

Home Office Police Research Group Briefing Note



AUDITING CRIME AND DISORDER: GUIDANCE FOR LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

Police Research Group Crime Detection and Prevention Series Paper 91

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Summary

The Crime and Disorder Act (1998) requires local councils, police and other agencies, in partnership, to:

- conduct and publish an audit of local crime and disorder problems;
- consult locally on the basis of the audit;
- set and publish objectives and targets for the reduction of crime and disorder;
- monitor progress; and,
- repeat the process every three years.

Guidance has been prepared on the structure of partnerships, conducting the crime and disorder audit, information exchange and training; and this has now been widely distributed. This PRG paper reproduces the guidance relating to the crime and disorder audit, specifically on how to develop, implement and monitor local crime and disorder strategies. This advice draws heavily on research and practitioner experience about what is effective crime prevention practice.

Timescales

The partnerships are required to publish strategies on 1 April 1999. This implies a timetable along the following lines:

- Summer/Autumn 1998 - mount review and analysis of crime and disorder
- Autumn 1998 - publish results and consult
- Winter 1998 - consider results of consultation
- Early 1999 - finalise strategy
- 1 April 1999 - publish strategy

The audit of crime and disorder

The purpose of the audit is to help partnerships set strategic priorities. It is not simply a compendium of all available data on crime and disorder. Conducting the audit will require skilled staff. Those working on the audit need to understand the policy process, and to be able to collect and analyse a range of data on crime and disorder. In some cases technical help may be sought externally, though it is important that the audit is fully understood locally. The first audit may be less elaborate than later ones, but it is important that pressures of time are not used as an excuse for an

inadequate audit or for relying on recorded crime alone.

In all cases police data on recorded crime and on calls for service (incident data) will be relevant in analysing the level and distribution of local crime and disorder. The police should also be able to provide data on the characteristics of known local offenders. Within the local authority various departments may have data on the nature, distribution and costs of crime and disorder not available to the police.

Crime and disorder do not happen in isolation. The Government has made a firm commitment to tackle both crime and the causes of crime. The statistical analysis needs to profile the area - in as much detail as possible - in terms of census information, unemployment, truancy, school exclusion, domestic violence, retail crime and general disorder. This analysis will set crime in the context of other social problems, and inform the strategic approach of the individual agencies as well as the police, the local authority and the partners.

Other statutory agencies required to participate in the partnership, including probation and health, will hold potentially relevant data on offenders, drug misuse, and violence and a variety of other social indicators. The fire service, members of the voluntary and private sectors, and others, may have useful data. It will be useful to begin an audit by assessing the local availability and accessibility of routinely collected robust data, and the scope for improving them.

In addition to using routinely kept records, some authorities may wish directly to collect data on local concerns and preventive priorities. This may be either through specially commissioned surveys or through supplementing surveys already regularly conducted. While one-off surveys will be costly if the work is to be of adequate quality, the lack of relevant surveys may prove an expensive obstacle to progress.

The crime audit needs to provide an overview of problems - including costs where possible - to assess existing responses and to suggest provisional priorities for action. Partnership priority-setting clearly involves value judgements as well as data on problem-patterns.

Points for action:

1. agree on co-operation and roles within the local partnership;
2. assemble audit team;
3. team to take stock of existing audits and existing data sources and report back;
4. team to plan scale of audit in light of (3), and report back;
5. team to collect and analyse data and draft report;
6. identify targets for action, including 'hot spots' and the need for inter-agency actions;
7. partnership group to receive, revise and publish report as a basis for formal consultation; and,
8. arrange for appropriate press handling.

Consultation

The aim of consultation is to check that the audit has construed problems accurately, that it does not contain crucial omissions, that provisional strategies are not based on misconceptions about the communities to which they relate, and to canvass opinion about priorities and options. Formal organisations can be consulted through the issue of the audit document and asked for written comments. Existing facilities for consulting informal groups and members of the public, where working well, can be adapted. Special arrangements may be needed in relation to relevant hard to reach groups, such as the homeless and members of the gay and lesbian community, where it may be useful to conduct or commission focus groups. Focus groups may also be useful for tapping victims' views.

Points for action:

1. identify persons and bodies who will be consulted;
2. identify means of consulting local residents;
3. agree form(s) of consultation; and,
4. consult and analyse results.

Formulating strategic priorities

An early decision is needed about the relationship between the crime and disorder strategy and the other plans or strategies of partner agencies. The ideal may be that the former embraces the latter.

A small number of achievable but challenging objectives is preferable to a large number that are unattainable. Targets will help turn plans into reality. Targets need to emphasise outcomes, but should also

Related PRG Papers

CDP Paper 82
CDP Paper 85
CDP Paper 90

Biting Back II: Reducing Repeat Victimisation in Huddersfield
Getting the Grease to the Squeak: Research Lessons for Crime Prevention
Repeat Victimisation: Taking Stock

Copies of the full version of the Crime and Disorder Act Guidance which provides information on auditing, structures, information exchange and training can be obtained from:

internet: <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk>
or from the Crime Prevention Agency on 0171 273 2155

refer to inputs, processes, and outputs needed to achieve these outcomes. Partnerships are required to publish their strategy, including audit findings, objectives and performance targets. Publication may need careful media management.

Points for action:

1. consider the findings of the audit and the views of local people;
2. review relevant strategies and targets of member agencies and related partnerships and change where necessary;
3. develop strategies appropriate to the issues identified by the audit;
4. agree targets and performance indicators;
5. draft strategy document;
6. publish strategy; and,
7. arrange for appropriate press handling.

Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring crime reduction work is important in all initiatives to ensure that activities are following their planned course, and in order that adjustments are prompted when necessary. In addition to monitoring initiatives, it is useful to track emerging crime and disorder problems to respond to them promptly. It is also advisable to scan the environment for developments which might precipitate crime or disorder, to inform efforts to pre-empt problems. The resources and skills needed for effective monitoring should be available within partner agencies.

By contrast, accurate evaluation of the impact of interventions can be difficult and expensive. It is sensible to do so selectively, where the expenditure and possible use of results suggests that it is worthwhile. There is little to be said for devoting resources thinly to inadequate evaluation of all work. It is worth exploiting evaluation capacity in local universities, for example, and reputable local consultants.

Points for action:

1. lay foundation for monitoring and evaluation strategy for 1999/2002;
2. ensure that there are baseline data for key objectives;
3. make provision for monitoring all initiatives;
4. decide where to focus evaluation effort; and,
5. promote ownership amongst partners of the evaluation outcomes.