

Summary of Main Findings of Fear of Crime Survey

Introduction

Prior to amalgamation with Worcester City and Malvern Hills, Wychavon Crime and Disorder Partnership conducted a survey of residents in a number of areas of the District during July and August 2003. The aim was to collect information on residents' perceptions and experiences of crime, along with their priorities for how fear of crime could be reduced.

The parameters for the survey were determined by representatives from Wychavon District Council, West Mercia Police, and Priority Research Consultants.

A cross section of residents living in the Wychavon District were consulted through a series of short interviews. The purpose of this consultation was to seek their responses to the following open question.

"Wychavon is a low crime area, but levels of concern are sometimes higher. How can the community be better reassured that Wychavon is a safe place to live, work and play?"

Their responses then formed the basis of the second section of the questionnaire and by completing this section residents were able to prioritise their responses to create a clear agenda of their preferences for reducing the fear of crime.

The survey was conducted by in-home interviews during July and August 2003. A sample of 419 were successfully interviewed across the thirteen areas selected for the survey. These areas were grouped into four categories (urban and rural areas in both Evesham and Droitwich) within which about 100 interviews were carried out. The interviews were conducted according to quota sample to ensure that they were as representative as possible of the age and gender profile of Wychavon District.

Perceptions of Wychavon

Biggest single group said they thought crime in Wychavon was about the same as anywhere else. Fewer than half of all respondents felt levels of crime were better than the rest of the country, Worcestershire, or West Mercia Police area. Over one in ten respondents thought crime levels in Wychavon were worse than the rest of Worcestershire.

Those living in urban areas were much more likely to claim Wychavon was worse than rest of the country than were those in rural areas. Also experience of crime increased the likelihood that respondents would compare Wychavon unfavourably to other parts of Worcestershire.

The issues of drugs rated as the biggest problem by Wychavon residents, with around 60% saying drug use or drug dealing was a very/fairly serious problem. Over a third of the sample said that drug dealing was the main cause of crime in Wychavon. Drugs were considered a serious problem by a greater proportion of urban residents and those with children under sixteen.

Dealing with anti social behaviour is a key theme of the current community safety strategy and two fifths of residents thought this was a serious problem in Wychavon. Burglary and car crime was also considered to be a problem by around 40% of the sample.

The sample population thought the largest concentration of criminal activity during any 24 hour period was late evening until after midnight (65.5% said between 8pm and 2am). This may be true of crimes against the person but the biggest concerns that respondents seemed

to have been regarding vehicle and property crime which are actually more likely to occur during the day.

Concern about Crime

Recent research has suggested that fear of crime surveys may have over estimated the levels of concern due to the format of the questions. The Wychavon survey has therefore taken into account some suggested amendments to question wording, notably by asking respondents if they remember fearful episodes during a given time period, rather than asking for a difficult to define general emotional state. The assumption is that those who cannot remember specific occasions would be unlikely to have experienced any intense fearful episodes. Respondents were asked to recall whether they were ever worried about experiencing a number of types of crime. These questions were individually asked, however further analysis revealed that under half of the sample (44%) had worried about one or more of these crimes in the preceding year (the majority of this group only worried about one or two, 63.4%).

The percentage that said they were worried about any of the ten options was higher in the urban areas (52%) than in rural (35.7%). There was no real gender difference and the only notable age difference was those aged 75+ who were actually less fearful.

The most common concern was about burglary (25.5%) with car crime next (17.2%). Concern about anti social behaviour was highest for those who rented their homes from a Housing Association (19.2% compared to 11.7% for homeowners). This is consistent with the greater incidence of these problems for HA tenants and the greater priority they expressed for non-police resources that could be accessed to deal with minor problems.

30.1% of those who reported being worried about one or more crimes claimed they remembered doing so more frequently than once a month for any one of them.

Two of the three most frequent reasons for why people were worried about crimes happening to them both related to hearing things via word of mouth (34.9% had heard stories of the crime happening to others and 31.7% knew someone who had experienced it before). Personal experience and word of mouth seemed, therefore, to be quite influential in determining respondents' fear of crime. This is interesting when considering that 'follow up after a crime is reported to reassure us that something is being done' was the second highest priority for reducing fear of crime.

Less than a quarter of those who were worried about crime blamed local media reports (21.5%), with only 4.3% citing the national media. This low result may explain why 'work with the media to put more positive things in the local paper' was quite low on the respondents' priority list.

Experience of Crime

Just over a quarter of respondent households had experienced a crime in the Wychavon area in the last 5 years. The two crimes most likely to have been experienced were anti social behaviour and having a car broken into/vandalised (7.9% and 7.4% respectively). 16.2% of respondents or their family members had experienced a crime in the last year. Anti social behaviour was the crime most likely to have been experienced in the last five years. Repeated victimisation for the same crime in the last 12 months was experienced by almost one in ten respondents (9.1%), although most common repeat experience was anti social behaviour and if this is excluded from the calculations the proportion decreases to 5.5%.

Those who had actually experienced a crime were more likely to report that they were worried about crime happening to them. Three quarters of those who had experienced a crime in the last 5 years reported some level of worry about one or more of the crimes listed (78.4%). The level of concern was even higher amongst those who had experienced a crime in the last

year (83.8%). It was higher again amongst those who had experienced the same crime more than once (94.7%). One possible means by which this effect could be bettered may be to improve the follow up work with victims of crime as suggested in the overall priorities given by the sample for reassuring them that Wychavon is safe. The respondents' experiences of crime seemed to have no effect whatsoever on their priorities for reducing fear of crime.

Policing

More visible policing was unsurprisingly the clear priority amongst the sample for reassuring them that Wychavon was a safe place amongst all of the major sub groups. In fact 'not enough police presence' was considered to be one of the top three causes of crime by 60.6% of respondents.

A small number of respondents had reported a crime to the police in the previous 12 months (43 people). The level of satisfaction for all the statements was below 50% with the highest satisfaction being found with the courtesy of the police (44.1%). The follow up information and support received had by far the highest proportion who were very dissatisfied (35.7%) which is unfortunate considering that the second highest priority for the sample as a whole was 'follow up after a crime is reported to reassure us that something is being done'. However, the prioritisation of these follow ups is not just limited to respondents who experienced crime, which may be related to the fact that many respondents reported that they were worried about crime because of the experiences they had heard from other people.

Young People

The 2001 Crime Audit highlighted young people's facilities again this is considered by Wychavon residents to be a significant priority for reducing the fear of crime. The latter is particularly important for younger respondents and those living in housing association properties. Educating young people about how they can be less intimidating to older people was also a priority which is obviously relevant for the oldest residents in Wychavon. Two thirds of the sample said that young people with nothing to do was one of the top three causes of crime in Wychavon District.

Community Neighbourhood Wardens

Considering that one of the priorities for reducing the fear of crime was to 'have other resources for use rather than the police for smaller problems', it is timely that the Community Neighbourhood Warden Scheme was introduced in selected areas of the district in June 2003, just before the start of the survey.

Due to the fact that the scheme had only just started, relatively few respondents felt able to comment on their effectiveness. Nonetheless, 40% of this group were already able to agree that the wardens made them feel safer with almost three quarters (73.7%) who felt that continuing the scheme would make them feel safer in the future. Those respondents who did not believe that they had a Community Neighbourhood Warden scheme operating in their area were nevertheless keen on the idea, with over two thirds (68.5%) saying that they would value the introduction of such a warden in the neighbourhood.

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