

**COMMUNICATING
FOR CONFIDENCE**
INSIGHT AND RESEARCH



Home Office



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SECTION 1

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to look closely at how the public feel about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) and what is being done to tackle it, and to understand why they feel this way.

We know that confidence in the response to crime is low and that many people do not feel connected to the criminal justice system or aware of what's being done by all of those involved in the fight against crime – which includes the police and a broad range of other partners that make up Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs)/Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and Drug and Alcohol Action Teams (DAATs). By understanding how people feel about crime and ASB we are able to tailor our response in local areas, and then communicate what is being done effectively to the people who live there, reconnecting them with the system.

Negative perceptions around crime and criminal justice, and lack of confidence in the way that crime and ASB 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 we communicate effectively around these areas, and engage the public in a two-way conversation about the crime and ASB issues that matter to them. The introduction of a new national target for confidence in the police and local authorities¹ reflects the fact that this is a priority area for those involved in dealing with crime and ASB.

Figure 1 outlines the key factors that impact on people's confidence in the response to crime, which we will consider in more detail in this paper.

Figure 1

Key factors impacting on confidence and trust in the response to crime and ASB



The risk of becoming a victim of crime is relatively low: the British Crime Survey (BCS)² tells us that risk is at 22% – with less than a quarter of us having been victims of crime in the past year. But being a victim of crime is not the only factor that affects our views on crime. As Figure 1 shows, our views can also be shaped by the experience of people we know; what we see in our local area; what we see in the media; and our own personal levels of anxiety, which are likely to be influenced by our background, beliefs and circumstances.

These factors then influence a broad range of views – both positive and negative – on crime and how it is being tackled, as shown on the model. Ultimately, it is the nature of these views that affect how worried people feel about crime and how confident people are that crime and ASB is being effectively tackled.

Information and communication with the public about crime are crucial elements in the drive to ‘connect’ people and communities with the criminal justice response to crime. Effective communications serve a range of purposes – including informing people about actions being taken in response to crime and the consequences of this; highlighting resources and ways to prevent crime; reassuring people that their priorities are being acted upon; and encouraging people to engage with the process themselves, feeding in their views on the crime and ASB issues that are important to them. There are many ways to communicate with the public ranging from face-to-face interaction at public meetings through to providing in-depth online information on crime and actions. The *Practical Guide* section of *Communicating for Confidence* will take you through the stages of developing a communications strategy and delivering the practical elements of your plan.

SECTION 2

WHAT ARE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE PUBLIC LACKING CONFIDENCE IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND PARTNERS' RESPONSE TO CRIME?

From listening to what the public tell us about their views on crime we know that confidence in the way that crime and ASB is being tackled is low. The majority of people believe that crime in the country as a whole is increasing, and significant numbers of people continue to worry about crime. Confidence in a number of aspects of the criminal justice system is low, including its effectiveness in bringing criminals to justice and reducing crime³.

But why does this lack of confidence matter? Thinking about it in a broad sense, there are a number of reasons why it matters that people are not confident; that they may be fearful or worried about crime; or that their perceptions (and in many cases experiences) of the extent of crime locally, do not match with what the crime statistics tell us at a national level. Figure 2 shows some of the key consequences which can result from this lack of confidence, which can include damaging effects on individuals, communities as a whole, and the public's relationship with the police and partners in CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs:

Figure 2

Consequences of the lack of confidence and trust in the response to crime



2.1 EFFECT ON INDIVIDUALS

A lack of confidence in how crime and ASB are being tackled can impact directly on individuals' lives. It can manifest itself in fear of and worry about crime, which can affect an individual's health and well-being as well as their behaviour.

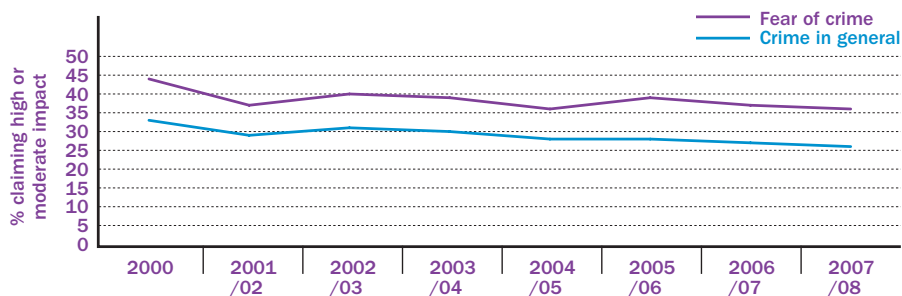
A recent survey⁴ showed that more than a third of respondents (36%) had worried about becoming a victim of crime in the past month – notably a higher figure than the risk of becoming a victim at 22%.

Figure 3 demonstrates that worry about crime impacts on more people's lives (36%) than actual crime does (26%), with more than a third stating that fear of crime has a high or moderately high impact on their quality of life⁵.

Figure 3

Impact of crime in general and fear of crime on quality of life

Source: British Crime Survey 2000 to 2007/08



Analysis of the 2004/05 BCS also looked at the impact that perceiving high levels of ASB (having had experience of it in the past year) had on people's quality of life, across different types of ASB. A much greater proportion of those who had experienced noisy neighbours said that it had a high impact on their quality of life compared with other types of ASB.

For those respondents who had experienced ASB, the impact they said that the behaviours had on their quality of life varied⁶, with:

- **49%** saying that noisy neighbours had a high impact on them
- **23%** saying drug use or dealing had a high impact on them
- **21%** saying that young people hanging around had a high impact on them
- **18%** saying that drunk or rowdy behaviour had a high impact on them
- **15%** saying that vandalism and graffiti had a high impact on them

The impact that worry about crime and ASB, and lack of confidence may have on people's quality of life and behaviour, can include: poor health and anxiety; people not going out as much; increasing their security measures; avoiding certain places or areas or even thinking about moving away in some cases⁷.

Of course some level of concern about crime is appropriate and encourages people to be vigilant and take precautions. But what we want to address is lack of confidence and fear which impacts on behaviour and well-being to a level disproportionate to the risk posed to an individual.

2.2 EFFECT ON COMMUNITIES' ABILITY TO MAINTAIN SECURITY

Linked to the point about the effect on individuals' lives, lack of confidence and fear of crime can also affect how willing people are to contribute on an informal level to maintaining security. The term 'collective efficacy' was coined to refer to the ability and will of a community to deal with local problems⁸. Evidence from the 2003/04 BCS supported the idea that 'collective efficacy' within a local area can help to prevent disorder, as well as crime⁹.

Recent polling¹⁰ on how people react to 'unacceptable'¹¹ behaviour they see in their local area (including violence, vandalism, littering and noise pollution), found that generally people say they will not take any action against the behaviour, even though they believe it to be unacceptable. The main reason given is that people do not want to get hurt or involved.

As such, low confidence, alongside a perceived lack of support, fear of reprisal or getting hurt or into trouble themselves can contribute to an unwillingness of people to exercise informal social control – that is to say that there is a reluctance to take any direct action. This can have a knock-on effect on the ability of the community to maintain security, and puts further pressure on police, CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs.

One important role for communications therefore may be highlighting the positive impact that people can have when playing a part in protecting their community.

2.3 EFFECT ON THE POLICE, CDRP/ CSP AND DAAT PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE PUBLIC

As well as impacting on people's willingness to take direct action in the face of unacceptable behaviour, a further consequence of a lack of confidence is that people may become less willing to work alongside police and partners to tackle crime and ASB, and ensure justice is done.

Public involvement in the response to crime is crucial for the system to operate effectively. Most crimes come to the attention of the police as a result of a report from a victim or a witness; the justice system then requires this person to offer evidence and potentially proceed to a trial. Likewise local residents are often experts on the issues in their local area and can share information invaluable to CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs.

But lack of confidence in the system and its ability to provide protection and deliver justice can mean that people are fearful of repercussions or believe that their contributions will not make a difference:

'If I really thought that my family, my home and my community would be safer as a consequence then I might consider it – but I don't.'¹²

Assurances that public contributions are acted upon, do make a difference and are welcomed and sought and therefore are a crucial part of communications in a local area.

SECTION 3

WHAT DOES THE DATA TELL US ABOUT CRIME AND THE RESPONSE TO CRIME?

Although crime statistics are regularly challenged, not least by the media, they do provide us with the best available picture of what is happening in terms of crime and how it is being tackled. In looking at both police recorded crime and people's self-reporting of crime (through the BCS), as well as a range of other measures we can see that across many of the core measurements there have been overall improvements in recent years.

For example, according to the statistics: within the last decade crime has fallen from its peak in the mid-1990s and it remained stable over the past few years before falling again in the last year; the risk of being a victim is at its lowest ever; police numbers have grown; and more offences are being brought to justice.

Figure 4

Trends in all BCS crime, 1981 to 2007/08

Source: British Crime Survey 1981 to 2007/08

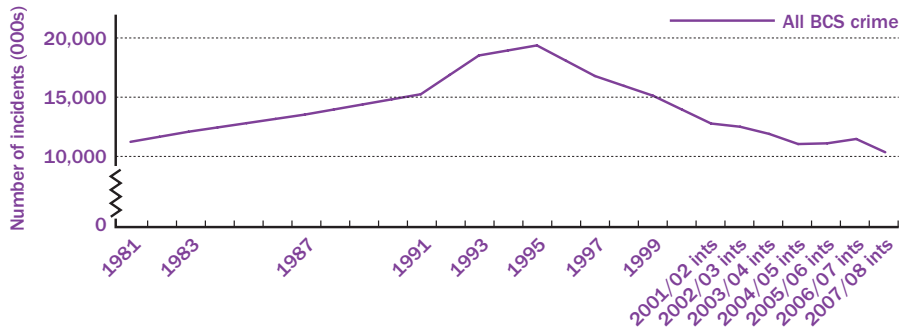


Figure 4¹³ shows the downward trend in crime rates since the mid-1990s according to the BCS. In 2007/8 BCS crime was 48% lower than the peak in 1995 – with more than 9 million fewer crimes. Police recorded crime has also declined over this time period¹⁴.

Since 1995 the three key crime types have all fallen significantly in England and Wales: domestic burglary has reduced by 59%, vehicle theft has reduced by 66% and violent crime by 48%. The chances of becoming a victim of crime are low – based on the BCS the risk is now 22% (for all BCS crime), significantly lower than the peak of 40% in 1995¹⁵.

And in 2008 specifically the PSA 1 (Public Service Agreement) target to reduce crime by 15% was exceeded. The 18% reduction achieved, according to the BCS, represented more than 2 million fewer crimes in the year to March 2008, compared to the year to March 2003¹⁶. CDRPs/CSPs were fundamental in coordinating local crime reduction activity which contributed to the meeting of this target.

In addition to looking at crime figures we can also look at measures of change within the response to crime. For example, police numbers have grown significantly over the last decade. The most recent figures from September 2008¹⁷ show that the police service in England and Wales is larger than ever. This includes – amongst others – 142,684 police officers (increased by 15,526 since 1997), 15,740 Police Community Support Officers (newly introduced in 2003) and 77,979 police staff (increased by 24,968 since 1997).

And as well as an increase in those protecting the public from crime, we can see improvement in the response from the criminal justice system. Latest performance figures¹⁸ show that the number of offences brought to justice (OBTJ) has also risen steadily during the last decade, from 1.10 million in 1998/99 to 1.449 million in 2007/08.

These show some of the key measures of changes in crime levels and the response to crime. However, in all of these measures we consider the national situation, but the national picture of crime may be very different to some people's experience of it in their local area.

There are, of course, different crime levels, crime types and risk levels 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. For example, the risk of being a victim of *household* crime is highest in the most deprived areas in England (21% for BCS household crime in the 20% most deprived areas compared with 15% for the 20% least deprived¹⁹).

So while nationally the crime rate is falling, this may not be the experience of those living in areas with higher crime rates or those affected by particular crime or ASB issues.

Likewise there will be differences in risk according to who you are.

EXAMPLE

The BCS shows that those most **at risk** of violence are men aged 16–24, who are *more than twice as likely to be a victim of violent crime* as women of the same age.

However, when looking at levels of **worry** about crime for the 16–24s, women are nearly *three times more likely* than men to have high levels of worry about violent crime²⁰.

Of course young women may feel they are more vulnerable to crime which would explain this level of concern without them being aware of their actual level of risk of being a victim of violent crime. But these figures illustrate to us that the data does not always match the way that people feel about crime and the response to it.

SECTION 4

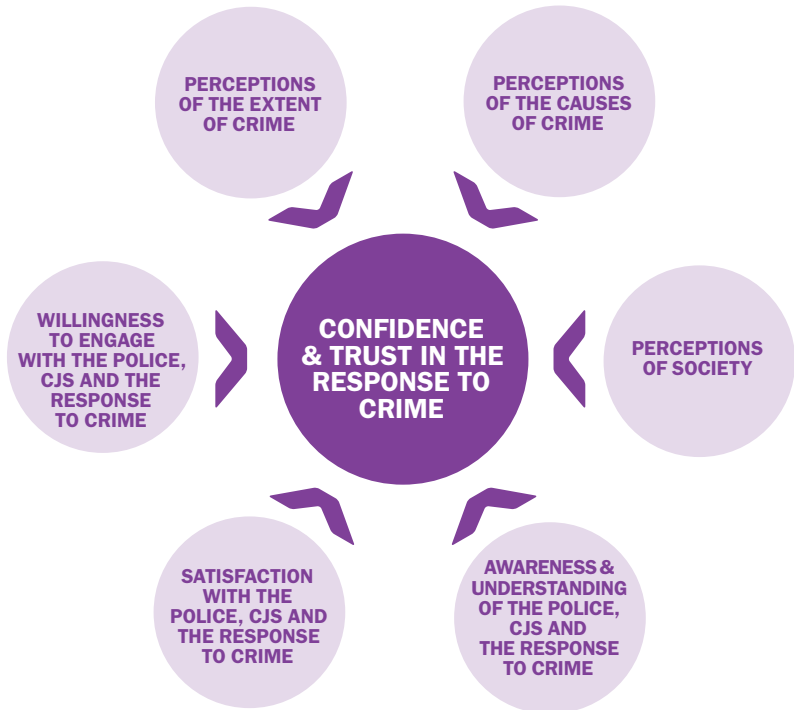
WHAT DO THE PUBLIC TELL US ABOUT WHAT THEY THINK AND HOW THEY FEEL ABOUT CRIME AND THE RESPONSE TO CRIME?

So having looked at what the data tells us, we can now see how this differs from what the public tell us about how they feel about crime and ASB, and the response to them. When thinking about public perceptions it is useful to group them into the six areas shown in Figure 5 opposite. It should be noted that many of the views examined are also likely to be drivers of other views, for example, lack of awareness or engagement with the response to crime (two of the areas being discussed) may impact on satisfaction with the response to crime.

In combination, the views an individual has within each of these areas may influence their level of confidence in the response to crime:

Figure 5

Public perceptions of crime and the response to crime – grouped into six areas



4.1 PERCEPTIONS OF THE EXTENT OF CRIME

We saw in the previous section that according to the BCS, people are less likely than ten years ago to say that they have been a victim of crime. But despite this crime is consistently considered to be one of the biggest issues facing Britain²¹, and a majority of the public (65%) believe that crime has risen over the last two years at a national level²².

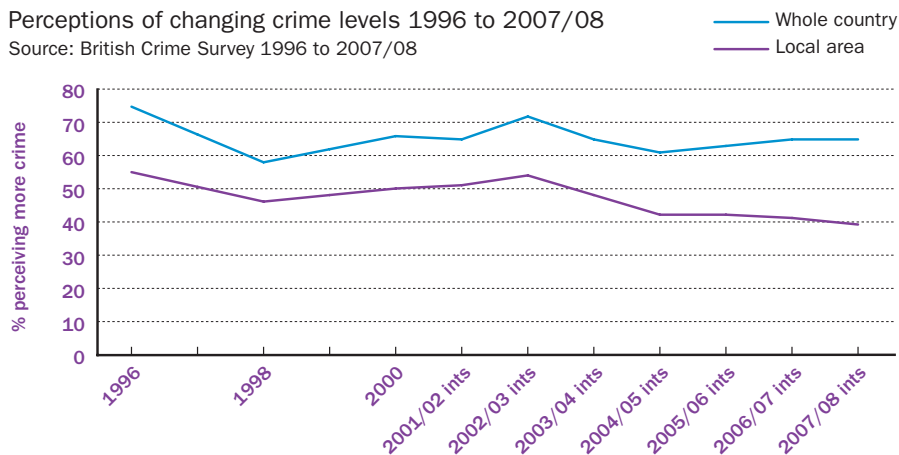
Research shows that only one in five believe that crime is falling, and less than half (43%) believe there are more police than ever²³.

Figure 6²⁴ shows people's perceptions of crime rates at both the national and local levels.

Figure 6

Perceptions of changing crime levels 1996 to 2007/08

Source: British Crime Survey 1996 to 2007/08



We can see from the chart that there is a significant difference between people's views of crime nationally and locally. While two-thirds believe crime has risen in the country as a whole during the last two years, at the local level this falls to just over a third believing crime has increased. Perceptions of crime locally have been consistently lower than nationally.

Evidence suggests that impressions of crime locally are more likely to be driven by what you and others you know see and experience in the local area, whereas views of crime nationally are largely impacted upon by the media and beliefs framed by people's background and personal characteristics (see section 5: *What affects the public's views on crime and the criminal justice system?* for more information on this).

This difference in local and national perceptions does suggest that people feel more positively about the response to crime at the local level, despite the lack of confidence at the national level.

Perceptions of anti-social behaviour

There are a range of different behaviours referred to as ASB, some of which relate to criminal offences and others which do not.

The BCS uses seven factors to measure people's perceptions of ASB as shown in Figure 7 overleaf. ASB has been described as behaviour that causes 'harassment, alarm or distress'²⁵.

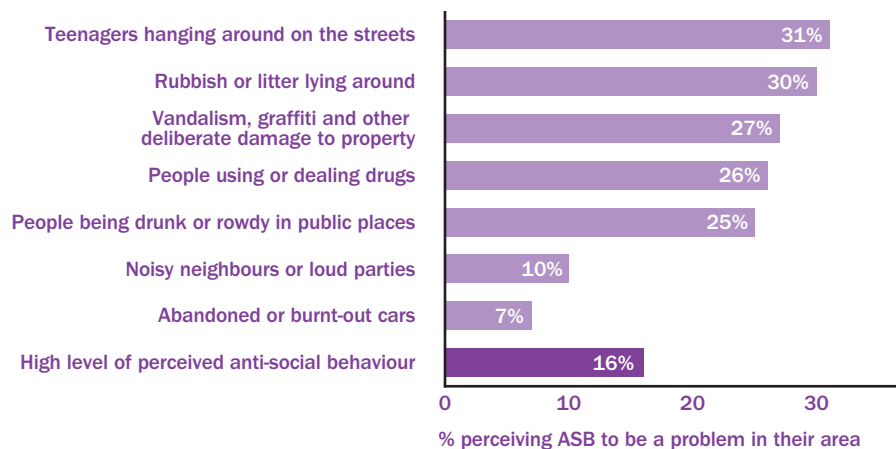
There is evidence to suggest that those who perceive high levels of ASB in their local area also perceive crime levels to be increasing. For instance, 34% of people who perceived high levels of ASB²⁶ thought that crime in their local area had increased 'a lot' in the previous two years compared with 9% of those who did not perceive high levels of ASB. For most people their immediate neighbourhood provides the clearest tangible evidence of whether crime is being tackled effectively by the police and other partners in CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs.

Figure 7 shows the proportion of the public who consider the different ASB factors to be a problem²⁷.

Figure 7

Proportion of people perceiving ASB to be a problem in their area

Source: British Crime Survey 2007/08



We can see that factors such as teenagers hanging around, litter and graffiti or vandalism are all considered to be a problem in the local area by more than a quarter of respondents. Disorder and low-level crimes such as these have been described as ‘signal crimes’²⁸, acting as a sign to people of danger and risk in a local area without them necessarily having seen any evidence of serious crime itself. As such these ‘signals’ in the local area can contribute to perceptions of rising crime levels or worry about crime.

But while many people may not have seen signs of serious crime in their local area, it does not appear to be the case that views of ASB are ‘misperceptions’. Looking closely at the evidence around perceptions of ASB, we can see that there is a strong link between people’s experience of ASB and their perceptions.

According to the BCS, the vast majority of people who perceived ASB to be a problem had some personal experience of witnessing it in their local area at some point in the previous year. For instance, 96% of those who perceived problems with teenagers hanging around, and 87% of those who perceived problems with people being drunk and rowdy had personally seen or heard such behaviours in their local area in the last year²⁹.

There is one exception to this trend however, which is that only around half (48%) of those perceiving problems with using or dealing drugs in their local area had personally seen evidence of this behaviour in their local area³⁰. This is considerably lower than for other types of ASB; the fact that perceptions around drugs are influenced more by other sources than personal experience than other types of ASB is worth consideration when thinking about communicating around these areas. For example, where the public have reported problems with drugs, the outcomes of interventions should be fed back to show action and justice being done, even in cases where there has been no evidence of drug use or dealing – with a focus perhaps on cracking down on ASB instead. For more information on what influences perceptions of ASB see section 5: *What influences the public's views of crime and the criminal justice system?*

Clearly then it is important that as well as communicating with the public on how more serious crime is being tackled in the local area, there should also be reassurances and information around how ASB and low-level crimes are dealt with, and how those involved are brought to justice.

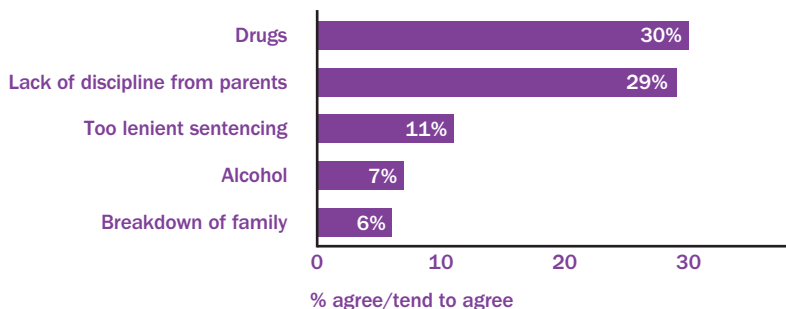
4.2 PERCEPTIONS OF THE CAUSES OF CRIME

Figure 8 shows results from the BCS³¹ on what the public think are the main causes of crime in Britain today. Looking at these causes may help us to understand what the public see as priority areas for tackling crime.

Figure 8

Public perceptions of the main cause of crime

Source: British Crime Survey 2007/08



People believe the top five causes of crime to be as follows:

- **Drugs**

Three in ten (30%) people believe that drugs are the main cause of crime and over a quarter (26%) of people think that drug use and dealing is a very or fairly big problem in their local area³². When asked why they don't feel safe in their local area three in ten people (30%) also mention concern around people using and dealing drugs³³.

But as we saw in the previous section, 4.1 on *Perceptions of the extent of crime*, perceptions of drug dealing and use are not as strongly related to personal experience as other factors of ASB are.

Compared with other types of behaviour a higher proportion of people said they based their perceptions around drugs on local media, or said that ‘it was just generally known about the area’³⁴.

- **Lack of parental discipline**

Lack of parental discipline is the next most commonly cited cause of crime, with 29% believing this is the main cause. We can say that the underlying assumption here is that young people are the key offenders – as a direct result of the lack of parental discipline. This is backed up by other research which showed that the majority (55%) feel that better parenting is also the top way to reduce crime³⁵.

- **Lenient sentencing**

Lenient sentencing was believed to be the main cause of crime by 11% of people, while other research has shown that a fifth of the public (20%) think that lenient sentencing is one of the most important issues facing Britain when it comes to crime³⁶. Further to this, confidence in the criminal justice system and agencies generally is low compared with police (with around half the number of people feeling confidence in magistrates, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) and judges as in the police)³⁷. For more information on attitudes to sentencing see section 4.5 on *Satisfaction and confidence with the police, criminal justice system and the response to crime*.

- **Alcohol**

Alcohol is the fourth most commonly cited cause of crime by the public, and over a quarter (27%) of those who do not feel safe and secure in their local area say that this is because of people being drunk and rowdy³⁸. More than half (52%) cite alcohol as one of the major causes of crime, while 7% think it is the main cause³⁹.

- **Breakdown of family**

6% of the public believe that breakdown of families is the key cause of crime, and more than a third (35%) say it is one of the major causes. This may be linked with views of there being a lack of parental discipline and also that young people are the main offenders of crime.

As such – and 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, given that according to the BCS, the 16–24-year-olds have the highest levels of perceived ASB (and the highest levels of experience of it)⁴⁰.

4.3 PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIETY

Also worth consideration when looking at long-term trends in people's views of crime rates and towards the response to crime, are the significant social changes seen over the last 25 years.

Changes reported throughout this time have included, amongst others, growing economic and employment insecurity; greater demographic diversity in neighbourhoods; weakening of cohesion in communities; changing family structures; a decline in religious beliefs; and a growth in the impact of the media⁴¹. These changes may contribute to people's views of society (see section 5: *What affects the public's views on crime and the criminal justice system?* for more information on the factors that contribute to people's views).

Clearly people's views of society will vary depending on a range of factors including who they are, their age, situation and how they feel the changes have impacted on them, if at all. It is argued that these changes collectively have had the impact of increasing feelings of uncertainty and anxiousness, and this may have an impact on concern about crime⁴².

The impact of increased levels of insecurity may be that people become more likely to think that things are not under control, and in particular, not under their control. This is backed up by anecdotal evidence and research asserting that people have a sense that society is changing, with a feeling that 'things are difficult', and that there is less respect nowadays⁴³.

Considering these changes to society and how the public may feel about them or be impacted by them helps us to better understand public fear and lack of confidence which can sometimes seem to be disproportionate to the risk posed to them. This serves to reinforce the idea that more information and engagement with the criminal justice system is needed within this context to reassure the public that crime and ASB are being responded to effectively.

4.4 AWARENESS AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE POLICE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE RESPONSE TO CRIME

Evidence suggests that although people are interested in the criminal justice system and knowing 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.

It should be noted that much of the research available on awareness, knowledge and understanding of the criminal justice system relates to the police. However the principles uncovered by this research, and of communicating with the public about the response to crime, apply more broadly to all those involved in the response to crime within CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs.

Awareness of what is being done to tackle crime

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’ informed⁴⁴, and a majority (62%) also saying they would like to receive more information about how crime is being tackled in their area⁴⁵.

Specifically 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, what neighbourhood police teams are doing and what their priorities are⁴⁶.

Knowledge of the service provided by police

Looking specifically at the service offered by the police – the most visible arm of the criminal justice system – just over half (52%) of respondents do not feel well informed about the service they provide in their local area⁴⁷.

People also have limited knowledge when it comes to finding out about police issues, services and events, with two-thirds (67%) of respondents having little or no knowledge of how to find out about local police priorities, as an example.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF PEOPLE BEING MORE INFORMED ABOUT WHAT'S BEING DONE TO TACKLE CRIME AND ASB?

A recent survey⁴⁸ assessed people's knowledge of the service provided by the police and the findings suggest that those who feel informed about the service provided by their local police were:

- more likely to be satisfied with the way that the Government is dealing with crime
- more likely to feel safe in their local area
- less likely to be worried about being a victim of crime
- more likely to get involved, for example, to give information on crimes to the police, get involved in priority-setting, join a group like neighbourhood watch
- more confident that authorities in their local area are effectively tackling crime or ASB committed by young people

As mentioned previously, although this survey asked specifically about the police, we can see how the principle that being more informed and aware of what's being done to tackle crime locally can apply across a broader range of agencies, with positive impacts as outlined above.

Neighbourhood policing provides the opportunity for visible teams dedicated to specifically defined local areas. However, only half of survey respondents (49%) are aware of the existence of the teams in their local area, and of those who are aware, their knowledge is relatively low, with half (50%) saying they know ‘nothing’ or ‘not very much’ about them⁴⁹.

Knowledge of the criminal justice system more broadly

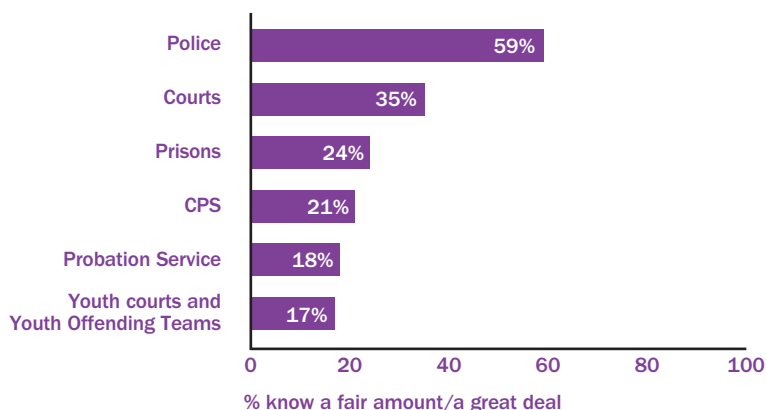
Looking at the public’s knowledge of other parts of the criminal justice system, we can see that understanding is even lower. Figure 9 shows knowledge of a range of parts of the criminal justice system⁵⁰.

Of all the parts of the criminal justice system, respondents were most likely to know about the police, with 59% saying they know a great deal or a fair amount about the police. Other aspects of the criminal justice system are less well known, with respondents knowing the least about the parts of the system that deal specifically with youth offending, an area we know to be of particular concern to many people.

Figure 9

Knowledge of the different parts of the criminal justice system

Source: Home Office quarterly crime and immigration tracker



Knowledge of who, how and when to contact about crime and ASB

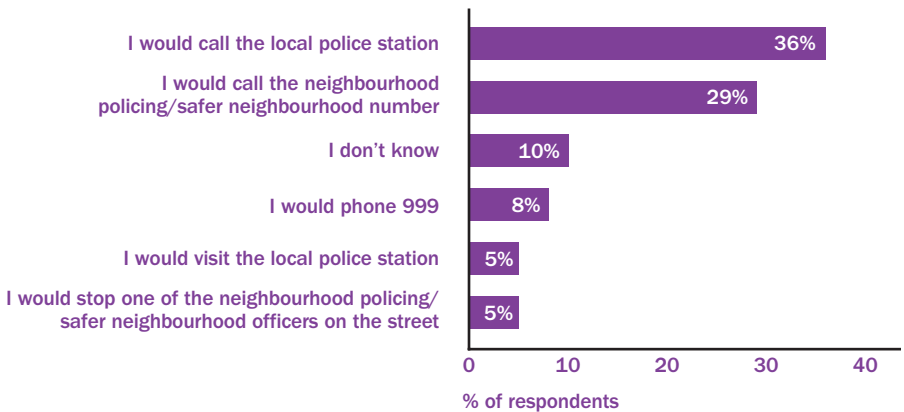
Also relevant to the lack of understanding is that many people are not aware of who, how and when to contact regarding different crime issues. For example, while most people are aware of the 999 number for contacting the police for emergencies or the reporting of urgent crimes⁵¹, there is more limited knowledge of other channels for contacting the police⁵²; particularly in the case of less urgent/serious problems or ASB, or for general concerns about crime in their area.

Figure 10 shows that when asked specifically about how they would contact local neighbourhood policing or safer neighbourhood teams, more people say they would call their local police station than any other method of contact⁵³.

Figure 10

How people would contact their local neighbourhood policing/
safer neighbourhood team

Source: Home Office quarterly crime and immigration tracker



The impact of lack of awareness and understanding on confidence

The evidence suggests that those who are less informed about what is being done to respond to crime and ASB can feel less confident that crime is being tackled effectively. On the other hand those who feel more informed are more likely to feel satisfied, have more favourable views of local police and others involved in tackling crime and ASB⁵⁴. This can in turn lead to feelings of confidence that they are being protected and can reduce worry about crime.

An example of how being informed can translate into higher levels of confidence in the local police is shown in Figure 11⁵⁵.

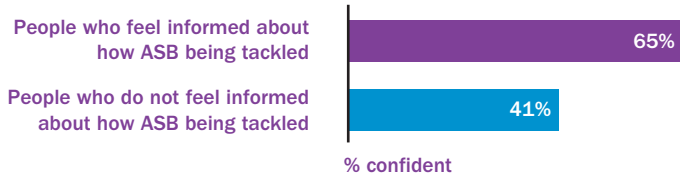
Research demonstrated that when people felt informed about the way ASB was being tackled in their local area they were more likely to feel confident in their local police force and their local authority than those who felt uninformed. We can see that confidence in police was significantly higher amongst those who were informed about how ASB was being tackled in the local area (41% amongst those who were not informed versus 65% who were), and likewise confidence in the local authority amongst those who were informed was double that of those who were not (28% not informed versus 54%).

Figure 11

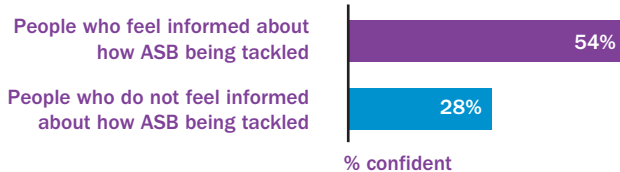
Link between feeling informed about how ASB is tackled, and confidence in local agencies

Source: Perceptions of ASB in Trailblazer areas, Home Office 2006

CONFIDENCE IN POLICE



CONFIDENCE IN LOCAL AUTHORITIES



Clearly then it is important to ensure that people are as informed as possible about crime in their local area. However, the type of information provided must also be considered.

EXAMPLE

Following a spate of burglaries in a local area it is useful to inform people in the area so that they are aware: if this has become a local priority, that they should increase precautions, and that they should pass on any relevant information about things they see and hear to the police. However, without any follow up information this may make people more worried about crime in their area and anxious about going out. In this case it would be necessary to follow up with information on any arrests and prosecutions made, including sentencing information where possible. This will reassure people that the problem is being tackled effectively, and demonstrate the justice system in operation. For cases where offenders have not been apprehended it is still important to communicate follow up information in terms of what is being done and successes in tackling that crime type in general.

There is a sense that often feedback is not given once crimes have been reported⁵⁶, with nine in ten respondents to one survey suggesting that the public are not told enough about what happens to those who have committed crime⁵⁷.

The importance of follow up information about the response to crime

Evidence supports the fact that those who are informed about crime in their local area, but not necessarily the response to crime, can become more worried⁵⁸:

- 73% say that hearing about someone being a victim of crime in their local area affects their feelings of safety
- 77% say that hearing about someone being a victim of crime in their local area makes them worry about the safety of other people in their neighbourhood
- 22% said hearing about someone being a victim of crime in their local area made them feel less safe, 40% said it made them more cautious, and 8% said it affected where they went

4.5 SATISFACTION AND CONFIDENCE WITH THE POLICE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE RESPONSE TO CRIME

In addition to awareness and knowledge of what is being done to tackle to crime and ASB we can look at how satisfied and confident people are in those who are working to achieve this.

As with the previous section, much of the research available on satisfaction and confidence with the criminal justice system and the response to crime relates specifically to the police. However the principles of communicating with the public about the response to crime, apply more broadly to all those involved in the response to crime within CDRPs/CSPs and DAATs.

Confidence in the way that crime is being dealt with

Crime is consistently one of the top issues facing Britain today⁵⁹, and starting with attitudes to Government we can see that satisfaction with the way the Government is dealing with crime is low, with just one in five (22%) satisfied and more than half (56%) dissatisfied⁶⁰.

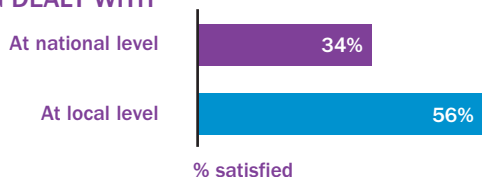
However, when we look at how people feel crime is being dealt with more broadly by all those involved, we find that satisfaction differs at the local and national level, with people being more satisfied and more confident about how crime is dealt with at the local level, as seen in Figure 12⁶¹ overleaf.

Figure 12

Satisfaction and confidence levels with the way that crime is being dealt with at national and local levels

Source: Ipsos MORI, Public Confidence in the CJS, 2003

SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY CRIME IS BEING DEALT WITH



CONFIDENCE IN THE WAY CRIME IS BEING DEALT WITH



As explored in the earlier section 4.1 on *Perceptions of the extent of crime*, there are differences when it comes to some perceptions of crime when considering them at the national and local level. A difference in satisfaction levels at the local and national level is a common trend found in other sectors and countries⁶². As mentioned previously, evidence suggests that impressions of crime locally are driven by what you and others you know see and experience in the local area, whereas views of crime nationally which differ may have been impacted upon by the national media and beliefs framed by personal characteristics and background (see section 5: *What affects the public's views on crime and the criminal justice system?* for more information on this).

Confidence in the way that ASB is being dealt with

And when asking respondents specifically about confidence in the way that ASB is being dealt with we see similar levels to that of confidence in dealing with crime broadly⁶³:

- Just over half (55%) were (very or fairly) confident that the authorities were effective in reducing the ASB problems in their area
- Less than half (46%) were confident that the authorities were effective in bringing those who commit ASB to justice

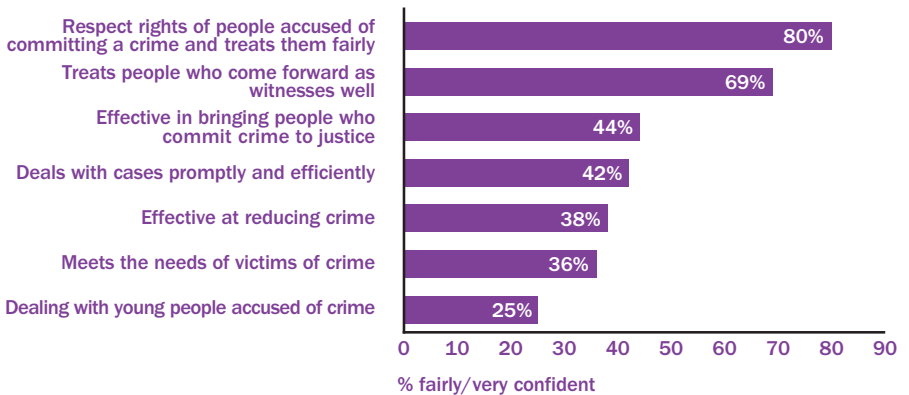
Confidence in the criminal justice system

Confidence in the criminal justice system as a whole varies for the different functions measured as shown on Figure 13⁶⁴ below.

Figure 13

Public confidence in the criminal justice system

Source: British Crime Survey 2007/08



The BCS shows that just over a third (37%) are confident that the criminal justice system as a whole is effective, though more than half (56%) think the system as a whole is fair⁶⁵. In looking at the ratings of specific functions the criminal justice system performs (in Figure 13) we can uncover more on people's views on this:

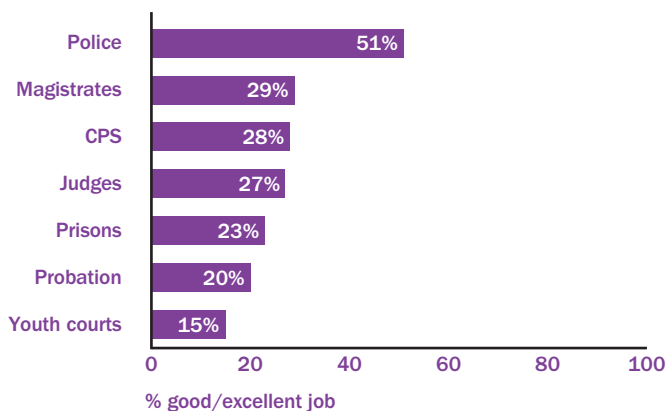
- There are high levels of confidence that the system is fair and treats those accused of crime and witnesses well
- There is less confidence that the system is effectively bringing people who commit crimes to justice and reducing crime
- People are least confident that the system is meeting the needs of victims and dealing with people accused of crime

Figure 14⁶⁶ shows ratings of the criminal justice agencies at an individual level. We can see that the police receive the highest ratings, and this is significantly higher than the rating of all other criminal justice agencies.

Figure 14

Ratings of the job done by the criminal justice agencies

Source: British Crime Survey 2007/08



Thinking back to the last section we can see that these levels match closely with knowledge of the criminal justice agencies – which acts as another indicator that greater levels of knowledge and understanding relate to higher levels of confidence.

At the local level, latest polling tells us that ASB and crimes involving young people are seen to be the most important crime issues⁶⁷, but only around half of respondents (or less) are confident that these issues are being dealt with effectively by the range of authorities:

- **41%** think that police and the local council seek people's views about the ASB and crime issues that matter in their local area
- **45%** think they are dealing with the ASB and crime issues that matter in their local area⁶⁸
- **51%** are confident that the authorities are dealing with youth crime and ASB in their local area⁶⁹

Clearly actively seeking people's views about the issues that matter to them is important in terms of engaging with communities, responding to local priority areas of concern and demonstrating that this is being done.

Confidence and satisfaction with the police

As we have seen, police are the most well known part of the criminal justice system and the agency seen to be doing the best job. Therefore understanding people's views of the police is crucial to understanding perceptions of the response to crime and ASB.

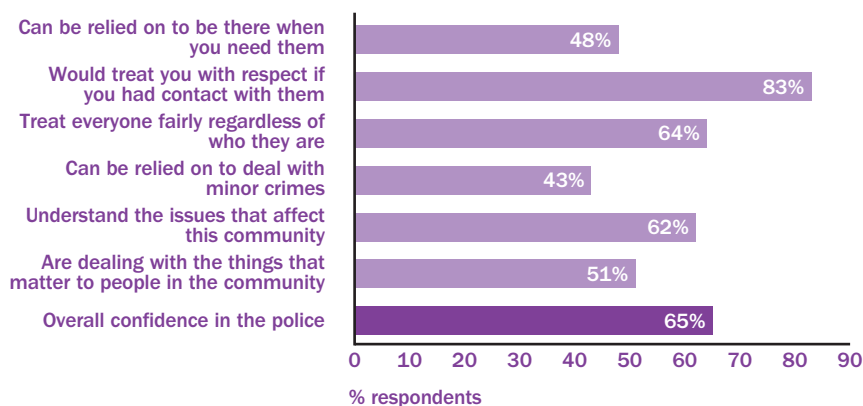
Overall confidence levels in the local police are positive with two-thirds (65%) agreeing they have confidence in the police in their area. However, views of police performance on a range of issues vary as shown in Figure 15⁷⁰. Most positively, 83% agree that the police 'Would treat you with respect if you had contact with them', which tallies with views of the criminal justice system as a whole.

Those statements for which agreement is the lowest at around 50% or below are around responsiveness, and dealing with local priorities including minor crimes. These are all areas where feeding back more information could help to make people feel more confident, for instance on the service people can expect, local priorities, and updates on progress.

Figure 15

Public confidence and attitudes towards local police

Source: British Crime Survey 2007/08



Police resource is another area often highlighted as an issue of concern by the public. The majority of people do not believe that there are more police than ever⁷¹. The main criticism is that there is a need for a greater police presence, and many (48%) see this as a crucial factor that would reduce crime⁷². It is also consistently a factor that people mention when considering the top issues when it comes to crime, at both the national and local level⁷³.

In terms of the visibility provided through neighbourhood policing, recent research⁷⁴ shows that a majority of respondents (53%) felt that police community support officers (PCSOs) are doing a good or an excellent job.

Satisfaction with contact, communications and feedback

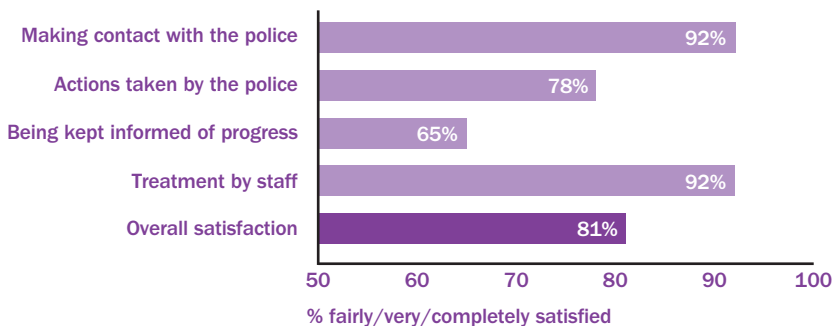
Satisfaction with contact had with the police is key to how satisfied and confident people feel in the service as a whole, as we saw in *The impact of lack of awareness and understanding on confidence* in section 4.4 when considering people's satisfaction with levels of feedback.

Looking specifically at the police, latest BCS figures show that 53% of respondents say that police are doing a good or an excellent job⁷⁵. And looking only at those who have had contact with the police, we can see that they are very satisfied with the service received, with overall satisfaction (those responding fairly, very or completely satisfied) at just over 80%⁷⁶.

Figure 16

Satisfaction with the police among those people who have had contact


Source: Home Office data from Police User Satisfaction Surveys 2007/08



However, this is not a clear picture, as some research has shown that confidence in the criminal justice system is higher amongst those who have not had direct contact with the police, with 56% of those who have had contact with the police (being victims or witnesses) being confident in the criminal justice system compared with 67% of those who have had no dealings⁷⁷.

This finding differs from what we see in many other areas of public service. One possible explanation for this may be that the experience of being a victim or a witness of crime is particularly likely to be a negative one, which may impact on someone's perceptions of the whole process.

But one area to focus on in terms of improving satisfaction and confidence would be the element that receives the lowest satisfaction score on Figure 16 on the previous page by some distance: *'being kept informed of progress'* which highlights again the importance to the public of communication and feedback from police and other areas.



'The police are good at putting up boards but not so good at communicating follow-up information, such as arrests.'⁷⁸

Attitudes to sentencing

There is a commonly held view that sentences handed down by the courts are too lenient, with 20% believing this to be one of the most important issues facing Britain today when it comes to crime⁷⁹. It is likely that the view of lenient sentencing impacts on confidence in the system to deliver justice, and also on satisfaction that sentences are effectively acting as a deterrent to crime.

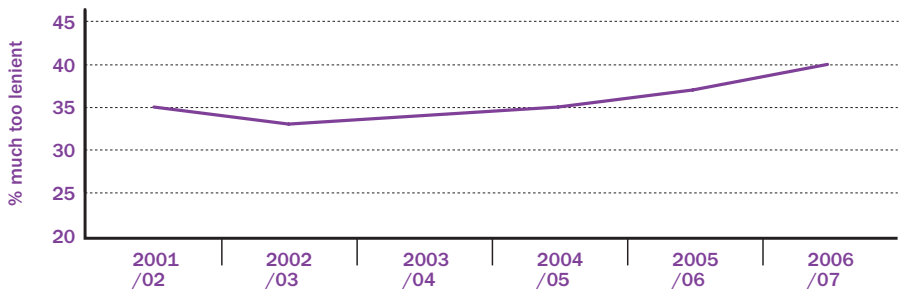
Over the last decade both use of custodial sentences and the length of them have increased. In 2007, there were nearly 136,000 persons sentenced to custody (immediate and suspended), the highest in a decade, representing an increase of 40% from 1997. During the same period, average custodial sentence length increased from 22.5 to 24.0 months (though this peaked in 2004 at 26.5)⁸⁰.

Figure 17 below shows an upward trend in people believing that sentences are too lenient. The 2006/07 BCS showed that 79% of people felt sentences to be too lenient, with 40% thinking they are much too lenient⁸¹.

Figure 17

Perceptions of sentences handed down by the courts as much too lenient

Source: British Crime Survey 2001/02 to 2006/07



However, when putting these views together with evidence of public knowledge of sentencing, courts and imprisonment, we can see that knowledge is low in terms of: the range of sentencing options, practices, and their effectiveness, and estimates of imprisonment rates and sentence lengths⁸².

For example, in some questions asked as part of the 2004/05 BCS, when asked to estimate the number of young men sentenced for rape within a particular year who went to prison, the actual number was 98%, but the public significantly under-estimated this figure at just 58%⁸³.

The view that sentencing is too lenient may impact on people's confidence in the system, with just a third (34%) of respondents of the 2004/05 BCS confident (very or fairly) that sentences were appropriate⁸⁴. More recent research also showed that there are significantly lower levels of confidence that judges and magistrates are doing a good job than police (as we saw earlier in Figure 14).


This again emphasises the importance of communicating the outcomes of arrests and court proceedings, highlighting where justice is being done and punishments are handed out.

Criminal justice system 'self-confidence' and advocacy

Finally it is important to consider confidence of the criminal justice system in its own effectiveness, as the impact of members of the criminal justice system as advocates for the system will be great.

Self-confidence appears to be at relatively low levels with more criminal justice system staff saying they would speak critically about the system (32%) than those who say they would speak highly of it (19%). Most critical of the system are the police, with just one in ten (10%) saying they would speak highly and half (49%) saying they would speak critically⁸⁵. As we have seen that police are the most visible and trusted element of the system so these low levels of confidence are a cause for concern. Low self-confidence may be the result of perceiving the public's low confidence in the system, but it is likely to also be a cause of this, creating in effect a vicious circle of low confidence. Equally low confidence may be linked to the fact that police working on the front-line may sometimes feel dissatisfied with ultimate outcomes of the system.

Consideration of internal communications within CDRPs/CSPs, 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.



‘We are committed to working in partnership with communities and other organisations as it’s a great way to develop ideas, share best practice and ultimately offer better... services to those who need them. Working with other agencies also helps... as you can deliver a stronger message when speaking with one voice.’

Community Safety Manager at Bedford Borough council

4.6 WILLINGNESS TO ENGAGE WITH THE POLICE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM AND THE RESPONSE TO CRIME

It is essential for the effective functioning of the criminal justice system that people engage and are involved to some extent, for instance in acting as witnesses, providing the police with information about crime and ASB and what they see as the priorities in their local area.

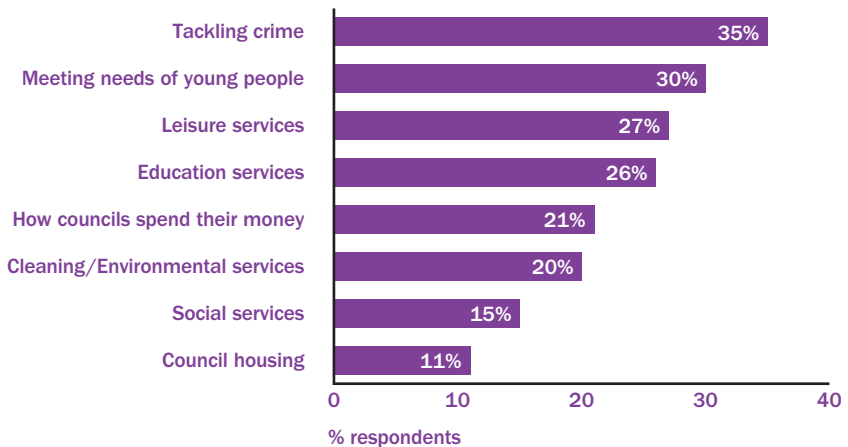
Lack of engagement can be both a cause and an effect of being uninformed about what's being done to tackle crime, and as a result, affects confidence. Those who are more involved in community matters and the response to crime are likely to be more informed, and therefore more confident, and likewise those who are more informed and confident are more likely to want to get involved. We can therefore see this as a virtuous circle.

The evidence shows that there is a general interest and willingness in becoming involved in crime and policing matters. Figure 18 shows that crime is the issue that attracts most interest in greater involvement⁸⁶.

Figure 18

In which services or issues would people like to have greater involvement

Source: Closing the Gaps: Crime and Public Perceptions, Ipsos MORI 2008



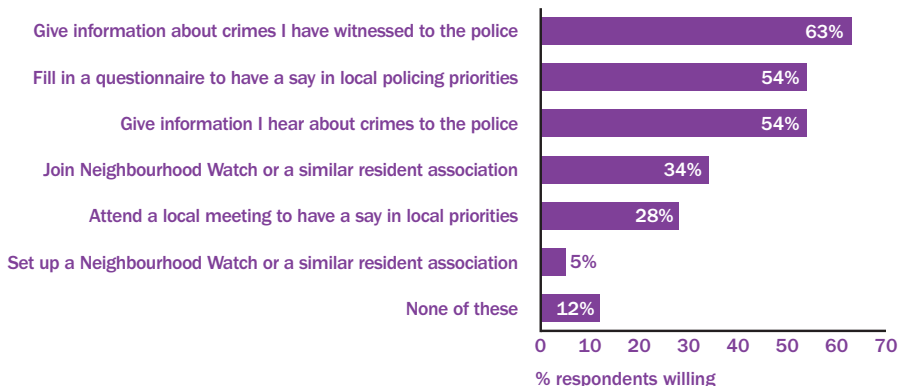
We also know that most say they are willing to take part in specific activities relating to local policing, with 86% of survey respondents saying they would do at least one of the activities mentioned in Figure 19⁸⁷:

Figure 19

Willingness to get involved in local policing issues

Source: Home Office quarterly crime and immigration tracker

Q. Which of these, if any, would you be willing to do?



Although people are interested and willing to get involved, it appears that many only want to get involved in low-level activities. Looking at the percentages shown for different activities in Figure 19, many more people are willing to report crimes, pass on information and fill in a questionnaire than to commit to setting up a resident association, for example. And looking more closely at the research we can see that although more than a quarter (28%) say they would attend a local meeting, the reality is that just one in ten (10%) say they have actually done so⁸⁸.

And looking at reporting of ASB specifically, even though this can be seen as a relatively low-level activity in terms of engaging with the response to crime, the BCS shows that the majority of ASB incidents go unreported⁸⁹. Previous BCS analysis examined why respondents said they did not complain about ASB incidents; the most common reason given was that it was too trivial or a waste of time⁹⁰.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ENCOURAGING TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION

The 'Rat on a Rat' campaign – demonstrating the benefits of a strong criminal justice system-public partnership, facilitated by two-way communications

Devon and Cornwall constabulary used National Tackling Drugs Week 2008 to promote their 'Rat on a Rat' campaign. This urged residents to help put drug dealers behind bars by encouraging them to call in with information, and making it as easy as possible to get in touch. The campaign was run in conjunction with Crimestoppers to enable callers to give confidential information through their free telephone number, and a large number of posters were displayed across the local area to encourage the public to call in.

'The Rat on a Rat campaign is an important initiative to increase intelligence on drug dealers and ultimately lead to drug dealers being convicted and the drug supply market disrupted...Drug-related crime causes misery to victims and has a significant impact on communities.'

Detective Constable Mike Bradley, Force drugs intelligence officer

The Force ran the campaign following the success of similar initiatives run in the past in Plymouth and Exeter. By successfully facilitating and encouraging two-way communications with the public, during a three-month campaign in Plymouth in 2003 275 arrests were made.

The arrests were based on some 400 calls made to Crimestoppers by the public, showing the power of a strong partnership between the public and agencies, and the benefits of encouraging the public to communicate and engage with the criminal justice system. During the campaign, £73,840 worth of drugs were seized. Much of this was cannabis but at least £17,000 worth of the haul was Class A drugs. Stolen property worth around £10,000 was also recovered, along with £17,400 cash. Feeding back on the success of the campaign and the impact that people's involvement had was a crucial part of the communications strategy.

Encouraging greater involvement

There are a number of reasons why people may not feel they can get more involved in crime, policing and community matters, including the following⁹¹:

- Not feeling they have time to commit⁹²
- Being fearful of the repercussions of reporting crimes or speaking to police about issues of concern – in terms of reprisal from offenders or their friends and relatives⁹³
- Worry about prosecution – some fear that if they intervened to stop a person committing a crime or tried to restrain them they themselves might be prosecuted for assault or using excessive force⁹⁴
- Feeling that their contribution would not be valued or make a difference if they did try to get involved⁹⁵
- Not knowing how to get involved – more than half (51%) say they know little or nothing about how to take an active role⁹⁶

To make it easier for people to get involved and encourage greater engagement the evidence suggests that the following would help to convince the public⁹⁷:

- Providing more clarity about the role they were expected to play in their local area
- Providing more information on how to get involved – for example, ways to feed in their views on the crime and ASB issues that matter to them/their local area
- Providing information on schemes to get involved in
- Simply being asked

And to encourage people to report crimes and provide information to the police:

- Discreet ways of reporting and protection from intimidation and reprisals where appropriate
- Assurance that action will be taken and they will be kept informed
- Assurance that crimes will be appropriately punished

This provides us with some food for thought in terms of what types of information and action might make people more willing to engage in future.

SECTION 5

WHAT AFFECTS THE PUBLIC'S VIEWS ON CRIME AND THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM?

Having looked at what the most commonly held public views are around crime and ASB and the response to crime, let us consider what affects those views. Research indicates that there are five key factors that impact on people's views of crime and ASB and how it is being tackled, as follows:

Figure 20

Key factors that affect public perceptions on crime and the response to crime



5.1 OWN OR OTHERS' PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF CRIME

Not surprisingly, personal experience is once of the most cited factors which people say impacts on their views about crime levels⁹⁸.

Those who have experienced crime (as a victim or witness) within the last 12 months have a higher level of worry about crime. For example, those who have been burgled were more than twice as likely to have high levels of worry than those who had not been a victim of any crime⁹⁹.

Similarly hearing about others who have been victims can have an impact, with 73% of the public saying that hearing about someone being a victim of crime in their local area affects their feelings of safety and makes them cautious, angry and sad¹⁰⁰.

Analysis of the 2004/05 BCS also found that people's own experience was the most common source of perceptions of ASB. For all types of ASB considered personal experience was the most common reported source of perceptions of problems (although as we saw earlier this was a considerably lower proportion for drug use and dealing than other types of ASB).¹⁰¹

5.2 LOCAL AREA EXPERIENCE AND CHARACTERISTICS

Also linked to people's views of crime in their local area is what they see in their local environment. Clearly people's experiences of crime and ASB will vary according to where they live, and for many, concerns about crime are proportionate to what they see and experience in their local area.

According to the BCS, the likelihood of perceiving ASB problems as increasing is much higher among those living in areas with deprivation¹⁰².

And as we saw previously section 4.1 on *Perceptions of the extent of crime*, in addition to serious crimes they and others experience, people's views of crime rates can be impacted by evidence of low level signal crimes or signs of ASB in their area.

5.3 PERSONAL BACKGROUND, BELIEFS AND CHARACTERISTICS

People's views on crime, policing and justice are also significantly affected by their own personal situations. Background and upbringing (for instance the views and beliefs of those around them as they grew up, as well as experiences) can clearly impact on people's views as well as personal levels of confidence or anxiety.

In addition to background and values, certain socio-demographic characteristics have also been found to be associated with people's perceptions of crime rates, ASB and worry about crime. Figure 21¹⁰³ overleaf shows some examples of this: the factors that are most strongly independently associated (after controlling for all other factors) with the perceptions of high crime rates nationally and locally, perceptions of ASB as a problem and those most likely to have high levels of worry about three key crime types.

This shows the broad range of factors that affect people's perceptions of crime and ASB – that as well as where they live and their personal experience, other factors which make up their unique situation can have an impact, such as age, ethnicity, and occupation.

Figure 21 also shows that the factors influencing people's perceptions of crime rates locally are not necessarily the same as those influencing perceptions of the national crime rate.

Figure 21

Factors most likely to impact on perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system

Source: British Crime Survey 07/08

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO THINK THAT CRIME RATES ARE INCREASING 'A LOT' NATIONALLY

- Older people
- Those who read tabloid newspapers

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO THINK THAT CRIME RATES ARE INCREASING 'A LOT' LOCALLY

- Victims of crime in previous 12 months
- Those not living in 'wealthy achiever' areas (ACORN geo-demographic classification)
- Those living in an area five years or more
- Residents of London

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO PERCEIVE HIGH LEVELS OF ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR

- Those living in 'hard pressed' or 'moderate means' areas (ACORN geo-demographic classification)
- Young people (aged 16–24)
- Those who have been a victim of crime in the last 12 months
- Those living in an area with high levels of physical disorder
- Those living in an area for 12 months or more

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE HIGH WORRY ABOUT BURGLARY

- Women
- Black and Minority Ethnic groups
- Those not living in 'wealthy achiever' areas (ACORN geo-demographic classification)
- Those who have low qualifications
- Victims of crime in previous 12 months

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE HIGH WORRY ABOUT VIOLENCE

- Women
- Black and Minority Ethnic groups
- Those who do not have managerial or professional occupations
- Those living in certain regions (Government Office regions)

THOSE MOST LIKELY TO HAVE HIGH WORRY ABOUT CAR CRIME

- Being a victim of crime in the past 12 months
- Those living in 'hard pressed' areas (ACORN geo-demographic classification)
- Black and Minority Ethnic groups

5.4 BROAD SOCIETAL FACTORS

Closely linked to people's backgrounds and personal circumstances is the idea of broad societal factors and how these can impact on people's lives and perceptions. Factors within this group would include, to name just a few, economic prosperity, demographics, community relations and cohesion, religion, family structures, and the impact of the media.

As discussed in more detail in section 3: *Perceptions of society*, it has been argued¹⁰⁴ that significant changes over the past 25 years within these areas collectively have had the impact of increasing feelings of uncertainty and insecurity. This is likely to have had an impact on public views across a broad range of terms of areas including concern about crime and confidence that it is being responded to effectively, despite a reversal in the long-term trend of crime levels increasing. Clearly this will impact on each individual's views differently, depending on personal circumstances and how this may have affected them.

5.5 MEDIA REPRESENTATION

We know that the media has a great impact on people's views on crime and ASB. 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, particularly at a national level. When people were asked in a recent survey how they form their opinions about whether crime is going up or down the most often mentioned reason was 'any media', by 49%¹⁰⁵.

While the media may present a useful channel for informing the public about the response to crime and ASB, 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 is.

60% of the public say that television makes them think that crime is rising, and 46% say the same of newspapers¹⁰⁶ (with tabloid readers being twice as likely as broadsheet readers to believe that crime is rising¹⁰⁷). We can see that people are much less likely to draw on experience – with just a fifth responding that their view that crime is rising had come from their own personal experience (22%) and a quarter citing the experience of others (26%)¹⁰⁸. This does not necessarily mean that media coverage has more impact than personal experience, but its effects are likely to be felt by a greater number of people, and more frequently.

‘People... read about [crime] in newspapers, hear about it on the radio, and see it on television... even when apparently factually reporting events, crime ‘news’ tends to be selective and distorted with a general overemphasis on crimes involving sex and violence.’¹⁰⁹

Research into the content of news about crime found that 45% of all crimes reported in the papers in the UK involve sex or violence, compared with only 3% of actual reported crime¹¹⁰, 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 imply that there is some truth in the assertion that crime is being portrayed as a bigger problem in the media than the reality.

Of course we must be mindful of the fact that on many occasions people will choose the media that they consume, and particularly in the case of newspapers that they are likely to choose the sources that confirm their existing beliefs. We know that characteristics and existing views of tabloid readers will differ from those of broadsheet readers.

Further consideration of newspapers shows that local newspapers are a far more trusted source than national, 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 tabloids¹¹¹. This can present opportunities for communicating with the public about what is being done to tackle crime in their local area.

‘It is important to keep residents informed of successes in crime reduction locally and also of means of protecting themselves and their property. We have found it helpful working with local media to promote crime reduction initiatives and activities. All too often it is the negative side of crime that hits the front pages of the newspapers which instantly raises the fear of crime, especially with older residents. However, by developing a working relationship with media representatives, the positive side can also be promoted.’

Project Development Officer, Gloucester CDRP

‘Publicising positive stories and using real people to highlight the messages we are trying to inform the public about, helps people understand the work we are doing and improve reassurance.’

Community Safety Manager, Safer Gateshead Partnership

USE OF CRIME STATISTICS

Related to media coverage of crime is use of crime statistics. We know that the public are mistrustful of official statistics and suspicious of attempts to tell them that crime is not increasing¹¹². Views that statistics cannot be trusted stem from a range of factors including: lack of clarity around the figures (for instance confusion around the difference between recorded crime and self-reported crime); media coverage of statistics which may focus on single elements rather than a rounded picture of crime; and importantly statistics that conflict with what people are experiencing in their lives and local area. There is also the belief that statistics can be selectively quoted to promote particular agendas.

*'Well you can read statistics in different ways. For example, they can be manipulated depending on what you want to say.'*¹¹³

It is clear then that care needs to be taken in the use of crime statistics within communications with the public at any level, both nationally and locally. Where you feel that statistics are likely to add value or impact to your message, it is advisable to use real numbers (rather than percentages) to make them clear and more meaningful, put them into some kind of context (for instance by providing comparisons, say, with the national picture) and always relate them to action – to ensure that they do not have the detrimental effect of increasing worry about crime.

SECTION 6

CONCLUSIONS – THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIONS ON CRIME

Having looked at what the public thinks and feels about crime and ASB, and why it matters that people are not confident in the response to them, we can move on to consider what the role of communications is.

It is clear that across the range of public views about crime that there are differences between what people perceive the situation to be nationally and in their local area. While views of crime at the national level are more negative, which research suggests is likely to be an impact of media representation, local level views of crime appear to be impacted more by real experiences and concerns from within the local area.

We have identified that as a result of this, local level perceptions are likely to have a greater impact on worry about crime and confidence, and so this provides a focus for a local level response to crime which needs to be meaningful, accessible and visible.

A key part of tackling crime and ASB is developing a communications package which aims to reconnect people with the response to crime. Crucial elements of this include:

- providing information which helps to improve understanding of what is being done to respond to crime and ASB, and evidence of its effectiveness
- encouraging the public to engage in a two-way communication around crime and ASB; seeking the public's views on the issues that matter to them
- increasing public familiarity with those involved in the response to crime
- demonstrating a joined-up approach with a consistent message; working with partners to ensure messages are as aligned as possible

The six key purposes of communication on crime

In building a tailored communications approach for your local area it is important to consider the range of purposes of communication. Communication and information in relation to crime and ASB can be diverse. It can range from a PCSO stopping to chat in the street to leaflet about local priorities, to a website mapping crime figures over the last year. Just as it is diverse, it has a range of purposes important in serving the public, including highlighting resources *for* the public, providing information *to* the public, and communication *with* the public. Six key purposes 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.

For example, providing information on actions and consequences

‘When there was a burglary on our street, we got a letter from the police through our door about it, things like that are really helpful and instil confidence in the service...you have a sense that somebody is doing something about problems and that the authorities actually care...’¹¹⁴

- **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.

For example, providing explanations of how to complain

- **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.

For example, providing details of the team, priorities and recent action taken on these priority areas

- **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. A way to consult and measure satisfaction.

For example, providing details of local policing or PACT meetings

- **To provide a supportive resource**

For victims, witnesses, and anyone else who might need advice or assistance.

For example, providing contact details for different times and situations

- **To help prevent crime**

Highlighting safety measures; signposting help with parenting, community involvement, and youth activities, and providing a route to other resources.

For example, promoting tenants associations, safety measures and youth activities

‘...we had some PCSOs knock on our door and talk us through how to further protect our house and car break-ins – and that was really good...’. ‘I’ve heard of police informing residents of hints and tips to avoid future incidents, perhaps we could have more of that’¹¹⁵

For more information on developing a communications strategy and planning and delivering the tactical elements, see *Communicating for Confidence: A Practical Guide*.

ENDNOTES

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Home Office

ISBN: 1-84478-682-X

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Product code: CFC-IR

Product description: Insight and research document

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