

# SECURING THE CITY

## Involving the private sector in local crime prevention partnerships

Crime is not only big business for criminals. Crime also has a major impact upon business and the economy.

A 1991 Confederation of British Industry/Crime Concern report estimated business losses from crime to be £5-10 billion a year. Insurance losses for commercial and domestic theft in 1992 exceeded £1 billion. It is estimated that crime cost retailers £2 billion in 1992/93 and that retail profits would have been 23% higher were it not for the cost of crime (British Retail Consortium Crime Survey). These costs may often be passed on to consumers through increased prices.



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Crime therefore is a cost to us all whether or not we are direct victims.

In some cases crime, particularly against small businesses or self employed traders, can be the last straw when trying to balance the books at a time of economic hardship. This can lead to the withdrawal of valued services to the local community. A small parade of shops on an inner city estate may be abandoned when shopkeepers are refused insurance, suffer repeated break-ins or vandalism and harassment. Residents of the estate may be unable to purchase basic goods without costly and time consuming trips to shopping facilities elsewhere.

The problem is obviously not confined to small retailers or business start ups. National and multi national businesses are becoming increasingly aware that crime affects productivity of staff as well as the profit line. The crime reputation of an area can play an important role in decisions made by multi nationals on where to locate new offices, or indeed where to re-locate if they are already experiencing high crime problems.

**National Board for Crime Prevention**  
In July 1993 the Government through the

Home Office established a new National Board for Crime Prevention which includes a number of senior representatives from major industries. The National Board has already established 3 working groups on Retail Crime, Auto Crime and Youth Crime.

The influence of the private sector on shaping initiatives in the Government's crime prevention strategy is therefore apparent. The belief that economic regeneration must include attention to efforts to reduce crime and fear of crime is evidenced in the recent round of bidding throughout the country for Single Regeneration Budget resources. One of the criteria to be satisfied in consideration of SRB bids by government regional offices is the extent to which issues of crime prevention are addressed.

The Government is therefore keen to encourage the involvement of the private sector in both national and local crime prevention partnerships. Much progress has already been made by the first 20 Home Office Safer Cities projects which brought together the statutory, voluntary and private sector in local partnerships to tackle crime co-operatively in inner cities.

But there is still a major job to be done in persuading the private sector that joining in a local crime prevention partnership has commercial as well as more esoteric community benefits.

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### Safer Town Centre initiatives

One approach that is being developed in the London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is that of fostering private sector involvement through the medium of the 'safer town centre' concept.

In London's urban sprawl there is frequently no clearly recognised 'city centre' within which significant private sector businesses, large and small, can easily identify. One strategy is therefore to select areas of a borough which can be given a 'town centre' identity, thereby fostering local connections with large and small businesses. In Hammersmith and Fulham a start was made by establishing a local partnership group around Hammersmith Broadway.

Issues identified included employees' fear of crime when using the subways

around the centre, problems around car crime and aggressive begging, and the support needed for homeless individuals in the area.

Police regularly provided information for the area. This enabled police to publicise the successes they were having in tackling various crimes, and provided reassurance to local businesses. Projects developed by the group included a car crime prevention campaign where businesses provided free sites for publicity, loan of cars for police 'sting' operations and access to premises for surveillance purposes. The police provided self defence sessions for local employees and manned a mobile crime prevention trailer provided through Safer Cities support.

A consultancy by Urban Cultures, funded jointly by Safer Cities, the Council and private businesses provided detailed plans for the regeneration of one particular problem area and led to detailed discussions with Council planners and local councillors on how to implement the improvements.

Some companies took responsibility for removing graffiti and fly posters in their locality and the Council played its part by ensuring that environmental problems brought to their attention by businesses were tackled speedily. An international hotel chain made facilities available for the Safer Town Centre meetings and also provided a complimentary venue for the launch of a local Offender Employment Network. Progress was sometimes slow and tortuous but was nevertheless made.

### Issues emerging

A key element of the approach in trying to involve the private sector in these partnerships has been to foster the local nature of the task and to clearly highlight the impact that crime can have on individual businesses and traders in the local area. The aim is to highlight to the private sector that it is in their business interests to become involved in such partnerships. Such involvement can also have important PR benefits through companies being seen by local people and their staff to be doing something positive about crime. Crime cuts across all sections of society and demonstrated involvement in crime prevention partnerships can be a powerful marketing tool for a company.

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