

HOUSE OF COMMONS  
ORAL EVIDENCE  
TAKEN BEFORE THE  
HOME AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

**POLICING: POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONERS**

TUESDAY 26 OCTOBER 2010

PROFESSOR JONATHAN SHEPHERD

Evidence heard in Public

Questions 143 - 161

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is an uncorrected transcript of evidence taken in public and reported to the House. The transcript has been placed on the internet on the authority of the Committee, and copies have been made available by the Vote Office for the use of Members and others.
2. Any public use of, or reference to, the contents should make clear that neither witnesses nor Members have had the opportunity to correct the record. The transcript is not yet an approved formal record of these proceedings.
3. *Members* who receive this for the purpose of correcting questions addressed by them to witnesses are asked to send corrections to the Committee Assistant.
4. *Prospective witnesses* may receive this in preparation for any written or oral evidence they may in due course give to the Committee.

## Oral Evidence

Taken before the Home Affairs Committee

on Tuesday 26 October 2010

Members present:

Nicola Blackwood  
Mr Aidan Burley  
Lorraine Fullbrook  
Dr Julian Huppert  
Steve McCabe  
Alun Michael  
Bridget Phillipson  
Mark Reckless  
Mr David Winnick

In the temporary absence of the Chair, Mr David Winnick was called to the Chair.

### Examination of Witness

*Witness: Professor Jonathan Shepherd*, Cardiff University, gave evidence.

**Q143 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Would any member of the Committee like to declare an interest?

**Alun Michael:** I have a son who is employed as a Chief Executive of the North Wales Police Authority.

**Mark Reckless:** I am a member of Kent Police Authority.

**Q144 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Professor Shepherd, the Chair is absent due to another meeting and I have taken his place for the moment. Thank you very much for coming along to give evidence to us on the Government's proposals to establish elected police commissioners and so on. You have written quite a bit about the subject and are undoubtedly an authority. We look forward very much to your evidence.

May I begin by asking a question or would you like to make an introductory statement?

**Professor Shepherd:** I am happy to take questions.

**Q145 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Thank you. How far do you believe the Government's suggestion that police and crime commissioners should be elected will improve the position of the police in England and Wales as far as offending and reoffending are concerned? Will it make any difference?

**Professor Shepherd:** It may make a difference if the commissioners commission continuous scientific crime data collection, analysis **and use**, and if it commissions tasking of police services based on highly scientific, rigorous data on a continuous basis, particularly

from community safety partnership analysts who have the expertise to combine crime information derived from different public services. For example, those analysts have the capacity and expertise to combine evidence from public health **and from** emergency departments with police intelligence to derive accurate knowledge about hot spots and how they are changing in an urban environment. That role is essential and if it is lost in the new world of police and crime commissioners, we are going to take a backward step in levels of crime.

**Q146 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** The Government seem determined to go ahead with what many believe to be a controversial subject. As you will know very well, Professor, the previous Government intended to do the same and made a decision in view of the protests that were made and opposition from this Committee. I am not suggesting that that was the deciding factor, but there was certainly much more opposition to the idea than otherwise and they dropped the proposal. Do you feel that this Government are likely to listen to the views of those who have many doubts, not least within the police force and police authorities, about elected commissioners?

*Professor Shepherd:* The roles of the commissioners do need to be defined and defined well. It would be a backward step if there were a free-for-all and the police commissioners were given complete freedom. The parameters need to be defined. For me, as I've said, that includes commissioning continuous data so that the patterns of crime can be identified and carrying out or commissioning rigorous surveys, perhaps using police community support officers, to gather information on citizens' fears and concerns about crime. That is important because fear of crime is just as important as crime itself and the drivers of those things are different. It reminds me of the situation in the NHS where there is a lot of demand from the worried well, particularly in middle-class areas. It seems to me that unless the community is surveyed properly to find out what citizens' concerns and fears really are, then there will be a bias in commissioning that would perhaps reflect anecdotes and the views of let's call them the fearful safe—people who think that crime is a major problem in their areas and are worried about it, but in fact are just like the worried well; there is not really a problem. So I think that the Government need to listen to pleas for a rigorous approach to commissioning based not on anecdote, not on fad and fashion, but on real scientific data about crime and the fear of crime.

**Q147 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Have you yourself made representations to the present Home Secretary on this issue?

*Professor Shepherd:* I was privileged to be asked, just before the general election, to write a report for the Home Office on violence prevention, particularly data sharing. But no, I have had no contact with the present Home Secretary.

**Q148 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Does that stop you from having such contact in the future?

*Professor Shepherd:* In fact, as I understand it, the Home Secretary sat here and promised, fairly recently, to visit Cardiff to see the data-sharing enterprise in progress.

**Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** I'm sure that would be an interesting visit for her. Perhaps we will find out what happens later on.

**Q149 Nicola Blackwood:** Professor Shepherd, I wonder if I can just follow on from that and ask whether you have any evidence that the Government intend to set their policing strategy on the basis of fad, rather than on scientific evidence?

**Professor Shepherd:** No, indeed. I mention that simply because it is a potential pitfall. With a focus on greater responsiveness to and engagement with the public, that needs to be balanced in my view with the rigour of high-quality data about crime and the fear of crime. I wasn't suggesting for a moment that the Government were ignoring that, but I think it is a pitfall.

**Q150 Nicola Blackwood:** My understanding is that they want to bring in data by street so that people are much more informed about the exact nature of crime in their area and can respond accordingly. Do you think that that will help to alleviate that risk?

**Professor Shepherd:** I think that street-level information about crime is really important—yes, I do. We have learned in the Cardiff community safety partnership over the years that information, that intelligence if you like, down to the micro level about, for example, violence and antisocial behaviour inside, or immediately adjacent to, a licensed premises is key to tackling the problem. Whether people will understand exactly what's happening in their street or pub is another matter. Their opinions are certainly important, and the public can be powerful advocates for change, but that needs to be balanced with the rigorous crime data that I have been talking about.

**Q151 Mr Burley:** You mentioned a couple of times the need for scientific data and not policing by anecdote, but I think that people know what is and isn't going on in their neighbourhoods. They know whether they see police on the streets, whether they are getting the response to things such as antisocial behaviour and whether the police are tied up in bureaucracy. Anecdote is, perhaps, more important than the scientific evidence that you cite. Do you think that the public currently have sufficient opportunities and information to influence the priorities of the police locally?

**Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Before you answer the question, may I say to my colleagues that sometimes I ask witnesses to speak up, and there is certainly no necessity to ask you, Professor, but my colleagues also need to speak up. With all due respect, Mr Burley, this is not a private meeting.

**Professor Shepherd:** On the first point, let us take the analogy with health. Would we expect people to know the size of a measles or Legionnaire's disease outbreak, the size of the problem of road accidents or to know about vaccination programmes? We'd expect them to have a view and to be able to tell doctors and other officials about their experiences of the NHS, but we wouldn't expect them to know how many cases there had been in their community. That's why we have public health bodies and good health surveillance to do that for us. By the same token, I don't think that we can expect people to know objectively about the size of any particular problem in their area. Sure, they'll have examples, which they can cite, but the analogy with health is a really persuasive one. Stories and anecdotes are important, but the data are also important. Forgive me, I've missed the last question.

**Q152 Mr Burley:** It was whether on the back of that you think that the public feel that they have sufficient opportunity to influence policing locally.

**Professor Shepherd:** I think that the proposals to do with beat meetings are welcome. The formation of community safety partnerships was a really first-class step in enabling

different sectors of the community to contribute to crime reduction policy. It was remarkable, and perhaps an example of the big society in action, to see community safety partnerships coming together for the first time 15 years ago and to see communities forming in front of one's eyes as people met who had never met previously, but that has more to do with the representatives of the different agencies than the public.

**Q153 Mr Burley:** How do you think that that situation will change with the Government's proposals for elected police and crime commissioners and the panels that will sit under them to support them, as opposed to the situation now with police authorities?

**Professor Shepherd:** That would increase the participation of local people, but I'd be surprised if, on its own, it drove down crime further. We have seen year-on-year decreases according to the British crime surveys over the past 15 years. From emergency department information about injuries sustained in violent crime we can see reductions year-on-year. Behind that the secret is better targeted policing and ever greater reliance on good clinical—if I can use that term—analysis of what is happening. If we neglect that then we are throwing the baby out with the bath water. We must retain that; we cannot depend on individual stories as the basis for strategy in this area, important though the stories undoubtedly are.

**Q154 Dr Huppert:** I am delighted to hear your comments. I think that for far too many years Government policy in this area has been driven by anecdote and the *Daily Mail*, rather than by evidence of what is actually happening. I applaud all efforts and I hope that the new Government will take greater account of the evidence base.

There is a tension between a localist agenda and an evidence-based agenda here, because we know that public perception of crime prevalence does not fit with what is actually happening; there are numerous examples of that. Are you concerned that increased localism and increased power for the police commissioners would mean that resources would go to the people who shout the most, rather than the people who actually need the most?

**Professor Shepherd:** In a way, localism is already represented by CSPs, so I think that it is an excellent decision. The Minister, James Brokenshire, has written recently to those of us who chair CSPs, saying that they would be strengthened. That should be the basis of the localism.

To avoid the sorts of biases that you are talking about, the commissioners need to ensure that CSPs are well managed. They need to ensure that CSPs have adequate analytical capacity and that analysts are prominent and not seen as backroom staff, away from the front line of advice locally. By the same token, it is important that the commissioners ensure that CSPs are delivering the coalition commitment to data sharing and use, which has been shown to reduce violence in particular substantially.

**Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Professor, forgive me, but we have a very crowded agenda. Please keep your answers brief as far as possible, because we are already—unbelievably—running out of time.

**Dr Huppert:** I will take your hint and finish.

**Q155 Mark Reckless:** On that point, Professor Shepherd, your idea is to have the CSPs perhaps managing performance to some degree, with an appropriate analytical focus, working with the police and crime commissioners. How would you see that process integrated into the policing and crime panel that will be a check and balance for the commissioner? In particular, would you support the idea of the council portfolio holders forming part of that panel?

**Professor Shepherd:** I do not really know the detail of what is being proposed there, so I do not have a view. All I would say is that there is duplication at the moment, which needs to be tackled. There are too many bean counters and not enough analysts who have the professionalism and expertise to direct and advise at the senior level, so that would need to be protected and enhanced.

Perhaps the panel could also ensure that crime prevention is evidence-based and that the strategies that are implemented have a strong basis in evidence about what works. My experience has been that CSPs and policing can be innovative, but can lack the rigour to find out whether the innovation is working. **A brake has to be applied** to innovation that has not yet been tried and tested.

**Q156 Alun Michael:** I have two questions. First, you referred earlier to the use of data by police. Do you accept that data—including your A and E data, on which you have given evidence—are being used better and better by the police in terms of understanding where they can intervene, particularly in relation to violence, but that that information is not shared in a way that is really informative to the local community? It is at a macro level but not at the community level.

My second question concerns the definition of the role of the commissioner. The Government are clearly going to go ahead with the election of commissioners. How would you define the role and responsibility of the commissioner in order to maintain the effectiveness of the crime and disorder reduction partnerships which you have referred to as the key to localism?

**Professor Shepherd:** It seems to me that from the inception of community safety partnerships after the 1998 Act, policing has become slowly more scientific. One of the more recent manifestations of that has been the adoption of the national crime recording standard, which has brought more uniformity to the recording of crime in the forces. That is to be welcomed but we've still got a distance to go, I would submit. My own team when giving a seminar about the data-sharing arrangements in the north-east found that there was one particular area where the use even of police data by the local force for resource allocation seemed to be somewhat of a foreign concept. It is patchy and there is room for an even more scientific approach to this.

With regard to the commissioner's roles, I have outlined some of the roles here but for me they need to be defined and put into a job specification so we are not left in a situation where the commissioners do not know what the distinctive contribution of each partner agency is. That would be important. So, for example, the commissioner would need to know what the distinctive contribution of the health sector would be and the distinctive contribution of the CPS needs to be spelled out. The induction process for them is going to be really important.

**Q157 Lorraine Fullbrook:** Professor Shepherd, the Home Office consultation paper discusses the role of local partnership working and proposes giving local community partnerships greater flexibility to decide how best they should deal with their communities. It also gives the commissioners a role in commissioning community safety partnership work. What are your views on the Home Office consultation paper with regard to those two issues?

**Professor Shepherd:** Local flexibility is good. One of the real strengths of community safety partnerships is that they provide that ability to be flexible locally and to address the real problems in that community, which may be very different even from the community next door. There is a "but": I think it is flexibility but within certain parameters. So, for example,

we would not want to see crime prevention or crime reduction strategies introduced that were known not to work or were even positively harmful. I think of the Scared Straight initiative where the idea was to introduce young people to prisons to show them how awful prisons were and to deter them from behaving in a criminal or antisocial way. It had precisely the opposite effect: these young people were attracted by the lives of some of the prisoners and so it increased rather than decreased crime.

**Q158 Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** So showing people round prisons, far from acting as a deterrent, impressed them?

**Professor Shepherd:** Yes. It is known as the Scared Straight initiative and it was shown to increase offending rather than decrease it. That is an example of, with the best will in the world, doing more harm than good. It is the same in health care, of course.

**Q159 Lorraine Fullbrook:** In essence, Professor Shepherd, you would agree with the consultation proposals to give community safety partnerships greater flexibility to decide how best to deliver community working in their areas?

**Professor Shepherd:** Yes, I would, but not to the extent that the partnerships were delivering things that didn't work or hadn't been proven to be effective.

**Q160 Lorraine Fullbrook:** What about the role of the commissioners in commissioning work locally? How do you feel about that?

**Professor Shepherd:** One of the lessons I learned in my review of data sharing for violence prevention is the crucial importance of the management of community safety partnerships, which are comprised of round-table representatives of various agencies. It is very important that such partnerships are well managed so that each person at the table knows what their distinctive contribution should be. The current situation is often one of suits turning up to a meeting where they don't really know what they're supposed to be doing. There is potential for real waste, because those practitioners, and others, might better serve the public by being back at their hospital or in their police station rather than in meetings.

**Q161 Lorraine Fullbrook:** In essence, the role of the commissioner is that of a chief executive, if you like, which would accommodate what you're saying.

**Professor Shepherd:** Yes, indeed. I very much agree. If the commissioners are able to bring a higher level of management to partnerships, that would be very helpful.

**Mr Winnick (in the Chair):** Thank you very much, Professor, for coming along today. The evidence that you have presented to us has been very useful. Again, we very much appreciate your giving your time.

**Professor Shepherd:** A pleasure, Sir.