

Neighbourhood Policing and Partnerships

Briefing from the LGA for prospective police and crime commissioners



One of the most significant developments in policing practice over the past decade has been the rise of neighbourhood policing. Borrowing from the successful Chicago model of dedicated teams based on small geographical areas, neighbourhood policing in the UK began in earnest with sixteen sites of the National Reassurance Policing Programme in 2003; by 2007, every ward in the country had a dedicated neighbourhood policing team.

The key aim of neighbourhood policing is to reconnect the police with communities. By having dedicated officers in a small area, local people can get to know their “beat bobbies”, which plays a strong part in improving public confidence in the police and empowering communities to take ownership of problems in their own area. Police teams are ably assisted in this with the support of Police Community Support Officers - PCSOs - in their teams. PCSOs are an additional uniformed presence, working on increasing public confidence through visibility and community engagement and working in situations which may not require the experience or powers of warranted officers. In many places, councils fund or part fund large numbers of PCSOs to provide a visible and accessible presence in a range of locations across the police force area.

One of the key roles of neighbourhood policing teams is to consult with the community to identify the crime and disorder issues that are of most concern to residents, to take action to solve those problems, and then to feed back the results to the community – which will in itself increase confidence.

The key learning of this has been the realisation that the police can better tackle the problems raised by entering into partnerships with other agencies. Many of the issues identified through consultation with the public are often not traditional crime categories; rather they are a mix of crime, anti-social behaviour and other environmental issues, many of which are not the responsibility of the police alone to solve.

This has led to the creation of “neighbourhood partnerships” between the police, the community and councillors. Successful neighbourhood partnerships help communities feel more confident about their neighbourhoods by tackling those key indicators – visible signs of disorder - which cause them to feel anxious. Every agency working in an area has a role to play in minimising the impact of these behaviours, and by taking a co-ordinated approach, a neighbourhood partnership can ensure these are successfully tackled in a timely way.

In the world of community safety, there is a long history of partnership working. However the word partnership is often synonymous with talking shops, driven by process and saturated by plans, meetings and targets. The true value of working together is in building a relationship where local people have more say over local delivery.

A successful neighbourhood partnership will always include the input of the elected representatives for the area. Councillors – be they parish, district, unitary,

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metropolitan or county – are the democratically elected advocates for a locality. Therefore it is vital that they have an input into the design of a community safety strategy for an area. Councillors can use their influence to lever in services from the council itself and other agencies to assist with delivering neighbourhood priorities.

By co-operating with elected representatives, the neighbourhood partnership can greatly boost civic participation in the democratic process. Giving the elected members an opportunity to work directly with agencies on the ground, and participate in joint engagement, consultation and problem solving, means that members of the public can really see the work of local politicians' at first hand. It is essential that the public feel that they have real influence over the partnership and residents witnessing that the public sector is working for the people, and are accountable to them leads to increased public co-operation.

In Milton Keynes neighbourhood policing teams have co-located successfully with parish councils, and community engagement takes place jointly with parish and borough councillors. In Cwmbran, elected members facilitate the coming together of voluntary sector agencies with the police and Communities First to provide a holistic approach to problem solving. Blackpool have co-located multi-agency teams in neighbourhoods under a single manager, working with ward members, to best serve local issues.

For the Police and Crime Commissioner, ensuring an integrated approach with other elected members to support neighbourhood partnerships will be important. PCCs can support neighbourhood partnerships by developing a culture where neighbourhood policing teams are encouraged to work closely with other agencies and elected members, building capacity within communities. A PCC can use their political influence to encourage ward councillors to work in tandem with neighbourhood policing teams to make a real, visible difference to communities. The benefits to all involved of adopting such an approach are far-reaching.

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