Partnerships in the Delivery of Policing and Safeguarding Children

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Contents

Acknowledgements

Executive Summary

Crime and policing-related problems – be they violence, abuse or child sexual exploitation - do not respect organisational boundaries but demand coordinated responses and joined-up solutions. In short, they necessitate policing partnerships. Nevertheless, the challenges associated with partnership working across organisational boundaries, cultures and established practices are significant. The benefits, however, are many and varied. Partnerships afford the potential coordination and pooling of expertise, information and resources, as well as opportunities for innovation, learning and cultural change that foster preventive and problem-solving approaches. Whilst a philosophy of partnership is strongly embedded within contemporary policy - notably in the context of child protection and safeguarding - there remains much to learn in developing and fostering multi-agency collaborations that achieve real public safety outcomes for the well-being of children and young people. Against this background Professor Adam Crawford and Dr Xavier L'Hoiry of the Centre for Criminal Justice Studies at the University of Leeds conducted exploratory research into policing partnerships with a focus on safeguarding children across Leeds in collaboration with West Yorkshire Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire.

The findings highlight the importance of effective partnership working in the delivery of safeguarding children and young people as well as policing more generally. The quality of the partnership relations, in large part, determines the quality of the service provided to children and families as well as the outcomes realised. The implication is that successful inter-organisational partnerships do not arise spontaneously; they need to be forged, nurtured and supported at all levels by people committed to realising the benefits of collaborative working. They require both strategic leadership and appropriately knowledgeable and skilled people to deliver outcomes on the ground.

The study found:

✓ Contemporary policing by necessity is embedded in and dependent on a complex constellation of inter-agency and cross-sectoral partnerships.

✓ Effective partnerships cohere around and communicate a shared vision of the collaborative advantages that derive from joint-working and result in improved outcomes for victims and members of the public.

✓ Working across divergent occupational cultures represents one of the most considerable challenges to partnerships, notably in the context of safeguarding children.

✓ Clear and consistent leadership and strategic direction are vital in promoting partnership working and have been evident in the context of Leeds Safeguarding Children Board across all key participating organisations in recent years.

✓ Many partners are involved either directly or indirectly in safeguarding children, although partnerships between police and Social Care are perhaps the most established.

✓ The importance of education, early prevention and early assessment are pivotal aims of working across all participating organisations. Intrinsic to this is early and effective information sharing.

- ✓ Multi-agency working relations have been enabled by a cluster model, developed largely between Social Care and education. However, the police do not emerge as having significant involvement in the clusters and there appears to have been a missed opportunity to have embedded policing within this devolved multi-agency model.

- ✓ Co-located and embedded multi-agency teams are often effective mechanisms to enable productive and transformative partnership working – the 'front door' team constitutes a crucial structure for delivering partnership work in the context of children (and adult) safeguarding.

- ✓ Increased demand and the changing nature of children's safeguarding - i.e. the pursuit of historical cases and growing social awareness concerning child sexual exploitation - present ongoing challenges for all partners.

- ✓ For the police, partnership working is sometimes seen and justified as a means of reducing demand on police services. This can prompt benefits in terms of a clearer division of labour but also provokes challenges arising from perceptions about the possible reallocation of responsibilities.

- ✓ Perceptions by partners about the police focus on prosecution can act as an impediment to preventive safeguarding work with children and families.

- ✓ Managerial and frontline staff experience partnership relations differently. Trust relationships between partners are most developed and consistent at a managerial level, more so than at the frontline. Moreover, there is not a consistent cascading of the operation of partnership relations from managerial to frontline staff.

- ✓ For partnerships to play an evident role in changing and challenging organisational cultures, attitudes and behaviours within the police (and other agencies), partnership relations need to be embedded and sustained in frontline practices.

- ✓ There is an important role for training in multi-agency relations and working dynamics, including for frontline staff. Currently, not all relevant staff have routinely benefited from dedicated training to enable them to better understand partnership working and the responsibilities and priorities of other partners involved.

- ✓ The current constrained financial context provides both opportunities for innovative partnership working and novel challenges to be overcome:

  - o There are dangers that pressures on resources combined with increased workloads of statutory partners can impact negatively on partnership relations as participating organisations focus on core activities at the expense of peripheral ones and as third sector organisations struggle to engage.

  - o Conversely, a by-product of austerity and the pressure on reduced resources has been to prompt innovation and serve as a catalyst to work more creatively through partnership arrangements.

About the Project

The study represents one strand of an Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded Knowledge Exchange Opportunities Scheme project exploring innovative models of research co-production and knowledge translation. It constitutes a collaboration between a team of researchers at the University of Leeds and West Yorkshire Police (WYP) together with the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner for West Yorkshire (OPCCWY). The police contribution to the partnership strand was led by Detective Inspector Andrew Staniforth, Head of 'West Yorkshire for Innovation' (WyFi) - a research and development team from the OPCCWY. The project was overseen by a steering group with representation from West Yorkshire Police, including Assistant Chief Constable Andy Battle and Chief Superintendent Paul Money (Leeds District Commander), and Fraser Sampson, Chief Executive at the OPCCWY. The project ran between 1 November 2014 and 31 October 2015.

In the spirit of co-production, the focus of the study was prompted by the West Yorkshire Chief Constable's desire to understand better the extent to which partnership working within the police organisation can serve as a dynamic of culture change and to comprehend the benefits and challenges that attend to partnership working. WYP's stated intention is to develop and enhance the organisational culture across all levels of the Constabulary to ensure that it reflects the organisation's 'purpose and values'. The role of partnerships in culture change and in shifting the organisation to a greater focus on prevention therefore is an important contemporary goal, especially given pressures on budgets. Hence, the study sought to understand better the inter-organisational barriers that impede closer forms of collaboration and the opportunities available to enrich partnership relations with a view to learning lessons from these.

The project Steering Group determined that the research case study should focus on relations between WYP and external partners in the context of safeguarding and child protection, particularly the work of the Leeds Safeguarding Children Board. This would allow the research to explore partnerships that tie in forms of service delivery and the daily activities to which they give rise in ways that are particularly susceptible to analysis, and which challenge organisational cultures and raise issues of wider national significance and debate both for the police and partners.

Background

Safeguarding children is a subject of considerable public concern and policy attention which, by its very nature, cuts across the responsibilities of diverse public and voluntary sector organisations. It demands the engagement of multiple actors and agencies to deliver collaborative benefits to children, young people and families. The risks, threats and harms to children have multiple causes, many of which are interdependent. Safeguarding children involves the police working with an array of different agencies with contrasting cultures, priorities, assumptions and working practices around sensitive issues. Key partners alongside the police include: adult and children's social work services, health, education, youth services and third sector organisations. Hence, the challenge for relevant organisations is how to combine effectively the contributions of diverse knowledgeable and competent actors towards a clear understanding of the problems and confidence in delivering appropriate interventions. In essence, it demands effective, open and mature partnerships.

Existing research has highlighted significant benefits that derive from partnership working in terms of crime-related outcomes (Berry *et al*. 2011; Crawford and Cunningham 2015). At the core of partnership working is the idea of *collaborative advantage* which is 'gained through collaboration when something is achieved that could not have been achieved by any organization acting alone' (Vangen and Huxham 2003: S62). By contrast, *collaborative inertia* 'relates to the often-pertaining actual outcome, in which the collaboration makes only hard fought or negligible progress' (*Ibid*.). There is a paradox in that:

'The possibility for collaborative advantage rests in most cases on drawing synergy from the differences between organisations, different resources and different expertises. Yet those same differences stem from different organisational purposes and these inevitably mean that they will seek different benefits from each other out of

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Hence, negotiating common purpose, forging shared values and ensuring appreciation of the divergent contributions of differing partners are all cornerstones for mature partnerships. Ultimately partnership working is a means to an end, not an end in itself. However, means are outcome determinative. As well as enhancing a specific crime-related strategy or objective such as safeguarding children, through pooled knowledge, collective intelligence, collaborative skills, and multi-level interventions, partnerships also afford benefits for organisations—notably the police—in terms of cultural change and openness to external engagement and critical reflection.

Partnerships and Safeguarding
The appeal to partnerships as the effective means of delivering safeguarding children - and community safety more generally - has been an established refrain in policing, crime control and crime prevention policy for nearly three decades now (Crawford 1997). Elizabeth Butler-Sloss (1988: 248-51), in the recommendations of her *Report of the Inquiry into Child Abuse in Cleveland 1987*, prominently highlighted the need for improved inter-agency coordination in dealing with child abuse cases of the future. Whilst much has changed in the intervening years to facilitate and embed partnership working, the goal of delivering genuinely joined-up and effective responses to child abuse, sexual exploitation and crime often remain stubbornly elusive. The independent report into child sexual exploitation (CSE) in Rotherham (Jay 2014) concluded that whilst Rotherham saw the development of good inter-agency policies and procedures applicable to CSE, the weakness in their approach was that members of the Safeguarding Board rarely checked whether these were being implemented or whether they were working.

Under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, the police, working with partner agencies – children's Social Care, health and education services – are responsible for making enquiries to safeguard the welfare of any child in the area who is suffering (or likely to suffer) significant harm. The police are under a duty to refer to the local authority those children in need and the local authority is under a general duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children who are believed to be in need (s. 17 of the 1989 Act). In early 2005, responsibility for overseeing and coordinating a multi-agency response to child sexual abuse and exploitation passed to Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCB), established by the Children Act 2004. Their task is to co-ordinate the actions of agencies represented on the Safeguarding Board and to ensure their effectiveness in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children in its area. Government guidance entitled *Working Together* (first published in 1999, but revised and reissued by HM Government in 2015) sets out how organisations and individuals should work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of children and young people in accordance with the Children Acts 1989 and 2004. It includes the advice that 'every LSCB should play a strong role in supporting information sharing between and within organisations and addressing any barriers to information sharing' which 'should include ensuring that a culture of information sharing is developed and supported as necessary by multi-agency training' (*Ibid*.: 71).

Leeds Safeguarding Children
Leeds Safeguarding Children Board has provided the leadership, management and governance to partnerships delivering child protection that in recent years has drawn considerable praise (Ofsted 2015). The Front Door Safeguarding Hub is an integrated and co-located unit that brings together partners from a range of organisations, including: Police, Adult Social Care, Children's Social Work, Health, Substance Misuse, Housing, Domestic Violence, Probation, Fire and Rescue, Anti-social Behaviour Team, Youth Offending, Education and Families First.

In addition, the 'front door' provides early and targeted help services to families, children and young people in relation to safeguarding concerns and domestic violence incidents involving children. It provides opportunities to gather, share and exploit information and intelligence. It is supported by the restructuring of social work services into a locality model based around 25 multi-agency 'clusters' across the three divisions of Leeds.

Daily partnership meetings focus on medium and high risk cases where a crime has been committed and allow information sharing and the development of action plans relating to victims, perpetrators and children. The purpose is to

enable the management of risk, facilitate the coordination of support and reduce duplication and multiple contacts with victims. In recent years, there has been an investment in and commitment to early intervention and the use of 'restorative practices', notably Family Group Conferencing, across services for children and families within the city. Since 2013 there has been a CSE/Missing Persons coordinator based within the Integrated Safeguarding Unit. The Ofsted report found:

> *'There is clear evidence of continuous strengthening of partnerships between schools, police, health and the voluntary sector, supported by the children's social work service' (2015: 15, para 38).*

Across the city there is a general commitment to engage in a 'professional conversation' between agencies to explore concerns about child protection and safeguarding wherever and whenever these arise. The Ofsted inspection found that this openness and 'assured professional response… enhances the confidence of these agencies in working with families significantly reducing any barriers between professional boundaries' (2015: 15, para 42).

However, an earlier HMIC inspection of WYP force's engagement with child protection found that 'some multi-agency teams were less developed, for example in Leeds, and this led to inconsistencies in practices across the force area' (HMIC 2015: 11). It also raised concerns about 'how little the police were involved in longer-term plans for children who were most at risk' (*ibid*.). Police attendance at case conferences where there may have been a need for a child protection plan was found to be both limited and uneven, whilst written reports were of varying quality. As a consequence, Inspectors concluded that WYP did not always fulfil its responsibilities under the statutory guidance to attend initial case conferences when required to do so. In the light of the HMIC report findings and the new Leeds District Policing model, WYP have been re-evaluating and restructuring the organisation and delivery of child protection, including the incorporation of domestic violence and rape within police safeguarding arrangements.

Methods and Data Collection

The study entailed three principal elements of data collection:

First, a mapping of the nature and extent of policing partnerships across the West Yorkshire force area. On the basis of documentary data as well as interviews with key police managers, this mapping exercise sought to identify and catalogue formal partnerships at force, district and local levels and understand variations and differences across areas and partnership types.

Second, face-to-face interviews with six senior managers from the LSCB, Integrated Safeguarding Unit, children's social work, education (x2) and the police.

Third, nine focus groups with a total of 50 frontline staff drawn from social work (20), police (15), health (7), youth services (5), and third sector organisations - including Family Intervention Services, Families First and Housing Support (3). The three social work focus groups were drawn from across the three different districts that make up Leeds and the three police focus groups included one comprising specialist staff in the Safeguarding Unit, one from the Front Door Safeguarding Hub and one drawn from specialist officers focusing specifically upon CSE and Missing Persons.

The interviews and focus groups all lasted between an hour and 90 minutes and were recorded and transcribed. The fieldwork was conducted between May and August 2015.

Mapping Partnerships Across the Force

Mapping the nature and extent of partnership working in policing is a complex and extensive task. This project provides a 'snapshot' of partnership working within West Yorkshire Police and the OPCCWY on the basis of existing documentation. It found:

- The range and reach of policing activities and services delivered with and through partnerships is extensive, such that 'partnerships' constitute a prevalent, considerable and necessary feature of contemporary policing.
- The form and consistency of coverage that partnerships take vary depending on the extent to which they derive from or are informed by statutory responsibilities, legal or

contractual arrangements, strategic organisational priorities and/or specific sources of funding.

- Whilst some partnerships have a legal foundation and formal structure, others have a more informal composition often based on interpersonal relations of trust and mutual benefit.
- Outside of partnerships that derive from statutory responsibilities, local partnerships tend to be more informal and uneven in nature.
- Partnerships tended to be organised at one of three spatial levels within the police organisation and Office of the PCC: (i) force-wide; (ii) district-wide; and (iii) locality or neighbourhood level. In West Yorkshire, there are the five police districts of Leeds, Wakefield, Calderdale, Kirklees and Bradford which are co-terminous with local authority boundaries.
- At the force level, oversight and coordination provides an important focus of partnership structures and relations – for example, the PCC's Community Safety Partnership Forum seeks to join-up and coordinate the five district Community Safety Partnerships.
- Four strategic partnership boards were identified as particularly important and consistent at district level: (i) Community Safety Partnerships; (ii) Health and Well-being Boards; (iii) Safeguarding Children Boards; and (iv) Adult Safeguarding Boards. At a district level there are also a number of multi-agency sub-groups that aim to deliver the strategic objectives of these boards.
- Whilst there are significant similarities in composition and coverage across districts in terms of strategic partnership boards, there are some relevant differences. Moreover, inconsistencies appear not simply to reflect differences in demand but also variations in organisational responses.
- A key challenge for partnership working is to ensure a joined-up approach both horizontally *between* strategic boards and district-wide arrangements and vertical communication *down to* sub-groups and local units charged with delivery on the ground.
- Cuts to funding that undermine partnership structures and relations may have a significantly detrimental impact on service delivery.

Interviews with Key Senior Managers

Interviews with senior managers and staff from contributing organisations involved in the delivery of safeguarding and child protection reinforced many of the views expressed by frontline staff in focus groups (below). In addition, they found:

- A coherent and consistent area-wide policy that combines the efforts of different partner agencies is held out as desirable not only because it provides the basis for more effective safeguarding but because it enables positive engagement with service users, families and children.
- Leadership has been clear and consistent across all partners in promoting a message of joint working and highlighting the importance of partner collaboration. The consistency of this message is believed to filter down to senior operational staff and eventually to frontline officers.
- Working across the divergent occupational cultures represents a considerable challenge to partnerships in the context of safeguarding children; however, recent years have shown how successful partnership working overcomes these obstacles and provides real benefits in terms of service delivery for children and families.
- Senior management across all key participating organisations are believed to provide appropriate, clear and consistent leadership and strategic direction in the context of Leeds' approach to safeguarding children which, it is believed, has improved the quality of the service delivered and outcomes.
- Partnership working is believed to be much more effective and open; as a result work is more 'joined-up' than ever before. The Ofsted report is seen as evidence of and testimony to this progress.
- The partnership model in Leeds fosters a culture of frank and open dialogue between partners in which difficult issues can be discussed and deliberated between partners with a view to resolving problems. Potential conflict is managed in a transparent and mature way – reflected in the commitment to a 'professional conversation' – and this is seen as necessary to successful child protection and safeguarding.

- The importance of education, early prevention and early assessment are pivotal key aims of working in partnership across all participating organisations both in the context of safeguarding and policing more broadly. Intrinsic to this is early and effective information sharing.
- Some partners identify issues concerning police expertise (or lack thereof) around child safeguarding issues, notably CSE. For instance, police officers involved day-to-day within clusters are not specialist child protection officers; they are frequently PCSOs and neighbourhood officers who may not have an adequate awareness of CSE or may lack appropriate expertise if a partner agency seeks to discuss a child safeguarding case.

Focus Group Findings

Focus groups with frontline staff from key organisations involved in the delivery of safeguarding children revealed the following insights regarding the nature of partnership relations.

1. **Working Relations between Partners:**
- In safeguarding children the most commonly identified and established partnerships exist between police and Social Care. Other key partners include education/schools and health service professionals (i.e. GPs, health visitors, hospital staff and school nurses). Youth Service and third sector agencies are more rarely identified as key partner by other agencies. Probation and mental health services are also mentioned as more indirectly involved.
- Close working relations between partners in relation to children's safeguarding tend to occur more frequently and more extensively at managerial levels (namely Team Managers in Social Care and police officers of the rank of Sergeant or above) than amongst less senior frontline staff.
- Partnership relations at the frontline are more uneven and inconsistent, in that sustained relations are often dependent on the coincidence of working with the same officer from a different organisation (be it police, social work, education, health, etc.) from one case to another case.
- Contexts in which significant frontline contacts between partners occur that enable sustained partnership relations to mature include: carrying out joint visits; requests for

information during investigations and assessments; attendance at strategy meetings and child protection conferences; and *ad hoc* discussions between frontline staff.
- There are mixed feelings as to whether partnership relations have significantly improved over recent years (as reflected in the Ofsted report). Some respondents feel that there has been a clear improvement in (non-police) partnership relations mainly due to the multi-agency cluster model that has been developed in Leeds
- Relations between non-police partners in particular have improved as a result of the cluster model in some areas, as the cluster structure fosters closer partnership working and enables staff to get to know one another, build trust relations, share information, etc.:

> *'I think the clusters are brilliant; it's the cluster working for me. Because you are in your own sort of little bubble aren't you and [yet within the cluster] you do get to know everybody. And everyone knows each other's names so even if you don't know directly who you're going to go to, you'll know how to get to somebody who will know. So I like working in clusters.'*
> *(Social Worker)*

- Not all clusters are similarly well developed; some are more mature and better organised than others and as a consequence work in more evidently joined-up ways.
- Police attendance at multi-agency meetings and case conferences tends to be perceived as inconsistent.
- The police are not perceived to be significant contributing partners within the cluster model.
- The nature of shift-working in the police is seen by many (including police officers/staff) as a significant hurdle to successful partnership working:

> *'We like our shifts for days off... but for work it's terrible, especially when we're talking about working with partners because they're there Monday to Friday.'*
> *(Police officer)*

> *'Shift patterns – [police officers] might be on for a few days and then off for seven but there's no one able to deal with it in their absence. So you might leave messages or ask to speak to someone else*

but because it's their case [no one else can deal with it].' (Social worker)

- The difficulties associated with contacting social workers outside of normal working hours are identified by police and non-police partners as problematic.
- The similar hierarchical structure of police and Social Care provides a useful model through which to escalate issues and obtain decision-making from senior staff/officers.
- Particular difficulties in partnership relations are expressed in relation to Housing (poor communication; difficult to speak to staff; reluctance to share information; etc.) and GPs (in relation to sharing information).

2. Shared Vision, Leadership and Operational Practice

- The importance of partnership working in safeguarding has been strongly emphasized through leadership. This shared approach is understood by frontline staff who universally accept that they 'can't do this work alone' and cannot work in isolation from partners.
- Most frontline officers agree that safeguarding children in Leeds has a clearly articulated shared vision at a broad level. How this manifests itself, however, varies somewhat from one organisation to another.
- Strategic direction, particularly within Social Care, has been very clear in ways that help to encourage partnership working.
- Differing levels of risk assessment that exist between the various key organisations may arise as a result of a number of factors:
  - Social Care and other non-police partners claim to have greater understanding of risk thresholds due to more consistent contact with families/children and seeing families in context of long-term progression.
  - Police officers claim that resource issues at times prevent Social Care from removing children from risky circumstances (i.e. the insufficient availability of beds).
  - Nearly all frontline staff highlight the professional anxiety of 'getting things wrong' or 'missing something', notably in light of recent high-profile safeguarding incidents (such as Rotherham, etc.). This concern can affect judgement and sometimes dictates the readiness to assess risk as 'high':

'I think rather than actually managing risk, it's almost managing professional anxiety. It feels like a massive part of our job. Professionals are incredibly anxious.' (Social worker)

'It's high risk reputation to West Yorkshire Police. It might not be a high risk missing person but we will say this is a risk for West Yorkshire Police and we'll risk assess it on that and not the risks to the person.' (Police officer)

  - Some social workers raise questions about the priorities that inform police assessments of risk. Where an incident will clearly lead to prosecution (i.e. when a parent admits hitting a child), it is believed that the police are more willing to assess risk as 'high' and take action. If evidence is unclear (i.e. the parent disputes hitting a child), the police may assess risk at a lower level and refrain from taking immediate action.
- It is recognised by officers working across all different organisations that the police operate with a largely short-term focus on detecting crime and pursuing prosecution. This is seen to be frequently at odds with other organisations' goals of ensuring longer-term positive outcomes for children and families:

'I think for the police the law is very black and white and they've got to work within that legal framework and if they can't make a conviction then they'll just pull out and that's their involvement ended. And obviously we have to carry on and things are a bit more grey for us; we've got to look at other factors and not just what's within the law. We've got to look at how that affects that child as well.' (Social worker)

- Non-police organisations are often concerned with the long-term detrimental effects of criminalising clients (i.e. in cases of under-aged sex, 'sexting', etc.) which can lead to less of an inclination to contact the police until deemed absolutely necessary, as the police priority is assumed to be primarily concerned with treating incidents as 'crimes':

'[On a recent case with a problematic young person], the last thing we had in our minds was to make the police phone call because we didn't want to criminalise the young person. I was thinking why are

we making a police call when in theory that could be dealt with via the social work system or mental health for young people?' (Third sector worker)

- The reactive focus of the police can inhibit prevention and early intervention where prosecution and criminalisation may undermine information gathering.
- Competing timescales and varying durations of assessments or investigations can cause tensions between partners. Police investigations and protocols tend to be lengthy and can be at odds with protocols of partners (i.e. some Social Care assessment must be done within 10 days, whereas police checks can take up to 8 weeks).
- Social workers express an impression that their job role is still seen as 'soft' (by both clients and police partners) compared to the 'stronger' or more authoritative stance of the police:

'I think families as well view the police as the more powerful agency. So if the police don't take further action, it kind of makes a mockery of what we're doing - like our work has to stop because the police's has.' (Social worker)

- Tensions arise for non-police partners and their relations with clients when it is necessary to work closely with police. Traditionally hard-to-reach populations may disengage if they know that non-police agencies are working closely in collaboration with the police.

Shared values, a common purpose and an appreciation of divergent organisational priorities and cultures are the glue that holds complex partnership relationships together. The basis for effective and mature partnerships lies in creating shared understanding about the problems and a collective commitment to the possible means of resolving them. However, shared understanding does not mean that all the partners necessarily agree on the nature or extent of the problem or hold the same views of it. Shared understanding demands that the partners understand each other's positions well enough to have meaningful dialogue about the different interpretations of the problem, and to exercise collective knowledge about how best to seek to resolve or overcome it.

However, policing with its focus on detection, prosecution and criminalisation can sometimes conflict with other priorities in safeguarding children. An emphasis on reactive policing can get in the way of safeguarding children, notably in relation to cases of CSE. As the HMIC report noted:

'A reactive approach limits police capability to gather intelligence and to deter and apprehend suspects' (HMIC 2015: 20).

3. The Quality of Inter-Organisational Trust Relations

Trust is a central coordinating mechanism of networks and is essential for cooperative behaviour (Tyler 2010). A key ingredient in successful partnerships entails establishing and sustaining trust relations across agency boundaries. This is not easy, particularly where there is a history of mistrust or misunderstanding. A crucial element in establishing trust relations is making partners aware of the limitations of their own and other organizations' contribution, so that they neither try to 'do it all' (something that the police are particularly prone to do and often expected by others to do as a '24 hour' service), nor do they have unrealistic expectations of what others can deliver. Mutual respect and recognition of professional judgement, discretion and differing organisational priorities, help to foster open partnership relations built on trust.

- Developing sustained and good quality inter-organisational trust relations takes time. The longer a relationship develops, the greater the scope for the quality of trust relations. Shared experiences help to develop trust between partners, including for example: joint visits; joint investigations; mutual sharing of information, etc.:

'The best working relationships with police officers I think are often borne out of the fact that you've gone and done a joint visit. You know that name and face, don't you, and you can just pick up the phone and have that discussion rather than someone who is reluctant because they don't know who you are.' (Social worker)

'For me it's about trust, credibility, worth and value for agencies of them sharing

information. I think where we've made progress over the last couple of years is we've shown other agencies the value of them sharing information with us and we've built that trust.' (Youth service worker)

- The development of partnership relations of trust is also dependent on individual personalities and characteristics – some officers are deemed simply '*too hard*' to work with whilst others are seen as '*really good and you feel like they do want what's best for the child*' (Social worker):

  'Some I've had really good relationships with them and others not so much. I think it's down to personality and how cooperative they are.' (Police officer)

- Staff feel that they are more able to build and establish trust relations at managerial levels as partnership relations are more likely often 'built-in' to everyday working practices - i.e. by way of compulsory attendance at strategy meetings; daily sharing of information; etc..
- Sustained relations of trust are not as easy to build amongst frontline staff - as compared to managerial levels - due to the inconsistent and uneven nature of inter-organisational working relations.
- Co-location between different agencies helps to foster greater understanding of mutual job roles, organisational pressures, professional capabilities, resources, etc.:

  'When we first started working in the Duty and Advice Team we didn't know those officers... [but] after 18 months we are now working as a multi-agency partnership. But at the start I think the police were quite paranoid... But now, and it's to do with relationships, we have very open discussions and we are open with them and they are open with us but it's that trust and building that trust and having those relationships over a period of time. So it doesn't seem to be an issue anymore.' (Social worker)

4. Inter-organisational Conflicts

Misunderstandings with regard to the roles, responsibilities, powers, skills, resources and limitations of different partners fuels inter-organisational conflicts.

- Police respondents claim that partners still have the impression that police resources are limitless and, as a result, police are often seen as the default service for queries which could be dealt with without involving the police. Moreover, police are frequently expected to back-fill other agencies' duties as they are the only '24 hour' service amongst partners:

  'There's an unrealistic idea of how many police officers there are working. So they'll ring up on a night time and say this person is missing and we'll say we've got nobody to go. "What do you mean you've got no officers to deploy, what do you mean?"' (Police officer)

- Social workers state that police hold greater power to remove children from family homes (using Police Protection Orders). The use of this power at times creates tensions between different agendas and resources of partner agencies (i.e. Social Care will have the responsibility of finding alternative accommodation of a child removed from family home etc.).
- Some social workers feel that the police are seen as the most powerful agency within the partnership by clients which can causes difficulties – i.e. if police choose not to prosecute an incident, concerns of social workers can dismissed or undermined.
- Social workers and healthcare professionals also state that, at times, police concerns are taken more seriously than concerns of other agencies during strategy meetings, child protection conferences, etc.:

  'I've found that the police seem to have some kind of power over what happens in some meetings... I don't know how to explain it, but they have more power than we do in the sense of people listening to what their concerns are.' (Health professional)

- Partners sometimes misunderstand and over-estimate the powers of the police – i.e. there can be a perception that the police can 'go and kick the door in' or use complex technical analytical investigative techniques (such as cell site analysis to track mobile phone usage) for minor issues.
- In the context of differences of opinion during child protection conferences, conference

chairs play an important role in resolving conflict and differences of opinion.

- Many felt that a clear protocol is in place to escalate inter-organisational problems appropriately and that there is confidence in the existing mechanisms for resolving conflict. Some frontline staff claim they would not be comfortable confronting partners without such conflict resolution protocol.
- Despite resolution of conflict, several respondents question the extent to which long-term learning is achieved after conflicts are resolved; some commenting that 'we see the same problems again and again' and 'it's resolved until the next time'.
- Conflict is often resolved by partners noting their objections/positions on specific issues and moving on. Professional anxiety has potentially led to partners to become more focussed on 'covering themselves' than resolving problems in best interests of families/children.

5. Information Sharing and Data Exchange

Data sharing and information exchange often remains one of the most intractable and contentious aspects of policing and community safety practice: technological and cultural barriers to data exchange often undermine effective partnership work (Crawford *et al.* 2012). Misunderstandings of data protection legislation persist and there exists reluctance on the part of some to share information, presenting difficulties for partnerships.

- Information sharing is frequently mentioned by all partners as a significant source of possible tensions and problems between partners. There are mixed views as to whether this has improved or worsened over recent years.
- Despite acknowledging the importance of privacy and confidentiality, there is near unanimity from staff in all agencies that obtaining information from other partners involves too much protocol and bureaucracy.
- Responses from co-located teams (i.e. the Duty and Advice team and Partnership Vulnerability Unit) suggest that information exchange within such teams/units between partners is good and has been greatly helped by co-location.
- Information sharing is sometimes more easily undertaken via informal channels, using contacts within different agencies, rather than

by following formal policies, procedures and protocols:

> *'I think usually if they know that you're involved – so if a police officer knows that and you've got a rapport, then you're likely to get more information (without having to go through the formal procedure)'. (Third sector worker)*

- Practitioners are sometimes uncertain about the circumstances and purposes for which data can and should be exchanged. This can result in somewhat arbitrary distinctions between what they are willing to exchange in face-to-face interactions and what they are prepared to share electronically.
- Both police and social workers claim that queries about small piece of information (i.e. history of Domestic Violence within 6 months timeline) often result in masses of information being shared (i.e. entire DV history covering several years). This is time-consuming to analyse and is deemed to be an unnecessary infringement of client privacy.
- Non-police staff feel that they rarely receive feedback from the police on *ad hoc* pieces of intelligence and information passed to the police in relation to safeguarding cases, which is seen as unhelpful and not consistent with open and reciprocal relations:

> *'It's just human nature, you do get quite emotionally attached to some of these cases and you need to know that things are now ok, don't you? I think that's what's lacking for most people, you're putting all that work in and you're getting very much back.' (Health professional)*

6. Skills and Training

- Nearly all frontline staff claim never to have received specific training on partnership working. Some say they received training on related themes but this tended to be several years ago.
- Officers tend to place greater emphasis on personal experience and abilities in terms of developing appropriate skill-sets conducive to working in partnership – for example, one respondent argued: 'you can't train someone to communicate with partners'.
- Respondents suggested training should focus on developing greater understanding of each agency's working protocols; pressures; workloads; capacity and resources; etc. This

would help to foster mutual understanding of what is/isn't achievable in specific contexts:

> *'Maybe there's some lack of awareness perhaps sometimes. So I think sometimes it's about understanding each other's organisations because it is true that the police have a different job to us and we have a different job to them and maybe some joint training would be helpful.'*
> *(Social worker)*

- Suggested training include: shadowing; more invitations to multi-agency meetings for frontline staff (as opposed to managerial-level staff); joint conferences between different agencies; etc.

In partnerships there is a need for knowledgeable and skilled actors who recognise mutual respect for different types of contributions. In this regard, there is an important role for training in multi-agency relations and working dynamics which needs to be recognized, particularly in relation to designated staff performing linked functions within partnership networks.

7. Current Funding Climate and Future Challenges

Austerity measures and shrinking public sector finances constitute an uneasy but ambiguous context for partnership working. On the one hand, fiscal pressures can foster innovative strategies and prompt organisations to ask fundamental questions about purpose, expertise, responsiveness and effective service delivery. Partnerships can constitute a vehicle for achieving collaborative advantages that yield longer-term cost efficiencies. They can redirect investments in 'up-stream' preventive solutions to crime problems and away from costly reactive fire-fighting. However, such radical thinking and restructuring would necessitate significantly bold shifts in police organisational culture and working practices. On the other hand, there are dangers that in the face of budget cuts organisations (including the police) retreat into their 'silos'; retracting from inter-organisational collaborations, redrawing their boundaries to focus on core objectives, and seeking to off-load responsibilities to others, wherever possible. Short-term cost savings may arise at the expense of partnership commitments, particularly where key individuals or posts are lost to early retirements or workforce re-organisations.

- Some staff feel that austerity has indeed compelled partners to work together more closely and effectively in response to the loss of resources across all agencies.
- By contrast, others believe that partnership working is essential to safeguarding children regardless of austerity, as evidenced by failures in Rotherham and elsewhere, some of which were blamed on the absence of partnership working. For them, increased partnership working is not the result of budget constraints but rather a necessary progression in the wider context of safeguarding children:

> *'I don't necessarily think it's because of austerity [that partnership relations have improved]; it's because of the nature of the work. It's become more prevalent, more in the public eye and we're more accountable really. I don't think it's anything to do with austerity, I think it's just that we are seeing [that] we have to work together to get the job done.' (Police officer)*

- Consequences attributable to austerity measures are evidently apparent, nonetheless, as it was felt that the presence of fewer third sector agencies in safeguarding work has increased workloads for statutory partners.
- Nearly all respondents claim the biggest challenge presented is the lack of resources across all partner agencies. Resources are felt to be almost at breaking point and further cuts to funding, resources and staffing threaten the ability to carry out a proper service to children at risk of harm:

> *'Personally I think the challenges for future are it'll get a lot worse before it gets better. And I suppose it's about how you look after yourself because I think in the middle of that, I think a lot of our practitioners feel really, really stretched and they're almost at breaking point. And I suppose it is about strengthening relationships with our people and it's about getting that peer support.' (Health professional)*

- Some police officers feel that austerity measures have led to greater demands on police service (more so than other agencies) as a result of fewer resources for partners. Some police respondents believe that it should be made clearer to partners – via senior officers -

that the capabilities of the police have changed and reduced in the light of austerity over recent years. As a consequence, police officers hoped that partners would then be more inclined to limit demands placed on the police service.

- Some police respondents claim that re-structuring of the safeguarding team in West Yorkshire Police has meant that officers trained specifically in child protection are forced to cover other safeguarding matters (including: adult safeguarding; rape; domestic violence; and Missing Persons). As a result, expertise of these officers has been diluted which represents a challenge.
- This is also mentioned by social workers who cite several instances in which a police officer has evidently lacked specialist training during an investigation (i.e. whilst interviewing children).
- Fostering greater partnership relations is frequently mentioned as the solution to overcoming problems. This includes more training opportunities and greater co-location of teams (provided the latter is carefully thought through rather than seen as a silver bullet to all problems).
- The above would lead to greater understanding of the capabilities and resources available to each agency which would potentially mean more efficient use of each agency's resources.

Conclusions

Working through multi-agency partnerships that combine organisations and professionals with differing interest, values and expertise is an indispensable facet of contemporary public policy governance. Crime problems that are difficult to solve because they are highly complex and dynamic have multiple causes and involve many interdependencies – like child sexual exploitation - demand the engagement of multiple actors and agencies with different competencies, understandings and resources. Effective partnerships allow for holistic approaches to crime and community safety that are 'problem-focused' rather than 'bureaucracy-premised' according to the existing organisational units available. Real word problems do not respect agency boundaries.

As well as enabling the coordination and pooling of expertise, information and resources, partnerships can provide valuable opportunities for innovation and learning whilst simultaneously challenging introspective organisational cultures and the (often cozy) working assumptions of specialised agencies. Effective partnerships allow for problem-oriented approaches to flourish and for the development of problem-solving capacity and skills to come to the fore and to be appreciated. For the police, in particular, partnerships offer prospects to deliver the necessary organisational change that will underpin any sustained shift in resources, priorities, and commitment to a greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention.

Leeds Safeguarding Children partnership provides evidence of strong leadership and strategic direction with a focus on delivering a central coordination of effort, getting buy-in from partners and managing the relationships. In particular, the commitment to a 'professional conversation', mutual acknowledgement of differing contributions and open management of any conflict provide the basis for mature and effective inter-organisational relations. However, the extent to which commitments forged at managerial levels filter down into routine practices remains uneven and the engagement of some partners is inconsistent and patchy.

Safeguarding children involves multiple agencies, with the police being a key partner. The cluster model developed by Leeds City Council has played an important role in facilitating working relationships between partners. The police, however, were not brought into this cluster arrangement and have yet to establish a meaningful place within it. This would seem to be a missed opportunity.

Increased demand and the changing nature of children's safeguarding - i.e. the pursuit of historical cases and growing social awareness concerning child sexual exploitation - present ongoing challenges for all partners. It is therefore important that partnership relations continue to be developed and steps taken to address some of the key challenges.

The current constrained financial context provides both opportunities for innovative partnership working and novel challenges to be overcome. There are dangers that pressures on resources can impact negatively on partnership

relations as participating organisations focus on core activities at the expense of shared ones. Conversely, a by-product of austerity and the pressure on reduced resources has been to prompt innovation and serve as a catalyst to work more creatively through partnerships.

Partnership working, both generally and specifically in the case of safeguarding children, is now an established part of the policy and operating context and likely to increasingly become the norm. It is important therefore to reflect on the evidence emerging from this study and consider how it might inform future policy and practice. Key amongst these are:

- The possible tensions between organisational priorities – notably between the police orientation towards prosecution which can operate at the expense of a focus on prevention and victim support.
- The inter-organisational perceptions and misperceptions that persist among frontline staff with regard to the goals, responsibilities, limitations, cultural assumptions and working practices of the different partners
- The importance of education, early prevention and early assessment are pivotal aims of working across all participating organisations. Intrinsic to this is early and effective information sharing.
- For partnerships to play an evident role in changing and challenging organisational cultures, attitudes and behaviours within the police (and other agencies), partnership relations need to be embedded and sustained in frontline practices.
- The absence of a consistent approach to training in partnership working, including for frontline staff, is a significant gap in the development of effective partnership relations.

Further Information
Copies of the project summaries and reports as well as further information are available from the project website: http://www.law.leeds.ac.uk/research/projects/an-exploratory-knowledge-platform-for-policing

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