

Tackling organised crime through a partnership approach at the local level: a process evaluation

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Background

In 2010 the Home Office set up an initiative to engage Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) across England and Wales in exploring how local partnership working could be used to more effectively tackle organised crime. This report presents the main findings from a process evaluation undertaken of the 12 pilot sites included in this initiative.

Our understanding of what works in relation to tackling organised crime is limited to a handful of studies focused on police-based responses to particular aspects of organised crime (e.g. people trafficking). However, the range of activity committed by organised criminals is extensive and the effects are dealt with by a range of local and national level partners and organisations.

There is evidence to suggest that partnership working can be an effective component of initiatives to tackle complex crime and disorder problems (Berry et al., 2011). There is, however, no published evidence specifically on the deployment of multi-agency approaches to tackling organised crime.

Approach to evaluation

In April 2010 an evaluation was established to evaluate the 12 pilots included in the initiative, and to investigate the role that local partnerships can play in tackling organised crime. The aims of the evaluation were:

- to understand and describe how partnerships were established;

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Keywords

Partnerships
Organised crime
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- to identify key elements of the partnership approach to tackling organised crime and describe how they were undertaken; and
 - to explore stakeholders' perceptions of the mechanisms necessary for information sharing.
- In the majority of areas the police were described as being responsible for driving the pilots forward in the early stages of implementation. However, a common perception expressed by interviewees in all roles was that in order for the pilots to be sustainable, an equal balance of responsibility needed to be achieved across partners as the process matured.

All pilot sites were asked to nominate a police lead and a CSP lead to implement the approach. The areas were supported during implementation through Action Learning sets¹ which ran from April to December 2010. No funding was provided to the areas involved and no single approach to implementation was advocated by the Home Office.

A total of 57 interviews were completed with police and partnership leads, analysts and partner agencies. Findings from the interviews were analysed and triangulated with documents from areas developed during the pilot and with information collected during the Action Learning sets. The findings of the evaluation are therefore based predominantly on the perceptions of pilot participants, and any assessment of impact is based purely on these perceptions (i.e. the research was not designed to be an outcome evaluation).

Key findings

- Overall, areas predominantly described the local organised crime problem as being made up of gang activity and drug supply. These were commonly perceived to be the most visible manifestations of organised crime at the local level.
- Prior to the implementation of the pilots tackling organised crime was perceived to have been a police-led activity in which partner agencies had little, if any, involvement. There were, however, a handful of areas where partnership arrangements had been in place prior to the pilots; such arrangements included multi-agency case conferencing for gang members as well as ad hoc involvement in particular operations.

- A strong and consistent view expressed by interviewees was that a 'one model fits all' approach was not appropriate when developing responses to such a complex crime area. As a result, the way in which partnership approaches evolved in each site varied considerably. However, each area's approach broadly encompassed the following four components:

- identification of organised crime targets;
- engagement of partners;
- sharing of information between partners; and
- partnership activity based on information that was shared.

- The general approach that areas adopted to develop their partnership arrangements fell into one of four categories: two areas looked to adapting existing partnership structures; four areas introduced new partnership arrangements designed to specifically tackle organised crime; four built partnerships around existing approaches to tackling organised crime; and two areas built the process around existing arrangements for Integrated Offender Management.

Identifying targets

- In all areas, decisions about who to target during the pilot were made by the police and were based on data from the Organised Crime Group Mapping exercise². In most areas sensitive information relating to individuals was removed before it was shared with partners; the level of sensitivity allowed was locally decided.
- Decisions about who to target were most commonly based on the size and nature of organised crime in the local area, the threshold set as to what information could be shared with partner

¹ Action Learning sets were designed to provide peer support for pilot sites throughout the lifetime of the pilot. The focus of the sets was sharing the experiences of those involved in the pilot in order to identify solutions and share good practice across all areas. A library of documentation developed in local areas was also made available to all pilot sites. A small grant-based fund was provided to support travel and subsistence to these meetings.

² Organised Crime Group Mapping is a model that identifies the nature and scale of organised crime nationally. The mapping exercise is focused on the sharing and aggregation of data held by relevant agencies.

organisations, and the role it was felt the partnership could play in tackling organised crime (e.g. disruption and/or enforcement activity). The majority of areas decided to focus on tackling organised crime groups, while one pilot site decided to focus on a number of specific organised criminals and another area focused on a discrete geographical area (a housing estate) which was considered to be of particular concern for organised crime.

Partner engagement

- Across areas a wide range of traditional (i.e. those previously engaged in tackling crime and disorder) and non-traditional partners were engaged in adopting a partnership approach. Partners engaged for the pilot fell into four categories: statutory CSP partners; Local Authority partners; national government partners with local/regional representatives (e.g. United Kingdom Borders Agency) and local non-government partners (including third sector).
- A method of developing a shared understanding of the roles that each partner could play was to run a 'tools and powers' event where partner agencies would come together to discuss the pilot. These events were run by several areas and were perceived to be successful in identifying the roles partners could play, the tools and powers available to them and how they might benefit from involvement in tackling organised crime.
- Almost all partners involved in the pilots identified a range of opportunities that arose as a result of working in partnership to tackle organised crime. These ranged from direct benefits and opportunities (e.g. better information to target individuals) to indirect benefits (e.g. developing a wider network of partners to tackle other crime types).
- Partners involved in enforcement activity based on information shared were able to demonstrate perceived immediate benefits of the approach to their role. In particular, these partners described how information sharing allowed immediate enforcement activity to be undertaken (e.g. using police data on an individual involved in a violent assault to prosecute the same individual for claiming disability allowance).

- Key facilitators identified by areas in developing partner engagement were: ensuring strategic oversight of the partnership process (i.e. the right level of senior level buy-in); strong one-to-one communication and the foundation of pre-existing partnership working. Conversely, a lack of understanding of the aims of pilot, lack of clarity around how each partner could play a role in tackling organised crime and lack of information on the outcomes achieved by the approach were felt to have inhibited partner engagement.

Information sharing

- Deciding on what information-sharing protocols were required was described as being a time-consuming process complicated by the breadth of legislation in place governing each partner engaged in the process.
- Sharing information on organised crime was considered to be a complex process in comparison to more traditional CSP information sharing, not only because information was sensitive but also because many partners had not traditionally been involved in tackling organised crime at the local level. Most pilots, therefore, reported a process of trial and error between partners to identify what information was relevant and how that information could be built upon to inform the use of a partnership approach.
- The type of information that was shared included information about individuals' lifestyles, finances, friends and associates, as well as on previous enforcement activity. This information was cross-referenced with what was available on partners' systems to identify new avenues for activity against targets such as additional personal and business addresses, associates or vehicles. This information was then subsequently used to tailor the approach of partnerships to targeting individuals (either through disruption, enforcement or prevention).
- A common view expressed by areas was that dynamic and ongoing dialogue had to be established between data providers and data users to develop a shared understanding of how the range of information that was available could be used to target organised criminals.

Taking action against targets

- Progress in implementing the pilots was slower than anticipated and at the time of undertaking the interviews most areas were not well developed in terms of undertaking activity to target individuals or groups.
- In particular, identification of partners and the types of information required took longer than expected. However, developing this knowledge was considered by partners to be an understandably time-consuming process in response to a complex problem, and most areas were clear that they would continue implementing the approach as 'business as usual' once the pilots had finished.

Perceived benefits of partnership approach

- Most interviewees identified a number of both realised and potential benefits to adopting a partnership approach. The main benefit described was the ability to take action against organised criminals who would otherwise have a limited response against them either because they were too low-level (and therefore would not be the focus of police action) or because police information alone did not provide any avenues for enforcement or disruption activity.
- In addition, working in partnership was felt to provide opportunities to use available resources more efficiently. Many interviewees outlined how partnership working could contribute to joined up approaches to tackling organised criminals and could provide local areas with a greater range of options to tackle individuals, using the tools and powers available across partners to greatest effect.

Conclusions

This evaluation suggests that it is possible to set up a multi-agency approach to tackling organised crime at the local level and identifies ways in which barriers can be overcome to develop more joined up processes to address both individuals and organised crime groups. It therefore takes us some way towards understanding how partnership working can play a role in addressing the harms and risks posed by organised crime at the local level.

Overall, many interviewees outlined how, prior to the implementation of the pilot sites, an informal boundary existed between the role of police and partners in

tackling organised crime. Implementation of the pilots was perceived to have challenged this acceptance of traditional boundaries and developed an understanding of the role that partnership activity could play. As a result all areas felt that, if implemented effectively, a partnership approach could be more effective than a solely police-based response to tackling organised crime.

The delay in implementation, while a finding in its own right, constrains our understanding of the later stages of development, particularly the nature of operations and activity against organised crime groups. The evaluation therefore provides stronger evidence on the feasibility of setting up a partnership approach and less evidence on its potential effectiveness. However, taken together with the wider literature and evidence on multi-agency working, the study indicates that partnership approaches have the potential to be effective in tackling organised crime at the local level.

Recommendations

A toolkit should be developed for partnerships outlining the roles that different partners can play in tackling organised crime at the local level.

Most areas described how a considerable amount of time was spent identifying what role partners could play in tackling organised crime and crucially what the benefits were for individual agencies in engaging in the approach. A toolkit for partnerships detailing the range of partners that can play a role in tackling different aspects of organised crime at the local level should be developed. The toolkit should outline what information partners can provide, what the benefits of involvement for each organisation are and what tools and powers are available to them.

A standardised information-sharing protocol template should be designed and agreed at the national level which can be adapted for use by local areas.

Work should be commissioned to develop a standardised information-sharing protocol template for the purposes of sharing information on organised criminals which can be adapted to suit local circumstances. This template should be agreed at a national level and should include information on the implications of existing legislation around personalised information sharing for partners sharing information locally in the context of organised crime.

Consideration should be given to undertaking further research to understand how the pilot will be implemented when a partnership approach is rolled out across force areas.

The dilution effect that could occur if a partnership approach is rolled out across force areas, particularly in relation to partner engagement and/or the reduction of capacity to target a larger number of organised crime groups, was considered by pilot areas to be a risk to the sustainability of the approach. Further research should be undertaken to consider how different models of working in this context can be developed.

Further information

Further information is available from
CSPenquiries@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

Glossary of terms

The below sets out a range of terms used throughout the report.

Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO)

An Anti-social Behaviour Order (ASBO) is a civil sanction which can be given to anyone over the age of ten who has committed a number of anti-social offences. They are orders from the court that ban an offender from doing threatening things, hanging out in certain areas or spending time with certain people. An ASBO is effective for a minimum of two years.

Community Safety Partnership (CSP)

Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) are made up of representatives from the police and police authority, the local council, and the fire, health and probation services (the 'responsible authorities'). CSPs were set up as statutory bodies under Sections 5–7 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. The responsible authorities work together to develop and implement strategies to protect their local communities from crime and disorder.

Family Intervention Project (FIP)

FIPs are programmes which aim to reduce anti-social behaviour (ASB) perpetrated by the most anti-social and challenging families, prevent cycles of homelessness due to ASB and achieve positive outcomes for children and young people. FIPs use an 'assertive' and 'persistent' style of working to challenge and support families to address the root causes of their ASB.

Information-sharing protocol

An information-sharing protocol (ISP) provides an agreed framework which underpins the work of partners in the exchange and use of information. It aims to govern the secure use and management of information and outline the processes in place to manage information that is shared.

Integrated Offender Management (IOM)

IOM is based on the principle of end to end offender management. The aim of IOM is to co-ordinate all relevant agencies to deliver interventions for offenders identified as warranting intensive engagement, whatever their statutory status. It also aims to ensure, by support and disruption (of potential further offending), the continued commitment by offenders to engage in interventions offered with the express purpose of reducing further offending.

MAPPA

Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) are a set of statutory arrangements to assess and manage the risk posed by certain sexual and violent offenders. MAPPA bring together the Police, Probation and Prison Services into what is known as the MAPPA Responsible Authority for each MAPPA Area. A number of other agencies are under a duty to co-operate with the Responsible Authority. Offenders eligible for MAPPA are identified and information is gathered and shared about them across relevant agencies. The nature and level of the risk of harm they pose is assessed and a co-ordinated risk management plan is implemented to protect the public.

Organised crime group (OCG)

Organised criminals that work together for the duration of a particular criminal activity or activities are classed as an organised crime group.

Organised Crime Group Mapping

Organised Crime Group Mapping is a model that identifies the nature and scale of organised crime nationally. The mapping exercise is focused on the sharing and aggregation of data held by relevant agencies: Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC); Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA); Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) and the United Kingdom Border Agency (UKBA), (as well as ACPOS for Scotland and Police Service of Northern Ireland for Ireland). This data is used to build up a picture of organised crime at the local, regional and national level. Each individual agency collates information that they hold on organised crime groups and the threat they pose.

Partner

For the purposes of this report, partner refers to any agency or organisation involved in the pilot process, for example those from Local Authority departments, local organisations and national and regional agencies and organisations.

Target

An individual organised criminal or organised crime group which is the focus of partnership activity.