



Community Safety Research 2021

Project 1: Partnership working including skills and
learning needs

MainStreet Consulting

May 2021

Project 1: Partnership working including skills and learning needs

INTRODUCTION

This research was designed to a) understand the benefits of partnership working to deliver safer communities and b) define what an effective and modern Community Safety Partnership (CSP) might look like in the 21st century. Work on both elements took place from late January through to early March 2021, informed by three strands of activity:

1. a rapid literature review, identifying findings and recommendations for community safety (CS) policy, partnership working, modern public servant skills, data & evidence and user experiences
2. a subsequent questionnaire, issued to all SCSN members and partners, and other selected stakeholders with an interest in community safety policy or practice.
 - 50 full returns (45% response rate)
 - 18 separate local authorities (56% of total possible)
 - a spread of remote rural, islands, major urban and mixed rural/small towns/large towns areas of Scotland
3. three focus group sessions with 12 participants, mainly Community Safety Partnership lead officers from local authorities or wider Community Planning Partnership (CPP) functions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The understanding of community safety informing this report has been drawn from a review of current academic thinking in this field, reviews of CS practice and reports of emerging new approaches. This has been achieved by using the time available to concentrate initially on some key research papers and policy documents where the history of recent thinking has been summarised. Beginning with the work undertaken by SCSN on partnership working in 2012, 2013 and 2014, two further SCSN reports published jointly with Scottish Government and CoSLA in 2018 and 2019 provided a foundation for this research project: *Community Safety: the emerging landscape & future opportunities*

(Hayley Barnett, 2018) and *Developing a Community Safety Narrative for Scotland* (Tricia Spacey, 2019). Further reading focused broadly on three areas:

1. Additional policy documents, reviews and reports on wider public policy of relevance to community safety (Scottish Government, Audit Scotland, What Works Scotland, Improvement Service, etc.)
2. Other community safety literature (reviews and reports from Wales, England & Northern Ireland, academic publications)
3. Reports and academic literature focused on other fields of study and practice of relevance to this research (partnership working, community engagement & participation, public service skills, rural strategy, active citizenship, placemaking, community empowerment & resilience, co-production, lived experience, evaluating evidence, using data and more).

The overall project has been an iterative one where ideas emerging through the literature review have informed the consultation process (including the design of the questionnaire and planning for the focus group discussions) and the emerging thinking has in turn informed some of the decisions to review specific literature of relevance. As well as reviewing some key literature in detail, the project has benefited from the breadth of literature accessed by reviewing executive summaries and searching for some details within wider ranging studies. Further detail of the wide range of documents accessed for the desktop research can be found in the Bibliography, documented as Appendix B.

MODERN & EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP WORKING

This project asked the question: 'what are the components of a modern and effective CSP'? The level of response to the questionnaire and the vibrancy of the focus group discussions suggests that this is a question that is welcomed by the sector. Despite the many challenges involved in community safety work, the focus group participants demonstrated a sustained and positive commitment to achieving the best possible outcomes for their communities. The research also explored what skills people working within and across public service partnerships might require to progress the work of a modern and effective CSP with a view to identifying any learning needs. The findings of the research are presented around four themes:

- Complexity
- Approach
- Relationships
- Capacity

Complexity

- A modern and effective CSP recognises complexity and positions community safety strategically in the local context
- is not unduly focused on crime as the primary indicator of safety
- is specific to each local area and may not always follow a standard pattern of 'obvious' partners. For example, some work more with the Third Sector than others, involvement of NHS is very varied, some involve Community Councils extensively, others not at all, etc.
- often uses the language of 'reducing harm' as a proxy for community safety on the basis that this often resonates more meaningfully with key partners and communities

Approach

- A modern and effective CSP understands leadership as collaborative and dispersed and identifies community leadership as a key contributor to the wider leadership strength achieved through partnership working with agencies
- is informed by cross-cutting issues such as poverty, isolation, wellbeing and widespread changes to *community dynamics* through increased reliance on digital connectivity, the pandemic response, demographic and environmental factors, etc.
- is both reactive and proactive, anticipates and responds and continuously scans the horizon
- prioritises meeting the needs of those at greatest risk of harm, understands lived experience and respects diversity in all its forms
- uses an assets-based approach where partners understand the strengths and vitality of people and communities alongside their needs

- is agile, flexible and responsive using a proactive approach as well as reacting in proportionate and effective ways when facing situations where harm requires to be mitigated by timely intervention
- continuously adapts and changes, playing to the strengths of local partners using an evidence-based approach

Relationships

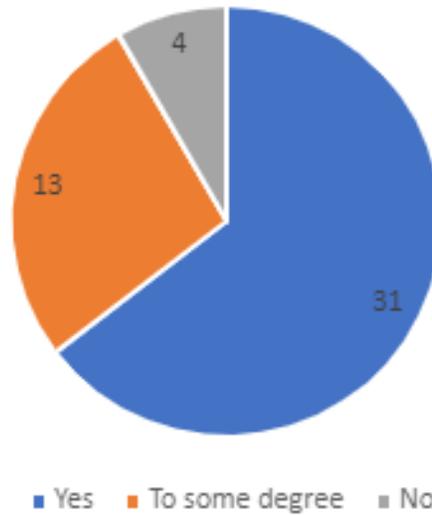
- A modern and effective CSP is highly engaged with the communities it serves, helps to build social capital, strengthens community resilience, and co-produces community safety activities
- identifies opportunities to collaborate with a broad range of partners
- communicates effectively across partners, within communities and between a range of important stakeholders
- has developed sophisticated partnerships, collaborations and joint ventures
- breaks free of silos using a relationship-based model of trust and respect
- may be organised in informal networks which are as valuable, if not more so, as the formal partnership structures they can sit alongside
- is built on maximising the potential represented by a *breadth* of local partners
- maximises the potential presented by the particular dynamics of good working relationships which may be due to the exceptional skills of key individuals at any one time

Capacity

- A modern and effective CSP harnesses resources (such as pooled budgets, knowledge exchange, skills sharing) and is multi-skilled
- is agile and ready to focus where need is greatest, make connections between need and opportunity and respond positively to feedback.

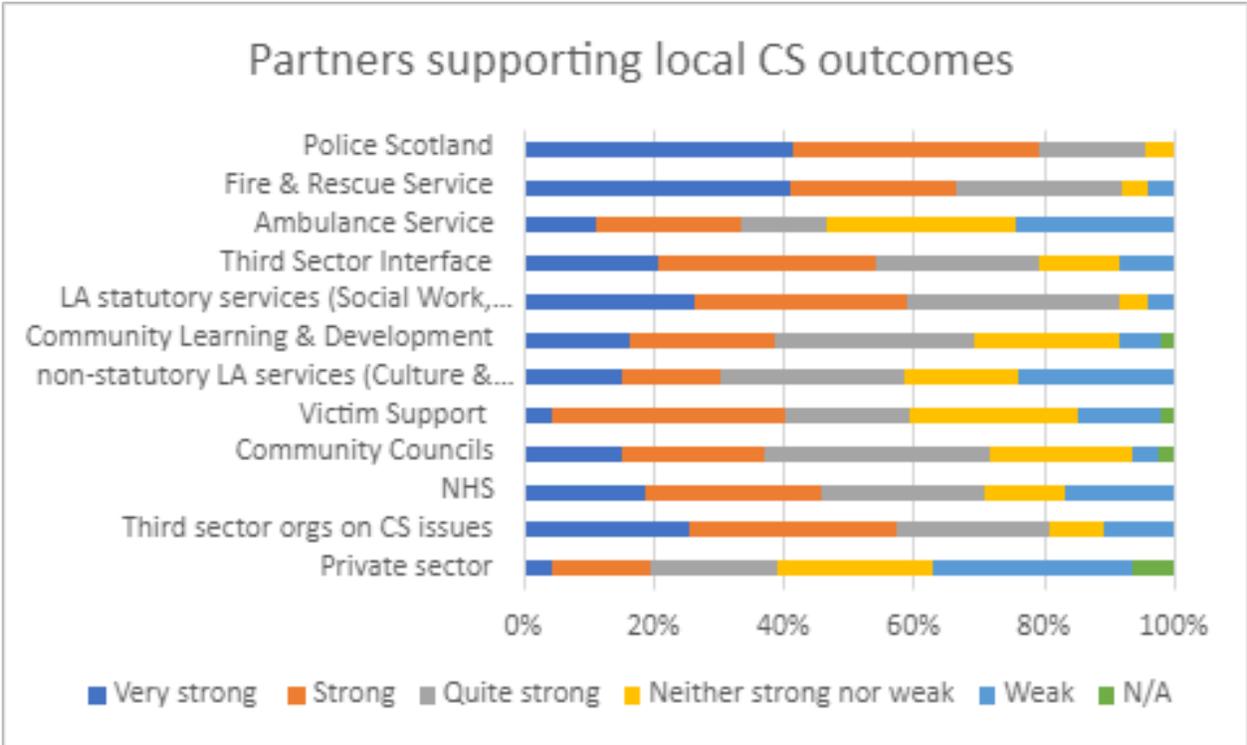
Many of the points noted above are rooted in the findings of the literature review. The breadth and range of partners is extensive and responses to the questionnaire showed the extent to which this has increased significantly in the last ten years:

Compared to 10 years ago, we are working with a wider range of partners



SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

The questionnaire also provided respondents with an opportunity to indicate the range of partners they are working with. The responses show a strong range of partner relationships with some potential for further development in relation to Community Justice, Ambulance Service, Victim Support, NHS, Community Councils and the private sector:



SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

Some ideas about complexity, approach, relationships and capacity emerged or were significantly further developed through the consultation process. The following is an indication of some of the key ideas and areas of new thinking arising through the research project, many of which have further potential to inform future practice:

Complexity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complexity of the context at national and local level with local complexity informed by a range of highly local factors • Concept of 'types' of localities (rural, semi-rural, urban, etc.) broadly useful but all local areas have highly complex peculiarities • The language of community safety: review of messaging including 'reducing harm'
Approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community dynamics: being attuned to the specific needs, context and potential for all areas of Scotland • Agility & Flexibility – fine tuning the balance of reactive, responsive, proactive

Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Breadth and range of partners: maximising the potential whilst avoiding becoming overstretched • Collaboration as a more advanced form of partnership • Communication: tools and skills for engagement and collaboration • Innovation: joint ventures, informal networks, visionary individuals • Importance of trust and respect as foundation for all relationships
Capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budgets and staffing structures under significant pressure • Resilient and inventive CS professionals • Appetite for collaborative learning, sharing 'best thinking'

In view of this current work and an analysis of the potential, the future for CS work is likely to be based on:

Engagement

- working across partner structures and within community networks to shape complex lines of communication and create a dynamic model of trust
- working on a community-centred basis to build social capital, support individuals and co-produce solutions with one or more CS partners
- harnessing the value of lived experience to engage, communicate and support people in danger of harm

Perception & Empowerment

- understanding more about local *perception* of danger as well as hazards. Using this understanding to shape a bespoke programme of support that will require a process of engagement to explore and develop the local community safety narrative. The strength of these relationships may include a degree of challenge as well as support to enable collaborative action with partners and communities.

- recognising the importance of promoting and enabling *agency* for individuals and their communities, especially where there is a risk that some may perceive that their ability to control the forces that shape their lives puts them in a position of powerlessness and hopelessness due to a devalued sense of agency

Strategy

- refreshing the concept of *early intervention and prevention* as a foundation for the achievement of important outcomes through CS work and developing further a shared understanding of where and how intervention can be early and preventative
- considering *principles* as well as themes, services and components when designing community safety work
- targeting resources

Collaboration

- greater sharing of experience, exchange of knowledge and joint action learning between partners
- seeking *economies of scale* where relevant (e.g., data access and interpretation, distributing safety information, tackling online harm)

Evidence

- considering data to a greater extent to anticipate need and shape responses
- acting more as a generator of data, particularly *qualitative data*, and working collaboratively to evaluate and make use of evidence to change and fine-tune the application of limited resources to achieve the greatest positive impact

SCSN may wish to consider supporting this future work by exploring the opportunities for co-designing some aspects of support at national level. For example:

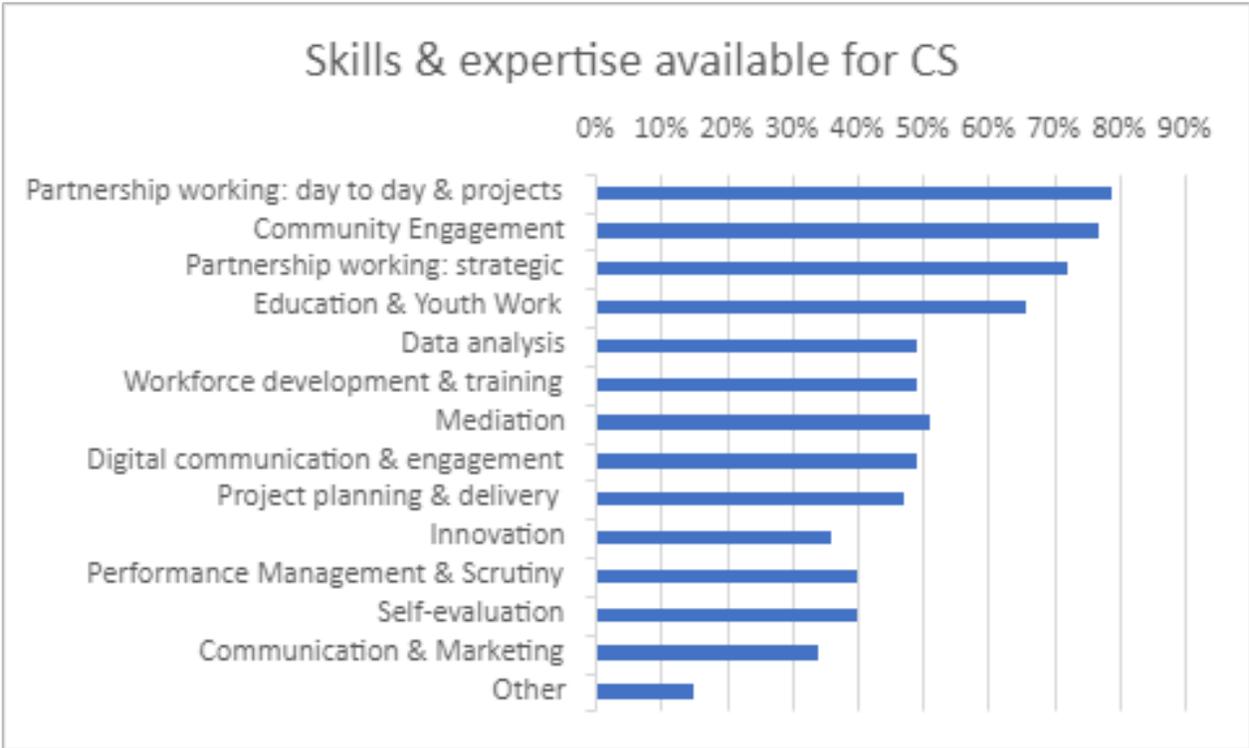
- analyse key data at a national level to derive insight and provide an interface/portal function supporting CSPs seeking to cross-reference, interpret and link analysis of data to their local circumstances
- through this analysis, interpretation and linking of data with other sources of information and intelligence, explore opportunities with CSPs to develop new evidence-based approaches
- SCSN may be in the best position to act as a hub to achieve economies of scale, help avoid duplication, achieve a higher profile, etc. for some key issues and activities. Aspects of community safety that could benefit from a hub and spoke model include data analysis, policy development, some aspects of procurement, public information campaigns, etc.
- develop a systematic approach to sharing best practice through a collaborative learning project as outlined below (skills and learning needs) including sharing, exchange and development of knowledge, learning, skills, action learning and mentoring

SKILLS & LEARNING NEEDS

This part of the research was developed alongside *Partnership Working* with the aim of determining the skills needed to work in a modern Community Safety Partnership. Responses through the questionnaire identified a slightly mixed picture with a significant number of respondents feeling highly skilled and confident in relation to the majority of skills listed and a small number indicating that some important skills were underdeveloped. Examples of skills requiring to be strengthened include:

- limited use of deliberative (28%) and facilitation skills (23%),
- only 40% of respondents identifying performance management and self-evaluation skills as being in place
- communication and marketing skills (referenced by 34%) at relatively low levels.
- around 50% of the questionnaire respondents reported skills in place for data analysis, workforce development & training, digital communication & engagement, project planning & delivery and mediation.

However, this is in the context of very high reported levels of the skills required for partnership working (at both strategic and frontline levels) and also for community engagement and education & youth work. The range of skills currently available for community safety work was reported by the questionnaire respondents as follows:



SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

Further discussion about skills within the focus groups allowed the researchers to assess relative strengths and weaknesses and opportunities for further development. The summary of the issues is provided using the following themes:

1. Leadership & culture
2. Breadth & range of skills
3. Learning & development

Leadership & culture

- the human resource available to community safety work across Scotland can be recognised as a significant strength. Many participants in focus groups referenced the 'can do' attitude of their teams and demonstrated a personal drive to identify and implement innovative, creative and highly effective approaches to community safety.
- 'soft' skills are particularly important for CS work. Knowledge and behaviours that enable people to be successful in their role are also particularly important for CS work. Key examples include problem-solving, the ability to analyse, take initiative, negotiate and plan, all of which were particularly evident during discussions with CS leads. Community Safety appears to be a field in which knowledge and behaviours have developed particularly well to meet the challenges presented by complex community safety situations

Breadth & range of skills

- Whilst the results of the questionnaire suggested that there may be a mismatch between confidence and some skills, the strength of competencies suggests that the 'foundations' for continuing to meet the challenges of CS in the future are sound
- '*Capability*' is about integrating knowledge and skills and adapting and flexing to meet future needs. CS leads in focus groups are very self-aware about the knowledge and skills required to create, innovate, lead, manage change, and demonstrate impact
- Focus group participants at middle and senior manager levels spoke about the extent to which their teams were now multi-skilled
- one specific skill discussed was that of data analysis where access to this skill now seems much reduced from the levels being reported in the 2012-2014 SCSN research despite the need and the value of this skill being more relevant than ever for community safety work
- using digital skills to explore trends, patterns and insights was recognised as an area of considerable further potential

- of the skill gaps identified through the questionnaires, addressing these could be done well through a collaborative learning approach where skilled CS professionals support the learning of others to strengthen skills around important generic skills - deliberative, facilitative, consultative, participative - and other specific areas including an outcomes-based approach, reaching 'difficult to engage' people, analysing data, evidence-based working.

Learning & development

- participants in focus groups welcomed the opportunity to reflect, share and learn. Further work to facilitate and support this process on a systematic and ongoing basis is in line with the existing SCSN role which could be further expanded and strengthened to maximise potential
- there is excellent experience in the sector that could be more shared, reflected upon and adapted for use in a wide range of local areas of Scotland. Reflective learning, action learning and mentoring have potential. Action Learning is a process that involves a small group working on real problems, taking action, and learning as individuals. The focus on group learning and the potential to develop this learning in relation to the wider context is likely to be particularly relevant to community safety partnership work. SCSN could work with the sector to coordinate and support this type of approach as a networked collaborative learning project which would build on the existing good work to support reflective learning that was recently started as a partnership project with Evaluation Scotland. This appears to be an area for development likely to be productive and empowering for CS work which is different to an 'addressing skills gaps' approach. However, where skills gaps do exist it will be possible to continue to offer specific training events alongside the collaborative learning approach.
- the collaborative learning approach also offers the opportunity to explore community safety *principles* as well as themes and priorities.

Conclusion

Conclusions concerning skills and learning needs emerged from analysis of the questionnaire responses, further discussion through the focus groups and aspects of the literature review.

Some key strengths and opportunities for further developing specific skills were identified, which also led to the researchers identifying an opportunity for SCSN to consider how learning can be supported through a collaborative learning programme. Further work would be required to develop this approach which could include action learning, mentoring, and learning activities designed to support the sharing of 'best thinking' across the sector.

Another area with potential for a strategic intervention on the part of SCSN would be in relation to data analysis, interpretation, and utilisation. The creation of a data intelligence interface operating between national and local level (in terms of data sharing as well as skills development and sharing) would be worth exploring further; this is in turn explored in the separate Project 3 report.