

CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ACTION

Visit by the Criminal Justice Council to
Lichfield District Council

2nd December 2009



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ACTION

SUMMARY REPORT

1.0 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The tragic murder of Michael Eccles, which took place in Lichfield during January 2009, was the catalyst for a meeting between members of the Criminal Justice Council, local community safety partners and representatives from the criminal justice system and Home Office. Although the incident was not the focus of the event, it did provide a case study for related issues to be identified and considered.

2.0 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

- 2.1 The event was based around a discussion on the prevention of offending / reoffending and how agencies could work together to contain the impact of offending upon the community. The programme for the event (attached at **Appendix 1**) provided the opportunity for a range of inputs on specific topic areas within the context of a free flowing debate. Thirty five individuals attended representing 15 different organisations (listed at **Appendix 2**).

2.0 KEY THEMES

A wide range of key themes emerged through the discussion and these are set out below:

- 2.1 **Partnership working (local)** - it was recognised that local partnership working (via the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) on crime prevention and problem solving is strong and effective; however, there is a limited interface between community safety partners and the judicial system at both strategic and operational levels. Although it is essential that judicial independence is protected, opportunities to facilitate closer working with the magistrates and CPS could be mutually beneficial. The probation service has recently become a 'Responsible Authority' and this will further strengthen the local focus on offending and preventing reoffending. It was noted that the White Paper 'Protecting the public: supporting the police to succeed' has the potential to simplify the CDRP landscape and develop a closer working relationship with Criminal Justice Boards. However, a 'same for all' approach would not be appropriate and there should always be some scope for **local determination** of priorities and governance structures to address these.

2.2 **Partnership working (national)** - there continues to be some compartmentalisation between different government departments which means that connections between discrete issues are not consistently made and addressed. Different performance management regimes and targets can also mitigate against partnership working (eg. although there is a single confidence indicator, the police and local authority baselines are different). Efforts being made by the LGA to promote cross departmental working at government level should be continued and encouraged.

2.3 **Communication** - the need for more and better communication was recognised at a variety of levels and was a common thread running throughout the event

- **Public confidence needs to be raised;** despite falling levels of crime, fear of crime continues to be high. More effort needs to be put into feeding back on outcomes when an incident is reported or witnessed and more opportunity for both victims and members of the community to be able to track progress on specific cases once they have entered the justice system. Very local initiatives such as community newsletters, covering a small number of streets or a neighbourhood, were felt to be effective and should be promoted
- **The confidence of community safety practitioners needs to be raised;** a recent survey of officers who work within the community safety / criminal justice arena highlighted their own levels of confidence in 'the system' which were even lower than those of the public. This could be addressed through more dialogue between practitioners and by raising the profile of the many initiatives being developed successfully, at both local and national, to tackle offending and reoffending.
- **The public profile of some individual services needs to be raised;** the criminal justice system can appear to be very 'closed' resulting in a lack of public trust and confidence. Good practice examples where the courts have developed very positive relations with the local media were cited. However, budget pressures have resulted in a reduction in the number of courts and the residual service may appear to be increasingly remote.

2.4 **Substance misuse** - the relationship between offending and substance misuse is well evidenced and recognised. Although the majority of public investment is directed towards interventions in relation to drug use, the impact of alcohol misuse was felt to be a far more significant issue, especially because alcohol is so easily accessible within the home, sometimes provided to children by their parents. Alcohol was a major factor in the murder of Michael Eccles and a significant contributor to the tragic outcome and therefore it is regrettable that alcohol services are regarded as the 'poor relation' within the context of substance misuse. Alcohol misuse can lead on to other forms of dependency behaviour and therefore early intervention can make a significant impact on long term health and risk of offending. Concerns were raised regarding potential reductions in substance misuse budgets and the restrictions on pooled treatment budgets which at present can only be used to commission services in relation to drug misuse.

- 2.5 **Mental health** - mental ill health is another key issue for the offender population. Offenders with mental health problems often suffer 'double discrimination' because they have poor access to services available to the general population and there is a need for more investment in services which are tailored to the specific needs of mentally disordered offenders. The need for a 'pathway' from arrest through the prison system (as advocated by the Bradley report) should be addressed.
- 2.6 **'Difficult families'** - all local authorities have challenging families which can cause disproportionate levels of nuisance and disruption to their local neighbourhood. Partners need to understand their issues and work proactively together to tackle them. This would not only reduce the risk of anti social and offending behaviour but also improve the life chances of the families concerned. The murder of Michael Eccles has led to a serious cases review, the conclusions from which are about to be published. Within the context of this review, Lichfield's LSP is challenging itself about the approach being taken to identifying difficult families and whether agencies are working effectively together in dealing with them. In many cases, the voluntary sector may be the most appropriate conduit into such families and be able to take a more creative approach to prevention.
- 2.7 **Proportionality and dealing with offences** - a careful balance needs to be struck between cautions / out of court disposals / penalty notices and the need to a) avoid criminalising young people unnecessarily and b) deter offenders from committing further crimes. Often the most effective way of preventing reoffending is to take time to understand what has caused offending behaviour in the first place and address the underlying factors. Unfortunately, there is often limited resources available to do this especially in relation to offenders who receive short sentences and benefit from limited if any support while in custody.
- 2.8 **Resettlement** - access to a suitable resettlement service can be a 'postcode lottery' and can be more difficult if custody is taking place some distance from home. Mentoring offenders before they are to be released has demonstrated a proven value but again, more resources are required to support this service which is often delivered by the voluntary sector.
- 2.9 **Victim awareness** - the recent focus on the 'victim perspective' of offending was welcomed and should be supported. The criminal justice System should refocus into a criminal justice Service which places the victim at the centre rather than on the margins of policy and delivery mechanisms. Initiatives that bring victims and offenders together were considered to be particularly effective.
- 2.10 **Budgets** - resource constraints and anticipated reductions in budgets were common themes throughout the event. Most public sector agencies are expecting growing pressure on budgets and concerns were raised regarding the impact on all aspects of the community safety and criminal justice system. Again, the LGA is working with government to address financial issues and where possible mitigate the effects of financial restraint.

3.0 CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The 'Criminal Justice in Action' event was considered to be a rare, perhaps unique, opportunity for such a wide range of policy makers, strategists and practitioners to meet together and share an understanding of the national and local criminal justice landscape. Feedback has demonstrated that the participants greatly valued the opportunity to consider this landscape as a whole and better understand how their own role 'fitted in'. Many issues were raised which reflect the complexity and significance of the criminal justice system and these will be used at local level to further inform our strategic approach to community safety, crime and disorder.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 To note this report



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ACTION

MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE COUNCIL
2ND DECEMBER 2009, 11.30AM - 3PM
COMMITTEE ROOM, COUNCIL HOUSE, FROG LANE, LICHFIELD

PROGRAMME

11.15AM	Arrival and refreshments	
11.30AM	Welcome and introductions Purpose of the event	Councillor David Smith, Leader, Lichfield District Council
	Lichfield District context - overview	
	Criminal Justice Council - overview of role	
	National Picture	Mark Norris, Senior Policy Consultant, LGA
11.50AM	Crime, offending and reoffending context	Mick Harrison, Acting Assistant Chief Constable, Staffordshire Police Juliet Prince, Superintendent, Justice Services
		Mark Jones, Area Manager, South East Staffordshire Youth Offending Team
12.15PM	Preventing offending	
	Licensing (Bird Street Case Study)	Councillor Ken Humphreys, Chairman, Regulatory and Licensing Committee, LDC
	Diversionary activities (Positive Futures Case Study)	Councillor Val Richards, Deputy Leader and Leisure Portfolio Holder, LDC
	Community Development (NLI Case Study)	Councillor Helen Fisher, Community Portfolio Holder, LDC
	Substance misuse	Pat Merrick, County Commissioner for Substance Misuse Sarah Forrest, Priority Service Commissioning Prisons, South Staffordshire PCT
1.00PM	Working lunch	
1.15PM	Preventing reoffending	
	Role of Crown Prosecution Service	Mark Forster, District Crown Prosecutor, CPS
	Role of courts	David Goodman, Justice Clerk and Director of Legal Services
	Role of prison	Tom Watson, Governor of Swinfen Hall Prison
	Role of probation service	TBA
	Resettlement	Jackie Worrall, Director, Policy and Public Affairs, NACRO
	Role of Victim Support	Martyn Herward Regional Manager (West Midlands), Victim Support
2.05PM	Impact of national criminal justice framework on locality	Discussion
2.50PM	Summing up and close	David Smith



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Attendees

Lesley Bovington	Community and Partnerships Manager, LDC
Chris Brown	Strategy Unit, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Jenni Coleman	Community Safety Manager, LDC
Nina Dawes	Chief Executive, LDC
Cllr Helen Fisher	Community Safety Portfolio Holder, LDC
Sarah Forrest	Priority Services Commissioning Prisons, South Staffordshire PCT
Mark Forster	District Crown Prosecutor
Lesley Gilman	Chairman Elect, South-East Staffordshire Magistrates
David Goodman	Justices' Clerk and Director of Legal Services
Hugo Gorst-Williams	Strategy Unit, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Mick Harrison	Acting Assistant Chief Constable, Staffordshire Police
Martyn Herward	Regional Manager- West Midlands, Victim Support
Cllr Ken Humphreys	Chairman, Regulatory and Licensing Committee, LDC
Dan Johns	Local Delivery Advisor for the West Midlands, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Mark Jones	Area Manager, South East Staffordshire Youth Offending Team
Cllr Les Lawrence	Chairman, Safer Communities Board, LGA
Lucy McKee	Strategy Unit, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Pat Merrick	County Commissioner for Substance Misuse, Joint Commissioning Unit, Staffordshire County Council
Ian Moss	Director of Strategy Unit, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Bal Nahal	Solicitor, LDC
Mark Norris	Senior Policy Consultant, LGA
Juliet Prince	Superintendent, Justice Services, Staffordshire Police
Cllr Val Richards	Deputy Leader and Leisure Portfolio Holder, LDC
Peter Scott	Area Manager, Business Development, Probation Head Office
Sharon Shattock	Safer Communities Team, GOWM
Cllr David Smith	Leader, LDC
Helen Spearey	Strategic Director, Community Safety, LDC
Laura Timms	Head of Strategy Unit, Office of Criminal Justice Reform
Rose Vakis	Director, Lichfield and District Community and Voluntary Sector
Julie Walker	Director of Housing, HomeZone Living
Tom Watson	Governor, Swinfen Hall Prison
Dawn Williams	Chair, Mentally Disordered Offenders Steering Group
John Wood	Staffordshire Criminal Justice Board
Jackie Worrall	CJC - Director, Policy and Public Affairs, NACRO