

The East and Mid Devon Community Safety Partnership

A Partnership between East & Mid Devon District Councils, Devon & Cornwall Constabulary, Devon County Council, East & Mid Devon Primary Care Trusts, Devon & Cornwall Probation Service, Devon & Cornwall Police Authority, Devon Fire & Rescue Service.



Criminal Damage

It has recently been recognised that if we could find ways to reduce the incidents of criminal damage being caused across the country then our crime figures would reduce dramatically and this would also have a positive impact on fear of crime. This single crime type accounts for the highest number of offences committed. In New Devon alone this represents some 40% of all crimes committed. Offences in East Devon have risen by 26% over the last two years.

In our current Crime and Disorder Reduction Strategy 2005 to 2008, we highlighted criminal damage as being one of our priorities to tackle. It is a particularly anti social crime and for many reasons is difficult to detect. It is often alcohol fuelled and as a result many offences take place when it is dark.

Over the last 18 months the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary has raised the profile of criminal damage. As part of their Strategic Assessment process it has produced detailed documents which indicate where the main problem areas are and when such offences are committed. They have also suggested ways to tackle the problem.

This has all been considered by the Partnership and attached is a draft copy of the suggested Action Plan which we would like to adopt in East and Mid Devon. We ourselves recognise that it would be impossible to tackle all aspects of criminal damage therefore we intend to concentrate on two main issues. Firstly, offences which take place when young people leave schools at the end of the school day. Research shows that such offences are committed in the areas surrounding schools as the pupils walk home. Secondly, we want to deal with offences which are connected with the late night economy.

It can be seen from the Action Plan that some agencies have more responsibility than others. In terms of the District Council what does this mean?

The suggestion is that trying to tackle this issue should be imbedded in some areas of council work. For example there are lots of council staff who are out and about during the course of their daily duties. These include Street Scene, Environmental Health Officers, Housing Officers etc. If they can be encouraged to report offences which they perhaps witness or where they feel offences are likely to be committed, to the Police, this would be a good start. It could also be possible for these staff to be asked to do their work in the areas where most damage is committed so that they provide additional eyes and ears. For example if Phear Park in Exmouth suffered damage when the schools finished for the day, could not Street Scene staff be asked to do some work in the Park at the relevant times? Also, actual damage to council property should be reported to the Police so that at least they have a better chance to identify patterns and trends and as a result are better placed to target their own resources.

If all the relevant Departmental Heads could be encouraged to think about how their staff could have an impact on criminal damage. They would be expected to report back facts and figures on a regular basis as to how this has been achieved.

In terms of 'Designing Out Crime', for the Planning Dept and local councillors to work with the Police in order to address local issues and put forward meaningful ways to deal with them.

As the District Councils are the responsible authorities for liquor licensing, better engagement with Licensees to make them more accountable. For example if it can be proved that a drunken offender who caused damage in the street had only a short time before been drinking in a local pub or club, for action to be considered against the licensee or his staff who may have committed offences themselves by selling to a drunken person.

In essence the Partnership is looking for a contribution from all agencies as to how they can have an impact on criminal damage. Clearly the Police cannot deal with all the ills of society and this is one element of work where partner agency contribution could make a significant difference.

Gerry Moore
Community Safety Officer