

**West Midlands Regional
Business Crime Forum**

**A business communications
strategy for the West Midlands:
results of the Coventry &
Warwickshire pilot**

Final Report

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1 Introduction and background

During 2004 the Home Office Regional Business Crime Reduction Advisor (BCRA), based at Government Office for the West Midlands (GOWM), supported the region's 34 Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in carrying out audits of the crime issues affecting local business and consulting with the business community. In the process, it became apparent that the business representation element within each partnership varied greatly and that a more structured and consistent approach was needed. The fact that there were so many regional business intermediary groups with an active interest in business crime also suggested the need for a more coherent regional response. As a result, an inaugural meeting took place in January 2005 to set up the West Midlands Regional Business Crime Forum.

One of the challenges identified by the Forum was the need to understand the communications networks that currently exist between the business community and the CDRPs and, on this basis, to work towards a more structured approach to the next CDRP audit and consultation process, which will take place in 2007. As an evidenced based preparatory piece of work, the BCRA at GOWM negotiated with Coventry & Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce to run a local communications pilot study on behalf of the Forum. This has been designed to examine the structure and functioning of the seven local CDRPs (County, City and District) in Coventry & Warwickshire, principally to determine what level of business representation is in place, how inclusive that representation is across business groups and how communications with the wider business community are being managed.

The Chamber appointed a local research and policy consultancy – UK Research Partnership Ltd, based in Coventry – to carry out the background research and fieldwork required. This report is the result of their work. It contains an overview and summary of interviews held with:

- Police officers with direct responsibility for business crime and local authority/CDRP liaison.
- Key CDRP personnel within the pilot area
- A sample of business intermediary organisations with branches and/or members in the Coventry and Warwickshire area.

The report concludes by outlining a model communications strategy which is designed to facilitate business inclusiveness and set out a process for interaction with each CDRP.

2 Police approaches to business crime in Coventry and Warwickshire

Face-to-face meetings were held with Police officers from Warwickshire and West Midlands forces. One has direct responsibility for running a business crime reduction initiative (Warwickshire Beating Business Crime) and the other acts as the Local Authority Liaison Officer (LALO) linked to the local CDRP (Coventry Community Safety Partnership/CSP). Interviews covered the following main topic areas:

- Their role/relationship with the local CDRP/CSP.
- The relative status of business crime as a local CDRP/CSP priority.
- Perceived barriers to business crime achieving a higher profile within local CDRP activities.
- Obstacles to greater business involvement/representation in local CDRP/CSP activities.
- Opportunities and ideas for boosting business representation and communications within CDRP/CSP activities.

2.1 Warwickshire

Warwickshire Beating Business Crime (BBC) is a Police led service funded as a partnership initiative by the five Warwickshire CDRPs, Warwickshire Police and local business. A team of three Business Crime Advisers (BCAs), led by a BC Manager, provide a range of dedicated crime advisory, aftercare and crime prevention services direct to Warwickshire businesses. These services are outlined in their own information sheet as follows:

- ❑ **Engaging business and statutory agencies to manage out crime**
 - ◆ Formation of Business Action Groups
 - ◆ Links into District Planning departments to design out crime
 - ◆ Working with District and County Economic Development staff
 - ◆ On site security evaluation
- ❑ **Educating business to prevent crime**
 - ◆ Completion of risk assessments
 - ◆ Provision of educational materials
 - ◆ Organisation of road shows and seminars
 - ◆ Provision of employee training
- ❑ **Communicating with business**
 - ◆ Recruitment into “Watch” schemes
 - ◆ Attending and supporting Business Action Group meetings
 - ◆ Giving early warning of local crime activity via the Watch system
- ❑ **Providing an aftercare service to business crime victims**
 - ◆ Support to victims of commercial burglary, high value business crimes or vulnerable individuals by personal contact, followed up by:
 - ◆ Gold Service – personal visit
 - ◆ Bronze Service – telephone advice and risk assessment package by post

- ◆ Installation of temporary alarms at vulnerable premises
- ◆ Highlighting business crime patterns to Police for proactive action

It is a unique service in the West Midlands region for a number of reasons:

- It is a dedicated full-time service focusing exclusively on business crime.
- It stems from an explicit Warwickshire Police Force commitment to target business crime as a County-wide priority.
- It relies on active input from and engagement with CDRPs, both in terms of strategic planning and funding.
- It is supported by the collation of crime incident statistics which provide direct and persuasive evidence about levels of business crime across the County, defining business crime as any crime that takes place on or against business premises. These statistics have also been used to calculate the local economic and commercial costs of business crime – evidence that has been critical in furthering the case at a regional level for dedicated business crime interventions.

In common with other business crime prevention initiatives, the Warwickshire BBC relies on the active commitment of local businesses, for example to install and use anti-crime measures, to send and receive crime-related messages (e.g. about specific incidents or suspicious circumstances), and to join with other businesses in the area in maintaining vigilance.

Business engagement is the key. The Warwickshire BBC supports at least two different levels of collective business engagement via its Business Action Groups (BAGs) and Watch schemes (which currently have a combined membership of around 2,500 local businesses covering eight sectors). BAGs require at least some commitment of time from their members and are likely to address a much wider and more varied range of business issues than business crime alone. Watch schemes, by contrast, tend to be more reactive and focused on specific incidents and intelligence as they relate to a given location, such as a retail area or industrial estate.

For the Police team running the BBC in Warwickshire, securing and sustaining adequate levels of business engagement is the biggest challenge. Business interest waxes and wanes with seasonal crime waves, as might be expected. But it also has to compete with a host of other issues that might take precedence from time to time – be it local transport or litter louts, council tax or red tape. The problem lies in tying business down to a single issue and, having done so, maintaining their interest in debates about local crime at CDRP level that are so wide-ranging that they have no very obvious or immediate relevance to business.

The other main barrier to greater business engagement is the perceived cost in terms of time and money. This can make businesses reluctant to invest up front in anti-crime measures. It can also deter individual business owners and managers from committing their time to a BAG meeting, say, or to consultations with local Police about specific initiatives where these are on offer.

Politics also play a part. These are the small ‘p’ politics affecting every organisation that represents a given constituency or business interest. No single business

intermediary body is thought to be trusted by any of the others to represent 'the business voice' adequately or fairly. There is a perception, at least, that the business community is not really a community at all – that it is difficult to talk to business using single channels and that hidden, often very parochial, agendas are shaping what business intermediaries say they want 'for *their* members'.

The Warwickshire BBC manager implies that small, area-based initiatives, such as BAGs, are more likely to be representative of local business concerns than sector groups or formal trade associations – bodies that have a defined membership or lobby to promote across a wide geographical area. The interest of BAGs in business crime, though, is variable and priorities can shift with little or no warning. But there is at least a degree of consistency in these groups' membership and a reasonably reliable route to key contacts for outside bodies.

Whilst Chambers of Commerce are acknowledged to have the weight and resources needed to make a difference, we were told their interest in business crime is unreliable. A number of respondents reinforced this more widely held view. One said:

“Chamber people come and go on these committees – it all depends on who the individual is and how interested they are personally. I can't remember the name of the last Chamber rep we had. They were pretty good, actually, but when they left the Chamber no one replaced them and we haven't heard from them since.”

In defence of the Chambers, we suspect (and interviews in the next section confirm) that the same could be said of many other business intermediary bodies. Their professional staff (and/or volunteers) are already stretched. In addition, many of their members are not convinced that official crime reduction structures as they stand are either very responsive or particularly effective. In other words, the business community remains to be convinced that their involvement in official crime reduction initiatives is going to be worth their while unless the focus on business is prioritised and resourced. However, for as long as public funding for such initiatives is in short supply, and with no signs yet that the Home Office or Police will be adopting explicit business crime reduction targets, incentives for business to get involved are likely to be thin on the ground.

Despite all this, we were told that the real problem is not so much the politics of business bodies, the lack of resources or unclear policy commitments. Rather, it is an in-built mismatch between what business organisations are required to respond to on behalf of their members (a multiplicity of issues which may or may not include business crime) and the sorts of things that CDRPs are tasked with considering. CDRPs only talk about crime and disorder, and business crime is just one item on a very long agenda.

The Warwickshire model, nonetheless, has been very successful in keeping business crime in the headlines and in mobilising business support for specific anti-crime activities at the local level. In essence, it plays the role of service provider and information conduit within its CDRPs rather than 'the voice of business'. In this sense, Warwickshire BBC acts almost as a delivery arm of the CDRPs, not as a representative of business.

2.2 Coventry

The Coventry Police role in relation to the CSP is very different. Theirs is a partnership and liaison role, requiring regular communications and information exchange with key agencies, several of which are now 'nested' under the LSP (the Coventry Partnership). In common with most other large forces, West Midlands Police have not adopted any business crime targets, as such. Although they clearly acknowledge its importance, their input on business crime is entirely shaped and overshadowed by current KPIs and funding, neither of which make business crime a priority. Similarly, the Coventry CSP do not single out business crime as a particular priority. They, too, are responding to the priorities set by PSA1 targets and BCS comparators.

Lack of funding is a particular frustration for local Police. They had been enthusiastic partners in a recent bid to fund a dedicated business crime initiative within the local Regeneration Zone. This had targeted businesses in specific locations with a range of crime prevention measures and deterrents. The prospect of funding from AWM to support these measures had also encouraged strong local interest from business. But the bid had been rejected (because of a squeeze on revenue funding at the RDA) and business interest quickly evaporated.

This very disappointing experience, we were told, was a particularly good illustration of the essentially short-term interest that business has in the issue and of the conditional support the Police are able to offer where the funding is either time-limited or simply not forthcoming. The Police can maintain a profile on business crime (as in Warwickshire) only if the resources can be committed and sustained. Whilst Police leadership and commitment are necessary, these are not sufficient conditions to keep *businesses* involved. They, too, need an incentive. Businesses need initial help with the investment required to keep crime out, and they need to see some fairly quick results on the back of that investment.

Leadership on the issue from within the business community itself is seen as critical. The local Chamber has a fine track-record in terms of higher level strategic engagement with key partners. But business crime needs a champion on the ground as well if it is to become a serious local priority:

“... someone whose job it is to get out on the road, sending them stuff and talking to businesses face-to-face.”

This touches on what is seen as the crux of the problem. Experience shows that what really works is having someone whose 'day job' is:

“... to go the distance with business. Their time is more precious than yours. If you accept that, you'll do more of the running than them, the leg-work and the running around, meeting them as and when and where suits them.”

The other key is sustainability. Too many initiatives have got started and then run out of money. A number of recent examples – one involving Coventry post offices – show how quickly good intentions without sustained, longer-term resourcing can simply run out of steam. If businesses are 'once bitten' they tend to become 'twice shy' – less likely to be motivated to join new initiatives if they have seen others before them fail:

“You’ve got to stay with it. You can’t dip in and out. You’ve got to know the people, the context, the funding, the strategies and priorities and stick with it. It’s got to be a full-time job.”

The Coventry Police view, in sum, is that securing and maintaining active business support for business crime initiatives and structures is a long-haul commitment requiring dedicated resources. And the people leading it need to understand and work around the essentially short attention span of most businesses in relation to this issue.

3 CDRP approaches to business crime in Coventry and Warwickshire

A combination of face-to-face and telephone interviews were held with CDRP officers in most of the local authority districts covering the Coventry and Warwickshire sub-region. Interviews explored the following main topic areas:

- Make-up and structure of the CDRP/CSP – organisation (e.g. specific task groups) and communications with members/interested parties.
- Priorities and targets for the CDRP/CSP and where business crime (however defined) features in these priorities.
- Nature and adequacy of existing links with local business.
- Assessment of the barriers preventing local businesses from becoming more active in the CDRP/CSP.
- Ideas about how business representation and communications might be improved at the local level in future.

3.1 Warwickshire CDRPs

County-based CDRPs are distinguished from almost all their West Midlands counterparts by an explicit and shared commitment to tackling business crime as a priority. The latest strategies published by Warwickshire CDRPs bear this out. All five district level CDRPs have identified business crime as a priority and all have set themselves specific targets for BC reduction over the next three years. Most are aiming to cut BC overall by at least 15%, and one has added a target of cutting commercial burglary by 18%.

This unusually high BC profile amongst local CDRPs is almost certainly attributable to the influence and leadership exercised by Warwickshire Police via its Beating Business Crime initiative. The BBC team have established a successful track record of sustained commitment to the BC issue over a number of years. As a dedicated resource and direct service to business, they have proved the value and effectiveness of specific interventions. The result is a generally high level of confidence and trust amongst CDRPs in the capacity of the BBC team to achieve real impact on BC patterns (which show a fairly consistent downward trend on most indicators). Added to this evidence of success is other data from local audits that show business crime to be a major concern for many local people and firms. BC is therefore seen both as a real problem (evidence-based) *and* as something that someone is doing something about (again, evidence-based).

CDRPs vary in the way they are structured to address BC as a priority. Most have sub-groups with responsibility for overseeing progress on the achievement of specific targets, including business crime. But all seem to rely on input from the Police (often one of the BBC team or their manager) rather than direct business representation to maintain the CDRP's scrutiny on BC issues and activities. All make a significant (and growing) financial contribution to keeping the BBC initiative going each year and see this as their principal means of addressing the BC priority in their area.

When questioned about their view of the sorts of barriers that might be getting in the way of more active business engagement in the CDRP's BC work, the story that

emerges appears to be increasingly familiar. Businesses, we were told, face a number of barriers in various combinations, including:

- BC is a (surprisingly) low priority for some key local businesses, such as large chains, combined with what one commentator described as “*a rather a fickle attitude*” to BC amongst the general run of local businesses.
- Lack of time.
- Perceived costs.
- Lack of incentive to get or stay involved (e.g. low or no funding for dedicated BC activities that are seen to relate to very localised/doorstep business concerns).
- Fear of being overwhelmed and de-motivated by crowded CDRP agendas and bureaucracy.
- Problems identifying the right people at the right level in local businesses that can speak for a wider constituency.
- Lack of CDRP resources to get out on the doorstep and raise the profile with individual businesses.

These barriers seem to boil down to four main obstacles:

- **Cultural** – the attitudes of business (especially very small firms, making up the overwhelming majority of all local firms) are thought to be conditioned by very short-term, highly cost-conscious considerations. Long term planning which requires any additional investment (of time or money) is likely to be anathema.
- **Procedural** – added to this is an apparent worry about irrelevant and time-wasting bureaucracy.
- **Financial** – the lack of funding to address BC concerns in very direct ways also acts as a disincentive.
- **Political** – finally, there are said to be problems establishing trusted leadership and representation from amongst the numerous business intermediary bodies that populate most CDRP areas.

Direct communications with business by the CDRPs are said to be either fairly poor, under review or being developed. None of the Partnerships produces a regular newsletter or other written communications with a business audience specifically in mind. One (Warwick District) is supporting the creation of a series of Community Safety Action Groups which it is hoped will appeal to businesses in the area as well as involving residents, the Police and other key interest groups.

Perhaps the exception to this rather low-key approach to business engagement across Warwickshire is the Rugby CDRP. Rugby’s Business Improvement District (BID) project director chairs a tactical business crime theme group, which has a strong focus on stimulating business interest in crime issues within the town centre in particular. The BID initiative is closely related to business crime because of the priority it attaches to security issues. The process of winning funding and support for the BID has involved extensive consultations and publicity with local firms, around 700 of whom have been contacted to date. This means that local awareness of the BID offer and related security issues is probably unusually high at the moment, as the BID team prepares to launch the full initiative in January 2006. However, it is again apparent in this case that business interest is *conditional* – on there being

some early wins, on seeing visible results, and on a wider agenda of business concerns being addressed through the BID process than business crime alone.

Feedback from the Warwickshire CDRPs confirms a general picture emerging across the County of:

- a clear commitment to the business crime agenda in the form of explicit BC priorities with targets attached;
- a desire to improve business communications and a widespread willingness to involve businesses more directly in CDRP activities;
- a realisation that effective business involvement is difficult to achieve for all the reasons spelled out earlier;
- a heavy reliance on the lead and services being given by the Police through the Beating Business Crime initiative.

3.2 Coventry

The focus of Coventry's Community Safety Partnership (CSP) is less directly on business crime than on combating the volume crimes committed by prolific offenders, many of which are aimed *at* business or where businesses pay the price, such as shoplifting. Prolific offenders are also likely to be targeted for other, related, reasons, such as illegal drug use and other substance abuse. Businesses get caught in the middle of a vicious cycle between one offending habit that has to be fed by committing another. Although business crime is not singled out as a priority, the Coventry strategy is designed to impact on business crime incidents by rooting out the perpetrators. Business crime is therefore seen as a wider community safety and community health issue

Local audits and other research have revealed business concerns in Coventry about 'low level' crime, such as vandalism, and the reluctance of firms to report such incidents to the Police. There is clearly under-reporting of crimes that impact on businesses across the city and there is a popular (mis)conception that 'business crime' is somehow victimless. But even where reliable statistics are/could be made available, there are no incentives (PSA1 targets, KPIs or funding) for the CSP to prioritise BC or to set specific reduction targets: *"We can't devote our time to things that aren't funded or prioritised"*.

Nevertheless, CSP officers would like to see business crime being treated differently and with a higher profile in key arenas, especially at LSP level (the Coventry Partnership). Business crime needs to be seen as a cross-cutting theme in the context of a range of other LSP theme groups' work, such as Employment and Transport, or where small firms play a key role in isolated or deprived communities. But CSP staff resources are limited and it would be very difficult for them to make an input on business crime to every relevant theme group.

Business engagement, although always welcome, is again seen as problematic, and for all the same reasons as those outlined earlier. It is clear that no one has a definitive answer and that the onus, ultimately, rests with the business community itself to act. Local doors are open, but too few businesses are motivated enough to walk through them. In Coventry, higher level engagement via the LSP has been very positive, with the Chamber's Chief Executive most recently chairing the Partnership board. Whilst this sort of engagement gives real strength and authority to the business voice at that level, it is not reflected closer to the coal face, where the specifics of business crime are discussed and new ideas are actually progressed. And it is precisely here that business involvement would be valued most:

“We will have to rely on a bottom-up groundswell from businesses out in the communities affected by crime, not on top-down incentives, to get things done.”

Our view, as we shall see in the concluding section of this report, is that top-down incentives (also referred to as leadership and resources) have to be combined with bottom-up pressure from business if we are ‘to get things done’. A single channel approach will fail. And as interviews with business intermediaries in the following section will reveal, we need to find a way of aligning official CDRP-type interventions and structures with those that businesses themselves are actually prepared to use. This is the real challenge for the communications strategy overall.

4 The local business perspective

As part of the pilot study, we contacted business intermediary organisations with branches and/or members in the Coventry and Warwickshire area to seek their views on business crime and the best ways to involve business in CDRP or related initiatives. Searches through websites, local directories and newspapers revealed more than 30 such organisations in this area alone. These included local branches of the much larger Coventry and Warwickshire Chamber of Commerce, the FSB, NFU branches, the regional Engineering Employers' Federation, retail associations, a scattering of business parks and industrial estates, and a number of very small street trade associations. Together, this multiplicity of business voices speaks for most of the business sectors, sizes and locations that make up the sub-regional business community and economy – manufacturers, business and financial services, retailers and farmers, small and large companies, rural and urban locations.

After some considerable effort to track down contact details, especially for the many very small organisations identified, we eventually managed to interview representatives from 18 separate bodies or branches, as listed in the table below. The table also shows where they are based and the number of member businesses represented within the Coventry and Warwickshire area.

Table 4-1 Business intermediaries contacted by location and membership

Business intermediary organisation	Where based	No. members in Coventry/Warks
Bayton Road Group Ltd	Exhall, Warwickshire	200
Coleshill Business Action Group	Coleshill, Warwickshire	30
Country Land and Business Association	Staffordshire (Regional Office)	739
Earlsdon St Traders	Coventry	35
Engineering Employers Federation	Birmingham (interviewed a Coventry member)	107
Far Gosford St Traders Association	Coventry	3
Federation of Small Businesses	Regional office covering Coventry and Warwickshire	3,000
Kenilworth Chamber of Trade	Kenilworth, Warwickshire	155
Market Traders Association	Coventry	170
National Federation Retail Newsagents (Coventry Branch)	Coventry	200
NDC Business Network	Coventry	75
NFU (Coventry Branch)	Coventry	160
NFU (Henley in Arden Branch)	Henley in Arden, Warwickshire	110
NFU (Shipston Branch)	Shipston on Stour	100
NFU (Stoneleigh Branch)	Stoneleigh	250
NFU (Stratford Branch)	Stratford upon Avon, Warwickshire	200
Tachbrook Park Business Group	Leamington Spa, Warwickshire	30
Westwood Business Park Action Group	Coventry	100
Total no. of business members		5,664

It can be seen that the range of business intermediaries interviewed is broadly representative of the sorts of sectors, sizes and locations of business activity that make up the local economy, although there is a much stronger rural/agricultural presence in this sample than would be found in the general population of local employers and industries. Nevertheless, over 5,600 Coventry and Warwickshire businesses are represented by these bodies, accounting for about 20% of all firms operating in the sub-region. We can also see that the geographical spread of these organisations is reasonably balanced, with seven based in Coventry, eight elsewhere in Warwickshire and three covering the whole sub-region.

On this basis, we are confident that the views expressed here are likely to represent the variety of business voices that will be heard across Coventry and Warwickshire at the moment.

4.1 Main findings

Telephone interviews explored a range of issues with respondents, with particular emphasis on:

- Their awareness and understanding of CDRP activities and engagement with local businesses.
- The relative importance of business crime for their members.
- Their involvement in and support for business crime initiatives.
- Views on the extent to which business crime is treated as a local priority.
- Their own or members' likely interest in getting more involved in business crime initiatives.

4.1.1 Awareness and understanding of CDRPs

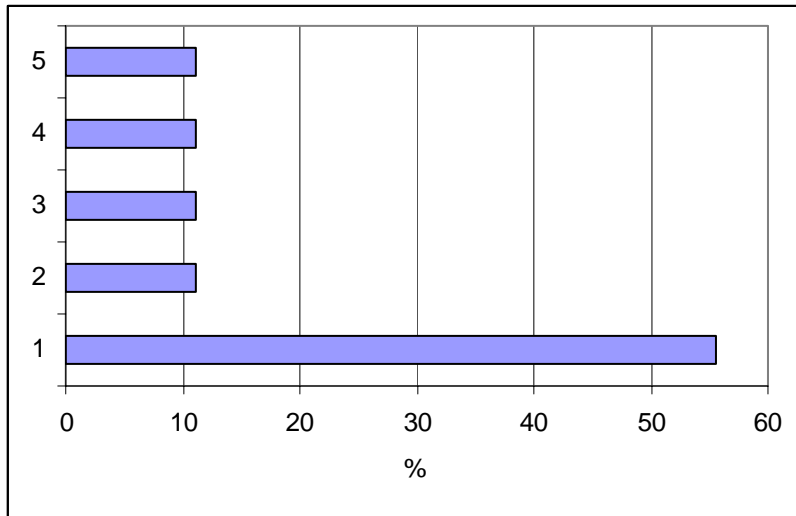
Only half those questioned had heard of CDRPs and most of these were linked to business groupings in particular locations, such as industrial estates and business parks. Those who were less likely to be aware of CDRPs included broadly based sector bodies representing retail newsagents, for example, and farming interests.

It is worth noting, that CDRPs in areas that contribute to Warwickshire's Beating Business Crime initiative appear to be better known than elsewhere. Nevertheless, awareness of CDRPs is at its highest in specific *locations*, especially where conscious collective efforts have been made recently to address business crime issues. We shall see later that these location and 'recency' effects are quite significant in shaping businesses perceptions of the scale of business crime and of the effectiveness of measures taken to combat it locally.

Those who *are* aware of the CDRP do not, however, rate their own understanding of partnership activities very highly. The figure below shows that around two-thirds of those who said they had at least heard of CDRPs ranked their actual understanding of them as either non-existent or very poor (scoring 4 or 5 on a five point scale, where 1 = 'no understanding' and 5 = 'very full understanding').

Moreover, only two respondents knew of any local representatives who sat on a CDRP committee or action group, and these were themselves! Added to this, no one could say for certain that they had ever received mailings, newsletters or any other communications from their local CDRP.

Figure 4-1 Understanding of CDRP activities (rated 1 to 5)

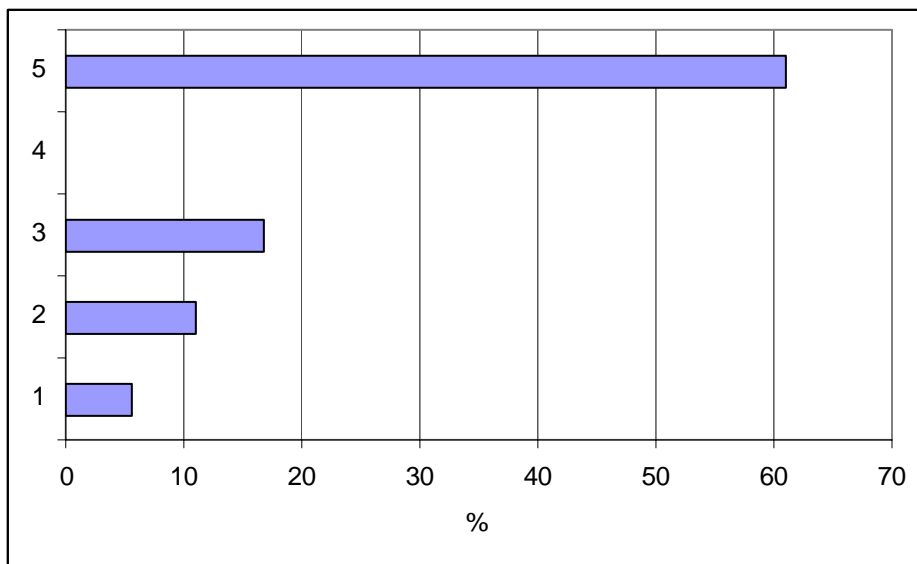


It seems, therefore, that business awareness and understanding of CDRP and related activity is either low overall or very patchy. This is the case even within Warwickshire, where business crime is high on most CDRPs' agendas and the Beating Business Crime initiative has achieved a relatively high profile.

4.1.2 The business crime issue

More than 60% of those questioned said they thought business crime was a major issue for their members, on a day-to-day basis, all year round. Another 17% said it was a moderate concern and a similar proportion thought that members were not particularly worried by it, as the figure below shows (where 5 = 'a major concern all year round').

Figure 4-2 How big an issue (rated 1 to 5)



One respondent from a local Chamber of Trade, made it clear that business crime had a distinct sectoral profile, affecting their retail members, for example, much more than others.

Seasonal crime waves impact on a wide range of businesses – retail and manufacturing – depending on the presence of certain sorts of perpetrators who are said to come and go at different times of the year:

“It's much worse than the official figures suggest. The peaks are in the school holidays and at Christmas – for example, we had four episodes of vandalism last week (half term) and none for weeks before. It's also worse if there are gypsies there.”

Another argued that the scale of business crime is higher than reported because of members' worries about the readiness of the Police to respond and the cost implications:

“Petty crime is a massive issue all year round. Members report a lot of petty crime to us – but they don't always tell the Police because members don't think it's important enough. It takes time out of their business to deal with it and drives insurance costs up.”

We have seen that CDRPs achieve a rather low level of awareness amongst business intermediaries. Nevertheless, the fact that business crime is seen as a major issue has prompted a large proportion (over 72%) to get involved in local business action groups or initiatives which signal business crime as a priority. These include five organisations that are involved in 'Watch' schemes of some sort, another three whose internal committees discuss business crime on a regular basis, and others who have been working either directly with a local Police contact or have adopted their own preventative measures, such as CCTV.

Added to this, more than half those questioned (10) said their organisations actually produced special literature or guidance on business crime for members. Six produced material at head office level, while the rest used either local newsletters or updates from the Police attached to minutes of meetings.

All this suggests that the *institutional* map of business engagement in 'official' business crime initiatives is misleading. Left to their own devices, business intermediaries are, it seems, actively responding to the concerns of their members about crime, but in less visible ways, perhaps. Quite how to align Home Office sponsored efforts more closely with those of a more informal, ad hoc and 'self-help' nature clearly needs further thought.

4.1.3 Raising the profile, getting more involved

The figure below suggests that opinion amongst business intermediaries is either divided or unclear as to whether business crime is being treated as a priority in their area. About 40% of those questioned believe it is receiving the right level of attention, but the rest are either unsure (28%) or doubtful (33%). This could be taken to mean that most business intermediaries in Coventry and Warwickshire remain to be convinced that their members' concerns about crime are being treated as a priority locally, especially by the Police.

The reasons behind these views are linked, for the most part, to people's perceptions of the responsiveness of local Police. They range from the very positive ...

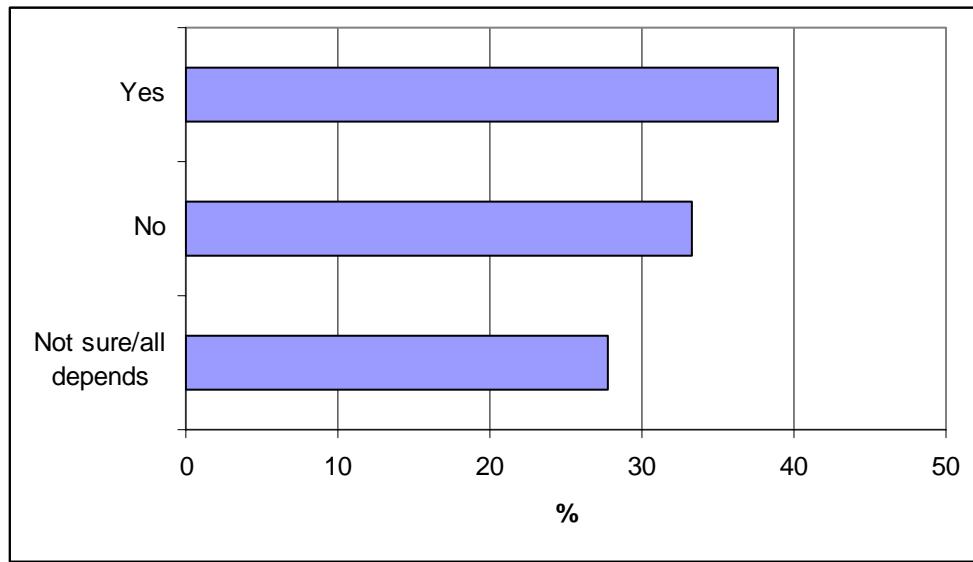
“We've got a great Beat Officer which makes all the difference.”

... to the frankly disillusioned:

“Police don’t get there quickly enough. People say they report vehicle thefts as they happen – they see the car being driven off in a certain direction, give the registration number – and the Police show up days later.”

The common denominator here is the extent to which the Police are seen to have a good *local* presence, profile and knowledge. Where there is a visible presence ‘on the street’, business confidence in Police responsiveness and interest in the business crime issue tends to be much higher.

Figure 4-3 Is business crime treated as a priority locally?



The other main responses to the question about local priorities are shaped by respondents’ professional roles within their respective organisations and by their level of strategic knowledge and engagement. For example, two people commented that business crime would only receive priority attention when it featured as a key performance indicator for the Police. Both were paid staff employed by a business intermediary body, so it was part of their job to know about these issues.

When asked whether they thought their members would welcome more of a say in how business crime is tackled in their area, respondents again gave a mixed response. Only half said that they would welcome such a move, with another five not being sure and four saying they thought members would probably not want this. This latter group is made up of people who either believe they have dealt successfully with the level of business crime on their doorsteps or have given up hope of ever doing much to tackle it. And those who are unsure argue they cannot guarantee to make a contribution because they are too small or too busy.

We asked the organisations that expressed a positive interest in having more of a say to indicate what method of involvement/engagement would suit them best. There is a clear preference, overall, for face-to-face contact of some sort. People want direct links with the local bodies that are responsible for tackling business crime, many via regular formal meetings with the Police. One said:

“I would think monthly meetings on a fairly formal basis, with minutes and Action Points so something gets done and people are accountable.”

The key to securing greater business engagement seems to be to focus on practical action, especially at the local level, with Police visibly involved in and committed to doing something that will have an impact.

Despite some apparent reluctance to commit their organisations to getting more closely involved, most of the individuals interviewed said that they personally, or a member, might be persuaded to represent local businesses in a business crime reduction forum of some sort. Two organisations had said earlier in the interview that it would not matter to them which local body represented 'the business voice' in these forums. But whoever they were would have to communicate with everyone and take care to represent all interests, including "*the rural voice*". Our impression overall is that there is a general willingness to put time and effort into the task, *in principle*, but that ongoing involvement would be conditional on getting some quick wins and palpable results.

4.2 Conclusions

The selection of quotes reproduced below illustrates the core issues that business organisations want to have tackled, as well as some of the in-built 'cultural' barriers that exist to greater business engagement:

"Businesses are mostly only interested in what happens on their own doorstep – not elsewhere in the area. They want action – not another strategy."

"Members feel that the agricultural community has been abandoned. They are fed up with continual vandalism/trespass, etc. They feel they have to exaggerate to get a reaction from the Police."

"Members are angry about crime but resigned to it."

This sense of smouldering resignation, coupled with a somewhat parochial interest in immediate 'doorstep' action to tackle crime, presents a significant challenge to the wider network of business crime activists across the region. The challenge will be to harness the anger, channel the energy that is already going into business crime reduction on a very localised scale and convert it into a positive lobby for change in official targets and performance measurements for the Police.

4.2.1 Main issues emerging

- Location and 'recency' effects are quite significant in shaping businesses perceptions of the scale of business crime and of the effectiveness of measures taken to combat it locally. The more geographically focused the business crime initiative (and experience), the more likely BC is to be a high priority on business action agendas.
- Business awareness and understanding of CDRP and related activity is either low overall or very patchy. This is the case even within Warwickshire, where business crime is high on most CDRPs' agendas and the Beating Business Crime initiative has achieved a relatively high profile.
- The *institutional* map of business engagement in 'official' business crime initiatives, however, is misleading. Left to their own devices, business intermediaries are actively responding to the concerns of their members about crime, but in less visible ways, perhaps. There is therefore a need to align Home

Office sponsored efforts more closely with business responses which are essentially informal, ad hoc and 'self-help' in nature.

- The key to securing greater business engagement seems to be to focus on practical action, especially at the local level, with the Police visibly involved in and committed to doing something that will have an impact.
- Our impression overall is that there is a general willingness to put time and effort into the task, *in principle*, but that ongoing involvement would be conditional on getting some quick wins or at least palpable results.
- There is an underlying mood of smouldering resignation in relation to business crime amongst local businesses in Coventry and Warwickshire. Coupled with a somewhat parochial interest in immediate 'doorstep' action to tackle crime, this presents a significant challenge to the wider network of business crime activists across the region. The challenge will be to harness the anger, to channel the energy that is already going into business crime reduction on a very localised basis and convert it into a positive lobby for change in official targets and performance measurements for the Police and CDRPs.

5 A business crime communications strategy for the West Midlands

Our concluding section draws all of our fieldwork findings together into a communications strategy that is designed to harness the latent business energy we noted earlier. The strategy builds on the critical success factors that seem to be driving the business crime 'dynamic' in areas where BC has achieved priority status on CDRP agendas.

The strategy is formulated around two main prongs:

- The first focuses on the **leadership, incentive and drive for change** that can only be provided **from the top down** (the pull factor) – such as by the Police working in close liaison with business crime partnerships, most notably through the Regional Business Crime Forum and local CDRPs.
- The second prong centres on **securing greater ownership** of the business crime agenda that can only come **from the bottom up** (the push factor) – from businesses themselves deciding to seize opportunities to tackle business crime by identifying the alliances and resources they need to make real progress on the ground, including by forging new links with their local CDRPs.

In what follows, we spell out what actions each of these prongs requires to move them forward.

5.1 The strategic role of the Regional Business Crime Forum

The evidence gathered for this research strongly suggests that there are a number of critical factors that make the difference between successful action on business crime and effective engagement with the business community, on the one hand, and failure on the other. These critical success factors include:

- **Accessing and disseminating the evidence:**
 - first, evidence of the extent and nature of business crime in the West Midlands: establishing, updating and disseminating 'best practice' benchmarks for data definition and collation in order to demonstrate the true scale and reach of business crime (defined as any crime committed on or against business premises) across the region;
 - secondly, evidence of the business costs and local economic/community impacts associated with business crime: establishing, updating and disseminating examples of economic impact analyses.

These are strategic tasks that imply an explicit **research and communications role** for the Regional Forum.

- **Providing leadership and support:**
 - to CDRPs and business intermediary bodies: in the form of capacity building information, advice and support, helping to raise awareness and understanding of business crime issues, new BC initiatives, resources, 'toolkits' and examples of good practice;

- to businesses: for example, in the form of training packages, such as the learning materials currently being piloted for use in workforce training on security and related issues; set-piece presentations; resource and information packs, etc.

This is a key continuing role for the Forum which will require **ongoing funding** from regional bodies, perhaps via a funding partnership between the public and private sectors. At some point, business must be asked to contribute.

- **Lobbying for change:**

- aimed at the Home Office, primarily, in order to establish business crime reduction as a PSA target, National Policing Plan priority and KPI. Work could also be undertaken centrally to link business crime with the broader agendas of other Government departments, such as DEFRA, DTI, ODPM, etc;

- directed at key regional, sub-regional and local decision makers and influencers in elected and other responsible authorities;

- designed to inform and persuade business intermediary bodies as well, again at regional, sub-regional and local levels.

Such a campaign would draw heavily on the impact evidence, and the experience of frustrated good practice, being accumulated by Forum members. It would have to be steered and monitored **as a priority Forum action** over the coming year.

These three areas of activity are essentially a distillation of what the Forum has been doing already during its short life. The formal adoption of these strategic tasks, though, would require an explicit campaign action plan spelling out a clear set of objectives, milestones and measures. And this plan would provide a major platform for the other main strand or prong of the communications strategy we are proposing here – the promotion of a local business communications and engagement model.

5.2 A local business communications and engagement model

All of our discussions with intermediary bodies in the pilot study area and elsewhere suggest that business interest in business crime is difficult to pin down and sustain. It seems to be easier to engage with business on this agenda where there is a specific local/geographical focus and where the Police are resourced to provide a dedicated response and support service. Something like this is working well in Warwickshire. Even here, though, the business engagement model operates at arm's length, with liaison between front-line business activity and the CDRPs, for example, mediated through and largely managed by the Police, not business representatives themselves.

Yet we have also learned from our survey that the multiplicity of voices that speak for business across the pilot area *do* see business crime as an important issue, *are* involved in propagating messages back to members about the impact and value of active crime prevention, and *are* willing to field candidates to represent the business community in key local policy arenas, such as the CDRPs. If the main challenge is to plug business into the heart of CDRP policy making and influence, the question is:

how do we bring the two 'sides' together – the official channels with the more ad hoc business response?

Below we sketch out a model of communications and business engagement that could be promoted more widely across the West Midlands. This draws both on discussions we have held about what might work with the Regional Business Crime Forum and recent experience in Birmingham. In Birmingham, the Chamber has taken a leading role in setting up a business crime task group. This will be made up of a range of business intermediary bodies and will report to/be seen as part of the local CDRP. Their aim, ultimately, will be to shape CDRP policy, planning and resource allocation, as well as monitoring progress on specific targets.

This model could only be rolled out (or at least tested in a series of pilots) if the following assumptions hold true:

1. That CDRPs across the region would welcome more direct input from local businesses, as our research in the pilot area suggests they would.
2. That business intermediary organisations are serious about getting involved, as they say they are in the pilot area.
3. That most business bodies could field volunteers to take the lead locally, again based on what we have been hearing in Coventry and Warwickshire.

At the heart of the model is a decision by local level business intermediaries to take ownership of the business crime agenda and to drive this through their CDRP. Reporting links between local and regional levels of each business organisation and agreements on how each task group manages its business would be down to negotiations between the principal parties. This model does not (and cannot) dictate local protocols. Nor can it anticipate precisely how business led task groups would communicate with/be represented on the Regional Forum. That, again, would be a matter for agreement between regional bodies and their local branches, where they exist.

The core feature of the model is the commitment of local business to take the lead on 'their bit' of the CDRP agenda, supported by the Regional BC Forum in its role as provider of evidence, advice and support (as outlined earlier). This will require the Forum to take the lead for the time being, seeing this as an investment in capacity building on the ground.

The Forum might decide to trial the promotion of this model in 'pilot' CDRP areas – areas which are not yet on the starting block as far as making business crime a priority is concerned. The Forum might select a small number of target areas where there is a business presence and interest in the idea but not much progress on profiling business crime as a local priority. An alternative would be to take the opposite tack and concentrate only on those CDRP areas where there is an established BC priority.

Whichever path is chosen, and assuming Forum members support our proposed way forward, the Forum will need to set out some evaluation 'markers' to help it measure progress towards its ultimate goal – which is to secure active business ownership of the business crime agenda within local crime reduction partnerships by 2007, when CDRPs will carry out their triennial audit and consultation in preparation for their 2008/2011 Community Safety strategies.

Figure 5-1 The business communications and engagement model

