

## **Appendix 1**

### **Local newsletters about crime and anti-social behaviour**

*Evidence-based recommendations*

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## Introduction

This is the third of a series of briefings on different aspects of **Justice Seen, Justice Done**, a Government programme to increase public confidence in how crime is tackled and justice is delivered. It is a national campaign but with the focus on local delivery – raising awareness and understanding of what the public can expect from the police; that the police are tackling the issues that matter to the public and that offenders face consequences for their actions.

This is a practical guide for Pioneer Area co-ordinators based on the findings of research about what the public want from local information about crime and anti-social behaviour.

Good quality information should reflect the expectations, needs, concerns, and interests of the recipients. It is one thing to produce information *available to* the public, but another to produce information with the public *in mind*. This guide presents evidence-based recommendations for producing **public-oriented** information.

People want information that is useful, clear, honest, and reflects their concerns and experiences. People are most interested in local information which tells them what action is being taken, what has happened as a result of that action, and how to get in contact if they want or need to.

You will be already be using a variety of ways of getting information across to the public about what you are doing to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. However, this guide specifically focuses on the use of newsletters and leaflets as the evidence shows that these are important and trusted sources of information, yet relatively underused.

Information and communication about crime is very important in building public confidence in criminal justice services. Communications of course do not replace practical action to tackle the crime and anti-social behaviour which the public expect to address the real concerns they have. But they can build on action ensure that the public is properly connected to the criminal justice response to crime and disorder.

Research has shown that providing the right kind of communication and information is a driver public confidence in the police, their partners, and the wider criminal justice system. More information on factors affecting public confidence and the role of communications on crime can be found in a forthcoming Home Office document for partnerships which will provide insight, evidence and practical advice on how communications can play an important role in increasing public confidence.

## Key sources of evidence

The document makes frequent reference to several key studies:

- Ipsos MORI *Communications Research Study*, conducted on behalf of the Metropolitan police (referred to in this guide as '**the Met study**')
- Ipsos MORI *The Role of Communications in Tackling Anti-social Behaviour*, conducted on behalf of the Respect Task Force at the Home Office (referred to in this guide as '**the Manchester study**')
- Office of Criminal Justice Reform (OCJR) *Inform, persuade, and remind: an evaluation of a project to improve public confidence in the Criminal Justice System* (referred to in this guide as '**the OCJR study**')
- *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime: a review by Louise Casey* (referred to in this guide as '**the Casey review**')

## The Importance of communicating with the public

Communicating with the public about crime and anti-social behaviour serves a variety of important purposes in providing a service to the public:

- Communication provides *access* to the police and their partners, for victims, witnesses, and anyone else who might need assistance or advice.
- Communication can *reassure* people – not in an ‘everything is fine’ sense - but by making it clear that the police and their partners are working to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour and that they have the interests of local people at heart.
- Communication *informs* people what has been done, what is being done, and what will be done about crime. It lets people know how the police and their partners are spending their time, what the impact of their efforts has been, and what service people can expect.
- Communication *explains* to people how the police and their partners work, why they are doing something in particular, and what their various procedures mean for people. It helps to make their work transparent, fair and accountable.
- Communication can *engage* local people, by encouraging reporting, learning about what matters to people, showing how people can help or get involved, and checking whether they are satisfied.

## **Delivery - how and how often**

Communication about crime and safety can range from a PCSO stopping to chat to residents in the street, to a website mapping crime figures, to a local or national awareness campaign. The most direct way to reach people is to talk to them face-to-face. The increasing use of the internet (particularly to search for information) means it is helpful to have a good website. Many people read local papers and it is sensible to develop strong links with the local media. But leaflets and newsletters remain one of the best ways to reach a large number of local residents directly.

- In a survey of the public conducted by Ipsos MORI, newsletter information from the police was among the most trusted sources of information, but among the least received.

Whilst this guide is focussed on newsletters and leaflets, many of the principles and features are relevant to other forms of communication such as websites or information provided at local meetings. Types of communication are also linked, for example in the way that a newsletter can promote a website or public meeting.

### **Frequency**

The public preference for receiving crime information seems to be to receive something on a monthly basis. Depending on the amount of information included, if newsletters are difficult to produce on a monthly basis, then they should be produced at least quarterly, perhaps supplemented by leaflets on a monthly basis.

- The Casey review found that the public tended to say they preferred monthly information about crime (45%) or quarterly information (25%).
- Similarly the Met police leaflet research found that over half (62%) of people felt that the police should produce local leaflets on a monthly basis with a further 29% saying quarterly. Respondents stated that anything less than quarterly information was too infrequent.

### **Delivery**

Newsletters and leaflets should be delivered to as many homes as possible in an area, as well as being available at other public spaces. However, research shows that recall of a newsletter or leaflets can be enhanced by hand-delivery or in combination with door-knocking, for example by PCSOs or wardens. Other methods to boost recall may include delivering the information alongside other important or interesting information. Where residents do recall receiving leaflets or newsletters on crime, the evidence suggests they find them useful and interesting to read.

- In the Met leaflet study, of those that had recalled/looked at the leaflet, more than half said they read most or all of it.

- In the Manchester study, around one in six (16%) residents recognised the leaflet after the initial leaflet-drop. This increased to two in five (42%) when PCSOs hand delivered the leaflet.
- The OCJR research found that personally handing a booklet to people, either with or without providing an explanation, made it more likely they will read the booklet as well and resulted in more of an increase in people's confidence in the Criminal Justice System, compared with sending the booklet through the post

*“Mine was handed to me by somebody that came to the door which puts more of an emphasis on it. It's more meaningful because somebody's actually given you this. They've gone out of their way to come to your door and give it to you”*

[OCJR research respondent]

- In the Met study one set of neighbourhood policing leaflets were delivered alongside the widely read local newspaper (recall of the leaflet in that neighbourhood was 57% compared to around 25% for the normal door drop)
- The OCJR also recommended that consideration be given to emulating or piggy-backing the practice of local authorities who provide annual statements to rate-payers which include details of the proportion of the budget dedicated to police services.

## **Content**

This section describes important elements to include in a newsletter or leaflet, based on research conducted with the public about what they want to know about crime and anti-social behaviour in their local area.

### **A clearly defined area and map**

Areas are often defined in administrative terms such as local authority areas, basic command units, wards, or neighbourhood policing areas. However, residents tend to understand their area in more meaningful terms. It is therefore important to define the area or neighbourhood the newsletter covers in clear and easy-to-understand ways. A map is a helpful way of achieving this, but should be clear enough to make out the street names involved.

- Research by the met found that 15% of London residents visiting the Met website did not know the name of their ward.
- The Manchester leaflet research found that people liked a map to be included in a leaflet or newsletter so that they could understand the relevance to them.
- Respondents in Manchester tended to identify their area using main street names, parks, supermarkets, and other recognisable local features.
- In addition to defining the area, maps can also be included to show the location of local police stations, and/or information about crime in the area (see section on local crime figures)

### **Contact details and how to report**

All newsletters and leaflets should have a section indicating clearly and simply how to contact the police and their partners so that people are able to report crime (emergency and non-emergency) and anti-social behaviour, or to make contact for another reason. The newsletter should also include details of the neighbourhood team, including names and photographs.

- The information on reporting crime and anti-social behaviour should spell out clearly how to report emergency crime, non-emergency crime, and anti-social behaviour. The Casey review found that people felt they knew more about safety precautions than they did about how to report non-emergency crime.
- In the Manchester research all participants thought it was essential to include instructions of how to report anti-social behaviour. Whilst people pointed out that they might not actually report something they liked knowing that they could, and found that empowering.
- Contact information can be useful for people to keep after having read the material. The Met research found that people said they were more likely to keep leaflets where contact numbers and information were all on one page (or in a section they could tear off).



- The Met research also found that in one case people said they specifically appreciated knowing the details of the local policing team and how to contact them, because they had been concerned about police station closures.

Email and postal addresses are useful to include, as are the location and opening times of nearby police stations.

## Action

*“What we want is a safer community so...how are we getting on? What are we doing?”*

[Manchester resident]

The most common theme to emerge across all of the evidence on what people want from local communications is that people want to hear about action to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour. Perhaps the key recommendation of this guide is that newsletters and leaflets should predominantly be concerned with what the police and their partners *are doing*. However, the evidence is that this is one of the hardest things to get right, as the public think that newsletters and leaflets tend to talk too much about ‘successes’ without talking about current action.

- The Met research found that residents did not feel the leaflets delivered in their area were very good at telling them what their local police are doing to tackle crime. Residents commented that ‘it was not good enough to just state how well the police *think* they are doing. They want to know *what* they are doing.’
- Information about successes and achievements is not the same as action being taken, because it is focussed on the past rather than the current, may come across as singing your own praises, and may not acknowledge current problems.
- The Met research found that residents in one area were disappointed that the section entitled ‘doing our bit’ in their local newsletter was not concerned with fighting crime, but rather boasted about the police’s green credentials.

*“Sometimes they tell you about what you should be doing but they’re not actually really telling what they’re doing. They tell you, don’t put your handbag on the seat in the car and all this sort of stuff...but they’re not really saying what they’re doing”*

[London resident]

- Similarly in the Manchester research residents said they wanted localised information about what is being *done* and *when*. They wanted to be informed of progress and outcomes of efforts and action in their neighbourhood.

This last point about progress is also a key point in considering the content of newsletters and leaflets. The interest in feedback about progress means

information provided should, where possible, relate to the information in *previous* newsletters and leaflets, rather than be an isolated snapshot. In other words newsletters should represent an ongoing dialogue with the public.

Closely-related is the recommendation that newsletters and leaflets should clearly include information about **local priorities** i.e. what the police and their partners are concentrating in a particular month, based on the concerns raised by local residents.

- Residents concerns, in turn creating local priorities, in turn triggering action, should be linked where possible. This approach was taken in the Manchester research where information in the leaflet was spelled out using clear headings 'we've listened', 'you said' and 'we are doing'. This was based on an approach taken by South Tyneside council which adopted a 'we asked', 'you said', 'we did' approach to public information<sup>1</sup>.

### **Consequences, sentences and punishments**

Nine in ten respondents to the Casey review felt they were not told enough about what happens to those people who commit crime. However, incidences, or even any reductions of crime and anti-social behaviour, are frequently communicated with little reference to what happened to those involved.

*'Why do criminals suddenly become invisible when they are caught? We have a right to know what happens to them, but the powers that be conspire to keep us in the dark'.*

[Casey review, Have your say respondent]

Research with members of the public finds that people are interested in knowing what the consequences of action to tackle crime have been. So, for example, if one month's newsletter describes action to tackle robbery, a subsequent newsletter should describe any consequences of that action, such as any arrests made.

- In the Met research the residents of one area were pleased to find out that the police were tackling knife crime in their area, but also wanted more detail. They wanted the leaflet to say what happens to the people they catch, and felt that the information should be more direct. They suggested that the leaflet should be used as a way to identify criminals by showing photographs of them. They wanted to know who was committing the crimes, as they thought criminals can walk around unrecognised.

Information about arrests, convictions, sentences and punishment can be conveyed in a variety of ways, such as:

- Information about anti-social behaviour powers used.

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<sup>1</sup> An approach previously used by the supermarket chain Tesco.

- Information about arrests made
- Information about sentences handed out by local courts
- Information about punishment, such as community payback being carried out in the area.
- Information, where possible, about those convicted, such as names or photographs.

*If you put out some sort of advert somewhere that said 'Last month so many hours of Community Service were done in this town. We did this patch, painted this fence, scrubbed this graffiti', that sort of thing, and you could actually see it for yourself, that's when you're going to start believing it.*

[OCJR study respondent]

Generally, the public don't differentiate between parts of the Criminal Justice System. Just as they expect to hear about policing in their area, they expect to hear about justice relevant to their area as well. Newsletter and leaflets should communicate the consequences of action to tackle crime.

*The public like to read: crimes committed, crimes solved, who committed them, what was the sentence*

[Casey review, Have your say respondent]

### **Local crime figures**

There is some interest from the public in knowing about crime figures for their local neighbourhood, although it is a focus on action that people are most interested in. Crime figures should be as local as possible because people tend to mistrust general crime statistics. They should also be presented in an easily understandable way and make comparison with the previous month or quarter.

- The Manchester research found that statistics need to be reported in context so readers are aware of whether the figure is better or worse than last year, or better or worse than a similar area.
- People tend to prefer real numbers to percentages.

*Our [local police] report to us with actual figures not percentages. He tells us how many more/less crimes in each category. I think this is the sort of information people are interested in*

[Casey review, Have your say respondent]

Crime figures can also be presented on a map and/or the newsletter can provide a web address to access online crime-maps.

### **How to have a say or get involved**

Newsletters and leaflets should contain information about how the public can voice their opinions or, for those that wish to, become involved in helping to

tackle crime in their area. The most obvious of these is advertising the date, time and location of the next public meeting.

- The Met study found that invitations to forthcoming meetings should make clear the purpose of the meeting and bear in mind that people might not understand the difference between, for example, a ward panel meeting and a street briefing.

As well as public meetings, other ways of involving the public which can be conveyed in a newsletter or leaflet include providing information about:

- Support for victims of crime and anti-social behaviour
- How to make a complaint or challenge the way crime and anti-social behaviour is being tackled locally
- How to get involved in residents associations or Neighbourhood Watch schemes
- How to nominate community payback projects.
- Parenting support, activities for young people, or crime-prevention information.

## General Features

This section summarises the kinds of things that improve the quality of newsletter or leaflet content, and is based on research with members of the public about what they like and dislike about communications on crime and anti-social behaviour.

### Provide an ongoing dialogue

As mentioned in the content section, people are interested in knowing that information provided to them is not just a 'one-off snapshot' but rather that efforts to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour are ongoing and have consequences. Therefore, stories described in newsletters should be continued in further newsletters.

Similarly, people tend to want coherent messages on crime, anti-social behaviour and justice. Wherever possible, people should not be bombarded with different information from different agencies.

### Be specific

Information should be as specific as possible, which makes it more relevant for the reader. For example, when describing locations it helps to use street names or landmarks. Names of local officers should be used, and meetings should have specific (and accurate) meeting dates. Information about arrests and sentences should also be as specific as possible as well.

*"[It says] 'Our next meeting will be later in the year'. That means they haven't had the fore thinking enough to actually say our next meeting will be on the 7<sup>th</sup> May...that just doesn't say anything really"*

[London resident – Met research]

### Avoid jargon

The evidence indicates that people do not like to read language which uses jargon, technical terms, abbreviations and too many acronyms. Expressions such as 'problem-solving' 'community safety' and 'partnerships' are likely to be meaningless to most residents. Similarly saying 'the police and council' is clearer than saying 'the CDRP' or the 'partnership'. If acronyms are used they should be spelled out the first time they are used e.g. Police and Communities Together (PACT). Plain, matter-of-fact language is what people appreciate the most. A balance should be struck between a professional yet approachable writing style.

### Provide an honest and realistic account

Although people are interested in hearing about successful outcomes and how things have changed for the better they are sceptical about anything that comes across as 'trumpet blowing' or 'spin'. Again, people appreciated 'matter-of-fact' language that did not try to oversell success, and appreciated an honest account of how efforts were going.

- Participants in the Manchester (and OCJR) research said it would be refreshing to sometimes be informed about initiatives that were not as successful as hoped, and what was going to be done to improve them.

### **Make it locally relevant**

The more local the information in a newsletter or leaflet is, the more relevant and meaningful it is for the reader. This was found in both the Manchester and Met studies, where people preferred a very local focus. One way of maximising local interest, is to include the views of local people in the newsletter or leaflet, as people said they were more interested in listening to the views of people who live in an area (i.e. those who may live with crime or anti-social behaviour), than the views of officials or authority figures.

- The Manchester research found that articles that focus on local people were much more appreciated and considered more credible than those where the focus of the story is not known to them, or not relevant to their area. People mentioned that trusted local spokesperson would add meaning to real-life stories.
- Similarly the OCJR study found that people would like to see information with local people's views included, which they felt would put some flesh on the bones of the statistics and provide human interest.

To summarise the above features, local direct communications such as leaflets and newsletters should use straightforward language and real, specific, local examples. They should be relevant to the interests of residents, present information clearly and tell an ongoing story by relaying the consequences of previous action and explaining current efforts to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.

## Presentation

This section makes some brief recommendations for the format of local newsletters and leaflets.

### Title and first impressions

One of the best ways to make a newsletter and leaflet stand-out (and to make it distinct from advertising and junk mail) is to make clear that it is information about crime.

- The Met study found that straightforward presentation i.e. not too 'glossy' helped in this regard. However one of the best ways was to make the headline title of the newsletter or leaflet spell out what it contained. The study recommends using words like 'News from your local police team' rather than 'community safety newsletter' (this also shows the need to avoid using jargon).
- Similarly the Manchester study used the title 'Tackling anti-social behaviour in [name of area]' as a way of indicating what the leaflet contained.

### Logos and branding

There are often a number of logos associated with agencies responsible for crime and community safety in an area. However, the public do not, for example, tend to know what a Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) is, or a Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB), or a community safety team. They are likely to best understand terms such as the 'police' and the 'council'. So whether the newsletter is from the neighbourhood policing team or from several partners (and given people's interest in one dialogue joint-branding is a good thing) it is preferable where possible to make clear police involvement using their logo prominently for the reasons below. Other logos, if included, should be kept small and to the bottom of the newsletter or leaflet.

- In the Met study a lot of people mentioned they were more inclined to read the leaflet when they realised it was from the police. Where the police logo was not prominent people suggested making it more noticeable.

*There's a lot of rubbish, but I think if it was about the police I think I probably would take the time to read it*

[London resident – Met research]

*First look you think its police, yeah. You pay more attention to it.*

[London resident – Met research]

- The Met research found that 'Safer Neighbourhood Team' branding added little because awareness of the 'brand' was poor and not clearly associated with the police (confusion with neighbourhood watch and the council).

- In the Manchester study (where the leaflet was from the council) groups had mixed feelings about the trustworthiness of any information coming from the council. Residents, however, generally appreciated the fact that the Council was communicating with them, as it showed them that something is being done.
- In the Met study when residents looking at example leaflets realised they were from the local police there was more often than not a change in attitude towards the leaflet (for the better), reflecting a sense that the residents were keen to understand more about crime in their area and how it was being tackled by the police.

### **Layout and format**

The golden rule for newsletters and leaflets in relation to format is that they should be clear and readable. A consistent format can help to foster recognition and familiarity.

- The Met study found (for leaflets) that A5 was the preferred format (and also recommended for newsletters).

### **Photographs and text**

Photographs are generally good to include and colour makes the newsletter attractive. Ideally photos should be locally relevant and related to the information in the newsletter e.g. police on patrol.

- In the Met study photos which showed local area and told a story gained the most approval. Residents preferred to see images of the police in action (rather than idle).

The evidence suggests that leaflets should not be cluttered/have too much text, but should also not waste clear space. As mentioned in the previous section, jargon should be avoided e.g. problem-solving, intelligence-led, and should make clear explanations e.g. 'three things you've told us are a problem that we'll be concentrating on' rather than 'three agreed local priorities'.

- The Met study found people had a preference for text to be laid out in blocks, broken up with pictures and using clear bold headings and consistent font types and sizes.



## Summary of recommendations

- Crime information should be provided at least quarterly, and preferably monthly. Quarterly newsletters with monthly leaflets or updates should be the minimum.
- Attention to newsletters or leaflets can be enhanced by hand delivery.
- Newsletters and leaflets should define the area clearly, using a map.
- Contact details should be included, including ways to report crime and anti-social behaviour, and information about the local policing team.
- The content should focus on action being taken to tackle crime and anti-social behaviour.
- The results and consequences of action should also be included including arrest, sentencing and punishment information
- Local crime figures should be presented in a simple way, using numbers and comparisons with previous months.
- Ways for the public to be involved should be highlighted, including forthcoming public meetings, ways to complain, information about joining residents groups, and how to have a say in community payback.
- Newsletters and leaflets should use straightforward language, be honest and matter-of-fact, and represent an ongoing dialogue with the public.
- Information should be locally relevant, use specific names and places, and avoid jargon.
- Titles should make clear what the newsletter or leaflet is about, and ideally use a prominent police logo.
- Photos should show police and partners in action, text should be clear and readable.