



Parish and town councils working towards crime prevention

**An evaluation and good practice paper
2006**



Start at the Start

- In 2006 the CRC undertook an evaluation into approaches to tackling rural crime (with the support of CJA Consultants Ltd)
- This reviewed the extent recent reforms to reduce rural crime and fear of crime had been successful.
- Part of this evaluation included surveys of parish and town councils.
- This paper reports on the findings. It includes good practice case examples and recommendations.



National policy context

- The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 gave new powers and duties to town and parish councils
- (Section 5) county/district councils required to cooperate with town and parish councils, in formulating and implementing strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder
- (Section 17) – every town and parish council has a duty to exercise its functions *‘with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area’*
- Section 17 is potentially wide-ranging in impact. It gives parishes a responsibility for action on crime and disorder
- In November 2000, the Rural White Paper emphasised partnership working, based on local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CRDPs).



- The RWP made it clear that “there is no ‘acceptable’ level of crime, wherever it exists”.
- In 2002 the Countryside Agency produced ‘Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998: a practical guide for parish and town councils’. This was distributed to parish and town councils.
- More recently the Government has developed proposals for neighbourhood policing. The Government is committed to its introduction in half the country by the end of 2007 and the remainder during 2008.
- This should enable policing to be organised to suit the needs of each community, thus matching rural and urban requirements in different ways.
- If full advantage can be taken of the experience already gained, this should enable greater effectiveness of the new system within rural communities from the outset.



The research approach

- The research team split the opinion survey of parish and town councils into two parts. An online survey with 635 respondents. A telephone survey of 50 parish/town councils.
- The survey was promoted by (most) County Associations of Local Councils (CALCs).
- The online survey produced 544 responses from parish councils (86%) and 91 responses from town councils (14%).
- This is one of the largest surveys undertaken of the parish sector in recent years.



Research results – answers to 12 questions

‘Is your Council involved in the local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership?’

- 21% of Parish Councils were involved.
- Over 50% of Town Councils said that they were involved.
- 13% of respondents *did not know* whether they were involved!

‘In your opinion, how effectively was your Council consulted before crime and disorder reduction strategies were decided?’

- Only around 20% of Parish and Town Councils felt effectively consulted by local authorities and the police.

‘Has the local authority formally delegated to your Council any responsibilities in connection with crime and disorder?’

- The vast majority of both Town and Parish Councils (approximately 90%) do not have any delegated responsibility for crime and disorder.



Research results – answers to 12 questions – cont'd

‘In general how closely does your local police force liaise with your Council about the policing arrangements for your Council’s area?’

- 62% of Town Councils responded that liaison with the local police was ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ close, while Parish Councils were split fairly evenly between those who felt that liaison by their local police force was ‘not very’ or ‘not at all’ close (49%) and those who liaised ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ closely (50%).

‘In your opinion, in your Council’s area, to what extent has the fear of crime increased or decreased in the last three years?’

- Both Parish and Town Councils felt that there had been a slight increase.

‘In your Council’s area, if you are aware of any evidence, to what extent has actual crime and disorder increased or decreased in the last 3 years?’

- Town Councils on average said that there had been no real change while Parish Councils suggested that there had been a minor increase in crime and disorder.



Research results – answers to 12 questions – cont'd

- ‘As far as you can recall, roughly how many times has your Council discussed issues of local crime and disorder in the last three years?’
- In almost 80% of Town Councils, crime and disorder had been discussed more than 10 times over the last three years (with nearly 40% of respondents stating that the issue had been discussed more than 25 times).
 - Some 50% of Parish Councils had discussed crime and disorder more than 10 times over the same period.
- ‘Has your Council completed a Parish Plan or a Market Town Healthcheck?’ If so, ‘How important is crime and disorder in the Plan?’
- 31% of responding Parish Councils and 39% of responding Town Councils had completed such plans and healthchecks.
 - Of these, Town Councils on average rated crime and disorder as a slightly more important issue (2.29) than did Parish Councils (2.54), (where ratings went from ‘1-very important’ to ‘5 – not at all important’).



Research results – answers to 12 questions – cont'd

‘Does your Council discuss the impact on crime and disorder before taking specific decisions?’

- A significant majority of Parish and Town Councils *do* discuss this impact. However, 18% of Town Councils and 37% of Parish Councils rarely or never discuss crime and disorder

‘Has your Council spent any of its percept or other resources on crime prevention during the last three years?’

- Some 73% of Town Councils and 44% of Parish Councils spend on crime prevention.
- Categories of spend include: CCTV (17%); Neighbourhood Watch (16%); Youth facilities (11%); Design improvements (11%); Information campaigns (8%); Lighting (5%); Police & Community Support Officers (PCSOs) (3%).



Research results – answers to 12 questions – cont'd

‘In your opinion, how useful have the provisions affecting Town & Parish Councils contained in the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 been to your Council?’

- 37% of survey participants (205 of 551) *did not know* whether the provisions of the Act had been useful. (This might reflect high levels in turnover of Parish Clerks).
- Of those with views, Parish Councils in particular did **not** find the provisions useful, with an average rating of 1.93 (with 1 = ‘not useful at all’ and 5 = ‘extremely useful’).
- Only 5% of those Parish Council respondents who provided a rating (14 out of 290) suggested that they had found the provisions to be useful.
- Town Councils have found them slightly more useful, with an average rating of 2.52.
- Many respondents were unaware of the Act. Most did not think that it would be useful to their areas, especially in the parishes and smaller towns where crime rates and fear of crime were not seen as being problematic.
- Most of the Parish (rather than the Town) council respondents said that crime was not a particular concern in their areas, and that they had had no reason to apply the powers under the act.



Research results – answers to 12 questions – cont'd

‘Have there been any major new initiatives in policing or crime prevention in your locality in the last three years?’

- Some 47% of respondents answered ‘Yes’ and 43% answered ‘No’ (and 10% didn’t know).
- Types of new initiatives included:
The most common new initiatives were the introduction of PCSOs and wardens and measures to increase police presence, such as the introduction of new Beat Officers. These initiatives accounted for more than 50% of all new measures in Towns and Parishes.



Some good practice - Moulton Parish Council Community Safety Initiative, Cheshire

Initially driven by a Parish Plan this initiative involves a wide range of partners, including the police, the local authority, a neighbouring parish council, the youth service and a regeneration charity.

The Parish Council appointed a councillor to take responsibility for the community safety agenda. A Community Safety Group was established with a neighbouring village, which faced similar youth disorder problems.

In the last 2 years, the following initiatives have been managed:

- Redevelopment of playing fields, including a multi-use games area, a bikes area, and two 'teen shelters'. The project was co-ordinated by a Youth Committee, set up by the Parish Council.



Some good practice - Moulton Parish Council Community Safety Initiative, Cheshire

- Parish Council funding for schemes, including equipment for a weekly litter-pick by Moulton WI, a playing field safety check, and support for a youth scheme offering outdoor adventure training for young people.
- Newsletters and an annual report to keep the community informed and to promote involvement.
- The re-establishment of the local Homewatch Scheme.
- The work of the Parish Council was recognised through a Village Community Safety Award last year. The Parish Council has also been contacted by other parishes for information and guidance on approaches to addressing community safety.



Some good practice - Rural Safety Initiative, West Mercia

In 2001 local rural communities were concerned that frontline police services were being withdrawn and that crime rates were rising. A research study showed that low level crime and disorder (e.g. problems with young people and speeding) was a priority.

Following a successful pilot a Rural Safety Initiative was rolled out by West Mercia Constabulary in Shropshire/Herefordshire/Worcestershire.

Responsibility for the initiative rests with the 5 Divisions of the Constabulary. All Beat Managers have been trained in how to run the initiative, which follows a common structure. This provides a supported and step-by-step approach to establishing a *Rural Safety Group*. This identifies problems and finds solutions.

Once a Rural Safety Group has been through this process and taken action on its problems, it usually becomes dormant until new problems arise and further action is needed.



A few other examples of good and interesting practice from the telephone interviews

Introduction of PCSOs: the introduction of 6 PCSOs helped address long-standing public nuisance problems at local allotments and playing fields – problems to which the police were previously reluctant to respond. The Town Council does not have a formal role in the work of the PCSOs, but has found it very easy to liaise with them.

Establishment of Safer Neighbourhood Team: a Town Council has been invited by the police to join the team, which is regularly consulted on crime and disorder issues. The group also involves tenants and residents associations and a wide range of public agencies.

PCSOs and youth projects: the introduction of PCSOs 12 months ago has had a dramatic effect on youth crime and disorder. The presence of the officers on the street has cut truancy rates by 90%. Officers have run successful projects involving young people in creative and sporting activities. The Town Council has helped to fund some of these, e.g. paying for clearance and of land for the creation of a BMX track.



A few other examples of good & interesting practice from the telephone interviews

Neighbourhood Police Officer: this officer provides the Town Council with a formal point of contact with the police, and helps to co-ordinate the work of 4 PCSOs. With better links to the police, the Town Council has seen a reduction in incidences of vandalism on its properties.

Youth Shelter: a Town Council is funding the construction of a shelter in a public park, to give young people a place to socialise away from the high street, where some of them had been accused of anti-social behaviour. The project has been led by the Community Police Officer, who has been instrumental in creating closer links between Councillors and young people in the town.

Youth Cafe: one Town Council has been funding a café for two years at £20k per annum, offering young people a place to go on 3 nights a week. About 90 young people currently go to the café each evening it is open.

Police bicycle patrols: these patrols on bicycle had an immediate impact on crime (with a number of long-standing problems resolved) and have improved police links with the community.



A few other examples of good & interesting practice from the telephone interviews

Traffic speed monitoring: the installation of speed monitoring devices led to the establishment of a Speedwatch programme, run by volunteers and supported by the Parish Council.

Community Wardens: following lobbying from the Parish Council and the local community, the local authority now funds an extended Community Wardens scheme with wardens now working evening and night shifts, when anti-social behaviour is more prevalent. The introduction of extended shifts has resulted in a significant reduction in crime and disorder.

‘Bobby Bus’: more frequent routine visits, plus additional visits in response to incidents, by a ‘Bobby Bus’ to a small village has helped to reassure residents following a number of house break-ins. The police have also organised security improvements to homes in the villages.



Observations

An IPSOS Mori poll for the CRC in 2006 showed that the *most* important thing in making somewhere a ‘good place to live’ is the existence of low levels of crime.

There is a sense that towns and parishes regard crime and disorder issues as important but not predominant.

Relatively informal relationships between the parish sector and the police and local authorities appear to score more highly than formal partnerships (such as CDRPs) and formal consultations.

Overall, parishes & town councils appear to have an increased involvement in community safety. Partnership working is beginning to deliver. Parishes are seen as a key element in this process. But local authorities & the police could be doing more to consult and co-operate effectively with the parish sector.



Observations

There seem to be quite large numbers of local initiatives on crime reduction, which the telephone interviews confirmed as being perceived as successful/effective.

On the other hand, surprisingly (?) the powers and duties under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 are seen as being of little beneficial use. This contrasts with the findings that a significant majority of Parish and Town Councils *do* discuss the local impact on crime and disorder before taking decisions. This fulfils their statutory duty under Section 17 of the Act.

But significant minorities of parish/town councils do not appear to be fulfilling their statutory duties. Some 18% of Town Councils and 37% of Parish Councils rarely or never discuss the impacts on crime and disorder before taking decisions.



Observations

Lack of knowledge within the parish sector of their statutory duties under the Act appears to be high. This may, to an extent, reflect the high levels of turnover of parish clerks.

The parish sector is (increasingly?) prepared to contribute financially to addressing issues of crime and disorder.

Despite some lack of knowledge of statutory responsibilities, in reality many parish & town councils are probably doing more than what was the case 5 or 10 years ago in addressing crime and the fear of crime within their communities.

This should be recognised, applauded and further encouraged.



Practical Recommendations

Parish and Town Councils should:

1. Review the extent to which they are meeting their statutory responsibilities under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998;
2. Look again (or for the first time), at the 2002 guidance report, *'Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998: a practical guide for parish and town councils'*. This is downloadable from the Government's crime reduction website, at:
<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/legislation.htm>.
3. Learn from good practice examples within this sector.



Practical Recommendations – cont'd

This guidance report included suggestions to parish councils that they need:

- To audit crime and disorder in their locality. By law, the local CDRPs will have carried out a crime audit and should be able to provide data on the area covered by individual parish and town councils.
- To consult with their local community about their approach.
- To identify local crime and disorder problems. And then decide on priorities and practical and realistic ways of addressing these.
- To identify what resources are needed, including funding, skills, labour and so on; identify how these resources will be found; and set a timetable for implementing the chosen options.



Practical Recommendations – cont'd

Local Authorities and the police and CDRPs should review what more they could be doing to consult and co-operate effectively with the parish sector.

The national (Defra led) Parish and Town Council Development Group and the various County Training Partnerships around the country should review the need for briefing and training to the parish sector on these issues.



Thanks...

- The research was undertaken by a research team led by CJA Consultants Ltd (<http://www.cjac.co.uk>)
- The research for this paper was supported by a reference group.
- This included representatives from: NALC, SLCC, LGA, ACPO, the Home Office, Defra.
- The CRC is grateful to all the above for their contributions to this project.
- Full report of this paper is available from the CRC's website: www.ruralcommunities.gov.uk