

There has been extensive coverage in the past few weeks of the emerging proposed approaches to justice and safety in England and Wales with commitments to put more police on the streets, increase use of stop and search, and incarcerate more offenders with longer sentences. The idea is that these proposals will reduce crime, deter offending and therefore make people safer.

As an organisation that feels passionately about community safety and evidence-based decision making we wanted to challenge the narrative that these are activities that will reduce crime (they don't) and which will make people and communities feel and be safer (they won't). We've been thinking about what makes a safer community as part of our work stream on 'Making the Case for Community Safety. Some of the evidence we have found includes:

- ✓ Feeling safe is about **more than just the absence of crime**, there are many more factors that create a safe community. It is also more than just about the presence of police, policing activities and prisons. (Reassuring the Public programme and What Works to reduce reoffending, 2014 and 2015)
- ✓ Understanding the underlying **causes and contributors of crime** is a key element in prevention. (What Works to Reduce Crime, A summary of the evidence, 2014)
- ✓ **Interventions on one issue can improve other** outcomes – improvements to housing and the physical environment, for example, can help to reduce crime rates. (Taylor, 2008)
- ✓ Recognising and **fostering the wider social conditions** that impact upon community safety are key. This includes: people's social networks and personal relationships; volunteering and participation in community activities; the way people relate to each other including trust and shared values; and the extent to which people in communities have control and can influence decisions and actions to improve their local area. (Multiple sources including Hale, C. 1996; work by Jackson, J. et al. 2008 and 2009; Rutledge P, 2011)
- ✓ Investing in **upstream interventions** such as parenting support, health services, housing, youth services, mentoring; ensuring people are educated, have stable employment and good quality housing all have a role in preventing offending and making communities safer and stronger. (Multiple sources including The impact of community based universal youth work in Scotland, 2019; What Works to Reduce Crime, 2014; research by Prof Kathy Sylva on Sure Start)
- ✓ Recognising the **role and expertise of citizens** - to bring change that will really help; policy makers and service providers must start listening to and working alongside those who know the problems best. (Multiple sources including the Scottish Community Development Centre and What Works Scotland)

So, what are the proposals...and the evidence?

### **Proposal – to increase use of stop and search**

**Evidence** - A Home Office study of its increased use in London on a large scale found no evidence it had contributed to reducing crime levels. Marian Fitzgerald, a former principal researcher in the Home Office research and statistics directorate and now visiting professor of criminology at the University of Kent, said this increase in stop and search did nothing to reduce knife crime and inflamed tensions between communities and the police<sup>1</sup>.

Ben Bradford from the Jill Dando Institute was recently hosted by the Scottish Institute for Policing Research (SIPR) to talk about Stop and Search and its effects on crime and people. There is very little correlation between stop and search and crime reduction and the more stop and search you perform the less likely the arrest rate will go up. Research finds very little effect on crime rates.

This session also explored why it is used when the evidence for its intended impact is limited? This brings up issues of control and discipline but also expectations by the public and elected members. As seen in a number of places, however, the policy can backfire: if stops are perceived to be unfair then it can erode trust in the Police, reduce cooperation from the public and promote future offending. Contact the Scottish Institute for Policing Research for more information.

You can read more about recent developments in Stop and Search in Scotland here <https://www.napier.ac.uk/about-us/news/stopsearchchange> and <https://www.gov.scot/publications/twelve-month-review-code-practice-stop-search-scotland-independent-advisory-group-stop-search/> and by reading *The Relationship between Stop and Search, Community Safety, Procedural Justice and Police-Youth Relationships in Scotland* by Professor Ross Deuchar, University of the West of Scotland.

**Proposal – A range of proposals have been put forward in relation to prisons.** Some are in relation to increasing prison places in order to reduce overcrowding, improving the prison estate and others are in relation to longer prison sentences and the cessation of early release schemes.

**Evidence** - In response to these Peter Dawson, the director of the [Prison Reform Trust](#), said: "Doing away with overcrowded and outdated prisons makes a lot of sense." However the cost implications are large."

No one would disagree with the intention to reduce overcrowding and improve safety however there is a bigger conversation to be had about whether more prison places and sending more people to prison is the answer to reducing offending. This plays into a wider conversation about what the *purpose* of prison is – punishment, rehabilitation, public safety, deterrence or a combination of all or some of these.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2016/mar/17/mass-stop-and-search-police-crime-study>

### **Proposal – Longer prison sentences, cessation of early release schemes**

**Evidence** - There's something about the idea of a long prison term that gives the impression that justice is being served, but research shows that the threat of such long sentences doesn't actually deter people from committing these crimes.

Evidence also shows that long prison sentences do not necessarily mean lower reoffending rates as rehabilitation isn't a focus - Charlotte Pickles, director of the [Reform thinktank](#), said: "...evidence shows that longer prison sentences are ineffective at deterring crime or reducing reoffending."

Long sentences that result in people losing housing, employment and family and community ties are known to be factors which play an important role in (re)offending.

### **Proposal - Putting more people in prison**

**Evidence** - Whilst prison can represent value for money in the short-term when it is used for high-risk serious and/or certain types of prolific offenders<sup>[6]</sup> evidence shows that short-term sentences can be less effective as a community-based sentence: some figures show about two-thirds of offenders on prison terms of less than 12 months reoffend, compared with a third of those given a court order or other community-based sentence. Much of this is to do with a lack of access to rehabilitative programmes on short sentences. Christina Marriott, the chief executive of the [Revolving Doors Agency](#) charity, said a broad consensus among experts and practitioners was "bolstered by the government's own data, which shows that short prison sentences drive up crime and make people less safe".

Community-based sentences where people have the opportunity to give something back to society, get support with tackling some of the underlying causes of offending behaviour whilst maintaining stability in terms of family and other social relationships and housing have been shown to be more effective at reducing reoffending.

You can read more about What Works to reduce reoffending at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-reoffending-summary-evidence/> published in 2012 and updated in 2015.

### **Proposal - More police officers**

**Evidence** - This is a complex issue – policing, and The Police, have a critical role to play in keeping communities safe – but simply increasing the numbers of Police officers is a simple answer to an issue that requires a more complex solution. Note also that some outlets have indicated that the increase suggested would only boost numbers back to what they were prior to large-scale cuts, and neglects to consider the role of police staff and the importance of technology in the wider policing picture

Evidence suggests that increasing police numbers may be effective in reducing crime, particularly in relation to property-related crime. However further evidence is required to establish a causal link between the two.

The effectiveness of increased police numbers is also dependent on how they are deployed and targeted, with evidence to suggest that increasing patrols in crime

hotspots has been shown to be associated with a reduction in crime. A community policing approach is also associated with a decrease in crime but it is difficult to establish exactly which aspects of this make it effective (due to the many different elements involved e.g. police-community relations, communities being able to influence decisions etc.). We do know, for example, that if people feel empowered and satisfied with local services they are more likely to feel safe (Allik and Kearns, 2016 - The study found that interacting with and trusting neighbours had a slightly greater effect on feelings of safety than the perceived quality of policing services; and that people feel safer at home when their housing service provider keeps them informed of things that might affect them, and takes their views on board in making decisions).

Overall, substantial evidence indicates that the way in which police officers are deployed has the greatest impact on preventing serious crime.

This is backed up with international evidence too – a number of US sources from New York: “It’s more important what the officers do, versus how many of them there are.” “It’s not what you have, it’s what you are doing with them.” And if what you’re doing with them is stop and search and helping facilitate an increase in prison population rather than addressing the causes and contributors to crime and safety then this might not lead to reduced crime and people feeling safer.

You can read more about this in <https://www.gov.scot/publications/works-reduce-crime-summary-evidence/>

### Safer Communities

So with this in mind, what will make communities safe? The system that makes a ‘safer community’ is complex – there are multiple factors which create a safe (or unsafe) community and therefore a number of approaches that act on all bits of the system with all actors in the system are crucial.

We’d like to highlight a few things we think are important: understanding what interventions and approaches work to make a ‘safe community’ but also unpicking the drivers and root causes of crime (and other community safety issues) and tackling them too. And most importantly, these can’t be done in isolation – all actors working together in partnership is essential.

- The **role of ‘concentrated disadvantage’** was the factor most strongly associated with disorder and crime. Underlying causes such as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), addiction, poverty, and neglect all contribute to crime and disorder.
- Understand the **role of the Police and policing** in the wider picture but **remain focused on the wider** determinants of safe communities and undertaking **evidence-based prevention-focused** work.

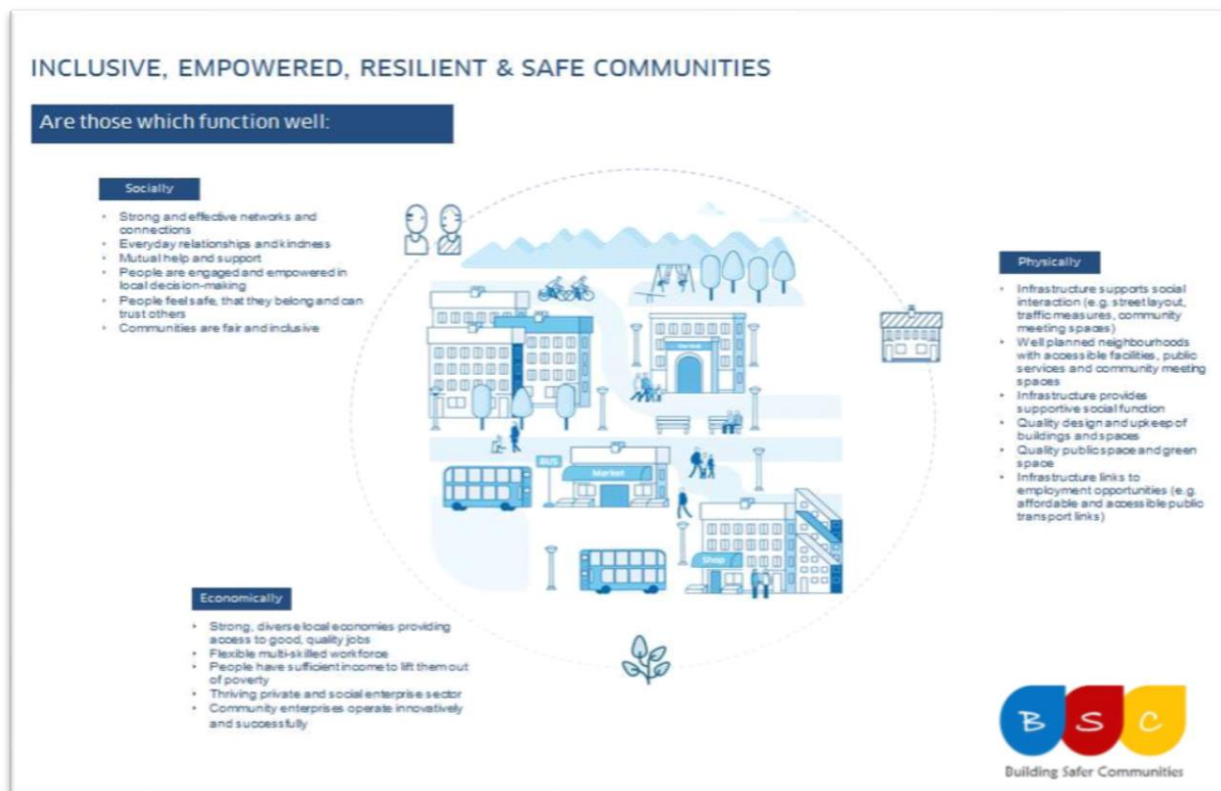


Figure 1 Communities outcome, Scotland's National Performance Framework

- **Investing in communities** – greenspace, safe homes, nice places to live, work and play - and upstream provision like education, youth work, employment, early years investment, parenting (this is not an exhaustive list!).
- **Foster the wider social conditions** e.g. community cohesion, social relationships and connections and listen and **work alongside citizens** and communities.

We would urge partners to work together and alongside communities, to remain focused on trying to understand the causes of crime, understand what makes a safe community and commit to adopting evidence-based approaches to prevention and early intervention in order to create a safer Scotland.

Get in touch with us if you'd like to have a conversation about this, or find out more about some of the approaches and evidence covered in this briefing:  
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