



Scrutiny Report

Fear of crime in North Lincolnshire

January 2011



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FOREWORD FROM THE CHAIR



**Councillor
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Chair of the Safer
and Stronger
Communities
Scrutiny Panel

This report sets out the findings and recommendations of the panel's review into the 'fear of crime in North Lincolnshire'.

Crime and the fear of crime is a major issue of concern for the people of North Lincolnshire. But while crime rates locally have fallen by an impressive 15.8 per cent during 2009-2010, people's fear of crime has actually increased. Fear of crime is an issue that affects our most vulnerable residents and it is something that can have a real impact on their daily lives.

The Panel heard that members of the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership had implemented many initiatives aimed at tackling crime in North Lincolnshire, which were clearly successful in reducing crime locally. However, as good as the partnership may be, if it doesn't clearly inform the community what it is doing then why should local residents believe the neighbourhood is safer? Or why should residents come forward with information or have confidence in the police and local agencies to reduce crime?

It is perfectly understandable for the Partnership to focus on the practical side of reducing crime, while putting on hold tasks such as communications that seem less important. But communication is an essential element in building confidence. The more that people know about action to tackle crime then the more confidence they are likely to have in their local services, and the more likely they are to get involved by reporting crimes and acting as witnesses.

As part of the review, members conducted an online survey into residents fear of crime in North Lincolnshire. To promote the survey, the council utilised social networking sites. Due to the popularity and accessibility of these sites, the members received their best response to one of their surveys. This is evidence in itself that members of the Partnership need to 'think outside the box' in how they communicate with local residents, as it's only right and proper that local communities know of the excellent work partner agencies are undertaking to make North Lincolnshire a safer place to live and work.

I would like to personally thank the members of the scrutiny panel for their hard work and commitment towards producing the report and highlighting recommendations. I would also like to thank the many partners of the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership for their co-operation and for answering members questions so honestly and openly. As ever, the willing co-operation from many people always adds significant value to scrutiny reviews.

BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

Despite considerable improvements in reducing crime rates in North Lincolnshire, evidenced by the recent British Crime Survey which stated that the chances of becoming a victim of crime are the lowest they have been for twenty years, there still remains a disproportionate fear of crime among the public. Fear of crime is related to people's perceptions of how likely they are to be a victim of crime as well as the reality of the situation.

In the majority of cases, this may be a response to crime in the local area. However, particularly if people exaggerate the risk of becoming a victim of crime, fear of crime can start to take over people's lives and produce emotional as well as practical responses.

This is evidenced by data from the inaugural Humberside Police Authority Citizen Panel - Wave 1 - February 2010, which stated that 73.3% of respondents believed crime levels had either stayed the same or increased. Yet Humberside Police performance for North Lincolnshire (B Division) from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 showed that crime had actually fallen by 15.8%.

Therefore, in view of the importance of this issue and the very real impact it can have on the daily lives of some of North Lincolnshire's most vulnerable residents, the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel agreed to look more closely at the factors behind fear of crime, the reasons for its growth and the actions being taken by the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership.

SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

The panel agreed to focus on a number of key issues. These were:-

- Why residents of North Lincolnshire appear more fearful of crime than the actual incidence of crime suggest, and
- What North Lincolnshire Council and its partners are doing to address this

RECOMMENDATIONS

The final recommendations of the panel are summarised below:

Recommendation 1

That working alongside the local media, consideration be given to members of the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership publishing a bi-monthly four page newsletter of local crime prevention initiatives, community safety initiatives and quality of life issues. This will allow all partners to publish the articles they deem appropriate, whilst maintaining full editorial control.

Recommendation 2

Where large screen televisions are owned and displayed in areas of high footfall by statutory and non-statutory partners, for example in libraries, local links, leisure centres and accident and emergency departments, consideration be given to showing corporate messages giving information on crime related issues, education, health related issues and seasonal campaigns. .

Recommendation 3

That the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership consider running competitions in schools and colleges to encourage young people to think about crime and safety issues. Prizes could include students having films and art work shown on the community televisions described previously.

Recommendation 4

Members recognise the increasing popularity and accessibility of the internet as a source of public information. However, the Safer Neighbourhoods website is outdated and low on up to date content. Therefore, a complete overhaul of the website is required to include, for example, a media player so visitors can watch partnership TV clips.

Recommendation 5

Members were greatly impressed with the Safe Links website. This website is an excellent source of information and advice for residents of North Lincolnshire and should be publicised accordingly.

Recommendation 6

Members were reassured to hear that all Community Safety Partners were proactive in promoting the positive work they were doing to reduce crime. However, the creation of a properly resourced multi agency communications strategy to ensure successful media messages are delivered from Community Safety Partners is essential.

Recommendation 7

Although the council has created a Section 17 Group, members would still like to see all service areas further embed their commitment and responsibilities to community safety and to Section 17 requirements.

Recommendation 8

Members would like to see a greater commitment given to the multi-agency Intergenerational Steering Group which is currently in existence. In particular, greater emphasis should be placed on the creation of more intergenerational projects between young and older people which break down the prejudices which frequently exist

Recommendation 9

That a colour booklet, designed and written by the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership be produced to raise awareness of the raft of crime interventions which the Partnership are involved in. This booklet to be available at the 'meet the people' sessions, circulated to local voluntary and community groups and using geo-demographic data provided by Mosaic Public Sector software, to be delivered to 5,000 local households who the software identifies as living in areas which are populated by those who are most receptive to and likely to read leaflets delivered through the door.

Recommendation 10

That the Partnership reaffirms its commitment to holding 'meet the people' events where, instead of asking residents to come to public meetings, the Partnership goes to them. Members of the Partnership would be in attendance to discuss any issues or problems relating to community safety and anti-social behaviour.

Recommendation 11

This Panel wholeheartedly supports Humberside Police's commitment to neighbourhood policing and to the high visibility policing provided by Police Community Support Officers and strongly recommends that this commitment continues.

Recommendation 12

That Humberside Police considers the comments made in our survey in relation to the call-centre and the 0845 number

Recommendation 13

That Humberside Police and North Lincolnshire Council explore the development of new technology which would allow their respective call centre operators to transfer callers to the relevant organisation, for example, if a caller rings Humberside Police with a trading standards issue then the operator transfers the caller through to the council.

Recommendation 14

Members believe that the 'unpaid work in the community' Community Sentence scheme has great value in helping to raise confidence in the Criminal Justice System. The panel feel that the scheme has the potential for dealing with local environmental concerns, itself a major factor in fear of crime. Members support the promotion of unpaid environmental work and people having a say in what work should be undertaken.

FINDINGS

1. National Perspective

The findings of the recent British Crime Survey (BCS), an annual analysis of crime figures for England and Wales, were both striking and positive. Positive because crime is going down; striking because the findings are at odds with public perceptions.

According to the BCS, crime fell by 4%. Crimes recorded by the police fell by 8% to 4.3m incidents over the year to June 2010, with large falls in car crime, criminal damage and burglary.

The number of murders, manslaughters, and child killings has dropped by 17 per cent to a 20-year low. Thefts and domestic burglaries are up, but overall crime is down by 4 per cent, with violent crime and gun crime down by six and 17 per cent respectively. And yet, as surveys consistently show, though public perceptions of crime fluctuate (generally quite mildly), the prevailing view steadfastly holds that crime is much more widespread and out of control than it really is.

What does the British Crime Survey reveal about current public misconceptions?

Far more people think certain types of crime are a problem nationally than think are a problem in their local area. This suggests that survey responses reflect a generalised anxiety about crime in Britain, rather than the personal experiences of respondents. The proportion of people who perceive an increase in crime nationally (75 per cent) is far higher than that which perceives an increase in crime locally (36 per cent). The difference is most stark for knife crime (93 per cent of people think there has been an increase nationally,

compared with 29 per cent locally) and gun crime (86 per cent and 16 per cent, respectively), despite actual reductions in both these offences.

The BCS interviews tens of thousands of people on a rolling basis in an attempt to identify crimes which may not have been reported to the police.

Recorded Crime In Year To June 2010

Total incidents: 4.3m - down 8%
Criminal damage: 768,503 - down 17%
Vehicle crime: 479,218 - down 16%
Home burglaries: 263,646 - down 8%
Sexual offences: 55,217 - Up 8%
Most serious sex offences: 44,513 - Up 10%
All violence: 862,965 - down 4%
Knife crime: 29,981 - down 7%

An Ipsos MORI report¹ found that while overall crime has fallen during the lifetime of the previous government (-32%), only one in five of the population accept this, with 55% seeing crime and violence as one of the most worrying issues. In fact, crime and violence have consistently been a higher priority for the British public than the US and many other European countries since 1997.

2. Local Position

In February 2010, Humberside Police Authority commissioned an independent research company to recruit residents within the region to form part of its Citizens Panel.

The entire panel consisted of 6000 people across the four territorial divisions in the Humberside Police area, represented by 1500

people in each to ensure that localised variations in views are highlighted.

Data from the inaugural Citizens Panel² showed that when asked ‘how would you say the level of crime has changed in your area over the past year?’ the 1500 respondents stated that -

| | Humberside Police Force as a whole | B Division (North Lincolnshire) |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| A lot more | 4.7% | 4.1% |
| A bit more | 13.7% | 14.5% |
| About the same | 52.9% | 54.7% |
| A bit less | 17.9% | 16.8% |
| A lot less | 4.5% | 3.7% |
| Not sure/ don't know | 6.2% | 6.1% |

Therefore, 73.3% of those questioned thought that crime levels in North Lincolnshire (B Division) had either stayed the same or it had got worse. This was compared to 71.3% for Humberside Police force as a whole.

However, if you compare this to the actual number of crimes reported in North Lincolnshire, the figures demonstrate a marked improvement in performance as the table below demonstrates -

Performance - North Lincolnshire (B Division) - 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010³

| | North Lincolnshire | Forcewide |
|-------------------|--------------------|-----------|
| All crime | -15.8% | -10.1% |
| Domestic Burglary | -30.8% | -22.7% |
| Vehicle Crime | -39.1% | -22.4% |
| Robberies | -29.2% | -20.8% |
| Assaults | -10.7% | -1.5% |
| Criminal Damage | -13.5% | -7.1% |

However, despite these significant improvements and in line with the national situation, there has been a growing perception gap between actual recorded crime levels and how safe people say they feel.

Scrutiny Panel Fear of Crime Survey

The Home Office has established a crime reduction website which enables local partnerships to find ways to reduce fear of crime. The website contains a number of toolkits to identify specific concerns about fear of crime, how to determine the best approach to the issue locally and how fear of crime is a particular issue for young and older people. The scrutiny panel used the toolkit to draft its own questionnaire, which was accessible via the council's website, as well as in hard copy at all local links and libraries.

The consultation ran for six weeks and attracted 215 responses. Although this was a

significant number compared to other online surveys, the number was still too low to be a truly representative sample. However, the data provided by the 215 respondents was interesting. Some of the key messages include: -

- 88% of respondents believed that the local crime rate had either stayed the same or increased since two years ago (this was compared to 73.3% who responded to Humberside Police Authority's Citizens Panel).
- 28% of respondents thought this was the case based on their personal experiences of crime.
- Respondents' number one priority for crime partners was tackling drunken behaviour, followed by violent assaults and drug/substance abuse.
- More police foot and/or bike patrols was respondents number one preference for making them feel safer, followed by the police responding quicker to emergency calls.
- Perhaps more disappointing for the members was that only 21% of respondents were aware of Neighbourhood Action Teams in their area with only 42% of people knowing of the existence of Neighbourhood Watch Groups.
- Similarly, only 51% of respondents knew how to contact their local neighbourhood police officer.
- The most overwhelming response to any question was respondents' comments on their personal experiences of using the Humberside Police non-emergency number. There were many negative comments on the service received by callers to the non-emergency number.
- There have been no changes in perceptions of local safety. During the day, 87% (88% in 2008) state that they felt either very or fairly safe, including 49% who feel very safe. At night the proportion who feel safe falls to 53% (52% in 2008), while 32% (31% in 2008) state that they feel unsafe.
- Looking in more detail at the views expressed regarding safety at night they show that there are particular groups significantly more likely to state that they feel unsafe in their local area after dark.
- These are females (38% compared to 25% of males), those who are dissatisfied with the local area (51% compared with 27% of those satisfied with the local area), and, those who feel that they do not belong very strongly to the neighbourhood (42% compared with 25% of those who do feel they belong).
- Analysis by rurality shows that 64% of those residents living in rural wards feel safe after dark compared with 39% of those living in urban wards. Conversely, 44% of those living in urban wards feel unsafe after dark compared with 22% of those living in rural wards (a significant difference).

Performance Framework

Work to tackle fear of crime and public reassurance is exactly the sort of cross cutting initiative that fits well within the structure of the local area agreement (LAA) framework. In North Lincolnshire, the following national indicators are all included in the LAA:

- NI 5 – overall/general satisfaction with local area
- NI 17 – perceptions of anti-social behaviour
- NI 21 – dealing with local concerns about anti-social behaviour and crime by the local council and police

Performance of NI 5, NI 17 and NI 21 is listed in the table below -

| | Current Performance | Target |
|-------|--|---|
| NI 5 | 81.1 % (taken from the 2008 Place Survey) | Not set, as reporting on the indicator is not expected to take place in 2010. |
| NI 17 | 18.3 % (2008-09 result) | 15.3 % |
| NI 21 | 22 % (2008-09 result) | 25 % |

The scrutiny panel, as part of their fear of crime survey, agreed to include a question on 'whether respondents agree or disagree that the police and the local council are actively dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime issues in your local area (NI 21).

| | Humberside Police Authority Citizens' Panel | Humberside Police Force | 2010 Scrutiny Panel Survey |
|---------------------------|---|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| Strongly agree | 16.3 | 14.3 | 16.36 |
| Tend to agree | 48.7 | 50.9 | 31.31 |
| Neither agree or disagree | 7.0 | 8.9 | 21.50 |
| Tend to disagree | 14.6 | 13.8 | 23.36 |
| Strongly disagree | 5.8 | 5.1 | 7.48 |
| Don't know | 7.7 | 7.0 | N/A |

The figures for Humberside Police Authority Citizens' Panel and the scrutiny panel's own survey are noticeably different. As was stated previously, the scrutiny panel survey saw only 215 people complete the questionnaire, compared to 1500 who completed the Citizens Panel. However, members were confident that their own survey was valid and the data could be used accordingly. However, what the data didn't tell members was why the respondents gave a particular answer to the question e.g. what factors influenced why the people 'strongly agreed' with the statement for example.

While improvements are being made in people's perceptions and fear of crime there is still a considerable amount of work to do in making people actually feel safe.

Understanding Fear of Crime

The relationship between crime figures and fear of crime is not simple.

British Crime Survey figures show that people who are more likely to experience crime — such as those from deprived areas and Black and Minority Ethnic groups — are also more likely to be worried about crime. However, people in areas where there is a low level of crime may also experience a high level of fear.

Fear of crime is related to people's perceptions of how likely they are to be a victim of crime, which can be influenced by a number of different things. For example, statistically, older people are less likely to experience crime than any other age group but experience a higher level of fear of crime.

Researchers found that this is because they tend to base their knowledge of crime on their perception of what is happening, including changes in society that they may struggle to come to terms with, which may exaggerate the actual risk of being a victim of crime. It is still important to address older people's fears. As research by Help the Aged has shown, older people are more likely to be a victim of crime if they live in a socially deprived area.

The impact of certain types of crimes may affect the way people feel — for example women may be particularly concerned about being raped because of the seriousness of the offence, rather than the risk of it happening to them.

Being in an area that they do not know can affect people's perceptions towards crime and make them more worried about becoming a victim. Areas may also feel unsafe at different times of day, particularly at night and when there are few other people about.

The presence of drunken people or large groups of young people can have a large influence on people's concerns about their safety. Graffiti, litter, and other types of anti-social behaviour that give the impression that an area is not being looked after can also increase people's concerns. Fear of crime may also be higher in areas where crime prevention measures such as increased lighting and CCTV have not been installed.

The Home Office toolkit on tackling fear of crime states that there are several reasons why people experience fear of crime, which includes aspects of both reality and perception:

- People live in a high crime area.
- They have already been a victim of crime.
- They feel vulnerable.
- They are poorly informed.
- They feel powerless and isolated.
- They are subject to persistent anti-social behaviour.
- Their local area is experiencing economic or environmental decline.

People may also fear crime if they think that nothing or not enough is being done to reduce crime and anti-social behaviour in the locality.

However, one of the reasons fear of crime remains a particularly difficult problem is because possible ways to reduce fear of crime, such as increased crime prevention in the area, may in fact result in an increase in the levels of fear of crime. For example, if people are being informed of ways to secure their properties and possessions, some residents may interpret the message negatively, in that the message is actually saying you live in a crime hot spot and need to be extra careful.

Confidence in the Judicial System

Evidence suggests that although people are interested in the Criminal Justice System and know more about the response to crime, actual knowledge and awareness of what is being done to tackle crime is low.

One direct result of people being uninformed about the response to crime is that the lack of understanding of what is being done to protect the public can lead to a belief that nothing is being done, which impacts on confidence.

Awareness among the public of what is being done to tackle crime in their local area is low, with two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents claiming they feel either 'very poorly' or quite poorly' informed⁶, and a majority (62%) also saying they would like to receive more information about how crime is being tackled in their area⁷.

In order to find out more about the measures being taken to improve the judicial system in

North Lincolnshire, members agreed to speak to officers from the Magistrates Court, Humberside Probation Service, Humberside Police and the Youth Offending Service.

Magistrates' Court

The Magistrates' Court has an important role in helping to influence the public's opinion of the criminal justice system. The experiences of witnesses, defendants and visitors and the messages sent out to the public can have a big effect on public confidence in the judicial system.

Members heard from North Lincolnshire's Deputy Justices' Clerk who informed them that magistrates are very proactive toward community engagement. All schools in North Lincolnshire are invited to participate in an annual 'school project'. This initiative allows all school children to attend the Magistrates Court, speak to magistrates and observe a court hearing. Magistrates also extend an open invitation to all voluntary and community groups to request that they attend their respective meetings to learn more about the work of the judiciary.

Although magistrates are proactive with their community engagement, they are unable to communicate directly with the media as they have to maintain their independence. Magistrates are bound by strict Sentencing Guidelines which are freely available from the Ministry of Justice website. However, many residents have their own interpretation of what an appropriate punishment for a crime should be and, without the magistrates being

able to communicate with the media, it is very difficult to educate the public as to the reasons why a certain punishment has been imposed onto an offender.

Members were also concerned to hear that as a result of the re-organisation of the number of courts nationally, the Ministry of Justice announced on 14 December 2010 that Goole Magistrates' Court was to close, with no decision being taken on the future of Scunthorpe court. This is of great concern due to the possible move away from local justice.

Law Enforcement

The Police are the foundation of the Criminal Justice System. It is important that the Police are visible and approachable to their local communities.

Neighbourhood Policing Teams therefore have an important role in providing a very visible police presence in the local community.

Elected members were extremely complimentary about the work undertaken at a local level by neighbourhood police officers. However, data from the scrutiny panel's survey showed that 51 per cent of respondents did not know how to contact their local neighbourhood police officer.

Many people feel that they are not receiving enough information about local policing practice and priorities, for instance: how things are going, where problems are and what neighbourhood police teams are doing⁸. Also relevant to the lack of understanding is

that many people are not aware of how, when and who to contact regarding different crime issues. For example, whilst most people are aware of the 999 number for contacting the police for emergencies or the reporting of urgent crimes, there is more limited knowledge of other channels for contacting the police, particularly in the case of less urgent/serious problems or anti social behaviour, or for general concerns about crime in their area. This was evident from the scrutiny panel survey, where 33% of respondents had never used or thought of using the 0845 non-emergency number, whilst 13% of respondents were not aware of the existence of the number.

Perhaps more concerning to the members was the downbeat comments received from respondents regarding their experience of using the non-emergency number were. Many respondents were critical of the service they received or the perceived lack of action arising from the call.

As stated previously, Humberside Police performance for North Lincolnshire (B Division) from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2010 showed that crime had actually fallen by 15.8%. Members had every sympathy with our Police colleagues in that whilst their efforts to reduce crime had brought such great rewards, members of the public unfortunately held a contrary point of view.

It is the members belief that the Criminal Justice System must be seen to be dealing firmly with anti social behaviour and low level

crime. This should help to instill greater faith in the criminal justice system and reduce fear of crime. Members feel that such 'low level' crime has an accumulative affect on people's perceptions of fear of crime.

Unpaid Work

Members had an interesting and informative discussion with the Director of Probation, Humberside Probation Trust (North and North East Lincolnshire Local Delivery Unit).

Under the Criminal Justice Act (2003), a single Community Order with a range of 12 possible requirements replaced the different community sentences previously available for adults. Courts are able to choose different requirements to make up a bespoke Community Order. Requirements include curfews, unpaid work in the community, supervision etc.

Members were particularly interested in the 'unpaid work in the community' Community Order.

In the Humberside Area, some 160,000 hours of unpaid work is undertaken by offenders annually on community based projects. Of this total, 21,000 hours was completed in North Lincolnshire. For Humberside as a whole, this equates to just short of a million pounds worth of free labour that local communities benefit from each year.

Work undertaken in Albert Marsden court in Scunthorpe and in various parts of Westcliff are excellent examples where the community

has seen first hand the benefits of the Community Order. Examples of unpaid work in the community include the removal of litter, fly tipping and other environmental improvements.

Statistics show that there is 25.3 % reoffending rate for offenders who participate in Community Sentences compared to 65% of offenders who don't participate in those projects.

However, the general public still view prison as the ultimate deterrent, predominantly as there is a very limited understanding of what Probation Services are provided locally.

Members learnt that one of the strengths of the 'unpaid work in the community' "Community Sentence" is that people have the opportunity to put forward suggestions for suitable projects they would like to see offenders complete as part of a community sentence. It also represents a visible demonstration of restorative justice. However, awareness of both the availability of the scheme and the scheme in action were limited, even though all residents were informed locally of a scheme and offenders wore high visibility jackets.

Environmental Issues

As stated previously, the fear of crime is not simply about being a victim of crime. Graffiti, litter, and other types of anti-social behaviour that give the impression an area is not being looked after can also increase people's concerns.

Members were delighted to hear that repairing broken and vandalised facilities, removing litter and generally improving the appearance of a local area is having an impact on resident's fear of crime. The implementation of the Handy Person Scheme and StreetRight are just two examples of initiatives the council has put in place to assist local residents in improving communities.

In addition, officers from Neighbourhood and Environmental Services are proactive in attending Neighbourhood Action Team meetings; the use of direct magazine is widely used as well as the council's website and 'bluetooth' on mobile phones is also used to educate and persuade residents on caring for their community.

Officers from Neighbourhood and Environmental Services liaise with their colleagues from Humberside Probation Trust in terms of Community Orders in North Lincolnshire. Interestingly, the success of these schemes was mixed due to the lack of supervision and the tasks deemed as 'inappropriate' for offenders to undertake. This was unfortunate as members had heard of examples whereby Community Orders were extremely successful in North Lincolnshire.

Youths

According to the Home Office Crime Reduction website, young people are often perceived as one of the main groups of perpetrators when it comes to criminal offences and particularly anti-social

behaviour. Yet the 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) reveals that over three quarters (78%) of young people aged 10 to 25 years had not committed any of the 20 core offences covered by the survey⁹.

Furthermore, young people are more likely to be victims of crime, with young respondents aged from 10 to 15 years being more likely than those aged 16 to 25 years to report being a victim of a personal crime, often in school or college, and more likely to know the perpetrator. For 16 to 25 years olds, incidents were most likely to take place in a pub, bar or nightclub, or in the street, where it was more likely that the perpetrator was not known to the victim.

Anti-social behaviour is a high profile national government priority. In the recent 2009 Place Survey, residents were asked to indicate how big a problem they believe seven specific issues of anti-social behaviour were in their area (listed in the table below). The full responses are shown below. These perceptions remain largely unchanged since 2008. The exception is the issue of teenagers hanging around the streets, as the proportion indicating this as a problem has fallen by 9 percentage points, from 47 per cent (2008) to 38 per cent (2009).

The following table compares results between surveys carried out in 2006, 2008, and 2009.

| Thinking about your local area, how much of a problem do you think each of the follow | Very / Fairly big problem 2009 | Very / Fairly big problem 2008 | Very / Fairly big problem 2006 | +/- 2008 to 2009 |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------|
| Noisy neighbours or loud parties | 13 | 12 | 18 | +1 |
| Teenagers hanging around the streets | 38 | 47 | 58 | -9 |
| Rubbish or litter lying around | 34 | 34 | 45 | 0 |
| Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property or vehicles | 32 | 33 | 42 | -1 |
| People using or dealing drugs | 26 | 27 | 36 | -1 |
| People being drunk or rowdy in public places | 27 | 28 | 28 | -1 |
| Abandoned or burnt out cars | 6 | 7 | 16 | -1 |

Whilst the situation is improving, teenagers hanging around on the streets (11% in 2009, 14% in 2008) is the issue most likely to be described as a very big problem in each area.

Trading Standards

Trading Standards in North Lincolnshire contribute significantly, through various initiatives, to reducing the fear of crime and tackling crime and disorder. Members were informed that officers from Trading Standards are currently focusing on underage alcohol sales, doorstep crime and internet crime as priorities.

Schemes such as Trader Watch Zones which monitor 'cold calling' and the Home Service Directory which is an approved list of traders have proved effective in reducing potential low level criminal activity targeted at elderly and vulnerable householders. Recently, using new powers under the Enterprise Act 2002,

the service has been able to deal more speedily with rogue traders preying on residents.

The purchase of a range of goods can contribute to anti-social behaviour or crime, such as alcohol, fireworks, age-restricted knives and spray paints. Trading Standards work to restrict the sale of these items to minors. Particularly effective, the members believe, have been the joint activities between Trading Standards and Humberside Police in visiting licensed premises and attempting to make test purchases of alcohol. The targeting of premises and retailers who sell alcohol to people under age has been effective in tackling and reducing drunken and rowdy behaviour in town centres. These joint activities have a positive effective on reducing fear of crime.

Media Representation

Members are fully aware that the media has perhaps the greatest impact on people's views on crime and anti-social behaviour. Beyond personal experience (or that of people we know) the media is a key way that we are informed about crime and the response to crime. When people were asked in the scrutiny panel survey how they form their opinions about whether crime is going up or down, 23 % of respondents believed that crime levels had either stayed the same or risen as a result of what they had read in the local paper. Yet the reality is that recorded crime for North Lincolnshire actually fell by 15.8 % last year.

While the media may present a useful channel for informing the public about the response to crime and anti-social behaviour, there is also a concern that the media presents sensationalised coverage around crime, tending to focus on the most serious crimes, and giving an impression that crime is more widespread than it actually is.

National research into the content of news about crime found that 45% of all crimes reported in newspapers in the UK involve sex or violence, compared with only 3% of actual reported crime⁴, reinforcing the view that there is a tendency for crime reporting to focus on the sensational. Although it is difficult to quantify the impact this is having on people's views of crime, it does suggest that there is some truth in the assertion that crime is being portrayed as a bigger problem in the media than the reality.

Evidence suggests that local newspapers are a far more trusted source than the nationals, trusted by 77% of people to tell the truth about how crime is being dealt with, as opposed to 60% for national broadsheets and just 22% for tabloids⁵. This can present opportunities for communicating with the public about what is being done to tackle crime in their local area.

Members received evidence that, in general, crime stories help sell newspapers. It was alleged that such articles contribute to fuelling feelings of insecurity amongst the public. An alternative view was also prompted which says that informing people of incidents of crime makes them feel safe when the emphasis is on how it has been tackled.

Communication

As has been stated previously, negative perceptions around crime and criminal justice, and lack of confidence in the way that crime and anti-social behaviour are being tackled can impact on: people's quality of life and wellbeing, the ability of communities to maintain security, and how effectively the Criminal Justice System operates. This is why it is essential that crime partners communicate effectively around these areas, and engage the public in a two-way conversation about the crimes that matters to them.

It has already been highlighted that people who feel more informed also feel more confident and suffer less from fear of crime.

Communication is therefore vital in tackling the issue of fear of crime through the promotion of key messages around schemes and projects, as well as feeding back to local communities on what has been achieved.

This can help counter the danger that people are depending on the media and word of mouth for information rather than the main crime prevention organisations.

Members were encouraged that all the criminal justice organisations were extremely proactive in issuing press releases to the local media. However, members were disappointed to learn that there was no co-ordinated, properly resourced multi-agency

plan to ensure successful media messages are delivered from Community Safety partners.

Members were also disappointed to hear that Community Safety partners were still using traditional communication channels instead of thinking outside the box and exploring social media as a communication tool.

Done well, publicity is a crime prevention tool in its own right, allowing the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership to reinforce the action being taken and to promote the services available to the public.

CONCLUSION

As a result of the evidence brought before the scrutiny panel, members concluded that there are a number of improvements and developments that it would like to see in order to address some of the drivers which affect the public's fear of crime.

Members recognise the effective work already being undertaken by the Community Safety Partnership. However, they wish to highlight a number of developments which should be extended and enhance the work already being carried out.

Members would like to see the Safer Neighbourhoods Partnership use a variety of old and new media channels to run

campaigns that aim to raise awareness of crime and the fear of crime in North Lincolnshire.

Big-name consumer brands insist they “put the customer at the heart of everything they do”. Members would like the Partnership to adopt the same strategy.

The objective is that the more people who are informed and aware of crime and crime prevention will lead to an increase in people who will pick up the phone and report crime, come forward as witnesses and give intelligence about what is going on in their area.”

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APPENDIX 1

Membership of the Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Panel

Councillor Davison (Chair)

Councillor Waltham (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Ali

Councillor Armitage

Councillor Clark

Councillor Ellerby

Councillor T Foster

The panel conducted a number of evidence gathering sessions, speaking to a range of key officers from the council and its partners.

The panel would like to thank them for their valued input and attendance. They also received and considered a range of written evidence, including local and national research, guidance and legislation.

APPENDIX 2

- Stuart Minto, Head of Safer Neighbourhood, North Lincolnshire Council
- Councillor L Foster, Chair, Safer Neighbourhoods Strategy Board
- Malcolm Osborne, Divisional Manager, Trading Standards, North Lincolnshire Council
- Chris Skinner, Head of Communications and Resources, Community Planning and Resources, North Lincolnshire Council
- Chief Superintendent Simmonds, Divisional Commander, B Division, Humberside Police
- Mel Cook, Editor, Scunthorpe Telegraph
- Kate Munson, Director of Probation – Humberside Probation Trust
- Mike Prudom, Deputy Justices' Clerk, Scunthorpe Magistrates' Court
- Neil Laminman, Service Director Community Planning and Resources, North Lincolnshire Council
- Sue Sheridan, Youth Offending Service Manager, North Lincolnshire Council
- Keith Ford, Service Director Neighbourhood and Environmental Services, North Lincolnshire Council
- Stephen Coulman, Environmental Health Manager (Communities), North Lincolnshire Council
- Dave Hey, Head of Stronger Communities, North Lincolnshire Council

