

The New Community Safety Duty: The LGA View

The Local Government Association (LGA), which represents all local authorities in England and Wales, strongly supports the proposals in the Crime and Disorder Bill to create a joint duty on local councils and the police to establish community safety partnerships, undertake local crime and disorder audits, and develop strategies for the reduction of crime and disorder.

In the 1980s, increasing numbers of local authorities developed closer links with the police and with other groups in the community concerned about crime and disorder. Local housing authorities became very concerned about the level of disruptive, anti-social behaviour by a small minority on housing estates. The local authority associations supported the call of the Morgan Report in 1991 to give local councils a duty to take the lead in community safety.

In 1997 the newly formed LGA - created out of a merger of the previous three local authority associations - published its own Community Safety 'Manifesto', calling for a new power and duty on local councils to develop and lead community safety partnerships. However the LGA full supported the shift in the Crime and Disorder Bill creating a new joint duty on the police and local authorities to work together.

The LGA believes that the prevention of crime, disorder and anti-social behaviour is a responsibility for everybody in the community, not just the police. The concept of community safety differs from conventional crime prevention work in that it focuses not only on crime itself, but the fear of crime, and on the underlying environmental, social and economic causes of crime and disorder. The local authority is unique in the number of 'levers' which it can pull to bring about changes in the environment in which crime is generated, including housing, education, social services, planning, street lighting and economic regeneration.

The other key difference between conventional crime prevention, emphasising 'target hardening', and community safety, is the latter's emphasis on developing a genuine partnership between all the agencies and groups in the local community with a contribution to make to reducing crime and the fear of crime, statutory agencies such as the probation service and health authorities (with their links with Drugs Action Teams); the local business community, particularly the town centre retail sector; and a wide range of voluntary groups, including Neighbourhood Watch and Victim Support.

The LGA supports the provisions in the Bill for the new duty to operate at the geographical level of the district or borough council, because community safety is essentially a local issue, but also supports the proposal that, in non-metropolitan areas with a two-tier local government system, both the district council and county council must be equally involved, with the police, as the 'responsible authorities' identified in the Bill on which the duty is to be placed. County council involvement is essential because of its responsibility for education and social services, structure planning and highways, and the fire service.

In the guidance which is currently being drawn up by the Home Office, in conjunction with the LGA and other organisations, encouragement will be given to councils to consider developing co-operative arrangements at a wider, more strategic level, covering the whole county or, in metropolitan areas, the conurbation. Safer Merseyside, Safe in Teesside, and the partnership in Tyne and Wear/Northumbria already provide excellent models of joint working on a wider geographical canvas. These will remain, however, voluntary arrangements in law; there will still have to be a separate audit and published strategy for each district or borough.

The Crime and Disorder Bill also makes provision for a new form of civil injunction, under which the police and/or the local authority (who must consult with each other) can apply to the magistrates' court to obtain an Anti-Social Behaviour Order against named individuals to prohibit them from behaving in a way which causes, or is likely to cause, 'harassment, alarm or distress' (ie. in an anti-social manner) to people in the local community. A breach of such an Order would be a criminal matter, and could lead to imprisonment for up to five years.

Local authorities - particularly Housing Committees - have been pressing for years for a weapon of this kind to add to their armoury, mainly to deal with serious examples of the increasingly notorious 'neighbours from hell' syndrome. The Housing Act 1996 provided some new powers to use against anti-social tenants, the advantages of the new Orders will include the fact that they cover everybody in the community and not just local authority tenants.

Many local authorities and police forces, have developed excellent and imaginative community safety partnerships working over recent years, often funded by Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) money. The LGA has, in its contribution to the guidance currently being produced, stressed the importance of building on good practice and good partnership arrangements which already exist, rather than reinventing the wheel. Many will, therefore, have little difficulty about being ready for the new duty by April 1999; for others, however, there is a lot to do over the next twelve months, establishing good working relations, conducting a joint audit and producing a strategy together, all without new resources.

Potentially, however, the prize is a very significant one; a reduction in crime and disorder (already under way in some areas); a reduction in people being disabled by the fear of crime, which is often much greater than the underlying reality; and, in the medium to long term, significant savings in the overall expenditure on the criminal justice system.

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Detail of what will finally be in the Act will not emerge until it passes into law. Yet the proposed section 6, relating to strategies indicates a statutory duty for each local authority to 'formulate and implement for each relevant period, a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder in the area'. Further, the responsible authorities shall 'carry out a review of the levels and patterns of crime and disorder in the area.'

Later paragraphs indicate that the 'relevant period' is three years, and that the strategy must specify overall objectives, and long-term and short-term performance targets for achieving them.

Measuring fear of crime

Jason Ditton, Stephen Farrall, Jon Bannister and Elizabeth Gilchrist argue that there is as yet no reliable methodology for conducting the reviews required in the Crime and Disorder Bill.

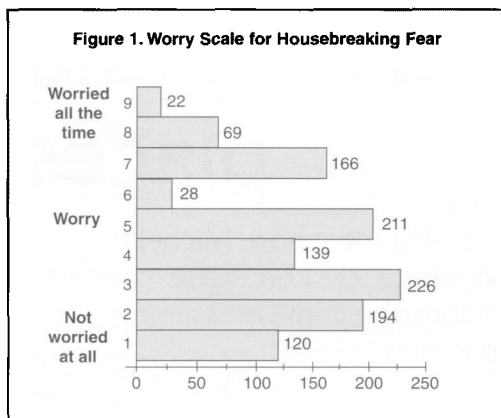
We presume that local authorities will calculate local levels of crime and disorder and 'fear' of it. No doubt most will use bits of a standard crime survey questionnaire. Well-meaning strategies will be developed and money invested. Three years later, the area will be surveyed again in the hope that the 'objectives' (probably reducing crime and 'fear' of crime) will have been achieved.

We feel that irrespective of the chances of actual success, the chances of demonstrating 'fear' reduction via the usual crime survey are close to zero.

The stubbornness of crime 'fear'

Why? The briefest possible history of the 'fear' of crime would be this. There was no 'fear' of crime in Britain until it was discovered in 1982. Crime surveyors liked it because whereas only about 5

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interviewees in 100 could recall a crime victimisation from the recall period (usually the previous year), 100 out of 100 could give usable data about their 'fear' of crime. Politicians and policy-makers liked it because it seemed more amenable to manipulation and reduction than crime itself. Rates of 'fear' of crime, at one point, seemed about to become more important than rates of crime itself. People set about energetically trying to reduce the 'fear' of crime. They failed.

Let us expand a bit. First of all, rates of 'fear' of crime seem remarkably stable. Any review of recent national crime survey data over the last decade would discover that the number of respondents who claim that they feel a bit or very unsafe when walking alone in their area at night is $35\% \pm 6\%$; the number of respondents who claim that they feel a bit or very unsafe when home alone at night is consistently $10\% \pm 1\%$; and the number of respondents who claim that they are a bit worried or very worried about being burgled is $60\% \pm 5\%$.

These consistent findings obtained whatever the trend in police recorded or survey discovered crime rates. A criminological maxim appears to be emerging here: it seems that rates of 'fear' of crime may climb when the crime rate climbs, but fail to fall when the crime rate falls. Rates of 'fear' of crime seem to be relatively independent of crime rates.

Second, while local action can reduce crime rates, the frequency with which people 'fear' victimisation is much harder to reduce. Perhaps the best example of this is the massive study conducted by Ekblom, Law and Sutton (1996). Their goal was to see if Safer Cities investment in

burglary prevention actually reduced both burglaries, and the fear of burglary.

They found that the more crime preventative action taken, the greater the decline in the actual burglary rate. But, there was an increase in the self-declared levels of worry about burglary, and this was greatest in those areas which had implemented the most crime preventative action.

A third problem is that the British Crime Survey questionnaire - often used as a template for local crime surveys - is good at what it was designed for (consistently asking the same questions in the same way so as to permit temporal comparison), but not, we feel, necessarily any good at evaluating fear reduction as a response to crime prevention initiatives at the local level.

Lessons from recent research

The research into the methodology of crime and fear of crime surveying that we have been conducting recently as part of the ESRC's Crime and Social Order Programme (published output is cited at the end) has persuaded us that local surveys should ask far fewer questions, and that far more time should be spent on analysis.

A couple of examples might show what we mean. First, one question we asked was a fairly standard one, 'in your everyday life, are you afraid of someone breaking into your home?' Respondents were given the five response actions: 'not at all', 'hardly ever', 'don't know', 'some of the time', or 'all the time'. As a check, and unusually for crime surveys, we asked the question again later in the interview, albeit in a slightly different form as 'could you tell me how worried

you are about having your home broken into and something stolen?'. Here, the closed response options were 'not at all', 'not much', 'don't know', 'quite a bit' and 'a lot'.

The aggregated results were broadly similar with 40% (n=461) worrying 'some of the time' or 'all the time' the first time the question was asked, and 35% (n=402) worrying 'quite a bit' or 'a lot' the second time.

So far, so good. But when we reinstated the 5 original closed response options, and then cross-tabulated the original distributions for the two questions, there are some interesting inconsistencies. What can be made of this? We scored respondents for worry on a 9-point scale, from somebody answering 'not at all' to both questions scoring 0 points for worry, through to somebody who answered 'all the time' to the first one, and 'a lot' to the second scoring 8.

What does the result look like? The distribution is in Figure 1, ranging from the 120 respondents (at the bottom) who scored 0 points (didn't worry at all at either question) to the 22 respondents (at the top) who worried 'all the time' and 'a lot'.

What does this tell us? Firstly - survey reporting conventions aside - the number of respondents that can be deemed to be 'worriers' is a matter of choice rather than of fact. Is it just the 22 full-time worriers? Or all but the 120 who never worry? Second, worry clearly is, when the data are analysed in this way, a matter of degree, and this must logically present not a single policy problem of 'fear', but different degrees of problem, and probably, different problems.

We also asked similarly paired questions about the fear of both

assault and vandalism. They were scored in the same way, and on the three 9-point scales, only between 8 and 22 respondents worried 'all the time' and 'a lot' for each. The three scales were then summed to a 24-point scale, where only 4 respondents (0.3% of the total questioned) worried 'all the time' and 'a lot' about all three possible victimisations. All four were women aged between 43 and 53.

Degrees of safety

Our second example comes from the same research, but this time from the two original and most frequently used questions on the (presumed, but crime isn't mentioned) 'fear' of crime: 'how safe do you feel walking alone in this area after dark?' and 'how safe do you feel when you are alone in your home at night?'

At one level the simple unanalysed frequency of various responses to such questions has often been used to paint a bleak picture. For example, with our sample, 23% said that they would feel very or fairly unsafe walking alone in their area after dark, and 9% said that they would feel very or fairly unsafe alone at home at night.

We asked a third question, one which isn't usually asked: 'how often do you walk around alone locally after dark?' Although only 23% said that they sometimes or often walked around alone locally after dark, the addition of this third question hugely increases the analytic value of the first two. The responses can then be combined in one new variable with 8 separate values, as shown in Table 1.

The possible responses have again been scored, here for apparent degree of 'unsafeness'. Notice, first, that the largest number of respondents (row 6: 57%) stay in, feel safe there, and

Table 1. Relevance of feelings of nightly 'unsafeness'

Row		Score	n	%
1	Feel unsafe in, stay in, feel unsafe out	3	45	4
2	Feel safe in, stay in, feel unsafe out	1	152	14
3	Feel unsafe in, go out, feel unsafe out	3	14	1
4	Feel safe in, go out, feel unsafe out	2	26	2
5	Feel unsafe in, stay in, feel safe out	2	14	1
6	Feel safe in, stay in, feel safe out	0	627	57
7	Feel unsafe in, go out, feel safe out	1	8	1
8	Feel safe in, go out, feel safe out	0	206	19
	Total		1092	99

reckon they would feel safe if out. The second largest number (row 8: 19%) feel safe in, go out, and feel safe when out. A small proportion (row 7: 1%) feel unsafe in, but they go out, and they feel safe there. A larger group (row 2: 14%) would feel unsafe out, but they stay in and feel safe there. So far, this amounts to 91% of the sample who don't really have a problem with crime 'fear'.

This leaves only 8% of the sample with an 'unsafety' problem. Notice how they don't have a shared one, but constitute four different types of problem. Two groups have a minor problem: those who feel safe in, but go out and feel unsafe out (row 4: 2%), and those who would feel safe out, but stay in where they feel unsafe (row 5: 1%). It is a bit flippant to suggest that to reduce 'unsafety', those in the first group should stay in, and those in the second should go out, but why not?

Those in rows 1 and 3 have a more major problem. Those who feel unsafe when they are in, stay in, but would feel unsafe if out (row 1: 45 respondents, 4% of the total), and those who feel unsafe when in, go out, and feel unsafe when out (row 3: 14 respondents, 1% of the total) offer a considerable challenge to those working to enhance community feelings of safety, but notice that they only number 59 respondents out of a sample of 1,092. Further, being a member of either group is not related to gender, age or past victimisation (variables which are traditionally used to explain noticeable feelings of 'unsafety').

'Seriously worried...'

Incidentally, of the 4 respondents which earlier analysis indicated on a 24-point scale, that they worried 'all the time' and 'a lot' about becoming a victim of assault, housebreaking and vandalism (all four were women aged between 43 and 53), one was a woman who feels unsafe when she is in, stays in, and would feel unsafe if out (i.e. in Row 1 in Table 1), but the other three were all women who have no problem on the 'unsafeness' scores: all would feel unsafe out, but they stay in and feel safe there, that is, they are in Row 2 of Table 1.

How did this group of 59 respondents fare on the earlier generated 24-point worry scale?

Putting the two scales together, we only have one person who is 'really' worried in the sense that she scored 24 out of 24 for overall worry, and is in row 1 of Table 1 for 'unsafety'. Perhaps we should find her, and recommend that she consult her doctor.

All of this points to a fresh approach if real local crime and 'fear' of crime problems are to be pin-pointed accurately, and if an appropriate number of objectives selectively can be set. Then, an overall strategy evaluation will need a new methodology if it is successfully to discover the effects of local strategy implementation. ■

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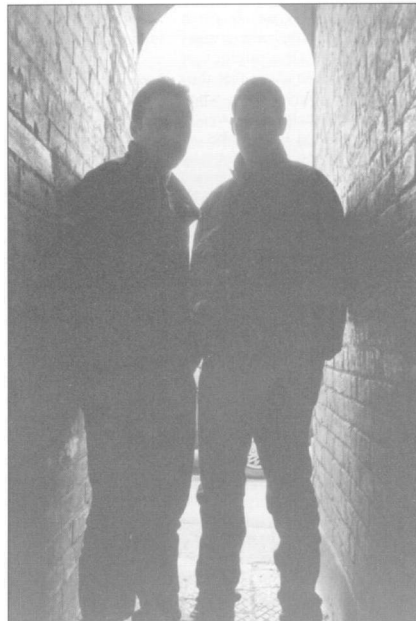
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Traces and places

Jeanette Garwood, Michelle Rogerson and Ken Pease consider unobtrusive crime measurement strategies.

Section 6 of the Crime and Disorder Bill sets out the duties of local 'responsible authorities' in addressing crime and disorder. It tasks them to

1. Formulate and implement, for each relevant period, a strategy for the reduction of crime and disorder in the area.
 2. Before formulating a strategy, the responsible authorities shall:
 - (a) carry out a review of the levels and patterns of crime and disorder in the area;
 - (b) prepare an analysis of the results of that review;
 - (c) publish in the area a report of that analysis; and
 - (d) obtain the views on that report of persons or bodies in the area.
- A strategy shall include:



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“The Crime and Disorder Bill puts the local ‘responsible authorities’ between a rock and a hard place.”

- (e) objectives to be pursued by the responsible authorities, by co-operating persons or bodies; and
- (f) long-term and short-term performance targets for measuring the extent to which such objectives are achieved.”

Reviewing the evidence

Experience of the Safer Cities Programme and Single Regeneration Budget projects suggests that such review and performance monitoring will leave a lot to be desired (Pawson and Tilley 1997). A review of the patterns of crime and disorder will almost certainly comprise some combination of crime recorded by the police, a systematic victimisation survey, and anecdotal accounts. The shortcomings of the first and third are well known, and the high cost of the second limits its use. The presumption must be that ‘long and short term performance targets’ should be explicitly linked to the data from the crime and disorder review. If so, it makes the victimisation survey impossibly expensive, given that it needs to be repeated to show whether performance targets have been achieved.

In short the Crime and Disorder Bill puts the local ‘responsible authorities’ between a rock and a hard place. The problem with recorded crime data is not primarily that it will massively distort the picture (although for crimes like domestic violence and hate crime it might well, see Farrell and Buckley 1998), but that it is not usually helpful in clarifying time, place and circumstance in enough detail to generate focused action. The geocoding of recorded crime data is in its early stages, and the identification of crime hot spots correspondingly imperfect. Anecdote is just that, although disproportionately important in the politicised atmosphere which too often surrounds community safety.

Unobtrusive measures

Are there any other possibilities for methods and data which could replace or supplement the conventional approaches? There is one. It stems from the approach advocated by Webb et al (1966) and known as unobtrusive or non-reactive measurement. Do you want to know what kind of radio the car-owning public listens to? You can either get a market research organisation expensively to survey the public, asking them whether they drive cars, and what radio station they generally listen to, risking that they will answer in terms of social desirability, with an implausibly high audience rating for Classic FM. Much more cheaply, you can get garages servicing cars to check what station their radios are tuned to when they come in for service. If you want to know which museum exhibits are most interesting, you can either ask people or measure how scuffed the floors get around each exhibit. If you want to know day-by-day differences in sexual activity, you can mount a survey, which would have to be fairly sophisticated, or look at the filter beds of sewage works for flushed condoms. In short, unobtrusive measurement concentrates on the traces of human action, on the signature scrawled on the environment by human agency.

Unobtrusive measurement is typically cheap, and is not liable to response bias. It may not always be conclusive when taken alone, but will be at least suggestive. Crucially, it has several advantages over the alternatives. Triangulation (the use of more than one method to yield conclusions which would be questionable by the use of just one) involving police recorded crime data and unobtrusive measurement probably represents the best bargain for the review and performance measurement process required by the Crime and Disorder Bill.

Crime measurement

What are the kinds of

unobtrusive measure which could be brought to bear on crime and measurement? The following are just examples:

1. Criminal damage to theft from cars often leaves tell-tale heaps of toughened glass along roadsides and in car parks. Simply count where these piles are to be found as an index of the poorly reported crimes involved.
2. Rates of infective hepatitis can serve as proxies for the amount of drug use by injection. The debris of smoking heroin is distinctive, with matches and burned foil. The utility rooms of multi-storey blocks and the toilets of pubs in which drug use is extensive have much debris of this kind. Cannabis smoking can be indexed by the sale of cigarette papers.
3. Serious interpersonal violence can be flagged by numbers of accident and emergency department visits, particularly those involving stabbing and ‘falls’.
4. Burglary and criminal damage to local authority homes, schools and the like can be looked at in relation to replacement doors and windows from stock required.
5. Public drinking may be looked at by examining the contents of litter bins (and their vicinity) for drink cans and bottles. The kind of drink (alcopops, cheap wine, cider or lager) will give a clue as to who may be doing the drinking.
6. Seat repair costs in soccer grounds will give an idea of disorder. These will, it is anticipated, be higher in the away sections of grounds, since travelling supporters are typically more committed and volatile. They will be highest in the seats at the territorial divide between home and away fans, since fans who choose such seats are those most interested in taunts and confrontation.
7. Rate of glass replenishment in clubs and pubs (in relation to takings) will give an indication of the degree of theft/damage/use as weapons of glasses. Meanwhile, back in the street, the distribution of shards of drinking glasses will mark out hot spots of public disorder.

changes, and this may elegantly be done by unobtrusive measures. For example, attempts to encourage usage of town centres as a means of reducing disorder may be indexed by revenue from public toilets or the use of toilet rolls, the number of bus tickets into town by time of day supported by a senior citizens’ pass - indeed the number of bus passes issued might be relevant. The point is not whether these particular measures are in some way correct, but that a combination of them, cheaply acquired, can give invaluable information for routine monitoring. Two additional advantages of the approach bear mention.

1. Since partnership seems to be extraordinarily difficult in community safety, the attempt to generate agreed non-obtrusive measures could be a kind of bonding process for the participants. Frankly, thinking through the measures one already has which are relevant is just simply fun.

2. Although it is fun, thinking about measures of this kind is a serious way of working out how one’s town or city actually works.

If the problem is an evening town centre problem, it is a product of people coming (or not coming) by one or other form of transport, doing things while they are in town, and going home by means with which they feel safe (to which the ratio of licensed cabs to buses is a relevant index). Thinking what to change and how to change it is a measure of how you understand the social and physical dynamics of place.

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Local audits

In some contexts, one may wish to measure changes which are believed to underpin crime

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