

Cheshire Police Citizen's Panel NEWSLETTER

Issue 3



August 2006

Consultation on Authority's Summary Accounts

During June 2006, a random sample of 100 panel members were sent a consultation survey on summary accounts. The purpose was to assess what panel members thought about the financial content of the annual report and whether the information needs of residents would be better served by adding further information or changing the format. 50 questionnaires were returned, giving a 50% response rate.

The results highlighted general satisfaction with the financial content of the annual report and the format of the financial information. There was a majority (78%) who favoured the introduction of information relating to where the Police Authority obtains its income. 58% were in favour of retaining the presentation of figures in "tables" rather than the use of diagrams/pie charts etc. 64% wished to see information relating to the levels of financial reserves.

The results of the consultation have been used to shape the content of the financial section of the annual report for 2005/06; the presentation format has been retained and the amount of space devoted to the financial summary has been kept broadly the same. More information has also been added; there is now a section headed "where the money came from" and commentary has been added relating to the levels of reserves that the Authority has.

The Head of Finance & Procurement would like to express thanks to all those who participated in the survey.



Your Comments

If you have any comments that you would like to make about this newsletter or any other issues in relation to any of the surveys, please write to us at the address on the front page of this newsletter or alternatively just drop us an e-mail.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Dear Panel Member,

Thank You!

Firstly, we would like to take this opportunity to thank all our existing panel members who have continued to support us over the past year. Any assistance which may have been given has been greatly appreciated by the Force. Secondly, welcome to any new panel members. Your agreement to support the Cheshire Constabulary through the Citizens' Panel is also very much appreciated.

Cheshire Police and Fire Service Experience

On Sunday 3rd September 2006, 11am – 4pm, the Cheshire Constabulary, in conjunction with Cheshire Fire & Rescue Service, will be holding an Open Day at Police Headquarters, Winsford. As in previous years, there will be numerous activities taking place throughout the day involving many departments and representatives of both emergency services. Entrance is free, so all Panel members and their family and friends are invited to attend and make it a great day.

Contact Details

If any of your contact details have changed recently, such as your e-mail address or telephone number etc. please could you let us know, to ensure our records are kept up to date. Alternatively, if for any reason you decide that you no longer wish to be a member of the panel, please let us know and we will remove your name from our records.

Write to us at:-

Management Information Unit
Performance Development
Cheshire Police Headquarters
Clemonds Hey
Oakmere Road
Winsford
Cheshire CW7 2UA
OR e-mail us at: -

Management.Information.Unit@cheshire.pnn.police.uk

Inside this Issue

Police Response Community Survey	page 2
Police Force Restructure Consultation	page 2
Citizens' Panel & Independent Advisory Group (IAG) Focus Group	page 2
Police Service Restructuring	page 3
Merger Update	page 3
Customer Satisfaction Survey Focus Group	page 3
An Examination of Violent Crime Within Cheshire	page 3
Consultation on Authority's Summary Accounts	page 4
Your Comments	page 4

Police Response Community Survey

Purpose
In order to gauge the public's level of understanding of Cheshire Constabulary Police Response Standards implemented as part of the force wide change programme, a face to face interview survey was developed for completion at the Cheshire Show and Constabulary Open Day, in conjunction with a postal survey which was issued to members of the Citizens' Panel.

Respondents were provided with a written summary of the various methods of requesting a service from the police, and an explanation of the 5 grades of call resolution ranging from Grade 1 "Emergency" to Grade 5 "Referral to another agency". Participants were then given ten scenarios, against which they were asked who they would contact and what timescale they thought would be appropriate to resolve the problem.

351 postal questionnaires were returned by Panel members giving a 47% response rate.

Summary of Findings

On the whole, the citizens of Cheshire appear to have a good level of understanding about the most appropriate method of contacting the police.

Exceptions to this include:-

- 21.5% would dial 999 if they saw youths painting graffiti or setting fire to a litter bin
- 31% would dial 0845 458 0000 to report an abandoned vehicle
- 51.4% would report noisy neighbours to their Community Action Team Officer
- 11.5% would dial 999 to report a damage only, non obstructive road traffic collision

With regards to acceptable timescales, again there appears to be an appropriate and sensible acceptance of what would be deemed an "emergency". Results which cause some concern are:-

- 18.3% expected a "prompt" response to cars parked on double yellow lines
- 17.6% expected a "prompt" response to finding the lawnmower missing from the shed, having returned from holiday.
- 24.9% expect a "prompt" response to a damage only, non obstructive road traffic collision.

Conclusions

There is still some work to do regarding the communication of what is police responsibility and when to engage with our partner agencies, such as the local authority or environmental health. Work has since been undertaken to train staff in Call Management to inform the public about the role of Community Action Team officers who will be able to provide a more appropriate response to incidents where the public currently expect a "prompt" (i.e. within 1 hour) response.

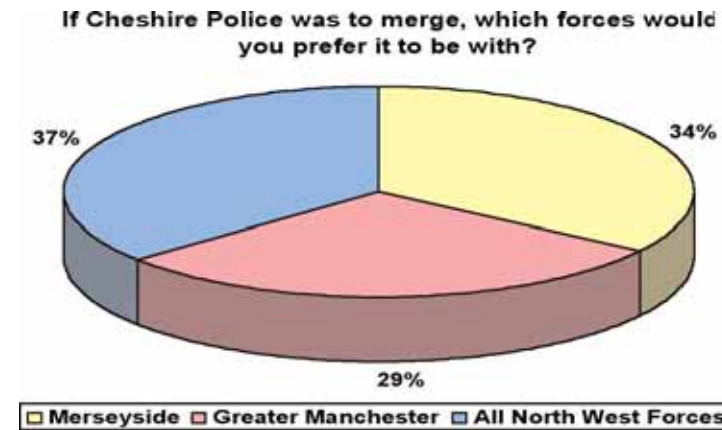
Thanks to all those that took part in this survey.

Police Force Restructure Consultation

As part of the statutory responsibility that Police Authorities consult, engage and inform communities about any significant changes to their local police service, considerable work has been undertaken to canvass the views of staff, the "general" public, representatives of diverse communities, partners, opinion leaders and lobbyists about the Government's proposals to merge police forces in England and Wales.

During October 2005, a postal questionnaire was distributed to over 1,500 members of the Citizens' Panel and Police Forum networks, which received 674 (43%) responses.

- 60% agreed or strongly agreed that "it is important that my police service is provided by a force called "Cheshire Police" instead of "North West Police".
- 77% agreed or strongly agreed that "It is important to me that local representatives such as councillors determine local policing priorities and council tax levels rather than a larger regional organisation."
- As the diagram opposite illustrates, there was no clear definitive preference about which forces the citizens of Cheshire would prefer us to merge with.



Thank you to everyone who completed and returned the survey.

Citizens' Panel and Independent Advisory Group (IAG) Focus Group: Police Force Restructure Consultation

An in depth face to face discussion was held with ten members of the Independent Advisory Group (IAG) and Citizens' Panel, in order to gather the views of representatives of diverse communities such as gypsies and travellers, muslims, afro-caribbean, disabled, chinese, business owners and working mothers.

Members of the group were keen to see savings that could be accrued from business support economies of scale and drew comparisons with private industry. They were concerned about the process for setting council tax precept and that resources from Cheshire would be diverted to GMP or Merseyside. They were vociferous in their view that the identity of Cheshire Police be maintained as a local name indicates that

local officers know their communities, local geography, local offenders and that local identity was key to promoting confidence and reassurance in policing services.

Thanks to those panel members who gave up their time to take part in the Focus Group.

Police Service Restructuring

A postal survey was carried out during April 2006 to gain the views of the Panel on the proposal to merge Cheshire Constabulary and Merseyside Police. It was important to get views from a wide cross section of people from Cheshire. Of the 721 questionnaires sent out, 526 were returned, giving a 73% response rate.

74% of respondents were against the proposal. This result was expected but was not as opposed to the merger as other consultation with Police Forum attendees.

The higher opposition to the proposals by the Police Forum consultation may indicate that when an issue is promoted or discussed in more detail (i.e. there was an item at the last round of forums highlighting the

Authority's key concerns to a merger with Merseyside), the results are inevitably affected.

The results were used as evidence in the Authority's submission to the Home Secretary opposing the merger proposals. This, connected with our Police Forum consultation showed overwhelming opposition to the proposal and strengthened the Authority's case in opposing the merger.

Merger Update

On the 12th July 2006, it was announced that the police force mergers would not go ahead, with Home Office powers to force the move kept as an "absolute last resort".

The Police Minister Tony McNulty told a meeting of police authority members that he wanted a new emphasis on collaboration between forces. During a speech in central London, he said: "Are the mergers going to go through in one way or another eventually? I think the definitive answer to that is 'No'." The minister indicated that the police restructuring could now take years to complete.

He stated that police forces had now been asked to discuss with the Home Office alternative ways of dealing with shortcomings identified by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary.

Within Cheshire, we will continue to work on our own plan on how to improve protective services and to meet the financial challenges we face in the future. We intend to be in the forefront of the national debate.

An Examination of Violent Crime Within Cheshire

Purpose

During April 2006, a questionnaire entitled "An Examination of Violent Crime Within Cheshire" was distributed to a random selection of panel members. The survey was designed to complement other statistical analysis of violent crime data over a two year period, locally within Cheshire and more widely in the context of the Northwest region. The survey sought to compare public perceptions of violent crime in terms of nature, levels and associated fear, with the statistical reality that had already determined. In particular it sought to probe the impact of the relaxation of the alcohol laws, identify how this affected crime rates and identify the public consensus on the likely outcome. The sample consisted of 105 members of the Citizens Panel. The sample covered the entire Western area with 35 selected from each CDRP area (Chester, Ellesmere Port and Vale Royal). The return rate was 71.4%.

General results

In the main a view existed that violent crime had increased in Cheshire over the last two years. This statistically was the case; however the reality was that this increase was as much down to the introduction of the Centralised Crime Recording Bureau and the resultant process change as any natural crime increases.

The majority of respondents considered Cheshire to be less violent than other counties, which was indeed the case. In support of this, Cheshire only contributed to 12.1% of the regional violent crime (5 Forces). Within Cheshire, violent crime accounted for 21% of all crime.

Common assault was regarded by most respondents as being the most common violent crime, a view which is supported by the crime statistics. Robbery however, was regarded as one the more prevalent offences which was not representative of the crime figures, with the number of offences in this group remaining fairly low. Wounding was not regarded as a prevalent offence which is again inaccurate as low level woundings were amongst the highest number of offences.

Not unsurprisingly most respondents gained their perceptions surrounding violence from newspapers, TV and word of mouth.

The vast majority of respondents (84%) considered alcohol to be a significant contributor to the local violent crime problem. In the development of this theme, 82.5% of those surveyed believed violent crime would increase as a result of extended alcohol license laws. However the statistical reality demonstrated that the crime rates in Cheshire did not increase as a result of this change in policy. This may be due to heightened policing during this initial period and will need further analysis to confirm this.

Respondent's fears of geographic areas were explored with alleys and underpasses being the most feared.

In terms of the fear of crime, the majority that responded were not worried about the prospect of becoming a victim but where a fear existed, Robbery was the most feared offence which is an interesting fact, due to the low level of offending actually recorded within this crime group. In the main, increased police visibility was cited as the most successful method of reducing the fears held.

The recent introduction of Police Community Support Officers (PCSO's) was explored with the panel; unfortunately 77% did not know who they were or who their local CAT officer was, yet 71% stated they would be more reassured if armed with this knowledge.

The results of this survey have allowed the force and in particular the Western Area to look at the issues regarding violent crime from the perspective of the public. This research should allow the area to consider these issues in the formulation of tactics and strategies in the forthcoming year.

Particular Issues

Some respondents formed their views around crime levels based on the frequency they heard police sirens being utilised within their community. Some of the issues in particular the PCSO and CAT identity has been flagged up across the force as an urgent issue particularly with the imminent arrival of more PCSO's.

Some of the geographical data that demonstrates the fear of crime is heightened in certain surroundings or even worse individuals reduce or restrict activities due to this fear is a really important piece of data which we hope may influence some of the Crime and Disorder Partnerships future plans.

Detective Inspector Andrew Southcott would like to thank everyone that participated in the survey.