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POLICING IN COLLABORATION – WORKING TOGETHER IN A CHANGING WORLD

James Slessor, managing director, Accenture Police Services, writes that police forces are collaborating more than ever before and despite the challenges they are finding new ways of thinking and working.

Speaking at this year's Superintendents' Association conference, Tom Winsor – HM Chief Inspector of Constabulary – warned that merging police forces now could “cause havoc”, putting an enormous drain on the energy of leadership teams in the current financial crisis. Rather than amalgamations, Mr. Winsor advocated greater collaboration to achieve a more efficient service.

With large-scale mandatory force mergers in England and Wales unlikely police leaders must focus efforts on greater collaboration, reviewing how collaboration has worked to date and finding ways to enhance collaboration in the future.

A recent study by Accenture – ‘Preparing Police Services for the Future’ – interviewed 22 police leaders from 17 police services around the world and found most viewed collaboration not only in terms of working with other forces, locally and internationally, but also with non-policing partners – criminal justice agencies; the public, private and voluntary sectors; and citizens themselves. Similarly, in England and Wales, forces are exploring options for collaboration with a broad set of partners.

For some observers, collaboration is not happening quickly enough. An HMIC report earlier this year expressed disappointment with pace of change, which it said was too slow. The majority of forces, it noted, made less than 10% of their savings by collaborating. HMIC made clear that more could be done to realise benefits from what it terms the “untapped potential” of collaboration.

Forces in England and Wales have undoubtedly spotted many collaborative opportunities. HMIC found that by November 2011 there were over 540 planned or active collaboration projects – with an expectation that nearly £170m in savings would be generated over

the current Spending Review period (2011/12–2014/15). The pace of cross-force collaborations has increased in the last two years and, as the financial benefits from collaborative ventures can take time to realise, forces and their partners are likely to see further savings in the years to come.

Police leaders have responded to the financial crisis.

Many police leaders entered into the recent period of austerity with limited experience of having to find long-term sustainable solutions to budget cuts. In practice, the approach taken was often the ‘salami slicing’ of resources – for instance, cutting 10% of all departments budgets across the force. However, the budgetary crisis has crystallised and sharpened leadership thinking around cross-force collaboration. Partnership has always been central to effective policing but now police leaders are increasingly looking to innovate and seek new types of partners.

The role of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs)

The local focus of Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) may at one level, make collaboration harder to achieve. However the inclusion of crime as well as police within their purview creates an opportunity for PCCs to be a positive force for wide-ranging collaboration in the future. For the first time, there is a single accountable individual with a remit stretching across policing and justice. Whilst their principal power comes from control of the policing budget, a key part of their role must also be to drive greater collaboration between criminal justice agencies, and to be true catalysts for change across the policing and justice system as a whole, with local and regional partners.

Harnessing the power of the public and voluntary sector

More and more volunteers are assisting police forces across the UK in many different ways. These include Special Constables and Police Support Volunteers for example working in station front counter administration. There are also more than 170,000 Neighbourhood Watch and Home Watch Network schemes. In Ireland, An Garda Síochána introduced the Garda Reserve programme, where volunteers

provide local patrols, participate in crime prevention initiatives and provide operational support to full-time Gardai. These new Reserve teams will make up 10 percent of the total police service.

Accenture's international study found that police leaders place an important emphasis on the support that citizens and voluntary groups can offer to police forces. In the UK, greater emphasis must be placed on the role of these groups, which are often uniquely placed in communities to provide assistance that other collaborations cannot. However, the voluntary nature of citizen participation requires police to find different ways of engaging with voluntary and community groups to harness support and goodwill for their policing activities.

International co-operation

As crime and security threats become more global in nature police in England and Wales have increased interaction and collaborative activity with colleagues overseas. Cyber-crime, for instance, does not recognise national borders, therefore it is vital for police to collaborate so criminals can be brought to justice in the countries they operate from, using evidence from other countries or jurisdictions where their victims may reside. In 2011 Europol supported more than 13,500 cross-border criminal cases and the number is growing each year. The international complexion of many of our towns and cities also requires police forces to work alongside interpreters and embassies and to travel abroad. As globalisation increases, international collaboration between forces will become routine.

Joint justice agency working

Whilst many police forces are gradually working towards a single digital case file, there is still considerable potential to collaborate across the overall justice system. The introduction of virtual court hearings should become more widespread and multi-agency work to reduce reoffending levels must be a priority.

Integrating information management systems across the justice system will be vital for true collaboration. In Italy, the SIDNA system at the national Anti-Mafia Department managed by the Ministry of Justice is available to 700 different users from multiple agencies – including police, judges and justice employees. Similar systems should be considered in the UK if a seamless joined-up digital justice system is to become a reality.

Public sector collaborations

Various examples of cross-public sector collaboration can be found. The Met Police already work closely with Transport for London and many forces police city centres in collaboration with local authorities – but even greater integration is possible and indeed necessary. In Denmark, a programme that unites social services, schools and the police supports officers to work with people who are deemed at high risk of committing a crime or who have previous criminal convictions.

People who come to the attention of police are often also known to the health service, education service and local authorities – but these different agency databases could be far more effectively integrated and a greater sharing of information is possible. Sharing such information across the police, education, local authority and health sectors will improve protection of victims and help to reduce levels of reoffending.

Private sector collaboration

This is a well-established area of collaboration. Mobile phone networks and internet service providers, for instance, are long-time partners of the police. However, again, much more collaboration can be achieved through greater sharing of information.

The Facewatch scheme, developed by a wine bar owner in London, enables businesses to send CCTV evidence and electronic witness statements about thefts on their premises to police, and has 6,000 businesses registered. A recent development, the Facewatch ID smart phone app, allows police forces to share images of convicted thieves and suspects with the public. These are great examples of the private sector innovating to support policing efforts.

There is also greater scope for private sector companies to provide specialist expertise to integrate or replace the many different information and record management systems that have grown up, piecemeal, over the years in forces. Accenture is currently working to help the new national Scottish police service to replace or integrate around 120 information systems and processes – across crime, custody, missing persons, case preparation, and many other areas – into one integrated operational policing system.

The quick fix

Not all collaborations are long-standing and complex. The police service has in the past established task forces and collaborations to deal with particular crime threats as they arose. However there should be more robust analysis of such projects – how and why they worked and how they can be improved. The College of Policing has an important role to play in encouraging all forms of collaboration by sharing best practice examples and learning.

Sharing and patience are virtues in collaboration

Long-term collaborations promise many benefits but to be successful all stakeholders must be willing to share information and to relinquish, to a greater or lesser degree, some control of resources they have committed to the project. And they need to 'stick together' – to see the collaboration through to its natural conclusion and not be deterred by inevitable challenges. From the outset clear, end-to-end business cases must be established so stakeholders can see the benefits that will accrue as a result of their commitment. There may be apparent 'winners and losers' at particular stages of the collaboration process but it is crucial that all stakeholders believe they will benefit in the end. The benefits of collaboration are multiple and can be great if the Police Service and its partners are prepared to seize them.



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