

Julia Middleton speaks.....

Vision Panel: Julia Middleton

It would be hugely satisfying if we could sort out community safety. It would be simple and satisfying if we could figure out that community safety was entirely Peter's problem. And frankly, if he worked a bit harder and a bit better and we could give him a bit more money, he could just get on and sort it! Life would be very simple if it was all Peter's problem.

The difficulty of course is the complexity of the players and that nothing is one person's problem. There are often in my experience professionals missing from the community safety discussion. Those of you with experience of Common Purpose will know that you start with trying to engage more and more people, and more and more professions in your partnership. In fact I've learned that the definition of the word 'partnership' is the suppression of loathing in the pursuit of funding! Which makes being at Thames Valley Partnership particularly exciting!

My experience on the whole is pretty grim, and yet there is something very exciting when you can see two and two making six or seven for a change. The problem is you try to engage more people and the difficulty is there are so many others to involve that in my limited experience you will only do that by pestering them for such a long time that often you

just give up. The other thing is if it could all be Peter's problem then it wouldn't be ours, which might be wonderful — the thought that we wouldn't have to take any responsibility for issues of community safety.

It has to be said I get really naffed off with people who spend their whole lives slagging off Blair and the Government. Frankly if I were a politician I would take the view that if I am expected to win this football match and half the team doesn't turn up, because most citizens of this country are some form of sleepwalking citizens who don't actually engage and frankly just sit there expecting Peter — or Blair — to solve the problem don't expect too much. But actually in truth, it isn't Peter's problem, it's our problem and that of course becomes immensely difficult because if it's our problem, then it's down to us to do something about it. Then of course when you do begin to do something about it as citizens, you'll be pursued by some nasty pundit who tells you, you have no right to do anything because you're not a politician. They've forgotten what democracy is. The real need is for all of us to engage and to take part. I sat with this woman last night who is a stand-up comedian, an immensely disabled lady who is incredibly funny. She was talking about as she called it the "creative courage" to be a stand-up comedian and to really go out there on a limb and make a fool of yourself with no idea if you're going to be able to take the audience with you. And I was thinking, yes, that's what great citizens do. They take part in the partnerships but occasion they make complete fools of themselves and they really go out on a limb and they really push something that's really, really hard to do and impossible to listen to. And actually might even go counter to what everybody else believes. But if you have a passion...

You'll find the creative courage to go out and not just sit and nod, but actually get involved.