

Somerset Community Safety Strategic Assessment

Summary

January 2010



CONTENTS

1. **Introduction**
 - 1.1. Background
 - 1.2. Methodology

2. **Main Findings**
 - 2.1. Reducing the Harm Caused by Drugs
 - 2.2. Limiting the Damage of Alcohol on our Communities
 - 2.3. Safeguarding Vulnerable People
 - 2.4. Prevention and Protection
 - 2.5. Feeling Safer
 - 2.6. Improving Safety on Somerset's Roads
 - 2.7. Help Reduce the Impact of Recession

3. **Recommendations for Action**
 - 3.1. Newly identified threats which should become a primary priority
 - 3.2. Newly identified threats which should become a secondary priority
 - 3.3. Previously identified threats which ideally need additional resources put against them
 - 3.4. Previously identified threats which should remain priorities



1. Introduction

1.1 Background

The Somerset Community Safety Strategic Assessment is a report published annually. As a part of the process it gathers national and regional research, evidence and intelligence, as well as drawing on the professional expertise of those working locally. From this information gathering phase potential threats to Somerset's community safety are identified and prioritised. It is a joint partnership document and is designed to be a point of reference and guidance to resource community safety initiatives among all partner agencies across the county.

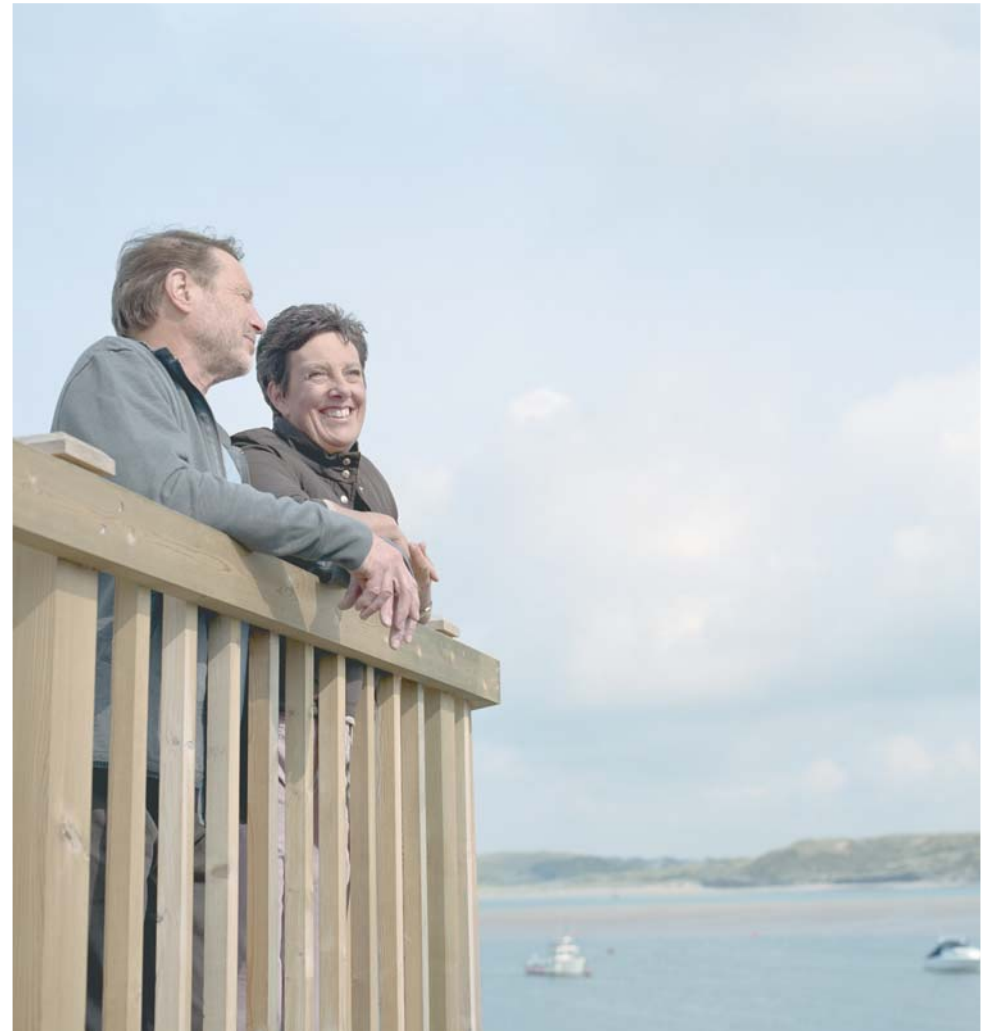
The main aim of the document is to identify priorities which will inform a joint strategy and action plan in order to tackle these priorities in a co-ordinated approach across Somerset. Between publications, other work will be commissioned to fill identified intelligence gaps or identify new potential emerging threats over the year. These will then be integrated into the Strategic Assessment process.

1.2 Methodology

A list of potential threats identified by stakeholders was systematically investigated to determine whether there was evidence to support their existence. Only where evidence points either to an increased threat, or to an absolute level which is of concern, have particular themes been included in the assessment.

In addition, the threats identified in the workshop have been further informed by understanding emergent themes at a national level.

Partnership organisations have supplied the information necessary for this assessment of community safety to take place. The report and summary documentation have been written and produced by the Partnership Intelligence Unit, a partnership resource based at Somerset County Council.



2. Main Findings

2.1. Reducing the Harm Caused by Drugs

Users of heroin and/or crack and/or cocaine were responsible for up to 75% of the total acquisitive crimes committed in Somerset in 2008/9. Reducing the overall number of drug users remains a very high priority because available data suggest that between 30-50% of all acquisitive crimes are related to illegal drug use.

In the light of the rising strength of cannabis and national evidence which suggests that young people are more quickly moving on to class A drugs, this should be identified as a high priority.

There was a 22% decrease in the number of incidents of discarded needles in Somerset between 2007/8 and 2008/9. It would be desirable to expand some of the very good work that has been done in some Somerset's districts to tackle discarded needles. Although the health risks from discarded drugs paraphernalia are thought to be small, amongst the general public discarded needles create fear, anger and disgust.

2.2. Limiting the Damage of Alcohol on our Communities

It is estimated that 19% of our population engages in hazardous drinking and a further 4% in harmful drinking. These drinkers cause considerable damage to society, with 3,120 crimes in Somerset last year attributed to alcohol. It affects the health of our community and impacts on life expectancy.

Although the number of people aged under 18 years admitted to hospital with alcohol specific conditions in Somerset (65.6 per 100,000) is lower than the South West (78.6 per 100,000) and national

average (72.3 per 100,000), within Taunton Deane (92.6 per 100,000) the rate is much greater than the regional and national average.

2.3. Safeguarding Vulnerable People

Over recent years the number of admissions to hospital which result from a fall amongst the elderly has been increasing. Falls account for 5.1% of all admissions in those aged 65+ and are the most frequent and serious type of injury for the over 65s, and are a major cause of disability.

The ASPIRE database holds detailed information about reported hate crime across Somerset. However, the full report highlights the difficulty of accessing more in-depth information about hate crime within Somerset, the size of this threat and the nature of attacks. Without this information, it is impossible to decide upon appropriate measures to tackle it.

Hate crime is a massively under reported crime but from recorded offences we know that a large proportion of these are racially motivated. BME residents, migrant residents and gypsies/travellers are particularly likely to be victims. In addition, we believe that disability-motivated hate crime may be the most under reported and that it occurs in large numbers.

In respect of homophobic hate crime, the biggest issue is one of the paucity of systems for capturing and recording incidents.

2. Main Findings

There was a 5% increase in the number of reported domestic abuse incidents between 2007/8 and 2008/9. Much work has been undertaken to encourage the reporting of domestic abuse in Somerset and this may in part be responsible for the 5% increase. However, looking beyond the relative rise in number of incidents, the absolute number of incidents remains high and the nature of this offence, which has high levels of repeat victimisation, ought to persuade us to put additional resource into this threat.

Against a backdrop of a slight decline in the number of sexual offences committed both nationally and in Somerset, the incidence in Sedgemoor has bucked the trend and is on a par with the all England and Wales average.

The sex market in Somerset operates via an off-street arrangement in the most part. However, we believe that approximately 69% of sex workers may be subject to coercion and exploitation, with many performing sexual services to fund a drug habit.

The partnership needs a more co-ordinated approach to the collection of data and monitoring of bullying generally and of cyberbullying specifically. Furthermore, young people need help in learning how to recognise cyberbullying and how to deal with it.

2.4. Prevention and Protection

The planned re-development of Hinkley Point as a new generation nuclear power station may prove a threat to community safety in several ways. Once work commences, we expect there to be an increased risk of fire and demand for fire inspections, and an impact

on traffic volumes and road safety. Until work commences, the most significant risk is likely to be the potential for unrest amongst affected communities and from environmental groups.

The Olympic Delivery Authority has sought to adopt a small area of our road network into the Olympic Road Network, as part of an alternative route down to Weymouth. This could impact on many factors around road safety in Somerset.

The government has identified a potential risk to major businesses from terrorists attempting to hijack their IT systems. It has set up a national response to the problem, but local responses may also be needed.

2.5. Feeling Safer

Improving crime is a particular priority for those living in some of the county's urban areas and with good reason, as often this maps to the same locations as higher rates of serious acquisitive crime.

Young people are often perceived to be the main perpetrators of crime and older people to be the victims. However, young people are relatively more likely to be victims of crime and to feel less safe than adults of working age.

Fly-tipping is the most common form of ASB in Somerset and costs councils large sums of money to put right.

2. Main Findings

The numbers of abandoned vehicles show a slight decline this year but this remains a sizeable issue for the districts. It is in Mendip that the largest number of abandoned vehicles are dealt with, but this is also an issue for South Somerset and Taunton Deane.

2.6. Improving Safety on Somerset's Roads

Still of significant concern is the fact that a disproportionate number of collisions involving a car result in a 16-24 year old casualty and that 16-24 year olds feature disproportionately amongst the fatalities. It should be a high priority to continue to target collisions involving motorcycles, as these are particularly likely to result in a fatality.

2.7. Help Reduce the Impact of Recession

This year has seen a 25% rise in retail theft. Retail theft has typically been linked with drug users as they struggle to find ways to fund their habit. However, it may be that the recession is responsible for this latest rise.

The total number of burglaries in Somerset rose last year, with increases evident in all five districts.

There have been 283 metal thefts in Somerset over the last 12 months, 140 in the East of Somerset and 143 in the West and we expect metal theft to increase further in the county. The rise in metal prices since Jan 2009 is believed to be driving offending.

Avon and Somerset Constabulary report evidence of a recent uplift in the number of thefts of jewellery and particularly gold. This is fuelled by the high price of gold at the moment and by the ease of disposing

of the stolen items with the emergence of companies which buy gold for cash.

We have witnessed an increase in cycle thefts this year, consistent with a national rise, as criminals exploit the growing popularity of cycling to work.

Robbery is at fairly modest levels in Somerset, but it is the most serious form of theft and has seen a 28% rise over the year.

There is some evidence regionally of an increase in the number of people falling prey to the activities of loan sharks, although little is known about this threat for Somerset specifically.



3. Recommendations for Action

3.1. Newly identified threats which should become a primary priority:

- Drug use amongst young people: improve knowledge about patterns of drug use amongst young people and a strategy for targeting this.
- Workers in sex market: adopt a co-ordinated strategy to identify and support vulnerable people coerced into work in the sex market.
- Hinkley Point Redevelopment: develop plans to respond to unrest associated with the Hinkley Point redevelopment.
- Metal theft: develop plans to tackle the rise in metal theft
- Gold thefts: monitor rises in thefts of gold and plan for addressing this.

3.2. Newly identified threats which should become a secondary priority:

- Discarded needles: wider implementation of successful schemes for dealing with discarded needles.
- Cyberbullying: identify cyberbullying as a discrete form of bullying and a strategy for dealing with it.
- Contingency planning: communicate contingency plans more widely to make them more accessible by the general public.
- 2012 Olympics: evaluate the impact on our roads of the adopted route for the 2012 Olympics.
- IT systems threat: engage with local businesses to alert them to the threat of terrorist attack on their IT systems.
- Young people as victims of crime: challenge the perception that young people are to be feared in our society.
- Fly-tipping: raise the profile of fly-tipping as an illegal activity.
- Abandoned vehicles: plan to tackle the number of abandoned vehicles in Mendip, South Somerset and Taunton Deane.

- Cycle theft: work with Somerset employers to encourage secure cycle storage.
- Loan sharks: review the activities of loan sharks in the area.

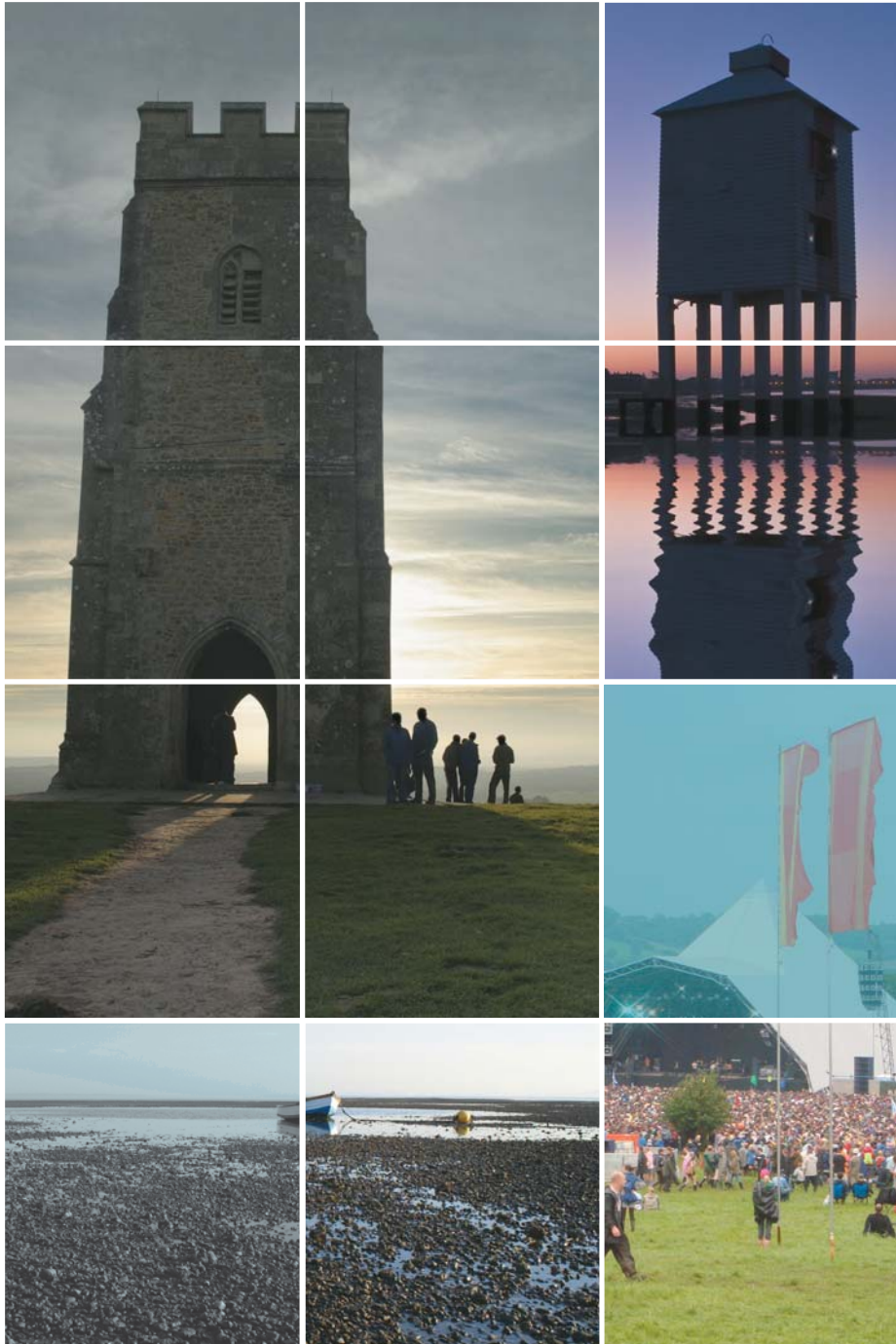
3.3. Previously identified threats which ideally need additional resources put against them:

- Reducing the number of falls amongst the over 65s.
- Creating a more holistic and consistent record of hate crime.
- Development of a strategy for tackling racially-motivated hate crime. Development of better systems for capturing and addressing disability-related hate crime.
- Encouragement of reporting of homophobic hate crime.
- Renewed efforts to tackle the incidence of domestic violence.
- Continued work with retailers to tackle the rise in retail theft.
- Reversing the upward trend in burglaries.
- Addressing the rise witnessed in robbery.

3.4. Previously identified threats which should remain priorities:

- Reducing the overall number of problematic drug users.
- Reversing the tide on hazardous and harmful drinking in our society.
- Addressing the rate of admissions to hospital with alcohol-related conditions for under 18s in Taunton Deane.
- Reducing the incidence of sexual offences in Sedgemoor.
- Counter terrorism activities focused on community engagement.
- Fatalities resulting from collisions amongst 16-24 year olds. Collisions involving motorcycles.

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Partnership Intelligence Unit
County Hall
Taunton
Somerset TA1 4DY