

## **Community Safety in Wales: in Retrospect and in Prospect**

an Ideas Wales Policy Discussion Paper

**Gordon Hughes, Julian Buchanan, Jonathan Evans and Kate Williams**

*Correspondence:* Professor Gordon Hughes, Director of the Centre for Crime, Law and Justice, Cardiff University, CF10 3WT. Email: [HughesGH@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:HughesGH@cardiff.ac.uk)

### Introduction:

This paper does two things. Firstly, it summarises briefly the current state of community safety policy in Wales and clarifies the framework within which it is delivered. Secondly, it sets out the direction in which the authors think Welsh community safety policy should move in the short- to medium-term future. As with our other papers in this series, the approach taken here is based on a commitment to strengthening community life by developing socially inclusive policies and, where practicable, building participatory models of practice.

#### 1. The Current Policy Position:

### *The Home Office Reform Programme for Community Safety Partnerships in England and Wales*

The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty on all district-level authorities in England and Wales to establish partnerships with other responsible authorities to conduct three-yearly audits of crime and disorder and implement strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder informed by these audits. The performance of these partnerships was reviewed by the Home Office in 2005 (Home Office, 2007) after the second tri-annual cycle of audits and strategies. As a consequence of this review the Home Office produced a programme of reform for the Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Wales, and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in England. The reform programme proposes alterations to the statutory duty and the introduction of national minimum standards for work undertaken by these partnerships. The six hallmarks of the national minimal standards are:

- (i) empowered and effective leadership;
- (ii) intelligence-led business processes;
- (iii) effective and responsive delivery structures;
- (iv) engaged communities;
- (v) visible and constructive accountability; and
- (vi) appropriate skills and knowledge.

(Home Office, 2007)

The reform programme has three main elements:

- alterations to the statutory duties placed on partnerships;
- the introduction of national minimum standards for work undertaken by partnerships in meeting these duties, including the Assessments of Policing and Community Safety (APACS); and
- new performance targets established by the 2008/9-2010/11 Crime Strategy and related Public Service Agreements (PSA) on Safer Communities and the Criminal Justice System.

The key milestones of the reform programme are:

- The Police and Justice Act 2006 introduced four important changes: it (i) removed the statutory duty to conduct three-yearly audits and strategies, replacing these with a duty to report annual strategic assessments; (ii) widened the scope of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to include anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and behaviour that adversely affects the environment (these are now considerations for all responsible authorities across the breadth of the services they deliver); (iii) imposed a duty on these authorities and probation committees to share de-personalised information; and (iv) provided for the introduction of Overview and Scrutiny Committees (OSC) for crime and disorder matters, and for the Community Call for Action (CCA) – a means by which local citizens can require responsible authorities to take action on particular issues of crime and disorder.
- In the summer of 2007 definitive national standards were issued. The new crime strategy and related Public Service Agreements were also announced.
- In April 2008 the first strategic assessment was conducted, the Community Call for Action was fully implemented, Overview and Scrutiny Committees<sup>1</sup> were established, and Assessments of Policing and Community Safety were introduced.
- In April 2009 the first Assessments of Policing and Community Safety reported.

#### Community Safety and the partially devolved powers of the Welsh Assembly Government

Research undertaken (Edwards et.al, 2008) has shown that there is substantial *variation* in the roles performed by the partnerships. In turn this reflects significant differences in the definition of community safety work and capacities for undertaking this work in the variegated local contexts inhabited by Community Safety Partnerships.

An understanding of this variation would, of course, be incomplete without reference to the impact of devolution on community safety work within Wales. Although the Welsh Assembly Government does not currently possess decision-making powers over policing and criminal justice, it does have powers in areas of social policy that are of central importance to community safety work. Specifically, the Assembly Government formulates policy on substance misuse and youth inclusion, both of which were identified as strategic priorities for the government of Wales in 2003 (Welsh Assembly Government in 2003). As a consequence, the Assembly Government established the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF) which, according to the survey of lead community safety

officers conducted by Edwards et al (2008), accounts for between 60-80% of all community safety grant-aid received by community safety partnerships in Wales. It also established the Safer Communities Fund (SCF), which prioritises work with young people at risk of crime and disorder. It is important to emphasise the point that there is considerable potential for community safety work to promote youth participation in projects supported by SCF (Hughes *et al*, 2009; Evans *et al*, 2010: 7). The involvement of young people in such projects not only has the potential to promote a sense of 'ownership' and empowerment amongst project participants, but may also help all of us understand more clearly the precise nature of young people's fears and experiences of crime.

Both of the above mentioned funds are allocated by the Community Safety Unit of the Assembly Government's Department of Social Justice and Local Government. Responsibility for community safety work in Wales is consequently split between this Department of the Welsh Assembly Government, the regional Home Office in Wales and the responsible authorities for each of the 22 community safety partnerships. The partially devolved context for community safety work in Wales is an important dimension of the uneven economies of scale that confront local partnerships in reconciling the aims and objectives of the Assembly Government and local citizens with the Home Office's Reform Programme.

#### Capacities for Community Safety Work

Statutory Community Safety Partnerships in Wales have been in place for a decade and a consensus amongst lead officers and agencies exists over the broad priorities, scope and purpose of their work - with the substantive issues of 'youth annoyance', anti-social behaviour and quality of life, substance misuse, and violence most commonly ranked as priorities (Edwards et al, 2008; Hughes et al, 2009).

Discrepancies in capacity are also related to the differing economies of scale confronting partnerships in different localities across Wales, particularly linked to variations between rural and urban, and relatively affluent and deprived localities. The unevenness provokes a number of challenges in relation to the concept of National Minimum Standards (NMS) for local community safety practice.

Clarifying the capacity for meeting National Minimum Standards in community safety is complicated by the following difficulties in auditing the allocation for community safety work: (i) double-counting the core budgets of responsible authorities; (ii) double-counting the job descriptions of community safety workers; and (iii) the contribution of other grant-aid programmes such as *Communities First* and initiatives such as *Local Service Boards*. Such auditing problems acquire greater significance given the relatively crude, quantitative, comparative data used to assess the outcomes of community safety work by the Home Office.

The nature of funding, together with meeting national targets from the Home Office (e.g., volume crime reduction) and Welsh Assembly Government (e.g., substance misuse)

remain the most commonly expressed concerns regarding capacity by Community Safety Partnerships. Universal dissatisfaction is expressed locally about the Home Office's *Building Safer Communities* short-term funding allocation. Much of the uneven capacity for community safety work is also accounted for by the Substance Misuse Action Fund (SMAF) from the Welsh Assembly Government. Despite the recognition of the importance of substance misuse as a driver of volume crime, it is widely felt that other local issues (such as 'youth annoyance') may be marginalised due to this national priority. In turn this problem is exacerbated by the volume crime targets of the Home Office (Edwards et.al, 2008).

## 2. Challenges in meeting National Minimum Standards in Wales:

At this point it is worth considering in a little more detail some of the challenges in meeting the National Minimum Standards in Wales identified by Edwards et.al (2008). The pertinent issues relating to the six 'hallmarks' will be taken in turn.

### (1) Effective and empowered leadership:

- Leadership remains a chief or senior officer responsibility (Chief Executive / senior police officer) rather than that of an elected member. As a result Community Safety Partnerships tend to remain 'officer-owned'.
- The uneven contribution of local authority and non-local authority partners is still pronounced. Community Safety Partnerships remain, at best, duopolies of the local authority and police.
- The role of elected members varies from being 'tame' and supportive of the Community Safety Partnership to that of being parochial and unaware of the 'bigger picture'.

### (2) Intelligence-led business processes:

- There is widespread reliance on police intelligence, which is compounded by resistance to sharing information between key partners.
- There is need for partnerships to develop multi-agency or 'partnership intelligence' if this Standard is to stimulate genuine strategic problem-solving. This includes developing substantive knowledge of the causes of multi-faceted problems confronting Community Safety Partnerships.

### (3) Effective and responsive delivery structures:

- There is a tension between the Community Safety Partnership and local authority role of the lead officer, including operational and strategic work.
- The notion of community safety as a 'dumping ground' or 'bin' for generic problems within local authorities and other partners remains evident.

(4) Community engagement:

- Community engagement is largely rhetorical in character.
- Community engagement remains largely police-driven and linked to neighbourhood policing fora such as *Partners and Communities Together* (PACTs).
- As a result of the afore-mentioned dynamic, a community forum such as a PACT risks generating tensions and conflicts, especially between the police and local authority.
- A more sophisticated way forward would be based on a multi-agency neighbourhood management model that is linked to the promotion of cross-cutting ‘partnership intelligence’.

(5) Visible and constructive accountability:

- Accountability, as currently constituted in community safety work, is widely and tellingly viewed in financial terms; particularly as it relates to the auditing requirements of national funding bodies. This is in sharp contrast to a model of political accountability based on local democratic debate, scrutiny and oversight.

(6) Appropriate knowledge and skills:

- The direction provided in the National Minimum Standards and both the Home Office and Welsh Assembly Government is too vague and unspecified. This appears to reflect a more profound uncertainty about the identity of community safety work as either a specialist service or a cross-cutting exercise in adding value to public services by better ‘joining them up’ for the purposes of solving specific problems in particular localities.
- There is a need to support training and education in what may be termed ‘strategic problem-solving’ and for the development of clear career pathways for younger community safety workers.

3. Options for Change:

In light of the foregoing analysis, the following options for change are presented for consideration (adapted Edwards et.al, 2008, Hughes et.al, 2009).

(1) Economies of Scale

Community safety work remains a relatively new area of service delivery and it competes with other services for policy prioritisation and scarce resources. In this context the unevenness in the economies of scale provokes a number of options for change:

- Option (i): Retain the existing 22 Community Safety Partnerships in Wales, allocating additional resources to each Community Safety

Partnership to meet the National Minimum Standards. This would entail the development of more sophisticated resource allocation criteria which recognises the different contexts in which Community Safety Partnerships operate.

- Option (ii): Retain the existing 22 Community Safety Partnerships, but lower the threshold of what constitutes a minimum standard whilst accepting the quality of community safety work will be superior in those localities with more favourable economies of scale.
- Option (iii): Reform the boundaries of Community Safety Partnerships, amalgamating those in smaller local authority areas in order to take advantage of better economies of scale in producing strategic assessments, assessing the performance of staff and allocating personnel to manage community engagement and democratic scrutiny and oversight.

Each option for change entails certain dilemmas which cannot be avoided by the key stakeholders:

- Option (i) requires greater investment if all existing Community Safety Partnerships are to meet National Minimum Standards set above the current lowest common denominator.
- Option (ii) is the least costly option, both in terms of funding and political implications, but it effectively undermines any commitment to a universal quality of public protection from threats to safety.
- Option (iii) has the advantage of a more efficient use of existing levels of funding and other resources, but threatens often fierce notions of political identity associated with particular local authorities within Wales.

(2) *Problem-solving for safer communities: the strategic operational split*

A sea-change is needed in national and local government attitudes towards community safety given its importance as a policy priority for local citizens. One key aspect of this sea-change relates to the distinction between strategic and operational ways of working for Community Safety Partnerships. It is suggested that there needs to be a community safety manager with a team in every Community Safety Partnership. The establishment of effectively managed teams would facilitate the development of analytical capacity and strategic problem-solving skills.

Strategic problem-solving for community safety involves two principles which necessitate specialisation:

- detailed knowledge of received ‘scientific’ wisdom in the field; and
- time and space for the strategic manager and her/his team to plan sustainable reductions over the medium term by employing ‘partnership intelligence’.

If intelligence-led business processes are to be put into practice, a dedicated senior post for ‘engineering’ partnership work is needed. Notwithstanding the importance of senior

political and officer ‘buy-in’ (e.g., Chief Executive or Deputy), the post of community safety strategic manager – if standardised across all Community Safety Partnerships – would provide the missing link between local leadership and front-line workers.

In turn the creation of a strategic manager post would also clarify the nature of the ‘appropriate skills and knowledge’ associated with the range of tasks required of community safety managers: from the strategic to the operational.

In the medium term the community safety manager should be located in the local authority. This would involve key work around mainstreaming community safety in the council, in accordance with Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, as well as leading and co-ordinating the work of other agencies in the Community Safety Partnership. Difficulties will, however, remain with these twin-track roles. A radical alternative for national governments to consider would be to separate the role/person as lead local authority community safety officer and Community Safety Partnership manager (with the latter centrally funded by the Home Office and Welsh Assembly Government).

There are distinct roles associated with the local authority community safety team. It is estimated that there are potentially 150 such officers in Wales. The future development of this emerging division of labour necessitates a serious debate regarding career pathways and the professionalisation of community safety work across the too often divided worlds of policy and practice, and education and research.

### (3) Improving the monitoring and oversight of community safety outcomes

Further resources need to be located in the Welsh Assembly Government Community Safety Unit in order to enhance its capacity for the nationwide monitoring and performance management activity across the 22 Community Safety Partnerships (or ‘top-sliced’ from within existing budgets). Training and resources to support more stringent performance monitoring may benefit a range of local policy makers, practitioners and analysts. The delivery of such training by organisations outside of the Home Office and police policy networks may help to effect a cultural change whereby performance management is more consistently applied by local community safety and youth justice policy makers and practitioners across Wales.

### (4) Maximising the potential impact of interventions

Joined-up partnership intelligence could enhance the effectiveness of local interventions, but may require the following:

- Creation of strategies that distinguish between (i) immediate tactical aims and (ii) medium-to-long term plans for sustaining impact in terms of reducing risk, crime and disorder, and enhancing entitlements. Within this approach there is a need to define a broad repertoire of preventive responses that deal not only with the tertiary end of prolific and priority offenders, but also secondary prevention work with ‘at risk’ groups and primary prevention for the whole population of young

people. The latter is in accordance with the principles set out in the *All Wales Youth Offending Strategy* (WAG & YJB, 2004) and *Extending Entitlement* (2000): both policy documents commit Welsh government to providing unconditional universal entitlements free at the point of delivery. The subject of community youth crime prevention is dealt with in greater detail in another paper in this series (Evans et al, 2010).

- Development of a delivery plan that Community Safety Partnerships can use to map and validate (i) the local balance of tertiary versus secondary versus primary interventions; and (ii) how impact and outcomes are going to be assessed. Both project and strategic-level assessment cycles need to be timed so that they can feed back effectively into the production of community safety strategies and, in particular, youth crime prevention and inclusion strategies. A broadening of evaluation methods is needed that enables partnerships to assess outcomes (not just outputs) of projects.
- Enhanced analytical capacity for partnerships that connect analysts with the commissioning of preventive projects. This should incorporate not only police analysts, but also those from other responsible authorities. To complement this more analytical approach, support from social scientists in the universities across Wales could provide advice on the ‘framing’ or conceptualisation of problems and challenges. This could include the fear of crime and disorder, the development of strategies for improving the quality of community life, or the promotion of personal and public safety.

(5) *‘Decentring’ the public police in community safety work*

This final option for change asks whether we should be looking to re-centre an older social democratic criminology which recognises and celebrates the role of the public police as (i) purveyors of last resort legitimate violent conflict resolution and (ii) experts in investigating and detecting serious crimes ‘after the event’. At the same time we should insist on the primacy of social and economic policy measures for intervening against the causal mechanisms driving volume crime and disorder and, especially, its escalation into serious violence (as in the increasingly violent street drugs trade in the major English cities over the past decade).

Such drivers of crime and disorder lie beyond the remit of the over-extended expertise of the public police and should be addressed at ground-level via multi-agency local governance. It is both unreasonable and unrealistic to off-load the main responsibility onto the police. In the proposed scenario, local government could offer the sort of strategic leadership originally envisaged in the Morgan Report of 1991 (Home Office, 1991). This vision was never realised in statute, but it seems to be an opportune moment to revive the idea.

Conclusion:

In conclusion the authors would argue that community safety can be enhanced by effective professional leadership, clearly identified roles for agency and community

partners, and improved democratic participation and accountability at local level. It is to be hoped that the capacity-building measures and participatory models promoted in this paper will help us move in the direction of meaningful engagement by the citizens of Wales in neighbourhood life.

### **Notes**

1. Subsequently, the Home Office have postponed implementation of the CCA and OSC beyond April 2008 in order to take into consideration any implications of Sir Ronnie Flanagan's independent review of policing for the local accountability of CDRPs and CSPs. At the time of writing, no deadline for the full implementation of CCA and OSC has been announced.

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### **Authors:**

Julian Buchanan is Professor of Criminal and Community Justice at Glyndwr University and a core member of the Social Inclusion Research Unit.

Jonathan Evans is a Senior Lecturer in the Centre of Criminology at the University of Glamorgan

Gordon Hughes is Professor of Criminology and Director of the Centre for Crime, Law and Justice at Cardiff University

Katherine S Williams is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology in the Department of Law and Criminology at Aberystwyth University