committees not necessarily be required to use the LSC name, and the PCCC evaluation recommended that they be an optional form of engagement and that any decision to create/continue or discontinue a PCCC should be made with reference to the views and needs of the relevant local community. As part of this

flexibility, both reports emphasised the need for all engagement processes to define their purpose, principles, goals, objectives and performance measures, as well as the rights and responsibilities of members.

2. The need for central coordination and sufficient resources. Both reports called for greater coordination between LSCs, PCCCs and other community engagement processes, and the PCCC evaluation called for greater formalisation of the relationship between LSCs and PCCCs.

3. The need for dissemination of information about consultative process and good practices. Both reports called for a range of measures including regular state-wide forums of staff involved in community engagement, the improvement of training materials and greater presence on the internet and other means of communication by Victoria police.

4. The need for integrated performance reporting. Both reports stressed that consultative processes should be better integrated into performance management at all levels. There was particular emphasis on the need to incorporate the outputs and outcomes of community engagement into performance processes such as COMPSTAT.

5. The need for skills training. The reports noted that consultative committee members, both police and external, need ongoing training and development in the role, function, focus and process of committees and on establishing, maintaining and achieving results from partnerships.

6. The need for varied engagement processes. The reports recommended the use of processes such as surveys, focus groups, inviting people to attend meetings on a short term basis, or joining existing committees with projects initiated by other groups.

Evaluation of the community governance of crime prevention

Three preliminary reports of the joint Crime Prevention Victoria - Victoria University research project on the governance of crime prevention have been published (Armstrong and Rutter 2002; Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2004; Totikidis, Armstrong and Francis 2005). The 2004 and 2005 papers focused on the work of LSCs and. while they noted that LSCs were launched by the Police Minister and Chief

Commissioner in 2000, almost no other mention or analysis was made of the role of Victoria Police or of the Local Priority Policing approach. From data in the tables and the responses to survey questions about chairing, funding and reporting of the committees, it appeared that the ownership of the LSCs was attributed more to local councils than to Victoria Police. This attribution of ownership to local councils is not inconsistent with the flexibility accorded by Victoria Police to District Inspectors which allowed them to build on existing local structures when implementing LSCs under Local Priority Policing. However, it is also a reflection of an apparent lack of clarity by the researchers about the drivers of the LSCs and, perhaps, of 'turf wars' over ownership.

The 2004 report on the determinants and inhibiters of community governance focused on LSCs and indicated that:

> The conclusions are that the LSCs are very effective in generating networks of people. They had input into local government safety plans, and were able to bring diverse resources together to successfully tackle local issues. Limitations to their success were lack of leadership, infrequent meetings, lack of objectives and lack of seniority in the members of participating partners ... and data sharing was limited. (Armstrong, Francis and Totikidis 2004).

The results of the 2005 report were also generally positive. Almost 83 per cent of LSC members surveyed agreed with the statement that LSCs facilitates partnerships between agencies, while 55 per cent had a strong sense of achievement from their participation and 54 per cent believed that the LSC was very successful in preventing crime.

Conclusions from the evaluations of community engagement

From the above evaluations, it can be concluded that LSCs, PCCCs and other community governance structures have been successful in extending and entrenching community engagement as a core strategy in Victoria Police, as well is in other government entities involved in crime prevention and public safety. The implementation of LSCs and PCCCs and the development of LPP demonstrates that Victoria Police has come a long way since Bayley's declaration 20 years ago that there was no community engagement in Australia (Bayley 1986). When implemented, LPP

was a new way of doing business for Victoria Police and tipped the organisation on its head, both structurally and philosophically. In restructuring the organisation, LPP devolved decision making and accountability to the local level and the designers hoped it would involve the key stakeholders of local communities in solving local problems. Moreover, LPP has developed community engagement models that are used for other engagement processes, such as the Police and Community Multicultural Advisory Committee (PACMAC), and has resulted in more officers becoming interested in community liaison positions.

The evaluations highlight the importance of flexibility in implementation, with local commanders being given leeway to make arrangements according to local conditions/history. The goal is to implement processes appropriate to local conditions and as research papers from Victoria University demonstrate, LSCs sponsored by local councils can also be successful.

Despite the successes, there continues to be an undercurrent of resistance to, and lack of skills in, community engagement, as well as more widespread confusion about the role of competing processes. While the various processes appear to have strengthened inter-agency connections, there still appear to be significant issues of 'turf' and ownership.

The recommendations of the evaluative reports focus on:

1. Strengthening organisational commitment to consultation at all levels;

2. Entrenching flexibility as a positive aspect of consultation;

3. Clarifying the roles of diverse consultative process and formalising the commitment of participants;

4. Identifying underperforming consultative process and providing the support and training needed to strengthen them;

5. Facilitating information sharing on successful models and provide assistance to obtain resources for crime prevention and community safety initiatives.

In considering these finding and recommendations, it should be kept in mind that the evaluations have focused on current participants in community engagement and governance activities and on the outputs of the processes. There has been little attention given to non-participants and to the evaluation of substantive outcomes.

Have LPP, PCCCs, LSCs impacted on crime rates? Victoria has the second lowest crime rate in Australia (after Tasmania), despite the fact that it is the most urbanised. The low crime rate can be seen as a result of strong community networks, but it is at best speculative to conclude that these networks are a result of effective community engagement by Victoria Police. An equally plausible interpretation is that the cause-effect relationship is in the opposite direction; i.e. the successful outcomes of engagement efforts by Victoria Police may, in fact, be the result of the pre-existing strength of the community networks. One of the paradoxes of community engagement is that building trust between stakeholders is a desired outcome of engagement processes but that trust is also a necessary pre-existing condition for the success of community engagement (Casey 2007). If some level of trust does not already exist among stakeholders who gather at the table, then engagement process are unlikely to result in positive outcomes (see Skogan 2006 for an analysis of the impact of networks and trust on police community engagement in different racial-ethnic communities in Chicago).

Barriers to the success of Local Priority Policing

While the evaluations continue to express support for community engagement, this appears at times to be more for the theory than the practice. There are case studies of 'success stories' but another common theme that emerges from the evaluative research is an apparent scepticism about the outcomes.

Those working with community engagement in Victoria Police can, at least, take heart in the fact that it appears to operate with the same contradictions as in policing overseas. Myhill et al. (2003, p. 3) found that some three-quarters of UK police authorities still ran Police Community Consultative Group meetings despite the fact that none of them considered them very effective. Some authorities had tried to reform or replace the meetings but this also had mixed success. In the USA, Skogan (2006) found that community engagement structures had been successful with some communities in Chicago but less successful with others.

Moreover, in other areas of the public sector, the situation is much the same. A recent review of the consultation by the ACT Planning Department concluded that it was: 'characterised by strengths worth retaining and building on … but also by low

levels of trust and confidence among stakeholders … [and it was] not always conducted in a transparent and accountable way …and was subject to problems in communications and the effective dissemination of information' (National Institute of Governance 2004). The Victorian Department of Human Services, in an evaluation of its consultation process, concluded that 63 per cent of nongovernmental agencies they dealt with were very satisfied with the processes, 20 per cent were neutral and 18 per cent were dissatisfied (Ipsos 2005). In a recent meta-analysis of evaluations of community engagement in various public sector agencies, a pattern started to emerge: while the evaluation methodologies and definitions used were different, and the issues dealt with and types of participants surveyed varied, there seemed to be a certain consensus that a small majority of those surveyed (around 60%) were supportive of the outcomes and processes; a small minority (around 20%) were dissatisfied and the remainder (around 20%) were taking a 'wait and see' attitude (Casey 2007). These figures are similar to the Victoria Police figures quoted above and it appears that the police and the public sector in general share an attitude to community engagement that can be described as 'sceptical goodwill' (Rawsthorne and Christian 2004).

There are a number of structural and cultural barriers that have stopped LPP from reaching its full potential. One of the greatest problems has been the large number of policies and instructions relating to the delivery of policing services that have been centrally promulgated since the advent of LPP. These policies are very prescriptive and attempt to ensure that all regions comply with common rules and conditions. This is at odds with the principles of LPP and tends to discourage local managers from using innovative, locally developed solutions to resolve local community problems.

It is not surprising that senior managers who were brought up in a system of central control would be uncomfortable with those below them having free rein but such attitudes, unfortunately, limit the ability of more junior members to introduce innovative local ideas. Even in response to the evaluations outlined in the previous section, which recommended more local flexibility, Victoria Police has unfortunately promulgated yet more central directives that have been not only unhelpful to LPP but unnecessary and have led to those who were initially expected to gain autonomy being stifled.

As the summaries of the four research projects demonstrate, community engagement by Victoria Police has been the subject of extensive evaluations and these evaluations have provided specific recommendations for future directions. The question

then becomes 'Will Victoria Police learn from this experience, and what factors are likely to inhibit learning?' In a recent round of confidential interviews with stakeholders in community engagement in Victoria Police, the following barriers to organisational learning about these issues emerged:

1. The organisational culture in policing and crime prevention continues to be somewhat averse to scrutiny and possible criticism. Evaluations – such as the LSCs and PCCC evaluations cited above – are not widely published, disseminated or discussed. When they are published, the response is more generally defensive.

2. While decentralisation in Victoria Police and other government agencies has created local flexibility, it has made coordination and cross-agency learning about community engagement more complicated.

3. Any institutional commitment to a particular approach continues to be tempered by individual commitments by key local leaders who must act as 'champions' for engagement. The reality is that some local police commanders are not committed to community engagement.

4. Programmatic 'silos', both within agencies and between agencies, continue to have a negative impact. Different community engagement programs operate through separate units/agencies and there is little discussion between them. These silos have an interest in their own continuity so are often not able to reform themselves.

5. A high turnover of staff involved means changing levels of interest in the subject matter, in commitment to changes, and even doubts over ownership of material. One research organisation involved in evaluations of community engagement ended up returning funds it had been granted to evaluate a specific community engagement initiative after having dealt with three different directors of the sponsoring government department during the research period.

6. A change of government means significant changes in priorities and programs. When the government changed in Victoria, the former government's Safer Cities program was essentially abandoned.

7. Changes cannot be implemented within a community engagement program in isolation from other agency processes that may be less amenable to change. Or

conversely, related processes in the agency may be changed without taking into account the implications for community engagement.

8. Interest in the implementation of an evaluation quickly wanes when another related evaluation takes place. During interviews about the LSC and PCCC evaluations, a number of people noted that any changes should wait until the completion of the new Nexus evaluative program that was just starting up (see information about Nexus below).

9. In an organisation the size of Victoria Police and given the number of other stakeholders involved, there are limits to knowledge circulation. For example, the external evaluation team from a university were unaware of internal LSC and PCCC evaluations, even though they had police on their steering committee.

10. Organisational learning and change have real costs that often cannot be met. Given the size of the Victoria, it is estimated that the cost of a single meeting to disseminate good practice is around $25,000 in terms of travel, accommodation and staff time.

11. Good practice in community engagement is often dependent on structural issues that are unlikely to change or be taken out of the hands of any single agency. Successful LSCs are often dependent on the local council having a full-time crime prevention officer and/or on being successful in obtaining funds from outside sources.

12. Community engagement, particularly when it is functioning well, is not seen as a core/high priority issue for some of the agencies involved.

13. The fact that successful community engagement is difficult to measure and even more difficult to link to changes in crime data continues to be a barrier.

More than 15 years ago, Beyer (1992) expressed her confidence that, by building on the success of the original 1981 Police Community Involvement Program, Victoria Police would soon adopt what she referred to as 'wholistic community policing', which involved widespread community engagement. After all, Beyer claimed, 'once police become familiar with the new way of working they will not want to give it up', and she called for 'changes from the ground up, rather than from the top down' (1992, p. 100). While LPP has started to move Victoria Police in that direction, the re-organisation that Beyer saw as necessary is still a work in progress.

Postscript: Beyond Local Priority Policing

A review of LPP in 2005 (Victoria Police 2005) recognised that LPP had been partially successful in moving Victoria Police from a central command and control structure to one where local managers actively involve the community in finding solutions to the problems they face. However, it found that this paradigm shift had been hindered by the three models used to implement it (the State-wide Management Model, the Service Delivery Model and the Community Consultation Model), which were seen to be overly prescriptive and so hindered the delivery of policing services that were tailored to local community needs and expectations. Added to this, the proliferation of corporate policies and procedures has limited the empowerment of local managers and front line police, which is one of the key philosophies of LPP.

The review concluded that if Victoria Police was to make the cultural change from an organisation governed by centralised command and control structures to one which was more devolved in its authority and accountability and inclusive in its decision making process, it was time to remove many of the constraints. They recommended a new *fit for purpose* service delivery model. This model was accepted in 2005 and is now being implemented across the state (Victoria Police 2005).

While LPP started the journey towards true community policing for Victoria Police, the new model is a continuation of this journey. The architects of *fit for purpose* believe that it will assist managers and front line police to play a key role in both building community strength and improving social outcomes through the use of community and partnership policing. It will also nurture a work environment within which all employees are included in the development of policing initiatives and programs. Such inclusion should ensure policing initiatives are creative in their conception and sensitive to the wishes of local communities. As such, they will be far more effective than programs developed centrally. Local managers and front line police will be given increased authority in decision making but along with the increased authority will come the accountability for achieving frontline service delivery. Local managers and front line police will be accountable to their communities for their work performance, rather than the traditional reliance upon bureaucratic rules and regulations.

The foundation stones of *fit for purpose* are three key reforms. These are:

- Aligning Accountability and Authority for Achieving Frontline Service Delivery;

- Adopting the Strategic Work Focus Model of Organisational Hierarchy;

- The Professional Decision Making Model.

<div align="right">(Victoria Police 2005)</div>

These key reforms are described in the following sections.

Aligning Accountability and Authority for Achieving Frontline Service Delivery

While LPP has been successful in moving Victoria Police along the path towards true community policing it has been unsuccessful, for reasons previously discussed, in aligning accountability and authority for the delivery of frontline policing services. *Fit for purpose* aims to rectify this by allotting twenty-four hour accountability for the service outcomes delivered within a geographical area to the manager of that area. In doing this, it mandates that the smallest unit of service delivery become a local government area in order to ensure that local partnerships and cooperation with other government and community groups are maintained.

Under the LPP model, Local Government Areas have been known as Districts and controlled by District Inspectors; however, under the new model this is to change. Local government areas will become Police Service Areas (PSAs) and the managers of such areas will become Police Service Area Managers. In doing this, it has been decided that PSA Managers may vary in rank depending on the size and complexity of the area; some may require a superintendent while others may by served by a senior sergeant. In the main though, these PSA managers will continue to be Inspectors.

There is an acknowledgement that PSA managers will need the autonomy to deploy their resources in ways that are most likely to meet locally identified policing needs and priorities. The present system of fixed staffing quotas in response zones and specialist areas has led to non-cooperation across areas due to the consequent silo mentalities they create. Where people are located and for how long will be the responsibility of the PSA Manager rather than being determined and authorised centrally or by those above or below. To make this a reality it has been proposed that position descriptions and the interpretation and application of industrial agreements and HRM policies need amendment.

Under the LPP structure the existence of LSCs was mandated. This was the primary method to identify local problems and implement strategic initiatives to resolve them. The 2005 review concluded that the generic LSC model across the state with little or no consideration of local factors is not best practice. While LSCs are appropriate and work well in some areas, in others, due to factors such as culture, population mix etc., they do not. Therefore, PSA Managers are to be given the ability to choose the manner of community consultation that best fits their area. With this increased autonomy will come the accountability for the quality and effectiveness of their community consultation and partnership building.

Adopting the Strategic Work Focus Model of Organisational Hierarchy

It has been accepted that under LPP there was generally an absence of clearly defined roles and requisite levels of autonomy and authority. This caused further problems as higher level managers disempowered those below them by micro-managing them. This micro-management also made the issue of accountability unclear due to the authority of lower level managers being compromised. In order to alleviate this problem Victoria police will move from a strict line control model of management to a strategic focus model. Under this model, roles of each level will be clearly defined and management accountability will be aligned accordingly. Job functions will be allocated on the basis of complexity rather than position. This will enable managers to be held accountable for the outcomes of their particular role. In holding managers accountable, Victoria Police proposes that they be given the material and financial resources, as well as the freedom of decision making, required to be successful.

## The Professional Decision Making Model

Fit for purpose attempts to enhance the ability of local police to institute problem oriented approaches to their local problems by removing the high level of formalisation, in terms of prescriptive rules and regulations promulgated at state, regional and divisional levels, that exists within Victoria Police. LPP's philosophy of flexibility leading to innovative solutions was hindered by this formalisation.

This formalisation not only disempowers the workforce but it also stifles true creativity and hinders the implementation of innovative solutions to local community

problems. It also reinforces the notion among lower levels that the hierarchy are more interested in adherence to rules and regulations than they are in the notion of community service.

To overcome this, *fit for purpose* proposes to adapt the model developed by Simmons (2000 cited in Victoria Police 2005, p. 51) which is reproduced below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Professional Decision Making Model
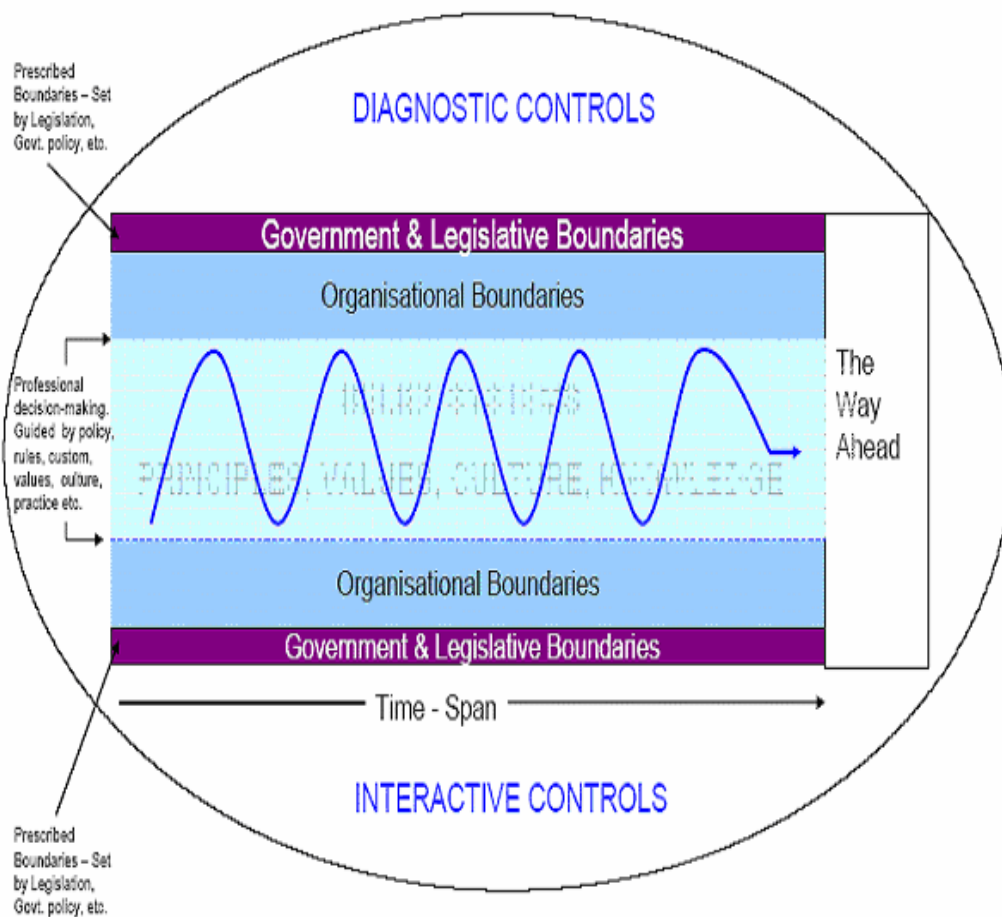
Source: Victoria Police (2005)

In this model rules are set as boundaries that cannot be changed. These are identified in the model above as government, legislative and organisational boundaries. The lightly shaded area in the middle is the leeway in which local managers and frontline police

are free to find the solutions they need to solve local problems. In doing this they are most likely to be guided by policy, rules, customs, values, culture and practice etc.

In addition to these reforms, Victoria Police is undertaking a range of other programmatic changes that are likely to impact on community engagement. Victoria Police has entered into research collaborations with a number of universities to examine various aspects of its operations. Of particular interest to community engagement is the joint four-year research and innovation project with the Australian National University titled *Nexus Policing – partnerships for safer communities* (Victoria Police 2006). Nexus will work in partnership with key service providers and community groupings to address issues as diverse as Indigenous, multi-cultural and youth affairs, sex offender recidivism and public transport safety. Research is mapping the ways in which Victoria Police, service providers and community groups coordinate and integrate their knowledge, skills and resources in addressing community safety. A particular focus of the project is to build an understanding of the diverse nodes that impact on the governance of local security concerns (RegNet 2006).

The Nexus research will inform the development of models designed to achieve 'smarter' ways of promoting safety through partnerships and networks. There are currently seven pilot sites that look at the following issues:

1. Safety in public housing;

2. Family violence;

3. Indigenous issues;

4. Youth safety;

5. Youth and multicultural issues;

6. Safety on public transport;

7. Sex offender recidivism – justice system.

The Nexus project will develop programs that can be applied throughout Victoria to address community safety issues. Once implemented, the ongoing sustainability of the project will be determined by local police, government service providers and community agencies closely involved in the development of the project specific to their area.

Conclusion

From the case study of Victoria Police, it can be concluded that, despite any shortcomings, community engagement continues to have some success as a process that creates dialogue and interchange on local crime and disorder issues and serves to assist police in meeting local accountability and oversight imperatives. While the link to crime reduction of these outcomes may be hard to measure, they are an important value in themselves. Fleming (2005) questions the widely-reported findings that Neighbourhood Watch programs are of little value by re-framing the criteria for their assessment in terms of relationship building, community participation and the reassurance they provide that something is being done. These criteria can also be applied to community engagement programs in general.

As Casey and Tofymowych (1999) noted, community engagement establishes legitimacy with key stakeholder communities such as business and community elites, local activists, and specific ethnic and racial communities, and it continues to be an integral part of the new public management and governance frameworks applied to policing. Community engagement processes can be essential for mobilising support for police (Squires 1998) and for responding to the consumerist rhetoric of an ethos of effective service and responsiveness to clients. Despite its flaws, community engagement continues to reinforce the current agenda of *serving* the community and provides the basis for intelligence-led and problem solving approaches to policing. Engagement with the community is a 'lynch pin' of both operational effectiveness and public accountability; it continues to enjoy widespread support, both from within policing and from external oversight bodies and it is an integral part of a wider movement of public sector reform and citizen participation.

As community policing strategies became more extended in Australia, Moir (1992) questioned whether it was possible for police to use engagement processes to work with communities to become co-producers of public order. Later, Sarre and Tomaino (1999) declared that it would be a 'formidable task' translating community policing rhetoric into reality because expecting police to accept widespread community engagement involved a fundamental challenge to police leadership and culture. Yet, as this review of the community engagement efforts of Victoria Police indicates, there is now substantial evidence that Australian police agencies have been prepared to meet those challenges. Significant barriers remain but there also seems to be little doubt that police agencies have made significant strides in the move to incorporate community

engagement as an institutional commitment. Under the new service and governance arrangement currently being developed, and through its research collaborations, it appears that Victoria Police is well positioned to embed this institution commitment and to provide the local flexibility that effective community engagement requires.

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