

MPA

Metropolitan Police Authority

Community Police Engagement in London

From the Bottom up: Empowering Local Residents

*Report of Metropolitan Police Authority
conference on 28th October 2006*



Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Foreword	3
Towards best practice: highlights and conclusions from the conference discussions	4
Community police engagement in London - the changing dynamics of policing in the 21st century <i>Cindy Butts</i>	14
Community engagement and Safer Neighbourhoods Panels <i>DAC Alf Hitchcock</i>	20
Reflections on Safer Neighbourhoods in one London borough: the Lambeth experience <i>John Roberts</i>	26
APPENDIX Conference programme	32

Acknowledgements

First a special thank you to MPA Members Jennette Arnold, Damian Hockney, John Roberts and Rachel Whittaker, who played such an important part in the success of the conference. Your presence and contributions were much appreciated and underlined the importance which the Authority attaches to community engagement in policing in London.

Thank you also to those members of the community who spoke to us from the platform: Chris Fagg from Camden, Ruth Ward from Enfield, Enid Ledgister and Fred Williams from Haringey, Elizabeth Beggs from Hillingdon and Sandra Flowers from Kingston.

Our special guests, DAC Alf Hitchcock from MPS, and Mark Liddle from Applied Research in Community Safety at Cambridge also deserve our thanks for their stimulating and scene-setting presentations.

And finally our thanks must go to all the MPA staff who organised and took part in the conference.

Cindy Butts

Deputy Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority and Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Citizen Focus Policing

Conference Chair

Photographs of the conference by
Peter Ward and Monica Roucou

Foreword

Policing these days is more complex and more demanding than it has ever been. As a society we expect our police officers to be ever more professional and ever more determined to combat the major threats such as terrorism. At the same time we complain (and rightly so) if they fail to deal with so-called 'minor' crime and disorder in our own neighbourhoods.

But we also expect the police to behave like citizens in uniform and to engage with us, the ordinary members of the public, on our terms. Indeed, there is general agreement that in the long term the success of the police depends on the cooperation they win from us, the community.

The key to this dilemma is the establishment and maintenance of constructive and challenging relationships between police and community. The borough community engagement groups have been around for 20 years in some cases, while the Safer Neighbourhood Panels are brand new.

Establishing appropriate and effective structures by which Londoners can help shape their policing requirements was at the heart of this Community Engagement Conference sponsored by the MPA held on 28 October 2006. Attended by more than 180 Londoners involved in borough based Community Engagement Groups and Safer Neighbourhood Panels the purpose of the conference was to share good practice and contribute to identifying areas for improvement.

Citizen Focus and Community Engagement are closely interlinked. So I

was pleased to see the Police emphasis on citizen focus being matched by the community's willingness to engage with the police. I am delighted to say that I came away from this conference greatly encouraged by the enthusiasm and commitment of groups both old and new.

There is much still to do, and many important lessons to be learnt from the exchange of views and experiences that took place during the day, but I am reassured that the formal structures for community police relationships are in rude health.

Like any report of a conference it is impossible to replicate all that was said, nor is it possible to adequately reflect the level of enthusiasm, knowledge and commitment demonstrated by all the panellists and participants. In presenting the key messages and emerging issues from the conference I hope this report will contribute to further discussion and the furtherance of good practice.

I can only conclude by thanking the MPA staff who worked behind the scenes to make this conference a success, and most particularly my thanks and congratulations to all the community and police members of the groups and Panels who are making such a success of police community engagement at the local level in London. Long may you continue!

Cindy Butts

Deputy Chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority and Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Citizen Focus Policing

Towards best practice: highlights and conclusions from the conference discussions



MPA member Damian Hockney chaired the afternoon session.

A strategic priority of the MPA is the transformation of community engagement at the local level. The establishment of a seamless process of effective community police engagement at the local level is a fundamental ingredient of a citizen focussed, community policing model. This interlinked process also reinforces the government's direction of travel in devolving decision making and strengthening local partnership working.

Each Safer Neighbourhoods (SN) team is required to undertake a range of community engagement activities. Establishing a Safer Neighbourhoods Panel is one of the principal means of engaging with communities. The Panels' role is to provide insight into the local community's crime and disorder concerns and decide the priorities for their local Safer Neighbourhoods teams to work on.

With the inevitable challenges posed by the rapid roll out of the 630 Safer Neighbourhood teams now established across London, the conference provided a timely opportunity for Londoners to discuss their experience and learning to ensure best practice is applied to the monitoring of the establishment and effective running of Safer Neighbourhoods Panels.

The MPA regards Safer Neighbourhoods community engagement activities as a vital and essential foundation to effective community policing in London. They

also provide a critical ingredient in the membership and representation of borough-based community engagement groups.

With 150 conference participants from the community (both community engagement groups - CEGs, and Safer Neighbourhoods Panels - SNPs), plus the police (borough and centre) and the police authority as well, lively debates were expected and indeed took place.

The participants took part in 12 workshops during the day, six in the morning and six in the afternoon. The following are some of the themes that emerged from these discussions.

1. Constitutions for Safer Neighbourhoods Panels (SNPs)

It was noted that there was no universal constitution or terms of reference for SNPs, although there were several models.

On the negative side constitutions were said to be:

- unnecessary;
- complicated, scary, and written in 'legalese';
- alienating prospective members, especially young people;
- a bureaucratic prescription; and
- yet another layer of unproductive bureaucracy.

On the positive side constitutions were said to be:

- easy to write using plain English and keeping them short; and

- necessary in case you wanted to eject inappropriate members or those whose behaviour was unacceptable.

Tower Hamlets reported that they use ground rules rather than a formal constitution so as to not put young people off. Another suggestion was to use the phrase terms of reference instead of constitution.

Conference conclusions: all Panels should have a constitution, or some other governing document, so that there is an established framework for governing a Panel's activities and its members' activities.

The MPS should develop minimum standards for this.

2. Chairing the Panels

There was universal agreement that all SNPs should have Chairs – the argument was about who should take on this role.

At the time of the conference just over half of Panels were chaired by community members, just under half by police officers.

Conference conclusions: all Panels should aim to have a member of the local community in the chair as early as possible, even if it is expedient to ask the police Sergeant to take this role in the start-up phase. It is not appropriate to have a borough councillor in the chair, because the Panel is there to promote grass roots influence over the activities of the Safer Neighbourhoods Team.

The MPS needs to clarify the position regarding Safer Neighbourhoods Panel

Chairs and disseminate this across London.

3. Safer Neighbourhoods Panels membership

Personal invitation was seen as the best way to boost attendance at meetings of both CEGs and SNPs.

Young people are alienated by formal structures, which means that Panels and CEGs alike need to go to them rather than expecting them to come to us.

It was pointed out that young people are not just disproportionately perpetrators of crime and anti-social behaviour, but also disproportionately victims of it.

Suggested ways round all these difficulties included:

- not regarding young people as an alien species;
- holding themed meetings as they do in Tower Hamlets;
- inviting youth participation for one item on the agenda and then letting them depart after a joint problem solving session;
- organising a Youth Safer Neighbourhood Panel, as they have done in Camden; and
- setting up an email discussion group as in Brixton.

As to older people, they were seen as being particularly important to engage because of their generally higher fear of crime. In Enfield the practice is to give them lifts to enable them to attend meetings.

While too often used in derogatory terms, the 'usual suspects' should be recruited to Safer Neighbourhoods Panels precisely because they are the committed, enthusiastic and involved people that Panels need. They are the usual suspects because they are concerned citizens. The challenge we all have is to ensure that we build upon this foundation.

Conference conclusions: Panels should be aware both of the difficulties in attracting young people to Panel meetings and of the measures that other community groups have found to be effective for engaging with young people. Proactive efforts need to be made to ensure that the Panel

membership is demographically representative of the local community.

To enhance the Panels' status as a legitimate community voice, members should be nominated or elected at public meetings/events to avoid any impression that the Panel has been imposed or selected by the police.

MPS needs to collate and disseminate good practice in engaging young people and to encourage all Panels to replicate such practices.

4. Safer Neighbourhoods Panel meetings

Some Panel meetings admit the public, either as observers or as participants, while some don't. Across London the



Workshop Discussion

majority practice appears to be to allow the public in for most meetings, with only a few Panels making their sessions closed affairs.

Conference conclusions: *open meetings are strongly to be encouraged, There must always be flexibility to have closed sessions, but only when the sensitivity or risk of a particular item of business justifies it.*

Panel processes must allow for not only public answerability in the sense that statutory partners provide clear answers to reasonable questions about practice and performance, but also that the Panel itself is accountable to the local public. There need to be effectively functioning arrangements in place for feedback or information flows to local residents.

The role of Panels, including their membership, meetings and outcomes must be a matter of public record.

In addition, for example, the issues and concerns identified by each Safer Neighbourhoods Panel should be fed into – and seen to be feeding into – the borough police intelligence and priority setting processes.

5. Administration

The provision of administrative or secretarial support for Panels was raised a number of times. There was general agreement that this role should not be expected of a volunteer, and a number of alternative options were discussed.

Conference conclusions: *Panels should*

make their own local arrangements for admin support, and Safer Neighbourhoods teams should provide a small budget for this purpose.

6. Local police/community structures

The overall view from the workshops was that both ward and borough level groups have their part to play.

The natural link for the SNPs seems to be the borough level community engagement group (CEG), not the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

The CEG/SNP link should be two way, with CEG members encouraged to attend their local SNP meetings, as well as vice versa. In practical terms this might mean clustering SNPs.

Conference conclusions: *borough level CEGs should be proactive in building links with SNPs in their area. The question of clustering Panels for CEG liaison purposes should be determined locally.*

7. The role of the borough council

The local council was recognised as having a key role to play in local community safety as the agency responsible for tackling some of the issues raised in SNPs such as graffiti or vandalism. They were also thought to be much more likely than the police to have the time and resources to enforce Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

Similarly it was felt that too much of what gets discussed at SNPs is not really police work.

On the other hand there was concern that councillors would use the SNP for political purposes.

Conference conclusions: *Panels should explore with their CEGs how best to hold the council to account for its community safety work.*

Local councillors should be expected to participate in Safer Neighbourhoods Panels for the purposes of sharing information, hearing community concerns and for being held accountable for local council performance.

Safer Neighbourhoods Panels should also take every opportunity to influence what happens at the borough level Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership. Their borough's community engagement group is the best channel for this.

8. The role of the police in the CEGs and SNPs

The role of the police in the CEGs is well established and did not give rise to concern at the conference.

The police role in relation to the Panels, as reported by conference participants, is both complex and evolving.

Conference conclusions: *the police, the local council, the borough level CEG and the Safer Neighbourhoods Panels have joint responsibility for ensuring effective community engagement in policing and community safety at the local level. Although this should be a partnership, not all the partners are equal and the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel should generally be*

seen as the local lead.

The Panel should be supported and regarded by the Safer Neighbourhoods team as a credible, independent community voice. Panels, rather than being solely dependent on the resources, guidance or approval of the Safer Neighbourhood Team, should have the freedom to take the initiative on their own including raising additional resources.

9. Communications

There was general agreement that communications were crucial to the success of the Panels and that they should make more imaginative use of the £1,500 budget available to each of them.

Conference conclusion: *communications are vital to the success of SNPs. The MPS should support Safer Neighbourhoods Panels and teams in sharing their experiences with one another so as to spread good practice.*

10. Training

Practically all participants, whatever their background, agreed on the need for training for SNP members, especially for their 'officers' (Chair, Vice Chair if applicable, Treasurer and perhaps Secretary).

The Safer Neighbourhoods Central Team at MPS are producing a toolkit and training package but it was understood that this focussed more on the needs of the police officers in the Safer Neighbourhoods team than on the community members of the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel.

Conference conclusion: *training for both CEG and SNP office holders is of great importance. Panel members need to be supported in obtaining the relevant skills and expertise to perform their role effectively. This includes orientation materials on the role of Panels, the wider community safety context, etc.*

11. Sharing experience and raising standards

With upwards of 600 Safer Neighbourhoods Panels in London, and considerable variety in their composition, roles and activities, participants agreed on the need for a mechanism to ensure consistently high standards across the capital.

Conference conclusions: *the preferred approach is to share good practice with one another, as opposed to an onerous external inspection regime. Area clustering of SNPs is also considered to be a good way to encourage the spread of good practice.*

The MPA is planning a newsletter for both Safer Neighbourhoods Panels and community engagement groups, and this will be a vehicle for the dissemination of good practice, as will the joint SNP and CEG conferences which MPA plans to hold annually.

12. Resources

One participant commented that there was plenty of money available for community safety related activities, so why couldn't his SNP have some of it?

In reply, one of the Borough Commanders present explained that there were a whole host of factors affecting the availability of police resources at local level, and that the participant should take this matter up with his local police.

Some religious premises are available for community purposes at low or zero cost. Local ethnic community groups might be able to help with translations, which can be very expensive, and councils might be able to process expenses claims on behalf of Panels.

Participants felt that there was a large reservoir of community goodwill towards the Safer Neighbourhoods initiative just waiting to be tapped into.

Conference conclusion: *Groups and Panels should be imaginative in seeking practical and financial help from local businesses and other private, public or community resources on hand in their locality.*

13. Priorities

Currently priorities for neighbourhood policing may be based on police concerns, community concerns or a mixture of the two. It may be territorial (for example focussing on one housing estate) or more personal – focussing on certain individuals.

DAC Alf Hitchcock reinforced the message that the Safer Neighbourhoods teams should be working to community priorities.

A participant from Haringey said that

their local priorities were:

- youth crime and disorder;
- vandalism and graffiti; and
- vehicle crime.

This list struck chords with participants from other parts of London.

Conference conclusions: the setting of priorities for local policing is the core business of Safer Neighbourhoods Panels.

The MPA will expect the role of Panels to be clear, consistent and widely disseminated. Their role is:

- *to assess local community safety concerns and establish priorities for policing in the Safer Neighbourhoods area;*
- *not only should Panels influence local police priorities and the actions to be taken, but also act as advocates calling not only the police but all statutory partners to account;*
- *the Safer Neighbourhoods team, and other local statutory partners need to recognise the independence and 'critical friend' remit of the Panels and see this as a useful resource for their own performance management; and*
- *rather than focussing on community intelligence for the purposes of reducing criminal activity, recognition needs to be given to utilising the unique and rich variety of experience and knowledge that Panel members can bring to*

the supportive, educational and preventive objectives of 'engineering crime out of society'.

14. Impact of the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel initiative

There were mixed views of the impact of the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel initiative. In some places there was a recognition that huge differences have been made and that situations have been turned round. Yet paradoxically, as DAC Hitchcock pointed out, crime was going down as fear of crime was going up – the 'reassurance gap.' It was suggested that there is a role here for Safer Neighbourhoods Panellists actively to reduce fear of crime by telling local residents about the work the Safer Neighbourhoods team is doing and the resulting improvements.

Some reported examples of positive impact:

- burglaries cut by two thirds in one hotspot;
- police have closed down crack houses;
- schools are demanding Safer Neighbourhoods team services as they are deemed so successful;
- "PCSOs are particularly good at youth diversion work";
- elders in particular find the PCSOs approachable; and
- the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel in the area covered by Notting Hill

Carnival provided an opportunity for local people, police, local councillors and other agencies to meet together and get changes put in place. Local residents now feel that they have access to information and have seen some action occur as a result.

Some reported examples of work still needing to be done:

- response times to 999 and SNT calls are still too long;
- too much of what gets discussed at SNPs is not really police work;
- successes of Safer Neighbourhoods not publicised enough;
- more clarity is needed over the formal memberships of the Panels;
- lack of continuity of SNT personnel;
- lack of involvement in SNPs by young people and working class people;
- Safer Neighbourhoods teams need to be open about the fact that they are not on call 24/7, in order to manage community expectations;
- SNPs currently have no influence on CDRP spend; and
- more should be done by SNPs to alleviate elderly people's fear of crime.

Conference conclusion: the Safer Neighbourhoods Panel initiative is proceeding at different speeds in different parts of London, and each neighbourhood has its own distinctive characteristics. That said, the initiative is proving its worth as an integral part

of community engagement in policing and community safety in the capital.

15. Results oriented evaluation

At various points during the conference discussion turned to evaluation.

There was general agreement that the Safer Neighbourhoods Panels have a distinctive and valuable role to play in community engagement with the police at the most local level. It was also recognised that the pace of development of Panels varied across London and that more work was needed, particularly in respect of the link between Safer Neighbourhoods Panels and community engagement groups. Both bodies stood to gain a great deal from closer working relationships, and needed to be encouraged to develop these.

At the same time it was apparent that there were few if any formal criteria in place for evaluating the new Panels. To some extent these would be the same as for the Safer Neighbourhoods teams (lower crime levels, increased reassurance for example), but work was needed on evaluation criteria for the community engagement aspects of their emerging role.

Conference conclusions: members of the community who give their time must be satisfied that their contribution has been worthwhile.

Appropriate criteria and performance indicators need to be developed and implemented on a regular basis to assess the results and impact of the work of Panels.

16. The way forward

The MPA will be holding a number of meetings with the MPS to discuss all the observations and recommendations contained within this report.

Community police engagement in London - the changing dynamic of policing in the 21st century

Cindy Butts



Cindy Butts

Over the last two years the borough based community engagement groups have been going through an important and sometimes difficult process of reform.

They have:

- involved themselves with the borough Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in holding all local statutory partners and not just the Borough Commander to account on behalf of community members;
- engaged in serious and sustained efforts to ensure that their membership fully reflects the communities of the borough. And they are developing a much broader array of approaches than simply bi-monthly meetings in reaching out to all sectors of the community; and
- in a development that will have great impact on the future of community police engagement groups, the roll-out of the Safer Neighbourhoods teams in every neighbourhood across London is now complete. The establishment of Safer Neighbourhoods Panels in each of the 630 Safer Neighbourhoods is beginning to take root.

A key theme of the new Police and Criminal Justice Act is that strong local partnerships are crucial to the safety and well-being of communities.

Underpinning this new legislation is a drive to greater local community accountability and community

power and influence. Engaging and empowering local people is seen as the centrepiece of police reform.

The development of the Safer Neighbourhoods initiative has drawn heavily from the experience of the Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS). And as Philip Clive, the Chief of the Chicago Police Department has written:

“When thinking about community policing it is helpful to imagine a triangle. The community makes up the base of the triangle; the police and municipal agencies make up the remaining sides. The community is not on the bottom because it is the least important element, but because it is the most important. Without a strong base, the triangle collapses.”

So community members have a vitally important role to play. Community members are at the very forefront of this new approach to policing, to tackling local crime and disorder.

And rather than denigrate this vital role as simply the ‘usual suspects’, we need to recognise the huge amount of time and effort that such citizens see as their civic responsibilities. We need to recognise that these people are rare, highly committed, and in need of cherishing.

So what is community engagement?

First let me suggest what it is not:

- it is *not* a discrete, separate programme of activity;
- it is *not* something that can be left

only to Safer Neighbourhoods teams themselves;

- it is *not* a public relations exercise;
- it is *not* community relations programmes; and
- it is *not* an institutionally managed consultative tick box exercise.

Throughout its history, policing in London has by and large been centred on the concept of consensus policing - policing by consent within a community context.

Sir Robert Peel's principles, when he formed the London Metropolitan Police in 1829, overtly emphasised the need for good relationships with the public.

But it was not until 1984, after the Brixton riots and Lord Scarman's report, that dialogue with the community became mandatory. It was a stark reminder that the police had become too far removed from the communities they policed.

As many of you know, it was in the 1980s that most of the borough based community police engagement groups represented here were first established. You have an enviable record.

The evolution of policy and practice over the last twenty years has perhaps brought us full circle back to Robert Peel and what we mean by the concept that "the police are the public and the public are the police."

It has been a process of revisiting what Peel meant by the "approval and cooperation of the public". It has in

fact been a process of moving beyond Robert Peel and the traditional notion of policing by consent.

Community engagement today is a more pro-active, dynamic and accountable process of cooperation and collaboration between the police and citizens in the delivery of policing.

Community police engagement today therefore is no longer merely a reactive activity of gaining community support and consent. It is being redefined as a proactive role.

Community police engagement seeks to harness the energies of local communities in identifying problems and holding the police to account.

It also seeks to negotiate and influence the priorities for action, participating in and shaping solutions.

Community engagement therefore requires a much fuller, clearer and robust spectrum of community participation in policing - from basic information provision and consultation, through to increasingly intense participatory levels, to actual community partnership and collaboration in policing decision - making.

In pursuing this citizen focused agenda, we want to ensure that the community's crime and safety priorities - to reduce anti social behaviour, to reduce the fear of crime, to increase the sense of security - are indeed the police's priorities.

We really are going through a major paradigm shift in the way policing is being carried out. The emphasis on

citizen focus, on social cohesion, on community engagement is central to this shift.

These concepts must be understood and made to be compatible with core policing business. It makes for more effective policing and it can directly impact on the level of trust and confidence in our police.

Responding to diversity

Any strategy of engagement must recognise and address the implications of the incredible diversity of London, particularly where we know that the initial reaction to the police in different communities will sometimes be one of suspicion and hostility.

Communities experience wide differences in the levels and impact of crime according to disability, race and ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation, gender, lifestyles and life chances.

Not just local but across the organisation

Community engagement, I suggest, is not just a local activity but needs to be pursued at all levels of the MPS. And they should be interconnected.

For example, Safer Neighbourhoods Panels should be linked up with borough based engagement groups, who in turn should be linked up with the borough Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Appropriate mechanisms need to be developed for these to feed into the central, policy and strategic levels.

At the strategic level, let me mention the MPA itself. Established only since 2000, for the first time it has given Londoners a proper, accountable governance framework for policing in London. After 175 years, the Met became directly, democratically accountable to the people it serves.

So the very establishment of the MPA and its governance and oversight responsibilities might be said to reflect the most formal dimension of community engagement.

Responding to terrorism

As you know, the MPA is currently supporting the Met's work in this area by delivering a programme of community engagement to counter-terrorism. One aspect of this is local consultation in all 32 boroughs.

I would like to congratulate all the borough based community police engagement groups for taking up the invitation to facilitate these important discussions.

The MPA has a role to play in sustaining and widening informed debate on how society should respond to the terrorist threat. The MPA will continue to foster public discussion and a sense of public ownership of the problems, and their solutions.

In doing this we hope to increase the likelihood of generating future community intelligence, build social capital - and therefore resilience - in London, and reduce the likelihood of future terrorist attack.

Democratising policing

This initiative is a good example of encouraging greater public involvement and ownership of policing issues.

The joint MPA/MPS Community Engagement Strategy adopted by the MPA full Authority in September 2006 in many ways symbolises the formal commitment to reverse the trend of the last 175 years which has seen a steady shift of responsibility for public safety away from the community.

The evolution of a professional, managerial, technocratic police service has in many ways hampered democratic ownership. Policing in our society, more so in London than anywhere else, had become the exclusive preserve of the police.

We are now reversing this trend. We are re-establishing the recognition that the police grow out of communities - of the citizen in uniform - and Robert Peel's original notion of the "police are the public, and the public are the police".

So what will successful community engagement look like?

May I suggest that successful community police engagement requires two things:

- community members who are informed, willing and able to get involved; and
- a police service willing and able to involve and be influenced by the viewpoints of its communities (talking in general, not London specific here).

And equal attention needs to be given to both these dimensions – community engagement and citizen focused policing.

Linked to these two dimensions, may I suggest that there are two types of beneficial outcomes - those that bring improved decision-making within the Met Police and secondly, those that bring an increased sense of trust, confidence and of ownership by Londoners over its police service.

In terms of decision –making, successful community engagement will:

- improve policies and services, in that local people and service users bring a different perspective to problems and first hand knowledge to policy and service issues;
- allow policy and service decisions to be made that better reflect the perceived needs and demands of users and citizens;
- increase the openness, transparency and accountability of the police to the public; and
- help to avoid wrong or unpopular decisions being made which in turn can provide savings in time and money.

With respect to the public, successful community engagement will:

- build community trust, knowledge, and ownership and reduce the 'us and them' mentality;
- encourage more active citizenship by encouraging people, by taking part in the decision-making process,

to develop the skills and interest in becoming more active in their communities;

- strengthen inclusiveness by opening up decision-making to all parts of the community; and
- enhance the sense that democracy is something that everyone has a stake in and takes part in.

In moving from the traditional notion of policing by consent to the principle of policing through cooperation and collaboration, the MPA is particularly concerned with pursuing and strengthening this partnership process.

Community engagement and Safer Neighbourhoods Panels

Deputy Assistant Commissioner Alf Hitchcock



*Deputy Assistant
Commissioner Alf Hitchcock*

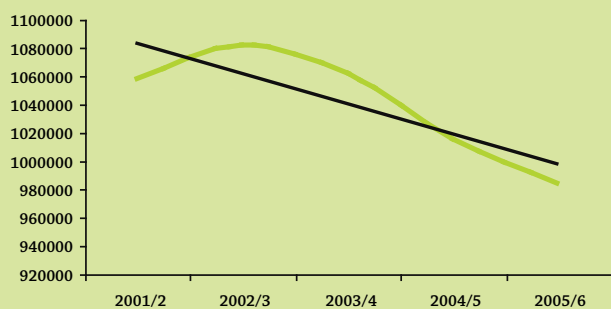
I would like to provide an overview of the role that Safer Neighbourhoods Panels have in engaging local communities, how they are currently working in London and insights into issues that we need to address - together.

But before moving to look at Neighbourhood Panels, it is important to get a sense of the background to their development and, in particular, an understanding of how and why they form such an important part of the Safer Neighbourhoods programme.

Background

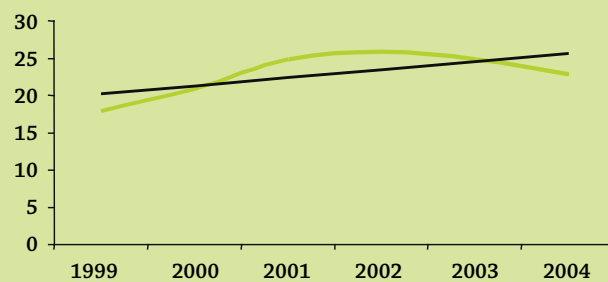
Over last few years, crime has been consistently falling and, by any standard this represents a success for policing in the capital.

Metropolitan Police: Total Notifiable Offences (2001 – 2006)



But whilst crime has been falling, dissatisfaction with policing has also been rising – and this has been accompanied by similar rises in the fear of crime and concern about anti-social behaviour.

MPS – Trends in Dissatisfaction with Policing (1999 -2005)



The reassurance gap

This has led to a phenomenon known as the ‘Reassurance Gap’. Research has identified that part of the reason for this gap is that the unremitting focus on crime targets has led to a lack of focus on the issues that are priorities for local people living in neighbourhoods across London.

Safer Neighbourhoods represents the determination of the Metropolitan Police to not just reduce crime (because that remains a fundamental requirement of policing) but to identify and tackle the crime and disorder issues that are important to local people.

Recorded volume crime down



Fear of crime up & sense of insecurity increased

Safer Neighbourhoods: a vision for London

The programme is based upon establishing 630 teams across London that must operate in a way that makes them visible, accessible, familiar, and answerable to local people. It entails:

- increased police resources to provide dedicated teams for every ward; and
- increased resources in 'support' areas.

Each team comprises:

- 1 police Sergeant (Team Manager);
- 2 police Constables; and
- 3 Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Each team uses the '7 stage model' (as below) to police their neighbourhood.

The 7 stage model is the business model that Safer Neighbourhoods teams must adopt in order to deliver an excellent service for local people. It is a product of years of research under the National Reassurance Policing Programme which involved 16 wards across the country – four of which were in London (Enfield, Bexley, Kensington & Chelsea and Merton).

Characteristics of Neighbourhoods Panels

Safer Neighbourhoods Panels should be:

- small (10-12) but representative of the local community;
- chaired by a member of the local community;
- include community, police and partners;

- consider information about community issues and underlying problems;
- establish 3-5 local priorities;
- monitor and review the work done to tackle these priorities;
- meet every 4-6 weeks to ensure that they track activity properly; and
- involve local councillors as observers and there should be opportunities for them to pass on their views and to be involved. However they should not act as panel members or chairs – to avoid Panels getting overly-politicised.

There are central SNT guidelines and standard terms of reference for teams to refer to when setting up Safer Neighbourhoods Panels. The police Constables, PCSO's, Sergeants and Inspectors receive formal training during their Safer Neighbourhoods training course. The guidelines are issued to those attending as handouts for future reference. A suggested Panel constitution has been distributed and is available for reference on the recently created CD ROM – Guide to Delivering Safer Neighbourhoods.

There have been a small number of people excluded from panels across London by the panel members, within their constitutions. These exclusions have been the result of inappropriate remarks or behaviour within the meetings.

Several boroughs have formed youth

panels (Camden being particularly advanced). These forums have been formed to enable the young people to have a voice in Safer Neighbourhoods. Traditionally it has been difficult to involve young people within adult ward panels. Bromley has started a business Safer Neighbourhoods Panel as they have a large business community within their town centre. This is in addition to the ward panel that is in existence for that Safer Neighbourhoods area. It is important that the youth panels and other specialist panels are linked together to ensure information sharing and sharing of ideas takes place.

As of this date [October 2006], there are:

- 630 Safer Neighbourhoods teams;
- 493 Neighbourhoods Panels;
- 283 chaired by community member;
- 210 chaired by police;

- 15 boroughs have linked Panels to a borough-level structure; and
- 8 boroughs also have intermediate (i.e. sector) structures.

Current issues:

Some areas in London have experienced difficulty in attracting panelists and in ensuring that Panels are able to adequately reflect the communities they serve. In some areas there have been difficulties in transforming existing residential and community groups into panels that genuinely reflect the geographic and demographic makeup of the neighbourhood.

There is currently no formalised central training provided for panellists. Some Borough Operational Command Units (BOCUs) have provided bespoke training for Panel Chairs. Team sergeants are able to explain to prospective panellists what is involved and the terms of reference



Workshop Discussion

for ward panels as a result of the training provided to them.

Constitutions: As with many community groups some members will request a formal arrangement, while others will prefer a less structured approach. However, experience is starting to suggest that a written constitution enables panels to avoid many difficulties further down the line. This need not be bureaucratic and a sample constitution (from Enfield) is available as a guide.

Our experience is that the development of effective Neighbourhoods Panels is, quite simply, not easy and requires considerable skill and determination on the part of all involved. This remains a challenging area for Safer Neighbourhoods teams. Panels are at different stages in development and experience suggests that they can take a significant time to develop properly. There is a variable understanding of the purpose and function of panels amongst Safer Neighbourhoods officers themselves and this is often reflected in differing expectations amongst panel chairs and panel members. Support for Safer Neighbourhoods teams in this area of business is a priority and forms a substantial part of their training and has been part of the quarterly briefings that all Sergeants attend.

Panels are a significant and powerful consultation mechanism and whilst we require Safer Neighbourhood teams to ensure that ward panels are developed, we also recognise that they are being created in an environment in which local government and others have already

undertaken significant work to engage with local communities. Integrating these different systems is complex and very much dependant on local factors.

Advisory visits by our central team have also highlighted the importance of Neighbourhoods Panels being able to integrate into borough structures that can assist with tackling cross-border issues and strategic themes that affect the whole borough. This suggests that work to develop borough based structures to coordinate and support work by Panels will become increasingly important.

I am raising these issues here, in this forum, because they cannot and should not be resolved or taken forward by the police in isolation. They need to be resolved in partnership with the members of the community, who are at the heart of the reason why Safer Neighbourhoods exists.

Reflections on Safer Neighbourhoods in one London borough: the Lambeth experience

John Roberts



John Roberts, MPA Member

The MPA hosted an event for community members and other participants in Lambeth Safer Neighbourhoods in July 2006. The following highlights are largely drawn from that discussion.

Impact of Safer Neighbourhoods

There was general agreement among community residents that Lambeth IS much safer and FEELS much safer since the advent of Safer Neighbourhoods teams in the borough.

Participants felt their involvement in Safer Neighbourhoods Panels was worthwhile as evidenced by the impact they have had dealing with such issues as:

- stopping motor scooter riding on pavement;
- reducing burglary;
- dispersing drunks around Stockwell tube station;
- displacing prostitution and drug dealing; and
- anti-social behaviour.

Relationships with the police

Perceptions of the local police have changed significantly. They used to be seen as distant and selective about what they would do. The Safer Neighbourhoods teams by contrast are much more involved and now there is always someone there when you need to pass information on to the police.

Participants spoke of a good relationship between community

and police, and the opportunities Safer Neighbourhoods provides for community members to get to know police officers personally. This 'personal connection' is especially valued by community members. They praised the way the police keep in touch with them.

The Role of the Panels

The Panels are there to influence police priorities locally, and to act as advocates calling not only the police but all local statutory partners to account, including local councillors; thus Panels also have a scrutinising function.

Panellists welcomed the absence of politicking at their meetings.

Setting priorities

Priority setting for local police action was a major reason for getting involved in Safer Neighbourhood Panels. One participant spoke of "a sense of pride in being able to feed back the priorities of the neighbourhood." The new found ability for community and police to share their agendas was especially welcome.

In terms of the priorities themselves, participants commented that most ward panels seemed to have reached a rapid agreement on priorities: "The issues affecting local people just seem to announce themselves, and there is a natural consensus about them." This was felt to reflect how cohesive communities were, that people tended to have the same concerns and also that they recognised that not all their priorities could be acted on straightaway.

Processes and structures

All participants would like to have some basic orientation and instruction, for example on successfully chairing a meeting and taking minutes etc. A particular need for trained minute takers was expressed.

The times of meetings should be rotated to enable a wider group of people to attend. One Panel for example alternates meetings between daytime and evenings.

The processes and structures of community engagement at the local level need to be clarified. For example, participants at the event were not clear whether they had been invited as representatives of a Key Individual Network (KIN), of a ward panel or simply from a community meeting.

Panels need to be empowered to become effective. They need cash to do things like newsletters.

Participants were informed that they were allowed to raise their own money from sponsors, but should also talk to the borough police for possible support.

Attendance levels

Attendance at meetings varied enormously. One factor affecting turnout was whether people had individual issues they wanted addressing, as opposed to coming along out of a generalised sense of community. What incentive was there for continuing to attend after one's issue had been addressed?

A related issue is knowledge of the Panels. How can local people participate?

Word of mouth was claimed as the main way for people to find out about Safer Neighbourhoods.

Panel composition

How representative are the Panels? (NB: The charge of not being representative has dogged several CPCGs across London.) The role of the police in achieving a representative Panel was acknowledged, as was the importance of word of mouth and a build-up over time as local residents get to know their Safer Neighbourhoods team.

Participants were concerned about attracting suitable people for the Panel, i.e. those that are well informed and representative of their community. There was some feeling that those who attend at the moment are "those with more time on their hands." As against this image of people with nothing better to do, all participants at the event stated that they were involved in a range of other Lambeth community activities as well.

There was broad agreement that Panel members are not representative of the demographics of Lambeth in terms of age, race etc. and that the diversity of the community is not being addressed.

In particular there were not enough young people on Panels despite being major stakeholders in crime and community safety (both as victims and as perpetrators).

There was also concern that panels would not be able to recognise and involve new ethnic minority groups.

Panels should work with the council on this issue.

Are local councillors members on Panels ex officio? One Panel's attitude was: "we allow them to come!"

Boundary issues

The public don't know (and probably don't care) where the ward boundaries are or which ward they live in. Neither do criminals. Some crimes will be common across these ward boundaries in a locality, and some criminals will commit crime away from where they live in an adjacent ward.

There is also a risk of Safer Neighbourhoods activity in one ward displacing criminal and anti-social behaviour to another.

Communications

Good communication – between different Safer Neighbourhoods teams and the ward panels – is of great importance, not least for tackling the problem of displacement.

A number of participants wanted to know how they as individual panellists should communicate news, especially the good news, about Safer Neighbourhoods. While communication at the individual level was not really discussed, there was consensus about communication by Panels:

- residents need information on what is going on in their ward, where the ward boundaries are, and how they can participate in their local Panel;



Workshop Discussion

- use of the council's newspaper – Lambeth Life – was recommended;
- the South London Press was generally not felt to be supportive of police activities and was not recommended as a vehicle;
- existing community groups should be used to disseminate messages to the wider community;
- those present had received some literature through their door on local policing, and newsletters generally were recommended; and
- one Neighbourhood Watch coordinator is using his website to publicise what CPCG and Safer Neighbourhoods teams are doing, updated every quarter. It also gives details of what crimes are occurring street by street – and people value this

Participants felt that the council should be involved in Safer Neighbourhoods to provide publicity and other support – the Panellists themselves having enough (or too many) other responsibilities.

The Borough Commander urged participants to be patient with the council (as well as with the police) while they too adjusted to having 21 wards making demands on them simultaneously.

John Roberts

John Roberts is an MPA Member and 'Link' Member for Lambeth

The role of Lambeth Council

It was acknowledged on all sides that the local council is a key player in Safer Neighbourhoods and the hope was expressed that the Panels will hold the council as well as the police to account. The presence at meetings of council officers able to answer queries and deal with issues was helpful.

Lambeth's Lead Member for Community Safety (Cllr Mark Bennett) was at the event and promised full cooperation from the council. Councillors will be accountable to the Panels, and will listen, secure action and report back.

Appendix

METROPOLITAN POLICE AUTHORITY COMMUNITY - POLICE ENGAGEMENT CONFERENCE

**“From the Bottom up:
Empowering Local Residents”**

When

Saturday 28th 2006 October from 9:30 – 4pm

Where

The Institute of Mechanical Engineers, 1 Birdcage Walk, Westminster. London, SW1H 9JJ

Purpose

The Purpose of the conference is to bring together Londoners who are engaging with the police:

- To recognise, support and strengthen their effectiveness at the neighbourhood and borough level
- To strengthen the linkage between the neighbourhood and borough level and with all local statutory partners concerned with community safety.

The conference will be an opportunity to network and share experiences, to learn from best practice across London, and to identify gaps and areas for improvement.

Participants to Include

A maximum audience of 200 representing:

- Borough Based Community Engagement Groups (CPCG, CSB, etc)
- Safer Neighbourhood (Safer Neighbourhood Panels, etc)

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

09.30 – 10.00	Registration & Refreshments	
10.00 – 10.15	Welcome Address	Cindy Butts, Deputy Chair, Metropolitan Police Authority
10:15 – 10:45	Panel Presentation 1	Safer Neighbourhoods: Chair: John Roberts Member MPA Panelist: DAC Alfred Hitchcock Chris Fagg, Chair Camden SNP Ruth Ward, Chair Enfield SNP
10.45 – 12.00	Discussion group 1	(Tea and coffee available)
12.00 – 1.00	Lunch	
1:00 – 2:00	Panel Presentation 2	Borough Based Community Engagement: Responding to the Changing Landscape. Chair: Damian Hockney Panelist: Mark Liddle ARCs Enid Ledgister Haringey CEG Fred Williams Haringey CEG Elizabeth Beggs Hillingdon CEG Sandra Flowers Kingston CEG
2.00 – 3.15	Discussion group 2	(Tea and Coffee available)
3.15 – 4.00	Concluding Plenary	Damian Hockney, Member of the GLA and Metropolitan Police Authority.

Further copies

This report is available in other languages, large print, audiotape or Braille on request. If you would like additional copies of this report, they can be obtained by contacting the:

**Community Engagement Unit
Metropolitan Police Authority
10 Dean Farrar Street
London SW1H 0NY**

Tel: 020 7202 0202