

editorial

crime prevention

Looking back on the past 50 years we cannot escape the fact that the considerable investments that have been made in criminal justice during the post war period have failed to reduce crime. Consequently, as **Adam Crawford** points out in a book reviewed in this issue of CJM, to many people 'crime prevention and community safety represent the new panacea for the ills of the criminal justice system'. In particular, this year's Crime and Disorder Act puts the subject of crime prevention at the top of the criminal justice agenda.

In the first of our two articles which set this issue of CJM in context, **Adam Crawford** provides a critical overview of what he sees as the progressive potential and possible shortcomings of the Act and questions whether crime is the best vehicle around which to foster open and tolerant societies. Remaining on this theme, **Tim Hope** suggests that whereas the stated aims of the Act are to advance the solidarity project of the Labour Government, the Act's constituent parts do not add up to this. He warns of the danger that the remedy for preventing crime will come to be seen as being embodied in the letter and spirit of the Act, rather than in a broader range of policies to tackle the social and economic inequities associated with crime.

One outcome of the Government's recent comprehensive spending review, as **John Thompson** informs us, was to define the strategic direction of the entire criminal justice system as being 'to reduce crime and fear of crime and their social and economic costs'. Whether this equates to community safety and precisely what the role of prevention is in all of this remains contested. One of the key issues which the Crime and Disorder Act seeks to settle is the question of who should be responsible for crime prevention. **John Croft** is avowedly sceptical about the capacity of local agencies to deliver the effective and integrated strategy envisaged in the legislation and its accompanying guidance. For **Jon Bright** it is imperative that central government itself engages in 'joined up thinking' between departments around crime prevention; this, it is to be hoped, will lead to the same kind of thinking at local level. **John Blackmore** considers the role that ordinary members of the public can play in their role as consultees in the crime and disorder strategy process. In their interview with **Ian Loader, George Kelling** and **Catherine Coles** affirm their belief in the central role the police should continue to take in the fight against both disorder and more serious crime. It is all very well, they argue, for political ideologies to maintain that crime is borne out of poverty and social injustice, or out of the condition of welfare dependency,

but there is no escaping the fact that something needs to be done here and now to prevent those who already experience the most crime from suffering further.

Inherent within the Crime and Disorder Act is the view held by the Government that crime prevention should and will pay for itself, that the costs incurred in developing service delivery informed by crime preventive considerations will be outweighed by the savings made by reducing crime. For this reason, as **Laura Hawksworth** reminds us, no extra resources have been made available to the new crime and disorder partnerships at the local level. The question of resources raises particular issues for rural areas argue **Harriet Pierpoint** and **Daniel Gilling**. Such areas are more likely to have spatially dispersed patterns of crime than urban areas: are less likely to have co-terminous boundaries and are less able to access regional funding sources, making the business of devising strategies to reduce crime more difficult than in urban areas.

The Crime and Disorder Act and the Crime Reduction Strategy for which the Government is making available £250 million over the next three years, provide the opportunity to implement some successful strategies and to test out some new ways of tackling crime. In recent years there have been increasing efforts to seek answers to the question 'what works' to reduce crime? For a while, 'nothing works' seemed to be the order of the day. A new Home Office research study rejects this claim and presents a long list of tried and tested interventions (some outside and some within, the criminal justice system) which have been shown to be effective in reducing crime. We provide a summary of this report on page 18 of this issue. In addition, other initiatives, which operate outside of this structure are also being implemented. We feature an interview with **Barry Anderson**, Chief Executive of 'Communities that Care', who sets out the aims, working methods and anticipated outcomes of this significant new 'crime prevention' initiative in the UK. On the technological front CCTV has rapidly become the tool that few local crime prevention partnerships seem to want to be without. Despite its popularity, **Clive Norris** and **Gary Armstrong** voice some concerns about its use, which are not so much about whether its presence does or does not contribute to the reduction of crime, but about the way in which it is used to target particular groups of the population - often, on the evidence of their research, for 'no obvious reason'. Indeed, according to **Hazel Croall**, the focus of the Crime and Disorder Act is on the 'usual suspects'. In her article she turns our attention towards the range of 'white-collar crimes' that are less visible (to the gaze of CCTV cameras for example) but which also impact upon the same people and places as those crimes that the new Act seeks to regulate, and about which the public and politicians seem to be most concerned.

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