

Public Perceptions of Crime

Driver – Social

Related Drivers – Anti-Social Behaviour, Counter Terrorism, Collection and Storage of Personal Information, E-Crime / Cybercrime, Equality, Diversity & Human Rights, Fraud, Increasing Accountability, Neighbourhood Policing, Organised Crime, Victim & Witnesses, Violent Crime – Gun & Gang Violence, Violent Crime – Knife Crime, Violent Crime – Sexual Violence, Efficiency, Public Sector Productivity, Criminal Legislation, Public Order, CCTV, Crime Recording, Conservative Party Policing Reform, Drugs – Cocaine, Drugs – Cannabis, Human Trafficking, Prostitution, Youth Crime, Race & Crime, Public Confidence in Policing, G20 / Public Order, Stop & Search, Jean Charles de Menzes Shooting

Background

Since peaking in 1995, crime measured by the British Crime Survey has fallen by 48%.¹ However, according to the most recent national survey 65% of people thought crime in the country had increased over the past two years even though only 39% had risen in their area. Only 53% of people thought that the police in their area did an excellent or good job in 2007/08.²

Louise Casey, who was commissioned by the Government to investigate public attitudes towards the criminal justice system in 2008, concluded that:

Most of the public do not believe the official statistics on crime—they think the statistics miss some important crimes and that many minor crimes go unreported. They have lost trust in how figures are relayed to the public—with ‘cherry-picking’ of figures by the media, politicians of all parties, professionals and single-interest lobby groups.³

The revelation in October 2008 that some police forces had failed to record a number of criminal offences in the correct category, meaning that serious violence was in fact 20% higher than shown in official figures, has only increased this mistrust.⁴

The Ipsos-MORI report, ‘Closing the Gaps – Crime and Public Perceptions’, explores why the gap between actual crime and the perception of crime exists and considers what the Government could do to improve public perceptions. Findings from the report include:

- There is strong evidence that the media plays a key role in both the perception of rising crime rates and the gap between perceptions about national and local crime rates.
- Following contact with the police, members of the public, particularly victims and witnesses, seem to become less confident in the police than they were before contact.

The MORI report states the importance of communications to perceptions of crime and related issues, those who feel informed are more confident in the approaches being used.

According to the report, the police themselves are among the most trusted among CJS agencies yet are least cited as sources of information.⁵

The Home Affairs Committee supports this theory as they state the low levels of public confidence in the police and distrust of statistics are driven by a lack of clear information about local crime and police activity.⁶ **They recommend the public should be provided with better information about crime levels in their neighbourhood.**

This is recommendation will be meet via the Policing Pledge and information sharing targets set in the Policing Green Paper but all in all these activities reflect a cultural change. All these approaches that increase direct contact and communication with the police will only improve confidence if the information is robust and accessible and the staff are well trained in its delivery.¹

Potential Skills Needs

Customer service skills – delivering a consistent high quality service

Communication skills – to engage with the local community and communicate to all staff at all levels to create confidence in the community;

Community policing skills – to discuss local priorities and encourage more people to become involved in crime reduction as well as operational policing task

Data recording skills – recording information in the appropriate crime recording format

Data reporting skills – reporting crime statistics to the public

Equality and diversity skills – to treat people appropriately and sensitively as well as better understand the cultural issues of the communities they serve.

Media management skills –communicating the policing pledge to the public; to sell the success in tackling crime to the community

Relationship building skills - to engage with the community maintain public confidence

‘Soft’ skills – personal qualities and interpersonal skills necessary to effectively deal with the public

Victim and witness care skills – to treat victims and witnesses appropriately and sensitively; keep victims informed throughout the criminal justice process

¹ [Home Office \(2008\) *From the Neighbourhood to the National: Policing our communities together*. Cm 7448, London: The Stationery Office Ltd.](#)

² [Home Office \(2008\) *Chapter 5 Public Perceptions from 2007/08 British Crime Survey*. London: Home Office.](#)

³ [Casey, Louise \(2008\) *Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime: A review by Louise Casey*. London: Cabinet Office.](#)

⁴ The Times, 24 October 2008, ‘Police blunder hides true scale of violence’, p3.

⁵ [Duffy, B., Wake, R., Burrows, T., & Brenner, P. \(2007\) *Closing the Gaps – Crime and Public Perceptions*. London: Ipsos-MORI.](#)

⁶ [House of Commons Home Affairs Select Committee \(2008\) *Policing in the 21st Century*. Seventh Report of the 2007-08 Session. HC 364-I, London: The Stationery Office Ltd.](#)