



Community engagement in policing:

case-study evaluation of a demonstration project in Cheshire

Andy Myhill (Home Office)
Kai Rudat (Office for Public Management)

Contents

Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Section 1: Process evaluation	5
Section 2: Impact evaluation	19
Assessment – is it a useful role?	30

List of boxes

Box 1: The Taking Control review	1
Box 2: Key phases of activity	4
Box 3: Process evaluation themes	5
Box 4: Capacity – key insights	8
Box 5: Approaches and methods – key insights	11
Box 6: Training for community action teams	12
Box 7: Partnership working – key insights	13
Box 8: Leadership, vision and priorities – key insights	15
Box 9: Culture and performance management – key insights	18
Box 10: Positive relationships with local media	24
Box 11: Converting the complainers at CAMs	26

Summary

Some key learning from the Cheshire demonstration project

- A wide range of skills can add value to community engagement in policing. Authorities and forces benefit from being open to the insights to be gained from other sectors.
- Community engagement should not be seen as the domain of specialist staff. Frontline officers can be encouraged and, with appropriate training and support, enabled to be actively involved in community engagement.
- Impact is widened dramatically if new approaches can be communicated to others and successfully branded to gain buy-in, and if other officers can take a role in their delivery.
- The growth of electronic engagement approaches will place new demands on corporate IT systems, processes and resources.
- Partnership connections are made relatively successfully between practitioners, but are harder to establish at a strategic planning level.
- Agencies' internal communications may not ensure all relevant stakeholders are informed of activity if the initial approach is to just one person or department.
- Time needs to be invested in 'learning about each other' to ensure that public expectations are managed, promises made are realistic, and partnership working is seen by communities as joined up and effective.
- Visible leadership and high level support is recognised not only by those directly involved in community engagement, but by a wide cross-section of operational staff.
- As the post holder was granted access to all levels and areas of the service, she was able to contribute to corporate developments on a scale normally beyond the reach of a demonstration project of this size.
- The authority and constabulary recognised that community engagement will lead to changes in delivery and performance, and that performance management and measures will need to be adapted in order to measure impact and recognise and reward effort.

Five key outcomes from the Cheshire demonstration project

- Mainstreaming of a community engagement focus into police authority ways of working and the creation of a specific role to support and further develop this.
- Community profiling to evaluate the success and coverage of previous community engagement and to suggest specific groups to be targeted.
- Introduction of new and innovative ways of communicating and engaging with communities.
- Raising the profile of the police authority and raising awareness at all levels of the force of the role that the authority can play in facilitating change.
- Enhancing and supporting an organisational change process, providing an alternative, non-police, non-local authority perspective.

Introduction

The Invest-to-Save budget funded Community Engagement in Policing Project included three 'demonstration projects' in three different police authorities – Cheshire, Merseyside and Northumbria. The projects provided the authorities with a staff member for a fixed period of eighteen months. Each role was to test a different way of engaging with communities. The Cheshire project involved testing different methods of community engagement with an overall marketing and performance management focus. A summary of key learning from all three projects is available at <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk>

Context of the project – Cheshire police's Taking Control review

The demonstration project run by Cheshire Police Authority was the first to go live, in January 2004. From the outset, this demonstration site had linked the project to a wider organisational review and culture change programme, the Taking Control review (see Box 1). The connection to an organisation-wide change programme, and to key initiatives such as reassurance and emerging neighbourhood policing activities, provided considerable opportunities in this demonstration site.

Box 1 The Taking Control review

The demonstration project was linked to a major force review and subsequent organisational change programme, initiated in response to perceived increases in demands for service. The fundamental drive behind the Taking Control review is to deliver more locally based policing. The review aims to identify efficiencies throughout current force deployment, which can be converted into community policing activities. A key element of the Taking Control initiative has been the reorganisation of Cheshire Constabulary into three Basic Command Units (BCUs). Within the BCUs there are eighteen Neighbourhood Policing Units (NPU), which are split into fifty-three Community Action Teams (CATs). These are led by a sergeant and are made up of community beat officers, Community Support Officers (CSOs), and volunteer special constables. Working alongside the NPUs' investigation teams, CAT officers focus on problem-solving, with an emphasis on working with other local agencies (e.g. partnership working around neighbourhood issues).

The Taking Control review included piloting a Safer Communities programme in six areas of Cheshire – Stanney Grange (Chester and Elsmere Port), Whitecross (Warrington), Alsager (Congleton), Audlem (Crewe), Bollington (Macclesfield) and Halton Brook (Halton). Each programme consisted of public perceptions surveys and environmental audits. These were known as 'CAT walks', where local councillors, local service providers, media representatives, and members of the public accompanied officers and noted problems in neighbourhoods. Results from the surveys and audits were used to help suggest priorities for local policing at Community Action Meetings (CAMs). These regular public meetings are facilitated by CAT staff. Members of the public are encouraged to suggest priorities and attendees vote for their top priority by placing coloured dots on a flip chart. The top priority is tackled by the CATs with partner agencies between meetings and outcomes are reported at the following CAM.

Another notable contextual feature in Cheshire is the close working relationship between the authority and force. They are co-located in the force headquarters. Senior staff in the authority (the Clerk and the Chief Executive, and the Deputy Clerk) and in the force (Head of Corporate Development) provided joint management and guidance. The newly appointed Chief Constable was also interested and involved in the project. These factors combined to create an environment which afforded the post holder high level support and relative freedom to work across the authority and constabulary.

Demonstration project aims and objectives

The overall stated aim of the Cheshire demonstration project was:

To make the people of Cheshire safe and for them to feel safer by responding to their needs as well as by shaping their expectations of the service we can deliver.

During the early stages of the project, the evaluators from the Home Office team and from the Office for Public Management (OPM) worked with the post holder, joint management team and two lead members of the authority to agree more specific objectives for the demonstration project. All stakeholders recognised that the complexity of community engagement meant that its impact may be slow to assess (because of time lags between engagement and impact), difficult to measure (because engagement can raise issues which may not always be specific, or to which complex service changes are required), or unrealistic (because public expectations may exceed resources or remits). The key objectives were set by the project stakeholders and evaluators during an evaluation workshop in Cheshire.

- Evaluate the success of existing engagement systems to establish the need for new or improved systems.
- Increase the level of dialogue between the authority and constabulary and communities and improve the quality of community engagement methods.
- Introduce better central co-ordination of engagement activity and a more consistent approach to engagement across the service.
- Reach a broad cross-section of the population.
- Create a two-way meaningful dialogue between the service and local communities, including feedback.
- Increase community confidence by increasing the involvement of communities in priority setting and local problem-solving.
- Shape public expectations of the service the police can deliver.
- Use public feedback to shape and improve service delivery.
- Improve accountability such that the public believes that the service takes their views into account and the authority's decisions have legitimacy through public support.
- Create better links with non-police partners on community engagement issues.
- Ensure that the changes made are sustained beyond the life of the demonstration project.

Some of these objectives are more directly measurable than others. The evaluation focuses on these. Where evidence for the impact of the project on a particular objective was beyond the scope of the evaluation, this is stated.

Evaluation methods and sources of data

The evaluation of the Cheshire demonstration project covered both processes and outputs/outcomes. OPM was responsible for the process evaluation; Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) was responsible for evaluating the impact of the project. Both strands of evaluation are interconnected and the two evaluators co-operated fully in the collation of evidence and reporting. Section 1 of this report summarises the key lessons from the process evaluation; Section 2 assesses the impact of the project against its original aim and objectives.

From the outset, the Home Office encouraged a developmental or learning approach to the project design and its evaluation. The evaluators were encouraged to work with the demonstration sites closely, to capture useful insights as they occurred, to share these across the three demonstration sites, and feed them into the work of the National Practitioner Panel for community engagement in policing. This ongoing tracking of learning formed the basis of the process evaluation. Data was collected through the following methods.

- Regular conversations with the post holder.
- Observation at key events.
- Depth-interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders in the project – including the post holder; police authority members and staff; Cheshire Constabulary Chief Constable and the Head of Corporate Development, the Taking Control project team, NPU Inspectors and CAT officers in Whitecross and Alsager.

- Depth-interviews with key partner agency representatives who contributed to or were affected by the project.

The impact evaluation focused on the specific project objectives. Assessment of success against the project's overarching aim was beyond the scope of the evaluation. The impact evaluation was designed to be a collaborative process. An evaluation workshop was held at Cheshire police authority to discuss and agree an evaluation plan. The workshop was attended by the post holder, two authority members, senior members of the police authority staff, the head of the force Corporate Development Department and the RDS researcher managing the evaluation. It was facilitated by OPM.

At the workshop, the project objectives were refined and outcome measures were formulated and agreed. Responsibilities for data collection were also allocated. It was agreed that the evaluation would be flexible and able to respond to both changes in the direction of the project and in available resources. The collaborative workshop approach was vital in building trust between the Home Office and the demonstration site and ensuring 'buy-in' to the evaluation process.

It was agreed that the learning generated by the evaluation should be useful to both the Home Office and the demonstration sites. One of the programme goals for the Home Office was that the lessons learnt from the demonstration projects should be transferable to other authorities and forces, with a minimum need for complex and costly monitoring.

Data for the impact evaluation came from several sources.

- Depth-interviews and focus groups with key stakeholders in the project – including the post holder; police authority members and staff; Cheshire constabulary Chief Constable and the Head of Corporate Development, the Taking Control project team, NPU Inspectors and CAT officers in Whitecross and Alsager.
- Depth-interviews with key partner agency representatives who contributed to or were affected by the project.
- Semi-structured quantitative surveys undertaken by members of the public at a Community Action Meeting in Alsager.
- Observations at CAMs in Alsager and Whitecross; semi-structured qualitative interviews with meeting attendees.
- 'Activity reports' produced by the post holder detailing specific community engagement activities undertaken as part of the project – these built into a final project report submitted to the authority in August 2005.

The interviews and focus groups informed both the process and impact evaluations. The process evaluation also relied on the ongoing observations and perceptions of the evaluator, meaning it is more impressionistic than the impact assessment.

What skills did the post holder have?

The authority was committed to recruiting a highly skilled marketing professional and made a substantial investment in the recruitment process by designing a clear person specification. The authority employed a recruitment consultant who generated a strong field of applicants. The successful post holder had around 25 years experience in marketing and publishing, having worked for a range of different organisations. Her competencies included good networking and negotiation skills, a strong focus on problem-solving, and maturity and resilience.

The post holder also brought to the demonstration project a sound knowledge of quantitative and qualitative research methods, and was highly skilled in assessing needs and opportunities and creating appropriately designed processes. Her wider understanding of marketing and communications also proved extremely valuable in promoting the demonstration project and maximising its impact within the authority and force, and with partners. The post holder's interest in learning ensured that unfamiliarity with UK policing was

not an issue; the fact that she could quickly draw in insights from other areas and sectors was a positive.

It became clear, in the course of the project, that the post holder was capable of managing a considerable workload, and producing work of a very high standard. All stakeholders interviewed in the authority and force praised the personal commitment of the post holder and the way they were prepared to work with great flexibility. The key skills highlighted above enabled the post holder to develop a strong evidence base, from which capacity and new approaches could be developed.

What did the post holder do?

Activity in the demonstration project in Cheshire occurred in three phases. A full and detailed activity report was produced by the post holder.

Box 2 Key phases of activity in the Cheshire demonstration project

Phase 1: January to July 2004

- Appointment of post holder.
- Project planning, including objective setting and agreement of milestones.
- Appraisal of existing engagement and communication approaches used by authority and in force.
- Segmentation analysis: development of market segments (a matrix of over 200 segments consisting of community definitions and engagement processes) and assessment of current coverage.
- Review of effective practice elsewhere.
- Early interventions: the post holder collaborated with a number of existing projects, adding marketing and research skills to, for example, pilot projects with community action teams, youth engagement, and the development of an action research component to an environmental audit pilot.

Phase 2: July 2004 to January 2005

- Community Action Teams – the post holder played an active role in the roll-out of the CAT pilots. This included:
 - training CAT officers in facilitation and research skills;
 - supporting environmental audits and public perception survey projects in all six pilot areas; and
 - supporting the monitoring and analysing the evidence collected through these processes.
- The widening of engagement methodologies such as the introduction of web-surveys, exploration of other e-consultation methods, such as kiosks, texting and electronic voting.
- More in-depth engagement work with young people.

Phase 3: February 2005 to August 2005

- Streamline engagement processes used by CATs.
- Enhance the communications tools used by the force and authority – newsletters, video interviews and launch of a DVD.
- Create a more comprehensive youth engagement strategy and processes (including launch of wristband campaign to promote street safety and distribute information about stop and search legislation and launch of youth website).
- Ensure sustainability by assessing the benefits produced through the demonstration activities and assessing resource options for ongoing funding.

Section 1: Process evaluation

For the process evaluation, OPM explored how the post holder, and the activities initiated or undertaken by the post holder, affected the authority's and the constabulary's ability to engage with local communities. It also covers the involvement of partner agencies. The priority themes for the evaluation are the impact of the demonstration project on the authority's capacity to engage, and the processes and tools used. However, capacity and process development do not occur in a vacuum, and other dimensions of organisational performance and behaviours needed to be considered. These dimensions can be broken down into a number of interconnected themes, which provide the structure of this section.

Box 3 Process evaluation themes

- **Capacity:** how did the post holder (the demonstration project) strengthen organisational capacity to engage communities?
- **Approaches:** how did the post holder widen the range of community engagement approaches and how was this implemented?
- **Partnering:** how did the post holder connect with the constabulary, and with other partner agencies to strengthen community engagement?
- **Vision and priorities:** how did the community engagement activities initiated or undertaken by the post holder inform organisational priorities and strategies?
- **Leadership:** how did the post holder gain endorsement from members and senior management?
- **Culture:** how did the post holder affect the wider organisational culture, and did the culture of the organisation enable the post holder to operate effectively?
- **Performance management:** how did the post holder influence performance management approaches to ensure that community engagement activities are assessed and recognised within the wider performance of the organisation?

Capacity to engage

What was community engagement like before the project?

'Baseline' assessment interviews conducted by the Home Office and OPM with key managers in the authority and force, and with authority members, revealed there was a consistent feeling that the service in Cheshire had not been successfully engaging communities prior to the demonstration project. The situation appeared not dissimilar to many authority areas, in that engagement activities prior to the launch of the demonstration project were seen as formalised, fragmented and of limited reach.

- **Formalised** – Police Community Consultative Forums were the main method used by the authority and many police authority members saw these as the 'be all and end all' of engagement. Forums attracted a fairly narrow range of highly committed residents, who had built up an understanding of policing issues and were largely supportive. These public meetings had a degree of procedural formality.
- **Fragmented** – a range of engagement activities were carried out by the force at BCU level, often without corporate input or learning. Central teams were often unaware of these activities and therefore unable to support and guide their design or share lessons across the force.
- **Of limited reach** – whilst some members of the community were involved intensely (for example those participating in consultation forums), there was a concern that many sections of the community were not involved.

It was generally felt that most activity stopped short of genuine engagement – the focus was on 'telling' the public, or consultation as a 'fait accompli'. There was some feeling that there were 'pockets' of effective practice, but engagement activity was unco-ordinated and lacked

consistency. The theory behind the project was to demonstrate to local officers that the centre could add value so that they would actively come for advice and support.

Finding out where to start from by 'community profiling'

An important feature of the first phase of the demonstration project was the creation of a geodemographic segmentation typology to enable analysis of Cheshire's communities and their levels of engagement. In the course of the project, the post holder used two of the leading community segmentation tools – ACORN (developed by CACI) and MOSAIC (developed by Experian). These tools use a combination of Census and other government statistics, together with lifestyle information to create socio-demographic typologies which capture the distinctive characteristics of different communities and areas.

The post holder used ACORN segmentation categories together with a framework of participation based on Wilcox's 'levels of engagement'¹ to produce a matrix showing level of engagement by degree of engagement for communities in Cheshire. This was an easy, low-cost method for producing a useful 'gap analysis'. The profiling work enabled the post holder to capture existing processes quickly, and to assess the authority's and force's current strengths and weaknesses in relation to community engagement.

This community engagement segmentation identified weak links with a number of community segments. Key amongst these were:

- young people;
- Black and minority ethnic (BME) groups;
- gypsies and travellers;
- gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people; and
- people with disabilities.

The demonstration sites were given access to MOSAIC during the project. The post holder found that hands-on training was necessary to make the most of this tool. It is likely that staff with existing analysis skills would be best placed to use community segmentation software packages. This emphasises the value of the less formal profiling undertaken by the post holder as an interim measure until the specialist skills are embedded in the organisation.

What did the post holder do to get the project moving?

Throughout phase one, the post holder made connections with force officers with related corporate portfolios (e.g. the Taking Control review team, corporate marketing and research, performance management), and frontline staff involved in the various pilot initiatives.

During this phase, concern was expressed by the external evaluators that this strong connection with force activities might detract from the primary purpose of the demonstration projects, which was to test how police authorities can strengthen their community engagement. Follow-up discussions clarified that the post holder's ways of working were very much in tune with the working arrangements between the authority and the force, and that both saw the post holder's ability to connect the two organisations' activities as an advantage. This was reflected in the authority's decision to co-locate the post holder with the force's Taking Control review team.

The post holder's role provided additional capacity for the Safer Communities pilots, playing a significant part in the piloting of the environmental audit and public perception survey approaches by CATs. The post holder also had a more strategic role, for example making the case for frontline officers, CSOs and special constables to be given responsibility to facilitate CAMs. Another role was in the training of CAT officers to communicate effectively and to take a consistent and corporate approach to the facilitation of CAMs.

¹ Wilcox, D. (1994) *The guide to effective participation*. Brighton: Delta Press.

A final capacity building role played by the post holder was acting as a 'gateway' between the force and sections of the community they have not traditionally engaged with. This could be seen in relation to the youth engagement, where the post holder's alternative forms of communication gained the interest and trust of local youth to enable more direct involvement by CAT officers.

A significant element of the demonstration project was the improvement of engagement with young people. The post holder provided the authority with a strategic way of engaging with this section of communities. Based on the findings of focus groups, it was concluded that future initiatives with young people should be based on the following.

- Understanding – using language they understand and that is attractive to them.
- Accessibility – use of technology and approaches that are familiar and attractive – e.g., the website and small gifts like wristbands.
- Relevance – engaging at the level at which they want to engage and which they find useful.

These simple building blocks became a major element of the Cheshire demonstration project, and form a useful basic strategy of engagement more generally.

How did the post holder pass on her skills to others?

The post holder was directly involved with providing training to operational police officers in the Safer Communities pilot areas. A member of authority staff training police officers is quite unusual, but reflected the need for the training to include a focus on engagement skills and techniques. The training specifically included instruction in the facilitation of local problem-solving meetings with the public.

As well as formalised training, stakeholders in the force agreed that the post holder had played a more general 'upskilling' role. CAT officers said they had been provided with different ways of approaching problems. A member of the Taking Control review team emphasised an improvement in the design of force communications – the post holder showed officers how to produce more professional leaflets and posters, written in clear, jargon free language.

As an authority employee the post holder was one or two steps removed from direct supervision of staff – in fact any of the staff could have ignored the ideas and suggestions. There was a certain 'freedom to fail' which also came from the freedom the Home Office project team allowed – it was emphasised that this was a learning opportunity and this was one of the great advantages of the way the project was funded.

What were the constraints on capacity building?

Overall, the demonstration project in Cheshire led to a rapid increase in the joint community engagement capacity of the authority and the constabulary. The post holder gained the trust and collegiality of significant parts of the constabulary, which in turn strengthened the image of the authority amongst officers. Many of the public-facing activities, particularly those aimed at young people, promoted the authority as a body.

The growth in organisational capacity did encounter some constraints. Capacity development was strongest where the goals of the demonstration project matched those of other initiatives, and where staff needed to acquire community engagement skills. However, some sections of the constabulary, most notably information technology and support, were not sufficiently agile to support this widening of capacity. Members of the Taking Control team felt that this department in particular was not prepared for the forward thinking and innovation that the post holder brought to the organisation.

Towards the end of the project, as a greater number of CATs were launched, training was handed over to a sergeant and member of police staff working in the Taking Control team in order to handle the larger volume.

Box 4 Capacity – key insights

- A wide range of skills, including those gained outside policing, can add value to community engagement in policing. Authorities and forces benefit from being open to the insights to be gained from other sectors.
- Authorities and forces in the first instance can draw on existing segmentation tools to profile their community make-up.
- Using community segmentation, authorities and forces can assess how they engage each community, highlight gaps in provision, and use this information to tailor future engagement activity.
- Successes in the engagement of some community sectors need to be assessed and often can be transferred to other sectors. The development of a set of core principles can help in the transfer process.
- Community engagement should not be seen as the domain of specialist staff. Frontline officers can be encouraged and, with appropriate training and support, enabled to be actively involved in community engagement, thus enhancing capacity.
- The capacity building process can be restricted or magnified depending on the interaction with other organisational functions (such as IT, training and development, or analytical services).

What approaches and methods were used?

There is some interconnection between the development of capacity and of an appropriate repertoire of approaches and methodologies. However, capacity and effective approaches cannot always be equated. As the gap analysis carried out by the post holder illustrated, Cheshire was overly dependent on a limited set of engagement methods which failed to reach many segments of the community. Phase one offered the post holder opportunities for early trials of different approaches and methods by linking to existing projects. Examples of this are:

- customer satisfaction research which helped to evaluate the piloting of a support pack aimed at victims of burglaries; and
- evaluation support for early engagement pilots in Congleton and Halton.

The post holder was able to use the connections and credibility gained through this early collaboration to gain support for trialling other approaches.

Youth engagement

A key 'quick win' opportunity was offered by the pilot of the environmental audit project in Weaverham. The environmental audit and local consultation had identified 'nuisance youth' as a priority. The post holder targeted young people in Weaverham through a focus group, a method which was developed and 'branded' by the post holder as 'pizza and cola groups' (healthy options also were provided). The success factors of the pizza and cola groups were:

- **outreach** to young people (the post holder approached young people directly, with the help of local youth workers);
- a sense of **relevance** by conveying to young people that the police were seeking their views; and
- a simple **incentive** in the form of an attractive social event which could be offered at a relatively low cost.

The market segmentation, the early involvement of young people in Weaverham and during the Cheshire Show, created sufficient impetus to place a major focus on youth engagement.

The post holder succeeded in setting in motion a youth engagement programme which fitted well with wider corporate priorities (e.g. neighbourhood policing and safer communities and reducing community complaints about nuisance youth). The latter phases of the demonstration project extended the force's and authority's capacity to engage young people, by scaling up the amount of activity and the range of methods used. In several of the CAT areas, youth engagement became a key element of the Safer Communities activities and, corporately, experimentation with e-consultation aimed at youth was prioritised. Successful examples are the use of online surveys, and the widening of web-based approaches through a youth-oriented website.

Towards the end of the demonstration project, a major youth activity was the launch of the Streetsafe campaign. Over 32,000 wristbands were produced (after youth consultation established that children and young people found these attractive and useful). The wristbands promoted the Streetsafe message and authority website, and the pack also contained a credit card sized information card communicating the new stop and search legislation together with Streetsafe messages. The campaign was picked up by the local media and generated a high level of publicity, with queues of young people reported outside police stations. The wristbands were also distributed by school liaison officers and CSOs, supporting their visibility and relationships with young people.

Engagement with other groups

Whilst phases two and three continued to pursue and expand the youth engagement strategy, there was only limited capacity to strengthen the engagement with the other community

segments for which the profiling showed less developed engagement processes. In phase three the post holder was able to act as a gateway between the force and other communities they had not previously successfully engaged – this time gypsies and travellers. This engagement was at an early stage at the end of the demonstration project, but it has the potential to develop into an ongoing relationship and again shows the value of an independent, non-police role in brokering engagement with ‘hard-to-reach’ communities.

By the end of the demonstration project the authority concluded that relations with communities that have traditionally not been engaged are best managed through inclusion in mainstream consultation activities or through specialist advisors such as Independent Advisory Groups. For example, the various public perception surveys established that 2.6 percent of respondents came from black and minority ethnic groups (compared to 1.7% which makes up BME communities in the authority as a whole).

E-engagement methods

The post holder’s e-engagement experiments ran into a number of difficulties. Interactive information kiosks were located in popular sites, such as supermarkets, to be used by members of the public to obtain information about local policing, and feed back their views and ideas. There were several problems with the method:

- some kiosks were initially not situated in the most accessible or conspicuous places;
- members of the public seemed more willing to learn how to use the kiosks with an officer present, which negated a potential benefit of saving staff time; and
- the kiosks were not used as much as was hoped, suggesting perhaps that some members of the public are not prepared to engage in this way.

Trialling of the method was postponed, though the authority indicated it may revisit the idea if it perceived there would be greater public demand for it.

A similar experience was the trialling of engagement by text messaging. This was found to be a relatively expensive form of engagement to set up and operate. The authority is continuing to experiment with the method after completion of the demonstration project (see Section 2).

The use of kiosks and web-based questionnaires required support from corporate IT services in the purchasing of hardware and software, and its installation and servicing. Problems were encountered due to the tight regulation of internet use, restrictions on the software which could be used, or which corporate IT staff were able to support, and delays in gaining permission and technical support. The IT department appeared to operate within a structured and predetermined work programme, which was not flexible enough to respond to emerging opportunities. Under-resourcing and under-investment in IT for many years has contributed to this problem. Co-operation had to be sought through intervention from senior managers.

Rapid trialling and development of innovative approaches

A striking feature of the Cheshire demonstration project was the rapid trialling and assessment of different engagement approaches, and flexibility in moving forward. For example, the public perception survey methodology was first used in the pre-launch testing of an information pack for burglary victims. The first focus group with young people in Weaverham was effectively the prototype for the ‘pizza and cola’ method used more widely in the later stages of the project. The wristband campaign built on a much smaller campaign during the annual Specials’ Weekend, at which credit card-sized torches with Streetsafe messages were given to young people. The examples of the information kiosks and text messaging show that Cheshire was also willing to abandon less successful approaches and learn from what did not work as well as what did.

A number of the opportunities to move initiatives from one-off, limited impact activities to a larger programme were embedded within the constabulary’s change programme. But the combination of foresight by the authority (in terms of using the opportunities offered by the

demonstration project), organisational support for culture change, and post holder capabilities produced a rapid and more wide-reaching spread of innovation across the constabulary.

The post holder combined her expertise in different engagement approaches with her marketing and communications skills in highly effective ways.

- The use of a commercial community segmentation tool (which is used frequently in commercial marketing) introduced an easy to understand, yet rigorous community profiling tool, which in turn provided a more systematic way for assessing where the authority and force engaged well or less well.
- The post holder used her public relations experience to 'customise' and 'brand' many of the approaches and methodologies used by the demonstration project (such as 'pizza and cola group'; CAT walks; public perception surveys; CAMs). Again, this helped to raise awareness and increase the impact of the activities as people bought into their success.
- The post holder also acted as champion for the demonstration project and for community engagement more widely. This included the training and development of officers; regular reports and analysis; networking and active contribution to seminars and other information-sharing activities.

A key success factor in the approach taken by the post holder was the ability to take experience and skills from outside the policing and community engagement fields and apply them to add value.

Barriers to the new approaches

The spread of effective practice was not completely unhindered. As mentioned above, innovation in e-engagement was hampered by difficulties in gaining support from corporate IT resources.

Other limitations emerged during the workshop with Neighbourhood Policing Inspectors. Although generally signed up to neighbourhood policing and the need for community engagement, some inspectors displayed a somewhat simplistic understanding of engagement. This tended to focus on demonstrating that the police were listening, and responding by articulating what was possible, rather than a commitment to partnership and two-way dialogue, joint problem-solving and co-production of change.

The police authority and force recognise that the wider roll-out of CATs across the constabulary will put pressure on the existing community engagement expertise, and have taken steps to address this (see Section 2).

Box 5 Approaches and methods – key insights

- Under the right circumstances, a relatively low resource and staff investment can lead to a rapid expansion of tools and approaches to community engagement.
- The impact is widened dramatically if approaches can be communicated to others and successfully branded to gain buy-in, and if other officers can take a role in their delivery.
- Methods and approaches should not be seen as ends in themselves, but part of a wider strategy for engaging communities; this means that senior managers and frontline staff need to be convinced of their value.
- Rapid and flexible trialling and assessment of approaches enables efficient progress; at times this may mean deciding to abandon less successful initiatives.
- The growth of electronic engagement approaches will place new demands on corporate IT systems, processes and resources.

Partnership working

Corporate links between the authority and constabulary were already strong in Cheshire. One of the key partnering objectives for the post holder was to strengthen this connection in support of community engagement in policing. As shown earlier in this report, existing force and authority activities neglected sections of Cheshire's communities, were fragmented, and often had insufficient corporate impact. Any improvements would need to create a more joined up approach, which the authority and force both felt would be best achieved through stronger partnering.

For many operational staff, the authority is perceived as a somewhat distant organisation. Being able to work closely with a staff member from the authority creates a much more practical relationship and a better understanding of the overlay between constabulary and authority roles. This was achieved by the post holder being encouraged to work directly with officers of all ranks and by a direct contribution to training for operational officers.

Box 6 Training for Community Action Teams

A good example of partnering between the authority and constabulary was the training of CAT officers. The overall training programme was developed by members of the Taking Control review team, with input from the department responsible for delivering the constabulary's corporate training, to ensure consistency. The post holder strengthened this through training modules dealing with the environmental audit process (delivered jointly with an officer colleague), the public perception survey methodology, and the training for the chairing of Community Action Meetings.

Police authority staff providing training to operational police officers was seen as unusual, but it was recognised that the post holder had transferable skills in relation to communication and marketing. It was also felt that the post holder could deliver the training in a non-traditional policing style which would be beneficial in relation to community engagement.

The post holder also attempted to develop partnering relations with other local agencies. A number of the youth engagement projects brought the post holder into contact with local authorities, youth offending teams, and community representatives. These relationships contributed to the success of the events. For example, youth engagement work with skateboarders was supported by several local agencies. This increased the resources (staff and budget) available for the event, and raised its profile.

Similar benefits were identified by several Neighbourhood Policing Inspectors. Additional resources for neighbourhood problem-solving were contributed by local authorities in at least some Safer Communities areas. The Safer Communities programme has proved attractive for some local authorities. The post holder's activities also helped to bring into focus the role of the police authority. For many partner agencies, BCU officers had been the only contact point, with only peripheral awareness of authority staff and members.

What barriers and problems might there be?

The demonstration project identified opportunities for partnership working at a local level, often around local problems or issues. The post holder, and other officers and staff involved in this could not draw on long-established connections, but had to identify and establish partner opportunities afresh. Not surprisingly, a number of barriers and problems were encountered.

Although local authorities viewed the demonstration project as a positive development, some representatives felt that the youth activities were developed too rapidly, and may have missed opportunities for more continuous follow-through. Some also expressed concerns that the youth events may have raised expectations of better youth provision, which local councils considered unrealistic to resource. The evaluators also gained the impression that local authority representatives did not carry the same sense of ownership as the post holder, partly in recognition of the resource constraints under which they themselves were operating.

The post holder made contact with all partner agencies in advance of initiating engagement activities. However, some partner agency representatives still claimed not to have known about the events at an early enough stage. A key learning point is that simply contacting one department or individual in an agency may not always ensure that all relevant stakeholders are aware of your plans. It is crucial to identify the right people at the right level in partner agencies.

The limited understanding of partners' operational priorities and flexibilities was also displayed by some of the constabulary's frontline officers. Several admitted to an initial lack of knowledge of how quickly partner agencies were able to act in relation to problem-solving. An example was mending a street light. Beat officers promised members of the public at a CAM that this would be quickly dealt with, without realising the local authority lighting team had structured periods for repairs and would have to wait three months to be able to resolve the issue.

Whilst the broad consensus was that partnership working at the operational level (in particular around neighbourhood problem-solving and management) had improved, there was concern that this had not extended beyond partner practitioners to strategic planning and priority setting. Although local police commanders have been encouraged to make links with community safety departments, there was a sense that the success of this would still depend on individual relationships. Most force and authority stakeholders were hopeful that strategic partnering could be achieved in the future, but it would require more positive leadership from some partner agencies. Senior members of the force and of the authority expressed the view that local authorities are not as geared up to a 'neighbourhood management' approach as the police service.

It will be important to build on partnering that has occurred to enable the authority to maximise its engagement reach through partner organisations' own engagement activities, as well as shape them through promoting its own expertise (e.g. in youth engagement; in neighbourhood focused problem-solving; and in market segmentation). The development of Local Area Agreements, and the greater emphasis placed by the Police and Justice Bill on demonstrating the effectiveness of community engagement as part of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership responsibility, should open opportunities for the police authority to accelerate its partnering approaches.

Box 7 Partnership working – key insights

- Community engagement activities provide an ideal opportunity for practical partnership working; local authorities and other partners showed significant support for the demonstration activities.
- Partnership connections were made relatively successfully between practitioners but were harder to establish at a strategic planning level.
- Initial speed of implementation can achieve early successes, but needs to be embedded into better planning, knowledge sharing, and strategy development.
- Agencies internal communications may not ensure all relevant stakeholders are informed of activity if the initial approach is to just one person or department.
- Time needs to be invested in 'learning about each other' to ensure that public expectations are managed, promises made are realistic, and partnership working is seen by communities as joined up and effective.

Leadership, vision and priorities

The current vision of neighbourhood policing and local engagement in Cheshire dates from a change of Chief Constable in December 2002. All stakeholders interviewed in the authority and the force emphasised the commitment of the Chief Constable to community engagement. This commitment was clearly also shared by senior members of the police authority staff and the lead members for the demonstration project.

The original bid document for funding as a demonstration site showed from the outset that the project had the full support of both the police authority and the constabulary. The senior management team of the authority and two lead members took responsibility for the project, together with the Head of Corporate Development in the constabulary. The Chief Constable also served on the Home Office project board, which oversaw the whole Community Engagement in Policing Project.

Throughout the evaluation period, these senior managers and members contributed their insights, articulated goals, helped shape the evaluation, and provided assessments of progress. The project clearly benefited from this leadership commitment.

At the same time, the change programme articulated a clear vision and programme for the development of neighbourhood policing. In the course of the evaluation, officers at all levels spoke positively about the neighbourhood policing programme, and the support it received from senior managers. Those involved in the pilot stages were particularly positive and had started to take on the role of change champion for the subsequent roll-out. Although the evaluators encountered no opposition to the shift to neighbourhood policing, some officers certainly appeared less enthused or ready than those who had been part of the pilot stages.

For the demonstration project, the overall vision and leadership contributed:

- a joint management approach created by the authority and key managers in the constabulary;
- the co-location of the post holder with constabulary staff with day-to-day roles in Taking Control, neighbourhood policing, and corporate communications; and
- commitment to rapid trials and, where successful, effective roll-out.

At times, senior support was needed to overcome internal resistance – for example when IT support was inadequate for the development of e-engagement methods. The consistency of perspective among authority and constabulary management ensured that communications across the two organisations, and into different operational areas, were clear and consistent. This ‘tone from the top’ ensured that, in a relatively short period of time, community engagement was seen by large numbers of managerial and operational staff as a key objective for policing in Cheshire.

The Taking Control change programme

The driving ambition for the service was the successful implementation of the Taking Control review. At its core, this was a business process re-engineering (BPR) project, seeking to make the constabulary more agile and responsive, and reducing costs whilst maintaining or improving performance. In common with many BPR initiatives, any focus on involving communities initially intended to generate public support for change, to overcome resistance, and to capture relevant performance indicators to demonstrate improvement.

The connecting up of the demonstration project to the Taking Control review forced a degree of fresh thinking into the change programme. It was the evaluators’ impression that the demonstration project widened the constabulary’s conceptualisation of community engagement; it came to recognise that community engagement could produce a stronger partnering with local communities, which will form the basis of joint problem-solving and improvement. The demonstration project appeared to have helped to rebalance the focus

from a more passive, consumerist perspective to a more dynamic and collaborative view of communities.

It is clear that senior figures in both the force and authority recognised, prior to the demonstration project, the need to improve the way in which the service engaged the public. It was acknowledged that the force and authority would have experimented with alternative methods of engagement with or without the demonstration project. All stakeholders agreed that without the post created by the demonstration project this experimentation would not have been as extensive and effective and would not have dovetailed as well with the wider change programme.

The post holder's activities within the Safer Communities pilots and the youth engagement strategy helped to carry this focus into frontline activities, and provided a more rounded approach to local and authority-wide service changes. The apparent inclusion of a strong community focus, and visible 'outreach' programme, within an ambitious restructuring of services appeared to have conveyed a much more positive vision for change than a singular focus on 'savings' or 'efficiencies'.

What about the long-term strategy?

A focus on local priorities and problems sits well within the current vision and change objectives in Cheshire. The roll-out of neighbourhood policing has been greatly strengthened by the community engagement activities undertaken as part of the demonstration project. Most of the project activities have focused on very local community issues, such as neighbourhood safety or engaging young people in small geographical areas. The project and its various reports have prioritised locality engagement and have promoted a belief that this is what local people are most easily engaged in.

In other public services, this assumption is challenged regularly, and the direction of travel is towards more strategic involvement (for example around community strategies and participatory budgeting). In the next phase of the authority's community engagement activity, a key role for the holder of the authority's new post has been to strengthen community engagement on more strategic issues, such as priority setting, policing principles, proposed police force restructuring, and budgets and finance. The theory of the demonstration project post holder was that once people are initially engaged at a local level, the authority will then be able to channel these newly established relationships to focus on more strategic objectives.

The approaches developed as part of this demonstration project, and the wider organisational readiness and confidence to engage with local people (either directly or through partnerships) offer a strong foundation from which more long-term engagement could be developed. At the close of the demonstration project, there were plans to explore how forum meetings could be restructured to take on a more strategic perspective. This work has been developed through the implementation of a Consultation and Engagement Strategy that was developed by authority members. This, in turn, will help to add wider public legitimacy to the strategy and leadership of the authority and constabulary.

Box 8 Leadership, vision and priorities – key insights

- Community engagement in policing was promoted actively by the Chief Constable and the force's senior management team, and by the management team and lead members of the authority; this visible leadership was recognised not only by those directly involved in community engagement, but by a wide cross-section of operational staff.
- The newly launched organisational change programme created a sympathetic framework for the community engagement project; the insights gained from the post holder and the demonstration project helped to reshape some elements of the change programme.
- This combination of leadership, vision and priorities ensured that community engagement itself became a change and improvement tool; it recognised that engagement necessitates a willingness to take action in response to the community.

Culture and performance management

It is clear that the authority and constabulary established an environment in which a culture of 'engagement for improvement' was intended to flourish. This was not a chance process, but an active leadership priority.

The organisational culture in Cheshire enabled the post holder's role to have maximum impact. In particular, there was a working environment which minimised constraints on the post holder's activities. Effectively, the post holder was given a 'licence to operate' under an outcome-focused performance management system. The post holder was given appropriate 'status' and actively encouraged to interact directly with and challenge staff at any level of the service.

How did the post holder influence organisational culture?

The Cheshire demonstration project benefited greatly from its connection with a corporate change programme, strong leadership support, and a close partnering relation between the authority and constabulary. The post holder did not only benefit from these dynamics, but contributed and helped to shape them.

A strong impact on organisational culture can be detected in relation to CATs. The post holder helped convince senior members of the force to place trust in frontline officers and empower them to facilitate local problem-solving meetings and deal directly with local media. Traditionally, these tasks would have been undertaken by senior officers. By providing hands-on support and training during the pilot stages, the post holder demonstrated that frontline officers, including PCSOs, not only could succeed in leading local community engagement, but that communities saw this as a positive connection between local people and the police. The post holder underpinned this influencing process with the provision of expertise and guidance, the creation of tools, and the collation and dissemination of effective practice.

All the frontline staff who participated in the evaluation praised these contributions, which were made in a supportive but, at times challenging, style. The post holder's personal influencing style, combined with substantive knowledge and experience, helped win over many staff in the force. This in turn created allies and promoters of community engagement methods, which helped to expand the organisational capacity.

Throughout the demonstration project, the post holder acted as a change agent. By attaching herself to various initiatives, she helped create the understanding and practical approaches needed to move forward with community engagement in policing. This direct exposure to a highly skilled change maker, who operated within a wider culture of change and improvement, was highly effective. The Cheshire demonstration project provided a very good case study of how an individual's enthusiasm and conviction can have a significant impact on the organisation because the organisational culture provided support and endorsement (freedom and permission).

Performance frameworks and key performance indicators

The recognition that community engagement needed to demonstrate its effectiveness was shared at the most senior levels of the service. Success in terms of youth diversion, reductions in calls over youth nuisance, greater public support, or increased reassurance need to be captured. Shifts on these indicators will not occur overnight, but clearly will be important for the authority and constabulary in order to identify what success will look like, and how it can be demonstrated.

Senior authority staff members and police officers at all levels pointed to the vulnerability of community-oriented policing because of an absence of relevant key performance indicators. There was a widespread concern that central government priorities around volume crime will leave community policing resources at risk. Inspectors (key middle managers with control over local resource deployment) felt that allocation of resources at command level was mainly

dictated by central key performance indicators and that any pressure on local commanders relating to these would automatically result in abstraction of officers from community-focused roles.

During the Safer Communities pilots, neighbourhood policing inspectors and other frontline staff felt that it was reasonable and desirable to commit extra effort and resources to community engagement. The early pilot stages were well resourced, and progress was rapid. However, limitations in terms of available capacity already began to demonstrate themselves. In Warrington, the Whitecross CAT were instructed during the pilot period to cover another two neighbourhoods. The officers felt that this severely limited their capacity to engage as effectively as they had been. They also felt they risked alienating the community in Whitecross by not being able to deliver the level of engagement they originally promised.

Senior members of the force were aware of the dangers of overcommitting when rolling out the model of CATs and CAMs to all NPUs. Attempts were made to profile resources in advance of rolling out the model, to ensure that NPUs were sufficiently equipped to undertake both response and engagement functions. It was clear though that some inspectors felt that what they had been allocated was inadequate. It is recognised by senior managers that the reprofiling of resources will have to be a continuous process.

The challenge for the authority and the constabulary is twofold. Firstly, it is clear that a single change agent does not have sufficient capacity to support all community engagement activities throughout the organisations. If the constabulary wishes to embed community engagement within an organisational culture which is user- and community-focused, it needs to mainstream this capacity, leaving the authority's permanent post to target the early phases of change.

The second element is that any such mainstreaming needs to be embedded in performance management processes. Whilst officers expressed a broad consensus that community engagement and joint problem solving will have long-term benefits for community safety and efficient policing, there was a need for indicators of success. This is recognised by senior management, and the work of CATs and the impact of community engagement will be monitored as Cheshire is one of the pilot forces selected to implement the National Neighbourhood Policing Performance framework.

The Community Action Team Officer role

CAT officers in the Safer Communities pilot areas felt that there was limited incentive, in terms of career progression, to undertake their role. This accords with previous research on community policing, where the role of beat officer is also often perceived as low status.²

Cheshire constabulary are attempting to broaden the community's awareness of the CAT officer role by automatically placing probationers in CATs for their first six months in service. Senior managers feel they have made some progress in changing the organisational perception of community-focused work and that interest in the role is increasing.

The National Neighbourhood Policing performance framework being piloted in Cheshire will also ensure that community engagement activities remain part of CAT officers' priorities, and that their achievements are recognised.

² See for example Skogan, W. *et al.* (1999) *On the beat – police and community problem-solving*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press; Sadd, S. and Grinc, R. (1994) Innovative neighbourhood oriented policing: An evaluation of community policing programmes in eight cities, in Rosenbaum, D. (ed.) *The challenge of community policing*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage; Irving, B. *et al.* (1989) *Neighbourhood policing: The natural history of a policing experiment*. London: Police Foundation.

Box 9 Culture and performance management – key insights

- The organisational change programme and strong leadership support in Cheshire created a culture in which the post holder could maximise her contribution to community engagement.
- The post holder was granted access to all levels and areas of the service and was able to contribute to corporate developments on a scale normally beyond the reach of a demonstration project of this size.
- The authority and constabulary recognised that community engagement will lead to changes in delivery and performance, and that performance management and measures will need to be adapted in order to measure impact, and recognise and reward effort.

Section 2: Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation considers both outcomes and outputs from the demonstration project. Outcomes are general things that have happened as a consequence of the post holder and the role. Outputs are more specific products resulting from the project – such as the matrix of engagement created by the market segment analysis.

Assessment of evidence against aim and objectives

The objectives of the demonstration project are listed in turn and evaluation evidence presented to assess the performance of the demonstration project against those objectives.

Objective: Evaluate the success of existing engagement systems to establish the need for new or improved systems.

Community profiling

The post holder undertook, during the first phase of the project, a community profiling exercise in order to determine how communities in Cheshire are composed and to what extent each area, or community of interest, had been engaged by the police service. The process is described in Section 1.

The community profiling exercise resulted in a clear and useful matrix listing communities and communities of interest and indicating the degree to which they have traditionally been engaged by the police service in Cheshire.

As mentioned in Section 1, Cheshire police authority was given access to MOSAIC, a commercially produced community profiling software package. Due to the training needed to operate the package, widespread work using MOSAIC was not possible during the life of the project. The skills and capability with this tool have been embedded for the future.

The impact of the project in this area was to:

- make the police authority aware of the need to profile the communities it represents in order to have the capability to target groups not traditionally engaged;
- provide a simple, user-friendly tool for undertaking profiling work; and
- introduce a more advanced profiling tool for the authority to further develop its capabilities in this area.

Existing methods of engagement

As explained in Section 1, there was general agreement that community engagement by the police authority and force in Cheshire was not as effective as it might have been, prior to the demonstration project. It was recognised by many that Police Community Consultative Forums, the authority's principal form of engagement, were not effective in their present form.

The post holder undertook an evaluation of the forums, attending meetings in nine areas. This produced results similar to all previous studies of such meetings.³

- Younger (under 45 years old) and minority ethnic people were underrepresented.
- The majority of attendees were 'representing' organisations in some capacity – e.g., local councillors and residents' associations.
- Meetings were generally held in very formal, inaccessible venues.

³ See Myhill, A. *et al.* (2003) *The role of police authorities in public engagement*. London: Home Office Online Report 37/03.

- Issues raised by the public fell into two main categories – complaints about specific service-related incidents and comments about lack of police visibility.

It was concluded that forum meetings were a significant use of resources and could be refocused and restructured to be more productive. In particular:

- local issues and complaints could be redirected to CAMs;
- presentations at forums could concentrate on strategic issues, such as the policing plan, budget, and proposed restructuring; and
- forums could become more accessible and less formal.

Since the completion of the demonstration project some forums have been relocated, and review of attendance has been completed. Tactics to market the strategic nature of the forums are being implemented through banners, adverts, and flyers that explain the difference between forums and CAMs. Newsletters have been developed to replace formal minutes. The post newly created in Cheshire police authority as a result of the demonstration project is likely to take this work forward.

The demonstration project was extremely successful in achieving its first objective. This comprehensive profiling and evaluation of existing practice was undertaken during phase one of the project, which allowed for the implementation to occur more effectively in the subsequent phases. In particular, fulfilling this objective provided:

- a clear picture of communities and interests the service has traditionally not engaged, allowing for targeting of these groups during the project; and
- an honest local assessment of the effectiveness of existing authority methods that gave weight to informal staff assessments and accorded with the findings of national research.

Objective: Increase the level of dialogue between the authority and constabulary and communities and improve the quality of community engagement methods.

The impact of the demonstration project in relation to community engagement activity fell into two areas:

- contribution to the development of the Safer Communities pilots – Community Action Teams, public perception surveys and Community Action Meetings; and
- targeted engagement activity with groups identified through the community profiling exercise.

Safer Communities pilots

The post holder was able to improve the implementation of the Safer Communities pilots in several ways.

- Redesigning and streamlining the public perceptions questionnaire produced by the Taking Control team.
- Delivering parts of the training CAT officers received in advance of the pilots.
- Persuading senior officers that frontline officers (PCs/CSOs) were best placed and able to run CAMs.
- Persuading senior officers to encourage frontline officers to develop relationships with the local media, including speaking on local radio.
- Developing and facilitating specific events if it was considered that specialist facilitation was required.
- Providing specialist knowledge of methods of engagement and spreading effective practice across the force.
- Providing an independent, non-policing, non-local authority perspective and encouraging the service to communicate in ways it would not have otherwise considered.

- Providing efficient and effective *ad hoc* support and encouragement direct to CATs during the development stages of the pilots.
- Providing non judgemental presence and back up for CAT officers in CAMs.

Stakeholders in the force and authority were unanimous in feeling that without the demonstration project the Safer Communities pilots would have started to be implemented less efficiently and less effectively. There appears to have been a two-way synergy – an authority member closely involved in the project felt that, without the wider change programme, the force would not have heard as many of the ‘messages’ coming out of the demonstration project.

One of the most successful aspects of the demonstration project was the post holder’s ability to provide direction and fuse together aspects of the change programme. The Taking Control review team acknowledged that, although they were clear about the overall aims of the programme, their ‘brief’ was less clear in relation to the specific objectives to achieve the aims. The post holder was able to provide specialist knowledge on methods of engagement and communication and communicate effective practice extremely clearly to a wide range of programme stakeholders.

The post holder also acted as a ‘champion’ at the operational level for the change programme and for community engagement more generally. By helping to convert theory into practice, she was able to help plug the gap that sometimes exists between the ‘big idea’ and the operation. The success of this role was partly demonstrated by one of the force’s middle managers saying specifically “I am a convert” when interviewed about the change programme.

Another positive outcome of the demonstration project’s links to Taking Control is the way police authority members have become involved in local engagement in a more structured way. Since the completion of the project, all seventeen authority members have been aligned to NPUs to:

- act as the authority media contact point for the NPU area;
- engage in the Safer Communities programme (i.e., CAT walks, public perception surveys, CAMs);
- provide feedback to the NPU inspector and staff about their work and authority decisions;
- develop an insight into ‘hot-spots’, local priorities, incidents and operations, to share with other members and key contacts; and
- have an awareness of NPU performance.

Targeted engagement

There is also clear evidence of the demonstration project, via the wider activities of the post holder, having increased dialogue between the authority and specific groups. It was acknowledged by both the authority and the force that the service had not been particularly successful in engaging young people. This was borne out in the profiling exercise. The post holder undertook targeted engagement with young people, using a variety of methods that the authority had not previously attempted:

- consultation and interviews with young people in a school setting;
- ‘pizza and cola’ events using interactive voting technology to discuss young people’s issue and priorities;
- issue specific focus groups and working parties;
- ‘taking the challenge’ consultation via postcards and email, asking young people for their ideas and input for problem-solving;
- using a videoed mock-up graffiti wall for young people to air views about anti-social behaviour in a safe environment;
- online questionnaires and development of a ‘4UTH’ section on the police authority website; and

- piloting and development of a Streetsafe campaign, which ultimately involved the distribution of 32,000 police authority wristbands to young people, alongside information about stop and search and staying safe.

The work with young people has led to the development of an ongoing strategy for youth engagement, based around three principles:

- engaging young people at the level at which they find it useful;
- using language which they understand; and
- using methods that are familiar to them (for example, a website).

The post holder has been successful in acting as a 'gateway' to young people for the service. Along with the use of alternative methods of engagement, the independence associated with being an authority as opposed to a force employee has enabled the building of trust. Often a uniform can act as a barrier to engaging sections of the community who may have a history of poor relations with the police. Towards the end of the demonstration project, the post holder initiated a similar process with the gypsy and traveller communities in Cheshire. It is envisaged that this strategic and enabling role will continue to be played by the holder of the authority's new post through a series of in-depth focus groups with diverse community segments.

Overall, the increase of approaches used over the duration of the 18-month funding period is marked. In the authority, there is now a recognised expertise and established track record in using a variety of engagement methods; in the constabulary, the use of methods is more joined up, with a clearer understanding of what works in what circumstances and why. Awareness and competence in using a wider range of methods has also spread more widely throughout both organisations to frontline staff, and to senior officers and managers.

Learning from what did not work

Staff at Cheshire police authority said they were happy to be able to learn from activity in the demonstration project that was less successful, as there is often a sense of having to be seen to make something work in the policing environment.

The less successful aspects of the demonstration project involved the use of information technology as an innovative means of engaging the public. The authority experimented with interactive 'kiosks' in supermarkets and other public places. They also explored the possibility of using text messaging and e-mail for consultation. There were key problems with the use of IT during the project.

- The IT department in the force were not able to support some of the initiatives. An e-mail address, for example, was not set up in time to receive consultation responses. There was a feeling among both authority staff and members of the Taking Control team that problems with the IT department stemmed in part from their reluctance to support new or innovative methods. However, much of the effort of the IT department, at the time of the demonstration project, was already geared towards implementing new systems to accommodate changes required by the Taking Control programme.
- The public did not appear to engage with certain aspects of the technology – for example, many people seemed more willing to use the kiosks if they had a member of the authority's staff assisting them.

There is a clear learning point about ensuring that the support and infrastructure is in place before attempting to use innovative methods of engagement – particularly where a staff member comes from a private sector environment where such issues are less common. Since the completion of the demonstration project, the Constabulary has evaluated options for using text messaging and has developed a 'portal' for e-mail and text-based communications. Members of the public are asked to provide their contact details at CAMs to be kept up to date between meetings. It is proposed that this service will offer crime reduction advice, seek information for intelligence purposes, and provide information about community activities and operations.

Objective: Introduce better central co-ordination of engagement activity and a more consistent approach to engagement across the service.

There is evidence of a more corporate approach to community engagement in Cheshire as a result of the demonstration project and its contribution to the Taking Control review. The police authority and central departments in the force (such as Corporate Development) now have a far greater awareness and influence over engagement at a local level than before the project.

The key reason for the change is that the centre, mostly in the form of the post holder, has had 'something to offer' neighbourhood policing units. Previous attempts at a more co-ordinated, corporate approach to engagement tended to be less successful due to there being no overarching programme of change and no real incentive for local officers to keep the centre informed of their activities. With the demonstration project, there has been a sense that local officers have approached the centre, as well as the other way round. Local officers have received practical help and support; central departments have been able to ensure engagement is of generally high quality and also have access to greater local information to complete the 'feedback loop'.

The post holder has been able to offer a great deal of general support to CAT teams in the pilot areas. CAT officers interviewed felt that, subject to adequate continued resourcing, they would be able to sustain the new methods of local engagement and policing. However, they all felt that, without the support and contribution of the post holder, they would not have been successful in initiating the process. They mentioned both practical support and ideas – the officers felt that the post holder had provided them with methods of engaging and communicating that they might not otherwise have considered. The post holder also directly contributed to corporate training provided for both CAT officers and inspectors.

Both police authority members and authority staff interviewed believed that the project had raised the profile of the authority at the NPU level. This was corroborated by interviews with CAT officers, who said they were now aware of the role being played by the police authority and how they could contribute. The Home Office wanted the demonstration project to be based in the police authority and to have a discernible impact on the authority. Cheshire police authority staff ensured at an early stage that the post holder was aware of this and that all activity relating to the project was 'badged' as a police authority contribution. This included the actual name badge worn by the post holder on a day-to-day basis.

Although the Taking Control review is encouraging a corporate approach to neighbourhood policing and community engagement, it is recognised that the roll-out of CATs and CAMs may have to be tailored in certain circumstances. The post holder has played a key role in convincing senior members of the force to place trust in the ideas and abilities of local CAT officers. This should help ensure a necessary degree of local flexibility.

Objective: Reach a broad cross-section of the population.

The demonstration project has been successful in broadening the profile of people engaged by the police service in Cheshire. More importantly, the project has left behind the capacity for this to continue and for even greater representation to be achieved.

Community Action Meetings, based on those observed during the evaluation, have partially succeeded in broadening the profile of those engaging in policing. In Chicago, where a model of action-oriented 'beat' meetings was first implemented, it was found that meeting attendees were often involved in other community groups or networks. Results from questionnaires completed by attendees at a CAM in Alsager revealed that more than half (eighteen) respondents said they were not involved in any other community group or activity. Only five attendees came in an 'official' capacity whilst nearly a third (ten) said they were motivated to attend by a general interest in the welfare of their community. This suggests that CAMs, perhaps by being very locally based and action focused, may succeed in attracting a wider group of participants than more traditional forums.

Attendance at CAMs in the Safer Communities pilot areas has also been significantly higher than at traditional forums, with some meetings attracting over a hundred people. Attendance has steadily increased as well, most likely through a combination of good marketing – posters and leaflets distributed locally and advertising on local radio and in the local press – and word of mouth. However, the CAMs have still tended to mirror previous public meetings in terms of the under-representation of young and minority ethnic people. Several respondents to the questionnaire said that one thing that would improve the meetings was greater attendance by young people.

However, the post holder's role has also provided the service with the capacity to engage on a more strategic, targeted basis with communities and interest groups not represented at public meetings. Successful engagement with young people has occurred through a variety of activities described above and engagement with gypsy and traveller groups is underway. It is intended that the holder of the new post created by Cheshire police authority will continue to play a strategic profiling role, undertaking targeted engagement where necessary, or acting as a gateway to under-represented groups and the police.

The public perception surveys are another way to try and ensure a representative contribution to priority setting. CAT officers undertaking the surveys are instructed to ensure there is representation in the final sample of interviews. An authority member interviewed was aware of the danger of increased participation by certain groups (those most likely to attend public meetings) on minority groups who often choose not to engage in this way. This emphasises the importance of the authority continuing to facilitate more targeted engagement with a cross-section of community interests. This is intended to be one of the roles played by the holder of the authority's new post, which is intended to further develop the role tested by the demonstration project, not act as a direct replacement.

Objective: Create a two-way meaningful dialogue between the service and local communities, including feedback.

As noted above, CAMs have been designed to include direct feedback from CAT officers on actions they have taken since the previous meeting. In areas where attendance at meetings has been high – up to one hundred members of the public – this appears quite an effective mechanism of creating a two-way dialogue between the police and the public.

There are other methods of promoting dialogue that have also been developed. The media training provided to CAT officers has also enabled them to effectively use local media as a means of both providing feedback to the public and publicising future meetings and events.

Box 10 Positive relationships with local media

Members of the Community Action Team in Alsager felt that the demonstration project had helped them to develop and maintain positive relationships with the local media. They were given training on how to interact directly with the local media as part of the Safer Communities pilots. Media training was delivered to all NPU staff and support is given to CATs by the BCU press officers.

An interview with a journalist at a CAM in Alsager provided some evidence for success in relation to providing feedback to the public. They attended the CAMs regularly and felt that being able to communicate directly with local CAT officers was a positive step. Previously, information had to be sought from the force central communications department – who were often unaware of developments or events in specific local areas. The journalist felt that more informal interaction with local officers enabled a more balanced account of crime to be reported – without this contact, it was often only possible to find out about crimes committed or major incidents. They felt that there was definitely a more positive slant to local crime reporting as a result of attending the CAMs.

Objective: Increase community confidence by increasing the involvement of communities in priority setting and local problem-solving.

There is clear evidence of increased involvement of local communities in the Safer Communities pilot sites. This increased level of involvement has taken several forms.

- Public perception surveys – 1,600 people have been surveyed in total, at least 150 from each area. Surveys have mostly been administered by police officers or CSOs, which has the effect of making them more visible. In one area, local children were enabled to undertake the surveys alongside police and CSOs as a school project. The surveys included questions about policing priorities.
- CAT walks – members of the community have accompanied officers on 'environmental audits' of their local areas. Community members have also been on patrol with CAT officers and contributed to local problem-solving.
- Community Action Meetings – attendance at these increased steadily during the demonstration project, with some meetings attracting up to a hundred people. The meetings identify key priorities for local policing and also attempt to recruit members of the public for problem-solving.
- Targeted engagement – as mentioned above, the post holder has undertaken specific engagement activities with groups that the service has not traditionally engaged with, principally young people.

This increase in involvement has been at the local level. The post holder did not have scope during the project to effect change on engagement at a more strategic level. It is intended that increased involvement at a local level will enable engagement at a strategic level in the future.

Views of Community Action Meeting attendees

It is clear that those who have actually been involved in CAT walks and CAMs have generally felt them to be a success and many have expressed an increased confidence in local policing.

Self-completion questionnaires were handed out at the Alsager CAM on 14 July, 2005. Thirty-two responses were received – approximately 72 community members attended the meeting.

Respondents made almost exclusively positive comments about the contribution of the CAT officers to the meetings and a majority (twenty-three) felt that the police were genuinely taking their views into account. No respondents felt that officers were not taking their views into account. Almost all respondents said they found the meetings useful.

It should be stressed that Alsager is not a particularly high crime or socially deprived area. It is the kind of area where public meetings are most likely to be well attended. However, the anecdotal views of attendees at a CAM in Whitecross, a socially deprived area of Warrington, were also extremely positive. The attendance was lower than at Alsager, but regular attendees expressed increased confidence in local policing and felt local people had recognised a general improvement in the area as a result of the pilot.

Views of the wider public in Cheshire

It was not possible to conduct any survey work with members of the public for this evaluation. Cheshire police are conducting periodic public perceptions survey in Safer Communities areas. The results of these surveys will allow for some local monitoring of the impact of the programme.

Objective: Shape public expectations of the service the police can deliver.

The evaluation did not include any extensive study of the views of communities in Cheshire. It is not possible to prove whether the demonstration project and the Taking Control change programme has succeeded in shaping the expectations of the public in the six pilot sites.

However, there is evidence to suggest that the engagement mechanisms put in place could potentially provide successful outcomes for this objective. As well as the public voting for priorities in CAMs, the police also provide clear feedback on actions they have taken between meetings to address priority issues. If action has not been possible, the reasons for this (including available resources) are fully explained. This appeared to satisfy the meeting attendees in the CAMs observed.

CAT officers also encourage meeting attendees to accompany them on patrol and report back their experiences to a subsequent meeting. Early evidence suggests this is an effective way of managing public expectations – particularly if attendees also communicate their experiences to non-attendees. Further evaluative work would be needed to explore whether this has occurred.

It is also possible that the more positive links with the local media developed in some NPU may help to shape public expectations about the service that can be provided by CATs.

Box 11 Converting the complainers at CAMs

A community member made a vocal complaint at a CAM about inadequate response to a call for service. The complaint was informally investigated and found to be justified. The NPU inspector personally visited the community member to apologise and the person was invited to come out on patrol with local CAT officers. This gave the person a clearer perception of the challenges faced by local officers and a greater insight into the role performed by CATs. The community member agreed to report back his experiences to the next CAM and gave a very positive account of the job that the local police were doing.

Objective: Use public feedback to shape and improve service delivery.

Cheshire Constabulary has built community tasking of local service providers, through prioritising problems at CAMs, into its National Intelligence Model process. It is too early to say definitely whether CATs and CAMs have improved the service provided by the police in the pilot sites. To evaluate this robustly would require systematic observation at meetings and in-depth qualitative work or case studies in specific areas.

However, there are early indications of success from the work undertaken. Half (sixteen) of the questionnaire respondents in Alsager said they could give examples of how the meetings and the CAT had made a difference to the area. Most of these responses specifically mentioned a reduction in 'youth nuisance' and/or 'under-age drinking', which were the priority issues voted for at previous meetings. Six respondents said they had not perceived any difference to the local area; ten respondents did not provide an answer. It is possible these ten respondents had perceived no difference, or felt that it was too early to make a judgement.

As part of the project, the post holder produced a DVD to promote the roll-out of CAMs throughout the force. As part of this, members of the public and partner agency representatives were encouraged to speak directly about their involvement in the process. There were several very positive accounts from those involved about the improvement in policing service as a result of the Safer Communities pilots. This does not, of course, provide a representative assessment of the views of the public in the pilot areas.

Objective: Improve accountability so that the public believes that the service takes their views into account and the authority's decisions have legitimacy through public support.

Assessing the fulfilment of this objective is also beyond the scope of this evaluation. Discerning the legitimacy of police authority decisions in the eyes of the public would require targeted survey or focus group work. This was not possible in the context of the evaluation.

Objective: Create better links with non-police partners on community engagement issues.

There is mixed evidence of success in relation to partnership working. There is clear evidence of increased involvement with partner agencies in some areas. There is also learning that will facilitate more effective partnering in the future.

The final project report produced by the post holder in Cheshire highlights the following.

- Warrington Borough Council have invested an additional £100,000 in their Street Scene programme in support of the Safer Communities programme, including extra funding to street cleaning services in response to priorities raised at Whitecross CAM.
- Congleton Borough Council has invested £20,000 in a transportable skateboard park, in response to targeted youth engagement undertaken during the project.
- Several local authorities have been represented at CAMs, including Macclesfield and Ellesmere Port Borough Councils' environmental health teams and Warrington Borough Council's youth facilities team.
- Vale Royal Borough Council has increased their involvement in the programme and is undertaking problem-solving work with CATs.

Views on partnering from project stakeholders were mixed. CAT officers interviewed felt they had created some positive links with partners – and that partners had mostly delivered what they promised. However, there was an initial lack of awareness that partner agencies cannot always deliver to the same timetable as the police. Officers in one CAT also felt that due to abstraction and lack of capacity they had been unable to maximise the extra resources they had attracted from partners.

Senior managers in both the force and the authority felt that the police service was leading the way in relation to 'quality of life' issues and that local authorities were not as prepared for a neighbourhood management model as the police. This was felt to be particularly true of two-tier council areas, where there tends to be conflict between county and district councils. There was also concern that police officers should not become 'conduits' for organising partner agencies' responses to non-police issues.

A senior member of the Taking Control team said that they were encouraging local commanders to make links with local authorities. An authority member, however, felt that there had generally been a lack of communication and that the police service and local authorities were both pursuing localism agendas in parallel. This was echoed by a representative from a partner agency who had been informed of the outcomes of an engagement event. They said that being involved in the planning stage would have enabled them to extract equal value from the event and also ensure that the local authority had sufficient resources to respond to the outcomes.

Some lessons on multi-agency working can be taken from this demonstration project.

- Partnering can occur in an *ad hoc*, bottom-up way, but it is vital for sustainability to have medium and high level co-ordination and support.
- Partner agencies often work to different timetables and have different budgetary constraints.
- Multi-agency working is desirable at the planning stage as well as at the delivery stage.
- The authority can network more effectively, and such networking can produce practical outcomes, such as joint problem-solving and resource-sharing, and an improved awareness of the authority and its remit.

Objective: Ensure that the changes made are sustained beyond the life of the demonstration project.

The sustainability and legacies of the demonstration project can be seen in relation to community engagement becoming a mainstream part of police service working, a change in

attitudes and strategic approaches to community engagement in the police authority and in the contribution to changes in operational policing in Cheshire.

'Mainstreaming' of community engagement

Police authority staff in Cheshire were careful to ensure the demonstration project had the key strategic impact of promoting community engagement as a mainstream part of authority business. The post holder reported directly to the Policy and Finance Committee – the main authority committee. This helped ensure that the work and community engagement more generally was not seen as an 'add-on', or a specialist, stand-alone project.

All authority stakeholders felt that the project had helped to put engagement at the forefront of authority and constabulary thinking. The two authority members specifically linked to the project felt that, because they had been so closely involved with the post holder, authority members as a whole were alive to embedding the work and producing an 'exit strategy'.

The best evidence to support successful mainstreaming of community engagement in Cheshire is the decision – taken by the whole police authority – to fund a post to further develop the role tested by the demonstration project. This was a reallocation of resources in the context of cuts elsewhere, making community engagement the only 'growth' area in terms of service staff. As well as this newly created post, two 'project co-ordinator' posts have been funded by a 'pump prime' grant made available under the Local Public Service Agreement for Cheshire.

Senior authority staff also pledged 'unlimited' commitment to community engagement and the wider change programme. The newly created post will not only continue to support the change programme, but is also intended to further develop the authority's strategic capacity in relation to engagement issues.

Change of attitudes and approaches

Stakeholders from both the authority and the force felt that the skills profile of the post holder had provided the service with alternative ways of communicating with the public and different ways of approaching engagement. In particular, the non-local authority, commercial marketing perspective of the post holder was emphasised. A senior manager in the force thought this was crucial and that if the change programme had been approached from a more traditional police authority way of working it simply "would not have worked".

Alternative or improved methods of communication were continually emphasised by all stakeholders. Positive impacts of the post holder included more accessible designs for service leaflets and posters, 'jargon busting' and the use of plain English.

Police authority staff felt that the demonstration project has also had an effect on the views and approach of some authority members. In particular, it has made them aware of alternative methods of engagement that are not traditional public forums.

Changes to the structure of policing

There are several consistent factors than can contribute to the unsuccessful implementation of community engagement and neighbourhood policing⁴, principally:

- resistance to change by police organisational cultures;
- lack of recognition for community roles in performance management systems;
- inadequate training for officers; and
- insufficient reallocation of resources.

⁴ See Myhill (2006) *Community engagement in policing – Lessons from the literature*. (http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk/news-and-publications/publication/community-policing/Community_engagement_lit_rev.pdf?view=Standard&pubID=295455)

The model of neighbourhood policing being rolled out in Cheshire does appear promising, as senior management in the force and authority have sought to address the above factors.

- Organisational culture change is being driven from the top of the authority and the force in a consistent, co-ordinated way; as well as occurring 'bottom-up'. In the authority, a community engagement focus has been mainstreamed and a post created that will provide both strategic vision and practical support on engagement issues. In the force, probationers are automatically placed in Neighbourhood Policing Units for their first six months and efforts are being made to raise the status of neighbourhood beat officers.
- National performance indicators have traditionally been focused on volume crime, as opposed to community-oriented outcomes. Cheshire are piloting the National Neighbourhood Policing performance framework, although it is acknowledged that creating measures for things like public reassurance is not easy. Individual officers will have targets relating to community engagement on their performance reviews. The Taking Control review team regularly holds workshops for neighbourhood Inspectors at headquarters to provide updates, training, and hold them to account for delivery of the model of neighbourhood policing.
- Training has been provided for CAT officers and middle managers (e.g. inspectors), on the model being implemented, and the nature and benefits of community engagement. Members of the Taking Control team noted that this was largely provided in advance of implementation; training often occurs in retrospect. Senior authority staff also indicated a commitment to ensuring training continues to be provided. There are currently thirty-four 'Safer Communities' areas in Cheshire, with over one hundred trained staff. All NPU staff have undergone media awareness training and are currently receiving problem-solving and customer-focus training. There are also plans to provide presentation skills training for all staff who facilitate CAMs.
- Cheshire police have undertaken extensive modelling of resources and patterns of demand, using a specially adapted computer programme called SIMUL8. Some NPU inspectors expressed concern that the initial resource profiling was insufficient, so it may be that either the profiling has to be a dynamic process, or implementation of the Safer Communities model be slightly flexible. Cheshire is taking a structured approach to resource reallocation though and strategic managers seemed aware of the danger of promising communities a level of service that they are unable to deliver.

Did the demonstration project achieve its overall aim?

The overall aim of the Cheshire demonstration project was:

To make the people of Cheshire safe and for them to feel safer by responding to their needs as well as by shaping their expectations of the service we can deliver.

This aim can be seen as that of the Taking Control reform programme as a whole. It was not possible for this evaluation to assess whether the demonstration project specifically achieved this aim. There are two reasons for this. Firstly, it would be extremely difficult to isolate the effect of the demonstration project on such an overarching aim. Any impact would have to be regarded in conjunction with the wider change programme. Secondly, impact on feelings of safety and public perceptions would have to be measured over a period of years after implementation of the change programme in order to detect any (sustained) changes.

It is possible to conclude that the demonstration project has helped put in place a framework for the police service in Cheshire to achieve its overarching aim.

Data from local public perception surveys will enable the Cheshire police service to monitor progress towards this aim in an ongoing way.

Assessment – is it a useful role?

The Cheshire demonstration project has been extremely successful in delivering against its original objectives. There have been two key reasons for this. Firstly, there was a favourable context for the post holder to work in, and secondly, the authority and the force in Cheshire have a close relationship and a shared view on the future direction of the service. There was a pre-existing change programme for the post holder to influence and she was given appropriate access and status to be able to affect it. Secondly, the post holder was an extremely hard-working, dynamic and appropriately skilled individual, who was able to act as a facilitator and catalyst to extract maximum value from the context she was placed in.

There is an overwhelming sense in both the authority and the force that the demonstration project has been a success. This is reflected by the decision to reallocate resources to mainstream and further develop the role played by the post holder. The project has shown that the authority can provide a valuable resource to facilitate change and organisational improvement in relation to community engagement. The role tested by the demonstration project in Cheshire could be a valuable one for police authorities to consider. The independent and alternative perspective brought by the post holder was considered beneficial to the change process at all levels of the force.