

# Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime

Review by Louise Casey – Summary



# Foreword

It has been a real honour to have spent these last eight months taking an in-depth look at crime, justice and community involvement on behalf of the Prime Minister.

Getting to grips with how we can work together to reduce crime further, reduce the fear of crime and give the public a sense of hope and trust that those working to fight crime are on their side, has been a tough but rewarding task. These are hugely important issues and the contents of this report provide a rare opportunity to listen to – and hear – what the public are saying.

One of the most striking things that I have discovered during this review is that the very bedrock of our Criminal Justice System is the public – whether as jurors, magistrates or witnesses, or as ordinary citizens abiding by the law of the land and setting an example for their children and others around them. But it is the one element that the system at best takes for granted and keeps at arms length, and at worst rides roughshod over. Too often there is a sense that the public can't be trusted to take a view on their policing and Criminal Justice System.

During this review I have tried to redress that balance by putting at its heart the voice of the public. To outline the factors which undermine their faith in the system, lead them to believe the system is not on their side, and want to give up and not be involved in helping their communities become safer.

I have also found many things that give me great heart. The Government deserves great credit for the strides that it has made in crime



and justice. Crime has fallen, and by no small amount. Victims themselves get a better standard of care, there are record numbers of police officers and new dedicated Neighbourhood Police Teams in every local area. Nine in ten local authorities have reduced public concerns about anti-social behaviour – the kind of persistent problems that can make people's lives miserable and whole communities suffer.

The Criminal Justice System has been reformed so that more offenders than ever are brought to justice and punished more severely – partly reflected in a doubling of those now locked up in prison and 93% of offenders being made to pay their fines.

But however necessary and laudable these reforms have been, they have not gone far enough yet to win public confidence. Too often, the public don't believe that their voice is heard, don't believe wrong-doers face adequate consequences for the crimes they commit, don't believe they are told enough about what happens in the system and, perhaps because of this, they don't believe that crime has fallen when they are told so.

Their concerns about crime are higher than on other issues like health, education or housing – and how they feel about crime detrimentally affects their daily lives and their willingness to help tackle crime.

And, as in so many walks of life – and many of the areas of public policy on which I have had the privilege to work in the past – it is the most deprived communities that suffer most. Above all else, we owe it to those who do not enjoy the advantages of the majority to respond forcefully to these concerns in the poorest neighbourhoods.

The public want the basics right: the maintenance of order, the rule of law, the clear acknowledgement of the difference between right and wrong, and a strong sense that when someone breaks the law they face appropriate consequences. Of course, the public have an appetite for helping children to avoid becoming criminals and giving offenders a second chance to reform themselves.

But too often, the system leaves the public feeling its principal concern is to process the law breaker rather than meet the needs of the victim or the ordinary law-abiding citizen.

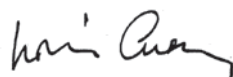
This review is not a strategy or statement of government policy. Rather it is an analysis of what I have found by looking at the evidence, talking to the powers that be, the frontline workers and above all, the public. It's a common-sense view on what further changes need to be made to build confidence and trust, and some suggestions on how those changes should happen.

What I have found interesting is that many, many government policy makers have trod this road before, in particular over the last ten years – their ambitions have been right but they have not achieved the full extent of

the changes needed. So the key test is not just identifying what needs to change, but making it happen. That will be difficult. In many cases it means being willing to rethink assumptions and settled ways of doing things which have been in place for decades. But I would urge those who, often for good reason, are cautious about change in areas like justice, to read this review and take stock of what the public demand.

The Government has shown over the last decade that it is willing to push through radical reforms in this area, for example over anti-social behaviour. In my view the time has come for similar boldness again.

Most of all I would urge policy makers, professionals, lobby groups and law makers to take note of one thing – the public are not daft. They know what's wrong, they know what's right, and they know what they want on crime and justice. And it's time action was taken on their terms.



**Louise Casey**

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## The public, crime and justice

Crime is tackled most effectively when the law abiding majority stand together against the minority who commit it. The ability of the law abiding public to make that stand is dependent on their trust, faith and confidence in the police, local government, the Criminal Justice System and the Government to support them; to act together on their behalf to tackle crimes and deal with criminals effectively – all in a straightforward and transparent manner.

The organisations that exist to tackle crime have their own distinct roles and functions within the Criminal Justice System: preventing and deterring crime, catching, sentencing, punishing, managing and rehabilitating criminals.

But while these organisations play particular roles within the Criminal Justice System, the public want them to engage and work with them on the basis of a clear sense of overall purpose, on the side of the law-abiding citizen.

The public have a vital role to play: laws themselves spring from ordinary people's views on what is right and wrong, from norms about what is acceptable and unacceptable that we all observe and enforce in our everyday actions – as parents, neighbours or citizens. And most crimes that are brought to justice rely on members of the public coming forward to report them and give evidence.

Without public action, support and confidence, the police and other criminal justice agencies cannot make communities safer. But for the public to play their part,

the public want first-rate services – services that tackle crime effectively, give them confidence and back them up.

And the public want one dialogue on crime – they want crime and justice organisations to engage them on the community's concerns and priorities, they don't want to have to take part in multiple conversations about different organisations' concerns and priorities.

This review has looked at what more could be done to improve the ways that crime-fighting agencies and the public work together to reduce crime. During the review, we have heard from over thirteen thousand members of the public – talking directly to around eight hundred people at meetings and major events across the country, conducting surveys to test the opinions of nearly eleven thousand, and receiving written comments from around one-and-a-half thousand individuals. Additionally, we have analysed research evidence and talked to and received written submissions from a wide range of organisations and professionals involved in tackling crime; its causes, its detection and its consequences.

What is clear from what we have seen and heard during this review is that crime remains a top public concern. Some members of the public we have spoken to think that crime has reduced in recent years – and they give credit to the police for that. But the majority do not feel that crime has fallen. Perhaps most critically, regardless of whether people think crime has fallen or risen, virtually all see it as a priority that must be addressed more forcefully.

At first sight, the public's concerns on crime may seem at odds with the evidence on recent trends in crime, policing and justice. Official statistics (including the British Crime Survey – the only measure which has remained consistent over the last 25 years) show, and most professionals in the field (including academics and police chiefs) agree, that overall crime has fallen by more than a third in the last decade. There are more police officers than ever and major reforms have been introduced to make the Criminal Justice System more efficient, with increases in the numbers of crimes brought to justice, longer custodial sentences and measures in place to provide greater protection for victims and witnesses.

Despite this, there is a significant gap between what the public want on crime and justice and what they feel they have received.

Added to this, most of the public do not believe the official statistics on crime – they think the statistics miss some important crimes and that many minor crimes go unreported. They have lost trust in the how figures are relayed to the public – with 'cherry-picking' of figures by the media, politicians of all parties, professionals and single-interest lobby groups. Many feel let down by a lack of meaningful information about crime and what is being done to tackle it in their local area.

The public have noticed the arrival of extra Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) but have not noticed the impact of wider increases in police numbers or other reforms. While some feel let down by the response they get from the police, most are supportive of them and, rightly or wrongly, blame red tape and over-zealous interpretation of regulations on human rights and health and safety for keeping them away from frontline

duties. The public want a police service that delivers to the same standards, that has a familiar 'identity' wherever they live, and to know what they can expect from it – irrespective of their postcode.

Even with criminals more likely to get jail sentences than 10 years ago, average sentence lengths longer and prisoner numbers at an all-time high, the public think sentencing is still too lenient. And they are more likely to think that prison overcrowding results from a failure to build enough prisons than from improvements in efforts to catch more criminals and lock them up for longer.

The public place punishment – a clear set of consequences that are faced by those who choose to break the law (from financial penalties, through loss of personal time working in the community, to complete loss of liberty in time served in prison) – at the heart of the Criminal Justice System. They are more than ready to support preventative and rehabilitative interventions with criminals if they believe these come on top of, rather than instead of, punishment.

But the public have little awareness of what happens to offenders after they have been caught by the police, and believe fundamentally that the law is stacked more in favour of offenders' rights than victims'. As a result the public see the Criminal Justice System as a distant, sealed-off entity, unaccountable and unanswerable to them or to Government.

In part this distance is created by the fact that little information about what happens to those who commit crime is placed in the public domain. The apparent lack of systematic communication to the public about sentencing decisions means that few are aware of the increases in numbers of criminals brought to justice, and only get

to hear about the exceptional cases where seemingly inadequate sentences are passed, or only hear about the early release from custody of a few weeks, and not the overall increase in sentence lengths.

Overall, the public think too much crime and anti-social behaviour goes undeterred, unchallenged and unpunished in society, and that the Criminal Justice System does not put their concerns first. There is a marked absence of a body that represents the public's voice; no-one that challenges the status quo or gives the public the support and information that might help them take a more informed view.

We have looked in some detail at the evidence on what influences people's fears and concerns about crime – and at the consequences of those perceptions.

In part, people's worries are driven by media coverage of guns, gangs and knives and other high profile incidents of violent crime. But it is not just media presentation or sensationalism of crime that causes public concern. The public are worried by disrespect and disorder and anti-social behaviour which they see outside their own front doors, as much as by what they read in the papers or see on the television.

Often, their concern is for their own safety and their own risk of victimisation. But, just as commonly, they are worried about the impact on their family, friends and neighbours, and even on wider communities across the country which suffer even higher levels of crime than they do. There is a 'secondary victimisation' effect at play – even if people are not victims themselves, hearing about victimisation of others still affects their behaviour and feelings of safety.

And while people experience these signs of crime around them, they do not see enough

visible action being taken to challenge, catch and punish criminals. Too much of this work is invisible. In other words, while the public see high profile 'signal crimes' that create fear and mistrust, they do not see any 'signal justice' to counter those concerns.

It would be wrong to dismiss public concern about crime as nothing more than a gap between perception and reality. That is not the case. The crime, anti-social behaviour and disrespect that the public see and experience themselves, and their perceptions and worries about crime more generally, make communities feel unsafe. And they make ordinary citizens angry, sad and wary.

This is especially so in more deprived areas. As has always been the case in these areas, perceptions and actual levels of crime and anti-social behaviour are much higher, there are huge concerns about coming forward as a victim or witness for fear of reprisal, and communities are not as strong as they could be.

There was a strong view from members of the public during the review that they would no longer intervene if they saw a crime taking place, for fear that they would either be attacked by the perpetrators or be arrested themselves by the police. This may be caused by wider factors but it is symptomatic of reduced public confidence in the crime-fighting agencies leading to a greater reluctance on the part of decent, law-abiding members of the public to play their part in tackling crime.

The Government and all those employed in the Criminal Justice System are right to be very concerned about this. Where people's fears, experiences and perceptions of crime drive down their confidence and willingness to engage, they become less neighbourly and lose their community spirit. In these

circumstances, the police and others face even more of an uphill struggle to keep the public safe – and to stop crime getting a grip that can strangle whole neighbourhoods.

There are some who argue that the Government and the Criminal Justice System must not allow itself to be swayed by public opinion; that pandering to public opinion leads to ‘mob rule’ and an uncivilised society. But, currently, the system is so far away from pandering to public opinion that this seems the remotest of risks and, if anything, there is a greater risk of the public withdrawing even further from the active part they need to play. Radical change is needed to get the public more engaged in tackling crime and to stop the erosion of community spirit.

The Government has been pursuing policies to respond to the concerns identified in this

review. We have looked at a number of those policies and come up with a series of common-sense proposals to build on them and help reduce crime further, create safer communities and increase public confidence in the police and other agencies responsible for tackling crime and bringing criminals to justice. Our proposals are based in part on our analysis of research and other evidence, and on what professionals have told us on visits and in meetings.

The strongest influence on our review, however, has been the views expressed by thousands of ordinary members of the public. The public are the most important weapon in tackling crime. As one leading criminologist has put it: “If people always reported what they know to the police, the local criminals could not continue to operate.”

## Ten key facts from the review

- 55% of the public say crime is the most important issue facing Britain today.
- Only 33% of the public are confident that the Criminal Justice System meets the needs of victims, but 79% agree it respects the rights of offenders.
- 73% of the public say that hearing about someone being a victim of crime in their local area affects their feelings of safety and makes them cautious, angry and sad.
- 91% of the public think the basic approaches and standards of service delivered by the police should be the same wherever they live.
- Better parenting is the top thing (58%) the public say would do most to reduce crime and 58% of the public think that Friday night is the most important time for youth facilities to be available.
- 90% of respondents to the review think the public are not told enough about what happens to those who have committed crime.
- When asked what is the most important issue facing Britain on crime, the top answer from the public (29%) is that sentences are too lenient.
- 90% of the public agree that community punishments for crime should involve some form of payback to the community.
- When asked who they would trust as a source for national statistics on crime, the top answer from the public (48%) was an independent watchdog.
- 75% of the public are prepared to play an active role in tackling crime.

## The proposals from the review

**Proposal 1:** To address the absence of a strong public voice on crime, the Government should go further than its current stated intention to appoint a commissioner for Victims and Witnesses, by appointing a Public Commissioner on Crime. The Commissioner should have a broad remit to champion the public's concerns about neighbourhood crime and justice within Government. In addition they should have specific responsibilities for driving up the levels of support offered to victims and witnesses.

**Proposal 2:** Proceeds from the Victims Surcharge should be used to directly support victims and witnesses of crime:

- to finance projects that support victims that currently struggle for funding; and
- to establish a Victims' Compensation Fund, allowing victims to receive compensation ordered by a court in full at the time the court order is made, stopping the current prolonged contact a victim has to have with the offender.

**Proposal 3:** The provision of automatic eligibility for special measures around anonymity (beyond those that currently exist for children and victims of sex crimes) should be introduced for victims and witnesses who are:

- vulnerable – for example through old age or disability, in the same way that special measures are justified for children; and/or
- in fear of intimidation or reprisal and where wider impact on the community is particularly high (for example in cases of gang, gun and knife crime or persistent anti-social behaviour).

**Proposal 4:** Her Majesty's Court Service should introduce arrangements to ensure separate seating arrangements for victims' families attending court.

**Proposal 5:** The Victims' code and the Witnesses' Charter should be widened to cover civil proceedings where these are linked to defined acts of crime, like domestic violence, or anti-social behaviour.

**Proposal 6:** The Government should, together with the 43 police authorities and forces in England and Wales, provide a local police commitment in every neighbourhood, based on the ten approaches identified by the public in this review. This should focus on the delivery of all local police activities, not just on the service provided by the Neighbourhood Policing Team. The commitments should be put in place in each area by the beginning of 2009.

**Proposal 7:** The Government should ensure on behalf of the public that standardised approaches to Neighbourhood Policing are adopted by all forces by the beginning of 2009 to improve public awareness, familiarity and confidence. From our discussions with the public during the review, we suggest that these should focus on:

- agreeing a single name and identity for Neighbourhood Policing Teams where several currently exist – we favour 'Neighbourhood Policing Teams';
- using a single name for local public engagement meetings on crime – we favour 'PACT' (Police and Communities Together) – in partnership with local government and other criminal justice

agencies, and applying approaches that are based on key good practice principles for public engagement; and

- providing monthly common and comparable local information via Neighbourhood Policing and PACT meetings, including feedback on action taken on crime and neighbourhood problems and what has happened to any criminals convicted for local crimes.

**Proposal 8:** The Government should ensure that the following action is taken with regard to Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs):

- Maximum abstraction rates should be set for PCSOs as a condition of ring-fenced funding allocations to police forces.
- Powers to detain and to issue Fixed Penalty Notices for disorder should be added to the standard set of powers and duties that apply to all PCSOs.
- Standard PCSO uniforms and equipment should be adopted nationally.

**Proposal 9:** Local authorities and police forces should consider establishing structures that ensure closer local working of Neighbourhood Policing, wider neighbourhood management and council services and other criminal justice services, by:

- establishing strategic Neighbourhood Crime and Justice Co-ordinators in every Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership area;
- nominating a local authority officer as a Neighbourhood Policing Team liaison person for every team for all joint action and tasking needed to resolve neighbourhood problems and feedback to the public; and

- ensuring that at every Neighbourhood Policing public meeting (PACT – Police and Communities Together), local authority officers are present to ensure that problems raised by the public – from litter to pot holes, to activities for youngsters, to crime – can be resolved in one forum.

**Proposal 10:** The Government should continue with its interventions where poor parenting is putting children at risk of getting involved in crime and anti-social behaviour. However, it should go further by ensuring that these arrangements are publicised locally so that everyone in the community knows what action will be taken with parents and children when a child is:

- excluded from school;
- persistently truanting;
- found out on their own late at night;
- found drinking or using drugs;
- found behaving anti-socially or committing crime; or
- where parents themselves are involved in drugs or crime.

These circumstances should trigger a formal response co-ordinated by the local authority that gets help to the family.

**Proposal 11:** Building on the work that the Department for Children, Schools and Families is already pursuing in 50 local authorities that cover the country's most deprived areas, the government should ensure that, by Summer 2009, there are youth activities available where needed on Friday evenings in those 50 areas and that, more broadly, future capital investment in youth facilities across the country is dependent upon local authorities being able to demonstrate an ongoing commitment to adequate youth provision

being available on Friday evenings.

**Proposal 12:** Her Majesty's Court Service should provide greater information to the public on cases, sentencing decisions and what happens to offenders, on a regular and much more consistent basis.

**Proposal 13:** Community Justice pilots should be expanded and refocused on the key elements outlined in the justice proposals above and below – especially visible Community Payback and greater feedback to the community, through Neighbourhood Policing, on results of court cases.

**Proposal 14:** Wherever currently community sentences are being carried out under the title of 'unpaid work' this should be changed to 'Community Payback', the work should be more visible and demanding, not something any member of the public would choose to do themselves, and the local community should receive information about it and who is doing it. A deadline should be set by the Government for this transformation.

**Proposal 15:** The Government should consider contracting out from the Probation Service the running of Community Payback and, in future, Community Payback should be delivered to new agreed standards that reflect proposal 14 above so that it is visible, demanding and the public know about it.

**Proposal 16:** The Government should implement a new Community Punishment that requires offenders to carry out Community Payback as above – visible and demanding – but with increased loss of personal time/liberty through greater intensity and frequency of hours. For example, if an offender is in employment, they would be required to undertake work

several nights each week and at weekends or, if out of work, 5 days a week.

**Proposal 17:** An order to undertake Community Payback should be made at the same time a sentence is given, rather than having to adjourn and wait for a pre-sentence report to assess suitability for work. The assessment should still take place and, in the small minority of cases where the offender is subsequently found to be unsuitable for work, the order should be reviewed.

**Proposal 18:** Probation Officers should have the power to extend the number of Community Payback hours to be served where breaches occur, without the need to refer back to court. The extra hours added should be double the number missed or not complied with fully. That power and the consequence for non-compliance with an order should be spelled out clearly when the sentence is first imposed.

**Proposal 19:** Neighbourhood Policing Teams should become the 'face' of engagement and communication with local communities on crime and justice as a whole, and should be given the necessary support to achieve this. At local meetings with the police, local authority and public (PACT – Police and Communities Together meetings) the following should be given priority:

- A discussion of the community's priorities for the police and local authority with feedback on what action has taken place since the previous meeting.
- Feedback to the community on crimes brought to justice including, for example, work completed in the area as part of Community Payback, information on court cases and the

sentences handed down for key crimes that have been of particular concern to the community.

- Opportunities for the public to have a say on the work that should be conducted in the local community under Community Payback.

**Proposal 20:** Government should consider extending existing duties to co-operate on crime and related areas to all relevant agencies, with the intention that the public receive a seamless service.

**Proposal 21:** Government should ensure that ‘community engagement’ activities are rationalised. Police authorities, local authorities, the Crown Prosecution Service, magistrates and others should work together to ensure they are not separately asking the same questions of the same community at different times about what they want in relation to crime, policing and justice.

**Proposal 22:** The Statistics Authority or another independent organisation should be given full responsibility for producing the national crime statistics and trends. As part of a role in restoring public trust in national crime statistics, the Statistics Authority or another independent body should draw up a public protocol on responsible use of crime statistics and invite politicians of all parties, the media, and interest groups to publicly sign up to it.

**Proposal 23:** By the beginning of 2009, local monthly crime information should be published to include local information about action being taken to tackle crime, contact telephone numbers and e-mail addresses for local police teams, minimum standards of service the police are committed to delivering in the neighbourhood, how to complain if dissatisfied, opportunities to meet local police

teams and influence their priorities, and details of crimes committed, with feedback on what sentences offenders have received.

**Proposal 24:** The Government and/or the Statistics Authority should consider what more could be done to develop a more dynamic and interactive website that maps local crime information and allows the public to compare levels of crime and the performance of criminal justice services in their area with other like areas, along the lines of web-based services already available for the health service.

**Proposal 25:** The Government should consider ensuring that every household receives information in a ‘Crime Watch’ style that outlines their role in tackling crime, what the police and other local agencies should be providing to them, how they can hold those agencies to account, how particular crime problems can be resolved and where to go if they want to get more involved locally.

**Proposal 26:** The Government should develop a new and major training programme that can equip community groups and citizens to play a stronger role in tackling crime – a type of ‘Community Crime Fighters’ umbrella organisation – based on successful capacity building programmes to empower tenants and other community groups, like those run at the National Communities Resource Centre.

**Proposal 27:** Local authorities should consider what financial support they can offer in support of ‘Community Crime Fighters’ that help to tackle crime and neighbourhood problems, including award schemes that offer small grants to groups that Neighbourhood Policing Teams identify for outstanding achievements in reducing crime and the fear of crime.

**Proposal 28:** In its forthcoming Policing Green Paper and White Paper on Empowerment, the Government should encourage local public funding to be allocated to neighbourhood and community groups to help tackle community safety problems using participatory budgeting and community kitties.

**Proposal 29:** A senior police officer, working directly to the Policing Minister, should be given responsibility for reducing the number of police forms in use and for introducing new methods to reduce bureaucracy in all police forces, holding them to account for any bureaucracy that keeps officers away from frontline duties. The Policing Minister should publish progress reports detailing activity and results on a quarterly basis.

**Proposal 30:** Combined with a dramatic reduction in its approach to targets, monitoring, assessments and intervention, the Government should ensure that, in its place, an overriding measure of public

confidence is used, with performance reported to the public at ward, local authority (Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership), force and national levels.

**Proposal 31:** In its forthcoming White Paper on community empowerment, the Government should consider what steps can be taken to give the public proper redress where crime and neighbourhood problems are not tackled effectively in their communities and, as part of this, should ensure that the 'Councillor Call for Action' on crime and disorder is introduced forthwith.

**Proposal 32:** The Government should ensure that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of the Constabulary is sufficiently robust in providing the necessary advice on the performance of local police services to enable the Home Secretary to hold them to account on behalf of the public for reductions in crime and improvements in public confidence.

Cabinet Office  
Admiralty Arch (North)  
London SW1A 2WH

E-mail: [haveyoursay@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:haveyoursay@cabinet-office.x.gsi.gov.uk)  
Web address: [www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk](http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk)

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