



Community engagement in policing:

case-study evaluation of a demonstration project in Merseyside

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Summary

Some key learning from the Merseyside demonstration project

- Identifying individual authority members to champion specific parts of a project helps to raise its profile.
- The strategic impact of a project on the joint capacity of the authority and the force is restricted if there is no shared vision around respective community engagement roles.
- Strategic-level partnership working on community engagement can take a long time to develop and implement. If the context for brokering multi-agency working at a strategic level does not exist, relationships can be developed in a 'bottom-up' way. There is a risk that multi-agency relationships brokered in a bottom-up way will be lost if the individuals involved move on.
- If contacts and expertise for engaging a specific group or community do not exist internally, authorities can successfully lever these in from partners with a co-operative, multi-agency approach to engagement.
- Advice from voluntary and community support groups can be used to successfully match methods to objectives when engaging with minority communities.
- Having clear named contacts and responsibilities between multi-agency partners ensures events run with fewer problems.
- Piggy-backing on existing partners' events and activities can help maximise participation levels and save resources. Feedback should follow soon after the initial engagement event(s).
- There are often no agreed roles or objectives for partner agencies involved in community engagement. Funding streams are also usually not co-ordinated and usually not dedicated to community engagement. This is a key barrier to overcome.
- Within police authorities, members will have different views on approaches to community engagement. Those most sceptical of the need to supplement traditional approaches need to be presented with evidence of the success of a more flexible approach.
- When making an approach to partner agencies about joint working on community engagement, it is advisable to find out what targets and key performance indicators (KPIs) agencies work towards and emphasise how joint working may impact on these.

Five key outcomes from the Merseyside demonstration project

- Increased willingness and capacity within Merseyside Police Authority to use a range of community engagement mechanisms.
- Increased links and co-operation between Merseyside Police Authority and the force.
- Successful 'bottom-up' multi-agency working which provided evidence and impetus for more strategic-level co-operation.
- Facilitated access to minority communities for Merseyside police.
- A strategy for delivering ongoing multi-agency engagement with a range of communities, backed up by an internal structure for delivery.

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 Merseyside project involved attempting to promote a more strategic, multi-agency approach to community engagement. A summary of key learning from all three projects is available at <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk>

Context of the project – responding to a Best Value Review

The demonstration project based in Merseyside Police Authority (MPA) went live in April 2004.

In part, the project was a response to a Best Value Review of the authority. It said community engagement, consultation, and communication should be one of four key areas for MPA in seeking to achieve its strategic goal of:

Securing an efficient and effective police service and continuously improving local police services for Merseyside.

The Best Value Review concluded that while MPA was engaging effectively with the community through its Police and Community Forums, it felt it should look at developing new ways of engaging minority groups who were not attending the forums. It also recommended that a Comprehensive Community Engagement, Consultation and Communication Strategy should be developed. The aim should be to 'increase the Authority's profile and standing in the community'.

A form of neighbourhood policing was introduced in Merseyside in 2001. A policy decision was taken to hold 42 Police and Community Forum meetings each year – one in each neighbourhood policing area. Area commanders and neighbourhood inspectors regularly attend the meetings. While some are well attended by members of the public, many are not. It was becoming increasingly evident to MPA that there were many communities who were not engaging with the authority or the force through these forums.

Some authority members and officers interviewed as part of this evaluation felt that the forums were not an effective way of consulting the local community. They were attended by the same type of people each time, raising the same issues. However, some also felt that their primary role was not to consult, but to provide a forum for engagement where local people could speak directly to senior officers. Information generated from the meetings does help to inform the policing plan for Merseyside. The MPA also use the forums to market themselves and their role. The MPA felt there was a need to explore other approaches to add to the engagement provided by the forum meetings.

The post holder appointed to undertake the project had a background in working with minority groups in the Merseyside area. From this work she had developed good networks with the types of communities that the Best Value Review had recommended that the authority look to engage with. She was able to ensure that the organisations she made contact with as part of the project had the expertise, contacts, and capacity necessary for effective engagement.

Demonstration project aims and objectives

The Home Office wanted to give the demonstration sites a degree of flexibility in drafting project plans, aims, and objectives. The project in Merseyside became known in the demonstration site as the Citizen Focus Project – reflecting the dominant Home Office terminology at the time.

The stated aim of the Merseyside demonstration project was to:

Develop and promote a more strategic, co-ordinated, and multi-agency approach to community engagement on policing and community safety issues.

A number of objectives were identified to enable the Authority to achieve this aim.

- Develop a closer, more co-ordinated, working relationship with the force. Initiate regular and formalised communication; highlight opportunities for joint-working.
- Develop a clear idea, through mapping, of community engagement Merseywide, and of the specific nature of engagement within two specified Basic Command Units (BCUs).
- Use multi-agency focus groups to engage with communities identified as not previously engaged. Use the information to plan more effective future engagement with these groups, using a co-ordinated, multi-agency strategy.
- Make Merseyside Multi-Agency Group (MAG) and Joint Action Groups (JAGs) aware of the Citizen Focus Project. Map engagement undertaken by these groups. Identify opportunities for joint working.
- Develop a more co-ordinated relationship with Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). Identify opportunities for joint working and develop service-level agreement with audit co-ordinators for exchange of information. Develop joint questionnaires.
- MPA to play a key role in improving the Independent Advisors' Group (IAG), so that it has a new structure and reports regularly to the MPA. 'Sell' IAG to the police service.
- Develop a multi-agency approach to Recommendation 61 and develop a toolkit for engaging with racial minority groups.
- Take a strategic approach to Police and Community Forums.
- Capacity building within the authority's Communications Team; transfer of skills and working practices from the post holder.
- Share effective practice and learning between agencies involved in engagement.
- Make a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to community engagement part of the core business of MPA.

By the end of the demonstration project it was envisioned that a programme of co-ordinated consultation and community engagement would have been drawn up and agreed by stakeholders, agencies, and partners. This programme would help to avoid duplication of activities, and ensure that gaps in provision of consultation and community engagement were addressed. Also, results from engagement activities would be fed back to the community to raise awareness of how their input influences service delivery. And, to enable an understanding of these engagement activities, a database of results would have been created and shared.

Evaluation methods and sources of data

The evaluation of the Merseyside demonstration project covered both processes and outputs and outcomes. The Office for Public Management (OPM) was responsible for the process evaluation; Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) was responsible for evaluating the impact of the project. 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.

- Depth-interviews with key stakeholders in the project – including the post holder; police authority members and staff, and key members of the force involved in the project.
- Depth-interviews with key partner agency representatives who contributed to or were affected by the project.

The impact evaluation was also designed to be a collaborative process. An evaluation 'workshop' was held at MPA to allow stakeholders in Merseyside to contribute ideas to the evaluation plan. The workshop was attended by the post holder, an authority member, members of police authority staff most involved in the project, the head of the force Communications and Marketing Team, the Home Office project manager, a representative of the Association of Police Authorities (APA), and the RDS researcher managing the evaluation. It was facilitated by OPM.

At the workshop, the project objectives were refined and outcome measures suggested. These measures were finalised and agreed at a subsequent workshop involving the post holder, the head of the MPA Communications Team, RDS, and OPM. 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 learned 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 with key stakeholders in the project – including the post holder, police authority members and staff, and key members of the force involved in the project.
- Depth-interviews with key partner agency representatives who contributed to or were affected by the project.
- 'Activity reports' produced by the post-holder detailing specific community engagement activities undertaken as part of the project.

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.

The post holder and the demonstration project activity

The post holder brought a new set of skills to the authority. She came from a community development background and had a wide range of contacts within, and was respected by, the minority communities that the MPA wanted to engage with. The post holder also had experience of working with Merseyside Police (though not with the police authority).

In particular, the post holder had a commitment to community engagement that was inclusive of all sections of the community. She had well developed diversity and cultural awareness skills. She also had experience of working with statutory agencies from the perspective of the voluntary and community sector.

Box 1 Key phases of activity in the Merseyside demonstration project

Phase 1: April to October 2004

- Appointment of post holder.
- Project planning and agreeing project objectives.
- Identification of eight key areas of work:
 - multi-agency focus groups;
 - joint working between Merseyside Police Force and Police Authority;
 - work with Merseyside's Multi-Agency Group, and Joint Agency Groups;
 - work with CDRPs;
 - work with Independent Advisors' Group (IAG);
 - a multi-agency approach to recommendation 61 of the Stephen Lawrence Enquiry;
 - taking a strategic approach to Police and Community Forums on Merseyside; and
 - supporting the National Practitioner Panel for Community Engagement in Policing.
- Initial development of work-streams and raising awareness of the project.
- Developing early links with key partners.
- Analysis of existing police authority engagement mechanisms (Police and Community Forum meetings).
- Consultation events held with GYRO (Gay Youth R Out); Asylum Link; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgendered groups.
- Reorganisation of Police and Community Forums to make them more accessible.

Phase 2: October 2004 to April 2005

- Continuation of work-streams identified in phase 1.
- Focus groups with people with disabilities; youth engagement activities, including working in schools; engagement events with racial minority groups.
- Multi-agency distribution of a consultation questionnaire, raising awareness of MPA and recommendation 61, and asking people how they wished to be engaged.
- Mapping consultation arrangements of two of Merseyside's Basic Command Units and analysis of where the authority could benefit from the results and of where a joint approach would be advantageous.
- Raise awareness of MPA roles and responsibilities within the CDRPs and develop joint working.
- Work with IAG to make their role clearer to the force.
- Pilot newsletter developed for feeding back results of Police and Community Forums in the Sefton area of Merseyside.
- Attend and participate in Association of Police Authorities' North West Community Engagement Network.

Phase 3: April 2005 to October 2005

- Further multi-agency community engagement events.
- Begin to follow-up results of consultation exercises and agree future engagement and feedback mechanisms with various groups.
- Formalise the process of feedback of work with IAG to MPA.
- Develop links further with CDRPs and provide support for MPA members with CDRP work.
- Complete Community Engagement Framework highlighting pros and cons from different mechanisms used throughout the project.
- Newsletter feedback rolled out across all forum meetings, replacing the existing minutes.
- Provide practitioner panel with multi-agency community engagement case studies.
- Make arrangements for continuation and further development of post holder's role.

Section 1: Process evaluation

To undertake the process evaluation, OPM examined the role and activities undertaken by the post holder to develop and deliver a multi-agency approach to community engagement. It looks at how the profile of the project was raised within the authority and force, how external partnership work was undertaken, and the range of methods used to engage with minority communities. Developing a multi-agency approach has organisational considerations. These are set out as a number of themes and provide the structure for this section.

Box 2 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 performance management approaches influence the project, both within the authority and in the wider partnership context?

Capacity to engage

Building capacity within the MPA

Within the MPA, the post holder was part of a new Communications Team. This initially consisted of the post holder and her line manager, the Principal Officer for Communications and Media. It expanded during the course of the project to include a Communications Officer, Media Officer and Communications Assistant. This team was responsible for all external communications and tasked with developing a Community Engagement, Consultation, Communication, and Media Strategy.

One of the first activities undertaken by the post holder was to introduce the Citizen Focus Project and raise its profile amongst officers and members across the authority. She made a number of presentations to members and to the authority's Community Safety and Liaison Committee. She also organised internal seminars and training around community engagement.

Initially, awareness of the project seemed to be quite low amongst some members. One member interviewed said that it was only after asking questions about what the post holder was doing and what the purpose of it was, that the members started to learn what the project could deliver. However, it must be remembered that Merseyside is a large police authority and the Citizen Focus Project was one area of business among many for members and staff.

The formal home for the project within the authority was the Community Safety and Liaison Committee. Police authorities tend to operate with a committee structure. Committees have a fairly fixed cycle and often have many issues to consider. Individuals and personalities can have a big impact on the way they operate. It was not clear at the start of the project whether working through the Community Safety and Liaison Committee would be compatible with the intended 'action learning' approach.

The MPA developed several ways to ensure the demonstration project was able to operate effectively. It is usual for work to be delegated by committees and for the chair to be kept aware of developments. A number of members acted as champions for different areas of project work.

- Diversity: Alf Zack-Williams.
- Engagement with disabled and older people: Tom Kelly.
- Engagement with lesbian and gay people: Bill Weightman.
- Youth engagement: Bert Boonstra.

These members helped make others aware of ongoing findings from the project and encouraged the mainstreaming of the work outside of the Community Safety and Liaison Committee. Periodic summary findings were then presented at committee meetings, to be noted. Papers for committee meetings in Merseyside are also circulated to all members, not just those on the specific committee. The committee meetings also include appropriate representatives from the force, including a member of staff from the Community Relations department and the Assistant Chief Constable.

Roughly half way into the project there was a change in the Chair of Merseyside Police Authority. The authority Chair during the early stages of the project was supportive of the project, giving it the backing of the organisation, although community engagement was not as prominent in the wider police reform agenda at this stage. The appointment of the new Chair was felt by many project stakeholders to have resulted in an increased emphasis on and profile for the project, reflecting the increasing prominence of engagement as an issue. The new Chair also appears committed to more effective multi-agency working, particularly via Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships and is attuned to the role engagement has to play in the future.

Building links with the force

The historical context of relations between the authority and force in Merseyside may have had an impact on the demonstration project. The two organisations have tried to work closely at a senior managerial level. There is evidence of this in, for example, joint work related to stop and search. However, stakeholders on both sides perceived that relations have not always been co-operative. There is some tension around what each organisation does, which is often apparent in relation to the concept of police authority independence. The MPA and the force have traditionally pursued separate engagement activities, though they feel they work together more effectively than in the past. One interviewee felt that a lack of trust between the two organisations sometimes means that information sharing and joint working can be difficult to achieve.

In relation to community engagement, the MPA sees itself having a strategic policy level role. Some members believe they have a role in engaging on service delivery as well. Stakeholders in the force perceived engaging on service delivery and local problems and issues should be its role. A strategic joint authority and force approach to engagement to embrace both strands has not been formally developed.

The force had a change of Chief Constable at around the same time as the authority appointed a new Chair. Several interviewees felt that the new Chief also placed a strong emphasis on community engagement, reflecting its increasing prominence in the wider police reform agenda.

Box 3 Merseyside Police Force Modernisation Programme

The present Chief Constable of Merseyside police (Bernard Hogan-Howe) initiated a 'Blueprint for service improvement'. A force modernisation programme has been developed to deliver this (<http://www.merseyside.police.uk/html/aboutus/departments/fmt/index.htm>).

There are seven key projects that constitute the modernisation programme.

- Improving criminal justice processes – including devolving custody management.
- Improving crime recording – piloting a new process enabling officers to record crime.
- Recruiting Community Support Officers (CSOs), volunteers, volunteer cadets and Special Constables to support officers and staff in meeting our communities' priorities, involving communities in our work and increasing their confidence in us.
- Improving our citizen focus – consulting with communities about their priorities and increasing customer service levels.
- Creating a process for contact which is built around customers' needs – offering a variety of ways to contact us, first point resolution, and managing demand more effectively.
- Establishing the academy – providing learning and development to the extended police family through the latest techniques.
- Employing cutting edge technology to increase arrests and time spent on the frontline.

Early in the project, conversations occurred between authority staff and the force Assistant Chief Constable about how joint working could be achieved. Initial progress was made working with the Community Relations department of the force. This was partly down to an existing professional relationship developed between the post holder and members of this department, through previous work and the IAG. As a result, the Community Relations department have contacted the post holder when engaging on issues around community reassurance, the Race Equality Scheme, and the lesbian, gay and bisexual community.

Also, to further develop links with the force a small resource group was established. This group consisted of the post holder, an MPA member, the head of MPA Administration, head of Police Communications and Marketing and a member of staff from the police media team. This group was intended to meet approximately every six weeks. One member interviewed felt that it has been a useful body, helping to informally co-ordinate authority and force engagement activities. The group's main strength was that it brought together a good level of expertise around the table; its effectiveness was limited by the availability of some members.

Engagement activity began to have a higher profile and became more focused within the force with the formation of the modernisation team. A new member of staff has been appointed within the force to handle the citizen focus brief, working alongside the modernisation team.

Box 4 Capacity – key insights

- The aims and objectives of a project should be continually emphasised to key stakeholders.
- Identifying individual authority members to champion specific parts of a project helps to raise its profile.
- A project is able to have a greater impact on capacity within the authority when it has the active support of the authority chair.
- The post holder was able to influence the internal capacity of the police authority much more easily than the joint capacity of the service as a whole.
- The strategic impact of a project on the joint capacity of the authority and the force is restricted if there is no shared vision around respective community engagement roles.

What approaches and methods were used?

Mapping community engagement on Merseyside

At an early stage, the project attempted to map the range of community engagement activity taking place on Merseyside, to look at where there were overlaps and gaps. This work became too difficult and time demanding. It became apparent that even mapping activity within a single agency was a large and challenging task. Many agencies do not have a post with responsibility for mapping internal community engagement – including the force.

Instead it was decided that the police authority would begin to focus its multi-agency engagement work on those areas where it knew for certain that there was a gap in its own approach. This mainly involved improved engagement with specific sections of the community.

The groups that the project decided to target were:

- the gay and lesbian community;
- people with disabilities;
- racial minority groups;
- refugees and asylum seekers;
- young people; and
- older people.

Multi-agency 'focus groups'

The MPA wanted to gain an understanding of how the identified communities would like to engage with the authority and the police service. The findings from these meetings would then be used to help the authority more carefully tailor its engagement activities so that they are appropriate to different communities, rather than just convenient for the authority itself. It was intended that focus groups or specialist discussion forums would be arranged, in partnership with other agencies who may also benefit from this knowledge.

Gay and lesbian community

The MPA approached GYRO, a support organisation for young lesbian, gay, and bisexual people. The advantage of using this organisation was that their members corresponded to two of the MPA's target groups – young people, and gay and lesbian people. GYRO receives a lot of requests to facilitate consultation with its members and refuses most of these. The post holder was persistent and found out that the organisation's reluctance was mainly as a result of the perception that it is often used by agencies to 'tick a box'. The approach became successful when it was explained that the events were intended to create an ongoing relationship, on the terms of those involved. Promises of feedback and proof of intent to follow up the engagement were the crucial success factors.

Two consultation events were planned and undertaken in September 2004. One of these events was held with young women only. Merseyside Fire Service attended one event to distribute information about projects it runs aimed at young people and victims of hate crime.

The events were informal and interactive in their approach and included using a 'listening wall', where participants were encouraged to contribute their thoughts and questions anonymously on post-it notes.

Disabled people

The police authority felt it could not have undertaken a programme of engagement events with the disabled community without involving partners. There were two key issues:

- resources – making the events accessible to people with a wide range of disabilities is more expensive than an average engagement event; and
- expertise and contacts – knowledge of appropriate methods and access to the disabled community did not exist in the authority.

The post holder used a multi-agency strategy to overcome these problems. She approached all CDRPs and two who had similar engagement gaps in relation to people with disabilities – Liverpool and Sefton – became involved. She also involved organisations who provide funding for people with disabilities, such as Community Foundation for Merseyside and Merseyside Social Enterprise Initiative. This helped reduce the cost to the MPA of the engagement. For example, electronic voting equipment was provided at a reduced rate by one of the CDRPs.

To gain access to the disabled community the post holder approached the Merseyside Disability Federation (MDF). This is an umbrella organisation that provides support for community and voluntary groups across Merseyside that work with, or for, disabled people. The MDF ensured that the events were inclusive and accessible and also provided help and advice on the methods of engagement to be used.

A decision was taken not to stage a single event in Liverpool, as engagement in Merseyside can be seen as centred disproportionately in the city. Instead smaller, informal meetings were held, one in each local authority area. Protocols for multi-agency working were agreed in meetings prior to the events. Partners agreed allocation of tasks based on who was best placed to make a particular input. The MDF took responsibility for support needs, venues, invitations, refreshments and promotion; the MPA provided the technology, IT staff, and facilitation.

To help make the meetings interesting and interactive, and to maintain participant anonymity when it came to voicing opinions, electronic voting technology was used. This allows opinions and results to be immediately presented and further discussed. The use of pictures also formed part of each session. It was felt that this would be the most appropriate way of ensuring that people with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or dyslexia could take part.

Racial minority groups

The project undertook a specialist forum with the Hindu community. This was initially an example of the MPA being invited to a multi-agency event as a result of the post holder initiating links with CDRPs. A multi-agency meeting was held with representatives of the Hindu community to discuss local feelings about the delivery of public services. This resulted in a request for the MPA to facilitate a specialist forum on community safety issues.

An event was run at a Hindu temple. Invitees to the event included Merseyside Police, John Moores University, Merseyside Fire Service, Merseyside Racial Harassment Prevention Unit, CDRP members, and people from the Indian community.

The Hindu temple was chosen as a venue as it was somewhere that the intended community participants would know and be comfortable with. The event was piggy-backed on an existing Tuesday night event that the temple holds. One person from the temple was designated as a contact point for the MPA to help plan the event. A forum style event was held with interpreters on hand to enable everyone to participate. Attendees had the chance to raise concerns about safety issues and incidents; the forum was also used to determine how this community would like to engage with the MPA in the future. A further specialist forum has recently been held.

Other specialist forums were held at the Caribbean Centre and at Harold House, for the Jewish Community. These forums did not seek to elicit preferences for future contact and feedback. A further meeting was held for the Muslim residents, in an area of the city that also had a large Jewish population. This required sensitive handling by the post holder, who explained to Jewish community leaders that the meeting was being held on a Saturday due to

Ramadan, and that other forums would be held for Jewish people who would not attend on their holy day.

Refugees and asylum seekers

Another event was held with asylum seekers and refugees. This was organised in partnership with Asylum Link, a voluntary organisation that provides support services for asylum seekers and refugees, and the Community Relations department of the force. The force wished to engage with this community – but was aware of mistrust if uniformed officers were to attend.

The event took the form of a chat over coffee in the dining room of Asylum Link. Interpreters were present to aid participants. As with the event with the gay and lesbian community a 'listening wall' was used. However, in this instance nobody used the wall – participants were fearful of being identified and did not want to commit anything to paper.

This is an example of the police authority acting as a 'gateway' for the force to a vulnerable community that lacks confidence and trust. The event showed that an authority employee with community engagement skills, working in partnership with a voluntary organisation, can access and build trust with a community who may not engage directly with the police force. Another special forum has since been held.

Young people

This was another example of the post holder using multi-agency contacts to identify and 'piggy back' on to an engagement event. The authority's Best Value Review revealed that young people were not being engaged using a traditional forum-based approach. The authority wanted to find out how best to engage with young people. The post holder identified an event held at Croxteth Comprehensive School as part of Local Democracy Week, which included a Take Your Councillor to School day. This school was chosen partly because it had a police officer 'attached' to it – thus ensuring partnership with the force. (The Chief Constable wishes to align police constables to all secondary schools on Merseyside). The other agencies involved in setting up this event were the Tell X Project and Liverpool City Council. The event involved the participation of 120 young people for two hours.

To help ensure the event was interesting for the participants it was participatory in design. 'Stations' were placed in parts of the room with staff members present at each one. The stations had flipcharts and laminates asking questions attached to surrounding walls. Pictures as well as words were used to help students with literacy problems, ADHD, or dyslexia participate. The students were asked to place stickers to indicate their views on the different issues. Some of the questions asked students to write their comments on post-it notes and place these on a 'washing line'. Also, as with some of the events, a listening wall was also used.

Older people

The post holder arranged to meet with Age Concern to discuss working in partnership. However, although the organisation said it was happy to provide advice, they were not prepared to jointly fund any engagement work.

The post holder instead arranged a specialist discussion forum at Merseyside Pensioners' Federation at which there were approximately thirty people. The MPA have held further events and the force Community Relations Department now engage with this group on a quarterly basis, as a result of this initial contact.

Police authority forums

As part of the demonstration project, the post holder undertook an evaluation of the authority's Police and Community Forum meetings. This was done by systematic observation and attendance at meetings and by a questionnaire completed by meeting attendees.

The results of the evaluation provided empirical evidence to support the findings of the authority's Best Value Review. It was found that forums were attended predominantly by people aged over 60. Minority ethnic groups and people with disabilities were mostly not represented.

As well as carrying out the events described above to find out how identified minority groups wished to be engaged, the post holder also worked to ensure the authority's existing engagement events – forums – were made as accessible as possible. A structured plan was developed for forum meetings, to ensure they did not clash with major religious festivals or other key cultural events. Some changes are being made to ensure that they are more suitable for a wider range of participants. For example, translators, interpreters, loop systems and large print are being made available when needed. Also, the forums are now being held in more accessible venues and meetings are advertised more widely and in more suitable publications, such as Silk Road News (aimed at the Chinese community), Voices (Black community), and Out North West (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community).

Finally, the post holder experimented with a new form of feeding back the outcomes from forum meetings. In Sefton, feedback was provided by newsletter, instead of the usual minutes. Informal feedback from the community suggested this was appreciated and the newsletter format has since been extended to all the authority's forum meetings. Knowsley CDRP has also adopted this format for disseminating its news.

The Independent Advisors' Group

One area where there has been some more multilateral grassroots involvement in engagement activities with the authority and the force is through the Independent Advisors' Group. IAGs are one of the key community engagement mechanisms for the force but, prior to the demonstration project, the IAG was not well used. The Merseyside IAG consists of around forty members, drawn mostly from minority communities, or organisations that work with these communities.

It appears that the IAG interfaced more with the post holder and the Citizen Focus Project than with the wider police authority. The post holder believes this is because members of the IAG do not wish the group to be controlled by the police authority, as they perceive this will result in unnecessary bureaucracy. The post holder managed to link the work of the IAG into the police authority by getting the force Community Relations Department to include an update on the IAG's work in their reporting to the authority's Community Safety and Liaison Committee.

The policing plan consultation

The police authority's annual report evolved into a policing plan summary. Prior to the demonstration project, summaries of the plan were sent to every household and included a section for citizens' comments. This consultation did not achieve a high level of response – often less than thirty returns were received.

The post holder completely redesigned the consultation document to make it more visually appealing and more accessible by the use of plain English and other, non written formats. The new style was inspired by consultation material produced by MerseyTravel, an organisation that had been developing community engagement strategies for over ten years and were willing to share their experience. This was extremely helpful for the authority, both practically and in terms of recognising the length of time that would be required to mainstream engagement activity. The authority received over 3,000 responses to the most recent consultation exercise. This is valuable for overlaying the information collated from forum meetings.

Box 5 Approaches and methods – key insights

- Mapping community engagement activity across a region is not a realistic activity for a single person, particularly if partner agencies do not have posts with a responsibility for mapping their own engagement.
- If contacts and expertise for engaging a specific group or community do not exist internally, authorities can successfully lever these in from partners with a co-operative, multi-agency approach to engagement.
- Advice from voluntary and community support groups can be used to successfully match methods to objectives when engaging with minority communities.
- Engagement activity should be arranged around the needs of the participants and not the organisers – for example, meeting times and venues. If necessary, events should be arranged in locations at which communities normally gather and feel safe.
- Having clear named contacts and responsibilities between multi-agency partners ensures events run with fewer problems.
- Piggy-backing on existing partners' events and activities can help maximise participation levels and save resources.
- Feedback should follow soon after the initial engagement event(s).

Partnership working

The multi-agency vision

The original multi-agency partnership working envisioned by the project included working at a strategic level – via the Merseyside Multi-agency Group and Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships – and at a grassroots level, with voluntary and community organisations across Merseyside.

The Implementation Plan for the project accurately anticipated some of the challenges that multi-agency working would present for the police authority. It was felt that one of these would be gaining commitment from other agencies and partners currently involved in consultation and community engagement on policing issues. Considerable work would be needed to demonstrate the benefits of multi-agency working.

Looking to work at a grassroots level was also seen as presenting challenges for the demonstration project. There was a feeling that groups representing many of those communities that they would be seeking to engage shared the feeling that they have been over-policed and under-protected. As such, much confidence and bridge-building work would need to be done. This would involve convincing groups that their views are important and listened to and that they would receive feedback.

The multi-agency experience – strategic partnerships

Merseyside Multi-agency Group

At the strategic level it was originally felt that the MAG, which had been established for some time, would be the most suitable vehicle for developing the pilot. The MAG regularly brings together those agencies and partners who the MPA wanted to involve in co-ordinating consultation and community engagement, including:

- the police force;
- local authorities;
- housing trusts;
- criminal Justice Agencies;
- YOTs and DATs;
- Connexions;
- MerseyTravel;
- the Fire Service; and
- voluntary sector groups.

A presentation about the demonstration project was made to the MAG at an early stage of the project. However, while the MAG, with its focus on working with local communities, seemed like an appropriate focus for promoting and delivering this multi-agency project, it became apparent that there were difficulties.

The MAG's focus was on tackling the problems of rising street crime on Merseyside. It formed one of ten national Street Crime Initiatives promoted by the Government. The community engagement work that it carried out was aimed at gathering intelligence in support of its operational aim of reducing street crime. In contrast, the MPA's multi-agency project had a more strategic, rather than operational, focus, and had community engagement as a much more central aim. There was a feeling among some members of the police force that these two different community engagement approaches did not sit comfortably together. From the authority's perspective, one member voiced a concern that the operational focus of the MAG meant that it was force-dominated and did not operate as an equal partnership. Also, there was a feeling among some MAG members that because there were no targets related to community engagement that they were required to achieve, the Citizen Focus Project was not a priority.

The MPA's presentation to the MAG did not provide the strategic home for the project that it was initially hoped it would. One or two of the MAG's members, such as the Fire Service, did approach the MPA about the possibilities of joint working, but contacts and work tended to stay at this bilateral rather than multilateral level. The result of this was that the MPA focused on delivering quick wins through on-the-ground engagement activities, while also attempting to lay other foundations for strategic level engagement.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships

The post holder also made strategic approaches to the heads of all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in Merseyside. This approach also met with a very limited response. Two key factors appeared to explain this.

- The police authority did not have good existing relationships with some CDRPs. Authority members did not often attend meetings. This may, in part, have been due to authorities not originally being statutory members of CDRPs.
- Senior CDRP managers working at a strategic level appeared to be very much driven by key performance indicators. The post holder felt that if an approach for joint working was not perceived as impacting on a specific target it was viewed less favourably.

The post holder subsequently attempted to initiate CDRP involvement in the project by using existing contacts in two partnerships – Liverpool and Sefton. By presenting the aims of the project to existing contacts in the Hate Crime Reduction and Domestic Violence working groups, she managed to initiate partner involvement in multi-agency events that overlapped with these areas of work.

The post holder perceived that working relations between the authority and some partner organisations were not co-operative. A problem for a police authority seeking to take the lead on multi-agency working can be its perceived position in a partnership hierarchy. Police authorities were not originally statutory partners in CDRPs. As a small organisation with a limited budget that is not directly involved in service delivery it can sometimes be seen as a low status partner. This means that it can be difficult for the authority to create and lead a partnership – it needs to punch above its perceived weight.

The post holder successfully overcame these problems by developing a separate identity for the demonstration project. In the early stages of brokering work with partners, she branded the work as the Citizen Focus Project, as opposed to emphasising the police authority. She also emphasised the project was Home Office-sponsored, as she felt this lent more gravitas to the work.

These tactics enabled the post holder to initiate some 'bottom-up' CDRP involvement in the project. The danger with this way of working is that it is not formalised and is often personality-driven. If the key people in agencies move on, the links can be lost. The change in the police authority Chair placed a greater emphasis on partnership working in the authority and the post holder was then able to concentrate on working towards establishing ongoing protocols for working with Liverpool and Sefton CDRPs. The authority has also become involved in an Association of Police Authorities pilot on accountability, based in Knowsley CDRP. This may be a further way of developing a model for authority involvement with CDRPs across Merseyside.

The multi-agency experience – grassroots partnerships

Strong links have been built by the project with a number of voluntary and community organisations that represent minority groups. This was partly a result of the lack of initial success at the strategic level. The post holder had many existing 'grass roots' contacts and found at this level less barriers that were beyond her control.

Although relationships at the grass roots level were developed with strategic working in mind – the post holder attempted to involve all relevant agencies and community groups for each

identified theme – there was no direct process in place whereby these different bodies could be brought together in a more strategic setting to work in a wider multi-agency way. The post holder had to be persistent, making inroads where it was possible to do so. The MPA made arrangements for feeding back information to individual agencies, but this was mainly on a bi-lateral basis.

The key problem with this way of working is that relationships can be easily lost if the individuals involved move on. The MPA have attempted to guard against this by capturing contacts on a database, which can act as an ongoing resource for the authority.

The post holder acknowledged that there were less barriers to working at a grass roots level and that this would maximise time and resources in an eighteen-month project. She decided that, by demonstrating the benefits of multi-agency working at grass roots level, key stakeholders would be persuaded of the value of the work at the strategic level ('What's in it for me?'). As the role develops, and community engagement becomes increasingly strategic, the post holder will be able to make use of a wider skills set.

Multi-agency working – some familiar issues and barriers to overcome

There are two frequent challenges to partnership working, both of which were evident in the demonstration project. The first is the difficulty of aligning objectives – in this case having an agreed and co-ordinated approach to community engagement in principle. The second is providing the resources to deliver the agreed approach. Often there is no dedicated community engagement function within an organisation and no direct funding stream. The lack of a designated champion and no defined budget makes delivering change a difficult challenge. Also, funding is nearly always subject to competing pressures with the priority often being those areas where there are targets that need to be reached. There can be a lack of recognition that effective community engagement can help to better deliver some performance targets.

A further issue in relation to this demonstration project was time. Brokering effective and ongoing multi-agency working at a strategic level is likely to take longer than the eighteen months of the project. Impact at a strategic level was starting to be realised towards the end of the project.

Box 6 Partnership working – key insights

- Strategic level partnership working on community engagement can take a long time to develop and implement.
- A multi-agency group with a very operational focus is not the best vehicle for developing joint working on strategic community engagement.
- If the context for brokering multi-agency working at a strategic level does not exist, relationships can be developed in a 'bottom-up' way.
- The post holder developed a 'brand' for the demonstration project that helped to convince partners sceptical of what the police authority could offer. It gave the police authority something to 'bring to the table' and was evidence of it proactively plugging gaps.
- There is a risk that multi-agency relationships brokered in a bottom-up way will be lost if the individuals involved move on. The MPA attempted to insure against this by developing a database of contacts.
- There are often no agreed roles or objectives for partner agencies involved in community engagement. Funding streams are also usually not co-ordinated and usually not dedicated to community engagement. This emphasises the importance of piggy-backing on to existing events and drawing in resources from partner agencies.
- Partnership working on community engagement requires a mix of skills, and the ability to operate at both strategic and grass roots levels.

Leadership, vision and priorities

At the outset of the project three particular roles were set out.

- Chair of the authority: would champion the work; provide strategic vision and direction within the MPA, and also have an influence outside the authority.
- Senior managers of the authority: would provide support, advice, and guidance for the project.
- Post holder: would deliver the strategic approach and ensure that the project meets its aims and objectives.

Leaderships and priorities at the start of the project

The authority Chair at the start of the project was supportive during the bidding process and committed the authority to the work. The project also received continual endorsement at chief executive level, and from authority officers with the power to recommend to members that the work should continue. The progress of the project was regularly monitored and discussed at senior level forums within the authority.

In terms of practical involvement, the Head of Administration was heavily involved in the project from the outset, working with the post holder on developing the work, and acting as an initial liaison point with authority members.

It is not clear whether there was a recognisable champion for the project at Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) level in the force, though some input was received from senior officers. Individual members and departments in the force (most notably Communications and Marketing, and Community Relations) were interested and involved, but for them the project was inevitably one among many they are exposed to. The post holder initially had to work hard to make and maintain contacts in the force and to secure their contribution to the project.

A change in leadership and vision

A change in emphasis in the importance of the project came with the appointment of a new Chair for the MPA. The new Chair was a strong supporter of engagement and this coincided with increased prominence for engagement as an issue in police (and wider public sector) reform. At around the same time, the appointment of a new Chief Constable reinforced an emphasis on community engagement within the force.

The new Chair has helped raise the profile of the demonstration project, both within the authority and among partners. In particular, contact was brokered at a more senior level with CDRPs. One CDRP is intended to act as a model for future multi-agency working. It is not likely that the post holder would have been able to make such significant progress at the strategic level without this support.

Box 7 Leadership, vision and priorities – key insights

- A demonstration project must have the support of senior figures in organisations in order to have maximum impact.
- A shared commitment to community engagement from the authority Chair and force Chief Constable places more emphasis on it as an increasingly important aspect of reform.

Culture and performance management

Changing organisational attitudes to community engagement

Several factors came together to affect organisational culture around the time of the demonstration project. A Best Value Review, prior to the project, revealed a need to change the way the authority worked – and this was accepted by members. In relation to community engagement, the project reinforced a change of direction set in motion by the Best Value Review. There were though varying degrees of support for change in ways of working – the attitudes of some staff and members were shaped during the course of the project.

The staff at the authority helped facilitate some culture change by asking more supportive members to act as champions for particular areas of the project. These members could then make others aware of the success of events and of the benefits of different approaches to engagement. Other members were also encouraged to attend events if they could. The post holder galvanised the member champions during the early stages of the project.

Depth-interviews with members suggested this strategy was successful in effecting a culture change among members as a whole in terms of attitudes to community engagement. Members were universally positive about events they attended and felt strongly that the new type of engagement should be sustained. They were happy that the authority had moved beyond a 'one size fits all' approach and managed to engage with some sections of the community for the first time.

There was also evidence of a change of culture and attitudes among some authority staff, who were moved from a 'comfort zone' of providing support to more active engagement. Development work as part of the project has given staff renewed confidence to engage face to face in out-of-office settings.

There was evidence of a continued strong commitment to traditional forum meetings among some members. Some expressed concern that new forms of engagement may be too resource-intensive for the authority, beyond the life of the demonstration project. However, many of the more expensive events were designed to create links with communities and for partners to find out how they wanted to engage in the future. The process of culture change will likely be ongoing, with support from more sceptical members possibly increasing as they realise new forms of engagement can supplement existing forms.

Opinion among members is similarly variable in relation to the future role of the police authority and its interface with the force. Whilst some members appear to believe that the authority does not have the resources to engage on issues of service delivery, a majority of those interviewed emphasised authority independence, and believed strongly that they should not rely too heavily on the police for engagement. There is a view among some that, as a public body, the authority should be seen to do its own engagement and that a balance needs to be struck between this and monitoring and attempting to improve force engagement.

How has the police authority working culture affected the project?

Merseyside Police Authority, in common with many authorities, has a traditional style of working through committees. Whilst this can ensure that policy and decisions are well deliberated and considered, it can act as a barrier to culture change and innovation.

The main 'home' for the project was the Community Safety and Liaison Committee. The post holder expressed frustration at the formality of reporting the project findings to this committee. However, the project was able to operate in an 'action learning' way by developing relationships between the post holder and members (particularly those acting as champions for parts of the work) outside of formal meetings. It is important that these relationships are transparently facilitated and endorsed, to avoid staff such as a new post holder feeling that they are attempting to effect change outside of the formalised police authority working culture.

Did the project have any other effect on organisational culture?

There is some evidence of a less centralised and controlling approach amongst members. For example, the post holder has been allowed to talk to and carry out interviews with the local media. This may be as much to do with the change in authority Chair as with the post holder's clear ability to undertake this type of work. There is also support at the highest level in the authority for the post holder to be given a wider responsibility for community engagement and other related issues and receive greater support to enable her to carry out this role.

There was a sense that the authority was more comfortable with a flexible approach to engagement and that the demonstration project meant that there was less fear of initial 'failure' when adopting new approaches.

Performance management and key performance indicators

No system of performance management or monitoring existed in the authority prior to the demonstration project. The authority is currently looking at introducing some local indicators and a minimum level of involvement for members.

The issue of performance management and key performance indicators (KPIs) was seen by some involved in the project as a crucial one. The post holder felt that staff at senior levels in partner agencies were very focused on KPIs. As community engagement has emerged as an issue relatively recently in community safety, there are not many indicators directly associated with it. She felt this acted as a barrier to multi-agency work on engagement, as partners appeared to see approaches not directly related to existing indicators as potential extra work.

A further problem is that community engagement itself is often not well defined and may be understood differently by different partners. In fact, effective engagement has the potential to assist organisations in making progress towards many KPIs. The post holder perceived this quickly and attempted to find out which KPIs organisations were working to in advance of any involvement. She was then able to emphasise how more effective engagement could impact on these.

A member of the force also felt that a clear focus on KPIs often 'drives' work. In this way, worthwhile projects that are not perceived as clearly related to an existing target may either not be undertaken, or regarded with less importance.

An authority member highlighted a further issue. They felt that the lack of clarity around organisational roles in relation to engagement was mirrored in the performance framework. It was proposed that a lack of co-ordination and shared targets and KPIs for partner agencies is another key barrier to multi-agency working on community engagement.

Box 8 Culture and performance management – key insights

- Within police authorities, members will have different views on approaches to community engagement. Those most sceptical of the need to supplement traditional approaches need to be presented with evidence of the success of a more flexible approach.
- Police authority committees debate and endorse findings from workstreams. To facilitate a process of culture change, it is useful to create more informal, direct working relationships between member champions and authority staff.
- When making an approach to partner agencies about joint working on community engagement, it is advisable to find out which targets and KPIs agencies work towards and emphasise how joint working may impact on these.
- Lack of both a shared definition of community engagement and shared performance indicators can act as a barrier to multi-agency working.

Section 2: Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation considers both outcomes and outputs from the demonstration project. Outcomes are 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 database of engagement contacts produced by the post holder.

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 these.

Objective: Develop a closer, more co-ordinated working relationship with the force. Initiate regular and formalised communication; highlight opportunities for joint working.

The demonstration project has had a variable impact on the working relationship between the Merseyside Police Authority and the force. This is partly explained by the scope of the project and by the wider context in which it operated.

What was the working relationship between the authority and the force before the project?

There were mixed views on the working relationship between the respective parts of the service in relation to community engagement in the period prior to the demonstration project. Authority staff felt the two organisations had always attempted to work together at a strategic level, and some members felt there had always been a good working relationship. Other members felt there had been a lack of co-ordination and joint working between the authority and the force, which had resulted in duplication. Joint working on consultation and community engagement prior to the project was usually focused work around performance indicators. Some members felt they had not always been kept informed of activity by the force.

Force members interviewed perceived there had traditionally been a separate approach to engagement. They also emphasised an occasionally adversarial nature to the relationship prior to the demonstration project, perceiving that the authority prioritised their role in holding the force to account and sometimes seemed to be looking to 'catch the force out', as opposed to working co-operatively. Few interviews with force personnel were undertaken, so these views cannot be widely generalised.

It was also felt by those interviewed in the force that there was little understanding of the role of the authority and this sometimes caused resentment when work was not co-ordinated. This is perhaps because the respective roles of the force and the authority in relation to consultation and community engagement more widely are not well defined. The police authority role is also a difficult one to perform – attempting to balance co-operative working with a responsibility to hold the force to account. Authority staff felt they try to work collaboratively as much as possible, but sometimes reach a point where they have to say "this is what we do".

Has there been strategic impact?

The view from members of the force interviewed was that the demonstration project had been a success for the authority in terms of broadening its range of engagement with the public and that some of this activity had been of benefit to and conducted in partnership with the force. They felt there had been little impact on strategic-level working though and believed the respective roles of the force and the authority on engagement were still unclear in many areas.

There is little evidence of the demonstration project having had a direct strategic impact on co-ordinating community engagement activity between the force and the authority. However, there are several key reasons why this was an unrealistic expectation for the project.

- The project lasted only eighteen months and facilitating strategic-level working can take a long time. The project may have provided a platform for future joint working.
- There has sometimes been a slightly adversarial relationship between the force and the authority, partly due to the authority's independent role. Overcoming a lack of trust in relation to engagement is likely to take longer than the eighteen months of the project.
- The force has undergone a major period of change during the life of the demonstration project. A new Chief Constable has instigated a 'force modernisation' programme which is taking a fresh look at several overarching areas of business, including citizen focus.
- There has not been a role or a department in the force devoted to co-ordinating engagement activity.
- The respective roles of the force and authority in relation to community engagement did not appear clearly defined or agreed.

What has been the impact on relations between the force and the authority?

There is evidence of increased contact during the demonstration project between the authority and the force in relation to community engagement. Some of this can be directly attributed to the project; some may have benefited from the existence of the project.

There appears to have been greater contact between the force Community Relations department and the police authority as a result of the demonstration project. Community Relations now report their activity directly to the authority's Community Safety and Liaison Committee. There have also been engagement events jointly planned and undertaken by this part of the force and the post holder (see section on multi-agency engagement events, below). The success in this area seems to have occurred for two main reasons:

- the work of the Community Relations department corresponds most closely to a key focus of the demonstration project – engaging with minority communities; and
- there was an existing working relationship between the post holder and members of the Community Relations department.

Also during the life of the demonstration project, a protocol was agreed between the authority and the force for nominated members to meet on a monthly basis with BCU commanders. Community engagement is to be a standard agenda item for these update and feedback meetings. There was a feeling among authority and force staff interviewed that the demonstration project had helped to change the attitudes of some authority members in relation to engagement and joint working. So, although the BCU/member meetings were not directly brokered by the post holder, several people felt that the development having occurred during the life of the project was 'not entirely coincidental'.

Authority staff were able to cite other examples of increased contact with the force as a result of the project. This included instances of force personnel (for example, a Communications Officer) hearing about the project and contacting the post holder to explore how their work could better link up. Since the end of the demonstration project period, contact between the post holder in her expanded role and the force modernisation team has increased. The post holder now has a named contact in each BCU with responsibility for citizen-focus issues and meetings are held regularly.

Objective: Develop a clear idea, through mapping, of community engagement Merseyside, and of the specific nature of engagement within two specified BCUs.

It was agreed early in the project that mapping community engagement across Merseyside was not a realistic task for the post holder to perform. One key problem with the task was that few agencies appeared to have a clear idea of what engagement activity they themselves

were undertaking. If there is no co-ordination and mapping of engagement activity within partner agencies, the task of mapping and co-ordinating activity across a region becomes nearly impossible.

The post holder is currently working in partnership with Knowsley Council for Voluntary Services and the force modernisation team in an attempt to map activity in the Knowsley area. This may act as a model for other areas to adopt.

Instead of mapping activity Merseywide, the post holder attempted to map engagement activity in two of the force's Basic Command Units: St Helens and Knowsley. This task also proved to be beyond the scope of the project. Initially, a successful relationship was developed with neighbourhood teams in the relevant BCUs and information was fed back to the post holder. However, the post holder reported that, as a result of new priorities arising from the force modernisation programme, this reporting was no longer a priority. However, it is recognised that most major engagement activities to take place in neighbourhoods are reported on the force website.

Objective: Use multi-agency focus groups to engage with communities identified as not previously engaged. Use the information to plan more effective future engagement with these groups, using a co-ordinated, multi-agency strategy.

Community profiling

A degree of informal community profiling work was undertaken by the police authority as part of their Best Value Review. This resulted in several specific groups being identified as under-represented in the authority's engagement activity (see Section 1).

As part of the demonstration project, the MPA were given access to a community profiling software package – MOSAIC, developed by Experian. The post holder and Communications Team did not undertake any further profiling work during the course of the project, or use the MOSAIC software.

The decision not to use the community profiling software was in part due to reservations about the accuracy and usefulness of this type of tool. Those involved in the demonstration project were wary of a tool that relies to some extent on census data, as they felt that this is more likely to exclude certain vulnerable groups. The Communications Team did not rule out making use of the tool in the future if it was considered to be fit for purpose.

The multi-agency community engagement events

The multi-agency focus groups were perceived as a success by police authority members, staff, and those involved from partner agencies. No specific evaluation work was possible to determine the views of community members who participated; informal feedback received by those involved in the project suggested attendees were generally happy with the events.

The events were tailored to the needs and preferences of the groups targeted. They were intended to explore how members of these groups would prefer to be engaged in the future.

Box 9 Outcomes from the multi-agency focus groups

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered community – three dedicated meetings are to be held per year for this community as part of the MPA’s programme of forums. Attendees at the multi-agency event specified that they would appreciate engagement by more innovative methods, as their community is not a geographic one. They were also concerned about confidentiality and reprisals, so dedicated forum meetings must be well planned and in suitable venues. They also wanted police statistics to become more detailed and more easily accessible.

People with disabilities – the preference from people with disabilities was for engagement via e-mail or the internet, followed by fairly equal support for a range of methods – specific, targeted discussion groups; regular forums; street surveys and postal surveys.

Asylum seekers and refugees – these groups indicated they would prefer to be engaged in the future using the same method – a specific meeting or event held in a familiar venue where the community gathers and facilitated by independent, non-police personnel.

Older people – members of the Senior Citizens’ panel felt that forum meetings are too formal for some older people and are inaccessible, especially for those who do not like to go out at night. They said it was best to engage with older people in areas they already attend, such as supermarkets or post offices, or via agencies such as Age Concern’s ‘Good Neighbour Scheme’, or housing providers.

Young people – youngsters who took part in a focus group at Croxteth Comprehensive School showed a preference for using technology for future engagement and feedback. Young gay and lesbian people also showed a preference for technology, but said that in the immediate term specialist forums held at suitable times, in safe venues, were most realistic.

Racial minority communities – only a group held at the Hindu temple explored future engagement methods. This community said they would be happiest with similar dedicated forums at community venues.

A key transferable outcome of the focus group work was the evidence that the police authority played a useful ‘gateway’ role. Some of the communities targeted by the focus groups are those likely to have a history of poor relations with the police. It was clear that the post holder – as an authority employee with a background in diversity and community engagement – was able to easily develop trust and build relationships. This may pave the way for the force to engage with some of these groups in the future.

How have the events been followed up?

The grass roots-level organisations approached by the MPA welcomed the interest the authority was showing in engaging with them. Initial trust was easy to establish due to the post holder being well known and respected by these organisations. This trust was quickly built on to deliver a range of community events that were seen as appropriate in methodology and subject matter. All partner representatives interviewed for the evaluation regarded the events as well run and useful.

The post holder ensured that feedback from the initial events was given through agreed channels and in agreed formats. For example, a follow-up forum was held at the Hindu temple a short time after the initial forum. Feedback on the events with the disabled community was provided by a newsletter; feedback from the events with asylum seekers and refugees was provided by Asylum Link staff, who also handed out translated Recommendation 61 information cards.

However, there was some concern expressed amongst the community organisations about whether these were just one-off events or whether they will be the basis for ongoing engagement. Although feedback was provided on what the MPA has taken from the meetings with these groups, feedback on how the authority has used the information to further develop

engagement has sometimes been slow to appear. This is probably because the authority has not been able to make these key strategic decisions in such a short period of time.

A key learning point is the need to manage the expectations of partner agencies and groups. When new relationships are brokered, communities and organisations – especially those that have felt neglected in the past – may expect instant ongoing engagement. If resources are not available to provide this, authorities need to be very clear with partners and groups as to exactly what they can expect from them. If this is not done, the success of the initial engagement can actually turn out to be counter-productive, as groups may be less inclined to trust and engage in the future.

The MPA is building on its successes to try to ensure that engagement is more strategic and ongoing. A commitment has been made to adapt its current engagement activities to be flexible and responsive to the findings of the demonstration project. The authority has also been working to a new communications and engagement strategy.

Objective: Make MAG/JAGs aware of the Citizen Focus Project. Map engagement undertaken by these groups. Identify opportunities for joint working.

The Merseyside Multi-agency Group was formed specifically to deal with issues arising from Recommendation 61 of the inquiry into the death of Stephen Lawrence. It is a group with an operational policing focus, and stakeholders in the police authority see it as very 'police dominated'. The post holder made a presentation to the MAG early in the life of the demonstration project, with the aim of interesting the group in acting as a co-ordinating body for community engagement in Merseyside.

There is clear evidence that the MAG was not the appropriate multi-agency forum for progressing the demonstration project. There are a number of reasons for this, including the initial observation that the MAG had more of a specific, operational focus, as opposed to concentrating on community engagement at a more general level. The post holder felt strongly that the group (and one or two of its key members in particular) were also extremely focused on working towards key performance indicators. She felt the fact that the demonstration project did not appear to focus specifically on key indicators relevant to MAG resulted in it being dismissed from the outset.

Joint Action Groups feed into the MAG and are numerous on Merseyside. They are also extremely operational in their focus. The type of information generated through engagement by these groups is of less relevance to the police authority. Staff at the authority concluded that there was no value in trying to progress the project via the MAG and JAGs.

There were some positive outcomes of the presentation to MAG. Although as a body they did not contribute to the project, the presentation did arouse interest in specific agencies represented at the MAG – particularly the Fire Service – and this resulted in direct work between the police authority and these agencies. The post holder felt that, with hindsight, the project should have pursued the MAG route more vigorously. Others felt it was simply an inappropriate vehicle.

Objective: Develop a more co-ordinated relationship with CDRPs. Identify opportunities for joint working and develop service-level agreements with audit co-ordinators for exchange of information. Develop joint questionnaires.

The post holder also made a direct approach to the five Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in Merseyside. The partnerships were not generally responsive to this approach and did not take up invitations to discuss joint working at a strategic level. The demonstration project did reflect some success in relation to this objective, although progress was relatively slow. The real benefits of the work were only beginning to manifest themselves towards the end of the project.

The post holder was not successful initially in engaging CDRPs at a senior level. She was extremely successful in using existing contacts with the Hate Crime Reduction and Domestic Violence working groups to develop joint working with two CDRPs – Liverpool and Sefton – in a bottom-up way. Presentations to these groups resulted in them becoming involved in the relevant multi-agency focus groups. The work with these CDRPs, initially at least, concentrated on the priority areas for engagement identified by the authority's Best Value Review.

The level of involvement with CDRPs grew during the course of the project and really took off towards the end of the eighteen-month period. The work is continuing and is likely to expand more rapidly as the post holder's role develops further. The MPA are currently developing protocols with Liverpool and Sefton CDRPs for sharing information in all areas of business, not just those of the original focus groups. In Liverpool, a member of the Citysafe partnership has developed a simple template for recording engagement activity, to avoid duplication by other agency members. The work of the demonstration project was fed into this.

The post holder felt there were several possible reasons for the lack of progress with CDRPs at the strategic level.

- Existing relationships between the police authority and agency partners were mixed.
- Often police authority members did not see the benefits of linking up with CDRPs and the authority was sometimes under-represented at meetings. A senior police authority member agreed with this assessment to some extent, saying police authorities can see themselves as different to CDRPs and operate in a slightly 'stand-offish' way.
- The police authority was sometimes viewed as a less serious partner by other agencies. This may be a result of authorities not initially being statutory members of CDRPs.
- CDRPs tend to have different structures and operate in different ways, so a single strategy for linking up is unlikely to be successful.
- Performance indicators – CDRPs work to specific targets and any work not seen as directly contributing to this is viewed as 'extra' work, as opposed to an opportunity to co-ordinate and make savings.

Some authority members suggested that lack of interaction between the authority and CDRPs is a two-way thing. They said it could be difficult to get information from CDRPs, or to be aware of what they are doing. They suggested this may be to do with them wishing to retain independence. Local politics and personalities were mentioned by half the members interviewed as a potential barrier to multi-agency working.

Strategic multi-agency working involving CDRPs appears to have improved during the course of the project. The new authority Chair has provided fresh impetus for working at a strategic partnership level. With the encouragement and support of the post holder, he has encouraged members to become more involved in CDRPs. The MPA is now involved in a pilot project on accountability in Knowsley, sponsored by the Association of Police Authorities. The post holder believes this will act as a model for working in other CDRP areas. She is feeding in ideas and practice from the ongoing work in Liverpool and Sefton. It is also possible that the Knowsley work will experiment with the co-ordination of police authority and local authority forums.

Objective: MPA to play a key role in improving the Independent Advisor's Group, so that it has a new structure and reports regularly to the MPA. 'Sell' IAG to the police service.

The IAG was underutilised in Merseyside prior to the demonstration project. The post holder took responsibility for attempting to reinvigorate and refocus the activity of the group and for promoting its use by the force. This was achieved by:

- providing the group with an effective chair; and
- making it clear to the force what the role of the IAG was – when it should be involved and for what purpose.

Involvement with the IAG appeared to have been partly the result of the post holder's previous working relationships with members of this group and the Community Relations department of the force. It is clear that the demonstration project has been of benefit in allowing the police authority to exert some influence over the IAG. The group has engaged with the Citizen Focus project specifically, as represented by the post holder. The scope of the IAG has expanded during the course of the project. They now work at neighbourhood level, with each area having a Community Engagement Group and a Key Individuals Network. The post holder helped to explain the role of these groups to the wider force.

The IAG is now routinely used by the force to provide advice on sensitive operations. For example, they were involved from the outset in the response to the racist murder of Anthony Walker which occurred during the life of the demonstration project. The authority's Community Safety and Liaison Committee are formally kept informed of the IAG's activities by the force Community Relations department.

Objective: Developing a multi-agency approach to Recommendation 61 and a toolkit for engaging with racial minority groups.

The multi-agency approach to Recommendation 61 has developed as much as the wider multi-agency work associated with the demonstration project. The post holder has made engagement around this issue an integral part of all the relevant multi-agency focus groups and forums, specifically those with the Hindu community, asylum seekers and refugees, and young people.

The post holder produced a more general 'framework' for community engagement. There has been a gradual handover of responsibility for facilitating engagement events from the post holder to other members of the team, and the toolkit is being utilised. The framework provides a 'menu of options' and specific practical requirements for each engagement mechanism. In this way, members can decide what engagement mechanism is the most appropriate for a specific need, and staff can see exactly what they need to do to facilitate this.

Objective: Taking a strategic approach to Police and Community Forums.

Police and Community Forums are the traditional open public meetings that many police authorities have used as their principal form of community engagement. In Merseyside their perceived shortcomings were recognised in a Best Value Review. Authority members felt that they were not the best method of 'consultation', though they were a positive engagement with people. However, it was also recognised that attendees were self-selecting and not representative of the wider community. The demonstration project was intended to take a strategic view of forums and make them more attractive to the public.

The post holder undertook a year-long evaluation of forum meetings. Some of the learning from this work was used to improve the authority's approach to forums as the project progressed. The evaluation work confirmed the findings of the Best Value Review in relation to who attends forum meetings. This accords with findings of national research on this subject¹:

- forums were not engaging anybody from minority ethnic communities;
- meetings were attended by mainly older people (the majority aged over 60);
- people with disabilities were under-represented; and
- a high percentage of attendees were already involved in Neighbourhood Watch or Residents' Associations and were familiar with the police authority.

The post holder also identified several problems with the way in which forums operated in Merseyside, which possibly contributed to the profile of attendees.

¹ See Myhill *et al.* (2003) *The role of police authorities in public engagement*. London: Home Office Online Report 37/03

- Meetings were held at the convenience of the authority, not the community. There was often no cultural sensitivity in planning meeting times – they would clash with religious festivals and various other events.
- Meetings were not generally held in accessible venues. There was no provision for people with disabilities, such as wheelchair access.
- Translation or interpretation services were not provided in areas with high racial minority populations.
- Meetings were not well advertised; promotional material was bland and the existing database of contacts was not well developed.

A more general problem with public meetings is fear of reprisal from criminals if citizens are perceived to be co-operating with the police. The post holder felt this to be the main reason for poor attendance in some areas of Merseyside.

The project has had a clear impact on the authority's forum meetings in that they are now more accessible and available to a wider cross-section of community members. According to the post holder, this has resulted in marginally increased attendances. Evidence from the multi-agency focus groups shows that some communities targeted by the improvements in forum arrangements (disabled people, and vulnerable minority ethnic communities) do not necessarily wish to be engaged by this method. When there was a preference for a public meeting, it was usually a specific, targeted one.

A potential future impact of the work associated with the demonstration project would be a change in members' attitudes to the utility of forum meetings. The success of more targeted forums and unresolved issues around resources for engagement raise questions over the provision of a significant number of more general forums. These meetings require a significant resource to administer. One possible solution to this tension, favoured by some authority members and staff, is the closer co-ordination or amalgamation of the forum's with those of partner agencies – both of which cover issues of community safety to some degree. This situation has been looked at before in Merseyside and continues to be looked at. Authority staff feel that some areas are more receptive to the idea than others and that the individuals involved in each area may ultimately dictate whether or not this occurs.

Objective: Capacity building within the authority's Communications Team; transfer of skills and working practices from the post holder.

There is evidence that the post holder has had a positive impact on the capacity to engage of the Communications Team at Merseyside police authority. This can be seen in two key areas.

- **Training** – the post holder has provided training on community engagement techniques and methods to other members of the team. This role is being extended to include the training of police authority members.
- **Database of contacts** – the post holder – both through her background and through the work of the project – has vastly expanded the network of contacts available to the police authority. This has been developed into a database to act as an ongoing resource to support the work of the Communications Team.

The demonstration project also appears to have had an effect on the flexibility of working practices in the authority in order that the increased capacity of the team is utilised. For example, the post holder has conducted media interviews, which was not usual before the project.

Objective: Share effective practice and learning between agencies involved in consultation.

As mentioned earlier, the post holder has developed a reciprocal relationship for sharing information on effective practice with certain agencies. In particular, the relationship formed with MerseyTravel has been beneficial to the authority, as this agency has been developing

its engagement strategy and approaches for a number of years. This relationship helped the post holder to provide the authority with evidence that effective engagement takes time and a dedicated resource to develop.

It appears that networking and information sharing has been most effective with agencies who have a post dedicated to developing community engagement – principally the Fire Service and MerseyTravel.

The post holder also fed learning from the project to the multi-agency subgroup of the National Practitioner Panel for Community Engagement in Policing. A force-led citizen focus 'fair' was recently held on Merseyside. The police authority was invited to have a stall, from which the post holder distributed copies of the panel's 'guide' to community engagement.

As mentioned above, the post holder also produced during the project a 'framework' for community engagement, which included advice on many different mechanisms. As well as developing staff internally, this has been used by several partner agencies and other practitioners who have independently contacted the post holder about the project.

Objective: Making a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to community engagement part of the core business of MPA

Interviews with police authority members suggest there has always been a commitment to engaging the community in Merseyside. However, evaluation of the demonstration project suggests that that this commitment was in some cases narrowly defined and the work of the authority was not effective in engaging a wide range of people. There is a sense that the project has helped to move the organisation out of a 'comfort zone' of engagement with a narrow section of the community, using only traditional methods.

The demonstration project has had the biggest impact on the capacity and willingness of the authority to make engagement with all sections of the community a mainstream working requirement. The authority has started to put in place the practical infrastructure to allow this to occur.

Planning for the future

Merseyside Police Authority has shown commitment to the community engagement agenda by securing an internal reallocation of funds to retain the post holder and further develop her role. This demonstrates its commitment to mainstreaming the findings from the project.

As well as taking more specific responsibility for diversity and equality issues, the police authority would like the post holder to focus on the more strategic aspects of engagement – including partnership work with CDRPs and Local Strategic Partnerships. Work is under way to produce a minimum level of engagement for the authority and a five year plan of major engagement events. These are likely to take place on a rolling, thematic basis.

The Communications Team has produced an overall communications strategy that includes this work. There is also an intention to create internal performance indicators for community engagement. The post holder is producing a community engagement strategy designed to hit the authority's key aims. This will go to authority members for discussion.

What issues still remain?

The evaluation of the demonstration project suggests there is a mainstreamed commitment to community engagement in Merseyside Police Authority, which the project has helped to sharpen and become more prominent. The authority made considerable progress during the demonstration project period, especially around the widening of the scope of engagement. There is also an emerging strategy for progressing further with a co-ordinated, multi-agency approach to engagement. There are three key factors that may affect this progress.

- **Lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities.** This is currently an issue for every police authority, as the police reform agenda further develops. There does not appear to be agreement in Merseyside as to which roles should be played by the force and the authority in relation to engaging communities and this can cause tension between the two organisations. The authority has to balance a strategic, monitoring role and its own hands-on engagement and independence. The roles and responsibilities between the police service and other partners are also unclear; this is also not a problem specific to Merseyside. The increased involvement with CDRPs favoured by the authority Chair may go some way to overcoming this.
- **Allocation of resources.** Some of the multi-agency work undertaken by the post holder has involved 'piggy-backing' and levering in resources from partners; other work has been funded from the demonstration project. Now that the specific funding for the project has ended, the authority intends to find a way to balance its existing commitment to community forum meetings with a commitment to continuing the flexible types of engagement initiated by the post holder.
- **Pace of organisational change.** The pace of culture change is slow in many organisations. Merseyside Police Authority has made significant progress during the demonstration project, but the process is ongoing. Much of the work undertaken by the demonstration project has been a success, particularly the work with minority communities. However, this is only really the start of the process. Now that the authority has made initial contact with groups and asked them how they wish to maintain this relationship, expectations have been raised. It is vital that the authority now manages expectations and delivers on its promises. If the organisational change required to facilitate delivery – be it resource allocation, or better links with partners – is not sufficiently swift, there is a risk that momentum, confidence, and trust will be lost.

Did the demonstration project achieve its overall aim?

The overall aim of the Merseyside demonstration project was to promote a more strategic and multi-agency approach to community engagement and consultation on policing and community safety issues.

The impact of the demonstration project on this overarching aim has been mixed. The project had a clear impact on 'bottom-up' multi-agency engagement; it had less initial impact at a top-down, strategic level. However, it is acknowledged that the eighteen-month period of the demonstration project was insufficient to facilitate the strategic impact that was originally envisioned. Strategic impacts were beginning to be realised towards the end of the project and it has helped to lay the foundations for a more strategic approach to be mainstreamed in the future.

A strategic approach to multi-agency engagement

The post holder attempted to initiate a strategic approach to multi-agency working through two principal channels: the Merseyside Multi-agency Group and the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Neither of these approaches achieved the objective during the life of the project, though work with CDRPs is ongoing and may have more of an impact as the post holder's role is developed and mainstreamed.

'Bottom-up' multi-agency engagement

Due to the relative lack of progress at a strategic level, the post holder pursued multi-agency working in a bottom-up way. This mainly involved using her existing network of contacts to initiate joint working directly, without the involvement of more senior figures. It was hoped that success at the grass roots level would persuade authority members of the value of a multi-agency approach and generate support for developing links at the strategic level – this appears to have been the case.

The post holder was very successful in developing relationships with individual agencies, particularly in the voluntary and community sector (see section on multi-agency engagement events, above). In some cases, these relationships were to facilitate specific events, with the option to use networks and contacts to arrange further events or distribute information in the future. In other cases – particularly the Fire Service and 'MerseyTravel' – the relationship appears more ongoing, with a sharing of approaches and methods, as well as feedback.

The advantage of a bottom-up approach is that it can achieve 'quick wins' – rapid progress can be made without having to secure high level buy-in. The key disadvantage is that this type of working tends to be personality-driven or based on existing contacts and relationships. This can lead to engagement occurring in an uneven way. It is also less likely to be sustained – relationships, if not formalised, can easily disappear if one or more key players move on.

This rapid, bottom-up engagement has significantly increased the police authority's 'database' of contacts. The post holder has ensured that this information exists physically, so that any future holder of a similar role would not have to begin this process again from scratch. Authority staff feel the database is a major strategic output from the project, as it will allow them to target communications more effectively and also undertake 'quick' consultation if there is a recognised need. If this is to be done, feedback to the agencies involved becomes even more crucial, or there can be a one-sided feel to the relationship.

How will a strategic approach to multi-agency working be most likely to succeed?

The key messages to come out of the demonstration project in relation to multi-agency working is that it is perfectly possible to initiate very useful joint working in a 'bottom-up' way, using existing and newly acquired contacts. However, joint working is more likely to be developed and sustained if there is high level support and facilitation. The police authority was happy to achieve 'quick wins' in relation to bottom-up contacts and engagement, believing that this would facilitate progress at the strategic level to ensure these links are mainstreamed and sustained. As a result of this, they have committed to funding the post holder's role on a permanent basis. It is intended that the post holder will increasingly operate at a more strategic level as the role further develops.

Box 10 Barriers and success factors for multi-agency working

- High level support and involvement is required to initiate strategic multi-agency working.
- Local politics and personalities can still be a barrier to multi-agency working; stakeholders may be keen to keep control of their traditional 'domains'.
- Partners may see the benefit of joint working but be concerned about maintaining the identity and profile of their respective agencies.
- The different 'roles' and responsibilities of partner agencies are often either not clear to all partners or not clearly defined and agreed.
- Many agencies are strongly focused on delivering to performance indicators – any possible influence the proposed work may have on these must be demonstrated.
- Resources are an issue – although these may be maximised in the long term, in the short term an agency has to be prepared to lead on a piece of work and ensure delivery.
- Multi-agency working on community engagement is more likely to succeed if it is 'mainstreamed' in all partner agencies.

Assessment – is it a useful role?

The Merseyside demonstration project has had a number of notable successes. In particular, stakeholders in both the authority and the force are agreed that the authority has a much greater capacity to engage with a wide range of community groups than it did prior to the project. The post holder has helped to change attitudes among authority staff and members and has provided the authority with a wealth of new contacts and relationships with partner agencies and groups.

This role was originally intended to operate at a more strategic level than it has. A danger was that the post holder would be drawn into delivery of hands on engagement, and this was observed. However, it can be argued that this was necessary to create the capacity for the authority to then progress at a more strategic partnership level. It can also be argued that the context in which the project operated steered the post holder initially down a less strategic route.

The context within which a post holder operates is crucial. In particular, any authority wishing to trial a similar role might want to ask itself the following questions.

- Is there agreement among authority members on the role that the authority should play in relation to community engagement? Does strategic, multi-agency working have the support of the most senior people?
- Is there agreement between the authority and the force as to what their respective roles should be in relation to community engagement? Is there any clear picture of what the force is doing in relation to engagement?

If the answer to these questions is 'no', then it would be extremely difficult for a post holder to deliver a strategic, multi-agency working brief. The evaluation of this project suggests that senior buy-in and support is crucial for multi-agency relationships to be brokered from the top down. If this support is not there, a 'bottom-up' approach may initially be required.

This has an impact on the type of individual that should be recruited for this role. The post holder in the Merseyside demonstration project had the necessary skills to work at grass roots level and the existing contacts to find ways into organisations that were not brokered at a senior level. As it progressed, high level interest and support for the project appeared. It is too early to suggest how successful the retained and developed role of the post holder will be at taking the work forward at a more strategic level. Certainly it will require more of a mixture of strategic and community development skills to further develop this work.

A role such as this also requires flexible working within the authority itself. The post holder must be given access to all levels of the organisation in order to generate support and enthusiasm and act as a cultural change agent. The role was enhanced by the post holder being able to work directly with supportive members of the authority.

The project has certainly shown the value of having a resource dedicated to community engagement. The agencies in Merseyside with such dedicated posts were almost always the agencies best equipped to work at a multi-agency level. This is apparent at both a cultural level – it reflects a commitment to engagement as a mainstream activity – and a practical level, in that joint work is most likely to operate effectively if somebody has direct responsibility for it.