

Assessing the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in rural Norfolk

Prepared by
Norfolk RCC on behalf of Norfolk Police Authority



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Norfolk RCC is an independent charity with a broad remit to

- To help communities all the way from identifying needs to delivering solutions with friendly support and genuine expertise.
- To provide a voice to rural communities to ensure that decisions on services, policies and strategies do not discriminate against them and adequately serve and reflect their needs.
- To research, consult and develop initiatives to solve the problems faced by our communities.

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Executive Summary

Norfolk Police Authority has commissioned Norfolk RCC to assess the effectiveness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNTs) in rural areas. A sample based approach was used combining a range of consultation techniques including postal surveys and interviews to provide robust quantitative and qualitative data on:

- The knowledge of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in rural areas
- Community satisfaction with Safer Neighbourhood Teams
- The difference Safer Neighbourhood Teams are making in rural areas

The response rate allows us to be confident the conclusions below are representative of the Safer Neighbourhood Team areas examined. The data gathered also allows the views of key groups within the communities to be highlighted in terms of how they differ from those of the general community. Based on this research the following points can be made:

- Awareness of the 'Safer Neighbourhood Team' term is relatively prevalent with 46% responding that they had heard of it, however, understanding of what a 'Safer Neighbourhood Team' is and does is fairly limited. Knowledge of who the local police community support officer (PCSO) and police officers are and how to contact them is low with 82% not knowing how to contact their local team. It can therefore be concluded that additional efforts need to be made to ensure rural communities are aware of their local police officers and PCSOs and how to contact them.
- Although average satisfaction levels with SNTs are reasonable at 2.5 on a one to five scale (with five being very satisfied), 44% are dissatisfied with community policing. Importantly based on this sample there is no strong relationship between satisfaction levels and settlement size. However, although rural areas fair well in terms of officers per crime the police invest less in their relationship with rural communities than their urban counterparts in terms of officers per head of population. Responses from the community would suggest that improved satisfaction levels are likely to be achieved through increasing police presence on the ground.
- Knowledge of Safer Neighbourhood Team priorities is very low and 83% feel unable to influence local policing priorities. There is also an apparent mismatch between Safer Neighbourhood Team priorities and community concerns suggesting that this feeling of an inability to influence has a genuine effect. Overall communication between Safer Neighbourhood Teams and local communities is poor. Safer neighbourhood action panel (SNAP) meetings are failing as a method to engage local communities and other methods of community engagement need to be explored.

- An emphasis on community development and the use of communications technology and more direct engagement with local residents may help improve communications and Safer Neighbourhood Team effectiveness. This report contains some specific suggestions under the 'Way forward' section.

Introduction

Norfolk has a total of 52 Safer Neighbourhood Teams (SNT) in the county. Norfolk Police Authority has commissioned Norfolk RCC to undertake research in a total of six safer neighbourhood areas as a sample based approach to ascertain the effectiveness of safer neighbourhood teams in rural areas. In particular the research focuses on knowledge of safer neighbourhood teams, levels of satisfaction and whether SNTs have made any difference to rural communities. In reporting on these factors, it has also been attempted to identify possible solution to any issues raised drawing on community feedback and best practice examples.

Methodology

The approach taken has been to select three or four communities within each safer neighbourhood team area. These communities were selected to be broadly representative of the size, deprivation, crime and demographic profile of the safer neighbourhood area as a whole. These communities were then engaged with a combination of consultation techniques including a postal survey, community events, phone calls and meetings with key stakeholders groups. The latter are composed of the organisations and committees that compose civil society in rural areas. Whilst these groups are not generally demographically representative of their communities, they are far more likely to be aware of, and engage with, local initiatives and therefore represent an interesting sub-group within the community at large. The aim of this approach was both to gain quantifiable data but importantly to qualitatively probe responses to add depth to the information provided.

The response rate from the postal survey was 9%, statistically this sample means we can be 95% confident that the results presented here are accurate for those safer neighborhood teams examined as a whole plus or minus seven. The opinion of 64 individuals engaged in key stakeholder groups was gathered.

Appendix A contains a breakdown of the sample response to the postal survey. The sample is slightly biased towards the older end of the age spectrum, which is not uncommon, as from experience these demographics are more likely to respond to a survey of this type. In addition, a higher percentage of the sample had been a victims of crime in the last twelve months compared to the communities as a whole. This is probably a reflection that victims of crime are more likely to have an experience of a Safer Neighbourhood Teams, be it positive or negative, and therefore more likely to respond to the survey.

Understanding of Safer Neighbourhood Teams

Across the six SNT areas 46% of people had heard of Safer Neighbourhood Teams and 73% were aware that they were not just composed of the police. Across stakeholder groups these percentages increased to 78% and 64% respectively, which is as is expected among groups more actively engaged in civil society and with their communities in general.

From the consultation events, it was apparent that SNTs are often confused with either home watch schemes or a form of community warden. Therefore, whilst the name has penetrated fairly well an understanding of the model is limited. Among stakeholder groups there were a number of cases where individuals were aware of local officers and their activities but saw no connection between this work on the ground and the SNT concept.

Whilst a lack of knowledge of the SNT model is not necessarily detrimental to a productive relationship between the community and police, of greater concern was the 82% of postal respondents and 70% of members of stakeholder groups, who did not know how to contact their SNT officers. This evidence was further supported by the failure of the vast majority at events to identify their SNT officers from a list of names and photographs, however, encouragingly awareness of police non-emergency number was prevalent.

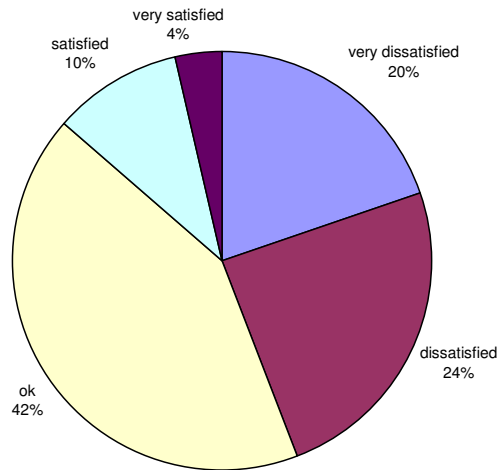
Conclusions

- Awareness of the 'Safer Neighbourhood Team' term is relatively prevalent.
- Understanding of what a 'safer neighbourhood team' is and does is fairly limited and is sometimes confused with other delivery models most notable Home Watch.
- Knowledge of who the local PCSO and police officers are and how to contact them is low.
- Additional efforts need to be made to ensure rural communities are aware of their local police officers and PCSO and how to contact them.

Service to rural communities

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with SNTs on a scale of one to five with one being very dissatisfied and five being very satisfied. The average across the SNTs was 2.5. Whilst this is not particularly poor it does leave substantial room for improvement with 44% being dissatisfied to a greater or lesser extent with safer neighbourhood teams.

Level of satisfaction across all respondents and stakeholder groups



A substantial number of people who hadn't heard of SNTs declined to answer this question, stating the obvious reason of lack of knowledge, with the majority making additional negative comments.

However, it must be remembered that with services such as the police there is a tendency to voice strong dissatisfaction when things go wrong but respond neutrally when performance is good. The comments collected from the surveys, events and interviews were mixed, but broadly speaking a greater amount of support was voiced for officers on the ground than criticism. Some specific concerns were raised across the SNT areas engaged with, but the picture was very similar across all of them suggesting these are issues of general concern. In particular the following issues were highlighted:

- The lack of ease in contacting officers
- Overall politeness of officers, although this may be a reflection of directness rather than rudeness, it is a public relations concern
- The limited powers of PCSOs
- In particular, staff turnover was raised as it results in it becoming difficult to develop a relationship with SNTs.

A greater dissatisfaction was voiced with 'the system', with blame being placed with bureaucracy, local authorities and under resourcing. Several individuals highlighted the peaceful and friendly nature of their rural communities pointing to the fact that regardless of the level of policing they are low crime areas.

A number of specific concerns were raised about the failings of the centralised call-centre to direct people appropriately, particularly if the queries were of a

crime prevention or community engagement nature rather than concerning enforcement or crime reporting. Linked to this were concerns over speed of response and feedback to individuals when concerns were raised, both of which were repeatedly identified as inadequate.

A reoccurring theme was the desire to see police on the ground in greater numbers and with greater regularity. Seventy percent said more officers on the ground would make them feel safer with respondents rating satisfaction with the level of police presence at two on the same scale of one to five outlined above. This is obviously within the context of the ongoing debate about the fear of crime in rural areas versus the reality, as well as the effectiveness of 'beat' officers in tackling criminal behaviour. One respondent added an interesting perspective to this debate, suggested that the presence of police in the village made them feel less safe as it meant something must be wrong.

When analyzing the data provided there is a slight upward trend between levels of satisfaction and settlement size. However, statistically the ability of this trend to explain satisfaction levels as linked to settlement size is very limited and given a relatively small sample size and range of settlement sizes it would be dangerous to make firm conclusions. However, it can be said that on the evidence presented there is no strong correlation between settlement size and perception of satisfaction with the police and it would appear other factors contribute more significantly.

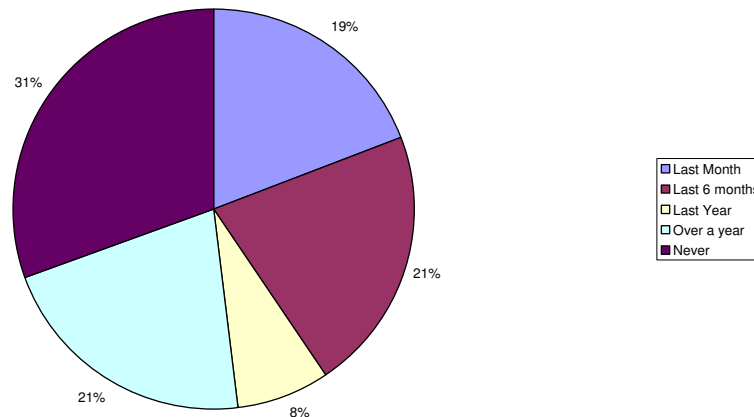
An investigation into the ratio of safer neighbourhood team members¹ to crimes² has rural areas fairing well with an average of 17 crimes per team member across the six sample SNTs, compared to 31 and 37 across the Norwich and King's Lynn SNT areas respectively. However, when comparing team members to overall population figures the relationship is completely reversed, whilst Norwich has a team member on average per 956 of population and Kings Lynn per 773, the six rural sample areas have a staggering 1,951 people per team member.

Given these numbers of officers and the far larger geographical area of rural SNTs it would be reasonable to assume high levels of dissatisfaction with the level of police presence. However, in the postal survey, 56% of respondents were not satisfied with the level of police presence and 31% reported never seeing a police officer, although this is not good it is a more positive picture than predicted. From the consultation events and other anecdotal evidence, this can be explained through the combination of the level of expectation of the police, which is often low, the sample bias as discussed above, but importantly to the efforts of the existing SNTs to make themselves visible within the communities. However, it is clear that there is room for significant improvements.

¹ All team members as detailed on the Safer Norfolk website

² All crimes in last three months as reported of the Safer Norfolk website

When did you last see the police?



The targeting of personnel resources' to areas with higher crime figures makes sense from a straightforward policing perspective. However, the focus within the safer neighbourhood model is on a relationship with the community, which would suggest that such a relationship should take place on an equal base with all communities. Currently the police invest less in that relationship with rural areas.

Conclusions

- Although average satisfaction levels with SNTs are reasonable a significant percentage are dissatisfied with community policing.
- Based on this sample there is no strong relationship between satisfaction levels and settlement size.
- The police invest less in their relationship with rural communities than their urban counterparts in terms of officers per head of population.
- Improved satisfaction levels are likely to be achieved through increasing police presence on the ground.

Engagement with Rural Communities

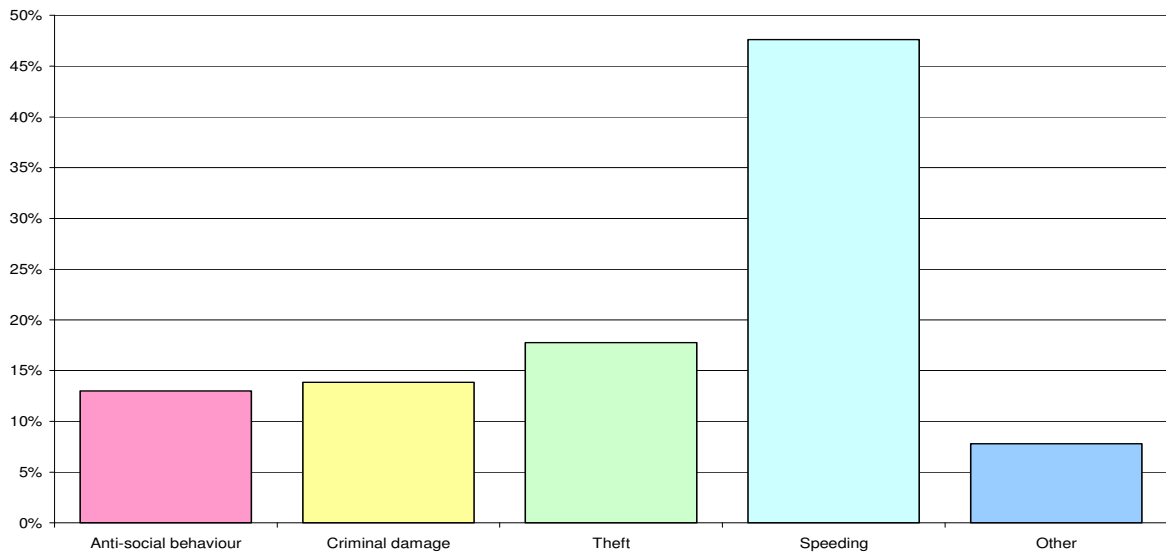
Of those responding to the question about current SNT priorities within their area 62% stated they didn't know, with virtually all who selected specific areas or issues identifying priorities incorrectly. This is not unsurprising, and it is likely only those taking a keen interest in neighbourhood policing will retain this level of detail.

However, as can be seen from the graphs below of more concern is the apparent mismatch between issues identified by the respondents and current³ SNT priorities. The major priority among respondents is speeding, accounting for 48% of all issues identified compared to only 13% for anti-social behaviour. Within SNT priorities, the relationship is more than reversed with only 6% of priorities

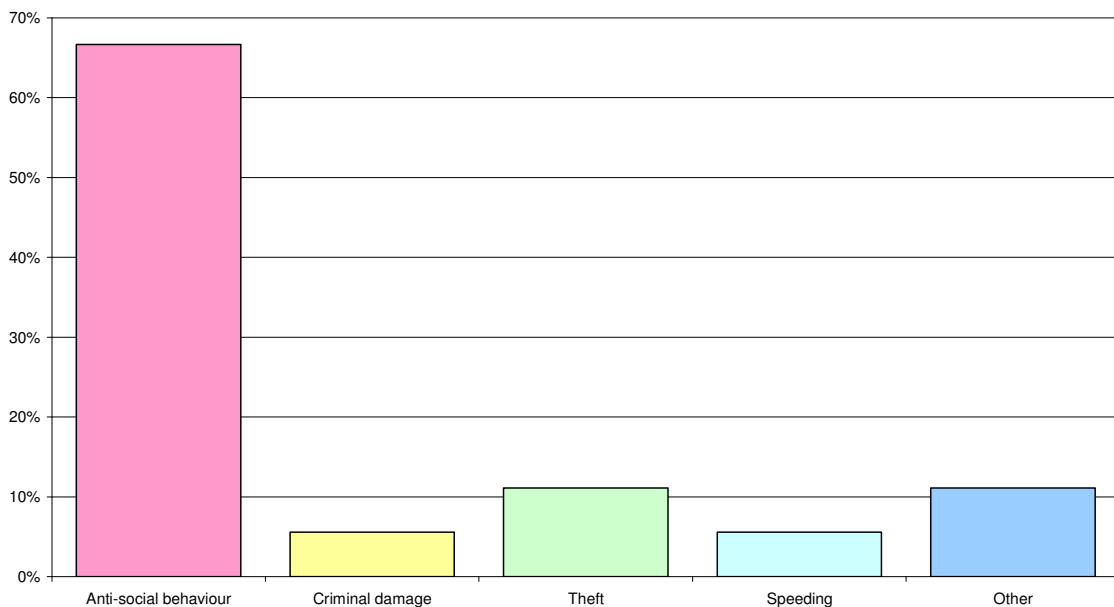
³ September 2008

relating to speeding, whilst 67% relate to anti-social behaviour. Anti-social behaviour is far more prevalent among stakeholder groups as an issue, perhaps indicating the undue influence these groups have but speeding remains the outright concern. This prevalence of speeding as an issue is further supported by analysis of Parish Plan actions, which ranks traffic management as the most prevalent of all action themes. This mismatch would seem to represent a failure of SNTs to effectively engage and identify community priorities.

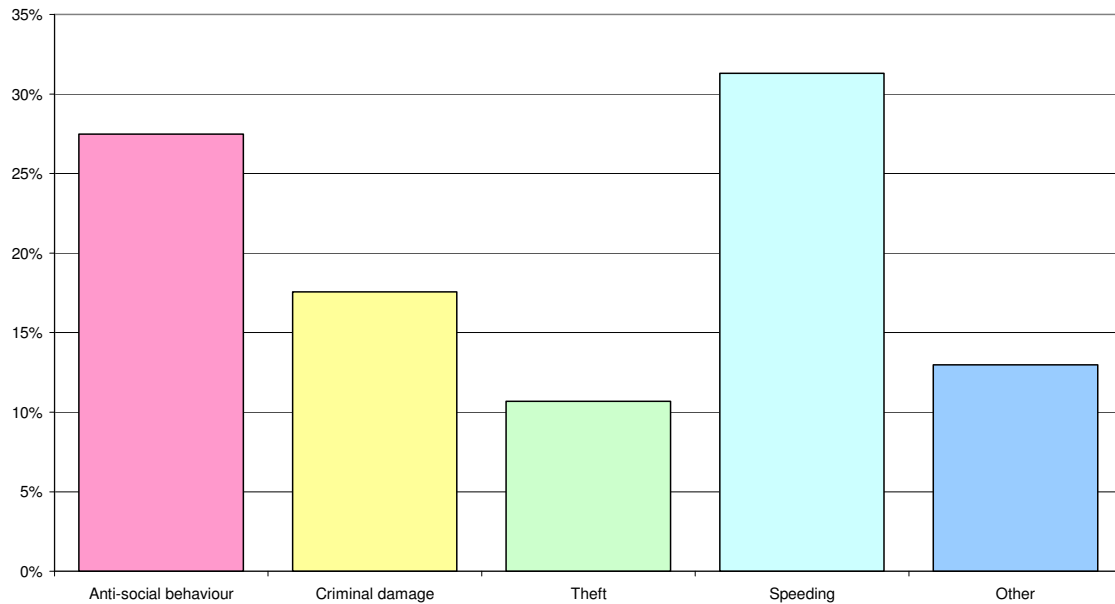
Issues identified by respondents



Count of current SNT priorities by category



Stakeholder groups identified priorities



This conclusion is supported by the fact that 80% among stakeholder groups and 83% among the general respondents felt unable to influence local policing priorities. As the ability of local people to set community policing priorities is a key tenet of the SNT model this is a significant failing.

Among the stakeholder groups interviewed none had attended a priority-setting meeting and only 2% of general respondents had. This is surprising, given that stakeholder groups are more likely to attend such meetings. Although there is the chance this is simply a sampling anomaly part of the explanation is anecdotal evidence that PCSOs attendance at parish council and other community meetings has resulted in fewer feeling it necessary to attend specific policing events, given the general disincentives of distance and time to attend such meetings.

There are also concerns that having a small number of priorities covering such a large number of parishes is an ineffective way of reflecting community needs. It is suggested in 'Neighbourhood policing in rural communities'⁴ that this could be overcome by having several panels within a large area and restricting each to one or two priorities. At the moment a number of SNTs operate rotational parish meetings across their area, this tends to result in a bias towards those communities over these periods, and with a very large number of parishes it can be many years in some instances before a particular parish has 'its turn'.

Another issue raised is the poor feedback from SNTs on queries and concerns raised. Some of this appears to be down to an overall resourcing issue but two-way communication with communities remains an ongoing concern. There were

⁴ National Policing Improvement Agency, 'Neighbourhood policing in rural communities'

also a few comments that the effect of priority areas dissipates or is transferred after the priority area has moved on. For example, that young people return to areas where they had previously congregated and caused a nuisance once PCSOs were no longer present on a regular basis, or that cars slow down whilst speed enforcement is taking place but then return to their original speed.

Collectively this evidence leads to the firm conclusion that specific meetings to identify community priorities are failing as a method of engaging local communities to identify priorities and alternative approaches need to be explored. This must be taken within the context that the majority of people will not engage unless they have a specific concern, but the evidence would suggest that even specific concerns are not being fed through effectively in to SNT priorities both through a lack of knowledge among residents of how to influence priorities and the failure of engagement vehicles.

Conclusions

- Knowledge of SNT priorities is very low
- Few feel able to influence local policing priorities
- There is an apparent mismatch between SNT priorities and community concerns
- Overall communication between SNTs and local communities is poor
- SNAP meetings are failing as a method to engage local communities
- Other methods of community engagement need to be explored

Ways forward

The sections above highlight a number of issues regarding the effectiveness of safer neighbourhood teams in rural areas. The purpose of this section is to offer some suggestions based on the research and Norfolk RCC's experience about how these issues may be addressed.

One concern is the need for a clear understanding of the distinction in rural areas between agricultural based policing issues (such as machinery theft, trespass, poaching) and community based policing issues (speeding, anti-social behaviour). This distinction appears to be far better made by officers on the ground than in the literature on the subject. It needs to be understood by those who determine police policy and strategy that specialist rural teams or initiatives will not be able to cover both these areas.

Formal meetings will always attract and engage with a limited percentage of the population whether these meetings are local action panels or Parish Council meetings. The reality is that in many areas Parish Councils and other groups are not representative of the community at large and whilst engagement with these groups must be maintained SNTs need to look outside these to ensure broader engagement with the community. The evidence within this report highlights the mismatch in the priorities gathered through the current action panel approach and the priorities of the community at large. As a result we have highlighted below a number of alternative approaches that may help improve engaging with local communities and ensure effective deliver of Safer Neighbourhood Teams in rural areas:

- Parish Plans represent a snap shop of the community at a particular time so are unlikely to be useful in setting short term priorities but with an average response rate of around 80% they are useful in determining underlying issues and trends. Norfolk RCC would be happy to work with SNTs to engage better with Parish Plans, in particular by helping communities to frame questions relevant to policing issues.
- Community newsletters have high circulation and readership levels in rural communities and are also receptive to the submission of copy. Whilst this is being taken advantage of by some SNTs it is not done consistently but would seem to be an effective method of reaching a wider audience. However, concern has been raised of the capacity of SNTs to produce community relevant copy on a regular basis.
- One suggestion highlighted at the Broadband Local Strategic Partnership is the use of SNT 'post boxes' as a means of gathering community concerns with posters on the boxes used as a means of feedback.
- The use of the web, emailing and text messaging as a way of communicating to a wider community audience outside of the demographics that typically make up stakeholder groups is not utilized enough. The ability to submit concerns via an ongoing online survey or SMS system and the use of SMS and emails to inform communities of

- current issues and activities could be an effective tool, although it must be remembered that not all individuals will be able to utilize this technology.
- Engagement with community groups, such as village hall management committees, should be increased to broaden the engagement base away from parish councils.
 - Ongoing community development work is an effective means of developing a strong relationship with local communities that is the best way to ensure effective communication and broad engagement. However this level engagement is highly resource intensive.

In addition, in terms of addressing community issues identified above the following points would be made.

- Speeding is a high priority across all the areas. Community based speed watch schemes seem to have been received very positively. The expansion of this program would seem prudent, however, some groups highlighted the cost to the community as a barrier in take up.
- Anti-social behaviour often has its root causes in lack of facilities for young people and lack of interaction between the generations. Specialist community development work, rather than enforcement is likely to be more effective in addressing these causes. However in many cases the police may be ill-equipped to undertake this work and it may be problematic for them to do so given the enforcement role that police will always maintain. Projects such as 'Negotiation not Confrontation' in West Norfolk and the forthcoming project on community play in South Norfolk that encourage intergenerational interaction should be more actively encouraged.

There is no avoiding the conclusion that additional personnel allocated to rural safer neighbourhood teams would facilitate better performance, but more people on the ground alone will not address wider community engagement and communication concerns.

As a final comment, it must be remembered that despite the issues identified above, rural crime levels are low and whilst additional rural proofing of policing is required, instance of crime will always take a priority.

Appendix A

Sample breakdown

	Sample	SNT areas
Victim of Crime	10%	3%*
Female	53%	51%
Male	43%	49%
16-24	1%	8%
25-44	17%	24%
45-64	38%	28%
65-74	26%	12%
75-84	14%	8%
85 and over	3%	3%
unknown	2%	-

Number of postal responses	175
Total number of postal surveys distributed	1923
Stakeholders Consulted	64

* Based on sample communities only