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From Voluntary to Statutory Status: reflecting on the experience of three Partnerships established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

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Introduction

The multi-agency partnership approach has been the preferred approach for implementing local crime prevention in Britain for over fifteen years. Its virtues have been espoused in Home Office Circulars and reports dating from the mid-1980s, and it has often been a prerequisite for funding for crime prevention projects and initiatives. The partnership approach is premised on a notion that crime problems cannot be effectively tackled by the police, or indeed any agency on their own (Home Office, 1991). Instead what is required is a holistic approach whereby effort, information, resources and expertise are shared and co-ordinated among key agencies. Moreover, over time the problem-solving model of crime prevention has been increasingly promoted as *the* vehicle for achieving reductions in crime and disorder, particularly in the police service (HMIC, 1998; Goldblatt and Lewis, 1998; Goldstein, 1990).

In 1990 an independent Working Group chaired by James Morgan was tasked with monitoring progress on the delivery of crime prevention through the partnership approach in the light of Home Office guidance in this area. The fifth recommendation of the Morgan Report, as it became known, was that local authorities working with the police should be given statutory responsibility for the development of *community safety* through the multi-agency partnership approach (Home Office, 1991). This recognised the role of the local authority in providing key services and resources that were necessary for enhancing the safety of communities, as well as ensuring ownership among partners so the burden did not rest solely with the police. This approach also allowed for the more permanent and

continuous involvement of elected members, and the business and voluntary sectors. Although these recommendations were not acted upon by the Conservative government, they did make their way into legal statute under the new Labour government of 1997 as part of the Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) 1998, although without the additional core funding for partnerships that was proposed by Morgan.

Section 5 of the CDA 1998, which was enacted in July 1998, placed a statutory duty on local authorities, the police, health authorities, police authorities and probation committees, to work together to tackle problems of crime and disorder in their area. Section 6 of the Act, following the problem-solving framework, stipulated that by April 1st 1999 partnerships had to produce and publish a strategy to reduce these problems, based on evidence drawn from an audit of crime and disorder in the locality. The strategy had to be informed by local consultation on the findings of the audit.

The aim of this paper is to consider the extent to which Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA 1998 have encouraged the kind of progress on community safety envisaged by the Morgan Report. It will also assess whether some of the well-documented pitfalls of partnership working are evident in the new statutory crime and disorder partnerships. The empirical data on which this discussion will be based comes from the initial findings of an ongoing Home Office research study that is examining the implementation of Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA 1998 in three statutory crime and disorder partnerships[1]. The research, like much of that currently undertaken by the Home Office, aims to provide principles of good practice to assist practitioners in the short term and contribute to evidence-based policy in the medium term. Its focus is on the local infrastructure which, in many cases, will be the

mechanism through which projects funded under the £400 million Crime Reduction

Programme are delivered. The project sits alongside the major programme of research that is

evaluating this programme.

The project consists of two phases, the first being to document the development of the

partnerships in the three case study sites and to understand how the partnerships compiled

their crime and disorder audits, undertook consultation, and formulated their crime and

disorder strategy/action plan. The research began in October 1999 and Phase I was thus

retrospective as partnerships' crime and disorder strategies had to be published by April 1st

1999. The second phase of the research study, which is ongoing, focuses on the

implementation, monitoring and evaluation of partnerships' crime and disorder strategies. It

is the findings from Phase I that are used throughout this paper.

The three research partnerships could not possibly serve as a representative sample of the

376 statutory partnerships that exist in England and Wales. However, they were selected

according to a number of criteria, which do reflect some of the variation between

partnerships across the country, and thus can give some idea of how the new multi-agency

partnerships are developing. The first partnership area, Collingbridge[2], is a large unitary

authority that is predominantly rural but with a number of small towns, and which has a

relatively low crime rate. Sandford is in a two-tier authority and covers a semi-industrial town

and surrounding rural areas with pockets of affluence and deprivation. The third partnership,

Riverton, is in a densely populated, multi-ethnic local authority which has high levels of

social and economic deprivation, and which experiences a broad range of crime and disorder

problems.

The research methods for studying multi-agency working have included observation of meetings, analysis of partnership documentation (such as minutes of meetings, protocols, monitoring exercises, and other management information) and 49 in-depth interviews with partnership representatives. This approach has offered the opportunity to study dynamic processes, such as consultation, negotiation, and co-operative working in depth, although since the first phase of the research was retrospective it necessarily relied much more on the interview data than the observational data. The majority of the interviews were face-to-face and were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. These data along with the fieldnotes have been coded and analysed using NUD*IST, a qualitative data analysis computer package.

The main limitation of this methodological approach has been that, at the time of interviewing in early 2000, there were some memory lapses in interviewees' recollection of events which have had to be filled by examining partnership documentation. Observational research also carries with it the potential for atypical behaviour by research participants, including their providing socially desirable responses or engaging in behaviour which would not occur if observers had not been present. While it is impossible to rule out atypical behaviour in the current study, the use of multiple methods of data collection have assisted in minimising the impact of this methodological problem. Moreover, Phillips and Brown (1997) contend that it is difficult for individuals to conceal 'normal' behaviour for extended periods of time.

Turning now to the research findings, this paper will include an exploration of the structural dynamics of the three statutory crime and disorder partnerships and an assessment of the internal and external constraints which bear upon partnership working. It will end with a

review of the current nature of the relationship between the Home Office and local statutory

partnerships, paying particular attention to recent changes in policy rhetoric.

The same old structural dynamics?

Partnership structures

In the three research sites, the partnership structures were multi-tiered. In each a partnership

group was in existence before the enactment of the CDA 1998. Although there were

variations in the composition of this body in each partnership, this structure had broad

representation including agencies such as the police, local authority service departments,

elected members and MPs, local businesses, educational institutions, the media, and

representatives from business, voluntary, community, and justice organisations. To respond

to the statutory requirements of Sections 5 and 6, two of the three partnerships had

established a new structure including, again with some variation in each, the BCU

commander, the chief executive (or nominated delegate), chief officers of key local authority

departments such as housing, education, social services, environmental services and legal

services, the Assistant Chief Probation Officer, YOT manager, police-local authority liaison

officers, community safety officers, and including representation from the voluntary sector.

The seniority of representatives in this structure suggests that the partnerships attached great

importance to their statutory responsibility, at least at the strategic level (see Liddle and

Gelsthorpe, 1994b; HMIC, 2000). The primary function of this group was to co-ordinate the

compilation of the crime and disorder audit, undertake consultation, and formulate a strategy

and action plan to reduce crime and disorder in the locality. The former group which pre-

dated the CDA 1998 was seen by partnership representatives as a vehicle for keeping wider

groups informed about progress on statutory responsibilities and for exchanging information about community safety activity more generally.

Representation: statutory and non-statutory partners

It has been nationally acknowledged that health authorities have been difficult to engage in crime and disorder partnerships, and this was reflected in all three partnerships (see Audit Commission, 1999; HMIC, 2000). In part this appeared to be due to the lack of available resources which health authorities could commit to the partnership process. However, the following extract from one interviewee in Riverton suggests this may also be because of more fundamental doubts about the appropriate role of the Health Authority in *crime and disorder* activity:

> it's been difficult to get people engaged in processes because they don't feel it's a part of their core responsibility…For Health Authorities generally one can say there's clearly an engagement around the drugs and alcohol agenda, that's straightforward. But we have got DATs for that…if I was looking for areas outside the direct health agenda which had a big impact on people's health locally, I would look at housing or traffic. Crime and Disorder clearly is there and is significant, but our ability to make changes is probably much more likely and is going to be much more productive if we focus on some of those environmental issues…

In contrast, crime and disorder is the core business of the probation service. In the current research representatives from the probation service were enthusiastic about crime reduction/community safety work, although their financial contribution to the partnership effort was limited by the lack of discretion in deciding how probation service resources can be used.

The police authorities in Collingbridge and Sandford were not active in the day-to-day work of the partnerships, although in the latter partnership the police authority had considered the resource implications of partnerships' crime and disorder strategies across the county.

In the three research partnerships, elected members were kept informed about the work of each partnership through briefings, committees, and via the main partnership groups on which they were represented. 'Community' representatives were not involved at the strategic level of the partnership, except in Sandford where a local resident was a member. Despite recent governments' attempts to encourage commercial sector involvement in multi-agency partnerships, local businesses had a limited role in the three partnerships, as was also found in the recent HMIC (2000) thematic inspection of partnerships (see also Morgan, 1991; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994b).

Power differentials in partnership relations

The academic literature has highlighted the importance of structural power differentials in multi-agency partnerships (Sampson et al., 1988; Crawford and Jones, 1995). In this research there was little evidence of the conspiratorial model of multi-agency working referred to by Sampson et al. (1988) as the 'police take-over', which involved the police determining the agenda and objectives of the partnership. The perception of those interviewed in the three partnerships was that they did not appear to be overly dominated by any one agency; the police were not the 'first among equals'. In fact, at the strategic level of the partnership there was considerable confidence in what the multi-agency approach could achieve whereby 'each [agency] can contribute its own expertise and together they can achieve far more than they can do on their own' (*SRB manager, Sandford*). Indeed, some representatives, particularly those

working in the statutory sector, tended to idealise the multi-agency approach as 'the way forward' for promoting crime reduction/community safety. Stokes-White (2000) has suggested that this is a characteristic of partnerships in the early stages of development where the potential for partnership working appears exciting. The key question, of course, is whether the rhetoric of idyllic partnership working was in evidence in reality.

The general view in Sandford and Riverton was that the 'prime movers' of the partnership were the police and the local authority (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994b). Indeed, as Gilling (2000: 53) notes '[I]f the buck stops finally with these two agencies, it is difficult to envisage a scenario where they will not be motivated to take a lead'. Implicit in the notion of lead agencies is some degree of hierarchy (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a). Yet in the Riverton partnership it was accepted that the legislation required statutory accountability by these two agencies, it was their core business (supported by resources), so it was deemed appropriate that they should have the 'lion's share' of the workload and decision-making powers within the partnership.

On the face of it, then, there appeared to be a clear consensus among the partnerships about the corporate aims of partnership working in the locality. However, feelings of marginalisation were still voiced in some quarters. In both the Collingbridge and Riverton partnerships, comments by smaller voluntary and community organisations suggested some resentment regarding statutory dominance within the partnership:

> Either we're there as equal partners or we're not there at all, and I think that you still
> have some discrepancies…

> I think that we want to be involved, we want to have an equal say in things when there are decisions on bidding for money and decisions on various things. It's a bit like CCTV, there's another round coming up now isn't there, about money for CCTV…I'm not quite sure at this stage whether it's the [Partnership] who make an overarching decision for everybody in the [area] on where the priorities are.

These views contrasted with those of some statutory representatives in all three partnerships who questioned the value of contributions by non-statutory organisations to the partnership effort, for example:

> Although you can see they have a valid role in it, they [the voluntary sector] could be more proactive…They come along, but you think: why are they here? They're not having an input in the meeting.

> there is a frustration that there are a lot of partners there whose input is to attend the [partnership group], but they have no input into either the output or the outcomes, nor do they have any input in terms of resources other than their attendance…

At the time of the first phase of the research, these negative comments did not appear to have affected the willingness of partners to work together. Neither was there any indication that less powerful partners were being excluded from key decision-making by informal networks of powerful agencies as previous research has documented (Sampson et al., 1988; Crawford, 1994b; Phillips and Sampson, 1998).

Reflecting on the benefits of working in partnership, interviewees noted that multi-agency working had encouraged inter- and intra-agency networking, as well as raising the profile of crime reduction/community safety work within some agencies. This co-operation had facilitated the development of information-sharing protocols, a significant achievement bearing in mind that previous research has highlighted how information exchange and confidentiality concerns can thwart the implementation of crime reduction initiatives (see for example Phillips and Sampson, 1998). The protocols were not, however, without problems. Although they were considered to be operating effectively by some partners, concerns were also raised about information exchanged being susceptible to abuse, including refusing particular services to individuals. Bureaucratic delays in accessing information and unresolved issues about the type of personalised information that could be provided under data protection legislation had also affected the efficiency of the protocols. Notwithstanding this, the general impression from representatives in all three sites was that the partnership process had facilitated information exchange beyond data exchange for the purposes of conducting the audit, but that this was most common among the statutory agencies:

> …the exchange of information has gone further than just an exchange of information on a 'committee' level…it's encouraged people actually to pass on information to police intelligence…It cuts through a lot of the red tape in a way, because if you want information, you know exactly who to ring and exactly what information they can give you…if you wanted information two years ago that would have been considered totally confidential and no way (*Probation Service representative, Sanford*).

The absence of conflict?

As Crawford (1998) notes, one of the key structural dynamics of multi-agency partnerships is the bringing together of diverse agencies whose ideology, mission, and interests differ considerably, and indeed, may be in conflict with each other. Conflict between partners may be most likely at three stages of the problem-solving process: first, where the definition, extent or nature of the crime problem is contested; second, when decisions have to be made about which crime and disorder problems are to be prioritised for action; and third, where the appropriate preventive solutions are proposed.

In the current research, the audit process effectively bypassed potential sticking points at the problem definition stage in two ways (cf. Saulsbury and Bowling, 1991; Sampson and Phillips, 1992; Phillips and Sampson, 1998; see also Crawford, 1994a). First and most importantly, the audits were contracted out to external consultants. This limited the impact of any disagreements about how particular crime and disorder problems were defined or how the data on them should be interpreted. The only difference of opinion that emerged was in Riverton where the audit consultant had interpreted crime reduction/community safety as including issues such as the policing of marginalised communities. In fact, while the CDA 1998 referred specifically to *crime and disorder reduction*, the *Guidance on Statutory Crime and Disorder Partnerships* (1998) which was issued by the Home Office, encouraged a *community safety* focus, as recommended by Morgan in 1991. However, this is still a long way from the wider aim of minimising *all harms* through an integrated policy and service response which makes public authorities accountable to local communities, as advocated by Wiles and Pease (2000).

A draft of the audit submitted to the partnership had included police data on stop/search rates by ethnic origin. This had resulted in a somewhat politically charged discussion about the kinds of topics that were appropriate for inclusion in a crime and disorder audit. This discussion was managed within the sub-group responsible for project-managing the audit. It did not appear to be an issue in which other partners (as members of the larger partnership group) were actively involved, nor did it appear to have any long-lasting effect on partnership relations.

A second way in which the audit process sidestepped potential conflicts was in the *nothing ruled in, nothing ruled out* approach, which permeated the legislation and the Home Office Guidance (1998). This meant that at the audit stage there did not need to be any prioritisation of what crime and disorder issues were included for review. The Guidance advised a two-tier approach beginning with an examination of the main crime and disorder patterns in the locality before more detailed collection and analysis on major local problems. In practice, the audits produced by the three partnerships included data on a wide range of crime and disorder problems. There was a heavy reliance on police recorded crime and incident data, but the partnerships also variously used data from local authority departments (such as housing, education, social services, legal services), the probation service, fire service, child witness service, the DAT and a variety of voluntary and community organisations. Additional data was provided by residents', business, victimisation/community safety surveys and various focus group discussions.

Partnerships are also typically faced with the need to prioritise which problems are to be tackled first, which is the second stage at which there is the potential for ideological

disagreement between partners. The qualitative data from the three case study sites indicated that a pragmatic approach was adopted whereby priorities were decided on the basis of the audit findings and consultation with the community, dovetailing with existing strategic priorities identified in other statutory plans, such as the Annual Policing Plan. The sometimes deliberate vagueness of the strategy undoubtedly assisted in ensuring consensus, as suggested in interview by one community safety officer in Riverton:

> With the strategy everybody was OK because it's generic, it's our desires, our
>
> aspirations, so everyone said: "Oh yes we can stand that."

Indeed, a review of the first strategies produced by partnerships in England and Wales also found that many published documents contained very broad, overarching aims for crime and disorder reduction, rather than detailed action plans (Phillips, Considine and Lewis, 2000).

The third key stage at which partnership relations may be adversely affected is where there is a conflict about the most appropriate preventative interventions to reduce particular crime and disorder problems (Crawford, 1994b; Sampson and Phillips, 1992; Phillips and Sampson, 1998). The research evidence, for example, has pointed to the chasm between the police service, on the one hand, and social services and the probation service on the other. The former, it is argued, advocates a situational approach, particularly favouring measures focused on increasing detection. The latter are more likely to adopt a client-focused perspective which gives primacy to social crime prevention (Sampson et al., 1988; Sampson and Smith, 1992; Crawford, 1994b). Indeed, Gilling (1994) suggests that the so-called neutral problem-solving process actually privileges the situational preventative discourse. Since problem-solving relies on available statistical data on opportunities for crime commission, patterns of victimisation, and requires the identification of 'hot spots', crimes against

property become a primary focus and it is in this area that situational crime prevention measures have been most commonly applied and shown to be effective. Thus, the potential for conflict between partners arises where diverse ideological interests are brought together to decide how crime and disorder can be reduced.

The all-inclusive crime and disorder strategy

In the three research partnerships, the development of the strategy/action plan was not marred by overt or covert conflict about preventative approaches. There are three possibilities as to why this may have been the case. First, the Home Office Guidance (1998) encouraged partnerships to set both short term objectives which, using situational methods would bring 'quick wins', and longer term criminality-reducing objectives. Thus, partnerships were able to accommodate strategic solutions incorporating both types of approach which might be favoured by different partners (see also Mills and Pearson, 2000). In fact, the review of partnerships' strategies by Phillips, Considine and Lewis (2000), showed a fairly even balance between situational and social crime prevention techniques. While 79% of documents included situational measures to reduce crime and disorder, 95% planned educational activities/actions to raise awareness, and 67% sought to rehabilitate offenders or provide drug treatment programmes.

Second, the Crime Reduction Programme has also promoted interventions spanning the spectrum. Whether the changing policy context for local crime reduction has limited the extent to which this two-pronged approach is being promoted by the Home Office is open to question, and I will return to this point later in the paper.

Finally, a major research finding was that instead of the formulation of the strategy/action plan being an opportunity for partners to brainstorm solutions to particular crime and disorder problems, it was a rather rushed process driven by community safety officers. Moreover, there was clear evidence that some partnership representatives resisted fully engaging in this process as the following quote demonstrates:

> [for] the action plan we wanted to do a bottom-up approach, get all the different departments, all the different agencies to say: "This is what we'd like to do, this is our input into the strategy…but in the process that didn't quite happen, people came back with empty sheets… Because I think what the government wants is everybody to say, 'Let's chip in, this is what we would like to do' - put it in. And that's the way we thought it was going to work. But later on we found no-one was saying, 'This is what we're going to do'. We had to tell them; we had to look through their plans and say, 'This is what you're doing, this is what you could be doing (*Community Safety Officer, Riverton*).

In Sandford, the strategy-setting process was referred to as a 'nightmare' in that some partners refused to contribute at all or deliberately avoided signing up as lead agency for strategic objectives. Due to time pressures, in Collingbridge the actions in the strategy had to be drafted by the community safety officer with minimal consultation with other partners. They were deliberately broad so that the agency nominated as the lead could not later respond that they could not deliver on a particular objective. Thus, the strategies which emerged were broad enough to appeal to all constituent partners, particularly as they often included 'easy wins' or activities already being undertaken by agencies to enhance community safety in the local area.

To summarise, there was little indication that conflict – destructive or constructive - was yet part of the landscape of partnership relations. There had been few occasions in which potentially conflictual situations had arisen, and optimism about the partnership approach was still very much in evidence at the time that this research was conducted. This seems somewhat surprising given the concerns raised about the participation of the voluntary sector in the partnership and the imbalance in the contributions made by agencies to the development of the strategy. Practice certainly contrasted with the idealisation of the multi-agency approach discussed earlier. However, despite, Sampson et al.'s (1988: 482) warning that 'conflict is, at the very least, always latent even in situations of apparent co-operation and consensus between the state agencies', it had not yet come to the fore in the three partnerships under study. Nonetheless, the unwillingness of some partners to actively contribute to the partnership effort raises concerns about what can be realistically achieved, particularly at the implementation stage where significant effort is required.

Internal and External constraints on partnership working

In addition to the power dynamics of multi-agency partnerships affecting the operation of the partnership, there are other constraints that can bear on partnership activity and these were present in the three research partnerships too. While ensuring immediate implementation of Sections 5 and 6, the April 1st 1999 deadline by which partnerships had to have conducted the audit, consulted, and published a first crime and disorder strategy put an inordinate amount of pressure on partnerships. In only the Riverton partnership were

community safety officers available throughout the whole process; in Collingbridge the community safety officer was appointed at the same time as the audit consultant, while in Sandford, the post was filled after the audit had been compiled.

Pre-audit consultation with the general public had taken place utilising some form of public opinion, victimisation or community safety survey, sometimes supplemented by additional focus group discussions or topic-based surveys such as a business survey. Post-audit consultation to confirm the public's priorities in the local area using summarised audits was carried out through newsletters to households or other media forms, in addition to the use of local authority customer service centres. Public meetings with a broad range of local organisations, including crime prevention panels, residents' panels, parish councils, youth groups and schools were used only in Collingbridge.

Time pressures particularly hit partnerships' ability to contact and consult with those sectors of the community who have traditionally been inaccessible ('hard-to-reach' groups). Certainly in Riverton, opportunities were missed to use existing consultative mechanisms or benefit from the consultation expertise within the partnership. In the main, however, the results from the consultation exercises in all three case studies largely mirrored the audit findings, albeit that these were largely based on a sample of those living in the partnerships' communities which was not necessarily representative.

While time pressures constrained what could be achieved by the three partnerships, there was also an indication that many partnership representatives did not possess the necessary

skills to deliver what was necessary in compiling the audit, consulting and formulating the strategy and action plan (see also Stafford and Silverlock, 2000). The expertise required to produce an audit of local crime and disorder problems, for example, include generic research and analysis skills, but also specific knowledge about crime and disorder patterns and recording systems. As previously noted, the crime and disorder audits were contracted out in all three sites: to a health sector researcher, to Crime Concern, and to a university academic. It was felt that the prerequisite skills or resources were unavailable in the three sites. While this is clearly a pragmatic response to a tight deadline, there is the danger that the expertise necessary to interpret local patterns of crime and disorder intelligently for the audit and during ongoing monitoring exercises is not capitalised on.

Moreover, although the problem-solving approach to crime reduction/community safety was the guiding framework in the Home Office Guidance (1998), it was little in evidence in the first strategies and action plans produced in the three research partnerships. A more common approach was for partnerships to list a range of activities which have shown some success in reducing a particular crime problem (often cited in the 'good practice' literature), regardless of its appropriateness for local patterns of crime and disorder. The resultant strategies, therefore, particularly where the input from some partnership representatives had been minimal, included some tasks that were difficult to achieve or monitor, or others which were too easily achievable. Other tasks did not clearly relate to objectives or omitted agencies who were already involved in such work at a local level. Deficiencies were also apparent in the setting of Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic Time-scaled (SMART) performance targets which were frequently output- rather than outcome-focused, a common weakness observed in multi-agency strategies (Crawford, 1998; see also Home Office, 1998).

The absence of financial support for the administration of partnerships from central government also undoubtedly played a part in the quality of contributions by partnership representatives in the first round. Although the Labour government acted on the Morgan Report (1991) recommendation to make local authorities statutorily responsible for local crime reduction/community safety, it has not assisted in the financing of this new duty. The difficulties experienced in funding the single community safety officers/co-ordinators in the Collingbridge and Sandford partnerships were testimony to the lack of resources available for the administration of partnerships. This coupled with complaints about central government 'initiative overload', the difficulties of developing crime reduction/community safety work alongside existing service delivery responsibilities, and the very exacting demands of the bidding process for Crime Reduction Programme funding were all common complaints, as the following quotes show:

> The difficulties in getting people to commit to the C&D partnership work also arise because so many new agendas are forthcoming from central government, for example, relating to social services, education. C&D is only one part of already very full workloads (*Senior representative from Chief Executive's Department, Sandford*).

> The difficulty with all legislation that comes out of central government is the actual timescale from consultation to delivery are impossibly short. It's almost we want it, we want it now, do it. And the reality is that to do that it almost means we have to drop everything else, and if we drop other things then we get it in the neck from other people. The services still have to be maintained, and it's difficult. If you had more time I think it would ultimately make the actual strategies themselves in this case, more realistic (*Youth Service representative, Sandford*).

Bids have been very rushed, and the work on the bids deflects time and resources

for crime and disorder partnership working. Central government does not recognise

the time and effort it takes to put bids together (*Community safety officer, Sandford*).

Thus the backdrop for partnership working at the local level is one of skills and resource

constraints. This has implications for partnerships' ability to fully implement their crime and

disorder strategies and to mainstream crime reduction/community safety work, while

responding to existing responsibilities and new ones imposed by the Government. The final

section of the paper considers the changing relationship between local partnerships and the

central state.

Changing central government discourses: from prioritising the local agenda to prescription and inspection

The Foreword to the Home Office *Guidance to Statutory Crime and Disorder Partnerships* (1998)

states that 'the people who live and work in an area are best placed to identify the problems

facing them and the options available for tackling those problems, and that maxim was kept

very much in mind when drafting the legislation.' At the heart of Sections 5 and 6 of the

CDA 1998, then, was the acknowledgement that local practitioners have the expertise to

create cogent strategies to reduce crime locally. Gilling (2000) questions whether this

governance of 'responsibilisation' which 'passes the metaphorical buck' to local agencies to

reduce crime without the concomitant resourcing recommended by Morgan (1991) is a

deliberate strategy employed by the government. The current policy climate certainly does

reflect the centre's directive approach to making local partnerships accountable for reductions in crime and disorder in the short term. In November 1998, for example, the Home Office Minister Paul Boateng wrote to partnerships to draw their attention to the importance of addressing domestic violence in their audits and strategies. Not surprisingly, 86 per cent of partnerships included a strategic priority to reduce domestic violence in their locality (Phillips, Considine and Lewis, 2000).

More significantly (as domestic violence is frequently underreported and underrecorded and undoubtedly should be prioritised for reduction by partnerships), in November 1999 the government published its Crime Reduction Strategy. The first chapter begins by highlighting the anomaly whereby partnership areas that are socially and demographically similar can have very different rates of crime. The aim, therefore, it is argued, should be for the police and crime and disorder partnerships to emulate the practice of professionals working in the education and health services to 'commit[s] themselves to reaching the standards of the best', to reduce crime nationally. Performance leagues tables to encourage 'poor performers to raise their game', clear and challenging targets, the dissemination of good practice, and hard work are the prerequisites of success. In the space of months, partnerships previously recognised as those most appropriate to determine locally important crime and disorder problems are instructed to set five-year targets with annual milestones to reduce vehicle crime, domestic burglary and robbery. The reaction from partnerships in the research sites was unsurprising:

> They introduced crime and disorder locally, and then they say you've got to
>
> concentrate on burglary, auto crime and robbery, and then we've got drugs…it just

goes on…whereas everything becomes a priority…robbery accounts for less than

one per cent of all our crime, so it's not a priority…the problems locally are more

about juvenile nuisance, criminal damage, antisocial behaviour, drugs…it lends

itself, if people wanted to to say: "There's so much confusion now. I haven't done it

because I've got to do this." (*Police Service representative, Sandford*).

The inspection and auditing of partnerships has also been accelerated reflecting the public

managerialist tendencies now familiar to the police (Crawford, 1994a; Johnston, 2000). Early

in 1999, the Audit Commission inspected around 250 partnership infrastructures, examining

their audits, the extent and nature of consultation undertaken, and their resultant community

safety strategies (HMIC, 2000). In two of the three partnerships under study, the District

Auditors' report highlighting weaknesses, particularly in strategic objectives, was viewed by

representatives as very insightful and served as a stimulus to revise the strategy/action plan

to include SMARTER objectives. As well as the local inspection process, Her Majesty's

Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) launched its own inspection in January 2000 working

in collaboration with the Home Office, the Audit Commission, the Local Government

Association, the Office for Standards in Education and the Social Services Inspectorate. By

its own admission, this inspection of 12 police forces and 36 partnerships, tasked with

establishing the critical success factors for achieving crime reduction and, in particular,

providing a template for successful partnership working, was established very soon after the

implementation of the CDA 1998. Further auditing of partnerships is to be expected under

the Best Value regime. This rigorous performance management process has put additional

pressures on partnerships, particularly police partners:

> We've got force key performance indicators, then we've got Ministerial Objectives,
>
> we've got Police Authority involvement in what we should be addressing, we've got
>
> local targets to achieve through crime and disorder [partnerships], then we've got
>
> Best Value reviews to do in terms of efficiency gains and things of that nature. It
>
> just goes on and on (*Police service representative, Sandford*).

This process will be further amplified now that recorded crime statistics are available by partnership area, and crime reduction targets will be set centrally for each partnership based on each achieving reductions compared with the top performing quartile of each 'family of partnerships' (Povey, Cotton and Sisson, 2000; Home Office, 1999; Leigh et al., 2000). In advance of this process, Section 7(1) of the CDA 1998 has already been used by the Home Office to request an annual progress report from partnerships. Partnerships were asked to supply detailed information about short- and long-term outcome targets for crime reduction for all crimes, violent crime, vehicle crime and burglary, and the extent to which these had been achieved a year after the first strategy was developed. This information would be used to 'provide a central perspective on the direction of the partnerships and [to] identify those partnership areas in which further support or assistance may be needed' (Home Office, 1999: 12). This exercise was viewed rather cynically in one of the research partnerships:

> …whether that is the best use of our time is highly debateable…If we don't fill in
>
> any of the Home Office questionnaires, if we don't produce any of the PI
>
> information generally that's required, nobody will talk to us, we'll be pariahed, we
>
> won't get any money…I think generally we ought to do less of that [completing
>
> questionnaires] and more of what's going to make a difference… (*Senior representative*
>
> *from Chief Executive's Department, Riverton*).

What Crawford (1997) has referred to as 'government at a distance' can further be seen in the arrangements put in place by the Home Office to provide the support referred to in the last paragraph. The Partnership Support Programme involves the contractualisation of two voluntary organisations, NACRO and Crime Concern (who receive some central government funding). This builds on previous neo-corporatist practices of creating local alliances who, controlled by the centre, are given responsibility to promote compliance with public policy (Crawford, 1994a; Hughes, 1996). The programme consists of giving individual consultancy support to partnerships to meet the strategic and operational challenges that they face, mounting a national conference and series of regional seminars to share and promote good practice and networking, along with a series of briefings which have a practitioner-focus and emphasise good working practices. This will be supplemented by the work of the high-level national Crime Reduction Task Force of senior central and local government officials. 'Raising the game' of crime and disorder partnerships will be assisted by the use of a series of toolkits focused on different crime types and a toolkit focused on good practice in partnership working. In essence then, the governmental crime reduction project encompasses strict adherence to public managerialist tendencies which give primacy to objective performance management and scrutiny of partnership activity coupled with a support programme provided outside of government, and a funding regime which is still somewhat short term in nature.

Conclusion

At the time of writing, there were 376 statutory crime and disorder partnerships in England and Wales implementing their first three-year strategy to reduce crime and disorder in their

local areas. This new statutory infrastructure for crime reduction/community safety represents a significant advance in that there are now locally accountable authorities, rather than the police alone, whose task it is to reduce crime locally.

This paper has considered the extent to which these new arrangements have been able to leapfrog some of the difficulties associated with multi-agency partnerships documented in the academic and policy literature. The research on the three case study partnerships revealed a rather mixed picture. On the one hand, there appears to be considerable commitment to partnership working at a strategic level. The domination of partnerships by statutory agencies is an issue but this does not appear to be holding back partners in their day-to-day activities. Neither was there evidence of partners being deliberately disempowered through informal decision-making outside of formal partnership fora. Indeed, there is a sense in which partners are in a 'honeymoon phase' where conflict has not surfaced in partnership relations. This may in part be due to the all-inclusive nature of the audit and strategy formulation process in the first year.

On the other hand, multi-agency activity has been limited by the time, resources, skills and expertise available to partnerships. The lack of financial support for administering local partnerships has hindered progress, while the skills deficit within partnerships, particularly in relation to problem-solving, has shown itself in the inadequacies of the strategies/actions plans produced in the three research areas. The fact that the crime and disorder agenda is, in effect, competing with other national social policy agendas has also been a fundamental difficulty facing local partnerships. In addition, the move towards much greater direction from central government has been problematic for partnerships, not least, because it

represents a major departure from the original spirit of the legislation and guidance to partnerships. This has increased the administrative workload of partnerships and often meant adding to existing strategic priorities to accommodate government demands on national targets.

This research has only been able to provide a snapshot of practice in the early history of three statutory partnerships. This is a new and fast-moving area of policy and it is impossible to predict what the future holds for the new structures established to tackle local crime reduction/community safety. It does, however, seem likely that the future will be one of further prescription, major auditing and inspection of local partnerships through a variety of means, including rigorous performance management. This will be complemented by guidance from the centre with some financial support being provided through the newly-established Partnership Development Fund[3]. It is also more than possible that the political drive to reduce crime and disorder in the next year or so will encourage more partnerships to seek the 'quick wins' associated with situational crime prevention, rather than opt for the longer term measures which seek to reduce criminality. Undoubtedly these and other issues will form the basis of further research to examine the evolution and development of statutory crime and disorder partnerships.

Endnotes

1   This research has been undertaken by Matt Carter, Mary Considine, Jessica Jacobson, Rachel Lewis and the current author.

2   Pseudonyms have been used to preserve the anonymity of the research sites.

3   Since this paper was prepared, the Home Office has established the Partnership Development Fund. Providing £60m for partnerships over three years, it aims to support cross-cutting work on information systems, data analysis, the effective implementation of partnerships' strategies, and promote good and innovative practice through consultancy, training and development work with partnerships.

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