

# Revisiting the Potential of Community Empowerment within UK Neighbourhood Policing Meetings

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## **Abstract**

Police attempts to engage with communities and involve the public in decision-making within co-governance meetings has a long history in the UK. This paper examines the most recent initiative for such engagement, exploring the potential and problems for community empowerment in meetings set up as part of the development of neighbourhood policing in the UK. The paper contributes to existing research by offering a more nuanced understanding of how co-governance is constructed in meetings, drawing on a longitudinal ethnography of the experience of these meetings in advantaged and disadvantaged communities. Our findings demonstrate the complex reality and practice of co-governance meetings between the police and community members and the paper explores three key themes in relation to these meetings. Firstly, in examining the potential for community empowerment, we show that while these meetings may have some regressive effects, core attendees fully embrace them and seek to establish an active citizen identity. Secondly, we offer some support for a radical communitarian thesis, demonstrating how residents even in disadvantaged communities are able to have their voices heard. Finally, the research demonstrates that while the police attempt to control these meetings, this control is not uncontested with frequent challenges against police and partner (in)actions. The paper concludes by identifying critical areas of change for improving community empowerment in co-governance meetings with the police.

**Key Words:** community empowerment; public meetings; ethnography; neighbourhood policing

# **Revisiting the Potential of Community Empowerment within UK Neighbourhood Policing Meetings**

## **Introduction**

The involvement of citizens and communities in public service decision-making has been the focus of a plethora of policy initiatives and academic research over recent years. Within the UK and in many other countries, the police service has had a long and chequered history of engaging with communities and the merits of citizen-focused or community oriented policing have been widely debated (UK Home Office 2004a, Skogan 2006). The focus of this paper is on the practice of community and police co-governance and on how it is constituted in community meetings. Between 2005-8 Neighbourhood Policing (NP) was introduced in England and Wales as the latest initiative to engage and involve communities in policing. A key element of this initiative was the introduction of regular neighbourhood meetings, open to all residents within their neighbourhoods. These meetings, called 'Partnerships and Communities Together' (PACT) meetings in the areas we studied, enable residents to meet regularly with police and other public service professionals. Through an analysis of collaboration within these meetings, the main aim of this paper is to provide a more nuanced understanding of how co-governance is constructed. Our study also reveals important locality differences between neighbourhoods and the differing experiences of 'better off' and disadvantaged communities.

The paper is structured as follows. The next section examines the appeal to community in public service delivery and reviews the efficacy of the community meeting as a practice of engagement for the police. Our methodology, a longitudinal ethnographic approach utilising critical discourse analysis (CDA) will then be considered. This is followed by a discussion of our empirical material. The final section will examine the paper's contribution to understanding the practice of co-governance and its effects.

## **The 'Appeal to Community' in Public and Police Service Delivery**

There is a common history both within the police and other public service organizations of appeals to community engagement (Brent 2004). Such appeals are

often based on a communitarian thesis and its discourse of cohesive and integrated communities that can be mobilised to come together and take responsibility (cf. Crawford 1997, Hughes 2007). It is assumed that communities can ‘make a difference’ and that community action will be based on a shared set of values and a shared history and identity. Since the mid-1990s there has been increased impetus for improvements in community engagement within the UK police service largely based on the identification of a confidence and reassurance gap between public perception of crime and actual crime figures (Dalglish & Myhill 2004, Reiner & Newburn 2007). The research for this paper was conducted at the time of the promotion of New Labour’s localism agenda in the UK, and their 1997-2010 term of office. At this time there was a strong agenda for citizen-focused public service delivery and for policing reforms that encompassed public service partnerships and community engagement to tackle crime prevention and community safety. This culminated in the national introduction of NP by 2008 (Home Office 2004a, Newman 2007).

At the heart of the NP initiative is local neighbourhood accountability and visible and dedicated policing teams supported by non-warranted police community support officers (PCSOs), focused on developing positive relationships with communities (cf. Cosgrove & Ramshaw 2015). PACT meetings were introduced as a top-down initiative linked to NP and were mandated by UK police performance targets (Home Office 2004b, NCPE 2006, Newman 2007). This reform has been described as offering communities a mechanism for participating in local policing (Bullock & Sindall 2014). The authenticity of this policy has been debated and the focus has increasingly been on whether it fulfils its potential (ibid, Lloyd & Foster 2009). These meetings are the latest initiative in the long history of police/community meetings and their use, in different countries over the years, will be reviewed in the next section.

### **The community meeting as a practice of co-governance**

Community meetings in the governance of crime and disorder take a variety of forms. They may be neighbourhood based or targeted on a specific issue or group, and range from formal meetings with an invited membership to informal or impromptu encounters (Myhill 2006). Generally, they are considered to have benefits for the police and community members. For the police, such meetings may help to educate

the public or to enlist their cooperation in dealing with crime and disorder. They may also provide a forum to receive feedback from the community on how they are doing (Bullock 2010). For community residents they offer the opportunity to express grievances against the police but the extent to which residents can exert influence and contest existing power-relations has been widely debated.

Within the UK, a focus on community consultation and engagement, was set out by Scarman in the early 1990s, and included the introduction of police consultative committees. Although the practice of these groups varied, they generally followed the tradition of the formal meeting, with the community represented by a group of community leaders. While Crawford (1997:49) suggests that these meetings were designed to give *'a better megaphone and more volume to public voice'* others refer to a lack of empirical evidence concerning their democratic accountability (Hughes 1994). In his review of these committees, Morgan concluded they were amateurish, overwhelmingly pro-police and dominated by the white male middle-classes, *'little more than a talking shop which lacked any role in the resolution of conflicts and in the solution of local problems'* (1992:180).

The problem of community representation and involvement has also been highlighted in the range of multi-agency groups set up in the 1990s in the UK to tackle locality based community safety or regeneration issues. For example research on Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Wales<sup>1</sup> concluded that public participation in these groups was tokenistic, with the police and their CSP partners more comfortable with their own definition of issues, rather than responding and redirecting resources to issues raised by residents (Edwards et al 2008). It has also been suggested that where these types of multi-agency partnerships utilise community panels, there may be problems linked to the selection of voluntary community members as well as the capacity of these members to mobilise, represent and report back to their constituencies (Barnes 2008). Riley et al (2005) found that while practices and the ability to gain influence varied, formal panels where voluntary and community representatives were trained in problem-oriented policing (POP) technologies had the most likelihood of gaining community influence.

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<sup>1</sup> In England these groups were called Crime Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)

The police and other public service agents have also used more open and informal meetings to engage with communities. One of the most extensive studies of such meetings was conducted in the US in Chicago (Skogan 2006). These ‘beat meetings’ were introduced as part of the Chicago Community Policing programme in the early 1990s. Coordinated by community police officers, they had a formal agenda within which community residents and beat officers identified crime and disorder problems, engaged in problem-solving analysis, and reviewed progress in solving problems. The effectiveness of these meetings for the different ethnic and socio-economic communities in Chicago was a key feature of Skogan’s research. Cumulative data collected over a ten year period showed that attendance was highest in African American (black) areas (that had the highest needs and levels of deprivation); lowest in the majority of white beats (that were the least troubled and frequently more affluent); and in-between levels in Latino areas (deemed equally troubled as black areas) where many people did not speak English (Skogan 2006:268, 311). The most effective meetings in all areas relied on a cadre of regular attendees and beyond the meetings it was the regulars who were more likely to report being involved in a range of related activities (ibid: 311).

What differentiates PACT meetings from Scarman’s original consultative meetings is the intention that through such meetings the local community should be able to hold the police to account through direct democratic participation. Within PACT meetings this is achieved in a number of ways. Firstly, through the setting of three local priorities (NCPE 2006) at the end of these meetings for public service and police action. Secondly, through the open nature of attendance to encompass all (or anyone) within the neighbourhood, rather than a stable membership of invited key informants. Thirdly, through the universal nature and regularity of these meetings across all neighbourhoods; including well-off and poorer communities, and those experiencing high or low levels of crime and disorder. The potential of this initiative as a new mechanism for engagement and accountability deserves research scrutiny.

Many researchers have raised concerns regarding the level of attendance and the types of residents who self-select to attend open community meetings (Bullock & Sindall 2014, Brunger 2011). Some have suggested that these attendees tend to see

themselves as ‘good neighbours’ and the ‘moral majority’ and represent only a partial minority of the local community (Hughes 2007, Skidmore et al 2006, Huey & Quirouette 2010). Others refer to the divisive potential of community meetings, with a range of groups (e.g. those who do not speak English, transient populations, ethnic minorities and ‘troublesome young people’) not being represented (Crawford 1997, Foot 2009). The concept of the ‘doubly disadvantaged’ (ibid) has also been coined to reflect the possibility that the most disadvantaged in society, who also experience the highest levels of crime, disorder and deprivation, may be the least able to participate or exert influence in these meetings. Herbert’s (2006) review of the operation of neighbourhood forums in a range of well-off and disadvantaged neighbourhoods in Seattle suggested marked differences in resident capacity and influence, with middle class voices given more credence and legitimacy.

There may be a number of reasons why residents within disadvantaged communities, especially those with high levels of ethnic minorities, choose not to engage in community meetings with the police. These residents are more likely to be the subject of policing (Myhill 2006) and historical levels of distrust may mean that the police may not be the first choice of partner, or even be acceptable, to some communities (Vernon & Lasley 1992, Huey & Quirouette 2010). The police too may have reservations concerning the usefulness of these meetings, viewing them as dominated by ‘usual suspects’ intent on progressing their own agendas (Barnes et al 2008). In addition community and neighbourhood policing may be under-valued within traditional policing cultures, with research into NP identities showing how these are often criticised as ‘pink & fluffy’ and compared unfavourably to what is regarded as ‘real policing’ (Davies & Thomas 2008). Somerville (2009) also suggests that the police remain an upwardly focused paramilitary organisation that may not be capable of effective community partnership, especially with communities that are alienated from the police (Liederbach et al 2007). Investigating the introduction of New Labour’s co-governance agenda in the UK, Westmarland & Clarke (2009) found that the police struggled to adapt to collective citizen-consumer led involvement and with vertical partnership with communities. Researchers have often commented on the unequal power dynamics and of the dominance of the police in such relationships (Skogan 2006, Terpestra 2009), with Herbert (2006) concluding that 90% of solutions at neighbourhood community meetings are those of the police.

Since 2005, the police within the UK have been tasked to hold regular PACT meetings. These are open access meetings involving representatives from the police, other public service partners and any members of the community who choose to attend. They are held on a regular basis (often monthly or bi-monthly) and set three key priorities for police and partner action, with feedback on this action and relevant outcomes reported in subsequent meetings. The main aim of this paper is to examine how co-governance between police, their partners and community residents is constructed through the practice of these meetings. It presents a bottom-up approach to understanding co-governance, focusing on specific interactions, power-dynamics and on how individual identities are implicated in governance processes. The paper will also examine the extent to which different types of communities have the potential for empowerment through these meetings. The final discussion of our findings will draw out their implications in relation to policy changes introduced by the election in November 2012 of Police and Crime Commissioners. This policy change represents a shift towards regional elected representation and to the commissioning of services and away from direct citizen participation and the previous Labour government's localism agenda (Morgan 2011).

### **Methodology: Researching Community Empowerment in PACT meetings**

The present study involved a longitudinal ethnography of the experience of PACT within different communities in Wales in the UK. The research process was framed within a social constructionist ontology in examining the way that co-governance was constructed through the practices of PACT. The study was confined to one large city in Wales that had a good range of disadvantaged, advantaged and mixed ethnic inner-city neighbourhoods. It was also confined to one policing command and local government area that enabled more in-depth findings suited to a multi-sited ethnographic case (Marcus 1995). This design was chosen to facilitate the tracking of potential changes in practices within PACT meetings through time, allowing a close and in-depth analysis of accountability, priorities, and relationships within these three different settings. This study of PACT in the UK is unique in terms of its rigour and the detailed analysis undertaken.



The major data collection period was 2007 to 2009 and the empirical data is from meetings, focus groups and interviews within this period. One of the authors attended the PACT meetings and conducted interviews and/or focus groups with police officers, other public service partners and residents. In total 44 PACT meetings were observed and 34 police officers (including local officers, administrators and senior police), 9 service partners, and 8 councillors (neighbourhood ward level elected local government politicians) were interviewed over a two-year period. In addition, three focus groups with PACT attendees were held, 12 residents were interviewed and in excess of 70 informal conversations between the researcher and residents took place. The researcher also attended a number of partnership workshops and meetings, most notably sector based Neighbourhood Management meetings (NMMs) comprising partners, police and some local councillors.

This longitudinal immersion within the field facilitated the building of trust relationships and allowed access to informal conversations. The data collected was mainly the rich naturally occurring micro-level interactions within the PACT meetings (Van Maanen 2011) with the '*talk of*' the participants and their interactively constructed identifications supplemented with reported '*talk about*' public participation gathered through traditional interviews and focus groups. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) techniques were used to work with the live interactive meetings data. Following Fairclough's (1994) CDA model, particular attention was given to the dynamic relationship between micro-level interactions and identities within the meetings and also to the wider discursive and social context. This process included an inter-textual analysis that looked at themes and subject positions across and within meetings and timelines. This analysis was based on sound recordings for most PACTs and field notes were made of embodied actions within the meetings. Capital letters have been used to capture emphases, anger and emotions displayed within the meeting.

The ethnography comprised a detailed study of the practices of PACT within three different types of neighbourhoods that were selected based on three different sources of information. The first two sources comprised factual information relating to levels of deprivation and the ethnicity mix of neighbourhoods based on the Welsh Index of

Multiple Deprivation<sup>2</sup> and census information from the Office of National Statistics respectively. The third source was police information concerning levels of resident attendance, typical crime and disorder profiles and police experiences of the different PACT meetings. From this information it became clear that for the police PACT meetings differed greatly and their assessment of these meetings were influenced by the levels of disorder or disadvantage in the area, by the role played by councillors at the meetings and by whether resident attendees were considered ‘easy or difficult to handle’. The three neighbourhoods chosen for study were given the pseudonyms Whitewood, Evergreen and Redbank and comprised advantaged white, deprived white and deprived mixed ethnicity areas respectively. Table 1 provides key profile information concerning these three areas as well as details of the PACT meetings held. The following empirical section considers how co-governance was constructed and begins by examining the general level of community engagement with the meetings.

[Table 1 below]

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<sup>2</sup> WIMD ranks communities in relation to levels of deprivation to better target resources and governmental initiatives. The index is comprised of a range of indices of health, education, housing, crime and disorder, employment.

**Table 1 PACT Summary Statistics: Evergreen, Redbank & Whitewood**

<b>PACT Data Categories (rows) / PACT meetings (columns)</b>	<b>Evergreen (15 meetings)</b> Observation of 15 of 21 meetings  Population <sup>1</sup> 14,754 Disadvantaged Area	<b>Redbank (9 meetings)</b> Observation of 9 of 13 meetings in South Redbank  Population <sup>1</sup> 12,009 Mixed Area -Predominantly Disadvantage	<b>Whitewood (6 meetings)</b> Observation of 6 of 9 meetings  Population <sup>1</sup> 11,281 Advantage
<b>Attendance level<sup>2</sup></b> at PACT meetings (collated across 24 month study period)	Stable at 0.3% of Population 14,754  (Range 14-34, average 16-24)	Declined from 0.2 to 0.1% of Population 12,009  (Initially 21-28, latterly 9-17)	Increased from 0.2 to 0.3% of Population 11,281  (Initially 14-17, latterly 29-36)
<b>Age range of attendees<sup>2</sup></b>	The majority of attendees were 50 – 70 with some regular minorities in their 40s and over 70. At one or two meetings people in their 30s attended on a one off basis to discuss their issue.	The regular minority were in their 60-70s; with some others in their 50s. On a couple of occasions younger people in their 40s and 30s attended.	No one below 40 attended these meetings. The regulars were mainly in their 50s-70s with a couple of people in their 40s. A few over 70s attended occasionally.
<b>Advantage/ Disadvantage</b> Area Rankings based on WIMD 2005 indices <sup>3</sup> for City	Ranked 2 <sup>nd</sup> most deprived Ward (10% most deprived in Wales)	Combined North & South Redbank is 11 <sup>th</sup> most deprived Ward (15% most deprived in Wales). North Redbank ranks as one of least deprived areas	One of top two least deprived Wards (5% least deprived in Wales)
<b>Ethnic/ BME composition &amp; attendance</b> WIMD (2005) <sup>4</sup>	White (98%)  Solely white attendance <sup>2</sup>	Mixed overall 18% ethnic WIMD (2005) South Redbank range of 27-34% BME / ethnic	White (99%)  Solely white attendance <sup>2</sup>
<b>Gender Balance of Attendees<sup>2</sup></b> (Women, Men)	Normally slightly more men than women	Normally a mix with usually equal numbers of men and women	Always more women than men
<b>Types of Priorities</b> raised at PACT meetings <sup>2</sup>	Harassment – noise nuisance, youth congregating, intimidation of elderly, drug dealing public places Youth ASB in parks Domestic fly-tipping/ illegal dumping Abandoned vehicles Deliberate Fires (rubbish & abandoned vehicles) Off-road biking Timed-closure of walk way Shop-lifting and property damage Burglaries cars & property	South Redbank only – Lack of street cleaning fly-tipping/ illegal dumping in lanes/streets Prostitution Dangerous / illegal parking blocking roads at major events Dangerous road crossings/ junctions for pedestrians  North Redbank only – Youth drinking in park during summer months	Lack of parking by village shops Speeding cars on main road Closure of village bank branch Children cycling on pavement Changes to bus routes, Rubbish collection schedule Local youths on way home from school Single incident with youths from outside area in local park

<sup>1</sup> ONS population data

<sup>2</sup> Based on information recorded in field notes at the observed meetings

<sup>3</sup> (WIMD 2005) combined indices based on housing, education, income, health, crime/ASB data

<sup>4</sup> ONS ethnicity data

## **The Practice of Co-governance in PACT meetings**

The findings on the practice of co-governance are structured to reflect community representativeness, levels of influence and the extent of police engagement and control of these meetings. Each of these is discussed in turn.

### ***Community attendance, representativeness and exclusion***

In the three PACT neighbourhoods attendance at the meetings represented between 0.1% and 0.3% of the population, with a core of regular attendees forming a majority of 80-90% of attendees. Numbers at meetings ranged between 13 (at the less well attended) and 31, with an age range between late 30s and 80. The majority of attendees were between 50-70; overwhelmingly this was the age group who were both willing and able to come to these meetings (see Table 1). In all three PACT neighbourhoods the core of regular attendees are characterised by being longstanding residents within their areas, frequently resident since birth or for all their adult lives. Residents at Evergreen & Redbank meetings drew on this resource to reinforce the legitimacy of their knowledge, contributions and requests, frequently presenting themselves as ‘genuine residents’. They also constructed themselves as bone fide representatives who could be relied upon to speak up for themselves and for their neighbourhoods. One of the core attendees at Evergreen, Mrs Neece, as she laughed and joked with others during one meeting, coined the phrase the ‘faithful’ to reflect their commitment to the PACT process.

Mrs Neece: Call us the ‘faithful’ if you like [laughter] we’re the ones who come whatever the weather on behalf of others.

Regular attendees were also white and first language English speakers and in many ways were typical of residents in their area. At advantaged Whitewood (99% white population) they came to the meetings in expensive mid-range cars, dressed in well-tailored formal or smart casual attire, with shoes polished. While the women outnumbered men in the meetings it was the men (often professionals or retired professionals) who spoke. Most arrived in mixed gender groups, and many of these were also members of local Neighbourhood Watch<sup>3</sup> schemes. At Evergreen and South

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<sup>3</sup> In Britain Neighbourhood Watch schemes were introduced in 1982 and by December 1983 there were 5 million, most frequently in better-off areas. They aim to support communities’ participation in the local security and crime prevention of small areas such as a single street/block (Crawford 1997:177).

Redbank, residents would usually walk to meetings; they were cleanly but shabbily dressed, clothes and shoes well worn and of a cheaper quality. While numbers of men and women were fairly evenly balanced at Evergreen, the men often came on their own but then held conversations together. Within Evergreen there were also some core attendees who had a history of activism in their neighbourhood. For example, a couple of the older men (65-75s) were involved in regeneration activities; or in their younger days and been active in trades unionism, having experienced the demise of traditional jobs and industries in their area. Evergreen is also an area where historically there have been difficult and conflictual relationships between community residents and the police and many residents commented on their fears and the risk of attending these meetings and of talking to the police. According to one of the residents, Mr Acton:

...Police are people who arrest them or raid the area, surprised that people are prepared to talk to them at all.

In the disadvantaged areas of Evergreen and Redbank, women were more vocal than men and they often dominated exchanges within the meetings. Two of the PACTs studied, Evergreen and Whitewood, had female community chairs, suggesting that in both advantaged and disadvantaged areas, women, in different ways were exercising influence within the meetings.

Similar to other research, our findings reveal a lack of diversity in the community residents attending the PACT meetings. Younger members of the community attended very infrequently and interviews conducted with some 'absent' younger residents revealed that they had little confidence in achieving influence through participation in these meetings. One young person, Adele, commented: *'nothing will change'*; that PACT meetings were for *'self-appointed busy bodies like older people with time on their hands'* and *'we are not welcome... they don't want to listen to us'*. Very few black and minority ethnic (BME) residents attended the meetings, which to some extent may be a reflection of the small number of BME residents especially in two of the three PACTs study. Only South Redbank is more ethnically diverse with 27-34% mixed BME residents. However, even in this neighbourhood, there were only two meetings where fluent English speaking BME professionals or local business owners

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attended. Interviews conducted with absent BME residents indicated that they felt unwelcome or uncomfortable at PACT meetings, especially when derogatory comments were made about non-white residents. This is demonstrated in the following quote from a Redbank meeting:

...when we first lived here none of them were here, it was a white area then and neighbourhood was much tidier and not the same problems (Mrs Hickson)

### ***Community demands, influence and frustrations***

PACT meetings provide residents with some opportunity for 'voice' and for meeting with police and other public service officers to discuss local quality of life and crime and disorder issues. Informal discussions with residents in all three PACT areas indicated that these meetings were highly valued.

Mrs Dean: Now we've got it we wouldn't want to give it up  
(Redbank)

Mr Trimble: It's been long overdue to have this sort of opportunity  
(Whitewood)

Bob: We can't say it's working well yet, but I hope it will improve  
(Evergreen)

Table 1 shows the typical concerns raised at the three PACT meetings and illustrates the wide variation in types of problems. The more deprived areas of Evergreen and South Redbank have the most serious and persistent issues, which include, anti-social youth behaviour, drug dealing, illegal dumping, a lack of street cleaning, deliberate fires, prostitution and illegal parking. In the more affluent area of Whitewood, while the issues raised are important to these residents, they are far less serious in comparison (e.g. closure of bank branch, village parking, and children cycling on pavements).

In 'privileged' Whitewood, the residents construct themselves as being of 'equal status' to the police and to other visiting public service professionals; often referring to their own professional roles and expert knowledge to credentialise their points: '*when Head of Planning I ....*'. Over the course of the fieldwork it was noticeable how close relationships were gradually built in this neighbourhood between the residents and police, and the officer present would take time to greet and talk to specific groups of residents. During the majority of the meetings, residents expressed satisfaction with

the service they received from the police and other public servants. As James remarked:

*'Nothing is ignored. Everything we raise gets a response and is treated seriously'.*

We witnessed how a single incident of problem youth in a local park obtained an immediate police and partner response, with the youths identified as mainly coming from other areas:

PC Ron: ... we told them they wouldn't be tolerated here so not to come back.

Jenny: We're not having them come here and ruin our area.

These residents therefore did not need to mount individual or collective challenges as the police and other professionals responded and acted promptly to their concerns. The level of service they receive is, according to Barbara, the community chair of this PACT meeting, *'the envy of other areas and a level they aspire to.'*

It was certainly the case that in the more deprived areas of Evergreen and South Redbank, repeat issues of antisocial behaviour (ASB) did not get the same police response and resident frustrations with the PACT process was evident. In the Evergreen PACT meetings, for example, residents would often talk of unmet needs and of their low levels of trust in service providers. The emotional tone of many of the meetings observed was that of anger, with residents feeling let down by services. As one resident Lois complains:

YOU GO ROUND THE CORNER [into a neighbouring better-off area...] AND THERE'S NO RUBBISH THERE. THEIR BINS ARE EMPTIED, they're done properly but it seems if you're from around Evergreen. THERE'S NOTHING DONE FOR US HERE. WHY'S THAT?

They also reject professional explanations for lack of services and the attempts of the police to co-opt and responsibilise them to identify perpetrators in risky circumstances. This is referred to by one of the councillors in Evergreen:

Cllr Smith: WHAT GETS ME IS THE POLICE ASK RESIDENTS TO GO OUT of our houses and ask these kids what their names are so we can identify who they are and put them on a list. [...]

SURELY IT'S THE RESPONSIBILITY OF THE POLICE TO  
IDENTIFY THEM find out where they live

It was evident how many of the residents in Evergreen worked together to challenge police attempts to dominate these meetings and the professional solutions they offered to deal with community problems. For example, they conveyed a strong preference for improved community facilities and diversionary activities for young people in opposition to the more heavy-handed police solutions linked to punishment and *'locking them up'*.

Lois: [...] children are bored we want a local solution something for them to do

Bob: ...they are not going to go to other parts of City

They also challenge the lack of resources that are allocated to solving their problems. Joy, cited below, criticises the police inaction in dealing with problems experienced by her parents.

I think we have serious differences of opinion on what is criminal and what is acceptable behaviour and the Police aren't protecting my parents' rights to have some peace in their own home [...]

During the course of the fieldwork we witnessed the development of high levels of trust and cooperation between the residents in Evergreen. Through this they constructed empowered citizen identities and worked from this subject position to achieve a better quality of service. Their success in achieving this empowered status was due to a number of factors. For example, since 2002 the Evergreen community had received additional funding for capacity building activities. Some of the attendees also had a history of local activism either through trade unionism, housing associations, or community-led single interest groups. In 2007 a group of women and a few men had joined together to fight a planning application to build housing on open park space in this neighbourhood. Called the 'Concerned Gardeners', they frequently attended PACT meetings and drew on their collective strength to argue in support of collective issues and concerns.

The influence of residents in Evergreen PACT meetings was also enhanced by the support of local councillors. On some occasions these councillors took on the identity



of an ‘*ordinary resident*’, in joining other residents in their criticism of the police and the local authority and challenging them over public service delivery.

Cllr Harris: [laughs] I’m a councillor but if I write to Chief Constable I never get an answer it just keeps getting passed down to the lowest level (Evergreen)

However, on other occasions these councillors positioned themselves as “*special residents*” with privileged information and access, suggesting to residents and to service providers (most often the police) what ‘should’ be done and which procedures could be drawn on in different situations. This resulted in meetings that were particularly difficult and challenging for the police representatives present, who were left with no partner support and often felt attacked by both councillors and residents.

Cllr Smith: The issue that I have with this reporting business when you ring up 101 [*non-emergency service number*] and they say there is a process to go through [...] I know there is an Anti-social behaviour nuisance process now, even if it’s not the tenant [...] the tenant’s responsible.

As already stated, attendees at the Redbank PACT mainly came from poorer South Redbank. These residents, similar to those in Evergreen, also constantly talk of being let down by service providers and of the continued failure of these providers to deliver adequate services. What is most noticeable in the Redbank PACT over time is the move from anger to resignation concerning the lack of responsiveness of service providers and the adequacy of public services. Most of the complaints of these residents are against the local authority rather than the police. Originally a local councillor’s residents meeting, they were converted to PACT meetings at the request of the police and continue to be dominated by local councillors. This may have influenced the types of issues raised.

The Redbank residents do not mount collective challenges (as occurred in Evergreen) and their meetings are characterised by sequential individual issues. The practice was for people to ‘wait’ for an opportunity to raise their own issues rather than supporting those raised by others. This is a key locality difference in the micro-level practices of challenge between the Evergreen and Redbank PACT meetings. The single occasion when residents of Redbank mounted a collective challenge is when a Local Authority Corporate Director and his senior staff attend the meetings. The frustrations of the

residents, in response to the tone and positioning of the Corporate Director, are palpable in the following extract:

Corporate Director: I know there are problems either side of Lower Church Road and in other parts of Redbank. We need the community's help [...] please report these

Matthew: That's an excuse. For years we've passed on information. It's action at your end that's needed

These residents are unimpressed with the explanations provided by professionals for the levels of service they receive, and they often contrast this with the levels they felt they 'should' receive as 'deserving residents'.

Throughout the fieldwork, residents of both the Evergreen and Redbank PACT meetings repeatedly voiced on-going problems with poor quality police and local authority services, such as ASB and harassment, street cleansing and illegal dumping. However, despite their frustrations, a core of residents continued to attend and fought to gain influence at these meetings. On a few occasions their challenges had some positive effects. For example, the residents campaigned for police officers, rather than PCSOs and non-uniformed police administrators, to attend PACT meetings and towards the end of our research police officers became regular attendees. The final section will focus more specifically on police engagement with PACT and on their attempts to control these meetings.

### ***Police Engagement and Control***

PACT meetings were introduced as a top-down initiative mandated by police performance targets. Therefore despite the 'P' of PACT representing 'partnerships' in the neighbourhoods studied, these meetings are considered by other public service partners and by many residents to be 'police owned'. The other partners therefore largely take a secondary role within the meetings.

Police engagement with the PACT meetings varied in the three neighbourhoods. At Whitewood the local police officer always attended. This officer, together with the local councillors and community chair, sit together at the top table. They always come well prepared to the meeting, treating the residents with respect and providing them with polite and detailed explanations to their questions. However, the Whitewood PC

confirmed that the problems of this community are *'nothing big or major, not like Evergreen's youth annoyance...it's building relationships and managing expectations that is important'*. At the Evergreen and Redbank meetings police officers did not regularly attend and the police were represented at these meetings by two PCSOs and a non-uniformed administrator. This administrator, Maureen, was based in the Evergreen community and knew the area and some residents very well. We will see how she plays a pivotal role in representing the police view and in managing these meetings. As a result of resident pressure from October 2009 neighbourhood police officers attended all PACT meetings in City.

This lack of police officer engagement could be linked to the rejection and criticisms of these meetings often related to low attendance figures. The police are frustrated by their failure to engage the public in these meetings, as the Redbank PCSO commented:

I don't know if people aren't interested or can't attend. However much we try we just can't get people to PACT meetings.

A number of police officers and partners drew on low attendance figures to criticise the meetings as unrepresentative of the total neighbourhood population. Regular attendees were denigrated as the 'usual suspects' by one Neighbourhood Inspector from Redbank, who continued by saying:

You can't even say they represent because you've got a handful of people... it's always the same old faces with axes to grind.

In an interview with a Community Safety Manager in City, similar criticisms were expressed:

It's attracting very low numbers and has not engaged across localities in any meaningful way [...] it seems to be an invitation for a minority to come on the basis of 'who shouts loudest'. It does not reflect needs across neighbourhoods or sectors and because of this it has no validity as a source of intelligence on actual priorities.

The police guidance for PACT meetings offers advice on their management and control, perhaps partly aimed at reducing the influence of the small number of residents who choose to attend. The following sections focus on police attempts to

control the meeting agenda, discussions and priorities, and to co-opt the local councillors and community chairs as allies and partners in the process.

### *Controlling the meeting agenda and priorities*

The police are the dominant ‘expert’ partner in the PACT meeting and a proportion of the meeting agenda is always set aside for ‘good news’ stories and for feedback on successful police actions. The PCSO’s comment below is one example of this type of positive feedback:

We did what you asked by patrolling Cherry Blossom Way and we are pleased to say there have been significantly less incidents reported, one resident even thanked us (PCSO Mat, Evergreen).

The importance of this upbeat positive tone for these meetings was emphasised by a neighbourhood Sergeant from Redbank:

Our aim is make sure meetings last no more than an hour [...] we want them snappy, upbeat, and to keep up the positive energy. We do not want to allow them to become moan and groan or bash the police sessions.

The police also had clear views that PACT priorities needed to be contained and focused on short-term quick wins. According to one Chief Inspector:

The police had a steep learning curve [since beginning PACT in 2006] learnt to say ‘no’ to medium term and long term issues, priorities taken on are short term.

Similarly a Neighbourhood Inspector commented on the importance of ‘*quick hits and easy successes*’, and that running PACT meetings is about ‘*managing residents’ expectations... [to] meet what is feasible for the police to action*’. This containment of PACT priorities was also evident in the lack of a clear reporting structure through which these priorities could be progressed. The police did not include PACT priorities within any of their decision-making or hierarchical structures that dealt with resource allocation, nor were the outcomes from priorities tracked at these meetings, or decisions made here concerning how priorities should shape local policing. The council manager who ran the Neighbourhood Management meetings suggests that this failure to monitor and progress priorities and their outcomes will detract from the effectiveness of PACT:

Residents need to see they are having an influence and their views are considered in services' decision-making and subsequent actions. We need to find a way to build their input into the decision-making processes for partner activities as well as individual police and council services

Police control and containment of priorities was evident within the meetings. On many occasions we witnessed the influence that Maureen, the non-uniform police administrator, exerted over this process. She positioned herself as broker, gatekeeper and enforcer on behalf of the police, as evidenced by the following extract from Evergreen:

Maureen (non-uniform): I'm not having that as a priority. It's a huge area for ASB.

Chair Jill: What about the issue with the motor bikes?

Maureen: No, NO way. I'm not having such a large area North Evergreen for motorbikes it's too much for officers to cover its too big for mounting operations [...] if we keep that one of the ASB will have to come off. It will have to be either Heol Mustard, or Water End Stores

Chair Jill: [tells the meeting] Okay we'll leave it with Maureen to sort out what can be done.

Similarly at another meeting in Evergreen, the influence of the police administrator in constraining the priorities set is clear:

Lois: Can we have a request for money for diversionary activities for the young people in the summer holidays?

Maureen (non-uniform): No I can't put that as a priority because it's not something the police can achieve between now and the next meeting, so it doesn't fit as a priority unfortunately. Sorry, nothing I can do, that's the way it is, my Inspector would kill me.

Even in affluent Whitewood, the police control of priorities was evident and the extract below reveals how the police officer at Whitewood persuaded residents to adopt a priority that was not directly relevant to them:

I appreciate it's not affecting anyone here but it is important and we want it as a priority for this area as it's an important crime.

Most residents within the disadvantaged areas were keen to focus on longer-term and broader-based solutions to problems rather than adopt the temporary quick-fix solution of targeting symptoms, often favoured by the police. The tight control of priority setting reinforced the existence of a distinct knowledge hierarchy within these meetings, where police expertise and knowledge were privileged and resident knowledge or 'live in' area experience was constructed as less credible. The police often drew on what they considered more reliable sources of intelligence and POP analyses, emphasising professional technologies of voice and choice rather than what were identified as partisan resident perspectives. The police desire to exert control is also evident in their manoeuvres during the meetings and their fluid identifications between viewing themselves as 'owners' of the process or conversely as 'equal partners' in co-governance. In the following extract from an Evergreen meeting, we see how PCSO Wayne and Maureen, the administrator, construct professional identities as 'experts who know best' to close down the discussion and literally 'shut-up' a challenge:

Bob: There will be deaths, don't know trouble closure will cause collateral damage [he gives examples]

Maureen (non-uniform): Shut up Bob

PCSO Wayne: We don't know, too early to say that will happen

Bob: Closure will make life more difficult for the shop on Heol Mustard, you don't appreciate how much they will suffer

Maureen (non-uniform): We do realise closure may have an effect and already spoken with them.

A further example of police attempts to control the PACT process can be seen in their suspension of these meetings in the two months leading up to the May 2010 elections in the UK. The argument, according to one Neighbourhood Inspector, was '*to avoid PACT becoming embroiled as a local platform for party politics*'. The residents and councillors in both Redbank and Evergreen opposed this cancellation, but were powerless to prevent it. The final section of our analysis focuses on the ways that the police attempt to co-opt both councillors and community chairs as partners to facilitate the smooth management of these meetings.

#### *Co-opting councillors and community chairs as partners*

The interviews and meetings with police and councillors revealed the police's aim to co-join councillors as a member of the PACT panel, sitting at the top table and helping to *manage* engagement with communities. This objective however proved to be a source of frustration for the police, with councillors adopting a range of positions and identities at the different PACT meetings. In some neighbourhoods there was real contestation between the identity position of the councillor as 'partner', working closely with the police, or as 'counter-public', representing their own and/or the community's agendas (Barnes et al 2003).

The three PACT localities reflected the range of positions that may be adopted by councillors in these types of meetings. Within advantaged Whitewood, councillors were the most acquiescent to the police's preferred positioning, sitting on the panel as 'police partners' and acting as the conduit between the community and the local authority. At the Redbank PACT (previously a councillor's residents meeting) the councillors were pivotal players. They occupied key roles both in managing and controlling the meetings and in liaising with the local authority. As a result, most of the issues raised in these meetings were local authority, rather than police, matters. One of them, in his frustration, referred to these meetings as "*CACT meetings*" (Councillor and Communities Together) bemoaning the fact that in Redbank the police were not sufficiently engaged, and had left too much of the running and agenda of these meetings to the councillors. Within Evergreen, the police were particularly frustrated as the councillors refused to join the panel at the top table, preferring to sit with the audience (as discussed earlier). These elected officers therefore contributed to the unpredictability of the PACT process, either alleviating or increasing the problems and frustrations experienced by the police at these meetings.

The police guidance on PACT meetings emphasises the appointment of a 'suitable' local community member as chairperson to reinforce the legitimacy and ownership of PACT meetings by the community. The police also viewed community chairs as providing an important facilitative role in meetings that were often conflictual (cf. Becher 2010). In the three PACTs studied, the chairs were chosen by the police and presented to the PACT meetings for endorsement in this role. Evergreen was the first PACT meeting in City to be chaired by a member of the community. The police were very proud that their first chair came from this disadvantaged neighbourhood. As the

Inspector boasted: *'Jill was our biggest critic and now she chairs the PACT for us'*. For most of the fieldwork, the Redbank PACT meetings were chaired by one of the local councillors. At the insistence of the police, the first community chair was appointed in 2009, but held a purely symbolic role, closely guided by the councillors and the police administrator.

In Whitewood, the community chair was a well-respected local resident, who, prior to the establishment of PACT meetings, had been active on a range of local matters and had developed a good relationship with the police. She saw PACT as both an opportunity to *'keep the police on their toes and [...] to thank the police for taking the time to meet with the community'*. This individual also relished the skill involved in running these meetings and saw her role as exerting *'orderly control and preventing awkward elements taking over or causing problems within meetings'*. We see here how the chair assists the police task of managing and controlling these meetings in silencing *'awkward elements'*. Police attempts to control PACT meetings was also evident in a fourth PACT meeting, that was not studied in detail in our research but which provides insights into the potential conflict between residents and the police over the choice of a PACT chair. Residents in this neighbourhood resisted the appointment of an individual chosen by the Police and appointed their own preferred candidate, a local authority community safety worker. This individual acted as a knowledgeable expert, representing the community and insisting on improvements in services that the police *'could or should'* provide. This person was described by a local police officer as a *'thorn in their side'* and was soon replaced as chair by a person who had local police approval.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The main focus of this paper is to examine the practice of co-governance in community meetings involving residents, the police and their public service partners. Our research focused on a diverse range of communities and our aim was to examine the different experiences of disadvantaged and more affluent communities. The paper draws on the findings of a longitudinal ethnography that enabled a detailed bottom-up understanding of co-governance experiences within PACT meetings. There is limited research that focuses on the lived experience of new governance structures generally and of neighbourhood policing and community co-governance specifically. The



present study therefore offers unique insights into these experiences and into the dynamic relationships between policing professionals and different ethnic or class-based communities

PACT meetings represent a bold attempt in the UK to engage with communities in a nationwide programme of informal public meetings. They were intended to develop a multi-agency response to concerns raised by residents, who were tasked with identifying priorities for public service actions. In many respects, they are similar to the beat meetings that were introduced in Chicago in the 1990s. However, as we have shown, these meetings were regarded by most of the relevant stakeholders as police-owned. They were introduced as part of the Neighbourhood Policing programme within the UK and other public service partners took a secondary role. Our concluding discussion, in relating our findings to the existing literature, will be structured around three main themes. Firstly, we will examine the potential for community empowerment through these meetings; secondly, we will focus on the differing experiences of disadvantaged and well-off communities; finally we will discuss police engagement and the extent to which they are able to control these meetings. In conclusion, the implications of our research for the future of co-governance through community meetings will be discussed.

### ***Community empowerment in police public meetings***

Much of the previous research, especially in the UK, focuses on the extent of community influence in formal consultative meetings that were set up in the early 1990s. Although the aim of such meetings was to empower communities (Crawford 1997), many researchers questioned their democratic accountability and referred to the tokenistic nature of public participation in meetings that include only representatives from different communities (Hughes 1994, Morgan 1992). PACT meetings are open to all, but, as other researchers have pointed out, the level of attendance at these meetings is low and they fail to engage a broad cross-section of community residents (Bullock & Sindall 2014, Brunger 2011). Therefore in any discussion of community empowerment, attention first needs to be focused on those citizens who choose not to attend such meetings or who, more importantly, feel excluded. Crawford (1997) refers to the potential regressive effects of such meetings resulting in a moral majority gaining voice and influence and excluding troublesome

others (e.g. young people, minorities, perpetrators). Our interviews with those who felt excluded identified these divisive elements, with the residents of all the PACT meetings being mainly over 50, white, and long standing members of their communities. They constructed themselves as the 'faithful', similar to Stokoe and Wallwork's (2003) 'good citizens' and in contrast to the 'other' in the community and to less worthy citizens (Hughes 2007, Huey & Quirouette 2010).

It has been suggested that citizens who do engage in these types of meetings should have the opportunity to influence decision-making and actions (Yang 2005; Skogan 2006) and the core of regular PACT attendees welcomed the opportunity to be involved. Through our detailed ethnography we have shown how residents, community chairs and councillors frequently challenged police solutions and (in)actions. Within all the communities we studied, the residents engaged in a bottom up search for legitimacy and democracy and we saw how residents and their representatives worked collaboratively to utilise a higher order collective identity (Gilchrist et al 2010) in addressing social justice issues. The core attendees drew on a range of public democracy or professional discourses that emphasised the importance of their knowledge and experience in asserting subject positions as 'caretakers' of their community, as 'local activists' or as 'knowledgeable residents' who demanded a voice and appropriate services. The acceptance of the citizen-consumer or active citizen identity may therefore be not as limited as indicated by Clarke et al (2007) and our approach reveals a range of contextual and historical factors that influence the dynamics of such empowerment (Choi & Lee 2014). We go on to look at the different experiences of advantaged and disadvantaged communities.

### ***Do disadvantaged communities experience progressive or regressive effects?***

Previous research seems to suggest that different types of communities may have greater potential for engagement although the evidence to date presents conflictual findings (Bullock and Sindall 2014). Some argue that community/neighbourhood policing is more readily welcomed by 'better off' residents (Herbert 2006, Westmarland & Clarke 2009) and that the most disadvantaged in society, who experience the highest levels of crime, will be the least able to exert influence (Foot 2009). However others conclude that poverty and neighbourhood disadvantage encourage greater community engagement (Skogan 2006, Pattavina et al 2006). Our

research demonstrated critical differences in the experiences of community engagement in advantaged and disadvantaged neighbourhoods. The well-off community in Whitewood had more positive experiences of engagement but also had far less need to challenge the police within their meetings. In the more deprived communities of Evergreen and Redbank, with worse levels of crime, disorder and quality of life, we suggest that residents struggled to be heard but that their voices were loud! They challenged the ‘quick fix’ short-term solutions of the police, emphasising broader-based solutions, and effective alliances were formed between residents and between councillors in these challenges. We therefore suggest that our findings offer more support for the radical communitarian thesis and for the enabling of ‘communities of fate’ than suggested by some previous research (Gilling 2007, Foot 2009). The residents of Evergreen, for example, were not automatically doubly disadvantaged by the burden of their environmental conditions and the limited levels of participation they were offered. They gained strength from a sense of belonging that came from their stable and long standing community (Gilchrist et al 2010, Bullock and Sindall 2014) that enabled them to form effective alliances in their demands for more effective services.

Our findings on these differential experiences directly contribute to the debate on procedural justice and participation (cf. Bradford 2014). Residents in disadvantaged communities, in demanding better public services, drew on discourses of distributive justice (a comparison of what they receive or how they are treated compared to other neighbourhoods) and outcome justice (the desired outcome for better services) (Bradford 2014, Tyler & Fagan 2008). This suggests that efficacy based on services received, and resource allocation, in comparison to relevant others, are important to publics in neighbourhood-based participation. This contradicts the dominant procedural justice thesis that suggests the need to emphasise the quality of encounters and to focus on positive police community interactions to increase the satisfaction and confidence of citizens with the police (Fielding & Innes 2006, Bradford 2014). Within this study Whitewood was the only site where these positive encounters took place and where there was any indication that gains through procedural justice could be achieved. We therefore suggest caution in assuming that public meetings, particularly within disadvantaged communities, would provide similar opportunities for procedural justice. This adds a neighbourhood dimension and further weight to

previous evidence that cautions the use of a procedural justice perspective to provide legitimacy to police-community interactions (Waddington et al 2015). The influence that can be exerted by different types of communities and any gains achieved through police-community interactions depends on the willingness of the police (and other partners) to share power. The final section of this discussion will explore these power dynamics.

### ***The extent of police control in community co-governance***

Previous research has questioned the capacity and willingness of the police to empower communities in co-governance practices (Westmarland and Clarke 2009, Terpestra 2009, Skogan 2006, Herbert 2006). Studies reveal how police and their public service partners are more comfortable with their own definition of issues and analysis of what should be the key priorities for professional action (cf. Lowe & Innes 2012). In the PACT meetings studied we also identified this type of knowledge hierarchy that dictated the priorities set and the substance of what could be discussed. The police were focused on 'quick hits' and short-term solutions and on presenting 'good news' stories and successful police actions in the different communities. They also attempted to dictate the role and positioning of others within the meetings, for example, in the appointment of 'appropriate' community chairs and in attempting to co-opt councillors as partners. To some extent these meetings could be viewed as a mechanism for intelligence-led policing (Gilling 2007) based on a professional-led agenda that reinforces the view of citizen inputs as geographically specific and highly localised community intelligence (Lowe & Innes 2012). This leaves little space for 'experience based lay knowledge' and community expertise (Elliott et al 2010). While this suggests that the police may attempt to use such meetings as PR exercises or to rubberstamp police and partner actions, such control is not uncontested and our research clearly demonstrates how community residents and councillors, especially in the disadvantaged areas, continually challenged police and partners solutions and (in)actions. The police were frustrated by their failure to co-opt the councillors in these areas as their Local Authority partner. Their more fluid identifications as representatives of the community or as members of political parties created challenges for the police, especially as the location of PACT meetings was frequently co-terminus with electoral wards (Sullivan 2009). Many PACT meetings in disadvantaged areas were angry and full of strong emotions and proved extremely

challenging for the PCSOs and non-uniform administrator, who were often left isolated in their attempts to exert control.

## **Conclusions**

In conclusion we would argue that co-governance involving the police, other public service professionals and community members is more fraught and difficult than suggested by some (Innes & Roberts 2011). The messy, complex reality and practice of the community meetings studied and of community empowerment poses problems for residents as well as for the police and other public service professionals. However, we support earlier suggestions that PACT is not wholly regressive and has potential to make a difference within communities (Bullock and Sindall 2014, Brunger 2011). The present study has provided a more nuanced appreciation of the efficacy of PACT as an accountability mechanism, improving our understanding of the dynamics of participation and empowerment within such meetings. We show how it is too simplistic to view community members as passive and powerless when confronted by professional elites, while recognising how their influence over service delivery may be limited. One resident's comment on PACT was: '*it doesn't do what it says on the tin*' and our research points to some critical areas of change to improve this type of community co-governance. The first relates to the need to improve transparency and actions arising from community derived priorities. One of the problems we highlighted was the lack of a clear reporting structure through which local priorities are progressed within central decision-making forums and tasking structures. The experience and success of the Chicago beat meetings emphasised the importance of these types of reporting mechanisms (Skogan 2006). The second and very familiar focus for change needs to be directed at police (and partner) cultures so that they are more responsive to community voice and challenge (Bullock & Leeney 2013, Bullock 2010, Somerville 2009, Chandler 2000). Our findings suggest that professional positions and identities continue to be privileged resulting in co-governance meetings being less valued and effective in both reach and outcome (Ho-Youn Kim 2013).

However, these recommendations for change need to be viewed in relation to recent police reforms in the UK. The introduction of Police and Crime Commissioners in 2012 heralded a major change in police governance, emphasising the regional accountability of police forces and Chief Police Officers to elected Police Crime

Commissioners (Morgan 2011). At the end of the study period senior police officers indicated that they expected a change in policy away from localism, citizen-led services and PACT meetings. These views may well have influenced the practice of PACT by police officers as there was no evidence of developing community influence or any changes in police practice through the time period of our study. PACT meetings continue to be held in the UK and we would conclude that support for improving their effectiveness is crucial. This support will need to come from Police Crime Commissioners, from police chief officers, other senior public service officers as well as from the public. In an era of austerity the appetite for such improvements may be limited but the quest for more effective accountability and citizen empowerment within co-governance community meetings continues.

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