

Introduction

Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) play a crucial role in tackling crime, addressing the needs of their communities, and ensuring the justice system is fair and effective. In this role, PCCs can stimulate local innovative practice, bring together organisations and individuals from across the criminal justice system to make these initiatives a success and make substantial change to the lives of people affected by crime.

This document highlights some of the main challenges facing the criminal justice system and provides practical innovative solutions that prospective PCCs could include in their manifestos for the 2020 elections.

Tackling violent crime

While overall levels of violent crime have decreased over the past ten years, there have been worrying rises in knife crime and robbery. To tackle this, PCCs, with the support of the Home Office, should create Violence Reduction Units, which use a multi-agency, long-term approach to tackle violence and its underlying causes, especially for young people. Much work is already underway to do just this. These efforts will be most effective when they draw on the crucial expertise of people with lived experience of violent crime in both the design and delivery of services.

Case study 1: The Scottish Violence Reduction Unit, initially created by Strathclyde Police in 2005, adopted a public health approach and developed a range of innovative solutions. These included the use of ‘navigators’ working in hospitals to connect patients affected by violence to programmes, and support for developing social enterprises such as Street & Arrow, who employ people with convictions to work in their street food stalls, providing mentoring and training. Since its creation, Scotland has seen homicides fall 39 per cent over the last decade.

Case study 2: St Giles Trust runs the SOS project which offers intensive support to vulnerable young people.¹ The support is provided by carefully selected, professionally trained individuals who come from similar backgrounds as the young people they are supporting, offering real understanding of the challenges they are likely to encounter. St Giles Trust also runs projects in Kent and South Wales, working in partnership with the police and others agencies to tackle the exploitation of children through county lines.

Case study 3: Preventing child sexual exploitation (CSE) remains a key priority for the police, and PCCs can play a key role in raising awareness of the issue to help identify CSE and prevent it at an early stage. PCCs can also support initiatives to increase understanding of the issue, such as in Cleveland where the PCC commissioned research into the perpetrators of CSE and effective interventions, as well as ensuring that victims of CSE receive tailored support.

Supporting victims of crime

PCCs play a crucial role in ensuring that victims of crime are appropriately supported and that they receive their entitlements under the Victims’ Code. One effective way of doing this is to commission restorative justice (RJ) services, which provide victims with an opportunity to meet or communicate with the person who committed the crime to explain its harmful impact. Evidence shows that RJ can improve victims’ satisfaction and feelings of fairness, while also holding offenders to account. RJ has also been shown to reduce reoffending.²

Main challenges



Tackling
violent crime



Supporting
victims of crime



Reducing the harm
caused by drugs



Breaking the cycle
of re-offending



Building trust in
policing across
all communities

Case study 4: Restorative Gloucestershire, which has benefitted from long-term funding by the PCC, brings together agencies and authorities to facilitate RJ, strengthening provision, taking the lead in its area to build awareness and confidence in the use of restorative interventions, and acting as a 'centre of excellence' that provides training and strategy development to embed restorative practice across a range of partner agencies.³ Gloucestershire allows both victims and those who have committed offences to initiate RJ, which can increase the number of referrals.

PCCs have a vital role to play in providing holistic services to support survivors of domestic violence and sexual abuse.

Case study 5: In Dyfed-Powys, the PCC consolidated a number of separate contracts to provide Independent Domestic Violence Advisory services, working with four local authorities to jointly commission a service that works in courts and with health partners to ensure victims are offered support at first contact with health services. Almost three quarters of people said they feel better able to cope with aspects of everyday life after leaving the service.⁴

PCCs can bring together relevant agencies, including grassroots organisations working with specific community groups, to help victims of hate crime access services and increase confidence in the reporting of hate crime.

Case study 6: The Warwickshire PCC coordinates the Warwickshire Hate Crime Partnership, which brings together representatives from a number of statutory, voluntary and community organisations. A partnership website also provides information and advice on hate crime, as well as allowing the reporting of incidents in Warwickshire.⁵



Reducing the harm caused by drugs

There were 4,359 deaths related to drug poisoning in England and Wales in 2018, the highest number since figures were recorded. Over half of these deaths involved an opiate.⁶ PCCs can help ensure police officers are equipped with naloxone and support other agencies administering naloxone.

Case study 7: Naloxone is an emergency antidote for overdoses caused by heroin and other opiates/opioids. It temporarily reverses the main life-threatening effect of these drugs (the slowing and stopping of breathing).⁷ West Midlands is one example of an area following such an approach.⁸

PCCs could also explore supporting the use of drug safety testing, which allows people to voluntarily submit a sample of their drugs for testing to identify what they contain, without fear of arrest. These tests provide information to individuals about what substance they actually have in their possession, and they also provide useful intelligence on the drug market in a particular area.

Case study 8: Initial evidence on drug safety testing schemes in the UK suggests that they can access harder-to reach and new user groups, and can play a part in reducing drug-related harm.⁹ Drug safety testing has been successfully implemented at a number of festivals in the UK and the Home Office has also licensed a pilot in Weston-super-Mare at a treatment centre for people who use heroin and other drugs.



Breaking the cycle of re-offending

People often commit crime due to underlying issues in their lives such as drug or alcohol dependence, mental and physical health issues, housing or homelessness, or problems with money or relationships. PCCs can use smart approaches to intervene early on, so people don't end up caught in the cycle of re-offending. Recent evidence suggests these types of projects reduce both re-offending and the financial costs to the criminal justice system.¹⁰

Case study 9: Checkpoint is a programme run by Durham Constabulary, funded by the Durham PCC, which aims to reduce the number of victims of crime by reducing reoffending. Checkpoint offers eligible offenders a 4-month long contract as an alternative to prosecution. They are supported through the process by a specialist police 'navigator' who completes a detailed needs assessment with them and draws up the contract. The contract offers interventions to address the underlying reasons why they committed the crime to prevent them from doing it again, and the offender makes a commitment not to reoffend for the duration of the process.

Case study 10: CASSPLUS is an advice and support service for people attending magistrates' courts in Devon and Cornwall. The service, which has been running since 2005, uses volunteers to offer practical advice, personalised support, and help to access services. It helps people resolve a range of issues which can lead to offending, such as debt, homelessness and mental illness. A 2017 evaluation found that the service 'has a considerable and enduring impact on the clients it supports and the agencies it works with'.

PCCs can play a vital role in commissioning Women's Centres, which provide safe spaces for women facing multiple disadvantages, many of whom are victims of sexual or domestic abuse, to access specialist services as a 'one-stop-shop' that will support them across a range of issues. Evidence shows that Women's Centres reduce reoffending more effectively than prison sentences, and have formed a successful part of Greater Manchester's pioneering approach to supporting women who have offended.¹¹

Case study 11: Sussex is pursuing a Whole Systems Approach to women in the Criminal Justice System. It consolidates agencies together to use existing resources more effectively, to share information and to coordinate women's access to services, improving the chances of successful outcomes in and out of the criminal justice system.¹²

PCCs' work can be greatly enriched by involving people with lived experience of the criminal justice system in the design, commissioning and implementation of policies and programmes. Recruiting and consulting with people with lived experience improves PCCs' understanding of how to prevent crime and re-offending in their areas. For example the West Midlands PCC has used paid internships to do this.

The expected changes to probation services may also give PCCs greater opportunity to work in partnership with agencies to ensure the right support is in place for people leaving prison to reduce reoffending.



Building trust in policing across all communities

In 1829, British policing was established on the principle that 'the power of the police to fulfil their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions and behaviour and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect.' PCCs can play a crucial role in building the trust of all our communities in the police and ensuring agencies comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, for example, by ensuring thorough needs assessments are carried out for different groups.

Case study 12: A group of individuals reflecting a range of voices from across a local community can be a valuable resource for a police force that wants to ensure it is transparent, accountable and effective. A Diversity Panel can assist with community scrutiny, as well as providing advice to the police, conducting research and helping co-produce services. Humberside PCC recruits its Diversity Panel with robust processes, holds regular community events and engages widely with the criminal justice system, including in prison. Humberside draws on the expertise of its Diversity Panel in a range of ways, including scrutinising the police's use of force.¹³

Young people aged 14-25 have lower levels of trust and confidence in the police than other cohorts. It is therefore crucial that criminal justice agencies, including the police,¹⁴ take a distinctive approach that recognises the range of developmental maturity.¹⁵

Case study 13: Youth Commissions on Police and Crime, established by Leaders Unlocked, are platforms for young people aged 14-25 to influence the future of policing and crime prevention in their local areas by working in partnership with their PCCs and police forces to tackle urgent issues such as reducing youth offending, relationships with the police, and support for young victims and witnesses. Youth Commissions are also valuable recruitment pools of talented and motivated individuals - about eight per cent of Youth Commissioners have progressed on to become Special Constables, PCSOs or other roles such as Independent Custody Visitors and Community Court members.¹⁶

Historically, the police's use of stop and search has disproportionately affected people from black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds, undermining their trust in the police.¹⁷ PCCs can support Community Scrutiny Groups to allow communities to scrutinise the police's use of stop and search, which may help to improve the police's relationship with the communities they serve. These groups should be independent, representative of those most impacted by stop and search, open and visible to the public, and informed by a range of relevant information.¹⁸

Case study 14: The Ipswich and Suffolk Council for Racial Equality analyses the legality of all searches in its area, taking concerns to the police and escalating issues to a Stop and Search Reference Group when necessary. This process has resulted in line management action being taken against officers and supervising officers. ISCRE also contributes to Suffolk Constabulary's stop search and policy, procedure and training.¹⁹

The police have long struggled to establish trust and confidence within BAME communities. PCCs can improve trust by supporting opportunities to create more diverse police forces that better reflect the range of communities they serve.

Case study 15: Bedfordshire's Accelerated Detective Constable Programme creates a rapid training path to detective for candidates meeting rigorous requirements. Bedfordshire Police have been encouraging individuals from BAME groups to apply for this scheme.²⁰

Endnotes

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The Criminal Justice Alliance is a coalition of over 150 organisations – including charities, voluntary sector service providers, research institutions and staff associations – working across the criminal justice pathway. We work to achieve a fairer and more effective criminal justice system which is safe, smart, person-centred, restorative and trusted.

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