

Background to Local policing summaries



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Why the legislation has been produced

The Government is committed to strengthening community engagement in policing and believes that the provision of information on how local policing is being delivered is central to this. If local communities are to have an informed view and actively engage in policing, they need to be better informed about how policing is being delivered and understand the priority issues, as well as having a better idea of how to access, engage and influence local policing.

Providing better information on local policing is also important as it supports the need to make policing truly accountable and transparent to the public. At present, few people have a sense of how well their locality is being policed, and whether their local service compares favourably with that being delivered elsewhere. The provision of such information is a reasonable expectation, given the financial contribution to the costs of policing that those same communities make both through the precept and through general taxation.

It is recognised that certain forces and authorities are already communicating with their local communities, and there are some impressive examples of good practice around the country. However, the picture is mixed and the information provided does not always amount to a consistent and objective appraisal.

The Government has therefore introduced a requirement on all police authorities to provide information to each household on the policing which has been and is being delivered in their area.

Local policing summaries – the statutory requirement

Section 157 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005 inserted a new section 8A in the Police Act 1996, introducing the concept of local policing summaries. Please refer to **Annex A** for the specific legislation.

The Act now makes it a requirement for every police authority to produce annually a report summarising matters relating to policing in that area, which is 'sent' to every 'person' who pays council tax in the area. In practice, this means reports need to be sent to households, as one council tax bill is sent to each household.

The obligation to do this is on police authorities, but we expect that it will, in reality, be a joint endeavour between forces and authorities and that you may involve other criminal justice and community safety agencies to reflect partnership activity across the force area.

The duty has been framed at authority/force level so as a minimum the local policing summaries will need to be produced at this level. However

we recognise that communities will have a greater interest in more local policing information and would strongly encourage the production of the information at a more local level, where this is possible.

Police authorities must take into account any guidance issued by the Secretary of State about the form and content of local policing summaries and the manner of their publication. The legislation requires the summary to be issued as soon as possible after the end of each financial year. Otherwise, decisions on the format and distribution method can be taken at your discretion, based on your knowledge of your local community and opportunities for economies of scale with partner organisations.

The Home Secretary has the power to specify matters that need to be included in the reports through secondary legislation – these are effectively minimum standards.

Section 157 comes into force on **1 April 2006**. This means that the first reports must be produced as soon as possible after that date.

Why there are minimum standards of information provision

While the Government is concerned to give as much flexibility as possible with regard to producing locally tailored information, it believes there are certain classes of information that are of interest and relevance to all local communities and that should be communicated as a minimum, no matter where the authority or force is located. This will give an element of consistency to the reporting of policing, no matter where in the country one finds oneself.

Development of the local policing summaries proposal

The Government's commitment to strengthening community engagement and the accountability of police to local communities was first set out in its November 2003 Green Paper, Policing: Building Safer Communities Together. This stated that:

Information is available – but we believe much more can and should be done to make it truly accessible for the public. But we also want to ensure that people can act on it to make a difference in their own communities.

The results of the Green Paper public consultation exercise showed that there was broad agreement on the need to make information more accessible to local communities. Regular newsletters through the door (58% supported this communication channel) and talking to a beat officer (57%) were cited as the two most popular methods of receiving information about policing.

The Government's 2004 police reform White Paper, *Building Communities, Beating Crime*, stated that:

The Government regards the dissemination to the public of better information about community safety as being a necessary first step towards increasing local engagement and accountability.

As such, the White Paper recommended the introduction of a statutory minimum requirement regarding what each household can expect to receive in terms of local policing information.

Local policing summary pilot

The concept of local policing summaries was tested in January 2005 in two local areas: Spelthorne (Surrey) and Mid-Sussex (Sussex). The pilot's objective was to gain feedback on the suggested minimum standards and on the format and distribution of local policing summaries. 1,600 reports were sent out and 400 people were interviewed on their views of the report and their interest levels in policing. Please see **Annex B** for a summary of the pilot results.

Consumer clinics

As has been clearly stated, the style and content of the summaries is largely a matter for individual authorities and forces. Nevertheless, we thought it would be helpful to provide a template for those who wish to use it, especially as it is one which has been established as providing the sort of information that the public said they found helpful. In October 2005 we tested the format, content and language of a number of reports on a representative sample of the population.

You will find the template (Quark and Word versions) on the CD-ROM, which is in the "*Guidance on producing local policing summaries*" folder.

Annex A

Section 157 of the Serious Organised Crime and Police Act 2005

After section 8 of the Police Act 1996 (c.16) insert-

“8A Local policing summaries

- (1) As soon as possible after the end of each financial year, every police authority established under section 3 shall issue a report for members of the public in the authority’s area on matters relating to the policing of that area for the year.
- (2) Such a report is referred to in this section as a "local policing summary".
- (3) The Secretary of State may by order specify matters which are to be included in a local policing summary.
- (4) A police authority shall arrange-
 - (a) for every local policing summary issued by it under this section to be published in such manner as appears to it to be appropriate, and
 - (b) for a copy of every such summary to be sent, by whatever means appear to the authority to be appropriate, to each person liable to pay any tax, precept or levy to or in respect of the authority.
- (5) It shall be the duty of a police authority, in preparing and publishing a local policing summary, to have regard to any guidance given by the Secretary of State about the form and content of local policing summaries and the manner of their publication.
- (6) Before making an order under subsection (3), and before giving any such guidance as is referred to in subsection (5), the Secretary of State must consult-
 - (a) persons whom he considers to represent the interests of police authorities,
 - (b) persons whom he considers to represent the interests of chief officers of police, and
 - (c) such other persons as he thinks fit.
- (7) This section shall apply in relation to the Metropolitan Police Authority as it applies to a police authority established under section 3.
- (8) A statutory instrument containing an order under subsection (3) shall be subject to annulment in pursuance of a resolution of either House of Parliament."

Annex B

Key statistics from the local policing summary pilot

Level of interest and knowledge

- 85% were very interested or fairly interested in policing.
- Only 11% felt they were currently very informed and 30% fairly well informed about policing in their area.
- 84% said they would like to know who their neighbourhood officers were, but only 13% claimed they actually knew (indicating a lack of information).
- Recall levels of the newsletter were relatively low at only 16% (this is likely to be skewed by the fact that the person interviewed was not necessarily the person who saw the summary when it was delivered through the letter box).
- 59% said they would be more likely to take an interest in policing issues after receiving the newsletter. This was 71% for the 16–34 age group.
- 61% said they had greatly or slightly increased their knowledge of policing by reading the newsletter.

Preferred media

- 44% said they would currently be most likely to find out information on policing through the local press.
- After being shown the policing summary, 83% said that having the information in newsletter format delivered to their door would be their preferred (or second favourite) way of receiving information on policing.
- Only 3% (as their first or second choice) said they would prefer this information through policing websites.

Content

- Over 90% were interested in receiving contact information for neighbourhood policing teams and police stations.
- Over 80% were interested in receiving information on key problems identified, priorities and responsibilities, crime statistics, police performance and how to provide feedback to the police.

Frequency

- 50% would like to receive a summary every six months.

Performance information

- 75% thought it was important to include trends over time.
- 57% thought it was important to compare the data with that of other similar areas.
- 78% said they would prefer the information for their local area, compared with 10% on a force-wide and 9% on a borough-wide basis.
- 81% thought it was very or quite important to show how the police respond to the performance figures.