



Review of Milton Keynes Community Safety Partnership Report 1 - Emerging Issues



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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The landscape for community safety will change in response to the appointment of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), the potential impact of the Localism Act and new legislation due for implementation in the next year or so. For example, it is likely that 'the market' will be opened up to a wider range of providers and new emerging partnerships and alliances will become interested in areas 'traditionally' associated with community safety. This indicates the need for the 'Responsible Authorities Group' (RAG), 'SaferMK' and its constituent partners to carry out analysis and review, in order to maximise the positive effects of these changes and minimise any negative potential.
- 1.2 A refresh of the Community Safety Plan is taking place, based on an updated strategic assessment, along with a review of the Neighborhood Action Groups (NAGs). To understand the impact of these interrelated activities and help prepare for the future, the RAG agreed at its December 2012 meeting to initiate a review to include:
 - Semi-structured interviews with key partners and stakeholders from RAG, the SaferMK Performance Group and the wider network
 - Structured discussions/seminars with current delivery groups
 - A series of Focus Groups with the business sector and community and voluntary groups
 - Further development of the relationship with the PCC.
- 1.3 This report focuses on the semi-structured interviews and summarises the key issues that have emerged from those conversations. There are still some interviews to take place, but up to 8th March 23 individuals from across the partnership and beyond have contributed.
- 1.4 The interviews covered four themes:
 - Structure and Governance (with a focus on RAG and Performance Group)
 - Data Information and Planning
 - Engagement
 - Delivery.
- 1.5 Each theme is considered in turn below identifying strengths and reporting on issues that have arisen. The report summarises a large amount of information into the most common themes. Inevitably, a degree of selection and interpretation has been necessary, but as far as possible, the text reflects the comments and opinions of those interviewed.

2. Structure and Governance

Strengths

- 2.1 The partnership has a long track record of achievements. It has provided a vehicle for agreeing a common purpose and facilitating joined up responses to local issues.
- 2.2 It has used data and information to establish a strategic direction and oversee activity that has had a tangible impact on the community. Milton Keynes has enjoyed relatively low crime and is generally a safe place to live and work and the partnership has made a significant contribution to the quality of life enjoyed by citizens.
- 2.3 Over a long period of time RAG has benefited from participation by senior representatives of its constituent partners, who have given priority to community safety. Non-voting and co-opted members have brought added value and in general, the work of the partnership is considered important.
- 2.4 Performance Group provides a framework to ensure that Delivery Groups remain focused on partnership priorities. They are also a useful opportunity for networking, learning and sharing success.

Issues

RAG

- 2.5 The unanimous view expressed by those interviewed was that the partnership would benefit from a refresh. Unlike some other strategic partnerships, community safety had not undertaken a review of its purpose and organisation for several years and has become 'comfortable' in the way it conducts its business, giving it an air of complacency.

Purpose

- 2.6 Though not considered by any to be 'broken', for some the problems the partnership has are felt to be fundamental, in terms of having 'lost its way'. The sense of common purpose and of there being agreement about 'what the partnership is for' and 'what it is seeking to achieve' are issues that need to be re-visited, in the opinion of a significant group (16 of 23 interviewed).
- 2.7 The extent to which RAG was willing and able to hold its constituent partners to account was seen as a key indicator that the partnership was fulfilling its potential. Of particular importance was the influence and challenge RAG members brought to bear on each other especially in terms of deployment of resources and commissioning decisions. This went beyond specific partnership priorities, but extended to the achievement of community safety objectives in a wider sense. Generally, the partnership was not considered to be strong in terms of 'mutual accountability' and has tended to defer this aspect of its remit to the SaferMK support team or for 'informal' resolution outside of its structure of meetings.
- 2.8 A frequently expressed opinion was that the RAG was not sufficiently strategic and had become focused on tactical and operational issues. It is rarely asked to make strategic decisions beyond the setting of priorities for the delivery groups. RAG, it was said, needed to raise its gaze to become sighted on wider issues, with a bearing on community safety including those 'coming over the horizon'. However, having sufficient oversight of the performance of the partnership against its specific objectives was seen as essential by the majority and getting the balance right was something that the RAG could resolve through effective agenda planning.

- 2.9 The image of RAG as a powerful decision making forum that thought about and was proactive in taking measures to tackle longer term and emerging issues requires strengthening. It was noted that RAG does not have a sufficient 'presence' beyond the confines of its own meetings, including at the delivery level of its partnership. The term RAG was seen by some to be unhelpful in this respect, as it is not an acronym that many, beyond its membership, would relate easily to ('we are the community safety partnership and should say so').
- 2.10 Similar views were expressed about the SaferMK 'brand', with confusion about whether it applied to the RAG, the wider partnership or the support team (or any combination) being typical of the comments. One risk was that the brand was more readily associated with the team, promoting an impression that 'the team is the partnership', thereby diminishing the importance of RAG. In contrast, others felt that the 'branding' gave a sense of independence, a partnership rather than something that belonged to one organisation.

Membership

- 2.11 Overall the partnership is considered to be at its most effective when the most senior people from each agency attend regularly. This seems to be as much to do with a public demonstration of commitment and priority as it is with ensuring the partnership works efficiently. However, there is recognition that this may not always be possible, especially as multi-agency structures increase and the numbers and capacity of senior leaders comes under pressure. Therefore, it is understood that the role of deputies is important. The expectation of partners is that not only should deputies be very senior people in their own right, but that they should be consistent so as to develop familiarity with the work and narrative of the partnership.
- 2.12 In general, it is considered that the partnership has engaged the right people in terms of knowledge and capability and has taken the right approach in widening membership of RAG beyond the voting members. It was suggested that the five voting members might form an inner 'executive group', but overall this was not supported on the grounds that it might lack transparency and devalue the contributions of the wider group.
- 2.13 There was concern that some key partners had been less consistently represented than others and that the scale of structural change taking place across all organisations had impacted on participation, particularly (but by no means exclusively) in relation to the health economy. That specific issue may now have been resolved, but those conversations emphasised the value that partners place upon the partnership and the desire that exists to 'do the right thing and make a difference'.

Style and Culture

- 2.14 A common theme and one which was seen by several to be 'the key issue' was the way in which RAG undertakes its business. It is considered to have developed a degree of formality that is inhibiting debate. Many felt it was 'over reported' and that too much time was spent responding to items that had little scope for the transparent 'lid off conversations' that should characterise a strategically focused group.
- 2.15 A particularly interesting observation from one RAG member was that there was little in the way of conflict and that RAG managed to complete its agenda 'peacefully', which had advantages. But it also reflected an absence of honest and open debate and a tendency to stay on non controversial and well managed ground.
- 2.16 The agenda was seen to be determined from the bottom up and partners were not clear how to influence the shape and content of meetings and put items on the agenda (although support team members felt that they were routinely invited to do so). Consequently, the level of engagement with the meetings has diminished, with views such as 'it's a tick box exercise', 'the meetings have become functional' and 'we only react, we just rubber stamp what we are asked' being typical.

- 2.17 This sense of RAG being an 'official committee' rather than a partnership meeting appears to have led to an impression amongst some that the partnership is overly led by the Council and that too much business is conducted by council officers outside of the meetings. However, there was a counter viewpoint that partners had too readily deferred responsibility onto the council and had become over-reliant on a strong and well led support team. One non council partner commented that 'we have been let off the hook and need to take more responsibility'; a sentiment also expressed by others.
- 2.18 It was noted that RAG does not have a forward plan and that agenda planning and management is not carried out in a multi-agency fashion. It was suggested that RAG should nominate a small (rotating) group of members to work with the Chair and support team to co-ordinate its work.
- 2.19 The concept of an 'Independent Chair' was discussed, but there was no overall consensus that this would be helpful. Chairing was not seen to be the issue and some commented that it was important to balance the aspirations for RAG meetings, with the capacity within any individual meeting to meet expectations and that this was a key task for the Chair.

Strategic Relationships

- 2.20 The partnership sits within a developing network of strategic activity and planning and there is further work to do in understanding how community safety links with key structures such as the Health and WellBeing Board, Children's Partnership and the safeguarding arrangements for both adults and children.
- 2.21 A view expressed by many was that a key function of RAG was to exert strategic influence, with respect to the priorities of other partnerships and to ensure strong alignment between planning and decision making. In turn, the world of community safety needed to be more responsive to the wider strategic agenda, if it was to avoid becoming isolated.
- 2.22 The relationship with the PCC raises similar issues, but at this early stage those interviewed were unable to be specific about how this new relationship would impact on local arrangements and what strategies might be employed to minimise any risks.

Investment

- 2.23 There is little clarity about the scale and nature of investment across the partnership. The extent to which individual partners provide resources in cash or kind to support the structures and activities identified with community safety has not been set out.
- 2.24 For some this meant that it was difficult to evaluate if the work of community safety was appropriately resourced and represented value for money. Some partners felt that their contributions were not transparent. It was suggested that greater understanding of what the sources of funding are and how they are being deployed currently would assist in identifying a more structured approach for the future.
- 2.25 It was also suggested that in addition to identifying the resource that can be linked directly to community safety attempts should be made to establish the extent to which wider agency funding and expenditure supports the achievement of community safety objectives. This would include core 'business as usual' activity and commissioned services.

Performance Group (PG)

- 2.26 The majority view is that the role and purpose of PG has become unclear and if it is to continue a review of what part it plays in the partnership will be required, with RAG clarifying its expectations. A number of those interviewed expressed the view that it was the element of the partnership which was functioning least effectively and questioned whether the time had come to explore alternative models, to link the strategic and operational aspects of the structure.

- 2.27 However, the potential for PG to be the 'engine room' of the partnership and 'drive the partnership's business' was recognised by many, who tended to feel that review and refresh of the partnership would help to re-define the role of PG. A commonly expressed opinion was that PG should be filtering those issues that RAG needed to be sighted on and escalating them for decisions, rather than as information items.
- 2.28 This concept of PG as the 'buffer' between delivery and RAG is dependant on the right people ('the experts') being present, who have sufficient insight and knowledge of all delivery areas to be able to offer challenge and make informed judgments about issues that require escalation. Currently, this was considered to be absent, inhibiting the extent to which PG is able to hold Delivery Groups to account and reassure the partnership that performance against objectives is being monitored. PG members are not clear about their role, with respect to challenge and accountability. Consequently, many felt that PG is not an environment in which they experience challenge, although some felt supported by it.
- 2.29 For many the problems associated with PG are related to deficiencies in planning and information. The performance report is considered to lack analysis and to be reliant on crime based data. The report template does not support understanding of barriers and successes and has become superficial. Information is not provided in advance to enable Delivery Group members to prepare and if necessary seek clarification and advice.
- 2.30 Alternatives to PG suggested included a more direct relationship between delivery and RAG, such as members of the strategic group participating in delivery groups as 'RAG champions'. This would promote expertise in RAG, enabling informed performance challenge and providing a voice for key aspects of delivery within RAG.
- 2.31 The role of 'co-ordinators' in holding delivery structures to account and feeding directly to either the RAG or through partnership wide support arrangements was promoted. Some went further, suggesting that a combination of RAG champions and partnership co-ordinators could replace PG. Recent developments with respect to the current Domestic and Sexual Violence Delivery Group may provide an opportunity to assess the viability of this idea.

3. Strategy, Information and Planning

Strengths

- 3.1 The partnership has a track record of using multi-agency data to inform its priorities and plans, which is more developed than in some other areas of public service. Historically, there are evidenced examples of links between an understanding of local characteristics and the selection of effective responses.
- 3.2 The partnership has never failed to fulfill its primary legal obligations to undertake a Strategic Assessment and develop a strategy to reduce crime and disorder, re-offending and the misuse of drugs and alcohol.
- 3.3 The surveys (both those on community safety generally and specific topics) that have been carried out have provided useful information and perspectives.
- 3.4 Inter-agency relationships have developed that have facilitated relatively trouble free transfers of information (including sensitive personal information) backed by an agreed protocol.
- 3.5 Some tactical/operational arrangements have supported proactive responses to emerging (critical) issues, based on sound information sharing and joint planning (e.g. JATAC, addressing community tensions).
- 3.6 Use has been made of local project evaluation and small scale research for service development and cross agency learning. This has involved external experts, but also 'in-house' knowledge and expertise.

Issues

Strategic Assessment (SA)

- 3.7 The overwhelming consensus was that the SA is too narrowly focused on crime based data. Consequently, valuable information and intelligence from a variety of sources had often been excluded, which could have provided a richer and more complete picture of local need and circumstances. Alternative sources suggested include:
 - Views of the public including the results of surveys
 - Intelligence from front line staff, service providers and wider stakeholders (e.g. businesses)
 - Existing data analysis from partner agencies
 - Community intelligence via NAGs, local Councils and 'residents groups'
 - Consultative exercises such as the Community Safety Forum.
- 3.8 The SA had lacked analysis and it was not always clear how the priorities had emerged from the information. This was reflected in comments such as 'we do not really understand how we got there' and 'it feels right rather than being evidence based'. How and why particular items of information were deemed more important than others was not transparent.
- 3.9 Some felt that there were critical gaps in the dataset used to compile the SA, especially relating to social care, health and victims. The view was that the data was available, but its importance had been overlooked. Others though felt that getting access to some of this information had been problematic. Sometimes this was because of concern about confidentiality/sensitivity issues or capacity, including not knowing who to ask or what to ask for. For some difficulties in obtaining information illustrated variable commitment or priority given to community safety objectives.

- 3.10 Several of those interviewed commented that there needed to be a stronger link between the SA and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA). Although there had been sharing of data with the JSNA, it was not clear how this had influenced the analysis and if, in return, the JSNA had made any impact on the SA and subsequent priorities.
- 3.11 It was suggested that in the future the SA should be considered as the crime and community safety component of the JSNA. However, it was also noted by others that they produce local assessments at different times, which can also feed into the SA. There may be benefit in mapping the alignment of these products, including the timing of their respective development.
- 3.12 There is concern that the SA is seen as a one-off annual exercise, rather than a more dynamic year-round process that feeds into ongoing review of risk and need, progress and performance challenge. The role that partnership structures such as Performance Group and JATAC have in this approach is under-developed, but they have significant potential.

Strategy and Planning

- 3.13 There was wide acknowledgement that the community safety partnership in MK could not operate effectively in isolation from the strategy formulation and planning of other key partnerships and authorities, particularly the Health and Well Being Board, Children's Partnership and the PCC. Aligning priorities and understanding the overlapping areas of business was considered by many to be a priority task for the next stage of development.
- 3.14 SaferMK could benefit from some of the recent approaches taken by other local partnerships, in terms of priority setting; defining what is partnership business and what lies elsewhere (e.g. 'business as usual' or the remit of other groups and alliances) and managing relationships between partnerships through, for example, the development of protocols.
- 3.15 Influencing commissioning decisions across agencies and of the PCC was considered to be a key objective of the priority setting and planning process if the partnership is to maximise its impact.
- 3.16 There is anxiety that even when the priorities are clear and planning is well integrated central government initiatives can 'knock you off course' and undermine local objectives. The arrival of the PCC has added a new layer and the worry is that what is developed locally will be driven by PCC expectations, rather than local analysis.

Other Issues

- 3.17 There is insufficient use made of research and evaluation (including national and international studies) and consequently, the partnership is less able to articulate what works and why when determining its own activities or influencing others. Some felt that the partnership would benefit from developing a distinct research and development component when defining the nature of any partnership support arrangements.
- 3.18 Several comments were made about the lack of clear pathways for the dissemination of data and information around the partnership. Delivery Groups said they did not get up to date and timely data or performance information to help them drive their activities. Some RAG and Performance Group members said that the nature and presentation of the information they received did not help them to understand what was working and what the barriers to achievement might be.
- 3.19 The collation, distillation and dissemination of purposeful information were seen by many to be essential components of any partnership support arrangements.
- 3.20 The lack of input into planning from some hard to reach groups, particularly young people and the BME population was seen to be a gap that needed attention when developing the revised strategy.

4. Engagement

Strengths

- 4.1 The partnership has historically made significant efforts to engage widely with varying degrees of success and this was valued by the majority of those interviewed.
- 4.2 The presence of Parish Council representatives on RAG helps to bring a local perspective and 'public voice' to the partnership.
- 4.3 Community safety surveys and engagement events are considered as useful mechanisms to engage with communities and stakeholders.
- 4.4 The partnership has participated in national and local campaigns and other initiatives which have helped to communicate key messages and promote local activity.
- 4.5 NAGs can be powerful when working well and the current review is welcomed.

Issues

- 4.6 There is no engagement and communication strategy and currently, no capacity to develop a distinct partnership approach. Individual agency resources have been made available (mainly for specific public relations purposes), but this is ad-hoc and has been unable to maintain a coherent public presence and is under pressure due to other demands.
- 4.7 The partnership does not know what kind of engagement the public wants. For example, some felt that people were focused on having their 'problems solved', but are less interested in the mechanics of the partnership. Others felt it was important to communicate the priorities of the partnership widely, including direct contact between RAG members and the public (e.g. addressing public meetings, handing out leaflets on the street).
- 4.8 The needs of different sections of the community have not been identified, so previous campaigns and events had been undifferentiated. Where individual agencies are in contact with specific groups information and learning is not being fed back to support the work of the partnership.
- 4.9 At this stage little is known about how the PCC will link with the public and some felt that it would be important to co-ordinate partnership engagement activity with the PCC's approach.
- 4.10 The lack of a media strategy has meant that opportunities to push out positive stories or key messages are being lost.
- 4.11 The mechanisms for problem solving at a local level when issues emerge are underdeveloped. Although JATAC and some aspects of the arrangements for tackling anti-social behaviour can be opportunities to mobilise multi-agency responses, more could be done to include local communities and the voluntary and business sectors.
- 4.12 The use of campaigns and branding attracted attention, with some feeling that they are not always congruent with partnership objectives and tend to represent particular interests or a response to national programmes.
- 4.13 There was general concern that the partnership website was not updated regularly and required some further development in order to portray the right image of the partnership. However, there was acknowledgement that this was a capacity issue and is another area that the partnership should consider when deciding future support arrangements.

4.14 NAGs are not being used effectively to link the work of the partnership with local issues and action. However, some pointed out that 'NAG priorities' are not always congruent with those of the partnership and that NAGs are reliant on volunteers suggesting that expectations need to be realistic.

5. Delivery

Strengths

- 5.1 The Delivery Group (DG) model is valued by many of those who participate in them. Over the years they have been responsible for or participated in a range of activities that have been beneficial to the community and have led to positive community safety outcomes.
- 5.2 DG's provide a platform for improving collaboration between different organisations and an opportunity for partnerships to demonstrate impact on day to day activity. They are a forum where relationships between agencies and individuals can generate ideas and creative solutions.
- 5.3 DG's have the potential to react to emerging issues and mobilise responses. They can bring those with expertise to the table to 'problem solve' at an operational level. Some had commissioned research and evaluation that had helped deepen understanding of specific issues and guide response.
- 5.4 The JATAC has the potential to play a central role in the co-ordination and delivery of the partnership's business, including directing resources in 'real time' at immediate concerns.
- 5.5 An effective and well supported NAG structure has the potential to contribute at a very local level including mobilising additional resources.
- 5.6 Those services that are currently formally commissioned (e.g. drug and alcohol services and domestic abuse provision) have demonstrated the role that commissioning can make and have provided lessons for a future in which an increased role for commissioning is inevitable.

Issues

- 5.7 DG's can lack clarity of purpose and are frequently unclear as to what is expected of them. They have been left to develop 'independently' and the level of co-ordination and oversight has been variable. Each group develops its own terms of reference (notionally 'signed off' by RAG) and individual action plans. They set their own performance measures and targets; a practice that was seen by many to be flawed.
- 5.8 A common analysis was that historically groups had developed as much in response to government initiatives and funding streams, as local priorities and had tended to be 'project' focused. For some, the DG's reflected a degree of complacency in local arrangements expressed as 'this is the way we have always done it' leading to a lack of critical challenge.
- 5.9 In general, the interviews indicated a sense of disconnection between the strategic and operational components of the partnership. The thread from strategic priority to activity can be tenuous and accountability unclear. Knowledge of the plans and activities of DG's varies amongst RAG members, but generally was sketchy. However, there are differences of opinion about the extent to which RAG should be sighted on the details of delivery, unless there are problems which require attention at a strategic level. The partnership lacks protocols, including escalation arrangements, which govern the relationships between the different elements of its structure.
- 5.10 A common theme (and significant frustration) was that the DG's lacked the capacity and resources to deliver effectively. The only group that now has a dedicated coordinator is the Domestic and Sexual Violence Group (employed by the commissioned provider). Other groups rely on their membership (particularly chairs and vice chairs, whose personal skills were considered to be central to effectiveness) to ensure their plans are implemented. Given the demanding roles that many DG participants have in their 'day jobs' there is concern that commitment, which is already variable will diminish further under increasing pressure. A

commonly expressed view was that the partnership should review the way in which it supports the delivery of the strategy.

- 5.11 For some groups getting the right people from those agencies that can make the required contribution has been a long term challenge, despite RAG agreeing terms of reference including membership. This was presented as an example of how partnership commitment including compliance with RAG expectations was not being met in some instances.
- 5.12 The number of DG's has been questioned along with their scope. There is a general consensus that if DG's are to continue they should reflect the strategic objectives of the partnership, as well as the specific priorities set out in the Community Safety Plan. Some suggested that DG's should become based around 'themes' that encompassed a number of priorities. For the majority the opportunity to review the purpose, scope and organisation of DGs was welcomed.
- 5.13 One group which attracted particular attention was the 'Prevent' group. Many of those interviewed, though recognising this topic required a partnership approach did not feel it was helpful (some said it was distracting) to include it as part of the local community safety partnership and felt it sat more logically as an important 'business as usual' issue for specific partners.
- 5.14 Some felt that the DG structure was too rigid, lacking flexibility to respond to emerging issues and that a more fluid task and finish approach would be preferable. In fact, the current arrangements do have a range of support groups intended to pick up issues that are not covered by the DGs. However, the majority of those interviewed did not seem to recognise this as part of the partnership arrangements and reporting lines for this work are unclear.
- 5.15 A topic attracting much attention was the role that commissioning would/should play in the delivery of community safety activity. For some the partnership's principal future role was to influence the commissioning decisions of its constituent partners (including the PCC) in support of local community safety objectives. This raises questions regarding the need for DG's and other delivery structures; the view being that over time there would be less need for them. Contrary to this others believe that reliance on contracted services would diminish the sense of partnership and create an inflexible contract compliance focused approach, which lacked transparency and was isolated from or unresponsive to changing needs.
- 5.16 The current arrangements demonstrate a mixed model, with some DG's working within and around commissioned services and others more concerned with the day to day business of partners and/or developing responses to enhance existing activity. Several people suggested that DG's should have a direct role in commissioning and be provided with the resources to develop responses in support of their action plans. The counter view to that was that it perpetuated an initiative led ethos of projects ('investing around the edges') rather than a more strategic and rational approach to deploying limited resources.
- 5.17 What emerged from this discussion is the need for the partnership and in particular RAG to debate and clarify the role of 'commissioning' as it moves forward.
- 5.18 Two important structures that are likely to feature as the debate unfolds are JATAC and the NAG arrangements. The issues of role, purpose, level of support and compliance apply as much to these as to the DG's. Currently, there appears to be uncertainty about how they relate, not only to the DG's but the delivery of partnership objectives overall. The contribution they are making seems less understood and acknowledged, although there is recognition that each has an important part to play.

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