Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour and public confidence

Why is it important?

County Durham has some of the lowest crime rates in the country and has seen significant reductions in anti-social behaviour, yet people’s perceptions and confidence in public services has not always reflected this.

Durham data – the local picture and how we compare

Measuring perceptions and confidence is not an exact science. The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is the only provider of consistent data, both year on year and as a measure against other areas in England and Wales. This crime survey measure is by police force area, including both County Durham and Darlington.

Perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour

County Durham’s crime rate is second best of its 15 peers within its ‘most similar community safety group’ and one which is lower than the national average. The number of crimes and anti-social behaviour incidents in County Durham reported to Durham Constabulary has significantly reduced over a number of years. This is in line with the national picture. Despite this, County Durham and Darlington fared slightly worse (12%) than the national average (11%) for people’s perception of high levels of ASB (see table 1). However, the force was second best in its most similar group of five. Darlington has a rate of 75 crimes per 1000 population. This may or may not impact on perception figures for the two areas combined.

ASB is acknowledged as a confusing term. Overarching perceptions of ASB tend to include a range of situations, from serious criminal violence at one end of the scale, to a lack of respect at the other. Actual police recorded incidents of ASB do not include this wide range of behaviours, which means that there is a significant difference between perceived levels of ASB and actual levels. The Home Office Research Report 34 recognises this, stating that a reduction in actual ASB does not necessarily lead to a reduction in reported perceptions and that, in many respects, perceptions of ASB should be viewed as an independent problem.

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (March 2015) showed that two thirds of adults perceived that overall crime in the country had risen in recent years, while only one third perceived it had risen in their local area. Two thirds of people cited TV News and radio as influencing perceptions of national crime levels, while half cited ‘word of mouth’ as influencing impressions of local crime rates. This provides an example of the discrepancies between actual and perceived levels.

High levels of deprivation can have a significant impact on perceptions of ASB and therefore deprivation in County Durham is likely to have an impact on local perception of crime and ASB.

Table 1 below shows that, despite fluctuations in perception data, fewer people perceive higher levels of ASB in 2015-16 than they did in 2010-11.

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<tr>
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<th>2010-11</th>
<th>2015-16</th>
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<tr>
<td>Durham Constabulary Police Force Area</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>England and Wales Average</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>11%</td>
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Public confidence
The Crime Survey for England and Wales measures to what extent people consider that their local council and police are dealing with local concerns about ASB and crime issues. The long term trend in public confidence is encouraging.

Confidence that the police and local council are dealing with the ASB and crime issues that matter fell by 2% to 61% in 2015-16 compared with the previous year. However, it is still higher than in 2013-14 when it stood at 58.8%. The England and Wales figure for 2015-16 is 62%

Challenges
In terms of the confidence which residents have in the police and council dealing with anti-social behaviour and crime, County Durham and Darlington have confidence levels close to the England and Wales average. Maintaining this level will be important for the area.

Perceptions need to be considered over the long term, given the fluctuations which occur on a quarterly basis. In the current economic climate, maintaining current levels will be important with a view to long-term reductions.

At a time of economic uncertainty, high deprivation levels will continue to present a key challenge in terms of people’s perceptions of ASB and their confidence levels. At a time when resources are limited, delivering a coherent marketing and communications strategy across all partner agencies will be particularly important in terms of maintaining and improving current confidence levels.

Groups most at risk
Those most impacted by perceptions of high levels of ASB:

- Younger respondents, women, ethnic minorities, the unemployed and those who are ill are more likely to perceive problems of ASB, as are victims of crime, those who read tabloids, students and those with a long-term limiting disability.

- Households comprising a single adult and child(ren), living in social-rented housing and those on low incomes.

- Personal, household and area characteristics are also known to impact on perceptions. For example, people who encounter high levels of deprivation and those who are social-renters are known to be more likely to perceive high levels of ASB.

- Indirect or vicarious experiences of ASB (including information drawn from the experience of others, the national and local media, and information from the police or other authorities) are seen to influence perceptions. Nevertheless, direct or personal experiences hold the strongest influence on people’s perception of ASB.

How does this topic link to our strategies and plans?
Further information can be found in the following strategies and plans:

- Safe Durham Partnership Plan
- County Durham Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Children, Young People and Families Plan
- Sustainable Community Strategy
- Durham County Council CAS Service Plan
- Police and Crime Plan
Data sources:
iQuanta - a web-based service provided to operational staff in police forces, Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) and Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary

Office for National Statistics (ONS) summary of the 2013-14 CSEW in respect of perception of ASB

ONS - Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2015

Crime Survey England and Wales (CSEW) year ending March 2016

Home Office Research Report 34 (HORR34) 2010

IPSOS Mori: Inspecting the Police in the Public Interest 2010

IPSOS MORI HMIC Research Study 2012