Northumbria Research Link

International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy

Community Safety and Crime Prevention Partnerships: Challenges and Opportunities[1]

Patrick Shepherdson[2]
Sydney Institute of Criminology, Australia

Garner Clancey
The University of Sydney, Australia

Murray Lee
The University of Sydney, Australia

Thomas Crofts
The University of Sydney, Australia

Abstract

In many jurisdictions around the world, community safety and crime prevention activity is supported by interagency committees. In the Australian state of New South Wales (NSW), local government Community Safety Officers (CSOs) lead, support or participate in a range of interagency and 'whole of government' networks, most of which were established to support central NSW state government crime prevention and community safety initiatives. Research was conducted with the aim of exploring the CSOs' experience of the 'whole of government' partnerships established to support community safety and crime prevention in NSW.[3] The findings support international research which suggests that central-local partnerships are inhibited by different agendas, responsibilities and power dynamics across different levels of government. Some of the key contextual challenges for this work include concerns about costs shifting from State to local government and about shifting State government priorities; barriers to funding and to accessing crime (and other) data; and various administrative burdens. Consequently, we argued that there is a need for formal engagement and negotiation between, on the one hand, State government agencies that steer NSW crime prevention and, on the other, community safety policy initiatives and local government. Such engagement could help overcome the perception, indeed the reality, that shifting and dumping costs and responsibilities to local government is creating a range of burdens for CSOs.

Keywords

Community safety, crime prevention, partnerships, community safety officers, central government, local government.

Introduction

Interagency partnerships have become a key component of community safety and crime prevention initiatives in many jurisdictions (Gilling 2007; Hughes 2007). Despite the growth since the 1990s in the range of local interagency partnerships established to support community and crime prevention initiatives in New South Wales (NSW), there has been little by way of research exploring the extent, nature and effectiveness of those partnerships. This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap in our knowledge.

The research discussed here is part of an on-going project that explores the work of local government Community Safety Officers (CSOs) in NSW. The establishment of CSO positions within local councils in NSW commenced in the 1980s, when two councils recruited CSOs to manage responsibilities under the State's first local crime prevention pilot (Clancey et al 2012). Since then there has been considerable growth in the number of councils that have established such positions to manage crime prevention and community safety at a local government level. While there is diversity in the position descriptions, titles and responsibilities of these officers, for the purpose of this article they will be referred to collectively as Community Safety Officers or CSOs. In all instances this refers to officers recruited in a local government context, as opposed to CSOs in other jurisdictions around the world, such as the PCSOs (Police Community Support Officers) appointed by Police in the United Kingdom under the Police Reform Act 2002 (Johnson 2007).

Stage one of this research explored the role, responsibilities and expectations of CSOs through the analysis of ten CSO position descriptions and transcripts of a focus group of 13 CSOs conducted in Sydney in November 2011. This identified great diversity across position titles and descriptions, working arrangements, location of the role within council and levels of support for the role (see Clancey et al 2012). It also found that CSOs spend a significant amount of time chairing, participating in or otherwise supporting a broad range of committees that support community safety at a local level. This finding led to the second stage of the research.

Stage two of the research is informed by a further focus group conducted in Sydney in February 2013 and a survey of the focus group participants. This research looked specifically at the partnership work of CSOs in NSW, exploring the nature of community safety partnerships, the time committed to support partnerships, the perceived effectiveness of the partnerships and the challenges presented by maintaining partnerships. Drawing on stage two research, this paper explores, through the perspectives and perceptions of CSOs, the partnerships that support community safety. It discusses the challenges and benefits that these partnerships offer, and the context within which these interagency structures were and are implemented.

Community Safety Partnerships in NSW

The involvement of NSW local councils in leading, supporting or participating in community safety and crime prevention committees and interagency forums can be traced to the introduction of the *Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility Act) 1997* (the Act)*.* The Act provides the legislative basis which enables access to financial support for those NSW councils which lead the development of local community safety or crime prevention plans in accordance with prescribed guidelines. Previous guidelines established to support the Act required councils to establish a local interagency community safety committee in order to be eligible to have a plan endorsed by the Attorney General as a 'Safer Community Compact' which, in turn, made a council eligible to apply for funding to implement strategies from the endorsed Compact. The Crime Prevention Resource Manual, developed by the NSW Attorney General's Department's Crime Prevention Division (NSW Crime Prevention) as an initiative of the (former) Premier's Council on Crime Prevention, stated that 'a comprehensive crime prevention program needs input from a wide range of sources' (NSW Attorney General's Department 1998: 26). It recommended establishment of a Crime Prevention Committee as a means of ensuring the

involvement of 'all major stakeholders … in devising and implementing strategies' (NSW Attorney General's Department 1998: 26).

The approach recommended by the Division is supported by a large body of international research that demonstrates that the multi-agency or 'whole-of-government' approach to community safety, which seeks to nurture collaboration between different government agencies and community, is necessary to address the multiple factors associated with crime (Cherney 2004; Cherney and Sutton 2007; Crawford 1998a; Ekblom 1987; Homel 2004, 2009; Hughes and Rowe 2007; Weatherburn 2001). The importance of collaborative partnerships was reiterated in a review of crime prevention planning in NSW undertaken by the Australian Institute of Criminology on behalf of the NSW Attorney General's Department. This research identified a 'unanimous view' that 'partnerships between stakeholders were fundamental to the effective operation of crime prevention initiatives' (Anderson and Homel 2005: 26).

Yet despite widespread acknowledgement of the importance of partnerships to address the multiple causes of crime (Crawford 1998a; Cherney 2004; Homel 2004; Hughes and Rowe 2007), Cherney observed a 'high level of discrepancy between how partnership work is theorised and understood and the way it actually manifests itself in practice' (2004: 238). Effective partnerships require 'appropriate conditions' that support collaboration and policies that 'foster reciprocity' (Crawford 1998b: 5). 'Whole of government' approaches to crime prevention need to be supported by 'integrated' policies and guided by a 'strong and responsive crime prevention agency' (Homel 2004: 2). To be effective, the agencies responsible for coordinating partnerships and leading collaborative strategies require 'influence over a broad range of agencies' (Cherney 2004: 246). This research project was designed to allow an assessment of the challenges and benefits of interagency cooperation experienced by CSOs in NSW and to give consideration to whether the recognised elements of effective partnerships are in place.

Research methodology

All local government CSOs affiliated with the NSW Local Government Community Safety and Crime Prevention Network were invited to participate in the focus group. While the Network email group has more than 50 members from across NSW councils, meetings are generally only attended by those from the greater Sydney area. The focus group was conducted on 1 February 2013. This occurred directly after a meeting of the Network in order to provide the greatest possible opportunity for CSOs to participate. Thirteen (n=13) CSOs agreed to participate in the focus group: 10 females and three males. The sample cannot be deemed representative of CSOs in NSW as the majority (n=9) were from the Sydney Metropolitan Area or areas in comparatively close proximity to Sydney.

A focus group interview was chosen to provide opportunities for CSOs to share their insights and to build on data provided by their colleagues during the previous focus group discussed above. Our use of the focus group method is informed by Hall who suggests that focus groups provide 'rich textual data containing information from interaction among participants … Often such interaction produces new ideas or novel ways of thinking about the issue that would not have arisen from the conduct of interviews' (Hall 2008: 203). The focus group methodology enabled the identification of key insights generated through participant interaction and discussion. However, as with any focus group, there is also the possibility that particular participant voices are heard more often than others (Sarantakos 1998: 185). The researchers attempted, however, to facilitate the discussion in a way that minimised such limitations.

The research interview instrument was also designed to address three key 'goal directing' themes (Sarantakos 1998: 183):

- How are your work priorities determined?
- Who are the key strategic partners that support your work?
- What additional support is needed to sustain and enhance your work?

These themes were devised to allow broad latitude to participants so issues could be identified and explored in depth beyond the confines of rigid research questions. Prompts had been prepared within these broad themes. However, these were not required in the context of the discussion. Overall, this empowered the CSOs to address the themes in the ways they saw fit.

Notes were taken by one member of the research team during the focus group and all discussions were digitally recorded. The focus group recording was transcribed verbatim and subsequently thematically analysed. While the observations of the CSOs are used liberally throughout the remainder of the article, anonymity of focus group participants has been maintained for ethical reasons.

In addition to participating in the focus groups, participants completed a short questionnaire that sought information pertaining to their involvement in interagency partnerships. Questions in the survey sought detail as to the:

- Types of interagency committees CSOs were involved in;
- Number of interagency committees they were involved in;
- Whether they led or participated in the forum;
- Frequency of interagency meetings attended;
- Hours per month invested in interagency committees; and
- Perceived effectiveness of interagency committees CSOs participated in.

The findings covered in this article specifically focus on the challenges associated with establishing and maintaining interagency community safety and crime prevention committees, with consideration of the context of these partnerships.

Key themes

CSOs identified a number of factors that limit the potential benefits of community safety partnerships. They also identified factors that suggest the partnerships formed to support local community safety in NSW can be an imposition on CSOs or, in some instances, detrimental to a CSO's productivity.

The challenges that were most commonly identified included concerns of cost-shifting from State to local government, shifting priorities and cultures among key NSW government agencies, barriers to accessing data, the funding necessary to implement and evaluate partnership initiatives and, finally, the administrative burden of supporting and attending interagency forums. Each is considered below.

Cost-shifting from State to local government

There has been considerable discussion and debate about cost shifting from State and Territory (and Commonwealth) governments to local government in recent years (Dollery et al. 2007; House of Representatives 2003; Local Government and Shires Association 2012). The Report of the House of Representatives Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting (House of Representatives 2003) noted that one of the major methods of cost shifting was 'withdrawal or reduction of financial support once a program is established, therefore leaving local government with the choice of continuing the program or suffering the political odium of cancelling the service' (House of Representatives 2003: 30). 'Community security and crime prevention services' was listed as the first of five 'major areas of cost shifting' identified (House of Representatives 2003: 30-31). More recently, the NSW Local Government and Shires

Associations (LGSA) report, *The Impact of Cost Shifting on NSW Local Government: A Survey of Councils – Financial Year 2010-2011* (2012), indicated that a number of councils reported cost shifting in relation to community safety. The 'net cost in dollars of community safety services in public spaces necessary because of insufficient services by other spheres of government (e.g. CCTV surveillance, security patrols, crime prevention programs, community safety committees)' (Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW 2012:12) means increased responsibilities for local government.

Focus group participants held similar views. One participant identified the following:

> It just seems to be a bigger issue of cost shifting, like every other government department. 'We're going to reduce crime and local government is best placed to do it. We're going to reduce alcohol-related issues and local government is the best placed to do it'. But there's no funding that comes down. And it's the same with ... meetings and inter-agencies in many cases, these groups are set up by one level of government, trying to implement some really great policy with some really great outcome.

Another participant suggested the imposition of responsibility onto local government by State and Commonwealth agencies is a widespread issue:

> For example, the Crime Prevention Division – 'We're the Division, we've got the information, we've got the resources, we've got the knowledge, and local government, you're best placed to implement it'. And it's also coming from Liquor Accords and federal government programs and health programs, and it's coming from everywhere.

The establishment of a program known as the Graffiti Hotline provides an example of how the State government is perceived to have shifted responsibilities to local government without any financial support. The Hotline was established to promote a process that encourages community members to report graffiti to a State government number, with those reports then referred by the State government to the relevant local council for action. The Graffiti Hotline initiative does not provide councils with funding for either graffiti removal or the administrative burden of complying with the system. Councils are expected to report back to the State government on action taken in response to reports – irrespective of the fact that input from CSOs suggests many of the incidents are, in fact, on State government property.

> The State government's current focus on graffiti is causing me a lot of problems, and it harks back to the Hotline ... I got a message saying that graffiti that they'd reported to council six times hadn't been removed. And five of those times I'd sent back saying 'It's on state government property'. So it's all very well and good for them to come up with a graffiti hotline and report to us ... but if they can't even get their own departments to be doing the same thing ... .

Responsibilities for managing or contributing to interagency groups established by the State government were also identified as examples of potential cost shifting.

> Yeah, CDATs [Community Drug Action Teams], CPPs [Crime Prevention Partnerships], liquor accords, all of those. And it's local government who ends up going and doing the admin work and having to report back ... because you're on the ground and you're dealing with individuals ... Whereas these state government departments are that one level removed.

The apparent disregard for the burden of these initiatives on local government mirrors Cherney's observation in Victoria that central government fails to recognise the impact of centrally driven policy and practice on the effectiveness of partnerships working locally on the ground (Cherney 2004).

Shifting priorities and changing culture of the NSW State government

It was clear from the focus group discussions that many CSOs felt that the relationship between State and local government had deteriorated. This was considered by some CSOs to be the result of a conscious shift in State government priorities and culture. As one participant put it:

> And we've seen the same thing within Attorney General's Department; there was a shift away from being close and supporting local government … there's obviously a cultural shift now within that organisation to keep local government at arm's length and there's different priorities … .

CSOs seemingly associated this with a significant shift in the government's crime prevention priorities. Despite the *Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility Act) 1997* stating that a crime prevention plan 'may include provisions relating to … Aboriginal community development, non-English speaking background community development, drug and alcohol management, parental education and family support programs and youth development strategies', current guidelines that support crime prevention adopt an approach that is almost exclusively situational. This is not unique to NSW, with international research recognising that situational crime prevention has obvious appeal to politicians and government, as it provides 'identifiable and tangible interventions in the physical world' (Crawford 1998: 186), producing ideal rhetoric for governments wanting to be seen doing something about controlling crime.

However CSOs indicate a clear frustration with the government's lack of support for strategies targeting more complex and arguably more important social issues. Indeed, they observed a very specific crime prevention priority from NSW Crime Prevention winning out over others: '…we saw a whole government department stop caring about anything but graffiti'.

At a glance, this would seem inconsistent with the *NSW 2021* Plan, which promotes a 'NSW Local Crime Prevention Planning process which assists communities to identify prevalent crime problems and develop local initiatives to address them' (NSW Government 2013: 46), suggesting State government assistance for communities to address locally identified crime concerns. On closer inspection, the Crime Prevention Planning Process is identified as a priority action in *NSW 2021* to address the target of 'Reduce Graffiti' (NSW Government 2013). The document positions crime prevention planning as one of a number of approaches to address graffiti, rather than identifying graffiti as one of a number of concerns that crime prevention planning might address.

Data from surveys completed by CSOs demonstrate a clear difference in priorities at a local level. Twelve of 13 CSOs consulted indicated they participated in a local domestic violence interagency, with two of those officers actually leading the relevant committee. This indicates that metropolitan CSOs were more likely to participate in a domestic violence committee than any other form of community safety partnership, including general community safety committees. The *Effective Crime Prevention Interventions for Implementation by Local Government* resource, developed by the Australian Institute of Criminology for NSW Crime Prevention, excludes domestic violence from the seven key crime categories deemed appropriate for local council to address (Morgan et al. 2012). So CSOs must look beyond the State government to obtain support for domestic violence prevention and awareness strategies. This indicates another clear disjuncture between State and local level priorities. In some

instances the CSOs are actually filling a gap in community education about the State's domestic violence laws and the provision of legal and support services.

Barriers to funding and data

When asked what additional supports were needed to bolster and enhance their work, the most common responses from CSOs were 'money' and 'data':

> The short answer to that is the money and the data you need to implement the things people are saying you're going to implement.

Previous research with NSW CSOs identified that 'increased provision of funding was seen as a means to improving the effectiveness of the CSO role' (Clancey et al. 2012: 250). Yet consultation suggests a clear perception that access to funding from NSW government is increasingly difficult:

> Attorney General's ... they're looked more upon as a funding body, but very rarely do we get funding. So I don't know if other councils have had more support or luck. So they're like a sore thumb of the partnership, but still considered an important part of it.

Access to data was identified as equally important to sustain and enhance the work of CSOs. While barriers to localised Police data have been identified before (Clancey 2011), CSOs suggest other barriers to the data needed to support central government initiatives:

> Funding is a problem, but it's not just the funding. It's the access to information as well ... When you've got an agency such as Liquor and Gaming saying 'You're council, you're on the ground, you can help the liquor accords, but we're not telling you who the licence holders are or where the licensed premises are unless you pay us'; there's something fundamentally wrong with that relationship.

The need for evidence-based crime prevention to be informed by thorough analysis of local crime data and intelligence is well documented (Cherney and Sutton 2007; Crawford 1998a; Ekblom 1987; Homel 2009; Sherman et al. 2002). This is reflected in the current *NSW Guidelines for Developing a Crime Prevention Strategy*, which suggest that analysis of a local government area crime profile on the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) website be supplemented by local Police Area Command input to identify factors that contribute to crime locally, along with localised victim and offender profiles, and some evidence of the impact of local police operations on reported crime statistics (NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice n.d.). The Guidelines state such information is 'essential' to ensuring that crime prevention strategies are relevant to local communities (NSW Department of Attorney General and Justice n.d.: 2), seemingly recognising the limitations of recorded crime data alone as a means of demonstrating actual crime rates and crime trends (Maguire 1994; Matka 1997).

Yet despite this, CSOs suggest that access to State government data that is necessary to support evidence-based work is increasingly difficult. While many CSOs previously utilised good relationships to negotiate access to local police data, there was a shared belief that there may have been a central directive ceasing this practice, as many CSOs have recently been refused access to local data and have been referred to the NSW BOCSAR website as the only source of crime data.

Barriers to crime data are not only a challenge in NSW and are not isolated to CSOs. Ironically, the report by the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) prepared for NSW Crime Prevention documenting a program performance analysis and a program outcome analysis of crime

prevention planning in NSW announced that an outcome analysis could not be undertaken due to the 'unavailability of necessary data' (Anderson and Homel 2005: 20). Despite the central agency supporting crime prevention in NSW having its own program evaluation hampered by barriers to data, CSOs suggest that the Department's requirements for data in support of grant applications and acquittals has increased. This is but one of the changes within government that pose a challenge to the potential effectiveness of community safety partnerships in NSW.

The administrative burden of interagency partnerships

A key issue identified through the focus group was the amount of time involved in participating or supporting the 'plethora' of local crime prevention and community safety interagency committees in NSW (Shepherdson et al. 2014), though discussion primarily focused on the five core interagency committees outlined above. In addition to Community Safety Committees, CSOs also participate in a range of other local partnership networks, including youth service provider networks, place management committees, local Aboriginal community interagency committees, cultural diversity networks, housing and homeless service provider networks, late night economy interagency forums and gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) community advisory networks (Clancey et al. 2012; Shepherdson et al. 2014). It should be noted, though, that some CSOs are also responsible for other portfolios such as youth services. One CSO's position is co-funded by the NSW government and has responsibility for the NSW Government Transport, Roads and Traffic Authority's Local Government Road Safety Program as well as broader community safety.

Analysis of survey responses from 12 CSOs who estimated their monthly time commitment to interagency committees suggests the average time invested was 28.5 hours per month or four standard workdays:

> There's always pressure to join another group, and to take on that role. And once you've got an interagency, then the floodgates can open because you can take on any number of inter-agencies based on particular issues.

The time committed by CSOs to supporting or participating in committees is considerable, with a survey of the 13 CSOs finding:

- the mean average monthly time commitment of CSOs who participate in or support a Community Safety Committee is almost 10 hours per month
- the mean average monthly time commitment of CSOs who participate in or support a Community Safety Precinct Committee is just over 3 hours per month
- the mean average monthly time commitment of CSOs who participate in or support a Domestic Violence interagency committee is 2.7 hours per month (Shepherdson et al. 2014).

Despite the time commitment, some CSOs seemed to accept that they were simply best placed to take a local leadership role in supporting committees, despite different views regarding their effectiveness:

> ... you're on the ground, and you're dealing with individuals and people, so you end up taking it on; whereas these state government departments are that one level removed, so they never get to know the individuals on the ground.

Given the significant time commitment to interagency forums by CSOs, one wonders if CSOs consider this time investment valuable. As one participant noted:

> … in my experience, there's a real risk of positions like these ones being dumbed down, because there is this notion or perception in the community that the various players will look to local government to set the agenda, to take the minutes, to chair the meetings. And so your role can become predominantly administrative … it's probably not why you went to university in the first place.

These pressures are pushing local government to come up with solutions to manage appropriately the growing drain on resources. Different councils are adopting a range of different strategies to try and curb the reliance on council to drive any number of so-called 'partnership' initiatives, or at least find ways to build local capacity and make them more effective.

> … we work with them [stakeholders] like we do with any community group in terms of capacity building and applying for grants … but we don't do anything beyond that. We don't convene the meetings, we don't host them, we don't provide catering, we don't chair.

There were other examples that demonstrate councils' investment in trying to build the capacity of local stakeholders networks. This pro-activity can take the form of strategic planning with a diverse range of groups:

> … once a year we offered to run for them, for a number of hours, a detailed planning day, and we helped them draft their business plan. And in that sense we can use what they agree to in their business plan as part of our crime prevention plan, and then all the way up through the community strategic plan.

Given that, in most instances, there is no funding provided to local councils to support these mostly centrally conceived partnership networks, it is not surprising that there is a perception of cost shifting and 'dumping' responsibility from State to local government. The only example identified (through research) of financial support being provided for maintenance of local safety committees is the availability of micro-grants of up to $1,000 from Family and Community Services to support local domestic violence interagency committees (Family and Community Services – Women NSW 2013).

Discussion

This research is based on the perspectives of CSOs who work in local government in NSW. These officers identified the partnerships established at a local level in the interest of improving community safety outcomes. It is noted that agencies supporting crime prevention and community safety at a State level may have a very different perspective on the partnerships discussed here, and may not be aware of the extent to which these partnerships operate on the ground. As noted, the *NSW Crime Prevention Guidelines for Developing a Crime Prevention Strategy* (Department of Attorney General and Justice n.d.) no longer requires councils to maintain a community safety committee in order to obtain State government support, which may indicate a shift away from the 'partnership' approach to community safety and crime prevention. Moreover, there is an obvious difference in the very language that is used by different levels of government to label their policy focus. Despite a legislative basis that supports councils developing strategies to be considered for endorsement as a Safer Community Compact (CPPR Act 1997), the State government has almost exclusively transitioned to the language of 'crime prevention', while the majority of councils who participated in previous research still frame position descriptions, strategic plans and advisory committees in the context of 'community safety' (Clancey et al. 2012). Crawford argues that the very term community safety specifically appeals to local government, as it reflects a 'bottom-up' understanding of crime prevention that recognises community as 'an important force' in

reducing crime, a definition that recognises that crime is linked to wider social problems and takes a broader approach than 'narrowly defined' crime (Crawford 1998: 9). This difference in philosophy is reminiscent of the 'clash of cultures' that Hughes and Rowe identified as one of the 'persistent sources of conflict' in multi-agency partnerships (Hughes and Rowe 2007: 332).

The difference between local and State government approaches is further evident in the shift in State government priorities, with State government funding and guidelines narrowing to an almost exclusive focus on situational approaches to crime, especially property offences, such as graffiti and theft. Crawford suggests this can be indicative of increasingly conservative government focusing on 'the *control* of crime' (emphasis in the original), a 'narrow definition of conventional crime' and the 'assumption ... that crime is ultimately connected to choice' (Crawford 1998a: 21). The State government's increasing emphasis on quantitative evidence to underpin crime prevention, to the exclusion of qualitative input, is fundamentally at odds with the practice of local government whose place as 'the closest sphere of government to the community' is reflected in a commitment to engage community in all planning processes (NSW Department of Local Government 2008).

The fact that the Crime Prevention Division recently funded the AIC to develop the *Effective Crime Prevention Interventions for Implementation by Local Government* (Morgan et al. 2012) resource suggests that there is still interest in supporting or influencing local crime prevention in NSW. However, there is no evidence of local government input into the document's development. There is, in fact, little evidence of any means by which State government engages the local government community safety sector in discussion, consultation or research, other than the fact that some individual councils were approached to participate in testing prior to the rollout of the Graffiti Hotline. Previously, engagement was multi-faceted: both the Department of Local Government and Local Government and Shires Association were engaged in the development of the *NSW Crime Prevention Resource Manual* (NSW Attorney General's Department 1998) and local government was represented on key NSW crime prevention advisory groups such as the NSW Premier's Council on Crime Prevention (NSW Attorney General's Department 1998), the former Attorney General's Juvenile Crime Prevention Advisory Committee (Bargen 1997) and, more recently, the former Attorney General's Anti-Graffiti Action Team (NSW Labor 2011). This observed disengagement from local government is clearly perceived by many CSOs as a deliberate policy shift, similar to that which Homel detected in an evaluation of the UK's Crime Reduction Program, with one stakeholder there observing how the Home Office 'began to progressively close the access points' of what had once been an 'open-process' (Homel 2004: 5).

Where to from here?

This research indicates that there is a clear need to establish a means by which local government Community Safety Officers or their advocates can engage with NSW government to build understanding and communication and ensure that central government priorities consider the needs and priorities of communities on the ground. Ideally, this would facilitate CSOs and councils having influence in both central policy as well as local service delivery. This can better foster the 'local ownership' that can ensure the 'durability and effectiveness' of community safety (Crawford 1998a: 167). It could improve understanding of and support for State government initiatives and facilitate access to the data necessary to demonstrate outcomes in the manner that State government seeks. It may also raise awareness within central government of the many benefits that have been reaped by CSOs acting as brokers for initiatives aligned to the State government's core responsibilities, 'overcoming initial suspicion, building trust between agencies' (Tilley 1992: 8 in Crawford 1998a: 178).

The *Intergovernmental Agreement to Guide NSW State-Local Government Relations on Strategic Partnerships* (Department of Local Government 2013), co-signed by the NSW Premier, the

Minister for Local Government and the Joint Presidents of Local Government NSW identifies a number of principles, including:

a) State and local government will work together as drivers of change and improvement to achieve strong communities through partnership
b) Consultation and communication will be open on the basis of mutual trust and respect
c) State and local government will engage with each other collaboratively and with a shared commitment to joint problem solving. (Department of Local Government 2013: 2-3)

The document recognises the State Plan *NSW 2021* and local council Community Strategic Plans as strategic partnerships that underpin the Agreement, and includes a statement in relation to 'cost shifting':

.... where local government is asked or required by the State government to provide a service or function to the people of NSW, any consequential financial impact is to be considered within the context of the capacity of local government. (Department of Local Government 2013: 4)

The Agreement, which commits to a number of meetings each year to discuss State-local issues, suggests an opportunity for the local government interest and investment in community safety and crime prevention to be discussed. Ideally, this could facilitate 'power sharing' (Homel 2004: 5), allowing local government input on the state government's policy direction, funding programs and processes that support crime prevention. Moreover, this would result in the devolvement of 'resources, authority and decision making powers' that research suggests is essential to the success of local community safety partnerships (Cherney and Sutton 2007: 75). Capturing of community safety outcomes through the local government Community Strategic Planning framework community indicators (Elton Consulting & Institute For Sustainable Futures 2011) may validate the contribution councils make to Goal 16 of *NSW 2021*: 'Prevent and Reduce the Level of Crime' (NSW Government 2013: 34).

Conclusion

Research with CSOs in NSW suggests a range of barriers to effective partnerships established to support local community safety and crime prevention in NSW. Key among concerns raised is the shifting of costs and responsibility from State to local government. In addition, there is a strong perception that State government support for local councils to lead crime prevention has eroded. There is also a view that NSW community safety and crime prevention priorities are imposed by State government rather than negotiated in consultation with local government.

Until some means of communication between CSOs and State government is established, CSOs will remain unclear as to whether there is any ongoing commitment from NSW government to support local community safety. It would seems that almost 10 years after the Australian Institute of Criminology conducted research into crime prevention planning in NSW, much uncertainty about the role of the NSW Crime Prevention Division in crime prevention planning remains (Anderson and Homel 2005). This uncertainty 'has the potential … to undermine the effectiveness of CSOs' (Clancey et al. 2012: 251).

There is still scope and, on the evidence presented here, a need to revisit the first of seven operational principles recommended by the AIC to NSW Crime Prevention in 2005, namely to improve the 'centre-local crime prevention relationships … to establish a pro-active, adequately informed central agency willing to participate directly in the partnership process…' (Anderson and Homel 2005: 11).

Correspondence: Garner Clancey, Sydney Institute of Criminology, Law School Building (F10), Eastern Avenue, Camperdown Campus, The University of Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia. Email: garner.clancey@sydney.edu.au

References

Anderson J and Homel P (2005) *Reviewing the NSW Local Crime Prevention Planning Process*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

Bargen J (1997) The role and function of the NSW Juvenile Crime Prevention Advisory Committee – A personal perspective. Presented at the Australian Institute of Criminology conference *Juvenile Crime and Juvenile Justice – Towards 2000 and Beyond*. Adelaide, June. Available at http://www.aic.gov.au/media_library/conferences/juvenile/bargen.pdf (accessed 5 August 2013).

Cherney A (2004) Crime prevention/community safety partnerships in action: Victorian experience. *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 15(3): 237–252.

Cherney A and Sutton A (2007) Crime prevention in Australia: Beyond what works. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Criminology* 40(1): 65 – 81.

Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility Act) (CPPR Act) 1997 (1997). Sydney: NSW Government. Available at stlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/capra1997484/ (accessed 10 February 2014).

Clancey G (2011) Are we still flying blind? Crime data and local crime prevention in NSW. *Current Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* 22(3): 491–500.

Clancey G, Lee M and Crofts T (2012) We're not Batman – Roles and expectations of local government community safety officers in New South Wales. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety* 14(4): 235–257.

Crawford A (1998a) *Crime Prevention and Community Safety: Politics, Policies and Practices*. Harlow. Longman Criminology Series.

Crawford A (1998b) Community safety partnerships. *Criminal Justice Matters* 33(1): 4–5.

Department of Local Government (2013) *Intergovernmental Agreement to Guide NSW State-Local Government Relations on Strategic Partnerships*. Available at http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/Intergovernmental%20Agreement%20to%20Guide%20NSW%20State-Local%20Government%20Relations%20on%20Strategic%20Partnerships.pdf (accessed 30 September 2013).

Dollery B, Byrnes J and Crase L (2007) The infrastructure crisis in Australian local government: A proposed federal asset fund solution. *Australasian Journal of Regional Studies* 13(1): 3-19.

Ekblom P (1987) *Getting the Best out of Crime Analysis*, Paper 10. London: Crime Prevention Unit, Home Office.

Elton Consulting and Institute for Sustainable Futures UTS (2011) *Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework – Community Indicators Project: Community Strategic Planning Indicators Resource.* Sydney: Division of Local Government of the NSW Department of

Premier and Cabinet. Available at
http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/Documents/Information/IPR%20Community%2
0Strategic%20Planning%20Indicators%20Resource.pdf (accessed 1 October 2013).

Family and Community Services – Women NSW (2013) *Local Domestic and Family Violence Committee Grants*. Available at
http://www.women.nsw.gov.au/violence_prevention/local_domestic_violence_committee_gr ants (accessed 30 July 2013).

Gilling D (2007) *Crime Reduction and Community Safety*. Cullompton, Devon: Willan Publishing.

Hall R (2008) *Applied Social Research: Planning, Designing and Conducting Real-world Research*. South Yarra, Victoria: Palgrave Macmillan.

Homel P (2004) The whole of government approach to crime prevention. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No 287*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

Homel P (2009) Improving crime prevention knowledge and practice. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice No 385*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

House of Representatives Standing Committee on Economics, Finance and Public Administration (2003) rates and taxes: A fair share for responsible local government. Report of the *Inquiry into Local Government and Cost Shifting*. Canberra: Parliament of Australia. Available at
http://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Co mmittees?url=efpa/localgovt/report.htm (accessed 30 September 2013.

Hughes G (2007) *The Politics of Crime and Community*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan.

Hughes G and Rowe M (2007) Neighbourhood policing and community safety – Researching the instabilities of local governance of crime, disorder and security in contemporary UK. *Criminology and Criminal Justice* 7(4): 317–346.

Johnston L (2007) 'Keeping the family together': Police community support officers and the 'police extended family' in London. *Policing and Society: An International Journal of Research and Policy* 17(2): 119-140.

Local Government and Shires Associations of NSW (2012) *The Impact of Cost Shifting on NSW Local Government: A Survey of Councils – Financial Year 2010-2011*. Available at www.lgnsw.org.au/files/imce-uploads/35/2010-11-survey-of-councils.pdf (accessed 7 February 2014).

Maguire M (1994) crime statistics, patterns and trends: Changing perceptions and their implications. In Maguire M, Morgan R and Reiner R *The Oxford Handbook of Criminology.* New York: Oxford University Press Inc.

Matka E (1997) Uses and Abuses of Crime Statistics. *Crime and Justice Bulletin No 11*. Sydney: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.

Morgan A, Boxall H, Lindeman K and Anderson J (2012) Effective crime prevention interventions for implementation by local government. *Research and Public Policy No 120*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology.

NSW Attorney General's Department (1998) *Crime Prevention Resource Manual*. Available at http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlghome/documents/Information/98-87.pdf (accessed 29 July 2013).

NSW Department of Justice and Attorney General and Justice (no date) *Guidelines for Developing a Crime Prevention Strategy*. Available at
http://www.crimeprevention.nsw.gov.au/cpd/forcouncils/onlinegrants.html (accessed 24 March 2013).

NSW Department of Local Government (2008) *Councillor Guide.* Available at
http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/DLG/Documents/information/CouncillorGuide.pdf (accessed 31 July 2013).

NSW Government (2013) *NSW 2021 – A Plan To Make NSW Number One*. Available at http://www.2021.nsw.gov.au/ (accessed 30 September 2013).

NSW Labor (2011) *Towards Graffiti Free Streets*. Available at http://www.nswalp.com/getattachment/5b5f1568-cba1-4903-ae60-094e27da7ee4/towards-graffiti-streets/ (accessed 5 August 2013).

Sarantakos S (1998) *Social Research*. South Yarra, Victoria: Macmillan Publishers.

Shepherdson P, Clancey G, Lee M and Crofts T (2014) Partnerships and NSW local government community safety officers. *Crime Prevention and Community Safety*.

Sherman L, Farrington D, Welsh B and MacKenzie D (2002) *Evidence-Based Crime Prevention*. London: Routledge.

Weatherburn D (2001) What Causes Crime? *Crime and Justice Bulletin No 54*. Sydney: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research.