

Street Weapons Commission – Birmingham

Suzette Davenport

Chair - Cherie Booth

Well welcome Suzette Davenport. You're the Assistant Chief Constable of West Midlands Police responsible for intelligence and neighbourhood policing. We're particularly interested in the hard end, if we can put it that way, of policing and how on the ground you're actually delivering real outcomes against violent gun crime and youth crime. Can you help us with, I know

you're involved in a specific project, can you tell us a little bit first of all about that?

Suzette Davenport

Yes, I am the Chair of the Birmingham Reducing Gang Violence Executive Group which is the strategic group that looks out and together with the three elements which is enforcement which is Police led, the second element which is Birmingham City Council led, a multi agency partnership made up of public servants, and then thirdly we have a critical friend, a group of critical friends

from the communities who help us develop the strategy, the approach, [INAUDIBLE] the direction that we're going in and really do prompt us and challenge us about what we're doing. Will it make a difference and when will that difference be noticed on the streets.

Chair - Cherie Booth

So what in the area that you're leading on, which is the enforcement area, what things are you actually doing and what's working and what isn't working?

Suzette Davenport

Well we've got a whole range of things that we do, a whole range of tactics that we employ, as I say we work with our partners so that we pursue with them education, initiatives to divert youths from crime, anti-social behaviour, to encourage them not to get involved in groups or gangs so that they have positive choices in their lives, but we're the Police and we also kick doors in,

and we arrest people and sometimes we do that at, using firearms, using enforcement. We have very successfully, in the last 12 months, worked an initiative which we've termed

Operation [Malva], and this is about identifying the most risky individuals in our communities, which we use a risk matrix to do that, and from that putting them into a particular group of people who then determine how we can achieve a level of control over them. When I...

Chair - Cherie Booth

And how do you achieve a level of control?

Suzette Davenport

When I use the term control that's about being able to affect where they go, who they're associated with and therefore their ability to get involved in high end, high risk criminality. We've done that through using anti-social behaviour orders, Civil Injunctions, Section 222 of the Local Government Act, in order that we could get control by saying that through interim injunctions and then

applying for full Orders that they couldn't associate with particular people or go in particular areas. One of the difficulties for us at the moment is that that's been, those injunctions have been stayed, and our figures will show us that having been very successful at the beginning of the year between May and August when we first started the programme, there were a significant

number of gang related shootings we believe, we reduced those by significant amount between August and January when we had the proceedings stayed, and between January and sitting here today, then I can say those figures have gone back up. So a tactic that we used, which was through the Courts, which we felt would get a lot of control so that people were not, not just

affecting people in other gangs, but, as you heard from Barbara earlier, it's about people, innocent people in the communities that are potentially getting in the way of some of this gang activity. So we're hoping that by coming here today, I'm hoping that by coming here today that together with yourselves we'll be able to encourage the Government that if we do not feel that Section

222 is an appropriate mechanism to get some control, we need to think about what level of control we can affect these individuals with, so they're not shooting, injuring each other, but also potentially victims in the communities who are innocent and affecting the quality of life of the people in the communities.

Chair - Cherie Booth

So you're telling us that you've, that the strategy that you adopted worked in that it, the numbers went down, and since you have stopped using that strategy things have got worse again?

Suzette Davenport

I mean the strategy is the three elements of BRGV as we call it, and it's important that I make the point that whilst we talk about Birmingham reducing gun violence, West Midlands Police is not just about Birmingham, it's about the wider Metropolis, and we have a strategy which we have taken much of the learning from BRGV provided a template that we use across the Force so

that as areas, more and more potentially become victims of this sort of criminality, that that template can be used as good practice in order that they don't have to go through some of the pain that's been undergone in Birmingham. So we have a strategic approach, we have a number of people through the three elements I've described, and through that we then effect different areas of the Force area, and we make sure that we are tackling the criminality, but we're also capacity building in the communities, we're using the sectors such as Mothers In Pain, so that we're supporting individuals and giving them choices. So the 222's and the ASBO's were about a particular tactic in a broader strategy.

Chair - Cherie Booth

Geoffrey.

Lord Geoffrey Dear

Could I take you across broadly the same ground that you've explored with us before but using different terminology, and to try to put it into context, if you go back to the invention of the Police in the 1820's it was all about prevention, Sir Robert Peel said prevention is paramount, we all remember that, and over the years, probably around about the 1950's and sixties the Police role had

moved right across the spectrum and was really little else than detection, patrolling and detection, and there was little or no interaction with anyone else who was working in the field, and the pendulum has come back again and the Police quite rightly are engaged with a

whole range of organisations in deterring educationalists and so on, youth clubs, you can go and build the

list up, and nobody would argue that that is wrong, but in terms of what is the Police role, limited resources, not enough of 'em, can't see 'em when we need 'em, all those sorts of things that people will throw up to you from time to time, in the end it's looking to the Police to enforce, detect and enforce, and I wanted to concentrate just on that, without any way diminishing the work that

you do elsewhere with other organisations. So in terms of visible patrolling, and whether stop and search is a good or a bad idea, and we've heard evidence in London from people who some say it is a good idea to stop and search and others say it isn't, can we focus on that sort of area of Police work, whether you should or should not use metal detectors in frisking people to

see if they've got knives, how do you actually get in and, in effect, putting it rather crudely, take the streets away from the gangs rather than the other way round. Can you give us some help on that end of Police work rather than the interface with the other agencies.

Suzette Davenport

Yes we have a whole range of tactics that we use. Stop and search is one of those, the Public Order Act Section 60 where there has been violence and we're concerned there might be more violence, then we can stop and search which is separate to the ordinary Policing Criminal Evidence Act powers which I'm sure that you recall. We also have, because these are talking

about some very serious criminals and when we are mounting operations to deal with them, then we similarly have to think about the health and safety of our own Officers and make sure that if we feel they're going to be met with firearms that we have an appropriate response. So we have stop and search, we have high visibility that we do, part of that is about reassuring the

immediate community, and the community beyond, but also about sending a message to some of these offenders that we are going to be there, and if you are going to be on the streets and you're going to be threatening, intimidating other people, we will be there to tackle it, and we have a range of armed operations that we undertake as well. So we have generic things that we

can do in the communities and then we also have a range of specific things we can do about

individuals.

Lord Geoffrey Dear

Can you just help me or help colleagues as well with stop and search, which is always, and has been since the 1960's a big debating point. What about stop and search?

Suzette Davenport

It's an effective tool. I think that everybody would agree, no matter what community that you're from, that we do not want people killed or injured on our streets, and I, together with the majority of the people in the community will say we're absolutely committed to achieving that, and as long as those powers are used appropriately and proportionately then they will support us in doing that.

Lord Geoffrey Dear

So help me with appropriate and proportionate.

Suzette Davenport

It...

Lord Geoffrey Dear

Because it, see that's the nub of the problem isn't it?

Suzette Davenport

Absolutely, but what...

Lord Geoffrey Dear

I think stop and search was ruled out by Scarman after the 1981 riots in Brixton, it lost face at that point.

Suzette Davenport

I suppose probably...

Lord Geoffrey Dear

So how do you use stop and search in a way to use your terminology is appropriate and proportionate.

Suzette Davenport

We work based on intelligence. So intelligence, information that suggests that individuals at certain times in certain places are likely to have weapons or going to places to create difficulties, harass people, intimidate people which provides us, if we go through the proper processes, sufficient intelligence to support the use of those powers.

Lord Geoffrey Dear

But...

Chair - Cherie Booth

What's the difference between intelligence and just saying, well, you know, everyone knows that black people carry guns and therefore let's just stop the next black person we see.

Suzette Davenport

Information and intelligence are two separate things. One supports the other. Intelligence is information that we've received and we have done something with it to make it useful to us in terms of deploying our staff in areas where they think they will be of most use to the communities.

Commissioner

Can I ask about ASBO's for a moment. They were once described by an academic as an evidence free zone, and I was slightly, well I was very interested to see your faith I suppose in ASBO's as one of your mechanisms for dealing with this problem because I thought well some of these severely at risk of serious crime characters are hardly likely to be the most probable

compliers with conditions of ASBO's, and so I just wondered what the compliance rate was really.

Suzette Davenport

Certainly if you want the detail of that then I could submit that in paper evidence. In terms of...

Commissioner

Because we know amongst young people that, you know, over half of young people, or around half of young people don't comply with the conditions of their ASBO's, so by and large they're ineffective even if they are not for young people, they're for reassurance of communities and to give communities some belief that something is being done, or some attempt is being done to stop those young people behaving in certain kinds of ways.

Suzette Davenport

In terms of the success rates I think that's variable where you go and the way in which they're used. I've always had a view that ASBO's are ultimately potentially failures, but you've had to go through those processes of not being able to alter the behaviour, and I have some sympathy with that. However I think that the statistical information that we've got would suggest that in the absence of some form of controls we're not going to be in a position to effectively stop people getting potentially killed and injured on our streets, and as I've said already then we are committed to making sure that doesn't happen, and we will use whatever tactics that we can, and if ASBO's can support doing that then I think our communities would say we would want you to do that, we would want you to pursue that because you want to try and keep us safe.

Chair - Cherie Booth

But you're saying of course in fact that obviously you don't actually get an ASBO without evidence.

Suzette Davenport

No, course you don't.

Chair - Cherie Booth

And secondly you found that it did in fact make a difference.

Suzette Davenport

As far as I'm concerned absolutely yes. Yes.

Commissioner

Just a quick question, after you've completed all your investigations etc. do you think, or that you could get more help from the judicial system, and if so what?

Suzette Davenport

Well I've mentioned the local Government Orders, they're Civil Orders which is why we've had the difficulties with it, I know having spoken to Jackie Smith when she came to visit the area on the back of the tackling guns action programme that the Home Office had been running, that she is keen as we are to pursue what alternatives there might be if we're not going to be able to use those Civil Injunctions.

Commissioner

Can you make any suggestions?

Suzette Davenport

Well that would be about identifying, and I know it's difficult, I know it's not easy to have absolutes, but identifying those people that are risky to themselves, risky to individuals, and understanding what controls we might have in place through a process that might look similar to either the ASBO's or the injunctions that will stop them associating with people, you heard

Barbara talking about postcode affiliations before, and the necessity sometimes to say to people well if you are demonstrating that you are a significant risk in a specific area or with specific people, then we can have a level of control over that. So the detail of that, I don't know what that would look like and I'm sure the legal people would work that through, what I will

describe is the outcome that I think we need to achieve.

Chair - Cherie Booth

I think the answer is again proportionality and intelligence led, but I think Mark had a question.

Mark Edwards

I wanted to talk about drugs really, that we know that the drugs trade is behind much of the crime, like to know some of the things that you're doing to combat that in the area.

Suzette Davenport

Yes, and certainly if you look at the history of some of the gang issues in Birmingham, 1999-2000 and that was very largely around drugs, in particular communities, I have to say that today the issues are less about, less driven in relation to drugs. It is more about what we describe as the three R's, which is about respect, it's about revenge, and it's about reward. So there might be some small part of that that is about drugs, but certainly my experience of being here is that that is not *the* driver, it is as much about identity and respect and revenge as it is about anything else like drugs.

Chair - Cherie Booth

Liam.

Liam Black

We spent this morning in the Layzell's Road area in the company of some very impressive small traders that are running car park, shops and grocers, and when asked, you know what's your perception of the Police, there were very divergent views, and there was one trader who had great respect [INAUDIBLE] Police [INAUDIBLE], we went to a chip shop where the facts were all pretty bleak really, that you can't get staff cos they're afraid to come outside of the area, they got robbed last year, they were particularly outraged that the 100 quid that was there for a Bangladeshi charity got taken, his insurance has gone up from £900 a year to £1600 which is a huge jump for a small business, and in terms of the, and they close every night now at ten o'clock because they're too scared to keep going, and I said well where's the Police? and the perception there was that well when you need them they just don't get there quickly

enough to be a deterrent to keep away these people. So I guess the question, and they asked me to pass that on to you, so I feel I've done that, but the bigger issue, do you think you're doing the, you know, the bread and butter policing as well as all these extra initiatives well enough to assure small business people and the rest of the community in places like Layzell's which someone described saying well the Police and the rest of Birmingham just regard us as the dustbin of the area, they don't care about that. Do you think that the bread and butter dull but really important stuff, turning up quickly when there are incidents, that you're doing that well enough?

Suzette Davenport

We're committed to making sure that we reduce disorder. That we reduce anti-social behaviour, and really importantly that we make our communities feel safer. So it's disappointing to hear those individuals that you've spoken to that said perhaps we're not delivering the service that they want.

[TALKING OVER EACH OTHER – INAUDIBLE]

Suzette Davenport

No I understand that, but also very pleasing to hear from others that they feel that we are absolutely doing that. The way in which we manage our resources that we as I've mentioned we work on the basis of intelligence and information, but also we have [INAUDIBLE] the different surveys. We're very committed to make sure that we do understand how our communities feel about the environment they're living in, and we track then wave on wave, which has happened over the last four years, where it is that people feel more safe than some other areas, and again, if I speak across the whole of the West Midlands Police area, then actually that's very positive data, and for the last four years wave on wave then that has improved in terms of how harmonious we feel the communities are, how much confidence we've got in policing figures in the region of around 90-95 percent which I think is very positive. We continually work at, and as things evolve, what is it that we can do to identify those specific areas that there are real difficulties, and making sure that we do have the right resources in the right place, in

order that we

do do what I've said, which is reducing crime and disorder and making people feel safer.

Liam Black

But we can't, I mean, you know, risk assessors Insurers are very good at assessing risk and there their perception is that it's double, if the increase in the premiums are anything to go by so...

Suzette Davenport

It's difficult for me to comment in terms of a specific incident. As I've already said then we are committed to making sure that we do the best with our partners, with our communities to make the streets as safe as they possibly can be, and we need our communities to help us to do that. So when, you know, people like Barbara come and support us through Mothers In Pain and

other groups, it's critically important to us to enable, in order that we can deliver what we need to the communities of the West Midlands Police.

Chair - Cherie Booth

Would you say there were any mistakes that you've made in West Midlands that you wouldn't, say I wouldn't try that again.

Suzette Davenport

There aren't mistakes that I would say. I think that we will continue to learn about what we do. Partnership working can sometimes be frustrating for all partners. Sometimes some of us want to...

Commissioner

For example?

Suzette Davenport

Sorry?

Commissioner

For example?

Suzette Davenport

Well we have different paces that we work at. We have different cultures as organisations and different priorities. I know and understand that detecting things is our core business. Community safety is all of our businesses and that's not just about the Local Authority, that's about education and all of those other things too. But there are frustrations in partnership working.

You've talked yourself about the initiatives that we've supported and some of that, for us, has been about having to step forward when we feel that other people because they've not been funded as they would want to, have made decisions about where they're going to put their resources. By the time things come to us, then things have gone wrong. What we need *all* collectively to

do is to make sure that we have money at the right end of the system to effect people so they have those positive choices so what we're not having to do is the bits at the back end of the process which is about dealing with the effects of it, which is people being shot and injured and we don't want that.

Commissioner

So can I ask you, go back to the guns and detect, what's some of the sort of measures you have to detect and like with, what's your sort of, the situation with sharing information with other areas as well in the Police. I know we spoke to a Liverpool Constable that said he's just concerned with his area, and obviously there's transportation of guns, they're coming from somewhere

and what are the guns, we've heard various descriptions of what people use the most, what would you think in this area?

Suzette Davenport

Well there are a whole range of weapons that I'm aware of that are available. I think that it's common knowledge now that a weapon that is potentially used in Birmingham could turn up in Manchester or London within a very short period of time. We have the National Ballistics Intelligence system now which will help us do that because it will enable us to collect the forensic evidence,

put it into the system which will be able to identify what weapons or ammunition has been used in what environments, and link that to offences which means that we will have a much better picture and it will support us in understanding in forming that intelligence picture in terms of what's happening where. But we know that there are a range of weapons and we know that they are circulating in criminal groups up and down the country.

Lord Geoffrey Dear

Can I ask one last question really which goes right back to what we've all been looking at in one way or another in this session, Police resources are very restricted and in the reality Police budgets are shrinking, and the problems continue to grow, so something has to give, that's fairly obvious. If you had to make a choice between moving the balance point very slightly towards detection, you know, the traditional Police role on the one hand, or enter the interface with society and society groups on the other, difficult I know but you probably get the gist of what I'm saying, where would you go? You've now got shrinking resources, a bigger problem, the Police are the Police, are you going to stay where you are or reposition up or down that scale?

Suzette Davenport

You talked about the Oath that we take as Police Officers and you've talked about the importance of detection, it says prevent and detect in our Oath, and if you ask me personally and professionally what I would rather do, that would be about it not happening to begin with. I've never met anywhere anybody who's been a victim of crime or anti-social behaviour who says I would rather that you caught somebody than it happen to me to begin with. We are not naive, we can't say that we're going to do, we have to assess risk and threat, and we have to match our resources to that. We can't say that we're not going to deal with a whole range of issues. If you live in an urban area then you are very [INAUDIBLE] quite rightly as we are, about high end criminality. If you live in a rural area then there are different threats and they will say well we need you to support us and resource our problems just as you would in an urban area. So one of the

real challenges for senior Police Officers today is about understanding that threat and risk, and then making a choice about where and how much resource, cos I don't believe you...

Lord Geoffrey Dear

But, forgive me, but in general terms would you move the balance point to tilt the emphasis towards the traditional Police role, the old traditional Police role of enforcement and uniform patrolling and all of that, or towards the interface with all the other groups who are in business to do that sort of thing anyway.

Suzette Davenport

I don't think it's either or, I think we have to manage to do that, both of those things whether that's about better working better pooled budgets, whether that's about more efficiency, whether it's about getting other people that can come in and help and support us, I don't know. There's a whole range of things as you will know that we're exercising our minds with at the moment

in terms of how do we get more for what we've got now, and we have to be able to do all of those things.

Chair - Cherie Booth

Well Suzette Davenport, thank you for coming.

Suzette Davenport

Thank you.

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