

Executive Summary

Background

In 2008, West Lothian Community Planning Partnership published their Community Safety Strategy for 2008 to 2011. This set out key aims to achieve reductions in anti-social behaviour, preventable injuries and deaths, and violence and crime.

The Strategy also included a commitment to the collation, analysis and understanding of existing data that relates to community safety in the area, to inform action planning in year two of the Strategy and to assist in the development of a second version of the Strategy in 2011. To this end, a community safety data audit was commissioned, the results of which are presented here.

Purpose

The audit report is primarily a descriptive document designed to provide:

- an index of available data that falls under each of the three areas of interest for the Community Safety Strategy (violence and crime, anti-social behaviour and preventable injuries and deaths), as well as extrapolating that which relates directly to children and young people;
- analysis of quantitative data and associated graphs and charts to demonstrate key issues for the local area; and
- a discussion of the extent to which existing data are 'fit for purpose' for the Community Safety Partnership.

In addition to focussing on these three core areas of interest, the audit report sought to highlight specific gaps in the existing data, as it relates to equalities issues and to explore links between substance misuse (drugs and alcohol) and each of the main themes above.

Approach

In developing the data audit, the researchers undertook early consultation with Community Planning Partners, to identify and collate relevant datasets, and analyse and assess the information in order to provide an early descriptive audit report and outline gaps in the data. This was complemented by desk-based research to identify and review relevant national and local (mainly statutory) data, and interviews with local stakeholders and data gatekeepers to identify, collate and index additional data.

Main Findings

Overall, the Data Audit revealed that, while some robust sources of data do exist to inform future action planning to improve community safety, these are often held within individual partners' organisations and are not readily available for secondary analysis. Since much of the data collected by different partners is confidential, it is unlikely that the sharing of data can be easily achieved. This is especially true of data held on police data management systems.

Perhaps the biggest data gap, therefore, is in our understanding of the victim and offender profiles of those living in West Lothian. Access to police data is restricted and alternative, complementary data sources are often skewed since they rely heavily on self-reporting.

Some national and local attitudinal data is available, but it is often based on small sample sizes and is difficult to generalise to the wider community. Perception data also does not provide an indication of the true prevalence of community safety issues in the local area, since it is not necessarily linked to direct experience of crime or anti-social behaviour.

From data that is available, the main findings are as follows:

- **Anti-social behaviour** does not appear to be unusually high in West Lothian, especially when looking at police recorded crime data alone. It also appears to have remained stable over recent years. There are, however, some key difficulties in providing accurate estimates of the prevalence of anti-social behaviour since much of it will not appear in crime recording databases. The use of measures to control anti-social behaviour are also not consistently applied between local authorities, making it difficult to compare West Lothian with other jurisdictions. Police data on reports of anti-social behaviour from the public is available, but is perceptual and so does not provide an objective measure of anti-social behaviour. Attitudinal data is also available but does not relate directly to experience.
- **Accidents and Injuries** data, as well as suicide data in West Lothian shows that patterns do not differ significantly from those presented nationally. Much of the information presented is based on small numbers of people and there may be questions around the accuracy of generalising findings from such small case numbers. That said, there does appear to have been general reductions in most areas of preventable injuries and deaths in recent years, with the exception of suicide, which has shown a recent increase in West Lothian.
- **Violence** and violent crimes in West Lothian appears to have decreased in recent years. That said, violent crime occurs differentially across the authority, and there appears to be a higher incidence of domestic abuse within the authority than other local authorities. Calculating accurate prevalence figures for domestic abuse is difficult due to under-reporting to the police, and an inability to cross-reference alternative data sets (such as those held by support organisations) with the core police data. This means that the problem is likely to be underestimated.

With regard to young people, the audit uncovered relatively little local data in the public domain, especially in respect of the extent to which young people are involved as victims or offenders of crime and anti-social behaviour. The audit did result in the identification of a number of local initiatives which are specifically designed to reduce young people's involvement in criminal activity, to divert them away from the justice system and to encourage positive healthy lifestyles, as well as some associated data to indicate their relative successes.

Analysis of the data regarding drugs and alcohol also showed some interesting links between age and entry into drug treatment services. In West Lothian, the age of people entering drug treatment for the first time is younger than the national average and may indicate that initiatives that promote early intervention are performing well.

Data regarding alcohol misuse also shows that males are considerably more likely to require hospital treatment due to alcohol related injuries than females, regardless of their age. The exception to this is the 0-15 age group where females are more likely to require treatment. This is one area where age, gender and substance misuse all combine to create a high risk group with regards to personal safety.

The data audit revealed little in respect of the diversity agenda. Most of the main data sources that were identified did not provide detailed demographic disaggregation, and, where breakdowns were provided, these were limited mostly to gender or age differences. Some national statistics data, and the core police recorded crime data, can be broken down to ward level (and 'beat level' for the latter), yet the audit revealed nothing that was broken down on the basis of disability, ethnicity and sexual orientation.

Where data is broken down, there are inconsistencies in the time frames used for reporting, the geographical level of analysis and the age band clusters used for disaggregate analysis. This makes comparison of datasets difficult and is one of the biggest challenges in ensuring that future action plans are targeted appropriately and are inclusive.

While there does not appear to be a problem with data collection techniques and, indeed, there is a multitude of data that could be used by partners in shaping future community safety activity, what does need to be improved is the storage of data in accessible formats, and greater awareness-raising between partners of what information is held.

Finally, there is restricted analytical capacity to maximise the usefulness of data that is currently held, so expectations need to be managed regarding the speed at which data analysis can be carried out.

Further Research

Immediate areas for primary research include: a need for better linking and integration of the datasets that are currently being held and managed by partners; geographical analysis for the core police recorded crime data; manipulation of existing data to allow it to be married with the Life Stages agenda; more qualitative exploratory work to identify the predictors of fear for different demographics; and a need for learning from elsewhere about how best to collect information about minority groups, since they appear to be largely hidden in existing data sources.

Next Steps

The Data Audit provides the evidence base on which to develop the first Community Safety Strategic Assessment. This will seek to make clear the main issues emerging from the data which will, in turn, allow Partners to make decisions about which areas to prioritise in future community safety activity.