

# The policy making process

Enver Solomon and Rebecca Roberts introduce this issue of *cjm*.

*Turn the clock back to 1997 and Labour entering government. Many criminologists, researchers, campaigners and practitioners were optimistic that after a long period remaining outside the policy making tent they would finally be invited inside to contribute to a more informed, consultative approach to devising policy. Indeed Labour promised a 'big tent' approach to policy making. It also made a commitment to 'evidence based' policy making. Unsurprisingly, many were heartened by this.*

More than ten years on many have been left feeling disheartened and disillusioned. The experience of some academics and researchers following their involvement in the independent evaluation of the Crime Reduction Programme and other Home Office research programmes has resulted in a break down in relations with government. Campaigners, practitioners and those working in the voluntary sector have also been left feeling excluded due to a lack of consultation on a number of policies, particularly on prisons and the creation of the National Offender Management Service.

So where does this leave us? Is it legitimate for the academic community to hunker down and for the government to selectively do business with those it regards as sharing its agenda? Do campaigners and lobbyists need to rethink their strategies and be more clever in attempting to influence Whitehall and Westminster? Are there lessons to be learned from Scotland or America where criminologists have also grappled with how best to impact on policy? Can practitioners effectively subvert carefully crafted centrally driven initiatives by moulding them to local requirements? Does the whole criminological community need to reappraise how it engages in public discourse? And finally, do we all actually need to think more strategically about how to seize opportunities to change the direction of government policy?

These are some of the questions addressed in this issue of *cjm* which examines the policy making process. The magazine, acting as a bridge between academia, frontline practice and the world of government and politics is perfectly placed to reflect on the issue.

**Professor Betsy Stanko** who has worked on both sides of the fence, as an academic, a civil servant and most recently at the Metropolitan Police Service draws on her own experience in the introduction to the themed section which she has edited. She notes that most of the authors 'urge involvement, patience, rigour of thought and clarity of message'.

In the topical issues and comment section the government's first 'Action Plan for Tackling Violence' is put under the microscope by **Professor Simon Hallsworth**. Professor Hallsworth, who has made

presentations at Downing Street seminars on 'gangs' focuses on the plan's proposals for dealing with violent street crime, what it describes as 'gun crime and gang related violence'. He laments the lack of evidence presented to explain the social factors behind street violence and argues that the plan signifies the triumph of a risk based 'anti-social criminology'. He concludes that the likelihood of it having any success 'without any commitment to change the social structures that produce the violence is frankly absurd'.

*The Guardian's* home affairs editor, **Alan Travis**, who has spent many years reporting on law and order reflects on the decline of the hang 'em and flog 'em Conservatives. He says they have been overtaken by a focus on voluntary sector involvement in prevention schemes – social liberals, he argues, have 'eclipsed their more authoritarian colleagues'. The result, however, is a 'patchwork' of policy suggestions which are 'small-scale and don't really trouble the scorers'.

**Dr Barry Loveday** takes a critical look at the 'cautious' recommendations of the inspectorate review of policing. He argues that despite public claims that government wants to reduce target setting, in practice, the Home Office is still committed to this in measuring and monitoring police performance. Reflecting on the 75 'key actions' outlined in the recent National Community Safety Plan, he argues that they may simply replace one 'bureaucratic monster' with another.

The 'In Focus' section provides a synopsis of the Centre for Crime and Justice Studies' recent review of evidence and policy on 'knife crime'. Highlighting the findings from their research, **Dr Roger Grimshaw** and **Enver Solomon** point out that claims around rises and falls in knife related violent incidents are impossible to make based on the paucity of the data. What the research does indicate, however, is the disproportionate experience of knife related injury amongst those people living in poor areas and black and minority ethnic communities. They call for greater engagement with those most affected alongside a more wide-ranging consideration of the structural causes of poverty, inequality and social disaffection.

Overall this issue provides a rich mix of articles examining both the latest developments in policy and reflections on the policy making production line. It will hopefully provide readers with much food for thought and stimulate a wider discussion and debate about how to engage and impact on the current and future thinking and actions of our political masters. ■

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