

**Reflections Dr Andrew Fisher
from [PB Network Unconference 2015](#)
26th October 2015, Birmingham**

**PB Conference Workshop on
PB and the police**

On Monday 26th October 2015 over 70 people attended the UK PB Network conference in Birmingham. The conference was designed for academics, practitioners and those who want to learn a little more about PB in terms of the process, the results and the successes.

Following a series of short, but informative keynote speeches, the participants opted to attend a series of workshops. This blog is about my workshop which was co delivered with Chief Inspector Darren Walton of Durham Police. We focused on the opportunity for police to use PB to increase social capital and reduce demand. Those attending the workshop included police officers, police staff, people working within a Police and Crime Commissioners office and representatives from two local authorities.

The workshop began with a fun exercise where participants were given a series of statements and asked whether they agreed or disagreed by standing one side or another of a length of rope. The strength of their agreement or disagreement was determined by how close they stood to the rope i.e. the further away they stood the less they agreed with the statement.

The result was as follows

1. There was a pretty even split in relation to knowledge and practice in relation to social capital
2. All strongly agreed that community engagement remains a core element of policing
3. The majority thought that within policing, the police (including PCSOs) do not receive sufficient training to enable them to truly engage with communities
4. There was a split (and some uncertainty) as to whether their organisation had a definitive community engagement strategy
5. Almost all had been involved in PB events delivered by their organisation
6. The majority thought that their organisation undertook post engagement measurements
7. Although some knew of social return on investment, none thought that it was considered when developing engagement strategies

In order to give some context to the workshop I expanded on some of the themes arising from this exercise, based on the work that MutualGain (www.mutualgain.org) has been doing with police forces.

Although those present had indicated that they had been involved in PB and had a fairly good knowledge of the process, there was an acknowledgement that the impact and value of the programmes were not properly evaluated. In some instances they were used as vote winners for elected representatives – nothing wrong there you may argue because PB is about improving democracy.

A self confessed cynic, Darren Chief Inspector Darren Walton articulated the journey that he had been through with MutualGain. He shared with the audience how he knew very little about the rationale and techniques for engaging communities. He shared how his team went on to develop strong relationships with partners and through a series of focus groups, fun events and a very successful PB event, broke down barriers to build a relationship with a closed community that is steeped in organised criminality.

Darren shared how he witnessed growing networks through the development of residents associations; a significant in crime and anti social behaviour and a significant reduction in demand - not only for the police, but for the fire service and ambulance service. Trust in the police has increased and new norms were developing resulting in the community taking increased responsibility for the safety and development of their own area.

Questions were asked about the support given by leaders to make the changes and whether the changes were sustainable. Leadership from the top was given by investing in Darren and his team – the real leadership was in his style - empowering his team and enabling them to police the area ‘differently’ based on their experiential learning.

Almost 18 months from the start of the programme, the community continues to go from strength to strength and has developed into a different police-public partnership. The officers from GMP also shared their experiences of PB breaking down barriers between communities as well as with the police and increasing the flow of quality intelligence.

Measuring success, when done at all, relied on typical indicators of reduced levels of crime or anti social behaviour. This was the cause of a lot of frustration, not only within the police, but also from elected representatives who are closed to trying new ideas and giving up power for communities to decide for themselves. What price democracy? There was no evidence of the return on social investment being considered, although all agreed that would be a logical and accurate measure of the value of PB for the community and stakeholders.

The workshop concluded with an acknowledgement of the value of PB, not only in engaging communities, but in empowering them to take responsibility for some aspects of their lives that they would previously have relied upon services to deliver. There was an agreement that PB should be encouraged and that systems of development that did not rely on target achievement should be developed.

For further information see

Fisher, A. and Ritchie, S. (2015) A functional Shift: building a new model of engagement. Policing. Volume 9 Number 1 pp 101 - 114

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<http://www.mutualgain.org/#/dr-andrew-fisher-biography/4579120084>