

A summary of POLICING IN AUSTERITY, a Vanguard event, Birmingham, 13 September 2011

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Dave Whatton, Chief Constable, Cheshire Constabulary

Introduction

'Boss, you're in danger of improving the morale of the constabulary'

'If you'd had to do the things the organisation asks us to do, you'd have stopped it long ago'

Austerity is an opportunity to ask hard questions about what matters (and doesn't): effectiveness, community engagement, efficiency and equity. We use the Vanguard Method to help us i) get crystal clear about purpose ii) establish measures that show how well we are delivering, and iii) develop methods to improve. Step one: understand current performance *before* changing anything – checking at first hand the reality of what we created (*'If you'd had to do the things the organisation asks us to do, you'd have stopped it long ago'*). Step two: ask simple what, why, when, how long, how often questions that provide *evidence* for change. Step three: experiment with methods that better align with the public view of purpose and give officers the freedom/confidence to use judgment to cope with variety. Judgment is founded on principle: 'we do what matters to the victim and to the community', 'we act fairly/firmly with the offender' – and 'whatever we do we act in the public interest'. This is a huge culture change that occurs naturally as officers grasp the opportunity with both hands. We have outstanding leaders at all levels: but we need continuously to upgrade management capabilities to understand the system, manage resources, drive down demand and fit ourselves for the future.

Nick Bailey, Chief Inspector, Cheshire Constabulary

What we learn when we study demand

'By understanding problems differently, by root cause, we could solve them differently'

To deliver purposeful service we need to understand demand and what causes it *from the public's point of view*. From that starting point follow measures to support and demonstrate purposeful activity and insight into how roles should be redefined. To respond purposefully to demand, what should the organisation look like? Like everyone else we thought we understood demand. But listening to calls taught us that just 9 per cent of demand was recorded crime; 40 per cent was 'preventable' – internally or statutorily or partner-agency generated adding no value for the public; while of the 'value demand' most concerned (non-reportable!) traffic accidents and lost property. For public and partner agencies much police behaviour made no sense – eg a bike theft treated quite differently depending on whether the garage it was stolen from was physically attached to or detached from a dwelling – since we managed *our* problems (numbers and Home Office codes) rather than theirs. Analysing the same incidents by root cause (alcohol, drugs, relationship problems...) instantly reframed them: by understanding them differently we could solve them differently. Similarly, plotting resources needed for each incident has allowed us to redefine what the front line should look like, importing some skills (eg dealing with vulnerable people) previously considered 'specialist', and allowing for different measures of success according to local conditions.

Graeme Gerrard, Deputy Chief Constable, and Beth Ivey, Cheshire Criminal Justice Partners

Working together for a common purpose

'When we listened to those 22,000 calls, not one of them was asking for an officer to make a road traffic enforcement – not one'

'We don't know what the answers are yet, but I'd be very surprised if it wasn't a lot better than now'

Cutting costs by eliminating whole functions/tasks is usually impossible, making reducing demand a priority across the whole criminal justice system (CJS). If the purpose is to reduce re-offending and develop a just and swift CJS, how do our actions match up? Examining the magistrates courts, we found that no one in the CSJ was addressing re-offending directly. 65 per cent of demand (60,000 cases a year) comprised traffic offences; many people in the system (good citizens, the mentally vulnerable) shouldn't have been; 'we were penalising the good and failing to punish the bad' who easily played the system. Further analysis showed traffic cases triggered massive administrative effort just to identify the driver before a case could proceed. Of those brought to court, 81 per cent failed to pay the fine in time and most fines were written off. It was difficult to pay even when people wanted to: one attempt triggered 20 CJS transactions before failing. Conclusion: Cheshire road traffic enforcement costs £8-10m pa and has no effect on road safety, re-offending or public confidence. The only people who pay up are good citizens who wouldn't reoffend anyway. We are experimenting with lessening reliance on cameras, dealing with the person not the offence, doing full checks on drivers on the spot and assigning end-to-end case responsibility to individual officers. 'We don't know what the answers are, but I'd be very surprised if it wasn't a lot better than now.'

James Hill, Deputy Head of Housing, Portsmouth Council

A different way of delivering housing services

'Whatever the public service, this method is proven to deliver real transformation and a change in culture in the way managers and staff think that sets it apart from other methods that are being used as the latest management fad without changing the underlying thinking'

'If six years ago someone had said to me we need to do this stuff I would have laughed them out of the door and come up with a million reasons not to do it'

Proof that the methods used by Cheshire police also work in other services. Portsmouth housing service (landlord for 15,000 properties, staff of 530) piloted the Vanguard Method in repairs in 2006 because customers and staff were saying 'something isn't quite right'. Correct: studying the system revealed poor performance concealed by targets and PIs. Not only was service poor (despite high official scores), it couldn't improve because front line was obliged to leave brains at the door. We used the method to redefine purpose from the customer's point of view and redesign services across eight service areas (no longer with consultancy help), in each case doing things completely counterintuitive to the old ways: eg for response repairs giving tenants exactly timed appointments and offering to do other repairs at the same time, an out-of-hours service identical to daytime. Consequence: more for less or the same and things we used to worry about (staff morale, absenteeism, 'culture') take care of themselves. Annual savings: £2m, with a further £1m anticipated. Note that savings were not the reason for redesign: they are a byproduct of providing better service.

Becci Bryant, Area Commander, Staffordshire Fire and Rescue Service

Top of the league tables but full of waste

'We were so hamstrung by targets and BVPIs that we couldn't see beyond them'

Staffs FRS was well regarded when it began its Vanguard journey in April 2010; but the test was to become a more efficient service that generated its own cost savings. The approach was to be community focused, bottom up (involving front-line staff in developing solutions), and evidence-based, all of which were challenges to a hierarchical, target-driven organisation. Guiding

principles were clarity of purpose (fast response, prevention); understanding demand; purpose-related measures; building structure round value-creating roles; and driving out waste. Of these getting the measures right was most difficult – ‘we were so hamstrung by targets and BVPIs that we couldn’t see beyond them’ – but going through the pain was part of learning. Check was revealing on both response and prevention. On response, crewing was only 17 per cent accurate, with huge impact on costs; key variables we were managing badly were holidays and training. Other questions: for more effective response did we need different appliances or just flexible crewing? On prevention, with huge work duplication (double inputting) costs had trebled as we amplified effort – but with no effect on the number of fires. Organisational audit discovered dis-joint between front line and support services, and little understanding of real operating costs. Based on this evidence, the pilot redesign aligns structure with purpose, introduces electronic working to reduce duplication, reviews crewing patterns and uses intelligence-fed prevention to target at-risk lifestyle categories. Projected savings: £2.6m over four years.

Fiona Catcher, Somerset Total Place Programme

Health and social care: building a system based on understanding, not labels

‘When people are labelled vulnerable or at risk, they quickly become their labels, fuelling the perception of decline. It’s perverse, isn’t it – how the system when it wants to help gives people a leg up into greater dependency and greater need, and of course at greater cost to the public purse’

‘Listening and understanding isn’t a profession: we need the right staff to be able to give people a right good listening-to’

‘Think of the impact on a spirited 90-year-old’s good life; but think also of the effect on the social care budget’

As an integrated service working across six organisations, we originally saw our aim as to redesign re-enabling for adults, but we soon realised it had to be much broader – in effect redesigning the interface between communities and services. Instead of ‘doing things better’ we are ‘doing better things’ – and seeing very different results. The present system is preoccupied with Assess–Treat–Refer – assess for presenting problem, give out a standard package or if the person doesn’t fit pass to a different agency on for more of the same. ‘Doing things better’ [ie cutting costs] means more standardisation, faster processing, less understanding of the individual and more fragmentation, leading to increasing dependence, unhappiness and more cost. The typical experience is repeated ATRs (35 in one case!) and ‘a straight glide path to residential care’, as the system sees the label first (‘vulnerable’, ‘at risk’) and prescribes an often overspecified, overheavy solution. People become their labels. By contrast, after revising purpose (painful across six agencies!) to ‘help me to do the things that matter to me’, we see ourselves as an ‘understanding and rebalancing service’ allowing people to solve their own problems usually at minimal cost: in one moving case, by replacing buttons with velcro, improving lighting and slightly altering shopping habits. The mantra is ‘light touch, right touch’. It is early days, but having redefined value work, we are now redesigning the workforce to do it.

Simon Guilfoyle, Inspector, West Midlands Police

A sector-level policing case study

‘All this is about me going to Wolverhampton and getting rid of some waste’

‘It’s not rocket science. It’s simple, obvious, free and anyone can do it tomorrow. It’s just doing the right thing’

'I arrived in October 2010 as operations inspector for the north eastern sector of Wolverhampton. It includes Heath Town, renowned for guns and gangs and serious criminality, so there are interesting crime patterns. The sector has 80 staff, half uniformed. I was struck by what was uncovered. Performance was measured on inputs, officers being expected to make x arrests and detections a month. Unlike criminals, the seven teams worked in silos. There was a lot of bureaucratic routine reporting, conflicting priorities, and officers were doing so much unnecessary work that important stuff was neglected and accumulating. Result: poor service and non-value adding work everywhere. We were reacting to normal variation, not signals. Officers were disheartened and disempowered. And crime rates were high. So what did we do? "Check" took all of five minutes. I can't do much about what the force or government are saying, but I can stop doing bad stuff. In stage one we scrapped arbitrary numerical targets, got rid of routine reporting, filed one-third of old crime reports with no prospect of convictions, and freed front-line sergeants and officers to use their professional judgement. We prioritised serious acquisitive crime and antisocial behaviour. Cutting out waste gave us extra capacity, so in stage two we set up a proactive team to tackle things we couldn't do before: like deal with the long list of escaped or wanted criminals who, guess what, were responsible for many of the crimes in the sector. Now the backlog is gone – and charts show crime is down. Coincidence...? It's still the same 80 people on the sector working the same hours; the difference is that previously they couldn't get anything done because they were swamped in waste. All I've done is say, let's stop doing this because it's waste; then when the situation is under control, what can we do with the extra capacity. Rocket science?

Denise Grant, Strategic Manager – Transformation, Stoke City Council

The leadership journey

'I learned more in four weeks in "Check" for housing repairs than in three years of my expensive management course'

'It was a huge lightbulb moment for me, because I didn't join the public sector to do those kinds of things to people'

'I expected to learn a method, some things I could replicate. I didn't expect my own mind to change, I really didn't'

'We've been going a year and a half, starting in housing repairs, then moving into revenues and benefits, housing generally, place and highways, and adult social care. A fascinating journey: I learned more in four weeks in "check" for housing repairs than in three years of my management course. Two huge lightbulb moments: one, discovering that instead of being 85 per cent right diagnosing repairs when people phoned in, we were 85 per cent wrong, with the result that we only completed a job on first visit one time in 10. I had spent ages trying to solve the wrong problem. You can't diagnose a repair on the phone, with software, between two people who don't know what each is talking about – you have to do it at the house. Second lightbulb: listening to an elderly man with emphysema explain that he'd waited a year for replacement of his insecure front door. I realised that the person responsible for causing him that problem was me, the manager. In our system a single repair took 290 steps, no one talked of purpose from the customer point of view (our customer was the Audit Commission whose guidelines we followed), targets drove waste and a 'repairs avoidance system'. The capability chart showing performance 'before' and 'after' redesign shows one of the best days of my working life. From a best-case 30 days repair times have fallen to four days upper limit and 1.2 days average. And then the hard work started... Learnings: act on fact. Get in the work. Expect mistakes and learn from them. Double-loop learning. Don't jump the gun – some processes have to play out before you can judge success or failure. Finally, have faith. Every intervention we have made in Stoke has saved money – and that wasn't the aim.'

Richard Davis, Vanguard

‘What we’ve done in administration in the public sector over the last 15-20 years is turn public agencies into deliverers of transactionalised services. When we do that the issues that come to the fore are standardisation and efficiency, and the more we standardise the less we understand about what matters to people and the more we miss the plot. One of the things that’s beginning to interest us is a move from looking at services as commodities, as they’ve become, to relationships, which is what they used to be. It’s the same in police and in health, where a lot of things go wrong because we don’t know people and have no relationship with them. It sounds terribly expensive until you understand the harm that’s being done because we don’t understand and the cost that’s being incurred as a result of doing the wrong things’.