

Northamptonshire Police Authority and Police

Joint Consultation Project on Annual Policing Priorities and the Policing Budget: Summary



1 Introduction

During October and November 2011 Northamptonshire Police Force and Authority jointly conducted a public consultation to inform Northamptonshire policing priorities for 2012/13.

2,757 members of the public participated in the consultation through a variety of methods, including online, postal and telephone surveys, social networking sites, focus groups and workshops with diverse communities. Participants were asked about the previous four priorities – anti-social behaviour (ASB), drugs, violence with injury and burglary – and were also asked to consider serious organised crime as a fifth priority. This summary highlights the findings from the consultation.

2 Key Findings

2.1 Effectiveness at dealing with previous priorities

Participants felt that over the last twelve months the police had been most effective at dealing with violence with injury and least effective at dealing with burglary and drugs:

- Violence with Injury (85% of participants rated the police as effective)
- ASB (79%)
- Burglary (67%) and Drugs (67%)

2.2 Top Priorities

Participants were asked which of the five issues should be Northamptonshire Police's **top priority** in 2012/2013. Ranked by proportion of responses, the following are the top three priorities chosen:

1. ASB
2. Drugs
3. Serious Organised Crime

ASB: The most popular reason given by participants for why ASB should remain a priority for Northants Police was that it is an **ongoing or escalating problem**. Participants also stated that it affects a large proportion of the community and **affects community cohesion**, and that it can 'blight people's lives'. Participants felt that the police need to 'keep on top' of ASB to prevent the situation worsening and it was also seen by participants as a precursor to more serious types of crime, which must therefore be dealt with as a preventative measure. Participants in focus groups held with socio-economically deprived communities noted that in 'hot spots' where ASB is a significant problem, the police need to make a very concerted effort to solve the problem and where that effort has been put in, it has made an enormous difference to the lives of local people.

Drugs: By far the most common reason given by participants for why drugs should remain a priority was that **drugs are a contributing factor to other crimes** and by tackling drugs other crimes would be reduced also. Participants felt that drugs are **prevalent**, that they negatively affect the lives of those who take them, their families and society in general, and that there is a need to **protect young people** from the influence of drugs. It was suggested that more could be done by the police to tackle drugs, with those involved with drugs being caught and dealt with harshly, and attention being focussed on particular individuals (i.e. dealers) or particular types of drugs.

Serious Organised Crime: Where participants described reasons for selecting serious organised crime as a priority, they mentioned the links between drugs, violence and burglary with organised crime groups and felt that the Force could address several issues through this one priority. Participants felt that serious organised crime has far reaching **consequences that affect a large proportion of society and the economy**, and that addressing it will create a safer environment for all. Participants in focus groups held with young people felt that serious organised crime is a high priority due to the moral implications for society where this type of crime is not dealt with forcefully.

2.3 Other Issues

43% of participants stated another issue that they thought the police should focus on. **Road safety issues** were most commonly mentioned, totalling 42% of suggestions. Participants specifically talked about speeding, using mobile phones whilst driving, parking offences, illegal drivers and dangerous or anti-social behaviour by drivers, cyclists and motorcyclists.

The second most commonly mentioned issue was **the need for more police on the beat and involved with the community**. Other issues participants thought the police should focus on included alcohol consumption and related inappropriate behaviour, vehicle crime, rural crime, fly-tipping and littering, metal theft, domestic violence, child protection, and community relations.

There was also widespread concern that the **reduction in street lighting** will impact or has impacted on crime levels. In focus groups, participants reported that darker neighbourhoods are making people feel very unsafe in their local areas, through fear of crime and of accidents.

2.4 Tackling the Issues

60% of participants gave suggestions about how they would like to see the police and partner agencies focus on the priorities they had selected. The most commonly given response was to **increase police presence**. Another common suggestion was that the **police and partner agencies need to work together with a coordinated approach**, specifically that there should be more effective sharing of resources, intelligence and information.

Many suggestions were related to **more effective communication and engagement with the public**, especially the need to get out into communities to **talk and listen to residents**; to **educate and provide information** on ASB and crime issues; to **encourage people to report crimes**; to act on information given by the public quickly and effectively; and to report on successes. There was a concern that more effort should be concentrated on **young people**, with more positive activities such as sports and youth clubs provided.

Some participants felt there should be **harsher punishments** for those that commit crime, and that there should be a **zero tolerance policy** for minor crime in order to prevent major crime: some participants commented that they felt the police were constrained by the law. It was felt that **tackling drugs and alcohol issues** would prevent crime. There was a belief by some participants that the police and partner agencies are constrained in tackling issues due to lack of funding and financial cuts.

2.5 Examples of Good Service

Participants were asked to give examples of where Northants Police offer good service; half of participants gave an answer to this question. By far the most common example of good service given was **Community Policing**, with PCSOs often specifically mentioned. Also mentioned were the quality and speed of police response, and the **conduct and demeanour** of staff.

Work in schools and time spent with young people was mentioned by participants, as were **good links with Neighbourhood Watch** and other groups. Operation Guardian was seen positively, as was town centre policing. Participants mentioned **feeling safe** and having **low levels of crime** in their area as directly attributable to good service by the police.

2.6 Value for Money

59% of participants stated that they agreed that Northants Police provides value for money, which reflects the findings in the consultation undertaken last year. 75% of participants would be willing to pay more each week towards policing, which has increased from 66% last year.

Reducing Wastage and Making Savings

Participants were asked how or where they thought Northamptonshire Police could reduce wastage or make savings. **Reducing administration and bureaucracy** was the most common suggestion. Also suggested was a **review of the use, management and procurement of vehicles**. An **increase in the use of volunteers** was proposed, as was a reduction in overtime.

Budget Simulator Savings

These results are produced by generating an average % change up or down in spending based on the responses to the budget simulator tool in the online survey. The clear messages are that the vast majority of the budget should be spent on **local policing and responding to the public**, whilst reductions should be made in spending on central financial costs, the Police Authority, organisational support and criminal justice arrangements. The findings largely reflect those of the consultation undertaken last year, however there is less emphasis on reducing spending on road policing. This supports the wider findings that road safety is a concern in the County.

2.7 What happens next...

The findings from this joint consultation will feed into the Local Policing Plan for 2012/13, ensuring that the public's views inform the priorities that are set for Northamptonshire Police to focus on.

If you would like a copy of the full report on the Joint Consultation or a copy of the Local Policing Plan (post April 2012) please contact the Police Authority:

Email: info@northants-pa.gov.uk

Telephone: 01604 887430

Write to: Northamptonshire Police Authority
36 Billing Road
Northampton
NN1 5DQ