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POLICE ANTI-DRUGS STRATEGIES:

Tackling Drugs Together Three Years On

Tim Newburn and Joe Elliott

Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 89

Summary

The White Paper *Tackling Drugs Together* was published in May 1995, and set out the previous Government's plans for tackling drug misuse. This report examines the progress police forces have made in devising, implementing and monitoring their anti-drugs strategies over the three years since the publication of the White Paper. The major issues considered are the development of enforcement strategies, police liaison and partnerships with other agencies, the implementation of arrest referral schemes, drugs education, and performance measurement.

The report presents the findings of a two-stage study of police anti-drugs strategies. The first stage of the research entailed a review of relevant documentary evidence and two postal surveys: one of Chief Constables and one of Drug (and Alcohol) Action Teams (DATs) in England and Wales. The second stage comprised six case studies in the following force areas: Avon and Somerset, Cumbria, Thames Valley, West Midlands, West Yorkshire, and the Metropolitan Police.

The study found that police forces have been highly active in the drugs field during the past three years. All forces have now published anti-drugs strategies, and many are in the process of producing revised strategies. This in itself represents considerable progress.

In relation to enforcement, it appears that activities have been reoriented away from possession offences and towards higher level trafficking. Particularly noticeable is the fact that, in line with many of the White Paper's recommendations, enforcement is increasingly balanced by an emphasis upon non-enforcement aspects of drugs work. Many

forces are now eager to participate in the development of harm reduction programmes, such as arrest referral schemes. It is evident also that forces are increasingly willing to become involved in drugs education in schools; indeed it is in the areas of drugs education and work (in partnership) with young people that there has perhaps been the greatest new activity in recent years.

The White Paper stresses the importance of multi-agency, partnership work, and specifically mentions the need for close cooperation between forces and DATs and between forces and the National Criminal Intelligence Service (NCIS), Regional Crime Squads (RCSs) and Customs and Excise (HMCE). The study found that on the whole police forces are strongly committed to multi-agency activity: a majority reported that they have good relationships with all the main agencies involved in drugs work. In particular, forces tend to regard their participation in the new DAT structures as among the greatest strengths of their drugs strategies. The importance of police contributions to DATs was confirmed by the DAT chairs themselves - an overwhelming majority of whom reported their satisfaction with the seniority and consistency of police representation.

Points for action

It is evident that by developing drugs strategies, broadening their enforcement activities, extending their involvement in harm reduction and educational work, and participating in a range of partnerships, police forces have played a considerable part in advancing the aims of the White Paper. The study has, however, highlighted some ways in which the effectiveness of police anti-drugs strategies might be further improved.

The key issues of concern to the police, and requiring attention from forces, other agencies and, where appropriate, central authorities, are the following:

- **Measurement of drug-related crime** Forces make use of many different methods in seeking to assess levels of drug-related crime - the most common of which are the monitoring of seizures of drugs and assets - and are in some cases introducing innovative methods such as the use of focus groups and public attitude surveys. Nevertheless, it is widely felt by forces that difficulties of defining and measuring the extent of drug-related crime in force areas hinder the development of effective strategies. There is thus clearly a need for dissemination of information about the most appropriate measurement tools.
- **Assessment of impact of local initiatives** Partially because of the problems of measuring drug-related crime, forces find it difficult to assess the impact of local initiatives. The development of more subtle performance indicators, and wider use of rigorous evaluation methods, would improve this situation. In addition, much would be gained from the existence of some kind of centralised clearing house mechanism to permit the sharing of information on good practice between forces.
- **Liaison** In general, the quality of liaison between the police and other key agencies involved in drugs work appears to be very high. However, there is scope for further progress in certain areas. Almost one third of forces believe that their liaison with HMCE and Social Services cannot be described as 'good'. More than a third of forces reported dissatisfaction with the amount of

intelligence they receive from NCIS, and more than a quarter with the amount received from RCSs (however, there was also quite a widespread perception that the intelligence received from these bodies has improved over the past year). It should also be noted that some DATs evidently feel that they have limited opportunities for input into the development of force drugs strategies.

- **Arrest referral schemes** In some ways, it is apparent that the development of arrest referrals is one of the areas in which the greatest progress is being made: just over half the country is now covered by some type of scheme. The study found that forces which have been running schemes involving the direct participation of drugs workers generally feel that they are working well; however, those forces running information-based schemes tend to a less optimistic view. There is a widespread desire on the part of forces to learn more about 'what works' in arrest referral.
- **Training** Despite some examples of good practice, training does not appear to be considered by forces as successful an element of drugs strategies as many others. In general, there is a need for more inclusive forms of drugs training for officers; it has also been suggested that training programmes could benefit from the inclusion of multi-agency components.
- **Communication** All forces should make strenuous efforts to ensure that drugs strategies are filtered down to divisions, and are fully implemented at divisional level.

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