

Crime and community safety

Headlines

Crime rates overall in Kirklees fell to lower levels than similar areas.

Vehicle crime, robbery and assaults significantly fell but domestic burglary rose. Violent crime associated with alcohol reduced and is significantly lower in Kirklees than similar areas, though serious acquisitive crime is higher locally.

Crime, both of victims and offenders, reflects deprivation across Kirklees.

The fall in actual reported crime is not reflected in residents' feelings of safety and confidence that the police and partners are dealing with their concerns.

Why is this issue important?

Not only does the direct experience of crime as a victim have a negative impact on a person's sense of health and wellbeing, but the fear of crime also affects how much adults and children use public space. The chances of becoming a victim or indeed an offender are not equal across communities. Issues like alcohol and substance misuse are associated with violence and property crimes such as domestic burglary.

When questioned, residents consistently identified crime as one of the main issues that affects how they feel about their local area. However, in experiencing crime, there were a small number of communities who were directly affected by crime either as a victim or as an offender¹.

Nationally, 10% of offenders are responsible for half of offences committed and less than 1% are responsible for around 10% of crime². A recent national evaluation of the prolific and priority offenders scheme showed a 43% reduction in offending for scheme participants as a result of addressing factors associated with offending such as employment, accommodation and substance misuse³.

Levels of total recorded crime in Kirklees were down 12% on 2008-9 and below average when compared with similar areas. Serious crime was down 12%, versus 2008-9 with falls in both vehicle crime and robbery of more than 25% being offset by an 8% increase in domestic burglary¹. Even so, this rate of serious acquisitive crime remains higher than other similar areas in the Iqanta family¹. Overall rates of crime are highest in inner urban areas such as town centres, where opportunities are higher and areas of deprivation are greater¹.

Violent crime assaults with injuries, often associated with the night time economy and alcohol, are 17% lower than 2008-9 and significantly lower than similar areas. While violent crime does peak at different times of the day and year, co-ordinated multi-agency planning and deployment in town centres during the evening resulted in a significant reduction in offences at traditional peaks such as over the festive period¹.

Although levels of crime halved over the past decade, these reductions are not always reflected in residents' feelings of safety and confidence that the police and partners are dealing with their concerns¹.

What significant factors are affecting this issue?

The more deprived the neighbourhood, the more likely it is to have social and environmental characteristics presenting risks to health including poor housing, higher rates of crime, and more risks to safety from traffic⁴ (p77).

The collective responsibility to create safer communities was formally recognised through the 1998 Crime and Disorder Act. This legislation brings partners such as the police, local authority, NHS and probation service together to both understand and deal with the issues, which are often interlinked and span beyond the traditional scope of a single agency.

This wider appreciation and addressing of community safety issues ensures different dimensions of complex problems are dealt with rather than providing communities with short term respite from single issues.

Effective partnership working lessened the effect of the recession on crime compared with previous economic downturns. However, the impact was most acute in some of the most deprived neighbourhoods in Kirklees and crimes such as serious acquisitive crime, fraudulent claims rose, as did pressures associated with the increased numbers of loan sharks.

Where is this causing greatest concern?

The Kirklees Safer Stronger Communities Partnership 'Strategic Intelligence Assessment' refresh for 2009 highlighted the following issues¹:

Batley, Birstall & Birkenshaw

Criminal damage, other violence and theft were the most reported crime types locally. The perceived occurrence of anti-social behaviour (ASB) is high. Personal safety at night is not alarming but there are some fears of safety during the day. Residents do feel that public services seek views on ASB and that public services are successful in dealing with ASB. Recorded domestic violence are above the Kirklees average especially in Batley West.

Denby Dale & Kirkburton

The rate of crime and fear of crime here were both low. Residents felt police were pro-active in seeking views and reacting to intelligence. Improvement in the activities for teenagers was a fundamental priority for residents. Domestic violence levels were relatively low with little variation across wards.

Dewsbury and Mirfield

Fear of crime here matched reported levels. Criminal damage, other violence, theft and theft from a vehicle were the most common. Safety of young people was of prime importance. Domestic violence as a reported crime was high especially in Dewsbury West and Dewsbury South.

Huddersfield North

Criminal damage, other violence, theft and burglary of dwellings were most common. Fear of crime occurring was low, personal safety was not alarming and residents felt public services sought views on ASB although they felt public services were unsuccessful in dealing with ASB. Although domestic violence levels were just below average, they were high within the Ashbrow and Greenhead wards.

Huddersfield South

Criminal damage, other violence, theft and theft from vehicles were most common. Fear of crime occurring was average, although teenagers hanging around and drug dealing worried residents. Personal safety at night was poor and few residents felt public services seek views on ASB, although they felt public services were relatively successful in dealing with ASB. Domestic violence levels as a proportion of all reported crime was just below average for Kirklees.

Spen Valley

Criminal damage, other violence, theft and burglary of non-residential properties were most common. Fear of crime occurring was low but personal safety at night was a problem. Residents felt public services do not seek views on ASB although they felt public services were successful in dealing with ASB.

The Valleys

Theft from vehicles, other violence, criminal damage and other burglary were most common. Fear of crime occurring was low, personal safety was not alarming. However, residents felt public services did not fully seek views on ASB and they also felt public services were unsuccessful in dealing with ASB.

Views of local people

The main issues identified by 14 year olds in 2009 were litter, drugs, vandalism and teenagers hanging around. All areas of policing were felt to be reasonably well carried out, with at least 50% of 14 year olds rating all services as being conducted either quite or very well. Arresting criminals was perceived to be the police's most useful function. 14 year olds felt most safe in school but least safe on public transport. Police community support officers PCSOs were valued, with 6 in 10 (61%) claiming PCSOs make them feel safer⁵.

What could commissioners and service planners consider?

- How to build on the continued reductions in crime and to improve residents' feelings of safety and confidence that the police and partners are dealing with their concerns.
- Continuing to broaden out what counts as community safety by recognising the range of factors that influence peoples feeling of safety and levels of crime and anti-social behaviour. Whereas once it was about a collective response to largely crime issues, increasingly it is about communities engaging in tackling root causes of crime and criminal behaviour.
- The current economic climate and associated cuts within public services may threaten effective partnership working. Partners working in innovative ways across traditional service boundaries will deliver better services to respond to locally expressed needs in a more focused and efficient way.

References

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5. NHS Kirklees, Kirklees Council and West Yorkshire Police. Young People's Survey (YPS). 2009.