Oxfordshire Voice 2009
Crime and anti-social behaviour

Summary Report

1. Background

Oxfordshire County Council staff, supported by Thames Valley Police and the National Indicator 21 Public Confidence Steering Group, carried out in depth research with residents with the following objectives:

- Explore in depth whether the police and other local public services are thought to be successfully dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour in the area. In particular, to focus on why people 'don't know' or 'disagree' that public services are dealing with this
- Identify key drivers in perceptions of public services around crime and anti-social behaviour and link to perceived 'solutions'
- Test response to specific proposals identified as part of 'Operation Confidence'

2. Methodology

Three discussion groups were held (in Oxford, Banbury and Didcot-covering market towns) in December 2009. Residents were recruited by telephone from County Council and Primary Care Trusts' resident panel known as 'Oxfordshire Voice'.

In total, twenty-one panellists attended including a good mix of men and women from across the county. (For more information on Oxfordshire Voice panellists or demographics of those who attended please see full report)

It should be noted that the research was not designed to collect statistical information or reflect the number of people who hold a particular view. The aim was to collect information about the range of views which exist and the rationale behind them.

3. Summary of findings

3.1. Importance of crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) vs other issues

Although panel members were recruited to take part in an exercise about crime and anti-social behaviour, for the majority who took part, crime was not the issue they felt was most in need of improvement in their area. Issues frequently identified as most in need of improvement included activities for teenagers, affordable decent housing, road and pavement repairs and the level of traffic congestion. This supports findings from other research activities.

3.2. Local crime and anti-social behaviour and prioritisation

As we might expect, a wide range of crimes and ASB were identified as local problems by each of the three groups. Some issues arose which were specific to one or two of the groups e.g. dangerous dogs were raised as a concern in Banbury whilst preaching in the street or door to door was raised as in issue in Oxford.

Individuals were asked to prioritise up to three issues they would most like to see tackled in their area. Problems which are thought to occur frequently and have a negative impact on individual's quality of life were most likely to be prioritised. These ranged from street drinking and assault to dog fouling.

3.3. Who should deal with crime and ASB?

Generally it was thought the police should provide emergency response and crime investigation. Council's were seen as central to responding to non urgent issues such as litter, graffiti and dog fouling during 'office hours'.

Links were drawn between the role of schools, youth clubs and council funded activities for young people and a reduction in ASB. Roles for community groups, religious organisations and individuals in tackling issues were also identified. There was concern however, about the ability of individuals to address ASB without putting themselves physically or legally at risk.

Where crimes and ASB related to mental health, drink or alcohol misuse participants recognised the role of health and social care professionals. It was felt the police were not always the most appropriate organisation to deal with such issues, although their emergency response and crime investigation roles would still be valuable.

Residents spontaneously made suggestions about more efficient use of resources to free police time to deal with serious crime and ASB. This included using more Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) and street wardens to deal with ASB. The potential roles of other visible staff from milkmen to traffic wardens were also raised.

3.4. Are police and local authorities dealing with crime and ASB successfully?

Many participants said they didn't know whether agencies were dealing successfully with issues. Whilst some participants were able to give one reason for this, many sited a combination of factors. These are shown below with issues summarised:

Low incidence of crime and ASB in the area	Little or no personal experience of crime or ASB
Crime is low but how can I tell if this is because police and other services are effective or for other reasons?	I haven't reported anything so I don't know effective the response would be
Little or no personal experience of local police or councils	**Little or no knowledge of local activities**
Not easy to get in touch with the local police station - you get put through to one in a different area (or have only dealt with national help lines or websites)	I don't know what's being done in my area to tackle issues so I don't know how successful they are
Mixed personal experiences	
They were good when I was burgled but not when I reported people vandalising the bus stop or 'low level' crime	

3.5. Knowledge of what is being done to deal with crime and ASB

Knowledge about activities in the local area varied greatly. However, most people did not feel they knew what was being done or how they could find out.

What knowledge participants had came from a range of sources including contact with; police, councils, street wardens, PCSOs and Neighbourhood Watch members, word of mouth, local newspapers, community newsletters and leaflets.

Participants welcomed the availability of more information on what was being done about issues in their very local area and about police and council performance. Some participants were only interested in accessing information when a problem arose.

3.6. <u>Operation confidence communications approaches</u>

There were some strong opinions about the practicality and potential success of specific communications methods. Opinions varied greatly by location as well as age, social class etc.

The success of leaflets in ASB hot spots was thought to depend on the size of area targeted, expense of producing and delivering leaflets and of course the nature of their content. Glossy, expensive, solely positive leaflets aimed at large areas were generally unwelcome.

Use of posters was welcomed in the Banbury and market towns groups as good value for money and getting messages across to a wide range of people. Some members of the Oxford group felt posters in problem areas would just be torn down.

The use of display screens generated a range of reactions. For those living in small market towns it was thought screens would be an eye sore. Oxford and Banbury residents were more positive but the content of messages would be paramount and it was suggested this method would be best received by younger residents and those 'on a night on the town'.

Response to the idea of promoting fixmystreet.com varied greatly. Some participants had used it and liked the idea but felt it didn't work as responses from councils were slow or non existent. Some suggested another website reinforced the problem of fragmented public services and didn't offer what people want- to report a problem to a person and get a commitment to deal with the issue from them.

3.7. <u>Other issues</u>

Most participants felt policing was a hard job, under resourced and that staff tried their best. Some of those who took part, however, had concerns about the attitude of their local police officers.

Police response was viewed as patchy and this lack of consistency impacted on confidence. It was seen as often very good for serious crime but poor for others. Problems included slow response, no response, over-promising, lack of interest and lack of resource.

A range of solutions were suggested to refocus the work of police officers on priority issues, to work with existing groups such as Neighbourhood Watch groups more effectively, to raise the profile of officers in local areas and to communicate information needed to raise confidence.

Full report will be made available at www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/oxfordshirevoice or contact ask@oxfordshire.gov.uk or tel 01865 323324