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## **Crime and ‘Community’:**

# **Exploring the scope for community involvement in criminal justice**

**Jessica Jacobson, Oonagh Skrine,  
Amy Kirby and Gillian Hunter**

**Institute for Criminal Policy Research,  
Birkbeck, University of London**

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Included in this report are the results of fieldwork in neighbourhoods in north-east London, Bristol, Nottingham and Merthyr Tydfil. In all four areas, we conducted interviews and focus groups with individuals involved in a wide variety of community organisations. We would like to thank them for the time they gave to the study, and for the honesty and openness of their responses to our questions. We wish to thank also the representatives of the police, local authority and other local services who helped us to identify community organisations in the four neighbourhoods, and provided further information about the local areas.

## Executive Summary

The promotion of 'community engagement' has been a significant and consistent theme within public policy in the United Kingdom since the late 1990s. It is a theme that, under both the Labour administration of 1997 to 2010 and the current Coalition government, has cross-cut many spheres of public policy, including criminal justice policy.

The term 'community engagement' is broad and subject to differing definitions; it also overlaps with many other public policy concepts. These include community empowerment; community involvement; social action; civic or civil renewal; co-production; and active citizenship. Another related term – albeit one that has largely fallen into disuse since 2012 - is 'the Big Society', which encompassed Prime Minister David Cameron's vision of an active civil society against a backdrop of sweeping public sector spending cuts. The common thread running through all these policy concepts is the aim of **fostering within communities more mutual trust, a greater sense of collective self-interest and a greater preparedness to act in this self-interest.**

'Community justice' refers to the intersection between community engagement and criminal justice. It encapsulates the idea that **local communities which have mutual trust and a sense of collective self-interest can and should play an active part in addressing problems of crime and disorder.**

This report undertakes a close and rigorous analysis of the concept of community justice. Specifically, it addresses the following three questions:

- How has central government, since Labour came to power in 1997, perceived the role of local communities in tackling crime and disorder?
- How do the members of local communities perceive their own role in tackling crime and disorder?
- To what extent do government aspirations for community justice match those of the general public, and what are the main areas of discord between governmental and public expectations?

We have addressed these questions by the following means:

- A review of policy developments under the preceding and current government relating to community engagement in general and community justice in particular.
- A review of existing data on volunteering and political and civic participation among the general public.
- Empirical research into the scope and nature of community activism in four deprived neighbourhoods in north-east London, Bristol, Nottingham and south Wales.

## Policy review

Policy initiatives relevant to community justice – under both the preceding Labour and the current Coalition administration – have tended to coalesce around three main aspirations:

- a) Helping communities to acquire or sustain a sense of commonality or shared values which enables them to **exercise informal social control**.
- b) Encouraging communities to **shape and hold to account local criminal justice services**
- c) Encouraging communities to become (formally or informally) **involved in the delivery of local criminal justice services**.

### *Community-building and informal social control*

Political concern about the fundamental importance of ‘community’ to public welfare generally, and to criminal justice goals more specifically, recurs throughout policy statements and documents since 1997. Under the Labour administration, policy documents made frequent appeals to communities – sometimes described as ‘decent communities’ - to play their part in criminal justice. Implicit and occasionally explicit in these appeals is the assumption that, through their very ‘decency’ and sense of togetherness, these communities can and should exercise informal social control over the perpetrators or would-be perpetrators of criminal and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Community cohesion is thus, in itself, presented as a valid and critically important aim of criminal justice policy.

Community-building is also a focus of many Coalition government statements on criminal justice; as in a speech given by Home Secretary Theresa May in May 2010, in which she stated that the Big Society is about saying ‘enough is enough and we come together to reclaim our communities for the law-abiding majority... Our communities will stand tall - because we're all in this together’ (May, 2010a).

### *Shaping and holding to account local services*

A theme common to many of the community engagement initiatives launched by central government since 1997 is the conviction that public services of all kinds must become more 'responsive' to the needs, priorities and expectations of local people, and that this must be ensured through mechanisms by which local people hold the services 'to account'. The broad theme of community justice appears to have been most frequently articulated in terms of the aspiration to involve communities in shaping and holding to account criminal justice services.

A key example of this was the heavy emphasis within the Neighbourhood Policing Programme – introduced by the Labour government - on the role of the public in identifying their local policing priorities, and on the obligation of the police to respond to these priorities. Developments in policing policy under the Coalition government have followed a similar trajectory, at least in theory. Although the policing budget cuts inevitably have implications for the provision of police safer neighbourhood teams, a commitment to building on the principles underlying neighbourhood policing has been repeatedly expressed. A significant related development was the establishment of the Police and Crime Commissioner role to 'work with their local communities to establish the crime and ASB priorities that matter most locally, and for the public to hold them to account for the performance of their force' (Home Office, 2010).

### *Delivery of services*

Broadly speaking, there are two ways in which local communities can be involved in the delivery of public services, including criminal justice services. First, formal organisations that are, in some sense, community-based can be contracted by government to undertake delivery. Opening up the delivery of public services to non-statutory providers (from both the private sector and the voluntary and community sector) was a core policy commitment of the Labour administration since the early 2000s. The Coalition government is committed to extending much further the role of non-statutory bodies in the delivery of public services, and to transforming commissioning structures in order to make this happen. However, while an increasing proportion of criminal justice work is being contracted out to non-statutory bodies (including most of the work traditionally undertaken by the probation service), it is rare for genuinely grass-roots community associations to take on these roles. Hence the commissioning of criminal justice services has limited applicability to the theme of 'community justice' as defined for the purposes of this study.

The second type of community involvement in delivery entails that undertaken by individuals and groups on a voluntary or largely voluntary basis. Voluntary involvement in the delivery of local criminal justice services can take a wide variety of forms, many of which have been actively supported or promoted by government since 1997. The spectrum of voluntary action encompasses local people who are involved in largely informal associations and networks which undertake 'delivery' in the loosest sense; the activities of more formalised community-based groups and associations, some of which may have access to some local or central funding; and the participation of volunteers in statutory provision of criminal justice services – such as magistrates and special constables.

### **Community engagement and community justice: views of the general public**

National survey data reveal that levels of political participation at a national level, and the sense of efficacy of such participation, are low and falling. In contrast, civic participation at local levels tends to be viewed in a much more positive light; although levels of stated *interest* in local participation are not fully reflected in levels of local *action*. Nevertheless, substantial minorities of the general population report being engaged in local civic action and/or formal volunteering; however, levels of involvement are influenced by socio-demographic factors. It is possible to identify a 'civic core' of individuals who undertake most of the civic participation and volunteering, and are disproportionately middle aged, female, and more educated than average.

The survey data also show that most people feel some degree of belonging or attachment to their local neighbourhood, although here again socio-demographic factors play a part, as do the characteristics of the local area. With respect to community justice, people tend to express relatively high levels of interest in participating in local efforts to tackle crime and disorder, but the extent to which this expressed interest is or can be translated into action appears limited.

A qualitative study of attitudes towards youth crime among the general public (undertaken by two of the authors of this study; published as Jacobson and Kirby, 2012) found a deep cynicism about the government's efforts to build the Big Society, and about the potential application of the Big Society vision to youth justice. In particular, the promotion of the Big Society was said to be the government's attempt to avoid taking responsibility for public services, and a 'cover-up' for its spending cuts. But while being largely sceptical about the government's vision of the Big Society, the focus group participants were not sceptical about

the broader notion of 'community' which lies at the heart of that vision. Indeed, many were strongly attached to the ideal of local communities in which people are mutually supportive and trusting, and which have the capacity to undertake some kinds of collective action. They evidently regarded a sense of community as a highly important bulwark against crime and anti-social behaviour, and thus believed the breakdown of community to be a cause of many of the current problems of youth offending.

### **Community engagement and community justice: views of activists**

Our empirical research in four deprived neighbourhoods entailed identifying the community associations which existed in each, and talking to members of these associations (whom we refer to as 'community activists') about what motivated them to undertake community activities, and what they perceived to be the role of the community in tackling local problems of crime and disorder.

#### *Motivations for community involvement*

Most of the activists we spoke to were devoting very considerable amounts of time and effort to community activities - usually for no pay, and often over periods of years and even decades. When asked what motivated them to get involved in these activities, the most common response was to talk in terms of a desire to help improve the local area and the lives of local people – whether this was expressed in a very general sense or with reference to more specific concerns. (Specific concerns included, but were not limited to, local problems of crime and disorder.) Related to these altruistic motivations was a sense of contributing to the community out of a sense of duty – a duty that was variously defined in religious, moral or civic terms. Many of the activists also referred to the pleasure or personal satisfaction that they derived from their community engagement.

It was clear from these discussions that most of the activists saw 'community' as something that was, or had the potential to be, profoundly meaningful to them – particularly in terms of providing social support, friendliness, and the sense of being part of something larger than oneself. Many of our activist respondents shared with the participants in the general public focus groups a nostalgia for a time when local communities were stronger than they are today. However, the activists' recollections of the past tended to be imbued with more optimism for the future. They were inclined to believe that at least some of the old community spirit survives today, or that it is possible, with a certain amount of effort, to rekindle that spirit.

For the activists, a sense of community was necessarily based on the existence of common values or interests, or a shared purpose, among its members. It follows from this that ethnic and other forms of diversity within a local population were sometimes described as a barrier to a sense of community – although not necessarily an insurmountable barrier. Some of our respondents, indeed, emphasised that a community will draw its very strength and meaning from the process of establishing commonalities across boundaries of class, ethnicity or interest group.

### *Perspectives on community justice*

We asked the activists whether and how the local community could contribute to tackling problems of crime and disorder. There was some, but limited, interest in the community's potential role in shaping and holding local criminal justice services to account, or helping to deliver services. There was far greater interest in the ways in which the very existence of a sense of community can help to reduce criminal and anti-social behaviour.

While the activists did not explicitly use the term 'informal social control', very many of their comments about community justice were focused on this general theme, which was articulated in different ways. Some respondents spoke about a passive kind of social control arising from shared values and a sense of unity which serve to discourage criminal and anti-social behaviour; while others were interested in a more active social control which involves deliberately challenging misbehaviour.

While the general notion of informal social control was popular among the activists, it was also recognised by some that putting it into practice is not straightforward. It was pointed out that those who wish to challenge directly criminal or anti-social behaviour face the risk of retaliation. The tensions within the very concept of informal social control were also alluded to. It depends on shared values: but whose values are they? Some of the activists voiced their concerns that a tight-knit community that seeks to foster a certain set of shared values may, by the same token, be an intolerant and exclusionary community. It was suggested also that this intolerance can shade into vigilantism.

It was also notable that, when asked about the role of the community in tackling crime and disorder, some activists spoke not so much about community involvement in local services, or informal mechanisms of social control, but about the responsibility of the community to provide information to the police. This is a more traditional conception of the relationship between the police and the policed, whereby the more compliant elements of the latter actively help the former, but do not see themselves as partners in the policing endeavour. In

line with this perspective, what many wanted from the police was not that they should 'engage' with the community over local concerns and priorities, but that they should be present and visible and, above all, respond when called in an emergency.

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

Much as government would like it, there would seem to be little immediate prospect of extending active community engagement well beyond the 'civic core' of the population. Barriers to participation seem to include apathy, time and financial constraints, general shyness or reticence, and community divisions. The current economic and political climate may, moreover, present particular problems for efforts to increase levels of community engagement. Deficit reduction was from the outset part of the very rationale for the Big Society programme. But while austerity may seem to make civic and community participation a necessity, it simultaneously undermines it. Not only is economic hardship likely to deter individuals from committing their time for free to community activities, but the association of Big Society and related policies with spending cuts has served to breed suspicion and cynicism. And all the more so in a context in which, more broadly, levels of political participation are low and falling.

But the limitations of community engagement policies (whether given the Big Society label or not) do not only stem from the reluctance of communities to engage. Arguably, there is a logical flaw in the very notion of community engagement – or, at least, to the extent that it concerns active participation in public services. As noted by Chanan and Miller:

Government is promising through the Big Society theme to 'give power to people and communities'. This generous offer overlooks the fact that government only has power in the first place because people have invested power in government itself to do things which people want done collectively. The things we want done collectively are mostly those that need to be done *systematically and fairly across society*. These are the things that cannot be done by spasmodic citizen action (2011: 32).

If this point applies to public services in general, it applies most of all to criminal justice services. Criminal justice provision by definition entails managing and resolving conflict between individuals and sectors within society; and the authorities have the means and legal right to exercise coercive power in undertaking this necessarily contested work. In a modern democratic and pluralistic society, 'the community' – however defined – cannot have the responsibility for dealing with its own conflicts through the use of coercive power.

The community activists who participated in this study implicitly recognised this essential limitation of community justice. For the most part, they did not desire active participation in criminal justice services; what they did want was a local police force who were present, visible, and would respond rapidly when a crisis arose. Among the general (non-activist) public, this viewpoint would appear to be even more entrenched. The low turn-out at the November 2012 elections for the new Police and Crime Commissioner posts would seem to confirm a lack of active interest in 'holding to account' local providers of criminal justice services.

However, it cannot be concluded from this that there is no scope or potential for community justice. Community justice remains important for two main reasons.

First, it is not enough to state that the people want an active, visible and responsive local police force, and to leave the discussion of community justice at that. In a world of limited (and declining) public resources, the police will never be present, visible and responsive enough to satisfy everyone. Moreover, noting again that the policing function is necessarily contested, there will always be disagreement among the public about *what* should be responded to, and *how*. Thus if any progress is to be made towards a goal of establishing active, visible and responsive policing and accompanying criminal justice services, there must be an element of negotiation with local people about what is being provided. The more this process of negotiation can encompass the doubtless discordant voices of those who are *not* as well as those who are part of the civic core, the more it can be said to permit a genuine 'community' input into criminal justice services.

Secondly, the concept of community justice is important because much of the general public – activists and non-activists alike - remain deeply attached to the ideal of 'community'. They share a belief that a sense of community acts as a vital bulwark against local crime and anti-social behaviour: a belief, in other words, in the capacity of communities to exercise informal social control. This suggests that government community justice policies which focus on community building are aligned with public wishes and expectations.

The argument in favour of community-building policies, from a community justice perspective, must however be tempered by a recognition of the inherent tensions within this task. While government funding and infrastructure support for grass-roots groups and activities can help to support communities, few would claim that a sense of community can be socially engineered from above. Further, the very rationale for community development

has often been opposition to government and the public authorities; hence government efforts at community-building run the risk of undermining the very processes they are seeking to promote. Policy must also grapple with the tension between the positive effects of community cohesion and its potential to engender intolerance or exclusivity. Perhaps, then, the greatest challenge in putting community justice into practice is the nurturing of a sense of collective self-interest within communities that is narrow enough to be meaningful but broad enough to embrace difference.

Our main conclusion is that community justice is a worthwhile goal for government, if this is conceived as a matter of helping to nurture community spirit and informal social control, rather than promoting communities' active engagement with criminal justice services. The recommendations below set out what this means, in practical terms, for policy-makers and commissioners at national and local levels.

**1. Support community justice by supporting communities: make generic community activities, rather than explicit criminal justice-related activities, the primary focus of community justice provision and funding.**

- Support small, grass-roots community organisations through the provision of grant funding, infrastructure support and practical guidance.
- Support community-based events – both ad hoc and regular, and including small-scale events – that can serve as a focus for social interaction.
- Ensure, in the provision of support, that small, grass-roots community organisations are not disadvantaged by a lack of expertise relative to larger-scale, more professional voluntary organisations – for example, by minimising the bureaucracy associated with funding applications.
- Utilise existing voluntary and community organisation networks for dissemination of advice and guidance to community organisations, including funding advice.

**2. Recognise that any 'local community' comprises numerous cross-cutting and intersecting interest groups, between which there will be areas of both agreement and disagreement about local needs.**

- Ensure that the provision of support for community groups encompasses a wide spectrum of organisations and events.

- Support organisations and events that can help to strengthen links between sub-groups of the local population; these might include, for example, groups running activities for children and young people, and environmental projects encouraging local involvement in gardening, conservation or street art.

### **3. Recognise that within a local population there will be divergent views on crime and disorder, as on all other aspects of local life**

- Don't expect the priorities of the police and the priorities of members of the public ever to be fully aligned, but rather seek to narrow the gaps between public expectations and police responses.
- Welcome and respect the views on local crime and policing expressed by the most actively engaged local people, but don't assume that these views reflect those of the wider population.
- Open as many as possible channels of informal communication and negotiation between community justice services - particularly the police – and the local population; these might include street surgeries and ad hoc police visits to community organisations and events.
- Remember that an area's 'bad reputation' for crime may not be shared by many people living within the area, and an eagerness to challenge the reputation may in itself stimulate community feeling and action.
- Be alert to the risk that public perceptions of police inaction, combined with strong feelings of solidarity within certain sectors of a local population, can lead to suspicion, intolerance and vigilantism.

### **4. Remember that the large majority of the public want to be effectively policed, but do not want to be engaged in an active partnership with the police or other criminal justice services.**

- Don't expect formal engagement with criminal justice services to extend beyond the civic core.
- Be aware that a combination of many factors - including lack of interest, lack of time, fear of retaliation, lack of commitment to the area – may limit local interest in engagement with criminal justice services.
- Don't waste scarce resources on trying to extend traditional community engagement and consultative events that routinely attract little interest or participation.

## 1: Introduction

The promotion of ‘community engagement’ has been a significant and consistent theme within government policy in the United Kingdom since the late 1990s. It is a theme that, under both the Labour administration of 1997 to 2010 and the current Coalition government, has cross-cut many spheres of public policy, including criminal justice policy.

The term ‘community engagement’ is broad and subject to differing definitions; it also overlaps with an array of other public policy concepts. These include community empowerment; community involvement; social action; civic or civil renewal; co-production; and active citizenship. Another related term – albeit one that has largely fallen into disuse since 2012 – is ‘the Big Society’, which encompassed Prime Minister David Cameron’s vision of an active civil society against a backdrop of sweeping public sector spending cuts. The common thread running through all these policy concepts is the aim of ***fostering within communities more mutual trust, a greater sense of collective self-interest and a greater preparedness to act in this self-interest.***

Many different kinds of social entities can be referred to as ‘communities’ – including local, national or global groupings based on religious, ethnic or political affiliations. However, for the most part, this ideal of mutual trust and collective self-interest and action is based on the notion of the community as comprising individuals from all backgrounds living and working within a local area.

Where the promotion of community engagement intersects with criminal justice policy what thus emerges is the idea that ***local communities which have mutual trust and a sense of collective self-interest can and should play an active part in addressing problems of crime and disorder.*** This policy aim is best captured by the term ‘community justice’. The concept of community justice will be subject to critical scrutiny over the course of this report.

### Aims of the study

Labour and Coalition government policies on community engagement have varied in their emphases, language, and many of their specific initiatives. In broad terms, for example, conceptions of civic renewal and active citizenship became prominent in public policy since the early years of the Labour administration. Under the current administration, policy

developments have been tied to the localism agenda and, initially, the wider Big Society programme; and while there has been a move away from the 'Big Society' terminology over the past two years, many of the policy aspirations remain the same. Notwithstanding the variations, there are many commonalities to each administration's policies on community, and the political thinking behind these policies shares many of the same roots – for example, in the communitarian ideas of Etzioni (1993) and Putnam's writings on the decline of social capital (1995).<sup>1</sup>

Under the Labour and Coalition governments alike, aspirations for community engagement in general terms have been translated into more specific aspirations for community justice. Writing in 2005, Rogers noted that while the roots of community justice lay 'in radical, often counter-cultural critiques of the criminal justice system and welfare state', this was an approach that moved with remarkable rapidity 'from the margins to the centre', thanks to its correspondence with 'New Labour's concern with the promotion of strong communities, able to tackle problems on their own or in partnership with public services' (2005: 4). Today, community justice continues to be perceived by government as a process of 'creating a new relationship between citizens, communities and the agencies of crime control', which can ultimately 'help increase confidence in the criminal justice system, diminish anxieties about crime and relieve punitive pressures on the CJS' (Donoghue, 2011).

Against this policy background, this study has sought – by means of a policy review and empirical investigations – to undertake a close and rigorous analysis of the concept of community justice. Our view, in launching the study, was that such an analysis had hitherto been lacking; and that, as a result, many of the relevant policy developments have been poorly informed.

Specifically, our research has addressed the following three questions:

- How has central government, since Labour came to power 1997, perceived the role of local communities in tackling crime and disorder?
- How do the members of local communities perceive their own role in tackling crime and disorder?

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<sup>1</sup> Although these shared roots can be said to be much longer; as noted by Civil Exchange 'many commentators trace this focus on civic society back to the eighteenth century political philosopher Edmund Burke ... if not back even further' (2012: 21). See also Power (2012) and Harris (2012) for discussions of the history of the ideas which underlie political aspirations for community engagement and the Big Society.

- To what extent do government aspirations for community justice match those of the general public, and what are the main areas of discord between governmental and public expectations?

## **Methods**

There were three main elements to this study:

- A review of policy developments from 1997 to date relating to community engagement in general and community justice in particular. This review encompassed legislation, green and white papers, political speeches and other policy statements and documentation, along with the related research literature.
- An exploration of public attitudes towards community engagement and community justice, which entailed a review of existing data (largely national survey data) on volunteering and political and civic participation.
- Empirical research into the scope and nature of community activism in four deprived neighbourhoods in north-east London, Bristol, Nottingham and south Wales. This research entailed identifying the community associations which existed in each of the neighbourhoods, and talking to members of these associations (whom we refer to as 'community activists') about their attitudes towards community engagement in general and, more specifically, community involvement in criminal justice.

## **Structure of the report**

This report comprises five chapters. Following this Introduction, Chapter 2 will outline key policy developments on community justice since 1997; and in so doing will track some of the key continuities in policy between the previous Labour and current Coalition administrations. Chapter 3 looks at what existing data tell us about how the general public perceive the role of communities in tackling local crime and disorder.

Chapter 4 then sets out the main findings of our empirical research in four deprived neighbourhoods. First, we will provide a brief overview of each neighbourhood and forms of community engagement in each. We will then look the views and experiences of local community activists relating to community engagement. The last part of the chapter explores

the activists' perspectives on the scope for, and potential benefits of, community involvement in criminal justice.

Finally, Chapter 5 will conclude the report with a discussion of the key findings of this study and their implications for further policy development on community engagement and community justice.

## 2: Policy developments

This chapter provides an outline of key policy developments on community justice under the preceding Labour administration of 1997 to 2010 and the current Coalition government. This will include consideration of continuity and change between the previous and current administration, and how the community justice policy agenda fits within the broader community engagement agenda. We propose to present a thematic review of policy, rather than a chronological description of the emergence of specific initiatives.

In the preceding chapter, we defined community justice in terms of the notion that:

***Local communities which have mutual trust and a sense of collective self-interest, can and should play an active part in addressing problems of crime and disorder.***

Clearly, this definition leaves open to interpretation what kind of ‘active part’ communities are expected to play in tackling crime and disorder. Policy analysis reveals that relevant initiatives – both under the preceding Labour and the current Coalition government – have tended to coalesce around three main aspirations, concerning three differing ways in which communities can take action:

- a) Helping communities to acquire or sustain a sense of commonality or shared values which enables them to ***exercise informal social control***. This broad aspiration is couched in many different terms within the policy literature. Only rarely is ‘informal social control’ explicitly referred to, but it is frequently invoked through references to ‘cohesion’, ‘community spirit’, ‘a sense of community’, ‘resilience’, ‘solidarity’ and ‘social responsibility’.
- b) Encouraging communities to ***shape and hold to account local criminal justice services*** by identifying local concerns, problems and priorities; and engaging in two-way communication with local service providers about what these issues are and how they should be and are being tackled.
- c) Encouraging communities to become (formally or informally) ***involved in the delivery of local criminal justice services***, in the form of voluntary action by

individual members of local communities or by grass-roots community organisations, working in partnership with local providers.

Over the course of this chapter, we will consider each of the above three policy aspirations in turn.

## **Community-building and informal social control**

Political rhetoric concerning the fundamental importance of 'community' to public welfare recurs throughout policy statements and documents dating from the early years of the Labour administration of 1997 to 2010. As we have already noted, the word 'community' can mean many different things. But by most definitions, an essential aspect of any kind of community is that there should be a degree of mutual recognition and solidarity among its members. In other words, a grouping of people who are bound together only because they can objectively be said to share certain characteristics, and who do not have any positive feelings towards each other based on their common characteristics, cannot be said to be a community.<sup>2</sup>

### *Community-building and community engagement*

Social cohesion or solidarity, as a defining element of community, has been of particular interest to politicians and policy-makers seeking to promote community engagement in its many different forms. Under the Labour administration, the civil renewal agenda, taken forward most emphatically by David Blunkett as Home Secretary from 2001-4, sought 'to strengthen community ties and to foster values such as mutuality, solidarity and altruism' while also facilitating more active political participation (Jochum et al, 2005). This was expressed, for example, in Blunkett's Scarman lecture, delivered in 2003, in which he spoke of the need for communities which are self-determining and embody the values of solidarity and mutuality:

Solidarity is founded on the commitment to regard the well-being of others as an integral part of our own collective well-being. Mutuality stems from the readiness to embrace our interdependence as a positive motivation to co-operate in the search for solutions to our problems.

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<sup>2</sup> By this broad understanding of community, members do not need to know each other or have face-to-face contact; a community can be 'imagined', as according to Benedict Anderson's conceptualisation of a 'nation' as a community which 'is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (1991: 6).

The New Deal for Communities programme, which ran from 1999 to 2008 with the aim of ‘closing the gaps’ between deprived neighbourhoods and the rest of the country, provides one of many more specific examples of the Labour government’s community-building ambition. Alongside its pragmatic regeneration goals, the programme had objectives for ‘community engagement [which] aimed to develop community cohesion and build stronger communities’ (Batty et al, 2010: 8). These were themes which continued to be accentuated under Gordon Brown’s premiership; such as in the 2009 statement of policy goals, *Building Britain’s Future*, which observed that ‘contributing to and participating in your community helps to build networks of trust, support and cohesion which benefit us all’ (HM Government, 2009a).

An emphasis on community-building has been no less evident in the current government’s Big Society agenda and related policy developments. The Big Society was promoted by Conservative Party leader David Cameron in the lead-up to the 2010 election. In a speech delivered in November 2009, Cameron set out his vision of the Big Society as an antidote to the ‘trend of continuous central state expansion’ that the previous 12 years had seen – while describing the Big Society in words which echoed much of what had previously been said about the agenda for civil renewal: ‘The big society demands mass engagement: a broad culture of responsibility, mutuality and obligation’. Just a week after the formation of the Coalition government on 11 May 2010, the Big Society programme was jointly launched by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg.<sup>3</sup>

After the initial launch of the programme, a large number of specific policy initiatives were associated with the Big Society; these initiatives were diverse in their focus and intent, but were often described in terms of three main ‘pillars’:

- **Community empowerment:** local people taking control of how things are done in their area and being helped to do this by local government and others;
- **Opening up public services:** public sector organisations and individuals demonstrating innovative ways of delivering public services and charities, social enterprises and private companies showing new ways of delivering them;
- **Social action:** people being, and being encouraged to be, more involved in their communities through giving time, money and other resources.

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<sup>3</sup> In his speech at the launch, Clegg affirmed his commitment to shared policy goals: ‘What I’m discovering .. is that we’ve been using different words for a long time and actually mean the same thing. “Liberalism”: “Big Society”. “Empowerment”: “Responsibility”. It means the same thing.’

(Number 10 website; cited by Civil Exchange, 2012).

Community-building – in the sense of helping to foster local networks of mutual trust and concern – is an aspect of all three of the pillars outlined above. It was central to many of the specific Big Society initiatives, including the high profile Community Organisers programme. This describes itself as a ‘national training programme in community organising and a grass-roots movement for social action’.<sup>4</sup> Through a network of paid and volunteer ‘organisers, the programme aims to help local people ‘develop their collective power to act together for the common good’.<sup>5</sup>

The history of the Big Society programme, as noted by Macmillan in January 2013, has been ‘very troubled’, despite several re-launches and the Prime Minister’s strong backing of it (2013: 6). Since 2012, there has been a marked decline in explicit references to the vision of the Big Society in policy documents and politicians’ pronouncements: notably, for example, it was not even mentioned at the Conservative Party Conference of October 2012. The government’s retreat from the terminology of the Big Society appears to be a recognition that it has failed to resonate with the general public – that is has, indeed, provoked ‘a combination of doubt, confusion, occasional enthusiasm, but also widespread indifference among the general public’ (Macmillan, 2013: 3) - but does not, however, signal a distancing from the community-building aims and ideals of the Big Society programme, which have remained prominent. Indeed, the *Big Society Audit 2013* published by Civil Exchange at the end of 2013, argues that while the Big Society today has a ‘lower political profile than when first launched’ and its ‘credibility ... has also been undermined’, ministers (including the Prime Minister) continue to be committed to it (2013: 11).<sup>6</sup>

#### *Community-building, informal social control and community justice*

What are the implications for criminal justice of the Labour and Coalition government efforts at community-building since the late 1990s? As noted at the outset of this chapter, both governments have encouraged local communities to take an active part in shaping and delivering criminal justice services; but they have also placed an emphasis on the informal role that communities have to play in tackling crime and disorder. The importance of this informal role has long been recognised in criminological research, which has produced ‘a sizeable body of evidence which links strong communities characterised by high levels of

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.cocollaborative.org.uk/about-community-organisers> [accessed 17.3.14].

<sup>5</sup> <http://locality.org.uk/projects/community-organisers/> [accessed 17.3.14]. The programme is being delivered by Locality, a nationwide network of community led organisations.

<sup>6</sup> With appropriate caution, the chapter of the *Big Society Audit* which addresses these issues is entitled ‘Is the Big Society dead?’

social capital, and “collective efficacy”, to lower crime rates’ and ‘suggests that one of the most effective ways of reducing crime will be to encourage associational life’ (Rogers, 2005:8).

Under Labour, policy documents made frequent appeals to communities – sometimes described as ‘decent communities’ - to play their part in criminal justice. Implicit and occasionally explicit in these appeals is the assumption that, through their very ‘decency’ and sense of togetherness, communities can and should exercise informal social control over the perpetrators or would-be perpetrators of criminal and anti-social behaviour (ASB). Community cohesion is thus, in itself, presented as a valid and critically important aim of criminal justice policy: community participation is seen as a means of ‘creating sustainable, cohesive and “safe” neighbourhoods’ (Bowen and Donoghue, 2013: 11). These are communities within which ‘active citizens’ are expected to be directly involved in the ‘co-production of security’, by doing their duty as witnesses, looking out for their own and others conduct (Gilling, 2010: 1146). It is notable, for example, that the Home Office Strategic Plan 2004-8 is entitled *Confident Communities in a Secure Britain*; and refers to the importance of people ‘contributing to building a community that upholds basic standards of decency and is strong enough to prevent and deter offending’ (Home Office, 2004: 38).

Nowhere are the appeals to community more marked than in the policy statements on ASB. Tackling ASB was a high priority under the Labour administration, and a number of initiatives and campaigns were undertaken to this end – including the flagship ‘Respect’ programme, launched in 2006. Communities (the ‘decent’ ones, that is) were urged to ‘take a stand’ against ASB; and shared values were said to play a crucial part in this. In his Foreword to the Respect Programme’s Action Plan (Home Office, 2006), Prime Minister Tony Blair observed that:

What lies at the heart of this [anti-social] behaviour is a lack of respect for values that almost everyone in this country shares – consideration for others, a recognition that we all have responsibilities as well as rights, civility and good manners. Most of us learn respect from our parents and our families – they are later reinforced by good schools and by other people we know in our local communities.

The Action Plan itself states its intention to ‘support families and community organisations and by so doing, nurture the values of co-operation and reciprocity that are the lifeblood of successful societies’. While the Respect programme was effectively brought to an end by Gordon Brown, the emphasis on community-building within criminal justice policy was

sustained under his leadership. In a 2008 review entitled *Engaging communities in tackling crime*, undertaken by government adviser Louise Casey on behalf of the Prime Minister, there are some explicit references to the importance of the informal social control exercised within communities and in other settings:

Most of us learn right from wrong first and foremost within the family, from our parents, then from teachers in schools and from role models in our community and society. Arguably, these informal controls have much more of an impact in preventing crime than the whole weight of the Criminal Justice System.

Community-building has likewise been a recurring theme in Coalition government statements on criminal justice; as in a speech given by Home Secretary Theresa May in May 2010, in which she stated that the Big Society is about saying ‘enough is enough and we come together to reclaim our communities for the law-abiding majority... Our communities will stand tall - because we're all in this together’ (May, 2010a). Two months later, in another speech, the Home Secretary vigorously criticised her predecessors’ approach to tackling ASB (‘top-down, bureaucratic, gimmick-laden’) while echoing their rhetorical appeals to community:

there is nowhere – not any single area of government policy – where we need strong, local community action more than in tackling anti-social behaviour ... We need to make anti-social behaviour what it once was – unusual, abnormal and something to stand up to – instead of what it has become – frequent, normal and tolerated. ... We need to give communities the power to bring about their own change; to build the town, the village, the city – the community – that you want (May, 2010b).<sup>7</sup>

By their very nature, policy statements concerning community-building and informal social control tend to be vague and aspirational in tone. However, a more concrete manifestation of these policy aspirations is, arguably, the effort made by both the Labour and the Coalition government to increase public knowledge about local offenders – given that what is popularly known as ‘naming and shaming’ of offenders may contribute to the exercise of informal social control. In 2009, the Ministry of Justice published guidance on *Publicising Sentencing Outcomes*; this was accompanied by a report by Louise Casey of the same name, subtitled *The Importance of Telling the Public*. The guidance was revised and reissued in 2011; among several rationales cited for publicising sentencing outcomes is that

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<sup>7</sup> Similar themes frequently recur also in the reports produced by Baroness Newlove, appointed as ‘Champion for Active Safer Communities’ in October 2010 (Newlove, 2011a, 2011b, 2012).

it should help to 'discourage potential offenders and reduce re-offending'. In the 2012 White Paper on *Swift and Sure Justice* (Ministry of Justice, 2012), the government stated its intention to take this further, 'with the more widespread naming of offenders, so that communities are more easily able to find out who has been convicted in their local court of crimes of local concern' – including possibly through the use of the police.uk website 'to show the details of certain offenders including their name, photo and sentence handed down to them'.<sup>8</sup>

## **Shaping and holding to account local services**

We are turning now to consider formal or semi-formal, rather than entirely informal, ways in which communities can become actively involved in criminal justice. As argued in a report by IPPR/PWC on 'citizenship participation', it is helpful to distinguish between two main ways in which citizens, as individuals or as members of communities, can play a part in public services:

- Involvement in service design; that is, 'the process through which outcomes are chosen and the means to achieve them selected'; and
- Involvement in service delivery; that is, the process of actually providing the service to achieve those outcomes and priorities (IPPR/PWC, 2010: 4).

This section of the chapter is concerned with 'design' ('delivery' is the focus of the section that follows). A thread running through many of the community engagement initiatives launched by government since 1997 is the conviction that public services of all kinds must become more 'responsive' to the needs, priorities and expectations of local people, and that this must be ensured through mechanisms by which local people hold the services 'to account'.

### *Responsiveness and accountability in public services*

The dual themes of responsiveness and accountability come to the fore in, for example, the 2006 Local Government White Paper *Strong and Prosperous Communities*, which was subsequently implemented through the 2007 Local Government and Public Involvement in

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<sup>8</sup> A related development was the introduction of high visibility clothing for offenders engaged in unpaid work, as part of the 'Community Payback' scheme which was first introduced in 2005 and continues today. In response to criticisms of the high visibility vests on the grounds that they were intended to 'shame' offenders, then Home Secretary Jack Straw insisted that they were rather about 'enabling the public to see that justice is being done' (Lewis, 2008).

Health Act; statutory guidance issued in 2008 on 'Strong, Safe and Prosperous Communities' (DCLG, 2008); and three implementation plans. The White Paper outlined the importance of having, in all areas, 'responsive services and empowered communities', meaning that people would be 'given more control over their lives; consulted and involved in running services; informed about the quality of services in their area; and enabled to call local agencies to account if services fail to meet their needs.' One of the ways in which this was to be achieved was through the creation, in the 2007 Act, of a statutory 'duty to involve'. This stipulated that local authorities must inform, consult and involve local people in decision-making across all their public functions, and was implemented in April 2009.

Although in September 2011 the Coalition government scrapped the 'duty to involve', the need for responsiveness and local accountability in public services continues to be emphasised in policy-making. These themes have been reflected in all three Big Society 'pillars' (community empowerment, opening up public services and social action); and throughout the government's programme for public service reform. This is made particularly clear in the *Open Public Services White Paper*, published in July 2011, which highlights as one of five key principles for public services that they should be 'responsive to the people they serve – held to account by citizens and their elected representatives' (HM Government 2011a).

The general principles of responsiveness and accountability are closely associated also with the Coalition government's localism agenda. This agenda has built on and far extended an attachment to localism that was evident in the last years of the preceding Labour administration – in tension with the centralising tendencies that were manifest in much of that government's policy making. November 2011 saw the passing of the Localism Act, which 'passes significant new rights direct to communities and individuals, making it easier for them to get things done and achieve their ambitions for the place where they live' (DCLG, 2011a). The Act's key measures focus on freedoms and flexibilities for local government, rights and powers for communities and individuals, reform to the planning system, and reform to decisions about housing.

#### *Shaping and holding to account criminal justice services*

The broad theme of community justice appears to have been most frequently articulated in terms of the aspiration to involve communities in shaping and holding to account criminal justice services.

In the early years of the Labour administration, this conception of community justice emerged alongside growing concerns with what became known as the 'reassurance gap': that is, the paradox that while crime rates were falling, public fear of crime and mistrust in the criminal justice system were rising. One cause of this was perceived to be the narrowing focus of policing – over the course of the 1990s - on crime-fighting targets (Fitzgerald et al, 2002; Hough, 2007). In response, a 'reassurance policing' pilot was launched in 2002; this was a neighbourhood-based approach which entailed identifying and responding to local concerns about crime and disorder – however seemingly minor these may have been - with an explicit aim, among others, of improving public confidence in the work of police.<sup>9</sup> This pilot was subsequently developed into the wider-scale Neighbourhood Policing Programme, which was rolled out nationally over the years 2005 to 2009. This programme placed a heavy emphasis on the role of the public in identifying their local policing priorities, and the role of the police – particularly through their newly established, ward-based 'safer neighbourhood teams' - in visibly responding to these priorities.

One of the key policy documents associated with the development of neighbourhood policing was the Policing Green Paper *From the neighbourhood to the national: policing our communities together*, published in 2008 (Home Office, 2008). This included a commitment to creating a 'Policing Pledge', which in due course clarified what people could expect from their police, and included a promise to 'Ensure your Neighbourhood Policing Team and other police patrols are visible and on your patch at times when they will be most effective and when you tell us you most need them'. The subsequent Policing and Crime Act 2009 was largely focused on methods of making the police more accountable to their local communities. Another related development was the launch in 2009 of a national crime mapping website by the National Police Improvement Agency, on behalf of police forces, which allowed members of the public to view crime levels in their areas.

Developments in policing policy under the Coalition government have followed a similar trajectory, at least in theory. In her 2010 speech to the Police Federation, the Home Secretary spoke of the importance of 'involving local people in developing local policing strategies, providing a clear and visible link between the police and the public' (May, 2010a). Although the policing budget cuts inevitably have implications for the provision of police safer neighbourhood teams, a commitment to building on the principles underlying neighbourhood policing is repeatedly expressed in the 2010 policing White Paper *Policing in the 21st Century: Reconnecting police and the people* (Home Office, 2010). As under the previous

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<sup>9</sup> See Tuffin et al, 2006, for an evaluation of the reassurance pilot.

government, crime mapping is regarded as an important means by which the local accountability of the police to the public can be achieved. February 2011 saw the launch of new crime mapping website, providing access to more detailed crime maps than the previous version, 'to provide the public with access to key crime and policing information, in a way they want and in a way that allows them to raise issues or take an active role in tackling crime and anti-social behaviour.'<sup>10</sup>

A significant related development is the introduction of elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) – the first elections for whom were held in November 2012, and produced a very low turn-out of around 15%. The PCC role was established by the 2011 Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act, to 'work with their local communities to establish the crime and ASB priorities that matter most locally, and for the public to hold them to account for the performance of their force' (Home Office, 2010). The Association of Police and Crime Commissioners describes the PCC role as focused on 'making the police answerable to the communities they serve ... ensur[ing] community needs are met as effectively as possible, and ... improving local relationships through building confidence and restoring trust.'<sup>11</sup>

Not only in policing, but also in other areas of criminal justice there has been a continuing emphasis on the importance of community involvement in shaping and holding to account local services. Some examples of this, from both governments, include the following:

- 'Citizens' panels' were established in 2008 to enable local people to nominate projects for offenders to work on as part of their 'Community Payback' (that is, unpaid work performed as a requirement of community sentences). The Coalition government has since stated its intention to enhance Community Payback and the use of citizens' panels.<sup>12</sup>
- Following the 2009 *Engaging Communities in Criminal Justice* Green Paper (HM Government, 2009b), Community Prosecutors were introduced in over 30 pathfinder areas to engage with local communities for the purpose of ensuring that local priorities informed decision-making by the Crown Prosecution Service. Alongside this, 'community impact statements' were introduced to provide information for law

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.police.uk/> [accessed 17.3.14]

<sup>11</sup> <http://apccs.police.uk/role-of-the-pcc/> [accessed 17.3.14]

<sup>12</sup> For example, see the 2010 *Breaking the Cycle* Green Paper on the reform of the criminal justice system (Ministry of Justice, 2010).

enforcement officers about local crime and ASB, 'to enable better informed decisions that are made with the knowledge of the local context and can be used throughout the justice system'.<sup>13</sup>

- The Coalition government's White Paper on ASB, *Putting Victims First* (Home Office, 2012), stated the government's intention to develop more effective responses to ASB and to 'support people and communities in establishing what is and isn't acceptable locally and in holding agencies to account'. Two means by which this is to be achieved are the 'community trigger', intended to give 'victims and communities the right to require action to be taken where a persistent problem has not been addressed', and 'community harm statements', which are meant to 'ensure that terrorised communities' voices are heard in the court room and will inform agencies' decisions on what action to take'.<sup>14</sup> These initiatives clearly echo some introduced by the previous administration, such as the 'community impact statement' (described above) and the 'Community Call for Action' which was legislated for in 2006-7.<sup>15</sup>

## **Delivery of local services**

Broadly speaking, we can conceive of two (sometimes overlapping) ways in which local communities can be involved in the delivery of public services, including criminal justice services. First, formal organisations that are, in some sense, community-based can be contracted by government to undertake delivery. Secondly, individuals and groups can deliver services on a voluntary or largely voluntary basis.

### *Commissioning of services*

Opening up the delivery of public services to non-statutory providers – that is, both private sector providers, and voluntary and community sector (often now known as 'third sector') providers – was a core policy commitment of the Labour administration since the early 2000s. The commissioning of public services was 'embraced by nearly all central government departments, as the means through which public services might deliver innovative, effective, efficient and quality outcomes for service users and citizens' (Bovaird et al, 2012: 2).

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<sup>13</sup> [http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a\\_to\\_c/community\\_impact\\_statement\\_-\\_adult/](http://www.cps.gov.uk/legal/a_to_c/community_impact_statement_-_adult/) [accessed 17.3.14]

<sup>14</sup> See also the 2012 White Paper *Swift and Sure Justice* which emphasises the importance of 'transparent justice', 'accountable justice' and the need to 'reconnect justice with communities', for example through magistrates. The capacity of new technology and social media to connect communities to the criminal justice system is also noted (Ministry of Justice, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Initially in the Police and Justice Act 2006 and then in an amended form in the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007.

The Coalition government is committed to extending much further the role of non-statutory bodies in the delivery of public services, and to transforming commissioning structures in order to make this happen. These processes are fundamental to the localism agenda and the government's programme for public service reform; and – as set out in the government's update on the *Open Public Services* White Paper - are envisaged in the following terms:

Replacing top-down monopolies with open networks in which diverse and innovative providers compete to provide the best and most efficient services for the public. It means re-thinking the role of government – so that governments at all levels become increasingly funders, regulators and commissioners, whose task it is to secure quality and guarantee fair access for all, instead of attempting to run the public services from a desk in Whitehall, city hall or county hall (HM Government, 2012).

These ambitions apply to the criminal justice sector as to other types of public services. The contracting out of criminal justice services is not new (the first privately run prison was opened in 1992), but has been undertaken with increasing vigour over the past few years. Key developments include the creation of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) in 2004, among the aims of which was the introduction of greater 'contestability' within prison and probation services; and the establishment of the Police and Crime Commissioner role in 2011, as part of the Coalition government's efforts to strengthen commissioning at local levels. Most recently and arguably most radically, the Transforming Rehabilitation programme involves the opening up of the majority of community-based probation services to competition (Ministry of Justice, 2013). The new providers are scheduled to begin delivery in early 2015.

The topic of commissioning is a vast one, which takes us far beyond the issues being addressed by this study. The relevance to our discussion of community justice is that we now have a policy environment within which the delivery of criminal justice services is open to an ever-widening array of providers, including those which style themselves as community-based.<sup>16</sup> However, it is clear that 'there is a big difference between participating in a local initiative, as opposed to bidding for a contract to provide a service' (Szreter and Ishkanian, 2012: 10). While an increasing proportion of criminal justice work

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<sup>16</sup> See Maguire (2012) for discussion of the implications of the increasing role of the third sector in delivery of criminal justice services.

– across prisons, policing and probation services - is being contracted out to non-statutory bodies, it is rare for genuinely grass-roots community associations to take on these roles. Rather, the private sector and, to a lesser extent, professionalised voluntary organisations (which may or may not be locally based) are taking greater responsibility for service delivery.<sup>17</sup> These developments thus cannot be said to contribute in a significant way to ‘community justice’ as we have defined it – notwithstanding the liberal use of the term ‘community’ in much of the policy rhetoric on commissioning.

### *Voluntary work*

The benefits of volunteering – not only for the direct recipients of the voluntary action, but also for the volunteers themselves and more generally for the wider community and society – have been strongly expounded by both the current and previous government. Volunteering was a prominent theme within the civil renewal and active citizenship agenda of the last Labour government which, for example, sought to promote employee volunteering (that is, where employers permit their staff to use a proportion of their paid time to engage in volunteering) and in 2007 appointed Baroness Neuberger as a special adviser to the government on volunteering. Similarly, the very concept of the Big Society brought volunteering to the fore; with one specific example of this being the launch of the National Citizen Service in 2011 – an eight-week summer programme for 16-17 year-olds which includes voluntary work in their local communities.<sup>18</sup> The *Giving* White Paper of 2011 proposes a number of measures to support volunteering – including, again, employee volunteering (HM Government, 2011b).

Voluntary involvement in the delivery of local criminal justice services can take a wide variety of forms, many of which have been actively supported or promoted by government since 1997. The spectrum of voluntary action encompasses local people who are involved in largely informal associations and networks which undertake ‘delivery’ in the loosest sense; the activities of more formalised community-based groups and associations, some of which may have access to some local or central funding; and the participation of volunteers in statutory provision of criminal justice services – such as magistrates and special constables.

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<sup>17</sup> Writing with respect to the commissioning of public services more generally, McGill sets out various ways in which ‘commissioning damages charities, community groups and the people they work with’, and notes that ‘the demands of commissioning have divided charities and community groups, both locally and nationally, into those who are able to or want to be “businesslike” and enter the competitive tendering environment, and those who can’t or don’t want to’ (2011: 6, 11).

<sup>18</sup> See <http://nationalcitizenservice.direct.gov.uk/> [accessed 17.3.14]

Neighbourhood Watch is a well-known example of voluntary delivery of criminal justice services within a loose organisational framework. Neighbourhood Watch is a voluntary crime prevention movement which first came to the UK (from the USA) in the 1980s, and comprises groups of neighbours who agree to keep a look-out for criminal or suspicious behaviour, and to share information with each other and with the authorities. It could thus be described as a slightly formalised expression of the informal social control we have discussed above. Neighbourhood Watch has not received a great deal of government attention in recent years, and the National Neighbourhood Watch Association (established in 1995) was disbanded in 2007 in the context of declining membership. However, Neighbourhood Watch has been referred to favourably in various policy documents and statements, and May 2010 saw the establishment of the Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network: a national charity with Home Office funding.<sup>19</sup>

Much more contentious than Neighbourhood Watch, but sometimes allied with it, is the formal or informal operation of neighbourhood patrols by local residents. Such initiatives (where they are undertaken independently of police or local authority action) are often viewed with concern by government and local statutory authorities, on the grounds that they can easily veer into vigilantism. However, the 'Street Watch' initiative, which began as a local civilian patrol in Hampshire in 2006 but was subsequently adopted in some other areas, has received cautious backing from local police.<sup>20</sup> More recently, the Coalition government has developed an interest in the concept of 'citizen patrols', and the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) have commissioned the Neighbourhood and Home Watch Network to develop information, guidance and good practice on this.<sup>21</sup>

Beyond activities such as surveillance and patrols, community associations are engaged in an array of different types of voluntary action on criminal justice, from providing activities for children and young people at risk of offending to supporting victims of crime. As noted above, some such associations may have access to grant funding; this provides scope for their work to become professionalised to an extent, but the heading

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<sup>19</sup> <http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/> [accessed 17.3.14]

<sup>20</sup> <http://www.sussex.police.uk/policing-in-sussex/your-community/street-watch> [accessed 17.3.14]

<sup>21</sup> See [http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/uploads/pub\\_res/Citizen\\_Patrol\\_Workshop\\_Notes\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ourwatch.org.uk/uploads/pub_res/Citizen_Patrol_Workshop_Notes_FINAL.pdf) [accessed 17.3.14]

'voluntary work' remains valid if many or most of the activities of these organisations continue to be undertaken by volunteers. The current government and its predecessor have launched various funding initiatives aimed at fostering and supporting community associations of all kinds. These include the £130-million 'Grassroots Grants' fund available for small community groups from 2008-2011, managed by the (since disbanded) Office of the Third Sector. A very similar, Cabinet Office-based funding stream is the £80-million 'Community First' fund launched in October 2011 to provide small grants to community groups and local social action projects, and due to run until 2015.<sup>22</sup>

The extensive participation of lay people, as jurors and magistrates, in the delivery of justice is a long-standing and striking feature of the justice system of England and Wales. Today, laypeople and volunteers continue to play key roles within and alongside the statutory criminal justice services: as magistrates and jurors still (the latter, of course, not as volunteers), as special constables, as members of independent monitoring boards in prisons, as lay visitors to police stations, as Witness Service volunteers supporting witnesses in the criminal courts, and so on.

Some policy initiatives have sought to enhance the role of volunteers in statutory criminal justice provision – with volunteers being seen not only as contributing to the services in which they participate, but also as having the capacity to build links between the formal justice system and their local communities. This perspective is evident, for example, in a 2005 Department for Constitutional Affairs document, *Supporting magistrates' courts to provide justice*, which looks how magistrates' courts can be better connected to their communities. This is a process in which magistrates themselves (described by Morgan [2012: 476], as 'arguably the epitome of the Big Society') are said to be central: 'The magistracy, drawn from local communities, is the lynch pin in delivering justice locally.'<sup>23</sup> A more specific example is provided by the introduction in 1999 of the youth referral order - a court disposal for youth offenders<sup>24</sup>. A young person given a referral order is required to attend a panel which agrees on restorative actions to

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<sup>22</sup> These two funding schemes are very similar, and effectively run by the same government department – the Office of the Third Sector which under the Coalition government became the Office for Civil Society.

<sup>23</sup> The years 2003-7 saw concerted efforts – which had limited success - to increase the diversity of magistrates with the aim of making them more representative of the communities they serve (Gibbs, 2014).

<sup>24</sup> Established by the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999.

be undertaken; the panel must include two volunteers designated as 'community members', whose participation is intended 'to engage local communities in dealing with young offenders' (Newburn et al, 2002: 1). A similar role is envisaged for local volunteers in restorative 'neighbourhood justice panels', which have been recently established on a pilot basis in several parts of the country, and are designed to tackle ASB and low-level offending largely through restorative techniques.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> The concept of neighbourhood justice panels was introduced in the 2010 criminal justice Green Paper *Breaking the Cycle* (Ministry of Justice, 2010). See Turley et al (2014) for a Ministry of Justice-commissioned process evaluation of some of the first such panels to be established.

### **3: Community engagement and community justice: views of the general public**

The chapter that follows this one will explore the views on ‘community’ and ‘community justice’ of individuals who are currently active within their own local communities – based on the findings of our empirical research in four deprived communities. But before we come to that, we want to look at how the wider public perceive the role of communities in tackling local crime and disorder. There are two parts to this discussion of public perceptions: first, we review existing national survey data from the United Kingdom on volunteering and political and civic participation; secondly, we review the findings of a qualitative study which examined public attitudes to youth crime and the Big Society.

#### **Survey data on political and civic participation**

A large number of national surveys have explored levels of public involvement in civic action and volunteering, and associated public attitudes. From these existing survey data, certain key messages emerge.

Notably, it is evident that levels of political participation at a national level, and the sense of efficacy of such participation, are low and falling. In contrast, civic participation at local levels tends to be viewed in a much more positive light, although levels of stated *interest* in local participation are not fully reflected in levels of local *action*. Substantial minorities of the general population report being engaged in local civic action and/or formal volunteering; however, levels of involvement have shown little change over recent years, and the likelihood of involvement is partially shaped by socio-demographic factors. The survey data reveal also that most people feel some degree of belonging or attachment to their local neighbourhood, although here again socio-demographic factors play a part, as do the characteristics of the local area. With respect to community justice, people tend to express relatively high levels of interest in participating in local efforts to tackle crime and disorder, but the extent to which this expressed interest is or could be translated into action appears limited.

More detail on these key findings is provided below.

- **Levels of political participation are low and falling.**

Around 375,000 people are now members of the three main political parties, compared to two million in the 1970s (data from various sources by Civil Exchange, 2013). The *Hansard Audit of Political Engagement* (2013) reports that just 58% of the public say they are ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ interested in politics; and the same proportion state that they know ‘not very much’ (42%) or ‘nothing at all’ (16%) about politics – with both figures indicating a steady decline in interest and knowledge since the Audit series began in 2004. The *British Social Attitudes* survey has found ‘a long-term decline in the proportion saying “it’s everyone’s duty to vote”, from 76 per cent in 1987 to 62% in 2011’, albeit there has been a slight increase since 2008. The survey also reports that while 3% said that it was not worth voting in 1987, the figure for 2011 was 18% (which then dropped slightly to 16% in 2012) (NatCen, 2013).

- **Participation in decision-making and action at local levels is viewed as more effective than national-level participation.**

The 2012 Hansard Audit reported that:

Almost three-fifths of the public (56%) agree that ‘when people like me get involved in their local community, they really can change the way that their area is run’. This claim is more widespread than the belief that the involvement of ‘people like me’ in a wider political arena with the potential to influence the country as a whole can bring about change (32%), suggesting that it is at the local rather than national scale that people feel the most potential to make a difference.<sup>26</sup>

Echoing the findings of the latest *Citizenship Survey* (DCLG, 2011b), the most recent *Community Life Survey*<sup>27</sup> found that 22% of the public thought they could influence decisions in Britain, compared to 38% who thought they could influence decisions in their local area (Cabinet Office, 2013a).

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<sup>26</sup> The 2013 Hansard Audit found the same figure of 32% believing that involvement in national politics can bring about change, but the question about efficacy of local involvement was not included.

<sup>27</sup> This survey started in 2012 as a replacement of the *Citizenship Survey*. The latter was an initiative aimed at measuring the extent and development of civil society; it was launched in 2001 and undertaken annually (first by the Home Office, and subsequently by the Department for Communities and Local Government) until 2011, when it was cancelled.

- **Most people want some level of involvement in decision-making and/or services in their local area – although this does not necessarily mean that *active* involvement is desired.**

While only 22% of people say they don't want to be involved 'at all' in 'decision-making in [their] local area', 47% report wanting to be at least 'fairly' involved (Hansard, 2013). Public opinion polling by Ipsos-MORI has typically found a 'large gap between supporting the idea of involvement and the reality of getting involved with available structures for involvement', as neatly illustrated when survey respondents were asked about the extension of Community Partnerships (meetings for residents to discuss how their local area can be improved):

- 82% support the principle of extending community partnerships within a borough, but
  - just 26% are personally interested in involvement, and
  - only 2% are prepared to attend a meeting about the extension of community partnerships
- (Ipsos-MORI, 2010a: 34).

It has also been found that while 58% agree with the statement: 'The experts who provide and manage public services know best – they should find out what we think and get on with it', only 17% agreed with: 'The general public should be much more actively involved in shaping public services, through for example people deciding on'; while 24% were the middle (Ipsos-MORI, 2010a: 34).

- **Substantial minorities of the population state that they engage in civic action and formal volunteering**

The most recent *Community Life Survey* (Cabinet Office 2013b) found that:

- 10% of the population were involved in *civic activism* (direct involvement in decision-making or delivery) at least once over the past year;
- 18% were involved in some form of *civic consultation* (active involvement in local consultation) at least once over past year, 2010/11;

- 34% were involved in *civic participation* (involvement in wider forms of engagement in the democratic processes, such as contacting an elected representative, participating in a demonstration, or signing a petition) at least once over past year.

Levels of formal volunteering over the past year (defined as providing unpaid help to other people or the environment, through groups or organisations) were found by the *Community Life Survey* (Cabinet Office, 2013b) to be:

- At least once: 44%
- At least once a month: 29%

Both the *Community Life Survey* and earlier *Citizenship Survey* indicate that levels of civic participation and volunteering have fluctuated to some extent in recent years, but there have been no major shifts. Thus government expectations that the Big Society and related initiatives would result in greatly increased rates of volunteering appear unrealistic (Ockenden et al, 2012).

- **Participation in civic action and volunteering tends to vary by socio-demographic characteristics.**

Higher socio-economic groups are much more likely than lower groups to be involved in civic engagement than lower. For example, members of social classes A and B are twice as likely to have signed a petition as members of social classes D and E (Undated *Democratic Audit* cited by Civil Exchange (2012); see also Cabinet Office, 2013b).<sup>28</sup> The *Helping Out* survey of volunteering commissioned by the Cabinet Office (2007) found volunteering to be most common among those in 34-44 and 55-64 age groups, women, working people, actively religious people, and people not at risk of social exclusion. Secondary analysis of *Citizenship Survey* data (Mohan, 2011) identifies the 'civic core' of the population: 'In total, this 31% of the population provides 87% of volunteer hours, 79% of charitable giving, and 72% of civic participation.' The people who make up this 'civic core' are described in the following terms:

more likely than their counterparts in other groups to be middle-aged, have higher education qualifications, are owner occupiers, actively practice their religion, and

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<sup>28</sup> The A to E social grade classification is a widely used occupation-based approach to defining social class in the UK. According to this classification, grade A broadly refers to the 'upper middle class'; B the 'middle class'; C1 the 'lower middle class'; C2 the 'skilled working class'; D the 'semi-skilled and unskilled working class'; and E the lowest income earners.

have lived in the same neighbourhood for at least 10 years. Some demographic groups are very heavily engaged indeed. For example over 60% of middle-aged females with higher education qualifications would be counted as part of the 'civic core' (Mohan, 2011: 9).

- **Most people feel a sense of belonging to their local neighbourhoods.**

The latest *Community Life Survey* found that 86% of people felt their community is cohesive (agreeing that people from different backgrounds in the local area get along well together); 78% felt they very or fairly strongly belong to their neighbourhood; and 84% were satisfied with their local area as a place to live (Cabinet Office, 2013a). All these figures have shown gradual increases over recent years, according to the preceding *Citizenship Survey*. The *Community Life Survey* also found that 62% of the public agreed that local people pull together to improve the neighbourhood; 80% said that they chat to their neighbours (involving more than just saying 'hello') at least once a month; and 49% agreed that they borrow things from and exchange favours from their neighbours.

- **But, again, the sense of belonging varies by socio-demographic factors, and also by characteristics of the local area.**

A specific 'community spirit' topic report on *Citizenship Survey* data (DCLG, 2011c) observes that satisfaction with living in the local area varied by ethnicity (with Bangladeshi respondents reporting the highest levels of satisfaction, at 67%, and Black Caribbean the lowest levels, at 56%); professional group (73% of those in managerial/professional occupations were satisfied compared to 59% of long-time unemployed); and deprivation of the local area (around four-fifths of those in the 10% least deprived areas were satisfied, as were around one-half of those in the 10% most deprived areas). Ethnicity was also a key factor in relation to a sense of belonging to the local area, which was stronger among those in south Asian groups compared to other ethnic groups.

Age was a particularly important factor with respect to the belief that local people pull together to improve the area: 77% of those aged over 75 subscribed to this view, compared to just 55% of 16 to 24-year-olds. Deprivation of the local area was also important here: 79% of those in least deprived compared to 52% of those in most deprived areas believed that people pull together to improve things. Trust varied significantly by age (63% of over-75s said that many local people could be trusted, compared to 32% of 16 to 24-year-olds) and by ethnicity (around one half of white people had trust, compared to 26% of black Caribbean

and 23% of black African people). Area deprivation was also significant here: around three-quarters of people in the least deprived areas thought many local people could be trusted, compared to less than one-quarter of those in the most deprived; there was also a clear rural-urban split here of 69% (rural areas) to 45% (urban areas).

- **People report relatively high levels of interest in community justice.**

In a survey undertaken for the Casey Review *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime* (2008), three out of four respondents said they would be interested in giving up spare time for at least one of the following activities:

- checking on vulnerable/elderly neighbours (28%);
- joining Neighbourhood Watch (21%);
- helping run activities for young people (15%);
- attending meetings with police to help set priorities (14%);
- helping out at community and parenting groups (10%);
- helping provide support to crime victims (8%);
- helping out in schemes to help offenders avoid crime (7%).

A 2007 YouGov survey cited in the Casey Review found that respondents' top local concerns were crime, policing and tackling ASB. 68% felt that responsibility to tackle local issues lay primarily with local government, but 36% believed the local community had a responsibility to take action. Just 16% reported feeling they could tackle ASB themselves; but only climate change (at 17%) scored more highly as an issue which people believed they could impact, as individual citizens.

In an Ipsos-MORI survey on crime and public perceptions, conducted in 2008, people were asked: 'In which, if any, of the following services or issues would you personally like to have greater involvement?' (Duffy et al, 2008). The issue selected most frequently – by 35% of respondents - was 'tackling crime'. The next highest scoring items were 'meeting needs of young people' (30%); leisure services (27%); and education services (26%).

- **But the relatively high levels of stated interest in community justice do not seem to translate into action.**

However, when it comes to *active* engagement with criminal justice services, levels are relatively low according to a 2008 Ipsos-MORI poll on participation (reported in Ipsos-MORI,

2010b). The following were the responses to a question about which forms of involvement in police service provision were the closest to respondent's view:

- Already work for/involved in police & their services: 2%
- I would like to have more of a say in what the police does, and the services they provide: 13%
- I like to know what the police are doing, but I'm happy to let them get on with their job: 53%
- I'm not interested in what the police do, or whether they do their job: 26%
- I'm not interested in what the police does as long as they do their job: 4%
- Don't know: 1%

Similarly, a 2009 Ipsos-MORI poll (Ipsos-MORI, 2010a) looked at levels of involvement in local crime/ASB issues and found:

- 4% were already involved
- 5% wanted active involvement
- 24% wanted more of a say
- 47% just wanted information
- 16% did not care

And the 2011/12 Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2012) found that:

- 3% of adults said they had attended a police beat meeting in the past year;
- 11% of adults had looked at or used crime maps in the past year;
- 14% of households were currently members of a neighbourhood watch scheme, with membership more common for wealthier than for poorer households.

In light of the above figures, the turn-out of only around 15% for the first Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) elections, held in November 2012, is by no means surprising. The low turn-out has produced considerable media and political comment. The wider disenchantment with politics, poor weather, and lack of public information about the PCC role and candidates are said to have undermined the public's willingness to vote; but another key factor is said to be public apathy towards localism.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2012/nov/18/andrew-rawnsley-public-to-blame-for-voter-apathy?INTCMP=SRCH> [accessed 18.3.14]; <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-20356910> [accessed 18.3.14]; <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/danhodges/100189855/we-dont->

- **Nevertheless, significant numbers of individuals volunteer within the criminal justice system**

While overall levels of active engagement with criminal justice services are low, significant numbers of individuals – who could be described as members of the aforementioned ‘civic core’ - currently volunteer formally within the criminal justice system. The 2009 Neuberger Review of *Volunteering Across the Criminal Justice System* found that criminal justice volunteering was not well documented; and notes that there only exist, through surveys, ‘snapshots of the importance of volunteers’. These snapshots indicate that, among numerous others, volunteers include approximately:

- 30,000 magistrates
- 6,000 Victim Support volunteers
- 1,850 Independent Monitoring Board members
- 7,000 volunteers involved in prisons through faith-based organisations
- 14,000 special police constables.

### **Focus group findings on attitudes to youth crime and the Big Society**

In 2011, two of the authors of this report undertook a Home Office-commissioned qualitative study of public attitudes to youth crime. The study involved focus groups with randomly recruited members of the public in five neighbourhoods, and explored participants’ views on the extent and nature of youth crime and disorder in their local area, the underlying causes of youth crime, and how it can best be tackled.<sup>30</sup> The main relevance to the current study was that the participants were also asked what they thought about the government’s vision of the Big Society – which, at the time of the groups, was high on the political agenda - and about the prospect of local communities taking on some of the responsibility for tackling youth crime, as part of the Big Society. The findings presented below are drawn from the published report on this study (Jacobson and Kirby, 2012).

The five neighbourhoods in which the focus groups were conducted varied in terms of their socio-economic characteristics and crime profiles; but in all groups, participants’ comments

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want-to-elect-police-and-crime-commissioners-we-just-want-the-people-we-already-elect-to-do-their-jobs/ [accessed 18.3.14]; <http://www.labour.org.uk/police-and-crime-commissioner-elections-shambles> [accessed 18.3.14]. See also Chambers et al (2013).

<sup>30</sup> 15 groups with a total of 125 participants were undertaken. Participants were aged between 18 and 76; a little over half were women; and just over two-thirds were white and the remainder black, Asian and of mixed ethnicity.

about local problems of youth crime and disorder tended to revolve around two issues. First, participants talked about the intimidating presence of groups of young people – usually informal gatherings rather than ‘gangs’ – on the streets and in public parks. The extent and nature of the problems ascribed to these groups varied, but for the most part participants spoke about nuisance and disruptive behaviour, or behaviour that could be deliberately threatening and abusive but did not tend to develop into outright violence. The second major concern was vandalism and other criminal damage committed by young people. Participants spoke of graffiti, cars being damaged, and windows being smashed; and many evidently believed this to have a corrosive impact on the physical environment and how people felt about their neighbourhoods. Other issues quite frequently raised included crime and ASB related to under-age drinking and drug (mostly cannabis) use.

Two themes emerged from the focus group discussions that are of particular interest to us here. The first is a cynicism about the government’s efforts to build the Big Society, and about the potential application of the Big Society vision to youth justice. The second theme is somewhat in tension with the first: it is the view that a sense of community is a highly important bulwark against crime, and that the breakdown of community is thus a cause of many of the current problems of youth offending.

#### *Cynicism about the Big Society*

Most, but not all, of the focus group participants had heard of the Big Society, but many were dismissive of the general concept, arguing that it was little more than a ploy by politicians to manipulate public opinion. In particular, the promotion of the Big Society was said to be the government’s attempt to avoid taking responsibility for public services, and a ‘cover-up’ for its spending cuts.

I don’t think anyone can argue with the fact that, yes, it’d be great to have people involved and doing things in the community. I just think it’s a political ... I think the way it’s been put over is just a political gimmick almost, because it’s trying to do something that you know everybody would like to have done but they’re going to try and get credit for it.

While participants tended to assume that the need to cut public spending was a large part of the government’s rationale for the Big Society, several also stressed that spending cuts in fact undermined the likelihood that it could be achieved. They argued that even if people

were willing to give their time for free in an effort to improve their communities, the impact of this volunteering would be limited unless it was supported by some degree of funding and a strong public and voluntary services infrastructure.

You do need funding for this Big Society to work, because you can't create something out of nothing ... It's hard enough to get by from one week to another as it is these days with everything going up, to suddenly say, right, OK, I'll take these kids [on an outing] on my own, and pay £50 on petrol.

Many participants were particularly sceptical about the potential application of the concept of the Big Society to the field of youth justice. They commented on the difficulties and challenges posed by working in any capacity with young offenders, and suggested that this was probably something that was best left to the 'professionals' or 'experts' – not ordinary members of the community.

I think [to have volunteers working in youth justice is] quite a big ask, to be honest, because that could be quite dangerous. If you get it wrong, and you've sort of tried to help that child or whatever, you could leave them with ... more damage... I think you should leave it to the experts.

One participant questioned the motives of people who would want to do voluntary work with young offenders:

So [if] they're using regular people who want to give up their time, their motivations to give up their time are going to be varied, and they're going to be: because ... I was a victim of crime so I want to teach this little git a real lesson; or I believe everybody should go to church more, I'm going to start giving him my religious views, or whatever. So it's a powder keg, and the benefits you're going to get are going to be severely restricted - much less than what you'd get if it was a professional approach where everybody reads from the same hymn sheet.

Community involvement in youth justice was said by many to be risky. Several participants spoke in general terms about being personally too scared to get involved – formally or informally – in tackling youth crime. As well as highlighting possible risks to personal safety,

some spoke of how those who try to confront offenders can themselves end up facing criminal charges. Another concern about community engagement was the bureaucracy associated with voluntary work, especially when the work involves children or young people. There were complaints about Criminal Records Bureau checks,<sup>31</sup> health and safety and insurance requirements – all of which were said to make community involvement feel like more trouble than it's worth.

Some people used to volunteer [for a local group] out of the goodness of their hearts, and we had to put them on training courses and things, and you just didn't have the money. So it's OK saying Big Society, but Big Society with funding, with training, with insurance ... You're thinking: Well, it's not worth it, and you'll walk from the Big Society, because it's too much of a headache.

Several participants supported the general idea of the Big Society – whether applied specifically to youth justice or as a broader concept – but were doubtful that it could be successfully put into practice. In the eyes of some participants, the biggest practical obstacle to achieving the Big Society was the fact that most people simply did not have the time to work voluntarily in their local communities – given the demands of work and family life. Moreover, they stressed that in the current difficult economic climate, people were working ever longer hours to make ends meet and therefore had even less time for social action; while others who were out of work might not be in a position where they felt willing or able to help the wider community.

I think it's a wonderful idea in a good economy, but when no one has a job and you're saying, oh, work for free now as well, I just think, like you're having a laugh. No chance - it wouldn't work.

### *The importance of community*

But while they were largely sceptical about the government's vision of the Big Society, the focus group participants were not sceptical about the broader notion of 'community' which lies at the heart of that vision. Indeed, many were strongly attached to the ideal of local communities in which people are mutually supportive and trusting, and which have the capacity to undertake some kinds of collective action.

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<sup>31</sup> Now Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

This attachment to the notion of community emerged in how some focus group participants talked about the causes of youth crime and disorder. Lack of discipline was cited most frequently as the primary cause; and this was the issue that tended to give rise to the most angry and impassioned comments. In talking about lack of discipline, several participants spoke more broadly about what they perceived to be a breakdown in the sense of community and associated informal social control that in earlier times contained much potentially criminal behaviour. Children, they said, were today 'running wild'; growing up without any respect for authority, or understanding that their actions have consequences.

Participants' comments on these issues were imbued with a strong sense of things having been much better 'when we were kids' – although given the mixed ages of participants, that period of time 'when we were kids' ranged from a few years to several decades ago.

For some participants, their attachment to ideal of community translated into the belief that the Big Society was, in theory at least, something worth pursuing. In other words, they regarded the community-building aim of the Big Society as valid and worthwhile, even if they were highly doubtful that it could be achieved. Others, in contrast, were convinced that efforts to revive community had come too late.

In two of the focus groups, there was a lively exchange between those who felt that 'community' was something still worth striving for, and those who felt that the revival of community was by now an impossible task.

*Focus group 1*

P1: It's going to take a long time this, it's got to come from the grass roots, it's got to come through the family, it's got to be -

P2: I don't think it will; I think it's gone too far.

P3: It's gone too far, yes.

P1: Well, it's just going to get worse. I don't want it to get worse when it can get better....

P2 ...I think a lot of people have given up though haven't they. They just think, I don't care anymore...You go in through your front door and think, that's it, the outside world has gone, you come in through your front door.

*Focus group 2*

P1: What is a community; isn't that a thing of the past?

P2: No! ...We're all part of a community, aren't we.

P1: Yeah, but have you ever known anybody muck in together? ...

P2: Yeah. I'll give you a real good example...When we had that big fall of snow, right? The street was cut off. Nobody could get down, nobody could get in. So, I went out with my shovel outside my house – I live in a block end; and I'm right at the end, so I thought I'm not going to get my car out unless I start doing something, so I went out with my spade and started digging to get my car out. And I got about half way down the street and then somebody else came out and said, 'Oh, do you want a hand?' So then he came out, and then another person came – and there was about eight of us in the end. And we dug the whole street out and everybody did it.

## **4: Community engagement and community justice: activists' views**

In this chapter, we look at the views of community activists in the four neighbourhoods in which we undertook fieldwork for this study in 2011-12. The neighbourhoods were in north-east London, Bristol, Nottingham and south Wales. The first part of the chapter will provide a brief account of the research methodology, an overview of each of the study neighbourhoods, and a description of our sample of activists drawn from the four areas. Next, we will look at what motivates people to become actively involved in their local community, and what the concept of 'community' means to them. In the final part of the chapter, we will explore activists' views on the scope for, and attendant risks and limits of, community involvement in criminal justice.

Following the description of the four neighbourhoods, the discussion of most of the research findings in this chapter is not broken down by area. This is because the key findings cross-cut all four neighbourhoods; it also preserves the confidentiality of the research participants.

### **The neighbourhoods and the activists**

Our fieldwork in the four neighbourhoods focused on existing community associations. We use the term 'community association' in a broad sense, to refer to all locally-based voluntary organisations whose activities are:

- largely conducted by volunteers;
- at least partially focused on the local area; and
- intended to contribute in some way to the common good.

We denote as 'community activists' those individuals providing regular input into these organisations, usually on a voluntary basis but sometimes on a paid part-time or (occasionally) full-time basis.

In each of the study neighbourhoods, our research had several dimensions:

- Desk research, to establish the profile of each area and identify local community associations that have an online presence.

- Informal discussions with individuals in community engagement roles within the police, local authority and other local services, who were asked to help identify local community associations.
- Focus groups and in-depth interviews with community activists – that is, members of the associations identified via the desk research and discussions with key informants. The focus groups and interviews explored the extent and nature of respondents' community involvement, their understanding of the concept of 'community', and their views on whether, how and why local communities should get involved in tackling crime and disorder.
- In the Bristol and London neighbourhoods only: distribution of a short questionnaire to community activists, comprising questions about motives for community involvement and views on community justice. Because the response rate was low, we decided not to use the questionnaire in the other two neighbourhoods.

#### *The four neighbourhoods*

The four neighbourhoods we selected for the research are all deprived; meaning that each comprises sub-wards predominantly falling within the bottom twenty per cent of the Index of Multiple Deprivation, and in many cases within the bottom five to ten per cent. Deprived neighbourhoods are those which potentially stand to benefit the most from effective community engagement, but may also face the greatest challenges in achieving this – and all the more so in the sphere of criminal justice given that local problems of crime and disorder are likely to be compounded by economic and social disadvantage. All four of our study sites are urban and predominantly residential; each is in a different geographic region; and three (all but the south Wales neighbourhood) are ethnically diverse.

#### Leyton and Grove Green in north-east London

This neighbourhood comprises two neighbouring wards in the London Borough of Waltham Forest: Leyton and Grove Green. The two wards form a geographically coherent block, with railway lines on two sides and a large A-road on another. Most of the area is residential, with the housing mainly composed of two-storey terraces and one large estate which is in the lowest five per cent of the national Index of Multiple Deprivation.<sup>32</sup> Around three quarters of

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<sup>32</sup> Ward Profiles: Leyton, London Borough of Waltham Forest, <http://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/Documents/2011%20Leyton%20ward%20profile.pdf> [accessed

the population defines itself as from minority ethnic groups – with White other, Pakistani, black Caribbean and African groups being particularly prominent. Anti-social behaviour, violence against the person and theft from motor vehicles are the most frequently recorded crimes in the area.<sup>33</sup> The large estate has a reputation for gang activity and drug dealing, although local people report that these problems have declined in recent years. Several large shops in Leyton ward suffered damage during the riots of August 2011.

Most community groups in the area are small and have few or no paid staff, and they have little online presence. Groups include two active residents' associations with overlapping membership, which undertake a range of activities ranging from a regular tea dance to play schemes for children. Other local organisations include a variety of minority ethnic cultural and religious associations which range in size and level of formality. The police safer neighbourhood teams hold regular local ward forums and walkabouts, but levels of engagement among local people tend to be low.

#### St Ann's and Dales in Nottingham

The Nottingham case study also encompassed two neighbouring wards: St Ann's and Dales. Around half the population of the two wards defines itself as white British, with the remaining quarter comprising a variety of ethnic groups<sup>34</sup> – including, in Dales, a rapidly increasing number of Eastern European immigrants. Most of the housing in St Ann's is social housing, while Dales has a substantial proportion of privately rented homes. St Ann's is the second most and Dales the eighth most deprived ward in Nottingham (out of a total of 20 wards). Over the past ten years, St Ann's has been associated with high levels of gun crime, and although this problem has receded recently, residents believe that there is still a considerable stigma attached to the area on account of its history of violent crime.<sup>35</sup>

In both wards there is a wide range of community-based activity; however, community engagement in Dales tends to be more formal and established than in St Ann's. Some community groups in Dales were established with the aims of tackling local problems of ASB and alleviating tensions between different – often transient – groups within the population. Community engagement in St Ann's has tended to take more fluid forms and to emerge on

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19.3.14]; Ward Profiles: Grove Green, London Borough of Waltham Forest, <https://www.walthamforest.gov.uk/documents/ward-profile-grove-green-ward.pdf> [accessed 19.3.14]

<sup>33</sup> Office of National Statistics (ONS), Neighbourhood Statistics, <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> [accessed 12.03.2014]

<sup>34</sup> Office of National Statistics (ONS), Neighbourhood Statistics, <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> [accessed 12.03.2014]

<sup>35</sup> Nottingham Insight: Dales Ward Profile; Nottingham Insight: St Ann's Ward Profile – One Nottingham, 2012.

an ad hoc basis in response to specific local issues as they arise. In both wards, gardening work and other activities related to open spaces have been the focus of much of the local community engagement.

#### Ashley and Lawrence Hill in Bristol

The Bristol study area comprises all of Ashley ward and most of neighbouring Lawrence Hill ward, and is made up of a number of distinct and varied neighbourhoods. One part of Ashley is well known for its bohemian atmosphere and busy nightlife. All the sub-wards in Lawrence Hill are in the most deprived ten per cent in the UK – a level of deprivation which continues some way into Ashley ward. The area has the highest proportion of black and minority ethnic groups in the city: around half the population defines itself as white British with large numbers of people in the white other and black African and Caribbean ethnic groups.<sup>36</sup> Both wards have relatively high crime rates within the city. Part of Ashley gained a reputation for drug dealing in the 1980s and 1990s, while Lawrence Hill's high street had a reputation for drug-related crime and shootings, although these problems have lessened in the last few years. Neither ward was severely affected by the August 2011 riots, although earlier that year there were protests against the opening of a supermarket in the area, which gave rise to some violent clashes with the police.

There is a long history of community activity across the area, and many of the community groups are relatively formalised. In Lawrence Hill a 'Settlement' has been active since the 1910s. A large community carnival, requiring the closure of a network of streets, has been an annual event since the late 1960s in a sub-ward of Ashley. More recently, Lawrence Hill received funding through the New Deal for Communities and has sustained the community structures put in place since the funding ended. Although many of the local community organisations started out as residents' initiatives, they have since professionalised, employing more staff and fewer volunteers. There is a great deal of interest in the local and global environment, most notably in Ashley. One group has worked with local graffiti artists to challenge the council's attitude to the area and street art. Graffiti, previously seen by some as anti-social behaviour, is now one of the area's attractions and has contributed to its increasing popularity. Several green spaces within the area also have community groups associated with them.

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<sup>36</sup> Office of National Statistics (ONS), Neighbourhood Statistics, <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> [accessed 12.03.2014]. See also Neighbourhood Partnership Statistical Profile 2012: Ashley, Easton and Lawrence Hill NP08 (Bristol City Council: 2012).

### Galon Uchaf in Merthyr Tydfil, south Wales

Galon Uchaf is a housing estate located in the Penydarren electoral ward. It overlooks the town of Merthyr and is divided by a main road from the much larger Gurnos housing estate. The housing in Galon Uchaf was built in the 1930s for Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council and comprises approximately 500 dwellings: largely semi-detached two storey houses. This housing stock is currently a mix of owner-occupier, social housing and private rental properties. There is little ethnic diversity in the area, with census data showing that 94 per cent of the population in Penydarren ward define themselves as white British.<sup>37</sup>

Anti-social behaviour is the most commonly recorded crime in the area, accounting for nearly half of all crimes in 2011-2012, followed by 'other crime' - a category including drugs offences, public order, criminal damage and theft.<sup>38</sup> However, overall, the ward is defined as a low crime area based on crime rates across all neighbourhoods in Merthyr Tydfil.

On key social, economic and health indicators, Merthyr Tydfil is the most deprived local authority areas in Wales and the UK and Penydarren one of the most deprived wards in Wales.<sup>39</sup> Galon Uchaf has been in receipt of community development funding from the Welsh Government since 1998. A focus of community activity in the area is the Galon Uchaf Community Association, which is run by a committee of volunteers and is the location for a variety of social and educational activities and the monthly meetings with the neighbourhood policing team. There are also a number of play schemes and a youth project in the area which have been developed, in part, by the work of volunteers.

#### *The activists*

This chapter is primarily concerned with the experiences and views of the community activists who participated in our focus groups and interviews or responded to the questionnaire. Our sample of activists numbered 116 in total, across all four neighbourhoods. Of this sample, 17 only participated by returning a questionnaire, while all 99 others took part in a focus group or interview (with a further 17 of the latter group also returning a questionnaire). Table 3.1 summarises their levels and types of community engagement, while Table 3.2 provides a demographic profile of the sample.

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<sup>37</sup> Office of National Statistics (ONS), Neighbourhood Statistics, <http://www.neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/dissemination/> [accessed 12.03.2014]

<sup>38</sup> [www.UKCrimeStats.com](http://www.UKCrimeStats.com)

<sup>39</sup> *Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2011 Summary Report*, Welsh Government, 2011.

**Table 3.1: Types and levels of community involvement among sample of community activists (N = 116)**

Community involvement		Number
Type of community association or activity (main involvement)	General community action	28
	Tenants'/residents' associations/ neighbourhood forums	17
	Children/youth/family activities	14
	Parks/gardens/other open spaces	13
	Minority ethnic/cultural	11
	Community justice/community safety	7
	Religious	7
	Political	5
	Arts	3
	Health-related	3
	Other	2
	Unknown	6
Voluntary or paid (position in main association)	Voluntary	97
	Full-time paid	13
	Part-time paid	4
	Unknown	2
Number of associations in which involved	1	51
	2-3	46
	4+	17
	Unknown	2

Since the research in the four neighbourhoods was qualitative in nature, our sample of activists cannot be described as representative of all those involved in community associations in the fieldwork sites. However, as Table 3.1 clearly demonstrates, we were successful in making contact with a wide cross-section of individuals who were involved in their communities. Our sample encompassed individuals engaged in a variety of types of community activity - from tenants' and residents' associations to local politics to arts-based organisations. Many individuals were members of multiple community organisations and forums: with 46 reporting that they were involved in two or three simultaneously, and 17 reporting four or more types of involvement; and the community engagement of most was very long-standing. Only 17 out of the 116 respondents told us that they held (full-time or part-time) paid positions within their respective community groups.

As shown in Table 3.2, the sample was skewed towards middle-aged and older people (73 of the 116 activists are aged over 50) and towards women (63 women to 53 men), which fits with the characteristics of the general population's 'civic core' (see Chapter 3, above). Almost three-quarters of the sample of activists were white.<sup>40</sup>

**Table 3.2: Characteristics of community activist respondents (N = 116)**

Characteristic		Number
Gender	Male	53
	Female	63
Age	Under 30	6
	30-39	18
	40-49	19
	50-59	32
	60+	41
Ethnicity	White	84
	Black	18
	Asian	8
	Other	4
	Unknown	2

### **Motivations for community engagement**

Most of the activists we spoke to were devoting very considerable amounts of time and effort to community activities - usually for no pay, and often over periods of years and even decades. The scope of these activities was extremely wide, and included, for example:

- Establishing and chairing a residents' association, neighbourhood watch or community action group;
- Acting as a magistrate;
- Serving as a local councillor;

<sup>40</sup> It is not possible to draw any general conclusions from this latter figure about the involvement of people from BME groups in community activities, given that the four areas vary widely in terms of the ethnic profiles of the local populations. One of the areas has a significant number minority ethnic and/or religious community associations, of which we were in contact with three; several of our BME respondents came from these organisations.

- Volunteering in a youth club;
- Serving as a committee member at a local place of worship, and helping to run youth activities from the place of worship;
- Initiating and organising local events including a carnival and street parties;
- Organising a film club for primary school children in a community centre;
- Setting up a fashion project for teenage girls;
- Volunteering for an archive preserving local black history and culture;
- Helping to run a credit union;
- Providing a lunch club for pensioners;
- Running a community café, which raises money to support local youth activities;
- Setting up and running a community-based art gallery;
- Campaigning to save a local leisure centre;
- Serving as a committee member on an association managing the local playing fields;
- Carrying out gardening work on various overgrown plots of land scattered throughout the local area.

### *Types of motivation*

But what is it that motivates individuals to commit themselves to these kinds of activities?

When asked about motivation, the research participants raised a variety of issues from which some key themes emerged. The most common kind of motivation was a wish to help improve the local area and the lives of local people – whether this was expressed in a very general sense or with reference to more specific concerns. For example, several spoke of wanting to tackle local problems of crime and anti-social behaviour; others spoke about the need for improvements to the physical environment; and some wanted to help provide better local facilities. Related to these altruistic motivations was a sense of contributing to the community out of a sense of duty – a duty that was variously defined in religious, moral or civic terms.

Many of the activists referred to the pleasure or personal satisfaction that they derived from their community engagement; this was sometimes described as their primary motivation, or as a factor alongside their wish to serve and improve their local area. Some of the activists talked about the relevance of community engagement to their personal circumstances or needs – for example, those who were seeking to extend their skills and experience with a view to improving their employment prospects.

## Motivations underlying community engagement

### 1. Improving the local area and local people's lives

If you ask people why we get involved we are trying to improve our lives and we are trying to improve it for everyone else if we can.

[I'm involved] foremost because I live here. Unless somebody volunteers and puts the time and effort in the area then nothing would ever get done. ... Just to make the place a better area.

#### ○ Reducing crime and anti-social behaviour

[Having had drug dealers live next door] Basically me and my wife had had enough and people round here had had enough so we got involved to make the area a better place knowing what we had been through.

We had youth annoyance problems in our street. And we all decided to get together and start a watch. ... We used to do all sorts of things. If there were problems, we used to come out and stand at the door. You know, you used to find kids would pass then, and not take your wing mirror off.

#### ○ Improving the physical environment

My main motivation is the way the area looks.

I thought it's a fascinating place and it's one of the reasons why I moved here - because it's got this intact built environment that nobody's ever knocked down and spoiled, and at the same time you can see there is a lot of different things need doing there. And I often used to stand around with friends or in the pub and say, it's a shame we can't do something about this

#### ○ Improving local facilities

I was walking down the road one day with my friend from the school where I'd been dropping my grandchildren, and it was a lovely day and there were a couple of kids sitting on the wall, and I said to my friend, 'They've got nowhere to go,' and I felt sorry for those kids. And I said: I know, I'm going to organise a carnival; and she told me I was off my trolley. But we done it.

### 2. A sense of duty

#### ○ Religious

God put me on earth to help people ... And when I when I help them, it's genuine, from my heart – I really want the best for them.

#### ○ Moral

You see that there's a gap somewhere, and somebody has to do something. And sometimes it ends up being you, and it ends up being a lot of work, and it ends up being a lot of late nights, but you do it because you hope that there's going to be something good that comes out of it.

My volunteer work is helping my friends who are a little less able than myself.

- **Civic**

I think one of the reasons I got involved and what I've noticed is there's a real lack of people who are able or willing to step forward to [take on] leadership.

I'm community minded anyway because I was in the Scouts and I always do loads of charity work because you will find a certain number of people will do that, a certain number won't - well I'm one of those chaps that puts myself out, if I can do it.

I want to give something back to my community.

### **3. Enjoyment, satisfaction**

Get me out of the house, mix with people – and there are a lot of us, elderly men, who have nowhere to go during the daytimes, so we come along and – recreation, we play games, have a laugh, jokes and everything.

You take the rough with the smooth and there's been times of rough but the majority of the time it has been really enjoyable, I've never felt so happy in terms of the people around me, there's lots of people actually doing things and getting involved and trying to change things for the better.

I do it because I have a lot of fun, I love working with people and I hate arguments and dispute and sometimes we do have minor arguments and disputes but on the whole we have fun and we know each other socially and it is great.

### **4. Personal circumstances**

- *For example, a mother who had grown up in care wanted to help organise activities for local young people so that her own daughters would have a better childhood than she herself had done.*
- *Relatives of a man who had died in his early twenties came together to organise youth sessions. The aunt of the young man who died said of him:*

He was a local [area] toe-rag. But sadly, we lost him. And before he died, he said: if he survived this, he wanted to turn not just himself around but all of his friends. And that's what motivates us all.

- *A self-employed man described his work in the community as 'good career development'.*

### *The meaning of 'community'*

In probing the activists about their involvement in their local communities, we sought to understand not only what had motivated them to get involved, but also - more generally - what 'community' meant to them. We asked about how they defined the term; whether they felt that there was a sense of community in their local area; and what they gained from being part of a local community.

What emerged most strongly from these discussions was that most of the activists saw 'community' as something that was, or had the potential to be, profoundly meaningful to them. For many, the meaning was primarily social: being active in the community provided opportunities for getting to know people and socialising; it enabled individuals to feel part of something bigger than themselves; at the most informal level, it encouraged friendly day-to-day interactions between neighbours. All this, it seemed, could play a significant part in making people feel better about themselves and their lives.

I'm just thinking about places that I've lived that didn't have a sense of community, I lived somewhere once where I had one really nice neighbour and the rest of it was like being in a bloomin' desert ... [This] is a fantastic community because I feel very much at home here.

[Community] means that people are living alongside of each other in a sense that they are not just all completely separate and that also, I think there's a sense that the place matters as well, there's a sense of belonging to that place and the people in it.

Essentially, [community is] that sort of life blood that day to day nurtures you as a social being.

P1: My daughter was with me and everybody say, 'Hi Penny, hi Penny!' My daughter said, 'How many people do you know!'

P2: That's what I'm saying, I'd rather it be like that than being that little face that just walks up and down the street.

Half the kids on the estate call me Granma – I've got more grandkids than you'd care to think. ...!

I think it's a really good community now to what it was and people, not just English, all races, we all get on now, which is good. Before you could walk down the street and say good morning and they wouldn't answer you but they do now.

Accompanying the social satisfactions to be derived from community engagement was a sense of efficacy. As we have already seen, many of our respondents were motivated to get involved in community activities because they wanted to improve things, to make a difference; and, for the most part, they appeared to feel that they achieved this. Communal action was seen as effective action – particularly, in some cases, where this action was spurred by a wish to challenge the ‘bad reputation’ of the local area.

Community means a lot to me. It means that I get involved and meet people from different groups and give their view and see where we can enhance our community. Better living, better communication with others and we don't want anyone to consider that we are from the gutter area.

I've never been the sort of person to sit on the side-lines and say 'they should do something', I've been brought up that way I suppose - my parents were particularly very active in all sorts of stuff so it's just what you do and it's a degree of insanity, I think. But I think if you can help to influence what's going on around you, you really should, I suppose – well, I think I really should.

[My] idea of community, is that everyone pulls together, feels like they've got a part to play and creates a kind of space.

... I think it's up to us to make our own neighbourhood work well. Things go wrong when people don't feel they have any influence on their area.

Many of our activist respondents shared with participants in our general public focus groups (discussed in the previous chapter) a nostalgia for a time when local communities were more cohesive than they are today. This was a time, it was often said, when everyone knew each other, people would leave their doors unlocked, and parents would let their children play on the streets, fully confident that other adults would keep an eye on them and reprimand them if they caused trouble. However, the activists' recollections of the past – compared to those of the general public focus group participants – tended to be imbued with more optimism for the future. They were inclined to believe that at least some of the old community spirit survives today, or that it is possible, with a certain amount of effort, to rekindle that spirit.

[Community means] that we are completely together on every issue; we are all in this; we are all talking from the same hymn sheet. It is feasible, it is possible,

I've seen it happen, I've touched that hymn sheet if you like. I know we can do it together. Most definitely.

P1: I do still think there is a sense of community here

P2: Yes ... I mean, I had a house fire in '96 and everything was destroyed; we only had the clothes we stood up in and people rallied round.

We've got quite a good community going round here now, that we lost about 20 years ago, but it's coming back now... It is gradually coming back again. It's just trying to get people together to talk.

### *Commonality and difference*

For most of the activists, central to the concept of community – as the etymology of the word suggests – was the existence of commonalities: common values or interests or a shared purpose. It follows from this that ethnic and other forms of diversity within a local population were sometimes described as a barrier to a sense of community – although not necessarily an insurmountable barrier. Some of our respondents, indeed, emphasised that far from being dependent on sameness, communities can emerge out of difference: that a community will draw its very strength and meaning from the process of establishing commonalities across the boundaries of class, ethnicity or interest group.

To me a community is people helping each other. No matter what – no matter what race you are or creed or anything else. You shouldn't be fighting each other - you should all be looking after each other, like you do a family.

I think for me it is different people from different walks of life, coming together and supporting one another and I think [this area] on the whole really embodies that which is really, really incredible. I guess that is it in short, yeah. And I think accepting each other's differences is perhaps one of the keys to a successful community and working together.

... I guess what I want is better for everyone, I want everyone to want that and say how can we do that together, so that for me would be the definition of community, it doesn't matter who you are or what background you are from culturally, it should be a given that you aspire to do things.

As far as some of the activists were concerned, differences in class or background need not undermine community; but differences in values certainly do.

Before, we had a set of boundaries that was nation-wide, community-wide ... And everybody lived by them boundaries. *Everybody*. ... And once them boundaries start moving, you don't know where you are. And everybody starts behaving differently ... [Before] it didn't matter if you were poorer than me, or I were poorer than you – it didn't matter if you spoke posher than me or you went to a better school than me – if I swore on [?] and my neighbour heard me, then I got slapped and took home; if you swore on [?] and your neighbour heard you, you got slapped and took home. Irrespective of where we came from.

### **A community role in tackling crime and disorder?**

Most of our respondents believed crime and disorder in their neighbourhoods to be a significant issue. Across all four neighbourhoods, the crime problem most frequently alluded to was drugs: complaints were voiced about the prevalence of open drug use, drug-dealing and drug-related acquisitive crime, particularly robbery. However, in two of the areas (the Nottingham and London neighbourhoods) some said that drug problems had lessened in recent years. In Merthyr Tydfil, several of the research participants had particular concerns about the growing popularity of the new stimulant drug NRG among young people. A number of participants in London mentioned local gang problems or 'postcode wars' – sometimes said to be related to drug-dealing – but were mostly of the view that this was less of a concern today than it had been in the past. Anti-social behaviour was – like drug-related crime – discussed in all four neighbourhoods. Participants referred to general rowdy and intimidating behaviour, petty criminal damage, alcohol-related disorder and more specific issues such as anti-social use of motorbikes. For the most part, anti-social behaviour was associated with children and young people, and sometimes described as 'youth annoyance'. Views on the seriousness and impact of these problems were mixed.

We wanted to know if the activists perceived a role for the community in tackling local problems of crime and disorder and, if so, what was this role. The short answer to the first part of the question is 'yes'. The slightly longer answer to the second part of the question is that they tended to see the community's role in terms of maintenance of informal social control.

This brings us back to the three policy aspirations for community justice discussed in Chapter Two, namely:

- Helping communities to acquire or sustain a sense of commonality or shared values which enables them to exercise informal social control;
- Encouraging communities to help shape and hold to account local criminal justice services;
- Encouraging communities to become involved in the delivery of local criminal justice services.

Thus our findings suggest that the first of these aspirations has resonance for community activists; the latter two much less so. However, this is not to argue that the second and third aspirations are entirely irrelevant. Far from it: among our respondents there were some whose own community activities could, at least in part, be described as forms of active involvement in the design (aspiration two) or delivery (aspiration three) of criminal justice services. Below, we will look at what the activists had to say about these forms of engagement with services, before moving on to address in more detail the theme of informal social control.

#### *Active involvement in criminal justice services*

As we have already noted, some of our respondents stated that their primary motivation for undertaking activities within their local community was a wish to help reduce crime or anti-social behaviour in the area. Others gave the impression that helping to tackle crime and disorder was an important and explicit part of their wider community activism. Many of these individuals were engaged in community justice in ways that broadly reflect the second or third of the policy aspirations listed above.

Among those activists involved in service delivery was a magistrate, and one other who had been a member of a Youth Offending Team referral panel. Another example was provided by a respondent who had established a neighbourhood watch scheme on her street and subsequently became chair of neighbourhood watch for the entire police force area. A number of the activists described setting up or helping to run activities for children or young people that encompassed the explicit aim of helping to divert young people from criminal or anti-social behaviour. Some of our respondents who ran youth activities evidently felt that too much 'blame' for crime and disorder was attached to children and young people, and that the onus was on the community to be more inclusive of them – especially because much of what was said to be bad behaviour largely stemmed from boredom and a lack of things to do.

More of our respondents, however, were involved in the 'design' rather than 'delivery' aspects of community justice. While very few spoke of attending police-run forums (such as safer neighbourhood panels) dedicated to identifying priorities for local action, several talked about engaging with the police and local council through their generic community associations. Some evidently saw this as a highly effective means of encouraging the authorities to address local problems and concerns relating to crime and anti-social behaviour.

I know a lot of the community groups in [the area] do get involved and they are very effective; they tell the police exactly what they want to see happen and make the police work very hard. I'm sure the police need the help as well.

So the police come along to our meetings, hear what they say, go away and deal with them and report back to the next meeting. And that will sometimes be saying we arrested a certain number of people, or we closed down a crack house. And they act upon them, if they don't... There have been some issues about how they've acted on things. A very big, important aspect of that is the information flow between the police and the community.

In the last three or four weeks, on T- Road, who are those most affected by it, have despaired of the rest of the [community] group not taking their particular problem [of anti-social behaviour] seriously and they have formed a little splinter group. ...It feels like for the first time we are being heard instead of constantly being told, 'This Is not a problem.' The councillors have been fantastic - two in particular and they have been talking to the police and trying to say that they want some solutions and they want more positive actions in one shape or another.

A few respondents cited specific instances of action taken by the authorities at the behest of local activists.

As I say the crime in my street - we had a little park and they took the benches away. We got the council to take the benches so we don't have kids hanging about there now, so our problems are solved. I think we look at areas and we say what are the main problems in your area, and then we contact the police.

[When a group of young people took over a children's park] we not only got the police involved but they sent out these big - don't what they call them - meat

wagons or something, with the heavies go in there. And they completely... got rid of all that and ... they also got a children's centre built as well, because other people [the housing association and council] were involved. That's where the Neighbourhood Watch flourished because they could see something coming out of this.

Notwithstanding the above examples of active involvement in criminal justice services, the appetite for these kinds of community justice among our respondents was limited. Most of the community activism that was described to us took other forms. And even among those who were personally interested in engaging with the police and related services, there was profound scepticism about the prospect of persuading many others in the local area to engage in this manner. Our respondents spoke time and again about the difficulty of getting more people involved in community activities of any kind; a difficulty that was considered to be even greater when it came to community activities with criminal justice dimensions.

The reluctance of others to engage - in community activities generally and those related to criminal justice more specifically - was attributed to various causes. In an economic recession, some said, time and financial constraints will discourage people from committing to voluntary activities and associations. Despite the (sometimes guarded) optimism of respondents about the sense of community in their local area, they often commented on the reticence or nervousness of many local people when it came to mixing with their neighbours, which impeded efforts to get community activities of any kind off the ground. Ethnic or cultural divisions within the local population were sometimes said to exacerbate this problem, which was also perceived as greater in areas where a significant proportion of the population was transient. (Streets in which many properties were owned by private landlords were hence said to be particularly resistant to community activities.) It was also sometimes suggested that a certain mutual mistrust between local people who were working and benefit claimants undermined social solidarity. Apathy on the part of local residents was perhaps seen as the greatest barrier to wider participation in the community. And a compounding factor with regard to engagement in criminal justice - which some activists said also affected their own willingness to engage - was the fear of intimidation or even violent retaliation from offenders in the local area.

### *Attachment to the idea of informal social control*

If our respondents' showed a limited appetite for active involvement in criminal justice services – and much scepticism about the likelihood of others' involvement – they nevertheless had faith in community justice of another kind. According to many, the greatest contribution of 'community' to tackling crime and disorder is its capacity to impose and sustain social order through its entirely informal, internal mechanisms. This perspective on community justice reflects the activists' wider conceptions of community as something that feeds into both individual and social well-being.

The activists did not explicitly use the term 'informal social control', but a great many of their comments about community justice were focused on this general theme. It was articulated in different ways. Most notably, some respondents spoke about a passive kind of social control arising from shared values and a sense of unity which serve to discourage criminal and anti-social behaviour; while others were interested in a more active social control which involves deliberately challenging misbehaviour.

#### **Informal social control**

##### **Passive: through shared values and a sense of unity**

Basically when you are united against crime you make them feel silly and unwanted, it's just pressure.

I think the better a community, the more chance somebody's got of feeling they are part of it and not just a completely separate person ... If the community gets together it can keep an eye out for other people as well. It can keep an eye out on things and places.

I think the local people can cohere as a group and have common behavioural codes which act to keep crime and disorder at bay.

Where I live, it's quite a small sort of area so it's low on crime, we encourage people to look after each other.

It's got to be a lot cheaper, and changing the way community acts and creating self-respect is permanent. I think it is a change that doesn't go away - I don't think it is just extra policing on the streets; it is basically an on-going sustainable change of attitudes.

[My organisation tries to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour] indirectly – [it] tries to promote community cohesion. It aims to give the youth a sense of identity and ownership of what happens in the area.

### **Active: by challenging misbehaviour**

I think that a lot of the people who cause all these problems, actually if the rest of the community were together - these people wouldn't be able to intimidate people. ... They're strong because nobody wants to stand up to them. But if everybody banded together and stood up against them, then there would be a lot less likelihood of the people who do the bad things.

If local people sort of see somebody doing graffiti on a wall or allowing their dog to mess up the pavement and things like that you would hope they would be able to take action against it.

It's about boundaries; it's about people saying, 'I'm sorry, that's not acceptable, you can't just walk down the street drinking on the street, shouting at the top of your voice and swearing.' So if I ever hear that I come out and say, 'Excuse me can you just keep it down please?' ... It doesn't have to be confrontational and there's always a risk factor involved but I think we have lost that ability to police the streets ourselves just by saying no; and I think you often find that if you say that people are just so shocked because they've never had anyone say that to them before.

I used to go out and tell 'em - I used to see them dealing drugs, and say, move away from my house, go somewhere else. And they'd respect you, and they'd go away.

When we had the [toy] cars pinched from the Sunday School building, I had a young teenage mum contact me on Facebook to let me know who had taken the cars. She didn't want to be named but she didn't like what had happened. I could see the support there. She went out of her way.

A variation on the general theme of active social control was articulated by one respondent who bemoaned the loss of informal authority figures in the local area, and spoke of his own intention to try and fill that role.

I think if there was another tier that's not a cop, not a PCSO, no uniform. If there was another strata, someone who owns the corner shop or a newsagent or a milkman that knows the area, knows the patch - that next strata is one that is gone ... In a sense, in a funny sort of way, I'm trying to rebuild that strata. I will talk to anybody, like the boy in the park, like the Polish when they are flinging another bottle of vodka at my place that I'm going to have to go out at seven in the morning and sweep up. I'm not Mr Wonderful but there are often people like

me ...That next strata ... is gone and that's the one we need to catch and quickly now before they are gone forever.

Even if the general notion of informal social control was popular among the activists, it was also recognised by some that putting it into practice is not straightforward. Those who wish to challenge directly criminal or anti-social behaviour face the risk of retaliation: these are risks that some of the activists said they were prepared to face, while others seemed less sure.

There was some kids making a noise there a few years ago and I went in and spoke to them, and my neighbour came over to see what was happening - and they leapt on him and beat him up while I was there. And that was pretty unnerving and that slowed me down a little bit in terms of speaking to people, but generally I've found them to be fairly responsive.

I'm not frightened to stand up to bullies.

If you stand up for yourself, you are well put in your place.

Now, if you were rowing with somebody, you've got to watch that their kids or grandkids don't attack you - and it's not worth it anymore.

The very concept of informal social control carries tensions within it. It depends on shared values: but whose values are they? We have already seen that some of our respondents argued that commonalities and a sense of community can and should emerge out of difference, but many also recognised that common ground can be hard to find across divides of age, class, culture, ethnicity or nationality. Some of the activists – while broadly supporting the ideal of informal social control - voiced their concerns that a tight-knit community that seeks to foster a certain set of shared values may, by the same token, be an intolerant and exclusionary community. It was suggested also that this intolerance can quite easily shade into vigilantism.

I think unfortunately, when we did community meetings you still get incredibly strong, highly prejudiced views - they feel because you are holding a meeting

about something that you are going to support their views and actually you have to say, 'That is one view, it might only be yours and we are trying to get a general overview here of what people think.'

You go too far into the informal way and everyone is a vigilante - walking around, machete-ing people for picking a flower or whatever it might be ... About litter, rubbish, these [drug] dealers - even people who are behaving anti-socially, whatever that might be - they are still part of the community aren't they? We are all here and I think if you ostracise someone from the community then they've got no stake in it so they are going to get even worse in their behaviour.

Vigilantism is always a fear, and people with intolerant attitudes ... We all have very different views of what's acceptable and I think the difficulty is that we are such a diverse community, there is never a collective view. We are not similar really - that would be the concern, that sort of vigilantism or bullying or picking on particular groups, encouraging segregation.

I'm not bothered by some forms of anti-social behaviour personally. I would be wary of a group or mob mentality.

A respondent in one of the study neighbourhoods described an incident in which local people – angered by what they perceived to be inaction on the part of the police – confronted an individual believed to be a paedophile.<sup>41</sup> In another of the neighbourhoods, a respondent spoke of the determination of local young men to protect their community (in this case, a minority ethnic and religious community) during the riots of August 2011. Both episodes were recounted by the respective respondents as positive examples of community action against crime, but clearly demonstrate that informal community justice carries the potential for conflict and violence.

### **Two episodes recounted**

#### **Community action against a local shopkeeper identified as a paedophile**

I asked our then police community support officer to look into [reports that a local shopkeeper was a convicted paedophile]; and three and a half weeks later when the next meeting came round, the inspector came and he didn't know anything about it – nothing had been done. People are probably aware of what

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<sup>41</sup> We had little information about the exact circumstances of this incident; however, we were informed by another respondent that it had been definitely established the man in question had at least one conviction for offences against children.

happened after, cause there was one hell of a riot out here. And that was the only way I felt I was going to get anything done. My children didn't go to the shop where this man worked. But other children round here did ... The rumours were justified, and the gentleman – or the man, I should say – was put out of [the area]. ... Put it this way – for one banner, at the bottom of the road there, there was one hell of a riot.

### **Protecting the community against the rioters**

So we raised ourselves to protect the [place] at that time as well. Obviously we was liaising with the police at that time as well – so just in case something happens we don't take the law in our hands. But I did have a word with the Chief Superintendent at the time we did this, and if we don't have any officers here on time, and something happens, then you can't blame us if we get involved in a fight or whatever happens ... Thank God nothing happened, noting serious happened, though there was a scuffle at the other end of the road, but nobody came this way. But we had about 20, 25 young guys, up here ... We stayed here for 2 to 4 days, something like that.

### *The desire for responsive policing*

When asked about the role of the community in tackling local problems of crime and disorder, some of the activists spoke not so much about community involvement in local services, or informal mechanisms of social control, but about the responsibility of the community to provide information to the police. This is, of course, a more traditional conception of the relationship between the police and the policed, whereby the more compliant elements of the latter actively help the former, but do not see themselves as partners in the policing endeavour.

The police don't actually protect most crime - it has to be reported by the community: the community has to see the crime, witness crime and identify the people concerned and so on; they are very much the first part of dealing with crime.

What we we've been trying to do round our area is when they see anything happening phone it in to the police, and the biggest problem is getting people to do that: they will come and tell us for us to phone in but they are not phoning in themselves.

I know at meetings when we've been having trouble at the allotments I have to reinforce to people: 'Ring the police; this is a crime.' When we were having a lot of drug use in the park I had to say 'Somebody is using drugs - you are allowed

to ring 999; it's a crime and the police want to know.'

What many wanted from the police was not that they should 'engage' with the community over local concerns and priorities, but that they should be present and visible and, above all, respond when called in an emergency. There were quite frequent complaints that the local police did not meet these expectations of them, and that the community suffered as a result.

I think it's really important for people's quality of life that they feel there's good communication with the police, and that the police are there when they need them.

One of the neighbourhood watches, on P-'s road, the reason they packed up, was that when they had a problem the police never turned up. They turned up the next day. And they said hang on a second, we were told we would get all this support.

Free and willing we've put our necks on the block so many times, we've named names many times ... so I feel very, very frustrated ... you've given it all and they are doing sweet FA with it.

P: But when you pick up the phone, no one wants to know. This is our argument. Nothing's – solid.

*Researcher: What you really want is a good response from the police?*

P: That's **all** we want.

## **5: Discussion and policy implications**

Both the current Coalition and preceding Labour government have placed a strong emphasis on volunteering and civic participation. An array of policy initiatives have sought to encourage people to 'engage' with others within their local communities and, particularly, with the public services provided to the communities. David Cameron's vision of the Big Society, which evolved into a flagship policy of Conservative/Liberal Democrat administration, called for 'a huge culture change' whereby 'people feel both free and powerful enough to help themselves and their own communities' (Cameron, 2010); while the government's localism agenda has also emphasised the importance of empowering local communities to take ever more control over the way they are run and the services provided to them. Governmental aspirations for community engagement have extended to the realm of criminal justice, whereby the expectation is that local communities play a part in tackling the problems of crime and disorder that affect them. This report has considered the extent to which these aspirations are reflected in the wishes and expectations of the general public – including both those who are and those who are not actively involved in their communities.

### **Limitations of community engagement and community justice**

National research has found that substantial minorities of people in England and Wales engage in civic action of various kinds and/or formal volunteering. National surveys typically find that around one-quarter of the population report undertaking some form of formal voluntary activity – which may or may not have a local community dimension – on at least a monthly basis (DCLG, 2011b; Cabinet Office, 2013b). The research identifies a 'civic core', comprising those individuals who undertake the bulk of volunteering and civic participation, and are disproportionately female, middle-aged, and relatively well educated. Across the four neighbourhoods in which we carried out fieldwork for this study, we were in contact with a large number of community activists who can certainly be described as members of the civic core. Many had very extensive and long-standing involvement in community activities of a wide range of kinds, and spoke of being motivated by a sense of duty and a wish to improve their local area and the lives of its residents.

Much as government would like it, there would seem to be little immediate prospect of extending active participation well beyond the civic core. Our activist respondents stressed the great difficulty of getting more of their neighbours involved in community action – blaming

apathy, time and financial constraints, general reticence, and community divisions. Fear of intimidation or retaliation, where community action takes the form of involvement in criminal justice, was said to be another very significant barrier. The statistics on engagement indicate that the proportion of active citizens has remained broadly consistent over the past decade.

The current economic and political climate may, moreover, present particular problems for efforts to increase levels of community engagement. Deficit reduction was from the outset part of the very rationale for the Coalition government's Big Society programme: 'Spending cuts on the scale and at the speed announced by government would not be possible without a strategy for shifting responsibility away from the state – to individuals, small groups, charities, philanthropists, local enterprise and big business' (Coote, 2010: 6). But while austerity may seem to make the civic and community participation a necessity, it simultaneously undermines it. Not only is economic hardship likely to deter individuals from committing their time for free to community activities, but – as was clear from responses of the participants in the youth crime focus groups – the association of Big Society and related policies with spending cuts is likely to breed suspicion and cynicism. And all the more so in a context in which, more broadly, levels of political participation are low and falling. As observed by Rowan Williams, at the end of his tenure as Archbishop of Canterbury, "Big Society" rhetoric is all too readily heard by many as aspirational waffle designed to conceal a deeply damaging withdrawal of the state from its responsibilities to the most vulnerable' (Williams, 2011). This cynicism appears to have helped persuade the government, since 2012, to retreat from the terminology – if not many of the ideals – of the Big Society.

But the limitations of community engagement policies (whether given the Big Society label or not) do not only stem from the reluctance of communities to engage. Arguably, there is a logical flaw in the very notion of community engagement – at least, to the extent that it concerns active participation in public services. Chanan and Miller have described several misconceptions associated with the idea of the Big Society, of which one – 'the empowerment misconception' - is particularly relevant to us here. They write:

Government is promising through the Big Society theme to 'give power to people and communities'. This generous offer overlooks the fact that government only has power in the first place because people have invested power in government itself to do things which people want done collectively. The things we want done collectively are mostly those that need to be done *systematically and fairly across society*. These are the things that cannot be done by spasmodic citizen action. What people and communities do for themselves, vital though it is, is not systematic. We have

delegated that power to central authority, and hold them accountable to use it well (2011: 32).

Similarly, Power points to the interconnectedness of ‘the complementary functions of state and civil society’ which means that while ‘widespread citizen participation’ is required to tackle many social, political, environmental and economic problems, ‘the state has a key role in amassing and redistributing both resources and power on behalf of all citizens’ (2012: 58-9).

If this applies to public services in general, it surely applies most of all to criminal justice services. Criminal justice provision – particularly provision by the police, the prosecution services and the courts – by definition entails managing and resolving conflict between individuals and sectors within society; and the authorities have the means and legal right to exercise coercive power in undertaking this necessarily contested work.<sup>42</sup> In a modern democratic and pluralistic society, ‘the community’ – however defined – cannot have the responsibility for dealing with its own conflicts through the use of coercive power. Of course, no official policies on community justice urge local communities to take it upon themselves to carry out front-line policing or to prosecute criminals in the courts: the role and remit of the community in criminal justice services are always much more modestly defined. But it remains a fundamental flaw in many notions of community justice that the essential limitations of community involvement are simply not recognised. In a general discussion of ‘what is Big Society?’, Szreter and Ishkanian consider the claims of the Big Society programme that ‘a “broken society” now needs to be regenerated by voluntary participation and leadership in ... fractured communities’. They warn that, ‘Proposing that this should be done while ignoring local government makes little sense; proposing that it be done in place of elected and accountable local government begins to look like some form of vigilante action’ (2012: 6).

These essential limitations of community justice were implicitly recognised by the community activists with whom we spoke for this study; and some explicitly referred to the risk of

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<sup>42</sup> Bacon and James make a similar point in contrasting the scope for neighbourhood involvement in different kinds of local services, and consider the implications for tackling anti-social behaviour: Agencies that tackle ‘public space’ issues have significant potential to devolve influence to the local level and even delegate the running of some services to neighbourhood bodies. However when it comes to dealing with the chaotic circumstances of many families and individuals involved in anti-social behaviour, community involvement can be counter-productive. There are risks that confidential information could be disclosed or that vulnerable people’s best interests are not respected. At worst it can lead to scapegoating and reprisals (2006: 25).

vigilantism. For the most part, they did not desire active participation in criminal justice services, but what they did want was a local police force who were present, visible, and would respond rapidly when a crisis arose. And if the activists revealed a limited appetite for active involvement in justice provision, surely the general public will respond to opportunities for involvement with even less enthusiasm. Certainly, this is suggested by the 'leave it to the experts' response of many of the youth crime focus group participants when they were asked about the scope of community engagement in youth justice. National survey findings indicate relatively high levels of general interest in criminal justice; but the extent to which this translates into action is limited. It is worth remembering the results of the survey which found just 13% support for the view 'I would like to have more of a say in what the police does, and the services they provide' compared to 53% for the view 'I like to know what the police are doing, but I'm happy to let them get on with their job' and 26% for 'I'm not interested in what the police do, or whether they do their job' (Ipsos-MORI, 2010b). The extremely low turn-out at the first Police and Crime Commissioner elections in November 2012 also points to a lack of active interest in 'holding to account' local providers of criminal justice services.

But does all this mean that community justice is an entirely doomed venture, and that the government should abandon all efforts to put it into practice? In fact, this is not what we would argue; and there are two main reasons for this.

First, it is not enough to state that the people want an active, visible and responsive local police force, and to leave the discussion of community justice at that. In a world of limited (and declining) public resources, the police will never be present, visible and responsive enough to satisfy everyone. Moreover, noting again that the policing function is necessarily contested, there will always be disagreement among the public about *what* should be responded to, and *how*. Thus if any progress is to be made towards a goal of establishing active, visible and responsive policing and accompanying criminal justice services, there must be an element of negotiation with local people about what is being provided – even if this does not imply an active 'design' or 'delivery' role for the public as envisaged in much of the policy on community engagement. The more this process of negotiation can encompass the doubtless discordant voices of those who are *not* as well as those who are part of the civic core – which essentially means making the most of all available channels for both formal and informal communication between service providers and local people – the more it can be said to permit a genuine 'community' input into criminal justice services.

Secondly, we would argue that the concept of community justice is important because much of the general public – activists and non-activists alike - remain deeply attached to the ideal of ‘community’.

### **Attachment to ‘community’**

Our community activist respondents told us about the personal strength and satisfaction they derive from being part of their local communities, albeit they often perceived these communities to be changing and sometimes declining in strength. The members of the general public who participated in the youth crime focus groups, on the other hand, were more inclined to speak of a sense of community as something that had existed in the past, and which they now greatly missed. But what both groups had in common was a belief that a sense of community acts as a vital bulwark against local crime and anti-social behaviour: a belief, in other words, in the capacity of communities to exercise informal social control. They also seemed to share a yearning for a return to the neighbourliness and social solidarity of the (variously defined) past, on which a sense of community was said to be based. The difference was that the yearning of the activists appeared to be at least partially fulfilled, whereas the non-activists tended towards scepticism that it could ever be fulfilled.

Interestingly, survey data indicate that most people have positive feelings towards their neighbourhoods: for example, the *Community Life* and *Citizenship* surveys have found that large (and gradually increasing) majorities of the population report that their local community is cohesive, that they belong to their neighbourhood, and are satisfied with their area as a place to live. This suggests that the activists’ general optimism about the persistence or revival of community may not be misplaced; although, on the other hand, the survey figures indicate also that a sense of belonging tends to be considerably lower in deprived areas compared to elsewhere.

We have seen, in Chapter 2 of this report, that government aspirations for community justice include the policy goal of supporting the development of communities and their capacity to exercise informal social control. What we have found over the course of this study, therefore, is that this policy goal would seem to have resonance for the general public – and is, on these grounds, a more feasible approach to community justice than most others supported by government.

The argument in favour of community-building policies, from a community justice perspective, must however be tempered by a recognition of the inherent tensions within this

task. While government funding and infrastructure support for grass-roots groups and activities can help to nurture communities, few would claim that a sense of community can be socially engineered from above. Noting that government attempts to ‘create or control community activity ... would be a contradiction in terms’, Chanan and Miller argue that the job of government is ‘to create the right conditions for people to strengthen themselves as communities’ (2011: 34).

But even conceived in these more limited terms, this task is fraught with difficulty. As commentators within what can be broadly described as the ‘community development movement’ have observed, the very rationale for community development has often been opposition to government and the public authorities – and a major strength of informal and semi-formal voluntary action has been its capacity ‘to operate independently from the state, and to maintain a radical ethos’ (Buckingham, 2012). Hence government efforts at community-building run the risk of undermining the very processes they are seeking to support - and incurring active resistance from those currently engaged in community development.<sup>43</sup>

There is another tension within public policy on community development, particularly as it relates to community justice. The aim of helping communities to be partially self-policing through informal mechanisms of social control brings to the fore what Roberts refers to as the ‘inherent conflict between the drive for civil renewal (which is based on cohesion, inclusivity and trust), and community safety (which is founded on the generation of suspicion, and is essentially exclusionary)’ (2006). Indeed, some of our activist respondents were concerned that ‘community spirit’ and associated social pressures to conform can give rise to intolerance and divisiveness within the community. These are issues seemingly overlooked by many policy appeals to ‘community’ – such as those that call on ‘decent communities’ or ‘the law-abiding majority’ to stand up to crime and anti-social behaviour. Such appeals fail to recognise that definitions of what is and is not ‘decent’ (and, for that matter, what is and is not anti-social) may vary from person to person and from group to group; and that within any community it is not possible to draw a clear line between the ‘law-abiding’ and the lawless.

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<sup>43</sup> For example, a speaker at the launch conference of the ‘Campaign for Community Development’, in March 2011, observed that ‘During the past ten years the government appropriated the language of Community Development to promote top down, value free, tick box approaches reflected in many community engagement and community empowerment programmes’ (Marks, 2011).

Our research found that some community activists regard diversity (of some or all kinds) as a threat to the emergence or survival of community, while others are of the view that a sense of community can and should emerge out of difference. At the outset of this report, we defined community justice with reference to the *mutual trust and collective self-interest* that makes it possible for local communities to play an active part in tackling crime and disorder. Perhaps, then, the greatest challenge in putting community justice into practice is the building and nurturing of mutual trust and a sense of collective self-interest that are narrow enough to be meaningful but broad enough to embrace difference. As with community-building more generally, this is not something that government can impose from the top down; but it is something that government should be able to support. This may mean reconfiguring the very idea of the Big Society and related notions of community engagement in the manner advocated in a report published by the Royal Society of Arts entitled *Beyond the Big Society*:

The idea of the Big Society is at its weakest when it is presented as a partisan technical solution to acute socio-economic problems, and at its strongest when viewed as a non-partisan long term adaptive challenge to enrich our social and human capital. From this perspective, the Big Society should be viewed as a process of long-term cultural change, driven by social participation for social productivity and social solidarity. The big idea in the Big Society that has cross-party agreement and public support, is the need to make more of our 'hidden wealth' - the human relationships that drive and sustain the forms of participation needed to make society more productive and at ease with itself (Rowson et al, 2012: 7).

## **Recommendations for supporting community justice**

Our main conclusion is that community justice is a worthwhile goal for government, if this is conceived as a matter of helping to nurture community spirit and informal social control, rather than promoting communities' active engagement with criminal justice services. The recommendations below set out what this means, in practical terms, for policy-makers and commissioners at national and local levels.

- 1. Support community justice by supporting communities: make generic community activities, rather than explicit criminal justice-related activities, the primary focus of community justice provision and funding.**

- Support small, grass-roots community organisations through the provision of grant funding, infrastructure support and practical guidance.
- Support community-based events – both ad hoc and regular, and including small-scale events – that can serve as a focus for social interaction.
- Ensure, in the provision of support, that small, grass-roots community organisations are not disadvantaged by a lack of expertise relative to larger-scale, more professional voluntary organisations – for example, by minimising the bureaucracy associated with funding applications.
- Utilise existing voluntary and community organisation networks for dissemination of advice and guidance to community organisations, including funding advice.

**2. Recognise that any ‘local community’ comprises numerous cross-cutting and intersecting interest groups, between which there will be areas of both agreement and disagreement about local needs.**

- Ensure that the provision of support for community groups encompasses a wide spectrum of organisations and events.
- Support organisations and events that can help to strengthen links between sub-groups of the local population; these might include, for example, groups running activities for children and young people, and environmental projects encouraging local involvement in gardening, conservation or street art.

**3. Recognise that within a local population there will be divergent views on crime and disorder, as on all other aspects of local life**

- Don’t expect the priorities of the police and the priorities of members of the public ever to be fully aligned, but rather seek to narrow the gaps between public expectations and police responses.
- Welcome and respect the views on local crime and policing expressed by the most actively engaged local people, but don’t assume that these views reflect those of the wider population.
- Open as many as possible channels of informal communication and negotiation between community justice services - particularly the police – and the local population; these might include street surgeries and ad hoc police visits to community organisations and events.

- Remember that an area's 'bad reputation' for crime may not be shared by many people living within the area, and an eagerness to challenge the reputation may in itself stimulate community feeling and action.
- Be alert to the risk that public perceptions of police inaction, combined with strong feelings of solidarity within certain sectors of a local population, can lead to suspicion, intolerance and vigilantism.

**4. Remember that the large majority of the public want to be effectively policed, but do not want to be engaged in an active partnership with the police or other criminal justice services.**

- Don't expect formal engagement with criminal justice services to extend beyond the civic core.
- Be aware that a combination of many factors - including lack of interest, lack of time, fear of retaliation, lack of commitment to the area – may limit local interest in engagement with criminal justice services.
- Don't waste scarce resources on trying to extend traditional community engagement and consultative events that routinely attract little interest or participation.

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