

Community safety

Summary

May 2006

Neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour

Making places safer through improved local working

Summary

- 1 How safe or unsafe people feel in their neighbourhoods is not always related to the actual incidence of crime. People's concerns are often about very local anti-social behaviour issues. The achievement of national targets to reduce crime and to reassure the public by reducing the fear of crime and anti-social behaviour depends upon the police, councils and other local services working effectively together at the neighbourhood level. Consequently a sound understanding is needed of what makes people feel safe in a particular area.
- 2 National targets for reducing crime and anti-social behaviour need to be underpinned by neighbourhood approaches by all local services delivering community safety:
 - local authority-wide targets can mask under-performance at a neighbourhood level and present the risk that resources are wasted;
 - making communities safer requires agencies to combine the knowledge and information of frontline workers at neighbourhood level; and
 - local partners need to be able to distinguish between the concerns of different types of neighbourhoods and deploy appropriate resources, evaluating the cost and impact of their actions.
- 3 To do this well, good multi-agency reporting systems and up-to-date information about problem areas are needed. In some areas, local partners have many of these elements in place. But further action is needed for local services to have a full picture of neighbourhood problems and prioritise their activities well to ensure effective use of their combined resources.
- 4 By most measures, the general trend of crime has been falling nationally since 1995. But the public, whose lives are affected by crime and anti-social behaviour on their local streets, often do not recognise this. In fact, nearly two-thirds of people believe that crime is rising and one in three people living in more deprived areas thinks that anti-social behaviour is damaging their quality of life.
- 5 Our findings show that the actual incidence of crime, including serious crime, is not the principal factor determining how safe people feel. For a majority of people, it is their daily experience of anti-social behaviour in their immediate neighbourhood, on their street or estate, or their perception of what is happening locally, that shapes their view. Fear of crime is fuelled by dirty streets cluttered by abandoned cars and anti-social behaviour such as noisy neighbours.
- 6 Despite recent advances by the police and councils, most data on low-level crime and anti-social behaviour still take too broad-brush an approach. Government targets and national performance results are measured using the local authority area, which can have up to a quarter of a million residents, as the smallest measurement unit. In other words, information is aggregated at far too high a level to paint a faithful picture of life in individual neighbourhoods which may have populations counted in a few thousands. This makes it hard to target the pattern of crime in different neighbourhoods effectively.
- 7 Precise and detailed data are particularly important in relation to anti-social behaviour where real-time intelligence can best single out what response is needed. Councils and the police do understand people's concerns but are not fully exploiting their combined intelligence and the

knowledge and skills of frontline workers to analyse and respond to local issues. High-quality information is needed for areas smaller than a ward.

- 8 This has important implications for the 373 crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs) in England and community safety partnerships (CSPs) in Wales. These are the key partnerships for addressing local crime and anti-social behaviour problems. The government is keen to ensure that their ways of doing business are brought up to date. The recent review of the Crime and Disorder Act proposes new national standards for CDRPs to improve their consistency.
- 9 The government has selected the 40 CDRPs with the highest levels of crime (a crime rate almost twice the national average) for particular attention. Yet measuring crime outcomes at CDRP level can conceal huge differences in local neighbourhoods. A typical CDRP covers a population of over 100,000 people. So even if government targets on crime reduction are achieved, many people living in pockets of crime or in areas where anti-social behaviour is rife may not feel any better off.
- 10 Solutions may be at hand since local agencies collectively hold a great deal of information, about crimes, incidents, victims, offenders and problem locations. But this information is collected in different ways. CDRPs could pool this information and adopt the principles of the police national intelligence model (NIM) to respond to local problems. Then they could create a detailed profile of crime and anti-social behaviour in their local neighbourhood and devise long-term solutions.
- 11 Frontline workers such as neighbourhood wardens, police community support officers (PCSOs) and housing officers are in daily contact with local people. They are well placed to identify the issues that concern people and tell them what actions have been taken. But frontline workers need the authority to take quick and effective action. Failure to act in a timely way dents the confidence of residents.
- 12 CDRPs have been targeting resources in problem neighbourhoods. But they need to get better at evaluating whether their choice of action represents value for money. Performance monitoring systems also need to measure improvements at a neighbourhood level and record whether residents think these actions have made a difference.
- 13 Addressing crime and anti-social behaviour must be linked to other improvements in the environment to enhance the quality of life for people. To be successful, CDRPs need to work with other partners to develop short- and long-term solutions based on local knowledge of what people really want.

Summary of recommendations

14 Local partnerships

CDRP partners should tackle crime and anti-social behaviour at the neighbourhood level. To do this, partners should:

- a) analyse and understand specific crime and anti-social behaviour problems in their neighbourhoods using the principles of the police national intelligence model (NIM) to collect community intelligence, including local information provided by frontline workers;

- b) deploy resources cost-effectively, respond quickly to local concerns and inform people when action has been taken; and
- c) evaluate neighbourhood interventions regularly, assessing cost-effectiveness and value for money through a rigorous performance management framework which focuses on neighbourhood improvement.

15 Local government

Local government has an important local leadership role to play as well as specific responsibilities to address anti-social behaviour and environmental nuisance. To contribute to better neighbourhood outcomes councils should in addition:

- a) ensure that the data they hold on anti-social behaviour is reliable, up to date, easily accessible to other partners and conforms to the National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR);
- b) make better use of their frontline workers in gathering information and community intelligence, empowering them to take swift action;
- c) enable frontline workers to perform an effective two-way communication role between the council and local people with an emphasis on keeping residents well informed of action taken; and
- d) use their enhanced scrutiny powers to support improved performance in CDRPs.

16 Central government

Central government should support, encourage and enable local partners to tackle neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour. To do this government should:

- a) ensure that the new strategic police authorities and forces maintain a focus on providing neighbourhood solutions; and
- b) review the performance framework for policing and community safety, shifting the focus to improving services at the neighbourhood level and providing assurance to people that CDRP partners are working together effectively to deliver shared outcomes.

17 Regulators

Regulators need to support a neighbourhood-focused and joined-up approach to service delivery. The new Justice, Community Safety and Custody Inspectorate and the Audit Commission should assess how well public bodies are collectively delivering safer and stronger communities to a local area, examining local community safety outcomes, disseminating good practice and providing clear and accessible information to local people.

i Copies of the full report are available at: www.audit-commission.gov.uk
or to order a printed copy telephone: **0800 502030** quoting stock code: **GNR3326**

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