

Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee

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Inquiry into Community Safety in Wales - Welsh Local Government Association

Introduction

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) represents the 22 local authorities in Wales, and the three national park authorities, the three fire and rescue authorities, and four police authorities are associate members. It seeks to provide representation to local authorities within an emerging policy framework that satisfies the key priorities of our members and delivers a broad range of services that add value to Welsh local government and the communities they serve.

This Report is submitted to the National Assembly for Wales's Communities, Equality and Local Government Committee in response to its inquiry into the impact of public spending cuts on the Welsh police forces, specifically:

- The impact of public spending cuts on frontline policing;
- Details about the Welsh police force's reform programme designed to improve efficiency and reduce costs; and
- The implications for local communities and community safety policy in Wales.

The majority of the information presented relates to the impact of the public spending cuts on community safety partnerships (CSPs). The WLGA is aware of and supportive of the evidence that has been submitted by the Police Authorities of Wales and endorses their key messages in relation to the future funding of policing.

General Comments

Community Safety is a high public priority and one that can affect the quality of life for individuals and entire communities. Community safety budgets have suffered significantly, and will continue to suffer next year, as a result of the reductions in public finances. The Home Office Community Safety Fund has been cut by 20 per cent in 2011-12 and will be cut by a further 40 per cent in 2012-13. Such cuts in funding will have a significant impact on the activities CSPs will be able to undertake and while CSPs will need to prioritise and innovate to reduce the impact of such levels of cuts, it is also inevitable that some community safety related posts will need to be cut, merged or curtailed. CSPs and their member organisations are actively considering how they can mitigate the cuts they are facing and maintain key activities in relation to improving the safety of their local communities.

It should also be noted that the Welsh Government provides a range of Grants to CSPs, for example, Substance Misuse Action Plan Fund and the Safer Communities Fund. These Grants for 2011/12 were maintained at a similar level to 2010/11, which was welcomed, but with no inflationary increase and indications are that the Grants will continue at a similar level for 2012/13. However, the future of the Community Cohesion Fund provided by the Welsh Government is unclear for the coming year as the current grant of £1.7 million is only committed until the end of March 2012. Without continued funding, it is likely that a range of community cohesion projects will be discontinued.

The Youth Justice Grant from the Ministry of Justice to Local Authorities has also been significantly reduced in 2011-12 (indicative cuts of 11-12 per cent), which is likely to have a particularly negative impact on prevention work with those at risk of offending. Some of the Ministry of Justice proposals in relation to reforming youth justice could have a significant financial impact on local authorities e.g. proposals to make local authorities responsible for the full cost of court ordered secure remand.

There is a huge risk and increasing challenge in the mainstreaming of community safety across other relevant policy areas and services in the current financial climate. Over 63 per cent of responses to a national survey reported that the commitment of partner agencies had reduced over the last twelve months^[1]. Responses also highlighted a reduction in the number of projects being undertaken, large scale merging of staff responsibilities, reduced community contact and a reduction in volunteering involvement.

Community Safety Partnerships

The WLGA facilitates the All Wales Community Safety Forum which has the aim of providing strategic oversight of community safety issues in Wales. It also aims to aid joint working and disseminate good practice and help provide a joined-up approach to deliver shared objectives and/or priorities. The issue of the cuts facing CSPs was discussed at their meeting in April 2011 and concern was raised by the members as to their impact on local community safety activities. The WLGA, on behalf of the Forum, then wrote to all local authorities seeking information on how the cuts were likely to impact at the local level and directly on CSPs. This paper is largely based upon the responses received.

Impact

A consistent theme of the responses was that funding changes were having a negative impact however the cuts anticipated in 2012/13 would have more of an impact with an effect on staffing levels and on activity, for example, related to preventative work, anti-social behaviour and prolific offenders. Linked to the cuts to CSP funding was the impact of budgetary cuts on other related services, for example, analyst posts and crime prevention posts had been cut which was also having an impact on the work of the CSP. Examples of what the cuts mean in monetary terms is highlighted in the table below:

^[1] Community Safety Consultation 2011, National Community Safety Network Ltd.

	2010/11	2011/12	2012/13
Authority A	£173,613	£138,493	£70,064
Authority B	£71,565	£57,088	£28,881
Authority C	£111,419	£88,880	£45,965

Some of specific feedback provided by authorities, that reflect the numerous negative impacts on the work of CSPs, is highlighted below:

"This financial year our CSP have cut several preventative and supporting services that were performing well and having positive impacts on reducing crime and disorder. This has put more pressure on statutory services to provide support at a time when they are also introducing the cuts, thereby leaving communities without the support they need".

"Although deemed a high priority by the Partnership, this funding does not sustain a 'service' or ensure the employment of key staff. Its loss reduces the effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Management approach but the consequences of cutting are not as dramatic as loss of a needed service".

"Inevitably, the absence of any capital funding has prevented any investment in measures such as lighting, alley gating or CCTV.....In addition, it is increasingly difficult for funding to be identified to deal with issues such as drug taking related litter, abandoned vehicles, off road motorcycling nuisance and other issues that feature regularly in PACT meetings and impact on the 'fear of crime' but in general are not allocated a status of priority."

"The cessation of the capital grant element of the Grant (Community Safety Fund) has had a significant impact on our ability to support vulnerable victims of crime by improving their personal safety and the security of their homes".

"Of more significant impact is the reduction in the Youth Justice Board grant for Youth Offending Teams and the potential impact of payment by results and changes to the funding formula. Again, this year we have managed the reduced funding in a way that minimises the impact on the frontline but future reductions will hamper our ability to support young offenders and their victims, prevent re-offending and prevent offending among young people in the first place".

"We are concerned that much of the excellent and innovative work that has been achieved in responding to local issues will be lost".

"Compounding the problem is the fact that both the Council and Police Service are currently faced with their own internal financial and resource issues, greatly limiting any ability for successful projects or initiatives to be 'mainstreamed'".

In addition to the issues and concerns highlighted, it should also be noted that the lack of sustainability of community safety grants impedes progress and any long term planning. Many CSPs have raised concern at the lack of notice of the impending cuts in funding, with limited time to plan for the 2011/12 cuts and give the required notice to staff and the affected services.

The immediate impact of reducing funding levels, as described above, is clearly an enormous concern, but the longer term impact of a reduction in community safety and crime prevention activity must also be considered. Effective community safety activity can result in on-going savings from reduced vandalism, crime and demands on the Health Service - savings that will no longer materialise as activity reduces, increasing future budget pressures on other parts of the public sector in future years.

Mitigating Actions

CSPs have worked hard to effectively manage the cuts introduced for 2011/12 and are increasingly preparing for the increased level of cuts in 2012/13. There are a range of steps local authorities are taking to protect prioritised areas of work and are talking with wider partners and across boundaries to assess and maximise the opportunities and benefits of collaborative working in reducing costs and maintaining priority services. For example, in North Wales a Community Safety Board is being established across the region. The purpose of the North Wales Community Safety Board will be to address the broad community safety agenda in an effective and efficient manner and its remit will encompass the business of the region's Community Safety Partnerships, Youth Justice Services and elements of the Criminal Justice Board. Governance arrangements are currently being put in place and a project group is working to ensure that the Board is functioning in time for April 2012.

CSPs are taking a range of actions to mitigate the impact of the cuts through thinking creatively, seeking alternative ways of working and funding and unfortunately, through the loss of a range of community safety posts, for example, Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinators. The examples highlighted below reflect the various approaches being undertaken:

"Our policy has been to seek to mitigate the impact by continuing to invest in the motivated and experienced staff of the CSP, and requiring creativity on their part to identify alternative methods of service delivery rather than by ceasing effective interventions and activities.....examples of this include working towards shared posts, community engagement activities actively promoting a culture of self help' and working more closely with third sector agencies and the Street Pastors who assist in delivering service".

"We are in the process of implementing a mini-restructure of our Community Safety Team which will see 4 posts replaced by 1. This will give us a staffing structure that we can afford in light of the reduction in funding notified for next year, but clearly it also means a reduction in activity".

"We have already been in discussion across our statutory partnerships to align our planning processes into a single plan and see longer term opportunities to reduce costs".

"With the ever increasing community safety agenda, the team has already streamlined workloads wherever possible to ensure that front line services and issues which directly impact on local communities are prioritised".

"We do have to find ways to reduce costs and get more for less whilst maintaining excellent public services and good performance. This is the challenge for community safety partnerships".

CSPs and Police and Crime Commissioners

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act received Royal Assent in September 2011 and elections for Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) will be held in November 2012. The Home Office intend that in future, funding for policing and funding previously allocated to CSPs will be provided directly to the Police and Crime Commissioners to allocate; it is understood that this policy will be introduced from April 2013 (PCCs will be able to make crime and disorder reduction grants to any organisation or person in their force area). The introduction of PCCs will mean a fundamental change for CSPs and the Act places a mutual duty on PCCs and the responsible authorities on CSPs to cooperate to reduce crime and disorder and offending. The Act also requires a PCC when pulling together a Police and Crime Plan to have regard to the priorities of the responsible authorities in their force area, while CSPs will have to have regard to the objectives in the PCCs' Police and Crime Plan when exercising their functions. However, CSPs are likely to find they face different funding issues as PCCs become commissioners of services.

Many CSPs and local authorities are concerned at the prospect of current Home Office CSP funding being transferred to PCCs in the future and there is a clear preference for the funding to be continued to be provided to CSPs direct. The Welsh Government has indicated their funding streams will continue to be allocated direct to CSPs (and not the PCC) and this is welcomed. Comments provided by local authorities on their concerns included:

"There is major concern that if Police and Crime Commissioners come into being and are given the Community Safety Fund, activity that bolsters and adds value to the core business of CSP agencies will be lost".

"Such a move will only serve to further undermine the work and importance of the Partnerships, alienate the Partners themselves and directly contradict the previous assertion that the Partnerships are best placed to deliver local interventions in response to local needs".

"Priorities will be decided on a regional rather than a local basis, thereby omitting some key issues for local communities.....It will be difficult for one

individual at the strategic level of a PCC to have the detailed knowledge to be able to make the right decisions for each county”.

“Colleagues take the view that the experience developed over a number of years, and the consistent and significant positive results achieved, demonstrate the effectiveness of financial decisions taken by the CSP, and we see no valid or rational case to change this arrangement”.

Conclusion

It is clear from the feedback from CSPs that the 60 per cent funding cut they face over a two year period will have significant impacts on community safety activity undertaken across all parts of Wales. The level of cuts required by the police over the next few years, when combined with the increasing budgetary challenges experienced by local authorities, poses a huge challenge for CSPs, community safety and in continuing to tackle and reduce crime and disorder. While positive steps are being taken to reduce and manage the impact on services, it is inevitable that community safety activities will reduce.

There remains commitment from CSPs to ensure that successes Partnerships have achieved to date continue to reduce crime and the fear of crime. CSPs and all members are aware of the importance of maintaining public confidence and reduce the ‘reassurance gap’.