

COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

Safer communities are important to the public and to the Government.

- community safety determines how local people see their neighbourhood, with 56 per cent of people stating that a low crime rate is their priority for a good place to live. Public demand for improved community safety remains very strong, despite falls in crime rates
- under the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act, 376 statutory local community safety partnerships were established, and the Government has targeted an additional £8.7 billion for community safety and related issues since 1999

The performance of community safety partnerships is difficult to assess...

- many organisations are involved in assessment, each with their own remit and methods, so no rounded performance picture exists to reassure the public
- performance is not always assessed against outputs from partnerships – so although total recorded crime has fallen in recent years, the contribution that community safety partnerships made to this reduction is not clear

...but the combined findings from audit, inspection and research show that community safety partnerships need to focus on three areas for improvement...

- ownership and organisational behaviour – in particular leadership, maximising the role of councillors and members, senior personnel and other local agencies, and making community safety a part of core business

- a sustained focus on a limited number of priorities – balancing local needs with national policy, setting action plans and targets, and engaging local communities
- effectively using their capacity and systems to deliver community safety – improving performance management, prioritising resources, sharing and using experiences in order to improve delivery

The Government needs to focus on...

- extending national ownership of community safety beyond the Home Office, to incorporate education, health, environment, transport and local government departments in particular
- clarifying its expectations of partnerships and simplifying its guidance to them
- making the allocation of funds more straightforward and flexible
- clarifying and simplifying the performance assessment framework
- facilitating joint inspections of community safety partnerships on an area rather than a service basis

Local partnerships have not made an obvious impact on community safety between 1999 and 2002. The Government and regulators need to work with the partner agencies to help them to maximise their impact and make neighbourhoods safer for local people.

COMMUNITY SAFETY IN CONTEXT

1. There is strong public demand for action to improve community safety. Over one-half of the public surveyed by MORI (56 per cent) said that a low level of crime was the most important thing in making somewhere a good place to live, and nearly one-third (29 per cent) said that the key need for their area was reducing crime levels.
2. The Home Office is responsible for community safety policy. The work of other government departments also contributes to community safety but, at present, it is not an explicit policy or expenditure theme. Since 1999 the Government has targeted an additional £8.7 billion to community safety and related issues through various funding streams. Local partnerships play a key role in spending this government funding, but complex allocation methods make it difficult to obtain and weaken its impact.
3. The social and economic cost of crime and disorder is high, with recent estimates suggesting that the cost of crime to the UK exceeds £50 billion a year. Despite falls in crime rates, public concern remains.
4. Comprehensive government guidance covers a range of subject areas from alcohol-related crime to vehicle crime. While the guidance is freely available, the sheer volume of it overwhelms some partnerships. Non-police agencies, such as health and social services, fail to engage with the guidance because of its narrow focus on crime reduction.
5. The public's sense of community safety is linked to beliefs about the chances and consequences of becoming a crime victim. Despite preconceptions, the reality is that most people have a low chance of becoming a victim of crime, with young people aged 16-24 being most at risk. It is not only crime that affects public concerns – vandalism, racial harassment and graffiti, also have an effect (**EXHIBIT 1**). The way in which basic services tackle all of these issues affects levels of community safety.

EXHIBIT 1 Factors that affect people's sense of 'community safety'

Crime is just the 'tip of the iceberg'.



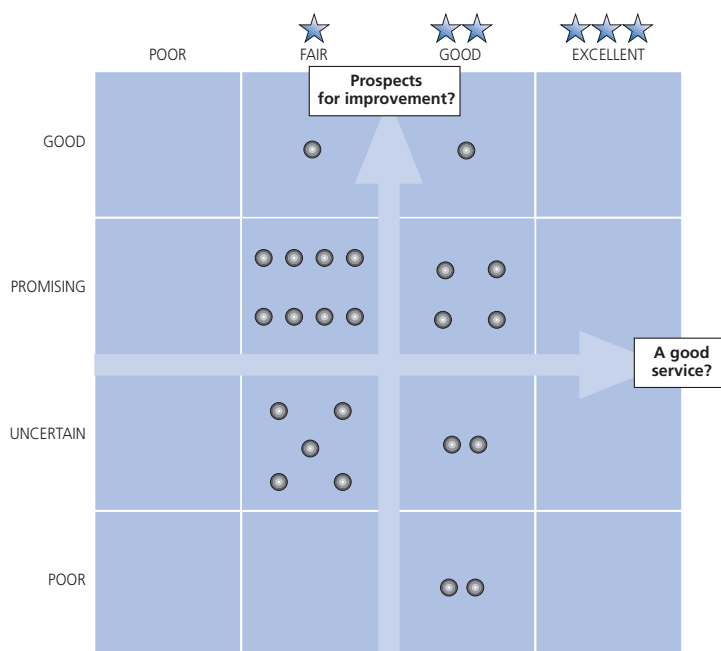
Source: Audit Commission

HOW WELL ARE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS PERFORMING?

6. Partnerships bring together councils, police and other local agencies to focus on community safety, but assessing their performance is complex. Currently, a broad range of different assessing organisations and methods exist. No single organisation provides an overview of performance for local people – a picture of performance must be pieced together from many different sources.
7. The national community safety best value performance indicators (BVPIs) now cover both councils and the police, but the indicators still focus on crime reduction rather than broader issues. There is, inevitably, a tension between national crime reduction targets and local issues of community safety. Partnerships that follow the national focus alone will fail to take account of local issues and will not serve local people well.
8. In terms of offences measured at partnership level, comparing performance between ‘family’ members (partnerships with similar local circumstances) shows that between 2000 and 2001 the number of robberies rose in two-thirds (65 per cent) of partnerships compared to the family average. However, the number of burglaries and car crimes fell in 72 per cent of partnerships compared to the family average.
9. In 1999 and 2000 external auditors found a mixed picture of performance. Many partnerships were characterised by high aspirations but weak delivery. There was an over-emphasis on bureaucracy and process, rather than a focus on outcomes, performance management and information sharing.
10. Audit Commission inspections of 23 councils found similar problems. Only 40 per cent of the councils inspected provided a good service (**EXHIBIT 2, overleaf**), but 61 per cent had promising or good prospects for improvement. The most frequent recommendations for improvement related to weaknesses in performance management, especially aims, plans and targets.

EXHIBIT 2 Audit Commission published inspection judgements

A mixed picture of current performance but promising prospects for improvement.



Source: Audit Commission – 23 inspections

11. HM Inspectorate of Constabulary's inspections of local police services produced similar findings. Inspectors observed varying levels of commitment among some local agencies, such as probation, social services, education and health services. There were tensions over the mix of local priorities, police service objectives and national targets. However, greater effectiveness was observed where senior agency personnel were directing and leading the work of the partnership.
12. Emerging fieldwork findings suggest a set of factors that are common to successful delivery in this area (**BOX A**):

BOX A Factors common to successful delivery

- A clear and specific focus that responds to public concerns.
- Competent leadership and ownership of the responsibility to deliver.
- A balance between national targets and local issues.
- Clear accountability, challenging targets and regular progress monitoring.
- Effective communication with all stakeholders.

Source: Audit Commission project fieldwork

13. Some smaller district and unitary councils demonstrated strong delivery. The evidence suggests that smaller district councils have risen to the challenge with relatively little support, as they do not have the time or resources to prevaricate. Unitary authorities are less hampered by historical constraints and so tend to adopt more innovative approaches.

DELIVERING IMPROVEMENTS

OWNERSHIP AND ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR

14. The biggest barrier to delivering better community safety is organisational values and culture in councils, police and other local partnership agencies. This barrier is surmountable where there is ownership of community safety and a clear willingness to change:
- councillors and police authority members must take responsibility for community safety, create a local focus, define aims and manage performance; and
 - senior council and police personnel are responsible for bringing leadership, co-ordination and commitment to the partnerships, as well as for supporting councillors and police authority members. They have a key role to play in building trust between partner agencies.

The extent to which local agencies work together is *the* key critical success factor.

15. The involvement of other agencies varies between partnerships. Health services, social services, probation and education services deliver significant benefits when they are fully involved, yet they are often not full participants. Criminal justice system representation is low, with patchy youth offending and drug action team involvement, particularly in district council areas. However, there is increasing involvement from fire services, new primary care trusts, victim support and groups representing vulnerable people, such as black and minority ethnic communities, older people, people at risk of domestic violence or homophobia.

A SUSTAINED FOCUS ON PRIORITIES

16. Community safety partnerships need to be clear about what they are setting out to achieve and why community safety is important to local people. The local vision and aims must balance competing priorities, and fit the local capacity to deliver:
- partnerships that cover areas with high levels of unemployment, poverty, social deprivation or crime may need to focus on tackling crime hotspots, on providing support to vulnerable people or on drawing in regeneration investment; and
 - partnerships in areas where crime is low but concern is disproportionately high may need to concentrate on managing communications in order to dispel concern.
17. Concern about crime is strongly affected by experience, deprivation levels and the environmental quality of people's neighbourhoods. People's concerns about disorder correlate to the actual risk of becoming a victim of household crime, such as burglary. However, concerns about violent crime are much higher than the risk of actually becoming a victim of crimes such as robbery or assault. Interestingly, where people live affects their level of concern:
- *in general*, people with the highest concerns about crime live mostly in rural areas of southern England (Hertfordshire, Lancashire, Suffolk, Surrey and Wiltshire) which have a generally lower risk of crime; and
 - *in general*, people with the lowest concerns about crime live mostly in urban, northern England and south Wales (Cleveland, Northumbria, Merseyside, South Wales, and West Midlands) which have a generally higher risk of crime.

18. To achieve a sustained focus on priorities, partnerships should map out a pathway toward achieving their vision. This will help to crystallise aims and shape action plans. Action plans and challenging targets should cover both preventative work (such as reducing pupil truancy or supporting families) and responsive work (such as targeting crime 'hot-spots'). Targets should cover all of the basic services that have a high impact on people's sense of safety, such as street lighting, building repairs and street cleaning.
19. Partnerships need to maintain an ongoing dialogue with local people. This is particularly important in the context of persisting public concern about crime. Improved public engagement should include:
 - consultation that targets hard-to-reach communities (black and minority ethnic communities, people vulnerable to homophobia or domestic violence), and that is co-ordinated both within and between partnership agencies;
 - involving young people in local decisions through the use of youth councils or parliaments;
 - dialogue with domestic violence and anti-homophobia groups in order to improve under-reporting of incidents;
 - engaging local people in discussion about neighbourhood issues through area-based services; and
 - having a clear and distinct partnership lead for communication with non-partnership organisations or individuals.

CAPACITY AND SYSTEMS FOR BASIC SERVICE DELIVERY

20. A major concern about community safety partnerships is poor performance management. A number of characteristics are common to some partnerships that have made progress in this area (**BOX B**).

BOX B Characteristics of a strong approach to managing performance

Some councils have a strong approach to managing performance

- The rationale for all community safety activity is clearly defined.
- Each action contributes directly to meeting one or more corporate aims.
- Each aim is cascaded down from the community safety strategy to the local agency best placed to lead action to achieve it.
- Progress against challenging performance targets is measured from an accepted baseline.
- The progress achieved is scrutinised regularly in order to understand the barriers and opportunities that affect the pace of delivery.
- The rationale for each activity is periodically reviewed in order to determine its continuing fitness for purpose.

Source: Audit Commission project fieldwork

21. Current national BVPIs tend to focus on a single service and on the efficiency of its processes. A broader suite of community safety BVPIs is needed and, within this, the Government should incorporate relevant aspects of health, education, transport and environmental policy.
22. Partnership agencies need to share funds, staff, information and experience. This will boost the mainstreaming of community safety implementation. Appropriately skilled and experienced staff are vital to successful implementation, and effective resource management. Clear financial plans are essential to the delivery of sustainable outcomes.
23. Additional government funding should be used to meet priorities by filling gaps in local spending plans so that local people gain a direct benefit. Local partner agencies need to change existing education, environment and health spending to reflect local community safety aims, such as better street patrols, cleaning and lighting or better support for vulnerable people. The Government needs to:
 - link additional funding to performance criteria that achieve more sustainable community safety outcomes (while allowing for partnerships to address local issues); and
 - encourage change in block grant allocations, such as environment, housing, education and health, to incorporate a community safety perspective.
24. Considerable experience exists in some partnerships, although few systematically analyse their actions to draw out the lessons that have been learned. A number of common factors affect whether community safety activities make a difference (**EXHIBIT 3**).

EXHIBIT 3 Factors affecting the success of community safety activities

Being clear about the task, researching the problem and tailoring solutions to fit the problem increase the chance of community safety action making a difference.

Factors enabling community safety activities to make a difference	Factors inhibiting community safety activities from making a difference
• Effective leadership and direction	• Ignoring issues beyond your control
• A clear focus on the issue	• Excluding key stakeholders
• A thorough analysis of the issue	• Ineffective planning, for example, omitting exit strategies
• Solutions tailored to fit the issue and local circumstances	• Misunderstanding available capacity or organisational capability
• Adequate capacity and resources to deliver	• Ineffective communications
• Effective communication and consultation with all affected people	• A focus on processes, not outcomes
• Flexibility and a willingness to experiment	• Ineffective project management
• Evaluation built in at the outset	• Searching for the 'perfect' solution
• Sustainability/maintenance built in at the outset	• A risk-averse culture

Source: Audit Commission project fieldwork

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

25. Where councils, police, health services, probation and other local agencies work together to deliver community safety, considerable benefits can be gained. If partnerships do not act now then they risk failing to deliver tangible improvements between now and 2005.
26. The public's demand for safer neighbourhoods sets a clear challenge to all local agencies, particularly the police and councils, to:
 - recognise and co-ordinate the essential contribution that non-police agencies can make to community safety;
 - provide leadership and take tough decisions about priorities (for example, whether to tackle crime reduction or concerns about crime first);
 - maintain a clear focus on what matters, with objectives, action plans and targets that flow from agreed priorities;
 - engage and communicate with local communities and other stakeholders;
 - manage performance effectively, pooling information to identify and analyse problems;
 - use resources efficiently and incorporate sound financial planning; and
 - learn from experience, seeking out examples of good practice.



If you want to know more: the full report, *AC Knowledge – Learning from Audit, Inspection and Research: Community Safety Partnerships* looks at all these issues in more detail and includes background information, case studies and specific guidance.

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