

Meeting the Challenges of Change

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Extern Conference, 20 October 2008

It is a pleasure to speak with you today and to join you in the celebration of 30 years of Extern in Northern Ireland. Thank you for inviting me to this event, and for the opportunity to say a few words about your organisation and its role within the criminal justice system.

I am particularly interested in the challenges facing policing and justice here and its implications for an organisation such as Extern – grounded in the values and beliefs of the voluntary and community sector – yet, very much part of what is required to deliver a modern, fit for purpose criminal justice system.

Background – Understanding how organisations work

I am also acutely aware that I am the new boy – and still very much in listening mode. My background is in the private sector as a professional management consultant - having worked across the whole of Ireland and overseas for the last 18 years. At this point, I shall get my retaliation in first and say I have heard all the management consultant jokes... I don't need to know the time at this point so your watches are safe!

During this time, however, I have had the opportunity to work across a very wide range of government departments, agencies, voluntary and community bodies in a many jurisdictions from Belfast to Dublin, Hong Kong and New York. One of the many benefits of the job was the opportunity to work with colleagues in a range of areas including health, agriculture, education, justice, law, social welfare, social development, tourism and environment.

I have been struck by the richness and complexity of each area, and the challenges facing senior people in the public sector, as they struggle increasingly to deliver more with less. As a specialist in strategy and organisational development, I have had the opportunity to work with Ministers and Senior Officials as they consider the management challenges of delivering responsive, cost effective and quality services. It has - I hope - given me some insight into how organisations work.

I have been struck both by the similarities in the work they do – irrespective of discipline or jurisdiction - and the challenges facing public sector managers and those in the voluntary and community sector.

They include:

- the difficulties in providing leadership, setting direction and ensuring that there is passion and drive to ensure delivery;
- the difficulties in focusing on outcomes rather than process; and
- the difficulties in understanding what citizens want and ensuring that it is delivered cost effectively.

The role of Criminal Justice Inspection

I have spent the last seven weeks getting to grips with the complexities of the criminal justice system and the position occupied by Criminal Justice Inspection. I have met with many colleagues each with a perspective and insight on the challenges facing *their own organisations and the system overall.*

While, the range of organisations that fall within the remit of the Inspectorate is wide – with all of the associated difficulties that fall out of that - it also provides, for me, one of its greatest strengths.

The Inspectorate is the only unified inspectorate in the UK and Ireland that can look at *all* the agencies – apart from the judiciary – that make up the criminal justice system. This puts us in a unique position to identify issues that are common to some or all agencies, and to promote inter-organisational learning and good practice. It is from this perspective, and my own background in how public sector organisations work, that I offer some thoughts this morning.

Challenges facing the criminal justice system

It seems to me that the challenges facing the criminal justice organisations will come from at least three areas. They are well rehearsed and comprise the often conflicting challenges presented by the pressures of increased local accountability, managing organisational change, and ensuring that standards and practice in service delivery remain best in class. Let me take each one in turn.

➤ **Increased local accountability**

None of us have a crystal ball in relation to the full implementation of devolved government. I have taken as a working assumption that it will be here sooner rather than later. Having a local Minister in Stormont five days a week, with access to the local community and the press, with an Executive Committee hungry for space, will present a huge challenge to the status quo.

As the Lord Advocate of Scotland, the Rt. Hon. Elish Angiolini QC, said this year at a CJI Stakeholder conference “*criminal justice, more than any other area of government activity, is vulnerable to the tyranny of the headline, of the last bad case, of the most recent horrific crime.*” It has been the case in Scotland that circumstances have combined to provide for more searching scrutiny of performance. As she said, accountability was much easier under Westminster control as “*there were more competing attractions to engage the interest of politicians down there.*”

Under a devolved administration, there is no doubt that all criminal justice organisations will come under increasing and relentless scrutiny. This is no bad thing - particularly in Northern Ireland where the criminal justice system has been a contested space for so long. It does mean that the type of independent scrutiny provided by Criminal Justice Inspection will attract even more attention.

One of the particular areas of potential interest is the cost of the criminal justice system. The current budget of £1.3 billion will make it the third largest after health and education. This will give it a prominence and profile that will be different. Particular questions that may arise include:-

- the balance of resources across the criminal justice system. Do they reflect political priorities? Do we have a system that is based on a historical allocation of resources rather than a *planned* approach to service delivery?
- staffing, behaviours and “the way things are done around here” (culture). Are they what are required to deliver a local vision for policing and justice? and
- it will open up the debate about value for money in a more focused way, with a more particular focus about what outcomes to we want from the criminal justice system.

It may also mean a more coherent focus on the linkages between the criminal justice agencies and the devolved departments – of course this is already happening. No-one could look at the issue of mental health in prison, for example, without considering the role of the health service in Northern Ireland.

Inevitably this will require a more outward looking criminal justice system. Can we really address the problems of youth offending without considering why young people are excluded from school, and their progression along a conveyor that for many, stops in prison? Of course I am not suggesting that these issues do not focus people’s minds or that co-operation is not taking place – I am simply saying that under devolved government, these issues will come under a sharper focus.

Will these questions govern the debate moving forward or will it be the headlines that appear in the Sunday papers... a weekly diet of “paedo accused of stalking play parks despite court ban”... that will inevitably focus political minds? It remains to be seen.

Within the immediacy of the gold fish bowl of political accountability, two further sets of pressures will also become apparent.

➤ ***Developing good practice in service delivery***

Standards and practices are constantly changing. What might have been regarded as good practice 10 years ago may be very different now. The development of local accountability may well open up a debate on the type of criminal justice system we want in the future. Will it, as the Lord Advocate of Scotland says, be a tyranny of the headline or a more informed debate about the critical challenges facing criminal justice?

- How should the police engage with the community? How do we reduce

- police bureaucracy and move more resources to the front line?
- What do we want our prisons to do in relation to resettlement and re-offending?
- How long should it take to get from the point of arrest, to prosecution and sentence?
- How do we supervise the most dangerous people when they leave prison and what are the implications of a public protection focus?
- How should victims be treated regarding decisions made by criminal justice agencies?

These issues are particularly challenging in Northern Ireland as the system emerges into a post-conflict agenda. How far is practice behind elsewhere in the world and in what areas are we the leaders for change?

➤ **Focusing on Delivery**

A consideration of what practice is required is only part of the picture – there also needs to be discussion on how services are delivered.

In this regard the agenda is relatively clear cut. Getting ‘more for less’ have become the watch words for public sector reform – or as it has been put more succinctly by others “*doing the right things and doing things right*”. More than ever before, the emerging agenda will place an even *greater* focus on how organisations work and the value that they deliver.

This means explicitly examining:

- firstly leadership within organisations and the role it plays in setting direction and ensuring delivery. To this I would add a stronger focus on corporate governance;
- secondly, a focus on how services are delivered. Do they provide value for money? Who is best placed to deliver services? Is there a connection between the stated intent of management and delivery on the ground? and
- thirdly, a stronger concentration on the outcomes achieved for the money that has been spent. What are we getting for the £1.3 billion we spend on the criminal justice system? Is it achieving the desired outcomes? Publishing this information will help raise public confidence in the criminal justice system.

Our work within the Inspectorate has shown that there are a range of issues to be addressed moving forward.

They include the need to:

- move beyond the silos of individual organisations;
- develop effective partnerships across agencies;
- share information to ensure joined up delivery of services;
- understand each others roles and responsibilities to avoid duplication; and
- share best practice in what works.

The role of the Voluntary and Community Sector

The work of Criminal Justice Inspection has considered the work and role of the voluntary sector on a number of occasions - either as a direct study or as part of a thematic review of wider issues, such as the management of high risk offenders in the community or the resettlement of offenders.

The contribution made by the voluntary and community sector to the criminal justice system is immense. The work is extremely diverse and ranges from custody related services and diversionary measures for young people to working with offenders in the community. We noted in an earlier review that the voluntary and community sector makes a distinctive and additional contribution to the working of the system.

This is directly illustrated by work undertaken by Extern and others in the provision of hostel accommodation. As you will be aware, Northern Ireland is unique in that all hostels that accommodate offenders are provided by the voluntary and community sector. Our recent Inspection of Approved Premises highlighted the important contribution made by Extern and other organisations to public safety. We documented many aspects of good practice in this difficult area and the pressures facing approved premises.

As we noted in this report, this system of provision has 'evolved' over the years, largely driven by the demands of criminal justice agencies. We recommended that there should be a strategy debate between the statutory and the voluntary and community sector that should take account of the configuration of the Approved Premises estate including such issues as geographical location and the appropriate mix in each category. This means a need for hostel providers to develop a statement of purpose. We also recommended that Approved Premises funding levels should be reviewed and related to the new statements of purpose.

The current head of the Crown Prosecution Service, Sir Ken Macdonald QC said recently that "*people do not have confidence in organisations they don't understand or know nothing about*". This seems an interesting point to make in the context of managing high risk offenders in the community. The balance between the need to manage your profile in local communities while, at the same time, demonstrating that appropriate arrangements are in place - is a difficult one to strike.

It is also important to be clear about the purpose of the provision. As we say in our inspection report, the role of Approved Premises cannot and should not replicate prison in the community. It is an important area however, as we strive to improve the confidence of people in the criminal justice system while, at the same time, focusing on the need to reduce re-offending.

The environment within which hostels work is likely to become more complex as public protection issues increase, and the workings of the Criminal Justice Order becomes apparent. These tensions illustrate, in a particular way, the nature of the debate moving forward

Implications for Extern

Looking to the future it seems to me that there will be:

- much greater public scrutiny of the justice system and the organisations within it – what it does and what effect it has;
- a focus on what practices exist in each organisation - how far we are behind or ahead of what happens elsewhere;
- greater emphasis on the linkages that exist both across the system and between criminal justice organisations and the wider public sector in Northern Ireland; and finally
- a sharper focus on leadership, accountability and outcomes.

So what does this mean for Extern? I believe that you are well placed to meet the challenges of change. As the headlines in yesterday's paper show you already live in a world of close public scrutiny in relation to the work that you do.

Over the last 30 years you have built up an impressive track record of delivery. Moreover, your work cuts across the organisational boundaries that all too often can block effective service delivery.

And working in the voluntary and community sector means extensive experience in doing more – if not with less – at least with the same as you struggle to meet current and emerging needs.

Many of the challenges I believe that will emerge you have direct experience in addressing. It seems to me that this will make you well placed to deal with the next 30 years – whatever this may bring.

Thank you.