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Policy Briefing

Community Policing: the challenges from a community perspective.





This policy briefing has been prepared by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland Observatory to inform discussions about the future of community policing in Northern Ireland. It draws on the experiences of CFNI groups involved in the Prison to Peace, Communities in Transition, Creating Space for Learning and Sharing, and SEARCH programmes, the PSNI, and academics working on community policing. The focus of the policy briefing is on communities significantly impacted by not only the conflict but also poverty and marginalisation, who continue to experience intra-community and interface tensions.

The PSNI's Community Prioritisation Index (CPI) has been developed to identify areas experiencing community polarisation, social stress, disengagement and crime and disorder. There is significant overlap between the PSNI's CPI Pathway Areas and those communities with whom CFNI works closely through its development and grant programmes.

A number of the CPI's key principles resonate with community development including the focus on vulnerable communities characterised by

fragmentation, breakdown, lack of engagement, disenfranchisement and isolation; where problems are continual, recurring or increasing. Interventions with these communities need to focus on promoting cohesion through building relations within and between them.

Community policing is a complex and dynamic area; specific areas for discussion are:

- *what is meant by 'community policing';*
- *the roles of and challenges for community representatives around policing, including who the PSNI engage with in communities, and who from local communities that are willing /unwilling to engage with the PSNI;*
- *positive experiences of effective community engagement and what can be learnt from these; and*
- *how community policing can be developed for example through practice, structures, research, and policy.*

Relationship with economic justice

The Observatory's work has focussed on economic justice, which is concerned with:

- **respecting** the rights of all people to an equal participation in, share of and benefit from the economic resources of a society;
- **protecting** members of society who receive an inequitable share of these resources; and
- **promoting** the equitable, progressive redistribution of economic resources within society so that all may realise their fullest potential.

CFNI as a social justice philanthropic organisation has worked with communities across Northern Ireland for over three decades. Since the Peace Settlement of 1998 it is clear that economic security is essential to transitioning to a peaceful society including the realisation of community safety and good relations agendas.

What does 'community policing' mean?

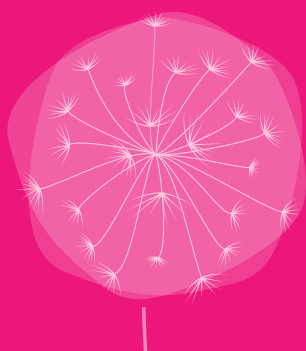
There are many different meanings for the term 'community policing', depending on who is defining it, and what the experiences of the person, community or organisation have been of policing in the past or in the present. Communities may recognise the necessity of some form of policing but they feel ambiguous about accepting this reality or are uncertain about what it might 'look like'.

To have community policing, you first need to have a community. Some of the communities with whom CFNI works are fragmented, have weak community infrastructure, experience a lack of community spirit, and have poor leadership (by community organisations and politicians). Key issues are how and with whom the PSNI does community engagement.

Community policing involves not only community members and organisations and the PSNI but also other agencies to address the causes and consequences of tension, conflict and crime.

For some, community policing refers to a specific form of policing by the PSNI; for others it includes policing by the community itself in many differing forms. In some local areas, community policing is seen as a continuing role for the local paramilitaries while in others, it was a role that paramilitaries had previously undertaken and the resultant gap has also had an impact with rising crime and anti-social behaviour leaving people feeling vulnerable and powerless. In yet other communities, community groups have organised at local level to make their streets safer and to support vulnerable people to feel safe at home.

If 'community' involvement in policing is to develop, then it must be seen as broader than a part of the 'formal' policing system. More work is required to develop models of good practice and co-operation at local level.



Research by Topping and Byrne, which is based on interviews conducted between 2007-2009 with organisations and politicians in loyalist and republican communities (N=60) and PSNI officers (N=35) found that:

'PSNI inertia in the delivery of effective, community based police services in Loyalist and Republican areas has created a policing vacuum that is being filled by paramilitary activity'; and that 'changing the hearts and minds of communities regarding the paramilitary 'option' had been underestimated by both the PSNI and politicians, in terms of the need for more effective frontline policing (...) the evidence pointed to paramilitary organisations 'cashing in' on the lack of confidence in policing, as delivered by the PSNI.'

(<http://news.ulster.ac.uk/releases/2011/5620.html> [Accessed 12 October 2011].

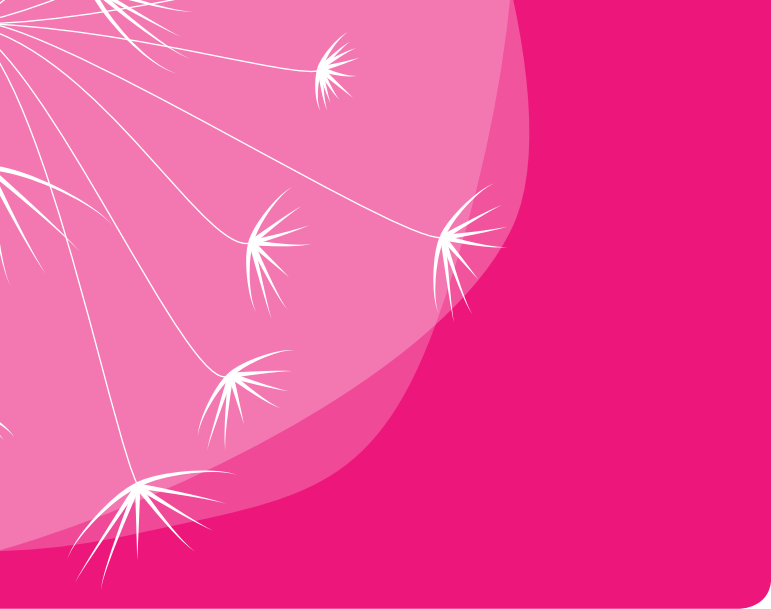
The PSNI is on a journey from a police force to a police service; strategically community policing is intended to be the way the whole service operates. This strategy must translate into visible change experienced at local level. It is important that more thought is given to involvement of communities. Therefore it is important that a genuinely changed ethos is embedded in the culture and practice of

the whole PSNI organisation, and that the message travels down to street-level PSNI (and community) structures. This is a big challenge.

Some community groups describe the police as disengaged, harassing (particularly of young people), and intimidatory (through the use of 'stop and search' procedures). Others report that the development of good relationships over time is breaking down mindsets and improving safety. However, this requires substantial engagement with communities – not 'charm offensives' of publicity and photo calls, which turn communities off.

Community support for policing needs to be negotiated, and some communities have neither been prepared nor supported for such a transition. Political decisions to support policing may not translate to people on the ground; pockets of acceptance and rejection of the police exist across Northern Ireland and there appears to be little pre-activity to redress this. Who should be involved from communities in developing these changing relationships with the police? Whilst some have found that it can be counter-productive for those who have had a negative history with the police such as ex-prisoners to be involved, others consider their contributions to be key to communities transitioning from conflict.





Acknowledging that there are tensions in the relationships between the police with both the loyalist and republican communities, specific issues raised around community policing by CFNI groups include the following.

- *In some loyalist areas, tensions are connected to the changing demographics of areas : for example in areas that were once highly policed because of the numbers of UDR and RUC members living there, residents (particularly older people) now feel abandoned.*
- *In areas where some republicans refuse to work with the PSNI for ideological reasons, there is a sense that the PSNI use this as an excuse to leave them to police interface areas and protect communities.*
- *Many examples were also noted, in both loyalist and republican, where police referred problem issues to the paramilitaries to deal with, thus re-enforcing their power and impact.*
- *The level of police response can be inconsistent – communities describe the PSNI sending in jeep loads of officers for what communities consider to be a minor incident but responding slowly and in low numbers to more serious incidents.*

Some communities are looking for a more visible police presence in their areas, commenting that officers are driving around in

cars through estates rather than walking around them. In response PSNI said that this may be about the logistics of the size of an area, or because the officers are engaged in particular types of work such as bail checks. Whilst foot patrols may reassure some members of some communities, research indicates that high visibility policing does not necessarily reduce crime or increase protection. However the PSNI has prioritised getting neighbourhood officers away from desk-based work.

In the PSNI's 'Policing with the Community 2020 Strategy', policing with the community is defined as follows.

'Community policing is proactive, solution-based and community driven. It occurs where the police and law-abiding citizens work together to do four things: prevent crime, inter-agency problem solving, bring offenders to justice, and improve the overall quality of life. The aim of community policing is to improve community safety by reducing crime and the fear of crime, and tackling anti-social behaviour. It cannot be properly implemented in an organisation where reactive policing is the underlying style.'

According to the strategy, community policing is put into practice through the application of the key principles of: service delivery, partnership, problem solving, empowerment and accountability. It commits to improving the quality of community engagement in order to support effective partnership working by developing 'a variety of engagement methods that identify and support local priorities and enhance the delivery of policing'.

What is acceptable and effective community policing?

Are there examples of where community policing has worked effectively?

The roles of and challenges for community representatives around policing

Because of the breadth of the communities with whom the CFNI works, issues around which community representatives the PSNI negotiate and deliver policing with have been raised from the perspectives of both former combatants as well as 'ordinary' community members.

Former paramilitaries have described the roles that they are asked to take on by the police including: mediating and calming tense situations within and between communities; and finding out who has committed crimes. There are several examples of Prison to Peace projects engaging strategically with the PSNI and working as local mediators between the PSNI and the local constituencies to calm situations and prevent or reduce outbreaks of violence. All the projects have been engaged in work of this nature and have also worked with the PSNI through various interface initiatives. Specific examples of good practice in this area include:

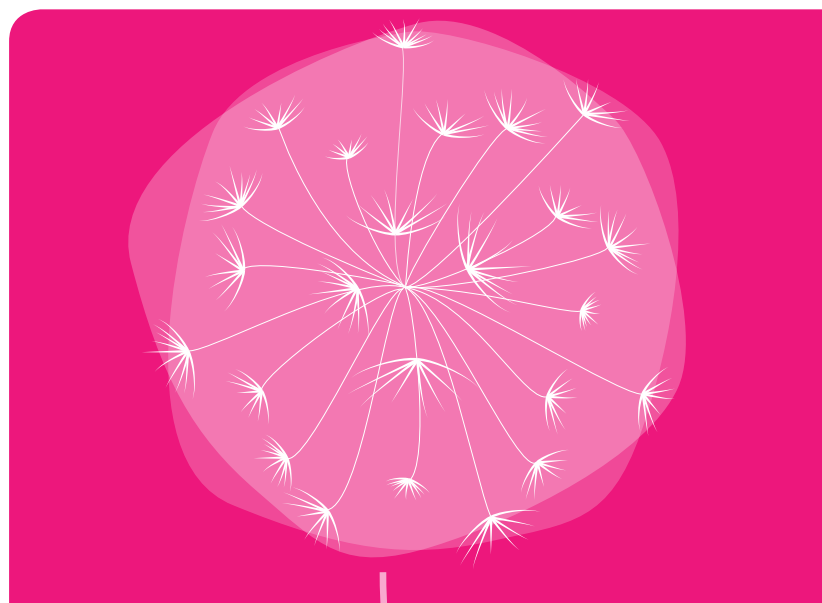
- *Lisburn Prisoner's Support Project has developed a working relationship with the PSNI and helped reduce tension and bridge the gap between local loyalist communities and the PSNI in Lisburn;*
- *the Prisoners in Partnership project has worked with the PSNI to pilot the Connect Project in the Highfield area; and*
- *ex-prisoners projects are active on the Interface forum in Derry and work closely with the PSNI at flashpoints.*

There can be negative consequences for 'political' groups in taking on these roles for example a 'political' group being asked to deal with interface violence and then finding that their members are arrested by other police officers when they are trying

to diffuse the situation. Some communities feel that they don't get the return that they expect from the police when they have been asked to play a major role in policing, and can feel used and exploited by the police.

Whilst the use of ex-combatants in community policing activities can be effective - reducing tension and levels of violence, and restoring calm along interfaces and during parades – as recognised by commentators including the PSNI, but it can also be problematic for these groups as it may conflict with the other developmental roles of these groups as well as give out the wrong message at local level. Ideally this role should become integrated into wider community safety structures in order to reduce the perception that ex-combatants are 'continuing to police' their communities.

From another perspective, some community organisations complain that there is a lack of real community policing. They comment that when something significant goes wrong in a community the police work with the paramilitaries and let them sort it out, leaving the community powerless. Community groups may be involved by the police to sort out small, day to day problems but not when it really matters and thus the status of the paramilitaries is strengthened.




Such groups assert that policing belongs to the whole community, that not all community leaders are ex-combatants, and that the police's engagement with former paramilitaries reinforces and extends their power within communities at a time when community support for them is waning.

Further, the PSNI's engagement with former paramilitaries has consequences for what and who is policed in communities. Community organisations anecdotally reported that when the paramilitaries do wrong or cause problems (which can happen regularly) that the police stay out of the area and leave 'ordinary' people unprotected. Community organisations have alleged that some former paramilitaries with whom the PSNI are engaging with are involved in criminal activity such as drug dealing, prostitution, predatory lending of money and selling of illegal fuel, domestic violence and child abuse. Consequently certain issues remain unaddressed and areas are left without police protection. Also, communities say that the police may not act against a criminal because they are useful as informers.

PSNI have responded to a number of the above issues. It is acknowledged that PSNI do work with former paramilitaries who have influence in their local communities for example to defuse tension and prevent violence. Similarly there may be contact between PSNI and 'political' groups before going into certain areas in order to avoid the PSNI presence escalating situations that can be managed within the community or with a negotiated police intervention. PSNI have commented that they may ask ex-combatants about criminal and anti-social activity within their areas; this is viewed as everyday intelligence gathering and standard practice.

PSNI acknowledge that community



representatives have a difficult role to balance between facilitating or negotiating with the police and bringing their communities with them; particularly as some members of communities are further down the road of transitioning to peace than others. What seems clear is that there is a need for more open and honest discussion about all of this.

What tensions have been experienced around community policing?

How is community confidence in the police to be built?

Community Engagement

In its policy role, the Policing Board's Community Engagement Strategy defines community engagement as follows.

'Community Engagement is about giving local people a voice and involving them in decisions that affect them, their community and their neighbourhood. At the heart of Community Engagement is the development of relationships, open and clear communication, networking and listening and building understanding of the diverse people and places within our society.'

The Police Board monitor the implementation of the PSNI's Policing with the Community 2020 Strategy through its Community Engagement Committee.

Within its operational role, the PSNI's Equality Diversity and Good Relations Strategy 2011-2016 states one of its cornerstones is: 'proper engagement, in particular with groups and in communities who traditionally have mistrusted or been disengaged from policing' (p23);

What do communities consider to be 'proper' community engagement?

Community organisations believe that they should have a role in community policing; and want to have a genuine engagement with the PSNI – part of which would involve co-developing solutions around local policing issues. However they see the police as hiding behind a lack of resources, and not really engaging with communities to find solutions.

Over the last decade, communities have extensive experience of engaging both with the police sector (PSNI and Policing Board Northern Ireland) as well as other statutory bodies.

Reflecting on this experience communities have a sense of what they consider to be genuine, substantial and effective engagement that creates real change in their communities.

Some community groups have commented that they found Community Police Liaison Committees to be a good tool (if implemented properly); they stressed that these committees should include all sections of the community willing to work with them including ex-combatants and especially young people and older people.



As well as the PSNI's neighbourhood policing structures, the new Policing and Community Safety Partnerships are being established from the outgoing District Policing Partnerships and Community safety partnerships.

Are formal structures working well to develop community policing?

The PSNI have responded that it engages with all types of groupings within communities, and the type and focus of the engagement reflects the policing issue that needs to be dealt with.

How do community organisations and PSNI ensure that community policing is accessible, appropriate and responsive to all members of local communities?



Supporting effective community policing

As well as considering the challenges around community policing from a community perspective, there is a need to talk through ways to further develop effective community policing with regard to practice, structures, research and policies.

PRACTICE *Are there models of community policing that have delivered for communities – in Northern Ireland and elsewhere?*

STRUCTURES *Are the existing structures sufficient to support the operation and evolution of community policing?*

RESEARCH *What are the questions that research needs to ask and how can communities be involved in community policing research?*

POLICIES *Do existing policies provide a robust framework for community policing, are they sufficiently nuanced to respond to the needs of communities experiencing continuing internal and interface conflict, and are they being implemented?*

Observatory

The Community Foundation for Northern Ireland has resourced and advocated for social justice and sustainable peace in Northern Ireland by promoting community-based action and influencing policy development over three decades.

Building on this tradition, the Observatory aims to promote economic justice and combat poverty. Economic justice must touch the individual, communities and wider society. It is concerned with:

- *respecting the rights of all people to an equal participation in, share of and benefit from the economic resources of a society;*
- *protecting members of society who receive an inequitable share of these resources; and*
- *promoting the equitable, progressive redistribution of economic resources within society so that all may realise their fullest potential.*

The Observatory asserts that the community sector is an equal partner within Northern Irish society during the current recessionary and change period. It aims to contribute to the strategic transformation of the community sector by:

- *connecting community groups with local and regional policy agendas, and*
- *producing relevant, accessible, authoritative and influential policy intelligence that articulates voices from the community sector.*

For Further Information Please Contact:

Iris Elliott
Observatory Facilitator
ielliott@communityfoundationni.org
028 90 245927
Community House
Citylink Business Park
Albert Street
Belfast Bt12 4HQ
www.communityfoundationni.org/Programmes/Observatory