Policy Memo

Safe neighbourhoods initiatives rely on evidence developed in partnership with local stakeholders and communities. What type of practices can be used for taking into account evidence stemming from "local knowledge" (Fleming and Rhodes 2018)?

"The mobilisation of local knowledge is fundamental to the construction of just and democratic forms of security governance." (Johnston and Shearing, 2003: 140)

Policy context

In recognising that safe neighbourhood initiatives rely on evidence developed in partnership with local stakeholders and communities, the Scottish Community Safety Network wishes to consider policy recommendations in relation to practices which can be used to take into account evidence stemming from local knowledge.

Local knowledge is context specific, offering complex insight into the interactions and actions of individuals and groups within a particular environment at a particular time. Such knowledge is entwined with other forms of evidence in influencing police decision making, and often leads to discretion in the exercise of their powers (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). The Scottish Government identify community engagement as a key priority for community safety, recognising that "communities are best placed to resolve local issues" (Scottish Government, 2011: 1). Community safety then, must take a broader view of local knowledge than that used by individual police officers in their decision making, to encompass evidence stemming from local knowledge across all stakeholders in the community in question.

Evidence based policy making (EBPM) approach

The utilisation of knowledge within the policy process has a long history, though the terminology of EBPM is associated with Blair's UK Labour government of the late 1990's. EBPM focuses on using evidence about policy interventions to do 'what works', be that through pilot programmes to test policy effectiveness, through policy learning, or policy transfer from elsewhere (Botterill, 2017). Whilst subject to critique that it is an 'ideal type' rather than a real-world approach (Cairney 2019), evidence based policy making (EBPM) is an appropriate framework to apply in this case as it is an established approach to

policymaking related to policing (Fleming & Rhodes, 2018). As well as pursuing effective policy, EBPM fosters transparency and accountability (Davies et al, 2000) which are important when public resources are being utilised.

There are limitations to EBPM. It is not generally feasible to make rational policy decisions based wholly on evidence because of the bounded rationality of actors, and the many other factors which influence decision making (Cairney, 2019; Botterill, 2017). Additionally, EBPM is associated with a hierarchy of methods in which randomised control trials (RCTs) are at the top (Cairney, 2019). This can lead to certain types of evidence (associated with scientific objectivity and measurement) being privileged over others, undermining alternative sources of legitimate knowledge, including experiential knowledge which itself is at the heart of this paper.

These limitations are not insurmountable, however. It is possible to use evidence to judge whether a proposed policy is likely to achieve a well-articulated goal, and to provide advice which improves decisions, even if we cannot, in the real world, access objective scientific truths on every policy issue (Cartwright & Stegenga, 2011). An important area to consider is the causal theory of why a particular approach works (Cowen & Cartwright, 2019; Davies et al, 2000). For policing, which occurs in a complex, adaptive social context (as distinct from the controlled conditions of RCTs), the multitude of factors at play can change the effect of an intervention 'proven' to work under RCT conditions. What is most useful to understand is the causal model behind the intervention: why it works, and whether it can be applied in context (Cowen & Cartwright, 2019).

In light of these considerations, to explore the value of local knowledge and how to employ community safety practices which promote its use, we consider the evidence base to inform policy recommendations.

Community safety: understanding local contexts

Throughout the development of the discipline in Scotland, community safety practices have involved practitioners working closely together with local services and community members, including schools, businesses, and families (Henry, 2009i). Communities themselves are unique and complex, riven with allegiances, divisions and tensions which change and shift through time. Effective community safety practices therefore entail engagement with

communities in their specific context, using and sharing local knowledge to plan and deliver services (Hughes & Rowe, 2007).

Situated local knowledge about a community is important in making decisions about service provision and location, for example Sheil et al (2005) note that 'friction' between two neighbourhoods in a Scottish community resulted in the decision to build a community centre in each neighbourhood, rather than a shared facility. A further example is set out by Wooff (2015) who highlights the importance of geography and local knowledge of the spatial context of communities in responding effectively to anti-social behaviour in rural Scotland.

Developing multi-agency community safety locally

Community safety practices are multi-agency in nature. To support effective practice, local knowledge of multi-agency stakeholders is crucial, including an understanding of their culture, organisation, values, politics, and pressures upon them. Additionally, to be effective and responsive to local needs and interests, community safety must be organised locally (Henry, 2009ii). Developing a strong local partnership governance structure, such as Community Planning Partnerships in Scotland, has been shown to be effective in maximising the benefits of coordinated multi-agency local community safety practice (Henry, 2009ii).

Sheil et al (2005) describe a range of practices utilising government funding to promote community safety in Scotland. Across the range of projects, the role of the local community in informing their development was a common factor: through consultation, surveys, meetings, and citizen's panels. There was wide variation in the projects themselves, evidencing the important role of local knowledge in developing bespoke approaches in different local contexts. Approaches which involved significant improvements to the local environment, from the perspective of the community itself, were amongst the practices showing the most positive results, again highlighting the importance of local knowledge in determining the right environmental changes in the local context (Sheil et al, 2005).

Co-production in community safety practices

Community co-production is key to policing and justice, and entails public services and citizens making use of each other's assets to achieve better outcomes, recognising the capabilities of users of public services to inform and drive improvement (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2020). Whilst the benefits of co-commissioning and co-design are still to be realised in

community safety, evidence suggest approaches involving co-delivery are effective. For example, in Scotland the successful role of peer mentors (in the form of reformed offenders) who offer newly released prisoners practical support and advice (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2020). Valuing the perspectives of all voices within a community contributes to richer local knowledge and new perspectives to further understanding of why and where different practices can work.

The development of co-production in community safety practices is complex, given the diversity of views and needs within local communities themselves. Rather than simply applying a set of practices to reduce instances of crime and disorder, community safety necessitates the co-production of security governance in and by the community (Hughes & Rowe, 2007). To be effective, this must be an active process given the dynamic nature of community, and requires careful attention to representation of the whole community, including voices which are more likely to be excluded. Sheil et al (2005) illustrate the risk if an inclusive approach is not taken in the limited evidence of impact on community safety of services for young people where young people themselves were left out of decision-making processes.

Because of their rich experiential knowledge, there is an increasing recognition of the expertise derived from the involvement users of services as partners in governance and provision of public services. Attention is needed however, to ensure vulnerable or disenfranchised groups who experience structural barriers to their participation are included in co-production and not further marginalised (Mulvale & Robert, 2021). As well as listening to the 'usual suspects' (Hughes and Rowe, 2007: 339) in terms of co-production for community safety, all voices need to be sought out and heard. Genuinely valuing lived experience can offer an innovative view of the 'shared typical' of individuals who have experienced particular events in their lives, and may lead to new policy solutions (McIntosh & Wright, 2019: 449).

Embedding high quality co-production, which values the lived experience of all members of the community into community safety practice is complex work. Ensuring disadvantaged people and groups have the same opportunity to engage in co-production is crucial to hearing their perspectives and ensuring they are not further disadvantaged (Loeffler & Bovaird, 2020). This requires resource commitment to devote the necessary time and develop the skills

practitioners need to build trust and relationships with disenfranchised groups. Building the trusting relationships needed for high quality co-production itself relies upon local knowledge of the community, being sensitive to the range of cultural, political, socioeconomic and health factors which can impact on engagement (Amann & Sleigh, 2021). Even in the pursuit of evidence stemming from local knowledge, local knowledge itself is key.

Policy recommendations

The evidence presented demonstrates the importance of local knowledge for effective community safety practices, and indicates an inclusive co-production approach is required to take the full range of perspectives and experiences into account in order to inform policy decisions. The casual theory of why a particular approach is expected to be effective in each unique community context matters, and this is only possible to evaluate if the perspectives of all stakeholders, including those often marginalised, are understood. However, embedding genuine co-production is complex work, subject to multiple challenges, and therefore the following policy recommendations are made:

- Detailed scoping work should be undertaken by the Scottish Communities Safety Network to ascertain the viability of developing and embedding co-production approaches in local communities. This may involve the initial development of pilot sites which 'champion' a co-production approach in order to develop evidence and learning before considering wholescale implementation.
- If embedding co-production is deemed a viable approach, the Scottish Communities Safety Network is well positioned to develop a specialist national forum for community safety practitioners from different areas to share information, resources and evidence to support learning and continual improvement of the approach.

(1646 words)

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