Home Office
BUILDING A SAFE, JUST
AND TOLERANT SOCIETY

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships: Round one progress

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"The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy)."

Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series

Foreword

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act requires local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies, to complete a specific cycle of activities every three years. This report details the findings from case study research undertaken in three partnership areas which explored in depth how the partnerships approached the early activities in this cycle (i.e. the production of an audit of local crime and disorder problems, consultation on the basis of this audit and development of a strategy to tackle the problems identified). It examines the considerable achievements of partnerships to date, the problems encountered and how these were overcome, and areas for development which remain.

The report contains recommendations and examples of good practice which should enable practitioners involved in the second round of partnership working to combat the difficulties encountered in the first. Additionally it will be of use to policymakers and those providing support to partnerships in central and regional government, as it explores in considerable depth partnerships' achievements to date and the challenges that remain.

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Executive summary

Background to the research

Sections 5 and 6 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act (CDA) place an obligation on local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies, to complete a specific cycle of activities every three years. The first stages of this cycle involve:

- Producing an audit of local crime and disorder problems

- Consulting locally on the basis of the audit

- Determining priorities among the issues identified, and

- Formulating a strategy for tackling these

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit has undertaken an in-depth study of partnership working at three sites, focusing on the processes involved in these activities in the first round of audits and strategies undertaken in 1999-2000. The aim has been to describe how the partnerships have approached these tasks, difficulties encountered and how these have been addressed. The fieldwork involved a review of documentation, observation of a range of meetings and in-depth interviews with partnership representatives. The report will be useful to partnerships as it contains examples of good practice and specific recommendations, which should assist those involved in preparing the second round of audits and strategies. In addition, it will be of use to those in central and regional government developing policy and providing support to partnerships since it explores in depth partnerships' achievements to date and the challenges that remain.

Partnership structures and working

There were many similarities between the three partnerships' structures, representation and ways of working:

- Structures – multi-agency groups existed in all three sites prior to the CDA. Additional groups were established in two of the sites to meet the statutory duties it imposed.

- Representation – no agency was perceived to be dominating the partnerships; in two sites, the police and local authority were regarded as the lead agencies. Participation by business appeared to be limited and the health sector had little involvement. There was some tension between statutory representatives and non-statutory organisations regarding power differentials in the partnership.

- Partnership Working – Relations between agencies were regarded positively; partnerships were seen to have built links between agencies who had previously not worked together. Community safety officers played a significant role in all three partnerships with assistance from police-local authority liaison officers in two of the sites. While there was considerable support for the partnership approach, heavy workloads and competing priorities were cited as obstacles to action-orientated partnerships.

Auditing crime and disorder

All three partnerships invested considerable time, effort and resources in the production of the audit. While most representatives were satisfied with their work, there was recognition of the difficulties encountered and how these could be addressed. Resources, contracting, data and information sharing presented problems:

- Resources – the timescale imposed by the CDA meant that the audits were carried out in a rush; this problem was exacerbated by the lack of extra funding available to support partnerships in conducting audits. All three partnerships opted to contract external consultants to undertake their audits.

- Contracting – The use of external consultants caused a number of problems – they had less local knowledge and experienced difficulties accessing data from partner agencies.

- Data – the data available for the audits presented problems as it was sometimes inaccurate, incomplete, inaccessible or not co-terminus with other data.

- Information Sharing – despite having protocols for information exchange, all three partnerships experienced problems in this area. However, the partnership process was regarded as having facilitated information exchange and there were signs that this would continue to improve (one partnership had established an audit group with a remit to look at information disclosure while, in another, voluntary information sharing protocols between agencies were being established).

Consultation

There were both similarities and differences between the processes and outcomes of the consultation undertaken by the partnerships:

- Process – the responsibility for planning and facilitating consultation was devolved to the community safety officers in all three sites. The nature of the consultation undertaken, in terms of timing and methods, differed markedly. The public were encouraged to respond to the audit through newsletters in all three sites; the use of other methods was more limited.

- Consultation with 'hard-to-reach' groups – each partnership experienced difficulties in this area. A number of opportunities to use existing consultative fora were missed

- Consultation responses – these tended to reflect the issues presented in the audits.

- Future ideas – all three partnerships were developing contacts with 'hard-to-reach' groups and were interested in using the Internet for future consultation.

Strategy development

In all three sites, the process of strategy development was found to be problematic in some regards.

- Establishing priorities – in addition to the findings of the audit and consultation, the emphasis placed by the government on certain crime types and the concerns of outside consultants influenced the selection of priorities for the strategy.

- Target setting – all three strategies contained long and short-term targets but many of these were not SMART.

- External constraints – problems of time pressure were exacerbated during the strategy development phase as the other phases had taken longer than anticipated. It was not possible at the time to establish how all the activities in the strategy would be funded.

- Partnership dynamics – in each site, the police and local authority were in charge of drafting the strategy. The process of strategy development indicated a lack of integration among partners. All three partnerships developed 'umbrella' strategies, which sought to incorporate individual agencies' pre-existing strategies.

- Problem solving approach – there was little evidence that the strategies adopted a problem solving approach; contents were often determined on the basis of representatives' past experience and existing knowledge.

Conclusion

The three partnerships studied approached the tasks of audit production, consultation and strategy development in a constructive manner and attempted to learn from difficulties encountered. A number of major issues emerged during the research regarding the first stages of partnership working:

- Commitment – all three partnerships met their statutory obligations. There was almost unanimous support for the idea that partnerships are the way forward.

- Resources – limited resources (time pressures, a skills deficit and funding shortages) hindered various aspects of the partnerships' work.

- Pressures of partnership – the very nature of partnership working brought its own problems. An element of cynicism regarding the unequal contribution made by various partners affected all stages of the process.

Key recommendations

- To address the problem of health sector involvement, partnerships should consider including representatives from Primary Care Groups on their strategic bodies. These comprise general practitioners who are more knowledgeable about local service provision than health authority staff who have a more strategic role.

- To address the problem of limited time and resources, partnerships should consider how various partnership groups could co-ordinate their activities (for example by holding joint meetings of the main partnership body and YOT to address shared issues of concern).

- Neighbouring partnerships should consider co-ordinating their audits to combat difficulties with data exchange. This could involve drawing up data plans to co-ordinate requests for information from agencies incorporating different partnerships.

- When undertaking consultation, partnerships need to ensure co-ordination with other consultation exercises such as those for Best Value and policing plans. This could prevent duplication and encourage the use of a wider range of consultation methods. They could consider establishing an annual round of focus group research, to complement an annual public attitude survey.

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1. Introduction

The multi-agency approach to crime reduction

The partnership approach to reducing crime and disorder recognises that such problems cannot be effectively tackled solely by the police or any other agency (Home Office, 1991). Instead, a holistic and problem-solving approach based on shared effort, information, resources and expertise among key agencies is required (Crawford, 1998; Gilling, 1994). During the 1960s in Britain, multi-agency work in the field of crime prevention took place on a relatively small-scale and informal basis. The 1970s saw the establishment of voluntary multi-agency partnerships by some police forces (Morgan and Maggs, 1984). However, it was not until the 1981 Scarman Inquiry into the Brixton disturbances that there was formal recognition of the need for partnership work on crime prevention. Over the following years, the benefits of inter-agency working were highlighted by a number of government reports.[1]

1   For example, the joint circular of 1984 issued by the Home Office with other government departments.

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 (Home Office, 1991), was that local authorities working with the police should be given statutory responsibility for the development of community safety through the multi-agency approach. This recognised the role of local authorities in providing key services such as housing, education and leisure that can enhance the safety of communities.

The 1990s witnessed wide-scale voluntary development of community safety partnerships across the country; however, these varied significantly in terms of both constitution and influence. The DETR and the Home Office formalised this process through the two Safer Cities Programmes of the 1990s, which provided funding for the development of multi-agency community safety strategies.

The desire to build upon Safer Cities, support voluntary partnerships and implement the Morgan Report was reflected in Sections 5 and 6 of the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 (henceforth referred to as the CDA). Section 5 of the CDA 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 local areas. Section 6 stipulated that by 1 April 1999 each partnership 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, and from local consultation on the findings of the audit. Figure 1 outlines the key stages in implementing Section 6, which are to be repeated every three years.

The Act has resulted in the establishment of 376 statutory crime and disorder partnerships across England and Wales. In many cases, the legislation essentially formalised existing multi-agency groups, whereas in other areas the Act necessitated significant institutional change. However, even those areas which had well-established multi-agency structures needed to adapt significantly to comply with the legislation.

Box 1: The three-year cycle as stipulated by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998

Stage 1

Carry out audit

> Section 6(2)a: review levels and patterns of crime and disorder in the area

⇩

> Sections 6(2)b and 6(2)c: analyse the results of review and publish analysis.

⇩

Stage 2

Consultation

> Section 6(2)d: consult with those specified by the Home Secretary by virtue of Section 5(3), other appropriate people and bodies, and with the public.

⇩

Stage 3

Develop strategy

> Section 6(1), 6(4) and 6(5): develop and publish 3-year strategy including objectives and targets.

⇩

Stage 4

Implement and monitor

> Section 6(6): implement strategy and monitor, adjusting objectives and targets as necessary.

Repeat process
Every 3 years

Adapted from the Home Office Guidance on Statutory Partnerships (1998)

Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA stopped short of providing the core funding for partnerships proposed by Morgan. However, crime and disorder partnerships were to become the vehicles by which local organisations would access the £400 million provided by the Home Office Crime Reduction Programme, across the range of sectoral crime issues, such as burglary, vehicle crime and domestic violence. In addition, a Partnership Development Fund has been established, which provides financial support for partnerships (via Regional Crime Directors based in the regional government offices) to assist with the development of new information systems, strategy implementation, and the dissemination of good practice.

The case study research

Aims

The Home Office Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRCU) is currently undertaking a programme of research into the implementation of Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA. The research programme has included projects on audit and strategy documents, the process of consultation, and is currently involved in projects concerned with monitoring and implementation of strategies. The programme includes research into the legal and procedural implications of Section 17 of the CDA, which states that relevant authorities (including police and local authorities) must consider the repercussions for crime and disorder of all their activities.[2]

This report presents the findings of a core component of the PRCU research: namely, an in-depth study of partnership working at three specific sites. The focus of the study was on the processes of carrying out audits, undertaking consultation, and formulating strategies, during the first three-year cycle of partnerships' activity following the CDA. The aim was to provide detailed accounts of each partnership's approach to these tasks; to describe modes of interaction between the partner agencies during the audit, consultation and strategy phases of their work; and to identify the various challenges the partnerships encountered, and the ways in which they sought to address these. A second phase of research is currently underway. This covers the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the first round of strategies, and examines how partnership working in the second round of audit, consultation and strategies compares with that in the first round.

As a study of only three partnerships out of a total of 376 operating across England and Wales, the research reported upon here has not sought to consider all the issues faced by partnerships, or to provide definitive answers to questions of how

2   The initial publications arising from the research are Phillips et al (2000), on the contents of partnerships' audit and strategy documents; Deehan and Saville (2000) on alcohol issues in strategy documents; Hester (2000) on consultation; Bullock, Moss and Smith (2000) on Section 17; Newburn and Jones (2002) on consultation; and the 'Partnership Working' Toolkit on the Home Office website.

partnerships can best carry out their statutory duties. However, it is expected that there are many experiences of the case study partnerships that could be drawn on by others, and hence these findings will have general applicability beyond these three sites. It should be noted, moreover, that these three partnerships are located in areas which differ widely in terms of their demographic and socio-economic profile, and hence illustrate the realities of partnership working in a range of different contexts.[3]

Therefore the lessons to be learned, discussed in the chapters that follow (and highlighted in the recommendations included in each chapter), should assist partnerships across England and Wales in enhancing the effectiveness of multi-agency working particularly at the strategic level. Furthermore, as the study has not only considered the internal dynamics of partnership working at each of the sites but also the structural constraints within which they are operating, the findings of the research have a bearing on efforts by central and regional government to support and promote multi-agency work on community safety.

Methodology

The case study sites are located in three different regions of England. In order to preserve the confidentiality of the respondents who took part in the research, pseudonyms are used in this report to refer to the sites, which are:

- Collingbridge: a large unitary authority which is predominantly rural, containing a number of small towns. It is relatively prosperous (but with some socio-economic variation) and has low crime rates in comparison with the national average.

- Sandford: a borough council within the County of Sandfordshire, encompassing a semi-industrial town and surrounding rural area which contain pockets of affluence and deprivation. This case provides an example of partnership working within a two-tier authority.

- Riverton: a densely populated, multi-ethnic local authority area with a full range of crime and disorder problems, of the kind that are evident in many deprived inner-city localities.

The fieldwork was carried out over a ten-month period beginning in November 1999. The research comprised the following:

3   *That it is important for partnerships to learn from one another's work and experiences is highlighted by the publication of 13 partnership family groupings (a similar concept to that of police force families) by the Home Office (Leigh et al, 2000). This should encourage comparisons of data and crime prevention initiatives among partnerships in similar authorities – regardless of the regions in which they are located – and promote the dissemination of good practice.*

- Review of documentation – both published and unpublished – produced by the partnerships, including audit and strategy documents, meeting minutes, protocols, and management information.

- Observation of a wide range of partnership and working/implementation group meetings.

- 49 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with partnership representatives. These included senior partnership officers (for example local authority department heads, police divisional commanders, DAT and YOT managers, and probation heads), community safety officers and co-ordinators, and practitioners (such as police community beat officers, social workers, and business and voluntary sector representatives).

Most of the interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The interview transcripts and field-notes from observations were coded and analysed using NUD*IST.[4]

4   A computer software package for qualitative data analysis.

The research commenced eight months after the publication of the partnerships' first audit and strategy documents which may have resulted in some knowledge gaps, through memory lapses among the respondents and the fact that some key officers were no longer in post. However, the triangulation of methods (interviews, observation and documentation review) enabled the researchers to have reasonable confidence in the accuracy of their findings. Furthermore, the assurances of confidentiality facilitated frank and full discussions of the relevant issues in the research interviews.

The report

Chapter 2 of the report begins with an analysis of partnership structures and patterns of working in the three case study sites. Chapters 3 to 5 document the processes by which the partnerships carried out their crime and disorder audits, undertook consultation, and formulated their strategies and action plans. Chapters 2 to 5 contain recommendations based on the findings. The conclusion in Chapter 6 contains a brief discussion of the key issues that have emerged from the research.

2　Partnership structures and working

Managing multi-tiered partnership structures

In all three partnerships, a multi-agency group with broad statutory, voluntary and business sector representation existed prior to the enactment of the CDA. However, in order to respond to the statutory requirements of Sections 5 and 6, the Riverton and Collingbridge partnerships established a new additional partnership group including, with some variation in each, the police 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. In Sandford, the pre-existing partnership group became a more focused and formalised group which – like the groups in Riverton and Collingbridge – had primary responsibility for co-ordinating the compilation of the crime and disorder audit, undertaking consultation, and formulating a strategy and action plan to reduce crime and disorder in the locality. It sits alongside a partnership board which was set up to 'take a helicopter view [of partnership activity] and identify missing links' (according to the chief executive) and to make decisions on major strategic issues such as resource allocation. In common with partnership structures across the country, there were significant variations in the make-up of the partnership bodies in the three partnerships. This variation – both between and within unitary and two-tier structures – makes it difficult to promote a particular 'best practice' model (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a; Home Office, 1999a).

Although it is difficult to advocate a particular partnership structure, it is clear from research that there needs to be good links between strategic bodies, such as those described above, and practitioners so that crime reduction approaches can be disseminated (see also Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a, 1994b; Crawford, 1998). In Sandford, a seminar was organised for operational police officers, for the purpose of introducing them to the CDA, the local partnership structures, and the crime and disorder strategy and action plan. However, there was evidence that some practitioners in the other two areas were not knowledgeable at that time about partnership activity: a police service representative in Collingbridge indicated that there was room for a greater awareness among junior police officers of community safety, the implications of the CDA and specific community projects within the area.

This issue is discussed further in Chapter 5, in relation to the formulation of the strategies and action plans in the three areas.

Related to dissemination is the need for clarity in partnership structures. It is clearly important for partnerships to bear in mind that if similar partnership groups – both in terms of composition and agenda – co-exist, there is a potential for duplication and wasted effort. At the time of the research, this was an acknowledged problem in the Riverton partnership where the newly formed partnership group and the pre-CDA group continued in parallel.

Two-tier authorities

In the Sandford partnership which exists within a two-tier local authority, the issue of co-ordinating different levels of partnership activity is even more complex. Liddle and Gelsthorpe's (1994a) study of multi-agency partnerships in two-tier authorities identified several factors which can impede the involvement of district and county council representatives in community safety work. These included political antagonisms, and perceptions that county councils were often far removed from local issues and that central funds were rarely forthcoming. The report on the Home Office's Pathfinder sites[5] similarly noted the difficulty of managing two-tier structures, arguing that 'the three way split of responsibility [between the police and the two tiers of the local authority] is perhaps the most challenging to balance and administer' (Home Office 1999a: 9). In the case of Sandford such difficulties were noted in a report by an external consultant on how Sandfordshire County Council was addressing Section 17 of the CDA. This concluded that county council representatives on the district partnerships were often unclear as to where their authority and lines of accountability lay, what their role was, the time they were expected to devote to this area of their work, and the resources they could bring to support the work of the partnerships.

Liddle and Gelsthorpe conclude that multi-agency partnerships may be best served if the county council has a facilitating and co-ordinating role, rather than being responsible for determining strategy. The former approach was adopted by the Sandford partnership, which developed its own crime and disorder reduction strategy in line with the requirements of CDA.

5   This report describes the outcome of work carried out by the Home Office Partnership Task Force with 12 Pathfinder partnerships, with the aim of drawing lessons for these and other partnerships.

Issues of representation

'Prime movers'

The perception of those interviewed in the three partnerships was that the partnership did not appear to be overly dominated by any one agency. In Riverton and Sandford, however, the view of partnership representatives was that the partnership was police and local authority-led; they were considered to be the 'prime movers' (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'. Although the notion of lead agencies does, to some extent, imply hierarchical relationships (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a), the overall perception in the Riverton partnership was that the framing of the legislation in terms of statutory accountability, the core business of the police and local authorities, and their available resources meant that it was right that the police and the local authority should have the 'lion's share' of the workload and decision-making powers.

This is not to say that feelings of exclusion and marginalisation were completely absent in the partnerships under study. In both the Collingbridge and Riverton partnerships, comments by representatives of smaller voluntary and community organisations did suggest some resentment regarding power differentials at the level of the strategic partnership bodies:

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

It is highly important that partnerships take an inclusive approach, for, as Gilling (2000) notes, there is always the danger that partners who do not feel that they have equal influence may withdraw. The views above contrasted with those of some statutory representatives who questioned the value of contributions by non-statutory organisations to the partnership effort:

> … I think there is a frustration that there are a lot of partners there whose input is to attend the Board, 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 Board. (Riverton)

At the time of the research, these negative comments did not appear to have affected the willingness of partners to work together. Neither was there any evidence of the exclusion of less powerful groups from key decision-making through informal networking (cf. Sampson et al., 1988; Crawford, 1994; Phillips and Sampson, 1998). This indicates that the partnerships were by and large adopting an inclusive approach; as does the fact that partnership representatives did not seem to feel constrained about making contributions at the meetings of the major partnership bodies.

Reluctant partners

At partnership meetings, the health sector was rarely represented in the three areas, reflecting national concerns about engaging health authorities in crime and disorder partnerships (Audit Commission, 1999; HMIC, 2000). This seems to have been largely due to the health authorities' lack of resources to commit to the partnership process. However, as a health representative from Riverton explained, there were fundamental doubts about the role of the health authority in crime and disorder partnerships, and an absence of inspection on crime and disorder activities:

> 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…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.

The local Primary Care Group (PCG) is represented on the Steering Group in the Sandford partnership. This appears to work well, not least because the PCG comprises general practitioners who are more knowledgeable about local service provision issues than health authority staff who have a more strategic oversight role.

Whilst some concerns have also been raised about the probation service not generally playing a full part in statutory crime and disorder partnerships (HMIC, 2000), this study found probation representatives to be enthusiastic about community safety work. However, like health authorities, the remit of many probation departments spans more than one crime and disorder partnership. This was the case in the Collingbridge and Sandford partnerships, while in Riverton, staff shortages had limited the involvement of the probation service. Probation service staff commonly cited their lack of powers of discretion regarding the use of their resources, which limited the financial contribution that could be made.

The police authority is named by the CDA as a statutory consultee; however, police authorities were not operational in the Riverton and Collingbridge sites during most of the fieldwork, and therefore could not play a part in these partnerships. In the county of Sandfordshire, however, the police authority had been involved in examining the resource implications of partnerships' crime and disorder strategies to ensure co-ordination.

The Home Office Guidance for partnerships (1998) recognises the input of elected members of the local authority into community safety work through existing committee structures, but does not indicate the need for councillors to be directly involved in the day-to-day work of partnerships. In all three sites elected members are apparently kept informed about the work of the partnerships through briefings, committees, and via some partnership bodies on which they are represented. There was no evidence to suggest that community safety work was marginalised as a result of their not playing a major role in partnership activity; locally this was recognised as a priority issue (HMIC, 2000; cf. Home Office, 1991).

The voluntary and community sector is represented in each of the three partnerships, while business sector participation appears to be somewhat limited, as was also found by the recent HMIC (2000) thematic inspection (see also Home Office, 1991; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994b).

Partnership working

There was much positive comment about relations among agencies represented on the statutory partnership bodies; a finding echoed by the Audit Commission's report on their study of over 250 partnerships (cited in HMIC, 2000). Interviewees noted that multi-agency working had encouraged inter- and intra-agency networking and, in particular, had built links among agencies that previously had not worked together. This co-operation among agencies had, for example, been translated into the signing of information-sharing protocols (to be discussed in Chapter 3). Partnerships were also seen as having had the effect of sharpening the focus and raising the profile of community safety work both within and among agencies.

The role of community safety officers/co-ordinators

In the Home Office's Pathfinder sites, police commanders and chief executives most often delegated the management of the audit, consultation and strategy formulation process to community safety officers (Home Office, 1999a). Community safety

officers/co-ordinators play a significant role in the activities of the three partnerships under study, assisted by police-local authority liaison officers in Riverton and Collingbridge.

Ideally, those who are responsible for co-ordinating partnership working require organisational skills, a knowledge of the policies and procedures of different agencies, and political knowledge (Home Office, 1991; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a). The multi-dimensional nature of the role is aptly illustrated by the following comment from the Collingbridge community safety officer, and emphasises the need for professional training:

> You've a public dimension in terms of the community; you've a political dimension; you've got a project development dimension; you've got the practicalities of being the support officer to a number of committees…as well as manage a staff and department, a budget, and everything else that goes with it…

6   *The partnership support programme has been running since March 2000. In addition to providing seminars and training, and disseminating good practice, Crime Concern and NACRO are working with individual partnerships to offer practical support and guidance.*

HMIC (2000) has noted that there are gaps in national training in the field of community safety (see also Audit Commission, 1999). The need for training for community safety officers is, however, partially being met by the National Community Safety Network, an association of community safety officers. A comprehensive national training programme in community safety has been commissioned by the Home Office as part of the partnership support programme offered jointly by Crime Concern and NACRO.[6] More recently, the Partnership Development Fund of £60m has been established to provide further assistance to partnerships over a three year period and Regional Crime Directors have been employed to oversee the expenditure of the Partnership Development Fund, and to ensure appropriately targeted help and guidance is given to partnerships. Other training in community safety is being provided by the Home Office, in conjunction with the Local Government Association and National Police Training, and a review is underway to ensure that this meets strategic needs. Web-based 'toolkits' are also being developed by the Home Office.

Commitment

Overall, there was considerable support for, and optimism about, the partnership approach for tackling problems of crime and disorder. Moreover, the seniority of representation in partnership structures indicates that partnerships attached great importance to their statutory responsibility, at least at the strategic level (see Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994b; HMIC, 2000). However, reference was also made in

interviews to some partners' lack of commitment to the partnership approach. In one of the partnerships, a senior statutory representative was singled out for his reluctance to engage in partnership meetings. In particular, it was mentioned that poor attendance at meetings was often a result of feelings of 'meeting overload' and the perception that partnership bodies were 'talking shops'. The Collingbridge partnership sought to resolve some of these problems by merging its main partnership group with its YOT steering group, and hence reducing the number of meetings.

Heavy workloads and competing priorities were frequently cited as obstacles to action-orientated partnerships. In Collingbridge, the large geographical area covered by the partnership has meant that some representatives have had difficulty attending meetings because of the distances they must travel. In Sandford, cuts in the budgets of local authority departments have limited their capacity to devote resources and officer time to the partnership.

Conclusions and recommendations

Despite some obstacles to effective partnership working, the research found that partners generally accept that the benefits of partnership working outweigh the costs in terms of resources, and that multi-agency partnerships are the most appropriate mechanism for dealing with community safety. The recommendations outlined below are based on the observations of the partnership structures and general partnership working in the three sites:

- Partnerships should include representation from Primary Care Groups in their strategic partnership bodies. Greater voluntary sector and business representation also needs to be encouraged at the strategic level. However, operational effectiveness and local circumstances should always be considered when determining agencies' representation on different partnership bodies.

- Partnerships should give thought to how the various partnership groups and working groups might streamline and co-ordinate their activities (for example through holding joint meetings to address shared issues of concern, as in Collingbridge where the YOT and the community safety policy group meet jointly) in order to minimise layers of bureaucracy. In two-tier partnerships, the roles of district and county-wide bodies need to be explicitly defined from the outset.

- Two-tier or multi-tiered partnerships must ensure that there is full dissemination of information and effective communication among levels in the structure; these processes should be bottom-up as well as top-down. The Sandford seminar held with operational police officers to introduce partnership working and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provides an example of how communication can be facilitated. Such seminars should be encouraged among all partners and could incorporate sessions on different agency perspectives and ways of working.

- Comprehensive national training for community safety officers covering issues such as monitoring and evaluation, community engagement, project management, and the management of staff and resources, are essential to build professionalism and expertise in the area of community safety.

3   Auditing crime and disorder

Introduction

According to the Home Office Guidance issued in 1998, the aim of the audit process is to 'capture realistically the patterns of crime and disorder experienced within the local community …[and] analyse them in ways which will inform the development of an effective, targeted strategy' (para. 3.11). Audits may therefore include the mapping of local problems, the identification of significant issues, the assessment of existing provisions and gaps in provision, and the suggestion of options for strategies (para. 3.13). A report on the findings of the audit must be published by each partnership, in the form of 'an accessible consultation document' (para. 3.40).

The assessment and analysis of local crime and disorder is an integral part of crime prevention work. Literature on the 'problem-oriented' approach to policing stresses that developing a good understanding of the causes, manifestations and extent of crime problems in a given locality is an essential first step in efforts to resolve those problems (see, for example, Read and Oldfield, 1995; Leigh et al, 1996 and 1998).

Furthermore, the partnership aspect of the audit process – that is, the expectation that audits draw on relevant data from a wide range of agencies – brings significant benefits. Most obviously, this enables the audit to present 'the "whole view", marrying up data from different sources to understand the various elements of the crime problem which may not be apparent if individual agencies table their own data on an ad-hoc basis' (DETR, 2000: 76). In addition, this should ensure that there is co-operation among partners from the very outset of the strategy-setting process, and makes it 'more likely to commit all partners to the conclusions of the audit' (Audit Commission, 1999: 33). Finally, by undertaking a holistic analysis of local problems, which is required to take 'due account of the knowledge and experience of persons in the area' (CDA 6(2)(a)), each audit should paint a picture of the local community that is recognisable to members of that community. This should facilitate the process of consultation that follows the audit, and further the general aim of developing community safety practices that are responsive to the needs and expectations of local people.

While the Home Office Guidance (1998) for partnerships advises on such issues as data sources and methods of data collection and analysis, partnerships nonetheless have much leeway with regard to the details of the audit process. Not surprisingly,

therefore, the first audit documents produced by the three research partnerships (see Box 3.1), and indeed other partnerships in England and Wales, varied widely in terms of the number and nature of topics covered, the definitions of crime and disorder employed, the levels of detail at which analysis is carried out, and their styles of presentation (Phillips, Considine and Lewis, 2000).

The sections of this chapter which follow discuss the major challenges encountered by the partnerships in carrying out their audits, in relation to the issues of resources, contracting out the audit, data limitations, and information exchange.

Box 2
The audit process in the three case studies

Riverton

The Riverton audit was undertaken by an academic at a local university on a full-time basis over several months. During the process, he fed back findings to a small number of partnership representatives, but these arrangements were somewhat ad hoc. The methodology involved analysing data from:

- the police, local authority, probation, education, health, environmental health, and drug support agencies and using a Geographical Information System (GIS)
- a postal survey of residents
- focus groups

Sandford

A small working group was set up to oversee the audit process, including the commissioning of Crime Concern to carry it out. The audit comprised:

- a postal survey of residents and a business survey
- focus group discussions with women, schoolchildren, young offenders, senior citizens and young people
- interviews with officers from various agencies about community safety policy and practice
- a statistical profile of crime and disorder based largely on police data (but also using some probation and youth justice data) carried out by a police authority researcher.

Collingbridge

A consultancy within a local health agency was commissioned to conduct the Collingbridge audit. The work was carried out by two researchers on a part-time basis over approximately two months, and was supervised by the community safety co-ordinator. The audit involved analysing:

- police, local authority, probation, fire service, and voluntary organisation data, additionally using a GIS

After the publication of the audit, the partnership established an audit working group, with responsibility for considering future audit needs. A second audit was undertaken a year after the original audit.

Resources

The CDA was enacted in July 1998, and required partnerships to publish their strategies by 1 April 1999. Hence the time-scale for conducting the audits – the first stage of the strategy-setting process – was tight. Comments from partnership representatives that the process was carried out in too much of a rush: (this caused 'much heartache and physical pain', in the words of one; another remarked that the audit became 'a bit like a train that wouldn't stop. There wasn't a great deal of time to stand back') were common.

The problems of a short time-scale were exacerbated by the lack of extra direct funding at that time for partnerships to support their new statutory duty to conduct audits. This made it difficult for partnerships to allocate sufficient staff time specifically for the task of conducting the audits (see also HMIC, 2000: 94). Hence, for example, while all three case study partnerships were able to use external consultants to carry out the bulk of the work, there was a lack of internal staff dedicated to the audit and as a consequence, arrangements for overseeing and assisting the process were somewhat ad hoc. Agency staff time is also taken up in the provision of information for the audit. This may be somewhat alleviated by the Home Office Partnership Development Fund which has identified the development of systems to facilitate information sharing, and data analysis support as priorities for funding.

Contracting out the audit

Those who conduct audits must have strong data collection and analysis skills, and the ability to present their findings in an accessible way. In each of the partnerships, the decision to contract out the audit was taken on the grounds that internal staff did not possess the necessary skills; although cost-effectiveness and the short time-scale were also considerations. The experiences of the three partnerships indicate that while there is much to be gained from buying in expertise from external agencies, there is also a number of difficulties associated with this. A number of the potential dangers of using external consultants were identified in the original guidance to partnerships on auditing (Hough and Tilley, 1998).

As 'outsiders', consultants may face the problem of commencing work with little knowledge of the relevant issues and the local environment. It was noted in Sandford that the draft recommendations drawn up by Crime Concern for the audit report were based more on generalised experience than on particular local needs of the locality, but since partnership members worked jointly with Crime Concern in finalising the recommendations, this was not considered a significant problem.

More serious problems may arise when there is the feeling within particular agencies that consultants are essentially out of touch with or ignorant of their own concerns. In Riverton, for example, there was disagreement about the very purpose of the process. The consultant saw his remit as being to explore 'community safety' in very broad terms, and hence to look at all social harms that affect the local community. This included, for example, an analysis of stop and search rates by ethnic origin, which the police reviewed as irrelevant to the crime and disorder audit.

Difficulties may also arise in accessing data from partner agencies as in Collingbridge:

> The first we heard [of the consultants] was when they suddenly said they wanted the data – and it was like: who are you? They said: we're working on Collingbridge. We said: are you sure? Police representative

It was also suggested that the consultants could not have an adequate understanding of the intricacies of police data. For their part, the consultants felt that they did not receive from the police as much data as they would have liked (such as data from below beat level to allow identification of hot-spots).

According to the Audit Commission (1999), another potential problem is that because external consultants' involvement with a partnership is temporary, their work may not contribute to the development of expertise and information systems on which the partnerships can draw on an ongoing basis. A Collingbridge consultant pointed out that it can be problematic to use external agencies because 'they don't have an investment in the data and on improving it'. The Sandfordshire County Council review of the county's audit likewise argued that partnerships (in other parts of the region) which carried out more of their audit work internally had benefited from this, as they had to focus attention on issues around data collection and analysis.

Data limitations

The Home Office Guidance (1998) lists a large number of possible sources and types of data that an audit might draw on, but each partnership must set its own parameters with a view to making the audit a feasible project. The DETR Safer Cities evaluation (2000) has noted that the quality of an audit suffers if it seeks to do too much with too many data sources. Once decisions have been made about what kinds of information are ideally required, the core tasks of data collection and analysis must be undertaken. As all three case study partnerships found, this entails a constant grappling with data limitations. Five common data problems are discussed below.

Lack of information

Agencies do not always record the kinds of information that might be expected of and wanted from them. For example, in both their original and the reviewed audit, the Collingbridge consultants found that the police did not record certain kinds of information about victims and offenders. Similarly, it was noted both in Collingbridge's second audit report and in the Sandfordshire audit review that data on costs of crime – which would have to be forthcoming from a range of agencies – were lacking, a problem found also in the Home Office's (1999a) Pathfinder partnerships.

Incomplete information

Where an agency does record relevant information, this may nevertheless provide an incomplete picture of the situation. The case study partnerships were well aware that police crime figures inevitably could not convey the true extent of any given problem. One obvious reason for this was the under-reporting of crime, and particularly of certain crimes such as domestic violence and racially motivated crime. The Collingbridge audit document pointed also to some other limitations of police data, such as double counting within the disorder data, as the police records did not differentiate between multiple calls about the same incident.

In Riverton, the community safety manager mentioned that local authority information on vandalism was generally incomplete:

> To understand vandalism, you need to know if it's the youths that are causing it … if it's the residents of the building that's causing it. But quite often … we just have: vandalism – date, time, location, cost.

Lack of co-terminosity

Where different agencies operate within different geographical boundaries difficulties of various kinds arise for partnerships – including those related to data collection and analysis. This appears to have been the case in Collingbridge and Sandford, in particular. The Sandfordshire audit review noted that problems arose in calculating crime rates because of disparities between police beat areas (the base for crime figures) and ward boundaries (the base for population figures). A Sandford probation representative pointed out that police data related to geographical areas, but probation data to the operations of the Courts; similarly, an education representative commented that education information on truancy, exclusions and so

on was 'per school and not according to the areas where the pupils live'. In Collingbridge, after the original audit was carried out, divisional police boundaries were realigned in order to be co-terminous with local authority boundaries – for the general purpose of facilitating partnership work under the CDA. The use of disaggregated data mapped using a GIS can also ameliorate this problem, although as the Sandfordshire audit review recognised, the use of GIS can be resource-intensive and mapping may raise 'issues of political sensitivity' because of the high level of detail at which information can be presented.

Inaccessible information

Whatever information is recorded by partner agencies, it is of little use to the audit if the data collection and analysis systems are so inadequate as to make the data largely inaccessible. It was observed in the Sandfordshire audit review that the statistical crime profiles carried out across the county incorporated little data from non-police sources, due to the fact that data from other agencies were 'not available in a useable form at that time'. Indeed, a Sandford probation representative complained of the 'very primitive' information systems within the service – but pointed out that more sophisticated systems are only helpful if staff have the time and expertise to use them. In Collingbridge the consultants had difficulty in accessing information from some voluntary sector organisations which lacked IT facilities: for example, victim support was making use of card index systems.

Inaccurate information

Finally, it should be remembered that whatever systems of classifying and categorising information are in place within partner agencies, there is always scope for mistakes or misjudgements to be made in the process of inputting and coding data. Hence, for example, discrepancies in police command and control incident data can arise if operators are not consistent in classifying data. Moreover, the complexities of data dealt with by some agencies are such that providing reliable information for audit purposes can never be straightforward. For example, the difficulty of calculating population size was described by a Riverton local authority representative in terms of:

> … It's so bad that on different government returns we put different population figures down depending whether you look through the housing system or the council tax system … or whatever.

Information sharing

A successful audit depends on the willingness of partner agencies to share data. Indeed, partnership working in general necessitates the sharing of information of all kinds among partners: previous research has found that information exchange and confidentiality concerns can impede the implementation of multi-agency crime reduction initiatives (see, for example, Sampson et al, 1988; Phillips and Sampson, 1998). Section 115 of the Crime and Disorder Act provides that persons can lawfully disclose information to relevant authorities, where this is necessitated by any of the provisions of the Act. The Home Office Guidance (1998) emphasises that 'the best way of ensuring that disclosure is properly handled is to operate within carefully worked out information sharing protocols … between the agencies involved' (para. 5.21). This is reiterated in a joint statement by the Home Office and Data Protection Registrar regarding the disclosure of information in connection with crime and disorder. However, HMIC's inspection on crime and disorder (2000) found that in many partnerships senior managers 'have a lack of confidence in Section 115 [of the Crime and Disorder Act] as a defence to their personal liability under the provisions of the Data Protection Act'.

In the case study partnerships, there appears to have been a general recognition of the importance of information exchange. In all three, however, there were problems associated with the process (additional to the practical and technical difficulties relating to data discussed above), despite the fact that all had protocols for exchanging information at the time the audits were carried out. It was noted in Collingbridge's second audit report, for example, that the lack of protocols among agencies other than the police and local authority had meant that information sharing depended on 'the periodic goodwill of agency managers and in some cases practitioners', which resulted in an 'ad hoc and somewhat opportunistic approach to data collection'.

The sensitivities around data protection and disclosure are illustrated by some specific examples of concern about possible repercussions of information exchange. At a seminar arranged in Sandford on this general subject, the question was raised of whether it was proper for housing departments to use information from the police to vet potential tenants. Such a practice, it was felt, would be against the spirit of the Crime and Disorder Act, as it would have the effect of displacing rather than reducing problems. In Riverton, a health representative commented that some Accident and Emergency hospital departments would be able to provide, for audit purposes, information about numbers of people with knife wounds, but that they

would be reluctant to provide details such as patients' postcodes: 'We can't say which postal districts they live in unless the numbers are so huge in each postal district that you can reasonably preserve anonymity.'

Notwithstanding the obvious difficulties, the general impression from all the case study sites was that the partnership process had facilitated information exchange, particularly among the statutory agencies – and not simply in the context of data collection for the audits:

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 representative, Sandford

There were, furthermore, signs that data exchange practices were likely to improve over time, as the partnerships continued to focus on the relevant issues in a serious manner. For example, an audit group was set up in Sandford with the specific remit to look at information disclosure; and Riverton established a voluntary information-sharing protocol between the education and housing departments and the police to facilitate preventive action against crime and disorder in schools.

Reviewing the first audits

In seeking to improve future audits, the partnerships of Collingbridge and Sandford had conducted reviews of the initial audits (involving, in the former, a second audit and, in the latter, a county-wide survey). The Collingbridge consultants concluded that there was little evidence of improvement in agencies' data systems between the first and second audits, and pointed to the need for systems to be put in place to allow information to be collected regularly, rather than every three years. The Sandfordshire audit review produced a number of recommendations relating to data collection and analysis. Respondents in Sandford had mixed views about the prospects for the next audit: some were concerned that funding problems would limit future work, but others noted that agencies' data systems were being improved, which would assist the audit process. In Riverton, likewise, there was some optimism that data systems would be improved by the time of the next audit (for example, the partnership is expected to acquire its own GIS) – due in part to the fact that problems inherent in the prevailing systems had been highlighted by the initial audit. It was also noted that partner agencies would become increasingly accustomed to the idea of sharing information.

Conclusion and recommendations

All the partnerships clearly found the audit process challenging, and devoted much time, effort and resources to it. For the most part, the respondents interviewed for this study were reasonably satisfied with the work carried out, and the quality of the findings. At the same time, there was a widespread recognition of the various difficulties encountered, and a willingness to consider the lessons that could be learned from these.

In accordance with the focus of the case study research on processes of partnership working, the recommendations listed below relate to the process of conducting audits, rather than the potential contents. Guidance on both process and content of the audit is included in the Partnership Working toolkit, produced by the Home Office, and available on the Crime Reduction website (www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits).

Management of the audit process

- Each partnership should have a member or members with designated responsibility for dealing with information issues (perhaps, where resources allow it, operating within an information unit). The role of the information/audit officers would include running the audit process and wider data strategy for the partnership. However, it is important that procedures are established that are not dependent upon the experience or expertise of specific individuals, which may be lost if they move post.

- Partnerships must undertake detailed advance planning of the audit process, taking into account the time required for completion of all components. Information timetables should then be submitted to partner agencies. The planning of any empirical research to be included in audits must take fully into account the demands on staff time and resources that this entails.

- If a partnership is to contract out elements of the audit, the information/audit officers must co-ordinate and closely manage the process, facilitate communication between the consultants and the partner agencies, and maximise the transfer of expertise and knowledge to the partnership.

Data collection and analysis

- Individual partner agencies must work with the information/audit officers in developing compatible data collection and analysis systems, and ensuring that the partnership can access data on an ongoing basis.

- Where partner agencies are not able to introduce new recording practices or systems to overcome current data problems, they should consider undertaking special data collection exercises over limited time periods, in order to provide at least some data on particular issues of concern.

- Partnerships should consider acquiring their own systems for storing and analysing data, including, if appropriate, GIS. This necessitates thorough investigation of available systems, to ensure that any acquisitions are suited to the partnerships' specific needs.

- Partnerships must develop research and analysis skills, even if they intend to contract out audits. If these skills do not already exist in-house, partnerships should consider recruiting staff who possess these skills or training existing staff.

Information exchange

- Information exchange protocols among the key partners must be put in place, which clarify not only the principle of data exchange (taking into account data protection issues), but also the categories of data that are to be exchanged.

- Full consultation with all the agencies involved must precede the establishment of the above protocols, to ensure that the agencies are satisfied that their own work and goals will not be compromised, and are aware of the benefits (to community safety work in general and to themselves) of data exchange.

- Further advice from central government is required on information exchange, in order to clarify data protection issues and the potential scope of data exchange protocols.

The wider context

- Wherever appropriate, neighbouring partnerships should co-ordinate their audit activities, for example by:

  - pooling resources and carrying out joint work (especially in the case of smaller partnerships)

  - drawing up coherent data plans to co-ordinate requests for information from agencies that incorporate several partnerships

  - working with police forces and regional government offices to assist the development of, and use of, general data collection and analysis systems.

- Regional government offices should seek to extend their support of partnerships' audit activities, for example through supplying regional-level benchmark data and co-ordinating audit activities across partnership boundaries.

4   Consultation

Introduction

Section 6(2)(d) of the CDA states that partnerships should 'obtain the view on that report [the audit] of persons or bodies in the area…whether by holding public meetings or otherwise'. As such, a central aim of the CDA is to widen the involvement of relevant agencies and the public in community safety work. This can involve using existing consultation mechanisms (for example, police/community consultative groups – PCCGs). Police consultation was included in the most recent 1995 and 1996 Police Acts; and the Best Value requirements of the Local Government Act, 1999 extended the existing consultation commitments of local authorities, and obliges police authorities to consult with businesses and taxpayers, among others.

This chapter takes a broad view of consultation, defined here as both statutory post-audit consultation and the consultative nature of the partnership process itself and the means by which both information and opinion can be gathered. This is relevant throughout all partnership processes from planning the audit to implementation and evaluation (Newburn and Jones, 2002). The consultation obligations of partnerships under Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA are summarised in terms of five separate phases in Box 3 below.

Box 3
Stages of the consultation process

1. Planning and consultation prior to the audit process
To determine priorities and resources available for consultation at the key stages and key objectives; to plan the consultation elements in the audit and strategy; identify issues to concentrate on in the audit; help to identify the 'hard-to-reach' groups; and determine whether consultation is to be done in-house or be wholly or partly contracted out.

2. Consultation during the audit
To establish and access secondary data sources; draw on existing consultative activities; to determine the resources to be spent on primary data collection; to consult partner agencies about interim audit findings and identify issues for further investigation in the audit; gather views and perceptions of problems and establish priorities among the issues.

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3. Statutory post-audit consultation
To stimulate comment on the audit and publicise it; ensure the audit has addressed all relevant issues; identify high and low priorities in the audit; solicit community involvement in strategies and action plans; ensure the audit has approval from all sections of the community; disseminate the draft strategy and obtain comments; justify the strategy and update it if necessary in the light of comments received.

4. Consultation during action planning and implementation
To ask groups for ideas on how to address issues and problems; ensure cross-working and non-duplication of effort; involving the community in the development of action plans by obtaining feedback and consent during the process in order to improve the quality of action plans; provide a benchmark against which success/failure of projects and plans can be evaluated.

5. Consultation during review and next round of audits
To review the consultation elements of the first round; use consultation to monitor the three-year cycle; provide a general forum for expression during all stages of the process; learn lessons for the next three-year cycle.

7   And Home Office Guidance (1998), and the Home Secretary through the CDA provisions.

Partnerships are required by the CDA[7] to consult with statutory consultees who include the probation committee, police authority and the health authority (Section 5(2)(a) and (b)). They must also seek the co-operation of registered social landlords, parish and community councils, and NHS trusts (Section 5(2)(c)). A wide range of voluntary and community organisations, youth and educational institutions, criminal justice agencies, and other public services (such as public transport providers and the fire service) must also be invited to co-operate in the partnership consultation process (Section 5(3)).

Consultation in the case study sites

The process of consultation

In the three case study sites, the issue of consultation was initially discussed at full partnership meetings, but the responsibility for planning and facilitating consultation was then effectively devolved to community safety officers. The nature of consultation differed markedly between the three sites, as is clear from Box 4.2 which describes the process in each.

Box 4
The process of consultation

Riverton
The audit was disseminated widely amongst both stakeholders and the public through a 30-page summary consultation document, with the police funding dissemination in the local press. Efforts were made to consult with relevant 'hard-to-reach' groups. Focus groups were held at an international drama forum (although this was not used to consult on the audit); the audit was published in a gay and lesbian medium; and an Asian member of staff was briefed in a one-stop-shop to solicit the views of the local Asian population.

Sandford
Sandford undertook most of its consultation (business survey, residents' survey and focus groups) as part of the audit process. A summarised audit was disseminated across the authority through the local authority newsletter.

Collingbridge
An audit summary was distributed to all households via the local authority newsletter, and various public meetings were held throughout the authority at which audit findings were presented and opinion sought. Questionnaires were utilised at many of these meetings in the attempt to quantify attitudes. The partnership involved several voluntary and community organisations; for example, a Neighbourhood Watch Forum co-ordinated responses to the audit across all its groups. Consultation also formed part of the audit review carried out in 2000.

The three sites used many of the same mechanisms to consult the public. For example, all three placed copies of audits, consultation documents and strategies in public places. In two of the three sites there was generally little utilisation of the existing consultative mechanisms of the partner agencies, which was again due in part to the time pressures. Nevertheless, certain achievements were noted. For example, the Collingbridge partnership made effective use of the existing police-led PCCG, while the Sandford partnership drew on the expertise of its youth service and social services departments in undertaking its focus groups during the audit process.

Consultation with 'hard-to-reach' groups

Recent research by Jones and Newburn (2001) on police consultation with 'hard-to-reach' groups has highlighted the problematic nature of this term, not least because it has such a wide range of definitions, and the absence of a generally accepted

alternative term. The term, 'hard-to-reach', can cover groups that have traditionally been poorly represented in official institutions or have traditionally had poor relationships with the police, although such groups may not be 'hard-to-reach' in a physical sense.

In line with previous research, all three case study partnerships experienced difficulties consulting 'hard-to-reach' groups, such that in some cases, opportunities were missed to use existing consultative fora. In Riverton, for example, the local authority had established a Refugee Forum involving young people, women and elders which could have been used for focus group research, and likewise a youth parliament set up by the education service was not utilised.

Consultation with 'hard-to-reach' groups must be undertaken sensitively and with understanding. The need for careful planning for this aspect of consultation, coupled with the tight deadline within which the partnerships were operating, severely limited their opportunities to engage with all sectors of the local communities.

Using consultation responses

An objective of the post-audit consultation was to cross-check the accuracy and scope of the audit findings. There appear to have been few complaints from consultees that audit information was incorrect or misconstrued. Consultation frequently elicits comments and suggestions on very specific local issues (Newburn and Jones, 2002). This was found to be the case in Sandford, where public comments included:

   'Block off walkways on [a named] estate'
   'Need policemen working in clubs and schools'
   'Some areas need more street lights'

Consultation also had the effect of informing the public about the activities of the partnership, which was furthered through the use of the local media in all three sites (see Chapter 5). More generally, the public consultation exercises allowed partnership representatives to familiarise themselves with the manifestation of crime and disorder issues within their communities.

Future ideas

Some suggestions for future consultation arrangements were proposed by the partnerships. All were interested in using the internet; and the Riverton partnership was considering the use of their mobile community kiosks (both to disseminate information and to conduct opinion polls) placed in shopping centres or places of worship. In Riverton, some representatives saw potential gains from using the reformed council member scrutiny committees and the newly established citizens' panel for future consultation. Similarly, all three partnerships were developing contacts with relevant 'hard-to-reach' groups to facilitate future consultative work.

Conclusions and recommendations

Each of the partnerships fulfilled their consultation obligations under the CDA by encouraging the public to respond to their audits, which were disseminated through local newsletters. In addition to this, various other (albeit sometimes limited) consultative exercises were undertaken both during and after the audit process. However, in the light of the difficulties faced by partnerships in fully consulting local communities, the recommendations listed below should provide further assistance for future consultative work.

Planning

- At an early stage in the audit process, partnerships should devise a comprehensive consultation strategy, which identifies all the existing consultative mechanisms in operation, as well as gaps in provision in light of the CDA requirements.

- Each partnership should be clear about the aims and objectives of its consultation, in relation to each of the consultative phases identified in the introduction to this chapter.

- Partnerships need to ensure co-ordination with other consultation exercises such as for Best Value and policing plans. Partnerships could consider establishing an annual round of focus group research, for example, to complement an annual public attitude survey. This would also create continuity and opportunities for gathering benchmark data.

- Each partnership should determine which groups of people in its authority are genuinely 'hard-to-reach'.

Implementation

- Consultation venues should be neutral (as far as possible) and meetings chaired by non-partisan members. Partnerships can maximise their contacts with potential consultees by holding or advertising focus groups in a range of settings, including, for example, places of worship, job centres, and shelters for the homeless. Recording details of attendees at consultation events (including large meetings) can assist in facilitating follow-up consultation.

- It is important that consultees are well-informed about their role and impact on partnership work. Partnerships should therefore demonstrably link the outcomes of their consultation to the issues included in their strategies and action plans (Phillips, Considine and Lewis, 2000). This might involve justifying priorities by making reference to survey findings, or explaining why certain issues are being targeted which were not raised through consultation.

- Wherever possible, consultation should be ongoing. For example, data from focus groups should be used at various stages of partnership activity to help prioritise the audit findings, to comment on implementation, and contribute to assessing the effectiveness of actions.

- Effective consultation requires expertise and experience, and thus partnership representatives should work with appropriate professionals and, if possible, undergo training. It is important that partnerships learn from each other; and it may be particularly helpful for partnerships to examine the consultative mechanisms used by others within the same family grouping.

5   Strategy development

Introduction

Section 6(1) of the CDA stipulates that every community safety partnership must 'formulate and implement… a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder in the area'. The strategy must include objectives, together with long-term and short-term performance targets for measuring the extent to which these objectives are achieved. Partnerships are also required to publish their strategies.

The procedures followed and strategies produced by the three case study partnerships are briefly described in Box 5. The remainder of this chapter considers: first, the main elements of the strategy development process; secondly, the external constraints within which the partnerships have had to work; and, thirdly, the dynamics of partnership working which have had a bearing on the development of the strategies.

The process of strategy development

Establishing priorities

It is the intention of the CDA that the prioritisation of issues should be based on the outcomes of the audit and consultation. However, it was evident that the process of prioritisation was not necessarily straightforward. Partnerships' inclusion of priorities on specific crime types, such as vehicle crime, could be a result of the emphasis placed by central government on these issues, rather than being warranted by local data. Moreover, the prioritisation of issues was sometimes influenced by outside consultants involved in the process of auditing and strategy formulation – as, indeed, was noted by the consultants themselves in Collingbridge and Sandford.

Box 5
Developing crime and disorder strategies in the three case study partnerships

Riverton
The Riverton strategy was devised by the partnership group using the findings of the audit. It contained a broad statement of seven priorities which were refined in the light of responses received from other partners. Each priority (e.g. To reduce burglary) encompasses between four and seven main objectives (for example, to

reduce the number of burglaries by x per cent year on year). For each objective, the lead agency responsible for its implementation is specified. A one-day meeting facilitated by Crime Concern was run to brainstorm the tasks in the action plan, but its development was primarily undertaken by the community safety officer and police-local authority liaison officer who ensured it dovetailed with existing service plans. The action plan specifies time-scales and relevant individuals (not just agency names) to take responsibility for the various tasks.

Sandford
In Sandford, a one-day strategy meeting marked the beginning of the process of strategy formulation. The meeting was facilitated by Crime Concern (who had conducted the audit), and attended by key stakeholders, although the strategy itself was drafted by the police and local authority representatives after the meeting. It comprises five main priorities (including, for example, reducing crime against business), each of which has a lead agency assigned to it and encompasses between two and four main objectives (for example, introducing better security measures). Each priority contains a sentence justifying its selection. A further one-day meeting was held to discuss action plans and to ensure they did not duplicate existing agency plans. Following the meeting, a full review of existing initiatives was carried out, and detailed action plans were drawn up.

Collingbridge
The Collingbridge partnership held a one-day strategy meeting for key stakeholders which was facilitated by a university consultant. The participants agreed an overall aim for the strategy, considered the issues arising from consultation, and brainstormed the priorities. Much of the work was carried out by small groups, although the final strategy document was written by the community safety co-ordinator following the meeting. Six main priorities (e.g. To reduce domestic violence) are outlined in the strategy; each of which encompasses a small number of key objectives (for example, to support the development of the local domestic violence forum), and has a lead agency assigned to it. One priority is to conduct an improved crime and disorder audit within the first year.

After the formulation of the strategy, the individual agencies had responsibility for devising action plans and for implementation of the relevant parts of the strategy. In addition, action plans were discussed and developed in partnership meetings and by working groups set up for the purpose of implementation.

Target-setting

The CDA requirement for partnerships to set targets has to some extent been met: the strategies of all three partnerships contain both long and short term targets. However, the setting of SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-scaled) targets – as recommended by the Home Office Guidance (1998) – has proved difficult. Partnership representatives admitted that they experienced problems in setting targets: for example, the Riverton community safety co-ordinator had devised targets without the prior opportunity to consult fully with the relevant agencies. As a result, he was reluctant to include very specific outcome targets in case the response from any agency was: 'I'm sorry, we can't deliver on that one.'

The Riverton action plans contain only one specific reduction target (a year-on-year target in relation to burglary); all others are expressed in more general terms: for example, 'to support schools in reducing levels of truancy'. The Sandford strategy and action plans include more specific targets, although many of these exclude time-scales. Other actions do not have targets attached. In Collingbridge, what were described as 'targets' were similarly phrased – 'to encourage', 'to monitor', 'to promote' – and had non-specific outcome measures.

External constraints

Time pressures

As already noted, the April 1999 deadline by which partnerships were required to have completed their audits and consultation and published their strategies meant that all partnerships worked under severe time pressures. These problems were often exacerbated during the strategy development phase, because the audit and consultation exercises tended to take longer than planned.

The time pressures appear to have caused various difficulties. For example, in Riverton, time constraints may have limited opportunities for feedback from partnership members about prioritisation after the strategy had first been drafted. The shortage of time also clearly contributed to problems faced by all three partnerships in linking actions to targets and setting realistic targets, which led to some lack of confidence regarding the potential effectiveness of the strategies.

The CDA stipulates that strategy documents should contain details of lead agencies responsible for pursuing the objectives set out within them. However, in Sandford,

lead agency status was not confirmed with some of the agencies concerned, and in at least one case the lead agency was actually unaware of its nomination. The fact that the strategies were developed in such a rush undoubtedly contributed to communication problems of this kind. It should also be noted that concerns about workloads within individual agencies prompted some representatives to try and avoid nomination for lead agency status.

Funding issues

Questions of funding are particularly pertinent to the strategy formulation phase of partnership work, since a strategy is only feasible if partner agencies have the necessary resources to carry out any new tasks that it entails.

It was not always possible, at the time the strategies were set, for the partnerships to take account of how all the activities in the strategies would be funded. For example, in Sandford, the local authority's decision to cut funding for some services impeded the partnership in carrying out some tasks in the strategy. Others also implied that funding issues were not taken into account:

> [The agency] don't have any…spare money…So that was the stumbling block, we didn't realise some of the tasks we put in meant that they couldn't physically do it because they didn't have the finances. Police representative, Riverton

This in turn raises the question of how partner agencies should determine what proportion of their funds should be allocated to activity encompassed by the strategies: a process that can be made particularly difficult when agency representatives on the partnerships do not have the authority to commit resources and make funding decisions. Funding allocation is an issue on which partnership members expressed a need for further guidance. A representative in Sandford supported the idea of ring-fencing budgets for partnership activity. Even then, conflicts may arise in determining local and regional priorities. In these situations, agencies must seek to strike a balance between the competing needs of all the partnerships in which they are involved.

Government funding for crime and disorder reduction projects under the Crime Reduction Programme is intended to 'harness the activities of the local partnerships' (Home Office, 1999b). However, the process of developing and submitting bids for funds requires expertise and skills not necessarily present within partnerships. In Sandford, it was noted that the partnership had suffered when a member with experience of preparing bids had left his post. In Collingbridge, an officer with

relevant skills found that there were so many demands made on him that he could not be fully involved in all the projects where funding was sought. In Riverton, a small team was created to prepare bids, although over-bidding was considered a potential problem: in the words of one police representative 'we need to be careful we don't bid ourselves into inertia'.

Partnership dynamics

It is clear that whatever the contents of any given community safety strategy, its effectiveness is ultimately dependent upon the commitment of the partner agencies. This section of the chapter examines the dynamics of partnership working in the context of strategy formulation: that is, issues of integration, co-ordination, acceptance of the 'problem-solving' approach, and relations with the public.

Integration and ownership

It is apparent that the 'prime movers' (Liddle and Gelsthorpe,1994b) of the partnership, namely the police and the local authority, have been prominent in the three partnerships; In each case, these individuals were in charge of drafting the strategy. Their contribution to the partnership, and particularly to strategy development, was therefore crucial. However, the process by which strategies and action plans were developed indicated a lack of integration among partners: this process was, in fact, described as 'a nightmare' in all three partnerships.

At the one-day strategy meeting held in Sandford, some participants said nothing at all; some decried the process of decision-making, saying that it implied that they were under-performing; and some offered ideas, but claimed that the local authority had responsibility for implementing and funding them. There was also an indication that some agencies – for example, social services – initially had to be persuaded that they had something to contribute to the strategy, while others, such as the probation service, admitted that they could have taken on more responsibility. It was also noted that an agency's responsibility for crime reduction does not necessarily imply ownership by individuals within that agency.

The Collingbridge strategy meeting was poorly attended – only half of the thirty people invited by the consultant attended. The strategy itself was drafted by the community safety co-ordinator with assistance from a few key people, which ensured that it was completed within the statutory deadline, but also led to the inclusion of some objectives that were not necessarily achievable:

 …a couple of the agencies… turned around and said, 'Thank you for writing that objective in, however it's not within my business plan and I'm not able to deliver that.' (Police representative)

In Riverton, the deliberate vagueness of the strategy undoubtedly assisted in ensuring consensus about its content, as suggested by the community safety officer:

With the strategy everyone was OK because it's generic, it's our desires, our aspirations, so everyone said, 'Oh yes, we can stand that'[8]

In contrast, doubts were expressed about the authority of some of those who had made decisions in relation to the action plan. As in Sandford, the strategy and action plans were drafted by a local authority and a police representative, and some agencies did not appear to have been well integrated in the process. For example, the fire service was unaware of the process and became involved in the partnership only after it had received the action plan documents.

The lack of involvement of some agencies in the initial strategy development in all three sites did to some extent affect the level of commitment to the strategies: in a few cases, partners admitted that they had been tempted to scale-down their involvement. However, it is encouraging that, on the whole, agencies were more inclined to accept that they could play a part in crime reduction work once the strategies and action plans had been drawn up. In Sandford, the social services representative attended more meetings and admitted to becoming more committed to the aims of partnership working as a result. Furthermore, partnership representatives had learned through experience about the need for more agencies to be 'brought on board'. This implies a commitment to the principles of partnership working among a wide range of agencies.

Co-ordination

Failure to develop a focused programme of work can be a major obstacle to inter-agency crime prevention (Bright, 1997). However, the co-ordination of individual agency strategies (especially policing plans) with those of the partnerships can bring greater focus to their work.

It appears that the three partnerships developed what the Home Office (1998) refers to as 'umbrella' strategies, which sought to incorporate individual agency strategies (as opposed to 'safety-net' strategies which plug the gaps in each). This was certainly

the case in Sandford and Riverton where co-ordination was spearheaded by community safety officers; indeed, some of the targets set out in the strategies were borrowed directly from the local policing plan. In Collingbridge, in contrast, less effort was made to align existing plans with the partnership strategy, which might explain why some representatives here felt that the strategy did not always reflect the work that was actually being carried out, and were uncertain of how their existing agency plans fitted in with those of the partnership. However, close links between the YOT, the DAT and the community safety partnership in Collingbridge ensured that the work of these three groups was co-ordinated.

It is also necessary for the strategies of neighbouring partnerships to be co-ordinated, as individual agency boundaries may straddle several partnerships. This is particularly relevant in the context of two-tier authorities, as the county councils will be drawn into several partnerships. In Sandfordshire, the police authority was involved in the county's partnerships from the outset, taking a strategic view of how they should develop, and trying to ensure that strategies were aligned.

The problem-solving approach

The problem-solving approach to crime reduction is the guiding framework in the Home Office Guidance (1998) for partnerships. This reflects the promotion in recent years of the problem-solving model as the vehicle for crime reduction within the police service (HMIC, 1998; Goldstein, 1990). Despite the range of social and situational crime prevention approaches included in the strategies, there was little evidence to suggest that the partnerships truly adopted a problem-solving approach. In devising their strategies, partners did not have time to undertake detailed analysis of the problems identified as priorities, but rather made decisions on the basis of past experience and existing knowledge of the issues. Partnerships tended to list a range of activities which had shown some success in reducing particular crime problems (often cited in the 'good practice' literature), without rigorous consideration of their appropriateness to the local circumstances.

Public relations

The aims of rooting partnership activities in the concerns of local communities, and establishing public support for these activities, requires partnerships to consider how to raise general awareness of their work. Constructive relations with the local media can greatly assist partnerships with this task, as the media can help to change the perception that crime reduction is just the responsibility of the police or the local

authority. Similarly, reports on successful projects can enhance the public's sense of ownership of them. The media can also help to disseminate crime prevention advice; however, the publicising of crime issues should be undertaken with care, as there are well-known connections between fear of crime and irresponsible reporting (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994c). The value of good publicity was stressed by a senior partnership representative in Sandford:

> What we've got to say is good news. And the more we can say the good news, the more likely we are to get more people come aboard and help us defeat the criminals.

The Sandford partnership publicised its strategy at the outset, although its ongoing work received less publicity. The activities of both the Riverton and Collingbridge partnerships have also been publicised in the local press. In the latter, a member of the press is represented on the partnership, and a local radio station was used to promote public support for a funding bid for CCTV.

The case study partnerships were also aware that publicity could be negative – for example, if sections of the media or the public disagreed with the priorities established by the strategy, or felt that the partnership was not achieving enough – and were therefore keen to monitor the media attention that they received. Hence, for example, an agreement was reached with the press representative in Collingbridge that the partnership be allowed to approve the content of stories about their activities prior to publication.

 The point was made in partnership meetings in Sandford that problems could arise if dealings with the media were not carried out in a careful and consistent manner. Relations among partner agencies could be damaged, and the partnership as a whole embarrassed, if one agency released information about another that was inaccurate or not intended for the public domain. This indicates the need for each partnership to develop a media strategy of which all members are aware and approve.

Conclusion and recommendations

In all three sites, the strategy development process was found to be problematic in some regards. In particular, the severe time pressures exacerbated problems arising from some agencies' lack of integration in the process, and the failure to adopt fully a problem-solving approach. Nevertheless, it is evident that such difficulties did not overwhelm the partnerships. All three had members who put considerable effort into the development of the strategies, with the result that they were produced within

the statutory deadline. Furthermore, it is encouraging that agencies' commitment to the general aims of partnership working on community safety remained strong. The recommendations outlined below should help partnerships to build upon their experiences in a constructive way for future rounds of strategy formulation.

Planning and management

- Partnerships should ensure that sufficient time is allocated to each separate stage of the audit, consultation and strategy formulation process, allowing for unforeseen delays. Time is needed for strategy development in order to assess the feasibility of actions, analyse data as a basis for formulating targets, devise innovative solutions, and involve all key agencies in the process.

- Strategies and action plans should be developed using the problem-solving approach (that is, by identifying and analysing problems, prioritising issues, developing integrated packages of measures, and developing systems for monitoring and evaluation). Partnerships should ensure that both operational and strategic staff within partner agencies contribute to this process, particularly to ensure it is realistic and feasible.

- Reviews of priorities and actions should be an ongoing activity, both at the strategic and operational level. This should enhance integration with service plans and ensure that activities are tailored to current circumstances.

Funding

- Partnerships should ensure that the necessary skills and expertise required to prepare essential bids for funding are available, preferably within the partnership and with devoted time attached to this task.

- Each partnership should develop a financial plan for implementing its strategy at the time the strategy is formulated.

Enhancing co-operation

- Agency representatives on each partnership should keep all staff within their respective agencies fully informed of the strategy and its implications for their work, in order to generate their sense of ownership of its aims and objectives, and reduce any operational-strategic divide within the partnership.

- Partnerships should regularly review the range and extent of agency involvement in their work, and should be proactive in educating other local agencies about the partnership and its aims. This will maximise the contribution of all organisations (in terms of consultation, direct representation and resources), broaden the scope of strategies, and prevent duplication of effort.

- Partnerships should attempt to co-ordinate their strategies with those of neighbouring partnerships, as many agencies operate across partnership boundaries, and crime and disorder problems are not always confined to single partnership areas. This might involve pooling resources to implement joint projects, and sharing knowledge and expertise in preparing bids.

Public relations

- Each partnership should develop a media strategy of which all key agencies are aware. This should specify the individual or individuals who have responsibility for media relations, and how and when agencies' activities within the partnership are to be publicised.

- The choice of priorities in the strategy should be explained to the public, to reassure them that all issues raised in consultation were considered. This will encourage future co-operation with consultation exercises.

6   Conclusion

This research study represents a snapshot of partnership experience during the first round of audits, consultation and strategy development. As the substantive chapters have shown, the three partnerships worked in a positive and constructive manner, and made efforts to learn from the various difficulties they faced. It is undoubtedly the case that these lessons will inform preparations for the second round which are already underway. The second phase of this PRCU research study will consider their experience in implementing, monitoring and reviewing their crime and disorder strategies. This concluding chapter of the report highlights some of the major issues to emerge from the first phase of the research.

Commitment

Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA imposed a new statutory responsibility on the police, local authorities and other agencies to reduce crime and disorder by working in partnership. As such partnerships have had to traverse a very steep learning curve, and therefore the enormity of the demands of the CDA should not be underestimated. In under a year, new partnership structures were formed, audits of crime and disorder were conducted, consultation exercises undertaken, and strategies and action plans developed. Moreover, the new structures necessitated the bringing together of agencies with diverse cultures and working practices, some of which did not traditionally regard crime and disorder issues as being within their remit.

The commitment among the partnerships to multi-agency working is demonstrated by the fact that they all fully met their statutory obligations to conduct audits, consult, and formulate strategies by April 1999. This highlights the willingness of partner agencies to commit a great deal of time and energy to the process of establishing and working within partnership structures to enhance community safety in their local areas. Indeed, there was almost unanimous support for the idea that partnerships are the way forward, and a general optimism about what can be achieved through the statutory framework. Overall, the perception was that partnership working had progressed: there was increased contact and co-operation among partners.

Resources

The achievements of the case study partnerships are all the more commendable, given that they were working within constraints imposed by limited resources. In particular, time pressures, a skills deficit, and funding shortages hindered various aspects of the work carried out by the partnerships.

The deadline of 1 April 1999, by which partnerships had to complete their first round of auditing, consultation, and strategy development, ensured immediate implementation of Sections 5 and 6 of the CDA, but put a significant amount of pressure on partnerships. This helps to explain a number of the difficulties encountered in the auditing process, such as those associated with information exchange: since time is needed to draw up satisfactory data exchange protocols, for trust between agencies to be built, and for the development of compatible data systems. Time constraints were undoubtedly a factor in the limited amount of consultation carried out with hard to reach groups in each of the three sites, and the missed opportunities to use existing consultative mechanisms or expertise within the partnerships. The time pressures also led to many parts of the strategies being drawn up without the full participation of the partnerships, which resulted in some tasks being included which were impossible to achieve or monitor, while others were included which were too easily achievable.

Although time pressures constrained what could be achieved by the three partnerships, there was also evidence that sometimes partnerships did not possess the necessary skills to undertake the various tasks. Conducting audits requires generic research and analysis skills and specific knowledge about crime and disorder patterns and recording systems. Moreover, some of the weaknesses evident in the strategies and action plans point to a lack of problem-solving ability within the partnerships. Specialised training in these areas would greatly benefit partnerships, as would practical training to promote effective partnership working. In addition to enhancing specific skills and competencies, training can promote understanding of the potential and processes of partnership working in general, and help to break down barriers between professions and communities.

The lack of financial support for core partnership activity from local and central government also affected the quality of contributions made by partner agencies to the first round of auditing, consultation and strategy development. Difficulties experienced in funding the single community safety officers/co-ordinators in Collingbridge and Sandford were testimony to the lack of resources available at that

time for community safety at the local level. The demanding bidding process, reconciling local and national priorities and competing work priorities were also significant obstacles. It is to be hoped, however, that the ongoing efforts by both central and regional government to assist partnerships, for example through Home Office guidance (e.g. In the form of web-based toolkits), funding (through the Partnership Support Programme and Partnership Development Fund), and training provision via regional government offices, will mean partnerships feel better supported in the future.

Pressures of partnership

The difficulties faced by the partnerships in carrying out their obligations to conduct audits, consult, and formulate strategies were not simply a result of limited resources. The very nature of multi-agency working also brought its own problems. Despite the general enthusiasm for partnership working, and the predominantly good relations that appeared to exist between the major partner agencies, it is perhaps not surprising that some of the problems that have long plagued multi-agency work were apparent in the case study sites, too.

It was noted, for example, that the optimism maintained by most of the partnership representatives was accompanied by some cynicism. This mostly focused on the unequal contributions made by certain partners and on the difficulty of ensuring ownership by all partners of all stages of the audit and strategy formulation process. These kinds of pressures were perhaps most clearly manifested in the strategy formulation phase of the work. Problems such as lack of ownership and the strategic-operational divide may have partially accounted for the inclusion in strategies of tasks that were inappropriate, ill-considered, did not relate clearly to objectives, or did not involve the most relevant agencies. To an extent, similar deficiencies were apparent in the setting of SMART performance targets to guide the work and make partnerships accountable. Most commonly, targets were output-focused rather than outcome-based. They tended to be borrowed from existing plans, and some were inappropriate or were insufficiently challenging to achieve.

Looking ahead

Much of this report has focused on difficulties faced by the partnerships, because it is felt that these difficulties, and the ways in which the case study partnerships have addressed them, offer the most useful and interesting lessons to other partnerships dealing with similar situations. Indeed, the level of awareness among partnership

representatives of the problems they have faced (and their desire to provide balanced interview accounts) bodes well for the future, since it suggests a general eagerness to learn from experience and to seek to make improvements to current practices.

The major partner agencies have not overlooked the deadline for the next round of auditing, consultation and strategy formulation in April 2002. Hence, as part of their implementation and monitoring of the current strategies, partnerships were already preparing for this second round. For example, in all three case study sites there was recognition of the need to improve data systems in order to assist subsequent audits and to facilitate general information exchange. However, there appeared to be mixed feelings among partnership representatives with regard to future work: a general optimism about their capacity to institute change for the better was tempered by ongoing concern about resource constraints and work overload.

It is clear that the challenges of partnership working, including those highlighted by this research, need to be addressed by central and local government as well as by partner agencies, if partnerships are to develop their capacity to deliver evidence-based and coherent strategies for reducing crime and disorder at the local level. The recommendations listed throughout this report, in the conclusion of each of the substantive chapters, should play a part in this process.

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