

Repercussions of the Coalition Governments Austerity Policy on Community Safety across Merseyside

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Abstract

This article explains the depth and breadth of financial cuts endured by community safety organizations across Merseyside. The article provides a robust explanation of how cuts to funding impacted on the delivery of public safety priorities under the coalition government (2010–15). This study implemented a mixed-methods approach which entailed in-depth consultations with the major community safety stakeholders within the region. Results reveal that over the course of the immediate past parliament, Merseyside Local Authorities within the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) and the police force area had to restructure staffing and service provision extensively in order to deliver efficiency savings of over £650 m. Budget cuts have had severe repercussions not just in terms of stakeholder's capability to provide key services but also for the morale of their staff. We project a further 33% cutback in funding over the course of the current parliament though subsequent more favourable Government announcements suggest a more modest figure of up to 15%. This undoubtedly will result in the further streamlining of public services with potentially serious ramifications for levels of public safety.

Issue Section: Original Article

Introduction

Numerous studies have shown that urban delinquency and its determinants are closely linked to the demographic, social, and economic contexts in which victims and perpetrators find themselves (Shaw and McKay, 1942; Kelly, 2000; Bottoms, 2007). Britain's contemporary community safety agenda has been shaped by critical constructs linked to socio-demographics and economics of communities (Squires, 1999). Some of these policy drivers include issues like poverty, social exclusion, income inequality, unemployment and social mobility, educational attainment, age distribution, gender dynamics, and urbanization (Webster and Kingston, 2014). There is no gainsaying that the changing face of the country's social, demographic, and economic landscape has had direct and indirect knock-on effects on community safety (Whitworth, 2012).

It is difficult to separate the historical antecedents of Merseyside from its contemporary social and economic challenges. Over a period of at least 200 years, Merseyside (and Liverpool, in particular) has experienced the extremes of opulence and acute need. During this period, the economic prosperity of the region was largely undergirded by the emergence of a globally renowned port

which enabled flourishing international trade. Merchandise like salt, slaves, and raw materials thrived during the 18th and 19th centuries (Wilks-Heeg, 2003).

Societal prosperity is usually a magnet for people (Nallari and Griffith, 2011). Therefore, as a result of a thriving economy, Merseyside and Liverpool, in particular, attracted people from all over the world. The population of the region peaked during the 1930s (Sykes et al., 2013).

However, following a lengthy period of economic boom, the good fortunes of Merseyside plummeted rapidly due in part to heavy and sustained bombing experienced during the Second World War, unfavourable economic restructuring and key planning decisions (Sykes et al., 2013). Connections between the economic decline of Merseyside and levels of crime or delinquency have an ambiguous and sometimes a counter-intuitive relationship (Altuna and Suárez, 2013; Webster and Kingston, 2014;).

Following the emergence of the coalition government in 2010, funding for public services plummeted across the UK (HM Treasury, 2010; HMIC, 2011; HMIC, 2012; HMIC, 2013; Millie, 2014; Hastings et al., 2015). Reduction in funding is directly linked to the government's plan to reduce the national deficit. Not only has funding reduced across the board, the nature of funding has changed markedly thereby further increasing uncertainty.

With the challenge of having to achieve efficiencies of over £650 m over the period 2010–16 and the prospect of further cuts to come within the next few years, the Merseyside Local Authorities within the Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA), and the police force area are experiencing monumental change. The crucial role of the community safety workforce in maintaining service levels for the 1.4 m residents of the five metropolitan areas of Merseyside¹ cannot be overemphasized. They combine the delivery of statutory and non-statutory services with the targeting of resources where they are most needed. Ensuring that community safety stakeholders across Merseyside remain financially sustainable is becoming increasingly difficult in a climate of deeper funding cuts (HMIC, 2013).

The remainder of this article considers wide-ranging implications of the austerity policy on Merseyside's community safety sector. The discussion is based on field work conducted in 2015 involving the major Merseyside Community Safety Partners (MCSP). The partners include: Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC), Merseyside; Merseyside Police; Knowsley Community Safety Partnership; Liverpool Community Safety Partnership; Sefton Community Safety Partnership; St. Helens Community Safety Partnership; Wirral Community Safety Partnership; Her Majesty's Prison Service; Merseyside Fire and Rescue Service (MFRS); Merseyside Community Rehabilitation Company; Merseyside's Registered Social Landlords (RSLs); and Travelsafe. In addition to the Community Safety Partners (CSPs), the study also outlines how the cuts have affected the five Youth Offending Services across Merseyside and the National Probation Service.

Isolating the impact of funding cuts: challenges and considerations

While it is relatively straightforward to measure the extent of funding cuts, gauging their impact is much more difficult for a number of reasons. As in many areas of public policy it is difficult to separate the impact of funding cuts on community safety from a host of other factors such as societal trends, performance of service providers and so on. This policy sphere is a crowded arena as there are many agencies involved whose policies and programmes interact in a multitude of ways (Millie and Bullock, 2012). Consequently, cuts have complex knock-on (indirect) effects in related service areas which are difficult to define, fully capture, and measure accurately. This can lead to 'cost shunting' where the burden of responsibility shifts from one agency to another, placing yet more pressure on restricted budgets (Ferry and Eckersley, 2011; House of Commons Public Accounts Committee, 2015). Disentangling the effects of individual community safety, crime prevention, and diversionary measures is also challenging, especially if they are running concurrently. Furthermore, it is difficult to demonstrate the effectiveness of different kinds of preventative measures because the lack of 'policy off' control areas makes it hard to establish what would have happened in their absence. The benefits of preventive measures may also take time to materialize (Ross et al., 2011). Similarly, there are time lags before changes in funding register an effect. Conceivably, current public perceptions of public safety may partly be a legacy of initiatives introduced in the relatively benign pre-2010 funding environment.

Finally, there is a dearth of intelligence on the impact of funding cuts, especially at grassroots level given the lack of formal monitoring and evaluation. In many agencies this problem has been compounded because cuts have resulted in the cessation of perception surveys and closure or downsizing of intelligence units. Also, assembling a comprehensive picture of changing community safety funding proved very difficult because it covers a number of different organizations and budget heads and data obtained varied in its level of detail and composition.

Attempts to gauge the impact of services on community safety and incidence of crime must also take into account that the current context is very different to what it was in 2010. New legislation has been introduced changing agencies' respective roles and responsibilities. Some community safety issues are less of a challenge than they were then, while others are more so as new forms of criminal activity such as cybercrime have emerged (Higgins, 2010).

Methodology

An up-to-date mixed-methodological analysis of the scale and distribution of funding cuts was achieved largely through direct consultation and validation with the key MCSP stakeholders. A deep synthesis of policy and academic literature relating to post-2010 austerity in the Merseyside region was conducted. A repeatable evidence-based approach was adapted to search and manage the literature in order to assure objectivity. This background evidence gathering was extended to the partnership-working configuration of Merseyside's community safety providers. Furthermore, the analytical synthesis was supplemented by triangulating contemporary demographics, socio-

economics, delinquency, and deprivation data for the region with community safety funding thresholds during the study period.

To evaluate the impacts of austerity from a strategic and frontline perspective, we drew on primary data from interviews and direct discussions with 12 core stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in the primary data consultation exercise include The OPCC, Merseyside; Merseyside Police; Knowsley Community Safety Partnership; Liverpool Community Safety Partnership; Sefton Community Safety Partnership; St. Helens Community Safety Partnership; Wirral Community Safety Partnership; Her Majesty's Prison Service; MFRS; Merseyside Community Rehabilitation Company; Merseyside's RSLs; and Travelsafe. In addition to the primary information, some of the stakeholders were able to provide useful case studies.

Secondary data sets such as the Index of Multiple Deprivation, crime and anti-social behaviour statistics, and historical public finance data sets from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting were also incorporated into the analysis to provide context of the impact of funding cuts.

Review of community safety funding trajectory in Merseyside

Prior to 2010 there was ample funding for community safety, crime prevention, and diversionary services within Merseyside. The then Labour Government made it obligatory for public sector organizations to collaborate in the reduction of crime through participation in community safety partnerships and this was reflected in a host of related targets and funding streams (Gilling 2007; Thwaites, 2013). Attainment of targets in some cases triggered further 'reward' funding. This helped promote a holistic, joined-up approach and spawned packages of complementary initiatives ranging from target hardening to diversionary activities and preventative measures (Thwaites, 2013). In addition, special funding (e.g. Neighbourhood Renewal Funds and Area Based Initiatives) could be tapped in order to improve socio-economic conditions in deprived areas which often experienced the highest incidence of crime and anti-social behaviour. Owing to the extent of Merseyside's challenges and past incidents of unrest, public agencies received relatively generous funding settlements and the fact that the city region had its own dedicated Government Office gave it a voice in Whitehall (HMIC, 2013).

The position in 2015 was much different to what it was in 2010. Table 1 shows that most stakeholder bodies have experienced significant spending cutbacks, though their extent significantly varied. Likewise, staffing levels have fallen dramatically by between 15% and 80%. More detailed budgetary information supplied by the Wirral Community Safety team suggests that cuts have fallen unevenly, depending on the type of community safety service provided. While bodies have continued to deliver core, mandatory services, cuts have meant that partners have had to pare back non-statutory services and responses. This is a particular issue for Crime and Disorder Partnerships since a lot of the services they provide are non-statutory—for example, Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences (MARACs). All stakeholder organizations have had to carefully consider the business case for different lines of expenditure and prioritize accordingly and target resources on addressing

the most salient issues and problems. Generally, agencies have moved away from seeking to provide services on a universal basis and towards adopting a risk-based approach. They are also designing briefer intervention models (e.g. with domestic violence victims) which make the most of limited resources.

Table 1:

Impact of austerity on community safety organizations

Agency Change in funding 2010–15 (%) Change in staffing levels (%) 2010–15 (%)

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|----------------|
| Merseyside Police | -15 | -20 |
| Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service | -12 | -31 |
| Public Health, Liverpool | n/a | n/a |
| Liverpool Youth Offending Service | -48 | -62 |
| Liverpool Council (Safer Communities) | -78 | -90 (estimate) |
| Wirral Council (Safer Communities) | -0.6 | -50 |
| St Helens Council (Safer Communities) | -26 | -66 (estimate) |
| Sefton Council (Safer Communities) | -70 (estimate) | -70 (estimate) |
| Knowsley Council (Safer Communities) | -80 (estimate) | -80 (estimate) |
| Riverside Housing - RSLs | -25 (estimate) | N/A |

Source: Survey of community safety organizations.

Note: CSP figures considerably differ because some included cuts in the number of neighbourhood wardens as well as core staff and also because they were in some cases ball park estimates.

On a more positive note, acute funding pressures have underlined the need for community safety organizations to maintain a partnership philosophy and work together even more closely in order to dovetail approaches, avoid duplication, and make the most of limited resources available.

Government legislation, principally the Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014, has urged organizations to place vulnerable people and communities at the heart of everything they do (Strickland et al., 2013). This has prompted an intelligence-led approach in the case of MFRS in which they look to intervene much earlier to prevent escalation and reduce demand on other services.

Implications of austerity on service provision

Most stakeholders found it very hard to separate out their activities into the three main areas of concern to this study: community safety, crime prevention, and diversionary services. We, therefore,

report the impact of austerity primarily on the main service providers before concluding with a brief illustrative look at the indirect effects of cuts.

Merseyside police

In 2010, Merseyside police played a prominent part in multi-agency Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (later Community Safety Partnerships) within each Merseyside district—indeed many were chaired or deputy chaired by the relevant District Commander. The lion’s share of resources was invested in crime prevention initiatives focused around target hardening such as alley-gating, smartwater, and security lighting (Mills et al., 2010). However, significant resources were injected into diversionary services such as youth engagement programmes, in the hope those would lead to reductions in burglary, robbery, car crime, and anti-social behaviour and also domestic violence (Cox, 2010; Yates, 2012).

The Police’s budget has fallen by nearly 15% in the 2010–15 period and staffing levels have fallen by around 20% during that time as indicated in Table 2. The reduction in the number of Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) during that time has been of similar magnitude. In total the Force has lost about £81 m in funding compared with what it would have received had 2010 levels of spending continued. This has impinged on all of its services but especially neighbourhood resources and policing which have been cut by 40%. Rationalization has resulted in the closure of 22 general enquiry offices and 2 custody suites. The cuts have prompted the police to streamline performance management arrangements and focus attention on delivering core priorities of reducing crime and anti-social behaviour, maintaining public safety, and providing neighbourhood policing. Additionally, focus has shifted to the most serious, persistent community safety problems using incidence of crime data rather than responding to temporary upturns and cyclical patterns. Resources allocation is now undertaken on a threat, harm, and risk basis—for example, by deploying PCSOs in more crime-prone areas rather than in affluent areas.

Table 2:

Merseyside police: change in staffing 2010–15

| | 2010 | 2015 | Percentage change 2010–15 | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------------|---------------------------|--|
| Police officers | 4,562 | 3,706 | -18.8 | |
| Staff | 2,287 | 1,769 | -22.6 | |
| Community support officers | 466 | 361 | -22.5 | |
| Total | 7,315 | 5,836 | -20.2 | |
| Specials | 547 (December, 2011) | 352 (December, 2015) | -35.6 | |

Source:HMIC, 2014.

OPCC for Merseyside

Since the OPCC was established in late 2012/early 2013, it has cut its annual costs dramatically from £2.4 m to £1.3 m and by restructuring it has reduced its staff complement from 29 to 20 people. This has resulted in savings of about £2.5 m over the period 2013–15. The Office has sought to maximize available resources by conducting research to determine how best to target funding (e.g. commissioning victim services) and bringing local authorities, voluntary bodies, and other partners together to deliver some services on a consistent pan-Merseyside basis thereby freeing up resources for other purposes, notably in the areas of domestic violence advocacy, rape, and sexual assault referral and third-party reporting of hate crime.

Local authorities

Austerity has had a harsh impact upon the five district authorities and their respective Community Safety Partnerships. They utilize a cocktail of funding for community safety purposes and without exception all their funding streams have been cut back dramatically. Local authorities receive more modest amounts of Community Safety Funding from the Police and Crime Commissioner for crime reduction and community safety initiatives. Such funding has fallen by about 10% overall in the 2010–15 period to around £2.87 m. In the past, local authorities have largely been granted discretion to spend their Community Safety Fund (CSF) allocations as they see fit given local needs. For example, some spend more on initiatives, others more on staffing. Cuts have, therefore, impacted CSF-funded activities in varying ways in the different district authorities. The Commissioner has drawn upon reserves in order to maintain CSF support at broadly the same level—otherwise the cuts would have been worse still. However, cuts in other kinds of funding have impacted upon local authorities and their Community Safety Partnerships.

Viewed collectively the cuts have impacted more on some activities than others because of the combined effect of cuts in different grant sources and other pressures on income. There has been a dramatic cut in the number of partnership posts and secondments by the main community safety organizations as their budgets have come under pressure and they have found it difficult to maintain non-core services. Anti-social behaviour teams have been disbanded, scaled back, or subsumed within other departments—cutbacks have been especially marked in Merseyside Police, for example. Councils have had to become more selective with legal interventions, though this is also due to new legislation concerning anti-social behaviour which has meant that enforcement leads to civil actions where the onus is placed on the party bringing the case to enforce it. Intelligence units which used to organize community safety surveys, for example, have been disbanded or significantly cut which has meant that agencies have had to rely more on soft intelligence. Furthermore, resources for target hardening such as alley-gating and CCTV are much less now than in 2010 whilst youth diversionary projects have been markedly scaled back because of cuts in CSF and also cuts to Youth Offending Teams.

MFRS

Introduction of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in 1998 encouraged MFRS to work with others in taking a holistic view of community safety and as a result of the 2004 Fire and Rescue Services Act, community safety and fire prevention became a central part of the Fire and Rescue service's modus operandi. This encouraged a lot of innovation and thinking outside the box, such as working with prison offenders to reduce the future likelihood of anti-social behaviour, promoting safe cooking, hosting obesity clinics at fire stations, youth engagement work, and appointing school fire liaison officers to raise young people's awareness of fire hazards in the home. MFRS activities in recent years have been organized around its four strategic aims: operational preparedness, operational response, prevention and protection, and developing and valuing its staff (MFRS, 2011).

Since 80% of MFRS's budget comprises staff costs, reductions in government grant (typically around 60% of its budget) of about 35% in the period 2010–15 have inevitably led to staff losses. However, the service has worked hard to minimize these through efficiency savings to just over 30%. The number of frontline fire appliances like response vehicles has also fallen by a similar degree (33%).

Although MFRS remains committed to preventative measures, emphasis on protecting frontline services has meant that cuts have impacted more on support services. By maintaining 10 key fire stations which can reach anywhere in the county in 10 minutes, the service has ensured that response times of first on the scene emergency vehicles remain good—the average is a respectable 5.2 minutes. However, the reduced number of vehicles and pumps has meant that the response time of the second engines is now over 8 minutes, 2 minutes slower than it was in 2010. Cuts have led to a significant reduction in diversionary services. Whereas MFRS delivered about 100,000 home safety checks (its flagship community engagement programme) each year before 2010, now the figure is about 40,000. These are targeted at the most vulnerable and those in greatest risk. Mentoring of young people on issues of anti-social behaviour and home safety was originally delivered by 20 school fire liaison officers but since only 2 remain this work is now on a much smaller scale.

Social housing

RSLs are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour because it adds to maintenance costs, problems with voids and reduces the popularity of their properties (DCLG, 2010). Direct measures range from injunctions, anti-social behaviour and criminal anti-social behaviour orders to eviction orders though the latter are only used as a last resort. RSLs also work with a variety of partners in supporting a wide range of youth development and diversionary activities, cultural integration, elderly, victim support, and community engagement projects (Pearson et al., 2008). The collective spending of RSLs on anti-social behaviour initiatives has fallen by about approximately £250k a year or £1.25 m over the 2010–15 period. RSLs remain committed to anti-social behaviour initiatives even in a harsh spending climate for commercial reasons but they have had to resort to rigorously testing the business case for each project. Cuts in resources sustained by the police, fire service and local authorities effectively meant that resources have had to be spread over a wider range of activities resulting in an effective 25% cut in resources. RSLs have tried to offset the impact of cuts by

thoroughly vetting prospective tenants, allocating properties carefully and tackling problems more intelligently through improved data sharing and joint working with partners.

Public health

The impact of austerity on public health in the period 2010–15 is difficult to gauge. The main development in this sphere has been the 2012 Health and Social Care Act which resulted in the transfer of responsibility for public health matters from the NHS to local authorities (DH, 2012; LGA, 2014). While cuts of around £2.8 m are only currently taking effect, there is great concern that responsibility for a range of services with a community safety angle to them such as alcohol services and rehabilitation services for substance misusers, domestic violence, preventative services, and health visiting is being transferred without sufficient funding.

Also, there appears to be no funding to cater for the increase in the incidence of certain problems such as domestic violence. There is talk of the need for more preventative action to avoid the need for NHS treatment but it remains unclear how such services are to be funded.

Youth offending service

The Youth Offending Services in Merseyside provide an indication of how austerity is impacting on preventive work within schools and amongst young people. Grants from both central government via the Youth Justice Board and the local authorities have been cut significantly, resulting in a major scaling back in the size of the service. The service has been faced with the twin pressures of coping with the cuts and dealing with a much more complex and entrenched cohort of young people who offend. On the other hand, the merger of the Youth Offending Service and the Youth Service within the district authorities has resulted in new ways of working and a more integrated service for young people.

It is worth noting that the above analysis under-represents the overall impact of austerity because we have not investigated the impact of spending cuts on community and voluntary sector organizations which are active in the community safety sphere and a support to other community safety sector organizations. Central and local government grants to such organizations have been cut back in many cases during that time. This is having particularly serious implications where the incidence of specific types of crime is on the increase such as domestic violence (McRobie, 2013).

Indirect impacts of austerity

Organizations have not just had to cope with cuts to their own budgets. They have also had to deal with the consequences of cuts in other bodies. While it is beyond the scope of this article to identify

every type of indirect impact, we provide examples of how cuts in a series of Liverpool City Council departments have had knock-on effects upon their partner bodies and wider community safety implications. The city council's ASB Unit which once comprised a large team with legal staff and police officers now has just four officers, dramatically limiting its scope. There is also a loss of City Watch wardens and environmental enforcement staff. City Centre goldzone policing funded by the council has also reduced scope to nip problems in the bud at the grassroots level. Findings from the study also revealed that there is less community engagement activity—particularly through Neighbourhood Services and a Community Cohesion team. Marketing cuts have meant fewer communication campaigns and less community consultation. Similarly, cuts to Trading Standards have lessened the ability to tackle fraud against vulnerable people and led to a scaling back of alcohol-related initiatives.

Austerity and public confidence in services

Public confidence in the police and emergency services is now only measured at a generalized level in the British Crime Survey. Stakeholders, therefore, conceded that the story on the ground may be rather different from what they perceive it to be. However, there is the general perception amongst MCSPs that public confidence in service providers across Merseyside has not so far been dented by austerity. This is in part a consequence of steady falls in many types of crime over the last decade. Merseyside community safety sector organizations generally believe that relative positive public confidence is a legacy of goodwill generated pre-2010 because of the fruits of partnership working between agencies on community safety issues (Fleming and McLaughlin, 2012).

Public confidence is closely associated with the performance of service providers. Available data suggests that the performance of the emergency services is holding up well and that it has not so far been adversely affected by the cuts in the 2010–15 period. Indeed, in the 2010–14 period, the percentage of Merseyside Police emergency and priority calls on target (under 10 minutes and under an hour, respectively) went up, significantly in the case of the latter, from 77% to 92% (HMIC, 2014). Police victim satisfaction levels remain high and better on Merseyside than in England and Wales as a whole. As already noted, MFRS's first vehicle response times remain good and compare favourably with most services in England and Wales. The police did indicate that some members of the public see attendance at the scene of the crime rather than dealing with it over the telephone as an indication of the seriousness with which they are treating the case. This has proved increasingly difficult to achieve given pressures on budgets.

Research has shown that public confidence in the police is also linked to their visibility—for example, neighbourhood patrols, response to 999 calls, and serious traffic collisions (ONS, 2014). Allocation of police officers and PCSOs to visible roles is better in Merseyside than the average UK in the former case and on a par in the case of the latter, despite a fall in the percentage of about 5% since 2010 (HMIC, 2014). Deployment of specials and prioritization of frontline policing has meant that the proportion of police officers on the frontline on Merseyside has increased slightly from 89% to 91% from 2010–15, despite overall staff cuts.

There is an understanding and acceptance, even sympathy amongst the Merseyside public that most agencies are doing the best they can with increasingly limited resources. This especially applies to those that are well regarded for the services they provide. That said, there have been local complaints, for example, when CCTV cameras have been removed in parts of Knowsley and when youth diversionary and other services have been cut back in Liverpool. Some stakeholders believe that the move to more general rather than specialized support in some areas because of staff cuts might in time damage public confidence.

Austerity and the morale of staff

Austerity has had a largely detrimental effect upon the morale of staff working in the sphere of community safety, crime prevention, and diversionary services. That said, there is a lot of variation within the sector. Some service organizations have had to endure more draconian cuts than others—most local authorities have been particularly badly hit. Some staff have more favourable terms and conditions than others. For example, uniformed police cannot be made compulsorily redundant unlike their non-uniformed counterparts, which has meant that morale amongst the former has tended to hold up much better than in the latter. The way in which funding cuts have impacted on staff working conditions and prospects has also had a crucial bearing on morale. We discovered that organizational culture and the political standpoint of individual employees have also affected staff morale.

Cuts have led to restructuring, mergers, voluntary, or compulsory redundancies, redeployment, changes to working hours, additional responsibilities, and workload. This has in turn affected job satisfaction and caused uncertainty, worry, additional stress, sickness, and loss of expertise.

Reorganization has also resulted in the need to forge new working relationships. While the vast majority of staff remain dedicated to their task, some—particularly those delivering the more vulnerable non-statutory preventative services—are beginning to wonder if they will be able to address effectively the extent of demand and needs of the general population if services are cut any further.

Detailed analysis of feedback from stakeholders based within Public Health Liverpool also revealed that legislative changes have also affected morale within the sector. The transfer of public health responsibilities from the NHS to local authorities (DH, 2012; LGA, 2014) though in many respects logical has affected staff morale. The change has caused disruption and resulted in the loss of staff and expertise through retirement or switching to other careers. There is the perception that the focus has been on getting internal structures right and clarifying division of responsibilities at the expense of service users such as those at risk of substance and alcohol abuse.

On a more positive note, both staff and host organizations are adopting various coping strategies. Year on year cuts have bred such widespread 'austerity fatigue' that many staff are adopting a

stoical philosophy of making the best of a difficult situation and seeking to adapt to a more austere spending climate. Generally, those organizations which have sought to adjust working cultures and maintain a good reputation with service users have ameliorated the negative effects of austerity on staff morale to a greater extent than those which have not done so. There have been instances where cuts have led to considerable organizational disruption and poor morale in their immediate aftermath but where the consequent restructuring has led to efficiencies and new ways of working in the longer term.

Austerity has also prompted community safety organizations to scrutinize closely their staff's use of time. For example, police officers traditionally had to spend inordinate time with those suffering from mental illness and who were reported for threatening behaviour. Police discussions with mental health trusts resulted in the latter allocating staff to provide a joint response, which in turn avoided the need for officers to spend many hours in accident and emergency departments accompanying such people.

The way organizations respond can also either build or detract from resilience. Esprit de corps tends to have been maintained where senior management has adopted a positive, encouraging attitude and kept staff in the picture when required and all tiers of staff have taken on additional workload to compensate for reductions in staffing.

Projected scale of future budget cuts

The future outlook for funding CSPs across Merseyside whilst not positive is now less bleak than feared at the time of the research. Local authorities indicated that they expected funding for community safety related services to contract by an average of 33% during the current parliament with the expected budget cuts ranging from around 20% to around 40%. However, the former Chancellor's promise in the 2015 Autumn Spending Review to protect police budgets (HM Treasury, 2015) has meant that Community Safety Funding cuts from the OPCC will not now occur with funding levels for 2016–17 continuing at the same levels as for 2015 for Merseyside Police, the five local authorities and other partners. Furthermore, the latest local authority settlement has indicated that cuts will not be as great as expected in late 2015.

Another positive development which will offset the impact of the cuts has been the introduction of longer-term budgeting for local authorities which will provide greater certainty and enable more informed medium-term planning. In future budgets will be set for a 4-year period. That said, continuing cuts of between 7% and 15% in the period 2015–20 will still make it extremely difficult for Merseyside local authorities to sustain current funding levels, especially for discretionary rather than statutory services, and on the back of swingeing cuts in the period 2010–15.

Youth Offending Services (YOS) across Merseyside are expecting budget reductions in the region of 20% to 30%. Like other organizations, the Merseyside YOS are already down to the bare bones. The

Mayor of Liverpool has already openly declared that it is unlikely that Liverpool will be able to deliver statutory services by 2017 (Brindle, 2015; Murphy, 2015).

The current budget of the MFRS is around £60 million. It is expected that this will shrink to £56 m by 2021. What is not immediately clear is whether budget cuts within the MFRS will be front loaded or back loaded. If the bulk of the cuts take place in the first few years from April 2016, the challenges will be much greater. However, if the cuts take place a little later, the MFRS may have just a little more room to manoeuvre. The current funding forecast suggests that the MFRS may reduce their fire stations from 25 to 16 by 2020.

Prior to the 2015 Comprehensive Spending Review, Merseyside Police was given warning that there would be cuts within the region of 25% to 40% over the 4-year period from April 2016 to March 2020. It was not known how the cuts will be spread out over the 4 years. However, due to a combination of the Paris terror attacks and sustained campaigning locally and nationally by the Police Federation, Crime Commissioners and also online public petitions spelling out the serious consequences of further cuts, the immediate past Chancellor, George Osborne, opted not to cut the police budget further. In the eventual grant settlement, a modest 0.6% grant cut was offset fully by a modest increase in the local precept and use of reserves. While there is still the need to search for significant savings, changes and reforms, the announcement averted the threat of losing most if not all PCSOs, the loss of the mounted police and major cuts to teams tackling serious and organized crime, hate crime, and investigation of rape and sexual offences.

The other challenge confronting Merseyside Police has to do with the Police Allocation Formula (PAF). The government accepts that the current model is inappropriate. The PAF is not capable of estimating the total amount of central government funding required for the police. Rather, the formula was designed to determine allocations between the 43 police force areas of UK once the total amount of central Government funding for the police has been confirmed (Home Office, 2015). The way in which funding is allocated from central government to forces, although not perfect, has served Merseyside well because Merseyside's allocation per head of population is the second largest in the country to the Metropolitan Police Service. The formula has been re-worked a couple of times. The most recent revision has seen Merseyside lose out about £3.5 million a year. This translates to roughly 5% year on year. The fairness of the process of re-calibrating the formulae is subject to debate (House of Commons Home Affairs Committee, 2015).

Anticipated consequences of further budget cuts

The dimensions of additional funding cuts (post-2015) do not present a universal picture and the consequences are likely to vary depending on the timing and level of exposure of each MCSP stakeholder to the cuts. Some stakeholders may feel the bite more significantly at the later stages of the current parliament. Whatever the case, stakeholders are planning for some degree of reduction in order to help bridge the budget gap.

Additional funding cuts will mean an instant end to discretionary services unless there is a strong business case not to end them. This literally means that public parks for instance will no longer be maintained. From a community safety perspective, this means that parks are likely to become overgrown, unsafe and less frequentable. There are other less obvious impacts of the reductions to local authority budgets that, although may be felt within a different portfolio, can have negative consequences for community safety.

Shrinking budgets could trigger the adoption of more of a pan-Merseyside approach to many aspects of community safety. This approach certainly has major benefits for stakeholders but it is also important to be mindful of some of the challenges it may present. Local authorities receive additional funding for community safety activities on top of OPCC grant which is determined locally and based on local priorities which will place limits on the extent to which it will prove possible to pursue a 'one size fits all' approach. Also, community safety challenges vary in the five districts because of their different character and make up. For instance, community safety challenges presented by night-time economies for various local authorities vary. The night time economy in Knowsley is miniscule compared to St. Helens where there is a busy town centre. The presence of a town centre also presents different substance abuse priorities for St. Helens when compared to Knowsley. So whilst budget cuts may point to the need for a pan-Merseyside model of community safety, it is important to be mindful of the gaps that such a model may inadvertently create and the limits of such an approach.

Future budget cuts will also affect the ability of community safety stakeholders to commission services. For instance, in Liverpool, the CSP currently commissions the Fire Service Street Intervention Team to do work around Anti-social Behaviour. This would be at risk in future.

Future cuts will impinge innovation and creativity amongst MCSP stakeholders. Hardly any of them would have the funds to experiment on alternative solutions. In a world gravitating towards evidence-based practice which is the corner stone for innovation and creativity, budget cuts could ultimately prove counter-productive and stifle any hopes of efficiency and effectiveness within the community safety sector.

Given increasing calls for Bobbies on the beat, there is widespread relief that future police budget cuts will be much more modest and community policing will not therefore be hit as severely as once feared. There are a couple of emergencies and rapid response activities that require the visible presence of the police. However, there are many other 'invisible' activities that the police perform. For instance, the investigation of rape, domestic violence, sex offences, serious and organized crime and terrorism often takes place behind the scenes. Although the public do not see these activities because they are not overt policing, they still need to be done. Reconciling such demands with continued calls for police to respond to new forms of crime and maintain frontline policing will continue to prove challenging despite better recent news about future funding.

From a comparative perspective, it is difficult to fully gauge the full impact of continued budgetary pressures on neighbourhood and other kinds of policing across the country because a lot of police forces are creating one pool of uniformed officers. Essentially, some of the forces are deciding when to undertake response activities and also when to undertake neighbourhood policing activities. Resources for these activities are drawn from the single pool of uniformed officers. Essentially, the lines are being blurred and although some forces are claiming they have actually got more people deployed in neighbourhood policing, the reality is that they do not because the same officers have response responsibilities as well.

Implications of research for other cities and CSPs

This research study has implications that may be relevant to community safety stakeholders in other major UK cities. Alternative delivery models will be required. Some stakeholders may consider outsourcing services although that in itself does present challenges and is not always a cost-effective approach. A higher degree of transition towards the third sector and voluntary agencies may be preferred.

There will always be debates and counter-debates around greater involvement and control of local issues by local communities. One of the suggestions put forward by a stakeholder in the course of this study is captured in the statement below:

There needs to be investment in changing the culture of our communities and our societies and I personally do not think there is anything bad in making our communities and societies self-sustainable. I think that is the model we should have always adopted when we were rich as well. We have got no money for them to invest to change the culture now so we are just going to force it upon them and that will put pressure on statutory services again because people will fall out of engagement (Wirral CSP, 2015).

The depth and breadth of budget cuts mean that a more joined-up public service driven by integration and collaborative ways of working is inevitable. The big picture emerging at this stage is that some form(s) of standardization (which takes into account the individuality of different community safety stakeholders) in terms of organizational culture, strategic and operational definitions, measures and priorities is required in the immediate future. Such standardization could ultimately strengthen interoperability and facilitate better collaborative working. Other measures that could be considered include targeted interventions, improving data and information-sharing protocols, and exploring co-creation with local authorities.

Conclusion

This study is the first attempt to capture the broad impact of the austerity policy of the coalition government on multiple aspects of community safety across Merseyside. The challenge confronting MCSP stakeholders is to look forward rather than backwards and to continue to seek to introduce

new approaches and methods of working after a period of sustained funding cuts and service rationalization.

In view of what lies ahead, MCSP stakeholders need to consider some possible coping mechanisms which may help to mitigate these pressures. In some scenarios, there is no doubt that universal strategies (Pan-Merseyside) will be required. In other situations, local circumstances will dictate the options available to stakeholders. In the immediate future, there appears to be scope for closer collaborative working between CSPs, joint commissioning of services in order to obtain best value and a consistent offer and adoption of common processes.

Where a Pan-Merseyside strategy is pursued, for instance, a more robust case could be made when trying to secure funding from non-traditional external donors to boost whatever comes through from central government. The findings of this study reveal that areas presenting common challenges for stakeholders include but are not limited to the exploitation of children and young people; domestic violence; hate crime; organized crime; and neighbourhood anti-social behaviour.

The new funding climate will also require stakeholders to come up with innovative ways of dynamically undertaking needs assessments. Such assessments will help stakeholders determine collective and peculiar priorities and focus on core challenges. An additional difficulty is that stakeholders within the third sector still feel they can rely on public sector agencies for funding. However, this has shrunk significantly. There is room for the public sector and the third sector to join forces to ensure that the necessary range of community safety data is collected to compensate for cutbacks in many agencies' research and information teams and to provide collective evidence of policy's impact on the lives of local residents (and its effectiveness), including the effect of spending cuts.

There are concerns with the future policing model which will result in a significant shift away from what is currently in operation. If there is a shift away from the current model, there will still be an appetite to deliver a local partnership programme to deal with issues locally. However, if the police are absent from the table, then the local knowledge, influence and ability to deal with certain key problems will be missing.

Footnotes

1 The five metropolitan areas include Knowsley, Liverpool, Sefton, St. Helens, and Wirral.

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