
Diverse Communities Survey March 2008

With thanks to Autism Bedfordshire and Bedfordshire County Council

Safer communities, together



We at Bedfordshire Police Authority would like to thank the 164 individuals, families and service providers who completed our recent survey on policing and community safety. We would also like to thank Autism Bedfordshire for allowing us to distribute the survey via their monthly newsletter to members.

We are pleased to be able to report the findings of this survey, along with information on how the information you gave us has been turned into actions by public service providers.

Who is the Police Authority?

The Police Authority is a public authority comprising Councillors, Magistrates, and Independent Informed Local Citizens. Its role is to monitor the effectiveness of the Police Service, and seek the viewpoint of the widely diverse local community. We also work with other agencies on community safety projects.

Results

Police Response to Special Needs

When asked whether you had ever had been in contact with police only 28% said you had. 30% said that during this contact, police recognised and responded to the possibility that you may have special needs immediately. Another 17% said police responded while they were taking your statement. The majority of you also felt that your contact with police concluded at this point.

Overall, you felt that the police responded favourably to your special needs once they became aware of them. However, your responses also indicate that identification of special needs is not always easy, and that ways of communicating any special needs (e.g. ASD identification cards) could be beneficial.

Stop, Stop and Search and Dispersal Orders

6% of you had been subject to a Stop, or Stop and Search (when an officer stops to ask you questions, or performs a physical search on you).

3% of you had been asked to disperse from an area (Dispersal or Dispersal Order).

58% of you who had been subject to a stop or stop and search were able to understand its purpose either immediately, or with a little more explanation from the officer. 43% had some difficulty understanding the purpose of being stopped by police and one comment was included in responses to indicate that this lack of understanding may cause confusion or distress.

Although stops and stop and searches are sometimes necessary for police, we feel your responses indicate building awareness in this area would be helpful.

Only 20% of you who had been asked to disperse an area felt they understood the purpose for the instructions. Comments were included in this response which helped us to understand that young people especially, may become confused if they are in a group with other young people being dispersed, if others in the group become argumentative with police.

Reporting Crimes

60% of you who had been a victim of crime had reported it to police. Only 4 of you did not report the crime (others did not know whether someone else had reported it). There was no outstanding reason listed for not reporting a crime to police.

Satisfaction

When it came to whether witnesses and victims felt satisfied with how police treated them, 64% of you felt that police did their best to be supportive towards you and any special needs you may have.

84% of witnesses and victims felt satisfied with how police responded to them. 66% of suspects felt satisfied that they were treated in line with their special needs. 53% of you who had been subjected to a stop, stop and search, or dispersal felt satisfied with police. We believe this may be related to the comments you made about how confusing stop and search or dispersal orders can be if police do not identify you have special needs.

In the event you found police response to be unsatisfactory, 87% did not file a complaint. We asked for comments explaining why this might be the case and in the majority of cases you responded that you did not understand how to file a complaint. Some of the other most significant reasons were that you felt the complaint may not be taken seriously, or that you felt that being treated unfairly was a common occurrence for people with special needs.

Part of the police's commitment to public satisfaction routinely involves dealing with complaints when they occur. Although mistakes could happen from time to time we are committed to taking all reasonable complaints seriously, and do our best to ensure we treat everyone fairly. We have also taken on board the need to raise awareness about how to deal with satisfaction issues.

Local Community Policing

68% of you did not have much knowledge of your local Safer Neighbourhood Team (Neighbourhood Policing Team).

Similarly, 77% of you did not have much knowledge of your local PCSOs (Community Support Officers). And 69% of young people and families did not have much knowledge of their Police School Liaison Officer. Not all schools have an assigned Liaison Officer, so this may have been a contributing factor for some of you.

Although to some degree it is each person's responsibility to find out what they can about services available to their local area, we also believe it our responsibility to ensure the

information is widely available. We are currently in the process of raising local awareness of Safer Neighbourhood Teams, PCSOs and School Liaison Officers.

Perceptions of Crime and Disorder

We asked you to comment on what you felt were the crime and disorder issues that most affected people with learning difficulties, disorders or disabilities related to ASD or ADHD. Most of you, in particular young or school-aged respondents felt that bullying was the biggest concern.

Other major concerns included theft of personal belongings and the risk that you may be tricked into committing a crime without realising it is illegal.

The issue of bullying for young people was a great concern to us. It has been referred to both the Bedfordshire and Luton Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs), who will be looking at it in more detail.

We have also been communicating your other concerns to some of our community safety partners, such as councils, NHS and social care partners who are also looking into them further.

Who Responded to the Survey?

We thought you might be interested to know who joined in with you to respond to our survey. Mostly we heard from young people (18 or younger), or parents of young people. However, all age groups were represented.

There was a good split between the different geographic areas, with 26% of responses coming from Luton, 19% from North Bedfordshire (and Borough), 33% from Mid Beds, and 22% from South Beds.

Approximately two thirds of you were male.

What Happens Now?

The survey seemed to indicate that overall police processes and levels of training are generally working well, although we have taken on board some of the instances where things may not have gone so well.

We believe that your responses clearly indicate that we need to do more to raise awareness of local policing services that are available, in particular Safer Neighbourhood Policing Teams and in the case of Police Liaison Officers that are assigned to schools.

We are discussing our findings with community safety partners and are delighted to report that Bedfordshire County Council has specifically chosen to share the findings with NHS and social care partners. We hope that by working together and sharing the findings of this survey, your experiences and concerns will be properly acknowledged and turned into successful actions by more than one public service provider.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for helping us to understand the issues and concerns specific to you.