

From Crime and Disorder Reduction to Safer Communities Services

Martin Davis, Head of Safer Communities Services in the London Borough of Hackney, outlines the second stage of development of crime and disorder reduction partnerships.

The development of community based crime reduction work is developing quickly and in a statutory and nationally funded framework; with almost £200 million directly earmarked for the work by central government in 2003/04. But, perhaps because it is located largely outside the traditional criminal justice services, information about the work tends only to trickle out and then leans toward fairly static analysis of projects rather than the enormous policy and practical changes that are now occurring and which affect the processes of crime control and criminal justice.

This 'second stage' development is happening now as a direct consequence of the completion of the first stage; the initial implementation of the statutory crime and disorder reduction partnerships over the past four years, and is intended to take the 'ad hocery' out of the work. Local partnerships will now have guaranteed core funding, and will be more closely co-ordinated with Drugs Action Teams. Those same co-ordinating bodies will become accountable to central government for the achievement of agreed and detailed targets and will also approve spending which will be transferred to local police for community action initiatives.

juncture it is helpful to point out that in Hackney the Emergency Planning team form part of the Council's Safer Communities Services.

In normal circumstances providing local 'front line' services are fairly straightforward. Know what you should provide and provide it. Be 'customer friendly', show consistent interest, understanding and concern. In an inner city area the complexities of ethnic and cultural needs are always present but public services have long since come to know the reality of difference and should not try to second-guess preferences; better to ask and make sure you really know. Really, that straightforward!

However, as the siege unfolded, although the principles were known and adhered to, this was far from being a familiar situation such as a civil emergency or a standard crime incident. Yes, it fitted neatly enough into the emerging awareness of gun crime but its impact on the civil life of the borough was far greater than any shooting that we have had on our patch. This was crime and a civil emergency banged into one.

During the 15 day period, the emergency services worked very well together to meet the local residents' needs and did apply sensitivity and

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Yet what is really known about the first stage? *The Crime and Disorder Act 1998* has spawned about 270 local statutory partnerships, a myriad of new configurations of services to make communities 'safer places in which to live work and visit' and more projects and programmes than any meta-analysis has yet got to grips with.

Take as an example the recent Hackney siege. The centre of the borough was completely isolated by police cordons for 15 days. The Emergency Planning Office was activated, over 350 local residents were directly affected as access to their homes were prevented or restricted. Food had to be bought, clothes ordered, medicines collected, pets fed. And all the time this most diverse of communities had to be informed about what was going on and protected from a man with guns and a hostage. One can see that on a practical level community safety was involved and perhaps at this

knowledge about our communities to meet those diverse and challenging requirements. But this was in the context of an active community safety partnership where emergency services (the police, council, fire and ambulance services) have an established working partnership at both a strategic and operational level.

The initial path from 1998 is fairly well known. The statutory Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) were constructed to enable a systematic development of crime and disorder reduction to be undertaken in local areas. These partnerships were able to implement short, medium and long term work and draw upon a range of skills to prevent and reduce crime. Where it becomes less well known is the transition from theory to practice. As CDRPs are primarily concerned with implementing a prioritised strategy, the development and delivery of community based 'safer



communities services' and the inter agency work that this has involved, and its impact on criminal justice either in action or outcome, are in need of careful analysis and explanation. And now, in this second stage, CDRPs are also moving toward a broader targeted remit combining the strategic management of crime and disorder reduction with similar roles for youth crime reduction and substance misuse reduction..

The Final Report of the Home Office Standing Committee on Crime Prevention in 1991 paved the way for local authorities and the police to work together with the community and other community services to challenge the problems leading to crime. The report also came up with a definition of community safety and although it is now a decade old it is the most significant description that exists.

"The term 'community safety' is seen as having both situational and social aspects, as being concerned with people, communities and organisations, including families, victims and risk groups as well as with attempting to reduce particular types of crime and the fear of crime. Community safety should be seen as the legitimate concern of all in the local community."

This has been a priority within many urban areas for several years and since the implementation of the *Crime and Disorder Act 1998*, additional resources have been injected into multi agency partnership activities and community safety work has been more focused. Commonly, partnerships have 80 or 100 active groups within them including the obvious ones like the Probation Service, the Crown Prosecution Service, local CREs and Neighbourhood Watches but also less obvious partners such

as social landlords, local businesses, a myriad of voluntary organisations, tenants and residents associations and so forth; working on a wide range of community safety projects.

Getting the partners around the table in various groups and configurations is essential in linking the work to community needs and interests as well as in spreading the load and developing community ownership. But it is important to understand that this is no impromptu gathering of concerned parties but a systematically developing and core funded part of the crime control process. That very early definition of community safety offered a general purpose for the work and an environment in which it could operate. Now, over a decade after it has been acted upon, it is possible to begin to see the *enormous terrain that this can cover*.

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