

A practical guide to local policing summaries



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Local policing summaries – content guidance

Introduction

From 1 April 2006 there will be a statutory requirement on police authorities to produce local policing summaries. For background information on the requirement, please see “Background to local policing summaries” which sets out the rationale behind the legislation. This practical guide aims to help you produce summaries, giving you advice on the minimum standards and other categories of information, as well as technical guidance on design and writing copy. We have developed this best practice guidance following research with the public.

Local policing summaries are intended to be concise (maybe three or four page), insightful publications geared specifically at reaching and engaging with local communities.

Their aim is to provide information with maximum impact and readership, not to provide huge amounts of information which very few people will take the time to read.

They are not intended to be solely about giving a favourable interpretation of local policing but also to give some objective sense of how policing has been delivered.

The information to be communicated in local policing summaries may exist already, for example on your website, but these summaries present an opportunity to really influence what communities think of the police by putting relevant information through people’s doors. When the sample reports were tested on the public in a consumer clinic, the summaries were particularly powerful in that they served to position the police positively. The key messages taken away by participants were that the

police were approachable, were working together with the community and were providing a reassuring presence.

Force or local level summaries?

The legislation has been framed at authority/force level, which means that as a minimum the summaries need to be produced at this level. Within some forces there are differing geographies and demographics, so local priorities can differ from BCU to BCU. We strongly recommend that wherever possible they are produced at Basic Command Unit (BCU) or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) level, or at an even more local level if possible, and that community safety partners are involved. The more local the information, the more relevant and interesting it is to local communities. Having this information means that people can act on it to make a difference in their own communities.

But we also recognise that people do not just live their lives in their home. They travel, shop and will have an interest in and experience of policing in a wider locality. Therefore, information at force level will give people a wider perspective.

However, there is flexibility on this point to enable you to decide the level that is most appropriate for your area subject to your own logistical and financial constraints. If you choose to use a mixture of local and force level information in your summary, stating whether the information is force wide or area specific will give clarity and avoid confusing readers.

The minimum standards

While the Government intends 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 should be communicated as a minimum, no matter where the authority or force is located. This will give an element of consistency on the reporting of policing, regardless of where people live.

The minimum standards, which all summaries must contain, are:

- a statement of the police authority's priorities for the year;
- an assessment of the extent to which the police force met the priorities set for the previous year; and
- an assessment of the extent to which the police force has met the strategic policing priorities (if any) set by the Secretary of State.

Under each minimum standard, we have provided guidance and pointers on the sorts of information that might usefully be included and at what level. The sample report will also give you an idea of what this means in practice.

Electronic versions of the Order (The Police Act 1996 (Local Policing Summaries) Order 2006) and explanatory memorandum can be found at <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si200601.htm> under number 122.

A statement of the police authority's priorities for the year

Under this standard, the intention is to map out your future priorities for the area the summary is covering. These priorities may be force wide or area specific or a mixture of the two. You will probably want to explain briefly what the initiatives aim to achieve. Our consumer clinic found that references to initiatives

without explanation proved off-putting to readers. But, at the same time, it is best not to be too detailed. For instance, references to internal strategy changes could lead to readers switching off.

People are likely to want to know how these priorities were identified and whether there was any consultation. We recognise that some authorities will have a large number of priorities for the year. The intention here is to select the key priorities (say, between three and five priorities).

An assessment of the extent to which the police force met the priorities set for the previous year

In the same way as the authority's key priorities for the year are set out, the minimum standard here is intended to capture how previous key priorities have been delivered. Again, there is a good deal of flexibility about how to do this, but we expect that there will be some performance information included. For further guidance on expectations in this regard, please see 'Communicating performance' on page 5.

The front page of the sample report shows how you can tell people in your area about a particular initiative and its impact on the community.

An assessment of the extent to which the police force has met the strategic policing priorities (if any) set by the Secretary of State

The strategic policing priorities are those set by the Home Secretary in the National Policing Plan. It is likely that these will coincide to some extent with priorities set by the authority. Where this arises, the local policing summary should only report on them once.

You may wish to give consideration to which of the strategic priorities have greatest impact and importance to your communities and focus principally on those.

Additional categories of information

The list below highlights the additional categories which our research suggested may be important to communicate in the summaries. Again, this will ultimately be a matter for local discretion. Results from the consumer clinic rated these categories as information the public found useful or wanted to know:

- details of how policing is organised and delivered locally;
- information on how to contact the police or others responsible for addressing key community safety concerns;
- inclusion of a map; and
- a sense of comparative performance between the area and similar policing areas elsewhere.

Details of how policing is organised and delivered locally

This might include information on who is responsible and accountable for policing locally, as well as details on local neighbourhood policing teams and how to access them.

Including photos of the local officers, maybe even with a mini biography or what they are focusing on in their particular area, will help put a face to a name and will mean that people are more likely to approach them.

Giving a contact number and email address will make the officers more accessible too. The back page of the sample report shows you how this could be done.

You may also wish to include information about the police authority, for example contact details and a brief overview of what police authorities do (emphasising the consultative function). Page 3 of the sample report gives an example of how this could be done.

Information on how to access the police or others responsible for addressing key community safety concerns

Knowing how and when to contact the police and other local community safety agencies easily, without getting passed from person to person, has a great potential to improve and enhance the public's perception of local community safety services.

This is one of the reasons we are introducing the new Single Non-Emergency Number (SNEN), which is being launched in five areas across England and Wales during 2006. When SNEN is operational in your area, you may want to include it alongside 999 with details of when each service should be used.

Examples of other telephone numbers you may wish to include are:

- abandoned vehicles;
- the local authority community safety team;
- Citizens Advice Bureau;
- council services;
- drugs and alcohol helplines;
- the National Domestic Violence Helpline (0808 2000 247);
- fire safety;
- victim and witness support (Victim Supportline on 0845 30 30 900);
- Crimestoppers (0800 555 111); and
- any phone lines for reporting racist incidents.

In addition, great efforts are also being made around the country to improve demand management; if we can direct calls to the appropriate place we are more able to control the pressures on the system. The back page of the sample report picks out a few key numbers.

Inclusion of a map

Maps should be included to illustrate the area covered by the report. Police terminology for an area does not necessarily mean the same thing to the people living there, so the inclusion of a map will provide clarity and avoid any confusion.

Communicating performance

A crucial purpose of local policing summaries is to provide a better sense to the public of how well they are being policed and the impact this is having on levels of crime and disorder in their locality. In discussion with stakeholders, concern was expressed that what was envisaged were lots of charts and graphs and references to 'most similar forces or BCUs', which would not be comprehensible to the public. This is certainly not the intention or the requirement.

We know from the pilot and the consumer clinic, which tested the sample template, that the public are interested in some evidence about crime levels in their area, whether they are increasing or declining and how this compares with what is being achieved elsewhere. This can be shown in fairly straightforward non-technical ways. It is important that this provides an objective assessment covering both good and less effective performance. This can, of course, be accompanied by narrative that contextualises performance where this is felt to be necessary.

The minimum standards do specify that the summaries should contain some information on how policing priorities have been achieved, and this is likely, therefore, to involve some quantification. In terms of expectations, we would suggest that where performance information is given, a number of guidelines are followed:

- Periods of reporting should be consistent across the report (that is, one quarter's data for one category should not be mixed with 12 months of data in a separate category). This will help to give a sense that areas are not just cherry-picking figures to present performance in the best light.
- Both numbers and percentages should be used where changes in crime levels are reported.
- Some sense of both crime reduction and investigating crime should be given in the report.
- Arrest figures, unless attributed to some other indication of performance (such as charging or convictions), are not a strongly persuasive indicator of success.

We also see strong benefits in the inclusion of the most recently published Police Performance Assessments grades for your force. Communicating these gradings will bring added transparency, consistency and objectivity into the way performance information is communicated to local communities nationally. The assessments are useful inclusions as they convey a clear and concise message of performance with a strong comparative element.

We do not envisage this inclusion of grades to be complex or statistical, but a simple reproduction of the table used in the Police Performance Assessment publication (please see page 2 of the sample report, 'How we have been doing'). You may wish to give background information to your assessments to contextualise them. Any negative assessments should be balanced with information explaining what actions are being taken to make improvements.

The Home Office had originally planned to introduce a statutory requirement for the summaries to include the Police Performance Assessment grades. We have agreed instead that as long as the summaries provide a robust appraisal of performance strengths and weaknesses of the force, the requirement to include the gradings is unnecessary. The inclusion of objective performance information in the summaries, however, has been endorsed by both the Association of Chief Police Officers and the Association of Police Authorities.

As part of the evaluation exercise of the first round of summaries we will review the approach taken by authorities/forces regarding the inclusion of performance information.

Other categories of information to consider

The following items were suggested during the consultation exercise as other categories you may wish to think about when deciding what to include in your local policing summaries. There is no expectation on our part that these optional categories will be included in your summaries; you will wish to consider their respective merits depending on local circumstances and space/length of the report.

Community safety

Community safety in its widest sense matters greatly to your communities. The importance of the police authority role in this work was recognised by the Government several years ago when police authorities were given 'responsible authority' status in Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships, alongside, for example, chief constables and local authorities.

There are a number of areas of CDRP activity that link in very closely to overall policing priorities and have a significant impact on the quality of life of people in your area. These include:

- Prolific and Other Priority Offenders Programme;
- Alcohol Harm Reduction;
- targeting anti-social behaviour;
- Drug Interventions Programme; and
- reducing domestic violence.

Working together with your local partners is important when producing your local policing summaries to ensure that your local communications strategy across the different partners is joined up.

Local victim and witnesses services

In the Code of Practice for Victims of Crime there is a duty to provide information to all victims within a specified time frame. This information is being produced centrally but with each Local Criminal Justice Board (LCJB) tailoring the leaflet to their area – you may wish to highlight the availability of this leaflet.

Your LCJB may have already produced leaflets or publications about the criminal justice system which you may want to mention in your summary. Victims can also access information about local support provision from a database at www.cjsonline.gov.uk. This will be available from April 2006, which might make a difference to whether you include it at this stage.

Information on local policing community engagement events

In this section you may wish to highlight events such as community consultations, police or LCJB open days, crime prevention or awareness-raising events. It may not be practical as far as space is concerned to give a full events list, so you may wish to list the key mechanisms for engagement, a contact point for getting involved and where to obtain further information.

Community groups and empowerment networks and volunteering opportunities

In addition to your policing community engagement events, you may want to tell your area about other local community groups or networks set up to represent the interests of local people and listen to their concerns. This may also be an opportunity to highlight any local volunteering opportunities available.

Diversity issues

You may wish to state how you are providing equality of service to all of those in your community, highlighting anything you are doing particularly to improve access to or the experience of the police service for specific communities. Providing equality of service may, of course, mean taking specific action to target or improve access or to tailor the response according to a specific community's needs.

Getting feedback from your community

Feedback is fundamental to community engagement and will be an opportunity to show that you are actively listening and responding. You may wish to give email (as on page 3 of the sample report) and postal addresses and/or telephone numbers so that your local community can give their views on the local policing summaries and other issues important to them. Alternatively, you could draw up specific questions to gain more tailored feedback.

Indeed, asking your communities for feedback about policing supports the 'Your Voice Counts' aspect of the Quality of Service Commitment.

Police powers, racist incidents and complaint handling

This section could highlight police powers that are of particular interest to the public, such as stop and search, which can give reassurance, but which can also cause concern if it is seen to be used in a disproportionate way.

There is currently an under-reporting of racist incidents. You may want to include the access points available (both police and non-police) for reporting such incidents.

You may also wish to give information on how to make a complaint about any aspect of police conduct. These include contacting a local police station or the Independent Police Complaints Commission, by telephone, email or in writing. You may also wish to refer to local organisations, such as Citizens Advice Bureaux or Race Equality Councils, if you work in partnership with these, to provide access to the police complaints system.

Production of local policing summaries

This section of the guidance concentrates on the practicalities of producing the summaries, covering:

- working with partners;
- timing;
- using the template;
- provision of local policing summaries in languages other than English;
- distribution of local policing summaries; and
- estimated costs.

Working with partners

With the introduction of the National Community Safety Plan, we strongly encourage working together with your local partners when producing your local policing summaries to ensure that your communications strategy across the different partners is joined up. You may want to avoid sending out your summaries when another major document is due to be published. Alternatively, you may want to use other documents or events to publicise your summaries or send out your publications together.

Partners may be able to share knowledge about local designers, printers and how to distribute your reports. There may be discounts you can get by having bulk contracts and there may be opportunities for you to tap into other sources of funding.

Timing

The legislation requires local policing summaries to be produced as soon as possible after the end of the financial year. In practice, there is a great deal of flexibility around this as we recognise that there are a number of competing pressures around timing. Within the year, we see three main points at which you could choose to publish your summaries, each of which produces pros and cons:

- soon after the financial year end;
- just before the end of the financial year; or
- after the Police Performance Assessments have been published.

Publishing very soon after the financial year end has a logic to it. It enables you to report on the known outcomes against the previous year's priorities while also being sufficiently early in the following year for the new priorities to be meaningful and relevant.

But we also recognise that it may be considerably more practical to issue summaries with council tax notifications. That is a matter for local discretion, depending on whether you can accurately estimate your expected outcomes on an extrapolation basis or similar and whether your priorities for the following year have been established soon enough.

Producing your summaries after publication of the Police Performance Assessments means you will be able to use the most up to date published performance information, but the summaries would go out later in the year.

Ultimately, it is for you to decide when the best time is to produce your summaries.

We are aware that authorities and forces are required to produce other publications, such as annual reports. The local policing summaries are not intended to duplicate the annual report but to provide a short, accessible and insightful picture of how policing is being delivered on a local level. This distinction is likely to become more pronounced with the potential

move to strategic forces. However, we are looking at the scope for rationalising publications to ensure that there is no unnecessary duplication.

Using the template

The style and content of the summaries are largely a matter for authorities and forces. However, you may find it helpful to use the template provided on the CD-ROM when developing your own summary.

Use of the template is optional but it is based on research findings, so it reflects what the public told us they wanted to see in their local policing summary.

About the template

The CD-ROM includes two versions of the template.

Quark: Quark is a professional software package used by most design agencies. The Quark version is extremely flexible, allowing you to add new content and images. If you are planning to work with a professional designer and want your summary to have the same look and feel as the sample report, use the Quark version provided. Most computers will not have this package as standard.

Word: If you do not have access to the Quark software package and are not working with a professional design agency, you can use the Word version, which contains the basic elements to give your local policing summary a professional, consistent look and feel. But the Word version is less flexible than the Quark version. Unless you are an experienced Word user, we advise that you use the generic images supplied in the template.

Benefits of using the template

The template was developed by professional designers and based on research findings. It is designed to help

you create a professional looking document that sets out information logically and clearly. Standard elements like the contents list, prominent headings and clear charts will help readers navigate the document and build up audience recognition over time. The template is also flexible enough to allow you to include information that reflects your own local priorities.

Writing clearly

Feedback from our research showed that readers wanted clear information written in everyday language. Local policing summaries should give an accurate and unbiased picture of your performance and explain to readers how your initiatives and strategies will affect them.

If you are not used to writing for the general public, the following simple rules developed by COI (Central Office of Information – the Government’s centre of excellence in marketing communications) may be helpful:

- Keep your audience in mind at all times. What do they need to know? Which pieces of information are most important to them? Always put your most important message first, and concentrate on answering the basic questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why?
- Using everyday language sounds confident and direct. Talk about ‘we’ and address the reader as ‘you’. Use the simplest language you can without compromising your meaning, and avoid jargon. Do not use acronyms or abbreviations without explaining what they mean.
- Write active sentences, not passive ones. The sentence ‘Changes were made to the way your area is policed’ is passive; the sentence ‘We have changed the way we police your area’ is active. The second version sounds more dynamic, and makes it clear to the reader who is doing what.

- Use verbs, not nouns. The sentence ‘Delivery of the outcomes will follow the completion of the first project’ uses nouns. The sentence ‘We will complete the first project, then deliver the outcomes’ uses verbs. The second sentence makes it clear that something is happening, and also tells the reader who is responsible.
- Keep sentences short: ideally, they should be between 15 and 20 words long. But don’t make all your sentences the same length, or your document may be uninteresting to read.
- Use short, logical titles and sub-headings to break up your copy and help readers navigate through it.

Visual appeal

Research showed that positive images of policing and clear charts and diagrams were the elements of the leaflet that readers remember most. Images that show the police interacting with the community were particularly well received. Think carefully and creatively about how the public will perceive the images you use and if they display positive police activity. While the photographs you choose must be realistic, try to avoid images that focus on the more negative aspects of policing, such as arrests and raids. The images you use should reflect the diversity of your community and, if possible, be taken in the area.

Leaflet size

The template is four A4 pages long. Research showed that readers preferred shorter documents, so it is preferable to keep your policing summary as concise as possible. However, the template is flexible so you can easily create more pages if you need to.

Design requirements: fonts

The Quark version uses the Helvetica typeface. The Word version uses Arial.

We have chosen these typefaces because they are widely available, and clear and easy to read.

In both versions, styles for headings, captions, highlighted text and body copy are pre-set. The template uses a variety of weights and sizes of font to create visual interest and create a clear hierarchy of information for the reader.

Design requirements: images

The CD-ROM includes a small folder of community-based policing images. You can use this if you do not have any images of your own. If you are sourcing your own images, make sure that the quality is as high and the format as large as possible.

Printing

If you are working with the Word version, first find out whether your printer can print from it. If not, you will need to find a printer who can and talk through the following issues with them:

- the number of pages in your local policing summary;
- whether you want the summary to be folded or stitched;
- colours; and
- paper quality.

If you are using the Quark version and working with a professional designer, ask them to liaise directly with the printer on your behalf.

Provision of local policing summaries in languages other than English

It is up to you to identify the main minority ethnic languages in your area into which the summaries may need to be translated. The translations do not have to be in the designed format leaflet, but could be in a simple Word document format.

You could note on the leaflet itself that translations are available (see the Punjabi, Turkish, Chinese and Urdu wording on the back of the sample report). Alternatively, you could provide translations on your website or put hard copies in a range of relevant community venues.

Police authorities/forces in Wales will also need to produce Welsh language versions in line with their statutory requirements.

Distribution of local policing summaries

Each household must be sent a summary; this legislative requirement was supported both by the consumer clinic whose participants felt extensive distribution was appropriate to reach a wide and diverse audience, and by the pilot areas.

There are a number of ways to send local policing summaries to each household, including:

- posting them to the named addressee;
- door dropping;
- sending them with your local council tax annual precept;
- using the distribution list of free local newspapers; or
- other mechanisms, for example, using partners' distribution systems.

Posting the summaries to a named addressee means that they are more likely to be read.

Door dropping is a service provided by mailing houses and is a means of leafleting without naming the addressee.

If you are intending to send your summaries with your local council tax annual precept, it is best to contact your local council as soon as possible to discuss exact timescales. Most precepts are sent in February/March.

Including the summaries within free local newspapers will only be effective if everyone in your area actually receives the local newspapers. Relying on this method could mean that the summaries are not read as they are lost within the mass of leaflets that normally accompany newspapers.

Estimated costs

If you choose to use the template, design costs will be kept to a minimum. It is better to print slightly more than you need than slightly less, as it is less economical to go back to the printers and ask them to print more.

Distribution via a door dropping or direct mail service can deliver significantly better value for money than standard postal services.

Together with Procurement Excellence in the Police Service (PEPS), we are considering whether any additional commercial arrangements may be required to support the distribution process. PEPS is engaging with procurement teams in each force to assess requirements and potential service delivery mechanisms. Further details will be communicated to you as this develops.

Local policing summaries may present sponsorship opportunities. Clearly there will be judgement decisions to be made before accepting sponsorship. You are advised to refer to Chapter 3 of the ACPO document, 'A Guide to Income Generation for the Police Service in England, Wales and Northern Ireland'. The guide is available at:
http://www.acpo.police.uk/asp/policies/Data/guide_to_income_generation_website_revised_05x08x05.doc

Compliance with the requirement to produce local policing summaries

We would very much welcome the opportunity to receive copies of your local policing summaries. This is entirely optional but if you would like to send us copies of yours, our address is:

Local Policing Summaries Team
Home Office
4th Floor, South East Quarter
Fry Building
2 Marsham Street
London SW1P 4DF

Following the production of the first round of summaries we will conduct an evaluation exercise, which will establish the impact of this requirement on communities. The evaluation will also look at how areas met the minimum standards, assess whether there was an objective performance appraisal and gauge from areas some of the good practice learning points.

In terms of compliance with the requirement, it is proposed that police authorities' success, or otherwise, regarding the production of summaries will be one of the areas of business that will be included in the Police Authority Inspection Framework. This is being developed at present in readiness for the new inspection regime for police authorities.

Any questions

If you have any questions about local policing summaries, please contact Dyah Wresniwiro (at Roro-Dyah.Wresniwiro@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or on 020 7035 3140) or James Evison (at James.Evison1@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk or on 020 7035 3159).

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