

The Future of Community Safety Partnership Working

1. One of the leading questions in relation to this issue is whether it would be advantageous to move to a single Community Safety Partnership for Cleveland in the near future. The ostensible advantages of such a change would be a reduction in the number of meetings, and that it would be more suited to the geography of some partners, including the Probation Trust, Fire Authority/Brigade and Police, especially as the Police move to their new structure of functional Force-wide Commands. In addition, the current discussions between Vela and Fabrick are noteworthy.
2. The main obvious disadvantage would be the risk of loss of engagement in the community safety agenda from local authorities, probably not immediately, but more likely on a gradual basis over a period of time. The force of this argument depends on how much local authorities are considered to have 'brought to the party' since 1998, and the answer probably varies from authority to authority. In Stockton, the contributions from the Council include nearly all the public open space CCTV and a significant number of private site applications, the Neighbourhood Enforcement Service, the lead role in relation to the Multi Agency ASB Team and the associated work to support the four Joint Action Groups (JAGs) and the Boroughwide Problem Solving Group, the lead role in relation to multi-agency work on Domestic Violence/Domestic Abuse, the lead role on drugs and alcohol and the lead role in relation to the Youth Offending Service, plus all the secretariat support for the Safer Stockton Partnership and the lead on consultations, preparation of Community Safety Plans, and Partnership Strategic Assessments.
3. It seems to me that there is a widespread consensus in favour of a stronger co-ordination role across Cleveland on some issues, and there are already examples of this sort of working, e.g. the current work on common approaches to Hate Crime. However, even this sort of work has to take account of variations in local resourcing.
4. One of the factors to take into account in relation to delivery is the question of volume. There are some issues, such as the operation of a Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), where nobody would seriously argue for the establishment of more than one SARC, because it is clear that there are not enough cases to warrant this. A similar argument about 'low volume' applies to Hate Crime. On the other hand, high volume issues such as general ASB and domestic violence incidents lend themselves much more readily to a Borough based approach.
5. A specific debate could be held about the delivery of IOM (Integrated Offender Management) schemes for Prolific and Priority Offenders. At present each Borough has its own scheme, and there are differences in terms of targeting, reviewing, performance management and performance between them. Each scheme is of a scale such as to minimise management overheads as they each have a single manager, whereas a single Cleveland-wide scheme would be much larger and would probably have to incorporate an intermediate management tier of some sort. It is possible that overall management costs would be reduced slightly (e.g. by trading in four scheme managers for, say, one senior manager and two deputies), but at the loss of some simplicity.

6. The role of the Police & Crime Commissioner (PCC) may also be thought to be a contributing factor. In Stockton the PCC has declined the offer of personal membership of SSP and has opted to be represented by a member of his staff. If two or more Community Safety Partnerships wished to merge, the written agreement of all partner agencies would be required, and the final power to approve such mergers, which formally rested with the Home Secretary, now rests with PCCs.
7. It seems to me that there is a fairly broad consensus in favour of a more structured and formal mechanism for co-ordinated activity across Cleveland than has existed to date. Over the last 12 months there has been an increase in dialogue between the four local authorities in relation to community safety issues, prompted largely by the transfer of Home Office funding streams previously allocated to CSPs, DAATs and YOTs to the PCC.
8. However, it would be a major step to dispense with the current CSPs in favour of a single Cleveland CSP at this stage, with attendant risks, and in all probability it would be necessary to retain some kind of Borough based forums. If this analysis is accepted, then the real choice is not about whether we should have one CSP or four CSPs, but about how the functions of five groups should be differentiated. To put it another way, in a '1+4' model, which level should be advisory and which should be decision-making?
9. Any proponent of a 'single CSP' model would have to describe in some detail how such an arrangement would work, including Constitution/Terms of Reference, frequency of meetings, membership and therefore size, whether or not sub-groups would be proposed, whether Elected Members would be included etc. A single CSP for Cleveland could easily become a very large and unwieldy body with a huge agenda to cover.
10. In Stockton we have always agreed to have our Community Safety Plans based on the results of a large scale consultation with local people, which confers a clear legitimacy upon them, but it is not clear that this has been the case in all of the other Cleveland localities.
11. In approaching these issues, representatives of Stockton Council and other Stockton lead agencies will naturally be trying to assess what would be the best option for Stockton and its residents, workers and visitors and will not be inclined to embrace any approach which offers greater consistency across Cleveland at the price of a lowest common denominator approach to service delivery.
12. My own advice on this would be that we retain Borough based CSPs for the time being, but firm up Cleveland governance arrangements for a selection of issues (such as SARC and Hate Crime) which are agreed to be best dealt with at sub-regional level, while retaining 'sovereignty' at the borough level. If the Cleveland-wide arrangements flourish and confidence in them grows, there may be a case in the medium term (three to five years) for re-visiting the relative roles.

Mike Batty
Head of Community Protection