

Crime prevention in rural areas

Harriet Pierpoint and Daniel Gilling question the transferability of urban models to rural settings.

For those pushing for crime prevention to be taken more seriously, and to be moved from the criminal justice margins to the mainstream, the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act is very good news indeed. It places a statutory obligation upon local partnerships, principally the police and district local authorities, to research local crime problems, consult, co-ordinate, implement and evaluate crime reduction strategies. However, inevitably with such a hasty piece of legislation, the good news must be tempered by various concerns. The concern we explore here is one regarding the applicability of the model and

methodology of crime prevention envisaged in the Crime and Disorder Act to rural areas.¹

We know that crime tends to be of greatest concern in urban areas, where it is typically more concentrated, in extent and impact. However, we also know that crime is rising in rural areas at a more accelerated rate than urban areas (Home Office 1994), that the drug problem is especially acute in some rural areas, and that the isolated circumstances of rural living may exacerbate the impact of crime on victims in rural areas (Anderson 1997), while rural statutory services, especially in such areas as policing, youth and social services, are chronically underfunded. Such information lends support to the Labour Government's move to establish a national framework for crime prevention, but the problem is that this framework has been devised on the basis of a largely urban experience.

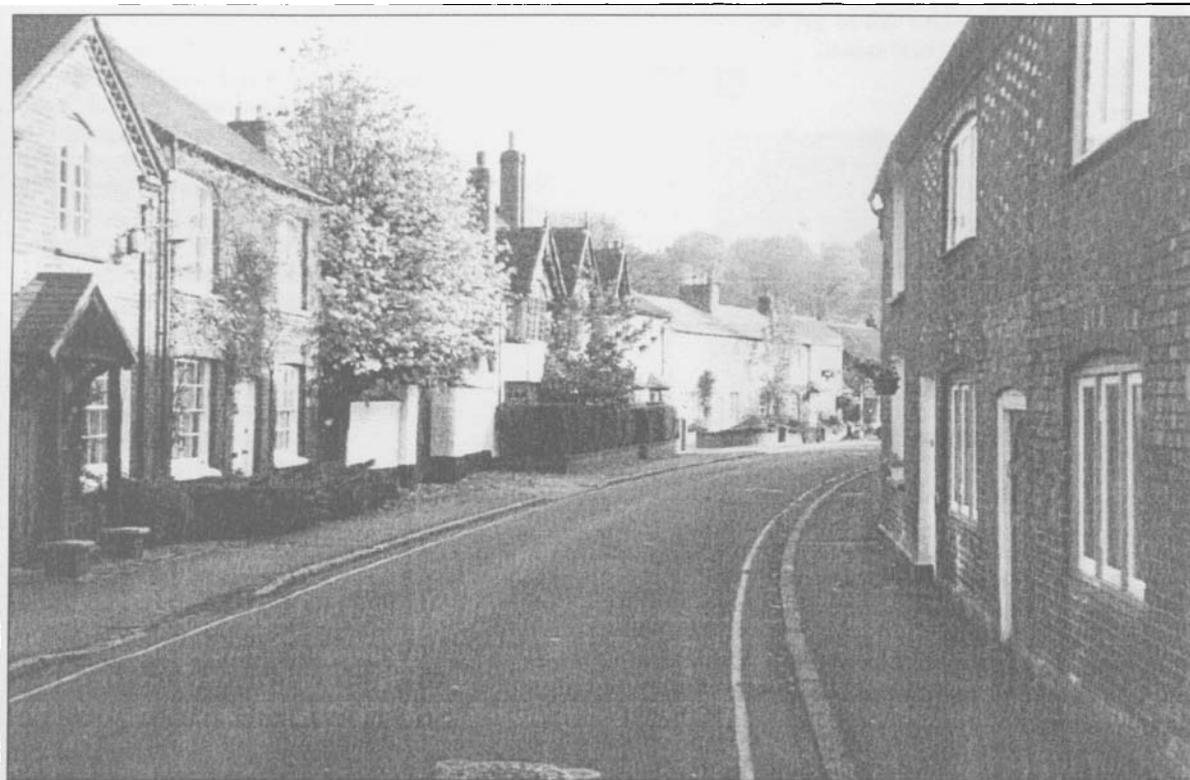
Myths of rural crime

For many, the Crime and Disorder Act will be seen as the logical culmination of a series of incremental urban steps taken first by the Home Office through, for example, the Five Towns Initiative and the Safer Cities Programme, and latterly by the Department of the Environment, in the shape of the Single Regeneration Budget. Understandably, given the priority to

demonstrating the effectiveness of crime prevention in high crime areas, rural areas featured hardly at all in these early steps. Rural crime prevention did feature to some extent in developments in the mid-1990s, when the police and Crime Concern managed to bring the issue to national prominence on the back of some dubious media claims about the exporting of urban crime to rural areas. Nevertheless, the form of crime prevention promoted by the then Conservative Government bore little relation to its urban counterpart, relying to a considerable extent on self-help measures (e.g. Neighbourhood Watch and parish special constables) that often do more to perpetuate myths of rurality than to prevent crime.

Forging partnerships

Now, however, in the wake of the Crime and Disorder Act, crime prevention is to take a very different shape in rural areas, or so it is imagined. The emphasis in the legislation is on partnerships, focused on district councils, not solely between statutory services, but across a mixed economy of crime control. Yet partnerships may not so easily be forged in rural areas. Coterminosity between agencies, and unitary local government, is more likely to be found in urban areas, both factors facilitating partnership working, especially over such delicate matters as information exchange. In rural areas, while the guidance suggests counties and districts should be equal partners, the practice may be quite different as authorities of different political hues will be expected to work together, with counties being required to make the space for each district to have its own distinct, separate strategy. The potential conflict is recognised in the guidance, but a solution is



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not volunteered.

Similarly, urban district authorities generally accommodate a specific strategic capacity based around the position of the chief executive. Some rural authorities, by contrast, do not possess chief executives or central policy groups, and in their absence strategic thinking may not be so forthcoming, or may be delegated to officers with narrower interests and less experience. In urban areas, moreover, crime is more likely to be spatially concentrated, which for coterminous bodies makes problems easier to find and prioritise, while crime is typically more spatially dispersed in the larger rural areas. Where problems are less easy to find, there is a greater risk that rural areas will find themselves at the mercy of a politicking between blinkered interest groups or councillors, hide-bound by concerns for reducing crime and promoting safety within their own particular patch.

Insufficient funds

Resource limitations will be a major issue for all of those expected to implement the crime prevention parts of the Crime and Disorder Act, but they are likely to be felt more acutely by rural areas for a number of reasons. The argument, forwarded by the government, that crime prevention will pay for itself may cut little ice with rural authorities, especially as savings, where they are made, may more likely accrue to the police and the wider criminal justice system than to the local authorities themselves. The greater concentration, and visibility, of poverty and other social problems in urban areas means that government (e.g. Single Regeneration Budget finance) or European money is more likely to be distributed in their favour, while the Rural Development Commission's (RDC) assimilation into Regional Development Agencies carries with it a concern that the funding the RDC once provided for the rural shortfall might be filtered back into urban areas. All of this could leave rural areas with insufficient funds to implement any strategy at

all, let alone conduct a crime audit, which is a very necessary first step. Support is not likely to come from the other partners of the mixed economy either: rural police resources are already spread very thinly; private sector funding is more forthcoming in the urban bases of large corporate bodies; and voluntary activity in criminal justice appears more common in urban areas.

The partnership approach to crime prevention is based upon sound principles, but these principles have been formed out of an urban experience, and it may be unwise simply to transport urban solutions on to rural areas, raising the risk of further marginalising rural sections of the population. Crime needs to be addressed in rural areas, but the difficulties of applying crime prevention there need to be thought through, with additional time being given to resolve the issues. Urban areas have had a head start, because the groundwork for crime prevention has been laid there. The same thought needs to go into the distinctive features of the rural context, before disillusionment takes hold, and crime prevention and partnerships fail to get beyond their rhetorical appeal. ■

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References:

- Anderson, S. (1997) *A study of crime in rural Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Office.
Home Office (1994) *Notifiable Offences*. Home Office Statistical Bulletin London: HMSO.

Note

1 This article is based on a small scale research project reporting on crime prevention strategies in rural areas. A fuller account may be found in our chapter in G. Dingwall & S. Moody (eds) (forthcoming) *Crime and Conflict in the Countryside*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press.

Book reviews

Daniel Gilling reviews *Crime Prevention and Community Safety - Politics, Policies and Practices* by Adam Crawford (1998) published by Addison Wesley Longman.

As a subject of academic inquiry, crime prevention has tended to suffer an image problem, being regarded as somewhat dry and technical. While 'what works?' may be an important question, demonstrating a socially useful purpose to most, but by no means all, in this book Adam Crawford endeavours to paint crime prevention across a much wider canvas. His intention in so doing is to bring to light the political significance of the recent rise of crime prevention, and its illumination of the changing nature of the role of the state and of the governance of crime. However, this intention is tempered by a mindfulness of his intended audience, and therefore this textbook does not seek to attain the sophistication or depth of analysis characteristic of his accomplished *The Local Governance of Crime* (Crawford 1997). This does not mean that the textbook is shallow. Rather, the political analysis is balanced with a breadth of coverage and a practicality that should make it appealing both to students and to practitioners. This balance is often difficult to get right, but to his credit, the author succeeds.

The book starts with a comprehensive review of attempts to define crime prevention, and a discussion of the utility of these in exposing its different practical, theoretical and political underpinnings. It then proceeds to chart crime prevention's shift from a neglected and peripheral activity to a major element of contemporary policy, as demonstrated by the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*. This journey from periphery to mainstream has not been unproblematic, as the author warns with an institutional tour of crime prevention through the police, probation service and local authorities, and with a critical

glance at recent policy, where the emphasis on localism is a thin veil for central inactivity and lack of direction. So long as crime prevention is the poor cousin of a punitive, populist penal policy, perhaps it will ever be thus.

Next, there follows a succession of well crafted chapters. The chapters on situational and social crime prevention are similarly structured, weaving the theoretical underpinnings of each with cogent critique and very effective illustrative case studies. Crawford's scepticism of situational crime prevention is tempered by an acknowledgement of its valuable insights which make it unwise to throw out the baby with the bathwater. He subjects social approaches to equally rigorous critique, showing that associated risk factors may not be causal, and that community approaches rarely connect with their targets: both risk ghettoisation and stigmatisation when wrongly practised.

The chapter on implementation focuses upon the difficulties of partnership working and the issues it raises, particularly for accountability. The chapter on evaluation, meanwhile, reviews the politics of success, where crime reduction is not the only goal, and a politics of method, where evaluations are too frequently absent, poorly executed, or stuck in a quasi-experimental design that offers little by way of understanding what happens, let alone what works. Crawford advocates a realist approach that is process oriented, but recognises that policy makers think differently, as with their current unhelpful obsession with audit.

The penultimate chapter takes crime prevention on to an international stage, comparing experiences in Sweden, France, the Netherlands and Japan, and recognising that the dynamic of crime prevention is culturally variable, with common themes of variance being the nature of the role of the state, the balance between social and situational approaches, and the extent of reliance upon technological and interpersonal controls. On all counts, one cannot miss the neo-liberal stamp on British policy.

This stamp is explored in greater detail in a final chapter that

seeks to explain the rise of crime prevention as a strategy of responsabilisation and privatisation. It is easy to be negative about this, but Crawford does not recognise in crime prevention all the hallmarks of the 'new penology'. Rather, he recognises the space crime prevention occupies between centre and locality, public and private. While this space creates tensions, it also provides opportunities for a more positive, normatively-informed vision of crime prevention and community safety.

Inevitably, textbooks sacrifice depth for breadth. There is an over-tendency, for the sake of comprehensiveness, to list issues and not explore them in full, although this rarely obscures argument. Also, the comparative chapter is too selective: clearly comparative analysis deserves a book in itself, although the issues Crawford raises in his selective analysis are important enough for the end to justify the means in this instance, for it is in our continental neighbours that Crawford finds part of the ray of hope he projects through his conclusion. Overall, the book is a great success, and Adam Crawford has played a major part in bringing a constructively critical perspective to the study of crime prevention and community safety.

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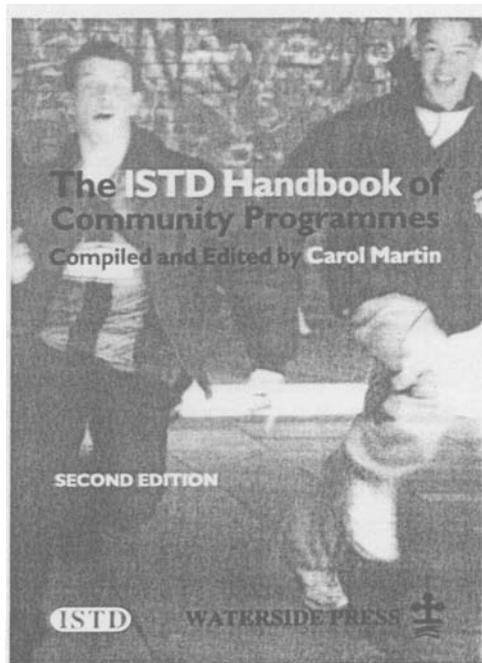
Reference:

Crawford, A (1997) *The Local Governance of Crime*. Clarendon Studies in Criminology. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Peter Francis reviews *The ISTD Handbook of Community Programmes Second Edition* (1998), compiled and edited by Carol Martin, published by Waterside Press and *A Guide to Setting Up and Evaluating Programmes for Young Offenders* (1998) by Simon Merrington (ISTD).

These two books, published by Waterside Press and the ISTD are to be regarded as companion volumes. *The ISTD Handbook of Community Programmes* (Second Edition) offers not only an updated review of community sentences and alternatives to custody available for young people, but also offers information on crime prevention and community safety programmes, while *A Guide to Setting Up and Evaluating Programmes for Young Offenders* offers discussion and advice on devising community based programmes for young offenders. In short, the aim of one is to collate information and review 'What programmes are out there in the community', while the other proposes practical advice and help on 'getting started and joining in'.

The ISTD Handbook of Community Programmes (Second Edition) is exactly what its title states and offers an excellent compilation of information on local community sentences for young people and programmes on crime prevention operating the breadth of Great Britain. Divided into two substantial sections, the first provides details 'where multiple programmes share common aims, objectives and other details', and entries are listed under the name of the responsible organisation or agency, while the second focuses upon specific programmes



or specialist areas such as anger management, burglary, diversion and parenting skills. Prefaced by a two page introduction, the *ISTD Handbook* conveys a wealth of descriptive information about local community programmes, not only regarding their broad aims and objectives, but also more practically relevant information and advice on referral criteria, principal target audience, along with management, funding and staffing data. In this way, rather than resembling a 'trainspotters' guide to community programmes - adored by a few and read by enthusiasts only - Martin's careful editing has ensured that the *ISTD Handbook* should appeal to a wider audience involved in developing, implementing and researching community based programmes for young people. It provides clear, concise and useful information about 'what is out there', 'how it is structured', 'who it is targeted at' and 'who to contact about it'.

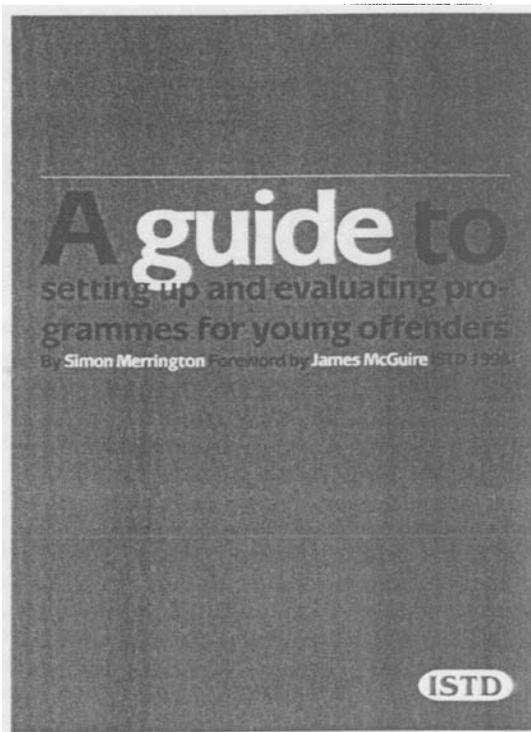
Yet in detailing its considerable strengths, one must also be aware of the *Handbook's* shortcomings. Thus, while it may tell you what is out there, the second edition, like its predecessor, is less impressive regarding the effectiveness of each of the programmes detailed and the possibilities and pitfalls of developing programmes yourself. Such criticisms are partially diverted by two sub-headings entitled *evaluation* and *replication* within each programme report, in which details of internal and external evaluation, and the extent to which such projects can be replicated elsewhere are listed. However, as regards the latter, replication is detailed as possible or otherwise without any discussion as to how this decision was derived at, while as regards the former, discussion of results of programme evaluation are sketchy at best and non-existent at worst. Thus, while we know what is out there, the *ISTD Handbook* is unable to gauge the extent to which programmes are effective in what circumstances and offer value for money.

These criticisms are partially acknowledged by Martin herself in the introduction to the second edition in which she states that 'a number of people commented on the absence of 'how to' information, and evaluative editorial comment in the first

edition of the book'. Indeed, this is partly the context within which the companion volume by Merrington has been written. Yet, despite the publication of the companion volume, and Martin's comment that it 'was beyond the remit of this research to analyse evaluative data on programmes', this reader for one can not stop feeling somewhat let down by the failure of the second edition of the *ISTD Handbook* to engage the reader in some discussion of the effectiveness and or otherwise of those programmes already in place up and down the country, and of the lessons to be learnt, both at the level of process and impact.

As detailed, Simon Merrington's *Guide*, has been written to provide 'how to' information concerning the development and evaluation of community based programmes. Drawing heavily upon the 'what works philosophy', the *Guide* aims to offer 'practical advice on how to set up and evaluate community based programmes for young offenders and young adult offenders up to the age of 25'. Certainly, Merrington provides a structured and evidence led approach to developing community programmes, starting with a discussion of the theoretical base upon which many programmes are guided and of the need to audit relevant experience elsewhere, through a discussion of defining the target group, defining aims and objectives to defining programmes, identifying referral procedures, securing management and funding arrangements and ensuring monitoring and evaluation. Throughout, and on almost every page the reader is presented with helpful information, useful references and 'at your finger tips' addresses and telephone numbers of organisations, institutions as well as active researchers and evaluators working in the field. Indeed, additional appendices offer the reader practical examples of questionnaire design, referral procedures and forms etc. It is, as Merrington himself argues, 'a kind of good practice guide' written, unapologetically at an elementary level for the practitioner.

Yet, while the *Guide* goes some way towards getting to grips with the practice of development, what is missing is a discussion of the development of good practice



(that is, what programmes should we be thinking of developing and implementing and why?). Additional problems also arise as to the appropriateness of the discussion on monitoring and evaluation.

With regards to the former criticism, while there is much on developing programmes generally, little space is devoted within the book to discussing precisely what programmes should be developed, when and why. This is not to indicate that there are not examples of good practice throughout the book, but rather to suggest that the reader is left wanting more guidance as to what they *should* be developing. In part, this criticism is addressed by the publication of the companion handbook, although as stated, the *Handbook* itself suffers from a lack of analysis of evaluation and replication. In part, this criticism is also deflected due to the fact that chapter 3 of the *Guide* offers a brief introduction to the 'what works' literature, while chapter 4 does highlight some reasons for researching relevant experience elsewhere together with how to do it and types of programme currently in use.

The second criticism directed at the *Guide* concerns the evaluation and monitoring section. While Merrington begins his discussion of monitoring and evaluation with the sentence 'evaluation has a lower chance of

being useful if it is bolted on as an after thought', the ensuing review, despite its length (more than double the number of pages of the other sections) sits somewhat uneasily within the last chapter (13) of the book. Moreover, whilst trying to avoid becoming bogged down in the intricacies of evaluation

methodology, the chapter fails to acknowledge the complexities of debate within both the literature and practice at the present time. Certainly a more detailed review of some of the various approaches to evaluation would have helped, identifying along the way the possibilities and pitfalls of the various models identified and the various debates which they have inspired.

It is often the case that publications such as these read as too mechanistic and formalistic - that is, they are written in a 'recipe orientated' way which suggests that if carefully followed, together with the correct ingredients, successful results will follow. Thankfully, Martin and Merrington have compiled volumes which steer clear of the worst excesses in this regard, and they should be congratulated in this. They said, both suffer from a number of problems, not least of which concerns their companion status. Despite the criticisms directed at both, however, there remains much to recommend each book and I am sure they will receive a wide circulation amongst their target audience.

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