



Local Government Association

# crimewatch

**effective** scrutiny of police and crime

**“What are the issues which concern people in the area you represent? Crime and anti-social behaviour are often mentioned. Crime and anti-social behaviour can blight the lives of individuals and communities. Thankfully, serious crime remains rare. But even low-level disorder such as graffiti and abandoned cars ruin our public spaces and are associated with fear of crime, holding back regeneration of disadvantaged areas and creating an environment in which crime can take hold.**

“Councillors as community leaders are in touch with these concerns. Councils have proved they can work side-by-side with a whole range of other agencies in order to tackle crime. Councillors have the expertise to listen to and act on the needs of local people. Residents now have new opportunities to talk to public agencies to find out about crime, to influence activity and to hold agencies to account. And the police are central to these arrangements.

“Our traditions see the police being anchored in the community, and we all know that policing is most effective when accountable to the people they serve. To ensure that the police focus on issues which matter to local people, councils can now extend their community leadership role, through the new scrutiny powers on crime and disorder. This provides an opportunity to hold public services to account, to review what is being done to tackle local problems, and to find better ways to reduce crime and disorder locally.

*“This publication aims to highlight what effective scrutiny of police and crime can achieve.”*

**Councillor Les Lawrence, Chairman,  
LGA Safer Communities Board**



# seven steps to success: a good scrutiny review . . .

## focuses on a priority issue

- There is intelligent prioritisation of subjects for review, choosing important, timely issues, where scrutiny can add value
- Reviews do not conflict with other service improvement work, or the programme of external inspectorates

## is well planned

- Reviews are well planned/scoped, have clear objectives and a manageable scale
- In planning the review, there is understanding of who needs to be influenced, and how to do this (stakeholder analysis)

## builds profile and understanding

- There is effective communication about forthcoming reviews with decision-makers and with the staff of the service

## is innovative

- The work encourages new ideas, innovation and dialogue, through finding new ways to work
- An imaginative approach to evidence gathering is taken, including hearing from the public and service users, whilst maintaining the focus of the review

## is constructive

- Decision-makers and relevant staff are engaged in the scrutiny debate in a way which contributes to a constructive outcome
- Reviews into something which may have gone wrong focus on learning for the future

## advocates change

- Recommendations are made, as appropriate, both to improve how the partnership tackles immediate problems, and which will feed into the longer term policy framework and budget. Necessary challenge is not evaded.
- Recommendations made to external service providers and other agencies, are supported by good communication and awareness of the need to build partnership working

## leads to action

- The findings of the review are communicated and support of the executive, the council and the partnership sought.
- Implementation of agreed recommendations is carried out (and the scrutiny committee monitors that this happens).

## further information

The statutory guidance for crime and disorder scrutiny can be found at: <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/regions/regions022.htm>

The Centre for Public Scrutiny guide to Councillor Calls for Action can be found at: <http://www.cfps.org.uk/what-we-do/publications/cfps-general/?id=92>

*A wider conversation: effective scrutiny of Local Strategic Partnerships* (February 2007) is available from: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/aio/6017524>

Information on Local Area Agreements is available from the LGA website including: *A councillor's guide to the new Local Area Agreements*, and *Changing places: Local Area Agreements and two-tier local government*.

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## the new scrutiny powers

Councils have new powers to scrutinise crime and disorder issues. Provisions for crime and disorder scrutiny in the Police and Justice Act 2006 came into force in England at the end of April 2009. At the same time the Councillor Call for Action (CCfA) on crime and disorder came into effect.

The members of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are required to take part in scrutiny locally. This includes the main partners ('responsible authorities'): the council, the police authority and police force, the primary care trust, the fire and rescue authority, plus the 'co-operating bodies': probation (soon to become a responsible authority), parish councils, NHS trusts, proprietors of independent schools, further education institutions.

### the powers this scrutiny committee has are:

- to scrutinise how the partnership members are discharging their crime and disorder functions;
- to require information to be provided by partners, and require attendance at meetings;
- to require partners (responsible authorities and the co-operating partners) to respond to reports within 28 days, and 'have regard' to recommendations.

These new powers can be integrated into your existing arrangements for overview and scrutiny. There is flexibility about how this can be done. Your council may well have already have carried out scrutiny investigations on crime and disorder issues. This will have involved the police, and other organisations dealing with crime and anti-social behaviour, on a voluntary basis, so for many areas there is a strong foundation on which to build.

The police, and other partners, will be signed up to crime targets in the Local Area Agreement. There are specific scrutiny powers in relation to delivery of Local Area Agreements, but for the police, the Police and Justice Act provides a framework within which to review performance against Local Area Agreement targets, and to make scrutiny recommendations.

CCfA gives councillors a new right to raise matters of concern to their constituents with their council's overview and scrutiny committee, where other attempts to resolve the issue have been exhausted. It is a further tool to strengthen councillors in their role as advocates and champions for the communities that elected them.

## reducing the fear of crime: London Borough of Merton

Merton is the fourth safest borough in London. Figures for most categories of crime have fallen year on year. Yet fear of crime persists. In the annual residents' survey of 2008, fear of crime rose by 7 per cent to 43 per cent, as the topmost concern of Merton residents. The fear of crime appeared out of proportion to the risk, and was harming local people's lives.

That's why councillors from the London Borough of Merton undertook a scrutiny review on the issue of fear of crime. A detailed review of the national and local evidence was undertaken, for example identifying which parts of the borough had higher crime levels. Four members of the scrutiny commission met with the police Borough Commander and his colleagues to learn more about what was being done to reduce fear of crime in the area. The review chair attended meetings of the Merton Seniors Forum, and the student parliament at Merton College to discuss how fear of crime impacts on the daily lives of older and younger people. Recommendations to the Safer Merton partnership included, plans for better public information,





tackling issues in specific areas such as the town centres and station areas, and on public transport, and work on 'designing out crime' in housing estates and town centres. Councillor Peter Southgate, who chaired the review, commented

*"Fear of crime blights people's lives, and inhibits them from doing everything they might want to do. Whilst there's no easy answer, a series of measures to address anti-social behaviour - rather than serious crime - can give them back the confidence they need to get out and about again, and lead more fulfilled lives."*



*Councillor Peter Southgate*  
**London Borough of Merton**

## **making arrangements to use the new powers**

All English authorities now have to set up an overview and scrutiny committee for crime and disorder, or designate an existing scrutiny committee as having this role. In many cases such a committee will already exist. There does not have to be a separate crime and disorder scrutiny committee or sub-committee. This function can be exercised by an overarching scrutiny committee, or scrutiny management committee, if this is what is preferred locally. These powers can also be exercised by task and finish groups or panels set up to carry out a specific scrutiny review.

In areas with two tiers of local government, the powers are held by districts and county councils. Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships are at a district level, with a county strategy group providing co-ordination county-wide. There is local choice about how to carry out crime and disorder scrutiny in a two tier area, as long as every area is covered by arrangements for crime and disorder to be scrutinised. There is also a requirement that the committee with the responsibility to scrutinise crime and disorder issues should consider this at least once a year.

## **hearing different views**

The scrutiny committee dealing with crime and disorder issues can choose to co-opt additional people to become part of the committee. These could be long-term co-options, or for the purpose of a specific review.

The Local Government Act 2003 allows councils to introduce a co-option scheme granting voting rights to co-optees on scrutiny committees who are not councillors. Whether or not your council has such a scheme, the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009 allow the designated committee to co-opt people and to give them voting rights. There should not be a greater number of these co-optees than the number of councillors voted onto the committee by the council.

The Association of Police Authorities has urged councils to consider co-option of a member of the police authority onto the scrutiny committee. Openness, dialogue, and clarity of function with the police authority are vital, but bear in mind there are other ways in which these could be achieved, not only co-option.

Different voices can be heard in scrutiny as expert advisors, observers, through planned consultation and public meetings of various kinds, visits, and inviting witnesses to scrutiny hearings.



## what scrutiny might achieve

Some positive ways in which scrutiny could contribute to crime and disorder reduction:

- improve the performance of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership in achieving the goals set out in the strategy to reduce crime, reviewing information about the incidence of crime and public confidence levels;
- engaging councillors, the wider community, the police and other public services, in innovation, finding new ways to tackle the causes of crime and its consequences for the area;
- support councillors who are not part of the council executive to contribute to strategy development for crime and disorder reduction;
- enhance democratic accountability and openness locally in relation to non-council services;
- engage service users and other local people in wider dialogue with the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

Scrutiny will work through a range of activities. These could include regular performance reports, question and answer sessions with the appropriate cabinet member and representatives of other partner bodies, one-off depth reviews, and a wide range of approaches to public involvement.

## reviewing neighbourhood policing: Nottingham City Council

This scrutiny panel aimed to investigate whether neighbourhood policing in Nottingham contributed towards community safety, reduced crime and fear of crime. The review, was chaired by Councillor Cat Arnold, who said:

*“We chose three local beat areas for investigation. Councillors visited these three neighbourhoods to meet the police teams at their police stations, and we discussed policing of the neighbourhood with local residents and the police. We also heard from other contributors.”*

The recommendations made particularly focused on getting different parts of the council to work better with the neighbourhood beat teams. This included the council’s neighbourhood management team; youth work; work on licensing to tackle alcohol-related crime; and better public information on community safety issues. Recommendations also promoted broader involvement of ward councillors in meetings with police; and joint training between councillors, police, housing and other neighbourhood staff.



*Councillor Cat Arnold*  
**Nottingham City Council**



## councillors tackling crime and disorder

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships have existed since 1998. The partnership will regularly ensure that the incidence of crime and disorder, and levels of public confidence in the area are systematically assessed. A Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy will frame their work.

Scrutiny is just one of the democratic roles through which councillors lead and shape the work of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships.

- **Leadership:** leaders and other executive members have a vital role in the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships. Councillors also play a leadership role in relation to the police as members of police authorities, alongside magistrates and independent nominees.
- **Strategy development:** councillors agree the Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy, and the LAA and the Sustainable Community Strategy which will all set out plans to reduce crime.
- **Scrutiny:** councils are increasingly involved in scrutinising other public services. As well as powers in relation to crime and policing, councils scrutinise NHS bodies and health issues, and LAA partners.

- **Neighbourhood representation:** at a neighbourhood level, there will be meetings between councillors, the police and the public which will review the incidence of crime in the area as well as levels of public confidence, and discuss how the council is working with the police to deal with this.

## the effects of criminal damage: Basildon District Council

Vandalism, particularly in the area's parks and open spaces, and to public sector housing, was investigated by this review. Councillors wanted to understand why vandalism is committed, who it affects, and the level and cost of damage to council-owned land and property. This included graffiti, vandalism, arson, damage to cars and to property.

The task and finish group of four councillors gathered information from the police, university academics, relevant council staff, and the local victim support group. Essex police provided a presentation with statistics on the extent of criminal damage locally.

There was detailed investigation of the costs of criminal damage to the council-owned parks and open spaces, and to their housing service initiatives to design out crime

were considered. Risks to council houses left empty were of particular concern. The review also heard from the council's graffiti removal service and community wardens. Recommendations covered actions which could be taken within the council, better reporting on the role of the crime and disorder reduction partnership to councillors, and better public information. Lead member and champion for scrutiny, Councillor Sylvia Buckley, said:

*“ This was an early and successful overview and scrutiny review that identified a wide range of initiatives to reduce criminal damage in our district; the council continues to monitor progress and build upon the review outcomes. ”*



Councillor Sylvia Buckley  
Basildon District Council



## Lessons from health scrutiny

Councils have had specific powers to scrutinise health since 2001.

Councillors may want to consider locally how that has worked, and what pointers that provides for the scrutiny of crime partners. Here are some suggested lessons.

- **Agree how you are going to work**

From the outset, liaise with external services and partner organisations who may be subject to scrutiny.

Create a protocol or code of conduct agreeing mutual roles, and practical arrangements about how you are going to work. Meet partners regularly to horizon-scan for future issues and review how work is progressing.

- **Create positive expectations**

Good early reviews engage a range of services including the council; are on subjects seen as useful and positive by agencies under scrutiny; are contained and manageable in scale; are on topics where there is a consensus that “things need to change”. Use scrutiny to build effective partnerships.

- **Develop skills and understanding**

Joint training and development will help you learn about the culture and assumptions of different organisations. Don't just do this at the beginning. Members need basic knowledge about structures and responsibilities of service under scrutiny, but don't let them be intimidated by professionals or jargon.

- **Scrutiny must be member-led**

Identify issues they think are important. Ensure organisations under scrutiny understand the democratic role of members as community leaders – unlike other non-executives.

- **Plan and prioritise your work programme**

Ensure scrutiny does what only scrutiny can do – use its unique characteristics: democratic engagement, partnership building, local priorities and place-building. Don't duplicate inspectorates and regulators. Ensure reviews have very clear objectives. Be realistic – better to do a limited number of reviews in depth and well. Don't let national priorities squeeze out local issues – you don't have to take part in national consultations if it is not a local priority.

- **Community and user involvement is vital**

Ensure information provided for elected members and community is clear for lay people. Allow time and resources for consultation, and use your imagination about how to do it. Use existing resources and organisations to consult, as well as new initiatives such as surveys. Let people know how their involvement contributed to the review findings and subsequent changes.

- **Ensure that scrutiny makes a difference**

Ensure that reviews are evidence-based and engage with influential people and organisations. Develop clear, timely, targeted recommendations, linked to evidence and public opinion, which are challenging but achievable. Allow scrutinised organisations to check your facts before publication.

- **Manage communications**

Build positive links with the local media and help them understand what scrutiny is. Use them to engage the public. Agree joint press releases if possible and agree who will deal with the media.

- **Evaluate and learn from your experience**

Monitor the response to recommendations. Review your projects and work programme to see what could be improved; engage those being scrutinised in this.

The lessons from health scrutiny are from *A wider conversation: effective scrutiny of Local Strategic Partnerships* (IDeA 2007)





## the bigger picture, locally

December 2009 will see the first of the new Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA) or One Place reports. This will review the characteristics of the area and how well it is being served by public services. It will highlight excellence and problems not being tackled. Scrutiny reports will be one way that the council can show it is tackling any problems of crime in the area, as part of this assessment.

## avoiding gang culture: Newcastle upon Tyne

Between January 2007 and March 2008, there was high-profile media coverage of teenagers who were shot or stabbed to death in London, often in gang-related incidents. Councillors wanted to know whether the factors existed for the development of this type of gang-related crime in Newcastle, and how the city could protect against it.

Councillors heard from researchers on gang activity, and discussed the local situation with Northumbria police, the youth offending team, and community groups. Councillor Ian Graham, chaired the group.

*“Most young people in Newcastle lead fulfilling, productive lives. Some gather in groups which can intimidate older residents, but this is overwhelmingly just friends socialising. For a variety of historical and cultural reasons”*

*Newcastle has not been affected by the type of gang culture seen in other cities. Even so, we cannot be complacent.”*



*Councillor Ian Graham*  
**Newcastle City Council**

The review recommended that guidance on gang culture should be produced for neighbourhood crime teams, for colleges of further education and youth workers. There should be monitoring by relevant agencies and pre-emptive action if necessary. Public information should provide reassurance, promote the positive achievements of young people, and equip councillors to tackle concerns raised with them by residents. Agencies should work together to tackle the root causes of economic and social exclusion, such as lack of skills and lack of political and social networks within communities.

