

Policing Priorities for 2009 – 2012

Cumbria Neighbourhood Watch Association (CNWA) response to the Letter dated 11 November 2008 entitled Policing Priorities for 2009 -12

1. The CNWA would like to thank the Chairman of the Cumbria Police Authority and the Chief Constable of Cumbria Constabulary for the opportunity to comment on policing priorities in Cumbria for 2009 – 2012.
2. The comments and suggested priorities shown in this paper are the result of a rapid survey of registered Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators in Cumbria. A voice connect message resulted in over 100 responses from locations throughout Cumbria.

Summary

3. In relation to the 9 issues of importance mentioned in the letter responses to the survey indicate that the **most important** are:
 - Reducing the harm caused by alcohol
 - Reducing the harm caused by drugs
 - Serious acquisitive crime (burglary in a dwelling; robbery and vehicle crime)
 - Improve community involvement and confidence in our services
 - Reducing criminal damage and anti-social behaviour
4. In addition it can be argued on the basis of the responses received that **motoring related offences** as mentioned in paragraph 8 below and **anti-social behaviour** as mentioned in paragraph 6 should form separate issues. **Community policing** should also be added to your list as separate from community involvement and community perceptions.

General Observations

5. As a general observation it is clearly the case that ordering of priorities will vary across the County depending upon a variety of factors; location, demography, socio economics, and levels and types of employment, for example. So **targeting specific areas with specific problems** was mentioned many times in our survey. It was also suggested that it might be a mistake to allow priorities (i.e. targets) to govern activity completely, which could be to the detriment of general community policing. The current economic climate, it was also felt, may lead to an increase in burglary and doorstep crime. This may be particularly the case in farming communities where thefts of farm vehicles, tools, diesel, machinery, etc. may increase, as also may poaching, and firewood theft for example.
6. It is also clear that the issues identified in the letter are significantly interconnected. Alcohol abuse, including under age drinking, leads to anti- social behaviour, like foul and abusive language, vandalism, confrontational behaviour and often domestic violence. Drug addiction leads to burglary, fraud, intimidation and often violence also. The point being made by respondents is that the cost of failure far exceeds the cost of prevention and, as many respondents pointed out, a major priority must be to have a **greater police presence** in difficult areas and a far greater emphasis on **neighbourhood policing** not necessarily constrained by police shift patterns. A greater emphasis on **education** involving the police in schools and colleges should also be high on the prevention agenda. Schools it was felt could play a much bigger role in reducing problems of anti-social behaviour but it was also recognised that not all anti-social behaviour was a teenage issue and other groups need also to be targeted. More active involvement with young people who could experience role models in action was suggested as one way forward.
7. Several respondents pointed out that perception and reality are not necessarily the same thing. Overcoming prejudice and ensuring that priorities are not skewed by perception rather than reality requires **reliable and trusted statistics**. Clearly some respondents felt that police statistics did not correspond with the reality on the streets. This is an issue that also needs to be addressed as it can have a negative impact on the public perception of the police.
8. A surprising number of people cited **traffic and vehicle related problems** as one of their priority issues, both in urban and in rural areas. For example speeding through towns and villages, illegal parking, dangerous driving, the unlawful use of mobile 'phones, untaxed and uninsured vehicles and car theft, the latter fuelled, it was suggested, by in-car technology development! It was mentioned that the majority of accidents were caused by dangerous driving rather than simply excess speed.

9. Community relations and neighbourhood policing has already been mentioned but it was very clear from the responses that this was a major issue. The public, it was suggested need to be able to relate to a **known police constable in the community** and be assured that when a crime is reported it will be followed up. Many communities in Cumbria are far from a police station and they need to be reassured of a speedy police response to any problems they may have. The Government talk a lot about 'joined up government' but in the present context we need much more **joined up police and community involvement**. There are many agencies who should have an input in helping the police, in what all our respondents recognise is a most difficult and demanding job, which in general terms is done superbly. But without effective communication and a shared set of priorities, inputs and support from other community focussed agencies will never be optimised.
10. In relation to the **role of Neighbourhood Watch** in 'joined up policing', volunteers need continuing police support and need to feel they are an integral part of what local policing teams do on a day to day basis and not just a useful add on. Neighbourhood Watch could develop for example into new roles such as Community Crime Fighters, a Crime Watch Information Network and play a major part in ensuring that the notion of 'active citizenship', becomes a reality and not just a promotional mantra.
11. As an interpretation of some comments on the **follow up of reported crime**, there is possibly a perception that, as the police are targeted on their success in clearing up reported crime, then the less reported, the better will be the statistics! This is again a misguided perception that needs to be addressed.
12. A number of respondents mentioned ensuring that the **elderly and vulnerable** should be given priority attention and their fears and concerns treated sensitively by the police. The BAT project (See the CNWA web site for details: www.cumbria-nhw.org) is one project specifically targeting this group and many respondents felt it should be given a greater priority.

Specific results

13. The message that was sent to CNWA members simply asked for their three top priority issues together with any comments they would like to make and did not list the priority issues mentioned in the letter. It was felt this would provide a less biased response. Of all the policing priority issues, **anti social behaviour in all its forms together with the strongly correlated drug and alcohol related problems represented 55% of all mentions, community policing represented 16%, burglary and theft represented 13%, motoring related offences 10%**. Also mentioned were mugging and violent crime, knife and gun crime, domestic violence, rape, child abuse, and the unauthorised use of unclassified roads and paths by vehicles and trail and mountain bikes. These latter mentions made up the remaining **6%**.
14. Looking at the 9 issues of importance listed in the letter therefore the most important in relation to this survey are:
 - Reducing the harm caused by alcohol
 - Reducing the harm caused by drugs
 - Serious acquisitive crime (burglary in a dwelling; robbery and vehicle crime)
 - Improve community involvement and confidence in our services
 - Reducing criminal damage and anti-social behaviour.

13. In addition it can be argued on the basis of the responses received that **motoring related offences** as mentioned in paragraph 6 and **anti-social behaviour** as mentioned in paragraph 4 should form separate issues and **community policing** should be added to your list as separate from community involvement and community perceptions.

We hope these results and observations are of some interest and CNWA would welcome an involvement in any additional activity following your analysis of the results of the consultation.

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