

# A REVIEW OF AUDITS AND STRATEGIES PRODUCED BY CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIPS IN 1999

## Briefing Note 8/00

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### Introduction

Responding to a key recommendation of the Morgan Report (1991), Section 5 of the Crime and Disorder Act (which was enacted in July 1998) placed a statutory duty on local authorities, the police, health authorities, police authorities and probation committees, to work together to tackle problems of crime and disorder in their area. Section 6 of the Act stipulated that by April 1999 partnerships had to produce and publish a strategy to reduce these problems, based on evidence drawn from an audit of crime and disorder in the locality. The strategy had to be informed by local consultation on the findings of the audit.

Anticipating the steep learning curve involved in a new exercise of this kind, a range of guidance materials and consultancy services were provided by national organisations such as the Home Office (1998), the Audit Commission (1999), DETR (2000), the Local Government Association, NACRO (1999) and Crime Concern to assist partnerships in compiling their audits, undertaking consultation and formulating their crime and disorder reduction strategies. This research forms part of a wider programme of Home Office research which is assessing the challenges faced and successes being achieved by crime and disorder partnerships.

As the audit and strategy formulation process must be repeated every three years it is necessary to learn from the first round in order to inform the next round in 2001/2. This briefing note gives an overview of the contents of audit and strategy documents produced by crime and disorder partnerships in 1999. As such, it provides an insight into the activities of partnerships in the early stages of implementing Section 6 of the Act. The note describes the range of data sources used by partnerships in compiling their audits and the types of analyses undertaken. The review of the strategy

documents shows which crimes were prioritised for action by partnerships and notes any crime reduction targets that were set. The extent to which priorities were linked to fear of crime can also be established.

### Audits

The analysis of the audit and strategy documents relied on those documents which were submitted by crime and disorder partnerships to the Home Office: **259 audits** or 69% of the total produced by partnerships<sup>2</sup>. It is impossible to say what differences, if any, exist between the 31% of audits excluded from this analysis and the 69% which are discussed in this briefing note. This limitation does not extend to the analysis of strategy documents, since these were available from 97% of partnerships (**363 strategies**).

There was considerable variation in the audit documents submitted by crime and disorder partnerships, in terms of both the structure of the documents and the type of details they contained. For example, some partnerships sent in documents that were comprehensive and included working documents or supplementary tables, whereas others provided executive summaries that were used in local consultation. Since it was not possible to take account of this variation in a systematic way<sup>3</sup>, the analysis necessarily compares documents that were frequently dissimilar in content. Moreover, it should be noted that while the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 emphasised *crime and disorder* as the main topic of interest for partnerships to examine in their audits and strategies, some partnerships widened the brief to include *community safety* issues, such as road safety.

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Jessica Jacobson and Lindy Maslin.

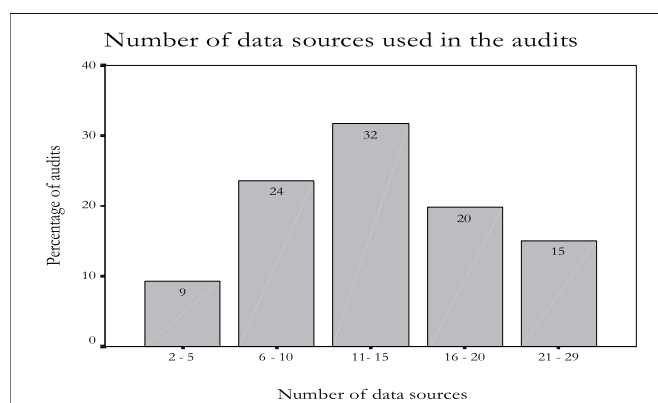
<sup>2</sup> There are 376 crime and disorder partnerships in England and Wales.

<sup>3</sup> It was often impossible to tell which documents were summaries and which were full reports. Moreover, partnerships were advised to publish only a summary of their findings (Home Office, 1998).

### Data sources: range and limitations

Figure 1 shows that the vast majority (91%) of partnerships used six or more data sources in their audit. Over one-third of audits contained 16 or more sources of data. The average number of sources used in the audits was 14.

**Figure 1**



The Home Office Guidance on Statutory Crime and Disorder Partnerships (1998) emphasised the need for partnerships to use sources other than police recorded crime to assess local crime and disorder problems. Undoubtedly this posed a considerable challenge for some partnerships, particularly where factors such as incompatible computer systems or data not being held in a computerised format, impeded cross-agency data exchange. Despite the difficulties associated with agencies sharing data, there was evidence that partnerships did not rely exclusively on police data, although this was a major source for all audits (see Table 1). However, although all audits included police recorded crime figures, other sources of police data such as data on incidents (calls for service), racist incidents, arrests and detections were also frequently provided.

**Table 1**  
**Sources of data used in the audits<sup>1</sup>**

| Type of data                                   | Percent | Number of audits |
|--|---------|------------------|
| <i>Police</i>                                  |         |                  |
| Recorded/reported crime                        | 100     | 259              |
| Calls for service (incident data) <sup>2</sup> | 80      | 208              |
| Detections / arrests                           | 52      | 134              |
| Racist incidents                               | 51      | 133              |
| <i>Local authority</i>                         |         |                  |
| Exclusions                                     | 52      | 135              |
| Truancy  | 38      | 99               |
| Noise complaints                               | 39      | 100              |
| Anti-social behaviour complaints               | 27      | 70               |
| Social services: offender data                 | 27      | 69               |
| <i>Other statutory agencies</i>                |         |                  |
| Probation: offender data                       | 64      | 166              |
| Health services: drug treatment                | 27      | 71               |
| Fire service: arson                            | 37      | 95               |
| Fire service: hoax calls                       | 38      | 91               |
| <i>Voluntary/community organisations</i>       |         |                  |
| Domestic violence data                         | 31      | 80               |
| <i>Other data</i>                              |         |                  |
| Attitudes to crime survey questions            | 54      | 141              |
| Fear of crime survey questions                 | 48      | 124              |

#### Notes

1. The table includes only data sources that were specified in 25% or more audits. Multiple responses recorded.
2. For example, 80% of audits contained calls for service (incident) data.

The most commonly cited local authority data sources were provided by education departments, detailing the extent of exclusions and truancy. Reflecting the need to include data on disorder, anti-social behaviour and noise complaints were also included in a significant proportion (over a quarter) of audits. Offender data, typically profiling the age and sex of offenders were supplied by the probation service in around two-thirds of the audits; these data were also sometimes supplied by social services departments. Despite the department's role in enforcing consumer protection law, trading standards data were rarely included in the crime and disorder audits.

Over one-quarter of audits contained drug treatment data from the health services. A slightly lower proportion (23%) had data on drug misuse or drug-related crime supplied by Drug Action Teams. Accident and Emergency records on assaults and domestic violence were included in a fifth of the audits analysed for this review. Notably, the fire service contributed data on both arson and hoax calls in over one-third of audits. Reflecting the community safety slant of many audits, nearly a quarter contained figures on traffic accidents.

The contribution of data to the audits by voluntary/community organisations occurred most often where Domestic Violence Forums (or other such groups) provided data on victimisation. Slightly less than a quarter of audits contained data which came from Victim Support schemes.

It was not always clear from the audits whether partnerships had undertaken specific data collection exercises for their audits, but 21% of audits did report the findings from surveys of young people and of focus group discussions with various groups in the community. Survey responses to attitudes to crime and fear of crime questions were more commonly included.

Many partnerships (70%) themselves recognised the limitations to the data used in their audits. Reference was made to: the lack of data available from some agencies; the difficulty in comparing data from different agencies, particularly where there was no co-terminosity of boundaries; data covering different time periods or sub-areas; and problems with the format of existing data, particularly where it was collected for management purposes and was not necessarily suitable for extensive analysis of crime and disorder for the audit. Moreover, since the data in the audits appeared to be largely included on the basis of its availability, it was not possible to deduce from the sources of data cited in the audits which crime type/issues should be prioritised by the partnership for inclusion in their crime and disorder reduction strategies.

#### Types of analysis conducted

The time periods covered by the data used in the audits varied widely. For example, police recorded crime statistics might be given for five calendar years whereas disorder data might only be available for the previous year. Table 2 shows the time period covered by the majority of the data in the audits, although it is intended to give a general indication only<sup>4</sup>.

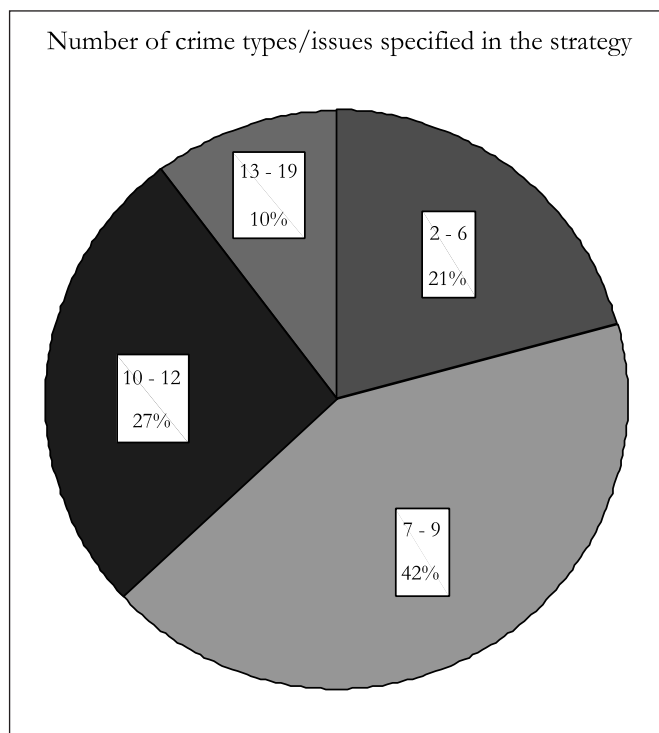
<sup>4</sup> In the above example, if this were the only data contained in the audit, the five year period would have been used since it covered the major source of data in the audit.

assault. Similarly, there might be a distinction made between *residential burglary* (which might refer to any of the following: dwelling, domestic, garages and sheds, distraction/artifice, aggravated) and *non-residential burglary* (which might include the following categories: non-domestic, including garages and sheds, commercial). Alternatively, these categories could be aggregated into a *burglary* category with little indication as to what was included. 'Catch-all' categories such as *crime committed by young people* or *anti-social behaviour* rather than specific crime (and disorder) categories were also in common use. Where it has been possible to disaggregate crime types/issues this has been done in the analysis.

#### Priorities for action

The number of crime types/issues prioritised for action by partnerships ranged from 2 to 18, a finding broadly similar to that found by Dencker and Harvey (2000) in their study of 157 strategies produced by crime and disorder partnerships. In many cases, this would have included a few general lead priorities, for example, to reduce crime committed by young people, and within this, other issues were specifically mentioned such as reducing disorder and criminal damage. As can be seen from Figure 2 below, around 40% of strategy documents selected between seven and nine crime types/issues to tackle in the crime and disorder reduction strategy.

**Figure 2**



The average number of priorities set by partnerships was eight. It is difficult to be prescriptive about the number of crime types/issues which should be prioritised for action in strategies as this largely depends on local patterns of crime and disorder. Nevertheless it could be argued that it is rather ambitious to tackle more than about six major types of crime, albeit that they may be further broken down into sub-categories of crime, as in the example mentioned above.

Table 6 sets out the different crime types that were specified in the strategy documents as priorities for action. It can be seen from the table that the most commonly cited crime issue, specified in 86% of the strategies was domestic violence. Other common issues specified were burglary (84% of strategies); drug-related crime/drug misuse (82%); vehicle crime (80%); crime committed by young people (77%); and disorder/nuisance/anti-social behaviour (72%). The least commonly specified issues (those specified in less than 10% of the strategies and therefore not listed in the table) included: under-age drinking (specified in 9% of strategies); robbery (8%); victimisation of elderly people (also 8%); and witness intimidation (7%).

**Table 6**

#### Crime types and issues specified as priorities for action and crime reduction targets set in the strategies<sup>1</sup>

| Crime Type / issue                              | Of all 363 strategies    |     | Of all strategies where crime type/issue was prioritised for action |     |
|---|--------------------------|-----|---|-----|
|   | Prioritised for action % | n   | Crime reduction target set %  | n   |
| Domestic violence                               | 86                       | 311 | 7   | 22  |
| Burglary  | 84                       | 305 | 57  | 174 |
| Drug-related crime/drug misuse                  | 82                       | 297 | 5   | 15  |
| Vehicle crime                                   | 80                       | 290 | 62  | 181 |
| Crime committed by young people                 | 77                       | 281 | 22  | 62  |
| Disorder/anti-social behaviour                  | 72                       | 261 | 35  | 92  |
| Alcohol-related crime and disorder <sup>2</sup> | 57                       | 207 | 9   | 18  |
| Racist crime/incidents                          | 50                       | 180 | 4   | 7   |
| Violence/assault                                | 46                       | 165 | 49  | 81  |
| Commercial/business crime                       | 43                       | 157 | 36  | 57  |
| Criminal damage/graffiti                        | 42                       | 152 | 42  | 64  |
| Road safety/dangerous driving                   | 37                       | 134 | 37  | 50  |
| Victimisation of young people                   | 31                       | 114 | 5   | 6   |
| Homophobic crime                                | 17                       | 60  | 2   | 1   |

EXAMPLE: Of the 363 strategies reviewed, commercial/business crime was specified as a priority for action in 43% (157) of them. Of these 157 strategies, 36% (57) contained a specific target to reduce it.

#### Notes

1. The table includes only crime issues that were specified in 10% or more of the strategies. Multiple responses recorded.
2. In some cases, specific references were made to reducing this within other general strategic priorities e.g. reducing alcohol-related crime and disorder under the priority heading of reducing youth crime. See also Deehan and Saville (2000).

Deehan and Saville (2000) have examined the coverage of alcohol-related crime in strategy documents in more detail. Their study found that 85% (311) of the strategies they examined refer to alcohol-related crime, and that in 57% (207) of strategies alcohol related crime was identified as a key strategic priority, often subsumed under an objective relating to 'substance misuse' (see Table 6).

#### Targets

Table 6 also shows the proportion of strategies in which specific crime reduction targets were recorded. Although both the Act and the Home Office Guidance stressed the need for strategies to include short-term and long-term performance indicators (preferably ones which were SMART<sup>5</sup>), it should be recognised that

<sup>5</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-scaled.

some partnerships who did not appear from their published strategy documents to have done this, may well have included this information in separate action plans.

Specific outcome reduction targets were included in one-half or more of strategy documents for vehicle crime, burglary and violent crime. This clearly reflects national priorities. Targets were set in around one-third of strategies for disorder/anti-social behaviour, commercial/business crime, criminal damage and road safety. The table also shows that for some crime types, the proportion of strategies containing a reduction target was small.

In addition to reducing specific types of crime many strategies recognised the need to reduce levels of repeat victimisation. Thus, 38% of partnerships aimed to reduce levels of repeat burglary, 31% domestic violence and 10% racist crime/incidents.

Similarly, the aim of increasing reporting levels was often included in partnerships' strategies. This was the case for crimes such as domestic violence (in 43% of strategies), racist crime/incidents (27%) and homophobic crime (10%). Notably, for these crime types/issues where targets were set to increase reporting, it was often noted that this could, in the first instance, lead to an increase in reported crime rather than a reduction. This probably explains why, of the strategies which prioritised domestic violence, only 7% of these contained reduction targets. Reducing fear of crime was noted as an objective in 80% of strategies.

*Methods to reduce crime and disorder*

Table 7 gives an indication of the types of methods proposed to reduce crime and disorder. (It is likely that more detailed action plans give a fuller picture of the type of activities which were planned by partnerships). Based on the information contained in strategy documents, it does appear to be the case that partnerships have recognised the importance of multi-faceted approaches to reducing crime and disorder. Over two-thirds of partnerships (with the exception of solutions based on family support), proposed solutions to reduce crime and disorder focused on law enforcement or on the situations where/in which crime and disorder occurred. Offender rehabilitation and victim support were as likely to form part of partnerships' strategies to reduce crime and disorder.

**Table 7**

**Methods proposed to reduce crime and disorder in strategy documents<sup>1</sup>**

|  | Percent | Number of strategies |
|--|---------|----------------------|
| Educational / awareness-raising        | 95      | 336                  |
| Enforcement                            | 82      | 291                  |
| Situational measures                   | 79      | 280                  |
| Victim support                         | 70      | 247                  |
| Offender rehabilitation/drug treatment | 67      | 238                  |
| Family support                         | 43      | 154                  |

*Note*

1. Multiple responses recorded.

Awareness-raising and educational activities were almost always noted in strategy documents. A similar proportion (80%) of partnerships noted the need to improve data collection and analysis in future audits to assist in formulating their crime and disorder reduction strategies.

**Points for action**

This analysis gives a clear indication of the tremendous effort by partnerships put into compiling audits and formulating crime and disorder reduction strategies. Considering that this was the first time that this process has been undertaken (and that it had to be completed within a relatively short time period), it would be perhaps surprising if there were not some aspects of the work which require further development before the next strategies are produced in 2002. Presented below are some suggestions for improving practice in this area, which largely reiterate points made in the Home Office Guidance (1998):

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>It is essential that partnerships begin the review of police and local authority data systems now.</b> This is so that any improvements to recording practices, special data collection exercises, or the setting up of integrated multi-agency data systems, can be achieved in good time before the next audit must be undertaken.</p>  |
| <p><b>A trawl of all local authority departments and sources of data within police forces should be completed to see what community safety data is available.</b> This should encourage departments such as trading standards to supply data, if appropriate.</p>   |
| <p><b>Voluntary and community organisations should be encouraged to contribute their data to the audit,</b> since they may provide a rich source of data on crime that is not reported to the police, particularly in relation to domestic violence and racist and homophobic incidents. Access to data on broader community safety issues of local concern may also be made available.</p>                                   |
| <p><b>Organisations representing local businesses and the business community itself should be engaged</b> as they are a potential source of useful data on commercial crime patterns.</p>   |
| <p><b>Partnerships must also consider at an early stage whether the research and analysis skills to undertake an audit exist in-house, or whether these need to be bought in through a consultant for example.</b> These skills are vital to enable partnerships to produce a meaningful analysis of <i>relevant</i> crime and disorder data, rather than simply presenting all available data in a decontextualised way.</p> |
| <p><b>Project management skills within the partnership will need to be available if an external consultant is used to conduct the audit.</b></p>  |

**Table 2****Time period covered by most of the data in the audits**

|                          | Percent   | Number of audits |
|--------------------------|-----------|------------------|
| 6 months or less         | 5         | 12               |
| 7 - 12 months            | 41        | 107              |
| 13 months - 2 years      | 42        | 109              |
| 3 - 5 years              | 10        | 25               |
| 6 years or more          | 1         | 2                |
| <b>Total<sup>1</sup></b> | <b>99</b> | <b>255</b>       |

*Notes*

1. Percentage does not sum to 100 due to rounding. In 4 audits, the time period covered by the data in the audit was not stated.

The table above shows that over half of the audits included data for a period of more than one calendar year; this is clearly preferable for understanding the nature of crime and disorder patterns over time.

As Table 3 indicates, in just over 10% of audits the crime and disorder problem was counted simply as the number of crimes/disorder incidents per time period (*volume*). As suggested by the Home Office Guidance, most partnerships calculated the number of incidents per head of population (*incidence*). Less commonly, audits included the proportion of people who were victimised (*prevalence*) or presented a measure of repeat victimisation. In over two-thirds of audits a profile of offenders was provided which included basic demographic information, such as age, sex and ethnic origin. Victim profiles were included in over one-third of audits.

**Table 3****Levels of analysis conducted in the audits<sup>1</sup>**

|                         | Percent | Number of audits |
|-------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Volume                  | 11      | 29               |
| Incidence               | 91      | 236              |
| Prevalence <sup>2</sup> | 28      | 72               |
| Repeat victimisation    | 34      | 86               |
| Profile of offender     | 67      | 174              |
| Profile of victim       | 38      | 99               |

*Notes*

1. Multiple responses recorded.

2. For example, 28% of audits measured the proportion of the population who were victimised.

The level of spatial analysis in the audits is detailed in Table 4. Not surprisingly, the most commonly used spatial units were based on local authority ward, parish boundaries or police command units. In slightly less than half of the audits (42%), a Geographical Information System was used to map patterns of crime or disorder. Such data is particularly effective in highlighting hotspots which are often smaller than electoral wards or police beats.

**Table 4****Levels of spatial analysis conducted in the audits<sup>1</sup>**

|                            | Percent | Number of audits |
|----------------------------|---------|------------------|
| Ward / parish <sup>2</sup> | 71      | 183              |
| Police beat / bcu / sector | 61      | 159              |
| Estate / other small area  | 19      | 50               |
| Enumeration district       | 12      | 32               |
| Other <sup>3</sup>         | 5       | 14               |

*Notes*

1. Multiple responses recorded.

2. For example, 71% of audits disaggregated their crime and disorder data to the ward or parish level.

3. Other levels of spatial analysis included the town centre.

The Home Office Guidance recommended using local and national data as benchmarks against which to measure local crime and disorder patterns. Over three-quarters of partnerships compared themselves with neighbouring boroughs or districts, while a slightly higher proportion used national trends (see Table 5). County and regional level data were used in more than a quarter of audit documents. In the future, partnerships will be able to use benchmark data from partnerships covering similar socio-demographic areas.

**Table 5****Types of benchmark data used in the audits<sup>1</sup>**

|                        | Percent | Number of audits |
|------------------------|---------|------------------|
| National               | 87      | 214              |
| Other borough/district | 83      | 203              |
| County <sup>2</sup>    | 35      | 87               |
| Region                 | 29      | 72               |

*Notes*

1. Multiple responses recorded.

2. For example, 35% of audits used county benchmarks.

**Strategies**

Just as the audits submitted to the Home Office varied in their content, so did the strategy documents. Some included detailed action plans whereas others focused on overarching aims and objectives, with separately produced action plans that were not submitted. For this reason it should not be assumed that the documents on which the following analysis was based are the only ones which informed partnership decision-making in relation to the formulation of the strategy.

There was considerable variation in the definition of crime types/issues which were covered in strategy documents. In one partnership, for example, *violence* might include violence against the person, sexual violence, robbery *offences* and domestic violence *incidents*, whereas in another it might refer only to

|  |
|--|
| <b>A minimum of two years of data is required to understand changes over time.</b>   |
| <b>Attention should be given to including data on repeat victimisation and victim profiles</b> , as this may assist in the prioritisation of crime types in the strategy.  |
| <b>Where there are differences between the priorities identified on the basis of the audit and those that have been included in the strategy (arising as a result of the consultation, for example), these should be explained in the strategy.</b> This is so that consultees and the public are reassured that their views have been taken into account, what has changed as a result, and why.                        |
| <b>Thought should be given to investing in a sophisticated Geographical Information System (GIS) if one is not currently available within the partnership.</b> The geographical mapping of crime and disorder is useful in that maps can be overlaid with socio-demographic data to give a more contextualised picture of problems in small areas. Also, the value of GIS extends beyond analysis of crime and disorder. |
| <b>Where GIS data is utilised, partnerships need to consider the potential output of the information, particularly when identifying hotspots (or in some cases, individuals).</b> This is critical where such information is in the public domain.   |
| <b>It is desirable for partnerships to include both short-term and long-term objectives in their strategy documents, or at the very least, in their detailed action plans. Objectives should include output<sup>6</sup> and outcome<sup>7</sup> targets which are Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-scaled (SMART).</b>   |
| <b>Data on crime and disorder is needed on a regular basis between the full 3-yearly audits in order to monitor progress on SMART objectives and understand outcomes.</b>  |

## References

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### Other related research papers

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<sup>6</sup> E.g. To increase the number of households fitted with basic security by 25% by March 2002.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. To reduce domestic burglary by 4% by March 2001.

*“The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the author, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).”*