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Paper 138

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# **Widening Access: Improving police relations with hard to reach groups**

*Trevor Jones  
Tim Newburn*

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*"The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy)."*

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### **Policing and Reducing Crime Unit: Police Research Series**

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (PRC Unit) is part of the Research, Development and Statistics Directorate of the Home Office. The PRC Unit carries out and commissions research in the social and management sciences on policing and crime reduction.

The Police Research Series presents research material on crime prevention and detection as well as police management and organisation issues.

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## Foreword

This report is part of a wider programme of research on police-community relations carried out by the Home Office's Policing and Reducing Crime Unit (Research, Development and Statistics Directorate). The programme aims to address some of the key issues about enhancing public trust and confidence in the police service which have been highlighted by the Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence and recent HMIC thematic inspections on policing diversity.

This report examines a range of police force initiatives to strengthen community relations. In particular, it looks at consultation with vulnerable sections of the community (i.e. those groups which have been seen to be hard to reach). It draws on a telephone survey of all forces in England and Wales, as well as more detailed qualitative research carried out in five case study forces. For each case study, in-depth interviews were carried out with police and police authority staff, as well as member of local communities.

The report highlights some of the problems with the notion of 'hard to reach groups'. Use of the term is often inconsistent and misleading, and can have a stigmatising affect. The report emphasises the need for police forces to focus on developing relations with the many publics they serve. In so doing, it recommends that hard to reach groups should be identified more precisely, rather than relying on a prescribed set of groups (e.g. minority ethnic, gay and lesbian communities).

The ways in which forces have identified and negotiated access with hard to reach groups are described in this report. In particular, the role that formal consultation plays in these processes is explored. It is clear that, in the case study forces, the impact of consultation with hard to reach groups has been greatest on central and local police policies rather than on officer practice and the attitudes of the community. The report also sets out some of the limitations of consultation highlighting, for example, the dangers of consultation overload and the lack of co-ordination. It points to the need for realism in what can be achieved by consultation, stressing that consultation is important but not a substitute for more practical and effective community involvement.

**Carole F. Willis**

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## Executive summary

### Introduction

Over the years, the notion of policing by consent of the public has been a central theme in discussions about policing in England and Wales. However, it is increasingly accepted that, as far as policing is concerned, there is not one public but many publics, and that policing impacts upon these in sharply contrasting ways – policing will, for example, involve adversarial contact with certain members of the public at certain times. The growth of social and cultural pluralism in this respect poses a challenge for a police service which must attempt to balance and respond to conflicting demands from an increasingly diverse society. Given the range of public views about and expectations of policing, universal popular approval for the police can never be a realistic aim of police-community relations policies. However, improved dialogue with marginalised groups may provide the opportunities for addressing aspects of policing that exacerbate adversarial relationships. At a minimum, it should enhance the possibility of achieving some workable compromises.

Two recent HMIC reports (1997, 1999b) on the policing of plural communities, though providing examples of good practice, have been critical of both the formal and informal links developed by forces for consulting with harder to reach sections of some communities. Perhaps most critically, the Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence (1999) has once again highlighted concerns about relationships between the police service and black and other minority ethnic communities.

### The research

The key focus of this study was to identify good practice in police forces in England and Wales for widening access to, and maintaining ongoing relationships with, what have been referred to as hard to reach groups. The research was based primarily on a telephone survey of 43 police forces (community relations departments) and five case studies at the local level in:

- Avon and Somerset Constabulary;
- City of London Police;
- Cleveland Police;
- Greater Manchester Police (GMP) and
- Northumbria Police.

Together with the analysis of relevant documents and observation of meetings, the bulk of the work in the local case studies involved undertaking face-to-face interviews with key individuals in each area (e.g. police officers and support staff, police authority members, and members of the community).

### **Problems with the term ‘hard to reach’**

There is a considerable lack of clarity about what is meant by the term ‘hard to reach’. There are three main problems with the notion of ‘hard to reach groups’. The term can be:

- used inconsistently – it is clear that, in some forces, the term is associated mainly with minority ethnic groups and the gay and lesbian community, whereas in other forces the term covers a much broader set of groups (e.g. the elderly, people with disabilities and young people in general);
- misleading – it is difficult to see why some groups often included under the rubric of hard to reach are described in this way (e.g. established minority ethnic communities with long-established means of communication with the police); and
- potentially stigmatising – use of over-arching terms suggest a level of homogeneity between distinct groups that does not necessarily exist. There is a danger that unthinking use of such terms may encourage ‘pigeon-holing’ or tokenism.

### **Defining characteristics of hard to reach groups**

Despite problems with the notion of hard to reach groups, it is important that police forces and police authorities develop imaginative ways of dealing with the inevitable conflicts that surround policing, and provide a focus for targeted consultative activity. In developing diversity strategies, police forces (in partnership with their police authorities) need to develop a more sophisticated appreciation of the many publics they serve.

Rather than selecting relevant groups from a pre-defined list of accepted hard to reach groups, police forces and authorities should consider the particular characteristics of some population sub-groups that contribute to problematic relationships with the police. Consideration should then be given to how far these underlying characteristics apply to various communities present in the force area, and how these might be alleviated within the framework of policing. The study identified a range of defining characteristics for hard to reach groups:

- small population size and/or relatively widely dispersed;
- suspicion of the police;
- diffuse or poorly organised internal organisation;
- acute socio-economic deprivation;
- social invisibility (e.g. people who engage in homosexual or bisexual relations but who are not openly gay);
- cultural or ideological barriers;
- distinctive service needs; and
- language barriers.

The wide range of different meanings and applications of the term 'hard to reach' brings into question its utility as a term. It is clear that there are a number of groups that have traditionally been under-represented in formal consultation with the police. It is also clear that there are groups that have traditionally had difficult relationships with the police, as targets of law enforcement activity or as victims of hate crimes (or in combination). However, few of these groups are hard to reach in any fundamental physical sense; in many cases 'hard to reach' actually means 'hard to engage with on a positive level'.

### **Identifying and accessing hard to reach groups**

There are two important preconditions to improving relationships between the police and a wider range of community groups. First, it is necessary to identify the relevant groups within the force area. The research highlighted six general ways in which forces engage in this process of identification, namely:

- guidance-led – those identified in response to official guidance (e.g. from HMIC or in relation to the Crime and Disorder Act);
- auditing of the force area;
- individual networking – based on officers or support staff known to have strong community links identifying individuals or groups;
- institutional snowballing – pre-existing consultative frameworks;
- problem-led – the need to consult with particular groups is related to specific problems; and
- responsive – following a direct approach from groups in the community group themselves.

Once groups have been identified, the second precondition is initial negotiation of access to those groups, which occurs in a variety of ways including:



- political initiative by senior officers;
- existing institutions – using organisations that already exist representing particular groups;
- research;
- using already existing meetings for operational purposes;
- representational approaches – using organisations to nominate individuals to represent specific groups;
- existing services – such as telephone helplines; and
- community policing – in order to build community networks.

### The aims of consultation

The study found that a clear and explicit statement of the objectives of consultation is somewhat rare, both within the police service and within community groups. It is often assumed that the purpose of consultation is self-evident and unproblematic. The research suggested that police and community participants in consultative mechanisms approached them with different general objectives. The table below summarises the police and public or community perspectives.

The aims and objectives of consultation	
Police perspective	Community perspective
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To identify local issues and problems.</li> <li>● To inform the delivery of policing services and the development of policing methods.</li> <li>● To inform communities of forthcoming operations.</li> <li>● To inform and educate the public about policing.</li> <li>● To promote support for and co-operation with the police.</li> <li>● To be seen to be consulting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● To influence local policing policy and/or style.</li> <li>● Encourage action on specific problems.</li> <li>● To elicit police recognition of community dynamics and cultural difference.</li> <li>● Accountability and conflict resolution.</li> <li>● To obtain access to police resources and facilities.</li> </ul>

The different aims of consultation need to be reflected upon when considering the levels at which consultation takes place. For example, from the police or police authority perspective, liaison committees at the force level are probably not the best way of identifying specifically local operational policing problems, or educating the public in a locality about the difficulties of policing. From the community perspective, such fora are not well-suited to the resolution of particular local

problems. Similarly, these differing aims need to be taken into account more explicitly when considering the different types of consultation. Large-scale surveys may help provide descriptive information about the extent of certain problems, but little in the way of detailed analysis of the fundamental nature of the problem. Neither are they well-suited to the development of solutions to problems.

### **Community relations and consultation**

Clearly, formal and informal methods of consultation cannot be examined independently of the wider pattern of policing in a locality. Within the limits of the present study, it was clearly not feasible to identify 'causal' links between forms of consultation and policing outcomes in the form of broader community relations. Nonetheless, the report examines impact on four distinct levels:

- strategic level – force-wide policies;
- operational level – policies at the police district level;
- practice level – attitudes and behaviour of front-line police officers; and
- community level – attitudes and behaviour of community groups.

It is clear from the case studies, however, that greater change has generally taken place at strategic and operational than at practice or community levels.

### **The limits of consultation**

It is important that police managers, police authorities and members of the diverse communities that the police serve, understand what can be realistically achieved by consultation. In particular, this requires a clear awareness of the limitations of consultation. There needs to be, for example, an awareness of the some of the difficulties associated with consultation generally, and with hard to reach groups in particular:

- confusing means and ends of consultation – there is a need to have a clear assessment of what forces hope to achieve from consultation with hard to reach groups in terms of outputs;
- consultation as an end in itself – thought needs to be given to what information might come from consultation and to what use it could be put;
- the difficulty of co-ordination and the danger of duplication;
- consultation overload;

- sustainability – consultation, where appropriate, needs to be considered as part of a longer term and sustained approach; a lack of clarity about the reasons for consultation and the high turn-over of participants means that the rationale becomes short term;
- representativeness – formal consultative links, particularly with harder to reach elements of the community, can be unrepresentative of the wider population (e.g. community leaders may not reflect others in their communities, particularly the young);
- incorporation – it is important for community groups to keep a critical distance from the police, and for the police to maintain professional independence; and
- different territories and agendas – the police need to engage in places and on subjects that people feel comfortable for consultation to be successful and sustainable.

Consultation also needs to be seen as a process, rather than an event. The reality of police-community relations, indeed all social relations, is that they are in a continual process of negotiation and re-negotiation. Consultation has to be seen as a long term, ongoing process without an end-point. From a police point of view, therefore, some consistency is required but, simultaneously, they will need to be both flexible and adaptable.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

Realism is therefore a key precondition to effective consultation. It is important, however, not to be overly pessimistic about what can be achieved. The study uncovered both realistic and overly-ambitious views within communities and police forces. Once the channels of communication are open, local people will quite reasonably develop expectations and make demands. At the heart of much of this activity were questions of accountability. Local citizens in the case studies wished to have a greater impact on local policing. Whilst recognising local constabulary independence, they also wished to have some means through which officers could be held to account for failing to deliver policing services either as effectively, or in the style, required. This is the real challenge raised by the process of widening access.

### *Recommendations*

- Police forces and police authorities should review which population sub-groups are hard to reach and why. This should be based on the underlying characteristics of the diverse populations in their area that might impact on their relationships with the police.
- Police authorities and forces should consider the various ways in which so-called hard to reach groups can be identified and accessed. Community consultation co-ordinators and third-party approaches for groups with hostile relations with the police appear promising.
- Forces should develop a systematic framework for consultation which:
  - delineates the responsibilities between forces and police authorities, and internally between different organisational levels and operational specialisms in the police;
  - recognises and prioritises the police aims of consultation; and
  - reviews the public's aims of consultation.
- Forces and police authorities need to consider adopting more flexible localised consultation frameworks, to supplement the current use of statutory consultative groups.
- The community impact should be a central consideration of all policing operations (e.g. the role played by the community consultation co-ordinator in Avon and Somerset).
- Consultation needs to be seen as part of broader framework of sustained and ongoing relationships with a range of groups in which consultation is a two-way process.
- Given the amount of consultation currently undertaken by a range of local organisations and agencies, all local agencies need to review their consultation approaches in partnership and take further action to pool resources.

- Forces should draw on the expertise of outside bodies (e.g. local universities and colleges) in order to provide relatively low-cost, independent data and research findings.
- Annual systematic reviews should be carried out by police authorities of the effectiveness of the consultative approaches currently being used in the force area.

## Contents

	Page
Foreword	(iii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Executive summary	(v)
List of boxes	(xv)
<b>1. Introduction: policing diversity</b>	<b>1</b>
Developments in police consultation	1
Hard to reach groups	3
The research	4
Structure of the report	6
<b>2. Defining hard to reach groups</b>	<b>7</b>
Terminology	7
The defining characteristics of 'hard to reach groups'	9
Hard to reach?	13
<b>3. Identifying and accessing hard to reach groups</b>	<b>15</b>
Identification of groups	15
Negotiating access	16
<b>4. Community relations and consulting hard to reach groups</b>	<b>19</b>
Community relations and consultation	19
Approaches to consultation – objectives	20
General consultation	26
Consultation with hard to reach groups	30
<b>5. Impact of consultation</b>	<b>40</b>
The strategic level	40
The operational level – policing policy in local districts	43
The practice level – policing style and behaviour	48
The community level	50
<b>6. The limits of consultation</b>	<b>54</b>
Confusion about means and ends	54
Consultation as an end in itself	54
Co-ordination and duplication	55
Consultation overload	57
Sustainability	58

Representativeness	60
Incorporation	62
Territory and agenda	63
<b>7. Conclusions and recommendations</b>	<b>65</b>
Recommendations	66
<b>References</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>Recent PRC publications</b>	<b>72</b>

## List of boxes

Box No.	Caption	Page
1	Conflicting community demands – Middlesbrough, Cleveland Police	23
2	Police recognition of specific problems – GMP	24
3	Accountability and conflict resolution	25
4	Decentralised and flexible models of consultation – Avon and Somerset Police Authority	26
5	Citizen's consultation panel – North Wales Police	29
6	Citizen's jury on drugs and crime – London Borough of Lewisham	29
7	Newcastle West End Asian Traders' Association (WATA) – Northumbria Police	32
8	Policing the deaf community – South Yorkshire Police Authority	33
9	Focus group consultation – Middlesbrough, Cleveland Police	36
10	Link worker scheme – Newcastle West End, Northumbria Police	38
11	Community participation in strategic planning – Avon and Somerset Police	41
12	Policing gay and lesbian communities – Hampshire Constabulary	46
13	Impact on local policy – Middlesbrough, Northumbria Police	47
14	The community impact of consultation – City of London	51
15	Representativeness of consultative groups	61





## 1. Introduction: policing diversity

Over the years, the notion of policing by consent of the public has been a central theme in discussions about policing in England and Wales. However, it is increasingly accepted that, as far as policing is concerned, there is not one public but many, and that policing impacts upon these in sharply contrasting ways. Policing inevitably involves adversarial contacts with some members of the population at certain times and in certain places. In all societies, adversarial policing contacts have historically been more likely to be experienced by economically disadvantaged groups in society, particularly working class people, the unemployed, some minority ethnic groups, and people who live in deprived urban areas. Research has shown that members of these groups have strikingly different experiences of (and views about) the police from other groups in the population (see Reiner, 1997).

During the late 20th century many societies experienced a growing social and cultural pluralism. For most of the post-war period, the key sources of social and political identity in British society were based around economic class divisions. However, the beginning of the 21st century sees the emergence of a society in which such divisions are becoming less important. Social differentiation along plural lines has increased in significance, especially along the dimensions of religion, age, gender, race, region, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality, and lifestyles (Johnston, 1999). At the same time, economic inequality has increased substantially over the past 20 years (Morgan and Newburn, 1997). Such developments pose huge challenges for a police service that must attempt to balance and respond to conflicting demands from an increasingly diverse society.

### Developments in police consultation

Concerns about the policing of an increasingly diverse society are not new. During the 1980s, there was growing criticism of the adequacy of the tripartite framework for police accountability that divided responsibility for policing policy between local police authorities, chief constables and the Home Secretary. In particular, the relative weakness of police authorities brought into question the degree to which the police service was really in touch with local concerns and needs. The view that the police had become distanced from their communities in some areas was supported by outbreaks of serious public disorder in many inner city areas of England during the early 1980s. In particular, it was suggested that a gulf had emerged between the police and the black community, especially young black men. Following the Brixton disorders in 1981, Lord Scarman's influential report criticised the insufficient formal liaison between the black community and the police in and around Brixton. Scarman (1981) argued that the absence of such communication was both a symptom and a cause of the 'withdrawal of consent' that underpinned the policing problems in the area (Morgan, 1992). Scarman (1981) recommended

the introduction of better arrangements for local police-community consultation in areas considerably smaller than those covered by whole forces. Following Home Office Circular (54/1982) and then the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, police authorities, most supported by their chief constables, established Police Community Consultative Groups (PCCGs) in their areas. As a consequence, PCCGs are often also referred to as s106 committees (though with the passage of consolidating legislation it is now s96 of the Police Act 1996 that provides the basis for such groups).

From the mid-1980s onwards, the work of Morgan and colleagues (Morgan and Maggs, 1985; Morgan, 1986; Morgan, 1987; Morgan, 1992) provide detailed information about the operation of these police consultative groups. They found that public attendance at PCCG meetings was poor, that the agenda at meetings tended to be dominated by police business, that “few PCCG members have ever had adversarial contact with the police nor are they the sort of people who normally meet people who have” (Morgan, 1992). Other work has suggested that participants in formal consultation with the police are overwhelmingly white, male and middle class (Stratta, 1990). Few members have any experience that might enable them to question effectively or challenge police viewpoints.

The Police and Magistrates' Courts Act 1994 placed the primary responsibility for consultation with the public on policing matters with local police authorities. From 1995, police authorities were required to publish a local policing plan outlining objectives for the policing of the authority's area during the forthcoming financial year. The legislation also gave the police authority responsibility for consulting the local community prior to setting objectives. There is some evidence that the reforms are having a positive impact in terms of consultation. Police authorities' statutory responsibility to consult the public appears to be leading to much more innovative thinking in this area (Jones and Newburn, 1997). However, the legislation also lays down that the chief constable (and not the police authority) has responsibility for drafting the policing plan. In addition, police forces are increasingly required to respond to a range of performance measures set centrally. It is not surprising, therefore, that a considerable amount of consultative activity takes place by police forces, as well as police authorities. At the strategic level, the growth area appears to be public satisfaction surveys, and in a few force areas, the development of consumer panels, focus groups, and other market research methods (Elliott and Nichols, 1996). This report focuses primarily upon the consultative activity from a force, rather than a police authority, perspective. Although some police authority initiatives have been discussed, the primary focus has been upon the impact upon the police organisation.

Two key pieces of legislation have further emphasised the importance of local consultation in matters of crime and policing. First, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 placed a statutory duty upon local authorities and the police to publish a community safety plan in partnership with other local agencies. The Crime and Disorder Act places particular emphasis on extending public participation in the development of such plans, which must reflect local views and opinions. Second, as part of the Government's drive to modernise local government, the Best Value initiative is aimed at achieving economy, efficiency, effectiveness and quality in the delivery of local services. This agenda has highlighted the need to extend the involvement of the public, both as consumers of local services and as local taxpayers, via more effective consultation arrangements (DETR, 1998). The Local Government Act 1999 places a central duty upon local authorities to consult local people in the planning and delivery of public services. As a key local service, police authorities and their respective forces are required to respond to the Best Value initiative, not least by reviewing and improving consultation mechanisms.

### **Hard to reach groups**

As noted above, it is well-established that some social groups are more likely than others to come into adversarial contact with the police. There is a large body of evidence showing that people in lower socio-economic groups, young people, the unemployed, people living in inner-city areas, council house tenants, and members of visible minority ethnic groups are all more likely to have negative experiences and views of the police (Jones and Newburn, 1996). In Britain, a key focus has been upon the relationships between the police and members of minority ethnic groups, and in particular young black men (Cashmore and McLaughlin, 1991). More recently, attention has also been paid to problematic relationships arising not primarily from economic deprivation, but rather from factors connected with lifestyle and culture. For example, discussions have focused upon relations between the police and young people in general (Loader, 1996), lesbians and gay men (Derbyshire, 1990; Burke, 1994) and gypsy and traveller groups. It is now generally accepted that there is not one public but many publics, often with mutually opposing views about, and expectations of, the police (Smith, 1987). In a pluralist society, these sharp conflicts of interest about policing are an inevitable consequence of the function of law enforcement and order maintenance. However, research has also shown that belief in the need for law enforcement and order maintenance - in the need for a police service - is very widespread, and extends to most members of society, including those groups that are most critical of the police (see for example, Smith and Gray, 1985). Thus, although universal popular approval for the police can never be a realistic aim of police-community relations policies, improved dialogue with marginalised groups may provide the opportunities for

addressing aspects of policing that exacerbate adversarial relationships. At a minimum, it should enhance the possibility of achieving some workable compromises.

Two recent HMIC reports (1997, 1999b) on the policing of plural communities, though providing examples of good practice, have been critical of both the formal and informal links developed by forces for consulting with harder to reach sections of some communities. Perhaps most critically, the Report of the Inquiry into the Death of Stephen Lawrence (1999) has once again highlighted concerns about relationships between the police service and black and other minority ethnic communities. The recent HMIC (1999a) thematic inspection on police integrity also raised concerns about effective consultation with diverse communities:

*Forces are trying hard to consult their communities and to understand their needs and concerns but each is failing to a greater or lesser extent in providing a better service to the disadvantaged groups in society, as well as ethnic minority groups. The seriousness of the present situation requires the police to find out, through public satisfaction surveys, how the public, and in particular 'hard to reach' groups, feel they are being served and what improvements need to be made.*

### The research

The overall objective of the research was to identify good practice in police forces in England and Wales for widening access to, and maintaining ongoing relationships with, hard to reach groups particularly for consultation; and in so doing, to assess the impact of these methods on operational policing policy and practice, and wider community relations.

More particularly, the aims of the research were to:

- examine how forces negotiate access with different groups in the community and the reasons for defining specific groups as hard to reach;
- investigate how traditional and innovative methods have been used by police forces and partner agencies to form sustainable relationships with hard to reach groups and to what effect;
- explore the use and impact of information gathered through consultation and longer term, more informal relationships with hard to reach groups (particularly in terms of operational policing, the planning process and Best Value);

- investigate how forces balance the needs and expectations of a diverse range of mainstream and hard to reach groups in the community;
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of consultative arrangements as they meet the needs of the community and the police; and
- draw general and case-specific lessons for guidance to forces.

The research was based on broad research at a national level along with five case studies at the local level. The national level work included:

- a telephone survey of 43 police forces (representatives of community relations departments);
- scanning of HMIC and other official reports; and
- discussions with local and national agencies representing hard to reach groups.

The primary focus of the case studies was to examine police-community relations in general within a particular force, and to look at how consultation impacts on these, with a specific focus upon attempts to improve relationships with groups perceived, in some way, as hard to reach. The forces selected for further study were:

- Avon and Somerset Constabulary;
- City of London Police;
- Cleveland Constabulary;
- Greater Manchester Police (GMP); and
- Northumbria Police.

Together with the analysis of relevant documents and observation of meetings, the bulk of the work in the local case studies involved undertaking face-to-face interviews with key individuals in each area, such as:

- police officers and support staff at a central (police headquarters) and local (Basic Command Unit (BCU)) level;
- police authority members and support staff;
- participants and chairs of PCCGs and other formal consultative fora;
- members of local advisory or community groups (including both groups known to the police and others without any contact with the police organisation); and

<sup>1</sup> See discussion in Chapter 6 concerning the problematic notion of representativeness in community consultation.

- so-called community representatives or leaders' from hard to reach groups.

### Structure of the report

The remainder of this report is divided as follows. In Chapter 2, we examine the problematic notion of the term 'hard to reach groups' and consider the range of defining characteristics of such groups. Chapter 3 examines issues surrounding the negotiation of access to groups that are considered hard to reach, covering both the identification of such groups, the development of opening channels of communication and building links with them. In Chapter 4, we consider the various approaches to consultation currently adopted within forces, both in general and with hard to reach groups, and consider the fundamental aims and objectives of consultation, from the viewpoint of police managers and community participants. In Chapter 5, we examine the role consultative activity may play in fostering and maintaining positive relationships with local communities. In particular, it examines the impact that different forms of consultation may have upon police strategies, operational policy and practice, and upon the perceptions and attitudes of community participants. Chapter 6 considers what we call the limits of consultation. Here we examine some of the difficulties of police-community consultation, particularly in the contemporary environment in which so much consultation activity is taking place. The final chapter provides a range of suggested policy recommendations emerging from the study.

## 2. Defining hard to reach groups

There is growing pressure upon police forces (as well as other agencies) to take into account the needs and wishes of hard to reach groups when formulating their policies and practices. However, there exists a considerable amount of ambiguity - inside and outside the police service - about what exactly is meant by the term 'hard to reach'. It is most commonly taken as a generic term referring to a range of 'minority' groups who for various reasons are seen to have problematic relationships with the police. Rather than provide an explicit definition, official documents that employ the term 'hard to reach' tend to list a series of examples of potentially disaffected or vulnerable social groups. The most detailed list of hard to reach groups is provided in guidance for community safety partnerships established under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This guidance lists the following examples of hard to reach groups: "young men, the homeless, drug users, the gay community, members of minority ethnic communities, children, those who suffer domestic abuse, and the elderly". The implication is that these very diverse groups share some common features in terms of their views or experiences of the police, and perhaps in the problems of delivering policing services to them.

The question for this chapter is, does the notion of hard to reach groups help to provide us with a model for dealing with the inevitable conflicts that surround policing and, more particularly, help in providing a focus for targeted consultative activity? We argue that whilst there are a number of difficulties with the term 'hard to reach', it does raise some important general considerations for various groups experiencing - in differing ways - problematic relationships with the police. What is required, though, is not a pre-defined list of groups that come under the category of 'hard to reach', and from which police forces select those they think are present in their area. Rather, we need to draw out the particular characteristics of some population sub-groups that contribute to problematic relationships with the police. Police authorities and their police forces should then consider which of these underlying characteristics apply to communities present in their force areas, rather than taking a specific group - gay people for example - and assuming that it is in all places and circumstances hard to reach.

### Terminology

The research suggested that there are three primary problems with the notion of hard to reach groups - namely, the term is:

- used inconsistently;
- misleading; and
- potentially stigmatising.



We outline each of these problems in greater detail below before moving on to consider the diverse characteristics of those groups that fall under the general rubric of 'hard to reach'.

### *Inconsistency*

The majority of forces, unsurprisingly, associated the term 'hard to reach' with disadvantaged populations. It is clear that in some forces the term is associated mainly with minority ethnic groups and the gay and lesbian community, whereas in other forces the term covers a much broader set of groups, including the elderly, people with disabilities and young people in general. Few forces provided an explicit definition of 'hard to reach groups'. For example, the community affairs department in one force requested information from its six divisions on their arrangements for consulting hard to reach groups. These responses indicated significant problems of definition, and in-force disagreement about which groups should be considered hard to reach.

### *Inaccuracy*

A number of respondents questioned the accuracy of the term, arguing that some groups included under the rubric of 'hard to reach' were not, in fact, hard to reach at all. For example, although it is assumed in some circles - including some official guidance - that minority ethnic communities are hard to reach, this is not necessarily the case. Some forces, covering areas where there are large, well-established minority ethnic communities, reported that these communities were often far from being hard to reach. Indeed, by contrast, they were often particularly well geared-up to making their views heard and had long-established means of communication with the force. For example one community affairs officer referred to the tendency to include minority ethnic populations under the term, and stated:

*Our ethnic minority populations are not really hard to reach, we have established contacts with a range of community leaders.*

Another officer said:

*I'm not sure that these groups are hard to reach; some groups are very vociferous, articulate and organised. It's more a case of us not liking what we hear, or perhaps just not asking them.*

A district commander in one of the case study forces also questioned the usefulness of the term 'hard to reach', saying:

*It's not so much that they are hard to reach, more that some groups are hard to listen to [because of their criticisms of the police].*

A related point concerning inaccuracy, concerns the simplistic assumption of common features between distinct groups. Several force representatives argued that one problem of placing such a diverse range of groups under the banner of 'hard to reach' was that this assumed similarities between extremely diverse groups. For example, although such terms have been employed in order to develop a more sophisticated appreciation of the diverse nature of communities, the danger is that the opposite will happen. The unthinking use of such terms may encourage pigeon-holing or tokenism, or assuming similarities where few or none exist.

### *Stigmatisation*

Interviews with spokespeople of groups that are often considered hard to reach found the term at best unhelpful. In some cases, the term was seen as stigmatising, placing the blame for the perceived lack of consultation firmly within the community concerned. As one black youth worker with strongly critical views of the police said: "How can I be hard to reach? You found me didn't you?" Some forces specifically avoid the term 'hard to reach', preferring in many cases to talk about vulnerable communities, or policing diverse populations. However, it may be argued that these terms involve some of the same problems, for example in over-generalisation between groups, or in terms of stigmatising some groups as 'problem populations'.

### **The defining characteristics of 'hard to reach groups'**

As we have argued above, a range of groups have been described as hard to reach. However, the circumstances under which they are defined as such, and the reasons they are perceived to be hard to reach vary according to a number of local factors. In this chapter we consider the key dimensions of groups that appear to lead to some groups being described as hard to reach.

### *Numerical size and concentration*

When groups are relatively small in number, and relatively widely dispersed, it is more difficult for the police to develop ongoing links with them. A number of examples concerned small minority ethnic communities dispersed across large rural areas. For example, in Devon and Cornwall, the police had found it difficult to maintain links with the Chinese community because it is such a small and dispersed population. In the City of London, the police had experienced problems in communicating with the local Bangladeshi population; other forces mentioned the

fact that their traveller populations were small and transient made it difficult to consult with them, and several forces mentioned homeless people as coming into this category.

### *Suspicion of the police*

Some community groups are suspicious of, or even hostile towards, the police. For example, representatives of numerous forces reported deep levels of suspicion among the local traveller communities. Similarly, several forces reported difficulties in the policing of prostitution and, more particularly, in maintaining a dialogue with both prostitutes and, especially, their clients. Other groups may be suspicious of the police because they feel targeted unfairly by police powers (e.g. young black men) or do not wish to be seen to be talking to the police due to peer pressure. Similarly, forces are increasingly encountering high levels of suspicion among refugee populations often linked, they suggested, to experiences at the hands of their own domestic police forces but also, possibly, because of their legal status in the UK.

### *Internal organisation*

It may be the case that although some populations may be relatively large in number, they may not necessarily be well-organised in terms of having an established network of community organisations or agencies upon which consultative efforts can be hung. Many forces identified the problem of finding appropriate participants for consultation from some communities. Forces still aim to find representatives from various population groups, and sometimes this is extremely difficult when the group is not well-organised. For example, even in those areas where the police have developed positive relationships with the out gay community - such as in GMP - this will not necessarily help in fostering positive links with those gay men and women who are not out.

Similarly, the group may be part of a wider sub-group, but feel that its distinct needs are being subsumed under those of the wider group. This was true of the lesbian population in one of the case study areas. A member of the local lesbian forum outlined the relative lack of political organisation and power of gay women relative to that of gay men. Although considerable advances had been made in developing consultative links between the police and gay men's organisations, gay women felt that their distinctive policing needs tended to be over-looked. This was related to the greater funding of gay men's organisations, in particular connected with campaigns on sexual health.

A related point concerns the problem that while some groups appear relatively well-organised into an identifiable community with leaders, these leaders may be rather

unrepresentative and, consequently, some elements of the community may remain hard to reach. A number of forces reported that close links had been made with religious leaders in some South Asian communities, but that these leaders themselves appeared to be increasingly isolated from younger members of their communities. It has been pointed out that for cultural reasons, many South Asian organisations are rather unlikely to involve women. There may be an assumption that a particular community is homogenous with a clear set of interests, when a community is in fact much more complex and divided internally.

### *Socio-economic deprivation*

Some groups may be considered hard to reach because they are suffering from acute social and economic deprivation. This may well be connected with other dimensions of being hard to reach including hostility or suspicion towards the police related to a more general disaffection. Research has shown that some minority ethnic groups (in particular, people of Pakistani and Bangladeshi origin and young black men) are relatively more likely to fall into this category, and thus it may work to reinforce language or cultural barriers (Modood, et al., 1997). A number of forces identified disaffected young white men, living in poverty on 'sink estates', as one of the most hard to reach groups. Whilst in most areas of high minority ethnic concentration, there exists an organisational network of some sorts which may provide a starting point for police consultation, there is little in the way of social infrastructure on many deprived urban estates.

### *Social invisibility*

Several forces, particularly the City of London, mentioned a number of communities who were, for a variety of reasons, 'socially invisible'. Most frequently mentioned was the population of men who engage in homosexual or bisexual relations, but do not lead openly gay lives. These men may simply not be out, may be married or wish to keep their sexuality secret for some other reason, or may in fact not see themselves as gay at all. This population was seen as particularly at risk from homophobic attack, and yet particularly unlikely to report any assaults to the police. Some lesbian groups pointed out that unlike the out male gay population, there is much less of a visible scene for gay women. Although most urban areas have pubs and clubs that cater specifically (if only at specific times) for gay men, and many areas have organisations and agencies concerned with gay men's health, there is less of an infrastructure, and less funding for gay women. This contributes to a relative invisibility and lack of political power in many areas. Some forces also noted the significant emphasis that is sometimes given to visible minority ethnic groups compared with the relative invisibility of other minorities such as Jewish or Irish people.

### *Cultural and ideological barriers*

Police forces cited examples of communities with a strong cultural tradition of self-reliance that prefer to deal with their own problems of rule-breaking and disorder. Examples included a relatively newly-arrived Somali community in one inner-city area, as well as Bangladeshi communities. The City of London Police described attempts that had been made to communicate or consult with the Bangladeshi community on one local estate, with some success with young people, but almost no progress with older Bangladeshi women. Cultural expectations and social restrictions in some groups may make engagement with any organisations or individuals outside of the family unit difficult. For example, in some Muslim Asian groups there are social restrictions upon women, who may be expected to refrain from social interaction, particularly with men from outside the immediate family.

There are also groups that, for strong political or ideological reasons, do not wish to engage with the police. Although campaigning groups focused specifically on policing are less common than was the case during the 1980s, there are still some groups that oppose contact with the police on principle. The research came across a few campaigning bodies whose political aim was to bring about societal change through a policy of critical opposition. This position would be compromised by regular and constructive contacts with agencies such as the police service. In one force, a representative of a gay men's organisation referred to members of a radical gay rights campaigning group, whose position of critical opposition to the police made consultative links with the police out of the question. Attempts to make links with such groups are likely to be counterproductive, in that they may simply alienate police officers from the wider group in question with little possibility of leading to improved relations.

### *Distinctive service needs*

There are some communities and groups that have very specific problems and needs regarding policing, needs that are rarely recognised or understood. Such groups include:

- the gay community;
- the homeless;
- travellers;
- prostitutes; and
- disabled people.

### *Language barriers*

The fact that some groups have relatively high proportions of people who do not speak English fluently provides a particular problem for police forces and authorities. Such groups include the most recently arrived immigrant groups, and this particularly applies to women within these groups. Studies have indicated that a relatively high proportion of women of Pakistani or Bangladeshi origin cannot speak English well (Modood, et al., 1997). The Somali population was mentioned by a number of respondents as an example of a community where there are key language barriers. The most recently arrived refugees from Eastern Europe and other parts of the world were also mentioned as examples of communities experiencing English language difficulties. In Cleveland Police, the Middlesborough district undertook focus groups with a range of groups including South Asian women, a number of whom spoke little English. A representative from a community centre acted as an interpreter in this case. Northumbria Police have also established link workers with good knowledge of local minority languages in the Newcastle West End district (see Box 10). Communication problems with police officers have also been experienced in police areas where there is a significant population of deaf and hard-of-hearing people (see Box 8).

### **Hard to reach?**

The wide range of different meanings and applications of the term 'hard to reach' brings into question its utility as a term. It is clear that there are a number of population sub-groups that have traditionally been under-represented (or not represented at all) within formal consultation processes with the police and other official institutions. It is also clear that there exist a range of different groups that have traditionally had difficult relationships with the police, as targets of law enforcement activity or as victims of hate crimes (or in combination). However, few of these groups are hard to reach in any fundamental physical sense. It seems fair to say that there are a number of groups who have at least some elements in common in terms of their difficulties with the police. But in many cases 'hard to reach' actually means 'hard to engage with on a positive level'.

In sum, the term 'hard to reach' is highly problematic when applied to local communities. What is being referred to within the term varies from force to force - and occasionally within force. It is a term that is hard to use consistently. The reason for this is that local context is vital. The danger in subsuming a wide range of groups under a single term, is that it implies a shared set of characteristics among 'communities' - they may not even be 'communities' in any recognisable sense. The groups that are generally thought of as hard to reach, as we illustrated above, cannot be so easily defined. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the term is

potentially stigmatising of groups thus defined. The term 'hard to reach' implies that it is some characteristic of the community or group that makes it difficult to 'reach', rather than a characteristic of the police or a characteristic of policing. It further implies that it is merely a question of finding the right means for the problem to be solved. As we have suggested, this, at least some of the time, is to misunderstand the nature of many aspects of policing.

The question that remains, therefore, is whether there is an alternative to the term 'hard to reach groups'. In our view there is not. Any simple alternative would be likely to fall prey to the same problem of over-simplification or over-generalisation; it would sometimes impute similarity where little or none existed. It would also be likely to be stigmatising in its effect. Although the term has come into common usage within policing and other public services - the reason that it appears in the title of this report - paradoxically, we would suggest that any such over-arching terms should be avoided if possible. However, we still need to describe the focus of the increased activity now being undertaken by the police service with the aim of involving as broad a range of local citizens in the identification of local problems and solutions. The answer may possibly be found in the more general terminology found in some diversity strategies: wherein the police attempt to acknowledge the realities of policing and consulting diverse communities. Following the characteristics identified earlier in this chapter of those groups often referred to as hard to reach, such strategies might include, as a minimum, a commitment to:

- improving confidence in policing particularly among those who feel particularly vulnerable because of their gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability or social disadvantage;
- reducing the impact of cultural, social and demographic barriers on the establishment and maintenance of effective forms of communication with local groups and communities; and
- paying particular attention to the identification of hitherto unrecognised or under-recognised service needs of local groups and communities.

### 3. Identifying and accessing hard to reach groups

As noted earlier, previous discussions about community consultation have presented a simplistic view of community that has failed to recognise the fact that there are many different publics as far as policing is concerned. Two important preconditions to improving relationships between the police and a wider range of community groups are:

- the identification of relevant groups within the force area; and
- the initial negotiation of access to those groups.

#### Identification of groups

It is important that police forces avoid the pressures to adopt an 'off-the-peg' approach to identifying groups in their areas. Clearly, the groups that are considered hard to reach will vary from force area to force area. Rather than prescriptively follow lists of social groups in official documents, forces should consider the various dimensions of 'hard to reach', as outlined in the previous chapter. They should consider which groups may be present in their area, and what are the precise factors associated with their being hard to reach.

The research found that forces identify their hard to reach groups in a range of more or less systematic ways:

- **Guidance-led** – This approach to the identification of relevant hard to reach groups tends to be undertaken in response to official documents such as HMIC reports or the Crime and Disorder Act guidance. These simply pick out the appropriate hard to reach groups that are thought to be present in that force area. This has the advantage of simplicity, but the danger is that it does not provide the basis for a systematic review of community complexities and dynamics in a policing area.
- **Auditing** – An audit of the population covered by a force area represents the most detailed and systematic method of identification of hard to reach groups. This can be carried out in-house, but some forces commission outside bodies such as universities, colleges or private consultants. The advantage of such methods is their comprehensiveness and level of detail. The disadvantage is that they can be prohibitively expensive, and thus must really be a one-off event.
- **Individual networking** – Some forces task officers or support staff, known to have strong community links, to identify any individuals or groups in groups other than those traditionally well-represented in consultation. One police



district in Avon and Somerset employed a civilian in the post of community consultation co-ordinator part of whose job was to network within the community in this way.

- **Institutional snowballing** – Given the pressure upon a range of statutory agencies to consult, there may well be pre-existent consultative frameworks into which the police may tap. This kind of access is most appropriate in relatively well-organised communities in which a relatively established network of agencies and organisations exist. One example is the way in which police consultation with the gay community appears to have been primarily based upon developing links with the relatively well-established network of gay men's health organisations. However, this method may work with less-established and structured communities such as travellers. A number of forces had made contact with local authority traveller liaison officers in order to develop links with gypsy and traveller communities. The community safety partnerships that have developed across the country following the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 have all undertaken more or less systematic crime audits part of which has involved consultation with a wide range of groups over crime and community safety issues. These provide key information for police managers keen to identify hard to reach groups in their areas.
- **Problem-led** – A force may decide that there is a need to consult with a specific grouping of people on the basis of a previously identified 'problem' with that group within the force area. For example in Cleveland a problem had been identified with widespread prostitution in the Middlesborough district. Following on from this a Prostitution Task Group was established and focus groups were held with prostitutes in order that a common agenda could be formed.
- **Responsive** – Under the responsive approach a consultative mechanism is established following a direct approach from a community group requesting consultation (see for example later discussion of the deaf community in Doncaster and the response organised by the police authority). The Avon and Somerset Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative was established following an approach to the police-community affairs department by a gay men's health organisation.

### Negotiating access

The successful negotiation of initial access to a group is dependent upon a thorough analysis of the underlying factors that make that population hard to reach. The current study identified a number of ways in which forces may open up channels of communication between the police and community groupings.

- **Political initiative by senior officer** – A new chief constable in one of the case study forces had a priority of improving dialogue with the lesbian and gay community, following the deterioration of relationships under his predecessor.
- **Existing institutions** – This approach is the most common way of forces accessing community groups. Under this approach a community group is identified (using any of the methods described above) and relevant officers then attempt to identify any way in which that community may already be organised within the force area. The fieldwork highlighted cases where, for example, Age Concern has been used to open access to the elderly, mosques have been used to open up access to Asian men, and women's refuges have been used to open up access to victims of domestic abuse.
- **Research** – The specific location of a particular community group may be identified through a more or less systematic process of research. Analysis of local area data of the census, analysis of local authority data, discussions with local beat officers and community workers.
- **Existing meetings for operational purposes** – Police may, at times, use consultative mechanisms already in place to widen access to a given community group. For example, there may already be meetings which pertain to the policing of a given community event which the police can then use to widen access to the community concerned.
- **Representational approaches** – These approaches may use existing institutions as described above, but in this case the police request that the institutions themselves nominate appropriate people who can adequately represent the views of others using that institution. This may be particularly the case where relevant populations are large and a variety of institutions exist to serve the needs of that community. It is commonly used in identifying an appropriate group of young people within a force area who might in some way speak for young people as a whole in that area. Police may, for example, ask every school in the force area to nominate two pupils to sit on a police and young peoples' community forum.
- **Existing services (e.g. telephone helplines)** – It may be the case that there is no specific community grouping within a force area but that some other service exists (e.g. telephone helpline service) which people from the community group in question may find appropriate to use.

- **Community policing** – A force may request that pre-existent community consultation officers build upon their own networks of contacts within given communities to identify relevant individuals with whom to consult, and to develop operational mechanisms for doing so.

### 4. Community relations and consulting hard to reach groups

For many years, 'community relations' in the context of policing was simply used as a euphemism for relationships with the black community. It is argued that there is still a tendency within the police service to view community relations policies as only relevant in areas with substantial black or South Asian populations, an approach seen as increasingly outdated (HMIC, 1997). The HMIC report *Winning the Race* underlined the need to take full account of the views of minority communities, but added that "they cannot be treated in isolation or as though they were somehow unique" (1997). This is even more important in the context of an increasingly fragmented and diverse population, when it no longer really makes sense to talk in terms of a 'majority' community at all. As HMIC have urged "forces should see community relations as core to all policing activity".

#### Community relations and consultation

The concept of community relations is difficult to define or measure in precise terms. In a broad sense, it simply means the general state of relationships between the police and the communities they serve. However, the concept has a number of possible dimensions. Morgan (1989) referred to the different forms of consent of a population to policing. Attitudinal consent refers to public satisfaction levels with the police among different population groups. It can be measured, with differing degrees of sophistication, through surveys of victims, people who visit police stations, or the general public. The state of police-community relations can also be measured with reference to public behaviour. For example, how far are people willing to report crime or to pass on information to the police? How far will they co-operate with police investigations by participating in identity parades, appearing as witnesses, making statements, or giving the police access to homes or businesses in order to carry out covert surveillance operations? Morgan (1989) also refers to operational consent as the degree to which policing methods reflect public attitudes and behaviour in a locality.

The development of police-community relations in practice depends upon a range of factors. Some of these are clearly outside of the control of police managers. Socio-economic deprivation, growing inequality, exclusions from school, societal racism and poor housing all impact crucially upon the relationships between the police and communities. But whilst fundamental sources of problematic relationships with the police can clearly be related to forces outside of the police organisation, it is generally accepted that styles or other aspects of policing policy can exacerbate problematic relationships. There are certainly variables within the framework of policing that play a key role in shaping police-community relations; for example, the recruitment and training of police officers to reflect (as far as

possible) the diverse nature of the populations served, or at least to provide a service that is sensitive to cultural difference and the special needs of some groups. The development of a consistent management approach that discourages unprofessional behaviour and rewards positive action by police staff. Ongoing commitment to developing dialogue between the police organisation and the community, at all levels, should attempt to make the pattern of policing at the local level as reflective as possible of local concerns and wishes. There is a key need, especially in areas characterised by social inequality and conflict, to provide policing frameworks that attempt to manage these tensions, minimise negative and unjust outcomes, and achieve workable compromises.

Given the breadth and complexity of the concept of police-community relations, it is difficult to specify exactly where consultation comes in. Consultation is but one important dimension within the broader concept of police-community relations. There are many ways in which police forces engage formally and informally with members of the communities they police. It is less clear how these might impact upon the state of community relations in a force area. Consultation - in its broad sense - is a particularly important facet within community relations because it can provide key indications of the state of police-community relations, as well as impacting directly on community relations itself. In previous work, HMIC (1997) have underlined the need to consider community relations at a number of different levels within the police organisation. Commitment to good community relations at the highest level is important in symbolic and practical terms. Force-wide policies and strategies need to be informed as far as possible by an awareness of diverse community needs. BCUs and operational departments are responsible for translating force-wide policies into practice, and also for feeding up local district concerns to the strategic level. Crucially, front-line staff have perhaps the key role in police-community relations - they are the public face of policing. Much of the discussion of formal mechanisms of consultation have focused upon the two levels above this, yet informal and daily contacts between police officers and a range of people from local communities at the ground level are arguably the key face of police-community relations (see, for example, Stone and Pettigrew, 2000). This study, therefore, examined consultation in a broad sense, looking at formal and informal links at different levels of the police organisation, and the degree to which they impact upon police-community relations.

### **Approaches to consultation – objectives**

It often appears that consultation is treated as if its purpose is self-evident and, moreover, as if this purpose is self-evidently unproblematic. However, it is clear that there are a range of explicit and implicit objectives for consultation from both the

police perspective and that of the public or community. Different types of consultation will be more suited to different kinds of objective.

### *Police perspectives*

- **To identify local issues and problems**

Police managers wanted consultation to identify issues, concerns or problems locally. This is one of the main ways in which consultation is conceived in connection with the Crime and Disorder Act. In addition, and related to the identification of local issues, consultation was sometimes used as a means of gauging or measuring the extent or size of local problems. Thus, for example, a number of forces used survey methods to assess levels of fear of crime among particular communities; others used specifically targeted focus groups to attempt to assess the extent of domestic abuse and racial harassment or violence.

- **To inform the delivery of policing services and the development of policing methods**

For some forces, public consultation was presented as an important means of informing both the style and content of service delivery. Thus, for example, consultation with the deaf community in Doncaster was primarily justified in relation to developing specific police responses to the distinct needs of the deaf community in that area (see Box 8). Linked to, but more specific than simply informing the delivery of services, consultation - in various guises - was undertaken by forces with the aim of identifying possible methods for tackling local problems. Many forces, for example, talked of the difficulties associated with the policing of public sex and of the importance of various forms of consultation in influencing the development of both policies and practices in relation to such policing. Again, focus groups were used, on occasion, for this purpose. Some methods such as citizen's panels or citizen's juries were perceived to be particularly well-suited to the particular aim of identifying solutions or strategies for tackling local problems. Community contacts were used in Avon and Somerset to provide expert opinion in the development of specific policing policies (the race and community relations strategy, and the policing of the lesbian and gay communities). GMP consulted widely via a network of contacts within local lesbian and gay organisations to develop a new staged response policy dealing with the policing of public sex environments.

- **Informing the community of forthcoming operations**

Similarly, forces would on occasion use 'consultation' as a means of informing particular communities about forthcoming operations. The hope in doing so is that any potential hostility that the operation might have elicited will be

reduced. This was a key part of the community liaison co-ordinator in one of the case study districts. In the words of a sector inspector, provision of information about an operation to key community figures helps “stop the rumour mill from getting underway”.

- **To inform and educate the public about policing**

Often consultation has a very straightforward, if rather one-dimensional, purpose: to provide information about policing to a public that otherwise would be likely to remain ignorant of key policies and changes. We describe such consultation as uni-dimensional as, on such occasions, there appeared to be little desire for two-way communication. Linked to this is what is perceived by some officers to be the educational aim of consultation. In this model, consultation is primarily a means through which the realities of policing can be brought home to particular publics.

- **To promote support for and co-operation with the police**

When asked directly about the purposes of consultation many police managers talked, implicitly or explicitly, about the importance of securing public support for policing. In this view consultation was a means of bringing the public ‘on-side’. As one officer put it to us, the aim of consultation is “to take people out of the demand line and put them into the resource line”.<sup>2</sup> Linked to this point, was the fact that consultation is occasionally viewed as an opportunity simply to gain support for policies that have already been largely decided. This is a long-standing criticism of PCCGs (Morgan, 1989) and was admitted by some officers in this study to be, at least in part, a fair criticism.

- **To be seen to be consulting**

Such is the current pressure on the police service to consult that there is a tendency, on occasion, for there to appear to be no reason, other than a statutory responsibility, to engage in such activity. As discussed earlier, police authorities have a legal requirement to consult with the public prior to the setting of local police objectives. Thus, it is an important objective for police authorities and their forces to be able to demonstrate that they are consulting effectively about a broad range of activities and with the fullest possible range of communities, using appropriate methods. From time to time, therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that there appears to be little obvious purpose or rationale in some consultative activity other than the act of being seen to consult. This kind of underlying rationale for consultation has been used as a criticism of the police, implying that consultation is simply about public relations. However, good public relations is one legitimate objective of some forms of consultation (so long as it is not the

<sup>2</sup> This is reflected by the development of independent advisory groups (e.g. in the Metropolitan Police). These groups aim to encourage the active participation of community representatives in the oversight of policing policy and practice and to act as a bridge between the police and different groups within the local community.

only or the primary objective). It may send out an important message to some more critical groups in the population, and increase the possibility of more effective operational contacts lower down the organisation. However, if the purpose of some forms of consultation is primarily symbolic (in this sense) then it should be explicitly recognised as such by police managers, and not confused with other more practical objectives.

### *Community perspectives*

- **To influence local policing policy and style**

For community participants, a key aim of consultation is to have some impact on the manner in which local policing is delivered. This may have a general aim such as the provision of a certain amount of visible patrolling or, as is more often the case for particular population groups, a more specific aim.

- **Police action on specific problems (e.g. more or less enforcement)**

Local people may make very specific requests about the way in which particular local problems are policed. Thus, for example, gay people have made specific representations about the policing of public sex in a number of force areas, basically claiming that the law enforcement was being unfairly targeted at the gay community. By contrast, formal consultation fora more often gave rise to a range of demands for more enforcement (e.g. more proactive policing of prostitution, higher profile policing of drug-dealing, police action against cottaging in public toilets).

### **Box 1: Conflicting community demands – Middlesbrough, Cleveland Police**

Residents and businesses in a particular part of the town have increasingly complained in recent years about the prevalence of street prostitution and kerb-crawling in their area. The police have been urged to take strong enforcement action against the problem. For example, in August 1998 local residents presented a 1,000 signature petition demanding that the police take action. Demands for action were also a frequent part of meetings of the local police consultative group. A questionnaire survey of residents conducted by the police force also gave rise to widespread complaints about the problem and calls for a more punitive approach from the police and courts.

The police adopted a range of responses to this problem, consulting agencies working to help female prostitutes, and holding focus groups with the women themselves. These contacts highlighted the complex difficulties faced by female



prostitute, the dangers and problems that they face, and the difficulties they experience in escaping from street prostitution. In particular, these contacts underlined how traditional punitive responses fail to solve the underlying problems that cause prostitution, and may even make them worse (i.e. women having to work more to pay off fines). Such findings have encouraged the police to adopt a more progressive approach to the policing of prostitution, which in many ways needs to be balanced against the stated demand of many local residents for more law enforcement.

Similarly, for minority ethnic communities participation in consultative fora often has the stated aim of getting the problem of racially motivated offending taken seriously. A lesbian member of a gay men's and women's group in one case study area wanted to highlight (via consultation) the specific problem of hate crime against gay women. In another case study area, some respondents were concerned that police consultation was primarily geared towards addressing problems raised by the more socially powerful groups in the force area.

### Box 2: Police recognition of specific problems – GMP

The Greater Manchester Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative is a formal consultation mechanism led by the lesbian and gay community in the Greater Manchester area working in partnership with the police, the police authority, local authorities, businesses and community groups. The group meets regularly, and has highlighted a range of specific problems pertaining to the policing of lesbian and gay communities. For example, the force has recently produced detailed policy guidelines relating to the policing of hate crimes. These include, provision of a clear definition of homophobic incidents, new recording methods, new procedures to encourage increased reporting of such incidents (including self-referral forms and third-party reporting), and guidance for investigating officers.

- **Police recognition of community dynamics and cultural difference**

In many cases, a primary purpose of consultation is to heighten police awareness of community dynamics and cultural difference. Numerous minority ethnic community representatives interviewed as part of this study made reference to what they perceived as an unsatisfactory level of cultural awareness on the part of local police officers<sup>3</sup>. A different example was provided by the deaf community

in Doncaster, which had sought to raise awareness among the local police of issues of personal safety and security for the hearing impaired.

- **Accountability and conflict resolution**

Occasionally mentioned was the possibility that consultative fora could be used, to a degree, as a means of holding the police accountable for particular actions or the implementation of particular policies. In one force area, local groups were annoyed by a high profile policing operation against suspected drug-dealers outside a school, in which a number of black pupils were searched by the police. A local community worker complained that this had setback community relations in the area, saying:

*The police should have taken the bull by the horns and made a total public apology, as well as apologising individually to the boys and their parents. They should have made a public statement saying they had got it wrong and that it would not happen again.*

In Avon and Somerset, one of the roles of a civilian community consultation co-ordinator (see earlier) was to facilitate meetings between members of the public and police officers when minor complaints or dissatisfactions were expressed. This provided the opportunity for explanation or apology, and was regarded to be a successful form of informal conflict resolution (see also Bland, et al., 2000).

<sup>3</sup> In response to recommendation 49 of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry, all police officers, including CID and civilian staff, should be trained in racism awareness and valuing cultural diversity.

### Box 3: Accountability and conflict resolution

In one inner city ward, the police were present on a multi-agency forum involving local voluntary and statutory agencies and people who live and/or work in that ward. Complaints had been aired at one meeting about the disturbance coming from a house that had become an unofficial youth club in the local area. However, some residents and groups supported the existence of this informal youth club on the grounds that it provided a safe place for young people to socialise, away from the streets. The police took firm action to close down this youth club on safety grounds, leading to local accusations of insensitive policing against young people. The police justified this to the local press by saying they had been requested by the forum to take action, a statement disputed by the chairman. He telephoned the local district commander to complain, and was immediately invited to a meeting at the police station, and received a full apology. The forum and the police subsequently issued a joint statement in favour of the provision of more 'official' youth facilities in the area.

- **Access to police facilities and resources**

Some community participants in consultation did appear to have some rather ambitious hopes of what consultation might achieve. One argued that the police should provide resources for local youth clubs, and offer office accommodation and other facilities for local community groups. However, while a limited amount of this kind of activity may be possible, it is clearly unrealistic to expect the police service to provide facilities and resources to local community groups routinely.

This is the background against which a more general discussion of consultation must be understood. The reality is that a term such as 'police-community consultation' not only covers a broad range of activities but also has diverse aims and objectives. At the crudest level the aims and objectives of consultation vary depending on whether it is the aims and objectives as understood by the police or as understood by the community. However, for both the police and community members the potential aims and objectives of consultation can vary hugely. As importantly, perhaps, they may also conflict with each other.

### **General consultation**

Given the complexity of aims and objectives that are potentially involved in police-community consultation it is no surprise that a range of means are required to engage successfully. We outline below the range of consultative activity currently undertaken by police authorities and forces.

#### *Consultative committees*

The study suggested that a significant number of police authorities and forces now explicitly recognise the limitations of traditional PCCGs, and many are either actively reforming them or, at the very least, are tending to bypass them as a consultative mechanism. Increasingly police authorities and forces are turning to other methods as the basis for their consultative activity, though PCCGs tend to remain in operation in most local areas and are still the primary forum in some.

#### **Box 4: Decentralised and flexible models of consultation – Avon and Somerset Police Authority**

Avon and Somerset Police Authority have overhauled their system of police-community consultation. The former system of traditional PCCGs meeting in each district of the force was seen as too rigid and not very inclusive. The police authority and force are currently moving to a new system that allows more freedom to local district commanders to develop a range of consultation mechanisms appropriate for the distinctive characteristics of their local areas.

PCCGs have been replaced by Public Consultation Planning Committees. These consist of about 10 members including two members of the police authority, the district police commander, the local sector inspectors, the community safety officer, and participants from local authority services (e.g. housing, education, highways, youth and social services). Each committee must annually review the local area and existing consultation arrangements, along with the particular local problems of crime and disorder. Following this, they must develop a consultative framework plan that outlines, in detail, the plans for public consultation for the coming year along with the expected outputs. The committee will be expected to draw upon the range of consultation being undertaken by other bodies, including the crime and disorder partnership. Each planning group must have at least one public meeting per year, in order that local people can attend if they wish and have an input. The key point is that local committees have the flexibility to design a programme of consultation methods tailored to the particular needs of the local area. This can include a variety of methods, including informal meetings, visits to schools and colleges, focus groups or public opinion surveys. Each committee must report annually to the police authority with details of its plans for consultation, and the outputs will be reviewed by the police authority at the end of each year.

It is hoped that by devolving consultation to the local level, and by providing a more flexible framework for consultation, the specific needs of groups that have traditionally been under-represented in formal consultative committees will be more likely to be incorporated.

### *Social surveys*

For some time, police forces have carried out surveys of service users in terms of people who have reported crime, victims of specific types of crime, or people who have visited the police station. Although useful as broad feedback about service delivery, this information is usually rather limited in scope, given the nature of the questions asked and the unrepresentative nature of the samples. However, surveys are now a commonplace activity within police forces, and are conducted with regard to annual policing plans and crime reduction strategies. Force performance monitoring departments continue to undertake customer surveys via self-completion questionnaires of general groups such as crime victims or people who have called the police.

Surveys vary from large face-to-face sample surveys to much smaller non-representative postal surveys (there is a continuing tendency for forces to report the number of responses received, rather than reflect on the representativeness of the sample).

### *Citizens' panels*

Citizens' panels usually comprise a relatively large sample of citizens (between 600 and 2,500) designed to be representative of the relevant population. These panels are used as sounding boards to test specific proposals, to assess the performance of local services, and to develop views about future needs. Citizens' panels tend to be conducted in partnership with several local service providers (e.g. local council, health authority and community health councils sharing the panel), although in Britain, local authorities have pioneered their use. Members of the panel are periodically consulted via questionnaires or telephone polling. Citizens' panels have a number of advantages. They can plot changes in views over time, collect the views of specific groups in the population or particular service users. However, citizens' panels have a number of disadvantages. The process of taking part in a panel is likely to make members increasingly experienced and knowledgeable. This will make the panel less representative of the population as a whole, and regular replacement of the membership is therefore essential. In particular, this form of consultation is likely to be very expensive, requiring significant resources in terms of staff time, skills and money.

The study found few examples of panels being maintained by a constabulary. In most cases where citizens' panels have been used by forces, the panels have been run by the local authority and have been utilised by the local force (e.g. Bedfordshire). Given the resources required to run a panel, this appears an appropriate relationship. Cleveland Police, one of the case study forces, provided evidence of a police district utilising a citizens' panel run by a local authority. In Middlesbrough, the local police district were allowed to develop a questionnaire specifically on policing for a citizens' panel run by Middlesbrough Council to assess the performance across a range of local services. Again, the information provided by such methods may be useful, but will tend to be at a broad level of generality, and are unlikely to allow detailed examination of the views and needs of particular population sub-groups (especially those that have been described as hard to reach).

### Box 5: Citizens' consultation panel – North Wales Police

In 1999, North Wales Police established a telephone consultation panel of 500 members of the public drawn from across the force area. The panel members were broadly representative of the population of North Wales in terms of age, gender, socio-economic group and other demographic characteristics. The panel members are contacted twice a year and asked questions about fear of crime, confidence in the police, experience of policing and satisfaction with police service. The force accepted that although this approach provides an innovative and ongoing picture of general public views about policing, the panel is not large enough to allow detailed examination of minority groups in the population.

### *Citizens' juries*

A citizens' jury is a way of undertaking in-depth consultation on a specific issue requiring the input of informed public opinion. A representative sample of participants is drawn from the population, and they are briefed in detail about the background and current thinking on a particular issue. They are then tasked with discussing possible solutions. Projects using citizens' juries have been conducted in the USA and Germany, and have had a real input into policy decisions in particular areas (Coote and Lenaghan, 1997). In general, between 12 and 16 jurors are recruited and fully briefed with background information. The jury sees presentation by key witnesses and has the opportunity to ask questions. In smaller groups, the jury can discuss various aspects of an issue, which are then presented to and discussed by the jury as a whole. The conclusions are then presented to the body that commissioned the jury. The idea of using a citizens' jury has been discussed in a number of force areas but, to date, has not been used for general consultative purposes. However, local authorities have utilised citizens' juries for specific issues, some of which relate to crime and policing.

### Box 6: Citizens' jury on drugs and crime – London Borough of Lewisham

Sixteen people from the local area were randomly selected for the jury. The jury met over four days to hear evidence and make recommendations. The council felt that the jurors responded to the challenge well, and jurors reported that they would recommend the experience to others, and felt they had been involved in and contributed to policy on important issues for the community. The jury's conclusions were reported back to the council and resulted in a new project focusing upon parents and drugs education.

### *Focus groups*

A focus group is a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions on a defined area of interest. It is conducted with a small group (usually between 8 and 12 people) by a skilled moderator, who encourages participants to share their ideas and perceptions. Group members influence each other by responding to ideas and comments in the discussion (Krueger, 1994). The idea is that higher quality information will be yielded in a group dynamic than would be elicited by one-to-one interviews. Focus groups have traditionally been used by market researchers, but have increasingly been utilised by social scientists, business consultants, political parties and public services. It is often used together with other research sources. Focus group research is relatively easy to organise and can be (where focus groups are conducted in-house by trained police staff) a relatively economical way of generating good information and evidence. It is still relatively rare for focus groups to be used for consultation purposes in policing, although they are increasingly used in relation to consultation with so-called hard to reach groups and we discuss this in greater detail below.

### **Consultation with hard to reach groups**

The success of specific attempts to identify and consult with hard to reach groups will depend in part on the broader context of relationships between the police and these groups, and the different factors that have contributed to problematic relationships. In some cases, forces have attempted to adapt their current approaches to general consultation to develop a more inclusive approach overall. This is to be welcomed in that it discourages the unhelpful notion of one mainstream 'majority' community plus a range of smaller 'minority' communities with diverse views and experiences. However, in some cases, particularly given the historical legacy of problematic relationships between the police and some groups, it is important that forces develop specific fora to consult with hard to reach groups.

### *Specific consultative fora*

A number of forces have actively established specific consultative committees in which representatives of the police service meet with participants from a particular community or population group with whom improved communication is desired. This approach is largely based upon the formal committee style of PCCGs, and perhaps shares some of the drawbacks of these. But as groups with a more specific focus (i.e. people who have specific policing problems or needs), they are a worthwhile start to widening access to the police organisation. These specialist consultative committees have developed at different levels, but are most common at the force-wide level. In some forces, such committees have a long history, such as

the Police and Communities Consultative Forum in Northumbria Police, which was set up almost 30 years ago to provide specific liaison with minority ethnic communities in the force area. Recently, a committee comprising women from different minority ethnic communities has been established to discuss policing issues at the force level. Many other forces reported force-wide bodies designed to liaise with minority ethnic groups. In Leicestershire, the Police Advisory Group on Race Issues meets quarterly, again discussing strategic issues at the force level.

Other groups seen as hard to reach are also consulted via specialist consultative committees at the force level. Many forces have tried to develop links with lesbian and gay groups within the force area. Such committees meet to discuss policing issues and involve a range of gay organisations (gay and lesbian switchboards, groups concerned with men's sexual health, owners and managers of gay clubs and pubs, university and college gay society representatives and other groups). Avon and Somerset Police are viewed as a leading force in this regard, with its Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative meeting regularly. Force-wide consultative committees provide a number of functions, primarily informing strategic force policy development, providing a symbolic commitment to diversity issues, and allowing for the development of contacts between senior police officers and active members of various communities. However, they are sometimes criticised as having little operational impact, and being rather more about public relations than police practice.

Forces have established local specialist committees designed to improve consultative links at the operational district level. For example, GMP has a well-established Gay and Lesbian Liaison Committee covering the gay village area in Manchester. The GMP Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative is a force-wide initiative, and currently liaison groups are being established in other districts of the force. A well-established local advisory group has, for some years, been operated at Collyhurst, an area with a relatively high minority ethnic population. In terms of liaison with the gay community, other forces have set up local committees to deal with specific population sub-groups. These include:

- Cambridgeshire – well-attended public meetings held in a gay pub, chaired by a police sergeant;
- West Midlands – four local liaison groups exist in the force;
- Avon and Somerset – liaison groups being established at district level;
- Staffordshire;
- South Wales;
- Durham;



- Sussex – a well-established local committee in Brighton; and
- Lancashire – several local liaison committees.

### Box 7: Newcastle West End Asian Traders' Association (WATA) – Northumbria Police

The Newcastle West End police district's Racial Incidents Investigation Unit analysed local incidents of racial abuse and racially motivated crime, and found that a third of victims during the previous 10 months were Asian traders. However, the traders had no formal bodies that could identify and address common problems, and no effective means of collective communication with the police and other agencies. Thus, the local police district decided to set up a traders' association in the area, with the aim of it becoming a self-running group with strong links to the police and local authority. Community beat officers visited all Asian traders in the district and invited them to a series of meetings held at a local school. Following initial meetings, almost 60 traders agreed to join WATA. Six traders volunteered to act as a steering committee for the association. The city council agreed to support the initiative and provided funding for an administrative worker to support the association. The implementation team applied for funding from New Deal for Communities on behalf of WATA, to purchase security cameras and shutters for traders in the area.

Eventually, 70% of Asian traders in the area joined WATA. The aim is for WATA to be a broad organisation representing the collective views of traders in the area, but that it should have specific functions regarding consultation with the police. For example, it will:

- approach the police to seek action on specific problems;
- hold the local police accountable on behalf of its members;
- act in partnership with the police to solve problems; and
- provide opportunity for third-party reporting of racial incidents and other crimes.

A number of forces have targeted young people, in particular by setting up youth fora. GMP has had youth fora run by the police authority in schools for some time now; Durham and Lancashire have both set up similar schemes. Police authorities and forces have suggested that one of the key problems with arrangements - which are often school or college-based - is that they tend to target the better-off and more

articulate young people. Disaffected youth tend to be overlooked. Again, however, a number of forces are attempting to overcome this. South Wales, for example, are targeting under-achievers and low attenders in schools across the force area, identifying the 'bottom 20%' as part of a scheme called WISE For Life, and undertaking various police-led activities and programmes with them. A large number of forces still undertake visits to schools, but these do not appear to be very comprehensive or have a clear rationale.

### Box 8: Policing the deaf community – South Yorkshire Police Authority

South Yorkshire has a specific police consultative group with the deaf community. The programme was developed by the police authority following a request from the Doncaster Deaf Action Group. Doncaster has a deaf school that serves the whole of the north of England, and many school-leavers set up home in the area, resulting in an unusually large deaf community. People from this community experienced problems in communication with police officers, both when reporting crimes or incidents, and when stopped or arrested. In conjunction with South Yorkshire Police Authority, a consultative group has been established in partnership with the Doncaster Deaf Action Group. This is beginning to address issues surrounding communication with police officers, and other issues.

- A worker from the RNID is now available to facilitate communication between police officers and deaf people in custody or victims of crime.
- Problems with minicom system at police stations were highlighted and resolved.
- A training video about the issue of hearing problems has been shown to officers as part of Deaf Awareness Week.
- Community participants stated that some police officers who have no experience of deaf people interpret sign language as aggressive. The force agreed to address this through training.
- The committee discussed how deaf people can use the CCTV help points located throughout Doncaster city centre, including training operators to recognise the sign for 'help me'.

This consultative forum for a previously hard to reach part of the local community has been generally welcomed as a positive development. Participants report that it has helped raise particular problems and issues, but also educated police officers and members of the deaf community about the problems they each face.

### *Social surveys*

Few forces have carried out major large-scale quantitative surveys of the local population, mainly because of the prohibitive cost of such an approach. Large-scale surveys can provide useful quantitative estimates about levels of satisfaction with and confidence in the police, particular experiences of policing, willingness to report crime or give other information to the police (e.g. levels of victimisation of hidden crimes). However, for a number of reasons, surveys are limited in their usefulness for consulting with many of the so-called hard to reach groups:

- Large-scale surveys need a proper sampling frame whereby a representative sample of the population to be studied can be drawn. No such sampling frame exists for many groups such as the lesbian and gay population, travellers, and newly-arrived minority ethnic groups.
- Response rates to surveys may be very low, especially in postal surveys. Face-to-face interviewing can increase response but is extremely expensive.
- Surveys provide little information about the deeper explanations lying behind statistical findings such as stated confidence levels in the police.

However, larger scale surveys have been attempted in some forces. For example, in 1997/8, the Crewe and Nantwich division of Cheshire Constabulary commissioned independent research to investigate relationships between the police and minority ethnic communities in the area. The research was carried out by Manchester Metropolitan University, and included a quantitative survey (although response rates were relatively low). The findings suggested that black and Asian people had consistently more negative views about and experiences of the police when compared to white people. A significant minority of black and Asian people stated that they distrusted the police to the extent that they would be reluctant to report a crime. Some police authorities and police forces undertake specific surveys of attitudes to and experiences of the police in gay and lesbian communities. Methods include distributing self-completion questionnaires in gay pubs and clubs (Cambridgeshire and Staffordshire). Perhaps predictably surveys have proved far

from straightforward. Thus, for example, in recent years Merseyside Police have conducted several surveys of hard to reach groups. In 1998, surveys were conducted of young people, the homeless, and gays and lesbians. With regard to the latter, 2,000 questionnaires were distributed via Merseyside Lesbian and Gay Community Forum. However, only 138 were returned - a response rate of 7%.

### *Focus groups*

A number of forces have used more focused qualitative methods to tap into the views and experiences of groups outside the traditional consultative process. A notable example was in Cleveland Police, where the Middlesbrough district have, for two years, carried out a series of focus groups with designated hard to reach groups in the local population (see Box 9). The findings from the focus group research have had an important impact on local policing policy, and have fed directly into the development of the district policing plan (see next chapter).

Staffordshire Police commissioned an independent research company to carry out a 'race audit' in the force area. This study primarily involved conducting a series of focus groups with members of the minority ethnic communities. Focus groups were used (rather than individual interviews or a quantitative survey) for two primary reasons. First, the aim was to provide a non-threatening environment for members of marginalised or vulnerable communities. Individuals who are nervous or under-confident about the police may feel more comfortable about contributing views in a group environment than in individual interviews. Second, the aim was to understand peoples' underlying perceptions, and generating specific proposals and ideas for a negotiated way forward. Focus groups lend themselves well to this kind of research (see Greenbaum, 1998).

Groups were based on existing organisations and fora in the force area, with a specific aim to include a wide range of individuals other than known 'community leaders'. A good cross section was achieved in terms of age and gender, and the groups included all the main minority ethnic groups present in the local area. Nine focus groups (including one of local white residents) were undertaken in the summer of 1999, and the results were presented in a detailed report to the force. As well as feeding back key information about the perceptions of people from minority ethnic groups about the police, the audit provided key recommendations regarding ongoing consultation with minority ethnic communities. In particular, the aim was for police staff to be trained in focus group methodology to allow groups to be conducted at regular intervals.

### Box 9: Focus group consultation – Middlesborough, Cleveland Police

During 1997/8, the Middlesborough police district undertook a review of consultation approaches, which raised particular concerns about the relative over-reliance on police attendance at formal meetings, and the quality of information that such meetings provided for police managers. When the Middlesborough district was subsequently chosen as a pilot site for Best Value, district research staff decided to pilot a number of focus groups with various groups in the area with a view to improving consultative information. Two staff members (one police officer, one support staff) undertook training provided by the Police Foundation in focus group moderation and analysis. A series of focus groups were conducted in 1999, and the results provided to district management.

Following this, a more systematic series of focus groups with hard to reach sections of the local population have been held in 2000. Each group lasts up to two hours, is moderated by two staff members, (usually) tape-recorded and fully transcribed. Focus groups were held at a range of locations, including the police headquarters, community centres, hotels and public houses. The data were analysed using a thematic matrix to trace key themes and concepts raised in the discussions. Staff reported that the exercise was relatively cost and time effective, having carried out 10 focus groups within two weeks. The focus groups carried out covered:

- the elderly;
- disabled people;
- minority ethnic men;
- publicans;
- students;
- minority ethnic women;
- single parents;
- gay men;
- lesbians; and
- prostitutes.

The focus group research has been incorporated in a broader consultation protocol that sets out a framework for consultation at different levels of the police organisation. The plan is for this protocol to be used by other districts of the force. The protocol allows for focus groups to be undertaken at regular six-monthly periods, with the results feeding directly into the force planning cycle.

Northumbria's Newcastle West End police district has implemented a pilot project called Enhanced Response for Ethnic Communities. This has involved a wide range of initiatives, including some mentioned in other parts of this report, such as the establishment of an Asian traders' association and the employment of minority ethnic link workers. A key part of this project has been to enhance the consultative process within the local area. This has involved various questionnaire surveys, along with a number of targeted focus groups exploring concerns about crime and racism, victimisation and willingness to report racial incidents, confidence in the police, main priorities for policing services and training needs for police officers. Focus groups were set up via community leaders, and took place mostly at places of worship. Further focus group discussions were held with members of an English class for Arabic women, and for elderly members of minority ethnic groups via lunch clubs run by Age Concern. In total, 13 focus groups were run with various different minority ethnic groups and covering different gender and age groups.

### *Special events and seminars*

Several forces organised specific, usually one-off events that were aimed at opening, or continuing, dialogue with particular minority communities. The following are three illustrative examples:

- Black meets Blue seminar (Suffolk) – a day's seminar was organised in Ipswich, the town with the highest proportion of minority ethnic people in the force area. Participants from local minority ethnic communities were invited to spend a day with police officers from the community relations department discussing issues surrounding policing and minority ethnic people. Various groups were invited including members of Race Equality Councils (RECs) and racial harassment monitoring groups, and other minority ethnic organisations.
- Seminars to discuss the implications of the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Avon and Somerset) – over 100 police and community participants came together at police headquarters to identify issues prior to the formulation of a new race and community relations strategy
- 'May the Force be With You' (Cleveland) – the Commission for Racial Equality choose 12 people to spend a week with the police of the central Middlesbrough district. After some class-based days where they heard presentations (e.g. on training and equal opportunities) they each accompanied an afternoon/evening shift. The force claimed that participants could "go anywhere and ask anything".

### *Multi-agency fora*

A number of forces, whilst not having established specific committees discussing the policing issues affecting hard to reach groups, are represented on broader multi-agency committees dealing with particular communities. It is now commonplace for police forces to send representatives to RECs that meet in local districts. Multi-agency groups dealing with racial attacks and harassment are now increasingly common, and the police play a central role in these. Gay and lesbian policing issues are considered on a range of multi-agency fora discussing gay and lesbian issues (e.g. Leicestershire, Devon and Cornwall, Nottinghamshire, North Yorkshire, and Dyfed-Powys).

### *Other approaches*

Some forces have tried to develop anonymous reporting of homophobic attacks via third parties (such as Switchboard - a lesbian and gay organisation in Manchester). One force (Cambridgeshire) has set up a special confidential telephone line for gay people to contact the police and to report incidents. South Wales Police, in partnership with Cardiff County Council, organised a national conference on responding to homophobic attacks; other national conferences have been held in Oxford, Brighton and Manchester. Community contact officers, with specific responsibility for liaising with the gay and lesbian communities, are planned in Norfolk and are established in Avon and Somerset as district liaison officers. GMP also holds surgeries in the gay village. Independent advisory groups have also been developed in several forces (e.g. Metropolitan Police and West Yorkshire Police) in order to facilitate community participation and oversight of police policy.

#### **Box 10: Link worker scheme – Newcastle West End, Northumbria Police**

Minority ethnic community members in the local area had limited provision to report incidents to the police in their own language. These consisted of a telephone helpline, where callers could leave messages in various minority languages. There was no provision for reports to be made at locations other than police stations, or through personal contact with a police representative speaking a minority language. If a person needed to make a report in a community language, police funds would pay for a registered interpreter, although this could incur significant delays in the investigation. From early 2000, the Racial Incidents and Investigation Unit at Newcastle West End police district employed two minority ethnic link workers for three years. The link workers, between them, can speak and write the four main local minority languages (mainly South Asian languages) and had a good understanding of the

## COMMUNITY RELATIONS AND CONSULTING HARD TO REACH GROUPS

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local area and community. They have been tasked with establishing satellite surgeries throughout the local area where incidents can be reported and advice given. The surgeries are also intended to highlight the availability of police services and procedures, and provide an interpreting service for victims. The surgeries are promoted via local newsletters and leaflets, and raise awareness in the local press.



### 5. The impact of consultation

A key aim of this study was to consider consultation within the broader context of community relations. Clearly, formal and informal methods of consultation cannot be examined independently of the wider pattern of policing in a locality. Within the limits of the present study, it was clearly not feasible to identify 'causal' links between forms of consultation and policing outcomes in the form of broader community relations. However, it was possible to explore general perceptions - among police officers and key informants living and/or working in the local community - about changing police-community relations over recent years, and the impacts of consultation. It should be noted that this limited assessment of impact was based on the perceptions of a relatively small number of well-placed individuals in local areas. Further detailed research in local areas is required to map out in more detail the complex relationships between consultative forms and the dynamics of police-community relations. In the discussion that follows, we consider the idea of impact on four distinct levels:

- strategic level – force-wide policies;
- operational level – policies at the police district level;
- practice level – attitudes and behaviour of front-line police staff; and
- community level – attitudes and behaviour of community groups.

#### The strategic level

It is clear that this is a time of substantial change in policing strategies towards disadvantaged or vulnerable communities. The study showed a very large volume of activity currently being undertaken by forces with regard to community and race relations in particular, and policing diversity in general. Many forces reported that they were currently reviewing (or had recently reviewed) community and race relations strategies, and in addition, gave details of a wide range of activities that might come under the general heading of 'consultation'. It is difficult to link the development of new strategies to consultation with minority groups. In fact, it seems much more likely that the key impetus has come from developments at the national level, such as HMIC's thematic inspection reports on community and race relations (1997; 1999b), and the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (1999) as well as the associated critical comment in the national press.

However, there does appear to be evidence that forces are attempting to inform their reviews by including lay opinion from outside police forces. Although the development of strategy cannot be accurately described as a direct result of consultation, it is clear that consultation is increasingly seen as an important part of the process. Reference was made earlier to the different levels at which specialist

consultative groups have been established. A number of forces, such as Northumbria, have specialist groups at the force level which are sometimes organised and serviced by the police authority. It is important that the objectives of such groups are made clear. They should primarily be seen as expert committees providing input and advice at the strategic level. Discussions of particular incidents or policy details should only be relevant in so far as they contribute to the formulation of wider policy frameworks, setting the scene for the details of operational implementation lower down the organisation. Such force-wide forms of consultation also provide an important symbolic function. Although the term 'public relations' is occasionally used as criticism of such bodies, we would argue that it is a legitimate and important function for police forces to be seen to be consulting at the highest level. Inevitably, such consultation will be limited in terms of the observable impact on practice lower down the organisation.

### Box 11: Community participation in strategic planning – Avon and Somerset Police

The new force race and community relations strategy, Race for Equality, emerged from a major review following the publication of the HMIC thematic reports, and with the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry underway. Representatives from across the force area were invited to a conference, including community participants from each district. About 100 people (half of whom were from outside the force) spent a day in working groups in unstructured discussions about what was required for a good race and community relations strategy. Separate working parties were established to look at the following aspects of the strategy, each chaired by a senior police officer:

- police searches;
- racist incidents;
- recruitment and retention;
- training; and
- crime prevention.

Community participants were included on each of the working parties. After the working parties had reported, a document outlining the new strategy was published. This is divided into:

- external matters (e.g. racist incident investigation, victim and witness care, crime prevention, stop and search, and intelligence); and

- internal matters (e.g. leadership and force procedure, recruitment, retention and training).

Under each of these sub-headings there is a detailed action checklist providing a list of planned developments broken down into five levels:

- force level;
- district/departmental level;
- supervisory officers;
- individual officers; and
- community level.

This level of detail compares well with the strategy documents of other forces, and provides a concrete list of aims against which success can be measured. The Deputy Chief Constable is currently chairing a working group review of implementation of the strategy, involving members of RECs from across the force area.

Very significant changes in official policies towards gay and lesbians were clear in many forces. Moreover, some forces - GMP in particular - claim to have played an important role in changing policing policy at a national level as well. Police forces were recently commended by HMIC for improvements in consultation with gay and lesbian groups. Most police forces have now developed specific policies for policing gay and lesbian communities, although these policies vary greatly in the level of detail and approach (Avon and Somerset Police, 1999). In some forces, detailed force policy documents have been produced, most usually after a process of consultation and dialogue with members of gay and lesbian groups in force areas. For example, Leicestershire Constabulary has published a detailed force policy document outlining clear policies for investigating homophobic incidents, the policing of public sex environments, and training about issues surrounding sexuality for police staff. In addition, most forces have some form of ongoing consultative mechanisms with members of the gay and lesbian community in place. Once again, the role of liaison groups at the force level is primarily one of expert advice on strategy and symbolic commitment.

### The operational level – policing policy in local districts

As noted above, although there appear to have been significant changes at the level of force policy, the more important question is how far these policies translate to the ground level. In a number of areas, those individuals or agencies who are critical of the police tend to recognise improved attitudes and commitment among senior officers, but question the degree to which this translates to operational officers at the local level. The difficulties in implementing strategic policies and bringing about substantive change in police styles and practices are well-established (see Jones, et al., 1994). A good deal of police work is naturally invisible, in that many police-public encounters take place away from the eyes of supervising officers or the general public. Changes in policing policy do not translate in any straightforward way to changes in patterns or styles of policing on the ground.

Some of the community participants in strategic consultation in Avon and Somerset reflected these concerns. Members of the local black community, both those directly involved in the working parties leading to the new force strategy and those outside of this process, were broadly critical of the police. They referred to high levels of discontent and distrust of the police among young black men in inner-city areas, primarily related to the perception that they were subject to unjustified police targeting of searches. Although the principle of community participation in force working parties was welcomed, community respondents underlined that this can only be a first step. Community participants welcomed the aims and contents of the force strategy documents, but they highlighted the need to ensure that changes were implemented fully at the local level. As one person said:

*We can't say things have improved just because they are inviting a few people from the community to the police station. It's a start, but only a start. We need to know if it's actually improving out there.*

In Avon and Somerset, police officers and community workers have had to deal with what one police authority member described as a “terrible legacy” of poor relationships in the St Paul’s area of Bristol between the police and the local (mainly) black community. Serious public disorder during the 1980s was related in general to social exclusion, unemployment and urban deprivation, but more particularly to enforcement-oriented policing and accusations of police racism. The practical result was that by the end of the 1980s, there was little in the way of positive contact between the police and members of the community. The local ruling Labour group on the city council had an official policy of non-contact with police, which in effect meant that all local agencies and organisations were hard to reach in

practice. Although a raft of post-Scarman reforms (including improved training, and the development of a police-community consultative committee) had been introduced at the policy level, it appears that the wider perception was that at the level of policing style and practice, little had changed. One result was that the police were reluctant to undertake high profile operations in the area, even though levels of crime and disorder remained quite high.

A new district commander was tasked to improve police-community relations in the area. Initiatives included:

- Briefing all officers about the cultural and ethnic make-up of the area, and developing a set of guidance notes to ensure that all officers had a better understanding of their local population.
- Undertaking a basic survey of local residents' perceptions of crime and disorder problems, carried out by local beat officers knocking on doors and conducting face-to-face interviews. Although this encountered considerable opposition (both from police staff and members of the community), the police persisted until a large number of responses were achieved, the majority of which highlighted concerns about street robberies and street drug-dealing.
- Senior police officers gatecrashing meetings of local agencies and organisations to develop better contacts with the local community. After initial opposition, gradually, improved contacts were achieved.
- High profile policing operations against drug-dealers, leading to the prosecution of a large number of people from outside the area. These convictions received widespread publicity in the local press, and helped to support residents' arguments that their area was unfairly stigmatised because of the activities of outsiders.

Although significant criticisms of policing in the local area remain, there did seem to be a sense that at the local district policy level, the overall style of policing had changed for the better in response to consultation with local people. Even those individuals who remained highly critical of the local police tended to compare the district's officers' approaches favourably with those of officers in other police districts. There did appear to be a general recognition that things had improved since the 1980s. One leading member of a local consultative forum reported that the police-community relationship had improved "to a very large extent; it has changed tremendously". He referred to the fact that there was less reliance on high profile

enforcement-oriented policing locally, and a greater willingness on the part of the police to discuss and explain policing priorities and operations with members of local community groups. However, even those involved in consultation with the police remained rather critical of the degree to which policy changes had been implemented at the operational level. In particular, concerns were raised about perceptions of mutual hostility between the police and young black men, and the fact that consultation mechanisms still tended to preclude the voices of young people in general.

There was some evidence that the developments at the policy level in policing the lesbian and gay community were having some impact at ground level. A member of the Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative in Avon and Somerset referred to “considerable improvement”, and another talked of the major steps at force policy level becoming increasingly visible at district level. One respondent was particularly pleased with changes in the local police response to homophobic incidents: “Some really effective work has been done here with officers working with their local groups”. In terms of the policing of public sex environments, there was consensus that actual operational policies (as well as force-wide policy) had changed at the local level, although examples of what was seen as insensitive policing still occurred. The development of local and force-wide consultative mechanisms provided an opportunity to address such problems when they arose. For example, because of established dialogue, complaints could be directed centrally via the force-wide liaison group if necessary or to the newly-established local consultative groups. Another example of a force where operational policy at the local district level had clearly changed, in part, as a result of improved consultation links with the gay community was Hampshire Constabulary (see Box 12).

### Box 12: Policing gay and lesbian communities – Hampshire Constabulary

A survey in 1994 by the Gay Men's Health Project had highlighted relatively poor relations with the local police and, more particularly, the high number of suicides among gay men prosecuted in connection with public sex offences. In order to address the problem a series of meetings was organised locally and, in 1996, Hampshire Police appointed a number of Community Contact Officers (CCOs) (later renamed Lesbian and Gay Liaison Officers (LGLOs)). A year later research was undertaken by the force into the specific concerns of the gay and lesbian communities in Hampshire. The research was conducted in two stages:

- prior to the introduction of the CCOs; and
- 12 months after, with the aim of assessing the extent of any changes.

The most positive change measured was an increase in the proportion of respondents reporting that they believed that the police were aware or very aware of gay men's concerns. At that stage, however, there was little evidence that the introduction of the CCOs might have been a significant factor in the changes identified.

Two years on, a number of developments at the level of both policy and practice are visible:

- A detailed policy on policing with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered communities, covering recording homophobic incidents, the responsibilities of divisional commanders and LGLOs, anonymous reporting, and the policing of sexual offences by males in public places.
- A service level agreement for the self-reporting of crimes and incidents with a homophobic motivation, the aim of which is to encourage reporting of incidents to the police. The agreement outlines the respective responsibilities in this regard of the Gay Men's Health Project, lesbian organisations and the police force.
- Changes in force practice in the charging of public sex offences; gay men now being cautioned rather than prosecuted for first offences.

In some cases, consultation developments specifically at district level have resulted in changes in local policing policy. A key example of this came from Cleveland Police. The Middlesborough district policing policy on prostitution changed completely, largely in response to a range of consultative initiatives adopted by the local police force.

### Box 13: Impact on local policy – Middlesborough, Northumbria Police

The Cleveland Police are associated with a zero-tolerance approach to the policing of low level disorder and other public nuisance problems, including prostitution. Residents in a particular area of Middlesborough became increasingly concerned about the visible impact of street prostitution on their area. This had significantly impacted on the quality of life of local residents. Traditionally, the policing approach to reducing the problem focused primarily on arresting the street prostitutes for soliciting, many of whom are subsequently fined. This does little to break the cycle of street activity.

However, within the last three years the approach has changed, partly in response to an extensive consultation exercise with relevant agencies, local residents and businesses, together with information from kerb-crawlers and street prostitutes. A multi-agency Prostitution Task Group has been established with representation from the police (it is chaired by the district superintendent), local authority, health authority, probation service, outreach groups, women's groups, a local journalist, residents, Barnardo's and the local universities. A wide reaching action plan has been designed. This includes:

- A Missing from Home policy for children deemed to be at risk of being drawn into prostitution.
- The appointment of a police liaison officer to improve contact between prostitutes working within the locality, together with the provision of a telephone hotline number for prostitutes who may need help and/or advice.
- A referral scheme which provides information and contact with the local drug advisory centre.
- A high profile police campaign which includes the 'naming and shaming' of convicted kerb-crawlers in the local media.
- The use of powers available under the Crime and Disorder Act, such as the successful application for an anti-social behaviour order for a kerb-crawler convicted of repeat offending.



The above example shows how, given the inevitable conflicts surrounding law enforcement and order maintenance, there is a danger that community consultation will simply give rise to an ever more complex range of demands upon the police. Police managers face dilemmas in trying to balance and respond to the conflicting demands of diverse populations. In the past, formal methods of consultation have been criticised because they have simply provided justification from the 'respectable majority' for the strong policing of marginalised groups. In developing links with marginalised and vulnerable communities, the police may face criticism from other groups that they are becoming driven by minority interests. Police responses to calls for tougher policing of prostitution in Avon and Somerset and in Cleveland appeared to fit squarely with the general recommendation of HMIC that two main criteria should guide decisions in the face of community conflicts. These are first, "protection of the more vulnerable groups in question" and second, the development of "good relations between different communities within the local population". Other examples of balancing conflict relate to the policing of public sex environments, which are often the subject of complaints from the general public. For example, the graded response developed in GMP, discussed above, attempts to balance effective law enforcement with the fair policing of a minority group.

### **The practice level – policing styles and behaviour**

Given the nature of the current project, we were unable to directly examine the impact of consultative approaches upon the direct practice and behaviour of police officers in local areas. Again, we must rely on the general perceptions of informed respondents in local areas. Despite a range of activities to address problematic relationships between the police and young black men in one force area, there remained significant concerns among local community workers about the attitudes and behaviour of some police officers. As noted above, there was a general feeling among community respondents that the police were still targeting young black men unfairly, and that new force policies had, as yet, had little impact upon this problem. By contrast, front-line police officers had strong perceptions that the style and practices of policing in that locality had changed fundamentally in recent years. Police officers with long experience of the area clearly felt that there had been significant improvements in the style and practice of policing on the ground. They argued that there was strong opposition to racist language and stereotyping on the local district, opposition that was enforced not by senior officers but by junior officer colleagues. Officers discussed how any operation some years ago would require huge back-up resources, which is not the case now. It is difficult to evaluate the degree to which either of these perceptions reflected the reality of policing in the local area. Previous research has noted how perceptions of community relations can be self-fulfilling:

*The views held by members of the public of their force may be based on direct experience or anecdote... Although police officers may believe them to be inaccurate or misconceived, collectively they constitute the realities of policing performance 'in the eyes of the community'. This must be recognised by forces as they engage in the unending task of repair and maintenance of their relations with the communities they serve.*

(HMIC, 1997)

Suspicion of, and hostility towards, the police in an area, whether well-founded or not, contributes to a vicious circle in which both police and community hostilities interact and feed off each other. One of the broad defining characteristics of hard to reach groups is that police-community relations are fragile. Thus, mistakes or unprofessional behaviour by a single officer can undermine the efforts of all those officers who behave at all times with integrity and fairness. A number of community respondents in the case study forces remarked upon this. One respondent expressed frustration with what was seen as insensitive policing against black youths in his locality which occurred against the backdrop of overall improved police-community relations, and said:

*Big improvements happen, but then small incidents like this totally undermine them.*

It is not only community representatives who find such developments frustrating. A number of police contacts expressed dismay at the actions of officers from outside the area, or officers who were not aware of changes in policy, acting in an insensitive way and damaging police-community relations. One example referred to a small group of officers in one force targeting a public sex area and arresting a large number of men, when local police policy (agreed with members of the gay and lesbian liaison group) was to adopt a lower-profile preventive approach to such areas. The local district commander was embarrassed and annoyed with this development, but could only offer apologies and explanation to angry members of the local gay community. This underlines the need to ensure that information and policies arising out of consultation are disseminated widely between different levels, and different operational specialisms, of the police organisation.

Despite the changes that would appear to be taking place within the police service, we were reminded by several respondents of the cultural limits that continue to exist. As one member of the Manchester Lesbian and Gay Group described it:

*I worked with Women's Aid in the '80s and through that I became involved with training and I used to do training sessions to sergeants every week... But I always knew that in any group there would be at least a third of the group who didn't want*

*to be there, who didn't see what I was talking about as being policing... I still struggle in dealing with the police despite having done this sort of thing for years. There is a culture in the police which is about defending their position. The police can feel vulnerable because there is now a requirement for accountability and they don't know how to do it.*

The difficulties of translating operational policy into the practice of individual officers was illustrated by the example of policy changes towards prostitution in the central Middlesbrough district. Despite what were widely seen as very significant changes at the level of operational policy, focus groups with prostitute women gave rise to a number of complaints about unprofessional treatment, such as verbal abuse, of women by some police officers. This contributed to a continued reluctance to report crimes or pass on other information to the police. In response to these findings, the district command team pledged to take action in terms of training and other ways of addressing the attitudes of some officers.

### **The community level**

It is important to remember that consultation is a two-way process. As discussed in earlier chapters, a key criticism of police approaches to consultation previously is that it has been constructed within a mindset that sees its primary purpose as educating a misinformed public about the realities of policing. Similarly, community approaches can be criticised as one-dimensional in as far as they focus primarily on making (sometimes unrealistic) demands of the police, and do not place sufficient weight on challenging stereotypes and hostilities towards the police within the community. Real dialogue takes commitment from two sides. Perhaps the most common interpretation of the term 'hard to reach groups' is concerned with groups that have traditionally been hostile or suspicious of the police. One of the problems that consultation mechanisms have to overcome is the legacy of a negative past. Whilst bringing about changes in the attitudes and behaviour of police officers is difficult, it is also difficult to bring about changes in the attitudes and behaviour of some members of the community. The study found some examples where involvement in consultation appeared to have some affect on the attitudes of community participants, although how far this affected wider community attitudes is impossible to tell.

### Box 14: The community impact of consultation – City of London

Respondents in the City of London working with young homeless people referred to changes in attitude and approach on the part both of police officers and young people, particularly in the attitudes of young black men towards the police. A hostel manager observed that, as recently as 18 months before the fieldwork, stops and searches of young black men were a regular, everyday occurrence. However, since the adoption of the diversity strategy by the force, with its increased emphasis on consultation and community contact, there had been a significant improvement: “Once we started questioning why they were being stopped and searched... the police stopped”. As a consequence “I feel young people feel safer with the police because we [community leaders] are introducing them to the police”.

Overall, there was a feeling that barriers between the police and the young homeless were being broken down. Respondents suggested that the police were now more inclined to take homeless people to shelters, to attempt to build up contacts with young people, to identify their needs, to provide facilities and to focus on developing trust within the local community. Within limitations, this was being rewarded by a more open attitude from young people in the area towards the police.

Members of the black community involved in the development of the new race and community relations strategy in Avon and Somerset remarked upon a change in their own attitudes towards the police. Although in many important respects they remained critical of the police, they reported that they were now much less hostile to the police than they had been previously. They contrasted their views with those of the majority of young black men in the locality, who had little experience of non-adversarial contact with police officers. They underlined the vital importance of providing structures in which young people can engage with the police in constructive dialogue, rather than simply being moved on or experiencing policing in other adversarial ways.

In one case study force, members of the Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative reported important changes in their own perceptions of and attitudes towards the police as a direct result of being involved in consultation. The initiative had, as one of its explicit objectives, the aim “to create a better understanding of the police service within the lesbian and gay communities”. A representative of a gay men's health

organisation reported that a key objective was “breaking prejudices on our side [about the police], and that is what we have done most successfully”. Although still quite critical of the police in some respects, there was a clear commitment here to a two-way model of consultation. Another example of this was in the readiness of another member of the gay men's health organisation to accept the need to educate gay men into accepting that public sex environments can cause problems for the wider population. Consideration needs to be given to other users of public spaces or public toilets, and that people “do not have the right to have sex wherever and whenever they please without consideration for others”. In a sense this was accepting that consultation is in many ways about negotiation and bargaining. In order to achieve a set of aims, it can be important to have something to offer back to the organisation with whom bargaining is taking place. Perhaps this instrumental approach to consultation offers more hope of achieving workable outcomes than the traditional idealistic approach.

It was clear that there were differences of opinion within the local Lesbian and Gay Policing Initiative in the case study force. For example, it was generally recognised that the initiative had to date been mainly focused on gay men, and the main players on the community side were gay men's health groups. A spokesperson for a local lesbian group was considerably more critical of the police, and felt that policy and practice had changed little with regard to the specific policing problems of lesbian communities.

One of the fears expressed about police-community consultation is that official mechanisms, which tend to exclude the most disadvantaged and marginalised groups, will be used to justify strong enforcement action by the police directed largely against these groups. In a policing district of one of the case study forces, the police accepted that the local residents' association and the consultative forum were rather unrepresentative, in that they were dominated by the older and more ‘respectable’ elements of the local community. The district commander accepted that these fora, although generally seen as positive, did not give him any idea about the perceptions of, and problems experienced, by disaffected young black people in the area. What was clear was that these consultative mechanisms did lead to specific requests for police action, to which the police responded. For example, residents in a block of flats complained of intimidation by youths and drug-dealing in the corridors. The police undertook a number of operations, and this high profile policing was praised by members of the residents' association. In a sense, it was clear that senior police officers saw this as being responsive to local citizens' demands. However, it was possible to see how critics might see it as simply legitimising strong enforcement action. Similarly, there were concerns voiced in the City of London

that behind the commitment to diversity and consultation there was a heavily armed force that, on occasion, used concerns about terrorism to search young (especially black) males. The force has responded explicitly to criticisms of its use of searches by including a review of its use in its current diversity strategy (the Mosaic Project).

### 6. The limits of consultation

As noted at the outset, it is important that police managers and members of the diverse communities that the police serve, understand what can be realistically achieved by consultation. In particular, this requires a clear awareness of the limitations of, and problems with, consultation. Disappointment and frustration with consultative mechanisms may be related to either unrealistic expectations of what consultation can achieve, or differing perspectives about the fundamental objectives of the process. Some of the problems identified in consultation are discussed below.

#### **Confusion about means and ends**

We outlined earlier, the differing objectives that police managers and community participants sometimes bring to police-community consultation. There frequently appears to be confusion about the means and the ends of consultation. For example, we have already documented the very significant pressures upon police forces to consult with vulnerable, marginalised or disadvantaged groups. The volume of activity currently being undertaken by forces in response to this is to be applauded. But such rapid developments bring with them the danger that forces will implement consultative arrangements with groups that might be described as hard to reach without an assessment of what they hope to achieve in terms of clear outputs. The reasons for engaging in consultation are often not spelt out, or are unclear (i.e. the anticipated ends may be at best implicit).

One clear example of a consultative mechanism that currently has, at best, rather hidden objectives is the traditional PCCG. Though we encountered a few examples of positive PCCGs during the course of the research, in many cases, they were either largely symbolic exercises or redundant. Many senior officers now view such groups as having 'passed their sell-by date'. Whilst this is perhaps too sweeping a criticism - there are dangers in merely following fashion in consultation as in anything else. It is increasingly clear that PCCGs are probably better seen as a mechanism to be used under specific circumstances, rather than as the basic building block of police-community consultation. They certainly appear rarely to be effective mechanisms for reaching what are referred to as hard to reach groups.

#### **Consultation as an end in itself**

At times, it seemed that consultation arrangements with some groups were seen as an end in themselves, and little thought had been given to, for example, what information might come from such arrangements and to what use it could be put. In these cases, the means and ends of consultation have become confused to the degree that consultation is seen as an end in itself. Of course, there is a sense in which consultation has some intrinsic value, and in some ways is an end in itself.

This does not mean that we should never expect substantive outcomes to arise from consultation. It simply underlines the symbolic importance of senior police officers to be seen to be consulting. The chair of a residents' forum in an inner city area emphasised the importance that he felt that he could telephone the local district commander and be taken seriously: "It doesn't mean that they will necessarily do what you ask, but you do feel that at least you will get a fair hearing".

Similarly, the manager of a hostel for the homeless suggested that simply the act of bringing the young homeless and the police together might serve later to help break down barriers. It is important that police forces and communities explicitly recognise the forms of consultation where this is primarily the case. Involvement in consultation has huge time and resource implications, particularly for senior police officers but also for community participants. There are occasions when consultation is either perceived by local communities to be entirely ritualistic with no realistic prospect of leading to change. On other occasions, police officers admit that consultation is largely pointless. We suggest that a clearer assessment of what the aims and potential outputs of consultation are would encourage a more effective use of the limited resources of both police and community participants. Thus, there needs to be honesty and clarity about the 'why' of consultation. Given the huge resources that are sometimes devoted, and the potential for alienating both members of the public and police officers, it is important to have a clear idea of why consultation is being undertaken.

### **Co-ordination and duplication**

As noted earlier in this report, there are pressures arising from a range of distinct sources upon the police service to show that it is consulting with its diverse range of customers, and in particular to include marginal or disadvantaged communities in this process. These pressures are also increasingly coming to bear on agencies other than the police, not least local authorities. The research highlighted the danger of a lack of co-ordination, overlap and duplication in developing consultation, both inside and outside of the police organisation. This problem can be viewed potentially at four levels:

- **Force and police authority level**

Although this study has focused primarily upon the police force perspective, the statutory responsibility lies with police authorities to consult with the public prior to setting local policing objectives. In practice, some police authorities delegate the majority of this work to the police force itself. However, many police authorities continue to undertake consultation themselves. Perhaps one of the most active in this regard is GMP Police Authority, where the authority



undertakes a huge volume of consultation independently of the police force. Previous research (Jones and Newburn, 1997) highlighted overlap in many force areas between police authority and police force consultative activity.

- **Police headquarters level**

Occasionally, within forces, there is a lack of clarity about where responsibility lies for different forms of consultation. There can also be a division of responsibility which can lead to overlap and confusion. We have already emphasised that in law, primary responsibility for consultation with the community about policing matters lies with police authorities. Clearly, police headquarters (primarily the department responsible for strategic planning) is usually involved to some degree in this. However, the responsibility for consultation under the Crime and Disorder Act tends to lie in a different part of the police organisation from the responsibility for consultation under Best Value.

Many police authorities and forces have recognised the dangers here and are working on methods for streamlining and co-ordinating these activities. Two of the case study forces (GMP and City of London) had established an officer or team with specific responsibility for rationalising the many different strands of consultation currently developing within the police service, and to try to avoid duplication and overlap. Others, however, are some way behind.

- **Police headquarters/BCU level**

Police forces are faced with twin dangers of:

- confusion resulting from too much central control; and
- fragmentation resulting from too little central co-ordination.

One of the difficulties of central level involvement can be the confusion about the aims of consultation and dilution of its impact. A degree of fragmentation may occur where there is insufficiently clear demarcation between the responsibilities for consultation at different levels of the force. In particular, the consultation carried out centrally (e.g. community affairs level) may not be closely connected with what goes on in local districts. Several of the case study forces reported an uneven impact of consultation across the force area, put down to the independence of the local district commanders. Within at least one of the case study forces, there was a shift to sector policing. One of the stated benefits of this model of policing was that it would enable local sector inspectors to develop close informal and formal consultative links in a relatively small geographical area. However, this adds to the dangers of fragmentation and parochialism. There needs to be a clear demarcation between:

- central level contacts concerned with strategy and policy; and
- local contacts focused on day-to-day policing problems and particular issues.

- **Organisational/individual level**

The research highlighted the fact that imaginative forms of consultation - as with innovative activity more generally - are often the result of the efforts of a single entrepreneurial individual. The results of the activity of such individuals often remains confined to the specific locale in which they have been operating. Forces often find it difficult, or simply do not have the mechanisms, to build on the activity stimulated by the entrepreneurial officer. Once the individual moves on, the work may cease. Perhaps one of the clearest examples of this occurred in one area in Hertfordshire in which an innovative and impressive consultative forum for liaising with people with learning difficulties had developed. The force recognised the potential importance of this work and the usefulness of the local policy for working with this community that had been developed. However, despite this recognition and force support for rolling out the policy force-wide, it admitted that this had not occurred.

### **Consultation overload**

Consultation overload was identified as a clear problem by senior police managers and community representatives. Certain groups or community representatives are repeatedly bombarded with requests to participate in consultation exercises, not just from the police, but from local authorities, health trusts and a range of other agencies, all trying to consult with hard to reach groups. Because of the perceived need to locate public policing within forms of democratic accountability, and because of the increasing political desire to include the public in policing activities, the demands on the police organisation to consult have increased significantly. There is a real danger that both the police, and the communities they are meant to serve, will suffer consultation overload.

The study uncovered a few examples of the danger of such overload. One lesbian forum highlighted the simple lack of organisations and activists upon which to hang consultation. A member of a gay men's group expressed strong concerns at the demands currently being made upon his time to consult with a whole range of statutory bodies. This was related in particular to the pressure upon community safety partnerships to consult with various groups in the community. He argued that there were simply "not enough activists to go around". Similarly, a community respondent in the Avon and Somerset force said that the same people appeared on a range of official or semi-official bodies. Whilst being problematic in terms of

representativeness, this also implied a more immediate practical problem of the time and commitment that a small number of people can give to an ever-expanding range of consultative demands. At a different level, police officers in several forces complained both of the multitude of consultation fora that they had to attend and what they described as “the usual faces” that were present at such events.

Two points warrant further considerations. The first concerns effective use of senior police resources. It was beyond the remit of the current study to estimate the absolute cost (in terms of officer time and other resources) of involvement in consultative processes. However, given the sheer volume of activity, it is reasonable to assume that this is considerable. Whilst a central requirement of the drive for Best Value is that the police undertake wider consultation, it is vitally important to consider how much this costs and whether it can, on any level, be considered to be value for money. In other words, given the huge resource commitment to the process of consultation, it is important to make the outputs as useful and as meaningful as possible. A related point here concerns the role of the police authority. As we have noted, although the police authority has the primary statutory responsibility for consultation, in many cases police forces themselves continue to devote considerable resources to involvement in consultative mechanisms. Although it is clearly important to provide, on occasion, for direct contact between police managers and community participants, a continued expansion of the vital role of police authorities in this regard is to be welcomed.

A parallel point applies to community participants in consultation with the police. As pointed out by a gay activist in one of the case study areas, given the relatively small size and lack of political organisation of the local gay communities, it was simply not physically possible to consult on everything, at least on the model of ongoing formal consultative links. Thus, he strongly supported a rationalisation of local consultation by a range of public bodies, and the added need to tap into a broader range of opinion, and not just the ‘usual suspects’ such as himself. Many police authorities and forces are currently engaged in developing consultation strategies that attempt to focus resources on meeting all the various needs of consultation.

### **Sustainability**

This problem arises, in part, from the confusion surrounding the purpose of consultation. A lack of clarity about why some forms of consultation are being undertaken means that the rationale becomes short term (e.g. it is a current priority). Consequently, there are occasions where long term commitment to sustaining consultation is not as visible as it might be.

Some forms of consultation are inevitably, and quite deliberately, short term or one-off events. Examples include convening short-standing groups to provide community input for specific ends (such as to help determine policing plan objectives) or providing the input of community participants on policy development workshops. A number of forces reported that they (or their police authorities) have held one-off seminars to which key people from minority ethnic communities have been invited, and where the forces' responses to the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry were discussed. Several forces reported the involvement of community participants on internal force working parties to develop new race and community relations strategies. Although the specific form of consultation may be one-off, this does require ongoing sustained relationships with local communities in order to facilitate short term involvement when required.

Another problem for sustainability arises from the fact that consultation, by its very nature, depends, in part, on the individual participants from the police and community involved. For differing reasons there is often a relatively high turn over among participants. This study confirmed HMIC's early finding that, in many cases, it is informal relationships developed by police officers at all levels that hold the key to good sustainable consultation. The police organisation is known for the tendency to move officers around, and in order to gain promotion officers are required to gain a range of experience. However, the downside of this is that valuable personal knowledge and relationships of officers working in a locality can be lost when the officer moves on, and the process must begin again. One community activist in one of the case study areas commented that:

*There needs to be more flexibility in giving officers the option of staying on in these posts. We hardly ever saw the person who was in post before [the present postholder]... We've no involvement in the recruitment process and there doesn't seem to be much thought put into recruiting officers for community affairs. Its almost like 'if you want to be promoted then you'll have to spend some time in community affairs' and often these are people who have no skills and no particular interest in community development.*

Part of this is an inevitable fact of life, people do not stay in the same place forever, either inside or outside of the police service. However, action can be taken to minimise the problematic effects of such developments for sustainability. This point is illustrated by contrasting examples from Avon and Somerset and the City of London. The first is the example of the central Bristol district, where a district commander was based for many years and developed a range of links with local networks of agencies and individuals, as well as an extensive local knowledge. Some

of this accumulated knowledge was inevitably lost when this officer retired. However, his successor spent some time shadowing him before his retirement, and he was introduced to the range of contacts made by his predecessor. In addition, the district maintained a relatively large number of officers who had long experience of working in the area. This can aid the possibility of sustained ongoing relationships. The City of London, partly because of its size, remains primarily a foot patrol force. It works on a system of permanent beat officers, officers who remain responsible for particular beats for between three and five years. Though this is not explicitly linked by the force to its emergent diversity strategy, it is clear that such a system lends itself to sustained and consistent informal community consultation at the ground level.

Another problem for sustainability can be when consultative links are used only intermittently by the police when there is a particular problem that they wish to address. An example of this was a community worker in an organisation for black young men, who complained that “[the police] only come here when they want something”. This was felt to be the case when, in particular, there was discontent or trouble brewing among local youngsters, and the police wanted to utilise the authority of community leaders to pre-empt disorder. This youth worker reported that he would be more inclined to help the police if their contacts with him were more genuinely two-way, for example, if the police came and asked his advice on local policies and practices, or asked about the concerns of local youths.

### **Representativeness**

A frequent criticism of formal consultative links, particularly with harder to reach elements of the community, is that they are unrepresentative of the wider population. The HMIC (1997) thematic report on the policing of diverse communities noted that while police forces now quite regularly have good relationships with community leaders from a range of groups, this still excludes significant parts of communities, in particular the young, the more disadvantaged or the more hostile groups. Our research found that this continues to be the case, although police authorities and forces are taking active steps to make their consultative processes more inclusive.

### Box 15: Representativeness of consultative groups

In one force area, a black youth worker complained that it was the “same black faces” that repeatedly appeared on consultative bodies working with the police, local authorities and other agencies. He claimed that the police (and other agencies) invite only relatively uncritical people to be involved in consultation. Radical groups are outside of the process, so that the consultation is confined to safe issues. However, the local police did appear to recognise that the local formal consultative meetings were rather unrepresentative, particularly in their lack of involvement of young people. In addition, a number of local people involved in ongoing consultation with the police were highly critical, and their views certainly did not give support to the impression that only supportive individuals were involved in consultation. Nevertheless, it is important that the police are seen to be making efforts to tap into the views of even highly critical population groups.

In Northumbria, for example, there is a long-standing Police and Community Relations Group, established for almost 30 years. The group has participants from nine distinct communities in the force area, with two people from each. The group discusses a range of issues with senior police managers. However, the force accepted that it was seen as a prestigious group, mainly including people of high status (including four members with MBEs). The group tends to be male-dominated, and consists of people in the 50+ age group. Having recognised a problem of representativeness, the force established a separate committee for minority ethnic women. As with the parent group, these women tend to be of high status within their communities, and are themselves unrepresentative.

Although some form of representativeness is a laudable aim for consultation with the community, the language of representative democracy is not always helpful. Perfect representativeness is, of course, an unrealistic aim. There will always be more sub-groups, and sub-groups of sub-groups that can be identified, and there is a limit to the number of consultative fora that can be realistically maintained. The main point is that people who can offer an informed view are involved, and that gaps in community participation are noted and addressed as far as possible. Most forces still report the difficulties in engaging young people, especially disadvantaged young people. Involvement in formal mechanisms such as youth fora or crime prevention panels tends to involve the more articulate and better-off young people. Peer pressure and a general suspicion of involvement with authority makes consultation with most young people inherently problematic. In terms of assessing the ongoing

concerns of younger people, it might be best for the police to engage in dialogue with youth workers, teachers and other people who might offer an informed view. Where relations between particular groups and the police are particularly strained, this third-party approach can be effectively developed by the police authority. In one force area, police authority officers organised consultative meetings with schoolchildren that did not directly involve police officers, on the grounds that the presence of police officers might, in the first instance, reduce the willingness of many young people to participate.

A similar experience was reported in GMP that had itself witnessed a significant change in relationships between the police and the gay and lesbian community in Manchester city over the past 10-15 years. Whilst the majority of opinion was extremely positive about the stance now taken by GMP - at least in the city centre itself - some concerns remained about representation, particularly from within the lesbian community. Indeed such concerns were expressed not only by forum members but by police officers themselves.

The HMIC has recently stated that police-community consultation is probably most useful when it is least comfortable for the police. As far as possible, it makes sense for the police to try to engage with the more confrontational elements of local communities, because this is the area where there is most need for dialogue. However, this can only be done within limits. There must, for example, be an awareness of the political bases of some groups' stances. There is a distinction between groups whose central purpose is critical opposition and those that genuinely wish to engage in constructive dialogue, however critical their contribution may be.

### **Incorporation**

Although police managers need to be realistic about the limits of consultation, this also applies to community participants. A number of participants in consultation with the police expressed concern about how far this should go. For example, the chairman of a residents' forum in a mainly black area applauded the "tremendous improvement" in police consultation over recent years, but questioned whether this should go much further. He pointed out that it would not be right to get "too cuddly" with the police, from both the perspective of the police and the community groups. Community groups need to keep a critical distance, and not feel compromised in their role by friendly relationships with local police managers. At the same time, police managers need to maintain a professional independence from local agencies and groups, who will inevitably make conflicting demands upon them. Local community groups are not police managers, and should inform but not direct the policy-making process. This requires a continuous attempt to achieve balance;

to make local policing broadly in line with the needs of diverse communities, yet at the same time retain a degree of professional independence for police managers.

Once again, this highlights the key role of the police authority in regard to community consultation. The primary role of the police authority is to hold the police to account on behalf of the local community. Although recognising the value of direct dialogue between operational police managers and citizens, the problem of incorporation can be partly addressed by continuing to enhance the role of the police authority in community consultation. Whilst in many cases working with the police in partnership, police authorities retain a vital oversight role over, and a degree of critical independence from, police forces.

### **Territory and agenda**

A clear finding from the local case studies was that a good deal of formal police consultative activity involves inviting community participants to take part in police-designed processes that more often than not take place on police territory. In fairness, an increasing number of forces are taking consultation away from police territory. In many forces, PCCGs meet in venues such as church halls, community centres and school premises. This practice is to be encouraged with regard to new forms of consultation with harder to reach groups. It is not always forthcoming however. As one respondent put it: "Perhaps the police need to visit [us] without being prompted... they should conduct more spontaneous visits".

In one force area, community participants in force working parties complained that the consultation was taking place on police territory. One stated that: "We're coming here to talk, if they want to show that they are serious, why don't they go out into the community?". They underlined the need for the police service to make use of effective mediators who could bridge the gap between the police and more hostile elements of the community. Again, we might emphasise the role of the police authority here. It would be totally unrealistic to expect suspicious young men from the local community to attend the police station to 'be consulted'. What was needed was a more active form of targeting young people's views. Community activists could be employed to run group discussions with young people on their territory, and feedback key points to the police. The problem with this is that in-depth qualitative research costs money. In an ideal world, each police district would undertake systematic surveys and qualitative work with the diverse communities within which they work, but most simply cannot afford it.

In terms of the agenda, one problem is that some groups may perceive police attempts at consultation to be restricted to relatively 'safe' issues. This is related to



the point made elsewhere about more critical groups remaining outside the consultative process, and only mainstream groups being invited. For example, one community worker in Avon and Somerset argued that: “the police target people [for consultation] who they know will be positive about them”. He went on to argue that the police only carry out two kinds of consultation:

*The first is a kind of PR exercise telling you how wonderful they are and what they have done. The second is when they need your help, as a community leader, help to prevent a riot! It is never the kind of consultation that says ‘you are the community, where have we gone wrong, tell us how to do things better and how we can improve’.*

Finally, there is a more sociological point that needs to be made about consultation as a process, rather than an event. Earlier in this report we made reference to the notion of policing by consent. Consent is not something that is ever fully achieved; it is rather, at best, something which is temporarily won. The reality of police-community relations, indeed all social relations, is that they are in a continual process of negotiation and re-negotiation. The importance of this point for consultation is that it is not something that occurs between two bodies in steady state. It, therefore, has to be seen as a long term ongoing process without an end-point. From a police point of view, therefore, some consistency is required but, simultaneously, they will need to be both flexible and adaptable.

## 7. Conclusions and recommendations

While realism is a key precondition to effective consultation, it is important not to be overly pessimistic about what can be achieved. As pointed out earlier, policing by consent can never mean complete popular approval for police activity in a locality. There are inevitably groups and individuals that are more likely to be on the receiving end of police powers. The reasons for this often lie in broader structural factors outside of the framework of policing. The most that policing by consent can ever mean, is that most members of the diverse communities that the police serve accept in a broad sense the police's legitimacy and their lawful right to do what they do. However, particular police policies and practices can exacerbate the general distrust and suspicion towards the police that exists in some communities, with the danger that it will become entrenched and widespread. The broad aim of police-community relations policies and the consultative approaches developed within them, must be to earn respect for the way the police carry out their job and their right to do so, even among groups who strongly disagree with particular instances of police activity (Reiner, 1992).

Discussions with community participants with regard to consultation provided evidence that there was realism about what can be achieved by consultation. One member of a local forum in a mainly black urban area said:

*The majority of people here want a safe community, we want to live in a secure area, and want to work with the police to achieve this as much as possible. We don't want special treatment, and if I commit a crime then they should throw the book at me. But we do want to be treated justly.*

Other members of different hard to reach communities underlined this point, that what they wanted was assurance of fair and just treatment.

This raises issues of integrity, service delivery and governance. Arguably, the missing ingredient in current discussions about consultation is accountability. It is, of course, important to seek to consult local communities and to feed the results of consultation into force policies and priorities. Indeed, there is a lot of evidence that there is now considerable activity of this kind taking place, and taking place effectively. However, underlying a lot of the activity there is a lasting feeling within many communities that it is not enough. It does not achieve what they hope it might. Though not always fully articulated, what appeared in part to be coming through from the case studies in this research was the view from local citizens that they wanted to have a greater impact on local policing and, recognising local constabulary independence, that they also wished to have some means through which officers could be held to account for failing to deliver policing services either

as effectively, or in the style, required. From such a viewpoint consultation is an important set of activities, but is no substitute for effective community involvement in police governance.

### Recommendations

- Police forces and police authorities should review which population sub-groups in their force areas are hard to reach and why. Lists of hard to reach groups provided in official documents should be used as indicative examples only, not 'off-the peg' definitions of what counts as a hard to reach group. Instead, forces need to consider how the underlying characteristics of the diverse populations in their area might impact on their relationships with the police.
- Police authorities and forces should consider the various ways in which so-called hard to reach groups can be identified and accessed. Various approaches are possible. The appointment of community consultation co-ordinators in police districts appears to hold promise. Similarly, third-party approaches to groups with significant hostility towards, or distrust of, the police (e.g. community workers undertaking focus group discussions within particular communities) may also be of benefit.
- It is important to review the aims of different forms of consultation. If possible, forces should develop a systematic framework for consultation that delineates clearly between:
  - the respective consultative roles and functions of the police authority and police force;
  - different levels of the police organisation - strategic, operational policy, practice; and
  - different operational specialisms within the police.

The various aims of consultation need to be explicitly recognised and prioritised. As far as possible, consultation should be given specific concrete aims. Where possible, these should also be measured.

- Greater attention might perhaps be paid to what communities seek from consultation. Forces need to review not only their own aims with regard to consultation, but also those held by the groups to be consulted.
- This study has confirmed the problems with formal PCCG-type consultation that

were first raised over 10 years ago. Many forces and police authorities have reviewed their approach to PCCGs (e.g. by moving them around the force and trying to advertise them more widely) but the difficulties still persist. Although a 'knee-jerk' disbanding of such groups is not recommended, it does appear that local forces and police authorities need to consider adopting more flexible localised consultation frameworks, such as those being developed in Avon and Somerset.

- Community impact should be a central consideration of all policing operations. Here, again, the Avon and Somerset model of including the community consultation co-ordinator in discussions of all district policing operations may be a useful guide. Forces also need to focus attention on managing the impact of policing - trying to counteract the rumour mill - by disseminating explanations and justifications for police activity as widely as possible among a network of community contacts.
- Sustainability – there is a need for consultation to be seen as part of sustained and ongoing relationships with a range of groups. A common complaint by local community groups in the study was that the police expect dialogue when it suits them, when they have a particular operational need. Clearly there will be the need for shorter term contacts, but these must be taken within the broader framework of ongoing consultative relationships.
- Consultation must be seen as a two-way process. It is by no means always the case that officers on the ground are convinced of the value of consultation. Yet, the advantages in terms of improved flows of intelligence, and increased background knowledge in the context of problem-solving policing, are potentially of great importance.
- Rationalisation – a huge amount of consultation is being undertaken by a range of local organisations and agencies. Following the Crime and Disorder Act there is increasing commitment to sharing information between the police and other partners but this could be taken further. All local agencies need to review their consultation approaches in partnership. Examples of good practice include the Middlesborough citizens' panel being made available for the police. In the same district the police included questions on access to health care in the focus group discussions with hard to reach groups. Agencies need to take further action to pool resources, especially for the more expensive forms of one-off consultation such as citizens' panels. There may be some scope for applying Best Value principles to consultation.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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- Forces and police authorities should draw on the expertise of outside bodies. Some forces, for example, developed good contacts with local universities and colleges in order to draw on their expertise in research methods. Collaboration with postgraduate students can provide them with good research data, and the police authority and/or force with relatively low-cost independent research findings.
- Annual systematic reviews should be carried out by police authorities of the effectiveness of the consultative approaches currently being used in the force area. Following the model used by the Avon and Somerset Police Authority, this should allow for sufficient flexibility for consultative arrangements at the local level, whilst providing for sufficient central monitoring and control.

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