

**COMMUNICATING
FOR CONFIDENCE**
INSIGHT AND RESEARCH
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Home Office



INTRODUCTION

Since the publication of the new Public Service Agreements in April 2008 delivery across crime and policing policy has taken on a renewed focus – one which is centred around the importance of increasing public confidence in local agencies and the police, and of improving public perception of crime and anti-social behaviour, drug use and dealing and drunk and rowdy behaviour.

Since the publication of the new Public Service Agreements in April 2008 delivery across crime and policing policy has taken on a renewed focus – one which is centred around the importance of increasing public confidence in local agencies and the police, and of improving public perception of crime and anti-social behaviour, drug use and dealing and drunk and rowdy behaviour. This new focus specifically set by PSA 23 (making communities safer) and PSA 25 (reduce the harm caused by alcohol and drugs) means that there is now an emphasis placed on delivery at a national, regional and local level to tackle the crime and anti-social behaviour issues that matter the most to local communities.

Communicating for Confidence is intended to support front line delivery partners such as Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs), Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs), Neighbourhood Policing Teams (PSTs), Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs), with evidence and practical advice on building public confidence in the work being done to tackle crime via communications.

The information and advice provided in this communications support package is applicable across all policy areas which fall under crime and policing policy whether it be anti-social behaviour (ASB), drugs or alcohol.

Communicating for Confidence – Insight and Research provides details of the range of factors which can affect confidence and perceptions of crime, why communications is important and how, working with policy initiatives and local activity, it can have a positive impact on public confidence and perceptions.

INSIGHT AND RESEARCH EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Communicating for Confidence – Insight and Research has been created to pull together background information from a broad range of sources, providing context when considering why it is important that we communicate with the public about crime, and suggesting what the role of communications should be around crime.

Confidence in the way that crime is being responded to is low, and many people do not feel connected to the criminal justice system or aware of what's being done to protect them and ensure that justice is done. The newly introduced national confidence target for police demonstrates that raising confidence is a priority for those involved in the fight against crime and ASB.

Communications can play an important role in improving confidence. By looking closely at how the public feel about the response to crime we can tailor both the response and the communications around it more effectively.

Why does the lack of confidence in the response to crime matter?

There are a number of serious consequences of people lacking confidence in the criminal justice system and partners' response to crime.

These include:

- **Effect on individuals** – fear and worry about crime caused by lack of confidence can affect people's health and wellbeing
- **Effect on communities' ability to maintain security** – fear of retaliation or getting hurt and a perceived lack of support can impact on people's willingness to exercise informal social control
- **Effect on the police, CDRP and DAAT partnership with the public** – lack of confidence and fear can lead to less public engagement and participation, making the task of responding to crime harder

What does the data tell us about crime and the response to crime?

Police recorded crime and people's self-reporting of crime through the British Crime Survey (BCS), as well as a range of other measures show improvements across many of the core measurements in recent years.

These include:

- Crime falling significantly over the last decade
- The risk of being a victim of crime is at its lowest ever
- Police numbers have grown significantly over the last decade
- More offences than ever are being brought to justice
- Sentencing has become more severe and custodial sentences longer over the last decade

There are, of course, different crime levels, crime types and levels of risk of being a victim of crime across different areas of the country, and a person's experience of crime will depend on where they live.

What affects the public's views on crime and the criminal justice system?

We can consider five key factors which affect people's views on crime, the criminal justice system and the response to crime:

- **Own or others' experience of crime as a victim or witness** – affecting their feelings of safety and views of the response to crime according to the experience they had.
- **Local area experience and characteristics** – what people see and experience in their local area.
- **Personal background, beliefs and characteristics** – people's personal situations and upbringing can affect their views as well as their personal levels of confidence or anxiety.
- **Broad societal factors** – factors such as economic prosperity, demographics, community relations and cohesion, religion and family structures will all impact on people's lives and their perceptions. This will include impressions of crime and the criminal justice system.
- **Media representation** – the media is a key way that we are informed about crime and the response to crime, especially at the national level.

What do the public tell us about what they think and feel about crime and the response to crime?

Having looked at what the data tells us about the impact of how crime and ASB are being tackled, we need to look at how this may differ from the way that the public feel about the response, and the role that communications can play in influencing this. There are six key areas of public perceptions under consideration:

1) **Perceptions of the extent of crime** – the majority of the public believe that crime has risen over the past two years at a national level; fewer, although still a significant number, believe so at a local level. Those who perceive high levels of ASB in their area are more likely to think that crime has increased over the last two years.

– Communications with the public around how more serious crime is being tackled in the local area is important, alongside reassurance and information about how ASB is being dealt with, and how those involved are brought to justice.

2) **Perceptions of the causes of crime** – the public believe that the key causes of crime are: drugs, lack of discipline from parents, too lenient sentencing, alcohol, and family breakdown.

– Depending on particular priorities in each local area, communications on the response to crimes involving young people, ASB (in particular drunk and rowdy behaviour, drug use and dealing), as well as the outcome of any arrests or court proceedings may be effective ways to build confidence and provide reassurance to those in the local area. Communicating effectively with young people, not just about them is also an important consideration.

3) **Perceptions of society**

– significant social changes over the past 25 years have included, amongst others, growing economic employment insecurity, greater demographic diversity in neighbourhoods, weakening of cohesion in communities, changing family structures, and changing religious beliefs. It is argued that people's views of society have been affected by these changes, which have collectively had the impact of increasing feelings of uncertainty and anxiousness, which can impact on levels of concern about crime.

– More information about and encouragement to engage with the criminal justice system is needed than ever before within this context, to reassure the public that crime and ASB is being responded to effectively.

4) **Awareness and understanding of the police, criminal justice system and the response to crime**

– although people are interested in the criminal justice system and say they know more about the response to crime, actual knowledge and awareness of what is being done to tackle crime is low. People who are more informed about what's being done to tackle crime and ASB are more likely to feel safe; be satisfied and confident with how crime is being dealt with; and to get involved. Lack of communication can result in a sense that nothing is being done to protect the local area and people. The majority feel that there is a lack of follow-up information on what happens to those who commit crime.

– Communications can play an important role here in informing the public on what the local problems and priorities are, who is tackling crime and what is being done. Follow-up information is also crucial: informing people of the outcome in terms of arrests and prosecutions: demonstrating that action is being taken and justice done; and ensuring that worry is not increased by highlighting the crime issues within the local area.

5) Satisfaction with the police, criminal justice system and the response to crime – confidence varies significantly across different functions of the criminal justice system, but confidence that it is effective as a whole is relatively low. The police receive the highest ratings amongst all of the criminal justice system agencies, and are also the agency that people know the most about, acting as another indicator that greater knowledge relates to higher levels of confidence.

Satisfaction with contact, communications and feedback are an important element in how confident and satisfied people feel in the service/system as a whole. There is a lack of knowledge and understanding around sentencing types, rates and lengths, and a commonly held view that sentences handed down by the courts are too lenient. Finally the criminal justice system has low ‘self-confidence’ and advocacy which is a cause for concern.

– As well as communicating around who is responding to crime and what is being done it is equally important to share relevant sentencing and other follow-up information to show that justice is being done and punishments are being handed out.

– Consideration of internal communications within CDRPs, DAATs and police forces and – importantly – between these partners, may be around sharing success stories and what works well in local areas; sharing public feedback and working together to respond to it; and considering consistency of messaging both internally and externally about the response to crime – giving the public one clear dialogue on crime. Police and partners acting as advocates for one another and the system as a whole is also an important part of communications with the public.

6) Willingness to engage with the police, criminal justice system and the response to crime – there is a general willingness and interest in becoming involved in crime and policing matters, with most people willing to get involved in low-level activities like giving information about crimes to the police, or filling in a questionnaire on local priorities.

Reasons people do not get more involved include being fearful of repercussions of reporting crimes or giving information, feeling their contribution would not be valued and not knowing how to get involved.

This information provides a clear steer on how communications could contribute to greater involvement in the process: providing more clarity about the role people can play; information on ways to get involved in schemes or priority setting; and actively asking people and demonstrating that their views are wanted and valued.

So what is the role of communications on crime?

Six key purposes of communication around crime, the criminal justice system and the response to crime are described below:

- **To inform** – to tell people what action is being taken, what has happened and is happening: how teams responding to crime and ASB are spending time and resources, and what has been the impact and consequences of efforts.
- **To explain** – to put in plain words who you are, how you work, why you are doing something, and what the procedures are: focusing on transparency, fairness and accountability, and providing one consistent dialogue on crime and ASB.
- **To reassure** – this is about being straightforward and realistic: show that you are concerned, that you are responding, and have the interests of local people at heart.
- **To engage** – encouraging the public to feed in their views on the crime and ASB issues that matter to them, encouraging reporting, providing opportunities for public involvement: helping you to gain greater understanding of community priorities and concerns; and a way to consult and measure satisfaction.
- **To provide a supportive resource** – for victims, witnesses, and anyone else who might need advice or assistance.
- **To help prevent crime** – highlighting safety measures: signposting help with parenting, community involvement, and youth activities, and providing a route to other resources.

By following a simple three step process partnerships will be able to build a successful communication programme.



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