

Housing & Crime

Safe as houses

INTRODUCTION

Crime is something that concerns all of us. It affects our quality of life, our communities and our own personal behaviour. Crime is high on the list of neighbourhood dissatisfaction, and a recent report for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation stated that over one fifth of householders perceived crime to be a major problem in their area.

INITIATIVES UNDERTAKEN INCLUDE

partnerships with the police, local authorities and others in developing local crime strategies, local statements and shared policies

making houses and estates be safer and feel safer - by improved design, lighting, surveillance

working with tenants on direct initiatives to tackle crime, including audits, preventative strategies, providing facilities, training

participating in the Social Landlords Crime & Nuisance Group, sharing experience, keeping up to date on good practice, training and lobbying for change

supporting community groups and other community activity

developing mutual aid and respect, whether through good neighbour projects, a direct "mutual aid compact" in allocations or changes in lettings policies

including crime initiatives in regeneration programmes

making partnerships with schools and youth service help to engender a sense of belonging with the community, improve self-esteem and confidence of young people

It seems obvious to say that where you live is going to affect your experience of crime. And for tenants of social landlords crime, and especially the fear of crime, can be a major issue. It is reported that up to two thirds of residents on inner city housing estates are worried about burglary or car crime. Surveys undertaken by registered social landlords have indicated that their residents are concerned about racial tension and physical attacks, graffiti and vandalism, car crime and burglary and intimidation by gangs of young people.

The effects of crime are not only felt by individuals, but also by whole areas and communities. Tenants of social landlords often suffer from high levels of stress as a result of crime and anti-social behaviour in the area in which they live. Research by the Housing Corporation has shown that crime and insecurity can make housing in certain areas difficult to let, it makes community participation difficult, it affects people's perceptions of communities and can lead to the rapid deterioration of areas.

There are a number of legal remedies available to deal with anti-social behaviour, including the Housing Act 1996, the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. Whilst there are no direct powers to independent social landlords, their role in working with the statutory authorities on crime reduction strategies is a vital one.

Indeed, many independent social landlords are working together and in partnership with other organisations to reduce crime. Partners include the police, local authorities and other organisations as well as involving tenants and residents in local areas. When tenants are involved in providing solutions for the communities in which they live, not only does this lead to an effective solution, it also helps reduce their own fear of crime.

This factsheet looks at some facts about crime, what needs to be done to overcome it, and some of the ways independent social landlords are fighting crime both with and on behalf of their tenants.



National
Housing
Federation

Facts about housing and crime

The following statistics are from the 1998 British Crime Survey. Vulnerability to crime varies for different communities and individuals. The BCS refers to "council estates" but this includes both council and housing association housing.

CRIME - WHO IS MOST AT RISK

Residents of inner city areas and those on council (or housing association) estates run the highest risk of burglary.

Household victims of burglary, by locality, 1997

| AREA TYPE | % VICTIMS ONCE OR MORE |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| INNER CITY | 8.5% |
| URBAN | 5.9% |
| RURAL | 3.4% |
| COUNCIL ESTATE AREA | 8.1% |
| NON-COUNCIL AREA | 5.1% |

However, different tenure types are affected differently. You are twice as likely to be a victim of burglary if you rent from a council or housing association than if you own your home.

- **4.9% for owner-occupied households**
- **9.9% for those renting from council/housing association.**

However, tenants of privately rented accommodation also suffer a high risk of crime.

| TENURE | % VICTIMS ONCE OR MORE |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| OWNER OCCUPIERS | 4.2% |
| SOCIAL RENTERS | 8.0% |
| PRIVATE RENTERS | 9.7% |

Recent studies have shown that 4% of victims suffer 40% of crimes and that 1500 neighbourhoods are the focus of up to 75% of crimes.

The following pages look at the variety of ways independent social landlords are helping to tackle crime and the fear of crime.

FEAR OF CRIME

The 1998 British Crime Survey looked at concern about crime as well as actual crime. It defined concern as people's beliefs about trends in crime and their perceptions of the risks as well as worries about specific offences or feeling unsafe.

For many people, the fear of crime can have as dramatic an effect on their life as actual crime. Their fear of becoming a victim can lead to changes in lifestyle and even illness. Tackling the fear is, for many people, as important as tackling the actual crime.

Whilst it recognised how difficult it is to measure anxiety affecting people's well-being, the Crime Survey showed:

- **most concern and fear was expressed by people who live in the higher risk inner cities, and those who had been victims;**
- **43% of those interviewed said the fear of crime had a moderate effect on the quality of their lives, whilst 8% reported a substantial effect.**

One of the effects of fear of crime is that people can overestimate the reality of the problem.

- **only 9% of people knew recorded crime had fallen between 1995 and 1997**
- **58% believed that violent crimes accounted for half or more of the total although it is actually one fifth.**

The following table shows more of a breakdown of those who say fear of crime substantially affects their quality of life.

Whilst 8% of all respondents said it had a great effect, specific groups experience a higher level of effects.

| | % GREATLY AFFECTED |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|
| WOMEN | 10% |
| OLDER PEOPLE (60+) | 10% |
| SINGLE PARENTS | 14% |
| LOW INCOME H'OLDS (LESS THAN £5,000) | 16% |
| DISABLED PEOPLE | 15% |
| ALL | 8% |

crime- busting caretaker

Crime-busting caretaker

The Drayton Bridge Road estate in West London has a high child density, one third of households headed by lone parents, and 10% of households with physical or mental health difficulties. Residents had a high level of fear of crime and its reputation was so poor people refused to live there.

In March 1997 Notting Hill Housing Trust (NHHT) employed a Community Development Worker. He surveyed residents to identify the problems and worked with residents and local partner agencies in proposing solutions.

PROJECT

Along with a youth worker appointed by the YMCA, NHHT employed a community caretaker. The caretaker's job description is based on the 'Caretaking Plus' model researched and piloted through the Priority Estates Project.

NHHT have also been working in partnership with the local police. The police attend steering group meetings, report on crime and advise on community safety initiatives. The police have also ensured a regular presence on the estate.

Other projects on the estate include:

- **decoration by teenagers of the youth club and community centre, co-ordinated with a local artist living on the estate**
- **developing a sports pitch for young people**

RESULTS

The crime rate on the estate is now almost zero. The older children have become more respectful towards their environment and homes, and feel more pride in their estate. NHHT recognise that bringing back caretakers onto estates is key to tackling crime and youth problems.

Joe Bond, the Community Caretaker says,

"Because I am around and open with them, I have become a friend to the kids. I have got their confidence and I like them. I can have a quiet word. And I try to give them pride in their homes, telling them about my own youth and how we kept our place clean at the time."

Regenerating away crime

Three housing associations - Brunel, Hanover and Habinteg - are including mechanisms to combat crime as part of their regeneration in the Royds area of Bradford. Working with the local authority resulted in over £100 million of funding for the ten year programme, including £31 million awarded from the single regeneration budget.

In addition to improving homes and providing employment, the Royds Community Association, the scheme's management board, is also determined to cut crime. The annual burglary rate in the area is more than double the rate of West Yorkshire Police district as a whole.

PROJECT

The housing associations and the management board worked closely with the police over the design of refurbished and new houses.

1800 local authority houses are being brought up to *Secured by Design* standard including improvements to doors, windows, and fencing.

The housing associations demolished unpopular walk-up three and four storey flats. Drug pushers congregated in its communal stairwells and just demolishing them reduced crime. In their place 260 new properties are being built to the *Secured by Design* award standard.

Some land was released which the council transferred to the private sector on which 570 new homes for sale can be built.

RESULTS

On the completion of phase one of the project the West Yorkshire Police compared the crime rates for the year before with those the year after the refurbishment.

The results showed an 82% reduction in burglaries. Furthermore there had not been a single forcible entry on any of the houses.

Of the seven burglaries, three were sneak-ins where security had not been used, three were failed attempts where security had been effective and one was entry via an unsecured upstairs window.

In a report, PC Town the Community relations officer, wrote: *“In relation to that which could be influenced by crime prevention, the houses were 100% successful.”*



Legal remedies to tackle crime & disorder

The Housing Act 1996 provides for:

- **repossessions in cases of nuisance**
- **injunctions to prevent the breach of nuisance clauses in a tenancy agreement**
- **powers of arrest attached to injunctions**

legal remedies

The Protection of Harassment Act 1997 creates

- **two new arrestable offences of harassment and putting another in fear of violence and intimidation**
- **additional civil remedies including restraining orders.**

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act also introduces a range of new measures helpful in tackling crime and disorder in local communities:

- **statutory partnerships between local authorities and the police to deal with crime**
- **new measures and additional new powers for the police and local authorities**
- **major changes to the youth justice system**

For more details on the legal remedies, the Federation and the LGA have issued a joint briefing.

Combating car crime and vandalism

Kemsley is a semi-rural estate in the Kent countryside. In 1991, Swale Borough's housing stock was transferred to Swale Housing Association. Kemsley was recognised as needing attention. The semi-rural setting on large roads made it a popular place to race, abandon and burn stolen cars. Residents were intimidated by gangs of young people, there was vandalism, and harassment of residents if they reported petty crime.

PROJECT

In 1993, a residents' association was set up and Swale Housing Association acted as a focal point. There was an outcry from local people demanding action to tackle the anti-social behaviour, and changes made in the design of the estate to prevent it happening again.

A range of changes took place – empty and unsafe garages were demolished and replaced with bungalows; road layouts and lighting were improved; joy riders were thwarted simply by a wall being built; the alleyways that had been a haven for crime were permanently closed or gated with keys. All this was done in partnership with the local councils. Further action to develop community facilities to help prevent crime is being investigated.

Furthermore, Swale Housing Association began proceedings against two families against whom there were serious allegations of anti-social behaviour. To counteract the harassment of witnesses, Swale offered housing outside the estate, and security surveillance for those who wished to put their evidence on record. For the first time witnesses came forward in sufficient numbers to put together a strong case. The resulting court case was successful and the eviction was a strong message that the association would not tolerate violence or intimidation towards other residents.

RESULTS

For the first time since Swale took over management of Kemsley, there is a waiting list of people wanting to move there. From an area of crime, it is area where people want to live and it no longer features in the police list of targeted crime areas.

Stephen Howlett Chief Executive of Swale said *“Local people have made the difference. We have worked with other partners including the police. There is still a lot to be done, but people are working together and sticking with it and that's what makes the real difference.”*

Mutual aid to build communities

Crime is reduced in areas where people know and trust each other. To build on this idea, Manningham Housing Association in Bradford has been piloting a mutual aid Compact. The association has used a new lettings criteria and a commitment to the Compact to create a sustainable community and enhance good neighbourliness.

PROJECT

In July 1998 Manningham proposed a radical way of altering their housing allocation on a new housing development. The association sought tenants who were willing and able to contribute to the lives and activities of their neighbours and the community. Prospective tenants were assessed on housing need and by a questionnaire.

To stress the commitment to contributing to the community, tenants sign the Compact. They agree to identify what skills they can contribute, to help each other with practical tasks and to sustain the community. Manningham believes that the Mutual Aid Compact, whilst not enforceable in law, helps to strengthen people's commitment to one another and the local area.

RESULTS

Twenty four families were housed on the development. The residents come from a range of ethnic origins: Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Bosnian, white English, Afro-Caribbean and Afghan. The response from the residents has been very positive.

One resident said *“We signed the compact straight away – we grabbed our chance. It's been brilliant: we have just mixed in with everyone and everyone has been friendly.”*

Anil Singh the Director of Manningham said *“It is the first pilot of mutual aid in the country and there was scepticism about whether it would work, but there has been a phenomenal response to the idea. We have become obsessed with equality and in the process have ignored fraternity, and fraternity has been lost.”*

Taking this forward

• Independent social landlords

Independent social landlords are important partners in tackling crime and must be involved in developing community safety strategies. RSLs should actively seek to make relevant partnerships to achieve this and think about the ways their tenants can be involved.

• Good quality design

Good quality design in new housing development can reduce the incidence of crime. Regeneration developments offer an opportunity to make areas seem and feel safer. Furthermore, *Secured by Design* should be made a standard requirement.

The Federation suggests that where building regulations or statutory requirements conflict there should be a protocol and different level of *Secured by Design* certificate awarded. For example, in supported housing facilities where there may be a need for a speedy exit, this prevents the fitting of five-lever mortice deadlocks. A different level of award would encourage inclusion of *Secured by Design* enhancements which are relevant to the use of the property and its residents' needs.

• Tackling anti-social behaviour

RSLs do have more powers to tackle anti-social behaviour. However, shared criteria for anti-social behaviour needs to be developed in order to prevent abuse of those powers within a community.

• Recognising the role of housing

It should also be recognised that housing, especially where there is additional support, plays a vital role in the rehabilitation of ex-offenders. Local residents need to be aware of the opportunities and support available to ex-offenders and their own role. Tackling the prejudice and fear of a local community is important for an individual's rehabilitation.

• Tenant Involvement

Tenant involvement is key to tackling the fear of crime. When local people are involved in projects, they are aware of the support offered by organisations as well as one another. Anti-crime initiatives can be identified as opportunities for tenant participation in line with more general tenant involvement.

For further details on the Social Landlords Crime and Nuisance Group, contact Tim Winter, 3rd Floor, Spire House, New Union Street, Coventry CV1 2PW.

FURTHER READING

Reducing Neighbourhood Crime - a manual for action - Produced by Crime Concern for the Home Office and supported by Securicor (1998);

Safe as Houses - A community safety guide for Registered Social Landlords Produced by Crime Concern for the Housing Corporation 1998;

Turning the tide, crime, community and prevention - Jon Bright, DEMOS (1997);

National Housing Federation/LGA joint briefing on Crime and Disorder, available from the Federation.



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