

Managing Perceptions of Local Environmental Quality

North West Liveability
Foundation:
Action Learning Days



About Keep Britain Tidy

Keep Britain Tidy is an environmental charity working to achieve cleaner, greener places for everyone. We campaign in England against litter and neglect, providing advice and leading others by inspiring practical action and better policy. With our origins in the 1950s anti-litter campaigns, we now focus on the range of issues affecting where people live including fly-tipping, fly-posting, graffiti, antisocial behaviour and abandoned vehicles. We run programmes such as Eco-Schools, Blue Flag and Quality Coast Awards for beaches, and the Green Flag for parks to demonstrate practical action. We are part funded through Government and other income is secured through training, consultancy and sponsorship. For more information on how you can make a change visit www.keepbritaintidy.org.

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Introduction

The aim of the North West Liveability Foundation (NWLF) is to make the North West a cleaner, safer and greener region. It will achieve this aim by working in partnership with as many local authorities, land managers and relevant organisations from across the North West as possible on a programme of support and events which will help to improve local environmental quality (LEQ).

The Foundation currently provides a suite of free access sub-regional services designed to deliver the overall aims of the NWLF, including meetings, conferences and action learning days. Action learning days are designed to help solve problems and encourage more effective learning.

As part of the NWLF sub-regional programme four Action Learning Days have been held in the following areas (sub-regions): Cumbria, Cheshire, Greater Manchester and Lancashire¹.

This report provides an overview and findings of the Greater Manchester sub-regional Action Learning Day.

Managing Perceptions

The NWLF held the Greater Manchester Action Learning Day on 26th May 2009 based on the theme of 'Managing Perceptions of LEQ'. The day was hosted by Oldham Council in partnership with Keep Britain Tidy.

The day involved discussion on a range of topics relating to managing perceptions. Perceptions of the local environment can vary greatly from the reality. What residents think of their area can sometimes have little to do with the situation on the ground. The workshop looked at ways to improve residents' perceptions through consultation, on the ground initiatives and improving communication, branding and targeted services.

¹ Keep Britain Tidy already has an extensive sub-regional programme running in Merseyside, so the additional NWLF work is being used to complement this programme.

The action learning day was facilitated by Gill Roxborough, Client Delivery Manager, Keep Britain Tidy and included three presentations from:

- Joanne Butcher, Group Director, Market Research and Local Campaigns, Keep Britain Tidy *'Perceptions versus Reality – Why the Gap?'*
- Dickie Felton, Media and Communications Manager, Keep Britain Tidy *'Changing Perceptions – The Role of Media and Communications'*.
- Mike West, Oldham Council *'How short term improvements on the ground have led to improved perceptions'*

The agenda for the day was built around the presentations proposed by partners and the experiences of the host organisations. A copy of the agenda can be found in appendix 1.

Discussion covered the following topics:

- Why are perceptions important?
- Popular perceptions
- How short term improvements on the ground have led to improved perceptions

A range of reading material relating to managing perceptions was included within the agenda packs and for reference during the day. The reading material is listed in appendix 2.

Workshop Attendees

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Workshop

This section of the report consists of notes taken during the day of views expressed by attendees during discussions in relation to the following agenda items:

- Why are perceptions important?
- Popular perceptions
- How short term improvements on the ground have led to improved perceptions

Why are perceptions important?

The workshop began with a general discussion about perceptions and what is meant by the term 'managing perceptions'; often it is characterised as being about actions taken to manage the gap between perceptions people hold of LEQ standards and actual service delivery performance on LEQ on the ground.

Why are perceptions important?

Attendees offered a range of views:

- They may influence the level of service provision – poor satisfaction expressed in a particular area may influence decisions about the level of service provided in order to satisfy or meet expectations.
- Satisfaction – perceptions can be used as a measure of satisfaction or performance. One example cited was an authority area with a satisfaction rating of 80% yet BV199 / NI 195 results indicate that it is one of the poorest performing areas in the borough for cleanliness.
- Quality of life –people's well-being may be affected negatively if they perceive their area to be of a low standard and vice versa.
- Investment – if the image of an area is good it is better placed to attract increased investment
- Reducing the number of signal crimes can make the area feel safer

Customer satisfaction: it's about what the customer thinks is important – an authority can get complaints that the street hasn't been cleansed for some time yet the street is spotless.

Managing expectations: It can be a case of 'the more the council does the more residents expect' so it is about managing those expectations as well.

Perceptions across different services: Consider what other departments are doing in the area – residents could be happy with street cleansing but unhappy with waste collections therefore it is important that all departments work together rather than in silos.

Authorities need to find out what people’s perceptions are of their area, but they also need to target every area appropriately to make sure the gap between the best and worst performing areas is narrowed.

Short term tenants - In some areas, particularly less affluent areas, tenants in short term privately rented accommodation can present particular issues for the delivery of services like refuse collection so consider targeting landlords with schemes such as the Private Landlords Initiative. Where landlords are failing to give their tenants information about waste collections and services, this can have an impact on how effectively services are used and delivered with a consequent negative impact on an area and the perceptions of more long term residents.

Working together – Consider working more closely with other departments – otherwise authorities can spend a lot of time sorting out small problems without having much effect. Think about how authorities can justify fining the public for dropping litter when bin men leave rubbish on the streets.

Get help from residents - inform and educate residents about the work the authority is doing in the area and about local service delivery. It is important to keep in touch with residents on a regular basis and keep them properly informed about waste, recycling and special collections.

Misconceptions – may include:

- Unrealistic expectations
- Incorrectly held perceptions around the delivery of services
- Expectations local authorities are unable do anything about

Can the public be affected by misconceptions?

One authority had complaints about a closed lid policy on waste receptacles yet the authority did not have such a policy in place.

Another authority carried out a week of action to deal with persistently poor areas. It was only when officers were talking to residents it became clear that many of them had mistakenly thought that they could put their rubbish out at any time and it would be collected as part of the standard service.

A particular street cleansed everyday was affected by litter which would blow in from other areas so it always appeared as if it hadn't been cleaned.

How do we find out what people think and manage common myths?

One authority gathered information through the LAA and fed it into Area Plans – it showed that every area was affected by litter. However, these figures were not linked to council services and resources so were not used to direct resource allocation and service delivery.

Employee and Council perceptions - Consider the perceptions of employees; a task and finish style of working may not be guided by a quality standard so that standards can slip. Changing working practices and procedures requires careful management.

It can tend to be the same people who complain so it may be useful for the local authority to spend time identifying precisely what the issues are. Also explain exactly what can be expected from the council in terms of service delivery and what the council is doing in their area. By informing and educating people about services it allows a better understanding of how the council works and helps manage expectations.

It could be that the authority acts disproportionately in response to those people who complain frequently which can mean that resources are unfairly distributed. There could be high numbers of unsatisfied residents in other areas who don't complain and therefore their area does not get the same level of attention.

Popular perceptions

- 'We never see a sweeper' (people like to see a visible presence)
- 'We don't get value for money' (lack of awareness about how council tax is divided up)
- 'We're keeping you in a job' (by dropping litter)
- 'There must be an election due' (Cynical)

- 'It's not my problem' (Not taking responsibility)
- Diverse communities (Language / culture barriers)
- 'We pay our council tax but none of it gets spent locally'
- It's a waste of time cleaning up' (people have given up)

Attendees felt that more affluent areas have higher expectations so they are more willing to complain about minor issues whilst people in less affluent areas tend to complain less even though they may have more issues that need addressing.

It was acknowledged, however, that perceptions can be valid and indicative of where the council may not be delivering services to the required standard.

'Perceptions versus Reality – Why the Gap?'

The following notes are an introduction to the presentation given by Joanne Butcher, Group Director, Market Research and Local Campaigns, Keep Britain Tidy. The full report is in appendix 3.

What defines local environmental quality? Is it the factual evidence of the problem on the street, such as litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, fly-posting, weed growth, etc? Or is it the perception of residents, visitors or workers in the area, of the cleanliness, visible appearance of the area and how safe they feel when in the area? Similarly, what defines a good cleansing service? Is it clean streets or satisfied residents?

On the ground surveys provide an assessment of the type, severity and likely cause of the local environmental quality (LEQ) issues. Public perception surveys aim to identify residents', visitors' and users' views and opinions on these local environmental quality, and / or related antisocial behaviour and wider neighbourhood issues. So if both of these measure good performance then they should show similar results, right? – Wrong! In many areas of England the results shown by these two measures are far apart and heading in opposite directions.

Jo Butcher's paper explains how public perception surveys or 'on the ground' surveys alone are only part of the mechanism to understanding local environmental quality and how to improve it, but combined together, these two types of surveys provide the full picture to better inform land managers to take the right action at the right time in order to make a real difference to both the incidence of visible problems on the ground and how they are perceived by the residents / visitors / users. It also shows the need to

understand the reasons for the figures in more detail before making ill informed decisions, and how to take steps to close the gap between perception and reality, where it exists.

Local Environmental Quality, Perception and Reality

Prior to the introduction of the new National Indicators, all local authorities have submitted results for BV199 (standards of litter and detritus) and BV89 (satisfaction with the cleanliness of the area in which people live). The most recent results are shown mapped against each other in figure 1. The higher the BV89 score the more satisfied people are and the lower the BV199 score the cleaner the place is.

Figure 1

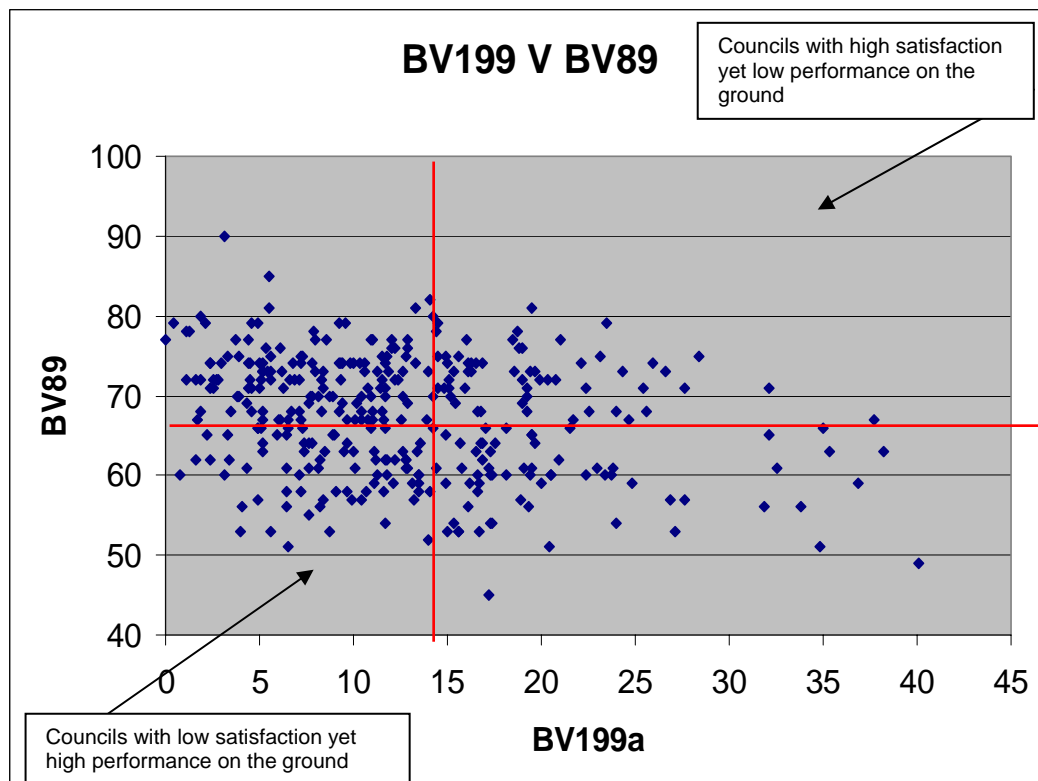


Figure 1 shows that a large proportion of authorities are falling into the two quadrants that show a gap between reality and perception. Clearly utilising only one of these measures to define performance in an area would be inaccurate. This gap applies not only for litter and general satisfaction but across a wider range of issues.

Figure 2

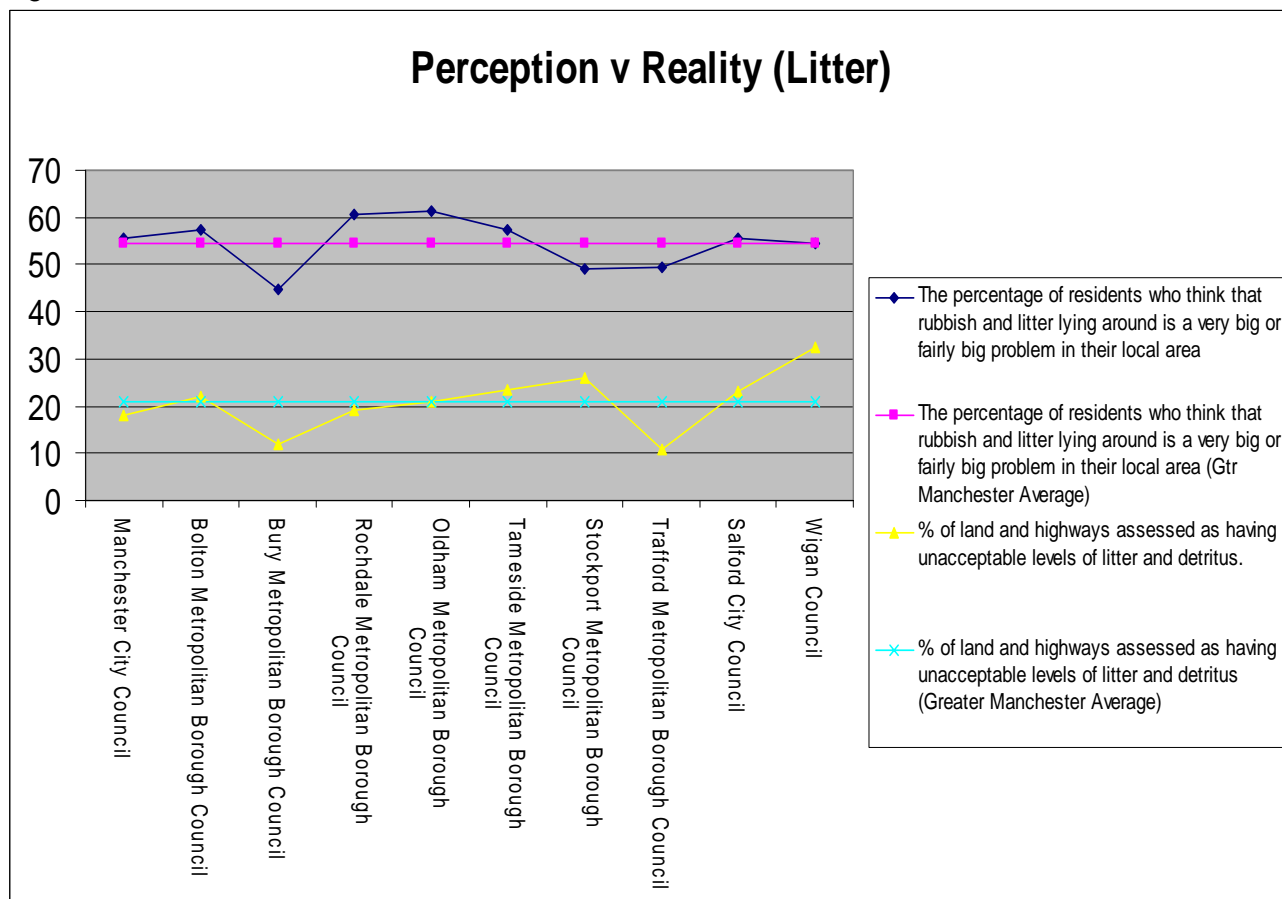


Figure 2 shows the relationship locally (Greater Manchester) between the percentage of residents that think rubbish and litter lying around is a very big or fairly big problem in their local area and the percentage of land and highways assessed as having unacceptable levels of litter and detritus.

Source: Audit Commission Area Profiles – Key LAA Themes, Safer & Stronger Communities – 2003/04

[http://www.areaprofiles.audit-commission.gov.uk/\(gylnfkqug1sf5j55ht0srkq0\)/StaticPage.aspx?info=25&menu=57&refer=http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/index.asp&](http://www.areaprofiles.audit-commission.gov.uk/(gylnfkqug1sf5j55ht0srkq0)/StaticPage.aspx?info=25&menu=57&refer=http://www.audit-commission.gov.uk/index.asp&)

Discussion

Improving standards

Although cleansing standards are important, local authorities will only be able to raise satisfaction levels so far by focusing on cleansing alone. In order to increase satisfaction levels authorities must use marketing to raise awareness about the work they are doing. Authorities need to:

- Understand the reality and perception

- Identify the gap
- Close the gap through:
 - Communications
 - Service delivery

Example: LEQSE shows that smoking related litter is present on 80% of sites but perception wise the public are not that concerned about smoking litter as it doesn't cause offence in the same way as dog fouling.

Working smarter

Authorities could run a campaign aimed at smokers to get them to change their disposal habits. Be smart about what partners are asked to engage in particular issues so that the best results are obtained for both cleansing and perception

Communications

A recycling initiative increased recycling on one estate from 10% to 35% but the residents were dissatisfied as they believed they were doing the work of the council. Tyneside carried out a 'you asked we did' campaign. They were providing a good service but also making sure everyone was aware of it. So it is important that authorities focus on getting communications right.

Getting residents on board

It is also important to get local buy-in from residents. On one estate that was earmarked for demolition residents did not want to move. They got together and raised funding to build a new community centre. The council then agreed to improve all the properties rather than demolish and re-house residents. There is a much higher level of satisfaction now.

Changing perceptions – the role of media and communications

The following highlights are from a presentation by Dickie Felton, Media and Communications Manager, on the role of media and communications. The presentation aimed to show:

- The importance of a structured and coherent approach to communicating with residents
- How perceptions influence the strategy and how the strategy can then influence perceptions.
- How branding can influence perceptions
- The role of the media – how the media shape perceptions and create fear. To cover counteracting 'bad news' and how to form successful relationships with media.

Main points of the presentation were that:

- Media is very influential
- Media can be very demanding and it is important to 'play the game' in order to get coverage
- Easter and Christmas can be very quiet times for the media so stories at those times will tend to get more coverage
- Be as helpful as possible
- Build up relationships – get a key contact at each newspaper / radio station
- Journalists don't have time to go out and get their own stories so keep sending stories out to them – especially with photographs. Quite often they will be published word for word

An effective communications strategy for any partnership requires:

- Commitment from all agencies to developing a joint framework.
- Lines of accountability up to the highest level.
- Appointing a dedicated resource to communications.
- Nominating a person from each agency to be responsible for input into the planner.
- Developing a planner listing all communications planned by agencies alongside seasonal crime trends and neighbourhood issues.
- Regularly monitoring and reviewing the planner.

- Identifying areas where joined up communications will be more effective.
- Identifying key methods for communication and use them appropriately.
- Tailoring communication messages to meet the needs of particular neighbourhoods.

The media are always looking for interesting stories so if any authorities are doing a campaign inform radio, TV, national and local newspapers, magazines, trade journals, websites and blogs. There are a lot of different forms of media – speak to your own media team and see how you can get your news out there.

For more information or advice on media issues please contact
 Dickie Felton Media and Communications Manager, Keep Britain Tidy
 T: 01942 612 617,
 E: dickie.felton@keepbritaintidy.org

Case Studies

The delegates discussed two case studies to look at what the lessons were. The case studies were:

- Doncaster crime reduction
- Radford and Hyson Green Neighbourhood Development Company

These can be found in appendix 4

The following points were highlighted from the discussions

- Work with residents and make sure they are aware of what the local authority is doing
- Communicate properly with residents so they know what is expected of them – only then can the authority consider enforcement measures and sanctions
- Think about language – not all residents are clear about what household waste means (general rubbish rather than bulky items)
- Communicate with other departments
- Get local wardens to educate people
- Make sure trades people have the correct licences
- Perception of the waste contractor was very good as residents believed they were providing a ‘clear all’ service

- Changing their service was risky because that would lower satisfaction rates and would take a long time to build back up
- Try and understand what people's perceptions are; it is worth making extra resources available

NWLF Werneth Initiative

This presentation was based on Oldham's experiences with the perception survey work carried out across the Borough. The presentation focused on work carried out on the ground between the first and second surveys in 2007.

The aim of the research was to provide Oldham Metropolitan Borough Council with information about residents' perceptions of local environmental quality in and around the Werneth estate and to track change in perception over the last nine months.

The objectives of this research were to:

- Understand how residents of the Werneth estate perceive their local environment.
- Identify feelings of safety and satisfaction in the area.
- Understand how feelings of safety relate to local environmental quality issues.
- Examine the usage of parks and open spaces.
- Review the current service provision.
- Assess ways to contact and inform the local community.
- Compare the results with those obtained in January / February 2007.

The vast majority of residents were satisfied with all the services in their area although the most endorsed service was overall waste collection; 85% of residents were either very satisfied or fairly satisfied with this service.

Residents were asked to comment on whether or not they had noticed improvements on the estate. Initially, the residents were not given any prompts or choices for responses regarding the perceived improvements and, in these cases, the most common responses were less general litter, new housing / HMR activity, less alcohol-related litter, less fly-tipping and less smoking-related litter.

When given a list of issues and asked whether they had got better, worse or had stayed the same residents were, on the whole, very positive. 64% thought the general appearance of the area had improved over the last 12 months. A fair proportion of residents also felt the level of general litter and alcohol-related litter had got better and many thought smoking-related litter and fly-tipping had also got better over the last 12 months. When queried about changes to the local environment overall, two thirds of residents thought it had got better in the last 12 months, a significant increase when compared to the previous survey.

When residents were asked if they had seen or heard anything about the work being done in the area, a small majority stated that they had. Many cited the HMR newsletter 'Werneth / Freehold Housing Market Renewal Update'. Some said they had received information via direct mail and some had seen the council newsletter 'The Oldhamer'. Just 1% of residents could not remember where they had seen or heard information on improvements to the area.

The critical success factors to the project included:

- Managing expectations
- Planning interventions
- Press coverage
- Flexibility

Perceptions and base line measurements go hand in hand and both are important.

For more information on the work carried out by Oldham please contact Will Wills, Project co-ordinator, Oldham MBC, T: 0161 770 1135, E: will.wills@oldham.gov.uk

Contact Information

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or would like to discuss any element of this report.

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Appendix 1: Agenda

Managing Perceptions – Local Environmental Quality

26th May 2009

Location: Chadderton Town Hall, Middleton Road, Chadderton, Oldham, OL9 6PP

Host contact details:

Will Wills, Project Co-ordinator,
Street Scene
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Facilitator contact details:

Gill Roxborough, Client Delivery
Manager
Mobile: 07918 625 663

9:30 Coffee

9:40 Welcome and Overview of the day

Facilitator

9:45 Why are perceptions important?

Group discussion led by facilitator.

A session to discuss the current work taking place in Greater Manchester

10:15 Popular perceptions

Group discussion led by facilitator

A session to establish perceptions of local environmental quality related services

10:45 Coffee

11:00 Perceptions versus Reality – Why the Gap? Understanding perceptions and changing them

Jo Butcher, Group Director Market Research, Keep Britain Tidy

A session to understand why people think / feel the way they do

12:00 Changing perceptions – The Role of Media and Communications

Dickie Felton, Media and Communications Manager, Keep Britain Tidy

A session to understand how to utilise the media more effectively

12:30 Lunch

13:15 Case study review

A workshop to review key elements of success

14:00 How short term improvements on the ground have led to improved perceptions

Oldham Council

15:00 Review of available information

15:15 Summary of learning from the day

15:30 Close

The facilitator will take notes during the day in order to compile a report of the day

Appendix 2: Reading Material

CABE Space – What are we scared of? – 2005

<http://www.cabe.org.uk/publications/what-are-we-scared-of>

Perceptions of anti-social behaviour: Findings from the 2007/08 British Crime Survey – 2008 - <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs08/hosb1508.pdf>

Perceptions of Anti-social Behaviour - Summary of the first stage of the three-year study commissioned by the Home Office - August 2004

<http://www.respect.gov.uk/members/article.aspx?id=8296>

Local Authority Perceptions of Anti-social behaviour –

http://www.respect.gov.uk/uploadedFiles/Members_site/Documents_and_images/Resources/AtoZ%20for%20website2.1.pdf

Appendix 3: Perception and Reality

Local Environmental Quality, Perception and Reality – Closing the Gap

Jo Butcher - Group Director, Keep Britain Tidy

What defines local environmental quality? Is it the factual evidence of the problem on the street, such as litter, graffiti, fly-tipping, fly-posting, weed growth, etc? Or is it the perception of residents, visitors or workers in the area, of the cleanliness, visible appearance of the area and how safe they feel when in the area? Similarly, what defines a good cleansing service? Is it clean streets or satisfied residents?

On the ground surveys provide an assessment of the type, severity and likely cause of the local environmental quality (LEQ) issues. Public perception surveys aim to identify residents / visitors / users' views and opinions on these local environmental quality, and / or related antisocial behaviour and wider neighbourhood issues. So if both of these measure good performance then they should show similar results, right? – Wrong! In many areas of England the results shown by these two measures are far apart and heading in opposite directions.

This paper will explain how public perception surveys or 'on the ground' surveys alone are only part of the mechanism to understanding local environmental quality and how to improve it, but combined together, these two types of surveys provide the full picture to better inform land managers to take the right action at the right time in order to make a real difference to both the incidence of visible problems on the ground and how they are perceived by the residents / visitors / users. It will also show a need to understand the reasons for the figures in more detail before making ill informed decisions, and how to take steps to close the gap between perception and reality, where it exists.

In order to illustrate this point, this paper includes a number of national and local examples, where both datasets have been mapped together to create detailed action plans to improve neighbourhoods and the quality of life of those living there.

Prior to the introduction of the new National Indicators, all local authorities have submitted results for BV199 (standards of litter and detritus) and BV89 (satisfaction with the cleanliness of the area in which people live). The most recent results are shown

mapped against each other in figure 1. The higher the BV89 score the more satisfied people are and the lower the BV199 score the cleaner the place is.

Figure 1

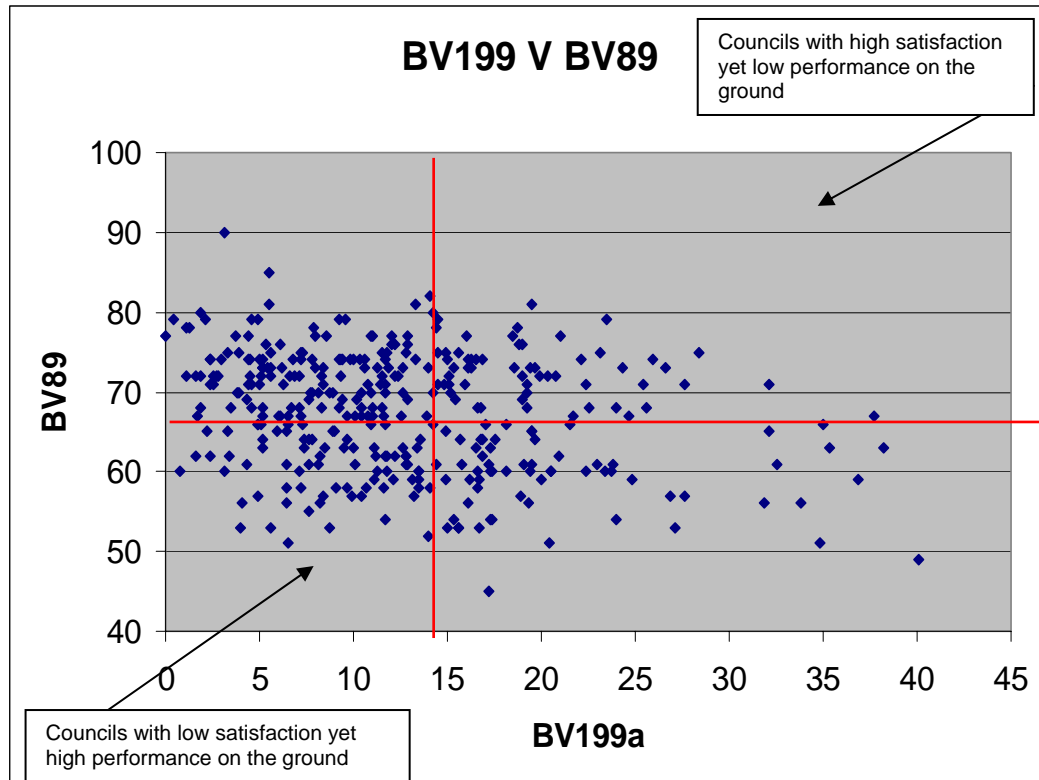


Figure 1 shows that a large proportion of authorities are falling into the two quadrants that show a gap between reality and perception. Clearly utilising only one of these measures to define performance in an area would be inaccurate. This gap applies not only for litter and general satisfaction but across a wider range of issues. The next few examples highlight further the importance of using both these measures.

The first example is the national Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE) results in relation to public perception surveys. The LEQSE, which samples 19,000 sites in a representative sample of local authorities across all nine English regions, measures the quality of the physical environment to find out how clean our streets and open spaces are and gives us the factual evidence of the problem 'on the ground'.

In 2005, the LEQSE survey revealed that smoking-related litter was found on 79% of sites across England and it had increased by a staggering 20% over the previous four years. In addition, the ban on smoking in public places was imminent and it was

felt that this could lead to an even bigger increase in the problem. Looking at general satisfaction levels, however, the general public were not concerned about cigarette ends; they felt they were far less offensive, messy and dangerous than other litter items such as fast food, bottles and glass. This did not mean the issues shouldn't be tackled however as the public were saying they could see a problem ahead with the change in laws and smokers increasingly dropping cigarette ends on the ground². Understanding public perception in addition to the situation on the ground did not mean that the issue was not tackled but it assisted in driving the way forward - to change smokers behaviour rather than simply continue to clean up.

In order for ENCAMS to campaign on smoking-related litter, research was utilised to help to better understand the problem, the target audience and triggers and barriers to behavioural change. Using the ENCAMS litter droppers' segmentation research that had been conducted in 2001³, which identified a number of segments relating to the attitude and behaviour of litter droppers, a target audience was selected – the 'justifier' segment. This segment confessed to dropping cigarette butts on a frequent basis, as they simply felt that nothing else could be done with their litter.

Research carried out with smokers identified this group as having greater feelings of guilt when dropping litter. In addition to this, national research was also conducted into the problem of smoking-related litter, attitudes towards it, current cigarette bin provision and appropriate solutions to reduce the problem in addition to research into smoking in / around the workplace. The research found that providing appropriately placed and designed cigarette bins in public places was essential to reducing smoking-related litter. Targeted education, marketing and communication campaigns also had an important role to play changing public attitudes towards littering. In addition to education and bin provision, we identified that providing alternative solutions, such as pocket ashtrays, could also help to reduce the problem. The campaign aimed to play on the 'guilt' factor identified amongst the target audience, to bring about positive attitudinal change.

Both pieces of research were used to develop a strategy for the campaign, which consisted of a multi-pronged approach that included national outdoor advertising, media relations, an increase in the provision of dedicated cigarette bins nationally, an increase in the availability of alternative solutions, such as portable ashtrays, an

² Litter Segmentation 2006, ENCAMS

³ Smoking Related Litter 2005, ENCAMS

increase in the use of fixed penalty notices by councils and partnership working with local councils and businesses. This campaign focussed on getting a message across, along with promoting what work was being done by councils, what facilities were available and the level of the problem currently.

In contrast, another issue which was shown through LEQSE to be increasing was fast food litter. In 2006, the LEQSE demonstrated that food litter was present on 22% of sites surveyed, a significant increase from just 4% in 2001. In addition to this, public perception showed this to be an item of increasing levels of offence and visibility. In response to this, ENCAMS dedicated 2006 to food litter campaigning by running three separate campaigns throughout the year⁴.

Of course, locally, the gaps between reality and perception vary. Each area is different and has its own issues and a one size campaign or message does not fit all. Although many local authorities have a good idea of what their residents overall like and dislike through best value consultations, they rarely know the differences in attitudes that exist amongst their residents or know how to communicate or market to them effectively to change their views or behaviours. Following are some examples of how ENCAMS has worked with local areas, particularly at a neighbourhood level, that have understood the need to map perception against reality, the plan of action they followed and the steps they have taken to narrow the gap.

Radford and Hyson Green Neighbourhood Development Company, Nottingham

The Neighbourhood Development Company (NDC) manages the New Deal for Communities programme for Radford and Hyson Green – one of the 39 government programmes across the country. Nottingham NDC was awarded £55 million in March 2000 to make a difference to the lives of the people who live in the Radford & Hyson Green area by working alongside them to change things for the better.

Radford and Hyson Green are located close to Nottingham city centre. The area contains about 5,000 dwellings with a population of 9,000 of which over 36 per cent are of African, Caribbean, South Asian or Eastern European origin. Students account for around 27 per cent of the total population. Unemployment within the area is more than double the rate for the city and four times the national average. Crime rates are

⁴ See www.encams.org for more details of campaigns

20 per cent above the average for the city and mortality rates amongst residents under 75 is twice the average for the Nottingham area.

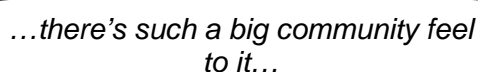
The NDC commissioned ENCAMS to undertake an on the ground assessment of the local environmental quality of the area and a programme of research to identify resident perception of the local environmental quality and antisocial behaviour in the area. This allowed a direct comparison between the problems 'on the ground' and the perceptions of these problems by the residents who live there. This information enabled the NDC to develop a targeted action plan to tackle the clean, safe and green issues affecting the area to improve the quality of life of those living there.

The methodology of this programme of work consisted of the following three stages:

- 1 Local Environmental Quality (LEQ) Survey - Independent assessment using electronic handheld units to collect data (reducing statistical error rate of data transfer).
- 2 Qualitative Research⁵ - Four focus groups undertaken, using a semi structured discussion guide.
- 3 Quantitative Research - 200 questionnaires (lasting 10 minutes each) carried out on street with residents of the area to measure attitudes towards local environmental quality and antisocial behaviour.

Some key findings from this programme of work are:

Residents had a very holistic view of the term 'local environment' and did not see it as any one thing. Many incorporated personal safety, local environmental quality and antisocial behaviour issues, while others felt a sense of community was an important consideration. It became very clear that many of the themes were interlinked.



...there's such a big community feel to it...

Overall, drugs-related litter was ranked as the worst problem in the area and was symptomatic of drugs / drug taking in the area. Whilst these were perceived problems, they were not widespread, but concentrated in hotspot areas.

⁵ This allowed for a clearer understanding of the problems facing residents in the area and gave focus to the aspects that were included for quantification in the next stage of the consultation.

The LEQ Survey results recorded fly-tipping as 'good', indicating that it wasn't a problem on the ground. However, the research showed that fly-tipping (particularly of large household items like fridges and mattresses) was perceived by residents as a problematic issue, but although it occurred frequently, it was also removed quite quickly by the council.

Residents had mixed views of graffiti; some residents perceived the graffiti that they had seen locally (particularly the murals done by the NDC) as attractive, whilst others had concerns about it as a form of vandalism. The LEQ survey rated graffiti as 'unsatisfactory' overall, but residents views showed that overall this issue wasn't having a massive impact on people's quality of life. The LEQ survey also recorded litter as 'unsatisfactory' and this aligned very well with resident perception; residents' perceived litter as a problematic issue and one which should be tackled as a priority.

Residents were very positive about the refuse collection service, but many of those residing in high rise flats noted problems with the chutes, that were frequently out of order due to them being blocked with large items of waste. This led some residents to place waste at the side of the entrance to the chute, which meant that waste collected there and often created a smell.

81% were satisfied with the rubbish collection service

On the whole, feelings of uneasiness and fear for safety were high in the area. There was a perceived lack of street lighting or street lighting that was blocked by overgrown trees that contributed to this.

...they [trees] need to be trimmed back...they've spent all this money putting in new lighting making them posh and whatever and you can't really get any light."

Although the vast majority of residents felt safe in their own home, feelings of safety dropped when outside of the home.

85% felt safe in their own home, only 47% felt safe in the street where they live after dark and 36% felt safe in their neighbourhood after dark.

Following this programme of work, the NDC has developed a targeted action plan which consists of a number of strategic and operational actions. Actions range from sharing the findings of this programme of work with Nottingham City Council

Neighbourhood Management team (to inform local priorities and encourage partnership working) and One Nottingham [Local Strategic Partnership] (to inform Local Area Agreement priorities and interventions around safer, stronger, cleaner, greener themes) to holding meetings with target groups (such as students, those living in the high rise flats and local businesses) to share the findings and explain that the NDC had sought residents views, had listened and was taking action to tackle the issues that were affecting residents' quality of life.

Carlisle Housing Association

Another example is Carlisle Housing Association. Carlisle Housing Association (CHA), part of the Riverside Housing Group, requested a Market Research study from ENCAMS to discover local residents' perception of local environmental quality (LEQ) issues on the Botcherby estate. The estate is a mix of CHA housing and private housing, and comprises approximately 330 houses. It has a primary school, a community centre, a youth drop in centre and a healthy living initiative within its boundaries. There were many void properties on the estate, which are shuttered and attract graffiti and other envirocrime. Unemployment levels on the estate were high and have worsened since the closure of a nearby factory. The main areas for concern as perceived by CHA prior to the research were fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and caravans, drug dealers who live in the estate and associated crime problems, and criminal damage.

ENCAMS conducted a quantitative survey of 200 residents on the Botcherby Estate. The doorstep survey lasted approximately 10 minutes and sought to establish residents' perceptions of their local environment, their feelings of safety on the estate, use of services and facilities, and how these factors interact.

Key findings

The results of the survey revealed that dog fouling and vandalism were the most critical issues for action, as there was a large difference between the residents' expectations and their perception of the reality. The majority of residents (78%) felt safe on the estate, however drugs-related litter was most likely to affect how at ease they felt. More than 8 out of 10 residents were interested in being kept informed on improvements CHA were making to the LEQ of the area and just over a third were interested in becoming involved in improving the local area.

Applications

Prior to the survey CHA had not regarded dog fouling as a significant problem, however the perception research revealed it to be of major concern to the Botcherby estate residents. Consequently an action plan was developed to address key LEQ issues and prioritising dog fouling. CHA instigated local campaigns on smoking related litter and dog fouling; posters were displayed around the estate, and personal ash trays and poop scoops were handed out to residents. Other activities included a 'waste amnesty' to tackle fly-tipping, and the introduction of a community warden scheme, where the wardens would work with residents to tackle a number of key issues.

Vale Royal Borough Council

In response to a number of long standing street scene and community safety issues, Vale Royal Borough Council, in partnership with Weaver Vale Housing Association, requested ENCAMS to conduct a market research survey with residents of their Crook Lane and Wharton Gardens estate, which is located in Winsford, a predominantly affluent town at the centre of rural Cheshire.

The area had suffered from poor waste management practices and a number of environmental crime issues including littering, fly-tipping, abandoned vehicles and graffiti. In terms of antisocial behaviour it suffers mainly from public nuisance, rowdy drunken behaviour and vehicle nuisance.

The research consisted of four focus groups conducted on site at the local community centre in January 2007.

The aim of the research was to provide the council and housing association with a qualitative account of residents' views on the local environmental quality and service provision in their area. More specifically, the research aimed to provide clarity in outstanding issues with refuse collection and poor performance in recycling, understand how residents perceived their local environment, understand how feelings of safety related to local environmental quality issues and discover the likely causes of the large turnaround of bulky waste. In addition, the research aimed to explore ways to encourage residents to take ownership of the estate with the objective of enabling the council and housing association to more effectively tackle the cleaner, safer and greener issues affecting the area.

Key findings

Overall the residents were happy with where they lived and were proud of the social networks they had built up. Most residents felt that the standards of the local environment on the estate had slipped dramatically over recent years and that it was only in the last couple of years that minor improvements had been witnessed. Although residents were committed to helping improve the estate, this was conditional and they insisted that the authorities should take the first steps.

Prior to the research an incentive-based campaign had been carried out which increased recycling rates from 30% to 50%, a result which was perceived to be extremely successful. However once the initiative had been removed, many residents felt that they were being encouraged to undertake unpaid work that the council should be performing and their view of the council following the removal of the incentive was poor.

Residents expressed a feeling of confusion over who was responsible for certain issues, some were unaware that there was a warden on the estate. For example, many were unsure of who to contact (council or housing association) with regards to a problem with the street lighting outside their homes. In addition, many residents felt that small improvements made by the authorities would go a long way to improving the relationship between the council and residents. Something like simply clearing the grass cuttings after mowing green spaces would be noted and greatly appreciated by the residents.

As a result of the research, Vale Royal Borough Council has addressed the low provision of litter bins in the area. The council liaised with local residents who then took on part ownership of the bins. Utilising current resources, they clarified responsibilities of the council and the housing association.

Closing the Gap

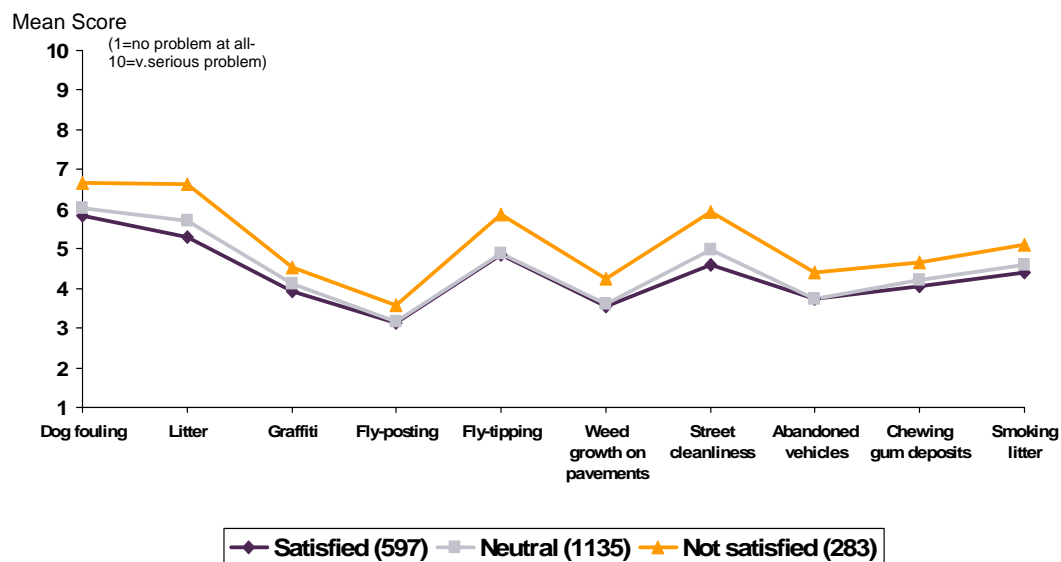
So why does the gap exist? What are those authorities doing that have closed the gap? If we refer back to the Local Government Association Reputation Campaign, the research behind it⁶ identified the factors that affect the reputation of a council. These key factors were all based around cleaner, safer, greener issues and communications, i.e. having a one stop telephone line for customer complaints,

⁶ See <http://campaigns.lga.gov.uk/reputation>

consistent branding, and use of media other than council magazines for communications. This study also concluded that a bad experience can have a disproportionate effect on someone's overall view of a council or an area.

Research carried out by ENCAMS into satisfaction also supports this. A study of 2000 English households was carried out in 2005 to understand householders' views of issues related to local environmental quality, recycling, service delivery⁷. This study looked at overall satisfaction against the rating of the problem with regard to specific issues. The results are shown in figure 2.

Figure 2 Overall satisfaction against rating of issues



Although there is a correlation between perceived high standards and satisfaction these don't necessarily relate to actual standards and there was no evidence to say that good local environmental quality drives satisfaction up. There was however evidence to suggest that poor local environmental quality drove satisfaction down.

So what are the good councils doing? In discussions recently with Bournemouth Borough Council, it was noted that they have good satisfaction scores for BV89 and good performance scores for BV199, therefore there is no gap between the reality of the situation (BV199) and the resident perception of the cleanliness of their borough (BV89). It was felt that this was because Bournemouth had made a conscious effort

⁷ Contact ENCAMS for further details

to promote their activities, be it cleansing schedules, refuse collection cycles or campaigning activity, and communicate with their residents. For example, in anticipation of a smokefree England in July last year, Bournemouth Borough Council installed cigarette bins throughout the town and planned enforcement activity to clamp down on those who littered their cigarette ends. In addition, Bournemouth worked closely with the local media to inform residents of the new bins and communicated the campaign to issue a fixed penalty notice of £75 to those who incorrectly dispose of their cigarette ends by dropping them on the floor.

The reputation study refers to South Tyneside Metropolitan Borough Council. South Tyneside Council has worked hard to lift the quality of its communications – improving the skills of staff, re-branding the council and engaging with local residents in a more positive and proactive way. The new emphasis has led to better systems and structures internally, and numerous external initiatives and campaigns.

Best practice includes:

- performance objectives for all council heads of services to demonstrate support to the Head of Communications, and promote a clear council 'brand'
- training in communications for existing staff, and a new communications module as part of the induction for new staff
- a 'we asked...you said...we did' campaign which raised awareness of how the council has listened and responded to residents
- 'Blitz it': an area-based street maintenance initiative that aims to encourage the community to take collective action to visibly improve the local environment
- training in 'participatory appraisal' for residents from South Tyneside, who worked with the council and the University of Northumbria at Newcastle to research the local community

They key to South Tyneside achieving good BV89 and good BV199 scores is that they are providing a good service and they are telling people about it.

In summary

- 1 The two measures (perception and reality) are as important as each other in understanding local environmental quality / service delivery.
- 2 It is critical to establish if there is a gap between these two measures and understand that gap exists.

- 3 It is not enough to provide a good service, people need to be told that the service is good – communication is key

Jo Butcher – April 2008

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Appendix 4: Case studies

The following information has been pasted from the ID&eA website at:

<http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pagelId=8039003>

Doncaster crime reduction

Synopsis:

Abstract	<p>The Local Area Agreement in Doncaster is focused on improving service delivery and ensuring agencies are responsive to neighbourhood needs.</p> <p>The Safer Doncaster Partnership, aware of the importance of reducing crime and reassuring the public, introduced a Communications Project.</p> <p>Safer Doncaster partnership has developed a shared communications strategy and a shared working group to target the seasonal variations in the crime statistics with tailored messages.</p> <p>It has saved money and avoided duplication</p> <p>It has been shown to contribute to reduced crime figures. It is intended to impact on the fear of crime, perceptions of crime, engagement with crime. These are key measures for SCS and quality of life (QoL).</p> <p>This Project is focused on using communications effectively to ensure that neighbourhoods know about the work that is going on to reduce crime and disorder.</p> <p>It also seeks to co-ordinate communications throughout the partnership.</p>
Date published	March 2008
Authorities involved	Doncaster
Themes	Crime Youth crime
Performance indicators	17 Perceptions of anti-social behaviour 30 Re-offending rate of prolific and priority offenders

The Issue

Reducing crime and disorder is a key priority for Doncaster's local area authority (LAA). The Safer Doncaster Partnership set-up the Communications Project to ensure that neighbourhoods were aware of the work of the partnership in reducing crime and anti-social behaviour.

This also offers a mechanism to target key neighbourhoods with crime prevention messages.

Developing the LAA.

To support this, Doncaster has prioritised neighbourhood level work and reviewed the way that services are delivered. This identified barriers that prevent local agencies and services from being delivered effectively.

Through the LAA development process the following priorities were identified:

- Restructuring the local authority to ensure services work together to deliver the LAA outcomes.
- The creation of a flexible and responsive service to improve community safety at the neighbourhood level.
- Volume crimes, for example by targeting neighbourhood hotspots.
- Management of the night-time economy to address alcohol related disorder.
- Developing more integrated services to prevent offending and re-offending.
- Using the analysis from the newly required partnership strategic assessments and the bi-annual police strategic intelligence assessments to inform local priorities.

The communications project

The communications project is a key element of the approach. This project is focused on ensuring effective communication between local agencies and local neighbourhood communities. Previously all agencies communicated separately. The project informs neighbourhoods about the work to reduce crime and disorder. This will minimise duplication across agencies.

The project focused on:

- Raising awareness of the safer Doncaster partnership and its work to make Doncaster a safer place to live.
- Increasing community engagement and involvement in the issues and decisions impacting on communities.
- Reducing the fear of crime.
- Changing public perception on crime and disorder.
- Reducing the gap between the reality and perception of crime in Doncaster.

This project is a key part of the delivery for the mandatory outcomes within the safer and Stronger block of the LAA. One of the key objectives is that:

'The quality of life in the most disadvantaged neighbourhoods is improved and service providers are more responsive to neighbourhood needs and improve their service delivery.'

This will be measured through targets and indicators based on satisfaction levels with local services.

What Doncaster did

An account communications executive was appointed in the strategic communications department of Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council (November 2006).

This role co-ordinates the safer Doncaster partnership communications activity. It ensures that key crime and reassurance messages are properly communicated.

The account communications executive meets monthly with nominated representatives from each of the partner organisations within the safer Doncaster partnership to discuss key communications issues. All proposed communications are plotted on a planner of activity.

This planner comes together as one document detailing each partner's planned communication activity and upcoming awareness days. This means opportunities for joined-up communications are highlighted.

Also included on the planner are details of seasonal variations in crime, highlighting the priority crimes for each month. This allows messages to be developed in relation to seasonal trends. Also in the planner are issues and actions highlighted by neighbourhood meetings. The whole process leads to a complete picture and plan for partnership communication over a six-month period.

Also when analysis of crime and disorder identifies local issues, the messages and communications medium used can be tailored.

Investment has also been made in developing the mediums for communication in the form of:

- A four-page safer supplement in Doncaster News -the council's monthly newspaper - which is delivered to every household in the borough.
- A Community Safety Network TV – a network of 12 plasma screens located in areas of high footfall including supermarkets, cafes and doctors' surgeries.

The communications project is run by the safer Doncaster partnership, which is co-chaired by the mayor of Doncaster and the district commander for the police.

Engaging partners

The key partners involved in the Communications Project are:

- Doncaster Metropolitan Borough Council both officers and elected members
- South Yorkshire Police
- Doncaster primary care trust
- St Leger Homes
- South Yorkshire probation service
- Local community groups

Impacts

The communications project has resulted in a more effective use of different, targeted communications by all partners in the safer Doncaster partnership. For example:

- Between December 2006 and May 2007 over 220 positive community safety articles featured in the local press.
- Over 2,200,000 community safety messages were broadcast in 2006/07 using the Community Safety TV Network.

This effective delivery of key messages has contributed to a 15.6 per cent reduction in the area's overall crime average for the period April to September 2007 compared with the previous year.

Results on public perceptions of crime, disorder and service delivery are not yet available.

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email: Nadeem.Murtuja@doncaster.gov.uk

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6 Quantitative Research - 200 questionnaires (lasting 10 minutes each) carried out on street with residents of the area to measure attitudes towards local environmental quality and antisocial behaviour.

Some key findings from this programme of work are detailed below.

Residents had a very holistic view of the term 'local environment' and did not see it as any one thing. Many incorporated personal safety, local environmental quality and antisocial behaviour issues, while others felt a sense of community was an important consideration. It became very clear that many of the themes were interlinked.

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On the whole, feelings of uneasiness and fear for safety were high in the area. There was a perceived lack of street lighting or street lighting that was blocked by overgrown trees that contributed to this.

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For further information about the NDC or its activity, please visit <http://www.ndcnottingham.org.uk/>

For further information about market research or local campaigns, please contact:

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