# Can we speak in confidence? Community intelligence and neighbourhood policing v2.0

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Informed by empirical data collected in the London Borough of Sutton (LBS) in four sweeps between 2007 and 2010, this article examines the impact of a community engagement methodology encouraging citizens to articulate their local security needs to Neighbourhood Policing teams (NPTs). By acting on this community intelligence police are able to 'tune' their interventions towards those problems generating most social harm. In so doing, the data suggest police are able to improve public confidence and increase overall community well-being. This case study of Sutton is used to illuminate some broader patterns and trends in how policing in England and Wales is being reconfigured in response to a set of economic and ideological pressures. It is suggested that the combination of forces are liable to induce a revised version of the principles and practices associated with the initial model of Neighbourhood Policing (NP).

**Keywords:** neighbourhood policing; community intelligence; community engagement; public confidence; social harm

In 2007, the then Labour government established public confidence as the pre-eminent measure of police effectiveness in England and Wales. Reacting to criticisms of the expanding the suite of centrally determined police performance indicators that they had developed (Fielding and Innes 2006), the 'single confidence measure' represented a radical departure. This pre-eminence did not last long, however. One of the first reforms of the new coalition government elected in 2010 was to remove the confidence measure, seeking to replace it with a far more localised system of police accountability.

Whilst these political machinations are intriguing, they are signifiers of a 'deeper undertow' in UK policing. For although much discussion of policing has focused around quantifiable metrics, such as the number of officers and aggregate crime rates, in the UK tradition, significant attention has always been paid to public structures of feeling and perceptions. In short, in UK policing perhaps more so than in other jurisdictions, what the public think about the police matters. Historically, there are various manifestations of this: Rowan and Mayne's founding instruction for the Metropolitan Police in 1829 that 'the police are the people, and the people are the police'; Robert Marks' dictum that sometimes police needed to recognise that they could win public support 'by appearing to lose'; and the Scarman Report's emphasis in the early 1980s upon securing and sustaining public legitimacy.

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This accent upon public perceptions and conceptions of the police was afforded particular salience by the National Reassurance Policing Programme (NRPP) that ran between 2003 and 2005 in 16 sites across England. Responding to a divergence in public perceptions of crime and recorded crime rates, this programme was important in that it was explicit in its assertion that subjective perceptions of crime rates should be as important to the police as objective levels of victimisation. The resulting model sought to reconfigure some key police processes and systems for a world where a prevalent sense of insecurity was becoming a pressing social problem in and of itself (Tuffin 2006).

The Neighbourhood Policing (NP) model, derived from the NRPP and now fully operational in all forces in England and Wales, was thus designed to render local policing more directly responsive to public concerns and needs (Quinton and Morris 2008). Founded upon a localised form of delivery, NP is enacted through dedicated Neighbourhood Policing Teams (NPTs), comprising community police officers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). Visible and familiar to local communities, NPTs are tasked with identifying what matters most to people in the area, before developing and implementing appropriate, multi-agency interventions aimed at effectively managing these problems. As such, they are heralded to be accountable to the communities they serve.

Whilst the allocation of police resources to NP has been generally well received, the methods via which the concerns of the public are identified, understood and responded to have been slower to develop. A variety of engagement methods have been utilised across the country, from public meetings to street briefings to quantitative satisfaction surveys (e.g. Herbert 2006, Skogan 2006). Whilst these have improved the knowledge base of local forces to varying degrees, they have rarely afforded the sophisticated level of detail needed to truly understand the drivers of public insecurity. In effect, whilst NP is broadly seen as having been a success, there have been *sotto voce* concerns that this has been predicated upon it having been very well resourced.

Any such concerns have been rendered more acute in the aftermath of the global economic recession. The coalition government elected in 2010 has set out a radical reform agenda that, in principle at least, has the capacity to fundamentally alter the centre of gravity of UK policing. Their approach has both economic and ideological overtones. The economic imperative, as part of a wider programme to reduce overall public spending, is set to reduce Home Office police funding by at least 20%. At the same time though, there is a more explicitly ideological motivation embedded in the proposed reforms. By introducing directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners, mandating police hold local 'beat meetings', alongside a number of measures, the government is looking to significantly extend and deepen the local public accountability and responsiveness initiated via NP.

In sum, the aspiration for these reforms appears to be about instantiating a far more 'democratic' style of policing, pivoting around three key principles:

- 'Seeing like a citizen': that the public's self-defined problems should be policing priorities. Rather than approaching the world through the rational-bureaucratic lens of their organisation, police must endeavour to understand what the world looks and feels like for citizens.

- 'Participative policing': there is a manifest drive, influenced strongly by the government's 'big society' thinking, that more people and groups should be engaged in the conduct of social control work.
- 'See through services': particularly in the recent Bill there is strong direction that accountability and decision-making needs to be made far more transparent to local publics.

Taken in combination, these economic and ideological pressures are profoundly re-shaping the orientations of policing in England and Wales. The size of the police is being reduced reflecting significant budget cuts. At the same time, ideological influences are re-thinking the social functions of the police and how the work of policing is to be accomplished. Refracting these pressures, it seems highly likely that some of the practices and processes associated with NP will be required to evolve and develop. Not least, because the government's reforms are placing very significant emphasis upon the interactions between police and public at neighbourhood level.

Drawing upon community intelligence data collected annually over a four year period in the London Borough of Sutton (LBS), this article explores how NP could be reconfigured in light of these broader patterns and trends. The data from Sutton were collected using an innovative community engagement methodology. It seeks to provide police and their partners with insight into what incidents and events shape peoples' sense of neighbourhood security, and should thus be targets for interventions. The discussion examines how the method has been implemented in Sutton and assesses the impacts achieved. Informed by these empirical data, the potential for evolving a more precise and sophisticated community intelligence-led NP is considered.

**The community engagement methodology**

The Sutton case study is founded upon the implementation of a community engagement methodology initially developed during the extensive programme of research conducted as part of the NRPP (Innes *et al.* 2004). It has subsequently been refined and developed through extensive field-testing (Innes 2005, Innes *et al.* 2008, Innes and Roberts 2008). Based upon the concepts articulated through the Signal Crimes Perspective (Innes 2004), 'intelligence-orientated Neighbourhood Security Interviews' (i-NSI) are a method integrating the principles of cognitive interviewing (Geiselman *et al.* 1986, Fisher and Geiselman 1992) into a qualitative GIS approach (Elwood and Cope 2009). The interviews are administered using a bespoke map-based computerised personal interview software and analysis package. It has been designed for use by front-line practitioners with minimal training.

*Re-thinking community engagement and intelligence*

That engaging with communities is an important and valuable facet of community policing is now well documented. Compared with other engagement vehicles that are now routinely implemented by the police, the methodology utilised herein combines three particular attributes:

- It is systematic. Rather than simply facilitating engagement with those with 'a natural predisposition' to work with the police, it requires a 'widening of the radar' to include those who might be otherwise 'harder to hear' or less naturally inclined to give their views. This is achieved by using a combined demographic and geographic sampling frame (described later);
- It is 'proactive'. Whereas other methods of police-community engagement typically depend upon people turning up to public meetings to provide their views or responding to surveys, the i-NSI positions the work as a 'proactive' undertaking for police staff;
- It is integrated. Rather than allowing engagement work to be out-sourced, or given to particular departments, this methodology is to be used by NPTs as an integral part of their role.

Designed as an applied policing methodology, rather than a 'pure' research tool, the interview instrument elicits information from interviewees about what problems locally are generative of personal and collective insecurity. It is less concerned with collecting general attitudinal data than knowledge about and perceptions of what incidents are occurring locally and what community impacts they are having.

In practice, administering a survey of this kind encounters a problem that we might term the 'knowledge-perception knot'. Given the fact that what people know and how they perceive their situated environments are intimately and ineradicably intertwined, it can be difficult to know sometimes whether some things that appear to be influencing neighbourhood security actually happened, or whether they are a function of local rumour or gossip.

The way that this is handled by the analytics of the methodology is twofold. First, whenever someone refers to a crime, disorder or policing issue, they are required to plot where this is occurring on the map. These data can be recorded as 'points' (specific locations), 'lines' (to denote roads) and 'areas' (e.g. for a whole neighbourhood or park). Requiring this geo-referencing helps to separate out more general 'free-floating' attitudinal statements from actual occurrences. This is reinforced by the way in which, reflecting the 'signal crime' concept, respondents are questioned about what effects (if any) the incidents they are plotting have had upon them. They are asked to specify whether the event concerned has altered how they think, feel or behave in relation to their security. It appears that the combination of these processes filters out approximately two-thirds of issues that people initially raise. The average respondent, in an average neighbourhood, typically plots between three and four signal crimes or disorders. The second process integrated into the analytic procedures is to insist on triangulation of data. The principle being that the more people identify similar issues as changing how they think, feel or act in relation to their safety, the greater confidence one can have that there is a genuine issue of concern in play.

At the point of analysis, the data collected in this way is translated into a form of 'community intelligence'. Community intelligence (Commtel) is a term that has become increasingly common-place in the policing lexicon over recent years despite the lack of an agreed upon and coherent definition. As far as i-NSI is concerned, Commtel can be defined as information that, when analysed, provides foresight into the risks posed by or too a particular group of people. Similar to both crime and

criminal intelligence it has a prospective dimension, but what gives it its unique value is that it has a 'collective' quality.

### Data capture

During the interview, respondents are shown a laptop computer displaying the electronic map of their neighbourhood and surrounding area. Commencing with some fairly general questions about life in the local area, the interviewer asks the respondents about 'any problems' in the neighbourhood and further afield that they are aware of, and they are encouraged, through probing and prompting, to provide detailed descriptions of any issues or incidents.

The interviewer next asks them to indicate on the map any locations that they avoid, where they feel afraid or where particular problems tend to occur. Having specified the problematic locations, respondents then explain and describe what issues are occurring there. This frequently results in the interviewees returning to incidents they had described in the earlier phase of the interview and also identifying previously unmentioned concerns.

All incidents and problem locations are plotted directly onto the map by the interviewer, triggering a series of questions designed to generate more descriptive detail about the problem, details of when it occurs and the impact or effect it is having on the respondent. The interviewer then 'attaches' this information to the geo-coded data via a combination of pre-defined tick-box codes and free text data entry. Additionally, the software guides interviewers to ask other questions providing useful supplementary information. These include assessments of neighbourhood levels of community cohesion, shifts in crime and disorder prevalence and confidence in police and council services.

The interview process is something of a hybrid methodology combining aspects of semi-structured interviews with more structured question based approaches. The interview interaction is guided according to the procedures and understandings that underpin the conduct of qualitative interviews, but data are coded in a fashion more akin to structured surveys.

### Sampling

#### Purposive sampling and 'Neighbourhood Sentinels'

Reflecting its antecedents as an applied commtel tool, the selection of interviewees utilises a purposive sampling strategy, recruiting 'high knowledge' respondents likely to be fulfilling a 'neighbourhood sentinel' function. Identification of such individuals is based upon three factors:

- An established role within the rhythms and routines of neighbourhoods such that they are firmly embedded within local social networks, with a high degree of situational awareness about what is happening to whom;
- Routine activities that involve large amounts of time traversing public spaces in an area, such that they are more attuned to what unsettling and troubling events happen, where and when. So for example, mothers with children, those involved in voluntary community activities, together with people working in

roles such as postal delivery workers, taxi drivers and hairdressers all seemed to have a particular awareness of local problems;
- Interest and investment in a neighbourhood, such that they take a greater interest in the fortunes of their local area.

Although thinking in this way is not especially common currently in many branches of social research methodology, there are important precedents within the literature for it. For example, Sykes (1951) identified that if one is interested in the information about an area possessed by its residents, rather than the attitudes that they hold towards it, then there are socially structured patterns detectable between those groups who hold 'more' and 'less' neighbourhood information. Campbell (1955) systematically examined this 'asymmetry of knowledge'. In his test he differentiated between a randomly selected group of respondents who were surveyed and a smaller group of deliberately selected 'high knowledge' informants who were questioned using a semi-structured interview. He found that the latter group was marginally more accurate than the far larger sample of randomly selected survey respondents.

*Size, distribution and representativeness*

The selection and recruitment of interviewees is further structured by the application of a 'geographic sampling' overlay. In effect, the size and geographic distribution of the sample is determined by reference to the Office for National Statistics output areas (OA). Each OA is calculated based upon a relatively consistent head of population (around 250–300). Thus at the start of the methodology, the boundaries of the research site are determined, the area divided into its constituent OAs and police interviewers tasked to recruit one neighbourhood sentinel from each. Sample size, then, is determined by the number of OAs within the area of interest and the OA grid provides a ready-made distribution framework. Additionally, in developing their sample of neighbourhood sentinels interviewers are required to keep broadly within a demographic profile based upon recorded census data for the area.

In Sutton and elsewhere, this geographic dimension has been helpful in preventing police from engaging solely with 'the usual suspects'. 'Reality testing' their engagement practices it has been found that they frequently have lots of contacts in some neighbourhoods and few in others. Thus by requiring them to develop neighbourhood sentinels in each output area, they are unable to rely upon people they already know.

*Data analysis*

Analysis of the data generated through the interviews is facilitated by a second piece of bespoke software. By aggregating the data from across individual interviews it seeks to develop a picture of what signal crimes and disorders are impacting most within and across different communities, and the significant locations where they occur. The software is especially helpful in allowing for large amounts of data to be processed quickly, to ensure that analytic products are available in a time-frame that gives them practical relevance to police and partners.

### Case study: the London Borough of Sutton

Having described the i-NSI methodology, the article now turns to a case study illustrating its application and value in understanding the concerns and perceptions of people in Sutton.

*Area profile*

The LBS lies 12 miles south of central London in the county of Surrey. It covers a land area of 4385 hectares and incorporates Sutton Town Centre (one of four Metropolitan Centres within South London) together with six district centres, a large number of local centres and many dispersed parades of shops. The borough has a resident population of around 181,000 (2008), with a relatively young age distribution (approximately: 37% under the age of 30 years, 44% in the age of 30–59 years and 19% in the age of 60 years and over). The population is approximately 85% white with an Asian/Asian British population of 7.5%, a Black/Black British population of 5% and the remaining 2.5% of other ethnicities.

Sutton is relatively wealthy, with much of the population consisting of younger professional working people who commute the short distance into central London (ACORN Classification 19). The Borough ranks 30th out of the 33 London Boroughs in the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) and 234th out of 354 authorities in the rest of England.

However, this summary picture hides some localised areas of disadvantage with three wards identified as 'deprived' by the IMD: St Helier; Wandle Valley and Beddington South. Three of the 121 Super OA in the Borough are ranked amongst the most deprived 20% in the UK. Two of these are in Beddington South, clustered around the Roundshaw estate, and the third is in Sutton Central. In contrast, there are three wards identified as 'affluent': Cheam; Nonsuch and Belmont. The CACI Wealth of the Nation report for 2005 shows that the gap between the wealthiest and poorest parts of the Borough (the local income gap) falls within the top five local authorities in England and Wales (London Borough of Sutton 2008).

Data on community cohesion from the 2010 i-NSI sweep suggests people generally enjoy living in their neighbourhood, perceiving it safe and consider their quality of life to have been stable or improved over the preceding 2 years. Of the 604 people interviewed, 54% felt that people will pull together to improve their neighbourhood and 44% felt that all or most people can be trusted. However, it is notable that 30% said that there is a very or fairly big problem with respect and consideration within their community.

The Borough is policed by the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS). Each of the 18 electoral wards in the Borough has a dedicated Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT), mostly comprising a police sergeant, two police constables and three PCSOs. An additional Town Centre SNT was merged with that for Sutton Central ward during the early part of 2010, creating a new, much larger team currently staffed with three sergeants, eleven constables and eight PCSOs. There are also two Safer Parks Teams and a Safer Transport Team dedicated to the Borough.

Police work closely with the local authority under the auspices of the Safer Sutton Partnership (SSP). Senior NP and council community safety staffs are

co-located at Sutton police station to facilitate this close working relationship. Sutton is one of the safest boroughs in London with recorded levels of crime consistently ranking 29th or 30th out of 33 in relation to total notifiable offences over the last decade.

### Application of i-NSI

Intelligence-orientated Neighbourhood Security Interviews were first conducted in the LBS during 2007. Officers from each of the 18 SNTs were given one day's training by the academic team, covering the background to i-NSI, cognitive interviewing skills, the identification of signal crimes and disorders and operating the software. Individual ward sample details were prepared as previously described and interviewers given a period of 14 working days on a rolling basis to interview the required number of respondents. Each officer's first interview was also attended by the academic trainer in order to consolidate the classroom learning.

In 2008, 2009 and 2010, the process was repeated such that each ward's data were collected approximately 12 months after the previous sweep, with annual interviewer training and refresher sessions for all staff involved. Each year the data collected were analysed by the academic researchers, firstly on a ward level and then again on a Borough level. This dual level analysis enabled individual ward level community intelligence reports to be produced for tactical use by each SNT, but also a more strategic borough report to aid wider strategic assessment and resource allocation.

Outline descriptions of the samples drawn by the SNTs over the four years are shown in Table 1. In some wards people have been re-interviewed, but these remain a minority.

### Changes in Sutton's signal profile

At the beginning of each interview, respondents were asked whether they perceive crime and disorder in their neighbourhood to have got better, worse or stayed the same in the last 12 months. Figure 1 shows the combined responses of all respondents' from each ward across the borough. It is clear that some important shifts have occurred over the four year period.

Year-on-year, the proportion of people in Sutton who think crime and disorder in the area has worsened over the past 12 months has reduced. Whilst these data mirror a downward trend recently observed in the British Crime Survey (BCS), the 2010 figure (12%) is considerably lower than the national average recorded by the BCS in 2009/2010, where 31% of people thought crime had got worse in their local area over the last 12 months and 66% thought the level of crime nationally had increased.

There was a notable increase in the number who believed things had got better between 2007 and 2008, although this returned to its baseline level and stabilised in the following two years. Over the same period, around twice as many people felt that things had stayed the same, intimating a stabilisation of public perception. Given that the data generated from 2007 onwards has been utilised by the SSP in developing their annual strategic assessment and informing local initiatives, it seems likely that this stabilisation is, at least in part, a result of targeted interventions across the Borough.

Table 1. Sample details 2007–2010[a].

|  | 2010 | 2009 | 2008 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Number of interviews planned | 610 | 610 | 610 | 610 |
| Number of interviews conducted | **604** | **603** | **617** | **598** |
| Male | 250 | 238 | 270 | 275 |
| Female | 327 | 345 | 328 | 302 |
| White | 514 | 524 | 541 | 528 |
| Black/Black British | 17 | 21 | 12 | 13 |
| Asian/Asian British | 40 | 36 | 36 | 40 |
| Mixed | 11 | 11 | 1 | 7 |
| Chinese or other Ethnic Group | 19 | 8 | 9 | 6 |
| Aged 29 and under | 72 | 83 | 71 | 79 |
| Aged 30–49 | 250 | 241 | 237 | 246 |
| Aged 50–69 | 194 | 181 | 187 | 169 |
| Aged 70 and over | 86 | 95 | 92 | 84 |
| Resident/reside and work in area | 540 | 528 | 540 | 526 |
| Work in area only | 62 | 72 | 77 | 72 |

Emboldened values highlight the total sample size attained compared to the planned sample size given above.
[a]Where figures in each category do not sum to the total sample size, this information was declined by respondents or not recorded by the interviewer.

Table 2 demonstrates a broad consistency in the problems being identified as the strongest signals since 2007, with youth disorder, speeding, traffic and litter cited. However, there are some important movements. Public drinking dropped out of the top five concerns in 2008 and graffiti in 2009. Neither has returned since, suggesting
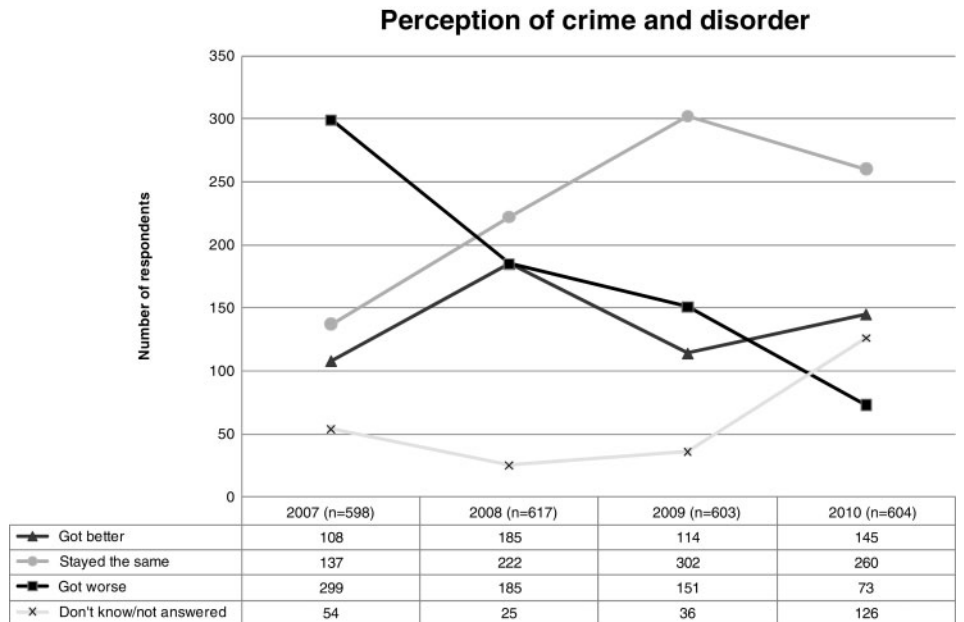


**Perception of crime and disorder**

| | 2007 (n=598) | 2008 (n=617) | 2009 (n=603) | 2010 (n=604) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Got better | 108 | 185 | 114 | 145 |
| Stayed the same | 137 | 222 | 302 | 260 |
| Got worse | 299 | 185 | 151 | 73 |
| Don't know/not answered | 54 | 25 | 36 | 126 |

Figure 1. Perceptions of crime and disorder.

Table 2. Top signals over four years.

| 2010 | 2009 | 2008 | 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Groups of youths | 1. Groups of youths | 1. Groups of youths | 1. Groups of youths |
| 2. Speeding | 2. Speeding | 2. Speeding | 2. Speeding |
| 3. Inconsiderate parking | 3. Inconsiderate parking | 3. Inconsiderate parking | 3. Graffiti |
| 4. Litter | 4. Undesirable groups | 4. Graffiti | 4. Litter |
| 5. Dog mess | 5. Litter | 5. Litter | 5. Public drinking |

that these issues are being adequately managed in the eyes of the community. Inconsiderate parking emerged as a significant problem in 2008 and continues to generate concern. The environmental problem of dog fouling emerges in the top five for the first time in 2010, replacing the unusual signal disorder, 'undesirable groups' that emerged a year earlier. This very subjective problem covers the congregation in public space of any groups of people labelled by the community as 'undesirable': be it young 'hoodies'; adult street drinkers; problem neighbours etc. In 2009, this was predominately related to the congregation of homeless people drinking and begging in Wallington Town Centre – a problem that hardly features in the 2010 data, reflecting a concerted approach to tackling the issue by the SSP during the year.

The analysis displayed in Figure 2 is based upon examining changes in the frequency of public reporting of these different types of signal crimes and signal disorder. Although the number of interviews has varied slightly each year, overall the pattern of signals has remained remarkably stable. The graph plots the data in such a way that indicative trends can be seen for each main signal type across the three years.
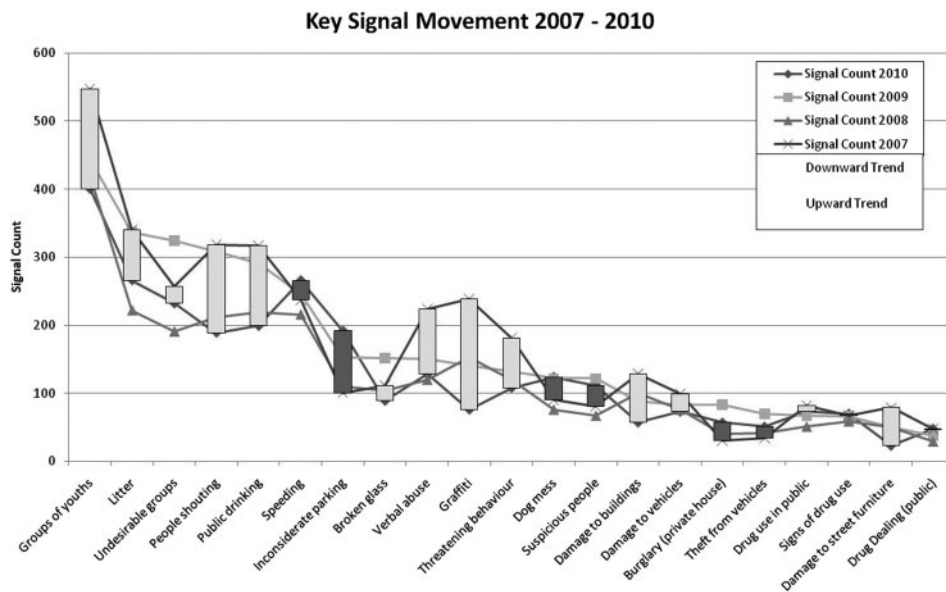


Figure 2. Key signals four year movement 2007–2010.

It can be observed that important improvements have taken place in relation to the overall prevalence of key physical disorders and many types of social disorders acting as signals that change how local people think, feel or act in relation to their security. Most notably youth related disorder and public drinking have declined significantly, together with graffiti and various other forms of damage. Road safety concerns, particularly inconsiderate parking, are growing drivers of insecurity, as are the presence of suspicious people. Environmental concerns are a mixed picture, with litter showing a slight improvement and dog mess worsening since 2007. Some key crime types are also showing a slightly increasing trend such as, domestic burglary and theft from vehicles. This shows that although public concerns consistently gravitate around he same problems, they are being mentioned less often than in 2007.

Amongst the issues in decline are those that have been targeted for police and partner intervention as a result of their identification by the analysis. However, other issues, most notably road safety problems, remain entrenched and are increasingly acting as 'magnets' for public perturbation despite interventions being taken in respect of them. One possible explanation for this is that these particular issues are not entirely under the control of the SSP, with Transport for London and the New Scotland Yard's Traffic Command having significant responsibilities in relation to London's roads. As such, interventions that have a significant impact are difficult to achieve. In addition, it may be that the community are in effect 'recalibrating' their concerns as a result of improvements observed. For example, as youth disorder and litter have declined in their neighbourhoods, concern switches to problems that are still very much evident, increasing the weight attached to them.

*Significant locations*

Extending the analysis to explore what sorts of problems occur in which localities offers additional insights. Table 3 conveys that the same locations feature strongly year on year as areas where a variety of different signal crimes and disorders are perceived to occur by the public. Consequently, they are and have been prime candidates for multi-agency interventions across the SSP.

Sutton High Street has been amongst these significant locations since the first sweep and from 2008 has increased in significance as a generator of risk and insecurity related to a range of different issues: indeed by 2010 it has become the top location for all but road safety signals. At first sight, this is a particularly disappointing finding for the SSP considering the significant extent of interventions in the area by both council and police over the period. However, reprising the 'recalibration' concept outlined earlier, this could be interpreted as a positive reflection of decreased concern about issues in more outlying areas. Town centre locations are always perceived by the public as problematic and improvements are often slow to be recognised as reputation persists. As such, they become more and more the focus of concern, particularly when problems in more other locations are being reduced. This hypothesis is supported by the decreased coherence in 2010 of locations such as Stonecot Hill (damage) and Collingwood Road (drugs-related issues) since 2009, together with Wrythe Lane and London Road (Worcester Park) from 2008, which have not re-emerged as significant two years on. In relation to road safety issues, London Road (Wallington) and Brighton Road are still problematic

Table 3. Significant locations over four years.

| Signal theme/type | Top locations 2010 | Top locations 2009 | Top locations 2008 | Top locations 2007 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| All signals | High Street (Sutton) | High Street (Sutton) | London Road (Worcester Park) | London Road (Worcester Park) |
| Groups of youths | High Street (Sutton) | High Street (Sutton) | Wrythe Lane | Richmond Green |
| Environmental signals | High Street (Sutton) | High Street (Sutton) | High Street (Sutton) | London Road (Worcester Park) |
| Damage | High Street (Sutton) | Stonecot Hill | Wrythe Lane | London Road (Worcester Park) |
| Speeding | Brighton Road | London Road (Wallington) Brighton Road | London Road (Wallington) | High Street (Sutton) |
| Road safety | London Road (Wallington) | Brighton Road Croydon Road Stonecot Hill | London Road (Wallington) | Brighton Road |
| Drugs related | High Street (Sutton) | Collingwood Road | Wrythe Lane | London Road (Worcester Park) |
| Causing fear and avoidance | High Street (Sutton) | High Street (Sutton) | Wrythe Lane | Brighton Road |
| Causing anger | High Street (Sutton) | London Road (Worcester Park) | London Road (Worcester Park) | London Road (Worcester Park) |

locations, as they have shown to be in previous years, supporting the earlier suggestion that these problems are more entrenched.

The diminishing salience of Wrythe Lane in the public's priorities provides an insightful exemplar of how the community intelligence gathered using the i-NSI methodology has been incrementally shifting the SSP's approach. In 2008, the road was highlighted as a locale where the occurrence of a number of crime and disorder problems and the perceived impotence of the police response to these was degrading public confidence. A long road spanning three wards within the Borough, the problem profile based upon the community intelligence generated through the interviews identified that people perceived and experienced particular problems with: drug use in public; youth disorder; and high levels of graffiti. Having identified that what was occurring in Wrythe Lane was an issue, further analysis of the problem was conducted, including consulting police recorded crime and intelligence data. This revealed two areas along the road where there were some crime hotspots – St. Helier Hospital and the area around Rosehill Shops. Key problems occurring in the area according to police data included youth disorder, rubbish and graffiti, shoplifting, assaults and criminal damage.

This analysis phase also identified that the reason previous interventions had failed to gain traction upon the problems was because of the length of the road and

how the Metropolitan Police's SNTs are structured. Because Wrythe Lane traverses three wards the issues occurring along different sections of it were in fact being addressed by different staff and not in a coordinated fashion. As such, a need to adopt a more joined-up and holistic approach in addressing the problems in these areas was identified, and a genuine 'joint-operations' approach was instigated across the relevant partner agencies. Adopting this perspective it was apparent that there were a number of triggers for public concern. Taken individually these were not particularly high profile issues, but packaged together as a problem it was clear why there was such a high fear of crime and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB), and why people locally were dissatisfied with the police response.

At Rosehill Shops, a small parade of retail outlets, there were three fast food outlets and a licensed newsagent. These were all magnets for young people and their customers were also responsible for a high degree of littering in the area. As part of the response phase all of these businesses were asked to sign responsible retailer agreements and the police and council are monitoring the licensed premises on an ongoing basis. A bit further along, there was a disused public toilet and graffiti laden walls. This was knocked down as part of the interventions performed by the Council. For their part, synchronized with these other responses, the police introduced high visibility foot patrols in the area, they undertook crime prevention campaigns at the hospital and placed particular accent upon improving their investigative response to any reported crimes in the area.

When the impact of these interventions was assessed in the 2009 i-NSI consultation, it appeared the joint operations approach performed by the police and council had been successful. From a position where Wrythe Lane was an area causing residents across Sutton considerable anxiety in 2008, by 2009 it no longer featured in the top five problematic locations in the Borough and has remained absent in the 2010 data.

During this period, distinct improvements in public confidence in the police were also detected by i-NSI, particularly in relation to the SNTs, although disappointingly, this was not accompanied by improved confidence in the local council, even though they have actively participated in the conduct of many of the key interventions.

### Drivers and inhibitors of confidence in Sutton

Developing the idea of linking problem resolution to confidence, the 2010 data-set has been examined to establish the indicative drivers of increased or decreased confidence in and satisfaction with policing. In 2010, 91% of the total sample said that they were 'fairly' or 'very' satisfied with the MPS as a whole, 5% were 'not very' or 'not at all satisfied' and the remainder had a mixed view, or did not know.

A total of 189 interviewees (31%) described something that had happened in the past 3 months that had increased their confidence in the MPS as a whole. This improvement was identified by respondents as a result of: something that happened to them (56%), something that they heard or read through the media (10%), something that happened to a friend or family member (7%), something that happened to someone else (11%), or a combination of reasons (6%).

Conducting a content analysis of these qualitative data enables some of the main drivers for increasing confidence to be determined (Figure 3). It should be noted that many of the categories identified co-occur and interact with others.

Looking across these data, several event types emerge as especially salient. The most important of these are dealing effectively with a specific crime or ASB incident and general effectiveness at keeping law and order within the Borough. These factors interact with high patrol visibility, and responding quickly and appropriately to calls for assistance.

The experience of communication with and feedback from the police through listening to, being sympathetic with and helpful with regard to respondent's problems is also significant, although the data here are too ambiguous to clearly attribute this to the SNT or response policing teams. However, interaction directly with SNTs is clearly an important confidence driver. As one interviewee described it:

> Local safer neighbourhood team come round and chat to me. I like it when they visit, it makes me feel safe

> (2010_shel_c7151_004_280910090256)

More widespread consultation and engagement methods, including participating in the i-NSI survey itself, were mentioned by a handful of respondents and appear to have had positive pay-offs in terms of increasing confidence by showing that the police were interested in understanding and engaging in local problems and concerns. The Sutton Police Station Open Day and 'street a week' engagement also registered positively within this category. All such interactions were important, in that they enabled the building of 'relationships' with the police locally. These findings have
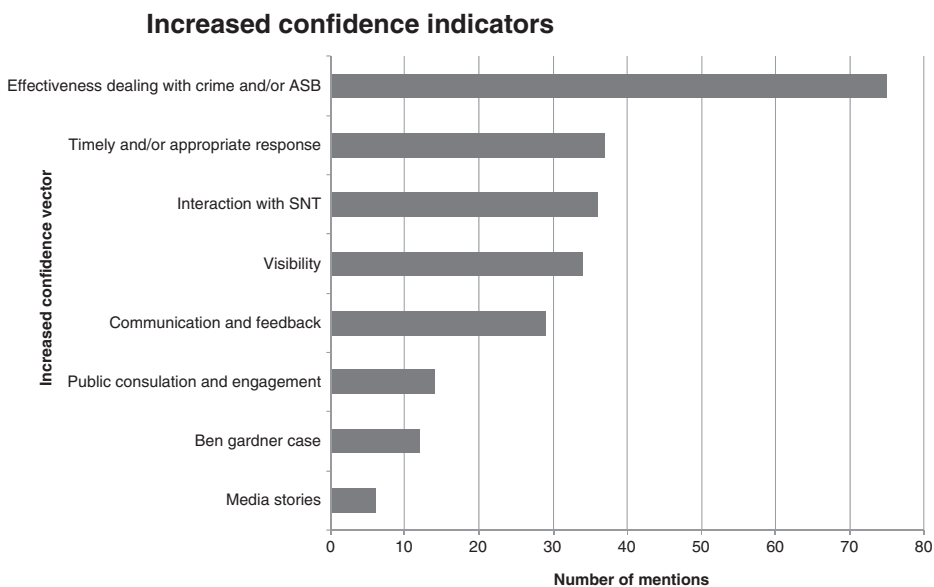


Figure 3. Increased confidence drivers.

important implications for our understanding of the vital but much neglected 'soft power' dimensions of community policing:

> Local community officer called round to do i-NSI. Shows police are interested in local issues
>
> (2010_twry_s7126zt_003_070910114530)

Significantly, police and criminal justice partners' performance in relation to the murder of Ben Gardner in October 2009 appears to have had a particular resonance with the local community. Mr Gardener died from his injuries following an assault by three young men in the town centre on Halloween 2009. The incident had been precipitated following the theft, earlier in the evening, of his girlfriend's Halloween party hat as she stood waiting for him outside a local fast food restaurant. The fatal assault, which was particularly violent, was partially caught on town centre CCTV and the assailants where quickly arrested and charged with murder. That a number of respondents specifically mentioned the case in the 2010 survey may not be so surprising given that the subsequent trial, conviction and sentencing of all three men to life imprisonment occurred during the data collection period. Nevertheless, it is an indicator of the importance of such critical incidents to communities when they construct their sense of security (Lowe *et al.* 2007). The following comment was typical of the positive views expressed:

> The murder last year in the High Street. I saw in the paper the murderers got life. It shows it can happen in Sutton, but it was dealt with well by police
>
> (2010_ssou_mp206247_006_171010112852)

Only 54 respondents (9%) said that something that happened in the past 3 months to decrease their confidence in the MPS as a whole. The reduction in confidence was identified by respondents as a result of: something that happened to them (38%), something that they heard or read through the media (22%), something that happened to a friend or family member (11%), something happened to someone else (2%) or a combination of reasons (4%). From the quantitative analysis it is evident that adverse media coverage affects the public's perception of the police in a significant and important way

Figure 4 displays the content analysis results of the smaller number of more negative comments made. Interestingly, although some of the factors are direct opposites of those above, some completely new ones are identified.

The central concern that led respondents to rate their confidence in the police negatively can be summarised under the heading 'ineffectiveness'. Here respondents were complaining that the police response to a particular incident was poor and ineffective. In a separate category are those data where police were either slow to attend an incident or indeed, did not attend at all. In all such cases there is a sense of security failure:

> Made numerous calls to 999, once for a fight, once for a detained suspect, once for a rowdy party and the response was not very good. One time, the officers didn't even get out of the car, just drove past.
>
> (2010_wnor_cc711020_011_131010152557)
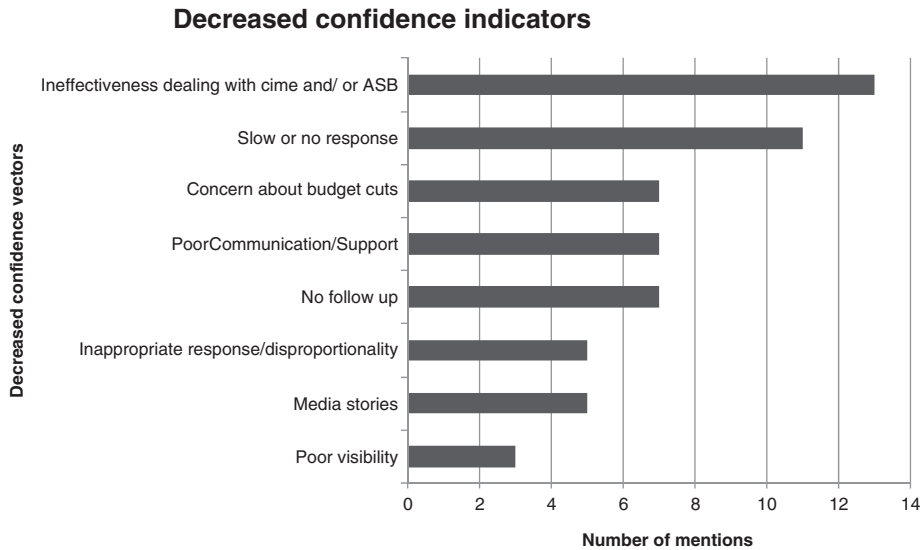
## Decreased confidence indicators



Figure 4. Decreased confidence vectors.

A handful of respondents commented that the police are unhelpful and do not communicate well with or support victims and public alike. Equally, a number complained that when police had responded to a crime report they had made, they had not been informed of the outcome or of any actions taken. For example:

> After the incident, it felt like they were not interested. Crime number was handed over no more communication
>
> (2010_wnor_cc711020_011_131010152557)

A surprising finding was the extent to which the planned public spending budget cuts were already contributing to decreasing confidence amongst a minority of respondents in the ability of police to deal with issues that concern the community.

> Cutting police numbers, funding etc. Worried that if police officers are cut down there will be nobody on the streets at all
>
> (2010_wnor_spc708236_001_061010094830)

Reporting of the potential effects of budget restraint on front line policing are central to this concern and it will be interesting to see if this continues or grows as the cuts impact.

In an additional question, respondents were asked if they had noticed any improvements to the level of crime and disorder anywhere in Sutton Borough over the last 12 months. A third of respondents said they had ($n = 198$, 33%) and of those, 73% gave detailed examples of the improvements they had observed. Figure 5 provides a content analysis of this qualitative data.

By far the most important category of improvements recorded related to increased police visibility and significantly, almost half of all those related to
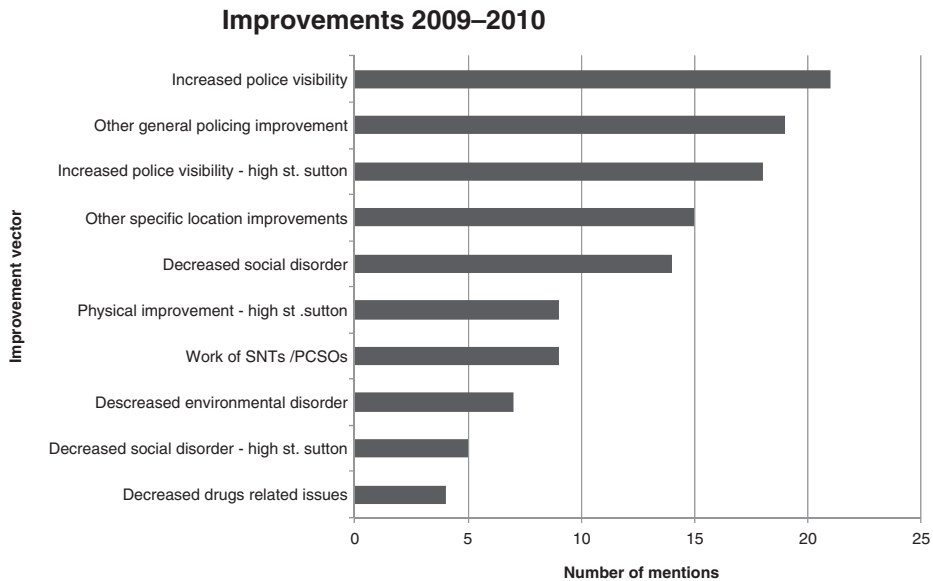
## Improvements 2009–2010



Figure 5. Improvements over 2009–2010.

increased visibility in Sutton town centre. Physical improvements to the town centre also featured, as did reports of decreased social disorder.

> More police at Sutton train station which is good and makes me feel more confident about using the train station again
>
> (2010_wnor_spc708236_001_061010094830)

Viewed in light of the increasing significance of this location in 2010, this finding is particularly interesting. The data suggests that, whilst the problems in the town centre are still driving insecurity in the borough as a whole, interventions by both council and police are being recognised and appreciated by the public. Together the signal and content analyses seem to support the notion that when problems in one's immediate neighbourhood diminish, focus shifts to significant public areas and despite visible improvements, reputation persists.

### *Changes in confidence*

Direct questions relating to respondents' satisfaction with and confidence in policing were introduced into the i-NSI interview from 2009 onwards, affording an opportunity to examine changes over that period (Table 4). Whilst the available data does not allow for a direct year on year comparison of overall public confidence with the MPS, they do offer an opportunity for examining some indicative movements.

There are indications in the data that an important shift in attitudes may be under way. In 2009 the people interviewed seemed to be placing more import upon the work of SNTs and the value of effective engagement. In the 2010 data, more

Table 4.   Confidence in and satisfaction with policing.

|  | 2010 (%) | 2009 (%) |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Very/fairly satisfied with MPS as a whole | 91 | – |
| Not very/not at all satisfied with MPS as a whole | 5 | – |
| Mixed view/do not know/not answered | 4 | – |
| Very/fairly confident in MPS as a whole | – | 79 |
| Not very/not at all confident in MPS as a whole | – | 16 |
| Mixed view/do not know/not answered | – | 5 |
| Confidence increased in last 3 months | 31 | 24 |
| Confidence decreased in last 3 months | 9 | 3 |

accent appears to be being placed by the public upon police effectiveness at dealing with crime, ASB and public order. Possibly this shift over the year from aspects of the police's 'softer' public engagement role to 'harder' police work of dealing with crime and disorder problems, may reflect a bedding down of the SNTs role in communities such that their availability and accessibility is now expected by the public.

To explore this idea further we have examined data on the performance of police, both local SNTs and central response teams, in relation to individual problems reported by respondents during interviews. Figure 6 shows the breakdown of partner performance ratings for those of signal crimes and disorders that were rated in the first and most recent sweeps of i-NSI.

The performance of SNTs was assessed as very good or good in relation to 74% of problems rated in 2007 and this has stayed remarkably stable over the four years, with a slight shift downwards (from 14% to 8%) rated as poor/very poor.

For the central uniformed response teams, assessments have improved, with a decrease of 28% points in the proportion of signal events for which their performance



Figure 6.   Changes in partner performance ratings 2007–2010.

was rated as poor/very poor (46–18%) and corresponding increases in good/very good (37–54%) and average ratings (19–28%).

The council fare less well. Whilst there has been a 12% shift in ratings from poor/very poor to average, the proportion of reported signal events where the council's performance was rated by the respondent as poor/very poor has remained at 22%.

These data pose some interesting questions. From the outset, SNTs have been highly valued by the residents of Sutton and this has not diminished as is sometimes the case with new initiatives. Furthermore, the performance of the police response teams has improved in the public's eyes over the period. This perhaps supports the notion that dealing effectively with all levels of crime and disorder becomes the primary focus once local police accessibility and communication are normalised.

For the council though, the figures are disappointing, particularly in light of the input from the SSP in re-configuring aspects of community safety service provision in Sutton. Two such examples of where additional council funding has enhanced the effectiveness of policing in the Borough were described later by a senior SSP manager interviewed by the researchers:

> Safer Parks Teams are funded by the council as a specific response to concerns around management of public spaces (not just parks within [*their*] remit)...The murder of Ben Gardner was quickly solved *specifically* because the incident was seen as it occurred on the council's CCTV system that is (very unusually) directly monitored within the police control room...with the council paying police to undertake the monitoring service on its behalf. Both of these measures (bearing in mind current financial pressures) produced direct and substantial revenue savings or efficiencies as well as enhancing effectiveness. The solving of the murder is the most obvious and serious example that we have. (WS2010)

It may be that the residents of the Borough will take far longer to recognise the 'back room' work of the local authority in this regard, particularly when the public facing role of visible police officers in neighbourhoods continues to grow.

## Conclusion: evolving and evaluating neighbourhood policing

Sutton has applied the i-NSI methodology to:

- Generate tactical community intelligence on the public's neighbourhood security needs, identifying what specific local problems and in which locations, are generating the greatest social harm from the point of view of the public.
- Develop a more strategic picture of public priorities and employing this to 'bend' services towards these. In this sense, the analysis has been used to inform the evolution of how NP is delivered across Sutton;
- Assess and evaluate the progress of implementing NP over time at a granular and local level.

However, implementing the methodology has encountered multiple forms of resistance. First, it has taken some time to build trust amongst potential users in the data. Initially, there was a tendency amongst some local practitioners to suggest that either, the analysis was simply telling them what they already know, or that it was wrong. The first of these was gradually overcome by explaining that the raison

d'etre of the 'signal crimes' approach is to determine what, amongst all the problems that local officers know about, should be targeted because they are causing most social harm. The accusation that the analysis was wrong was overcome by testing it against other data sources. Most notably, this was done by comparing the results with those derived from a representative telephone survey conducted by IPSOS-MORI in the Borough. As a senior police officer interviewed by the researchers to understand the implementation process described:

> They accept it now because when the Place Survey was done it said the same thing, but didn't give you the detail . . . The Council's own MORI poll said exactly the same things . . . that's what's gives credibility to the reports. (DG2010)

The correlation demonstrated between the data-sets across several higher level indicators, helped to convince local practitioners that the community intelligence provided by the public is often accurate. But as noted, the value of the i-NSI approach is the detail it provides about key intervention points. Relatedly, the same officer, also noted how the process of talking 'properly' and meaningfully with members of the public frequently elicited crime intelligence:

> We've found cannabis factories, we've arrested offenders, drug dealers...these little snippets of intelligence come out of i-NSI. (DG2010)

The breaking down of the initial distrust has been reinforced by strong performance in relation to recorded crime levels and other more subjective measures.

The implementation process also met more practical forms of resistance. Certainly in the first two years, it was evident that although the method was helping to understand community concerns in Sutton, the process of 'bending' resources to service these needs was proving more difficult. It was not until the second or third years that real traction seemed to be acquired. Resistance also came from the officers required to conduct the interviews. Despite the fact that all the officers were drawn from SNTs, there were frequent complaints that this was not 'real police work'. Although reduced, this front-line resistance remains. This is despite the evidence reported earlier that the proactive form of engagement actually encourages reassurance and public confidence. Relatedly, it must be acknowledged though, that the methodology is resource intensive and such benefits come at a price.

The four years of data reported herein afford insights into both the potentials and limitations of NP over the medium-term. That the profile of the community's principal concerns has partially shifted suggests that by 'gripping' problems at a local level, police interventions can make a difference. The counter-point to this is though that public concerns about the activities of groups of youths and speeding have retained their pre-eminence, thereby indicating limitations to what can be achieved. Likewise, the reduction of concerns about particular problematic places is important. However, there is also a suggestion that this does not mean that the public will become wholly unconcerned about neighbourhood security issues. Rather, they cognitively and affectively recalibrate what they are concerned about. In Sutton, concerns are increasingly tending to gravitate around the High Street. This may be acceptable as a utilitarian benefit. However, this 'recalibration effect' deserves further consideration.

There is potentially a second more subtle and nuanced conclusion to be gleaned from the Sutton data. Perceptions of crime have declined, and public confidence increased, despite only limited traction being obtained over several of the community's self-defined problems. This may indicate that the process of engaging communities and being seen to be trying to address the concerns that they prioritise is actually an important facet of influencing their attitudes and perceptions.

The patterns and trends observed in Sutton may be useful for thinking through some of the possible consequences of the coalition government's reform programme for policing in England and Wales. Sutton may tell us a lot about what might be expected of this emerging new regime of more democratically oriented and highly localised police accountability. First, the evidence suggests that diagnosing and responding to community defined concerns can yield improvements in confidence and community well-being. Equally though, there is a sense in which, whilst some problems and places have been impacted upon, others have not. Tracking the data in Sutton over time suggests that a 'narrowing' and 'reducing' of concerns has been achieved, but some challenging and intractable problems have retained their traction. This could transpire to be a major issue for Police and Crime Commissioners in the future.

A second observation on the situation in Sutton is that, although it is one of the government's Big Society pathfinder sites, the public's role has been very much in a 'steering' rather than 'rowing' capacity. By steering, we mean shaping and directing the focus of interventions, as opposed to becoming directly involved in the actual delivery of services and doing things to solve problems (or rowing).

Finally, the experience of working over an extended period in an area suggests that whilst it is possible to understand communities' needs, it takes time to effectively 'bend' resources to service these. In its most acute form this is about the challenges of making disinvestment decisions. Although, the research evidence derived from the interviews may suggest that some problems have been reduced, the politics of 'drawing down' assets and reallocating them to other areas of need is fraught.

In sum, the development and evolution of this approach to NP that has been under way in Sutton, may serve as a prototype for a revised version that is coherent with the requirements of the UK government's wider reforms. It is clear that there is going to be less money for policing, and that there is an expectation that policing will be organised and delivered differently in future. By placing a systematic and structured approach to community engagement as the 'engine' of community intelligence-led NP, the evidence from Sutton suggests it is possible to impact upon public experiences and perceptions of crime, disorder and policing. This NP v2.0 is, when compared with its predecessor, more responsive to the complex of local needs and demands that emanate from communities and seeks to deal with these in a far more transparent and evidence-informed way.

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