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How low should you go? Neighbourhood level interventions in the crime and community safety theme of New Deal for Communities

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Abstract

Neighbourhoods are viewed by policy makers as key to the renewal of citizen engagement and improvements in the delivery of services. The national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities offers empirical evidence of the possibilities and limitations of neighbourhood level service delivery. A review of crime and community safety initiatives in six case study NDC Partnerships suggests that neighbourhoods have been appropriate spaces in which to address some key issues, in particular property related crime and anti-social behaviour. NDC Partnerships have brought together communities and agencies to focus on local needs. But there have also been tensions: NDC Partnerships have struggled to maintain community participation and some agencies do not engage at the neighbourhood level. There are issues which require interventions at different spatial scales and sometimes neighbourhood level priorities are out of step with other initiatives and strategies. There is a need for neighbourhoods to be integrated into wider governance arrangements.

Keywords: Neighbourhood, Renewal, Community, Crime.

Introduction

This paper discusses the potential and limitations of neighbourhoods as sites for the planning and delivery of interventions in the crime and community safety theme of the New Deal for Communities programme. It outlines briefly the key policies currently endorsing neighbourhoods as arenas for community engagement and improved service delivery. It then presents evidence from work to tackle crime and community safety in six case study NDC Partnerships. The paper argues that neighbourhoods have much to offer in the context of devolved governance but that it is important to recognise their limitations as well as their strengths.

Neighbourhoods and policy

The arena of the neighbourhood has been the subject of longstanding policy interest. In regeneration and urban policy, in particular, the salience of the neighbourhood as a site for addressing poverty and disadvantage has been apparent for over forty years (Lepine, *et al*, 2007). Since the 1960s, a continuous stream of time limited area-based initiatives (ABIs) have sought to redress disparities in the circumstances, life chances and socio-economic characteristics of those living in deprived neighbourhoods (ODPM, 2001).

Since the election of the Labour Government in 1997, the role of neighbourhoods has been the subject of renewed interest. One of the earliest and most prominent articulations of Labour's commitment to the neighbourhood as a vehicle for policy and service delivery was the National Strategy for Neighbourhood Renewal (NSNR) (SEU, 1998). The Strategy, and its associated Action Plan (SEU, 2001) outlined proposals for what were, according to the Government's Social Exclusion Unit, the '*most concerted attack on area deprivation this country has ever seen*' (SEU, 1998). The strategy contained proposals for initiatives which aimed to achieve two key objectives: to improve outcomes in worklessness, health, education, crime and housing and the physical environment; and to narrow the gap between the poorest neighbourhoods in England the rest of the country. 88 of the most deprived local authorities in England were eligible for Neighbourhood Renewal Funding, to be spent on meeting targets for improved outcomes for public services, and a range of other programmes were designed to pilot new ways to tackle deprivation at the local level, notably Neighbourhood Wardens, Neighbourhood Management Pathfinders and the New Deal for Communities.

As Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) point out, the NSNR is based on the premise that it is at the neighbourhood level that the forces of social exclusion and political participation (or perhaps more appropriately lack of participation) are most keenly felt (p60). But there have been other, subsequent, policy directives which have also focused on the neighbourhood as a site through which to harness, and promote, community participation and to refocus, and ultimately enhance, the delivery of public services. In this latter context the reform of local government, towards a framework for local *governance* expressed in the Local Government White Paper 'Strong and Prosperous Communities' (CLG, 2006) expounds a vision of neighbourhood governance based on increased local accountability and devolved powers and responsibilities, enabling communities to have a more direct influence on the delivery of local services. Although there is no constitutional requirement for the devolution of power to local bodies in England, a new performance management framework for local government (which places emphasis on community involvement) combined with a range of 'new' policy tools (including the community call to action, participatory budgeting and community charters) are intended to support local government and communities in forging ahead in developing 'neighbourhood governance on a scale, and with a level of substantive decision making, not previously seen'. (Mulgan and Bury, 2006: 69)

There has also been an associated raft of initiatives designed to renew civic society. The Home Office's promotion of 'Civil Renewal' expressed through the concept of active citizenship, has emphasised the role of neighbourhood as a key site for building citizen engagement. The empowerment White Paper (CLG, 2008g) is the latest contribution to what is now a substantive policy stream which views a revitalised relationship between communities, local and central government through the lens of the neighbourhood.

p. 50 How low should you go? Neighbourhood level interventions in the crime and community safety theme of New Deal for Communities

Neighbourhoods are now congested, and sometimes confused, policy spaces. Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) have provided a theoretical framework which outlines a number of rationales for neighbourhood governance (civic, social, political and economic) and associated institutional constructs (neighbourhood empowerment, neighbourhood partnership, neighbourhood government and neighbourhood management). They argue that there are new trade-offs emerging in the key challenges facing neighbourhood governance: capacity, competence, diversity and equity, in the context of what they term 'new localism' which draws on all four rationales to present a comprehensive case for neighbourhood governance (p. 62). But these fault lines - between on the one hand an essentially technocratic understanding of the neighbourhood as an appropriate spatial scale in which to undertake the planning and delivery of local services, and on the other a more communitarian approach which sees the neighbourhood as an appropriate arena in which to foster citizen engagement and build associative democracy - are rarely articulated (and often conflated) in policy. The New Deal for Communities is a case in point, combining a commitment to community participation (through, for example resident representation on NDC Boards) with a focus on 'narrowing the gap' between deprived and non-deprived areas through the improved delivery of public services in NDC neighbourhoods (Lawless, 2006). In this context, the New Deal for Communities programme offers an important lens through which to disentangle some of these tensions.

The remainder of this article discusses findings from the national evaluation of the New Deal for Communities programme, and focuses in particular on research in six case study NDC Partnerships on interventions under the theme of crime and community safety (CLG, 2008a).

The New Deal for Communities

New Deal for Communities (NDC) was announced in 1998 and is designed to reduce gaps between some of the most deprived areas in England and the rest of the country. It was one of the key components of the NSNR and is one of the most ambitious and innovative ABIs ever introduced in England. 39 NDC Partnerships have been established in areas accommodating on average 9,800 people. Each Partnership, comprising local residents, the local authority and service delivery agencies, is implementing an approved ten year delivery plan which has attracted an average of £50m of Government investment.

NDC is being evaluated by a team of organisations, led by Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University. The first phase of the evaluation culminated in an interim evaluation report (ODPM, 2005). The second phase is due to last until 2010. The evaluation utilises three key sources of evidence:

- household surveys in NDC neighbourhoods and comparator areas in 2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008
- a range of administrative data collated for NDC neighbourhoods and comparators, providing an evidence base through which to track changes over time in benefit claims, recorded crime, morbidity and mortality and educational attainment in NDC areas
- and a stream of locality based work exploring a range of neighbourhood renewal issues, including working with agencies and communities, neighbourhood elections, and population turnover.

Crime and community safety interventions in NDC Partnerships: case studies of neighbourhood governance

A recent study has focused on interventions and outcomes in the crime and community safety theme in six case study NDC Partnerships (Bradford, Lambeth, Newcastle, Newham, Knowsley and Walsall) (CLG 2008a). In common with other deprived communities, NDC areas have experienced disproportionate levels of crime, despite trends which suggest that national crime rates are decreasing. Residents of NDC areas are between two and three times more likely to be victims of crime than is suggested by national averages (Beatty et al, 2005). But there have been improvements. Across the programme, NDC Partnerships have experienced reductions in levels of fear and recorded offences (CLG, 2008b). Between 2002 and 2006 there was a ten percentage point reduction in residents 'feeling unsafe in and around this area after dark' in NDC areas and police recorded crime data indicates a fall in the total crime rate from 84 to 73 per one thousand population between 2002/03 and 2004/05. In relation to burglary, rates in NDC neighbourhoods have fallen faster than the national average. Between 2002/03 and 2004/05, recorded police crime data indicate that burglary rates fell from 70 per thousand dwellings to 48 per thousand across all NDC areas. This was greater than the national decrease from 38 to 29 per thousand dwellings over the same period.

NDC Partnerships have introduced a range of interventions designed to reduce crime and fear of crime, including:

- a focus on tackling high levels of recorded crime through early interventions to combat vehicle and property related crime in particular
- tackling the fear of crime through resources for increased police presence, funding for neighbourhood wardens and the expansion of surveillance through CCTV
- preventative and diversionary work with young people in particular as a means of reducing levels of disorder and anti-social behaviour
- support to victims and communities
- flexible use of resources to enable targeting of 'hotspots' and problem areas
- emphasis on agency collaboration and 'joined up' delivery, with a focus on 'problem solving'.

But for the purposes of this paper the critical questions may be not so much what have NDC Partnerships done, but to what extent has the *neighbourhood* proved to be an appropriate spatial scale at which to tackle issues of crime and community safety and how issues of neighbourhood *governance* influenced the approaches NDC Partnerships adopted?

The neighbourhood has in some senses proved an appropriate spatial scale to address crime and community safety. One of the key successes of the NDC approach has been in bringing a neighbourhood focus to interventions and linking these interventions to multi-agency partnerships. In Newcastle, for instance, the SNAP (Safer Neighbourhood Action Planning) forum brings together local partners in a problem solving approach, and in Bradford an anti-crime partnership established by the NDC has been adopted by the local police force and meets on a monthly basis, bringing together key local agencies including voluntary and community groups and registered

social landlords, to share intelligence and identify joined up approaches to community safety. In Lambeth, the NDC is involved in regular meetings with local authority service heads to discuss local issues such as 'hotspots' of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour, and to monitor progress against local action plans.

These partnerships have offered a number of benefits:

- bringing together organisations involved in crime and community safety
- facilitating the development of neighbourhood based responses
- engaging residents and community groups who provide 'on the ground' intelligence.

The contribution of NDC Partnerships in bringing together agencies to encourage collaboration and co-operation at the neighbourhood level appears particularly effective in targeting certain community safety issues: crimes against property (there have been reductions in levels of burglary and theft), anti-social behaviour and 'youth nuisance'. The very local focus of NDC Partnerships has been valuable in addressing the problems caused by relatively small groups of young people. In Lambeth, for instance, the NDC Partnership responded to a series of complaints from residents that young people were congregating in groups during the school holidays and displaying anti-social behaviour. This resulted in a decision for the NDC to provide increased youth provision during the summer holidays and funding for an additional youth worker to work specifically with a core group of young people at risk of offending. Diversionary activities for young people have remained a key feature of this NDC Partnerships community safety approach.

The policy context has proved largely supportive of NDC sponsored neighbourhood level interventions to address local crime issues. The roll out of neighbourhood policing in particular has provided opportunities for targeted work at the neighbourhood level (see Flanagan, 2008). NDC Partnerships appear to have added value through engaging agencies and communities, providing strategies for tackling crime and community safety issues, challenging agency agendas and providing flexible funding which has been used to enhance mainstream and agency approaches.

NDC Partnerships have also provided a forum for communities and agencies, especially the police, to come together. As such, neighbourhood-based partnerships appear to play a, possibly, unique role in brokering and strengthening better relationships between residents and delivery agencies. NDC Partnerships have placed considerable emphasis and devoted significant resources to the involvement of local residents in the planning, delivery and evaluation of interventions (CLG, 2008d). Residents in the case study NDC neighbourhoods engaged with crime and community safety issues in a range of ways:

- in Lambeth and Newcastle, community safety theme groups involved a core group of residents who developed a good understanding of local issues
- in Knowsley a 'neighbourhood network' involving tenants and residents groups acted as a sounding board for work in the crime and community safety theme
- in Lambeth, feasibility studies provided residents with opportunities to influence the design of projects, including a 'safe space' project which built on the priorities of young women consulted at the project development stage
- many residents have contributed as volunteers; in Bradford a neighbourhood based drugs project attracted over 100 volunteers

p. 53 How low should you go? Neighbourhood level interventions in the crime and community safety theme of New Deal for Communities

- and residents have highlighted community safety issues and provided evidence to support the targeting of resources; in Newham, door to door canvassing and ward panels comprising elected local residents are sources of intelligence for the local Safer Neighbourhood Teams.

The independence of NDC Partnerships and their credibility with local communities are seen in the case studies to be critical factors in facilitating the engagement of communities in the planning and delivery of community safety interventions.

But there have been tensions. The case study NDC Partnerships experienced problems sustaining the involvement of agencies and communities in neighbourhood level activity. The police have been perhaps the most supportive of all agencies where NDC Partnerships are concerned, and there are strong organisational pressures for the police to engage at the neighbourhood level. But this is not the case for all agencies and perhaps inevitably in an intervention lasting ten years some partner agencies have experienced reorganisation and institutional change which may have limited (even if only temporarily) their ability to engage with NDCs (for instance, primary care services, child and adult social services, youth services).

There have been difficulties in NDC Partnerships linking their crime and safety work into wider forums and partnerships, such as LSPs. In one case study the NDC was working with a multi-agency neighbourhood partnership, which it had identified as a key vehicle for succession beyond NDC funding. However, the partnership had only limited influence on broader agendas and partnerships. One stakeholder commented:

“the local neighbourhood partnership almost doesn’t get a mention at LSP and LAA meetings, it certainly doesn’t get mentioned in the LSP management meetings where all the decisions are made, and it almost doesn’t feature in the LAA”.

A study of NDC elections (CLG, 2008f) has demonstrated that despite best efforts NDC Partnerships have found it hard to attract and retain elected Board members or to increase levels of enfranchisement within NDC communities. And despite the often vaunted importance of ‘crime and grime’ issues to local residents, the NDC Partnerships in the crime and community safety study struggled to involve residents in theme groups and meetings. Young people proved particularly resistant to involvement, an experience common to other regeneration partnerships.

Where residents have been involved they have sometimes been unable to disentangle complex local issues. Across the programme NDC Partnership Board members tend to be older men and although some NDC Partnerships have Boards that are broadly representative of the ethnic composition of the communities they serve, this is not always the case. In their efforts to tackle crime and improve community safety the case study NDC Partnerships prioritised some issues: burglary, vandalism and anti-social behaviour. This is to be expected as these are the things which impact on the everyday lives of those living in NDC areas and where action at the neighbourhood level can have immediate and positive impact. But sometimes this emphasis contradicted local evidence. For example, in one of the case study NDC Partnerships the Board had insisted on continuing efforts to combat burglary despite evidence which suggested that burglary rates in the NDC area had fallen to below the borough average. And in all the case studies there was less willingness to tackle violent crime, despite evidence that violence was increasing in all but one of the case study areas. Crimes of this nature are complex, and often hidden, but there may be

relevant issues of perception at play here too. Residents serving on NDC Boards may have had (or know someone who has had) experience of crime against property or have been disturbed or frightened by youth disorder. They may not frequent the night time venues with which much violent crime is associated, and be unwilling or unable to confront some of the sensitivities associated with domestic crime in the communities in which they live.

These crimes and other such crimes associated with the dealing and use of drugs, may be beyond the scope of neighbourhood intervention and certainly there is no suggestion that community based partnerships should be expected to tackle these issues alone. But the emphasis of NDC Partnerships on certain crime and community safety issues has sometimes put them out of step with approaches and strategies operating at wider spatial scales, and clearly these tensions will need to be managed if neighbourhood level improvements are to be sustained.

There has been a focus on prevention, detection and enforcement in the NDC Partnership approaches. In one case study, the local approach to anti-social behaviour, emphasising enforcement, was contrasted with the city-wide approach in its parent local authority, which included mediation and cultural activities and emphasised prevention, diversion and early intervention. NDC Partnerships have also placed less emphasis on integration or restorative justice and whilst these issues may be beyond the scope of NDC Partnerships (and other neighbourhood based partnerships) working alone, there may be long term implications for neighbourhoods if local organisations do not actively seek to create environments which help to resettle offenders.

A final issue concerns the extent to which, in the long term, neighbourhoods will be able to ensure the continuity of the approaches and interventions adopted by NDC Partnerships. In the case study NDC Partnerships community police, neighbourhood wardens and CCTV, are widely seen to be effective mechanisms for reducing crime and the fear of crime and in most cases will be supported by police and local authorities beyond NDC. Other initiatives, particularly those run by third sector organisations, are less likely to attract mainstream funding. This is a particular problem for preventative work and that which targets less high profile crimes or victims, for instance work around domestic violence or racial harassment, where third sector organisations may be particularly well placed to provide services. It is also true that many of the neighbourhood based structures for focusing on crime and community safety issues have been dependent on NDC resources and may not be sustainable once NDC funding ends.

Conclusions

Although the evidence outlined above relates to only one dimension of a area based initiative, it demonstrates that neighbourhoods provide a site for revitalised community engagement and service delivery. The NDC Partnerships in our study had developed multi-agency working bringing together communities and service delivery agencies and had implemented initiatives which addressed some of the crime and community safety issues which areas were facing. The ability of NDC Partnerships to identify and respond flexibly to neighbourhood issues was highlighted in the case studies as particularly beneficial.

Yet it also demonstrates that even within this one outcome area there are limitations in a neighbourhood based approach. The difficulties that the NDC

Partnerships experienced in engaging all sections of the community, and all relevant agencies, have created issues around capacity and competence (Lowndes and Sullivan, 2008). NDC residents have not always felt comfortable addressing sensitive crime and community safety issues and there have been tensions between community priorities and those of other agencies, sometimes resulting in NDC Partnerships being 'out of step' with wider strategies and approaches. Evidence from this study suggests that an emphasis on community priorities can mean that some issues receive less attention and there is an understandable tendency for communities to prioritise enforcement. Where there are diversity issues, these problems may be particularly acute. There may also be some issues which require interventions at different spatial scales, for instance drug-related crimes which cut across a range of deprived communities.

Perhaps the most salient conclusion to arise from this study is that neighbourhoods were a useful arena in which to address some crime and community safety issues, but they are not a panacea to the service needs of deprived communities, and whilst neighbourhoods can be a forum in which the priorities of citizens and agencies might coalesce, they do not offer a communitarian utopia in which residents and agencies engage spontaneously in local governance structures which mesh harmoniously with those operating at other spatial scales.

It is important, therefore, in the clamour for renewed citizen participation and devolved governance to recognise not only the possibilities offered by neighbourhoods, but also the limitations. It is too early to tell what impact new incentives for local government to engage with neighbourhoods will have, but there was limited evidence within the case study NDC Partnerships of systematic links with Local Strategic Partnerships or Local Area Agreements.

There is also the added problem of defining what the neighbourhood is and how it is identified and experienced by those living in it. Policy has been circumspect in its approach to defining neighbourhoods, conscious no doubt that, as Lepine et al (2007) point out, neighbourhoods are to some extent social constructs, only relevant when given meaning by those who populate them (Lupton, 2005). But policies have been implemented at different spatial scales and assumptions (implicit in the local government White Paper) about what constitutes an appropriate level at which elected representatives of local government should engage with the 'neighbourhood' may be very different from those which inform the community partnership or community anchor organisation to which regeneration and civil renewal agendas speak. Dilemmas associated with the assembly and operation of multiple layers of local governance may yet need to be overcome if neighbourhood governance is to thrive.

Nor, arguably, has the potential impact of these tensions in different socio-economic contexts been explored adequately. The NSNR seeks to address the manifestation of exclusionary processes at the neighbourhood level, including the lack of political participation which often accompanies poverty and disadvantage. But if, as Lowndes and Sullivan (2008) suggest, the new localism is to embrace all citizens, and not just those who are poor or excluded (p62), there will be challenges in ensuring that deprived neighbourhoods benefit equally, particularly in the context of a framework in which levels of economic participation, and not deprivation, are a key component of local funding settlements.

And finally there is the question of sustainability. Many of those living in NDC neighbourhoods would argue that NDC Partnerships are addressing the earlier failures

p. 56 How low should you go? Neighbourhood level interventions in the crime and community safety theme of New Deal for Communities

of local government and service agencies to meet the needs of deprived neighbourhoods. There was limited evidence in our study (and indeed in the wider NDC evaluation) of NDC Partnerships being able to fundamentally alter the approaches of mainstream delivery agencies; although as in the case of the police there have been clear benefits when agendas have coincided. NDC resources, though not inconsequential, are dwarfed by the resources which mainstream agencies commit to deprived neighbourhoods. But as a recent study on NDC succession has highlighted (CLG, 2008e), there are concerns about the ability of communities to sustain agency interest at the neighbourhood level in the absence of the 'carrot' of NDC funds.

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p. 57 How low should you go? Neighbourhood level interventions in the crime and community safety theme of New Deal for Communities

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