

The Comprehensive Spending Review was in some regards a typical Whitehall exercise. To the external world for many months all was very quiet and nothing seemed to be happening. But within and between Government Departments the pace was amazing as Government programmes (many of them sacred cows) were rigorously scrutinised from first principles.

From crime prevention to crime reduction

John Thompson, Head of the Crime Prevention Agency in the Home Office, outlines the Government's strategy for reducing crime.

Ambitious thinking

There is a foul canard that most work of that sort leads to business as usual. That was not the case for crime reduction. First there was the statement of the strategic direction of the entire criminal justice system. It is to have two overarching aims and the first of these is "to reduce crime and the fear of crime, and their social and economic costs". Second there will be a substantial investment - a quarter of a billion pounds over the next 3 years - in a crime reduction strategy. This latter will be evidence driven. We will be investing in what has been demonstrated to be cost effective. And investing in the promising approaches to find out whether they can deliver. All the time we will be evaluating. This is ambitious stuff. We know of nowhere else in the world where it has been tried on this scale.

The work will go far beyond the Home Office. There is much that can be done within the criminal justice system - techniques and strategies for the police that we know can be effective, work with

offenders to reduce re-offending, sentencing policies - but the levers on the causes of crime are in other departments' programmes. These include health, social services, transport, employment, education, and even trade and industry. Our role in the Crime Prevention Agency will be to pull the programme together and make sure that the evaluation is rigorous and the lessons disseminated.

Learning lessons

That fits well with the rest of our work, which has a common theme of partnership. Our task is crime reduction - of which crime prevention is a subset. We are after community safety as a reality not just a euphemism. The Crime and Disorder Act has created statutory partnerships throughout the country so that all those who can tackle local crime and disorder issues, do so systematically and publicly. There is nothing novel in the concept - it is a truism that the only really effective way to tackle crime is through partnerships. But that does not make the process any easier. And there is a difference in kind between a voluntary partnership and one based on statute. Now the Act is on the statute book our role is to help the partnerships function effectively. We will not be prescriptive. Local problems need local identification, ownership and solution. But we can help, whether through our guidance (which we will keep up to speed) or the pathfinder partnerships. We have established a small taskforce - two police officers and a community safety officer - to work with 12 partnerships to learn the lessons and pass them on.

Nor is it going to happen without training. The Crime Prevention College (which is part of the Crime Prevention Agency) has done much already but we need to work with the local government agencies and with national police training to identify how best the training need can be met.

Special initiatives

The world does not stand still while we plan for the future. The Minister, Alun Michael, has identified several areas where we need special initiatives to make an impact on crime now. He has set up a battery of 'taskforces'. There is the Youth Action Task Force which he chairs, and which will involve

DfEE Ministers and many others. He is determined that we should not just see youths as offenders. They must be seen as part of the solution. And of course they are 37 times more likely to be victims than elderly people.

Retail crime cannot be regarded as victimless. Working with the retail sector and including groups like Crime Concern we want to tackle the opportunities, causes, and profits of retail crime. As for vehicles, the UK is in the unenviable position of topping the international league tables on vehicle crime by a mile. That this is in large part a result of how we do the counting, does not disguise the fact that we have a problem. ACPO and the Vehicle Crime Prevention Group produced a 14 point action plan to tackle this. All the key players have much to do. Tackling crime at the design stage, whether it be of estates, car parks or televisions, is another theme. This is primary prevention which we are determined to pursue.

The crucial point about these initiatives is that it is not the Home Office or even central government that can act alone and produce results. We rely on partners across public/private sector, central/local government, departmental and all other borders. The voluntary sector are players in their own right. We need to adopt the partnership approach that we advocate for others. We shall. But partnerships are not easy.

CRIME PREVENTION ON THE NET

Crime Prevention Agency
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/cpa.htm>

Police Research Group
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/prghome.htm>

Home Office Research and Statistics Directorate
<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rsd/rsdhome.htm>

International Centre for the Prevention of Crime
<http://www.crime-prevention-intl.org/>

US National Criminal Justice Reference Service
<http://www.ncjrs.org/cpwww.htm>