

# CONSULTATION BY CRIME AND DISORDER PARTNERSHIPS

## Briefing Note

Police Research Series Paper 148  
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*The views expressed in this briefing note are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).*

### Background to the research

Sections 5 and 6 of the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act place an obligation on local authorities and the police, in partnership with other agencies, to:

- produce an audit of local crime and disorder problems
- consult locally on the basis of the audit
- produce a strategy for tackling issues identified in the audit
- monitor and evaluate progress on the implementation of the strategy
- repeat the process every three years.

In addition to the statutory duty to consult on the audit, the other stages in the cycle of partnership working could potentially involve consultation.

The Policing and Reducing Crime Unit commissioned research to identify good practice in consultation by Crime and Disorder partnerships in England and Wales. The research was based on a survey of community safety co-ordinators, a brief review of audits and strategies and discussion with relevant national and local organisations. In-depth interviews and analysis of documentation were undertaken in five case study sites. The fieldwork was carried out in 2000. The findings will help ensure that crime audits and strategies take account of local people's perceptions and experiences of crime and disorder.

### The aims of consultation

Partnerships had multiple aims when undertaking consultation, rather than consulting simply in order to comply with their statutory responsibilities. There was no clear consensus as to which aim was the most important. Partnerships most frequently indicated that the key aim of their consultation was either to identify local issues or to discover priorities for the strategy.

There were some tensions between some of the aims of consultation. For example, the aim of highlighting concerns about specific agencies such as the police may not fit easily with the aim of getting input from local people into strategic priorities.

### Consultation in practice

Partnerships were undertaking extensive and varied consultation. There was variation among partnerships in terms of who was responsible for consultation, which groups were consulted and by what methods. In most cases, the community safety co-ordinator was responsible for consultation, often reporting to a team or committee. Over half of the partnerships had used external contractors to help them to consult locally, especially during the audit.

Almost all partnerships had consulted the main statutory bodies – the police, local authority, probation service and health authority. Within the local authority, a very high proportion of partnerships had consulted with the housing and social services departments while fewer had consulted with the local education authority. Partnerships were most likely to regard consultation with the police as successful. Consultation with the local authority housing department was also highly rated while consultation with the NHS and town/parish councils was less frequently regarded as successful.

Most partnerships had attempted to consult with hard to reach groups. The majority had consulted with minority ethnic communities or bodies which represented them, over half had consulted with gay and lesbian groups, and a similar proportion had undertaken consultation with older people.

Partnerships used a variety of consultation methods. Most had used surveys, and the media and police community consultative groups (PCCGs) were also widely utilised. Over half of the partnerships had arranged focus groups. However, the methods of consultation regarded as the most useful by partnerships were not necessarily the ones which had been the most widely used. Citizens' panels were most likely to be regarded as useful while focus groups and public surveys were also highly rated. Partnerships were least likely to think that public meetings and PCCGs were useful.

## The benefits of consultation

- Consultation had a clear impact on partnerships' strategies in several ways. These included confirming, narrowing and ordering priorities for tackling crime; identifying priorities among hard to reach groups; providing alternative voices; and facilitating co-operation and communication between partners.
- Two-fifths of partnerships acknowledged that public feedback had identified problems or shortcomings in the strategy. These included failures to deal with particular crime problems and the fear of crime, and aspects of police performance.
- A greater proportion of partnerships felt that the benefits of consultation outweighed its costs than the reverse.

## Areas for improvement

However, consultation had limitations in six key areas:

- **Methodology** – there was a lack of knowledge of social research methods. Some of these methods had methodological limitations.
- **Timing** – due to the tight time-scale, many partnerships felt deadlines were unrealistic.
- **Consistency** – enthusiasm for undertaking consultation sometimes waned quickly.
- **Duplication** – the current emphasis on public consultation may lead to duplication and 'consultation fatigue'.
- **Conflicts with other targets** – some targets or objectives, supposed to be the focus of consultation, had already been established, especially by central government.
- **Costs** – the distribution between partners of the costs of consultation could cause problems and some felt that costs were too high.

## Recommendations

The report makes the following recommendations:

- **Focus** – partnerships should be clear how and why particular forms of consultation are undertaken
- **Streamline** – partnerships should seek to utilise consultation fora set up for other purposes
- **Mainstream** – partnerships should learn from each other to avoid re-inventing the wheel
- **Plan consultation** – partnerships should plan a long-term consultation strategy over a three year cycle. A person responsible for overseeing the process should be identified.
- **Consider using contractors.** – partnerships should use contractors when the relevant skills are not available internally. Contractors should be carefully monitored and managed.

- **Consider different methods for different groups/locations** – for instance, surveys are appropriate for the general population; qualitative methods may be more appropriate for hard to reach groups.
- **Consider different consultation methods at different stages of the process** – a possible framework is outlined below.

Linking consultation stages and consultation methods	
<b>Pre-audit</b>	<b>Exploratory discussions between partner agencies; collation of existing data; drawing feedback from existing consultative fora.</b> (Possible methods: Delphi exercise; citizens' panel; citizens' jury; public meetings; seminars; conferences).
<b>Audit</b>	<b>Specifically designed consultation should fill in significant gaps in available data identified in pre-audit stage.</b> (Possible methods: surveys; focus groups; depth interviews).
<b>Post-audit</b>	<b>The bulk of public consultation should occur at this stage and should validate / amend the local objectives identified in the audit and develop local interventions to address these.</b> (Possible methods: PCCGs; citizens' panel; citizens' jury; focus groups; newsletters; local media).
<b>Strategy implementation and monitoring</b>	<b>Consultation is likely to utilise existing fora to provide feedback on the perceived effectiveness of interventions.</b> (Possible methods: residents'/tenants' associations; and other representative groups).

## Other related research and guidance

T Jones and T Newburn, *Widening Access: Improving police relations with hard to reach groups* (2001) Police Research Series Paper 138. London.Home Office.

The Partnership Working toolkit on the Crime Reduction website provides more guidance on consultation. ([www.crimereduction.org.uk/toolkits.p00.htm](http://www.crimereduction.org.uk/toolkits.p00.htm))