

COMMUNITY SAFETY AND COMMUNITY JUSTICE – THE THAMES VALLEY PARTNERSHIP’S JOURNEY, 1993 – 2008

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Abstract

The Thames Valley Partnership held a conference on 18th March, 2008, to celebrate the work of its retiring Chief Executive, Sue Raikes, and to review the Partnership’s experience over the 15 years of its existence and the twelve years during which Sue Raikes had been Chief Executive. About 35 people were present, from a wide range of backgrounds including representatives of national organisations and central government, most of whom were working with the Partnership in one capacity or another or had done so previously. The title ‘The Journey’ was intended to convey a sense of the movement and progress which had taken place over that period, and to look forward as well as to the past.

This paper records and reflects on the main points which were made at the conference and in subsequent discussion. Information about the Partnership, its work, its people and the projects and programmes mentioned in the paper, together with most of its publications, is available on its website www.thamesvalleypartnership.org.uk

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Origins of the Thames Valley Partnership

The Thames Valley Partnership was formed in 1993, at the instigation of Charles (now Sir Charles) Pollard, the Chief Constable of the Thames Valley Police. Its original purpose was to co-ordinate and stimulate the local services’ responses to crime and their efforts to promote community safety. The need for local as well as national co-ordination had become clear from the attempts which had been made during the 1980s to manage the criminal justice system as a whole and to develop inter-agency, community-based programmes to reduce crime and increase public confidence. Much of the effort, then as now, was directed towards more effective management of the criminal justice system itself

– police, prosecution, courts, prisons and probation and the interactions between them. But preventive work and the importance of partnerships with services outside the criminal justice system, such as health and education, began to receive increasing attention. Examples included the formation of the new national voluntary organisation Crime Concern, the ‘Safer Cities’ programmes in certain large towns, and in the Morgan report on Safer Communities (Morgan, 1991), published in 1991 although its recommendations were not fully acted upon until the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 (Faulkner, 2006).

Some of the functions originally intended for the Partnership were later taken over by other bodies, especially the government-sponsored local criminal justice committees and community safety partnerships which have now become Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs) and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). But the Partnership found an increasing role for itself – and an increasing appreciation of that role – in identifying needs, exploring possibilities, finding opportunities, making connections, generating ideas, and brokering those ideas so that statutory services and voluntary and community organisations could put them into practice. The role was related to several features of modern life - the changing fabric of social life and social conditions in modern Britain, the increasing complexity of relationships between agencies, and the intense pressure under which public services now have to operate.

The Partnership has always worked from a set of beliefs which are founded partly on its social values and partly on its own practical experience. They are essentially that:

- People and relationships count for more than structures and processes.
- Everyone deserves respect and is of equal value as a human being - no-one should ever be seen as beyond hope.
- What happens in childhood can have a profound effect later on, often from one generation to the next.
- The best and most realistic hope for reducing crime and its consequences is with families and communities.

Those beliefs translate into the Partnership’s three guiding principles:

- Community Engagement and Social Inclusion
- Conflict Resolution and Restorative Justice
- Arts as a Method of Engaging and Communicating.

They are reflected in its programmes of work on such subjects as early intervention, domestic violence, restorative justice and community safety.

In the early years the Partnership framed its work in the language of community safety, describing it as a broad approach to preventing crime which brought together a wide range

of organisations and interests. It now describes its work as seeking long-term solutions to crime and tackling social exclusion. It always tries to use ordinary words, to avoid the sometimes loaded clichés of politics and management, the over-dramatisation of a ‘war on crime’, and any language which gives people labels or treats them as objects.

Context and Impressions

Most of the government’s criminal justice and social policies have a bearing on the issues with which the Partnership is engaged. The Partnership has been most directly affected by, and has often contributed to, those concerned with education and children, including the government’s programme ‘Every Child Matters’ (Department for Education and Skills, 2003); youth justice; crime and disorder; the management of prisons; the reform of probation; neighbourhood policing; the involvement of the voluntary and community sector; social exclusion; and the empowerment of communities and local citizens. All those policies have aims and intentions that are broadly in line with those of the Partnership itself.

No less significant for the Partnership has been the wider context of public service reform which now affects any organisation working in or with the public sector, including of course the Partnership itself and those who provide its funding. The need for efficiency, economy and accountability, and for consistency, economies of scale, safety, and visible results and effectiveness, is now taken for granted. Management practices such as performance measurement, risk assessment, targets, accreditation, and contracts are accepted even if they are not always welcomed. There is now a sharper focus and a stronger sense of accountability and responsibility to public services of all kinds. The Partnership itself has always been concerned to make sure that its own management conforms to the best standards of recognised good practice.

There have however been a number of consequences, some of them intended, some of them not. Public services will always, and rightly, be under pressure to achieve the maximum volume of output with whatever resources they have available. They will always, and rightly, want to make sure that a consistent level and standard of service is available across the country as a whole – to avoid a ‘post-code lottery’. Services will therefore have understandable difficulty in supporting, and even more in ‘mainstreaming’, programmes which do not easily fit their performance criteria. They will tend to prefer large-scale programmes to smaller and perhaps more costly schemes in small local areas or matched to individual users. Demonstrating compliance with the rules has sometimes seemed to be of more immediate importance than any results which might be achieved in the more distant future. Higher expectations of performance and accountability have created a bureaucracy of form-filling, ‘ticking boxes’, and submitting returns and reports which has kept public servants at their desks and computers and has prevented them from making human contact with those for whom they have responsibility or even with their own colleagues. Recognising that situation, the Partnership appreciates the interest which

colleagues in central government have taken in its work and their attendance at many of its events.

Practitioners working in large organisations may not have, or be allowed, the time to give to so-called 'hard to reach' individuals the attention and understanding which might make all the difference to their own future and to the future of those close to them. They may not have, or be allowed, much tolerance for those who do not for whatever reason take the opportunities that are offered to them or who struggle to understand instructions or respond to them. In the context of predominantly hostile media and confrontational politics, few will feel encouraged to try new methods which might seem to conflict with government's expectations, which might make themselves vulnerable to criticism, or which might put their careers or funding at risk. In this culture it may be the organisations themselves, rather than individuals, that become 'hard to reach'.

How the Partnership Works

That is the landscape through which the Partnership has been travelling. It recognises the difficulties which government, criminal justice services and their partners have found in working together and in identifying and responding to need in complex situations, and it has tried to find ways of overcoming or working round those, sometimes inevitable, frustrations and to fill some of the gaps that services cannot fill on their own. The role it has found for itself is one of brokerage, mediation and exploration; of developing partnerships and giving them support; of developing and supporting innovation; and of disseminating and sharing ideas with the aim of influencing the wider social and political agenda. It creates settings in which people can meet and feel confident in sharing thoughts and impressions, where they can be encouraged to think strategically and 'out of the box', and where they can be stimulated and challenged without feeling defensive, exposed or vulnerable. Important factors include trust, respect, continuity of contact, relationships, opportunities and motivation. To achieve them requires flexibility, local relevance, and responsiveness to individual and local concerns and opportunities. All those can be difficult to achieve in present circumstances.

In work with offenders, the government's main objective has been a reduction in re-offending, to be brought about by improving the evidence for 'what works', more accurate assessment of offenders' needs and risks, better-designed programmes and interventions, and more effective offender management, including enforcement. Mike Hough has described the approach as a 'case management/interventions' model, and argues that it should be complemented by a 'casework/craft model' focusing on relationships and motivation and drawing on studies of desistance and the factors that influence offenders to stop offending (Hough, 2008; McNeill et al, 2005; McNeill and Weaver, 2007). That is more or less the approach which the Partnership has followed.

The Partnership has always adopted a self-critical attitude, constantly asking what difference is being made, what is being achieved, what could be done better, and for what

reasons? Its programmes are always the subject of publicly available reports, but the nature of the issues and the role of the Partnership as a broker or catalyst rather than a service provider or deliverer makes it difficult to assess its own contribution to a piece of work which has largely been carried out by others. It is similarly difficult to say how much of the credit (or blame) is due to the Partnership or to those with whom it has been working.

How Far the Partnership has Travelled – what it has Learnt and Achieved

The Partnership has been able to identify a number of lessons which can be applied to the approach which services have taken to crime, social exclusion and community safety in the Thames Valley, and probably in other areas as well.

One lesson is that if people really want something to be done about the pain, grief and fear that cause and are caused by crime, they cannot leave it to government, or to the statutory services, on their own. That is quite often said, but the implications are less often followed through. Services (not only those which are part of the criminal justice system), voluntary organisations, communities and individual citizens all have to deal with people's situations and emotions as they find them, and must try to repair the damage as people have experienced it. Government and Parliament will normally provide the legislative, financial and policy framework, and within those it can make the work easier for them and give them encouragement and support. It can and does consult, as it has done for example in the strategy for Prolific and other Priority Offenders (PPOs) and Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), although the Partnership was not itself involved in those particular subjects. But it should be ready to listen as well as explain, it should not structure the questions to get the answers it wants, and it should not be too prescriptive in telling people what to do or how to do it. And although services and the Partnership itself will always have an eye on government and what it expects, some of the best work with which the Partnership has been associated has had nothing to do with government policy.

The policy and legislation on anti-social behaviour highlighted the problem and provided the framework, but then created first the rhetoric and then the expectation that the right response to nuisance was law enforcement and a new bureaucracy. Not much effort was made to develop social forms of prevention or to encourage local people to seek their own solutions. There has been surprisingly little research on the effectiveness of anti-social behaviour orders (for what there is, see www.respect.gov.uk/members/article.aspx?id=8284 and Campbell 2002). The Partnership's programme Mending Fences (see below) promoted problem solving, mediation-based and community oriented approaches to anti-social behaviour, but it was swimming against the prevailing tide and the information, skills and capacity proved inadequate. There is now some recognition that positive intervention and conflict resolution have an important part to play but all the structures – and funding – have

followed the enforcement route and many of the organizations who could have helped have disappeared.

Situations with which the Partnership becomes engaged are typically those where individuals, families or neighbourhoods are disproportionately affected by crime or are at risk. It may not make much sense to distinguish between 'offenders' and 'innocent victims': many people are both. Services and 'interventions' intended to be used by those who are socially excluded – young people at risk, having difficulty in education, parents who are struggling to cope, those with mental health problems, whether or not they are offenders - should be accessible, through processes and in locations where the person will not feel intimidated or out of place. People may need help or encouragement in gaining access to them or in starting to take part, and in becoming confident and familiar with what is expected or required.

The Partnership has found that many people who have been in trouble want to stop their own offending and most wish to prevent offending by others. They almost invariably want the best for their families and their children, not a life of crime. They would often like to accept help, but different people react to different situations or interventions in different ways. They may have difficulty if they have to make awkward journeys, put themselves in situations where they feel uncomfortable or out of place, keep to fixed times, or follow instructions they find pointless or complicated. Or the 'help' offered may not actually be helpful to them, have too many conditions, or seem meaningless. People are most responsive when they have feel they have some control, some choice and some sense of their own responsibility and ownership for what they are being required or expected to do. Almost everyone is capable of making progress, but it may have to be at their own pace and they may have to recover from setbacks on the way. Failing to take advantage of opportunities may not be a simple matter of personal choice, or deserve automatic punishment. The new methods of offender management are intended to make it easier for offenders and their families to gain access to mainstream resources, and the Partnership has been able to help, for example by enabling prison establishments and local probation teams to be better informed about what is available from family support services.

Providers of services or managers of offenders need to be allowed some discretion and flexibility when dealing with human lapses such as being late for an appointment, misbehaving in class or causing a public nuisance. They should not assume, and government policy should not assume, that they will always make rational choices, and the consequences of not doing so need not always be as severe as being sent to prison or losing one's home. Those responsible for services need to recognise what else may be going on in the lives of their service users – their own, or of those close to them. Abuse, domestic violence, poor health, mental health problems, drugs, alcohol, the imprisonment of a parent or other close relative, are some examples.

'What Works' depends as much on personalities, situations and relationships as it does on the actual content of a programme, course or intervention. Pilots which work may do so

more because of the interest and enthusiasm they generate than because of anything in their actual content. Almost any reasonable intervention will 'work' in the right circumstances and with the right people in charge. Programmes or models rolled out on an industrial scale may overlook the personal relationships that may be a necessary condition for their success. Although the modern emphasis is almost always on outputs and outcomes, the journey itself can be just as important – each step is progress and prepares the way for the next. A person's fellow travellers may be as important as the vehicle in which the journey is made or the road signs on the way.

Early Intervention

The Partnership's work on early intervention began in its earliest days with 'Schools in Action'. The aim was to encourage young people to find ways in which they could be active citizens by improving their school or community, and by taking an inclusive approach to community safety (Thames Valley Partnership, 2007). The programme helped schools before it entered the mainstream as part of the national curriculum. Later work tested different methods of intervention across a range of family support and early intervention projects in Slough and Oxford, and went on to test geographical targeting for intensive work in three areas of high deprivation which did not qualify for national funding under the criteria used at that time.

Poor collaboration between statutory and voluntary agencies was a consistent finding, but the main conclusion was that different situations call for different approaches (Ball and Awan, 2001). Success depends on relationships, personalities, the commitment of staff, and on what else is going on – the availability of other local services, the working culture and levels of engagement. A number of principles and approaches can be identified, for example the importance of supportive families and the need so far as possible to keep children in school and out of the criminal justice system. The approach was to engage with and to respond directly to issues identified in the three communities. The project therefore took a different form in each of the pilot areas, and no 'pure' models emerged which could be guaranteed to work in all settings or be suitable for general application.

A further development focused on social exclusion, later linked with the work of the government's Social Exclusion Unit. It concentrated especially on exclusions from school, problems of dealing with low achievement or poor behaviour, and the critical transition from primary to secondary school. The Partnership identified the importance of a whole school commitment to work with pupils who were posing difficulties and to using exclusion as a last resort. At the same time the restorative justice approach being promoted by Thames Valley Police was breaking new ground (Young and Hoyle, 2003) and set the framework for a much more direct and positive involvement of police officers in schools which is now central to the Safer Schools Initiative. It would now be common ground that the ways in which schools deal with "internal" problems such as bullying and drugs cannot be separated from problems of crime in the local community. Proactive

restorative justice approaches and problem solving are effective, but schools may need help because those approaches have not been part of their culture.

At this point the Partnership began to explore the potential of drama, script writing, film, music and dance to engage young people in themes relating to citizenship and community safety which give them new skills, confidence and ways of expressing themselves. Many of the projects supported within the 'Schools in Action' strand of work naturally used arts as a means of communication, to initiate debate and to look at issues of self-image and self-worth with young people. At about this time, Theatre ADAD was commissioned to produce a piece on Restorative Practices and it became clear that arts programmes can be a very effective tool. Since that time, many art forms, (for example film, ceramics, dance, aerial skills, photography), have been effectively employed with young people, disengaged communities and older offenders to explore ideas about community safety. The Partnership is now progressing on from this issue based approach towards seeing art as a powerful medium in its own right because of its capacity to engage those who struggle to engage in other ways. Creative approaches develop the capacity to imagine the world differently and, in a fast changing society, everyone needs the ability to conceptualise the world in a different way, foster the ability to cope with change and draw on inner confidence and motivation to make change happen for themselves (Thames Valley Partnership, 2005).

Five years ago, in 2003, the Partnership identified the children and families of offenders as a highly excluded group who had so far received little or no attention from statutory agencies. It contributed to the review of Families at Risk by the Social Exclusion Task Force (Social Exclusion Unit 2006), and to the joint review of the Children of Offenders by the (Department for Children, Schools and Families and Ministry of Justice, 2007). The Partnership's current programme under the title Family Matters has as its purpose to support the resettlement of offenders and break the cycle of offending within families through:

- Improving access to support for the families and children of offenders and prisoners
- Integrating the work of the criminal justice agencies and family and children's services in support of these vulnerable families
- Strengthening family ties of prisoners to aid their re-integration into their family and community.'

It thus aims to bring high quality support to a group of children who are at high risk of future criminality, victimisation, mental health problems, or poor educational achievement (Thames Valley Partnership 2008). The radical thinking behind 'Family Matters' is the open recognition of the need to break the cycle of violence and offending, and its readiness to do this by engaging actively with offenders despite possible criticisms that such a direct approach might lead to criticisms of stigmatization and net-widening. The Social Exclusion Unit reached the same conclusion in its Review. The National

Offender Management Service has identified the children and families of prisoners as one of the 'pathways to resettlement' – maintaining or restoring links with families can help prisoners to resettle in their communities and not to re-offend, but 'Family Matters' draws more of its inspiration from social policy on social exclusion, children's centres, and Sure Start, for example, than it does from criminal justice.

Domestic Violence

The progress which the Partnership has made on domestic violence illustrates many of the twists, turns and challenges of its work as a whole. Responding to domestic violence is a sensitive and complex matter, and requires commitment across different disciplines and structures. There are strong and often conflicting views, prejudices, taboos and philosophical tensions. Agencies find it easier to react after violence has taken place and been reported than to help to prevent it from happening in the first place. It is still difficult to obtain a strategic lead from local authorities who prefer to leave the subject to the police. It is essential to establish trust on the part of victims and if possible perpetrators and successful prevention may involve working with perpetrators and offering them opportunities to change – both inside and outside the criminal justice system.

Working with many others, the Partnership has now succeeded in moving domestic violence firmly up the agenda, in principle if not always in practice. The approach was to start with local partnerships and forums, to engage the interest of practitioners, and make connections with work on related subjects such as bullying, child sexual abuse and attitudes towards health and relationships more generally. That approach has helped Thames Valley Probation to work more actively on domestic violence, and to do so in partnership with others and with a better understanding of the wider social context. But it is only after fourteen years of work in this field that the Partnership has really been able to focus on prevention and breaking the cycle. Its 'No Joke!' programme in secondary schools, linked to the national 'Stop it Now!' campaign for a radically different approach to child abuse, brought agencies together to design and deliver a whole-school approach to domestic violence and its prevention, taking the implications for children into the mainstream of provision for responsible authorities and seeking to engage the wider local community. Agencies are beginning to focus more effectively on prevention and breaking the cycle, but for many of them a focus on prevention is still not on the agenda and there is too often an absence of strategic leadership. Nor is there so far enough recognition of the effects of domestic violence on children, for example on their behaviour and achievement at school, their relationships, their sexual and mental health, and their attitudes to violence more generally.

Restorative Justice

Restorative justice began to attract interest in Great Britain during the 1980s, and the concept was firmly embraced by Thames Valley Police in the 1990s. The Partnership became involved initially with research on restorative cautioning for young offenders and with the scheme which was later incorporated into the arrangements for referral panels as

part of the reforms of youth justice under the Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 (Young and Hoyle 2003, Wilcox and Young, 2007). Those arrangements are now well established, if still limited in their ambition and scope, and are generally considered to be successful.

Restorative justice has not made similar progress in the criminal justice system for adults, and a number of pilot schemes have been brought to an end without being taken into the mainstream, although they showed particularly positive results in terms of victim satisfaction (Sherman and Strang, 2007; Shapland, 2007). The exception is in the Thames Valley, where the scheme has been kept in being with support from the Partnership and local sentencers. One of the reasons for the lack of progress may be the difficulty of demonstrating that restorative justice helps towards the government's overall priority of reducing re-offending, even though it clearly gives satisfaction to victims. It is also hard to reconcile restorative approaches with an adversarial system of justice in which there is almost always an expectation of punishment.

The Partnership has seen restorative justice not so much as an alternative or additional form of criminal process, but more as an inspiration for new approaches across the whole range of community safety issues, including conflict in families and schools, the management of institutions such as prisons, and in resolving problems within communities. It has supported peer mediation and methods of conflict resolution in schools and these have now become more established in the mainstream, especially in special schools and residential homes for children. Work also continues to develop restorative justice in prisons, in communities as a response to anti-social behaviour, and with offenders and victims.

Restorative justice has an obvious application to crime and disorder, to the work of CDRPs, and to the government's former programme for 'Respect' and its continuing focus on anti-social behaviour. Mediation may often be a more effective and lasting way of resolving disputes within communities and between neighbours than enforcement followed by criminal proceedings or anti-social behaviour orders. Mention has already been made of the Mending Fences project where the Partnership worked with mediation schemes to develop their capacity to become significant players in what was becoming an anti-social behaviour industry. The project had some success in raising awareness of the scope for mediation in relation to anti-social behaviour, but this work initially ran counter to the prevailing political culture which promoted enforcement as the primary response. In situations of that kind it may be more effective to develop capacity in existing organisations committed to mediation or restorative approaches than to rely on experts or enthusiasts brought in from outside to set up new initiatives, however skilled or committed they might be.

A further development of the Partnership's commitment to restorative justice in the form of reparation is its current programme 'Making Good', where the aim is to engage communities in deciding on the kind of unpaid work to be done by offenders as part of a community sentence. The aims are to give the offender a stronger sense of purpose in

carrying out the work and a greater commitment to completing it successfully and to a high standard, and at the same time to give the wider public greater understanding of the potential for community sentences and confidence in their value and effectiveness. The work is promising and exciting, but requires genuine investment – community engagement is not a 'quick fix'. The extension of this way of working will be difficult while probation remains under the pressures of constant structural change and an excessive caseload from which it suffers at present.

The Partnership gave support to two new organisations in their early days. Circles of Support and Accountability for sex offenders (www.circles-uk.org.uk) has now been launched as an independent organisation with a national development plan funded by government (Nellis, 2008; Hampshire and Thames Valley Circles 2008); and Escaping Victimhood will soon be launched as an independent organisation to help people affected by serious crime such as the murder of a close relative. Both organisations valued the support which the Partnership was able to provide at the crucial early stage before their work was recognised.

Community Safety

Work on community safety as it developed during the 1980s and 1990s was intended to respond to local concerns, reduce crime and fear of crime, and build local confidence. Many organisations and individuals were involved, often working to different agendas and with little systematic knowledge of what might be involved or could be achieved. CDRPs have now become much larger industries, driven by national targets and more narrowly focused on government priorities. One result has been that local people have fewer opportunities to be involved (Raikes, Hedge and Chinery, 2006). Many CDRPs have come to concentrate on physical and situational prevention, on persistent and prolific offenders, and on the use of anti-social behaviour orders, while preventive work with younger children, families in difficulties, or children struggling in education rarely features in the plans. Community safety and criminal justice both need to be connected at a strategic and practical level with the policies for children being developed as part of the programme for Every Child Matters. The Partnership welcomes the recent involvement of the Department for Children, Schools and Families and its new remit for youth justice, which clearly indicate that work with young offenders is no longer the sole responsibility of the criminal justice system.

The Partnership believes that work on reducing crime and disorder should allow and encourage citizens and communities to be involved and to have a genuine sense of ownership of what is being for their benefit and in their name. That is now the aim for Neighbourhood Policing, where there are many similarities in the concerns and issues identified by local people. Neighbourhood policing represents a significant shift of philosophy in policing, and in theory it has been mainstreamed across the country from April 2008. It provides an opportunity to replace the engagement of local communities which became lost when work on community safety became more formalised. Building on

a conference held in 2006 (Thames Valley Partnership 2006), the Partnership looks forward to its further development in the Thames Valley region (For the connection with Integrated Offender Management, see below).

Features Contributing to Success

Several features of the Partnership and of the way it works can be identified as having contributed significantly to any success it may have achieved.

The Partnership has established extensive links across both the statutory and voluntary sectors, as well as with central government. It does not put itself forward as a service provider, but sometimes takes responsibility for developing a new service while the practice becomes established in the mainstream or is adopted by another, more specialist, organisation. The aim is to move from small scale projects towards creating and sustaining structures for delivery. The Partnership focuses on what needs to be done and why, on what can be achieved by working together, but does not try to develop restrictive or inflexible models to which schemes are required to conform. The amount of money that is used for pump priming is normally very small and used to respond to local requests from partners – the idea is to mobilise the resources that are available or can be generated within communities themselves or from agencies working in those communities, so that the work does not become dependent on external funding. An interesting and significant example is the baby clinic opened on the Bretch Hill estate in Banbury. The idea came from local residents and practitioners and was a simple solution which no-one had thought of until the Partnership brought people together. A very small amount of funding to 'prime the pump' combined with a re-arrangement of priorities by local practitioners led to a small scale but valued and sustainable resource.

The Partnership has good, and usually excellent, relations with government departments, statutory services, local authorities, and other voluntary organisations. It appreciates their interest and support. It works closely with many of them, and receives funding from some of them, as well as from foundations and other sources. It could not have been so creative without the support of its core funders, and it is especially grateful to Thames Valley Police and to the Probation Service in Thames Valley. But the Partnership has always guarded its independence, without which it would lose its authority and credibility and with those its leverage, impact and reputation. The Partnership's independence enables it to be an effective 'critical friend' to statutory services, to support them when possible, and to challenge them when necessary. It can make connections and promote ideas and initiatives where others cannot. It can also provide a 'safe space' where people can meet to exchange impressions, opinions and ideas without the risk of feeling threatened or compromised. It still uses traditional as well as new methods to share and disseminate ideas – meetings, networks, seminars and conferences. It is not afraid to spend time in discussion and does not follow the current fashion for dismissing meetings as 'talking shops': its conversations always have a purpose and very often a practical outcome in the longer term. E-mail and the internet have become an essential part of modern

communications and the Partnership uses them freely, but there is still no substitute for bringing people together in the same room and sharing ideas and aspirations in face-to-face discussion.

The Partnership operates at different levels, from central government to individual families and small neighbourhood organisations, through a wide range of networks. It is widely known in the Thames Valley and has access, and can make introductions, to the right people or the right organisations for a wide range of purposes. It can usually identify the right time and place to try out a new idea and the right people to engage in it – but it cannot move on its own if others are not ready and able to take part.

The Partnership has over the years received support from a large number of companies and charitable trusts – Arts Council England, South East; Esmee Fairbairn Foundation; Equitable Charitable Trust; Henry Smith Charity; Lankelly Chase Foundation; Lloyds TSB Foundation for England and Wales; Nuffield Foundation; Vodafone UK Foundation; Wates Foundation; and many others. What they have universally valued is the Partnership's independence, its robust approach to quality and its potential to try ideas in a practical way. The Partnership has represented low risk and high impact, and the money has gone a long way. Although the Partnership relies on its funders to support its work, it is not driven by its sources of funding. It does not take on new work simply because funding might be available for it: it decides first what is needed and what it can realistically expect to do, and looks for funding – often quite small amounts – to support it. It insists on sustainability and transferability – the work must not come to an end when the funds run out, and if it has proved successful it should be 'mainstreamed' or taken over by another, more specialist organisation. The Partnership will only be the service provider for a limited period, if at all.

Government, Communities and the Partnership – Where Next?

It is hard to predict what the situation will be in two or three years time. Everyday someone – a Minister, a report from a foundation, a columnist in a newspaper – will declare that the future is in devolution, citizens' empowerment, community involvement, a revival of local government and so forth. But even following the government's most recent proposals on community empowerment (Department for Communities and Local Government (2008) it is still not clear what that future might look like, and the proposals have little to say about criminal justice except in relation to neighbourhood policing and 'community payback'. And yet criminal justice is above all the area where progress is desperately needed. It is difficult for governments which have constantly to respond to opposition parties and to newspapers which thrive on turning every initiative into an opportunity to make the government appear incompetent, indecisive or 'soft on offenders'. Initiatives at a more local level may have better prospects of acceptance and support.

The questions include:

- Does mainstreaming within public services inevitably result in less engagement by citizens and communities?
- How is it possible to drive up performance and involve local people at the same time?
- Is it possible to build public confidence when both politicians and the media thrive on stories that depict a 'broken' society where the majority have constantly to defend themselves against a dangerous and lawless minority?
- What is the best balance between targeted and universal provision, and what are the best means of ensuring that targeting does not involve stigmatizing and that intervention does not become interference?
- How can the tension between the need for economies of scale and the importance of quality best be resolved?
- 'Bottom up' and 'top down' approaches are both needed, how can they best be reconciled?

None of those questions have straightforward answers, or any answers which can be applied to all situations.

There have been three promising developments since the conference on The Journey took place. One is the action plan for youth justice (Ministry of Justice, 2008) which proposes a greater emphasis on early intervention and children's welfare, with a stronger role for local authorities and children's trusts. The second is the green paper on policing (Home Office, 2008), with its plans to develop neighbourhood policing 'by giving the public more chance to drive local priorities' and for a 'national pledge that guarantees...some key service standards' with the prospect of a 'more personalized service'. The third is the plan for Integrated Offender Management, announced by the Ministry of Justice on 16th July, designed to bring about closer integration between neighbourhood policing, youth offending services, partner agencies outside the criminal justice system, and bodies such as LCJBs and CDRPs, with local communities being closely involved. All those indicate a direction of travel which is very similar to that of the Partnership's own journey.

Led by its new Chief Executive, Lindsey Poole, the Partnership will continue to play its part in helping services and communities to find the solutions which work best for them in particular places, at particular times and for particular individuals.

End Note

1. David is a Trustee of the Thames Valley Partnership

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