

RURAL CONNECT

FINDINGS FROM FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH IN DYFED POWYS



HOW THE POLICE CAN CONNECT WITH PEOPLE LIVING IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Executive Summary

The aim of this research was to better understand How the police can connect with people living in rural communities. Focus groups were conducted with two groups: (1) members of the public; (2) police staff and officers on the key question: ‘How can the police best connect with people living in rural communities?’ This report is the analysis of the focus group discussions. It identifies key themes from the data and from these makes recommendations on the ways engagement and connection within rural communities can be improved upon.

Key findings are:

- Both the public and the police perceive local policing positively; both cherished their presence within a community and welcomed increased opportunities to connect with each other.
- Situated knowledge is essential and only achieved through a closer and more ‘real’ connection between the police and communities. Officers need time to build good relationships and to gain understanding and knowledge about their area, what is important to individuals and the groups which make up that community.
- There is consensus that the connection between police and public is strengthened by intelligent local decision-making and the use of discretion.
- Building trust often requires inter-personal contact which, although time consuming and resource heavy, is most likely to build a strong police-public connection, will facilitate the flow of more information and intelligence and will support policing in general.
- If people contact the police and it is ignored, it damages their confidence in the police. Likewise, if a highly regarded community service is withdrawn without explanation, people feel angry and disempowered.

Recommendations:

- The Value of NPT. Valuing the role of a community focused officer or volunteer, including development and specialism opportunities. The ‘small stuff’ matters to people and the neighbourhood policing approach is viewed as a valued part of recognising and addressing this. A means to understanding and measuring the softer impacts and evaluating of this form of work requires consideration, but can be complex and difficult.
- Develop and retain ‘situated knowledge’ within the community. The opportunities to build and retain situated knowledge are maximised if police have time to spend in communities, have the transport to get there regularly and reasons to stay based in the same area.
- Localised decision making. There is no one-size-fits all approach to policing local rural communities. A degree of flexibility is required in the use of mobile police stations. Officers should then be able to leave them to walk around the village and surrounding areas, meet and visit communities. The collection and recording of information’s has local requirements and as such guided by local needs where possible.
- To communicate in a natural form, go to the public. The public often initiate contact when in need and so the force must engineer opportunities to connect with the general public that go beyond formalised PACT meetings. This communication may be through the use of technology. The use of such technologies to connect to certain groups requires further exploration, this may include social media and include the use of watch schemes and systems such as OWL to increase connection opportunities. Where communication is made through more formal channels, the need to understand ‘the local’ is key.

Introduction

Background

With a few significant exceptions (Dingwall, 1999; Fyfe, 1991; Yarwood and Gardener, 2000; Yarwood, 2007; Gilling, 2010 and Mawby and Yarwood, 2011) rural policing is notable by its absence from criminological discussion. Most criminological and policing debates have focused on social order in modern industrialised areas, focused on crime and its control in cities. For criminology this focus may be understandable but for policing, based as it is on control of crime and social order in a geographically confined area, this is less understandable. Police authorities with large areas of rural space need to be alive to the different pressures and needs of their communities and how most effectively and efficiently to respond. Yarwood and Mawby (2011: 218) sum it up well:

In many cases those policing the countryside face a difficult task: one that must balance efficiency against community interaction; local need against national policy; fairness with local sensitivity; and, above all, trying to achieve these over often vast areas with limited resources.

This takes account of the three central aspects of rurality set out by Halfacree (2006): locality; representations of the rural; and lives of the rural. However, it goes further recognising that in policing there is a need to place these local aspects in the national policy and political context. From this the complexity of delivering modern efficient policing which answers both local and national needs without damaging small community sensibilities is brought into focus. Importantly the quote does not allow a cosy and simple community policing resolution; rather it requires a more mature reflection.

Community policing (Fyfe, 1992; Mitchell, 1992; Skogan et.al., 2000) might be thought useful but empirical evaluation (Myhill, 2006) suggests its impact on crime is minimal unless the police in partnership with other community safety agencies deliver a community facing service (Henry, 2012). Where community policing is just a tool and policing remained responsive and law-enforcement based these positive outcomes were not apparent (Henry, 2012). Even when it delivers positive outcomes there may be problems as attendees at community engagement events may not be representative of the whole community (Fyfe, 1992; Skogan et.al., 2004), as one group feels safer so another may feel less safe or excluded from the community or area. Furthermore, the disparity in power between police and public in many of these meetings may help to undermine

their effectiveness as might the power of attending officers to deal with any issues which come to light (Fyfe, 1992; Skogan et.al., 2004). As usual in attempting a quick solution and import assumed 'truths' it misses the complexity that is reality. It is important that neither this research nor the force response falls into that trap.

At its core this report explores the expectations of officers and community members concerning how the police can best connect with people living in rural communities. This is achieved through police run focus groups with both members from within the force and members of the communities being policed. At a glance this work might be characterised as a community policing strategy in that it was a genuine attempt to engage public participation to shape part of the way in which policing is delivered in Dyfed-Powys and it was conducted by members of the force. However, we have avoided too much discussion about terms such as 'engagement' and talked instead of connection specifically to distance the work from simple ideas of community policing, and to ensure that it is considered within the complexity that is rural policing. We recognise that the focus groups were useful but also that they need to be treated carefully, they may not be fully representative. However, the views expressed cannot be ignored, they were set up to explore ways in which the police can connect better with their communities and resolution of this may require a culture change by the police towards those they serve, the community.

Whilst the focus was the connect between the police and public the comments probed deeper, considering official connects such as PACT meetings, more personal links or connections and, at its deepest, touched on the core function of policing in rural communities. At points therefore it suggests a more soul searching study needs to be conducted by rural forces. A tension between the question of whether the function of rural policing should be less responsive and more engaged came out (Bayley, 1994: 29-41) and therefore the discussion clearly entered the debate about the democratic connect between communities, people and their police (Jones, Newburn and Smith, 1994; Waddington, 1998). Discussion touched on how discretion may serve to shape crime issues and therefore the type of order a society enjoys (Waddington, 1998). However, the discussion about discretion was more nuanced; recognising both tensions between central discretion and individual officer's discretion and problems over use of discretion.

Importantly, both the public and the police perceived the police in their area positively, both wanted their very presence within a community to be cherished as an indication that all was well, as a transmitter of democratic 'virtues' and safety (Loader and Walker, 2001) but clearly considered this could only be achieved when there was a closer and more 'real' connection between the police and communities in rural areas.

Complexities of local, national and international crime and security issues touch all policing, even the very rural. Clearly, in a locally based research environment these aspects were largely absent but will be important to the force response. What did emerge was a related issue, the willingness and capacity of the force to negotiate and persuade its partners and the public to co-operate (Wood and Shearing, 2003) and then to negotiate both with other forces and with the overarching powers, locally the PCC and nationally with devolved and Westminster governments to ensure operational roll-out relevant to its area. This negotiation will only be effective and worthwhile if the police conducting it have a deep understanding of the three aspects mentioned by Halfacree (2006): locality; representations of the rural; and lives of the rural and how each of these impacts on policing and connects with aspects outside the area. To be in this position the police must connect with all their communities so building a deep and supportive relationship. This research is aimed at helping to improve that connectivity so empowering the force both internally and externally.

Rurality is not a homogeneous concept, it is a complex concept, difficult to define with little agreement amongst social scientists (Anderson, 1999). Researchers take account of: size of settlements; population density; accessibility and availability of infrastructure; proximity to services; and employment in 'rural' activities to build degrees of rurality – accessible rural, remote rural, deep rural (Wales Rural Observatory, 2009). The research did not delve into the definitional issues but notes that rurality is a particularly important issue in Wales as Wales' urban areas are concentrated along the north and south coasts, between these two is a large area of relatively low population density. Therefore between Llanelli and Cwmbran in the South up to Llandudno and Prestatyn in north is an area of more than 1.6 million hectares (about 80% of the country) in which there is no town with a population over 20,000 and in which about 28% of the Welsh population live. There are market towns but these are small and the distance between them is large and this impacts on the delivery of all services, including policing in that policy makers and practitioners must: search for different, non-traditional, mechanisms of service delivery; have a less centralised administration; and organisations should, where possible co-locate and/or work more closely and collaboratively.

This brief list belies major complexity. Before embarking on any discussion of the research it is important to take a few moments to break away from the misleading ideas often attached to rurality such as the rural idyll: spaces where collective efficacy is high, crime is low and life is simple. Whilst these have some truth their simplicity and certainty are seriously misplaced and any policing policy based on these would be flawed, lacking context and texture. The 'rural idyll' hides problems, for example, the level of welfare needs in rural areas is similar to that in urban settings; about 20% of families fall below the poverty line. Whilst the level of need looks similar in rural and urban environments there are differences: much poverty in rural settings arises out of low wages rather than unemployment; transport costs are higher (fuel is more expensive); poor public transport; food costs are higher; heating bills are higher; in some areas house prices (to buy and rent) are higher because of second homes, fewer public sector lets and holiday accommodation; fewer work and training opportunities; difficulties accessing all services; and access to broadband and mobile transmission is less certain adding to isolation. Furthermore, different rural areas display different levels and types of poverty. Another example is the stronger community ties often associated with rurality. Again this is an oversimplification, feelings of isolation from communities are high amongst some groups, for example young people in rural areas often report feelings of isolation (Matthews, 2000; Meek, 2005): problems with broadband and mobile transmission are particularly difficult and isolating for young people and there are few areas for young people to meet and socialise outside market towns (Meek, 2005). However, social cohesion in Wales has been found to be more resilient than in most Western countries, particularly in rural areas, (Charles and Davies, 2005) and many communities have a more communitarian approach to crime and policing (Drakeford, 2010). Even this is too simple and Cooper and Innes (2009) suggest a more nuanced community cohesion, strong when asked generally about whether people get on and less so when ideas of respect and consideration are introduced, they also noted a complex link to patches of weak cohesion often linked to other social deprivation.

This gives some flavour of the complexity of rural spaces, which are in constant flux and shaped by differences in social structural conditions of place, geography, poverty, population turnover, economic enterprises, unemployment, family structures and regional, national and global links. The 'rural' is becoming more culturally and economically differentiated and is changing in response to global forces (Cloke, 2006, Halfacree, 2007; Jones and Woods, 2013; Woods, 2015 a and b). Within these spaces Liepins (2000) argues community depends on the interplay between four main aspects: spaces and structures; people; meanings; and practices. These aspects (and others) are constantly

influencing each other and therefore continuously altering the community. Policing needs to be open to the complexities, nuances and transformations of the communities and spaces it is serving. Today it also needs to do this bearing in mind the effects of austerity both on the force and the people and other agencies which are also heavily affected by it. Understanding and taking account of the way in which people, communities, institutions, regimes and politics interconnect (engaging with the local negotiated orders), especially in times when austerity makes this more difficult, is essential to a successful building of real connections and alliances and controlling through co-operation (Henry and McAra, 2012). It is a consideration of how best to achieve this which means the report is not tied to one concept of rurality but recognises that each area within the force needs to be assessed locally and allowed flexibility to use local solutions, apply local justice. In turn each local policing unit needs to search for solutions which are realistic in austere times, resonate with force policy and take account of all parts of their local communities.

There are a few basic principles underlying the research and the analysis which underpins the report. Firstly, so far as the force can ensure, every individual should enjoy the same levels of service and of justice, they should all enjoy:

- The same entitlements no matter where they live – justice, not justice by geography;
- The same potential to be heard and to connect with the force (not dependent on geography or which part of a community one belongs to);
- A chance to have their problems and concerns taken seriously;
- A chance to be re-integrated into their community after problems;
- The same chances and opportunities.

Key Objectives & Methodology

Research Context

Dyfed-Powys police state that they wish to act with ‘... integrity, common sense and sound judgement’ (Dyfed-Powys police website) delivering their service equally and with respect for all, using their powers professionally and with restraint. They also recognise the importance of making connections with the public and rely on local co-operation and assistance to deliver the policing local people require. To this end they are committed to providing local services responding to and resolving problems in a way which is positive for each community. The force is proud of its community approach to policing claiming that their neighbourhood teams will be visible, accessible, locally-known and knowledgeable about their areas and will both use their powers to deal with crime and disorder alongside working with partners to resolve problems that matter most to local people. The force and the local Police and Crime Commissioner requested this research to enable them to better deliver on this aspect of its work.

Key Objectives

The force had two key objectives for this research:

- To assist the police, the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner to ascertain how the police can better connect with people living in rural communities and help them to recognise and deal with the barriers to a closer understanding between the force and the communities it serves, and
- To develop and enhance the research capacity and skills of staff and officers within Dyfed Powys police force to enable research to be conducted in-house in the future, thus developing the Research Practitioner. The UPSI/ Aber research team delivered a two-day seminar to train employees on how to conduct focus groups. These employees were then supported by the research team to conduct the focus group based research, from start to initial overview analysis.

Data Collection & Analysis

As a group, the employees decided that they should collect information from both within the force, its own employees, and from those living in rural areas in the force. Collecting local knowledge from different experience and power positions in relation to crime control would give a more holistic understanding of the connection between police and the public.

It is recognised that the focus groups are not representative of either the police or the residents, there are clearly many factions not represented at all e.g. children. However, focus group discussions do provide some understanding from the public and police viewpoints, capture a range of opinion and areas of consent and disagreement.

The research needed to reflect some experiences from across its large geographic base. As 'true' communities would be difficult and too numerous, each of the four legal administrative areas in the force were sampled.

There were two focus groups for each area:

- One police focus group; composed of those employed by the force. These were mostly officers and PCSOs though some civilian workers were included.
- One public focus group comprised of members of the public living in rural areas in the force. Some public participants attended as representatives of agencies, some as representatives of their local community, and others as residents.

The eight focus groups were held between the 14th and 22nd of May 2014. In total, views were collected

from 28 workers of various rank, position and experience in the force and 39 individuals not employed by the force.

For each discussion, an informal focus group guide was developed around the following question:

‘How the police can best connect with people living in rural communities’?

This guide contained key points to ensure the discussions covered similar ground. The participants were loosely led through a series of smaller issues followed by an opportunity to reflect more broadly on their experience and prompts were used where needed.

The discussions were recorded, transcribed verbatim and then analysed using Nvivo software to identify patterns, develop codes and themes occurring across the focus groups. Extracts from the transcripts are presented within this report; quotes made by members of the public will be labelled 'public', and quotes from both police staff, officers and volunteers will be labelled as 'police'.

Findings

This section presents the findings from the combined analysis of both the public and police focus groups. The findings are presented around the themes that were revealed and brought together through a detailed analysis of the focus group recordings and transcriptions. There are three main themed findings, ‘Connecting with Communities’, ‘Organisational Control’ and ‘Official Connections’ these will now be explored and followed by recommendations.

1. CONNECTING WITH COMMUNITIES: TRUST & DISCRETIONARY PROBLEM SOLVING.

Community policing has advantages but often tends to miss sections of the community and can be somewhat rigid and official, generally managed by the police or the Community Safety Partnership (Fyfe, 1992 and Mitchell, 1992). Whilst there are advantages and some similar groupings such as PACT meetings will be discussed later this type of connect was not considered either as most important or most useful by either the internal or external focus groups. The core of what is being considered here is not the formal links which may have their place and may be important. Here what was being discussed are the informal links and contacts and using these to prompt and build mutual respect. This could well be as powerful, if not more powerful, than any formal mechanisms (Mitchell, 1992). Here the interaction is real, not manufactured, it is built through developing a close working relationship with the local people, all the local people. Alongside this is local and often discretionary decision-making which can also be powerful in fostering trust and therefore developing connections. These two strands were interwoven in much of the discussion at the focus groups and will be similarly interwoven here but important strands and connections will be drawn out.

Building Connections – Maximising Engagement

The community networks and dynamics driving behaviours (criminal and non-criminal) in rural areas are complex and may not fit with the general, more urban, policing and criminological theories as the social cultural conditions differ, at least in the way in which they are experienced. There are similarities, All social communities are constantly altering as the interplay between: spaces and structures; people; meanings; and practices changes for the community as a whole and from groups within that community. If connections are to be built the way in which these interactions occur and are experienced needs to be understood and constantly updated. In policing terms the connections and interactions between police and public are always, to an extent, manufactured rather than natural, they need to be created and worked on in a form of negotiated justice. This can take official and fairly structured (these will be considered later) or fluid and more individual, to be considered here. In order to function the police need a certain level of connection with their community.

“The community networks and dynamics driving behaviours (criminal and non-criminal) in rural areas are complex and may not fit with the general, more urban, policing and criminological theories”

Carr (2012) identifies four citizen roles in relation to negotiated justice:

- partners who take an active role in the negotiated order, help in problem-solving, engage with agencies, including the police, and contribute to the stability of their community;
- associates who participate and feed negotiated justice but do not impact on decisions, they may be the ‘eyes and ears’ of the police but do not have the capacity, inclination or power to take an active part;
- bystanders accept the legal order and the agencies that regulate it such as the police and co-operate when required;
- opponents who are alienated from the legal order, particularly the police, they tend to be seen as ‘problems’.

Carr recognises that these types are not always clearly delineated, however, despite this they are useful in understanding how

negotiated justice plays out in a community and whether it results in something which is supportive for the order the community wishes to enjoy or is something forced on them from above. In simplistic terms:

- a lot of bystanders and opponents will result in, or be the result of, a centralised and controlling order which will find associates of use (their responsibility to help produce order is valuable, Garland, 2001) but will discourage any partner citizens – it is likely to result in a law and order type policing which responds to incidents.

- A community with a reasonable number of partners and associates is likely to give rise to, or result from, a policing which wants to serve its community and respond to broader demands about what is of importance to a community.

In searching for means by which the police can better connect with the community, the force and the PCC are indicating that they wish to serve the rural communities or to learn how to better serve those communities. In Carr’s analysis therefore to have a true connect the desire is to increase the number of partners and associates. Carr’s analysis seems to suggest that the four types are in the population but what this research sets out to discover is whether they can be created or at least persuaded to emerge by altering the way in which the police operate and relate to the individuals and communities in their area. First the discussion turns to the individual work of local officers, later the more centralised and structured connections will be considered.

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Good Practice

As noted above, building real, as opposed to constructed, connections requires a situated knowledge of the community and how different aspects of it interconnect (Henry and McAra, 2012). Police need to work with the communities to build confidence, bonds and trust. All the focus groups recognised that gaining or re-gaining trust is not easy and takes a situated knowledge, a lot of intricate and different connections and, most important, time and patience. Police and public noted positive outcomes from informal drop-ins to people's homes or places people visited such as shops, pubs, post offices fetes and shows.

'And they [NPT team and PCSOs] are doing a valuable job. It's them I ring now if there's a problem, and they go and sort it out.' (Public)

'... our local PCSOs who know the area, know us, they are amazing.' (Public)

'And it's always good to see the policemen, so much so that if I go away or were away, I let them know that I'm away and he will keep an eye on your property. Now that I think is good policing. I was almost tempted to put this guy up for an award because I think he takes such a great interest in the local community.' (Public)

'... you develop your contacts by going round all the shops, schools, pubs and everything ... and when I see people when I'm walking about on the beat they're saying, great, this is what we want.' (Police)

'Yes, it doesn't come overnight, does it? I've been doing it two years and I'm lucky, I live in the area that I work in, and still I feel, you know, I've got so much people I still need to see after two years of doing it, and ... lived there all my life' (Police)

'So therefore you need to regain trust, rebuild trust, and when you rebuild trust then, especially with the younger generation, ... it would take time, but if you don't rebuilt trust...' (Public)

'I know with xxx he's been supporting victims of rogue traders/callers and so forth, and if they're elderly he'll spend time with them, but to get from one to another

could take quite a long time, but they really appreciate it.' (Police)

'... all it takes is one person foot patrol there for an hour, and usually you'll have a couple of the busybodies will come out and have a chat, what are you doing here? And all of a sudden the whole community will know just from that one person that you've been in the village.' (Police)

The response to the slightly more formal but still very localised 'surgeries' where the police had a presence in a particular location every week or month was rather more mixed.

'... we used to have PACT meetings, which didn't work because the patch is so big. Instead of doing that we go to the community meetings across the patch and we've got a very good relationship with everybody here in town and in the rural communities. So it's just about keeping that up, ... letting people know we're there, which they do, and we do get a good turnout at our surgeries, Cuppa with Copper and things like that.' (Police)

'I've carried out beat surgeries on my patches for the last 18 months, of actual genuine concerns I've had feedback from, and I do in between eight and ten a month, I think I've just about got to double figures of genuine concerns. So that's sitting out there in the obvious places, in the large vans, and people just aren't... they're very sort of lethargic and not bothered really. That's what I'm finding' (Police)

'Surgeries. No, I don't think surgeries work myself, piggyback on other meetings and go to various places where there's a high volume of people passing through doors, like post offices and OAP groups and all sorts of things. But do we get a lot back from it? I don't know, other than you are seeing a lot of people in one go. So you've got to get out there.' (Police)

It is time consuming and the police need to be reliable, useful (deliver outcomes which are appreciated by the community) and fair in the way they deal with the public:

'Well I suppose what I'd describe it as is going round the farms, drinking tea in farm kitchens, but what you're actually doing is connecting with the people ... they won't phone but if they see you then they'll tell you. Farmers are naturally reserved' (Police)

'I think it's all about engagement ... you're doing these surgeries and it's about sorting out those ten issues that you've had that then breeds confidence with the people that you've dealt with and they always tend to their neighbouring farms and say go and see xxx (s)he sorted the problem out for us. And it's a very slow process but it is good for developing confidence in those communities by being there. And if we say we're going to be there, we have to be there.' (Police)

I know for local schools PC xxx goes into our local school, all the children know PC xxxx, which is fantastic. (Public)

I work a lot with young people and we were having a practice for something or other in the local village hall and the local police officer saw loads of cars, stopped, came in, had a chat, what are you doing, and that was really good because you felt as if he was in the community. (Police)

'we've got the MOBI bus for the youth ... people will go there, and they just don't bother turning up then, so there's no consistency there.' (Police)

[when visiting a village, in order to reach remote single houses and farms] 'you'd expect them to expand then to cover those small houses.' (Police)

'The offences themselves don't matter. If they haven't seen police officers and oil's getting stolen or there's a lot of damage, that's a big issue. However, if you're there all the time, it doesn't matter, the offences don't seem to matter so much as long as they've got that, they know you where they can go to you tell you, this has happened again, this has happened again. The fear of crime isn't there so much compared to how important it is just to have that connection with them. The crime is secondary ... if you're there present.' (Police)

There was general recognition that keeping the trust was a problem, it required constant reinforcement and that required support from the force, encouragement to perform well and the freedom and support to achieve NPT work.

'But we're not being allowed to personalise the service we deliver. We're being told how we're going to deliver it, based upon people who don't really know what is required. They think they know, and that's an age old problem with the police, we always thought we knew what the public wanted, when in fact we just need to ask the public what they want and then to deliver what they want. It's improving but it's still not there.' (Police)

'...you need a dedicated team, you need to know that you've got officers who can have that time, because with the best will in the world, we are short staffed, they are going to get called out in a lot of different directions, and you need to dedicate that to engaging with them by all sorts of means, methods.' (Police)

When teams were permitted or encouraged to design good systems their ideas were valuable. For example, one area reported a useful way of ensuring that each rural village got some attention was to build in a structure to ensure each community was included:

'and one of the things I tried to do on the personal development portfolios last year was to have officers identify 20 villages and to do an hour's foot patrol each month, and then they've got a wall chart, they just tick it off when they've done an hour. quite quickly you can see over three months there's some villages that have not had a foot patrol ... I didn't mind a few getting missed but you can see straightaway that some of these foot patrols haven't had an officer on foot patrol for six months. You've got to question why. Some officers did strive up to the challenge, and it was a good method of just visualising some of the smaller communities.' (Police)

Teams also considered it was important to ask their communities, or sections of their communities, what they wanted so that they could design systems to try to deliver on those desires.

‘... when police officers go into schools, particularly senior schools, they usually go in to tell them about drugs or to tell them about A or B, they never go into these Personal Social Education lessons, and say, what do you want?... instead of going in and telling them, you go in and listen to them, and then when they meet you in the street next time it’s, oh hello, you came to our school, didn’t you? And you become part of who they know, but it may be transgressing on the role of the education officers, because there are particular officers, aren’t there?’ (Police)

Of course, it is always important to ensure that delivering what part of a community wants does not have detrimental or repressive outcomes for others, this is the hardest aspect of local justice policing – ensuring that all parts of the community are considered in all decisions. For example, if a group or elderly residents complain about use of an open space by young people it may please the older community members to move the children on, but if that is done without considering what else is open for those young people it is likely to alienate another section of the community. The delivery of local justice requires a broad perspective and good problem solving skills which take account of numerous local, regional and maybe even national and international requirements.

Situated Knowledge

Situated knowledge is developed where policing connects with a community as a social enterprise, situated in a particular place and community, context-specific and culturally embedded. Interestingly, this is exactly what the police and public focus groups highlighted, what worked in one location or for one officer may not work elsewhere or for another officer.

‘Well people like it when they know the police, they can call him by his first name and they know the guy or woman. If you just get a person turn up who didn’t know you, didn’t know the set up, it’s totally different to when you’ve got somebody that you can relate to.’ (Public)

‘... it’s knowing the community you’re working in and right...you can’t put an umbrella on the way we deal with the rural communities.... all the rural communities require different approaches.’ (Police)

‘Officers/PCSO’s have a lack of interest in some rural areas – if they don’t get farming then how can they set up farm watch and liaise with the farmers properly.’ (Police)

‘The right officers need to be in the right locations to get community policing back. I have trust with my local “offenders” and have built up mutual respect over the years based in the area. I know if I was in trouble from a group of lads not from the area these guys would stand up for me. Officers who come in and don’t adopt a different attitude with rural policing don’t get the trust – example given re recent incident involving a local family and ended up with the wrong outcome as no “common sense” was adopted. PC’s who don’t know and understand their areas and just come in to get crimes, files and detections to get their figures up as opposed to doing what is right for the community.’ (Police)

‘Agriculture/farming is my interest, what I’ve been brought up with, and any things like that people tend to send it my way. So you utilise all officers’ experience.’ (Police)

Therefore whilst officers were interested to learn from one another and would welcome opportunities for NPT teams to share ideas and good practice in building links, they recognised that no one model would fit everywhere. Both internal and external groups recognised this need for police to be responsive to their communities. To ensure this this understanding of the locality, there was general agreement that ideally the police needed situated knowledge and wanted officers to live and work in the area they were policing.

‘Need people who live in the area’ (Public)

‘I’ve got a neighbourhood policing team now that actually ... live in the area they’re policing, it gives you that connection straightaway, and a lot of people, you know I’ve had people knock on my door because they know where the policeman lives in the village’ (Police).

‘Not everybody is from the rural community, not everybody understands farming or wildlife’ (Police)

‘... it’s having an understanding of how rural communities work, farming in particular.’ (Police)

‘Officers that don’t want to be in rural stations don’t care and then they don’t support. People who live in the communities should police those communities. They then get intelligence, and build up trust and links with the communities.’ (Police)

The ideal will not always be met, but both public and police discussions were against officers being brought in to police communities when they then returned home to the other end of the force at the end of their shift:

‘People are not being put in the right stations and locations. We will end up in a situation that officers don’t live and work in the same communities they patrol. People who live in Swansea can be based in Aberystwyth and they have no local knowledge and spend no time outside of work there getting to know the place they patrol. ... there’d be no mixing with their communities when they weren’t working there. And you then get that situation where you’ve got officers who don’t know, even though they might have been there for five years, they still don’t know anybody on their patch outside of work.’ (Police)

However, most accepted that officers may be moved in from outside an area. Whilst it might take time to make real connections with their community by frequenting areas used by locals such as the pub, local shop, post office and community events (e.g. fetes and shows) there was a feeling that they it was possible to build the knowledge and connections.

However, there were many concerns expressed by both parties that officers moved too quickly, often in order to get promotion. This left local rural areas with officers who were constantly new, who did not have the situated knowledge and had no time, inclination or incentive to obtain it, knowing that their posting would be short. It was felt that these officers were less able to make intelligent decisions for the area or to make true connections with the community.

‘Continuity. And you need to know that person.... Because they need to know the local area to be able to do a good job I think as well.’ (Public)

‘I like the neighbourhood policing role to be like a fixed... I don’t want it to be a stopgap, I’ll try that for three or four months, because it comes with trust and developing those links, and it should be a long term role.’ (Police)

Situated knowledge was valued by officers and public alike although it was not always protected by the force. To counter these problems, a number of solutions were forthcoming from the focus group discussions. Firstly, there were suggestions that the force might look at the way in which promotions were used, explore whether it might be possible to progress up the ranks within the same neighbourhood policing team, either from PCSO to PC or within the service itself.

‘Some people join the PCSO as a stopgap to be a PC. I’ve got two PCSOs now that have been with us two years and already they’ve been successful in the police application process, so all that work they’ve done for the last two years, somebody else is going to go in now and all those links, even though we’ve got them and they’re recorded, it’s not the same as those officers knowing that person.’ (Police)

‘Yes, it’s a job. It’s like Stefan, our town PCSO, saying that there were 12 people on his intake and 11 of them all had aspirations to be a PC, and they’re only applying to be a PCSO to get a foot in the door, so to speak.’ (Police)

‘Police officers have stopped being recruited because they want to be a PC. They are joining up because they want to be at middle management level.’ (Police)

Secondly, there were some suggestions of using specials to police their local areas.

‘we have probably got people living out in the rural community who would probably say I would join the special constabulary if I could police my particular area, my particular locality. They are going to know the people there, they are going to know the problems that are involved with that particular community’ (Police)

‘When I took this to the town council and said well actually my next door neighbour is a special constable, they said well who is he?’ (Public)

Even when they might work where they lived there were problems because Specials always had to report to the local major centre and then, rather than being able to patrol their own area they might be sent elsewhere. The public wanted that to be altered’ (Public)

‘there should be a change in the rules somewhere, that they [specials] don’t have to come here [the local market town] to report in first. (Police)

Thirdly, some argued the important element was the personal, individual link with the NPT team (officers and PCSOs). There was some discussion in a number of focus groups about wanting to have mobile numbers for the officers. The public generally thought this idea was good whereas the officers were more divided, thinking they did not want to be constantly contacted when they were off duty.

‘when it’s just ... a call to personal mobile ... the Community Council paid for me to have a mobile because old people couldn’t fathom the call centre ... So even when I was off then, I’d just go through my answerphone messages when I started duty again, so I can go round and speak to the people...’ (Police)

One solution might be a number of team mobile phones (rather than individual numbers). These would be passed from one shift to another so that there would always be someone at the end of the line when someone from the community rang. The types of connection set out by Carr did not really seem to encapsulate those being discussed by either the police or the public in the focus groups. They were not talking about connection only with particular groups or types but a desire to connect with all types, even those who were initially reticent or resistant, possibly even alienated by the police. This desire to reach all parts of the community was particularly strong in the internal groups, sometimes the least ready to connect were the most important to engage in terms of prevention or policing.

‘... if you’re making a point of going into your local village shop and spending some time in there, different times of the week, month or whatever, you see a cross section of people in there, and if they’ve got any issues, the more you’re in there the more they get more comfortable with you and they come over and talk to you’ (Police)

And one might need to be flexible and know the community to understand how to connect. Different geographical areas may need different approaches but also different communities and groups within the area may need different approaches:

‘Victim support tried to engage with young people, ... they couldn’t engage with young people on the phone or knocking their door. The only way that they found engagement, and they were engaged by about 80% was by text. (Public)

But what all officers and the public agreed on was that it was worth it. They also agreed that both local and central force decisions could help to build the trust, build the important connections.

Discretionary Problem-Solving

‘I think it’s problem solving really. You have somebody in the community who’s got a problem’ (Police)

Discretionary justice is essential to policing in England and Wales. No management or law can possibly control all decisions by individual officers and discretion arises when the law and/or rules set by superiors leave him or her free to make a decision (Davies, 1971). For many areas of decision making there are formal or informal rules or guidelines to help the use of discretion (Bronitt and Stenning, 2011) but supervisors are remote at the time most individual decisions are made and therefore many decisions are individual. This is true in both rural and urban settings. However, there are fewer officers in rural areas and the geographic areas covered and types of work they perform tend to be broader. The opportunities or requirements for them to make discretionary decisions are wider and more varied and their direct contact with supervisors is less frequent (Anderson, 1997). Gilling (2010), Payne et.al. (2005) and Weisheit et.al. (2005) all remark on the fact that geography and population distribution impact on the style of policing, the frequency of discretionary decision-making and the way in which it arises. Therefore in the rural context discretion is a particularly prominent part of the work pattern and supervision is more remote (something replicated in other criminal justice agencies, see Minkes and Raynor (2013) in relation to probation).

‘It is problem solving, it’s looking at what they want to do, what their outcome is as well.’ (Police)

Q. And when you say you’re problem solving,

and I assume all of you do this problem solving, are you solving the problem for the two or three people involved, or are you solving the problem for the community?

A. Both’ (Police)

In rural communities, problem solving and a negotiated order is more common for everyone not just law enforcement. Furthermore, it may be even more common in Wales where over many centuries there has been an attitude of regarding the resolution of offending as a process of negotiation, often involving loose local resolutions rather than as resolved through a formal process, a form of peace-making. Ireland (2015) notes ‘There remains the hint of the survival of a principle which sees the legal process as a basis of negotiation rather than a statement of authority.’ (101-2)

‘There’s a young lady with learning disabilities who’s also turned to alcohol as well. Mum is her carer but also with mild learning disabilities, and because I’ve built up a very good relationship we’ve managed to get some counselling for mum to enable her to learn more parenting skills and to put boundaries in place. And it’s helping the community because it’s keeping the daughter out of trouble, giving them power, always making sure they’re in control, never saying, you must do this,

you must do that. You say, well this is your decision, you are in charge. And it's suddenly power and having a knock-on effect, and it is reducing the calls definitely.' (Police)

'... I got a call, somebody with a quarry saying, can you have a word with somebody who's helped themselves to stone. We don't want anything doing can you come in and have a chat. That's neighbourhood policing. That's not ringing 101 and saying, can I have a police officer attend, I've got somebody stealing from the quarry, it's like, can I have a chat with you about this? We've got a local resident, he's got issues about when they're blasting, so there is that, trying to keep the community cohesion and address everybody's concerns in the most reasonable, proportionate way, if I can say that.' (Police)

For officers in rural areas, where back-up may take some time to arrive, this and official interventions may require driving an arrested person a long way to a custody suite; negotiated justice may be very attractive and an intelligent choice.

'... because custody's so far away you may ... use your discretion a bit more ... , whereas in a busy town they're easy to arrest and take straight back, and then it's a figure, it's another crime then. The perception is that they're busier.' (Police)

Such decision-making, if it resolves problems for the individuals involved and for the community is important not just to resolve the immediate problem but also to build up trust and therefore real connections with the community. Many officers argued that discretion could be a powerful and important tool but needed to be wielded by those with local knowledge, an embedded knowledge of the area and its communities, not of rural communities generally but of those particular local communities, a situated knowledge. Yarwood (2001) mentions the 'village constable' who lives and works in the community and is willing to help them with all problems, even the seemingly trivial. So, ideally officers need to live and work in the same community:

'Need people who live in the area' (Public)

However, some problems were thought to be too difficult to be resolved by use of discretionary decision-making, for example, in some situations any outcome would cause problems for one or another part of the community and might harm the connect. In such instances officers

appreciated mediation as a more transparent, and a more independent tool when undertaken by outside agencies. The use of officers as mediators in smaller and more intimate settings, especially where relationships with the officers is strong is better responded to by external agencies. The necessity in some circumstances to remain independent are apparent in both urban and rural settings, neighbourhood disputes, land disputes and ongoing issues can lead to complex circumstances that can involve communities as a whole. In these circumstances independence is crucial, the importance of available intermediary services to assist in responding and managing such situations is imperative, not all problem solving is best conducted by the local officer. They regretted the fact that it was no longer available to them:

'With the mediator what you get is independence, and that's the core of it. ... So when we've got a neighbourhood dispute, ... either both are unsatisfied with what we do or one of them is unsatisfied with what we do, we can't win. So we get mediation in, ... it's independent, so there's no argument about the police siding with one party, which is what we usually get.' (Police)

'Do you all agree that the mediating programme has been positive in engaging with the local community and helping confidence? Yes.' (Police)

Whilst the independence of the mediator was valued, it was recognised that as a fall-back it might be valuable to train all officers, or at least all NPT and PCSOs, in mediation:

'It would be nice for everybody to have mediation training; I don't think we're qualified mediators.' (Police)

'They could do it, but ... your independence is not there then, is it? Some people might be wary that it's someone from within the organisation that's conducting the mediation' (Police)

This reluctance, on the part of some officers, to mediate in neighbour disputes was interesting considering the importance both the public and officers put on their ability to solve problems more generally. The reluctance may arise out of a desire to ensure that nothing harms the connections they have invested so much time and energy in building, from a recognition of the value of the trust from the community and a desire to avoid being seen as 'taking sides'.

Trust

Once trust and connection is earned it needs to be constantly nurtured and there was some concern that this aspect of policing was being given less focus:

‘we’ve got to the pinnacle, I think we’re dropping down. I think there’s less engagement, there’s less emphasis on engagement, there’s no real direction on neighbourhood policing and I fear the inroads we’ve made in the last couple of years are going to be burnt.’ (Police)

‘Yes, I think and just show enough attention to all the villages there’s dozens of villages and realistically you’re not going to do foot patrol much in every village in say one week’s work, with other commitments – the meetings, the surgeries’ (Police)

For discretionary decision making to be accepted, the community needs to trust the officers. Much of this will depend on them being embedded in that community, known, recognised and accepted, but also in them making decisions which help to encourage trust. Trust is essential to building a good connection with the locals. However, trust is fragile, it can easily be broken by one wrong decision or one failure to respond.

‘But there’s also instances, and it comes to us being mentioned all the time, about the confidence in dealing with the police. ... the police used to go drinking ... with the farmers. Then the farmers would come out and start to drive home, and within about half an hour they would be stopped for a moving traffic offence, and breathalysed on the report of the police who were drinking with them in the pub. So that took away that confidence in the police’ (Public)

‘I’ve had incidences ringing the police, serious incidences at 9 o’clock and then the guy comes from St Clare’s at 11 o’clock when he’s just come on duty.’ (Public)

Withdrawal of Services

Trust can also be broken by the withdrawal of services people have found useful and which have helped to build trust, particularly if the reasons for this decision are not communicated.

In a number of the focus groups, for example, both police and public agreed that the ‘Bobby Van’ had been an excellent service; trusted and supportive. Officers also found it had helped to build connections with many parts of the community and that they gained pieces of information and intelligence from those running the service which helped with the policing of the area. Therefore its withdrawal was met with anger and upset, it was seen as a breach of trust:

‘The Bobby Van makes people feel safer’ (Police)

‘It’s not just a little visit checking your doors, they’ll check the gardens, they’ll suggest to have extra lights on or whatever their advice is. But it’s more than police engagement, it’s their peace of mind, after an event like a burglary has happened, which can be traumatic for anybody.’ (Police)

There was recognition that this service was largely about confidence rather than connect but they argued that one could not build and retain a healthy connection with the communities unless there was a high level of confidence so the two were closely linked.

Both public and police focus groups recognised that cuts were necessary but no-one seemed to understand why this service was cut. Better communication of reasons for unpopular decisions, and how similar cover would be assured, might be very useful to retention of both trust and a positive relationship with the public.

Central decision-making therefore has effects on the police-public connect in small communities. There is a need to take these communities into account as part of the decision-making process and to communicate the reasons for change to them. In a number of discussions, there was mention of feelings of distrust and dislike of the police borne out of a ‘them’ and ‘us’ culture, ‘being policed’

not 'served by' the police.

'No but there's a suspicion growing amongst the people that it's not a fair break of the system, people seem to be a set of laws for us and it doesn't quite apply over there you know' (Public)

If you complain about a PC nothing happens. There is a distrust following that there is 1 rule for them and 1 rule for us. You never hear about results of complaints.' (Public)

'Vast majority of public see Police as them and us. They used to be "our" Police. Police Officers are not approachable figures anymore. Gone are the approachable village PC's. There is too much of a divide between public and Police.' (Public)

'I have anecdotal evidence from farmers that assaults take place, but they don't bother reporting it. They don't like the Police.' (Police)

'People used to respect the Police.' (Police)

'People used to help the Police against outsiders.' (Police)

'It's all about distrust. People are getting very "anti-establishment". You can only Police with consent.' (Police)

Similar feelings were expressed in relation to the withdrawal or constant 'churn' of the local officers:

'How can you develop a relationship ... when they just move?' (Public)

'The contact isn't so personal maybe with an officer 'cause you don't know who they are half the time, and they've got a wide area to cover.' (Public)

Response and Other Law Enforcement

There were a few negative comments concerning decisions by non-NPT sections of the police. Where decisions were made without regard to the effect locally. It may be the correct decision but sometimes the reasons need to be carefully explained so that it does not cause any loss of trust and therefore does not break the connections which are so fragile and difficult to build up.

'Can I just make one point, ... it's something around about consistency and attitudes of police officers. It's that we've had a number of incidents where ... xxx who have been raped in very unpleasant circumstances. And in some cases the response has been good, and in other cases it's actually been quite appalling... it's the message that sends out to the wider community, people talk don't they, it's the message it sends out to criminals that if somebody is raped then there is the potential to get away with that.' (External)

'My company ran retail outlets for 40 years and the police see things like shoplifting as low level crime and totally unimportant, and in 40 years we only ever got two prosecutions through, which can't be right. They take people away and they give them a warning, and they'll do that five or six times before they ever take them to court.' (External)

'they cause mayhem with speed cameras, booking people at 34 mph and this sort of thing, and that creates a lot of aggro locally, which has nothing to do with the local police at all, but the community then are anti the police.' (External)

'they come in and they set up their cameras, they're gone within the hour but in that hour my God they've caused a lot of trouble within the community, within the trust and so forth.' (External)

Lack of Response

Some members of the public reported low confidence in the police or were starting to lose confidence due to lack of a response when they were called. If confidence is lost people will be less likely to help the police or to report incidents, especially when they are not the victim.

‘but what was their explanation to take three, four hours, was it? Because you could come from Swindon, from London in a police car in that time. You know, I would like to ask, like I say we’re not here to... But I’d question why didn’t they turn up?’

Does that not also raise the question of whether they take things seriously and understand, they need to understand that if people are contacting the police they’re doing it for a very good reason, they’re really concerned otherwise they wouldn’t...

Yes, you don’t do it lightly.

I think it’s not a case of they don’t take things of they don’t take things seriously, there’s just not enough of them. (Public – exchange between a number of focus group members)

‘I am aware of times where people have reported crimes yet they don’t get ‘crimed’ as they don’t get crime reference numbers. No crimes are being recorded – actions are not being taken.’ (Public)

‘If you neglect the small things, people won’t bother reporting the bigger things.’ (Public)

‘People are so fed up of reporting things and not having any results that they lose confidence and don’t bother.’ (Public)

‘Lack of confidence leads to no reporting.’ (Public)

‘We are on a dangerous path, as if people are so fed up of Police not attending / doing anything, people are going to start taking their own action.’ (Public)

Again, a poor police response in relation to a call-out damaged trust and therefore the quality of the relationship between the public and the police.

“In times of austerity, an open, negotiated and truly integrated multi-agency approach would benefit the police”

Connecting with other agencies

Both public and police focus groups recognised that, in order to build a good relationship with the community, the police needed to develop connections with other agencies, both those to do with criminal justice and those important to the local community (such as NFU). In general these agencies were not represented on the focus groups, but two agencies were present and both would have welcomed a regular police surgery on their premises.

‘If they were sat in our offices then they would perhaps have, for instance one day a week, perhaps they would have people reporting more of this stuff, because we know that lots of stuff isn’t being reported, ‘cause they’re telling us.’ (Public)

This is an aspect which should be more fully explored. In times of austerity, an open, negotiated and truly integrated multi-agency approach would benefit the police though might be more difficult as Community Safety Partnerships come under increasing threat. Other agencies often have access to ‘hard to reach’ groups so could facilitate a deeper community connect, building this more quickly than the police brokering such connections themselves. Through regular contact through these external agencies resilience might be better embedded into the connections. Clearly these positive outcomes will only materialise if the police are able to help the clients of these agencies resolve at least some of their problems.

2. ORGANISATIONAL CONTROL – ENABLING OR IMPEDING CONNECTIONS?

Situated knowledge is essential to intelligent problem-solving and use of discretion. Discretionary decisions which are positive for all parties are essential to the force and to their reputation. However, the force needs some guarantees so organisations set out bureaucratic practices and performance goals in order to impose some level of organisational control (Reiner, 2010). The way in which this control manifests itself might either support and facilitate a broad discretion based on situational knowledge, or obstruct and constrain such practices.

‘The force needs to trust officers to use their discretion.’ (Police)

‘The ... officers for those areas should be the ones making decisions and not people in headquarters, not the Crime Commissioner, not people like that saying this is how we want you to do it.’ (Police)

‘Centralisation is a problem ... there is too much centralisation ... the local is being lost and that is leading to less effective and efficient policing’ (Police)

However, not all central edicts are necessarily negative, some enable, others impede.

Enabling Connection:

Tearing Up Targets

Officers clearly felt that rural policing was not about targets and figures and were appreciative of recent decisions from the centre to withdraw targets. It was felt that this should reduce pressure on the officers and release them to deliver the type of policing necessary in their area, both problem-solving, discretionary decisions and time to connect. Whilst the message from HQ is that figures and targets don’t count anymore, this is not the message that gets filtered through to them. The problem was that middle management were not implementing the changes so were still relying on targets to assure themselves that their officers were performing efficiently and effectively:

‘Take the emphasis off figures and get middle managers to get on board NPT.’ (Police)

‘The message has got lost in translation at middle management level that targets don’t count. NPT is dead – NPT PC’s are required to solely do response work. Thankfully PCSO’s are helping to keep NPT alive.’ (Police)

‘I feel like I’m treated like a child sometimes and my passion for NPT falls on deaf ears. Engaging with communities doesn’t equal figures. Other areas use our multicultural events as best practice and want to do them but this County doesn’t want it.’ (Police)

‘I think for me, looking at rural crime, I think the rate has been, in my opinion, if you have crime on a farm in the middle of nowhere, as long as you get a drugs detection in the town centre the same day, your detection rate is 50%, let’s not worry about a no-hoper in the rural area because you’ve got that extra detection in the town centre. I know things are changing and they’re trying to say that we’re not monitored in that way anymore, however, I think something is lost between ACPO and our senior management team because there is a pressure there to get out and get some drugs off the street.’ (Police)

‘As much as the senior management want to ... once you get down to Inspector / Chief Inspector level, it’s all about the figures. And that overrides directions that are coming down and undermines a bit our ability to deliver effective local solutions.’ (Police)

‘Take the emphasis off figures, away from the middle management. Get the middle management on board with what officers out on the street are doing on a daily basis instead of chasing for figures, figures and more figures.’ (Police)

‘A lot of people forget how important NPT is – some officers are still asking what we do as NPT 8 years later.’ (Police)

‘There appears to be missing information between ACPO and the officers on the streets in passing the message across that targets don’t count. It’s a very slow process in developing confidence in the public – give NPTs the time to get into the community and know people.’ (Police)

‘Police officers who come into rural areas cannot focus solely on crimes and detections. Rural policing is great – it’s the most amazing job there is. You can have the freedom to influence rural communities/’ (Police)

Impeding Connections:

Central Information Collection

The way in which information is recorded and stored for national and/or regional crime figures may not be particularly supportive of local decisions.

‘what actually they want to know in government in London and actually what you need to know in your local community are two very different things.’ (Public)

STORM should be used as the central point for recording intelligence, but the issue is that for a number of years now off-roading hasn’t been a local qualifier, it has always been put under car nuisance or things like that. It is not recorded properly.’ (Public)

‘the powers that be start to understand that where we live, it’s not the serious crime that’s a major problem, but it’s the smaller stuff, it’s the anti-social problem, like the motorbikes on the A40, and where I live, and the off-roaders, that’s what’s causing our community’s problems.’ (Public)

Police public consensus

Response

The other aspect which was a major problem for all NPT officers was the frequency with which they now get called on to back up ‘response’. Many were very frustrated, all they wanted was to be permitted to get on with their important NPT role and that was not possible, NPT was undermined, they had to justify their existence by fulfilling response duties. Austerity

‘... and that is what’s wrong with the job is you can’t keep taking people away and expect the same level of service, and don’t expect the public not to complain. They will, rightly so, they’ll complain.’ (Police)

‘Neighbourhood policing for me is dead, it’s died a death. I’m on response basically full-time... we’re not NPT anymore. We’re quite fortunate, ... we’ve got excellent PCSOs and they do a fantastic job, and they keep the NPT running themselves, single-handedly. I don’t know when I did my last proper NPT work.’ (Police)

‘NPT dying a death has been at the detriment of rural villages. We are no longer a Police Service, we are a Police Force. People only have contact with you when you have a light that’s out or you are pulled over in your car. The My Performance Widget tool was addressing performance. It didn’t make you a good officer. NPT was great for 8 years, but now it’s gone.’ (Police)

‘DPP focus appears to be for NPT PC’s to be doing response to justify their existence and not genuine NPT work. Genuine NPT work means they won’t have anything to show for it.’ (Police)

This prioritising of response was seen to be short-sighted; if you undertake Neighbourhood policing effectively there would be less need for response because to some extent the areas will police themselves and people will be more likely to come forward with information and intelligence so the detection rate will look after itself.

‘If you build up links within the communities then the detection rate will look after itself.’ (Police)

‘If a crime has been committed by someone in that community, as a rural PC you get to know about it.’ (Police)

‘If neighbourhood policing works then it polices itself.’ (Police)

Undervaluing NPT

Some officers also felt they were not being valued, particularly by middle-management. Furthermore, they felt that neighbourhood and rural policing were undervalued overall.

'... Ironically I think the commitment from the PCSOs is really high, and from the higher ranking officers, but it's kind of the bit in the middle for us where it falls off.' (Public)

'The NPT officers have genuine pride in their patches and are frustrated that no one above cares.' (Police)

'The Force has spent thousands of pounds on HCSO training. There are far more people in rural areas than those classed as in minority groups yet no money has been spent on rural policing' (Police)

'As a PCSO – we don't get any support from some NPT PC's and we need it. We just get left to our own devices. The PC doesn't have the time or the interest.' (Police)

'We have passion for NPT but doesn't feel like anyone else does. Pc's and PCSO's make more decisions every day than anyone else in Force.' (Police)

'I feel like I'm treated like a child sometimes and my passion for NPT falls on deaf years. Engaging with communities doesn't equal figures.' (Police)

'We used the promotion pawns and your best ideas would be used by a Sergeant, by an Inspector, to make themselves look good, and then forget about you. And I know of people who have left the job, they're fed up of being used for people for promotion.' (Police)

Members of the public largely agreed with this. In almost all of the focus groups there were calls for a greater visible police presence:

'More Police Officers. Get face to face contact. Talk to people and explain things to them. Otherwise, people presume the worst and are cynical.' (Police)

'Village bobby used to have an impact. Bring back Police presence – farms, hamlets, markets (look at small village securities). Converse with people (crimes not reported – farm gates and animals etc).' (Police)

'More Police presence and allow volunteers to help.' (Police)

'Numbers of Police Officers' (Public)

“In almost all of the focus groups there were calls for a greater visible police presence”

The Need for Neighbourhood Policing Team Promotion and Command Structure

Part of the problem stemmed from the fact that many middle management figures were parachuted in with no prior knowledge of the area, nor an interest in rural policing.

'People applying to become an Insp in 2 years with no idea of the role causes unrest and upset in communities as a new Inspector with no idea doesn't go down well in a community. PC's and PCSO's can work hard but as soon as an Inspector says or does something wrong all the hard work is gone. New Inspectors coming in change the focus of the teams. There needs to be an NPT Inspector. Lack of motivated officers who are pushed for targets and figures mean that NPT has had a hammering.' (Police)

It was felt necessary for the NPT inspectors to be reinstated, that operational inspectors overseeing NPT did not really work as it undervalued NPT.

'We used to have an accountable NPT Inspector for NPT. We don't have any direction, we don't know what other stations do – we don't have any input.' (Police)

Need more vehicles

A number of NPT teams and PCSOs lamented the fact that, when they had time to get out into rural areas, there might be no transport available or the transport might be inappropriate for farm tracks.

'Now I find the biggest problem is transportation in Wales, it's getting the right transport for the job that you're trying to carry out. You're going down farm tracks with a little Fiesta which is riding through the road like that in the Welsh countryside, the vehicle is unsuitable. And that's another reason why sometimes you're not getting down to these farms because you cannot access. ... We need a specific vehicle for rural, which is a dedicated vehicle, a van whatever, we can carry kit, whatever you need.' (Police)

'Personally my biggest problem is getting out there because I've limited access to vehicles, I can use the buses and the trains but that doesn't get me to places I want to be.' (Police)

Media

There was some discussion about better use being made of the local media through a column in the local newspaper or a spot on the radio, this could be arranged locally or at force level.

'Could use media to feedback about how the police have responded to issues e.g. in PACT meetings or in letters pages of the paper.' (Public)

3. OFFICIAL LINES OF CONNECT

There are many ways in which the police orchestrate connection with citizens. Here we will consider those which were mentioned in the focus groups. There was a general consensus in the focus groups that, alongside the informal connections, the formal means of connecting with the police were important but needed to be sorted out:

‘People around here have much more of a sense of community and spot things that are out of sorts. We need to get this information. I think a lot of crime isn’t reported.’ (Public)

999

999 is the most obvious mode of connection but it was little discussed in the focus groups. The public seemed to be entirely happy with the service itself but they were concerned about both the time it took to respond, especially in rural areas, and about the lack of local consideration in decision-making when officers did respond.

‘We had a 999 call, we phoned, we were coming home one night late at night from xxxx to xxxx, on that road, and there was a body on the side of the road. So we phoned the police and they said where are you? So we explained, on this road, such and such a place, and we explained exactly where, we’d just entered Sardis, so we were quite specific. “What’s the road number?” “I’m sorry, we haven’t a clue.” “Oh, we can’t go any further without the road number.” Well...!!!’ (Public)

101

Many members of the public were unaware of the 101 number. In a number of external focus groups there were exchanges such as:

‘ We’ve got one.
You’ve got one, have you? Oh well I didn’t know that. I wouldn’t have known that either.
What is that number?’

101 is the number.’ (Public)

The 101 system drew a lot of adverse comment and the public felt that problems with the service were putting people off phoning the Police or making them turn to 999. The most common comment was that it took too long and was too frustrating.

‘Takes too long – have to go through things too many times with too many different people.’ (Public)

‘No use – don’t bother phoning because takes too long and is too difficult’ (Public)

‘101 is dreadful. I’m not a welsh speaker but have to listen to long periods of welsh and then English before you get through.’ (Public)

‘101 is so frustrating’ (Public)

Though some public and police complained about other aspects:

‘When I recently rang 101 I was told I couldn’t be put through to an officer and they would leave a message for him to be contacted. I wasn’t contacted, so I rang again. The same thing happened – people are not passing messages on.’ (Public)

‘You get put through to Carmarthen, they take the details, they say somebody will ring you back. Nobody ever rings you back, you never hear anything more about it.’ (Public)

'So we phoned when we got home but we got through to somebody up the line who didn't even know where we were talking about.' (Public)

'that if you do contact the police is that they don't know where you're talking about, so that local knowledge not being there and you have to spend a great deal of time explaining and then almost needing a grid reference for them to understand where you're talking about.' (Public)

'... it's appalling. These calls come in, scheduled response, they tell the operator everything that's happened and then ten minutes later IRT phone up and ask them the same questions and it's the same response there, why does this person need to repeat themselves twice?' (Police)

'At one time you used to phone up and you'd go through to your local station and now you get a contact centre that hasn't got a clue where you live, what you're on about, and by the time they've put you through to somebody you've given up the will to live to be honest. And that's one of the biggest gripes I get from people with the police, the personal thing is totally broken down.' (Police)

'People are also put off by the sheer amount of information they have to give. They have to give so many details before stating why they rang it puts people off.' (Public)

'If the people who are the eyes and ears of the community can't get a message to a Police Officer, you leave messages with the contact centre and never hear anything again.' (Public)

'...once I go into this call centre, nothing happens. It's a black hole.' (Public)

'A lot of people complain about 101 as it takes so long to get through. Someone recently complained that they took over half an hour to get through so won't be bothering again' (Public)

'I am lucky to be able to speak welsh, but why don't they say 1 for welsh and 2 for English to cut down on that. It's a case of "officialdom". Some Police are so baulchy they put everyone off and it undoes all of the hard work. (Public)

'The discretion is taken over if they ring 101' (Police)

Some recognised the service had its uses but merely wanted it to be improved:

' ... because of mobile phone reception and the speed of Internet services, the 101 is vital.' (Public)

'And it's reassuring for the ageing community in rural areas. ...but they need reminding [of the number].' (Public)

'people have got to be reminded via newspapers and television about the 101 service.' (Public)

'How many times have you ever seen on the television somebody say, quick, call 101? You never hear it. If there's a drama or anything on telly, and it's the subliminal messages that you need.' (Public)

'I think 101 ought to be free .. especially for people who have no credit' (Public)

'If you want to call the police and give them information, information's the lifeblood of policing, I think that ought to be free.' (Public)

'It is easier to remember (as a number), and is a fantastic system – people like it but it just takes too long.' (Public)

There was a general call for Welsh speakers:

'You can't put subtlety across in English like you can in Welsh. Don't expect everyone to speak Welsh, but Welsh officers should always be available.' (Public)

Direct Phone Lines

Members of the public would prefer to be able to ring their local station and/or to be able to use mobile phones to contact their NPT teams.

I don't pretend on the answer to it but we've got to get a method where I can speak to a police officer without going through 60 call centres and waiting four days, about whatever information I might... it could be you could be something quite serious, but by the time it's got to where...' (Public)

'how can police best contact with people living in rural communities? The first thing I'd say is answer the bloody phone' (Public)

This might be a personal mobile for each officer or a few phones that are used by whoever is on duty at the time.

'when I was in paid for me to have a mobile because old people couldn't fathom the call centre,

and obviously there's a process. So even when I was off then, I'd just go through my answer phone messages when I started duty again, so I can go round and speak to the people...' (Police)

'they've got a huge patch to walk around but I guess when they get back to the police station they would say that they've done their job, whereas they'd be better off walking through the housing estates and banging on doors, giving people cards – if you've got a problem phone me.' (Public)

Police Stations: closures and restricted openings

One of the other most frustrating problems for the public, and something which they recognised impeded the ability of police to connect with local people, were police station closures and restricted opening hours.

Many in both the police and public focus groups noted that people cannot get to a police station to report matters anymore and so they give up and matters are not being recorded.

'if they want to come and tell me something that's bothering them now but the station's closed, they won't come back tomorrow...It's too late then. ... And that I think is why we're missing so much of what the public want from us.' (Police)

'Police Stations are not available anymore. Opening hours are not good enough.' (Public)

'After you do that once or twice, people decide not to bother anymore and crimes don't get reported.' (Public)

'There were road works and there were no lights, there was no nothing, it was chaos. We went to the police station and there were no signs on it to say where we should go and what we should do, there was nobody... there was no sign on the thing...' (Public)

'Having the station open in xxx is working really well, instead of having a van out as a mobile office.' (Police)

One of the most frustrating aspects to the public was that often there is someone working in the station but they are still closed, whoever is inside refuses to answer the door. Almost unanimously it was felt that if there were people in the station then they should be open.

'There was a notice on the door saying 'Please ring the bell for attention' or something, nothing happened at all. Then it turned out that police were under instructions not to speak to the public at all, they would just use it as an office and a changing room, and the station effectively was closed to the public.' (Public)

'Attended local Police Station when there are cars and lights, and no one answers.' (Public)

There was one down-side to the idea of 'if we are in we are open':

'... a lot of the time the officers are in because they're busy doing files and what they don't want then is to have the bell ringing half way through transcribing an interview and then going to answer the person at the counter. So I don't think it works, having these slogans, if we're in we're open, they sound great but the truth of the matter is that if the officers are in the probability is that they're busy doing something.' (Police)

There were disagreements about the closures and some NPT members in the focus groups felt that their time was better spent out in the community:

'... they've asked for the station to be open, I'm sat in the station for two hours with nobody coming through the door. I should be out walking. Get a volunteer in perhaps to man it, let them take messages, let me go out walking and I'm seeing a lot more people by that way.' (Police)

A number of people suggested resolutions to the problem:

'... open Police Stations; Let volunteers help.' (Public)

'Opening police stations, having experienced members of the public paid, SDO staff, who know their area and know everybody in the area.' (Police)

'I think from a police staff point of view as well, do you know when they talk about some of these rural police stations, I mean they're trying to get us now to work all digitally so that we should be able to work from anywhere. ... I'd be more than happy to go and work obviously somewhere closer to my house where the police station could be open, even if it was just us taking some details, being at counter and then saying somebody else can call you back. I mean it's not going to take much out of our day to do that' (Police)

Whilst this was not mentioned in the focus groups, Smith and Somerville (2013) note 'the closure of police stations impacts on the number of police officers actually policing the rural areas and results in the loss of core rural policing skills' (Smith and Somerville, 2013: 355)

Mobile Police Stations

Most comments about the mobile police stations were negative. Where they were used in place of a police station people generally preferred the station to be open, especially if it was near-by.

'we've stopped using the mobile station... It's a shambles. ... it was two days a week for four hours. We now open the station for two hours a day, Monday to Friday. It's far, far better, the public know where the station is.' (Internal)

Where they were used as a point of contact in villages police officers and the public found them a waste of time:

'No use – need to get out of the station [mobile] to mingle more' (External)

'I have got a mobile station that I take around the villages. ... a lot of people don't want to be seen going into a police vehicle, so what I generally do is park the vehicle where it's seen by everybody, and then patrol around and people literally bump into me.

Why don't they want to be seen getting into the vehicle?

I think a lot of it is because the rural areas are that close-knit, should anything happen afterwards, we do a warrant or something like that, it could be like I have seen so-and-so in the back of the police van, and I bet they had something to do with it. So they don't want to be seen going in there.' (Internal)

There was very little positive said about the mobile police stations. There were a few exceptions:

'I think it's best used on a Saturday, Friday and Saturday night, when it's in town and people can see it and we're sat in it. ... It's a way of preventing any antisocial behaviour and drink related behaviours by having a mobile police station in the middle of the square ...' (Internal)

Watch Schemes

'there must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street.' (Jacobs, 1961: 35)

This call by Jacobs for securing safer cities is similarly important in rural areas. Agencies of control are sparse and rural communities have always needed an internal resilience in order to protect themselves. Where the eyes are too controlling or too embedded in controlling certain groups (often the young, Meek, 2005; Kraack and Kenway, 2002) unhealthy control emerges (McMullan, 1998) therefore care needs to be taken to avoid balance community involvement with local justice for all.

Present reliance on communities arises out of 'watch schemes' which have proven effective in rural areas; people naturally keep an eye out for each other and note the unusual. The process of watching boosts confidence and reduces fear even if there is an intervention. Watch schemes themselves generally drew positive comments but there was some apprehension about the number of schemes and the need for multiple connects such as 'Online Watch Link (OWL)'.

The issue was that the watch schemes had become too fragmented.

'Too many so devalued' (Public)

'I can't believe that we are going down the route of Farmwatch, Horsecwatch, we need to be more encompassing and go for something like Rural Watch. Because I used to live ... next to a farm and xxx might put a message out via Farmwatch to look out for a white transit van xxx. And my neighbour will get it but I won't, and I am at home, I am off duty and what comes by but a white transit van with xxx, and we completely missed it.' (Police)

Others considered they needed to be better supported and coordinated.

Should be used more – not just set up and forgotten (Public)
There were attempts to co-ordinate watch systems such as 'OWL' which is a charity who try to coordinate the watch systems, link them together to get a more intelligent and inclusive system. Some focus groups reported OWL as useful

though some wanted to be able to send a message back via the system. Others felt that to be effective it should be adopted force-wide.

‘Owl has some problems, particularly feeding information back in’ (Public)

‘To get OWL across the whole Force would ... be a really good system’ (Police)

‘Powys use a different tool to OWL’ (Public)

Watch schemes were seen to boost partner, associate and bystander roles for the public and therefore to act as positive means of engagement.

Other means of boosting the resilience of the communities in rural areas might prove equally, if not more positive. Closer partnership work with other agencies might help to build such resilience e.g. through use of community restorative projects. Such partnership working may be rendered more difficult as Community Safety Partnerships are become marginalised and their funding redirected.

Technology

Many of the focus groups, police and public, felt the force might make more, and more intelligent, use of e-mail, the internet and social media, especially to connect with young people. Though in all cases it was recognised that this should be as well as not instead of other systems as many of the elderly community may be unable to use it and many homes either lack the hardware or their connectivity to the internet is non-existent or sporadic.

‘Internet good and needs to be developed but cannot rely on it because many communities do not have it and groups such as very young and the elderly may not be able to use it.’ (Public)

And communication is another problem out there because of the signals, you know, mobiles, etc. Sometimes even the intranet is down all the time. Trouble communicating with that. (Police)

I’ve got a couple of email addresses, I send emails, it takes months, literally, to respond to an email. I once reported a brand new bike thrown over the rails three months later the local police got back to me and said, “We’ll go and have a look for the bike.” I said, “It doesn’t matter, it’s gone, it went the next day.” it’s no good coming back to me

after three months, answering an email.’ (Public)

Police and Communities Together (PACT) Meetings

PACT meetings were touched on in discussions but not considered in detail. Several comments were made by external focus groups noting that they didn’t have an agreed understanding about what a PACT meeting was. To a large extent, both police and external groups felt that PACT meetings were not very useful.

‘I think you’ll find with structured meetings what you’ve got is people with an agenda or people that are obliged or have statutory rights to go’
 ‘... what’s lacking is the youth element. ... we’re lacking with youth engagement. But I think it doesn’t help as well that we haven’t got a very proactive youth service.’ (Public)

‘Only police attend other agencies should come along. Many of the problems are about roads but no-one from Council so a problem’ (Public)

There were some who considered them useful

‘... at least the PACT meetings help to prioritise the resources that are there.’ (Public)

‘I have a very good relationship with the communities and get good turnouts at meetings. (Police)

One person suggested an alternative

Well I lived in xxx before I came here, and it was very strong on community forums, And they had the police there; whether it was the special constable and the inspector, most times it was both of them. They had planning, different people, they had presentations and everyone could turn up, it was well supported and also well advertised. I came here ... and I proposed it, and it absolutely got slammed because they felt it was encroaching on our councillor’s time. I just couldn’t get it through to them what a positive communication it was, I really couldn’t get it through to them. ... we would have had it as, perhaps, a half hour before town council meeting. ... they [the public] could bring issues to us privately, ... they could have had three leading questions, we could have got the police or whoever was involved with the, say three questions that we would allow this time for.

Q. And it could be attended by the general public as well.

Well yes, they would have been actively encouraged. So you would have had those people in place to answer, and you could have also accepted questions,... on the evening. And what happened was it was all put into a spreadsheet, so whereas something that is consistent, like dog fouling, you saw it from the start to the finish, to the continuum. Who was dealing with it, when they dealt, what was the answer, who had asked it. So you could turn up at this meeting and not know anything, but think I wanted to ask that question, I have no need to, I can see what is going on, I can see who to contact if I want to add my little bit. It was absolutely brilliant, and like I say I was slapped down. (Public)

CONCLUSION

Overall we need to question whether policing in rural areas is efficient and effective and whether a better police public connect might improve that. These focus groups certainly suggested that there is excellent work being done but that the connection between police and public in rural areas still needs considerable work.

There was also agreement that improving the connection would be likely to increase trust and confidence in Dyfed-Powys police. It would also be likely to increase efficiencies across the force as there would be far greater understanding of the communities and what they need. In turn it was believed that this would lead to an increase in information and intelligence from the public so helping to solve and possibly also prevent more crimes and also improving discretionary decision-making. Whilst this belief was strongly and honestly held it was not fully evidenced. However, if it is to be achieved it is necessary to improve the interaction for all groups, young and old, incomers and long-time residents, those who are supportive of policing and those who are neutral or alienated from policing. Trying to have absolute consistency – a uniform action/reaction for all problems may actually expose more problems than it solves. Crime is often a local and diverse problem with no single easy solution. However, the message from these focus groups seemed to call for more local justice, local decision-making and local neighbourhood policing but that this needed to be done by those with real situated knowledge, an ability to problem solve and mediate but with back-up when that was necessary.


Recommendations

- The Value of NPT. Valuing the role of a community focused officer or volunteer, including development and specialism opportunities. The ‘small stuff’ matters to people and the neighbourhood policing approach is viewed as a valued part of recognising and addressing this. A means to understanding and measuring the softer impacts and evaluating of this form of work requires consideration, but can be complex and difficult.
- Develop and retain ‘situated knowledge’ within the community. The opportunities to build and retain situated knowledge are maximised if police have time to spend in communities, have the transport to get there regularly and reasons to stay based in the same area.
- Localised decision making. There is no one-size-fits all approach to policing local rural communities. A degree of flexibility is required in the use of mobile police stations. Officers should then be able to leave them to walk around the village and surrounding areas, meet and visit communities. The collection and recording of information’s has local requirements and as such guided by local needs where possible.
- To communicate in a natural form, go to the public. The public often initiate contact when in need and so the force must engineer opportunities to connect with the general public that go beyond formalised PACT meetings. This communication may be through the use of technology. The use of such technologies to connect to certain groups requires further exploration, this may include social media and include the use of watch schemes and systems such as OWL to increase connection opportunities. Where communication is made through more formal channels, the need to understand ‘the local’ is key.

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