

HM Inspectorate of Constabulary



# Calling Time on Crime

July 2000



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Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary

First published in July 2000 by HMIC

50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 9AT

Printed in the UK by ABC Printers, Ditchling

ISBN 1-84082-486-7

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## Acknowledgements

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HM Inspector of Constabulary would like to take this opportunity to thank all forces, local authorities, partnerships and other organisations who contributed to the Inspection, either through direct discussions or by responding to questionnaires. He is also grateful to the many parties who supplied helpful comments as critical readers of the emerging draft. The constructive nature of all these contributions subscribed in no small measure to the inspection team's understanding in this complex area.





## Preface

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This report is the first of a trilogy of reports focusing on how central government, the police service and its partners are seeking to reduce crime and disorder. The reduction of crime has always been a stated priority. In 1829 the first commissioners of the Metropolitan Police asserted that crime prevention was the highest priority - everything else was a means to that end. But in reality, it has rarely achieved that status. The responsibility for crime prevention has hitherto been viewed as resting with the police service and, within the service, with specialists as opposed to mainstream service delivery.

We now stand at a point in time when the opportunities to reduce crime and, with it, disorder have never been greater. With the exception of violent crime, we have achieved six years of sustained crime reduction in England and Wales during the period 1993/94 to 1998/99. The introduction of the Crime and Disorder Act and, with it, the creation of statutory partnerships throughout England and Wales, has emphasised the multi-agency approaches that are so necessary to sustain these reductions. The importance being ascribed to crime reduction at national, regional and local level is promising to provide the support to those who are in the position to deliver sustainable reduction in crime and disorder.

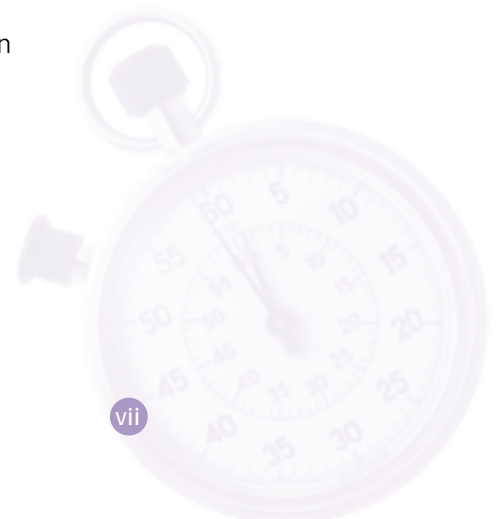
But there are also significant challenges ahead. Recent projections suggest an 'upturn' in crime trends through increased demographic and economic trends. The challenge here is for central and regional government, the police service and its partners to raise their collective game. The challenge for central government is to lead the way by demonstrating how true 'joined-up' activity at ministerial and departmental level can provide a real focus for replication at the local level. This can be met by ensuring that crime and disorder reduction is a mainstream activity at all levels. Although there are many excellent examples of partnership approaches at the local level, the challenge here is to ensure that partners demonstrate joint activity within an integrated framework that emphasises both short and long term strategies and tactics to reduce crime and disorder. Finally, there is a need to ensure that we are able to develop the capacity of all to meet these challenges.

The report represents the most comprehensive assessment of crime reduction performance ever undertaken and will provide an important foundation for driving forward activities to further reduce crime and disorder and to meet the challenges that I have outlined.

I am indebted to the many people from a large range of organisations that have taken an active and enthusiastic part in this work. It is the first time that HMIC has worked alongside the Audit Commission, the Local Government Association, the Home Office, the Social Services Inspectorate and Ofsted. The product is much richer for their involvement and provides an important signal in respect of the benefits of joint activity.

I commend the report to you.

Sir David O'Dowd CBE, QPM, BA, MSc, CIMgt  
Her Majesty's Chief Inspector of Constabulary





# Executive Summary

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This is the most comprehensive review of crime reduction activity ever undertaken. The Inspection was led by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC), but in collaboration with the Audit Commission, the Home Office, the Local Government Association (LGA), the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) and the Social Services Inspectorate. The main aim was to examine how police forces and partners were embracing earlier HMIC and Audit Commission Reports on crime reduction and community safety, the extent to which the Crime and Disorder Act was being implemented and the support provided by both central and regional government. Overall, the Inspection has confirmed that substantial progress has been made in developing and improving local crime reduction efforts, but that there is still a long way to go in getting the local strategies to drive activity and focus that activity on getting results.

This Inspection could not be more timely. The Crime and Disorder Act of 1998 has been implemented in phases since 30 September 1998 but much has already been done to support and develop partnership working. The Act has been universally applauded and is viewed as the most important piece of legislation to support efforts to reduce crime and disorder. This has been accompanied by unprecedented activity by the Home Office in putting crime and disorder reduction at the top of the agenda, and clear enthusiasm, commitment and activity by partnerships and other agencies to reduce its incidence. This report seeks to describe the extent and effectiveness of this activity, to highlight good practice and to comment on potential areas for improvement.

## Recent Trends

During the last 100 years, there has been a continual rise in recorded crime year on year. However, since the early 1990s, there has been a reversal of this trend with crime, except for violent crime, continually falling over a six-year period commencing in 1993/94 through to 1998/99. Recent Home Office research indicates that, without the pursuance of rigorous crime reduction initiatives, economic and demographic influences are likely to result in increases in crime. Figures recently published show that recorded crime has risen by 3.8% in the year ending April 2000. Although it is encouraging that this level of increase is less than predicted, it still sends out a sharp message that complacency must not prevail.

## The Social and Economic Costs to the Nation

Reducing the actual number of crimes is an important goal but the motivation must be the reality that lies behind the impact of crime. The experience of becoming a victim of crime can be devastating, the corrosive effects lasting long after the offence itself. The fear of crime can be as debilitating as the reality, creating unwarranted fear and insecurity for many. Crime undermines the sense of safety, security and wellbeing to which every member of the community is entitled. The removal of the negative impact that crime has on the individual and on our society as a whole is paramount.



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Research from the British Crime Survey (BCS) in 1998 showed that 54% of respondents believed that crime had either decreased or remained the same in 1998 compared to 34% in 1992. This encouraging trend mirrors the actual decrease in crime witnessed during the same period. The next BCS will be published in October 2000 and it will be interesting to note whether the perception of crime continues to follow the trend of actual crime.

As well as the personal trauma produced by crime and the fear of crime, there are enormous economic costs to the country. The most recent estimates suggest that the cost of crime to the UK is in excess of £50 billion per annum. Given the significant investment made by central government in recent years, there is clearly a need to ensure a tangible return through noticeable reductions in both actual incidence of crime and the fear of crime.

### The Role of Central Government

The commitment of the present government to reduce crime and disorder is unquestioned. Concerns, however, were expressed in relation to the lack of consultation and co-ordination. These issues are no doubt related to the enthusiasm and speed with which the government has sought to introduce measures to combat crime and disorder. Of encouragement is the continuing commitment to allay these concerns through, for example, the restructured Home Office Policing and Crime Reduction Group (PCRG), which has brought together a number of different units within one structure that has as its main aim the reduction of crime. In addition to the Crime and Disorder Act and the restructured PCRG, some of the many other positive steps that have been put in place to enable partners to reduce crime and disorder include:

- The government's Crime Reduction Strategy that sets out clearly its intended direction.
- The £400 million Crime Reduction Programme.
- A Crime Fighting Fund to include 5,000 extra police officers over and above the number that would have been recruited.
- The importance of linking central policy to local delivery through the creation of enhanced regional structures, including the appointment of regional crime reduction teams led by a director.
- Recognition of the link between criminal behaviour and drug abuse resulting in investment to break that link.

In addition to these praiseworthy actions, the government should now ensure that all ministerial portfolios contain the requirement to consider the prevention of crime and disorder. DETR and the Departments of Health and Education have much to offer partnerships in the effort to reduce crime and disorder. The government should encourage their greater participation and it is suggested that a number of key opportunities are

already present to facilitate this. These include the recent Home Office restructuring, potential models offered elsewhere and the provisions of Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act, which requires 'authorities' to exercise their various functions with due regard to crime and disorder reduction.

### The Role of Other National Bodies

The Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) has a unique role to play in influencing the policing agenda across England and Wales. Undoubtedly, it has, through its members, contributed much to the success of the partnerships. It is evident that the police service at local level is heavily engaged and often takes the lead in partnership activity. ACPO now has an opportunity to impress upon the country's policing community that crime and disorder reduction is paramount. At the time of the Inspection, the ACPO Crime Reduction Sub-Committee was undertaking a review of its role. It should seize this opportunity to raise substantially the ACPO profile in this important arena.

Within the Criminal Justice System (CJS), there have been a number of reforms and initiatives which enable the participants to contribute to crime and disorder reduction without compromising impartiality and fairness:

- ❑ Central government has introduced common objectives and a common business plan for the CJS, which includes working together to reduce crime, secure justice and meet the needs of victims and witnesses. The Attorney General, the Home Secretary and the Lord Chancellor are joint signatories to this plan.
- ❑ Following the publication of the Glidewell Report in June 1998, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) areas are now co-terminous with police force boundaries.
- ❑ The terms of reference for the Criminal Justice Consultative Council (CJCC) include a commitment to promote co-operation within the CJS to reduce crime and the fear of crime and to increase confidence in the rule of law.

These initiatives are welcomed, but there is a need to see more effective communication working in practice between the judiciary, the magistracy, the CPS and the partnerships to achieve crime and disorder reduction.

In addition, concerns have been raised that some courts are adopting a lenient approach in granting bail to prolific offenders and thus providing the opportunity for them to commit further offences. The courts need to reassure the public that this is not the case.

### Local Delivery

The Crime and Disorder Act has formalised partnership working and placed legal responsibilities on certain bodies to institute and participate in



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collaboration in crime and disorder reduction. Whilst recognising the commitment of central government, there were clear tensions concerning the determination of local priorities as envisaged by the Crime and Disorder Act and what is perceived as the imposition of centrally determined priorities in relation to burglary, vehicle crime and violent crime. The reality is that such national priorities are likely to be mirrored locally, but there is greater scope for improved consultation and negotiation.

Local partnerships are also driven by differing departmental agendas as a result of which planning confusion ensues. Some authorities, for example, are required to respond to more than 100 different plans from different government departments.

Co-ordination is vital. Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act offers real potential but also challenges. It is also suggested that central government adhere to the principles of the Section. The potential concerns the requirement for statutory partners to address crime and disorder reduction possibilities in all of their business. Failure to meet these responsibilities renders partnerships liable to legal action. The Inspection is aware of at least one application seeking a judicial review on the basis that Section 17 considerations were not taken into account. In view of the legal requirement imposed, all parties concerned must fully understand the implications. The Inspection team identified a lack of knowledge and understanding of this aspect of the Act and suggests further guidance and training from central government are required.

One of the key aims of the Inspection has been to identify the critical success factors for effective partnership working. Throughout, the benefit of co-terminous boundaries of partner agencies was evidenced. Co-terminosity was seen to improve co-ordination of effort, decision making and shared responsibility. It reduces duplication and the number of meetings required to put into place the mechanism of crime and disorder reduction.

Service delivery appeared most effective where it is focused at the local level, with police sectors and beats aligned with political wards and locally based staff given responsibility for a geographic area. Strong leadership is also important and was evident in a number of areas, but not in others. Where it is in place, there is a clear sense of purpose and direction, visibility of leaders and evidence of enthusiasm and commitment throughout basic command units (BCUs) and authorities. Elected members, community representatives and the private and voluntary sectors can also provide leadership. There was much evidence of willingness to engage with partners but more progress needs to be made.

Joint working between agencies is a clear factor. The police and the local authorities at all levels, together with other agencies, the private and the voluntary sectors have

demonstrated a willingness to make partnerships work. We have seen them producing a real impact on crime and disorder reduction which is very encouraging. Others have invested in the development of structures and systems to facilitate partnership working but have yet to progress to gaining real outcomes.

The problem-solving approach has long been established as a successful method of combating crime and disorder. It produces sustainable results rather than the 'quick fixes' associated with the treatment of symptoms commonly seen with reactive policing. The increased use of this approach by partnerships was encouraging, although it has yet to be ingrained within the culture of either police or local authority service delivery. The move from a reactive/proactive approach towards a 'co-active' approach in which the police, agencies and community identify the conditions that need to be addressed to improve community safety and work together to define and design appropriate responses is advocated. Effective problem solving approaches require the proper use of intelligence and analysis. More inroads need to be made in both these areas, particularly in respect of joint agency efforts.

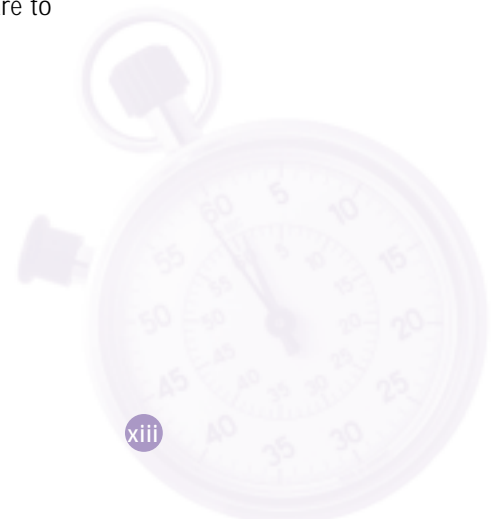
An integrated approach in tackling crime and disorder reduction is suggested. This will help to ensure that problem-solving, intelligence-led approaches are adopted with effective analysis leading to the consideration of a range of interventions. These interventions need to be assessed in both the short and long term with joint action examined at every opportunity.

Partnerships have developed by varying degrees but all need to build-in the capacity to sustain efforts by the improved management of resources, use of intelligence and information sharing, joint training to maximise on each other's skills and to promote good practice.

### **An Agenda for Action**

Central government has set the scene - crime and disorder reduction is of paramount importance. This should be reflected in all the policies and activities of police forces and partnerships. They should ensure they have robust accountability frameworks in place and should maximise their resources accordingly. Efforts will have to be increased if we are to sustain crime reduction.

This Inspection set out to identify what works in reducing the incidence of crime and disorder. Critical success factors required for partnerships and police BCUs have been developed in the form of a model. This can be found at the conclusion of the report and is intended to act as a catalyst for further development. In addition, an Agenda for Action describes what still needs to



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be done to achieve sustainable crime and disorder reduction. This Agenda for Action will support the government's Crime Reduction Strategy and the continuing Crime Reduction Programme to further enable all key stakeholders to work together with the common aim of sustaining recent levels of reduction against the upward pressures that are beginning to emerge.

The most important success factor is *a belief that it can happen*. This belief was evident in most cases. We should now 'call time on crime' by matching meaningful action to this belief.