



# **East Herts Council Community Scrutiny Task & Finish Group**

## **A report for the Community Safety Partnership Board (Part 2 of the Community Safety Review)**

**TASK:** Despite East Herts having low crime levels and ranking so highly in independent quality of life surveys, why do residents appear more fearful of crime than the actual incidents of crime suggest?

14 February 2012

### **Introduction**

This Task and Finish group was set up by the Community Scrutiny Committee, to review two aspects of Community Safety and pass on their considered views to the Community Safety Partnership Board, a multi agency group made up of senior representatives of various different agencies. The first report dealt with finance, this second report deals with public reassurance.

### **The Problem**

A decrease in funding and subsequent reduction in partnership resources has necessitated a scrutiny of Community Safety. Other agencies are considering how they deliver their services and are likely to concentrate their resources upon their own identified problems.

East Herts enjoys enviably low levels of crime and features very highly in independent 'quality of life surveys', confirmed by our own research (East Herts Strategic Assessment 2012). Consequently the East Herts Community Safety Partnership has previously agreed just one single priority, to ***'Keep crime levels low and improve public confidence through reassurance and crime prevention measures'***.

How are those who live, work and travel in the district to be reassured about crime and disorder when it is likely that headlines are likely to focus upon the effect of the cutbacks?

### **Current position**

As part of the Community Safety Review, the Community Safety Partnership (CSP) board approved a financial strategy proposed by the previous (Part 1) report of the Task and Finish group which dealt with the impact of reduced funding on projects. The CSP board now awaits Community Scrutiny's recommendations about 'Public Reassurance' which is likely to remain a key focus of the Partnership in the future.

The Task and Finish group has taken into account a presentation from a senior police officer, academic commentary, work by other CSPs and feedback received from a number of consultations.

### **External factors**

There are external factors which need consideration.

### **Media**

Any reduction in resources will be highlighted in the press. This will negatively impact upon how safe people feel, irrespective of actual crime and disorder levels. Aggregating these together will compound the matter.

### Partnership working

Each partner's finances will be under the microscope with the risk of organisations becoming parochial increasing, at exactly the time that the need for partnership working is greatest. Currently, partnership working between the Police and East Herts Council is paradoxically at its peak, following recent press reports alleging disagreements.

### Resources

There has been a dramatic reduction in resources for all the agencies in the Community Safety Partnership which is likely to continue. Examples are the reduction in partnership projects and the introduction of part-night street lighting.

Also non statutory services could be at risk of being reduced. Examples might be CCTV, PCSOs or Taxi Marshals. Each of these is likely to impact upon public reassurance.

The Partnership's Strategic Assessment concludes that East Herts has no overriding crime or disorder issue on which to target resources and so reassurance and confidence should remain the priority in the coming year.

However safe our district remains, the Strategic Assessment does suggest that crimes such as theft from shops, theft of metal and rogue trading are likely to increase in the coming year as a result of the current climate.

It is clear that decisions made now, need to take into account future resource reduction.

Investigation

In depth investigations by the Community Safety Task and Finish Group is summarised as follows;

Topic	Discussion points	Conclusion
<p><b>Interpreting people's fears</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What <u>scares</u> people &amp; what is just <u>annoying</u> can be very different</li> <li>• People's fear of intervening in something</li> <li>• In East Herts just one youth kicking a can gets attention</li> <li>• Fear based on a lack of knowledge, e.g. young people seen hanging about</li> <li>• Need to be careful not to stereotype youth in ASB (anti social behaviour).</li> </ul> <p>(‘Adult ASB’ = speeding, general traffic issues, night time economy problems, dog fouling and fly tipping.)</p>	<p>Creative options are best for young people. Could more be made of music and musical instruments?</p> <p>We should have a ‘Fresher’s’ day, a 3-day young people celebration.</p> <p>Promotion of <a href="http://www.police.uk">www.police.uk</a> website for facts about the number of crimes in an area. Ask people to check on things for themselves</p> <p>Need to work on speeding cars and parking outside schools</p>
<p><b>Friendliness between residents</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generally speaking, town residents don't know their neighbours.</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Watch &amp; Residents' Associations are beneficial</li> <li>• What would happen if everyone said hello to each other?</li> </ul>	<p>CVS could help identify local problems, possible resolution, signposting help and to liaise with and promote residents' groups</p> <p>Send out a reporter to see how many people reply to their ‘hello’ greeting</p> <p>Marketing campaign – ‘Just say hello’</p> <p>St George's Road, Ware mediation process</p> <p>Social media – what can we do with Twitter &amp; Facebook</p>

<p><b>Influence of location type</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban verses rural – Differences in reassurance terms. The sound of sirens are perceived as a police call to a disturbance or an ambulance to an accident dependant upon whether you are in town or in the countryside</li> <li>• Does noise contribute to fear? Sirens are just one aspect, but also shouting, music from cars etc in quite settings creates disproportionate fear.</li> </ul>	<p>Note the clear differences</p> <p>There is a difference between what works in urban areas and what works in rural areas.</p> <p>Note that rural areas perceive that resources are always delegated into towns, neglecting those in the countryside</p>
<p><b>Focus of message</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• People do not believe crime statistics</li> <li>• People are not reassured just by being told to be so, tackling reassurance is nigh-on impossible</li> <li>• Making people feel good about where they live impacts upon how safe people feel</li> <li>• Up to those present to push the message, no good waiting for public to come to us</li> <li>• Very important to celebrate what is good, not highlighting what is bad</li> <li>• It's not about promoting the Council, more about 'aren't we lucky to live / work here.</li> <li>• Need to be celebrating the community in its broadest sense</li> <li>• Market the good things in East Herts not spin.</li> <li>• Use the forthcoming Olympics and Diamond Jubilee to market</li> </ul>	<p>Promote support for street parties for Olympics &amp; Diamond Jubilee - 'Party packs'?</p> <p>Promote "Our District, our community" and "East Herts, a million miles from London", "The Friendly District", "Neighbourly" and "A good place to come home to"</p> <p>Each partner, Town / Parish Council, organisation, group or business could join in celebrating what is best in East Herts. Same message, same template, different logo.</p> <p>Focus peoples' attention on all the good things about where they live e.g. U3A, Ware In Bloom</p> <p>Question: Given the choice, would you move away from here? Council to celebrate all that is happening in the District</p>

	<p>East Herts</p>	<p>Need marketing (advertising) expertise rather than communications</p> <p>Pre-plan for what to do when something bad does happen</p> <p>Devise some sort of community safety game to hand out</p>
<p><b>Public's awareness of factors</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact of factors next year - youth unemployment, reduction in uniform presence, reduction in budgets generally, possible increase in crime</li> <li>• Issues from the recent survey – PCSOs (and uniform presence in general) &amp; CCTV seen as important (but likely to be reduced) and strong support for diversionary activities</li> <li>• The high number of 'don't knows' in answer to the question about whether the council and partners are dealing with crime/nuisance. Is this because no-one told me or I don't care?</li> <li>• Promoting police activity can have a negative effect ie drugs raids</li> </ul>	<p>Make use of Members to deliver common positive messages</p> <p>Why PCSOs in pairs?</p> <p>PCSOs could have space in places like the new Sainsbury's in Hertford</p> <p>Re-launch the Community Safety part of the EHDC website</p> <p>Promote police activity but not "drugs" angle</p>

## **Consultation**

Consultations have taken place with a wide range of groups and individuals. These include attendees to the Parish Council Rural Conference, a 'Conversation Café' event, a Member and a public survey, and presentations to most of the five Town Councils.

Other engagement has been by way of correspondence with a variety of community groups – Housing Associations, Street Pastors, Neighbourhood Watch, taxi drivers, youth groups and minority groups such as Mencap and Future Hope. The letter to each drew their attention to likely resource reduction, invited them to join the Partnership in reassuring the community and asked what community safety problems concerned them most. There have been just four responses to the letters. All offered to become involved, one listed their overall views and one suggested they may be able to help with funding in the short term.

In the Community Safety survey, the public were asked four questions;

1. To prioritise our four community safety projects.

PCSOs comfortably received the highest number of points, followed by CCTV and Diversionary Activities with similar totals. Taxi Marshals received the least.

2. Agree or not that East Herts Council and partners are dealing with crime/nuisances.

The majority 'agreed. The second largest number of votes was for 'don't know' (They do not know or they have no interest?)

Ranked third and fourth choice were 'neither' and 'disagree'.

3. Decide what makes people feel safer.

PCSOs were first, followed by CCTV and then Diversionary Activities. Publication of good news stories and crime stats were placed fourth and fifth respectively.

4. Identify two community safety problems that cause most concern.

The most common concern was Anti Social Behaviour (ASB), followed by traffic issues (mostly about parking and cyclists) and then drugs and speeding were placed equal third.

## **2011 Residents' Survey**

This has recently been published and has three sections which relate specifically to Community Safety.

The finding that 17% of residents admit to feeling unsafe outside in their local area after dark links to issues highlighted previously such as the reduction in uniform presence and part night street lighting. The Survey also states that identified vulnerable groups are less likely to say they feel safe. The Partnership needs more information about the vulnerable living within the District.

Resident's community safety concerns related to are teenagers hanging around, litter and people being drunk and rowdy in public places. Similarly the CSP review survey highlighted Anti Social Behaviour as the highest concern.

Diversions activities for youngsters were a very successful project last year given the small amount of money required. It is possible that as large partnership projects reduce, the remainder of the funding will benefit youth diversion projects in the coming year.

In respect of litter, greater use could be made of PCSOs and accredited persons to issue fixed penalty notices.

The Partnership has a Night Time Economy Group, one focus of which is addressing drunken behaviour. In the event that uniform presence is reduced and with an uncertain future for Taxi Marshals, the role of the East Herts Licensing Committee and officers may be expected to increase.

## **Conclusion**

Despite East Herts being statistically and anecdotally a pleasant and safe place in which to live, reassuring the public is difficult, if not impossible, to achieve. Rather than trying to reassure people, a similar effect could be realised by producing a 'feel good factor'; by raising the profile of the benefits of living and working in East Herts. Such a development should involve all agencies within the Partnership, and wider, taking advantage of the opportunity offered by the Olympics and Diamond Jubilee. An action plan will be produced from this review and both documents will be set before the CSP Board for consideration.

## **Recommendations**

- For the council to work with partners (communication teams of the partners to lead) to design and deliver a common positive marketing campaign message regarding East Herts as being a safe place to live – which can be used by all partners, members and included in all press contact (stories, quotes, press releases).
- To work with partners to identify and improve communication with vulnerable target groups to deliver better focussed information and solutions relating to community safety
- To work with partner organisations (and private/commercial concerns where appropriate) to deal with graffiti cleaning, litter collection, dog fouling, flyposting and fly tipping in a timely manner to reduce any possibility of creating an impression of a 'spiral of decline' (Broken Windows theory 1982 – James Wilson and George Kelling)

**Reference:** <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/1982/03/broken-windows/4465/>



## Essential Reference Papers

- C) Strategic Assessment (abbreviated)
- D) Community Safety Review survey results summary
- E) Extract East Herts Residents' Survey 2011

## Suggestions for an action plan –

- Poster campaign
- Improve Community Safety website – e.g. use of multimedia
- Increase involvement of District in targeting Prolific and Persistent Offenders (PPOs)
- Promote success with lower level crime, e.g. litter & graffiti
- Greater emphasis on S 17 the duty for all public bodies to consider to consider crime & disorder in all that they do
- Identify vulnerable members of the community
- Provide In Case of Emergency (ICE) boxes
- Ensure correct messages about PNL are given
- Use of screens in public premises to deliver messages such as crime, public health & seasonal campaigns
- Intergenerational campaigns to break down barriers
- Colour booklet written by CSP to be distributed to voluntary & community groups and to homes of most vulnerable
- Greater use of Community Payback Scheme