

Cookstown District Policing Partnership

Focus Group Consultation (2005) – Executive
Summary Report

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I. Background, Objectives & Methodology

Background

An important role of a District Policing Partnership (DPP) is to consult with the community to establish, in conjunction with the District Commander, policing priorities and monitor police performance against the local policing plan as outlined in Section 16 of the Police (Northern Ireland) Act 2000.

In order for each DPP to get the views of the public it is incumbent on each DPP to conduct a research programme that will inform each PSNI District Commander of the policing priorities of the public. The Central Survey Unit of the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) has already carried out a public consultation postal survey in 2003.

A second and equally important aspect of public consultation was the use of focus groups. MORI Ireland was commissioned to undertake this research and this document highlights the key findings from the consultation for Cookstown DPP in January - February 2005.

Objectives

The main objective of this research program therefore was to consolidate issues raised by the quantitative Public Consultation Survey and to build on the public consultation focus group research conducted previously.

Methodology

A series of focus groups were conducted across the Cookstown District Council area. A recruitment questionnaire was devised by MORI Ireland for each group and approved in advance by Cookstown DPP. The following groups were conducted:

Group	Age	Religion	Location
1	16-24	Protestant	Glenavon Hotel
2	55+	Protestant/ Roman Catholic	Glenavon Hotel
3	25-55	Protestant	Tullylagan House
4	25-55	Roman Catholic	Tullylagan House

Within each group there was a spread of gender and ages.

II. Summary and Conclusions

- The main positives respondents cited about living in Cookstown area were the good range of shopping and leisure facilities; the sense of community (more so among older people); and the fact that it was just generally a nice place to live.
- For respondents the main negatives of living in the area were the traffic congestion; number of fights in the town especially at the weekend; and increasing underage drinking and drug taking.
- Participants saw the major problems in the area as being underage drinking; fighting and assaults (especially drink-fuelled outside clubs at the weekend); drugs; vandalism (again after closing time at the weekend); and traffic issues (congestion and speeding). There were other less serious issues also mentioned such as racial crimes, car crime etc.
- Most felt that the main responsibility lay with the parents and they should keep a closer watch on their children. The police should also be doing more and a greater presence in the area would help to alleviate many of the issues, as would more backup from the courts in terms of sentencing. Pubs and clubs were also seen to have a responsibility by being stricter on who they do and don't serve.
- The groups felt that the police could do more to deal with issues at hand. Most across groups felt there should be a more visible police presence especially at night and at the weekends. Some felt that the police needed more resources, while others believed that current resources at their disposal could be much better deployed. There was also the belief that there should be more local policemen policing the area, and that the police should be concentrating more on important crimes rather than less significant misdemeanours.
- Awareness of DPPs was mixed. Some were aware of the DPPs but knew very little about what they did or of what their roles and responsibilities were. While the concept was broadly well received, some did have reservations as to what the point of the organisation was and what it could actually do or hope to achieve.

COMMENTARY

III. General Views on Living in the Cookstown Area

Advantages of living in Cookstown District

Among the 25-55 year-old Catholic group, respondents felt that both Pomeroy and Cookstown were kept clean. Indeed one participant mentioned that the council even cleaned the streets in Cookstown at 4am weekend nights.

The fact that there was a good choice of pubs/clubs/hotels and a good range of public leisure services were also seen as positives among this group.

For the 25-55 year-old Protestant group, the main positives of living in the Cookstown area were that it is still relatively safe compared to other places (such as Dungannon and Armagh), that it has fairly good shopping/leisure facilities, and also because of its location is convenient and has good access to other places.

For the younger 16-24 year-old group, the main advantages of the area were that there were good shops and leisure facilities, a good school, and plenty of sporting activities. It was generally seen as a "nice place".

Among the 55+ group the main plus points of living in the area were that there was a good atmosphere and a close-knit community (although there was some concern that this was disappearing to some extent). People were friendly and it was generally considered to be "homely" and a "lovely town". Good shopping and cultural and leisure facilities were also mentioned as distinct positives among this group.

General Negatives about Cookstown District

A commonly mentioned negative about the Cookstown area related to traffic congestion in the town. Lack of car parking (especially for disabled people) and the number of traffic lights in the town centre were also causes for concern.

Another commonly mentioned drawback was the number of fights in and around the town centre. These tended to happen outside pubs and clubs at the weekends after they were closing. There was a feeling among some that these fights have become increasingly violent.

The older group felt that there had been an increase in vandalism and generally felt the area was becoming less safe. This was allied to the fact that people in this group perceived there to be less of a visible police presence. There has also been a marked increase in underage drinking and drug taking.

Some in the younger group felt there was not much to do for people their age to do – and there was only really one place (the Royal) where young Protestants could go out in Cookstown.

IV. Specific Problems in the Cookstown Area

Major Issues

Respondents in each group were asked to indicate what they felt were the major problems in their area.

UNDERAGE DRINKING, DRUGS, FIGHTS

Underage drinking, drugs and fights as a result of drinking were considered major problems in Cookstown among all the groups.

Underage Drinking

The 25-55 year-old Catholic group pointed out that this occurred especially at Molesworth Street, the intersection between William Street/James Street, the Clubland nightclub and near the Glenavon hotel. Participants felt that it was too easy for underage kids to get hold of alcohol but acknowledged that it was difficult for authorities to police. It was commented on that there were virtually no underage drinkers openly on the streets; all were either drinking illegally in pubs or in hidden locations (e.g. hiding in trees in the Glenavon!). Other locations for underage drinking included the car park in Burn Road, and the graveyard.

Some of the 25-55 year-old Protestant group participants commented that they knew of underage drinkers receiving alcohol from their parents. One who worked in an off-licence reported a general reluctance from workers to report underage drinkers for fear of reprisals. She commented that police regularly took away internal CCTV tapes for inspection and this was resented as the workers didn't know if it was legal or not for police to do so.

"I feel very intimidated by them coming in, I don't ask any questions. I just give them whatever they want." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

Several mentioned that the Glenavon was strict on ID to prevent underage drinking.

The younger 16-24 year-old group also saw underage drinking as fairly commonplace in Cookstown. It occurred among those aged as young as 10 or 11 up to 14 or 15 years-old and happened at the back of Wellworth's and "up alleyways or anywhere where the cops wouldn't go". This group felt it was not an issue common to Cookstown and it happened everywhere and "it's really young ones acting tough".

For the 55+ group, underage drinking (and drugs) were seen as major problems. They felt that all other problems followed on from these issues. They were aware of 12 and 13 year-olds drinking ("the blue bag brigade"), claiming that older children would go in and buy the alcohol for them.

The older group felt that underage drinking was a fairly widespread occurrence and happened in car parks, alleyways and at the cemetery and "Pot Hill".

Drugs

Most of the groups felt that there was a prevalent drug culture in Cookstown. The 25-55 year-old Catholic group cited 'one bar in particular' (which was not named). Participants felt that drugs were easily available everywhere in the District but did not feel that 'drug pushing' was a particular problem. The younger participant voiced concern over the number of 'hard' drugs circulating in the District. Participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group felt that people were becoming more accepting of drug taking and that it is now not as 'hush-hush' as it used to be.

The 55+ group saw drugs as a major problem in the Cookstown area. They felt that drugs and excessive drinking led to most of the other problems. If these major issues were addressed it was felt it would have a positive knock-on effect on other crimes.

The young 16-24 year-old group felt that if they wanted to get drugs they would know where to go and there are certain know dealers in the area. They knew of quite a few people who took (soft) drugs but did not feel it was a major issue. Clubland especially and the Royal were the areas where this activity was most rife.

Fights

Generally, most of the people in the 16-24 year-old group felt that if they did not go out looking for trouble they would be ok:

"If you keep yourself to yourself and keep your nose clean it's not too bad" (16-24 year-old Protestant)

This younger group also highlighted that there were instances of fights at the weekend, mostly with people coming out of clubs. They cited the Oldtown Inn and Milky's as "hotspots". Younger participants also felt that fast-food takeaways (e.g. KFC, Dee's burger bar) were a draw for young people coming out of pubs and getting into fights.

Participants in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group felt that the road where the Greenvale and Glenavon are situated was even dangerous to drive along at night at the weekend because so many drunken people were walking the streets.

"You don't even feel safe in your car in case they come up to you or stagger out in front of you." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

Those in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group also highlighted the Drum Rd (where there are two adjacent hotels – Greenvale and Glenavon and hot food bars) as a particularly troublesome area on weekend nights.

"It's quite intimidating I wouldn't drive along there by myself. You're taking you're life in your hands" (25-55 year-old Protestant)

ASSAULTS

Assaults were also common, especially at weekends and it was felt that these were alcohol rather than sectarian-related. One participant noted that all pubs/clubs in the District now refused entry to anybody wearing a football jersey to avoid religious/sporting tensions. The 55+ group had heard of instances of criminal damage (such as smashing windows, kiosks), but again these mostly occurred at the weekend when the pubs and clubs came out. This violence mostly occurred around clubs such as Clubland and in certain estates.

A couple of participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group referred to incidences of stabbings (including a recent one in Monrush). The younger group pointed to areas such as Clubland and "Pot Black" where fights took place regularly.

Many respondents across the groups were aware of a recent sexual assault in the area:

"A young girl was recently raped in Molesworth St about 50 yards from the police station. It doesn't exactly inspire confidence." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

The younger group also highlighted this incident, as did the older who felt this was not a common but rather an isolated incident.

One participant in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group with a young child mentioned rumours of recent attempts by paedophiles to abduct young children. Others felt strongly that paedophiles should not be allowed to live in their area. One mentioned an instance of having been spied upon in a public toilet (toilets now being closed).

TRAFFIC ISSUES

Speeding

Participants in the 25-55 year-old and 55+ groups felt speeding was more of a problem than the younger 16-24 year-old group did.

Some highlighted speeding through Pomeroy (coming from Carrickmore direction). One participant felt that this was attributable to recent road widening which meant that cars tended to drive at speed through the village. She also stated that there were previously speed ramps in the village and she did not know why these had been removed.

Speeding was also thought to be a problem in Cookstown through all parts of the town after 7pm:

"As soon as the town empties, the boy racers take to the roads" (25-55 year-old Catholic)

This was echoed by the older group but they felt the problem was common throughout the town, especially at night but not just among young people.

Traffic Flow/Congestion

Traffic flow and congestion were also seen as major problems in the area. It is difficult to get through the town and there are always delays and hold-ups. Those in the young 16-24 group highlighted that on Saturdays and market days the traffic was a *"nightmare...you spend ages trying to get through the town"*.

Traffic congestion was right through the centre of the town and was exacerbated by the pedestrian crossing in the middle of the town.

VANDALISM

The majority of vandalism was also attributed to alcohol abuse. The 25-55 year-old groups pointed to the increase in vandalism in town centre and housing estates – broken windows, smashing phone boxes, damaging cars etc. There was also quite a bit of sectarian graffiti (e.g. pavement painting) in certain areas, the most affected areas being Stewart Avenue/Main Street and Drum Road.

The young group also felt that a lot of the vandalism occurred in and around certain estates in the area, such as Ratheeney, Coolnafrankey, and Monrush.

Young people causing a nuisance was brought up by the 25-55 year-old Catholic group. They mentioned instances of youngsters throwing stones and vandalising gardens in Forth Glen (it was thought they were coming from Westland Rd).

Other Issues

There were a number of other issues highlighted by the various groups, which were prevalent but not seen to be as major as the aforementioned. These are discussed below.

Racial crimes

It was felt that this was more of a problem in Dungannon due to the significant proportion of Portuguese and Lithuanians in this town. Participants referred to a shooting in Coagh (at a house where a Portuguese lived) and felt that some of the tensions stemmed from the fact that some members of ethnic minority groups themselves had been involved in crime (theft).

"I find it intimidating when a whole squad of them come into the shop speaking a different language, they're always hanging about in groups." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

There was also a general mistrust among some:

"I just think they're really sleazy, they come and stand right beside you in the Railway (bar), they give me the creeps." (16-24 year-old Protestant)

There are also problems between Portuguese and Lithuanians in the Cookstown area. Young people felt that these groups fight among themselves. There was also a recent incident of a local girl being raped by a Portuguese person, which turns local people against them.

Participants in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group felt that there were more problems with groups of travellers/gypsies than there were with ethnic minority groups.

"There's a lot of mistrust of travellers, nobody will take a wedding booking from them, they trash everywhere they go." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

Drink Driving

It was felt that drink driving was not as much of a problem as it used to be but was still apparent. However it was felt that, although there seemed to be sufficient taxis available locally, these were often booked in advance by regular customers so getting home after a night out was not always easy. It was also felt that there were a high number of illegal taxis operating in the District.

Car Crime

Participants also felt that car crime was less of a problem now than it was previously. One participant in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group commented that a few years ago there had been a spate of car thefts in Pomeroy but that had now ceased. It was felt that these were the actions of one or two individuals who had since moved on. Participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group referred to 'burnt out' cars in Monrush and in the car park on Burn Rd. Younger participants in the 16-24 year-old group felt that there were many burnt out cars on the outskirts of Cookstown.

Fear of Crime

Fear of crime was felt to be a fairly important issue - even younger people (male and female) felt uneasy about walking through the town centre at night, especially through certain estates or around the pubs and clubs. Most felt too scared to walk alone:

"Everybody just goes about in groups, safety in numbers." (16-24 year-old Protestant)

Attacks on the Elderly

The 55+ group did feel increasingly more vulnerable. They had heard of a number of robberies of elderly people and there was a feeling that these attacks were escalating in both the town and surrounding area.

Religious tension

Some in the younger group (16-24 year-old Protestants) felt there was a little bit of religious tension in the town. They did not feel there was much mixing between people of different religions.

Burglaries

Some participants felt that this was more of a problem in rural areas but others felt that there were particular areas (e.g. Monrush) where house break-ins were becoming more common. Others mentioned problems on Westland Road.

Bogus calls

Some respondents in the 25-55 year-old groups made mention of older people especially being pestered by phone calls telling them they've won competitions, but this was not mentioned in other groups.

Hostel

One particular individual in the 55+ group felt that the hostel on Molesworth Street was a major source of disruption and criminal activity. He felt this facility was used as a "bail hostel" where "undesirables" from other areas in Northern Ireland were sent and he did not like this. Participants in the 25-55 year-old groups also mentioned the hostel as a centre for the homeless, and complained of 'undesirable elements' there. It was felt that the people living in the hostel greatly contributed to the fear of crime in the area. Some also complained that this was situated behind a school which heightened fear.

It should be noted that others in the 55+ group were much more positive about the facility (also known as the Mid Ulster-South Tyrone Association For Single Homeless) and felt that it did good work.

V. Priority Areas/Community Audit Findings

Five Priority Areas

Five priority areas were highlighted as being of most concern in Cookstown District and respondents were asked for their thoughts and comments on these. The areas were:

- Fear of Crime
- Racist Crimes/Incidents
- Criminal Damage
- The availability of Illegal Drugs
- Underage Drinking

Participants across all groups mostly agreed with these and they were not surprised that these were highlighted as the five priority areas. Indeed most of these issues had already been highlighted and raised spontaneously in the preceding discussion as being the most prevalent problems.

Some groups felt that other issues should be added. For example, the 25-55 year-old Catholic group mentioned speeding and public disorder. A couple of participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group felt that paramilitary activity should be added. Some felt that harassment from paramilitary members was a bigger problem than underage drinking in some areas. They also felt that the paramilitaries had close links with the drugs trade.

A couple of other participants in this group (one a social worker, one a foster parent) felt that child abuse was a serious problem in the area.

The 16-24 year old group expressed some surprise that racial crime was on the list, as they did not think it was a major issue.

Most in the 55+ group did not see the five priority areas as any surprise. They felt the major two were the availability of illegal drugs and underage drinking and that all other activities stemmed from those.

COMMUNITY AUDIT FINDINGS

Respondents were presented findings from a recently commissioned Community Audit. These were:

- Criminal damage (including anti-social behaviour), domestic violence, offences against the person, and theft were the most prominent crime & safety concerns in the district
- 68% of all reported crime happens in Cookstown town
- One third of this crime happens in Cookstown town between 12 midnight & 3 am at weekends

The majority of respondents across all groups were unsurprised by these findings, however there were some interesting comments raised.

A couple in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group were surprised that theft was included but agreed with the rest of the findings.

While participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group mostly agreed with the statements, a couple pointed out the reference to *reported* crime and felt that up to 50% of crime in the rural areas went unreported due to a lack of faith in the police and because of the perception that the police would take too long to get to the scene of a crime. Another participant in this group felt that the percentage figure regarding reported crime was incorrect and that it was actually nearer 80%.

Those in the 16-24 year-old Protestant group were not really surprised by the findings. They felt the list "sounds about right" and that the key issues were included. They did not think there were any major omissions.

The 55+ group did not see the findings from the Community Audit as a surprise. They were slightly surprised to see domestic violence on the list because they felt that it was an issue which was kept quiet and not publicised. All others on the list (plus underage drinking and drugs) were agreed to be of most concern.

Respondents in the 55+ group (and indeed across all groups) were not at all surprised by the percentage of reported crime happening in Cookstown, but were aware of crime happening in more rural areas. Also the fact one-third of the crime happened in Cookstown town between 12am and 3am at the weekends was unsurprising and indeed this view had come out spontaneously earlier in the discussion.

VI. Perceptions of Responsibility for Prevention of Current Problems and Suggested Solutions

Responsibility

Respondents were asked where the responsibility for dealing with these problems lay.

Those in the 25-55 year-old Catholic group felt that the parents and police should be much stricter and 'come down harder' on offenders. This group also felt that police should inform parents if their child caught doing anything wrong, even if they're under age. They believed that publicans had a responsibility not to sell alcohol to underage drinkers and to encourage excess drinking.

Participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group felt that churches and community groups (e.g. Age Concern) could do more to ensure people's safety and allay fears. They believed that teachers and police had 'lost their authority' and that parents had a big role to play in teaching children respect. Some felt that local authorities should work more closely with Police (e.g. in the provision of CCTV cameras).

The younger 16-24 year-old Protestant group felt that a lot of the responsibility lay with parents and the way people were brought up. They felt a lot of parents allowed their children to go "clean daft". The police also had a role to play. The feeling was that the police could be a lot more visible on Friday and Saturday nights and could do a lot more to prevent the trouble and fights which occur. A more visible police presence (especially in the town at the weekend) would eradicate many of the problems, but at the moment they felt that "you never see any police about".

The 55+ group felt that the main responsibility should lie with the parents. They felt that many parents did not keep an eye on their children and the children were then able to do what they wanted without any censure. This older group felt there should be much greater parental discipline.

The 55+ group also believed there was an emphasis on the pubs and clubs not to serve those who were underage and to stamp out the use of drugs. By reputation, Clubland was believed to be particularly bad for drug use.

There was also a feeling among this older group that the police could do more to address these issues, but it was also recognised that there were resource issues and that they were not being backed up by the courts.

Suggestions for Improvement

There were a number of suggestions as to how the situation could be improved.

It was felt that the old community policing model was more effective 'as local police know local people and know who to keep an eye on'. It was felt that there was no particular sectarian tension with regard to peoples' attitudes.

A couple of participants believed that local policemen who were based away from their own area should act as advisors to police stationed in the District and that more use should be made of the Police Reserve who know their local areas.

It was also felt that sentences were too lenient ('they get a slap on the wrist and a bit of community service') and people were allowed to re-offend too often before serious punishment was meted out.

Some participants felt that the police concentrated on lesser crimes to the detriment of more serious ones.

Many also believed that police should keep residents better informed of what was happening in investigation after a crime reported and that the police needed to involve the community more:

"If you report something and never hear another thing about it, you think the complaint has just got lost in the vacuum somewhere and it discourages you from ever reporting anything again." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

Some participants felt that churches could get more involved in trying to combat drink/drugs etc, one mentioned that there was a church community forum in Cookstown and felt that they should be offering more support.

Others felt that the police already gave talks to community groups on drugs awareness and did not feel that there was much more they could do. Two worked in voluntary programmes but said that these had now stopped due to lack of interest from young people.

A couple of participants suggested a crime recording line where reference numbers could be issued automatically for insurance purposes for minor crimes (such as theft) thereby freeing up valuable police time for more serious crime investigation.

Participants felt that police should make more use of on-the-spot fines for vandalism and public disorder:

"They need to take the zero tolerance approach to regain respect. Do it like they do in New York, step out of line and you'll know about it." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

A number believed there should be more for young people to do and gave after school clubs for teenagers, older children as examples.

Phased closing of pubs was also seen as a positive way forward by a couple of participants although others disagreed with this suggestion and felt it would be very difficult to force certain publicans to close earlier than others. A couple felt that 24-

hour opening would be a better approach as people would then leave the pubs at different times. Younger participants also felt extended opening hours would resolve a lot of conflict.

Some felt that there should be more funding and support for schemes like Neighbourhood Watch.

Some also called for better street lighting, especially in lanes or alleyways, as that's where a lot of trouble took place. It is also important that vandalised lights are fixed and not left broken for months.

There was a mixed attitude to the concept of CCTV.

A large number of participants in the 25-55 year-old groups felt that this would act as a deterrent to crime; one explained how the idea had previously been put forward but had never come to fruition due to lack of funding. Another participant felt that even though CCTV could encourage increased irresponsible behaviour as people 'acted up to the camera' or displacement of activity, the overall deterrent effect would make it worth installing.

Participants were not aware of any CCTV cameras at present ('they are all DOE cameras'), although one person thought there might be one in the cemetery. All agreed that their installation would have a positive impact on crime reduction and some suggested that they should be located outside bars.

A couple thought CCTV would greatly reduce the fear of crime in the town. One participant felt that CCTV would only be useful if the Police acted quickly to secure any evidence on them and cited an example of a crime being reported, but the police only looking for the tape on the premises two days later (by which stage it had been wiped clean).

Those in the 16-24 year-old group were less sure how effective the CCTV cameras would be. Some younger respondents felt that it would only work once some prosecutions were made using taped evidence. Others felt that CCTV would make no difference and would not deter those intent on causing trouble.

VII. Attitudes Towards Policing in the Area

Attitudes towards Policing

The 25-55 year-old Catholic group felt that the police had a difficult job due to lack of personnel but were doing their best with the resources they had. All agreed that they were aware of a fairly good police presence during the day in Cookstown but less so at evenings/night-time but felt that this was understandable. Two in the group had a fairly low level of confidence in policing. It was felt that there was a low level of reporting of crime to the police 'unless you need a reference number for insurance purposes' for several reasons, namely:

- Fear of reprisal
- Lack of faith that the police can find the perpetrator
- Slow response time (within and outside Cookstown)

A couple in this group felt that there was not impartial policing in the area:

"It depends on who you are and what you are as to whether you get booked or not." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

Participants in the 25-55 year-old Protestant group also felt that the police had a fairly visible presence during the day in the District but felt that they should be seen more at night. It was generally felt that there was a low level of confidence in the effectiveness of policing in the District.

One participant spoke of police discouraging individuals to pursue legal action against criminals 'due to costs'. It was also felt that police didn't take some crime seriously enough, especially when it involved young people:

"They're not interested if they're underage coz they know they can do nothing." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

Two participants from rural areas expressed a low level of confidence in policing and felt that most crimes were 'dealt with through the paramilitaries'.

Slow response time was thought to be an issue in the town of Cookstown as well as in rural areas. There was disagreement over whether the slow response time was due to lack of resources or general apathy in the police force.

"I'm sick of hearing that there's not enough policemen, if they wanted to raid your house there'd be plenty of them. They just can't be bothered doing the paperwork and making the effort." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

Some participants in the 16-24 year-old group felt that police focused on the wrong problems and on less important issues (e.g. traffic offences – *"they're quick enough to stop you for having bald tyres"* – 16-24 year-old Protestant). They also mentioned that Police had often stood and videoed fights taking place at nights but people involved carried on as if they were not there because they knew they would not be prosecuted:

"They can't stop fights, they're too scared to get involved, they'd rather go after the easy target." (16-24 year-old Protestant)

This younger group felt a lot came down to the lack of numbers and the fact that many of the policemen were "strangers" who did not know the area:

"It would help a lot if there were more of them and more local people who know who's causing the trouble" (16-24 year-old Protestant)

This would also mean that policemen are likely to know families so they could go to the parents to get various problems sorted out.

Also there was the feeling that more police on the ground would deter criminals and lead to a reduction in crime and criminal damage. *"Maybe they can't afford it, but more police on the ground would stop a lot of everything" (16-24 year-old Protestant)*

The general feeling on policing among the 55+ group was that there were not enough police patrols, primarily it was felt due to a lack of manpower and financial resources. While there was some police presence in Cookstown town, it was rare to see police in the estates, where it was believed that most of the problems originated. More foot patrols in estates would help in this respect.

Another concern among this group was that nowadays most of the police in the area were "strangers", whereas before they were local people who knew the area much better and knew where the problems were. People in this group felt they knew police better from times past and could talk to them, but nowadays they did not.

Other issues were that there was a lack of respect for the police now and also that the police were not supported by the courts or by law. It was felt that even if the police did their job and brought perpetrators of crime to justice, the courts would hand down much too lenient sentences which would act as no deterrent at all, or criminals would find loopholes in the law making the whole system "a laughing stock".

VIII. Awareness of, and Attitudes towards the District Policing Partnerships

Levels of awareness of, and attitudes to, DPPs varied across the groups. Around half of the 25-55 year-old Catholic group had heard of DPPs, although only a couple had a clear indication of their roles and responsibilities and struggled to name any members. A number in this group felt there was insufficient knowledge available informing residents of what exactly the DPPs were doing and how well they were performing. The feeling was that they needed to be more visible and vocal and needed to do a better job 'blowing their trumpet about what they had achieved':

"They've been up and running now for a year and a half, they must have something they can shout from the rooftops about. People need to know that they work." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

A number of participants felt that the negative publicity surrounding DPPs deterred people from attending, however some felt that this opposition was lessening and it was just people's own apathy that prevented them from attending:

"I think some Catholics just use it as an excuse because they can't be bothered to attend. These things are there for all our benefit and I think people who don't make use of them are incredibly stupid." (25-55 year-old Catholic)

A number in this group also felt that DPPs should come out to the community to hear their views rather than them having to attend meetings.

There was a low level of awareness of the role of DPP's overall among the 25-55 year-old Protestant group. Some disagreed that DPP council members could ever be independent as they always had a political agenda. One felt that it was always a council member who had the 'casting vote' in issues so would always be swayed by his/her background.

Two participants had attended a DPP meeting, others were not aware they had taken place. One complained that questions had to be submitted in advance:

"It's an open meeting but you are not allowed to ask open questions, they all have to be vetted in advance." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

Some felt that not everybody was comfortable putting things in writing and preferred to deal with representatives face-to-face. Others felt that they were an unnecessary intermediary and police should be more accessible and available to deal with crime as it happened 'not a week later'.

Several could not see the point of the DPP's when they could phone the confidential Crimestoppers directly (obviously missing the point about what their real role was).

Some felt that because crime statistics had to be made public at DPP meetings this would 'spur the police on' to reduce crime levels. Others felt that this was causing Police to focus on the wrong priorities and 'just play a numbers game'.

One referred to the community policing liaison committee and felt that as this was made up of volunteers it was costing the tax payer less than the DPPs. Another felt that councillors were in a better position to discuss priorities with police than individual residents:

"I'd say they'd be in a better position to know what's going on rather than me turning up with my wellies on." (25-55 year-old Protestant)

The overall feeling among this group was that people did not know enough about the DPPs and their role to ascertain whether they were effective or not.

None of the participants in the 16-24 year-old group had heard of the DPPs and did not feel that they would attend meetings. They believed that questionnaires should be hand-delivered to local houses for them to identify priority areas. Some young people felt they sounded like a good idea and would be a good way of keeping things under control as long as you got people on them who could exert some influence.

Some in the 55+ group had heard of DPPs. Most felt the concept was a good one in theory (especially to involve members of the public and have greater community involvement), but voiced concerns over the ability of such an organisation to influence matters or to change things and also whether or not the public would use it.