GENERATION GAP: POLICE AND YOUNG PEOPLE IN BRITAIN'S CHANGING CITIES

Three events at the Labour, Conservative and Liberal Democrat Party Conferences supported by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and Barrow Cadbury

BACKGROUND

During the Party Conference Season 2014, Centre for London organised and chaired the following three panel discussions on the theme 'Generation Gap: Police and Young People in Britain's Changing Cities'.

The first two discussions were supported by the Mayor's Office for Policing and Crime (MOPAC) and Barrow Cadbury Trust. The third one was supported by MOPAC alone. All three discussions were chaired by Ben Rogers, Director, Centre for London.

CONTRIBUTORS

Labour Party Conference, Manchester: 23 September

- Stephen Greenhalgh, London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
- Sadiq Khan MP, Shadow Minister for Justice & London
- Frances Crook, Howard League for Penal Reform
- Joyce Moseley, Transition To Adulthood Alliance

Conservative Party Conference, Birmingham, 29 September

- Stephen Greenhalgh, London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
- Dr Debbie Pippard, Vice Chair, Transition To Adulthood Alliance
- Edward Boyd, Deputy Policy Director, Centre for Social Justice
- Sean Anstee, Conservative Leader, Trafford Council

Liberal Democrat Party Conference, Glasgow, 7 October

- Stephen Greenhalgh, London's Deputy Mayor for Policing and Crime
- Professor Susan McVie, Professor of Criminology, Edinburgh
- Will Linden, Strategy Lead at Scotland's Violence Reduction Unit
- Brian Paddick, Lib Dem peer and former Lib Dem candidate for Mayor of London

The events were well attended and worthwhile. Attendees included MPs, senior police officers and leaders from the CJS.

Inevitably the panelists disagreed on some points. But there was broad agreement on many others, including priorities when it came to improving relations between justice agencies and young people, and reducing youth offending and youth victimization.

Some of the main points of disagreement and agreement are identified below.

1. FALLING PUBLIC CONCERN ABOUT CRIME

Policing and crime policy has moved down the political agenda. This is in most respects a positive development, reflecting falling crime levels and decreased concern about crime among the general public. There was broad agreement that the youth justice system had become overly focused on meeting 'offences brought to justice' and similar targets and this had led to too many young offenders being sucked into the formal criminal justice system. Government reforms have helped discourage this focus, with very positive results.

Stephen Greenhalgh addresses a panel including Frances Crook and Sadiq Khan MP the Labour Party Conference

2. YOUTH CRIME RATES

Some panelists suggested that not all the fall in the number of young people passing through the criminal justice system could be put down to changes in the performance and accountability regimes of the police and CJS. Young people also seem to be committing fewer offences and generally engaging in less risky behavior. We don't know what is driving this change – which itself is part of the broader fall in crime already referenced. It could be that our public services (early years education, schooling, youth work) are doing better by young people at risk of offending – London schools have improved dramatically in the last decade. It could be that digital technologies are changing youth culture and patterns of socialising, with young people spending more time on-line and less time hanging out in the public realm.

For all the positive developments however, big challenges remain:

- young people make-up a very high proportion of offenders and victims – 18% of Londoners are under 18, yet 56% of all thefts 25% of robberies and 21% of rapes are against this group. Gangs in particular target young people. [1]
- Young people have a great deal of adversarial contact with the police – between a quarter and a half of 10-11 year olds have adversarial police contact. Stop and search is disproportionately focused on young people in London, especially on BME young people.
- while confidence in police and criminal justice agencies are not getting worse, it is relatively low and improving only slowly if at all;
- youth re-offending remains very high – at least a third of young people convicted re-offending re-offend within a year.

[1] All statistics were provided by panelists – they have not been verified by Centre for London.

3. IMPROVING POLICE/YOUNG PEOPLE RELATIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF JOINT WORKING

There was broad support for greater efforts to improve relations between young people and the police and broader criminal justice system. Stephen Greenhalgh in particular emphasised the positive role played by London's police cadets. Cadets tend to be very representative of London young people as a whole – over half are from black and ethnic minority groups. They have a good record at recruiting young people at risk of offending. It was noted that police had got much better at engaging schools and developing positive relations with school pupils ('Police-School Liason').

Greenhalgh argued that London's community policing model was alive and well, and police were getting better at focusing community engagement at areas where it was needed most. But he agreed that on-going funding pressures posed a challenge, especially to youth engagement initiatives, and we needed new neighbourhood policing models to keep that strong community links. The police will need to look as ways of resourcing their community and youth work. He noted that the policing of major events (football matches, festivals, etc.) take up a lot of police resource and argued that those responsible for organising these events should contribute more towards the cost of policing them.

The work of the Scottish Violent Reduction Unit was held up as an example of the positive contribution a sustained drive, engaging police, broader public services and civil society, can make to tackling violent offending. It was also noted that rigorous data analysis and project evaluation had been important elements of the Unit's success.

Some panelists and audience worried that spending cuts were undermining joint working and YOTs in particular. Others suggested that instead of encouraging joint working, YOTs policy has led to the development of a new sort of public servant – the YOT worker.

4. YOUNG OFFENDERS

There was also agreement that too many young people were still being pulled into the formal justice system. This can have negative consequences for their well-being and life chances. Once a young person is arrested they will spend at least 12 hours in custody – this can be a traumatic experience for a teenager.

Will Linden argued that government should review criminal records policy: too many of young ex-offenders find it hard secure work because their crime remains 'recorded' for too long. Joyce Moseley made a larger point: research is increasingly showing that young people are less mature than the law supposes – that the psychological transition to full responsible adulthood extends beyond 18. Young adults are less good at calculating consequences and have less self-control than older ones. The criminal justice system needs to be reformed in recognition of this.

Stephen Greenhalgh wanted to see more use of informal diversion approaches by the Met police for young first time offenders. He believed this was a particularly effective use of scarce resources – it was harder to prevent repeat offenders from reoffending and more difficult to integrate them back into mainstream society.

Panelists at the Conservative Party conference included Dr Debbie Pippard, Ed Boyd, Sean Anstee and Stephen Greenhalgh

5. THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSIONARY, VICTIM AND COMMUNITY-CENTRED APPROACHES

There was broad agreement that the police and CJS need to go further in developing alternative, 'diversionary' ways of dealing with offences. The police had to be encouraged and supported into addressing less serious offences without resort to the formal justice system – by for instance, referring cases to schools, local authorities and youth workers. A number of the panelists, notably Frances Crook, argued that while there was good practice in policing the nighttime economy, this was by no means universal. Too many young people are being arrested for drunk and rowdy behavior, when it would be better – and cheaper – simply to drive them home and follow up informally.

Many of the panelists and audience spoke up in support of restorative justice, with the evidence increasingly showing that it was very popular with victims and at least somewhat effective at cutting re-offending. Greenhalgh wanted to see more use of informal RJ approaches by the Met police. There was also broad support for a more formal level of diversionary restorative justice in the form of community panels, made up of local people trained in RJ, to sit below the level of the magistrates, and teen courts – courts run by young people for you people.

Panelists shared the view that we need to see more innovation in the courts service itself and could still learn a great deal from US community courts, most famously the Redhook Community Court, which had succeeded in putting community engagement, RJ and rehabilitation at the centre of the CJS. It was suggested by Edward Boyd and others that in so far as English experiments in community courts, (e.g., the Liverpool Community Court) had run into trouble, this was more to do with the over-centralised way these were run, rather than any fundamental flaw in community justice thinking.

The panel at the Liberal Democrat conference consisted of Professor Susan McVie, Will Linden, Stephen

6. TOWARDS A LESS CENTRALISED CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

There was broad support for Greenhalgh's suggestion that the Youth Justice Board should be abolished or at least reduced in size. Greenhalgh argued that preventing youth crime and tackling its consequences was all about local, joined up working, and that a national agency was not in a good position to promote this sort of work. He also argued that the YJB allocated resources to local areas in a very crude way – money was distributed according the number of young people in a local area, rather than the risk that they would offend.

Not all panelists agreed with Greenhalgh's argument. Joyce Moseley for instance, suggested that overall the Youth Justice Board had played a positive role in creating approaches, and services focused on the special needs of people under 18. She worried that its abolition would be a step backwards. But there was very broad agreement that we need to move toward a more decentralised criminal justice system.

There was wide support for the argument that the ways resources and incentives were aligned in our present centralised system was dysfunctional. Regional, city and local governments are best positioned to prevent offending but the bill for any failure to do so is picked up not by them but by central agencies – courts, prisons and probation. A more localized system would give local agencies the resources and incentives to invest in prevention or bear the consequences in the form of a heavy prison and probation bill ('Justice Reinvestment').

There was broad support for Stephen Greenhalgh when he argued that the Mayor should be given courts, prison and probation budgets for all crime committed in London. He felt strongly that London would use these budgets more effectively than central government currently does to reduce offending and improve rehabilitation. It was noted that Scotland has its own prison and probation system, yet its population is only a little more than half that of London.

Ben Rogers, 5 December, 2014