



Review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership

**Report by the Scrutiny Review
Group
December 2008**

**For presentation to the Community
Services Scrutiny Committee on
12 December 2008**

***Working in Partnership for the People of
Herefordshire***

Review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership

By Review Group of Community Services Scrutiny Committee

1. Introduction

At its meeting on 17th December 2008, the Community Services Scrutiny committee resolved to add a review of Community Engagement in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership to its work programme.

This review examined one aspect of the work of the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership – the way communities are engaged in shaping policy and practice in reducing and preventing crime, and a scoping statement for the Review (Appendix 1), including terms of reference, was approved by the Community Services Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 18th April 2008. It was agreed that the Review Group would comprise of six Members: Councillor PM Morgan (Chairman); Councillor PGH Cutter; Councillor DW Greenow and Councillor KS Guthrie.

The Review took place between 18 July 2008 and 9th October 2008. This report summarises its findings concluding with its recommendations to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.

2. Methodology

The review group consisted of members from the Community Services Scrutiny Committee chaired by Councillor PM Morgan. The key activity was the interview of representatives from organisations involved in community safety and community engagement (see Appendix 1 for list of interviewees). The interviews were supported by:

- Observation visits by members of the review group – Multi Agency Tasking group; drug and alcohol forums in Ledbury, Bromyard and Leominster; Domestic Violence Forum
- Focus Group for town councils, including Hereford City Council
- Written evidence from Government Office
- Supporting reports, policies and documents
- Attendance at PACT meetings

(A focus group for parish councils was organised but cancelled due to lack of attendance).

The focus for the review was on community engagement by the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership, however the review did touch on the wider crime prevention agenda and wider engagement in shaping policy and practice. This is reflected in the report.

3. Background

What is the community safety partnership?

It is a statutory requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act (1998) to have a community safety and drugs partnership operating in a local authority area. In summary the partnership aims to create benefit by different agencies and organisations working together to address the root and branch of crime.

The Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership is directed by a Strategy Group who consist of representatives from:

- Herefordshire Council (member and officer)
- Hereford and Worcester Fire and Rescue Service
- Herefordshire Housing (representing residential social landlords)
- Herefordshire Primary Care Trust
- Hereford and Worcester Youth Offending Service
- West Mercia Constabulary
- West Mercia Police Authority
- West Mercia Probation Trust

Based on available data and consultation the Strategic Group have prioritised five areas where resources are targeted:

- Reducing Crime through Offender Management and other interventions
- Reducing drugs and alcohol harm
- Promoting and delivering increased road safety
- Providing community reassurance in anti-social behaviour, disorder and crime
- Multi-agency and community dynamic tasking and co-ordination

Two other themes have been identified as having such impact across all other areas, that they should be considered within each of the other five groups priorities. They are:

- Young people – (victims and offenders)
- Violent crime

Linked to each of the priorities is a sub-group chaired by a member of the Strategy Group. Each of these sub-groups produces an action plan that relevant partners have a role in implementing.

Community Engagement Requirement

A key element of the work of the partnership is community engagement which is the basis of the scrutiny review work. The HCSDP has agreed to define its work using the Local Government Associations definition of community safety which has community engagement at its heart.

The definition is: “**community safety is defined as promoting the concept of community based action to inhibit and remedy the causes and consequences of criminal, intimidation and other related anti-social behaviour. Its purpose is to secure sustainable reductions in crime and the fear of crime in local communities**”.

There are three important references that can be taken from this definition:

1. Community safety should involve community based action
2. To address the causes of crime, not just the crime itself
3. Reduce crime itself and fear of crime

The work of the Community Safety and Drugs Partnership Team

Supported by a range of grant funding, Herefordshire Council employs a team of officers (13 fte posts) to administrate the partnership. Their role is to ensure the added benefit of organisations working together is realised. Key activities include:

- Facilitate priority groups and ensure the delivery of the action plans
- Commissioning drug and alcohol reduction activity
- Gathering and presenting data
- Reporting performance to funding agencies
- Joint promotion and marketing activity
- Facilitate drugs and alcohol forums
- Keeping abreast of regional and national policy and guidance that informs the work of the partnership
- Be part of the national network of community safety partnerships
- Produce the Three Year Strategic Plan and Strategic Assessment

In terms of the Three Year Plan the latest document was launched in April 2008. This will be updated annually through a strategic assessment, which gathers the evidence base to ensure the plan and its priorities are still relevant.

4. Review Findings

Requirements of Strategic Assessment

Information gathered to inform the Strategic Assessment took place between October 2007 and January 2008 to include:

- Trailer-tour to the market towns and Hereford City
- Survey results from the West Mercia Constabulary and Herefordshire Council
- Data from partners

- Desktop analysis of all the available data.

The Strategic Assessment document also mentions that focus groups took place with “hard to reach” groups but acknowledges that improvement can be made in this area.

226 people responded to the community consultation that contributed to the Strategic Assessment. The table below outlines priority areas:

What problems or issues encountered	Number of respondents
Alcohol/Drugs	65
Anti-Social Behaviour	39
None	32
Lack of Police Presence	25
Road/Traffic Safety	25
Crime* ¹	18
Litter	10
Youths Miscellaneous	7
Immigrants	1
Environment	1
Other	3
Total respondents	226

The quality of the Strategic Assessment and Three Year Plan is assessed by Government Office and is judged against meeting the “Hallmarks”. One of the requirements of the Hallmarks is to hold at least one public meeting. As part of the annual refresh of the Strategic Assessment in October 2008 the HCSDP ran three public events in collaboration with West Mercia Police. A role of these public meetings is to feedback figures on crime and the community safety activity. Comments made by the public at the meetings will inform the revised strategy, along with contributions from public consultation held at Tesco Superstore in the centre of Hereford on the 24th October 2008.

As ascertained as part of the review process consultation takes place beyond preparing for the Strategic Assessment. This either relates to regular contact with target groups e.g. drug users through the Drugs Intervention Programme, or for specific projects – see case studies.

Community Support Officers (West Mercia Police)

As discovered during the course of this review there is many forms of community engagement, with many levels of involvement. This can range from “shallow” engagement in completing a questionnaire, to “deep” involvement in being part of a police operation. Community Support Officers are an important link between the community and the partnership – they are a direct route for members of the public to become involved in crime reduction.

The Community Support Officers know the issues affecting their “patch” and can report safety issues directly through their chain of command. They have a wider role in bringing partner organisations together to solve a problem that is multi-faceted e.g. linked to housing, school attendance, family support, health. They are members of some of the key groups within the community and can bring awareness of crime matters but also respond to the concerns that groups are raising. They also play a key role in the success of drug and alcohol forums (discussed later).

Neighbourhood Watch

The Review Group were impressed with the inroads West Mercia Police have made in Neighbourhood Watch. A database of 25,000 households are registered with Neighbourhood Watch, reaching approximately one third of the population, with 662 individual groups. The coverage of the

¹ Crime: relates to a range of crime experiences such as burglary, criminal damage to vehicles, assault (victim of hate crime), vandalism and theft.

watch groups range from a street to a parish with the common aim of creating safer communities and more aware individuals.

A watch officer monitors their “patch” and has close contact with Community Support Officers. The Review Group heard the quality of the watch and involvement of the community did hinge on the watch officers being proactive. The attendance at the recent neighbourhood watch AGM was disappointing with 42 local co-ordinators attending out of a potential of 662. Initial recruitment is a challenge, but also retaining interest and enthusiasm is difficult.

The ambition is for the whole county to be covered by neighbourhood watch. Early next year a road show will be visiting locations in the county to generate interest in the watch scheme. In addition to neighbourhood watch there is farm watch, pub watch and rural watch. A youth watch is in the pipeline and initial contact with the secondary school head teachers has been positive.

Involvement of Town and Parish Councils

The current involvement of town and parish councils is either through surveys, parish plans or where intervention needs to take place. It is unrealistic to expect the partnership team to attend each parish and town council meeting, even once a year, but the town and parish councils provide a ready resource of local knowledge, contacts, manpower and even finance. At a minimum the councils need to know the work of the partnership.

The review group found that the most proactive areas are those with parish and town councillors who were actively involved, and the more they became involved the stronger the commitment to addressing community safety.

A focus group was arranged for Parish Councils but the lack of attendance could be a demonstration that community safety and wider crime reduction is not a strong issue for the parishes; or the Parish Councils had not heard of the HCDSF and did not see the relevance of attending a focus group.

Drug and Alcohol Forums

Drug and Alcohol Forums operate in each of the five market towns. The forums consist of representatives of key organisations. This membership varies from group to group but can include town councillors, the police and sometimes the PCT – the groups are facilitated by members of the partnership team. Their effectiveness is in the bringing together of local knowledge and expertise to form solutions and actions at a very local level. During the course of the review members were able to attend the Bromyard and Leominster forums, and at the Town Council Focus Group a member of Ledbury Drugs Forum was able to share his involvement in the local forum. All these groups were considered effective in implementing projects, although it is difficult to measure the impact of schemes.

The forums were able to demonstrate that the £3,000 awarded to them via the partnership was making a real difference in working locally. The financial support was not the most important factor, but the confidence to be able to tackle drug abuse with knowledge and understanding. It was clear the forums operated in different ways with different approaches. This is to be welcomed as it demonstrates the forums are responding to the distinct needs of the local community.

The operation and effectiveness of Drug and Alcohol Forums is inconsistent in the county and depends on local commitment. The funding for the forums comes from Pooled Adult Treatment and is restricted to being spent on drug misuse or alcohol linked misuse. This creates a tension as members of the forums see that drug misuse is often linked to other crime, and a joint solution is needed not a narrow one. This does not stop the forums addressing other forms of crime and disorder, but this is not funded activity and is not the key purpose of the forums.

A consideration is to change the nature of the forums to become “Local Community Safety and Drug Forums”, and as such extending the remit to include all aspects of community safety and crime reduction. The grant would need to be increased to reflect the wider remits, and potentially led by Community Support Officers. A stronger involvement of the Town Council may be profitable. That the partnership team provides information on “areas” to feed back to the groups and these forums can come together for an annual meeting to share good practice to add to the current quarterly meetings of the chairs of the groups.

Parish Plans

Parish Plans are action plans developed at a local level, with every member of the community having an opportunity to contribute. They set out a vision for the future and list what actions will need to take place to achieve that vision. Some of the activity can be conducted by the local community, but more often the ambitions have implications for public services (most often Herefordshire Council). There is a great deal of work involved in producing a parish plan, including community consultation.

To date 45 parish plans have been produced out of a potential of 142, which compares favourably to national completion rates. Also, 14 are group plans representing 53 parishes. Town Councils are also able to produce parish plans as well as Hereford City Council. Since 2006 Herefordshire Council has allocated funding to support the survey and analysis work that is required. There is also support to guide parishes through the planning process. This is especially in response to some of the early plans not receiving the guidance required to ensure plans were well considered, robust and achievable.

The Review Group heard there is a lack of co-ordination and resource to make the plans as effective as they could be and in particular influence policy. The evidence suggests that a wealth of information is gathered, but actions are often not acted upon with no mechanism in place to monitor implementations of plans.

In terms of the profile of community safety in parish plans there was a strong dominance of road safety, specifically reducing speeding through villages. In response a signal indicator device (SiD) has been purchased with the support of the partnership.

Partners and Communities Together (PACT)

Local Area Forums were introduced in 1999, and changed to Community Forums in 2005 with nine pilot areas, to eventually become twelve areas. From February 2008 the forums became known as Partners and Communities Together - or PACT meetings.

The aim is to allow members of the public to raise issues from their own communities with representatives from Herefordshire Council and West Mercia Police. The meetings give a brief update on progress made towards addressing the issues raised at the previous meetings, as well as providing the opportunity to raise new issues. Meetings take place in each of the twelve PACT areas at least four times a year. They are open to anyone living, working or spending time in the area.

The Review Group heard some strong reservations regarding the PACTs in terms of purpose and format. The PACTs have a potential role in galvanising interest in community safety and addressing the fear of crime. To maximise that potential the Review Group felt the following points apply:

- That feedback from Herefordshire Council and the Police is given on an area at the start of the meeting including key issues regarding community safety (not feedback on the last meetings issues – these can be posted on the website or even directly sent to people)
- That people are welcomed to the PACT meetings by local members as local people's representatives but also to give local members a sense of involvement and ownership in the PACTs
- That parish and town councils have joint ownership of the PACTs with their representatives contributing key agenda items reflecting local issues
- That the chairperson is from the area who can share local knowledge and understanding
- To have agenda items and presentation of key issues affecting the area e.g. a new development being presented to Planning Committee, etc.
- That the meetings are more proactively promoted including through village newsletters

Public Consultation and Engagement

A key issue raised during the review was that community engagement, real engagement not surveys and questionnaires, could have a positive effect on perceptions of crime. From the data available the perception of crime is higher than the reality in Herefordshire, and it is perception that will restrict peoples quality of life and involvement in the community.

The studies and government guidance the Review Group has seen makes this point clear. Through the interview process the review group members heard that when people are engaged through activities such as neighbourhood watch or forums, there is a sense of empowerment and control, and as a result overcome the fear of crime. There is little fact based data to support this view, and though

national guidance points to the positive side of community engagement examples of good practice were not readily available (attempts were made to interview a “good practice” authority but it proved difficult to identify a partnership strong in community engagement and available for interview).

In terms of consultation a key theme that emerged during the course of the review is the need to feedback to the public. This is to let people know the results of surveys they complete, or the difference their intervention made to reduce crime. Also, that their activity is making a difference and they are part of the wider “community safety family” alongside the members of the community safety partnership.

The review group heard that a MORI poll² had shown that of the total population only 6-7% were engaged in community issues, whilst 20% would get involved and the rest were regarded as apathetic. This conflicts with the government commissioned review entitled “Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime” that “75% of the public would be prepared to play an active role in tackling crime”ⁱ.

Whilst consultation is an important part of policy setting there is potential for “consultation overload” and not everyone wishes to become engaged in community activity. Where consultation and engagement takes place it should be relevant and tailored to the community it targets, and linked to existing forms of community involvement.

Vulnerable People

Sometimes referred to as “hard to reach groups”, vulnerable people are often those closest and most affected by crime. General surveys, open meetings, public forums, often do not capture the voice of these groups and creative solutions need to be found to reflect the issues and concerns of the whole of the community. Some inroads have been made in attempting to reach groups who are not currently engaged and who may be excluded, for example consultation at Eastern European shops, through the drugs intervention programme and drug users involvement in sessions. Attempts to reach groups should not be done by the partnership alone and should link to other council, partner and voluntary sector initiatives.

5. Key Considerations

The review group learnt about the different methods of community engagement either undertaken by the partnership or available to the partnership. These ranged from paper surveys to small local groups. The review group considered that there is a wealth of activity taking place and information available.

Emerging from the review process was six areas of concern and consideration:

- Need to make better use of the current community engagement activity and the networks already in existence – including through town and parish councils, PACTs and forums
- Improve feedback to communities as a method of improving engagement and as an opportunity to address perceptions of crime
- That engagement with “hard to reach” and vulnerable people had improved, but innovative ideas are always needed
- A balance needs to be struck between resource implication and the amount of community consultation / engagement
- Measuring the quality and success of community engagement is difficult. That national guidance points to community engagement as having a positive effect but without hard and fast data to support this. Currently available data can be included to indicators concerned with:
 - Crime figures
 - Percentage of people who feel they can influence decisions in their locality
 - Perceptions of crime
- The review group found through individual case studies and anecdotal evidence that community engagement is a valuable tool in addressing crime and perception of crime.

² The Consultation Institute 2007

ⁱ June 2008

6. Recommendations

- Improve relationship with Town and Parish Councils taking into consideration resource implications and likely outcome.
- Town Council Champions created as the anchor between the partnership and newly formed Local Community Safety and Drugs Forums.
- PACT meetings could be a valuable tool, but the review had deep concerns as to how well they are working. A separate review should be undertaken, possibly via Local Area Member Briefings to improve PACT meetings.
Items to be considered:
 - “Ownership” – should PACT meetings be owned by Herefordshire Council, Police, Town or Parish Councillors or a combination of all four?
 - Improving feedback and using this as an opportunity for communication
 - More effective advertising of meetings
- The Drug and Alcohol Forums become the Local Community Safety and Drugs Forums with a lead Community Support Officer, and additional funding sought for the forums to address the wider issue of reducing crime.
- That partnership officers are involved in the parish plan process to ensure community safety is included in the production of effective plans.
- To continue engagement with “hard to reach” groups and investigate linkages with other council, partner and voluntary sector consultation initiatives.
- That the new community pride grants for the county include support for small initiatives that aim to design out crime.
- The importance of feedback is emphasised to all officers and partners both to improve community engagement and to address perception of crime. All opportunities for giving feedback should be exploited e.g. PACT meetings, Parish Councils, Neighbourhood Watch.
- Public engagement is a valuable tool to improve public safety and public services by truly understanding the needs of residents. A separate review should be undertaken to evaluate the quantity and quality of the consultation and public engagement events that are taking place or likely to take place within the whole Council.

Case Study 1: Anti Social Behaviour in Clehonger

Raised through the HCSDP Community Safety Officer attending weekly meetings with the Police was the increased and ongoing anti-social behaviour in the Clehonger area.

This included criminal damage to the youth shelter, anti social driving in the village hall car park, underage drinking and stone throwing at the bus windows (the evening bus has now been rerouted to stop outside the village due to consistent damage).

As a short-term measure HCSDP and Community Safety Team produced and disseminated a poster asking for any information on the offenders who caused criminal damage. A3 Posters were also located in hotspot and community areas such as village hall, youth shelter, etc.

HCSDP's Community Safety Officer attended the local Parish Council and through this meeting it was agreed community consultation would take place to find out the route cause of ASB issues. Four community consultations were organised in the January period of 2008. Two meetings were specifically aimed at young people and two for the rest of the community. Separate meetings allowed for resident's views to be heard without the fear of reprisals. A trained facilitator chaired the meetings to ensure the meetings were proactive and constructive as possible. A confidential box was also set up.

Interventions that were agreed consisted of improving the youth shelter and the area where it was situated. Also established was a stakeholders group consisting of local representation with the young people as the main lead.

To date the stakeholder group has been successful in submitting and achieving an approved £15,000 application by the Youth Opportunities Fund for a new vandal proof youth shelter and swings. The group is currently progressing the project by looking at new sightings for the shelter, timescales, ordering of equipment etc and it looks hopeful that the shelter will be installed in early 2009. To also encourage children to use the playing field young people requested that swings were situated on the site so that the area was as user friendly as possible.

There has been a dramatic decrease in the report of criminal damage, starting at the first week of the consultation.

Case Study 2 - Blake Gardens, Ross-on-Wye

An issue at Blake Gardens was raised by a Community Support Officer at the Ross on Wye Drug Forum that there was a number of incidents regarding alcohol related disorder and underage drinking. The Drug Forum agreed that a small working team should meet to look at solutions.

2 community consultations were held, with feedback and regular communication kept residents updated on activity as well as receiving information on what to do if there was a problem. Targeted work took place with some year 9 children in the summer on alcohol education as part of another project by the Drug Forum. The police increased their visibility by adding the area to their beat route around Ross on Wye. The CSO's walk the area regularly with police with visibility increased to at least 2 hours a week. 2 residents have been made into capable guardians and they are encouraged to report any ASB to the police. Young people appear to have stopped gathering in this area as the main perpetrators have been reprimanded by the police.

As a result of the intervention there have been no verbal or formal reports of problems at Blake Gardens since February 2008.

Key:

ASB – anti-social behaviour

CSO – Community Support Officers

HCSDP – Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership

PACT – Partners and Community Together

REVIEW:	Community Engagement in Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership	
Committee:	Community Services Scrutiny Committee	Chair: Councillor P M Morgan
Lead support officer:	Natalia Silver, Head of Economic and Community Services	

SCOPING**Terms of Reference****The objectives of this review:**

- To understand the mechanism in which communities currently engage in the Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership.
- To look at models of engagement in other merged partnerships through desk research and interviews in relevant parties, e.g. Government Office and best practice elsewhere.
- To recommend ways, if required, of enhancing community engagement that is effective for the partnership and productive for the community in addressing local crime.
- To align these recommendations with national and regional guidance and practices.

Desired outcomes

- To gain an understanding of current practice for community engagement in Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership.
- For community engagement to address the issue of perceptions of crime and contribute to address key issues of community safety impacting on the County.
- To recommend ways of enhancing community engagement if required, and methods of promoting that engagement to enable local delivery of community safety.

Key questions

- How are communities able to engage in the work of HCSDP?
- How are the opportunities for engagement promoted?
- What influence does the consultation and involvement of the community have in influencing strategy or local activity?
- What, if any, are the barriers to communities becoming involved, influencing and shaping community safety policy and activity?
- How does the engagement of community marry with national and regional guidance in operating Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership?
- Are there other areas of good practice that can be used in Herefordshire?
- What are the best mechanisms for community engagement considering resources available, relevance to the work of the HCSDP and best utilisation of individuals / communities time?

Corporate Plan Priorities

Stronger and Safer Communities

Timetable (some of the facilities are only open seasonally and will influence the time table)

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Timescale</i>
Agree approach, programme of consultation/research/provisional witnesses/dates (first meeting with members)	June 08
Collect current available data	July to August 08
Analysis of data	September 08
Final confirmation of interviews of witnesses	July / August / September 08
Carry out programme of interviews	September / October 08
Update to Scrutiny Committee	To be confirmed

Final analysis of data and witness evidence	November 08
Present Final report to Scrutiny Committee	January 09
Present options/recommendations to Cabinet	February 09
Cabinet response	March 09
Implementation of agreed recommendations	April 09 onwards

Members	Support Officers
Councillor PGH Cutter	Laura Tyler, Community Safety Officer
Councillor DW Greenow	
Councillor KS Guthrie	
