Safer London Panel Workshop on Policing Priorities

29 June 2004

Final Report
June 2004

Contents

Executive Summary

Police authorities are in the process of finding effective and efficient mechanisms to engage the public in decisions on service delivery priorities. Not only is this good practice but it also strengthens relationship with communities. This report presents the finding of a one-day workshop of the " Safer London Panel" held on the 29th June 2004. The findings of the day will inform the MPA priorities for policing in London.

The Metropolitan Police Authority is currently recruiting members of the public to the Safer London Panel. The workshop participants were identified through this recruitment process. A total of 55 individuals from across London, representing diverse age, ethnic, gender groups attended which contributed to the overall success of the day.

As a way of exploring the important issues for policing, participants were asked a series of questions on four key service areas:

- dealing with anti- social behaviour;
- terrorism and major incidents;
- effective relations with the community;
- tackling serious crime.

Main Findings
Although the findings of the workshops varied in relation to the theme areas discussed, there are some key issues across each groups, such as police visibility, preventative approaches to crime, communication and information, working with other agencies, and strengthening relationships with the community.

Police visibility
More visible police presence was considered important across all theme areas. However, whereas some participants felt that too many police in an area could fuel negative perceptions that the area is an unsafe place to be, others emphasised the need for more civilian police on foot patrol particularly in the evening. Some individuals felt that Community Police Support Officers could fulfil this role, but there were concerns that these officers lacked the power to intervene effectively in the case of a neighbour dispute or a serious crime.

Preventative approach to resolving crime
Personal safety seemed to feature highly across all groups but there was also a strong sense that this did not correlate with an increase in CCTV cameras or the introduction of compulsory ID cards. Instead the focus was on strengthening community relations and adopting a preventative approach to tackling crime, (particularly petty crime), by working with local schools, youth groups, ethnic-minority communities (mosques, local churches). These measures were seen as effective in changing perceptions of the police.

Communication and Information

A fuller public information and awareness campaign that provides useful information on the issues and concerns for members of the public that is accessible and relevant was considered to be important. This could include basic information listing individuals, key areas of responsibility, what is new in the police service, how to deal with anti social behaviour, contingency plans for in the event of a terrorist attack. In addition priority information could be made available through television or local newspapers, public meetings, street surveys, public surgeries and posters in public places.

Community relationships

There are many benefits to the police service that arise from achieving good working relationships with all community groups. The police are more likely to influence the public's views of and demand for policing and, indeed, vice versa if there is in place a strong working relationship between the police, the public and all sectors. Maintaining strong public relationships is increasingly important and requires trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police. This can be achieved by improving the police's recruitment practices to represent London's diversity and increase its complement of Community Police Support Officers (PCSO's). However the need for higher visibility "more bobbies on the beat" cannot replace the need for a real relationship, commitment and service quality that the public is seeking.

Terrorism

Participants felt that Londoners need to know that an effective contingency plan exists. This requires involvement of the MPS (especially media relations), all public leaders (including the Mayor) and the community and voluntary sectors (including faith communities).

Anti Social Behaviour

Anti social behaviour is seen as a growing problem in local communities. It not only affects vulnerable members of the community (such as the elderly) but also has a profound impact on local businesses. More effective enforcement measures are needed as current legislation has too many loopholes. Preventative approaches, such as working with parents and schools are important and will yield long-term results but will not address the more immediate problems of anti social behaviour in public spaces. Some alternative recommendations include a weapons amnesty in schools and "on the spot checks", extensions to the anti social behaviour orders, and financial penalties issued to parents. In order to enforce these measures, there needs to be a clear commitment to treat anti social behaviour as a serious offence by all agencies and sufficient resources to make this happen.

Serious Crime

Very few participants had experienced a serious crime and were aware of what the appropriate police response should be. This limited the responses that came from this group and may suggest in the future that an alternative group to the panel be used.

Participants made a number of useful suggestions on improvement to policing on serious crime including developing a multi agency focus on young people's diversionary activities, increasing police visibility (particularly in crime hotspots and on London transport), and improving communication on events after a serious incident.

In summary, the findings show that striking the balance between where resources should be allocated and the priorities of members of the public is a difficult and complex issue for participants and often depends on their personal knowledge and experience of the issues. There are some issues that are easier to engage in (community relations and anti social behaviour) than others (serious crime and terrorism). Across each theme, a number of dichotomies arise including serious crime versus petty crime, uniformed police versus community support police officers, numbers versus quality. Underpinning most of these lay the importance of stronger and more effective relationships of trust and confidence by the community in the police. However, even though many of the recommendations focus on the police, there is also a need to work horizontally with other agencies at a borough-wide level, and vertically with government officials on issues raised such as the extension to anti social behaviour orders, changes in legislation, or improving intelligence (anti terrorism).

All members reported back that they had enjoyed the experience but were concerned that their views and opinions would be taken seriously. The panel also inspired some participants to begin to think about consultative forums in their local borough that they could get involved in.

Introduction and background

This report sets out the proceedings from the "Safer London Panel Workshop" that took place on the 29th June 2004 at the Metropolitan Police Authority. The Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) commissioned OPM (Office for Public Management) to conduct this work.

The purpose of the workshop was to obtain the views and opinions of individuals selected from the Panel on the priorities for the delivery of police services across four key service areas in London dealing with anti-social behaviour, terrorism, effective relations with the community and tackling serious crime.

The findings of the one-day workshop will inform the Metropolitan Police Authority priorities for policing London over the next year. This will ensure that the views of participants are used to develop policy and improve the planning and delivering of police services.

The context to the Panel Workshop is the drive to make the police service more responsive to citizens' needs, to increase public confidence in the police, and to improve local accountability for policing. If the police service is not connected to the public's views, there is a risk that its priorities will not match those of the public, leading to dissatisfaction and lack of confidence. The panel demonstrates the move towards more effective methods of consultation and police-public engagement that include marginalised sections of the population. A "citizen-focussed policing" programme of work will improve the way the authority and constabulary understands, communicates with and engages communities. However, given the resource constraints, the police service cannot deliver every item on the public's wish list. In order to assist the setting of priorities and plans for service development, a London panel, the first consultative forum of its kind in London has been established.

This report presents the key issues discussed and the proposed recommendations on how policing could be made more effective. We hope that it provides useful input to decisions on police priorities and resource allocation.

The structure of the report is as follows:
methodology - recruitment and structure of workshops
main findings
discussion groups

Methodology

The day began with an introduction from the MPA acting Chair, Richard Barnes and MPS Superintendent, Chas Bailey. The large group were asked to consider key improvements or desired improvements in policing in London. The large group was then organised into four smaller sub groups. Participants had been provided with colour coded named badges, (to correspond to each discussion themes), and pre-selected to work in groups. Staying in the same discussion group, participants were asked to discuss one other theme area. Each workshop was attended by 10-12 participants and lasted for an hour. Participants were asked to discuss what they would like to see, what makes a difference, and what changes should the police begin to consider.

The workshop themes were:
- dealing with anti- social behaviour;
- terrorism;
- effective relations with the community
- tackling serious crime

Each group was asked to develop recommendations and priorities for action and report back in the final plenary session.

To close the final session, the MPA presented what will happen next and the way in which the findings would be used.

This report mirrors the order of the events of the day.

Main Findings

The first presentations were designed to give basic knowledge about the MPA and MPS. It was assumed correctly that participants' knowledge about police bodies would be low. The facilitator introduced the concept of police authorities and the few individuals that had heard of them generally did not know who they were or what they did. The majority of participants thought that the name police authority sounded like "the police" and most would have assumed they were the same organisation as the force.

The day began with a welcome by MPA Acting Chair, Richard Barnes who explained the role of the authority. It is the Metropolitan Police Authority's responsibility to secure an effective, efficient and fair police service for London's communities. The Metropolitan Police has capital city, national and international obligations. In addition, the MPA has the responsibility to scrutinise the work of the Metropolitan Police Service and hold them to account. The MPA is independent, and has a statutory responsibility to both reflect and seek out the views of Londoners. The Safer London Panel provides a useful mechanism to do this. The Panel will comprise 3,000 Londoners from diverse backgrounds. The Panel will also build on MPA's existing consultation methods, including a web site, consultative groups, special interests forum and scrutiny committees, by providing an effective mechanism to hear the views of residents in London.

Superintendent Chas Bailey, Strategic Consultation Co-ordinator in the Metropolitan Police Service, worked with participants to identify and map the range of crimes that the Metropolitan Police have to deal with. This was placed in two categories, volume and special crimes (Appendix 2).

The next session invited participants to discuss what is working well and what needs to be improved in relation to policing in London.

The main areas that participants felt were working well include the following:

- A number of participants felt that there was a general reduction in crime rates. When asked to explain they referred to the fact that no major terrorist attacks had taken place.

- For many participants the police were becoming more visible as a result of the publicity on their recruitment campaign and the introduction of Community Support Police Officers. One participant mentioned policing booths ("Tardis") that was said to be an effective way of the police being visible and accessible to the public.

- The preventative approaches to policing were seen to be positive and making a difference at the local level. Examples given include police attending community events, CCTV cameras and improve policing of large events).

The areas that participants felt needed to be improved.

- For most participants, the police could do more to develop stronger relationships with the public through improving their customer service, raising awareness of local crime, participating in community events. Recruiting more police officers from black and minority ethnic backgrounds was seen as a positive way of building effective relationships with London's diverse communities.

- Given that participants came from across all areas of London, there was a general consensus that different areas required different styles and methods of policing, particularly areas known to have a high crime rate. In addition, some individuals referred to the police as being too heavy-handed in responding to incidents and this could fuel negative perceptions of the police in the community.

- Participants also raised concern on the lack of information available to the public, and this ranged from information on personal safety to policing priorities.

- It was felt that the police should work in partnership with other agencies including private contractors.

- Participants were also concerned about the number of police stations that are now closing.

Some responses to the above featured on the "what is working well" list as well as the "what needs to be improved" list, for example visibility of police, communication and information. Although participants felt that there was much more information available to the public on police activities and crime than in the past, there was still scope for further improvements to be made.

In-addition, the responses indicated that participants have different experiences and concerns related to policing in London, dependent on where they lived and their personal background (age, ethnic background and housing tenure). Participants who lived on estates or in high crime areas tend to be more concerned about anti social behaviour, personal safety and the lack of police presence, whereas participants living in relatively low crime areas were more inclined to emphasise the need for information, communication and civic engagement. Given these variations within and between areas in London, participants suggested a more flexible and targeted approach to policing be adopted. The discussion groups provided an opportunity to explore these concerns in more detail.

Discussion workshops

The following presents the key issues and recommendations discussed in each workshop group.

Dealing with anti social behaviour

Anti social behaviour is a subjective relative concept, which can vary over time and location. Quite often in practice there is no single definition of anti social behaviour at all. Both groups started with a brainstorm of what made up anti social behaviour.

Participants felt that most anti social behaviour took place in public spaces and therefore has a severe impact on neighbourhood and communities (this is outlined in Appendix 2).

For both groups, anti social behaviour was a daily occurrence, affecting almost every aspect of the quality of life in London. The groups identified many contributing factors.

Key areas:

- lack of respect in community
- people lack "social knowledge"
- peer pressure among young people; youth culture
- lack of community venues and activities (especially for younger teenagers)
- lack of parental control; parents do not act as good role models; do not set good examples
- social deprivation/unemployment

Several parents gave harrowing accounts of the threats, attacks and general bullying that was part of the day-to-day school lives of their children. Anti-social behaviour "gives bad impressions of areas", and some saw a negative impact on the commercial success of areas.

Many talked about being "frightened to go out", with a particularly strong impact on elderly people, vulnerable people, and children.

Anti social behaviour was not seen as a minor nuisance, but a real threat to the well being of communities. Furthermore, many felt that the toleration of anti social behaviour led to escalation into other forms of criminal behaviour.

Discussions on how to reduce anti social behaviour highlighted the dilemma of needing to take action and having to balance human rights. Many participants felt that the law allowed for too many loopholes, and that among children and young people, there now was a hard core of "untouchables", who felt beyond the reach of law enforcement activities.

The following three key themes for reducing anti social behaviour were identified by participants:

1. strengthening community involvement;
2. working with parents and schools;
3. enforcement.

Key Recommendations:
The groups made the following suggestions:

1. Community Involvement
Many individuals stated that there was not enough information available on anti social behaviour and when to get the police involved.

The problem of anti social behaviour could more effectively be addressed if the police and community work together more (this also will help reduce the fear of victimisation). However, there are also a number of community and voluntary groups working in this area but often the public are not aware of their services. Understanding what is available, and to whom, would not only develop a co-ordinated response to reducing anti social behaviour but it would also build a stronger sense of community.

Participants suggest that the police needs to listen more to the community, learn from the community, and understand community culture. Building a strong relationship with the local community would enable the police to identify hotspots and take firm action.

Key Recommendations:
Both groups recommended that agencies work more effectively together towards a revival of a sense of family ("a family mentality") and meet regularly to discuss problems and progress. This will result in an increase in youth provision and places (extra-curricular activities), and graffiti removal teams. Organising open days at police stations to involve the community more would also help to build relationships in the community.

2. Schools and Parents
The discussions identified that parents and schools were the major opportunities to educate children and young people about the impact of anti social behaviour on communities. The groups gave examples of how communities and individuals in communities can successfully intervene,

and avoid "messing about" turning into more disruptive anti-social behaviour. Success depended on a good understanding of youth and community culture, and the ability to forewarn children and young people of the possible consequences for themselves and for other people.

Education, and instilling a sense of personal responsibility are key. The other major challenge is the handling of those children and young people who are attracted to violent youth culture, "gangsta culture", and succumb to peer pressures in relation to drugs, and the carrying of knives and guns. In some schools and neighbourhoods, small numbers of "untouchables" have a massive impact on their schools, peer groups, and the wider community.

Key Recommendations:
Parents should be more aware of the need to be responsible role models of good behaviour.

Schools also need more power to discipline anti social behaviour but working in partnership with parents to do so. Partnership working should also include the police, school governors, local councillors and community groups.

This will be achieved by adopting a weapon amnesty at school, and encouraging spot check inspections of schools (for drug and weapons). The role of parents and schools should be strengthened by increasing disciplinary powers and providing parental support. Schools were encouraged to work in partnership with the police, local councils and parents should take these recommendations forward.

3. Enforcement
The third key theme was enforcement against anti social behaviour. Participants were concerned that the police and other agencies were not sufficiently resourced and committed to combat anti social behaviour. Whilst earlier recommendations recognised the importance of the community, parents and schools, law enforcement agencies need to tackle anti social behaviour.

Key Recommendations:
Law enforcement and criminal justice agencies should be encouraged to work together more effectively. This should also include private security for example in shopping centres. In addition the use of Anti Social Behaviour Orders should be extended. Participants also advised that more effective financial penalties against parents with children who engage in anti social behaviour would be a strong deterrent.

This will be achieved by developing stronger co-operation between police and other agencies. The wider use of ASBOs should be enforced by the police and courts. An official body, similar to the probation service, should be established to administer community service orders. Finally, participants felt that parents should be issued with financial penalties.

Terrorism and other major incidents

For many participants the role of the police in relation to the prevention of terrorism and its impact on their lives was a key concern. The police were considered to be doing a good job in

protecting the public from the real threat of terrorism in London. In this section participants looked at the role of the police in relation to terrorism and other major incidents, and recommended a number of practical solutions.

It was clear from the responses that participants need more reassurance that measures are in place to address the threat of terrorism. While participants are not requesting to know all the details, they do wish to know there is a contingency plan in place, with guidance on procedures to follow.

Even though London has been free of terrorist acts (as a result of effective police work), there was a strong consensus that the police cannot be complacent. In addition, participants acknowledged that there is a community responsibility to work with and cooperate with the police. The community, as the eyes and ears, are an underutilised resource of support and assistance in the fight against terrorism. Investing time and resources in establishing stronger relationships within the community to address anti-terrorism efforts will produce significant positive results. However, the police also have a role in educating the public on what to do in the event of a major incident occurring or a terrorist act.

Participants expressed their concerns that the MPS is not perceived to be representative of the diversity of ethnic groups in London. This was mirrored in comments on the public's awareness of institutionalised racism in the police force.

Recommendations

1. Community Relations

Working effectively in partnership with the local community is considered to be a key area where improvements can be made. This will require over the next twelve months that the Metropolitan Police Service begins to assign more resources to this area of work and undertake a much fuller public information and awareness campaign.

The Metropolitan Police Service was considered to be the lead organisation for taking this forward.

2. Awareness of Contingency Plan

Londoners need to know that an effective contingency plan exists. In order to accomplish this it requires the police, working with other agencies, to increase public awareness on the measures in place such as an integrated emergency team. An effective communication reassurance strategy would be able to target all groups and individuals and avoid any backlash or alienation of hard to reach groups. The result would strengthen that the trust and confidence in the Metropolitan Police by all sectors and communities in London. It was suggested that this requires a communication and information strategy owned and delivered by all public leaders, including the Major, and the community and voluntary sectors (including faith communities).

3. Trust and Confidence in the Police

In order to counteract terrorism, all agencies, communities and individuals will need to have confidence and trust in the police.

This requires that the MPS improve its recruitment efforts to ensure it is representative of London's diversity. Increasing the number of Community Police Service Officers (CSPOs), from all ethnic backgrounds was also seen to be desirable.

Effective relations with the community

Police authorities can only take into account public views if people know that they exist and how to access them. Authorities also need to be transparent and visible in order to account to the public for their own performance. If the public is unaware of authorities' role, it cannot scrutinise how well they oversee the police force. In this section, participants were invited to share their views on developing effective community relationships. It explored the perception of participants on how the role of authorities in community engagement could be improved. What are the key issues/problems?

Most participants agreed that a number of benefits could be achieved by strengthening the relationship between the police and the local community:

- breakdown of barriers between police and public, which may lead to greater confidence and co-operation;
- improved access to services;
- more accurate public expectations of services;
- enabling participation in dialogue about policing.

A number of views were expressed on the key issues that prevent effective community engagement:

- lack of visible policing, generally equated with foot patrol;
- inaccessibility of police stations and telephone contact;
- the police felt not to have the right priorities;
- police have poor attitude, communication skills, and do not treat people with respect;
- minority ethnic groups perceived racial discrimination;
- police lack of integrity and trust factor.

For some participants, it is important that the police become more visible in the local community. The increasing number of police from ethnic minority backgrounds patrolling the streets was said to be a good step towards building stronger relationships in the community. Community safety police officers were also seen to play a positive role in the community although they lacked real power to effectively intervene when a crime takes place. Participants still felt that more police should patrol during the evening when most people (especially the elderly) felt vulnerable and that the patrol routes should not be just the high streets, but estates and back streets.

Police stations were not seen to be customer friendly by some participants, particularly given the slow response rates and that many stations do not have adequate car parking facilities or disabled toilets. The closure of some police stations was said to undermine much of the positive measures taking place. These factors were considered equally important to maintaining the confidence and trust of members of the community.

There was a general consensus across both groups that police authorities should improve their communication strategy. Suggestions for the way this could be achieved include newsletters, forum meetings, visiting religious venues (mosques and churches) as well as introducing communication skills in police training.

Participants agreed that the emphasis should not only be on the police to prevent and resolve crime but that there should be a joint commitment across all agencies to share information and develop preventative initiatives, including local schools, youth clubs, the council, health authority and community representatives. In-addition, participants stated that all Londoners have a civic responsibility to be actively involved in making their neighbourhood a safe place to live. Some participants pointed out the importance of neighbourhood watch schemes, local community champions on a deprived estate, or volunteer schemes working with the police.

Recommendations

1. Higher police visibility
The relationship with the police will not be built up unless the police become more visible in the local community. It was suggested that this meant more police (uniformed, community safety police officers) walking the street rather than police being seen in cars travelling through communities, particularly in the evening. In addition, visible patrolling was felt to have a key role in deterring opportunitistic petty street crime/nuisance.

It was agreed that the responsibility for moving this ahead lies with the police.

2. Communication and information
The police were encouraged to use different communication methods, including the media to give the public more information, re-address its public image and develop stronger relationships with local communities. Some of the important information areas that could be included key contact points for reporting crime and identifying named officers and their respective areas of responsibility.

In addition to developing an effective communication strategy, participants suggested that the police organise open days and invite community representatives and members of the public to meet local police officers.

This requires the MPS to take a lead role in strengthening its public relations, although all agencies have a collective responsibility to share information and communicate effectively with the public.

3. Closure of police stations

The closure of police stations across London was said to undermine all the positive work currently taking place. Participants felt that this does not mean building new stations but re-opening old stations that are already in and part of the community. If there were no options but to close a station, participants suggested that this should be communicated to the community particularly the reasons why.

The police should take lead responsibility for taking this forward.

Tackling serious crime

A number of the positive features of the Metropolitan Police's handling of serious crime were discussed. Most participants agreed that the police were successful, as in the end they do find the offenders and then take them to court. However, securing a conviction was not the responsibility of the police once at court.

Although there is a lot of potential for serious crime in London, participants felt that relatively little actually occurs. For many, this demonstrates that the police are successful in preventing more serious crime from occurring. In addition it was stated that the police are quick to react when a serious crime does happen. The police were also considered to be open and transparent with the public about what is going on in cases of serious crime and what they are doing about it.

A range of methods used to raise awareness of serious crimes taking place was seen to be effective. This included the Crimewatch TV programme, notice boards in the street, and especially hard-hitting advertisements

There are some key issues of concern to the way in which police respond to the low awareness Most participants were not very well informed about local police activities in relation to serious crime and this limited their ability to engage in the discussion as well as their approach to the issues being discussed, (this tended to lean towards the preventative approaches rather than detection).

Recommendations

1. Young People
Participants felt a targeted multi agency approach to addressing the needs of disengaged young people should be developed. This includes strengthening good practice projects, working with young people (such as youth diversionary activities) and ensuring that they are sufficiently resourced to make the desired impact in the long term. This approach to addressing the different needs of young people will not only be a more effective use of scarce resources but begin to identify young people that are in need of intensive care and support.

2. High Visibility
Increased visibility of police on bicycles and foot patrols in known hot crime spots, including public transport, were recommended to prevent serious crime. Although this includes uniformed police, other crime prevention officers could also effectively carry out this role.

The MPS should consider how effective increased visibility is in addressing the perception of crime taking into account the effective use of its resources. Working alongside other police authorities and police officers could improve the overall quality of service provided, and begin to target areas where participants feel most vulnerable.

3. Door to door enquiries
After a serious incident, the public needs to be informed about what has happened and what role they can play in resolving crime. This should be handled sensitively to ensure that members of the public are reassured that the incident is under control, and to provide opportunities for them to engage in the process of investigation. Plainclothes police officers should therefore be used to avoid the risk of members of the public being tagged with "informer" status.

Police training programmes should focus on how best to address serious crime as well as how to communicate effectively with members of the public when relaying sensitive information.

4.Community Relations
Developing strong community relationships was considered to be critical to the performance of the police in providing an effective service. It was felt that it is the community who know what is going on, and who can really help the police. This requires improving communication, relationship building and changing perceptions of the police towards the community.

The police working in partnership with all agencies are charged with taking this recommendation forward.

Appendix 1.

Safer London Panel Workshop
Agenda
29 June 2004

10.15 Registration

10.30 Welcome and Opening Presentations
- Welcome by MPA Acting Chair (Richard Barnes) and explanation of the roles of the new Panel, the MPA and the MPS
- Overview by Office for Public Management Facilitator – Kai Rudat
- Metropolitan Police Service presentation: Policing London

11.00 Roundtable Discussions: Policing London
- A chance for everyone to discuss policing in London
  1. "what is working well"?
  2. "what needs to be improved"?

11.40 Coffee Break

11.55 Workshop I: Future Priorities
- MPA presentation on current priorities
- Panel discussions in small groups
- key messages from panel members

12.45 Lunch

13.30 Workshop II: Future Priorities

14.15 Plenary: Feedback
- priorities endorsed by workshops
- priorities with queries, further action needed
- potential additional priorities for future

14.30 Next Stages
MPA outlines next steps

14.40 Thank You and Close

Appendix 2

Anti social behaviour examples

Youth on corners
Gangs
Teenagers on motorbikes
Noise
Litter
Chewing gum on pavements
Spitting
Smoking
Mobile phone calls
Transport fraud
Assault
Intimidating behaviour
Illegal parking
Vandalism
Graffiti
Binge drinking
Drugs and alcohol
Insults
Bullying
Destruction of windows in bus shelters
Theft of mobile phones
Showing weapons

Anti social behaviour takes place outside or near schools

At street corners
At transport points (e.g. bus stops, train stations)
On public transport (buses, tubes and trains)
Around fast food outlets
In squares and parks
At sporting events
Outsides pubs, bars and clubs
In shopping areas
Car parks
In covered areas like walk-ways