

Safer Future Communities evaluation- Headlines March 2013

The Safer Future Communities Local networks

Given limited funding (c. £5K per network), a pressured timescale (12 months), the diversity and size of the Police regions, the lack of public awareness of the advent of the police and crime commissioners (PCCs), cuts in the voluntary, community, and social enterprise (VCSE) funding especially in England, and very rapid changes in the VCSE sector environment, in relation to their relationship with government, the Safer Future Communities project has been surprisingly effective:

- In all of the 42 police areas, Safer Future Communities networks were developed that raised awareness in the VCSE sector of the advent of the police and crime commissioners through emails, bulletins, information, meetings etc
- These Safer Future Communities networks are extremely diverse, and varying in strength and development, reflecting whether the networks:
 - had already started prior to the Safer Future Communities project and had pre-existing engagement with key local stakeholders;
 - the different levels of network leadership and commitment;
 - structural factors such as whether the police area was coterminous with other agency boundaries, and involved only a few local authorities that already co-operated
 - the levels of support available to the network
 - and whether VCSE infrastructure agencies had existing structures that helped them work together
- These Safer Future Communities networks have:
 - built or further developed positive relationships with key local community safety stakeholders, and sometimes promoted more effective working between the VCSE sector, Community Safety Partnerships, PCCs and other statutory agencies that impact upon community safety
 - made some limited progress towards the development of strong, well profiled, confident and sustainable networks which have wider VCSE sector legitimacy, though most of the more robust networks have been built on pre-existing networks, rather than the new ones
 - influenced community safety issues and VCSE sector role in delivery being reflected in the PCC manifestos and in the debates before the election, including advocating on behalf of excluded groups. These influences are starting to be reflected in the PCCs' Police and Crime Plans
 - mostly managed to engage local VCSE criminal justice and community safety organisations, often linking them for the first time with local VCSE infrastructure organisations and the wider VCSE Sector.
- In all of the 42 police areas network links were made with the PA Transition teams, and often existing links strengthened with Community Safety Partnerships, and some new links made with the Probation service and Health and Wellbeing boards
- 87% of Networks ran PCC hustings events for both the VCSE sector and the public
- 82% met with declared PCC candidates in the run up to the election
- Since the PCC elections, 93% of Safer Future Communities networks have met their PCC and most are engaging their networks in reviewing their PCC's draft plan
- Over 75% of networks believe they have influenced the thinking and approach of their PCC in relation to the involvement of the VCSE sector in the delivery of local services;
- All offices of the PCCs (OPCC) contacted through questionnaires and interviews (55% of OPCCs) felt it would be critically or quite importance to work in partnership with local VCSE organisations in next year
- In many areas, the networks have provided a useful conduit for the PCCs to talk to the VCSE sector where they would otherwise have failed to, or would have considered the task too onerous to undertake. Network effectiveness varies from being at the strategic heart of the changes with good evidence of engaging both the VCSE sector, PCC candidates and the statutory sector, to very patchy effectiveness, and bare existence as an electronic list
- There has been a tension between achieving good local VCSE sector engagement and representation and strategic influence- two sides of same coin but no capacity for both in most networks

- Achieving diversity and good representation of the VCSE sector is a challenge for newly formed networks though some networks put considerable resources into listening to less heard voices
- London and the 4 Welsh Safer Future Communities networks had extra local development support to get off the ground and they and their local stakeholders have valued this greatly
- A third of the networks, most but not all based on pre-existing networks, in areas where the PCC and their team are very aware of the potential role their network can play, are now working closely with their PCC and will be strongly involved in developing the commissioning framework and in their delivery plan
- There is significant learning about what works in setting up these networks and building these new partnerships and some of the issues involved
- Some emergent networks have used the small amount of investment to make significant strides forward to establishing a more robust and more strategically placed network that represents the views of the VCSE sector in crime prevention and community safety. However the influence of the networks will not fully be realised until 2014-15 financial year when PCCs will have more flexibility to re-design, de-commission, and tender new services.
- Due to the government commitment to radical changes in the nature of government and a redefining the relationship between government and the voluntary sector involving reforming public services, the networks are starting to be thought of as potential channels for the VCSE organisations working in the fields of criminal justice and community safety, to support the PCC and the public health agendas, to provide a co-ordinated point of contact and information, to help develop the commissioning frameworks, and to reach the hard-to-engage.

The police and crime commissioners

The PCCs are also very diverse, and very pressured to complete their plans. Following the elections, it appears that the key factors influencing network development, and the opportunities or otherwise of the individual networks to engage the VCSE sector with their PCC, or influence their thinking, are the PCC's (and their team's):

- approach to offenders, and crime and its prevention
- knowledge about, and experience and valuing of the VCSE sector
- approach to commissioning, procurement and grant aid
- perspective on VCSE sector engagement roles whether as strategic partners from the earliest possible stages of planning in developing the commissioning frameworks, or as delivery agents

Thus quite underdeveloped Safer Future Communities networks or VCSE sector are being asked to play key roles, and some quite developed Safer Future Communities networks are finding it difficult to get access to their PCCs; all engagement now is on PCC terms.

The National Safer Future Communities project

- There is recognition from both national and local VCSE organisations, key players in government and the national bodies (ACPO; APCC; APACE) that without the Safer Future Communities project, VCSE sector would have been little involved in the elections and would often have not featured in the manifestos and plans of the PCCs
- These wider stakeholders mainly acknowledge that the project and the networks definitely provided a focus for local VCSE organisations who might otherwise have not engaged with the PCC agenda,
- It is difficult for outside agencies to see the project as a whole but generally, Safer Future Communities is seen as a useful vehicle to raise awareness and engagement with PCCs, making a case for VCSE sector involvement to the PCCs, and potentially more widely
- There was general valuing of the role of the Safer Future Communities' work in helping the VCSE sector to prepare for the coming of the PCCs, building mutual support and co-ordinating work at a national level, and influencing key stakeholders thinking about the PCCs

- The national delivery partners worked well together and links have been made that are likely to be maintained to provide more of a co-ordinated national strategic voice, building links with the national bodies, and promoting support for local specialist groups linked to the networks
- The briefings and resources developed by the delivery partnership were greatly valued by the national reference group partners; the networks rated the newsletters and briefings and access to specific team support highly; the brand Safer Future Communities gained considerable coverage on the web and through social media, with all of the OPCCs contacted (55%) recognising 'Safer Future Communities'
- The wider reference partnership brought together almost all of the key national VCSE criminal justice and community safety organisations, involving both offender and victim focussed organisations. In developing a joint VCSE sector offer to the PCCs, for the first time the dichotomy between victims and offenders was overcome and this may be one of the most important legacies of the Safer Future Communities project
- There was considerable value in this wider group developing the sector offer to the PCCs and co-ordinating their work though there is limited evidence about the offer's influence;
- The national partnership was a requirement of the Home Office's Safer Future Communities tender, but there is quite a strong view that the funding might have been better spent in Clinks holding the contact and subcontracting aspects of work to the current delivery partners. This would have released quite considerable funds either for additional development support, as in London and Wales, or additional funding for the networks
- PCCs were a new and politically sensitive policy development so the Safer Future Communities project was subject to quite considerable pressures due to changes in Home Office policy and emphasis which diverted time and energy from the work; however with the advent of the Crown Representative for the VCSE in the Cabinet Office the policy landscape is becoming more supporting, and the visibility and salience of the project and the networks developing

The Future

- The phrase that many of those interviewed from all stakeholder groups used when asked whether the project had enabled the VCSE Sector to make their case to the local PCC was that it was '*too big an ask*'.
- Interviewees noted that local networks do take time to develop especially since many of the Safer Future Communities networks have been engaging with these issues for the first time, with very limited resources, and over a tight timescale;
- A few (c7) networks have guaranteed funding from their PCC for next year; some networks will continue at a low level of engagement funding their work from reserves, but many will become relatively inactive without further support and resourcing
- The sustainability of the local networks will be hard to achieve without longer term national and local support and resources. Based on the evidence, it is highly unlikely much work will continue beyond the life of the Safer Future Communities project unless the networks can secure funding.
- Clinks have encouraged local organisations to consider collaboration as a more effective solution than competition, particularly as resources continue to diminish. In areas where the networks are more fragile, this cultural shift is unlikely to become embedded without continued support and encouragement from the sub sector national partners and others to do so

Our **recommendations** are that taking account of the rapidly changing environment and the opportunities the networks can offer, the Home Office, the Cabinet Office and the Ministry of Justice consider positively a proposal to ensure some continuing national resources to the Safer Future Communities networks focusing on information provision and support for network development; also to encourage the PCCs in clear commissioning guidance of ways in which commissioners can help the VCS overcome obstacles to winning contracts, including recommending a mixed economy of grants and contracts, being Compact compliant and offering capacity building resources to them as part of strengthening the supply chain.

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