



The Whole of Government Approach to Crime Prevention

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Crime prevention work, both in Australia and overseas, has long been distinctive for its strong commitment to the use of “whole of government” approaches to the development of policies and the implementation of programs. Whole of government approaches are built on the assumption that because we know the causes of crime are complex and multifaceted, then preventive responses will be more effective if we combine the efforts of all the relevant government agencies (and community and business groups) into a single coordinated strategy. However, using a detailed analysis of the experience of the UK’s Crime Reduction Programme, this paper illustrates that implementing a whole of government approach can present many practical challenges and difficulties that need to be carefully planned for and managed in order that the improved benefits can be seen to outweigh the additional costs.

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The complex and various causes of crime are now better and more widely understood than ever before. These causes can range from aspects of an individual’s personal characteristics and how they relate to their families and communities, through to social and structural factors such as access to and achievement of health, education, employment and housing opportunities. Furthermore, these factors can be deeply embedded, stretching back over generations in patterns that are repeated in apparently unbreakable cycles (Homel et al. 1999).

With this better understanding of the causes of crime we have also improved our understanding of the type and mix of measures that can be used to bring about sustained reductions and the long-term prevention of crime. As such, we have expanded our traditional repertoire beyond deterrence, detection and incapacitation through police, courts and prisons, to include measures aimed at tackling the social and economic determinants of crime and attempting to improve opportunities for individual and community success along the developmental pathways that can lead a person into crime or keep them involved (Homel et al. 1999).

More recently, we have come to recognise that the interventions that make up these new programs are likely to have a greater chance of success if they are designed and undertaken as a package of closely linked and coordinated measures. In this way the possible perverse or contradictory effects of separate single measures can be planned for and designed out prior to implementation. A number of positive examples of this sort of approach can typically be found around public health partnerships (Roussos & Fawcett 2000). For example, it is generally believed that the establishment of policies, protocols and local agreements about not doing high visibility street level policing of drug offenders near drug treatment clinics can assist in achieving positive health and social outcomes (for example, reduced HIV infection rates) without having significant negative effects on drug related crime problems. For this to be effective, police and health authorities have to work closely with local government, businesses and residents to ensure that the goals of

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improved community safety and public health are both achieved in an environment in which public amenity is not disturbed and business is able to continue operating profitably.

The experience of public health/community safety partnerships is certainly not without difficulties or critics. However, this understanding of the need for collaborative policy development and program planning and delivery has also become a key feature of the way Australian crime prevention efforts are organised. Within Australia this is most commonly described as the 'whole of government' approach to crime prevention.

However, as already explained, this is an approach that is not unique to crime prevention. Nor is it unique to Australia. Rather, it is an example of a more general shift in public administration away from a command and control mode of governance and towards governance through multiple stakeholders working together to deliver integrated solutions to social problems across sectors and tiers of government. In parts of the USA this is known as 'networked government' while in the UK the approach is popularly known as 'joined-up government' (Lee & Woodward 2002).

These whole of government approaches require a high level of policy, program and organisational integration to the point of joint or collective action and shared or mutual responsibility for performance and outcomes. This is a situation that is sometimes referred to as 'organisational fusion' (IPAA 2002).

Because the program logic of the whole of government approach is built on the recognition that the causes of crime and their solutions are complex and multi-faceted, it requires that crime prevention action be a coordinated effort of many agencies in partnership with community and business groups. Organising to implement a whole of government program has significant practical implications for how normal business is transacted. Many existing processes may need to be changed, or at least adapted. Some important areas can include:

- the need for processes such as pooled budgets;
- partnership arrangements (for example, non-government/voluntary sector, private sector, other levels of government such as local government);
- revisions of relationships between provider and client;
- coordination of service delivery and tendering with partner criteria;
- integrated planning and triple bottom line analysis (i.e. assessing economic, environmental and social impacts);
- innovative community consultation, engagement and joint management arrangements;
- joint databases and customer intake and referral mechanisms; and
- joint performance measures and indicators (IPAA 2002).

This means that the adoption of a whole of government approach to crime prevention must be thoroughly planned for across all of the program delivery process. It also means that the policy development and program implementation process must be seen as a single integrated system rather than a series of discrete or loosely connected parts. A strong and responsive crime prevention agency is essential to guide this process. Crime prevention programs cannot implement themselves. A recent review of the UK's Crime Reduction Programme illustrates just how hard implementing a whole of government approach can be, even in a well resourced and sophisticated public sector environment (Homel et al. 2004). As such it provides some important and useful lessons for considering within the Australian context.

The Crime Reduction Programme

The UK government launched the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) in April 1999. It was one of the most ambitious, best resourced and comprehensive efforts for driving down crime ever attempted in any Western developed country. While other countries were still largely focusing on pilot

projects and fragmented crime reduction efforts, the UK turned to a quarter of a century of accumulated crime research and experience (Goldblatt & Lewis 1998) to develop a new and highly innovative program. This was based on a commitment to turning research-based evidence into mainstream practice – a systematic research and evaluation-driven approach known as an evidence-based policy program (EBPP).

In pursuing a research-based policy approach, well-tested crime reduction techniques were to be applied alongside new and promising ideas. The plan for the CRP was that lessons would be learned through careful research and evaluation, and successful innovations would be mainstreamed into everyday practice. New management arrangements would be developed and applied as a way of ensuring effective program implementation and delivery. Research and evaluation personnel would work hand-in-glove with policy and resource managers to ensure that successful initiatives flourished and the necessary changes were made to those programs that were shown to be less effective. As a result crime would be reduced and a new generation of evidence-based crime reduction programs would enter the mainstream of government policy and practice around crime (Home Office 1998).

It was this vision that led to the establishment of the three year CRP with an original budget of £250 million, which was soon raised to £400 million. The CRP had three goals:

1. To achieve a sustained reduction in crime.
2. To improve and mainstream knowledge of crime reduction best practice.
3. To maximise the implementation of cost-effective crime reduction activity.

The outcome of the CRP was to be a road map for guiding long-term investment strategies for the government in its continuing effort to drive down crime. To achieve this, the CRP worked through an array of 20 separate but linked crime

reduction initiatives of varying scale organised around five broad themes, or mechanisms. These were:

1. Working with families, children and schools to prevent young people becoming offenders of the future.
2. Tackling crime in communities, particularly high volume crime such as domestic burglary.
3. Developing products and systems that are resistant to crime.
4. More effective sentencing practices.
5. Working with offenders to ensure that they do not re-offend.

How the CRP was meant to work

The CRP was designed to operate within a multi-agency, mixed-service sector framework across every level of government in England and Wales. This meant encompassing action at a national, regional and local level. The initiatives that made up the program ranged from broad-based issues of community concern (for example, violence against women, youth inclusion), specific types of crime (for example, domestic burglary), and special and difficult populations (for example, offenders). By the end of its three year cycle in 2002, the CRP had implemented more than 1,500 separate initiatives that were managed by a variety of agencies at all levels of government, from central to local government and through community level partnerships.

However, the CRP was also part of a broader set of similar pathfinder social programmes that had started at around the same time as the CRP. Important among these were the Neighbourhood Renewal Programme (which included New Deal for Communities), Sure Start (an early childhood parenting program), the Children's Fund, and Action Zones for Health, Education and Employment. Although these initiatives were not specifically about crime reduction, it was expected that, to some extent at least, each would have some impact on crime and significant linkages with the CRP were expected as part of the process of

implementation as a whole of government initiative.

However, while the CRP was a significant criminal justice initiative, in any one financial year it represented only about 6.6% of the total expenditure of all of these area based initiatives when looked at in relation to these other initiatives (UK Cabinet Office 2001). In other words, while funded at historically high levels for a criminal justice innovation, on the ground it was a relatively small player. By the end of the CRP's first three years the program's implementation experience was one of significant program delays, funding underspending and other frustrations that had impacted on the program's overall viability and capacity to meet its stated goals. 17% of the allocated budget remained unspent and some program areas had still not started or were only just commencing. Within one program area it was found that nearly half of the projects had experienced some significant implementation problems. Of these, a third could be said to have experienced very serious problems - to the point that the money had been spent and the programs had not occurred. (Homel et al. 2004)

How the CRP was managed as a whole of government program

Many explanations exist for why these implementation problems had occurred. Significant ones were:

- Difficulties in finding, recruiting and retaining suitably qualified and skilled staff;
- Generally inadequate technical and strategic advice and guidance from the centre and regions; and
- Inadequate levels of project management competence and skill, particularly in financial and resource management.

However, a number of the most important explanations can be found in the way the Home Office approached the task of managing the whole of government implementation process. Understanding this provides some major insights into the

task of designing and implementing whole of government crime prevention programs. One of the key drivers of the program was the UK Treasury. In establishing the CRP as a specific program, it was made clear by Treasury that the funds were not provided to the Home Office purely for Home Office purposes. The Home Office was the nominated lead agency, but it was also acting as a 'banker' for the other government agencies who were part of the Crime Reduction Programme (Homel et al. 2004).

To try and ensure that the CRP was implemented in line with the concept of a 'joined-up' approach that saw strong linkages with other major Government programs with crime reduction related outcomes, a Ministerial group chaired by the Home Secretary was known as MISC 2 was set up. Apart from the Home Secretary, MISC 2 also involved Ministers from the then Department for Education and Employment, Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, Department of Health, Department of Social Security, Department of Trade and Industry, the Lord Chancellors Department, Law Officers' Department and the Treasury. The first meeting of the MISC 2 late in 1998 identified initiatives to commence in the first two years of the program, laid out a basic financial framework for the program and endorsed the program's underlying objectives, including the program mainstreaming and the transfer of savings objectives. It also formally set up an interdepartmental team of officials to manage the strategy under the Home Office's leadership. These were established in two streams: *Policy and Programs* and *Research and Development*, reflecting the strategic priorities identified for the CRP.

What is most apparent from this earliest management arrangement is that there was very little provision made for functional or operational interactions between the two management streams, except at the Ministerial and project/evaluation level. As such, the two streams seemed designed to operate separately and without much collaboration. During the six months prior

to the program's commencement at least three critical 'events' occurred that had a major impact how the CRP was actually implemented. These were:

1. *A sudden reversal in the recent downward trend in crime figures in the UK.* This resulted in a Government decision to refocus the main effort of the CRP away from its research and development orientation towards the single goal of driving down volume crime and prioritising measures to attack acquisitive (or property) crime. It also led to a greater focus being given to initiatives that could be implemented quickly and with a reasonable expectation of quick success.
2. *Staff recruitment freezes across the entire civil service.* Although not directed at the Home Office or the CRP in particular, this impacted on the Home Office's ability to put new staff in place ahead of the program's formal commencement date.
3. *The decision to convert the CRP from a centrally driven and managed initiative to a decentralised regional arrangement.* This was a response to a separate Government initiative to strengthen and promote regional governance. While this might seem a logical tool for improving the performance of local delivery, the mechanism, in the form of the Regional Government Offices for England and the Welsh Assembly were very new and organisationally and structurally immature. In other words, they were not adequately developed for supporting an initiative as organisationally sophisticated as the CRP. Their roles and functions in relation to the CRP were confused and each region had a very different level of capacity to support the initiative.

The importance of coherent and effective central management

These factors were all important and significant contributors to problems in maintaining a coherent whole of

government implementation process for the CRP. However, one of the key organisational challenges for whole of government working illustrated by the CRP experience is to do with the way the Home Office, as the lead agency of this whole of government effort, organised itself centrally to deliver this program.

As already described, the CRP's central implementation management started with two key structural features: the Cabinet level committee (MISC 2) chaired by the Home Secretary and an inter-departmental committee constituted in such a way as to reflect the ministerial committee at a Senior Civil Service level and to encompass the diverse range of programmes to be implemented. However, even in the earliest stages practical problems caused by the organisational split between the program management and research and development functions were becoming evident. One of these was the duplication in the information systems and data requirements.

The research and development staff managing the CRP's evaluation activity required a range of data from local projects to undertake their evaluation work. The Crime Reduction Programme Unit (CRPU) also required some of this data centrally. But each collected it independently through different agents (most commonly the Regional Offices). Quite reasonably, local project managers, who were struggling to develop and implement their projects within the shortest possible timeframes, saw this as inefficient duplication of effort and became increasingly resentful of the responsibility to provide such information and data. Similarly, Regional Crime Reduction Directors saw their roles as compromised by this confusion. Ultimately this came to be interpreted as a lack of cooperation and poor management. A cycle of mutual mistrust and suspicion began to emerge quite early.

On another level the lack of human resources within the CRPU to manage a wholesale implementation program, and the prioritisation processes used to determine commencement dates for CRP sub-programs resulted in the appearance

of program implementation delay. This led to the emergence of large unallocated blocks of money that were 'easy prey' for activities that did not meet the challenging criteria initially established for project funding.

Further, the role played in the management of the CRP by the Cabinet sub-Committee and the senior inter-departmental group progressively reduced just as these sorts of problems were becoming more significant. Meetings of the MISC 2 committee ceased during the latter part of 1999 and the inter-departmental committee very seldom met. Equally importantly, participation in the meetings by non-Home Office staff dropped away dramatically, to the point where, in the words of one person familiar with the process: 'the program and policy management processes became exclusively Home Office responsibilities and funding came to be viewed (both internally and externally) as Home Office money' (quoted in Homel et al. 2004).

That this occurred as it did certainly does not appear to be the Home Office's fault alone. Meeting documents and interviews with key people suggested that the task of collaborative inter-agency working was equally difficult for and unfamiliar to senior staff from across many Whitehall agencies as it was to local project staff. A number of those interviewed for the CRP review noted that as time went on the three original goals and special priorities of targeting crime reduction quickly started to become less clear and prominent. This was especially true when the projects were being undertaken in collaboration with other agencies. It was also noted that these competing views of priorities and goals also exposed conflicts in terms of program control and ideology.

By the end of 1999, Home Office Ministers were beginning to express significant concern about the rate at which the CRP was being rolled out and a strategic realignment exercise was undertaken within the Home Office. This was referred to as 'rebalancing the portfolio' and resulted in the publication of the government's Crime Reduction Strategy (Home Office 1999) and its increased

emphasis on the reduction of volume crime and mainstream roll-out of major strategic components of the CRP ahead of receipt of the evaluation findings.

To a significant degree this shift can also be attributed to an increased focus on the need to organise to achieve the Home Office's Public Sector Agreement (PSA) targets. The PSA system is government wide in the UK and identifies cross-portfolio priorities to which funding is directed. It sets quantifiable and measurable targets to be achieved over specific time frames, generally five years. It seems that while the PSA targets had always been intrinsic to the design of the CRP, the increased focus on their achievement meant a loss of focus on the learning and knowledge development aspects of the CRP's original objectives.

The Home Office's organisation and management arrangements changed accordingly. As observed by one program participant, while the CRP had started as an 'open-process' involving other departments and stakeholders, the Home Office began to progressively close the access points. Both the MISC 2 and inter-departmental committee ceased meeting and the program's management became exclusively the Home Office's responsibility with the management of joint initiatives negotiated through bilateral rather than multilateral arrangements.

Twelve months later, towards the end of 2000, the CRP was still reporting program slippage and associated under spending of its allocated budget and so a decision was taken to establish a formal program board, 'to review progress on CRP initiatives and to co-ordinate the reporting of progress to Ministers.' This Crime Reduction Board was made up exclusively of central Home Office staff, apart from one Regional Crime Reduction Director, on a rotating basis, and a representative of Treasury. However, provision was made for others to attend on an ad hoc basis. One of the primary products of the Crime Reduction Board was a detailed progress report documenting levels of expenditure and activity by the key projects – not outcomes or performance.

Early in 2002 an internal Home Office audit of the Crime Reduction Programme observed that the Crime Reduction Board had a tendency to allow operational issues to occupy a disproportionate amount of its time. The audit report also commented on the absence of non-Home Office representatives and capacity to address the widespread problem of inadequate project management capacity at all levels of the program (Home Office 2002).

In essence, what was being commented upon was the eventual collapse of the CRP as a whole of government program.

The whole of government lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme

The British experience from implementing the CRP offers a number of important lessons. They are based on important practical assessments of the need, capacity and readiness to adopt the whole of government approach.

1. *Using whole of government approaches to crime prevention is not easy and need not always automatically be the strategy of first choice.* There are significant overheads involved. For example, undertaking a whole of government approach requires significant planning, investment in management infrastructure and ongoing support, particularly at the centre. As such it may often be better to use a modified or scaled down approach based on effective bilateral partnerships or joint inter-agency arrangements.
2. *The decision about what is the optimum strategic approach and mechanisms employed to achieve policy goals should be the result of a thorough problem analysis and assessment of best practice/best value evidence.* In this situation it may be quite reasonable to adhere to the 'it is what works that matters' principle.
3. *A whole of government approach inevitably means redefining and renegotiating roles, responsibilities, relationships, accountabilities and*

power sharing. This means that there is also a need to adopt a flexible approach to performance management and change processes.

4. *Effective whole of government action means much more than good inter-agency cooperation and coordination.* It has been observed that the notion of coordination was the twentieth century equivalent of the medieval search for the philosopher's stone. If only we could find the right formula for coordination, we can reconcile the irreconcilable, harmonise competing and wholly divergent interests, overcome irrationalities in our government structures, and make hard policy choices to which none will dissent (Seidman quoted in O'Faircheallaigh, Wanna & Weller 1999). Too often, agencies, particularly central agencies, report that whole of government strategies are proving effective simply because they are working together to meet joint objectives. Their indicator or performance measures are the number of meetings successfully held and concluded and agreements struck. Unfortunately this completely misses the point, which should only be measured in terms of improved services and/or reduced crime, particularly when looked at from the community's perspective.

Lessons for the Australian experience

As a consequence of the development of increasingly sophisticated policy and program strategies, as exemplified by the whole of government approach, Australian community based crime prevention measures are currently undergoing a resurgence in popularity, particularly through an increasing interest in the potential of programs like the CRP and 'urban renewal' programs such as the UK's Neighbourhood Renewal initiative and the New Deal for Communities (Neighbourhood Renewal Unit 2003). Many whole of government crime prevention programs based on community

regeneration objectives exist across most parts of Australia. For example, over the past few years in New South Wales and Queensland significant effort has gone into developing a special version of this approach called the 'place management' model. Place management is a community development approach that is loosely based on some of the strategies developed during the US 'war on poverty' in the 1970s (Mant 1998). There are many examples of the 'place management' approach in Australia today, but probably one of the best-known is the recent work undertaken in the south-western Sydney suburb of Cabramatta designed to tackle a range of social problems including drug related crime (NSW Premier's Department 2003). Similarly, recent work in South Australia has sought to develop the crime prevention effort beyond the original approach, based on the French Bonnemaison model, which had been used for a number of years. The current effort is to find a way of embedding crime prevention work within a broader social justice framework that will assist to deliver initiatives directed from within the context of achieving overall community wellness, otherwise known as community regeneration.

A key goal of community regeneration programs is the transfer of a combination of economic and political resources to local institutions and residents as a way of contributing to the empowerment of communities, helping to integrate marginalised youth, and enabling the community to tackle key community-level risk factors of delinquency, etc. (Welsh & Hoshi 2002). These tasks are not simple.

The UK's experience with attempting to manage the Crime Reduction Programme as a whole of government initiative is just one illustration of the significant management and coordination effort that is needed to achieve effective whole of government working for crime prevention outcomes. Furthermore, given that there is little doubt that governments will continue to want to implement multi-faceted policy programs in response to complex social problems, the range of practical lessons for doing whole of government work that the CRP has revealed need to be carefully attended to. It is therefore important to ensure that the organisational and strategic approaches adopted are based on sound evidence and a proper analysis of what is required to ensure effective implementation.

The organisational complexity and significant up-front investment required for adopting a whole of government approach to crime prevention therefore needs to be properly assessed and resourced ahead of it automatically being adopted as the preferred approach in all cases. As evidenced by the UK experience, there is a need for that investment in time and resources to be sustained to completion. Otherwise the significant potential gains to be leveraged by whole of government strategies when applied to complex crime problems may be squandered. Crime prevention cannot implement itself.

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