

Scrutiny review of actions being taken to reduce the public's perception of the fear of crime

Report by the Project Board:

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June 2006



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1. Background

1.1 In September 2005, the Community Services Scrutiny Committee agreed to carry out a review on the public's perception of the fear of crime. This linked in with the continuing work by the Police and other partners to reduce public place violent crime - especially low level anti-social behaviour.

1.2 The County Council works in partnership with District and Borough Councils and a number of other agencies in order to fulfill its duties with regard to crime reduction. This review, therefore, also considered the work undertaken by these various agencies.

1.4 The Review Project Board (the Board) comprised Councillor Philip Howson, Councillor Phil Scott, Councillor Roy Martin and Dr Laurie Bush, Sussex Policy Authority. Councillor Howson was the Board Chairman.

1.5 The review was managed by Roger Howarth, Scrutiny & Best Value Co-ordinator. The project officer was Angela Haines, Community Safety Co-ordinator. Support to the review was provided by Annie Petch, Committee Co-ordinator and Sam White, Scrutiny Support Officer.

2. Scope of the review

2.1 This review investigated two main themes:

- a. why residents in East Sussex are more fearful of crime than the actual incidents of crime suggest, and;
- b. what East Sussex County Council and its partners are doing to address this.

2.2 The Board consulted with partner organisations, including Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), and analysed the effectiveness of existing projects and schemes.

2.3 The review focused on an urban and rural authority within East Sussex. Hastings was chosen as the urban authority because a significant amount of government funding has been given to the Safer Hastings Partnership to address crime reduction and fear of crime. The rural area chosen was Wealden which has received significantly less government funding than Hastings and has had to tackle fear of crime and crime reduction mostly within a rural setting.

3. Sources of evidence

3.1 A separate list of sources of evidence can be found in appendix one to this report. This appendix together with the supporting evidence file (available in the members room) provides the background information on which the Board's report is based.

4. Findings

A. The review investigated why residents in East Sussex are more fearful of crime than the actual incidents of crime suggest, and established that:

4.1. The latest police figures showed that, in 2005, there was a 40% decrease nationally in incidents of crime. This downward trend in crime is mirrored in East Sussex. When compared with the rest of the country, East Sussex is one of the lowest crime areas with all measures of crime rates showing below the national averages. Within the county, Hastings and Eastbourne suffer the greater levels of crime, but these are still low in comparison with other parts of the UK.

4.2 In common with many other counties, the public of East Sussex generally perceive there to be more crime than there really is. The evidence brought before the Board indicated that, at the most simple level, the view of the majority of people of how bad crime is nationally is influenced by the levels of crime in a person's immediate area and what they hear or read about in the media.

4.3 The Board received evidence that residents have concerns about their safety. This results from a perceived lack of action being taken by the authorities when a crime is reported or, when young people, in particular, engage in anti-social behaviour. Evidence indicated that members of the public often describe this perceived inactivity as the authorities not having sufficient concern for the social fabric of our society. For many people this makes them feel they live in a high crime area even though they may not. The Board, however, felt that the public's perception was affected by the level of response to criminal activity that did not meet their expectations. They concluded that other significant factors which affect how safe people feel are;

- * the physical environment in which they live;
- * quality and standard of housing;
- * community welfare and provision;
- * levels of anti-social behaviour, such as drunken/rowdy behaviour, drinking in public places, young people causing annoyance, motor vehicle nuisance, noisy neighbours, and being harassed by neighbours.

These factors can intensify or reduce a lack of confidence in the policing and criminal justice system.

4.4 The Board received evidence from a number of sources to suggest that there is no one single method of tackling the fear of crime which leads to total public reassurance. Different and varied localised techniques seem to be necessary alongside traditionally accepted methods.

4.5 The Board recognised that the problem of reducing people's fear of crime is not just a local East Sussex County Council concern but a matter which has

exercised the Home Office, the Police, CDRPs and others nationally, for a long period of time. This Board looked back at the issues which were of concern to the East Sussex CDRPs in 1999 when a survey of people's perception of crime was undertaken as part of the Crime Audit. The issues identified then appear to remain the same today.

4.6 Some theoretical models relating to fear of crime, as explained in the Home Office, Reducing Fear of Crime Toolkit, (see appendix one) help an understanding of it but do not necessarily explain why it occurs. In this respect, the Board became aware that, even though East Sussex is an area of low crime, there is evidence that the reasons people are fearful of being victims of crime fit the wider theoretical models. Two main kinds of fear are identified - feeling physically vulnerable and feeling socially vulnerable. For many older and younger people there is a fear of not being able to physically resist an attack on themselves or their property. For others there is a fear of being exposed to anti-social or violent activity either in a public place or in their own home.

4.7 East Sussex is a county with a large elderly population. The evidence shows that many elderly people feel vulnerable to crime, despite the fact that it is younger people who are most likely to be the victims of crime. The Straight To The Top 2 (STTT2) survey of young people in East Sussex, 2005, showed that they are quite likely to be, and often are, victims of crime rather than perpetrators, and many feel as vulnerable as older people do. 44% of young people aged between 12 and 19 surveyed said they do not feel safe in their local neighbourhood. The Board concluded that elderly people may exhibit high maturity but low confidence, while younger people may display high confidence and low maturity.

4.8 A Public Perception Survey in East Sussex in 2004 revealed that 93% of respondents felt safe in their neighbourhoods by day and 54% by night. Evidence showed that there are several perceptions for feeling unsafe in East Sussex. The review looked specifically at two areas of the county – Wealden and Hastings. The main perceptions for feeling unsafe in *Wealden* were youths loitering and causing annoyance, drunken behaviour, feeling vulnerable to attack, not enough police on the streets. Main perceptions for feeling unsafe in *Hastings* included the above but also the way crime is reported in the media was also cited. The Board concluded that this is a similar pattern to the rest of the country.

B. The review also identified what East Sussex and its partners are doing to address the fear of crime and established that;

4.9 The County Council has established a Community Safety Team with members of the team having co-ordinating responsibilities for domestic violence, drugs and alcohol and community safety issues. Several initiatives have been undertaken to meet the County Council's responsibilities under the Crime and

Disorder Act 1998 and subsequent related legislation. Much of this is at a local level with County Council members and officers working as part of CDRPs. It was noted that attendance at CDRP meetings by County Council officers was inconsistent.

4.10 In response to the recent Crime and Disorder Act review the County Council is currently considering proposals for changes to its strategic role in community safety. At the time of this review, consultation on the changes was taking place.

4.11 The County Council has targeted actions around crime, anti-social behaviour and safety with young people through the Youth Development Service and the Drugs and Alcohol Action Team. Similarly, officers with responsibility for reducing anti-social behaviour, bullying and domestic violence are tackling the crime and fear of crime reduction agenda throughout the county. This review highlighted that all agencies who work with young people have a lot to do - especially on reducing anti-social behaviour.

4.12 Trading Standards in East Sussex contribute significantly, through various initiatives, to reducing the fear of crime and tackling crime and disorder. Schemes such as 'Doorstoppers' (<http://www.doorstoppers.info/>) including the 'Bank/Building Society - Best Practice Guidelines' have led to successful prosecutions whilst the 'Buy with Confidence' approved trader scheme has 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.

4.13 The purchase of a range of goods which can contribute to anti-social behaviour or crime is for example, alcohol, fireworks, age-restricted knives and spray paints. Trading Standards work to restrict the sale of these items to minors. Particularly effective, the Board believes, have been the joint activities between Trading Standards and Sussex Police in visiting licenced premises and attempting to make test purchases. 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 - in particular in Hastings and Eastbourne. These joint activities have a positive effective on reducing fear of crime.

4.14 The County Council has recently allocated an extra £165,000 to locally identified projects which address crime and fear of crime in several areas of the county. The Board welcomes funding of local initiatives but has been unable to find or access evaluation information which shows whether or not initiatives have been successful or otherwise in reducing either crime or the fear of crime. More work is needed in this respect.

4.15 The CADDIE website is effective in presenting the reality of crime figures in East Sussex and plays an important role in providing a picture of the reality of incidence of crimes in East Sussex. However, there is no statistical evidence of its usage although the website receives about two feedback emails each week. Currently the CADDIE manager is investigating a web-stats package for use with the website in order to provide a record of how many people access it.

4.16 The County Council works with CDRPs through a structure which was established in 1998. The Director of Policy Management and Communications has recently written in a report proposing changes to the strategic co-ordination of safer communities across East Sussex. *“In the past year, two significant events have led to the need to consider new arrangements for the management of community safety at the county level. The first was the development of a Local Area Agreement (LAA) for East Sussex, with the Safer and Stronger Communities theme and associated targets being one of the four service ‘blocks’ required in the LAA. The second, in January 2006 was the long awaited outcome of the review of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.”* The Board welcomed this move. The evidence it received had been critical of the current East Sussex structure because it was not considered to be as effective as the West Sussex model for ensuring co-ordinated, strategic and operational working.

C. Conclusions

4.17 A survey in May 2006 showed that direct funding by the County Council of East Sussex Community Safety is lower than the other South East local authorities of Kent, Surrey and West Sussex. The information provided does not reflect statistically similar counties so, therefore, it is not totally reliable as a comparator. However, East Sussex's 2006/7 base budget of £178,000 for the community safety team plus a £40,000 GOSE grant and a one off payment of £200,000 for safer communities work with young people contrasts with, for example, Kent's 2006/7 budget of £4.5 million for the HQ community safety team and 100 community wardens. The Board recognises the overall pressure on the County Council budget and is, therefore, keen to ensure that the available resources are directed to initiatives that work and, that these initiatives are expanded either through refocusing of finances or extended when new finance becomes available.

4.18 This review, it must be noted, has not had a remit to look at the funding of community safety but the Board was made aware by several witnesses of a correlation between funding into the right kind of projects and the greater potential for reduction in crime and fear of crime. The Board understands why there is disparity in funding across the county with, for example, Hastings receiving additional government support and substantially more funding than Wealden. This reflects differences in the levels of crime in the two areas.

4.19 The Board noted, however, that where there is more funding allocated to reassurance projects, such as in Hastings, the money has been well spent. These have changed attitudes and behaviour and increased the public's confidence in their own safety as, for example, the Greater Hollington Partnership work demonstrates. However, the Board is concerned about the longer term sustainability of projects because many schemes and initiatives have been time and finance limited.

4.20 There has been a variety of actions taken across the county by different partners to educate the public about the actual levels of crime. However, there remains a higher level of misunderstanding about crime figures amongst the public than the Board would expect. In a recent statement, the East Sussex Divisional Commander of Police said that since 1995 crime has fallen by 40%. Yet in 2004, 61% of people surveyed believed it had increased. The Board concluded that tackling fear of crime requires sustained and prolonged attention with strategies that are local, consistent, long term and widely communicated – not short term fixes.

4.21 The Board received evidence that, in general, crime stories help sell newspapers. It was alleged that such articles contribute to fueling feelings of insecurity amongst the public. An alternative view was also promoted which says that informing people of incidents of crime makes them feel safe when the emphasis is on how it has been tackled. However, the Board was concerned about the perpetuation and level of reporting of the same story over a long period of time. Attempts to change the approach in local newspapers have not been successful.

4.22 Some successful schemes exist within the county to promote the distribution of good news about being safe. The Safer Hastings Partnership Community TV appears to be redressing the bad news about crime. The Board concluded that reassurance and building of confidence in the police and justice system, together with delivering messages that people live in a safe county, are not promoted with the same emphasis and intensity in all areas.

4.23. There is some lack of confidence in the way information passed to the police is handled and in the expectation that when a crime is reported it will be dealt with. The Board heard evidence of a lack of consistency in responding to reported local crimes. Moreover, there is evidence of a lack of confidence in a judicial system that takes months and years to bring perpetrators to justice. This has an affect on people's perceptions of how effective the criminal justice system is and their feelings of confidence and security as a result.

4.24. There are issues about the way in which the police are now required to record incidents of crime. The Government has recently announced an independent review of crime statistics. East Sussex has negative experience of changing national recording systems. East Sussex did not meet the

2004/2005 target on Public Place Violent Crime because of national changes in recording introduced through the Police National Crime Recording Standards. e.g. Violent crime in Wealden is shown to have risen by 60% in the last three years which is not an accurate reflection of reality. The changed basis of reporting means residents may think there has been a significant increase in such incidents when in fact this is not the case.

4.25 Violent crime now covers a number of criteria and includes categories that people may consider relatively minor, for example, dog bite and barging into someone. The Board is aware of the view that these incidents may distort the statistics and lead to a false perception amongst the public that there is more violence than there really is.

4.26 Whilst there are some very popular local neighbourhood activities/partnerships and schemes there is clearly scope for further development of Neighbourhood Policing Schemes and localised approaches to tackling such matters as anti-social behaviour, public place violent crime, graffiti and car crime. Similarly, the work of the Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) has received plaudits as a means of providing a visible and reassuring physical presence of authority on the streets.

4.27 A survey carried out with the CDRP co-ordinators and members for this review highlighted street lighting in some areas of the county as a major concern which is increasing people's fear of crime. Similarly, other surveys undertaken in the past two years, particularly by CADDIE, also highlight the lack of street lighting as a factor in their ability to feel safe. Investigation of this matter revealed that the County Council may wish to put more funding into street lighting but is currently unable to do so due to overall budget pressures. Provision of street lighting is not a statutory responsibility for the County Council. Others, including town and parish councils and private car park owners are also providers of street lighting.

4.28 The Board concluded that street lighting does influence people's perceptions of how safe they feel but there are contrasting views as to what is acceptable and, particularly in rural areas, the matter is contentious. For example, a number of parishes object to light pollution from street lights and some people believe that too much street lighting in their area encourages anti-social behaviour. The Board remains concerned that it has not been possible to improve the resourcing of street lighting. It is aware that escalating energy costs could be significant, however, it would like to see increased funding for street lighting given a very high priority by the County Council

4.29. The Board was made aware, however, that street lighting is only one element impacting on the appearance of an area. There are other issues such as graffiti, abandoned cars, fly tipping and conditions of buildings which impact on whether or not residents or visitors to an area feel safe or vulnerable to crime.

Whilst attention has been given to these environmental issues in some towns, the Board concluded that improvements have not always been addressed consistently across all parts of the county.

4.30. Over 40% of public place violent crime in East Sussex happens to the 10-19 age range, according to the 2004/5 Crime Audit. This has led to a Local Area Agreement target and a focus on addressing personal safety issues with young people. The Board, however, believed there is further work to be done in respect of young people - both in terms of their image as perpetrators of crime - and their vulnerability to being victims of crime. Some successful schemes exist which support young people but evidence suggested intergenerational work would help redress the perceived problems of image between the young and old in East Sussex.

4.31 The Board was unable to find out how successful some of the community safety activities and initiatives are and what they have achieved. For example, how effective is the Safer Hastings Partnership Community TV? Are Youth Shelters effective in respect of young people and crime? The Board, whilst recognising that monitoring and evaluation of community safety initiatives is improving, could not find evidence of all initiatives being formally evaluated. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there are different opinions as to the effectiveness of schemes and initiatives which are taking place across the county and no overall consistency in measuring the outcomes of initiatives.

5. Recommendations contextual statement

5.1 As a result of the evidence brought before the Board it 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.

5.2 The Board recognised the effective work already being undertaken by the County Council and its partners. It seeks to bring to the fore a number of developments which should be extended and enhance the work already being carried out.

5.3 The Board is aware of the potential need to readjust where financial commitment is made in order to tackle some of these recommendations. However, not all the recommendations have financial implications.

5.4 The Board is also aware of the County Council's proposal to establish a high level and multi-agency steering group in order to best meet the needs for strategic co-ordination of safer communities across East Sussex. Two of the intended purposes of this steering group are to:

- commission strategic intelligence assessments in order to identify strategic priorities across East Sussex for community safety, crime reduction and community reassurance, and;
- identify and commit resources (specific and mainstream) to meeting identified priorities.

5.5 With this in mind the Board concluded that this report and its recommendations, will assist the work of the steering group. It has, therefore, included recommendations which need to be considered and implemented by other agencies (not just the County Council) which will comprise the East Sussex Safer Communities Steering Group. For this reason the recommendations have been grouped according to who should respond.

A. Recommendations for the new East Sussex Safer Communities Steering Group

R.1 All partners in the Safer Communities Steering Group should give priority to public reassurance and confidence building activities in future programmes from 2007 onwards. The steering group should ensure there is co-ordination and delivery of these activities across the county.

R.2 All partners should increase their activity in ensuring there are more positive stories being issued to the media. It is important to tackle local and national media on 'responsible reporting' of crime, seeking ways of countering overly negative reporting in local newspapers.

B. Recommendation for CDRPs

R.3 CDRPs should implement the recommendations in the Crime and Disorder Review, Governance and Accountability section, which speak of community safety and fear of crime reduction strategies being tailored to the needs of local communities.

R.4 Further emphasis should be given to co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation of what initiatives and schemes are effective in reducing crime and the fear of crime to ensure there is always targeting of resources to what works.

C. Recommendations for the County Council

R.5 County Council departments should take action immediately to increase and embed their commitment and responsibilities to community safety and to Section 17 requirements and report these to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee in December 2006.

R.6 The Children's Services Authority and the Youth Development Service, should investigate the creation of more intergenerational projects between young and elderly people which break down the prejudices which frequently exist. The outcomes should be reported to the Community Services Scrutiny Committee in December 2006.

R.7. Consideration should be given to increasing the ability of Trading Standards to be involved in more joint activities with partners visiting licensed premises and undertaking test purchasing operations. Furthermore consideration might also be given as to how best to promote a 'Proof of Age' scheme to young people and businesses throughout East Sussex with the clear message 'No ID - No Sale'.

R.8 A report, from the Director of Transport & Environment on the viability of reviewing and addressing street lighting issues which can reduce the public's fear of crime, should be made to the December meeting of the Community Services Scrutiny Committee.

D. Recommendation for the Community Services Scrutiny Committee

R.9 When policy steers for community safety, under the reconciling policy and resources process, are presented to the full scrutiny committee in the autumn, members should be mindful of the conclusions of this report with regard to targeting of resources to effective initiatives which reduce crime and fear of crime.

Project Board: Councillor Philip Howson (Chairman), Councillor Phil Scott, Councillor Roy Martin, Dr Laurie Bush, Sussex Police Authority

Project Manager: Roger B. Howarth

June 2006

APPENDIX ONE

3. Sources of evidence

3.1 The Board interviewed the representatives listed below:

East Sussex Community Safety Co-ordinator
CADDIE analyst for Wealden
CADDIE analyst for Hastings
Greater Hollington Partnership
Trading Standards
Sussex Police
Editor of The Sussex Express
Safer Hastings Partnership co-ordinator and Communications Officer
Home Office Fear of Crime Team
East Sussex Youth Development Officer
Lead Member for Community Services, East Sussex County Council
Director of Policy Management and Communications, East Sussex County Council

Further work undertaken included:

- Analysis of national, local reports, publications and statistics as comparative and background information, including:
 - * Neighbourhood crime and anti-social behaviour, Audit Commission 2006
 - * Neighbourhood Policing – your police; your community; our commitment. Home Office, March 2005
 - * British Crime Survey 2004/05 Home Office
 - * Home Office Fear of Crime Toolkit. Available from the website:
<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/toolkits/fc00.htm>.
 - * Fear of Crime, www.renewal.net Overview
 - * Effects of improved street lighting on crime: a systematic view. Farrington , D P and Welsh B C. Home Office.
 - * Devonshire Area Project Report Sept.2005. Eastbourne Strategic Partnership.
 - * Community Safety Newsletters 2005/2006. ESCC.
 - * Crime & Disorder Act 1998
 - * Crime Statistics from STTT2. East Sussex Youth Development Service. 2005.

- * Crime & Disorder Questionnaire. County Council Network. 2004.
- * Local Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategies – the role of trading standards services. Home Office Nov 2005
- * Crime & Disorder Data Information Exchange. (CADDIE) Website www.caddie.gov.uk
- * Public Place violent crime and local public service agreements in Sussex. 2005.
- * Review of the Partnership provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1988 – report of findings. Home Office January 2006
- * Large Gap between Public Fear and Actual rate of Crime. Alan Travis. Article, Guardian Friday, October 22,2004. www.guardian.co.uk
- * www.upmystreet.com Policing and Crime figures for 2004/5
- * Crime in England and Wales. Quarterly Update to June 2005. Home Office Statistical Bulletin. October 2005.
- * East Sussex County Council Community Safety Strategy 2005-2008.
- * The Children’s and Young People’s Plan, A Consultation on behalf of East Sussex County Council. March 2006.
- * Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership Strategies, 2005 -8. for Hastings, Wealden, Rother, Eastbourne and Lewes.
- * West Sussex Strategic Community Safety Partnership – making communities safer, working together.
- * Wolverhampton Register for Reassurance. Nov 2005.
- * Greater Hollington Partnership Annual Delivery Plan 2005/6
- * Results of a questionnaire to East Sussex Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) officers and members.

End.