Crime Prevention Practice Paper 3: 
An Overview of the Crime Prevention Plan Endorsement Process 
in New South Wales 
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Abstract
Local government has been identified internationally as a key agency in efforts to prevent crime. Numerous policies and guidelines developed in New South Wales (NSW) over the past 10-15 years have reflected this position. Many of these policies have been developed, adopted and funded by State government agencies. This has created a situation in which local government can apply to the NSW Crime Prevention Division (Department of Justice and Attorney General) to get a Crime Prevention Plan endorsed as a safer community compact. Once endorsed, the council is then eligible to apply for funding (a maximum of $50,000 per annum for three years) to support implementation of initiatives outlined in their Crime Prevention Plan. A short survey was sent to staff in six councils to explore the views on the endorsement process. The findings are presented in this paper.

Introduction
There is now a well established body of research and practice highlighting local government as critical agents in the delivery of crime prevention (Crawford, 1997; Qld Criminal Justice Commission, 1999; Shaw, 2001; Sutton and Cherney, 2002; UNODC, 2004; Cherney, 2004a; Cherney, 2004b; Homel, 2005; Anderson and Homel, 2005; Cherney, 2006; Cherney and Sutton, 2007; Sutton et al, 2008; Homel, 2009; Shaw, 2009; Morgan and Homel, 2011). There have been a number of reports and guidelines from key international agencies promoting the role of local government in crime prevention. Margaret Shaw (from the International Centre for the Prevention of Crime) suggests that:

‘cities, municipalities, and their leaders are in a unique position to mobilize local agencies in the development of safe, secure and lively communities. They are strategically placed to bring together all the actors. They have traditionally been responsible for urban or rural planning, they have intimate ties with all the local services, hospitals, schools, transport, youth and social services, police and judiciary, and the business community, to say nothing of their constituents’ (2001: 2).
The United Nations Guidelines for the Prevention of Crime (UNODC 2002) and the Guidelines for Cooperation and Technical Assistance in the Field of Urban Crime Prevention (ECOSOC RES 1995/9) developed by the UNODC echo these sentiments. The UN-HABITAT Safer Cities Programme website states that ‘cities have a primary role in co-ordinating the activities aimed at reducing crime. Local governments are seen as the key actors in coalitions and in the development of community-wide planning strategies for crime prevention’ (available at: http://www.unhabitat.org/content.asp?typeid=19&catid=375&cid=1434). These are just some of the relevant international developments, reports and guidelines that have consolidated support for local government assuming a key role in the prevention of crime.

The increasing emphasis of the role of local government within crime prevention relies upon identification of crime as local, and the ability of local crime prevention resources (like police) to react to crime most efficiently. Further, this approach acknowledges the significance of local council planning powers to prevent and minimise the incidence of crime (Department of Local Government, 1998; Morgan and Homel, 2011), and suggests that the most effective crime reduction strategies are achieved through government agency co-ordination since local government bodies can target those crime issues of greatest concern within their local council areas (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2008:3).

Historical Approaches to Local Crime Prevention in New South Wales (NSW)

There have been a number of key legislative and policy developments pertaining to local crime prevention in NSW. The most significant developments are described below.


Enactment of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997 (NSW) (hereafter CPPR Act) in December 1997 commenced a new policy approach to issues of crime management and prevention within NSW. Part 4 of the CPPR Act outlines processes for developing a local crime prevention plan and for its endorsement as a safer community compact. The key features of the Act were outlined by the then Attorney General, The Honourable Jeff Shaw in the second reading speech:

‘The provisions introduced by part 4 of the bill will provide a legislative framework upon which to formalise and foster the development of proactive local crime prevention measures. Division 2 of part 4 established a process for the formulation of local crime prevention plans by local councils. Guidelines and assistance in the preparation of plans will be made available by the Crime Prevention Division of the Attorney General’s Department.'
Division 3 of part 4 of the bill seeks to encourage best practice in the development of local crime prevention plans by making provision for the accreditation of local crime prevention plans which meet specified standards as “safer community compacts”. Funds will be made available through the Government’s safer community development program to assist in the implementation of initiatives contained in safer community compacts. Funds from the program will also be available to assist more generally in meeting the costs of developing safer community compacts’ (1997: 10952).

Thus, Part 4 of the CPPR Act established procedures for the development of local crime prevention plans by local councils in NSW. Part 4 outlines the potential contents of a crime prevention plan (s33), the adoption (s35) duration (s36) of a local crime prevention plan, and outlines the procedures associated with having this crime prevention plan endorsed as a safer community compact (s39). The legislation also includes reference to the benefits (i.e. opportunity to apply for funding) that flow from having a crime prevention plan endorsed as a safer community compact (s40). Once a local crime prevention plan is endorsed as a safer community compact, the council is then eligible to apply for funding under the Safer Community Development Fund, which according to the second reading speech, was established with recurrent funding of $1.15 million annually (to which the shadow Attorney, Honourable J. P. Hannaford, stated, ‘in real terms, if $1.15 million is allocated it will not even touch the sides, so to speak, in the development of local crime prevention programs’ (Hannaford, 1997: 10956)).


Shortly after the commencement of the 1997 CPPR Act, the then Premier’s Council on Crime Prevention launched a manual for the benefit of local councils, setting out parameters for creation of the Crime Prevention Plans envisioned by the CPPR Act. This document provided guidelines in relation to development of such plans and suggested:

- Selection of only two or three issues of priority reflecting local needs (p50)
- Development of between three and five compatible strategies in relation to each priority (p51)
- Analysis and evaluation of the suggested strategies, including:
  - Necessary skills and resources
  - Potential obstacles and side-effects
  - Necessary time-frame
- Representative consultation with the community and stakeholders (p56)
- Detailed analysis of crime data for creation and development of an area crime profile (p41)

As required by s50, the CPPR Act was reviewed after its first three years in order to ascertain whether the Act was an appropriate vehicle by which to achieve its policy objectives (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001:5-6). External evaluation of Part 4 of the Act was undertaken by Nexus Management Consulting.

The review identified a high level of engagement by NSW councils in relation to development of Crime Prevention Plans (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001:21). However, it was noted that to implement plans in neighbouring areas required individual submission of Crime Prevention Plans, and would result in individual funding, indicating potential inefficiencies (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001:22).

Further, the report identified the absence of a comprehensive policy framework to align local and state crime priorities (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001:23). Other criticisms included the absence of links between social planning requirements and crime prevention planning, the lack of information about crime prevention best practice, and the apparent absence of a detailed framework for quality assessment of proposed plans (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2001:25-6).

The report contained 33 recommendations in total, including the following:

- ‘It is recommended that councils be retained as the lead agencies for developing and implementing local crime prevention plans’
- ‘It is recommended that the Crime Prevention Division develop a strategy to allocate resources to statewide skills development, networking of crime prevention practitioners and promotion of best practice in crime prevention strategies and implementation’
- ‘It is recommended that the local crime prevention planning guidelines make stronger reference to linkages between councils social planning requirements and local crime prevention planning’
- ‘It is recommended that seed funding be provided to smaller councils to assist with the development of local crime prevention plans’
- ‘It is recommended that the guidelines under Section 32 reinforce that the local crime prevention plans, where appropriate, need to clearly demonstrate how they add value to established initiatives and do not merely repackage existing commitments’
- ‘It is recommended that the Crime Prevention Division centrally produce standard crime profiles for LGAs for those councils proposing to develop a local crime prevention plan’
- ‘It is recommended that the Attorney General seek enhancement funding to increase the amount of resources available to councils for local crime prevention planning from the Safer Communities Development Fund’ (Nexus Management Consultants, 2001: 43-46)
4. Australian Institute of Criminology Review

Contracted by the NSW Crime Prevention Division, the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) reviewed the quality of local crime prevention planning activities in NSW in 2005. This project commenced in January 2005 and involved in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in three sites (i.e. Manly, Queanbeyan and Taree) and responses from 39 councils to surveys distributed to 49 councils that had had a crime prevention plan endorsed as a safer community compact since the commencement of the CPPR Act. The findings contained in a report completed in August 2005 concluded that:

‘overall, the crime prevention plans appeared to have a positive effect on the communities implementing them. The nature of the plans and initiatives chosen make it difficult to measure the impact on crime, thus it is still unknown at this point. However, since the object of the crime prevention plans in Part 4 of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997 stipulates that the crime prevention plans are to work towards building community involvement in crime prevention activities (s30) the safer community compacts so far have assisted in promoting this goal’ (Anderson and Homel, 2005: 49).

Moreover, it was recommended that consideration be given to the following to further enhance local crime prevention planning efforts in NSW:

- Create a crime prevention communication link on the Crime Prevention Division website
- Provision of funding for permanent crime prevention officers
- Improved guidelines for crime prevention implementation
- Greater Crime Prevention Division guidance
- Encourage more efficient evaluation techniques (Anderson and Homel, 2005: 45-49).

5. NSW State Plan

The NSW State Plan was released in 2006 and included a host of priorities for government across various areas and responsibilities. Reductions of various modes of criminal behaviour were prioritised. Over a 10-year period, incidence of interpersonal crimes and re-offending rates were to be targeted. Targets to be met by 2016 include:

- Reduction of property crimes by 15 per cent
- Reduction of personal crime (particularly violent crime) by 10 per cent
- Reduction of alcohol related crime
- Reduction of re-offending within 24 months by 10 per cent

In response to the 2001 Review of the CPPR Act, the introduction of the State Plan and a perceived isolation of the local crime prevention provisions, a Crime Prevention Plan Framework was implemented in 2008 to increase community safety and deter criminal behaviour. Overseen by the Crime Prevention Steering Group, the Framework seeks to co-ordinate state and local agencies to streamline their initiatives, combat variant local crime issues and collectively achieve state targets for crime reduction (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2008:2-3).

The Crime Prevention Steering Group is a taskforce of the central bodies in the creation and implementation of crime prevention policy tasked with assurance of cross-agency collaboration. It is comprised of the Assistant Director General, Crime Prevention and Community Programs Division, Attorney General’s Department, the Deputy Commissioner Field Operations, NSW Police Force and the Director of Operations, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The Framework was created to strengthen existing approaches to crime prevention, emphasising situational approaches such as management of public spaces and activities in order to reduce opportunistic offending (Department of Premier and Cabinet 2008:2).

7. Guidelines for Developing a Crime Prevention Strategy

To assist local government bodies in their preparation of Crime Prevention Plans, the Attorney General’s Department has prepared a short document outlining various necessary steps. This document addresses some of the concerns raised by the 2001 and 2005 Reviews of the CPPR Act, and places local government crime prevention planning capabilities within a specific scope of power and purpose. Targets outlined in the 2006 NSW state plan are reiterated, providing guidance as to the priorities appropriate to the program. Further, both the role of local councils in planning and the salience of situational crime prevention measures are highlighted (Attorney General’s Department, no date: 1-2).

Methodology

To evaluate the way current local council Crime Prevention Plans are assessed and endorsed, six (6) local government officers responsible for the development and implementation of these plans were asked to describe their experiences in an electronic survey in February 2011 as part of a student internship project. Five completed this survey. The survey consisted of the following questions:
1. How long (in months) was spent developing your Crime Prevention Plan?

2. Over what period was your Crime Prevention Plan to operate?

3. How many advisors from the NSW Crime Prevention Division were involved in the endorsement process of your Crime Prevention Plan?

4. How long did the endorsement process take?

5. How many drafts/amendments were required to be made to produce an acceptable Plan?

6. What specific feedback was provided in the instances of failed endorsement?

7. Was the feedback easy to incorporate into the existing Plan, or did it require significant alteration to your proposed Crime Prevention Plan?

8. Did the feedback reflect recognition of the crime data available for your local area, or the unique needs of your local area?

The data obtained from this survey cannot be considered to be representative of the wider experiences of councils across NSW. The respondents did represent both metropolitan and non-metropolitan councils and each has had specific experience of the endorsement process. Consequently, the answers reflect the individual experiences of the respondents and point to issues which would to be further explored to determine if they are representative of the experience of other councils in NSW.

**Findings**

Outlined below are some of the findings of the survey completed by five local government personnel involved in crime prevention and community safety activities. Specific reference will be made to the process by which Crime Prevention Plans are endorsed as Safer Community Compacts, including reference to correspondence between the NSW Crime Prevention Division and local councils.

**1. Duration of Plan Development**

It was found that the average length of time dedicated to developing a Crime Prevention Plan was 6-12 months. In the main, this time was spent gathering and analysing crime statistics, consulting with relevant
stakeholders (including community members and groups) and organising for the Plan to be adopted by Council (after a public exhibition period).

One respondent noted that when they submitted a draft plan to the Crime Prevention Division, they were advised to update the crime statistics, because they had become outdated. The length of the process to develop a Plan potentially undermines its relevance to current issues.

2. Period of Operation

Respondents were asked about the intended duration of their Crime Prevention Plan to determine how this was affected by the endorsement process. Two of the respondents stated that the duration of their Plans were changed because of the length of the endorsement process. In both cases, the starting year was put back (in one case it was put back two years). The three remaining respondents stated that their plans generally operated for three year periods.

3. Number of Advisors Involved

Respondents were asked how many advisors from the Crime Prevention Division were consulted or involved during the endorsement process. The responses ranged from 1 to 4 advisors, with the average being just over 2.5 advisors per Crime Prevention Plan. While it is not possible to quantify the involvement of each advisor, the purpose of posing this question was to determine continuity of involvement. Based on these findings, it appears that more than one advisor from the Crime Prevention Division will play a role in having a Crime Prevention Plan endorsed.

4. Duration of Endorsement Process

The range of responses to the question about the duration of the endorsement process ranged from 4 months to 20 months (although one respondent stated that they had originally submitted their Plan in late 2009 and due to various administrative requirements and issues running until late 2010, had decided not to pursue endorsement). Based on the four Plans that had been endorsed, the average length of time to receive endorsement exceeded 12 months. It should be noted that this is additional to the 6-12 months taken to develop the Plan.
5. Number of Drafts

Given the time taken to get endorsement and the period invested in developing a Crime Prevention Plan in the first place, respondents were asked how many amendments or revised drafts were required. The following were the responses:

- One re-draft – crime data updated and modification of strategies, but main text unchanged
- One major amendment was required, which involved changing the focus of the Plan
- One official change was requested, although this amounted to 10 actual changes to the Plan
- One to two drafts were required over a seven month-period
- The plan was submitted four times over a 12-month period

While the nature of or reasons for the changes were not explored in this short survey, it is clear that modification of original Plans was required in all instances.

6. Feedback Provided

The key thrust of responses to this question related to the inconsistent nature of feedback provided. One respondent received correspondence stating that their Crime Prevention Plan was a good one and that it would be supported for endorsement. A different advisor then stated that there were concerns about aspects of consultation informing the plan and a particular crime type should be included before the Plan could be considered for endorsement. Other respondents mentioned how they were advised to focus on only two crime types and to move away from social to situational crime prevention strategies. The introduction of the NSW Crime Prevention Framework and associated policies in 2008 might explain the nature of this feedback.

7. Incorporation of Feedback

The respondents ranged in their views on whether it was easy to incorporate the feedback provided into their Crime Prevention Plans. One suggested that the changes were minor and reflected a wider shift in government policy. Another suggested that it was difficult to incorporate the feedback because it was perceived as being inconsistent. Another suggested that they had to change the priorities of their Plan to meet the requirements of the Crime Prevention Division, rather than reflecting the concerns identified.
through community and stakeholder consultations and crime data analysis. A further respondent highlighted how the process had taken so long that the original Plan is no longer valid.

8. Nature of Changes and Relationship to Local Concerns

The following are summarised versions of the responses to the question that asked whether the suggested changes reflected local concerns:

- One respondent stuck with a community-identified priority and their Plan was endorsed

- Four respondents suggested that the recommended changes did not reflect local issues or conditions. Of these, two respondents highlighted the inaccuracies of reported crime data and a preference to focus on issues highlighted by community members and stakeholders, rather than those crime types which might have the highest level of reporting to police. This went against advice provided by the Crime Prevention Division.

It was suggested by one respondent that the time invested in developing a Crime Prevention (6-12 months), seeking to have it endorsed by the Crime Prevention Division (12 months on average) and then being required to develop a proposal to apply for funding and awaiting receipt of funding if successful, was ultimately a poor use of limited resources. They felt that alternative funding sources provided a more lucrative and relevant method of supporting local crime prevention initiatives.

Conclusion

While there is considerably recognition that local government plays an important role in preventing crime, it seems that processes adopted in NSW, in part, inhibit the ability of local government to undertake this work. The processes associated with developing a Crime Prevention Plan, getting it adopted by the relevant council, submitting the Plan to the NSW Crime Prevention Division for endorsement as a safer community compact, and applying for funding once the Plan has been endorsed, reportedly take upwards of 24-36 months. Given that many Crime Prevention Plans are adopted for a three-year period, it seems that the administrative processes to gain endorsement as a safer community compact and to receive funding is as long as the duration of a Plan.

In the review of Part 4 of the Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997, the following was highlighted:
‘A major issue emerging from the review is the protracted time between plan lodgement, endorsement and subsequent funding – upwards of six months ... This is a cause of major frustration in the field with many unintended consequences – trained staff are lost, impetus and motivation in the community among potential partners is lost, inefficiencies in processes creep in, priorities change and opportunities for action are lost’ (Nexus Management Consultants, 2001: 34).

Based on this small sample, it seems that little has improved in the 10 years since this review was completed.

This situation stands in stark contrast to that system operating in Western Australia, where it was recently found that 90 per cent of local government bodies had created crime prevention partnerships, and where 80 of 100 submitted plans were endorsed at the time of printing (Morgan and Homel, 2011:8). Western Australia’s progress is commendable, and a closer emulation of it would be beneficial to the process of crime prevention in NSW.
Bibliography

*Children (Protection and Parental Responsibility) Act 1997 (NSW).*


