



## **WORK PLACEMENT REPORT: ADDRESSING THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF MULTI-AGENCY RESPONSES TO ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR**

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### **Note from the Editor:**

In stage three of the BSc (Hons) Criminology and Criminal Justice Studies programme, students are able to spend time within a placement at a criminal justice or related agency. As part of their assessed work, students undertake an analytical report. In other words, they identify an issue or issue from their placement which they discuss in relation to criminological literature. In this way 'practice' and 'theory' are intertwined in order to critically assess their time in the work place. Jenna Widdecombe's report reflects upon the issue of multi-agency working within the criminal justice system.

### **Introduction**

The following analytical report will begin by introducing my work-based learning placement with Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. It will then move on to discuss how the organisation functions and why such organisations have been introduced. A key issue that became apparent to me whilst on placement is the importance of a multi-agency approach towards anti-social behaviour, as well as the issues and tensions that can occur in practice. This will therefore be the main focus of my analytical report. This report will begin by discussing how and why a multi-agency approach has been implemented; it will discuss the politicisation of crime by the Conservative Government of the 1990s and the introduction of a managerialist approach by New Labour following their 1997 election. It will consider the benefits of a multi-agency approach, as well as the issues and tensions that arise in policy

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and practice, by reflecting on my personal experiences and will draw on relevant literature. The core issues that will be discussed are resistance from professionals, competing organisational goals, the strains of managerialism, poor methods for information sharing and ambivalent political goals. The report will conclude by arguing that – notwithstanding the more holistic approach multi-agency partnerships provide in dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour – in practice, the culture of organisations and the strains of managerialism create resistance amongst many professionals in adopting this new approach. This has resulted in an implementation gap; although recent government proposals aim to address many of the criticisms discussed throughout this report, tackling anti-social behaviour in today's economically, culturally and politically challenging climate continues to provide many challenges.

## **1 Anti-Social Behaviour**

My work placement was carried out with Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. This organisation was established in 2001 to address the increasing problem of anti-social behaviour within Plymouth. The team consists of:

A police Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) liaison officer, five case officers, the unit manager, team leader and a senior lawyer specialising in ASB, together with an ASB assistant (whose duties include the use and installation of surveillance equipment) and an admin assistant. (Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit, 2010)

Whilst on placement, my role was to observe and shadow the practitioners in order to gain an understanding of how the organisation functions. This largely involved attending Plymouth Magistrates' Court and multi-agency meetings. The key aim of this organisation is to 'drive forward solutions to tackling ASB issues, strive to engage with individuals to modify behaviour within a multi-agency, problem-solving context and to work in partnership with other agencies' (Plymouth City Council, 2010a). Recent statistics demonstrate that Plymouth's Anti-Social Behaviour Unit is working effectively to tackle and reduce anti-social behaviour, with reports of ASB dropping by 3,239 in the last year and the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary awarding the 'ASB Unit a BCU (Basic Command Unit) Commander's Commendation for its work' (Prince, 2010).

The term anti-social behaviour is a multi-faceted concept and definitions of this social problem vary widely (Carr and Cowen, 2006). Millie (2009) argues that the level of discretion this provides enables local authorities to identify and prioritise local concerns. The Devon and Cornwall Constabulary define anti-social behaviour as 'a wide range of unacceptable activities such as vandalism, graffiti, speeding, littering, dog fouling, nuisance neighbours and intimidating groups taking over public spaces' (Devon and Cornwall Constabulary,

2010a). Tackling such 'quality of life' crimes and disorders has become a key priority (Tuffin *et. al.*, 2006) as it can be argued that they increase the fear of crime (Millie, 2009). This not only impacts negatively on individuals themselves but also on the communities in which they live (Dolan and Peasgood, 2007; Jackson, 2004). For example, it can be argued that the occurrence of anti-social behaviour represents a lack of control and stability (Wilson and Kelling, 1982; Crawford, 2007), which can then decrease community cohesion and trust as the members of that community feel that there is a lack of 'moral consensus' (Dolan and Peasgood, 2007). This can be supported by Wilson and Kelling's (1982) powerful 'broken windows' thesis, which suggests that the presence of such incivilities can decrease informal social controls meaning that 'decent neighbourhoods can tip into fearful ghettos of crime' (Crawford, 2007: 886).

Organisations such as the Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit were established as the responsibility for crime and disorder was increasingly placed on local authorities (Millie, 2009). This meant that social housing management and policing became the key mechanisms for dealing with issues such as anti-social behaviour at a local level (Brown, 2004). Such changes represented a key shift in the way that both public and private agencies approach crime and disorder (Downes and Morgan, 2007) and marked the beginnings of what Cohen (1985) discussed as the blurring of boundaries, mesh thinning and net widening. This is because a new form of social control was beginning to emerge which allowed a wide range of behaviours to be labelled as deviant (Becker 1963), justifying the emergence of a 'new domain of professional power and knowledge' (Brown, 2004: 203).

Methods for dealing with anti-social behaviour were originally implemented via the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which introduced sanctions such as the Anti-Social Behaviour Order. Such legislation instigated a 'punitive drift' towards crime and disorder (Hough, 2002). This trend has then continued with more recent legislation which has made a wide range of informal and formal sanctions available to agencies (Burney, 2009). Many of these sanctions were implemented following the introduction of the Anti-Social Behaviour Act 2003 (Home Office, 2003), which provided powers for housing action trusts and registered social landlords, as well as strengthening police powers and providing methods for dealing with irresponsible parents (Millie, 2009). Whilst on placement, I learned that the Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit use an 'escalation process' to deal with anti-social behaviour as this helps to ensure that diversionary and intervention methods are used where possible and enforcement is only used when necessary (Plymouth City Council, 2010b).

## **2 A Multi-Agency Approach**

A key issue that immediately became apparent to me whilst on placement is the importance of a multi-agency approach towards anti-social behaviour, as well as the issues and tensions that can occur in practice. I observed such issues whilst attending multi-agency meetings. This report will now discuss how and why multi-agency work was introduced into the criminal justice system and the positive aspects of this approach. It will then identify and address the aforementioned issues and tensions that arise in policy and practice. A multi-agency approach to crime and disorder became increasingly important following the politicisation of crime (Downes and Morgan, 2007), as a greater emphasis was placed on crime reduction and control (Gilling, 2008). The politicization of crime and in turn criminal justice occurred in the 1970s with the election of Margaret Thatcher, who implemented a 'law and order approach' (McLaughlin *et. al.*, 2001). Such an approach allowed Thatcher to embark on her aim of freeing Criminal Justice System agencies from the 'disempowering influences of welfare professionals and ideologies, and provide them with powers, resources and state patronage necessary to unleash a war against crime' (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2001: 2). This placed the causes of crime firmly on the criminal 'other' (Murray, 1990) and as a result the public became increasingly concerned about crime (Cohen, 1972). This in turn allowed the government to gain 'political capital' (Newburn, 2003) as it aided the construction of 'authoritarian populism' (McLaughlin and Muncie, 2001).

The focus on crime control and reduction was further enforced following the election of New Labour in 1997, who promoted managerialism with their 'tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime' approach (Downes and Morgan, 2007). This allowed the implementation of national standards, performance targets, audits, control of professional autonomy, and also ensured that resources were used more effectively (Barton, 2008; Carter, 2003). Within their pragmatic approach to criminal justice, New Labour also acknowledged that a more holistic approach was needed in order to address community safety (Crawford, 1998), following recommendations made by the Morgan Report (1991). This led to the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which introduced a partnership approach (Gilling, 2008). Such an approach recognised that issues such as anti-social behaviour are multi-faceted and 'there is no single agency solution' (Crawford, 2007: 893). This meant that central government would now monitor and provide funding for local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) throughout England and Wales (McLaughlin *et. al.*, 2001). From 2004, all CDRPs had a responsibility to assess the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of

their partnerships (Gilling, 2005), as a large emphasis was placed on research-based knowledge and evaluation in order to establish 'what works' (Crawford, 2007; McLaughlin *et al.*, 2000). The introduction of such partnerships has meant that local councils now have a statutory responsibility to work with public, private and voluntary agencies as well as the public to address and manage the risks posed by issues such as anti-social behaviour (Burney, 2009).

The implementation of this actuarial style of governance has also placed a greater emphasis on the 'responsibilisation' of citizens (Garland, 1996) in order to promote 'active citizenship' (Home Office, 2010b). This is achieved via the empowerment of communities which decentralises power and continues to challenge 'professional expertise, hierarchical competence and specialisation as well as state paternalism and monopoly' (Crawford, 2001: 56). As a result, precautionary actions by citizens are seen to be as vital as the role of the Criminal Justice System when controlling and preventing the risks posed by crime and disorder (Crawford, 2007). This is because they help to create 'the Active Community', in which citizens and agencies share the responsibility (Crawford 2001: 56). Whilst on my placement, it became clear from comments made by the practitioners that Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit regularly works with members of the public and very much values their co-operation and support. They also work with a wide range of agencies, such as the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary, Plymouth Community Homes, Social Services, Education Welfare Officers and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The importance of promoting a more holistic approach to anti-social behaviour became apparent to me whilst attending an anti-social behaviour neighbourhood conference hosted by the Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit. The conference was attended by Plymouth's Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and its key aim was to improve the PCSOs' knowledge of what the anti-social behaviour unit do and how they work in order to promote a multi-agency approach. The reason why the conference was held for PCSOs is because such individuals play a significant role in determining the public's trust in, support for and co-operation with agencies within the criminal justice system (Gilling, 2007). They act as 'moral guardians of social stability and order, held responsible for community values and informal social controls' (Jackson and Bradford, 2009: 493). Public engagement is achieved via methods such as Partners and Communities Together (PACT), which allow neighbourhood policing teams to engage with the community via meetings, surveys, postcards, door-to-door enquiries, and surgeries (Devon and Cornwall police, 2010b). Promoting a multi-agency approach therefore not only helps to improve community engagement but also ensures that

all organisations work together more effectively to reduce crime and disorder at a local level (Home Office, 2010a). This is achieved by moving from 'policing by consent to policing by active co-operation', which strengthens the role of CDRPs (McLaughlin, 2005: 480; Mason, 2009).

A further advantage of a partnership approach is that it is 'problem orientated rather than bureaucratically premised' (Hughes, 2002: 129). This not only ensures a more holistic and proactive approach to anti-social behaviour but is also far more cost effective (Burney, 2009), as it allows for the co-ordination of effort, expertise, resources and information (Crawford, 1998). The audit of such partnerships via a managerialist approach then helps to ensure that the government, local authorities and agencies make more informed decisions about where to allocate resources. This is because the decision making process is 'more transparent by organising information on inputs, outputs, impacts and outcomes in a single comparative framework' (Dhiri and Brand, 1999: 11). This makes all parties involved more accountable (McLaughlin et al, 2000) and ensures 'best value' policies and practices (Audit Commission, 1999). Furthermore, a report by the National Audit Office (2004: 29) states that the publication of CDRPs' strategies 'can help bring the partnerships together by clarifying each organisation's role, raising awareness of specific problems, and setting targets and priorities which the public and other organisations are committed to achieving'. Crawford (2001) argues that the implementation of such 'third way' politics has helped both policy and practice to evolve to meet the demands of late modernity, in which a great emphasis is placed on risk management and public protection.

A multi-agency approach also provides many advantages for the individuals and families against which action is being taken. This approach allows agencies to collectively address the wide-ranging causes of anti-social behaviour (Millie, 2009), for example unemployment, lack of education, alcohol and drug misuse, and troubled inter-personal relationships (Home Office, 2003). Multi-agency partnerships therefore help such families to become more socially included within their community and prevent behaviour from escalating into criminal activity (Burney, 2009); this in turn helps to build 'a strong society where civility and courtesy are the norm, where people are at ease with change, and are committed to being good neighbours and active citizens' (Commission of Integration & Cohesion, 2007:3). I witnessed the benefits that can occur whilst spending time with practitioners who run a support group called the Freedom Programme, which provides help and support for women suffering from domestic violence. The programme was implemented by Plymouth's Family Intervention Unit, who work in co-operation with the ASB unit, and provides domestic abuse sufferers with the self-esteem and confidence to improve the quality of their families' lives (Craven, 2010).

### **3 Issues and Tensions**

Although there are many advantages of implementing a partnership approach to issues such as anti-social behaviour, in practice there are many issues and tensions that arise (Phillips, 2002). Many of these became apparent whilst attending multi-agency meetings. A key problem that occurred on many occasions was that representatives from different organisations did not attend. For example, on day nine of my placement I attended a multi-agency meeting to discuss a family who were causing many problems within their community and a representative from a key agency did not attend. This meant that little could be achieved from the meeting since their advice and co-operation would be essential as there were five vulnerable children involved. It was very clear that this frustrated the professionals who did attend the meeting. Furthermore, the lack of attendance meant that an emergency risk assessment meeting would have to be called to ensure that all of the necessary professionals were present. As a result, throughout this time it would not be possible to put measures in place to help the family and prevent further anti-social behaviour. This observation supports the criticism that the partnership approach has been implemented into the criminal justice system with little attention paid to the way in which agencies interact or to their different priorities and practices (Burney, 2009). This can mean that problems occur due to a lack of trust, support and co-operation (Crawford, 2001).

This criticism was also identified by Matthews et. al. (2007:15), who asserted that many police officers believe that 'controlling anti-social behaviour was not proper police work and distracted them from concentrating on realising their crime targets', suggesting that many police officers do not take this issue seriously. Furthermore, It has also been argued that when tackling anti-social behaviour the power that the police service holds often allows them to disproportionately dominate via their enforcement role (Foster, 2002: Burney, 2009), as they are able to act quickly and have greater resources (Pearson et al 1992). This means that many organisations within CDRPs are not able to participate effectively and 'even the successful ones are not sufficiently visible' (Home Office, 2004:123). The consistent emphasis placed on enforcement ensures the continuation of a punitive stance towards anti-social behaviour, in which perpetrators are socially excluded rather than included (Bottoms, 1995: Young, 1999).

When discussing how organisations within such partnerships co-operate with one another, a further criticism has been the sharing of information (Crawford, 2001). The practical guidelines for recording information were not formally provided by the Home Office until 2004 (Burney, 2004), meaning that organisations were not following the same procedures. In addition, it has been argued that the legislation put in place to ensure data protection was often inadequate and interpreted differently by each organisation (Crawford, 2007). This led to a lack of trust between organisations (Gilling, 2005), which delays the information sharing process and can 'affect the nature and quality of evidence presented in court' (Matthews et. al., 2007). It has also been argued that the culture of 'target management' has demoralised staff when recording information, which then provides poor quality and incorrect data for research (Crawford, 2001). I observed a further problem associated with information sharing on day ten of my work placement, whilst attending a multi-agency meeting. On this particular occasion, the PCSOs who attended did not bring all of the required paperwork. This clearly frustrated the ASB team members as it slowed down the progress that could be made with the case. This represents a problem that can occur when professionals within organisations have different priorities, as the value of the information was viewed differently by the ASB officers and PCSOs.

It can also be argued that the partnership approach has not been as successful as anticipated because it was implemented alongside New Labour's 'managerial mania' (McLaughlin, 2005:477). In policy terms, the government were portraying a more 'hands off' approach, in which local authorities would have the power and resources necessary to address local problems (Gilling, 2007). However, in practice, the arm of the state was extended deeper and deeper into the community via the strict enforcement of performance management (Crawford, 2001). This resulted in a greater emphasis being placed on achieving performance targets rather than ensuring effective multi-agency work, as this would then determine the amount of funding that agencies would receive (Crawford, 2007). This criticism is supported by a report produced by the National Audit Office (2004:1), which identified that such methods placed a large burden on partnerships and more successful outcomes could be achieved 'by minimising the administrative work done by partnerships, so that monies can be spent on successful crime prevention initiatives instead'. This would extend the narrow focus of 'what works' and allow partnerships to pursue local issues beyond the narrow realm of crime reduction (Hughes, 2002), with a greater emphasis being placed on 'real life' local problems rather than easily measurable objectives (Crawford, 2001).



The final criticism raised is the tension created due to ambivalent political goals. First, it can be argued that the quest to promote 'communitarianism' conflicts with the managerialist agenda (Brownlee, 1998). Communitarianism is focused on re-moralising citizens, and placing control and responsibility for crime back within the community; in contrast, managerialism ensures state control and intervention (Crawford, 2001). This has meant that, in practice, a greater emphasis is placed on pursuing a 'populist punitiveness' approach rather than promoting community safety via CDRPs (Bottoms: 1995, Gilling, 2007). Second, it can be argued that in one instance government policy treats the majority of crime as 'normal social fact' (Garland, 2001), placing a large emphasis on methods such as situational crime prevention (Crawford, 2007); yet, an issue such as anti-social behaviour is increasingly portrayed as a deviance problem requiring state control and action (Burney, 2009). Crawford (2001; 76) argues that 'this dualistic denial and recognition produces volatile shifts in the state's presentation of its own capacity for effective action and crime control'.

Recent proposals from the Coalition Government aim to address many of these issues following high profile events such as the tragic suicides of Fiona Pilkington and her daughter, which was the result of months of anti-social behaviour by youths within her community (Greenhill and Clarke, 2009). The proposals state that the future of CDRPs is not threatened as they are still seen to be essential when addressing anti-social behaviour, but changes will be made to make them more effective (Local Government Improvement and Development, 2010). First, the government are proposing a reduction of the bureaucratic strain placed on partnerships by the removal of government targets, centralised performance management and a reduction in the data burden (Home Office, 2010b:19). This will allow partnerships to focus on generating solutions to locally identified problems. It has also been stated that a greater emphasis will be placed on the roles and responsibilities of communities 'to bring back a sense of personal and social responsibility and to make anti-social behaviour 'unusual, abnormal and something to stand up to' (Johnson, 2010). However, these changes will be implemented alongside further initiatives which will provide the police with more powers to tackle anti-social behaviour via their enforcement role (BBC News UK, 2011). Moreover, budget cuts will place a large burden on what CDRPs can achieve with the resources available to them. This means that, although in theory it appears that many of the tensions will desist, in practice such changes will not be easy to achieve.

## **Conclusion**

To conclude, my work placement with Plymouth Anti-Social Behaviour Unit allowed me to observe the differences in theory and practice when considering a multi-agency approach to

crime and disorder. As discussed throughout this report, there are many advantages of such an approach as it provides a more holistic and proactive response to multi-faceted problems such as anti-social behaviour. The implementation of this approach via a managerialist agenda has ensured that all agencies are accountable for the economy, efficiency and effectiveness of such partnerships. However, there are also many issues and tensions that have arisen in practice. These include resistance from professionals, competing organisational goals, the strains of managerialism, poor methods for information sharing and ambivalent political goals. Recent proposals from the Coalition Government appear to be aimed at addressing many of these problems, acknowledging that changes need to be made in order to ensure that multi-agency partnerships are more effective. However, it can once again be argued that the proposed changes are ambivalent; although in theory such changes will provide partnerships with more discretion and control over what issues to address, in practice it is likely that increased police powers will ensure that this agency will continue to disproportionately dominate CDRPs via their enforcement role. It can therefore be argued that tackling anti-social behaviour in today's economically, culturally and politically challenging climate will continue to prove challenging. Police domination will limit the success of other organisations, and the continuing need to ensure an economic approach will place a large burden on what agencies can achieve with the resources available to them. Finally, the public will continue to demand results which will ensure the continuation of state intervention and control.

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