

Public Engagement in Fighting Crime

James Brokenshire MP and Cindy Butts of the Metropolitan Police Authority.

Simon Burall, Involve's new Director started off proceedings.

"Our society is becoming more complex and interconnected. Traditional democratic structures are proving incapable of solving the issues facing local communities. In only three years Involve has established itself as an innovative organisation able to engage the public in some of the most critical issues we face; issues as wide-ranging as healthcare, education and crime, to the development of new technologies and the threat of climate change. Involve has proved that it is possible to develop a mature conversation between government and the public which can lead to constructive solutions and conclusions."

Simon continued by raising a number of questions to be considered. Crime rates, in most categories, are falling according to the Crime Survey. However, we are locking up more people than ever and public perceptions are that crime is on the increase. Can public engagement in fighting crime make a difference? Not just in fighting crime, but in the public's perception of crime? How do the multiple agencies involved in fighting crime link?

Simon then reminded the audience of the larger overarching questions we are faced with in reference to fighting crime – namely the fine lines between our security and our liberty, and does this feed into policy?

Cindy Butts – Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA)

Cindy Butts of the MPA was invited to speak at this seminar about the role that the MPA plays in citizen engagement in fighting crime. As she noted in her opening comments, the MPA are there to hold the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) to account and therefore hold it high in their priorities to do so on this issues.

Cindy gave us a background to the MPA and hence explained the key roles that the organisation plays, outlining the fact that each member is attached to a London Borough, who then has the responsibility of taking the concerns of that borough to the Commissioner (unfortunately however, there are only 23 Members and there are 32 boroughs, which can make things a bit more difficult). Cindy is the representative member for Fulham, and also sits on the Family Disorder Reduction Committee for the Borough and hence has a direct input at Borough level.

A key point for Cindy is that the MPA '*don't do community engagement because they have to*' they believe that it is crucial to get policing right – most important are the secondary benefits that this can create.

To Cindy, positive community engagement entails

- A community that is listened to
- Concerns being taken forward

This there results in

- An increase in confidence ratings
- An increase in the likelihood of reporting a crime
- An increase in the likelihood to work with the police

Cindy put forward the notion of citizen focussed policing – emphasising that the way that the MPS engages with the community is integral to their work.

However, Cindy acknowledged at this point that although this is a fine proposal – police on the beat do not necessarily see this as important as fighting crime – thus, the MPA are attempting to change these views, focusing on changing the perceptions on how to deal with crime and the criminal.

As it is where she is based, Cindy drew her examples mainly from London. She highlighted the two threats perceived as most serious in London today – terrorism and gun and knife crime. Both of which are highlighted as areas that can be helped by increases in the levels of community engagement, ultimately gaining the trust of the communities affected.

Cindy took this point and focussed on it further – the great importance in the need for the police to engage with the community not just to fight crime. It is important to engage with the community in a more ‘everyday sense’.

This understanding, Cindy explained, was developed by a number of investigations that they ran on crimes in the community.

Investigation

1. The London 11/7 Bombings
 - a. The MPA heard from community groups that they had not been encouraged to talk to the police.
 - b. They felt that they were only spoken to when ‘needed’ and that otherwise their opinions and relationships were negligible.
 - c. Cindy emphasised that we need a more trusting relationship than this.

The MPA are therefore trying to do this – to help the Police engage with the community on a more everyday level, and consult with Londoners on their priorities. For example through Police Consultative Community Groups, the MPA are attempting to make sure that all are up to a high level, with standards that reflect the community as a whole.

Questions – Cindy Butts

Q: Dave Furze – Independent Consultant on Community Engagement – Footprints

Agrees with engaging the community. Roles of other agencies that can be involved? What can we do to work in partnership?

Response:

The partnerships are there and are getting better within London. However, we still need to do more to strengthen them – for example working with schools – we need to strengthen engagement activities.

Q: Ketan Varia – Kinetik Solutions Ltd

What is it that you mean by a community group? Is there a map of these? For example, should it be led by race/faith – this is what normally happens, but what about other aspects such as sports clubs? Other aspects need to be considered.

Q: Statement – John Tomlinson – Resident Representative of Lambeth CPG

Community neighbourhood panels are what are important – they develop this contact with the people on the street. Within these panels you get individuals from the private housing areas to estate management teams working together rather than keeping separate in particular groups.

However, as you go up the levels of bureaucracy you lose these groups – we need the police to be engaged at all levels.

Response:

Community Groups are important, and as Sir Ian Blair said, “there are no all’s there are only ands”. Therefore we need to engage with structured groups as well as at community levels. We need to think not in an either/or mentality, but in a fuller/richer.

Q: Sian Mclean – Community Development Fund

What about the ‘prevent’ agenda and engaging with extremists? How about presenting this within the safer neighbourhood scheme at a local level?

Response:

Safer neighbourhood scheme is not for everyone. Need diversity within the people you are engaging with – not just those that want to get involved.

Q: Statement – Bennett Obong – London Hate Crime Unit, MPA

The MPA engage in other areas of work. When the MPS are not engaging with particular groups, they ensure that they do. They ask these specific questions and ask them to provide evidence of their actions. A lot of the time therefore the MPS becomes accountable to the MPA.

James Brokenshire MP

James began by talking about the 'Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime' review, produced by Louise Casey (former head of the government's Respect Task Force). This project's conclusion was that radical change is needed to get the public more engaged in tackling crime and to halt the erosion of community spirit.

He highlighted a number of recurring themes that come through:

- Trusting the police and crime statistics
- Unaccountability
- Public feel that crime is not going down

The report outlined that 75% of the public do want to be engaged in fighting crime, however, this translates to only 4 in 10 wanting to intervene in anti-social behaviour.

James highlights makes the point therefore that we should drawback to the code of Sir Robert Peel and his ['Nine Points of Policing'](#). Namely that,

Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent on every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.

He continued by outlining how Safety and the Community can be combined and developed.

James brought this relationship between safety and the community back to a very basic level – what does it mean to have confidence in the police? How will we develop a relationship that shows that they are there to deliver?

- For example recently the Children's Commission put forward a report asserting that confidence in the police declines as children grow older, and that respect for the police increases by interaction with them.
- As a result therefore the Community Policing Model needs to have this level of engagement with the police being much more intimate – a 'Virtuous Cycle' needs to be created.

However, this relationship is also about information.

Trust and confidence in information given needs to be rebuilt – for example, the lack of public confidence in crime statistics (again highlighted by the Casey report). We need to develop this confidence by having independent footing in crime statistics. For example, at present, the Prime Minister and the Home Office are the two least trusted sources for reports on crime levels. This needs to change.

James noted that, by giving citizens the capacity to engage properly e.g. panels or crime mapping, we can help people understand the types of crime they are dealing with in the neighbourhoods. Giving people the power to engage is an important factor in promoting these themes.

'The active citizen' needs to be brought back to the forefront – perhaps even the 'active participatory citizen' can be included. For example citizens arrests are no longer in the forefront – the public are less willing to get involved in these situations – for the fear of repercussions. We should be addressing the guidance on citizens' arrest.

James highlighted the importance of partnerships at this point. He identified local authorities as responsible for driving police work – a democratic arrangement is needed to make this happen so community engagement can be pushed forward.

To Conclude

The conservative view of putting an elected Police Commissioner in alongside the chief commissioner was highlighted at this point – as James put it, to help the community engage and develop. Going back to Sir Robert Peel, the ability of the Police to perform duties is dependent in the understanding of the community needs.

Engagement can make a difference to the ways that we fight crime.

Questions

Q: Wesley Walters – Lambeth CPCG

- Statistics are scary to people and on the ground they often don't appear to match reality
- Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) don't have transparency, the red tape needs to be lessened
- We need to focus on all sides of crime – for example youth violence is increasing, for example in gang culture and the abuse of young women.
- Security and information: for example DNA trialling and camera photography on children – what has happened to the child protection act? We need to decide who is going to create the trust

Response: MORI have reported that only 13% of young people feel that they are able to report a crime. The distinction between reported crime levels and crime surveys exaggerate this. We therefore need to have a proper balance as to better the understanding of measuring the crime levels – separate to the government.

Consultation and engagement perhaps not the best method – a more dynamic engagement strategy is needed.

Q: Anna Sweeting – BMRB

Concerned about the 'us' vs. 'them' mentality – we need to highlight there is no difference between victims and offenders when it comes to suffering from crimes.

Q:

Wesley Walters highlighted the increased abuse levels of young women in gang culture. Hence we are again talking about when the boundaries between the 'victim' and the 'offender' are blurred. We need to make sure that we are all helped and affected by the community engagement strategies. There is a complex mix behind the needs of individuals; we need to make sure they are all catered for.

Q:

Trust and Security. On 4 December 2008, the ECHR delivered its judgment on *S. and Marper v. United Kingdom* a highly anticipated case on the retention of fingerprints and DNA by the British authorities. Current British law allowed for the unlimited DNA, cellular samples and fingerprint retention of that category of persons, even when such persons requested the authorities to destroy such samples. However the Court unanimously found that this situation violated the right to respect for privacy under Article 8 ECHR. The case therefore indicates the outer limits of the acceptable storage of personal information in the UK.

Measures such as this need to be focussed on in order to start rebuilding trust within the systems and hence within the community.

Q: Perry Walker – New Economics

With reference to Sir Robert Peel's Nine Points, Perry turned the question on the audience; what would you do to help the police feel more like a member of the public?

Q: John Tomlinson - Resident Representative of Lambeth CPCG

Policing attitudes need to be changed with reference to the individual.

Response: Bennett Obong - London Hate Crime Unit MPA

The MPA gives police training on the specific issues. But, the MPS is an employer and there is a bureaucracy. The MPA expects the MPS to respond appropriately to the guidance from them that comes from the commissioner himself. However, there is a big gap between the commissioner and the police on the street. As a result this message can become misinterpreted.

The MPA takes officers to task when situations occur that are wrong or inappropriate and they are working hard to help the officers understand these messages and issues.

Hate Crime is one example, there often needs to be 15 incidents before a young person will report the crime. Therefore we need to think about what the police can do to encourage the reporting of incidents. Firstly this needs to be addressed within the police and then this can transfer into the community. Bring the trust into the community. If we can show that the police are changing and are acknowledging a better understanding of community engagement then this trust can be built.

However, there are a whole range of areas that aren't being held to account. For example, OFSTED inspections could incorporate hate crime inspections; a greater level of engagement needs to be developed across the board.

Response from James Brokenshire MP:

James himself has sat on boards of best practice and understands the needs of ensuring a positive impression on the streets. Community policing and engagement need to be measured properly, and appropriate action needs to be taken for poor behaviour.

To build these increased levels of trust, we need to ask ourselves a number of questions:

- What would we want to do?
- How would we make the police work at a better level of engagement?

With grass roots engagement on the increase, it is important that we don't look at the police in solo. James acknowledges that the CDRP criticisms that have been noted are founded; he also asserts that we need to bring in the links within the community to help with the fighting and understanding of crime.

To Conclude

Hence, what is needed is **partnership**.

It is important that the individual and the state have a relationship, and therefore it is important to work between the two so that we have a community feeling and that there are proper links between these wider bodies.

Wrap up Simon Burall of Involve

Simon closed the event by drawing out a few of the key themes of the discussion and raising them as further relevant questions.

- Who is it that we are engaging with – who are the groups and how do we define this? It is not just one set of people, which is challenging for individual forces and for the Home Office.
- Values in society? What do we really think about these boundaries – for example the holding of DNA?
- Who's responsibility is it to ensure that there is community engagement in fighting crime? The MPA? The MPS? Or us?
- Finally, how does the government go about keeping that engagement with the public strong?