



A RESEARCH REPORT FOR BELFAST CONFLICT RESOLUTION CONSORTIUM

Community Safety: A Decade of Development, Delivery, Challenge and Change in Northern Ireland

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr Jonny Byrne and Dr John Topping, University of Ulster

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Executive Summary

IN September 2011, the Belfast Conflict Resolution Consortium (BCRC) commissioned research to examine the development of community safety policy since the publication of the Patten report in 1999. The research was also tasked with considering the range of dynamics which impact upon participation in, and delivery of, community safety programmes within interface communities while exploring challenges facing the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships. Over a two month period between October and November 2011, an extensive audit and analysis of policy documents, academic literature and research reports related to the development and implementation of community safety was conducted. Alongside this, thirty semi-structured interviews were carried out with representatives from the community, voluntary and statutory sector.

The initial review of academic literature and policy highlighted a number of political developments which have positively influenced the community safety agenda – including the restoration of the Northern Ireland Assembly in May 2007 and the devolution of policing and justice powers in April 2010. In this regard, several observations can be made in relation to the design and development of a community safety approach suited to the unique landscape of a society in transition:

- The political, policing and security landscape over the past decade has had a direct impact and influence upon the delivery of a community safety model as originally envisaged by the Independent Commission for Policing in Northern Ireland;
- Local communities have embraced the concept of community safety. However, levels of community participation in local initiatives have been inconsistent across Northern Ireland;
- There has been a degree of scepticism at community level as to how much impact the community sector has historically had in relation to community safety and policing issues, especially when set against the influence of elected representatives and service providers;
- Because of the ever-changing policing and security environment, it has been challenging for statutory bodies to deliver what might be considered ‘normal’ policing and community safety services;
- The past decade has been predicated upon cultivating a more inclusive environment in which service and community providers can work together in delivering a community safety model suited to the needs of all stakeholders;
- The next decade of community safety and policing is about building upon existing practice and partnerships, and aligning those with the Department of Justice’s new vision for safer, shared and confident communities.

Aside from the literature review, four case studies were also selected to illustrate the range of community-based programmes and activities that have been established in both urban and rural settings to address the diversity of community safety issues. This analysis revealed the importance of community participation in the successful delivery and implementation of community safety strategies, programmes and initiatives; the need for statutory agencies to be flexible in regards to the holistic nature of community responses to local issues beyond their own policy lens; and the significant role that the ‘community safety’ framework has

in relation to facilitating and encouraging closer partnerships and positive engagements between communities and formal criminal justice providers.

Building upon the case study findings and policy analysis, it became apparent that local community groups were involved in responding to, and providing a diverse range of services to deal with community safety and policing issues. Indeed, a range of volunteers, community activists and (generally) under-resourced community-based organisations played a major role in bridging the gap between statutory service providers and communities through facilitating meetings, promoting advocacy and acting as facilitators for the implementation of the community safety agendas at a local level. A closer examination of their roles revealed a typology of community safety work and activity in which they were regularly engaged. These approaches have been categorised as follows:

- Community advocacy
- Education and intervention
- Emergency response
- Partnerships
- Prevention
- Mediation
- Restorative justice

The research concluded with a series of thirty interviews with representatives from the community, voluntary and statutory sectors. Discussions explored themes surrounding the implementation of community safety strategies within interface communities; participants' experiences of District Policing Partnerships and Community Safety Partnerships; and views on the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships and their potential. The findings revealed that interface communities had suffered disproportionately in terms of the legacy of the conflict in comparison to other urban and rural parts of Northern Ireland. Therefore, the implementation of a community safety agenda not only had to contend with high rates of social and economic deprivation, but also had to incorporate within it, manifestations of the conflict such as sectarian violence, peace walls and insecurities around policing.

The findings which related to DPPs and CSPs revealed a deep sense of frustration in terms of their general inability to address many of the community safety and policing issues prevalent at a community level. Respondents maintained that both sets of partnerships were not representative of the communities in which they served; often operated in isolation from community organising; and beyond pockets of good practice, had failed to meet the local communities' needs or expectations around policing and community safety. There was an acknowledgement that the past decade had been difficult for statutory agencies tasked with implementing and delivering a policing and community safety agenda because of the fluid dynamics underpinning the transition from conflict to peace. However, there was renewed optimism that the devolution of policing and justice powers, along with the political stability at Stormont, would facilitate the successful delivery of an effective, new community safety model in line with the DoJ's goal of creating safer, shared and confident communities.

Finally, the research also captured views and opinions in relation to the forthcoming PCSPs. There was a general consensus that the new structures provided an opportunity to shape

the future of community safety in Northern Ireland and build upon that which had been established through the DPPs and CSPs. As part of the 'streamlining' opportunity provided through the PCSP, a number of challenges were evident from the research. These concerns primarily focused upon the management of the PCSP structures along with issues as to whether PCSPs could facilitate improved input and delivery from statutory and community stakeholders. Aside from immediate challenges, the research also highlighted the need to define more fully, the roles and responsibilities of community stakeholders. Indeed, a key concern was that the community safety strategy, as delivered through the vehicle of the PCSPs, would become a conduit for a wide range of governmental programmes of action without adequately considering the potential limitations of stakeholder input. But in general, there was a great sense of optimism about the amalgamation of DPPs and CSPs, with an acceptance that the first year of the PCSPs would be a period of transition and learning. In general, respondents acknowledged the complexities which underpinned the streamlining of the community safety and policing agendas in Northern Ireland which for a decade had been split between the DPPs and CSPs. And where the lessons from the last decade could be learned, it was felt that the PCSPs could provide an excellent vehicle through which a new era of community safety could be delivered into the next decade. However, it was also evident that stakeholders involved in the delivery of community safety were cautious in relation to the future impact of the new community safety agenda and were now engaged in a 'watching brief' in relation to the 'roll-out'. There was therefore an acknowledgement that the role and function of the PCSPs would need to be carefully monitored as part of the transition to the new community safety landscape. But it was also noted that this transitional period would itself need to be carefully managed to avoid any detrimental impacts at the community level that could potentially negate gains made in relation to policing more broadly.

In view of the research findings, a number of recommendations emerged which have been documented below:

1. That greater consideration should be given to incentives for community involvement in community safety programmes. The research highlighted the difficulties with encouraging local participation in community safety processes. Therefore, training, internships, accredited courses, child care provision and accommodation of other family needs should be considered;
2. Steps should be taken to more formally recognise and quantify the contributions of community-based community safety programmes - outside traditional police centric measure of crime;
3. That sufficient acknowledgement and attention is paid to the continuing fragility surrounding the lives and experiences of those living in interface communities. It is imperative that future community safety agendas are tailored to meet those specific needs and not become subsumed under a broad community safety agenda;
4. That innovative, less bureaucratic means of both providing funding and assessing the impact of community safety programmes must be developed outside the current parameters of statutory frameworks;
5. The inherent frustrations and difficulties associated with the DPPs and CSPs should be taken into account and the necessary adjustments be made as part of the functioning of the new PCSP structures;
6. The DoJ's community safety agenda should not overburden the PCSPs with too many programmes related to the social, economic and political development of communities.