



Association of
Police and Crime
Commissioners



APCC FINDINGS REPORT: Towards better local partnerships systems in England and Wales

18.02.2025

A review of the views and experiences of Police and Crime Commissioners and their offices of local partnership systems in England and Wales, and of how these could be even more effective and efficient

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Foreword



Jonathan Ash-Edwards, PCC for Hertfordshire and **Clare Moody**, PCC for Avon and Somerset

Joint APCC Prevention Leads

Partnership is at the heart of what PCCs, PFCCs and Deputy Mayors do.

We bring together community safety and criminal justice partners to work in a joined up way to better serve people locally.

We chair key partnerships - for example, our Local Criminal Justice Boards and Serious Violence Reduction Partnerships - and work closely with others – such as Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to reduce and prevent crime

We are uniquely well-placed for this convening role, as locally elected and accountable office holders, with a mandate covering a wide ‘footprint’ and significant statutory powers that support partnership working, notably our power to convene.

Our offices play a pivotal role in facilitating, administering, managing, supporting and leading collaborative work, and we fund partnership activities.

Working through the APCC, we also play a leading role in national partnerships – linking up with other organisations across policing and beyond. This enables us to provide links between national and local work – for example, the APCC is a signatory to the National Partnership Agreement on Right Care, Right Person (RCRP) for England, with PCCs bringing local experience to the national work which in turn is underpinning and informing the delivery of RCRP in our police force areas.

The most serious issues for our communities can only be addressed by people and organisations working together. Policing and criminal justice partners alone cannot tackle illegal drugs, knife crime or violence against women and girls (VAWG); they need to work alongside education, health, local government, voluntary and community organisations.

Consequently, we have seen a proliferation of partnerships in recent years - for example, the creation of Combating Drugs Partnerships, the Serious Violence Duty and the duty to collaborate in commissioning of victims' services.

A lot of brilliant partnership work is happening as a consequence, but this has also meant that the partnership landscape is becoming increasingly complex – one PCC provided us with a list of over 80 partnerships that they are involved with, most of which meet several times a year. Local geographies increase these demands – for example, a PCC in a force area with 12 district authorities may need to engage with 12 CSPs. This raises a new question of how we ensure that local partnership systems are efficient and effective overall.

That is the focus of this APCC report. For example, it explores the work that some PCCs, PFCCs and Deputy Mayors are doing locally to provide leadership by creating high-level strategic boards for senior leaders to provide focus, co-ordination, oversight and stewardship for the multiple partnerships that are working on issues like VAWG, serious violence and anti-social behaviour (ASB). It also holds a mirror up to local experiences of the expansion of partnership work and makes recommendations for how we can build on all the successful collaboration already happening and do partnership even better in the future.

Executive summary

This project seeks to capture the experiences of PCCs/OPCCs of partnership working in an increasingly complex and multi-layered partnership landscape. It has had a particular focus on the effectiveness and efficiency of partnership working and how this can be improved. Its focus has been on partnership systems and configurations rather than on the individual multi-agency partnerships.

Research was conducted between June and December 2024 and comprised focus groups with OPCC leads; an online survey of PCCs and OPCCs and 'deep dives' in 4 areas. In addition, a Wales-specific review has been conducted with all 4 Welsh PCCs/OPCCs.

Key messages and recommendations from the APCC's engagement in Wales are included as Appendix A to this report and discussed in detail in the APCC Findings Report [Deep dive on partnerships in Wales](#).

Key messages

The following messages were consistent from our research:

- 1. Multi-agency partnerships are vital for crime reduction and community safety.** Ninety-seven per cent of respondents to the APCC survey agreed that they have a critical role to play in delivering PCCs' priorities.
- 2. PCCs/OPCCs play a vital role in convening, leading and enabling partnership working.** This includes chairing meetings, providing administrative, logistical and/or analytical support, and providing funding. Two thirds of survey respondents said partnership strategies aligned with their Police and Crime Plans. Our Deep Dive on Wales also concluded that PCCs/OPCCs have a leading role in convening and facilitating collaborations across a complex network of partnerships in Wales. Because of their involvement across multiple partnerships, PCCs and OPCCs provide a view reflective of the wider partnership landscape.
- 3. There are mixed views and experiences of local partnership configurations.** Half of respondents to the APCC survey agreed that their local partnerships were configured effectively and efficiently, whilst nearly a third disagreed.
- 4. The local partnership landscape is 'complex' and 'cluttered'.** This can be a particular issue in two tier authorities, particularly those with multiple borough and district authorities. One PFA provided a map listing over 80 partnerships. Another had identified more than 300 meetings annually which they were invited to attend. Local geographies have a significant impact on this, with some PFAs covering multiple local authority 'footprints'. The landscape in Wales is further complicated by devolution and balances local, regional and national partnerships.
- 5. The expansion of partnership meetings is causing capacity issues:**
 - Two-thirds of contributors to focus groups had challenges with resourcing the administrative, logistical and other support for multiple partnership meetings.
 - Around half of survey respondents said their PCC had sufficient capacity and resource to engage in relevant partnerships, compared to almost a quarter who disagreed.
 - Two fifths of respondents said some key partners did not have the capacity and resources to engage with some partnerships and said that they were not able to get sufficient engagement from senior decision makers.
- 6. There are concerns about duplication across local partnership systems:**

- One of the most consistent messages from our focus groups and deep dives was summed up by one contributor who commented, “I spend a lot of my time sitting in different rooms with the same people, talking about the same things, but with a different heading on the agendas and papers in front of us.”
 - More than 80% of survey respondents agreed that ‘there is a tendency for similar groups of people to have similar discussions in different partnership forums’, nearly half of them strongly agreeing with this.
 - Over two thirds of respondents agreed that ‘too many partnership meetings that should be driving work are talking shops’, nearly half of them strongly agreed.
- 7. The importance of capabilities for partnership working was also a recurrent theme**, including chairing, co-ordination and management of meetings and skills for ‘systems leadership’.
 - 8. There are issues with coordination, communication and data sharing.** This was a recurrent theme for our focus groups and deep dives. Over half of respondents did not think ‘there is appropriate data sharing across partnerships’ or that there was ‘sufficient join up, communication and co-ordination across partnerships’. Partners in Wales responding to an APCC deep dive survey reported a lack of confidence around GDPR, lack of understanding of relevant legal gateways and a lack of clarity about the motivations and rationale for data requests.
 - 9. There is strong support both for new statutory and other support for partnership working and for increased scope for local determination.** Nearly everyone agreed that ‘statutory and other support is needed to empower local system leaders to deliver multi-agency engagement and delivery through partnerships (for example, LCJBs)’, and almost three quarters that ‘local areas should have more scope to determine the best partnership structures.’
 - 10. There is limited assessment of the effectiveness and efficiency of partnerships.** A significant theme across our focus groups and deep dives was that even where partnership meetings were not delivering and were widely considered ineffective, it is rare for them to be discontinued or reformed. Two-fifths of respondents to our survey did not think that ‘existing partnerships are reviewed effectively to ensure efficient partnership working’, compared to just under a quarter who did.

Summary of recommendations

- 1. When new duties or expectations are considered, the default should be to deliver them through existing partnerships rather than to create new ones, with as much flexibility as possible for local areas to determine the best way to do this considering their local geographies, existing partnership systems, and so on.**

- 2. When the government or other agencies require local areas to have strategies on important issues, they should help and support them to create joint partnership strategies whenever possible. They should avoid setting expectations that each organisation will have its own separate strategy unless there is a clear rationale for this.**
- 3. Government proposals to create new partnerships and collaborative duties locally should be considered within the scope of the 'new burdens' arrangements, with the expectation that the resource implications are fully considered and appropriately funded by the relevant departments.**
- 4. Consideration should be given to introducing a new (resourced) duty for PCCs/OPCCs or their equivalents to take responsibility for oversight and stewardship of the local partnership landscape in relation to community safety and crime reduction, with corresponding duties for partners.**
- 5. Local areas should consider carrying out an audit of the costs of partnership boards and forums, including salary costs for attendees and the costs of support for meetings and other activities (for example, logistical and analytical support).**
- 6. A continued focus should be placed on developing a more data-confident and open culture and facilitating data sharing between partners. Based on our research, this appears the single most impactful thing that can be done to improve the effectiveness of partnership working within and across existing partnerships. Consideration should be given to placing a duty or requirement on partners to share data with PCCs and for PCCs to be able to request data from partnership agencies in the same way that they are able to request force data.**
- 7. The APCC and LGA, along with other national partners, should be supported to create guidance and resources for effective local partnership work. They should also establish a new national network of local partnership leads.**
- 8. More investment should be placed in partnership capabilities, including chairing, developing terms of reference, action logging, and so on, alongside support for senior leaders to develop their understanding and capabilities for system leadership.**
- 9. At the first opportunity, the government should look at the options for legislating to place PCC-led Criminal Justice Boards on a statutory footing. This was a key recommendation of the [PCC Review 2021-22](#).**
- 10. The government should consider commissioning a further in depth, independent review of local partnership systems, which might be undertaken as part of its wider public sector reform and/or police landscape reform agenda.**

1: Introduction

Effective crime prevention, reduced offending, safer communities and criminal justice and victims services all depend on effective partnership working, bringing together policing, health, local authorities, the voluntary and community sector and others.

PCCs play a critical role in convening, leading and supporting these local partnerships. This vital role has, for example, been central to discussions about further developing the PCCs' local role within the Police Landscape Reform programme.

In practice, local partnership working happens through a number of local boards, sub-boards and other collaborative arrangements, with distinct but overlapping roles and functions. Many of these partnerships are relatively new; others are under review. Focusing on criminal justice partnerships, they include:

- Local Criminal Justice Boards (LCJBs)
- Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs)
- Combating Drugs Partnerships (CDPs)
- Arrangements for the Serious Violence Duty, including Violence Reduction Units (VRUs)
- Arrangements for the Duty to Collaborate in relation to victim's services.

The distinct partnership arrangements in Wales are set out and discussed in the [APCC Findings Report - Deep dive on partnerships in Wales](#).

This research provides a snapshot of PCCs and OPCCs experiences of partnership working in this increasingly complex and evolving landscape. It has a particular focus on what is working well, what is more challenging, and on improving the effectiveness and efficiency of local partnerships. The focus is placed not so much on individual partnerships, but more on how they work together and the role of PCCs and OPCCs. It also includes feedback relevant to the review of LCJBs, CSPs and other individual partnerships, as well as plans for prevention and other partnerships.

The purpose of this research is to understand how partnership activity is managed locally by PCCs and OPCCs, to 'hold up a mirror' and make recommendations to government and other national leaders, identify notable practice and to shape and inform further APCC work to support our members.

2: Methodology

The research was conducted from June to December 2024.

It is based on extensive engagement with PCCs and OPCCs as well as other partners, particularly with partnership leads in OPCCs. It comprised:

- Desk research, including mapping of local partnerships and the PCC/OPCC role
- Eight regional focus groups with OPCC partnership leads across England and Wales
- A project in Wales working with the four PCCs and OPCCs
- An online survey of PCCs/OPCCs
- ‘Deep dives’ on PCC/OPCC experiences, views and approaches to partnership working in Lincolnshire, Humberside, Merseyside and Surrey, in addition to the work across Wales.

The research has also drawn on exit interviews with PCCs who stood down at the May 2024 elections and included discussion of their experiences of partnerships.

Further information is provided in the following companion resources and reports:

[Deep dive on partnerships in Wales](#)

[Towards Better Partnerships – Deep Dives](#)

[APCC Partnership Spreadsheet – England](#)

[APCC Partnership Map Spreadsheet – Wales](#)

3: Findings and recommendations

We held a series of eight focus groups with OPCC partnership leads across the English regions and Wales from 3 to 25 July 2024, and conducted an online survey from 23 August to 27 September, receiving 42 responses covering 37 police force areas. We also conducted deep dives in four police force areas in England and in Wales. Key findings and messages are summarised below.

The importance of partnerships and the PCC/OPCC role

Comments from OPCC leads:

“[Managing partnerships] can be like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle but with no overall picture to guide you.”

“PCCs and OPCCs are uniquely well placed for system leadership, as they don’t hold the same operational delivery workload as some other partners and they look across the whole system [e.g., because of their focus on prevention].”

There was overwhelming consensus on the importance of partnerships. In response to our survey, 97.4% of respondents agreed that ‘multi-agency partnerships have a critical role to play in delivering PCCs’ priorities’, with 81.6% of them strongly agreeing.

The PCC/OPCC was seen as uniquely well-placed to convene and co-ordinate partnerships and provide system leadership. Our ‘deep dives’ confirmed how critical the PCC/OPCC role is in supporting and sustaining local partnership work, whether that’s through chairing partnership meetings (for example, LCJBs and CDPs – and with OPCC officers often chairing sub-boards and working groups); providing administrative, logistical and/or analytical support for multi-agency work or supporting partnership work through funding (for example, in areas where the PCC is providing funding to CSPs).

Our Deep Dive in Wales also concluded that PCCs/OPCCs have a leading role in convening and facilitating collaborations across the increasingly complex network of partnerships in Wales. Because of their involvement across multiple partnerships, PCCs and OPCCs provide a view reflective of the wider partnership landscape.

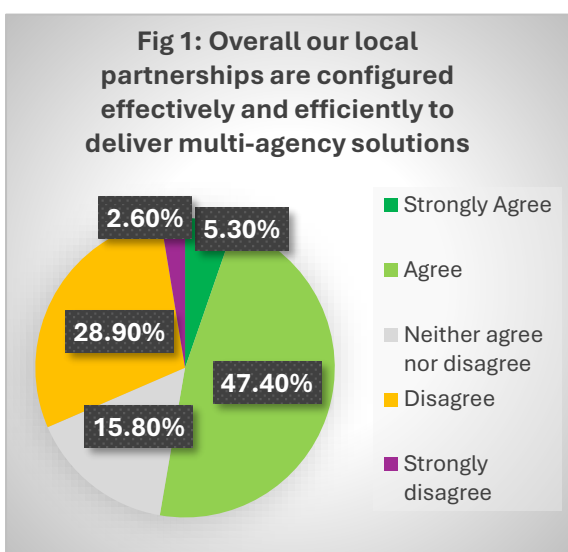
Case study: Collaboration across Avon and Somerset to commission therapeutic services for survivors of sexual assault and abuse

Before April 2023, various local providers of therapeutic services for survivors of sexual violence were funded under different agreements, leading to unclear commissioning and rising referrals and waiting times. In 2022, the OPCC collaborated with the Public Service Transformation Academy to develop a shared commissioning strategy, bringing together commissioners and providers to create a unified vision and clarify roles. This collaboration resulted in a service specification and NHS England agreeing to lead a co-commissioned, force-wide therapy service, with funding from NHS England, the OPCC, Bristol City Council, and the Bristol North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) Integrated Care Board.

An alliance of sexual violence therapy services, led by SARSAS and including Kinergy, The Greenhouse, Womankind, and The Southmead Project, secured a six year contract from this process starting in April 2023. This approach reduces duplication, enhances coordination, and ensures survivors receive timely, diverse services. It also supports clients on waiting lists to begin their recovery journey earlier. The contract runs until March 2029, providing stability for providers. The Sexual Abuse and Assault Strategy Board (chaired by the OPCC) and Commissioners’ Forum are working to expand funding and improve the system’s response to survivors, with support from the Rape and Sexual Abuse Support Fund (2023-25) and NHS England’s Enhanced Mental Health Pathfinder funding to assist survivors with complex needs.

Contact: Marc Hole, Director of Policy and Partnership - Marc.Hole@avonandsomerset.police.uk

Effectiveness and efficiency of local partnerships



The picture was mixed on how well local partnerships are working. In response to our survey, 52.7% agreed that ‘overall our local partnerships are configured effectively and efficiently to deliver multi-agency solutions’ compared to 31.5% who disagreed (see Fig 1). 67% of respondents to a survey in Wales said they felt ‘very optimistic’ about the future of partnerships in Wales, with none saying that they did not feel optimistic (see [APCC Deep Dive on Partnerships in Wales](#))

In addition, 66.5% of respondents agreed that ‘multi-agency partnerships in their force area work effectively together where they have linked objectives and priorities’, with 13.2% strongly agreeing, compared with 21% who disagreed, 2.6% strongly.

A complex landscape

“It’s a really cluttered landscape. When I came in as PCC it felt like the OPCC had it covered but also - oh my god was it complicated! ... its really tough for PCCs just to understand it.” PCC

“With 30 plus meetings a week, you don’t have time for much else.” OPCC Lead

Participants in our focus groups consistently told us that they were actively engaged in work to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of their partnership systems.

The most common activity that they reported was to map the partnership landscape within their Police Force Area (PFA), which was referenced by nearly half of focus group participants. One PFA provided us with a ‘map’ listing over 80 partnerships of relevance to the PCC/OPCC; another had identified over 1500 partnership-related meetings annually which the PCC or OPCC officers had been invited to attend, which the OPCC had reduced to nearer to 300 prioritised meetings. One area that had not undertaken a mapping exercise commented that a map would be out of date by the time it was completed, highlighting the fast pace at which partnership landscapes are expanding and developing.

The geographies of PFAs significantly impact on the number and configuration of partnerships, and therefore on the resource and other demands on PCCs/OPCCs. One consequence is that smaller OPCCs may be managing large numbers of partnerships due to local geographies (for example, the numbers of local authorities in their PFA area), but generally are not being resourced to manage the additional burden of partnership working. As one of our ‘deep dive’ interviews with PCCs highlighted, local politics also complicates the partnership landscape, and the PCC needs to manage this – for example, where different political parties control different parts of the system or in managing changes to personnel and/or approach that can follow elections.

It was also commented that the switch to online meetings during Covid and the continuation of holding many meetings via Microsoft Teams and similar platforms has contributed to the proliferation of meetings, and of meetings that are literally ‘back to back’, also making it more challenging to build and sustain one-to-one relationships with colleagues where contact is largely virtual.

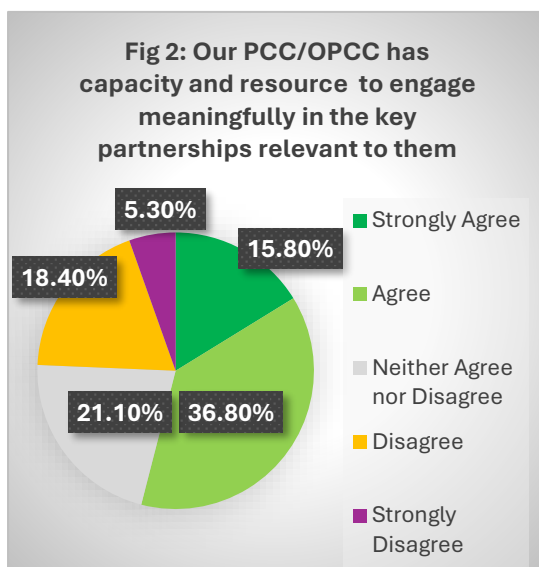
As discussed in the APCC Deep Dive on Partnerships in Wales, Welsh devolution has created divergence from UK Government policy. The operation of policing and justice in Wales is more complex as a result, with additional layers of decision making and coordination, and challenges in balancing local, national and regional demands.

In Wales there are 13 Public Service Boards, 7 Regional Partnership Boards, 19 Community Safety Partnerships, 7 Violence Against Women Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Wales Boards, 7 Local Health Boards and 6 Safeguarding Boards which span 22 Unitary Authorities, alongside national partnerships including the Policing Partnership Board for Wales, the Safer Communities Board and the Criminal Justice Board for Wales.

Bandwidth and capacity challenges

The challenges of directly resourcing partnership work were mentioned by two thirds of the contributors to the APCC’s focus groups. This included resourcing to provide the administrative, logistical and other support to partnership boards and the capacity of PCCs, DPCCs and other senior staff to attend and engage meaningfully and consistently across the evolving partnership landscape.

The sheer number of partnership meetings in many areas mean that they might not be attended by people with sufficient seniority to make decisions and/or with the expertise or experience to bring to discussions. The bandwidth for engagement – along with other factors such as staff churn in key partner agencies – was also felt negatively to affect the consistency of attendees at meetings; an important factor for building the positive, trusting relationships that underpin partnership working.



In response to our survey, however, over half agreed that ‘our PCC has the capacity and resource to engage meaningfully in the key partnerships relevant to them’, compared to around a quarter who disagreed, as shown in Fig 2.

By comparison, 42.1% disagreed that ‘other key partners have the capacity and resources to engage in a consistent way across the key partnerships relevant to them’, compared to 36.8% who agreed. Similarly, 42.1% disagreed that ‘we are able to get sufficient engagement from senior decision makers to enable partnerships to lead and drive multi-agency work’, compared to 39.5%

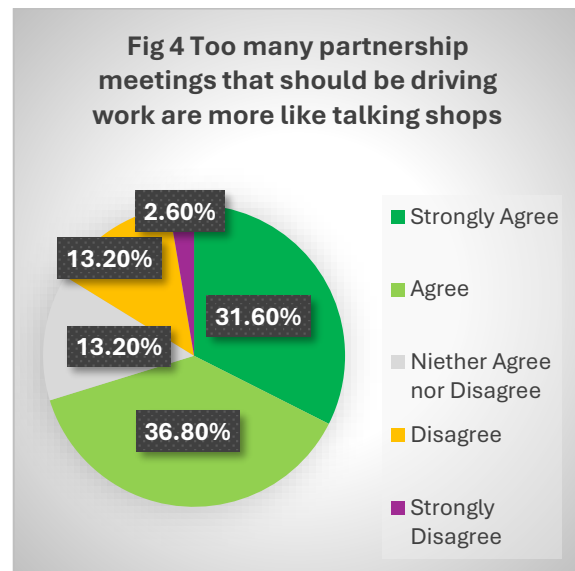
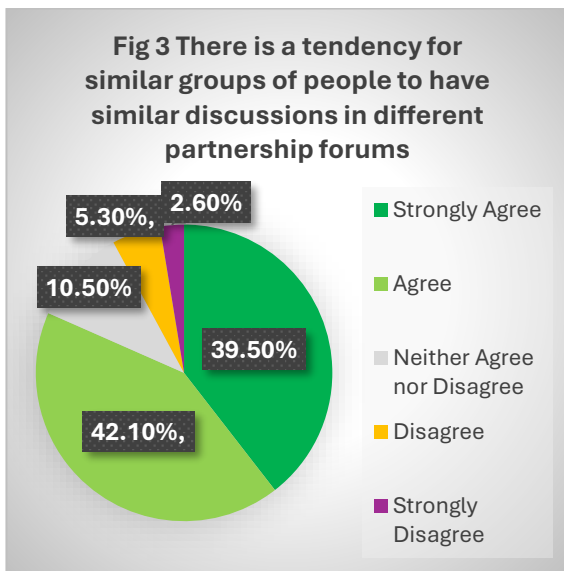
who agreed. The challenges of getting full engagement from health was a recurring theme in our focus group and deep dive conversations, and issues were also highlighted in getting involvement from education (for example, in Combating Drugs Partnerships).

Duplication: same conversations, different meetings

“I spent a lot of my time sitting in different rooms with the same people, talking about the same things, but with a different heading on the agendas and papers in front of us.” OPCC lead

One of the most consistent messages across our focus groups and deep dives was the tendency for ‘the same people to have similar discussions in different meetings’, and for meetings to become ‘talking shops’ rather than supporting meaningful collaboration or driving delivery (although it was commented that meetings do not always need a delivery focus to have value – for example, for building relationships and understanding across organisations, talking through issues, horizon scanning, and so on).

As shown in Fig 3, over 81.6% of APCC survey respondents agreed that ‘there is a tendency for similar groups of people to have similar discussions in different partnership forums’, with two fifths of all respondents strongly agreeing, and only 7.9% disagreeing. Similarly, as shown in Fig 4, 68.4% of respondents agreed that ‘too many partnerships that should be driving work are more like talking shops’, with a third of respondents strongly agreeing with this, compared to 15.8% who disagreed. As noted above, while it was commented that ‘talking shops’ can provide valuable forums for building relationships, exchanging information, and so on, the general view was that these meetings do not always have sufficient value to justify the time they take.



Duplication: multiplying strategies

"We ran a strategy mapping exercise. Looking across our police force area we had 20 strategies, and a strategy is basically a set of priorities (say five per strategy gives you 100 priorities). If you have 20 sets of priorities in partnership, you really don't have any priorities, it just becomes white noise." OPCC lead

Where multiple partnerships have multiple overlapping strategies, the risk is that the system is no longer able to prioritise meaningfully and in a strategic way. In addition, we were told that organisations often want to have their own strategies on key policy areas alongside any partnership strategies that they are involved with (for example, on VAWG). This can also result in multiple consultation and engagement exercises, contributing to 'consultation fatigue' and stretching capacity.

In our survey, 78.9% of respondents agreed that 'there are considerable numbers of partnership strategies being published', with 5.3% disagreeing with this. Encouragingly, 63.1% agreed that locally 'partnership strategies align with our Police and Crime Plan priorities', with 10.5% strongly agreeing, compared to 7.9% disagreeing.

During our focus group and 'deep dive' conversations, people also commented on the tendency for multiple strategies to be produced locally by individual organisations to address key policy issues, like VAWG for example, with significant duplication, and potentially missed opportunities for collaboration and alignment. Often a single strategy will subsequently be produced covering the county or police force area. It was noted that, for example, strategies for each lower tier local authority can be encouraged or even required by government and suggested that a better approach may be for partners to develop a single, shared strategy together first with opportunity for local variation at the delivery and implementation planning stages.

Recommendation 1: When new duties or expectations are considered, the default should be to deliver them through existing partnerships rather than to create new ones, with as much flexibility as possible for local areas to determine for themselves the best way to do this taking account of their local geographies, existing partnership systems, and so on. This is already the direction of travel; for example, with the local discretion to determine footprints for Combating Drugs Partnerships and local approaches to delivering the Serious Violence Duty. Our research suggests that there can be a trade-off between the quantity of partnership meetings and the quality of partnership working; multiplication of partnerships inevitably stretches resources, can dilute engagement (for example, in terms of seniority and consistency) and contributes to partnership fatigue.

Recommendation 2: When the government or other agencies require local areas to have strategies on important issues, they should help and support them to create joint partnership

strategies whenever possible. They should avoid setting expectations that each organisation will have its own separate strategy unless there is a clear rationale for this. Currently, multiple overlapping strategies are often being produced locally on key policy areas, with significant duplication of activity. These strategies can then become the focus for organisations, rather than shared partnership strategies.

Case study: Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership

First established in 2019, the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (MVRP) is a multi-agency team working together to address the causes of violence and to prevent it. Chaired by the PCC and convened by the OPCC, it includes representatives from police, fire and rescue, local government, probation, youth offending services, health, education, the Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector and community leaders.

The MVRP agreed a single Merseyside Serious Violence Strategy (MSVS), which was developed through a series of workshops facilitated by the OPCC and that ensured all key partners co-produced the strategy, including its objectives, outcomes and deliverables, with scope for CSPs to develop their own local delivery plans. The partners have subsequently worked together on an asset-mapping exercise for VAWG that identified around 800 assets at a strategic and operational level across Merseyside.

The development of a single pan-Merseyside strategy is improving data capture, consistency and sharing, with the OPCC leading work to draw data together for the MVRP. A dedicated data analyst post, paid for with Serious Violence Duty funding, has been critical for progressing this work. Options are being explored for the co-location of analysts from across partnership organisations to drive innovation and a multi-agency approach. *For further details and discussion, see [Towards Better Partnerships – Deep Dives](#).*

Contact, Roy McGregor, Business Manager, MCJB- roy.mcgregor@merseyside.police.uk

Case study: The Safer Lincolnshire Partnership

Lincolnshire is seeking to merge its Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) into a single board, formalising the Safer Lincolnshire Partnership (SLP), which is already acting as a force-wide CSP and strategic oversight board, with the PCC as its vice-chair. Strategic direction for the partnership is provided through the SLP Strategy Board. Work is led by 'core priority' groups that are delivery-focused, and include the Drugs and Alcohol core priority group, which acts as the Combating Drugs Partnership.

The individual district councils deliver against the priorities of the SLP in their local area while retaining their statutory duty to undertake local strategic assessments. This duty is discharged via a single Lincolnshire-wide survey, published by the PCC annually. This data also informs the Police and Crime Plan, and reliance on a common data resource helps to ensure strategic alignment between the activities of the SLP and the PCC/OPCC.

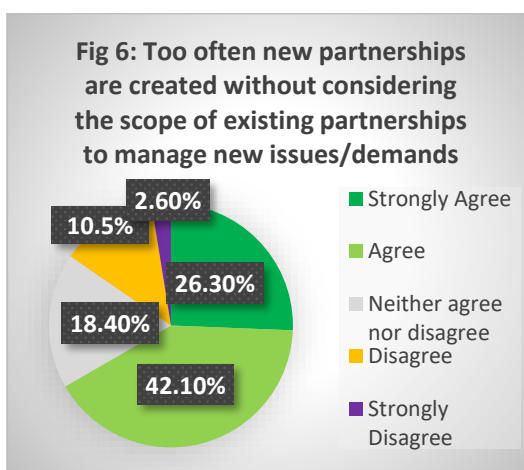
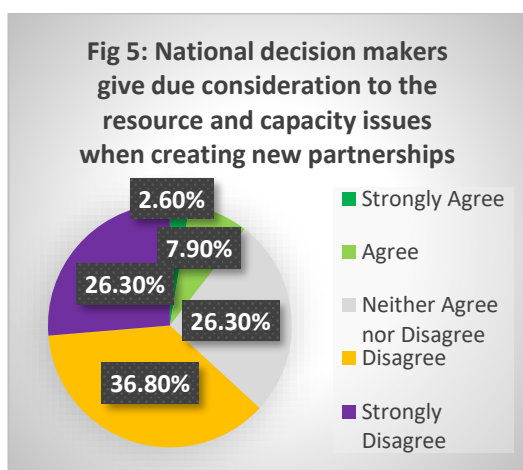
This merging of CSPs into a single county-wide partnership is still to be formalised under the relevant legislation. The PCC, whilst not able to request the merging of CSPs, is the deciding authority for the merger, with the proposal made to the PCC in the form of a business case. The formal merger process in Lincolnshire started in 2021 and was proposed by the county council. Alongside the PCC formally approving, all parties need to agree to the process for it to happen. The OPCC has worked to reassure local partners and district councils that the formal merger will not undermine the local focus that is one of the benefits of district level CSPs. *For further details and discussion, see [Towards Better Partnerships – Deep Dives](#)*

Contact: Jo Davison, Director of Strategy and Operations - joanne.davison@lincs.police.uk

Resourcing partnerships and efficiency

Good partnership work cannot be delivered effectively without appropriate resources. Our survey asked whether ‘national decision makers give due consideration to the resource and capacity issues when creating new partnerships’, with nearly two-thirds of respondents (63.1%) disagreeing that this is the case and 26.3% strongly disagreeing, compared to 10.5% who agreed that they did (Fig 5).

Noting the consistent messages from OPCCs about duplication of meetings and ‘similar groups of people having similar discussions’, we also sought views on whether ‘too often new partnerships are created without considering the scope of existing partnerships to manage new issues and demands’. As shown in Fig 6, 68.4% of respondents agreed with this, of which 26.3% agreed strongly, compared to 13.1% who disagreed.



Based on salaries alone, the cost of meetings is significant as shown in the table below.

The assumptions are highly artificial, of course, but do give an indication of the cost associated with attendance at partnership meetings in terms of the salaries of attendees. In reality of course, there will also be significant costs for administration, analytical support, data input, and so on.

| Time | Number of attendees | Average salary of attendees | Salary costs per annum (4 meetings pa) | Salary costs of 50 boards, etc. per annum |
|---|---------------------|-----------------------------|--|---|
| 2 hours plus 1 hour for prep, travel, etc. | 12 | £50,000 | £4,082 | £204,100 |
| As above | As above | £80,000 | £6,530 | £356,500 |

And there are a range of wider issues to consider around the resourcing of effective partnership working. For example, it is good practice to engage victims advocacy groups in relevant partnerships, but these will often have limited capacity to support engagement (including for voices with lived experience) and it is best practice to offer financial support to enable them to engage (see the [APCC/MOJ's Victims Commissioning Guidance](#)).

Recommendation 3: Government proposals to create new partnerships and collaborative duties locally should be considered within the scope of the 'new burdens' arrangements, with the expectation that the resource implications are fully considered and appropriately funded by the relevant departments. Effective partnership depends on administrative, logistical, analytical and other support – for example, to ensure meaningful actions are agreed, logged and followed through, with appropriate mutual accountability and analysis and tracking of outcomes.

Recommendation 4: Consideration should be given to introducing a new (resourced) duty for PCCs/OPCCs or their equivalents to take responsibility for oversight and stewardship of the local partnership landscape in relation to community safety and crime reduction, with corresponding duties for partners. For example, this could include a responsibility to review the effectiveness and efficiency of the local partnership system periodically (for example, every 2-5 years), producing a publicly available report and making recommendations. This could include recommendations to discontinue partnerships that are no longer adding benefit proportionate to the demand on resources. Other partners would need to have responsibilities to support and engage with the review and to have appropriate regard to its recommendations.

Recommendation 5: Local areas should consider carrying out an audit of the costs of partnership boards and forums, including salary costs for attendees and the costs of support for meetings and other activities (for example, logistical and analytical support). This will be helpful to inform local discussions and discussions with government on resourcing partnership working, and for assessing the efficiency of local arrangements.

Case study: Humberside – Streamlining the Local Criminal Justice Board

The Humberside LCJB is well-developed and has strong support from partners. The structure of the board was recently renewed. Part of the redesign involved the PCC as chair closing groups that potentially duplicated the work of other meetings and introducing a more flexible structure. Instead

of hosting dedicated groups for efficiency and effectiveness, reducing reoffending and victim and witness care like many other LCJBS, in Humberside a single Operations Board replaced all these groups. Reducing Reoffending is covered by local Reducing Reoffending Boards and the Yorkshire and The Humber Rehabilitation Partnership (the OPCC is represented at all these meetings).

The Operations Group has the power to set up dedicated task and finish groups, ensuring that short term work does not impinge on the group's efficiency; and where there are agenda items that would otherwise have been part of a dedicated group (for example, case studies for victims code monitoring) smaller groups are composed only of those members required to conduct the work, reporting back into the Operations Board and eventually the LCJB main board. This reduces the number of less-relevant meetings for partners but ensures they still have a voice at both a tactical and strategic level. *For further details and discussion, see [Towards Better Partnerships – deep dives \(link\)](#)*

Contact: Michael Richmond, Partnership Manager michael.richmond.8726@humberside.police.uk

Case study: Surrey – plans for a new county-level Criminal Justice Board

In Surrey, the PCC and OPCC are leading work to develop a new county-level community safety board, with support from the Chief Constable and the leader of Surrey County Council.

In 2019-20, the Surrey Health and Wellbeing Board merged with the Community Safety Board. The rationale was that the underlying risk factors for offending and victimisation are similar to those for physical and mental health problems (for example, poverty, isolation, substance misuse). However, particularly with the onset of the Covid pandemic, this approach has not provided sufficient bandwidth for community safety alongside health.

Conversations with key stakeholders also highlighted the need for a strategic board to help to coordinate and provide direction for the increasing number of partnerships across Surrey. The PCC and OPCC highlighted the need for a strategic, senior level, community-safety focused PCC-led board. This would provide a line of sight to, coordination of and to streamline as appropriate the plethora of different community-safety forums in Surrey, noting the recent growth in partnership boards, and sit alongside the Surrey LCJB with its criminal justice focus. The vision for the new board is that it will provide strategic leadership from senior leaders across the key partner organisations and have well defined, shared priorities, all supported by effective tools for problem-analysis and performance monitoring. *For further details and discussion, see [Towards Better Partnerships – Deep Dives](#)*

Contact: Sarah Haywood, Serious Violence Programme Lead – sarah.haywood@surrey.pnn.police.uk

Case study: Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnership Board

The Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnership Board (MSPPB), which meets quarterly, is chaired by the PCC and brings senior leaders from all the relevant partner organisations together. It provides oversight for the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership – and can help to address blockages to the Serious Violence Strategy. It also reviews the work of the Merseyside Criminal Justice Board. The

Combating Drugs Partnerships also report into the MSPPB. The membership is the PCC/OPCC; Merseyside Police; all five Merseyside Local Authorities; Liverpool City Region Combined Authority (LCRCA) Cheshire and Merseyside Health and Care Partnership and chairs of the sub-groups overseen by the SPPB. Other partners can also be invited to attend meetings to support delivery of the MSPPB's priorities.

The MSPPB is playing a key role in the PCC's VAWG strategy for example, with work on VAWG being reported there to ensure key partners are fully engaged. At a recent meeting the board reviewed progress against an action plan for Merseyside's response to the 16 days of action on domestic abuse campaign. This also helped to ensure partners who were signed up to the Action Plan were fully engaging with it and reporting against it. *For further details and discussion, see [Towards Better Partnerships – Deep Dives](#)*

Contact, Roy McGregor, Business Manager, MCJB- roy.mcgregor@merseyside.police.uk

Communications, co-ordination, data and information sharing

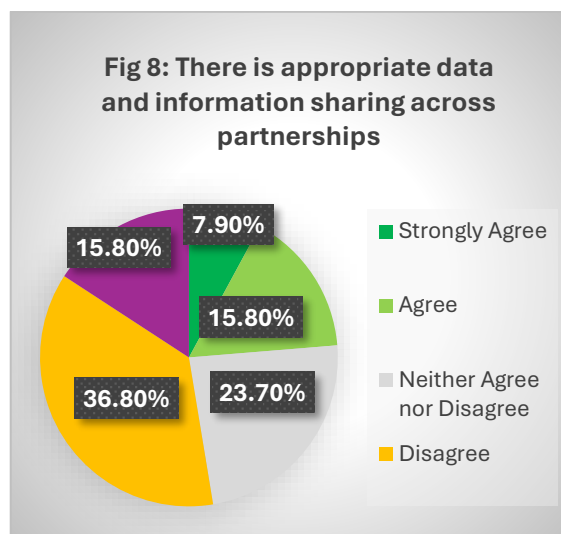
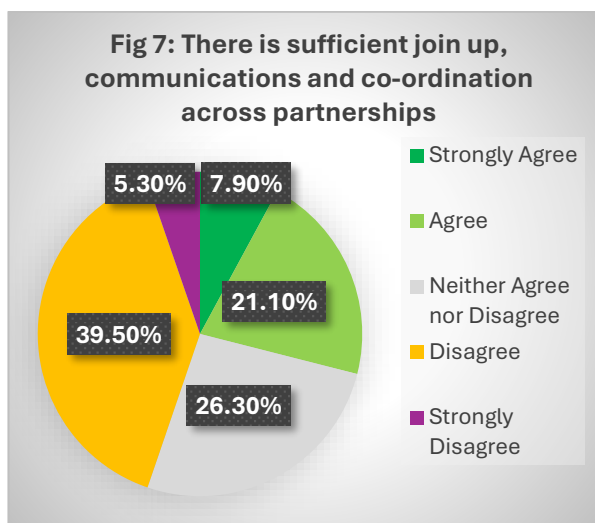
“The thing that frustrates me is that we’ve got all these meetings, but we’re not really sharing data and data is the key ... Policing, healthcare, NHS, social services are all dealing with the same cohorts of people in particular areas and on specific estates – we all know who they are ... but none of us are sharing data ... and that’s a constant issue. That’s real partnership work ... it’s not periodically sitting around a table.” PCC 'deep dive' interview

Co-ordination, communications and data sharing were recurring issues for our focus group and our deep dive conversations. It was felt that partners could be over-cautious about sharing data (for example, because of misinterpretations of GDPR). This could be compounded by a lack of standardised and/or compatible approaches to data management and presentation and, critically, by lack of dedicated specialists to undertake the data and other evidential analysis to support partnership work.

It was noted that engaging people in partnership work requires understanding of and sensitivity to their priorities, budgetary cycles, and so on. For example, if you are looking for a partner to commit to partnership activity with a financial element, then you need to ensure that you are doing that at a time where they have flexibility in budget setting for the relevant time period.

As shown in Fig 7, 52.2% of respondents to our survey disagreed that ‘there is appropriate data and information sharing across partnerships’, with 15.8% strongly disagreeing. As Fig 8 shows, when

asked whether there is 'sufficient join up, communications and co-ordination across partnerships', 44.8% disagreed that this was true in their local area.



Recommendation 6: A continued focus should be placed on developing a more data-confident and open culture and facilitating data sharing between partners. Based on our research, this appears the single most impactful thing that can be done to improve the effectiveness of partnership working within and across existing partnerships. Consideration should be given to placing a duty or requirement on partners to share data with PCCs and for PCCs to be able to request data from partnership agencies in the same way that they are able to request force data. There is a lot of work in progress to drive a step change in the quality and use of data within policing. It is important that this includes work with key partners (for example, local authorities, health and education) to enable data sharing between sectors and across the system. Positive strides are already being made in this direction, notably through the development of the Ministry of Justice’s Better Outcomes through Linked Data (BOLD) programme to improve the connectedness of government data across England and Wales. Other positive recent developments include data-sharing requirements for monitoring Victims Code compliance under the Victims and Prisoners Act.

Case study: Data sharing in Wales

Respondents to a survey of partner organisations in Wales highlighted several best practice examples of data sharing. These include the Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) in Wales, which exemplify robust collaboration among agencies, all underpinned by effective data sharing. There is a structured MAPPA framework that allows for the timely exchange of critical information for the assessment and management of high risk offenders.

The Wales Single Unified Safeguarding Review (SUSR) was developed following cross-sectoral collaboration. The SUSR is a new approach to reviewing and assessing multiple safeguarding

reviews. With the unified Wales model, one review will now be undertaken, and collective recommendations will be implemented by respective safeguarding boards.

Other examples include the Wales Race Disparity Data Dashboard, the use of Domestic Abuse Attrition Data and the Women's Justice Data Dashboard, which are all scrutinised by partners through the All-Wales Criminal Justice Board.

For further details, see [Deep Dive on Partnerships in Wales](#). Contact: Sarah Keefe, APCC Wales Policy Manager – sarah.keefe1@south-wales.police.uk

Case study: Humber Serious Violence Data Analytics Group

Humberside has taken what it believes may be a unique approach to the challenges of data-sharing and compatibility. Humberside has developed an in-house data team based at the OPCC as well as a wider data analyst network, the Humber Serious Violence Data Analytics Group (HSVDAG), partly with funding made available to the region as one of the VRU areas. The HSVDAG is a group of data analysts across the Humberside region who meet every two to three months to discuss work being undertaken and any issues that may have arisen. This includes partner organisations within education, health and probation services, alongside policing and OPCC staff. The HSVDAG further aims to address the issue of a lack of shared data sets and common data language, although this work is still in its early stages. *For further details, see [Towards Better Partnerships – deep dives \(link\)](#).*

Contact: Michael Richmond, Partnership Manager michael.richmond.8726@humberside.police.uk

Capability and learning & development

The importance of effective chairing, coordination and management of meetings was a recurring theme for our focus groups and 'deep dives', along with a need for training in chairing and other skills and the need to develop systems leadership.

It was suggested that achieving a step change in the effectiveness and efficiency of partnerships required a 'systems change mindset and skill set'. The [Leading Greater Essex Programme](#) was referenced as a good example of a system leadership initiative, providing a year-long programme for senior leaders across Essex partners on mobilising change in complex systems. The need for more learning and development support, guidance and toolkits to support partnership working was highlighted.

Recommendation 7: The APCC and LGA, along with other national partners, should be supported to create guidance and resources for effective local partnership work. They should also establish a new national network of local partnership' leads.

Currently, there are limited resources to support the effective management of partnerships, or networks to bring local partnership leads together to share experiences and learning.

The reference group for this project would provide the perfect basis for creating a new national network, which could oversee the development of guidance and other resources.

Recommendation 8: More investment is needed in partnership capabilities, including chairing, developing terms of reference, action logging, and so on, alongside support for senior leaders to develop further their understanding of, and capabilities for, system leadership.

As well as capacity issues, our research suggests there needs to be more consideration of, and support for, learning and development to support the development of appropriate capabilities for effective and efficient partnership working.

More levers, more flexibility

Comments from PCCs:

“I’d really like better levers to enable collaboration. I can’t even require the judiciary to turn up to my Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB). Everyone at the LCJB is perfectly polite ... but whenever I ask for any budget from them, it’s never forthcoming. Similarly, they’re willing to offer up ideas for improving the CJS, but it always feels it’s for other people to deliver.”

“Having to persuade, get people onside and prepare the ground, and having to demonstrate the value of an approach to get people on board, is actually a good way of doing business, so I think it would be possible to take things too far in giving more authority.”

Our focus groups highlighted both a desire for a stronger statutory framework for local partnerships and for more local flexibility to enable partnerships to be configured appropriately in the light of local geographies, cultures and relationships.

This was reflected in our survey, with 94.7% of respondents agreeing that ‘statutory and other support is needed to empower local system leaders to deliver multi-agency engagement and delivery through partnerships (for example, through LCJBs)’ (see Fig 9). 73.7% agreed that ‘local areas should have more scope to determine the best partnership structures to deliver effective multi-agency work in their areas’. (Fig 10).

Fig 9: Statutory and other support is needed to empower local system leaders to deliver multi-agency engagement and delivery through partnerships (eg, through LCJBs)

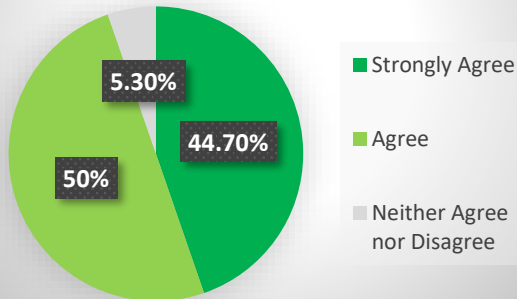
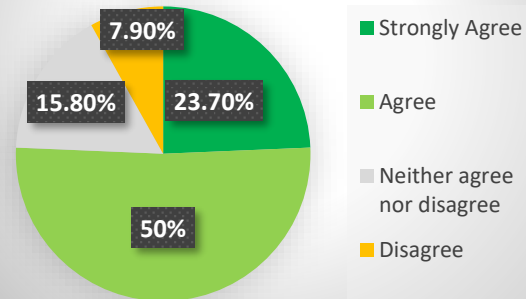


Fig 10: Local areas should have more scope to determine the best partnership structures to deliver effective multi-agency work in their areas



The point was also made that, as the partnership landscape has expanded, and with it the demands on the time and capacity of partners, there is a tendency for statutory meetings to be prioritised over non-statutory ones by senior leaders.

Statutory and other powers

One of the strongest and most consistent messages from our survey, reference groups and deep dive visits was that PCC-led LCJBs should be placed on a statutory footing, as recommended by Part 2 of the previous government’s PCC Review (2021-22).

As part of this process, further consideration could also be given to strengthening the LCJB’s role in providing strategic direction, oversight and accountability for other partnerships and collaborations.

As illustrated by our ‘deep dives’, many areas have developed - or are currently in the process of developing - high level strategic boards for senior leaders to provide strategic direction, oversight and accountability for partnership working in their area.

It was also noted that existing legislation – notably the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011 – include provisions and powers supportive of local partnership working, and that these might helpfully be signposted, considered and reviewed.

Funding and access to funding are also significant levers for securing engagement of partners, and this is something that government should consider when designing the funding arrangements for programmes and initiatives which require collaboration. Where PCCs have a convening responsibility, this is strengthened where they have a role in the management and allocation of relevant funding with and across partners.

Recommendation 9: At the first opportunity, the government should look at the options for legislating to place PCC-led Criminal Justice Boards on a statutory footing. This was a key recommendation of the [PCC Review 2021-22](#). Effective LCJBs have a key role to play in supporting delivery of the government’s Safer Streets Mission and driving criminal justice reform. Without this statutory backing, LCJBs are felt to lack the ‘teeth’ to achieve coordination across the system to drive delivery, at a time when ‘whole system’ approaches are needed to address a range of critical issues including the court backlog, pressures on the prison system and delivery of the duty to collaborate on victims' services.

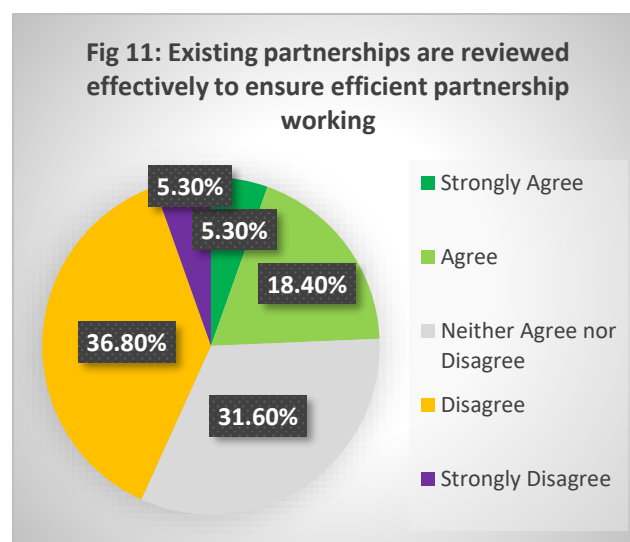
Flexibility

One of the key messages from our deep dives is that PFAs are configuring and developing their partnerships differently, to reflect their local geographies, footprints and relationships.

Any review of partnerships will need to consider the appropriate balance between statutory support and local flexibility for ensuring that partnerships are efficient and effective and are delivering for and accountable to the communities that they serve.

Our survey asked if ‘existing partnerships are reviewed effectively to ensure efficient partnership working’. While nearly a third of respondents provided a neutral response, 42.1% did not think this was the case, compared to 23.7% who said it was (see Fig 11).

There is both scope and demand for further guidance, toolkits and other resources on partnership management and configuration, including to support and enable assessment of the effectiveness of individual partnerships and partnership working.



Case study: Cambridgeshire High Harms Board

Cambridgeshire’s High Harms Board (HHB) provides multi-agency, strategic direction to enable the delivery of its key priorities to help make Cambridgeshire and Peterborough’s communities safer.

Chaired by the PCC, membership of the board includes senior representatives from local authorities, police, fire and rescue, probation, health, and Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs). It also includes representation from education (schools) and the voluntary sector.

The High Harms Board is responsible for helping these key partners to coordinate and deliver their statutory duties with respect to four agreed specific priority issues: (1) Harm to Hope Drug Strategy; (2) Serious Violence Duty (SVD); (3) Violence Against Women and Girls and (4) Serious and

Organised Crime. The Board also carries out the functions of a county strategy group and Combating Drugs Partnership.

The PCC and OPCC believe this is an efficient and effective approach to meeting a growing range of requirements. It provides an opportunity to consider cross-cutting themes across these agendas. Senior partners may not otherwise have the capacity to engage multiple times. There are also several themes where complexity or impact supports a countywide approach (for example, reducing re-offending, road safety, domestic abuse). These themes have multi-agency partnerships in place. A Community Safety Officer group also provides a co-ordinated approach between these delivery groups and CSPs.

Contact: Cristina Turner, Director for Strategic Partnerships - Cristina.Turner@cambs.police.uk

Bedfordshire – Strategic Mission Boards

Bedfordshire PCC has taken a new approach to their partnership work, through the development of strategic mission boards. This is based on the approach outlined in the PCC's Police and Crime Plan, aimed at a mission-led approach to policing and criminal justice. The PCC believes that to make Bedfordshire safer and fairer requires system change, tackling inequality and poverty, strengthening the local economy and high performing collaboration across the public sector with the voluntary and community sector, businesses and trade unions.

These mission boards are made up of professional experts from partner organisations and academia, the police, trade unions and the Police Federation, people with lived experience and other colleagues. Their focus is to identify opportunities and means to improve outcomes and to remove barriers to change. They take a 'whole systems' approach.

There are six boards focused on prevention, protecting women and children, tackling serious crime, putting victims at the heart of all services, reinvigorating local policing, and moving towards excellence in policing and the wider criminal justice system. Whilst still in the early stages, so far partner engagement with these boards has been strong, and work is being undertaken to provide a number of key missions for the PCC, Bedfordshire Police and partners to deliver over the next three years and beyond.

For more information on the Mission Boards, please contact PCC@beds.police.uk

4. Conclusions

There has been a striking consistency in the core messages across the three strands of the research - focus groups, the APCC survey and our deep dive visits and conversations – which we would expect to be replicated if similar research were to be conducted across other sectors:

- **Good partnership working is absolutely mission critical** – there is no other way to deliver reduced violence or tackle VAWG or drug misuse or knife crime, for example, than working collaboratively across PCCs and their equivalents, police forces, other criminal justice partners, local authorities, health, the voluntary and community sector and others.
- **PCCs, OPCCs and equivalents have a vital and unique role** – in the areas we visited it was clear to us that key local partnerships depended on the PCC/OPCC as conveners, enablers and facilitators of partnership work (the particular suitability of PCCs for leading and convening partnership working locally is recognised, for example, by their convening role with respect to the Serious Violence Duty and responsibilities with respect to the duty to collaborate on victims services).
- **There is lots of excellent, innovative and impactful partnership work happening across England and Wales but limited opportunities to capture and share learning**, with local areas actively looking at how they develop and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of partnership systems, and with plenty of notable practice to capture and share – for example, different local approaches to the development of high-level strategic boards or on the relationship with CSPs.
- **Local partners are often struggling to manage the resource and capacity demands associated with the recent proliferation of partnerships.** Many question the value of all of the meetings that they attend and feel there is a trade-off between the quantity and quality of partnership working. At the same time, there are many positive things happening locally to rationalise local partnerships – for example, locating new collaborative duties in the ways that fit best with local configurations, relationships, etc.
- **There is significant scope to build on, develop and improve the quality of local partnership working so it more effectively and efficiently delivers the government’s missions and local priorities.** Some suggestions for how this could be done are set out in this report’s findings and recommendations.

Ultimately, partnership working is not reducible to boards or achieved by attending meetings; these are a means to delivering in partnership and do not constitute it. The ultimate purpose and test of partnership structures and systems is the extent to which local partners are working together effectively, efficiently and impactfully to deliver outcomes for their communities. In many ways

they are and there are lots of examples of good and impactful partnership across England and Wales, but there is scope to build on this and make partnership systems even better.

Recommendation 10: The government should consider commissioning a further in-depth, independent review of local partnership systems, which might be undertaken as part of its wider public sector reform and/or police landscape reform agenda.

Our review has necessarily been limited in scope, but we believe that it makes a strong case for further work to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of local partnership. This should include the perspectives of other partners and develop policy options in more detail. It might also consider in more detail how funding flows into and through partnership systems and how it contributes to leveraging partner engagement and delivery. As our review shows, PCCs and their equivalents play a key convening role and will continue to drive collaborative work as system leaders.

Appendix A: Deep dive on partnerships in Wales – findings and recommendations

Key findings and themes

- 1. PCCs/OPCCs have a leading role in convening and facilitating collaborations across a complex network of partnerships in Wales.** The role of the PCC/OPCC in Wales is important in ‘bridging’ communication and engagement between devolved (for example, Welsh government and health) and non-devolved (for example, policing and justice) partners. This role is not supported by any additional statutory powers; however, it was felt that future partnership configurations will require some level of formalisation of the PCC/OPCC role in statute, if they are to provide ongoing and essential partnership system leadership.
 - **Partners across Wales say that they have a good understanding of police and crime priorities and that there is some level of alignment with their own organisational priorities.** Feedback from partners suggests that more could be done to prioritise and coordinate the delivery of key priorities relating to reducing crime; reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB); and addressing drug related crime.
 - **Welsh PCCs/OPCCs are leading efforts to configure partnerships across Wales through co-commissioning, co-location and co-production models.**
- 2. Key partners across Wales are broadly well connected, but more needs to be done to ensure the health sector regularly engages in collaborations that are concerned with public health, prevention and early intervention priorities.**
 - **Some CSPs in Wales were felt to have lost their way and required leadership and strategic direction from PCCs/OPCCs.** New partnership arrangements and collaborations have been created by both the UK and Welsh government since CSPs were first set up, with responsibilities that overlap with and may undermine the CSP role (for example, on serious violence or combatting drugs).
 - **Partnership performance in Wales could be more consistent.** It is unclear where partnerships across Wales are utilising performance measures to assess their own effectiveness, and what performance mechanisms are being used.

Recommendations

The below recommendations, which apply specifically to the Welsh context, are in addition to the recommendations set out in the main APCC report (see Appendix A):

- 1. The findings and recommendations from the Wales ‘deep dive’ will be circulated to Welsh partners, including the Welsh Government and Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA).** The report should be used to initiate a discussion to inform the development of future arrangements for partnership working, including through statutory guidance, within a devolved Welsh context.
- 2. Greater leadership and oversight across partnerships in Wales is needed, particularly for CSPs.** Specific guidance is required for Welsh PCCs as an interim measure while considering what statutory duties and levers could be placed on the PCC role to provide greater accountability and oversight of CSP activity across Wales. The PCC role with respect to CSPs should be discussed by Welsh PCCs and the Safer Communities Board.
- 3. PCCs in Wales should assess the role of devolved health partners across the local and regional partnership landscape.** In doing this, PCCs should set out a specific set of expectations of health partners that would achieve the necessary enhancement of their role in delivering public health priorities across police and crime partnerships, and in the prevention and early intervention space.
- 4. National guidance for Wales regarding the use of performance management frameworks is needed.** National direction and strategic leadership is necessary to support more consistent and effective performance arrangements for future co-commissioning and co-production arrangements, including drawing on examples where PCCs have worked in collaboration with criminal justice agencies.

See full [APCC Deep Dive Report on Wales](#)

Contact us

Association of Police and Crime Commissioners:

Lower Ground, 5-8 The Sanctuary, Westminster, London SW1P 3JS

Telephone: 020 7222 4296

Website: www.apccs.police.uk

Email: apccsgeneral@apccs.police.uk

The APCC provides support to all Police and Crime Commissioners and policing governance bodies in England and Wales.

Document authors

Marcus Roberts, Director of Policy and Strategy

Harry Palmer-Randle, Policy Assistant

