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# **Police-Community Engagement: Questions of implementation and outcome**

**N8 Policing Research Partnership:  
Community Engagement Workshop**

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# The argument



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- Community engagement has become an increasingly important concept within policing – offering both instrumental and expressive benefits
- It informs a range of policies which pose significant implementation challenges, but which may also presents certain risks in terms of outcomes
- Both implementation and outcome questions should be considered when embarking on the policy and practice of ‘community engagement’

# Unpacking 'community engagement'



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- A rubric term under which sit multiple (often overlapping) ambitions
- Processes: Informing, consulting, collaborating
- Outputs: Accountable, responsive, effective
- Outcomes: Confidence, trust, legitimacy
- A shorthand referent for many characteristics of 'good' local policing (e.g. visible, accessible, familiar, deliberative, inclusive, representative etc)

# Questions of implementation



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- Is community engagement easiest to do with/in those communities where it may be least needed?
- Is practice skewed towards those with the ‘loudest voices’ but also those who are ‘easiest to listen to’?
- Is it seen as ‘specialist work’ and, if so, might this absolve more ‘generalist’ officers of responsibility?
- Is there a cultural challenge (for police and communities) to be overcome and, if so, how might this be achieved?

# Questions of outcome



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- Is there a risk of community engagement over-inflating public expectations of what the police (and partner agencies) can realistically do and deliver?
- Is there a risk of 'lay knowledge' leading to the increased marginalisation of the 'usual suspects', hardening lines of difference between local publics?
- Is there a risk to the (actual/perceived) 'professional expertise' and 'detached stance' of police, central to notions of impartiality and equity of service delivery?

# Concluding remarks



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- Community engagement is a crucial aspect of effective and legitimate local policing
- Important to have two-way conversations - which are both *backward-looking* and *future-looking* – particularly with those most affected by policing
- Thinking about the constraints and ambiguities of community engagement might help to circumvent unforeseen and problematic outcomes