



Is partnership working? Complexities and barriers in the development of community safety practice in Wales

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Accepted: 5 July 2023
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Abstract

Community safety in England and Wales underwent significant change a quarter of a century ago when community safety partnerships (CSPs) were introduced as part of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Measures to reduce or prevent anti-social behaviour and crime became the responsibility of not just the police but multiple public and third-sector organisations working in partnership. In Wales, additional complexity exists due to most CSP partners operating and working under both the UK, and Welsh Government remit. Findings from mixed-methods research into the training needs of community safety professionals in Wales revealed that support was needed in several areas of practice, including the practicing of meaningful ‘partnership’ working and problem solving. However, given the complex partnership landscape in Wales and lack of clarity around partnership governance, coupled with a seeming overreliance on the police and local government within community safety, the success of collaborative learning and development plans is limited.

Keywords Community safety · Crime prevention · Partnership working · Learning and development · Partnership governance

Introduction

Community safety and localised partnership working has become a core method of crime prevention across the globe. While these approaches may be rooted in the political structures of each respective country and thus may not be directly transferable, ideas surrounding best practice are routinely shared in global seminars (Huff-Corzine 2018). In this paper, we discuss community safety in Wales which emerged following the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This Act introduced a new approach to community safety and crime reduction in England and Wales. Prevention and reduction of ‘community-based’ crime became the responsibility of several criminal

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justice and social agencies, as well as third-sector organisations working together in localised partnerships. The rationale behind these partnerships came from the Morgan Report that suggested that crime prevention was not the sole responsibility of the police (Home Office 1991). Since their initial inception as ‘Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships’ to present-day ‘Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)’, they have become the subject of plenty of academic scrutiny and evaluation. This work has been quite varied and wide reaching, from a focus on the general dynamics of partnership working (Gilling 2007), and the intrusive nature of some primary crime preventative methods used by partnerships (Crawford 1998), to the fusion of social and criminal justice policies (Gilling 2001). Added to this body of work is the expanded scope that falls under the remit of a CSP. Over the years, CSPs have been given the responsibility to reduce reoffending, conduct domestic homicide reviews, and decrease harm caused by substance misuse. These additional responsibilities show no sign of abating, with the UK Government adding a further explicit duty to prevent serious violence (Home Office 2022a) with plans to strengthen anti-social behaviour responses (Home Office 2023).

Arguably less known or understood is the influence that devolved Welsh Government policies have on CSPs in Wales (Edwards and Hughes 2009; Jones et al 2022; Jones and Wyn Jones 2022). Criminal justice and policing in Wales is a reserved UK Government policy area and thus operates as the England and Wales criminal justice system. However, under provisions outlined in the Government for Wales Act 2006, the Welsh Government and Senedd (Welsh Parliament) can legislate on several policy areas in Wales that impinge heavily upon the administration of criminal justice in Wales. These devolved policy areas include social welfare, health, and local government, which means that CSPs in Wales are shaped by policies of the UK Government and Welsh Government. Jones and Wyn Jones (2022) argue that criminal justice in Wales operates on the ‘jagged edge’ as it navigates and responds to the competing and contrasting views of two governments. Crime policies are typically punitive at UK Government level, but the Welsh Government’s approach has been described as progressive (Evans et al 2022). Wales’ constitution has been described as a global anomaly due to it being the only common law country in the world to have a legislature, executive but not a judiciary (Jones 2021).

Community safety partnerships in Wales

Convention in effective CSP working has long suggested that characteristics such as ‘communication’, ‘knowledge sharing’, and ‘mutual cooperation’ are integral (Crawford 1999). However, in practice, a sentiment of individual organisational autonomy, which ironically is shared by partners, has acted as a barrier meaning that CSPs have fallen short of their intended impact (Crawford 1999). Crawford and Evans (2017: 815) have provided further elaboration of this that includes:

“...reluctance of some agencies to participate (especially health, education, and social services); the dominance of a policing agenda; [an] unwillingness [of agencies] to share information; conflicting interests, priorities and cultural



assumptions on the part of different agencies; local political differences; lack of inter-organisational trust; desire to protect budgets; lack of capacity and expertise; and over reliance on informal contacts and networks, which lapsed if key individuals moved on.”

In Wales, CSPs have been seen as ineffective and in need of improvement by the Wales Audit Office (Thomas 2016). Despite the notion that partnerships usually improve when given time to mature (Hommel and Brown 2017), a Welsh Government (2017) review highlighted ‘assessment fatigue’, weakness within information sharing, and a lack of evidence-based approaches. CSPs operate unevenly in Wales in terms of financial resources provided, geographical boundaries, and local government commitment (Edwards and Hughes 2007). Reports produced by the Wales Safer Communities Network (WSCN) identified that agencies work within their own remit in terms of contributing towards community safety (WSCN 2021a; WSCN 2021b). Furthermore, WSCN found that substantive community safety initiatives were perceived to be driven by local authorities and the police ‘rather than truly reflecting a joint endeavour’ (WSCN 2021b: 8). Indeed, a Welsh Government review (2017: 38) observed that ‘responsible authorities have tended to *shrink back into silos* and focus on what is deemed to be *core business* or achieving the statutory minimum requirement, with partnership working viewed as *nice to* but not essential’. These changes are attributed to austerity policies and changes in funding when Police and Crime Commissioners were introduced in 2012 (Welsh Government 2017; Jones et al. 2022).

A further explanation of the rationalisation of Welsh CSPs may be understood through the inclusion of community safety work within ‘single integrated plans’ introduced within Local Service Boards in 2011 (see Welsh Government 2012). This work was replaced under the Welsh Government’s Wellbeing of Future Generations (WFOG) Act 2015, where devolved institutions such as local government, the NHS, and Fire and Rescue Services have statutory responsibilities to implement ‘wellbeing’ goals. It is within the legislative framework that Public Service Boards (PSBs) across Wales operate in a similar fashion to CSPs in terms of their localised structure, membership, and commitment to reduce or prevent behaviour, for example ASB, that affects wellbeing (Welsh Government 2023). Criminal justice agencies (such as the police, police and crime commissioners, and probation) participation on PSBs is voluntary, although they are known to regularly attend (Jones et al. 2022).

Learning and development

In its *Working Together for Safer Communities Review*, the Welsh Government concluded that decreasing resources for community safety had severely impacted the training and development of community safety practitioners (Wales Government 2017). Resources such as the Home Office’s Crime Reduction website, accredited multi-agency problem-solving training, as well as community safety toolkits and guidance (including examples of best practice) were removed because of UK Government led austerity policies (Welsh Government 2017). In response, the Welsh



Government “proposed to establish...in partnership with devolved and non-devolved partners [a] long-term programme of work...for safer communities in Wales” (Wales Government 2017: 74). An outcome of this was the establishment of the Wales Safer Communities Network (WSCN) in 2021 (WSCN 2023a).

Central to the remit of the WSCN is to influence the (re)development of community safety policy and practice across Wales, including learning and development opportunities. Recently, the WSCN identified that CSP practitioners felt confident in their skills and ability in relation to partnership working, although austerity had clearly impacted broader training needs to support professional practice (WSCN 2021c). This provided a rationale for further research that captured perspectives from a wider range of CSP partners and the resulting report which we draw upon in this paper (Rabaiotti et al. 2022).

Despite the emphasis and intention of the Welsh Government to professionalise CSPs (see Welsh Government 2017), the impact has been piecemeal and felt unevenly by all agencies involved. One possible explanation of this rests in the capacitive role of the Welsh Government. In many respects this is limited due to criminal justice and policing being a reserved UK Government policy, although this is not to suggest that CSP practices are not influenced by Welsh Government legislation. Indeed, as Jones and Wyn Jones (2022) point out, legislation such as the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence (VAWDASV) (Wales) Act 2015 created statutory requirements for numerous Welsh public services to set national and local performance targets and indicators in relation to preventing acts of domestic violence. While the police are not listed as a ‘relevant authority’ in this Act, other CSP partners such as local authorities, the NHS, and Fire and Rescue Services are. These partners sit on regional boards to provide practitioner development through a Wales (rather than UK) *National Training Framework* (Welsh Government 2022). Despite VAWDASV existing in a separate partnership from a CSP, it contains CSP partners that have similar responsibilities in their CSP role, not least the legislative requirement to conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews.

It is not just the constitutional settlement in Wales that affects CSP learning and development. In recent times, the opportunities, progression and professionalisation of policing through the development of the College of Policing, and the police educational qualifications framework apprenticeships also demonstrate the unevenness of development across community safety. These developments in policing have served to add to the dominant position that police have traditionally held in CSPs (Newburn 2002).

Methodology

An important aim of our research was to generate a more detailed understanding of learning and development opportunities for agencies that participate in CSPs across Wales. The focus of the research was on developing an understanding of the training needs of seven WSCN topic areas (ASB and disorder; crime and crime prevention; equalities, inclusion, and cohesion; modern slavery and exploitation; offending and justice; public safety; serious violence and organised crime)



Table 1 Survey participants

Organisation	20 Local authority 12 Police 8 Office of Police and Crime Commissioner 3 Other partners (specifically health, housing & third sector)
Location	16 Dyfed & Powys 14 South Wales 6 North Wales 6 Gwent (1 unknown)
Role	19 Managerial 15 Practitioner 6 Both Managerial & Practitioner 3 Other

(see WSCN 2023b). Analysis of training in relation to VAWDASV, as well as counterterrorism and extremism was excluded, as these are extensively covered through existing arrangements.

Our unit of analysis is CSPs in *Wales*. As a non-sovereign country that has a distinctive devolution settlement especially in relation to the administration of criminal justice, Wales is under researched in relation to all aspects of justice and policing (Jones and Wyn Jones 2022). It has, for some time, been recognised that community safety in Wales operates differently when compared with counterparts in England. Edwards and Hughes (2009: 78) have argued that ‘is seriously flawed’ to consider Wales ‘will simply reflect the tendencies of its larger neighbour (England)’.

Survey

A multi-methodological approach was used in the research. First, an online survey was distributed to a range of community safety agencies that had subscribed to the WSCN emailing list. This method of convenience sampling was used because of its clear accessibility to those that work in community safety. The survey was designed to gather data on (1) current levels of confidence in CSP practice (2) what development opportunities agencies thought were needed to progress community safety, and (3) what was the preferable approach (e.g., formal qualifications, CPD certificates etc.) of any community safety development opportunity.

Adopting conventional survey design, our survey predominately used closed-ended questions to enable participants to easily process answers and clarify meaning (Bryman 2016). From a distribution list of 250 participants, 43 participants completed the survey which equated to a 17.2% response rate. Most of the participants worked in local authorities or the police (see Table 1). We understood that our choice of sampling method could generate an unevenly distributed sample, although we redressed the representation of participants in the focus group.



Table 2 Focus group participants

Participant	Grouping for qualitative comments
Local authority community safety manager or equivalent	Local Authority representative
Representative of all wales ASB practitioners group	Local Authority representative
Representative of wales association of community safety officers	Local Authority representative
Police officer with training experience	Criminal Justice representative
Police and crime commissioners representative	Criminal Justice representative
Senior probation manager	Criminal Justice representative
Senior fire and rescue manager	Partnership representative
Senior health representative	Partnership representative
Third sector manager 1	Third sector representative
Third sector manager 2	Third sector representative

Focus group

In addition to the survey, an online focus group with community safety representatives was used. This method provided in-depth qualitative responses to questions that considered community safety skills, existing learning and development provisions. It also considered opportunities to further develop these skills as well as questions in relation to governance of community safety due to this being recognised in the survey as an area participants felt the least confident in. The focus group made it possible to reveal why there was a lack of understanding around governance, but also more generally we were able to reveal some of the discrepancies as well as corroborate findings from the survey (Webb et al. 1966).

A purposive sample was drawn from a sampling frame of WSCN board representatives. This enabled us to redress the imbalance of participants from the survey, as we were able to select from a wider range of partners involved in CSPs (see Table 2). In total there were nine participants selected to take part in the study. While research has argued that a sample of this size is too large for a focus group in terms of posing moderation difficulties (Barbour 2007), online focus groups enabled the exchange of comments and sharing of personal experiences, particularly where sensitive topics were discussed (Woodyatt et al. 2016). Participants were able to use the ‘chat’ function, and we were supported by an additional moderator, which enhanced the richness of our data.

Findings

Our findings are categorised into three thematic areas. First, we present our participants understanding of community safety skills and training. Then, the focus switches to barriers that influence meaningful partnerships. The final theme considers governance of CSPs. While our participants appeared confident in relation to CSP skills, there was a demand for training. This was compounded by issues



Table 3 Knowledge of crime areas covered in community safety

Crime area	Extremely knowledgeable	Knowledgeable	Somewhat knowledgeable	Somewhat not knowledgeable	Not at all knowledgeable
ASB and disorder	17 (39.5%)	15 (34.9%)	8 (18.6%)	2 (4.7%)	1 (2.3%)
Crime and crime prevention	15 (34.9%)	16 (37.2%)	11 (25.6%)	1 (2.3%)	0 (0%)
Equalities, inclusion, and cohesion	7 (16.3%)	20 (46.5%)	16 (37.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Governance	5 (11.9%)	14 (33.3%)	20 (47.6%)	2 (4.8%)	1 (2.4%)
Information sharing	7 (16.3%)	22 (51.2%)	12 (27.9%)	2 (4.7%)	0 (0%)
Modern slavery and exploitation	4 (9.3%)	16 (37.2%)	15 (34.9%)	7 (16.3%)	1 (2.3%)
Offending and justice	5 (11.9%)	15 (35.7%)	17 (40.5%)	5 (11.9%)	0 (0%)
Public safety	9 (20.9%)	17 (39.5%)	15 (34.9%)	2 (4.7%)	0 (0%)
Serious violence and organised crime	8 (18.6%)	17 (39.5%)	15 (34.9%)	2 (4.7%)	1 (2.3%)
Total responses	77 (20%)	152 (39.5%)	129 (33.5%)	23 (6%)	4 (1%)

connected to partnership working as well as a distinct lack of understanding of governance issues.

Reconceptualising community safety skills and training

The findings indicated a high overall confidence level in appropriate skills¹ for community safety (74.3% of participants), particularly within ‘communication’ and ‘involving others’. Despite this confidence, there was a demand for skills-based training, particularly in ‘strategic assessment’, ‘research skills’, ‘problem solving’ and ‘risk assessment’. Most participants felt they were knowledgeable in community safety topic areas (see Table 3), with the strongest knowledge within ‘anti-social behaviour’ (74.4% of all participants indicated that they were knowledgeable or extremely knowledgeable).

However, there was consensus amongst participants to re-establish basic community safety training. A third of the participants, all with long standing community safety experience, explained comprehensive training was available around 20 years ago but no longer exists. This included a crime reduction residential programme described as a ‘matter of course for people working in community safety’. Run by Centrex,² a precursor to the College of Policing, it included situational crime

¹ Skills were drawn from NOS/National Occupational Standards. (2017) Develop and manage multi-agency partnerships. NOS & Skills for Justice. Original URN SFJ HG4.

² Centrex, the common name of the Central Police Training and Development Authority in England in Wales, was established under Part 4 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, later subsumed into the National Police Improvement Agency.



prevention and problem-solving training and was open to local authority officers. As a result, participants explained that long serving staff are drawn upon for their knowledge and experience to apply to emerging responsibilities. This perspective is summarised below:

‘We find ourselves really trying to problem solve using those techniques but almost trying to modernise it, make it fit for purpose because our portfolio is just growing by the day... if we just stuck to maybe some of our fundamental crime reduction and community safety [learning] in terms of training. And then we could adapt that for some of these other new things that are coming down the track’ (local authority participant).

There was an agreement amongst participants that the range of work within community safety had increased and there was a consequential need to develop community safety training related to legislation, duties and powers, as well as having basic knowledge of relevant and emerging topics:

‘An overview of the legislation and the different tools and powers...I think that’s a basic thing that people need and then when you couple with problem solving...you’re on a good stead to make a good start as a [community] safety officer’ (local authority participant).

While this research did not set out to explore safeguarding training needs, participants all agreed it should be part of any community safety training package due to the perceived alignment of the two areas and the ‘lines getting very blurred’ (criminal justice participant). In simple terms, safeguarding is about ‘preventing and protecting children and adults at risk from abuse or neglect and educating those around them to recognise the signs and dangers’ (Social Care Wales 2023). This broader, more holistic approach to understanding issues of safety extend to approaches such as ‘contextual safeguarding’ (see Firmin and Lloyd 2020), as was identified by one participant as an area that needed to be considered in community safety training:

‘A lot of community safety issues now fringe so much on safeguarding that it’s certainly something that I’m looking for in my team now as practitioners...this move to contextual safeguarding...if you were to build a system for the future it would have to be in there’ (partnership participant).

It was also noted by participants that the College of Policing (2020) have a ‘what works’ evidenced-based online database, that includes a crime reduction toolkit, but it was unclear how useful this is to learning and development in CSPs. A local authority participant stated they liked the ‘what works’ database, but felt it was ‘a beast of a document’. Indeed, when participants were asked about training environments, online written courses were the least preferred. Participants favoured in-person training, with many suggesting a workplace learning approach as suggested by the following participant:

‘They really do need that on-the-job experience coupled with the classroom session. You can’t go one or the other. It’s got to be a solid combination of both’ (criminal justice participant).



Most participants (64.5%) were strongly in favour or in favour of having some form of professional recognition in community safety. When asked what type of recognition, most preferred a continuous professional development certificate (see Table 4). Police participants were less enthusiastic for the implementation of a higher education qualification. One police participant suggested ‘if you are looking to assist practitioners and communities, I urge you not to turn this [outcome of the research] into a degree making scheme’. Another participant welcomed a joined-up Wales approach to learning and development which focussed on professionalisation:

‘We need a national training framework for community safety. A wider review of all available ‘quality assured’ training modules across the community safety portfolio identified as ‘mandatory’ ‘non-mandatory’. [It would] also, [be] useful to look at national occupational standards to support the professionalisation of community safety professionals’ (local authority participant).

‘We’ve all got a role to play’: Practicing meaningful partnership working and problem solving

Participants were keen to stress the need for a detailed and practical understanding of how partners work together, bringing their own strengths to the CSP and to support the implementation of problem-solving approaches. It was particularly important to highlight the roles and responsibilities beyond the local authority and police:

‘For me one of the main difficulties is ensuring input from all relevant authorities. I believe community safety is often seen as the sole responsibility of the council and police, going against the ethos of the C&D Act 1998’ (local authority participant).

‘I don’t think some statutory partners, in terms of what their community safety partnership responsibilities, understand what they need to contribute to it. I think they see it as very much a local authority led meeting and that they just got to come and... just listen in’ (local authority participant).

Partnership working is a common phrase within the multi-agency landscape of Wales. However, participants strongly felt there needed to be training in relation to the fundamental principles of partnership working such as sharing examples of best practice and specialist knowledge. When participants were asked to prioritise which area of training needed to be most improved, 70% of participants said ‘information sharing’.³ Participants suggested improvements in information sharing could also help with the dissemination of specialist knowledge:

³ List of training areas included the topics listed in Table 3, plus those adapted from National Occupational Standards. (2017) including—communication, consultation and negotiating, influencing and persuading, involving others, leadership and decision making, problem solving skills, research skills—including data collation, sharing and analysis, risk assessment, setting, planning and reviewing, and strategic assessment and monitoring.



Table 4 Training preferences

Preferences	Very strongly in favour	In favour	Neither/Nor	Against	Strongly against	Total (type of recognition) (%)
CPD and certificate	13 (31%)	26 (61.9%)	3 (7.1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	100
Undergraduate qualification	11 (26.8%)	11 (26.8%)	15 (36.6%)	2 (4.9%)	2 (4.9%)	100
Postgraduate qualification	7 (17%)	12 (29.3%)	16 (39%)	4 (9.8%)	2 (4.9%)	100
Total (preferences)	31 (25%)	49 (39.6%)	34 (27.4%)	6 (4.8%)	4 (3.2%)	100

‘The expectation [of community safety practitioners] is around a general understanding of certain topics. That’s why it’s partnership working, you bring together everyone’s expertise in that one space so you can rely on that and that’s where the strength is’ (local authority participant).

The impetus placed on sharing specialist knowledge was thought to be crucial for partnership working and according to one participant this would only be achieved if partners were committed to ‘networking’:

‘I think good communication and facilitation skills because the community safety officer... you’re a jack of all trades.....you can’t know everything about all of them, but it’s about having those skills to link somebody over here to somebody over there’ (criminal justice participant).

Indeed, ‘communication’ and ‘involving others’ were considered a strength. However, participants acknowledged this was dependent on understanding roles and responsibilities and this may explain why training was still desired. As one participant commented, ‘it’s important that everybody understands their remit... what their organisation can do and what can be achieved’ (criminal justice participant). This was also particularly important in the application of ‘problem solving’:

‘A lot of partnerships seem to view that once the police become involved that they kind of take ownership. And I think it’s really important to stress that it is a partnership and we’ve all got a role to play in in the problem solving’ (criminal justice participant).

There was a sense of frustration if all agencies were not playing their part:

‘It’s getting to the root of the problem and getting all those agencies working together again to solve the underlying issues, not just enforcing our way out... just because the police are involved in a partnership meeting, it doesn’t necessarily [mean that they] have primacy or even any role other than just awareness and support’ (criminal justice participant).

Problem solving training appears readily available within the police, although there was uncertainty of whether the current police-led problem-solving approach is accessible to, and relevant for, the wider community safety partnership:



‘Problem solving training is most important and there’s been loads of problem-solving training over the years...the scope of community safety is ever so much wider, the things we are problem solving are a lot different than where we were maybe five years ago. And the way we do things is a lot different as well. And so, I think like an updated problem-solving training [is required]’ (local authority participant).

Findings suggest police-led problem-solving approaches may not consider the needs and practices of other partners. This includes the use of the Objective, Scanning, Analysis, Response, Assessment or ‘OSARA’ model also known as ‘SARA’ (see Tilley 2003). One local authority participant described ‘OSARAs’ as ‘too vague and lack detail and thought’.

It’s ‘complicated’: Strengthening governance to support community safety development

There were two key emerging issues around ‘governance’ within the findings. Firstly, it was an area where there was least awareness in relation of existing training provisions, and it rated highly in terms of participants thoughts as an area where training needed to be improved (see Table 5).

The second issue highlighted was that current governance structures (or lack of) act as a barrier to training and development. Participants expressed concern about community safety governance, with one arguing it is ‘an absolute nightmare’ and ‘particularly complicated’ (local authority participant). It was felt that it was difficult to devise and deliver training without the clarity of the governance arrangements in the first place:

‘Governance training would be amazing. People need to understand where they need to go. But there needs to be somewhere to go, and it needs to be set first’ (local authority participant).

Participants suggested this lack of governance clarity leads to silo working and frustration for those organisations whose role spans multiple partnership boards:

‘I [am] confident in my own area in terms of our local CSP board, our own governance because that’s my area of responsibility...but of course when it comes to police forces, fire service, the Health Board we’re always very conscious that what we are doing obviously they may be doing 2, 3, 4 times over at different boards and that’s when things can obviously become a little bit more complicated’ (local authority participant).

The participants drew attention to the various other partnerships within Wales, in addition to CSPs, at a local and regional level, and the complexity it presents for governance:

...the non-coterminous boundaries between the 22 local authorities, four police forces, three fire and rescue services, eight health boards, I think it’s very difficult. You’ve got all these different groups in PSBs, CSPs...you’ve



Table 5 Do you know where to locate training and do you think training needs to be improved

Crime area	Yes	No	Does not need to improve	Needs to improve	Do not know
ASB and Disorder	29 (70.7%)	12 (29.3%)	19 (48.7%)	17 (43.6%)	3 (7.7%)
Crime and crime prevention	29 (70.7%)	12 (29.3%)	12 (30.8%)	20 (51.3%)	7 (17.9%)
Equalities, inclusion, and cohesion	29 (70.7)	12 (29.3%)	15 (38.5%)	15 (38.5%)	9 (23.1%)
Governance	13 (32.5%)	27 (62.8%)	6 (15%)	23 (57.5%)	11 (27.5%)
Information sharing	24 (58.5%)	17 (41.5%)	5 (12.5%)	28 (70%)	7 (17.5%)
Modern slavery and exploitation	26 (63.4%)	15 (36.6%)	15 (38.5%)	15 (38.5%)	9 (23.1%)
Offending and justice	18 (43.9%)	23 (56.1%)	9 (23.1%)	21 (53.8%)	9 (23.1%)
Public safety	20 (48.8%)	21 (51.2%)	11 (28.2%)	18 (46.2%)	10 (25.6%)
Serious violence and organised crime	25 (61%)	16 (39%)	15 (38.5%)	16 (41%)	8 (20.5%)
Total responses	213 (58%)	155 (42%)	107 (31.6%)	159 (46.9%)	73 (21.5%)

also got the RPBs [Regional Partnership Boards] and they've all got their own terms of references, their own agendas, their own objectives, and none of them really overlap because of, again, governance, so statutory duties, statutory partnerships of these groups, they're not really interlinked (partnership participant).

The introduction of PSBs had caused confusion in CSP governance:

When I first [started as a Community Safety Officer] I knew where the CSP sat, where we all sat in the chain, but then when CSPs were moved to PSBs... and [understanding of] who sat where and all the different regional boards that were responsible for different elements of the statutory duties...my team now as practitioners they would not have a clue (local authority participant).

Comments from participants suggest that the multitude of partnerships in Wales had a predominantly negative impact in terms (a) partners attending multiple meetings and repeating the same message, and (b) creating further complexity in understanding governance structures.

Discussion

In our discussion, we present two broad implications for community safety in Wales. First, we consider the challenges for community safety development with focus on the professionalisation of the sector, the unclear responsibilities that partners have, as well as the proliferation of partnerships. Then we discuss and debate whether CSPs are working and in doing so we refer to some well-versed evaluations. We



finish the section by discussing whether problem-orientated approaches could be successfully applied in a CSP context.

The challenges for community safety development within Wales

Professionalisation

Our research raises important questions for the development of community safety skills and training needs in terms of the progression and professionalisation of the sector. On one hand, there was a high overall confidence in skills reported by police and local government staff who also felt knowledgeable in a range of community safety topic areas. However, a contrasting picture emerged with other participants in terms of their belief that there was a knowledge and training gap, particularly in understanding legislation, duties and powers (including conducting strategic assessments). Furthermore, there was a consensus amongst these participants that there was inadequate or insufficient training in relation to problem solving and governance. When considering this alongside frustrations within partnership working, these needs appeared to be as much about improving practice, than knowledge and understanding, which can be connected to the slow progress made in professionalising the CSP sector.

Prior to several Welsh Government (2017) recommendations aimed at professionalising CSPs, Roger and Thomas (2017: 4) identified several barriers that affected 'service providers to establish, maximise and sustain their services and for the processes necessary to establish effective, responses'. These barriers included a 'lack of funding and resources', but also 'poor leadership', inadequate or insufficient 'management and accountability' mechanisms, and 'ineffective partnership working' (Rogers and Thomas 2017: 37). Reduced funding and subsequent resourcing issues appeared to be a catalyst for the other barriers identified. However, with the unlikely prospect of funding policies being reversed, in addition to findings supported by Thomas (2016) that the CSP service provision in Wales was genuinely underperforming, a recommendation from Rogers and Thomas (2017) was that there was a need for professionalisation within the community safety sector. In response to this recommendation, the Welsh Government (2017) proposed a series of measures that seemingly committed to the idea of professionalisation by reviewing core aspects of partnership working that ranged from training in 'appropriate skills and knowledge' of partnership working, to developing a new strategic direction that incorporates the fusion and interplay of UK and Welsh Government legislation.

Blurring of lines

While CSP representatives felt confident in their respective skills and application of CSP objectives, there were concerns in relation to insufficient training opportunities in core aspects of CSP which does not reflect some of the key tenets of professionalisation in the public sector. However, 'professionalisation' in community safety where roles and responsibilities are periodically changing is becoming an



increasingly difficult prospect. Community safety work has broadened and reorientated towards safeguarding (Menichelli 2020). Additional responsibilities coupled with redefinitions of ‘community safety’ transgressions (see for instance, WSCN 2023b) and the blurring of lines with safeguarding, has led to a community safety working environment riddled with ambiguity. Indeed, while not considered an aspect of our original research, our participants felt it necessary to explain how safeguarding, or more specifically, ‘contextual safeguarding’ had induced uncertainty in practice. This circumstance is connected to policy and practice in Wales that emphasises trauma-informed working (see for example, Addis et al. 2023) and CSPs see this as a specific training gap (WSCN 2021c). Practitioners now work within contextual safeguarding frameworks which seek to draw on ‘extra-familial contexts’ within safeguarding and child protection processes, rather than focussing narrowly on families or traditional community safety legislative responses (Firmin and Lloyd 2020: 5). Furthermore, due to a reduction in funding, this modern community safety practice is now situated across several local authority departments rather than one community safety team (WSCN 2021a; WSCN 2021b).

Partnerships and partnerships

Most participants revealed a distinct lack of confidence in CSP governance issues and demanded more training in the area. In Wales, this is compounded by partnerships that have been created from Acts of the Senedd (Welsh Parliament). These partnerships in Wales either co-exist alongside CSPs (that have developed from the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 which is UK Government legislation) or they have been subsumed in terms of CSPs and other boards sharing the same platform but taking on differing executive responsibilities (Welsh Government 2017). There is no uniformity in this arrangement across Wales, and decisions are left with local authorities. This inconsistent structure has generated a situation where there exists differing levels of governance and accountability of justice functions across the local authorities in Wales (Commission on Justice in Wales 2019). It also appeared to be the source of confusion from one of our participants when referring to PSBs that were introduced following the Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. According to this participant the subsummation of CSPs and PSBs had an impact on their familiarity with CSP governance. Prior to PSBs the participant ‘knew where the CSP sat...in the chain’ and that their respective ‘team would not have a clue’ where responsibility currently lies (local authority participant). PSBs responsibility is expansive; its *raison d’être* is to produce opportunities that generate ‘wellbeing’ or reduce circumstances that impinge on wellbeing. Their remit has traversed into reducing preceding factors that can lead into crime, with Netherwood et al. (2017) identifying 17 out of 19 wellbeing assessments included crime prevention.



Is partnership working in community safety?

Same old problems

Findings in our research identified issues that have long been associated with CSPs; namely the problem of partnerships themselves. A substantial number of participants identified that some agencies did not share sufficient information with partners or their respective expertise to contribute toward CSP objectives. These problems continue to manifest, decades after they were first identified (Gilling, 2007; Evans, 2011). Similarly, participants perspectives on the dominant roles of the police and local authorities in CSPs echoes existing literature in this area (see Newburn 2002; Edwards and Hughes 2007; Menichelli 2020; WSCN, 2021a; WSCN, 2021b). Even the general public see community safety as the responsibility of these two agencies (Home Office 2023). As our participants remarked, this one-sided working relationship 'goes against the ethos of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998' (local authority participant), and it could be connected to 'some statutory partners [not] understand[ing] what they need to contribute' (local authority participant). These findings are concerning in that they still demonstrate that partnerships still do not function in their intended capacity 25 years after their formation.

Problem-solving approaches

One further need identified in our research was involving CSPs in the training and delivery of police problem-solving approaches. 'Problem-oriented policing' (POP) (also known as 'problem-oriented partnerships' or 'problem solving policing') is an operational approach to improve police effectiveness and reduce crime and disorder at a local level (Sidebottom et al 2020). Due to its acclaimed strong evidence base, it has been widely used across the UK, however it is recognised that the main challenge to implementation is partnership commitment (College of Policing 2020). Our participants expressed a desire to participate in problem-solving but highlighted 'underlying issues' that appeared to be associated with the police's 'primacy' in POP (criminal justice participant). However, some of participants remarked that different problem-solving approaches existed in different agencies. This was evident in local authorities, with one participant explaining that due to the extended 'scope of community safety' things were different to how police were trained and that the OSARA model 'was too vague' or not suitable (local authority participant).

Therefore, if police-designed problem-solving training is rolled out on a multi-agency basis, it is argued that non-police agencies are involved in its development and delivery to ensure relevancy and buy-in, including consideration of other agencies practices. There are examples of this in Wales, such as implementing the adverse childhood experiences approach where: 'the mixture of broad experience across different fields such as educational psychology, social work and teaching backgrounds enriched the delivery and was invaluable to its success.' (Barton et al., 2018: 29). Furthermore, Dyfed Powys Police (DPP) have delivered anti-social behaviour training to partners in conjunction with a specialist charity following a



developing partnership which has led to positive community results (see ASB Help 2021). Despite our local authority participant's view on OSARA, DPP's use of this model in their work with other partners, including Natural Resources Wales, Fire & Rescue Service and local authorities has been noted as good practice within their PEEL assessment (see HMICFRS 2022).

Limitations

Our research provides an updated picture on long-running issues for community safety partnership working, with particular focus on how these issues present challenges within Wales. While we have emphasised the importance of conducting criminal justice related research in Wales, a limitation is that some aspects of the research would be difficult to generalise. Furthermore, our sample of participants was relatively small, and our choice of convenience sampling used in the survey did leave us with an uneven representation of community safety practitioners. Further research may seek to explore why the issues we have raised (and other academics before us) continue to persist and how they could be addressed within the Wales context and wider.

Conclusion

Our research has contributed to the under researched and distinct space of criminal justice in Wales. CSPs in Wales must work and navigate policies of the UK, and Welsh Government. Legislative changes to community safety work in England and Wales requires Wales specific consideration. For example, the recent serious violence duty on CSPs brought about by the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act, has associated guidance for Wales spanning 18 pages (Home Office 2022b). These contextual differences support the argument that dedicated academic research is required to understand the Welsh criminal justice system and by extension, the community safety sector. This is particularly important, as highlighted by Jones and Wyn Jones (2022), given that poor outcomes exist within Wales, not least in the country having Western Europe's highest imprisonment rate. We do not know how Wales' community safety partnerships contribute to such outcomes and little is known about their specific achievements since the Wales Audit Office pronounced them as ineffective (Thomas 2016).

Where partnership works, it may lead to benefits such as holistic approaches to dealing with cross-cutting issues, improving service delivery, and involving the community in local problem solving (Fox and Butler 2004). It has been suggested that the new serious violence duty may reignite the work of CSPs providing an 'opportunity for the development of new knowledge' as well as new partnership approaches (Hopkins and Floyd 2022). However, the idea of partnership working could lose its credibility unless more is done to provide clear goals and structures (Dickinson and Glasby 2010). Indeed, the need for governance clarity for CSPs and their work



with wider partnerships was highlighted within this research. Effective partnerships require good governance and five principles to achieve this have been suggested as 'legitimacy and voice', 'direction/strategic vision', 'performance', 'accountability', and 'fairness' (Edgar et al., 2006). As reflected in the Welsh Government (2017) review, achieving these principles have been challenging in Wales and there is arguably a lack of fairness where two partners (police and local authorities) appear to be the dominant voices in community safety with other agencies arguably not fulfilling the potential of their roles and responsibilities. For instance, it has long been argued that probation should move beyond its direct work with known offenders to engage in crime prevention and apply crime prevention techniques within its practice (Laycock & Pease 1985; Smith & Vanstone 2002).

In a move to improve accountability, the Home Office (2023) are proposing to give stronger powers to PCCs to oversee community safety plans, as well as introducing a new duty around ASB. However, whilst good governance in partnerships requires accountability for those exercising power, the complexity within power distribution can give rise to unintended consequences (Homel & Homel, 2012). For Wales' CSPs, this is seen within the challenges of implementing new responsibilities from both UK and Welsh Government into practice, navigating a complex partnership landscape (Jones & Wyn Jones 2022), together with persistent issues of CSP governance (Thomas 2016; Welsh Government 2017). Given this particularly complicated picture, it is unsurprising that 'learning and development' is not given the due consideration that it needs.

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