

Evaluation of the use of CSP funding for 2014/15

Background and Purpose

Each year, Community Safety Funding (CSF) is provided to the fourteen Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) operating across Essex, Southend and Thurrock to help partners deliver the priorities set out in the Police and Crime Plan in their own areas, and to support local priorities for improving community safety.

£309,727 was allocated overall for 2014/15, 50% of which was in the form of a grant, and 50% agreed to deliver specific proposed activities.¹

This report provides a high level review of the annual monitoring returns provided by CSPs on the use and impact of the funding during 2014/15. Its purpose is to draw together a number of themed observations from the returns and original applications, highlighting good practice and also commenting where there appear to be issues with the design, management and/or delivery of projects.

These observations provide headline feedback to CSPs on the perceived quality of their application and use of the Community Safety Funding, with references to both good and poor practice. They are intended to guide CSPs to make improved bids for funding from the PCC and other commissioners, and to help CSPs evidence the impact of PCC funding on community safety outcomes and demonstrate Value for Money.

Annex A summarises examples of good practice indicated from the CSP monitoring returns under relevant themed headings.

The PCC will be commissioning a more detailed evaluation programme of all commissioning and grant making expenditure undertaken during 2015/16, including grants made to CSPs, in order to better assess outcomes and Value for Money. This evaluation will be done by an independent contractor and may also lead to recommendations on how the CSP funding process can be improved.

Observations and recommendations

1) Linking back to outcomes

Most of the applications were able to link back their proposals in broad terms to the Police and Crime Plan and local priorities. However, explanation of the outcomes that would be supported, and outlining how these would be measured, was less strong with very variable approaches and degrees of rigour.

Assertions were made in a number of applications, in some cases bold ones, which were not followed through in describing the impact of activities in the monitoring reports. For example one CSP made the broad statement in their application that *“the activities will reduce crime figures in the district, including repeat offences. The district (will have) the highest solve rate in the area, with all solved rates being higher than the county average.”* No reference was made to these measures in the monitoring return.

¹ From 2015/16 this has shifted to all of the funding being directed at specific proposed activities, with a realignment of funding across the county to better reflect local populations and levels of deprivation.

The more comprehensive returns provided separate impact assessments after each project update, rather than one combined assessment at the end. Castle Point CSP took this approach, which worked well. Basildon, Colchester, Tendring, Thurrock and Uttlesford CSPs returns were also relatively strong in explaining impact.

Recommendation: *More attention needs to be given to linking inputs to outcomes, and measuring the impact. Care should be taken throughout the application and reporting stages to articulating the expected impact of activity in relation to desired outcomes, being realistic about what can be achieved and knowing how this can be measured.*

2) Explaining developing strategic thinking

Some of the ideas put forward in the original applications developed as the plans were implemented. This shows a willingness to adapt and refine a plan, but the best monitoring reports went on to explain the thinking behind any changes in strategy, giving confidence that conscious decisions were being made to redirect and use the funding most effectively.

Some clearly demonstrated an evolving strategy, outlining local concerns, showing that an action plan was in place, providing some measures of impact (although not always directly attributable to the actions) and setting out an intention to build on initiatives that were considered to be successful. Basildon CSP's continuing work in Vange Community Safety Action Zone and the positive links being made with offenders being worked with through the IOM Scheme is an example of this.

Several new schemes appeared in the monitoring reports without an apparent explanation of why they were selected or the benefits they would deliver, and some that were outlined in the applications appeared to disappear.

Recommendation: *Where plans change, then these should be explained briefly and upfront, with more evidence shown of CSPs developing strategies and thinking behind decisions.*

3) Strategic fit with countywide activity

Most initiatives were quite rightly aimed at providing 'local solutions for local problems' but there were a few relating to enhancing provision of specialist support for victims of crime, such as support for victims of sexual violence which a number of CSPs funded. These decisions tended to emerge during the year. Support to victims of crime is being developed on a countywide basis, so there is a risk of duplication and double funding if CSPs also provide funding through locally negotiated arrangements. Where victim related schemes such as domestic abuse or sexual violence were proposed, there was often little if any reference made to county wide strategies, or how local schemes could support county wide approaches.

Recommendation: *Where CSPs are considering funding services providing support to victims of crime, they should discuss first with the OPCC what provision is already in place, what plans are in place to develop services and how their local proposals could fit alongside county wide plans to ensure the most effective use of resources and joined up services for victims.*

4) Targeted interventions for those at most risk of harm

Many projects targeted specific cohorts of those at risk at harm (e.g., Crucial Crew), those in a specific area (e.g., Days of Action) and at a specific time of year (e.g., activity linked to Halloween or Bonfire Night). Focussed action in specific locations is often directed and informed by analysis of crime trends and local intelligence.

A targeted intervention that stands out as good practice is the Trading Standards Mass Marketing Fraud Initiative (Castle Point and Rochford CSPs) where home visits are made to victims identified by the National Scams Team as having responded to scams for a number of years, with information also shared with colleagues in social care and referrals made to Safeguarding teams where appropriate.

Recommendation: *The more targeted the intervention, the more opportunity there is to demonstrate a positive impact. The mass marketing fraud initiative in particular supports delivery of the wider focus on 'hidden harms' in the Police and Crime Plan, and has the potential to be extended to other CSP areas and delivered on a countywide basis.*

5) Collaborative working and sharing resources

There was some evidence of collaborative working and sharing resources, but this seemed to be the exception rather than the rule.

Chelmsford CSP's ASB Co-ordinator helped develop the countywide Community Trigger, bringing their capacity and expertise to bear across the county. The shared analyst role provides analytical support for Epping, Thurrock, Brentwood and Harlow CSPs.

Several initiatives involved developing information resources, which have the potential to be used by others in different settings. The 'Secure Protect Prevent' home security literature developed by Epping CSP was also adopted by Harlow and Brentwood CSPs.

Whilst there are opportunities for economies of scale in sharing resources and collaborating on initiatives across CSPs, there was also evidence of the benefits of providing local events. An interesting spin off from providing local multi agency training on a specific issue of mutual interest, about new ASB tools and powers in relation to dangerous dogs and irresponsible dog ownership (Basildon CSP), was an opportunity for local networking and relationship building – 'putting a face to a name'. Could this model be replicated in other areas, using the same approach, or could it have been delivered across a wider area whilst achieving the same impact in terms of networking?

Recommendation: *Where a CSP identifies a need in their area, they should consider whether it is a local or countywide issue, and how best to deliver it most effectively in their own area or across Essex. This could involve developing a model in one area and rolling it out to others over an agreed timeframe, as with the J9 domestic abuse project, hosting or leading countywide events or campaigns, or collaborating with other areas who have similar issues and priorities.*

Where information packs or resources are prepared for use by one CSP these should provide the best advice and guidance on a topic, and be available for use by other CSPs as required.

Safer Essex and the Community Safety Manager's Network could play a role in disseminating this information.

6) Mainstreaming and exit strategies

There was some evidence of effective exit planning and proactive work in relation to mainstreaming services - for example Castle Point CSP's Sanctuary home security service is now integrated with Essex Police's Crime Prevention officer surveys and safety plans, which helps assure the future delivery of the service in terms of identifying and meeting assessed needs. Brentwood CSP is also helping to build local capacity by allocating funding to MenShed, a local church project, who have agreed to fit door chains for vulnerable older residents as part of the CSP's Door Chain project.

However, this was not universal and there continue to be areas where insufficient focus appears to be given to planning for sustainability or exit.

Recommendation: *The opportunity to turn proven one off projects into 'business as usual' should be an aim wherever possible, embedding activity into the work of relevant agencies and practitioners. The PCC's Community Safety Development Fund can help with this, particularly where an area wants to develop or scale up an initiative. Also where initiatives are not having the desired impact, there should be strategies for exiting them clearly and effectively.*

7) Openness to review and evaluation

There are few references to the review and evaluation of projects, and whilst this may be happening in practice it would help to have this documented more clearly in the application and monitoring returns. This is equally important for long standing initiatives and those that are being tried for the first time to ensure that the funded activity is having the desired impact. This would include assessing content and delivery mechanisms, and responding to concerns and opportunities as the project is being delivered. Examples of where evaluation has been mentioned include Basildon CSP's evaluation of Crucial Crew 'to inform the partnership of any learning points should the event be delivered in the future', and ongoing evaluation of the Borderline Project by Tendring CSP.

Recommendation: *Projects should be reviewed as to their effectiveness and more evidence is needed that this is happening and the outcomes. Where more formal evaluations are taking place, it would help to have more information about the lines of enquiry being used and certainly to share the findings with the OPCC and other CSPs.*

8) Problems with delivery

There were several examples where projects did not proceed as planned, for example referrals did not come as expected (e.g., Brentwood CSP's Firebreak for Families referrals from schools), there was a shift in target group (e.g., Braintree CSP's awareness raising of drugs paraphernalia and legal highs was originally aimed at parents and carers, but was delivered to practitioners instead) and partner involvement (e.g., Tiptree Day of Action was rearranged at the request of one partner which caused problems for other partners).

These and other examples suggest that assumptions were made about how the project would be delivered without finding out whether it was feasible, or how best to do it. In some cases advice from schools led to a change in approach, based on their views of historic take up of initiatives, without evidence of testing out these perceptions by finding different ways to deliver. They also suggest that in some cases ideas may not have been fully discussed with partners to understand their views, priorities and drivers.

Recommendation: *Projects should be scoped and planned well to confirm what the purpose is, who the target audience are, and how they are best engaged – with discussion with relevant partners throughout. Where delivery needs to change, this should not compromise the original intentions of the project.*

9) Incomplete evidence and non-specific measurement

Completion of the monitoring reports was variable. Most were comprehensive, but some were vague with partial returns and gaps in information. Southend CSP's return referred to individual partners for evidence of success instead of collating and providing this to the PCC themselves.

As commented on last year, many of the activities relied on measuring outputs, such as number of attendees for an event or number of items delivered, rather than outcomes.

Where a measure of impact was provided this often related to a wider population, for example using a reduction in the level of crime or ASB in a district as an indication of the effectiveness of a particular project. It was also not always clear the contribution the PCC funding had made to an overall project.

Recommendation: *More attention is needed in many cases to ensure that monitoring reports are complete and informative. Although it is very difficult to attribute the specific impact of an activity or work with a specific cohort, more work is needed to get sensible and relevant measures for each initiative, and a better understanding of what had been achieved with the funding invested.*

10) Understanding Value for Money

It would be helpful to have a better understanding and appreciation of value for money, especially for output related activity such as the cost of making an older or vulnerable person's home secure (Brentwood CSP's Door Chain Project) or the cost of supporting a mediation case (Castle Point and Rochford CSP's Neighbour Mediation Service).

Recommendation: *Inserting a column in the monitoring report for the value of an initiative would help get a better sense of the 'unit cost' of an activity and help with judgements about where funding is best spent, and how similar activities being delivered by different CSPs compare in terms of relative value for money.*

Annex A

Theme	Good practice references
1) Linking back to outcomes	Castle Point CSP – explained impact carefully after each project Tendring CSP – good explanations of how impact assessed for each project, at different stages and using different sources, e.g., Borderline Project
2) Explaining developing thinking	Basildon CSP – particularly strong approach, e.g., explaining developing strategy around Vange Action Zone work and IOM opportunities
3) Strategic fit with countywide activity	There were no examples of this being referenced specifically, some examples of initiatives to support victims of domestic abuse and sexual violence where it is not clear how they fit with county wide strategies
4) Targeted interventions for those at most risk of harm	Castle Point CSP – the Trading Standards Mass Marketing Initiative stands out Thurrock CSP – Stay Safe events for people with vulnerable characteristics
5) Collaborative working and sharing resources	Chelmsford CSP – ASB Co-ordinator helped to develop countywide Community Trigger Epping CSP – ‘Secure Protect Prevent’ dwelling burglary literature adopted by others
6) Mainstreaming and exit strategic	Brentwood CSP – helping build local capacity by engaging a local volunteer project in delivering the Door Chain project Castle Point CSP – Sanctuary Home Security scheme integrated with Essex Police’s Crime Prevention surveys and safety plans
7) Openness to review and evaluation	Basildon CSP – evaluation of Crucial Crew ‘to inform the partnership of any learning points should the event be delivered in the future’ Tendring CSP – ongoing evaluation of the Borderline Project
8) Problems with delivery	There were many examples where there were problems with delivery. Some problems may have occurred but were not reported. Where issues have been dealt with, explaining how this was done would help evidence ‘explaining developing thinking’.
9) Incomplete evidence and non-specific measurement	There were many examples of incomplete evidence and non-specific measurement. Most CSPs had issues with some of the detail, and the better ones tended to do well under ‘linking back to outcomes’
10) Understanding Value for Money	There were no examples of references to VFM