

**DRAFT**

**LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON**

**REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM**

**A SCRUTINY REVIEW ON**

**FEAR OF CRIME**

**APRIL 2009**



## **FOREWORD BY REVIEW CHAIR**

Fear of crime can have a pernicious effect on all of us – if we allow it to take hold. When sensible precautions against crime turn into an unreasoning or exaggerated fear of crime, it blights people's lives and stops them from playing their full part in the life of the community.

It need not be so. Merton is the fourth safest borough in London. Safer Merton, the highly effective partnership between the council and the police, consults with residents to identify and prioritise the crimes that concern them most – anti-social behaviour, alcohol related disorder, burglary, domestic violence and youth crime. Figures for most categories of crime have fallen year on year. And yet fear of crime persists in spite of the evidence that levels of crime are falling. In the last Annual Residents Survey, fear of crime rose by 7% to 43% as the topmost concern of Merton residents. Although this is lower than the London-wide average, it is still high enough to suggest that many of our residents are adversely affected by fear of crime, which is preventing them from leading happy and fulfilled lives.

Perceptions determine beliefs and behaviour, and beliefs cannot be changed overnight. Recognising the disconnection between fear of crime and low/falling levels of actual crime is not the same as eliminating it. There is no silver bullet, but many of the recommendations in this review are designed to create town centres, neighbourhoods and public spaces which all members of the community can use and enjoy with confidence. Most of the measures needed are already in place, but we have not made residents aware of them, nor have we always used them effectively.

In recommending this review to the executive, the Commission acknowledges it will take time to implement the recommendations, and more time before they show results. That is why the effectiveness of the actions proposed will need to be monitored into the future, and why further initiatives may be necessary as fear of crime evolves.

Many people have contributed to this review and I would like to thank all those who gave evidence at one of our witness sessions, as well as officers from Safer Merton and the Safer Neighbourhood Teams whose professional advice was invaluable. But my particular thanks are reserved for two people; Borough Commander Chris Bourlet, whose enthusiasm for this review was instrumental in getting it off the ground and who has continued to offer support and advice; and Barbara Jarvis, who combined the role of interim scrutiny manager with assisting me as chair of the task group. Without Barbara's unwavering enthusiasm, this report would never have seen the light of day.

**Councillor Peter Southgate,  
Review Chair and Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

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**Councillor Sheila Knight**  
**Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender**  
**Councillor Richard Williams**  
**Councillor Simon Withey**

### **Acknowledgements:**

The Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review.

Particular thanks go to Merton Seniors Forum for offering one of its meetings to discuss fear of crime among older people, Merton College Student Council, Safer Merton, and Merton Police. Also, a special word of thanks is expressed to the Merton Borough Commander for encouraging and supporting this review.

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## CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>Chair's Foreword</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Executive Summary and Recommendations</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>2. The Procedure for Undertaking the Review</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>3. The National Picture</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>4. Local Evidence Gathering and Analysis</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>5. Evidence from Local Witnesses</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>6. Conclusions/Next Steps</b>	<b>34</b>
<hr/>	
<i><u>Background Reading</u></i>	<b>35</b>
<i><u>Appendices:-</u></i>	<b>36</b>
<i>A     Review scope including terms of reference</i>	

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Evidence from the 2008 Annual Residents Survey indicates that concern about crime in Merton has risen by 7% on the previous year and is the highest rated concern for Merton residents (with 43% of respondents mentioning this as a personal concern). However, it is consistently lower than the London-wide average (51% in 2008) and is disproportionate to the actual level of recorded crime in the borough, which rates Merton the 4<sup>th</sup> safest borough in London. The Overview and Scrutiny Commission therefore decided to conduct a review on fear of crime and seek ways to help address the disparity between the high perceived fear of crime and the low and falling actual level of crime.

Evidence has been taken from a range of groups and individuals as well as local partner organisations. Analysis of local data has also been used to identify the key issues relating to fear of crime in Merton.

The following key recommendations have emerged from the review:-

<b>Short term actions</b>		
<b>Rec No.</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>To be actioned by:</b>
1	That work is undertaken to engage directly with residents including council, housing association and private tenants in the east of Merton, in order to identify specific actions which can help reduce crime and provide reassurance locally, including improved security measures such as entry phone systems, and the continuing support and retention of neighbourhood wardens.	L B Merton (Housing and Safer Merton)
2	That work is undertaken to explore the scope to disperse crowds leaving Wimbledon and Morden Stations by relocating bus stops.	LB Merton in consultation with Transport for London
3	That Merton Council should work with partners to identify sources of funding for community TV in Merton.	L B Merton and Merton Partnership
4	That work should be undertaken to improve Police communication by:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Highlighting in a positive way the number of police arrests and solving of crime</li> <li>b) Promoting Safer Neighbourhood Teams to help close the reassurance gap</li> <li>c) Providing regular space in 'My Merton' for articles by the Police on crime and disorder reduction.</li> <li>d) Linking with ward publications and newsletters</li> <li>e) Seeking ways to expand the use of the Reassurance Bus.</li> </ul>	L B Merton and Merton Borough Police
5	That existing initiatives for joint working should be supported and extended, particularly in town centres, where there will be 3 core partners - police personnel, local authority wardens and special constables. (for example, 'Shopwatch' allows shop employees to report incidents, and this could be expanded).	Safer Merton
6	That more promotion of the benefits of CCTV could be useful in sending a positive message about crime prevention and personal safety.	Safer Merton
7	That effective channels of communication with BME groups on crime and anti-social behaviour should continue to be developed, to strengthen the sharing of information more widely and contribute to increasing reassurance on levels of crime for BME residents.	Safer Merton and Merton Borough Police

8	That LB Merton should actively support community initiatives aimed at tackling local crime and disorder issues, where there is scope and willingness on the part of local residents to become involved. In the absence of such local community engagement, ward councillors should exercise their role as local champions and work with the Safer Neighbourhood ward panels to build up the necessary infrastructure in partnership with organisations such as Groundwork, until the community develops capacity to engage with the project.	L B Merton including local councillors
9	That consideration be given to the potential for creating “no doorstep selling/no cold-calling zones”, as introduced in other parts of the country.	Merton Borough Police/Safer Merton/Trading Standards
10	That Safer Neighbourhood Teams be requested to take action against adults and teenagers who cycle recklessly on pavements.	Safer Merton and Merton Borough Police
11	That the Council continues to find ways to fund ongoing improvements to lighting in public areas, particularly focusing on areas where there are currently poor levels of lighting and maintaining existing lighting provision.	L B Merton
12	That local partners responsible for crime and disorder reduction work together with local transport providers to find ways to create a safe and reassuring environment on local transport networks.	Safer Merton and Transport for London
13	That the Council recognises the importance of its enforcement policies in reducing fear of crime and underlining its commitment to a law abiding society, and devotes sufficient resources to ensure it is effective	L B Merton
14	That an exchange of data between members of the Merton Partnership, such as local public surveys, would facilitate a coordinated approach to tackling fear of crime in the local area.	Merton Partnership
<b>Long term actions :</b>		
15	That work continues to deliver the core elements of Merton’s Local Development Framework, particularly around “designing out crime” e.g. for new housing estates.	L B Merton
16	That the services to be offered through facilities in the borough, such as the Intergenerational Centre in Mitcham and the new lottery funded facilities at Pollards Hill Library opening shortly, actively promote a better understanding between age groups across the whole spectrum of the borough’s population.	L B Merton
17	That proposals for the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden Town Centres are used as mechanisms to design welcoming environments for a mix of every age and class, with pedestrian-friendly street scenes, creating a perception of safety and well-being.	L B Merton

The Overview and Scrutiny Commission will monitor progress with implementation of these recommendations, subject to acceptance by the executive, to determine the beneficial impact on local people’s sense of well being, as part of its ongoing scrutiny work programme.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In the summer of 2008, Merton's Overview and Scrutiny Commission considered a range of potential issues to be included in its 2008/9 scrutiny work programme, including topics for scrutiny review.
- 1.2 The issue of fear of crime emerged as a priority area of concern for a number of reasons, including:-
- Disparity between actual levels of crime in the borough (with Merton designated as the fourth safest borough in London) and increasing public concern about crime, which emerged as the highest concern in the 2008 Annual Residents Survey (increasing by 7% on the previous year).
  - Views expressed at Overview and Scrutiny Commission meetings about crime and disorder issues in the borough.
  - The setting of a single performance target for police forces - namely to deliver improved levels of public confidence in whether local crime and community safety priorities are being identified and addressed.<sup>1</sup>
  - Concerns about lack of public confidence in crime statistics.
- 1.3 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission has responsibility within its remit for crime and disorder issues and therefore it was agreed that the review on fear of crime would provide an opportunity for all Commission members to be involved in the review process, as well as engaging with the Police as key local partners.

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<sup>1</sup> *'From The Neighbourhood To The National: Policing Our Communities Together'* - Home Office Policing Green Paper, July 2008.

## **2. THE PROCEDURE FOR UNDERTAKING THE REVIEW**

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Commission agreed that Councillor Peter Southgate should lead on the review, but that other members of the Commission should be involved in the work whenever possible.
- 2.2 The challenges faced in identifying ways to reduce fear of crime, particularly where it is disproportionate to the actual level of crime, is a national issue. Therefore it is important to set the Merton scrutiny review and the local issues around concerns on levels of crime within the wider national context. (see next section).
- 2.3 A timetable of local witness sessions was drawn up to take forward the review. It was agreed that the first step should be to meet with the Merton Borough Commander and his colleagues at Wimbledon Police Station, to identify the key issues and gauge the way in which police partners try to tackle fear of crime in Merton.
- 2.4 Merton's Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership, Safer Merton, is also a key contributor to tackling local crime and disorder issues and contributing to developing a safer borough in which to live and work. Councillor Southgate met with the Safer Merton Partnerships Officer to hear about initiatives to tackle anti-social behaviour.
- 2.5 Another key element of the review has been to hear from specific sections of the local population and to listen to their views on how fear of crime impacts on their daily lives. It was agreed to focus in particular on young residents and on older people, as evidence suggests both young and older people have specific concerns about crime and their own personal safety. (See Chapter 3 for further details).
- 2.6 Other key witnesses were also identified as indicated in the review scoping document (attached as an appendix to this report), including local Safer Neighbourhood Teams who are at the forefront of driving forward on crime and disorder reduction with police colleagues.
- 2.7 An article was placed in the February/March 2009 edition of *My Merton* magazine, asking for views from the public on fear of crime and how it can impact on daily life. Flyers were also distributed to voluntary sector groups, including Merton Youth Partnership.
- 2.8 The findings of independent reviews, i.e. the Review of Policing chaired by Sir Ronnie Flanagan and Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime led by Louise Casey, have also been taken into account.
- 2.9 Detailed notes were made of each witness session to provide the evidence base from which recommendations in this report to tackle the issue of fear of crime in Merton have been drawn out.



### **3. THE NATIONAL PICTURE**

3.1 The Crime and Disorder Act, 1998 (amended by the Police Reform Act, 2002) detailed the statutory requirements for developing and implementing strategies to tackle crime and disorder and misuse of drugs through partnership working at local level. These statutory partnerships, or Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) involve local bodies and agencies, such as local police, the local authority, fire authority, police authority and primary care trust in working together to identify crime and disorder problems and developing strategies to address them. Through the CDRPs, promoting community safety is at the forefront of reducing crime and disorder.

#### **The Police and Justice Act, 2006**

3.2 The Police and Justice Act has helped to build safer communities by making sure key elements of the government's police reform programme and the Respect Action Plan are implemented. The Act will also help sustain further improvements in police performance at neighbourhood, force, national and international levels. The Act has established the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to identify and spread good practice, assist police forces to deliver the national 'mission critical' priorities and provide operational policing support when needed. Also, a standard set of powers has been established to cover all Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) to ensure that PCSOs in all areas have the powers they need to deal with anti-social behaviour and low level crime.

#### **The British Crime Survey**

3.3 The British Crime Survey (BCS) is undertaken annually on behalf of the Home Office and for the last 25 years has measured the number of crimes suffered by respondents in England and Wales. This includes crimes which may not have been reported to the police, or recorded by them. It thus provides an important alternative to police recorded crime statistics as it includes information on these unreported crimes. The BCS also helps identify those most at risk of different types of crime. This is used in designing and informing crime prevention programmes. It is also used to assess people's attitudes to crime and towards the Criminal Justice System. It is one of the major sources of information about levels of crime, public attitudes to crime and other Home Office issues.

3.4 The BCS includes information on trends in concern about crime and perceptions of crime levels. For example, the BCS asks respondents if they think the level of crime in the country as a whole and in their local area has changed over the previous two years. Despite falling crime levels and increases in other measures of confidence, in the 2007/8 BCS, around two thirds (65%) of people thought crime in the country as a whole had increased ('a lot' or 'a little') in the previous two years, the same level as in the 2006/07 BCS; with more than a third (35%)

believing that it had increased 'a lot', compared with 33 per cent in 2006/07.<sup>2</sup>

3.5 The BCS has included questions on worry about different types of crime since 1984. Worry about all types of crime reached the highest levels in 1994, although concerns have stabilised since then. The specific questions on worry about crime are based around three types of crime:-

- Violent crime
- Vehicle crime
- Burglary

3.6 Despite a reduction in the total number of crimes since 1995, the BCS reports that comparatively high proportions of people continue to believe that crime has risen across the country as a whole and in their local area. Public perception at both national and local levels is therefore a crucial factor in contributing to fear of crime.

#### **Crime Reduction Toolkits**

3.7 The Home Office has established a crime reduction website which enables local partnerships to find ways to reduce fear of crime. The website contains a number of toolkits to identify specific concerns about fear of crime, how to determine the best approach to the issue locally and how fear of crime is a particular issue for young and older people. Some of these are detailed below:-

#### ***The Fear of Crime Matrix***

3.8 The website includes a Fear of Crime Matrix which can be used to help partnerships identify local fear issues and to indicate an approach which is best suited to their area.<sup>3</sup> Based on local knowledge, the Matrix enables partners to fit their area into one of four categories:-

- ❖ High crime, high fear (Crime Reduction Programmes)
- ❖ Low crime, higher fear (Constituency for Fear of Crime)
- ❖ High crime, lower fear (Learning Zone)
- ❖ Low crime, low fear (Ideal)

Details of where Merton fits in the Fear of Crime Matrix are contained in the next chapter.

#### ***What can contribute to older people's fear of crime?***

3.9 A survey of older people by Age Concern<sup>4</sup> provided an insight into how fear of crime affects older people. Although older people may be experienced and resourceful, many are also vulnerable. Stressful issues such as ill health, bereavement, isolation and fear for the future

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<sup>2</sup> The British Crime Survey 2007/8, published July 2008; Home Office

<sup>3</sup> [www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/toolkits](http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/toolkits)

<sup>4</sup> Age Concern survey, 2002

confront them. The website sets out some specific issues which impact on older people's fear of crime:-

➤ *Increased physical and mental frailty*

The increase in physical and mental frailty and decline in health is undoubtedly the single biggest factor contributing to older people's sense of vulnerability. Failing strength and increased difficulty in getting about can have a real impact on an individual's self-confidence as they age. In relation to the fear of crime, this often translates into a sense that their personal safety is no longer in their own hands. If they are attacked, they worry they won't be able to run away or fight back.

➤ *Anti-social behaviour*

A major concern is anti-social behaviour, particularly in connection with younger people, making older people feel unsafe. The Age Concern survey showed that nearly one in five respondents said that they had personally experienced verbal abuse or harassment on the street. However, many older people are reluctant to report incidents of anti-social behaviour, as they know it's not a criminal matter.

➤ *Increased isolation*

Loneliness is another big factor affecting older people. The loss of a partner can severely affect an individual's confidence in their own abilities, but physical frailty also makes it much more difficult to travel to see friends and family, or participate in social events. A vicious circle can easily develop where individuals become scared to step out of their front door because of fear of crime, fuelling isolation and in turn fear of crime. In the Age Concern survey, one in five of the respondents' aged 75 and over said that they rarely see their friends and families because of the fear of crime.

➤ *Lack of information*

The Age Concern survey highlighted that, apart from Neighbourhood Watch and Crimestoppers, older people knew very little about any of the other crime prevention work being done by local authorities or police in their area. It also underlined the fact that older people were unlikely to have been consulted about crime prevention in their area. This left the media, and in particular the local media, as the main source of information on crime for older people.

***What can contribute to young people's fear of crime?***

- 3.10 The Home Office website states that young people are more likely to be the victims of many types of crime than the general population, including violent crime, property theft and vandalism. The annual

Youth Surveys conducted by MORI<sup>5</sup> have found that respondents aged between 11-16 years old are on average twice as likely to have been a victim of crime in the previous year than the over 16s. What's more, each year nearly half of secondary school children experience some form of victimisation.

3.11 The website sets out specific issues for young people relating to fear of crime:-

➤ *Risk of crime*

Particular groups of young people are specifically at risk from certain crimes. For example, young men are more at risk of physical violence than young women, young women are more at risk of sexual violence than young men, and young disabled people are more at risk of being physically and verbally abused than young non-disabled people, as are young people from BME backgrounds.

➤ *Parental attitudes*

Over-protective parents who are continually warning their offspring about the dangers of the outside world can also contribute to a sense of vulnerability and fearfulness in their children. This tends to happen particularly with young women, young disabled people and young people from BME communities.

➤ *Bullying*

Bullying can be dismissed as an inevitable and generally harmless rite of passage. In truth, prolonged or vicious bullying can have a serious and lasting impact on the victim. If left unchecked, bullying can lead to a culture of intimidation and fear inside and outside the classroom, which can be a breeding ground for criminal behaviour. Victims of bullying can also feel as though their complaints aren't taken seriously by those in authority, which could have severe repercussions on their future willingness to report actual crime. Bullying is closely linked to hate crimes.

3.12 **Independent Reviews of Policing and Crime**

In 2007, Sir Ronnie Flanagan led a review of policing and reported his findings in February 2008. His report sets out an alternative vision of what successful 21st century policing should look like. The central argument in the report is that:-

*“as the demands placed on policing become more complicated and stretching, the service’s ability to fight the threats which the public face, to minimise the harm which crime causes and to manage the risks*

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<sup>5</sup> [www.yjb.gov.uk](http://www.yjb.gov.uk) :MORI Youth Surveys conducting for the Youth Justice Board

*which it faces, is critically important if it is to both combat serious crime and build local confidence.”*

*“This simple operational goal must be incorporated into all aspects of modern policing to create a flexible, effective way of delivering public protection in the 21st century...”<sup>6</sup>*

- 3.13 A further report by Louise Casey, former head of the Government’s Respect Task Force, was published in June 2008, which highlights the fact that crime remains a top public concern. The report states that whilst some members of the public think that crime has fallen in recent years, the majority do not. Regardless of whether people think crime has fallen or risen, virtually everyone sees it as a priority that must be addressed more forcefully. The report asserts that:-

*“...most of the public do not believe the official statistics on crime – they think the statistics miss some important crimes and that many minor crimes go unreported. They have lost trust in the how figures are relayed to the public – with ‘cherry-picking’ of figures by the media, politicians of all parties, professionals and single-interest lobby groups. Many feel let down by a lack of meaningful information about crime and what is being done to tackle it in their local area.”<sup>7</sup>*

### 3.14 **The Policing Green Paper**

In 2008, the Home Office published its Green Paper on policing, ‘*From the neighbourhood to the national*’. This outlines a vision for the future of policing for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The key areas covered in the publication are:-

- Improving communication between the public and police
- Reducing bureaucracy and developing technology
- Defining roles and leadership in policing
- Focusing on development and deployment
- Coordinating change in policing
- Reinforcing collaboration between forces
- Improving performance in policing

- 3.15 The last of these key areas is particularly significant, as it outlines proposals to abandon top-down targets for police forces, in order to reduce bureaucracy. The only exception is the critical issue of overall public confidence, which is at the heart of the Green Paper, and of the Policing Pledge, which aims to set out standards for police in England and Wales, as recommended in the Flanagan Review. In acknowledgement of the higher demands on police forces and the commitment to the Policing Pledge, the Government expects to see a significant improvement in public confidence over the next three years, reflected in the PSA indicator from the British Crime Survey, which asks whether people think that the police and their partners are dealing

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<sup>6</sup> ‘*The Review of Policing*’, Sir Ronnie Flanagan, February 2008

<sup>7</sup> ‘*Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime*’, Louise Casey, June 2008

with the crime and anti-social behaviour issues that matter locally. Therefore future police performance will be assessed through this single measure.

#### 4. LOCAL EVIDENCE GATHERING AND ANALYSIS

4.1 To determine the local borough picture on fear of crime and its impact on Merton residents, some analysis of the detailed findings of the 2008 Annual Residents Survey was undertaken.

##### Local Statistics and the Fear of Crime Matrix for Merton

4.2 The Annual Residents Survey 2008 reports concern about crime as the highest scoring issue – showing a 7% increase since the 2007 survey. Taking a longer view, it is clear that concern is rising, although not as sharply as the 7% jump from 2007 to 2008 would suggest. Concern about crime stood at 40% in 2005 and 41% in 2006, then falling to 36% in 2007. So it has increased by 3% over 4 years to 2008. Analysis of the detailed data leading to this shows that:-

- *Crime was the highest scoring area of concern to residents, chosen by 43% respondents to the 2008 survey. This figure is significantly higher than the 36% recorded for 2007, but significantly lower than the Londonwide average of 51%.*
- *Further analysis reveals a link between social-economic status and fear of crime:*
  - *council tenants were more likely than owner occupiers to rate crime as their primary concern (51% compared to 41%)*
  - *the highest levels of concern were recorded for those in social group DE (66%), which includes those dependent on benefits.*

4.3 A comparison has been made between the number of crimes reported in each ward within the borough and the proportion of survey respondents who said that they were “very or fairly worried” about crime in their area. In order to obtain sufficiently large numbers for comparative purposes, this ward-based information has been grouped by area, as shown in the table below:

Ward Groupings (as per LBM Annual Residents Survey)	Reported Crimes (per 1000 population)	% survey respondents very or fairly concerned about crime
Village, Hillside, Wimbledon Park and Raynes Park	60.0	48%
Dundonald, Trinity and Abbey	99.5	51%
Cannon Hill, Merton Park, West Barnes and Lower Morden	55.8	53%
Lavender Fields, Pollards Hill and Figges Marsh	86.0	65%
Ravensbury, St Helier and Cricket Green	95.9	63%
Colliers Wood, Graveney and Longthornton	77.2	66%

- 4.4 This table indicates that there is a fairly strong relationship between fear of crime and actual levels of crime in the borough - the three areas in which concern about crime is highest do have above average levels of actual crime. These higher levels of concern about crime in the east of the borough can be linked to deprivation, given that the highest levels of concern were recorded for social group DE and deprivation in the borough is concentrated in the east, particularly around Mitcham town centre.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, action to help alleviate fear of crime, such as improving home security, would be beneficial, for example providing advice on home security and installing entry phone systems for tenants in blocks of flats to make them more burglar-proof.

**Recommendation 1: That work is undertaken to engage directly with residents including council, housing association and private tenants in the east of Merton, in order to identify specific actions which can help reduce crime and provide reassurance locally, including improved security measures such as entry phone systems, and the continuing support and retention of neighbourhood wardens.**

- 4.5 Interestingly, the area in the borough recording the highest level of reported crime (Dundonald, Trinity and Abbey wards) does not have a correspondingly high level of worry about crime. Trying to understand this is complex. However, it may be explained by the fact that Wimbledon Town Centre is located in this area, where the social activity in bars and restaurants along the main high street and the associated “night-time economy” may add to public disorder in the area, as well as higher incidences of shoplifting. However, residents may not perceive these crimes as personally threatening. Also, the transport interchange at the heart of Wimbledon Town Centre attracts a large volume of people at various times of the day, many of whom may live elsewhere in the borough. The locality may therefore appear threatening to the elderly because of the sheer press of people. This is likely to also apply to town centre stations generally.

**Recommendation 2: That work is undertaken to explore the scope to disperse crowds leaving Wimbledon and Morden Stations, by relocating bus stops.**

- 4.6 Using the Home Office Fear of Crime Matrix, Merton is revealed as a ‘*Low crime, higher fear*’ borough (i.e. Constituency for Fear of Crime). Once some of the drivers for people’s fears have been identified, strategies can be found to help them overcome their fears.
- 4.7 The Home Office Fear of Crime website<sup>9</sup> contains some possible reasons for this mismatch between low crime and higher fear of crime. These include the possibility that people:-

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<sup>8</sup> ‘Merton – the essential facts’ - the Merton Borough Profile

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.crimereduction.homeoffice.gov.uk/toolkits/fc0201.htm>



- Actually do live in an area of higher crime (making fear of crime more justified)
- Have already been a victim of crime
- Feel vulnerable
- Are poorly informed
- Feel powerless and isolated
- Are subjected to anti-social behaviour

4.8 There are also environmental factors which can affect how safe or unsafe people feel, sometimes referred to as the 'broken window syndrome', such as:-

- poorly developed or declining town centres
- unrepaired damage
- graffiti
- vandalised areas
- shabby surroundings
- rubbish over the streets
- poorly lit public areas.

4.9 The above can lead to a perception that no-one cares for an area, which in turn can heighten the fear of crime and sustain crime, and also indicate that the authorities are losing their grip on society, including the criminal element.<sup>10</sup> Many people are concerned about using public transport. People can be particularly nervous about travelling at night, walking to the bus stop or train\ underground station and then waiting for the transport to arrive.<sup>11</sup>

## **5. EVIDENCE FROM LOCAL WITNESSES**

### **5.1 The Merton Borough Police**

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<sup>10</sup> Home Office Crime Reduction Toolkit: Environment

<sup>11</sup> Home Office Crime Reduction Toolkit: Transport

5.1.1 As an initial step to gathering witness evidence, four members of the Overview and Scrutiny Commission met with the Police Borough Commander and his colleagues at Wimbledon Police Station in October 2008. The aim of this first meeting was to establish the key issues around the public perceptions on levels of crime in Merton from the Police perspective and to learn about how the Police are trying to counteract fear of crime locally. The meeting proved to be very informative and established the key factors relating to fear of crime, as well as highlighting some initiatives in place to provide reassurance for local people about levels of crime in the borough.

5.1.2 The key issues identified were:-

- Although Merton is rated as the 4<sup>th</sup> safest borough in London, concerns about crime in Merton have increased in the 2008 Annual Residents Survey (ARS) by 7%.
- The public generally tend to disbelieve published crime figures. But statistically, violent crime and anti social behaviour are reducing. (The Metropolitan Police website has an interactive map showing crime levels by ward).
- Fear of crime tends to be prevalent among young people and less so among young males (although they are more likely to be victims of crime). So the perception is inversely proportionate to the real position amongst the young.
- It was agreed that media coverage inevitably has a negative impact on fear of crime if sensationalist headlines are used. Generally the view was that local press in Merton are not overly sensationalising crime in the papers and are generally well balanced in their reporting.
- The location of the borough in relation to central London, particularly with regard to the west of Merton, means that fear of crime could be imported by people who travel into London to work, when they perceive crime issues from outside the borough, rather than incidents in Merton itself. Also, Wimbledon Town Centre consists of residential roads inside a commercial ring which is unusual for the average town centre.
- Rumour escalates fear of crime. There are more families living in Merton with children, who may worry more about crime, as well as more apartments with younger residents. So sociological factors are an issue.
- Use of CCTV can provide benefits in reducing concerns about safety through being a visible resource.
- There is a programme in some boroughs for installing community TV in high footfall areas – cafes, McDonalds, libraries etc. with screen messages – national, regional and locally filmed content. This costs £120k to install on a borough basis, providing 12 screens. The Borough Commander advised that the quality is very good, but funding would have to be found for this.

**Recommendation 3: That Merton Council should work with partners to identify sources of funding for community TV in Merton.**

5.1.3 Some of the Police initiatives already in place include the following:-

- Establishment of a 'Territorial Support Group' – which involves stop and search in high crime areas. (However, a bid has to be made for it and Merton may lose out to other boroughs with higher crime rates).
- The internet is a new dimension which is used as a main intelligence source by the police for issues such as gang activity.
- Establishment of the Reassurance Mapping Project – knocking on 10 doors on every street to give police tactical data and identify areas for local interventions.

**Recommendation 4: That work should be undertaken to improve Police communication by:-**

- e) Highlighting in a positive way the number of police arrests and solving of crime**
- f) Promoting Safer Neighbourhood Teams to help close the reassurance gap**
- g) Providing regular space in 'My Merton' for articles by the Police on crime and disorder reduction.**
- h) Linking with ward publications and newsletters**
- i) Seeking ways to expand the use of the Reassurance Bus.**

- The Safer Neighbourhood Teams cover late shifts and the Police have a good relationship with Safer Merton. Safer Merton facilitates a fortnightly Joint Tasking Group, whereby partners from the Police, Fire Brigade, Council and numerous other agencies from both the public, private and voluntary sector come together to tackle community safety related problems in the borough.

**Recommendation 5: That existing initiatives for joint working should be supported and extended, particularly in town centres, where there will be 3 core partners - police personnel, local authority wardens and special constables. (for example, 'Shopwatch' allows shop employees to report incidents, and this could be expanded).**

- With regard to convicted criminals, the police are about to look at offending at the strategic level to see whether there are criminals who travel into Merton from elsewhere. A study of burglaries was undertaken over a 6 month period and half of these were repeat offenders who came from outside the borough. There is a reasonable crime clear up rate in Merton.
- Work is underway on a project to map crime at ward level with the aim to shift from presenting crime figures towards satisfaction figures. It is important that people feel safe in the area where they live first and foremost. It was suggested that

minor issues such as non payment of car tax and benefit fraud can feed a general sense of lawlessness in the home area and fear of crime.

## 5.2 Safer Merton

5.2.1 A meeting with the Safer Merton Partnerships Officer, Chris Williams, was arranged in November 2008 to learn about the visible triggers for fear of crime. These include:-

- Groups of teenagers hanging around - even young people themselves find this threatening and they are more likely to be the victims of crime than older people. So the issue needs to be looked at from a young person's perspective. Young people are more scared than other groups of society and so they hang about together for support. They are then seen by other sectors of the population – middle aged and older people – as an intimidating presence. This creates a vicious circle of mutual mistrust.
- Graffiti and fly tipping, which are widely held to be visible indicators of a broken society. The top Merton ward for reported graffiti is West Barnes ward – not because it has more graffiti but because there is less tolerance of it in the ward. It is evidence of a lack of respect for other people's property.
- Drunk and disorderly behaviour and visible drinking (i.e. in the streets) generate fear of crime. The unpredictability of a drunken person who could be aggressive makes people fearful. There is lower fear about drug taking/dealing, as this is very rarely visible to the general public.

5.2.2 Chris Williams highlighted specific actions which can help to reduce fear of crime:-

### Tidying up the local area

- Dealing with litter
- Providing more litter bins
- Improving the environment

### Addressing bad parenting

- Working with pre-parents (research suggests that future young offenders may be spotted as young as age 2)
- Teaching respect for the environment, proper behaviour and understanding of other people from different socio-demographic groups

### Establishing regeneration programmes

- Regeneration programmes such as those planned for Mitcham and Morden will have a positive impact in reducing fear of crime
- What the eye sees affects fear – the visual effect of a run-down area contributes to fears for personal safety
- Encouraging development of mixed social profiles in specific areas can have a positive impact on how an area is perceived

Expanding communication

- Developing a good relationship with the media
- Having face to face dialogue with local papers
- More engagement and empowerment – people should get involved practically with council staff to resolve local issues
- Councillors are key as advocates in their wards

Promoting security schemes

- The Alleygates scheme – the Council provides a 40% grant and the owners supply the rest. This makes the gates the residents' property, not the council's and so they are more likely to take care of them.

Engaging with the local Police

- The ward panel system linked to Safer Neighbourhood Teams is a good model and should include council staff such as the ASB officer, environmental enforcement, parking and housing, i.e. a joined up approach by partners.
- Increasing community involvement is important, as is providing messages of reassurance that the situation is under control.

Making best use of CCTV

- There are 170 CCTV cameras in Merton, but they don't tend to change behaviour, and may relocate crime and disorder elsewhere. They can, however, help improve feelings of safety – e.g. the Bordesley Road footbridge in Morden now has lighting and CCTV, making it feel safer to use the walkway.

**Recommendation 6: That more promotion of the benefits of CCTV could be useful in sending a positive message about crime prevention and personal safety.**

Communicating with black and minority ethnic (BME) groups

- It was acknowledged that there is limited communication with BME groups. Black and Asian people are likely to be more fearful of crime due to the potential for racial hatred to be directed at them. Also, fear of crime is linked to deprivation and there are higher levels of deprivation among BME groups. Regrettably, then, it can be said that fear of crime for BME residents may be based on specific personal experience and is too wide an issue for this review, which is focusing on the disparity between perceived fear and real danger in the mindsets of residents who are not likely to be at risk of real crime.

**Recommendation 7: That effective channels of communication with BME groups on crime and anti-social behaviour should continue to**

**be developed, to strengthen the sharing of information more widely and contribute to increasing reassurance on levels of crime for BME residents.**

5.2.3 It is likely that at least some of the above practical suggestions to tackle fear of crime could be taken forward with minimal resource implications. Regular street cleaning and removal of litter in town centres is already a priority action. Town Centres are swept more than once every day and all town centre litter bins are emptied at least once a day.<sup>12</sup>

5.2.4 A specific example of how a local area can be turned around was highlighted by Chris Williams. Lower Morden ward experienced particular problems with local disorder and has been rated as having a high level of fear of crime in ward profiles, whilst being rated very low for real crime levels. One initiative in the ward focused on disorder issues in King George's Playing Fields, which mobilised the local community to act. A 'Friends' group was set up for the park and this fostered community spirit in the area and generated funding. Residents kept diaries of incidents including a cannabis factory, which was shut down. A new youth club opened in the park in November 2008 and so young people's behaviour was diverted to more constructive activities.

**Recommendation 8: That LB Merton should actively support community initiatives aimed at tackling local crime and disorder issues, where there is scope and willingness on the part of local residents to become involved. In the absence of such local community engagement, ward councillors should exercise their role as local champions and work with the Safer Neighbourhood ward panels, to build up the necessary infrastructure in partnership with organisations such as Groundwork, until the community develops capacity to engage with the project.**

5.2.5 Safer Merton has worked with Mitcham gangs and engaged with twelve hard core gang leaders, leading to them taking part in organised activity. Film shows are also used in Merton schools to highlight the negative aspects of gang culture. The word 'gang' sounds organised and gangs are more likely to commit real crime. Chris Williams suggested that here is also a cultural dimension, with vulnerable young people often alienated in Britain. Family unit ties are less strong than in Europe and young people are more likely to hang around from the age of nine or ten and then move onto high school. The move to high school, from a friendly primary school to a bigger, more demanding, and possibly more threatening environment, represents a huge change to young people's lives, and young people tend to fear other people they don't know. As stated earlier, national survey data has revealed that, for most people, somewhere else is seen as more dangerous,

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<sup>12</sup> L B Merton, Environment & Regeneration Department : Street Cleaning Charter

than their own locality. In addition, mothers are afraid for their children.<sup>13</sup>

5.2.6 An earlier scrutiny review on gang culture among young people in Merton in June 2008 had flagged up some queries about the level of real criminal behaviour in organised gangs. Specifically, there was some concern that the statistics recorded by the Police for serious assaults by young people in the borough were not reflected in the wider crime statistics used to determine how safe Merton is. However, the Borough Commander has confirmed that all recorded crimes, including serious assaults by young people, are included in the statistical data produced centrally by the Metropolitan Police (although some crime categories have changed).

### 5.3 Older People

5.3.1 In order to get a perspective on how fear of crime can impact on the lives of older people, the Review Chair attended a meeting of Merton Seniors Forum in January 2009, where a group of around 35 older people were invited to give their views on how fear of crime impacts on their daily lives. From this meeting, the following key comments emerged:-

- People are not convinced by the statistics about crime levels and Merton being rated one of the safest boroughs in London. Many people at the meeting had heard of local burglaries and theft of handbags and purses in supermarkets. Pickpockets often work in pairs and can leave the store before security staff can be alerted.
- People stated that they never seem to see any police in the locality and there is a lack of PCSOs. So a visible presence is not evident to them. Also, the powers for PCSOs are not strong enough. Some people did report that their PCSOs had called to the local street to introduce themselves.
- Travel on local transport, particularly buses and the tube, can be worrying, when older people can be hustled and jostled by school children etc. There may be drunks on the tube trains and outside stations
- Local magistrates do not take offences such as anti social behaviour and cycling on pavements seriously enough and so fines are too lenient.
- Older people are often concerned about falls in the street – so cycling on pavements and crowds of people together can increase the risk of a fall.
- The view was expressed that not all neighbourhood watch teams are effective and some residents associations are too 'cliquey' – they

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<sup>13</sup> The British Crime Survey (Home Office)

should be made to comply with standard criteria to call themselves a residents association.

- Some people reported that they no longer venture out after dark and so their social life is affected. Many people at the meeting agreed they would avoid town centre areas when pubs are turning out.
- Some people would feel safer driving a car locally, rather than using local transport, but parking has been made too difficult through restrictions in town centres, e.g. for visits to Wimbledon Theatre.
- Poorly lit areas can be frightening to older people.

Strangers calling at front doors after dark are a concern – older people are fearful about opening the door. There is also worry about people offering work on driveways etc i.e. persistent doorstep selling. There should be areas where ‘doorstep selling’ or ‘cold calling’ at homes after dark is prohibited. (This has been introduced in other parts of the country, such as Cambridgeshire, Loughborough, Poole and North Yorkshire and zones discourage rogue traders and door step selling used as an opening for distraction burglaries, or to make plans for future burglaries. They provide the opportunity for householders to collectively say “no” to the practice of cold calling and should reduce the fear and threat felt by some householders when the doorbell rings and the caller is unknown). **Recommendation 9: That consideration be given to the potential for creating “no doorstep selling/no cold-calling zones”, as introduced in other parts of the country.**

5.3.2 From the above views, it is clear that an older person’s fear about personal safety can affect daily activity to a considerable extent and restrict patterns of movement and social interaction.

5.3.3 The meeting with Merton Seniors Forum highlighted some practical suggestions for reducing older people’s fear of crime, including:-

- Having a more visible police presence on the streets – with police walking the beat rather than in cars.
- Better maintenance of pavements to prevent falls.
- Magistrates to be given guidance to deal with minor offences appropriately.
- Engaging more transport police.
- Requesting that large stores/supermarkets display signs more prominently about pickpockets and train their security staff to act more quickly when an incident occurs.



- Ensuring appropriate enforcement of legislation against cycling on pavements (whilst noting that magistrates cannot be directed by local partners on penalties handed down to offenders).

**Recommendation 10: That Safer Neighbourhood Teams be requested to take action against adults and teenagers who cycle recklessly on pavements.**

## 5.4 Young People

5.4.1 According to the Home Office Crime Reduction website, young people are often perceived as one of the main groups of perpetrators when it comes to criminal offences and particularly anti-social behaviour. Yet the 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (OCJS) reveals that over three quarters(78%) of young people aged 10 to 25 years had not committed any of the 20 core offences covered by the survey.<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, young people are more likely to be victims of crime, with young respondents aged from 10 to 15 years being more likely than those aged 16 to 25 years to report being a victim of a personal crime, often in school or college, and more likely to know the perpetrator. For 16 to 25 years olds, incidents were most likely to take place in a pub, bar or nightclub, or in the street, where it was more likely that the perpetrator was not known to the victim.

5.4.2 In light of the above, the Review Chair was invited to attend a Student Parliament at Merton College in February 2009, to hear the views of young people studying in the borough on fear of crime and how it impacts on their daily lives. Coincidentally, on the day of the meeting, the Police had set up a 'knife arch', to scan students entering the college premises. The issue of personal safety was therefore in the forefront of the students' minds when they expressed their views on fear of crime and the following key points emerged from the meeting:-

- Incidents reported in the news, such as a recent murder in Mitcham, make people more wary of an area where there seems to be trouble and it makes them more afraid because they feel it can happen to them - they don't want to go there.
- Being out after dark makes people feel more vulnerable generally – you see shapes in the shadows – the mind plays tricks in the dark.
- It seems that knife crime is increasing and that crime generally is not going down as reported. This is true everywhere, not just in Merton.
- Crime is more visible now and so it gives the impression of increasing because people know more about it – and so think it is happening more.

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<sup>14</sup> Young People & Crime: Findings from 2006 Offending, Crime and Justice Survey. S. Roe & J. Ashe

- There are cultural issues for young people which can be a challenge – carrying a knife for personal safety with no intention of using it and failing to understand this can actually increase their chances of ending up a victim of knife crime..
- There are peer pressures for young people to have to deal with – a number of the students advised that they chose Merton College to study because it is away from their home area where people know them – they feel safer and do not have to deal with taunts about studying etc.
- The view was expressed that crime and anti social behaviour are often the result of a ‘screwed up’ mentality and boredom when there is nothing else to do.
- Some parents are fearful of letting their youngsters go, out but others don’t care or even know where their kids go and what they are doing.
- There are general fears about vandalism, assault, rape, drugs. Exclusion zones, where groups of people are dispersed, were discussed (e.g.Green Lane and Wimbledon Chase). People were not sure how effective this was, as it was likely to just move the problem somewhere else.
- The key is to ensure that people take personal care when moving around. Young people may feel safer travelling in a group – but then they can be seen as a nuisance by other sections of society.
- Promoting self esteem and having self respect are key factors to feeling confident and safe.
- The Police can sometimes overreact to a situation and be too heavy handed which adds to the problem. Generally though, most students (but not all) thought the Police are doing the best they can and there will always be problems which are not their fault, although the law might be too lenient with offenders, so there is no real deterrent.
- There are general problems such as people drinking at bus stops, which is intimidating to others waiting for a bus. There is potential for trouble for young people when travelling on public transport.

5.4.3 Clearly, from the above comments, young people can be just as fearful about their personal safety when going about their daily lives, as other sectors of the population. A number of possible solutions were put forward by the Student Parliament:-

- More street lighting in public areas would make an area feel safer.
- There should be more positive news in the press about young people and fewer negative stories which create fear.

- Some of the problems relate to parenting skills – young adults should talk to parents about how they feel – reverse the roles.
- CCTV cameras are fine if they are actually working, but they have ‘blind spots’ and CCTV would not help save a life in an attack.
- Exclusion zones might improve a specific area, but action would then need to be taken elsewhere when the problem moves to another area.
- The penalties for offending should be tougher to act as a proper deterrent.
- Public transport generally should be made much safer so that people do not feel they must travel in groups.
- Activities to boost self esteem, for example martial arts such as judo and kick boxing, should be more available, to reduce insecurity and increase personal confidence.

5.4.4 It is interesting to note that some of the concerns of young people about fear of crime reflect those of older people, for example, not feeling safe after dark, offenders being dealt with too leniently in the courts. Also, some of the suggested remedies are the same, for example, better street lighting, making travel on public transport safer.

5.4.5 The Home Office Crime Reduction website contains a report undertaken in 1991 with regard to the impact of improvements to street lighting on both crime and the public’s fear of crime, drawing on research undertaken during a study by the University of Southampton, which monitored the effect of lighting improvements in Wandsworth at that time. This report suggests that lighting improvements are in general more likely to have a positive impact on the public’s fear of crime than on the incidence of crime itself. Also, when localised ‘blackspots’, where lighting is particularly poor, are dealt with, the pedestrians’ feeling of security is improved.<sup>15</sup>

**Recommendation 11: That the Council continues to find ways to fund ongoing improvements to lighting in public areas, particularly focusing on areas where there are currently poor levels of lighting and maintaining existing lighting provision.**

5.4.6 One of the most interesting observations made by the students was that, when they choose to travel together in order to feel safe, they are then perceived by other sectors of the community to be, at best a nuisance, and at worst a real threat to others! This only serves to demonstrate that perception about crime and anti-social behaviour fuels the fear, even when it is wide of the mark in terms of the reality of the situation. Also, both older people and young people cited the importance of feeling safe on public transport as a key factor.

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<sup>15</sup> ‘The Effect of Better Street Lighting on Crime & Fear of Crime: A Review’ – Malcolm Ramsay with Rosemary Newton, August 1991

**Recommendation 12: That local partners responsible for crime and disorder reduction work together with local transport providers to find ways to create a safe and reassuring environment on local transport networks.**

## **5.5 Merton Park Ward Safer Neighbourhood Team**

5.5.1 A meeting in March 2009 with Sergeant Harman from the Safer Neighbourhood Team responsible for Merton Park Ward revealed some interesting observations on the work of the Team in the local area. This particular Safer Neighbourhood Team was chosen to give evidence, as the ward includes much of Morden Town Centre, which had been the focus of comments from older people and local students.

5.5.2 The key points to emerge from this meeting were:-

- Negative perceptions are formed from negative dealings with the police and from incidents which may have occurred elsewhere some years ago, rather than current offences
- Whilst a heightened police presence in stores where theft of purses etc. has occurred may reassure some people, others, including the store managers, may take a negative view of this – and it may add to a general fear of crime. On the other hand, if the police are too wary about provoking fear of crime due to pressure from retailers, this could actually result in a rise in the level of real crime. So the line of balance on appropriate action is very fine.
- Some crime such as burglaries may be due to people taking poor precautions and people need to become smarter on crime prevention, which will then reduce incidents and make an area more safe.
- Reference was made to providing assertiveness skills – the mosque in Morden has held an event for Muslim women, and older people might benefit from learning such skills.
- The street scene affects how safe people feel in terms of how comfortable they feel in a particular area. So the visual characteristics of a locality send a strong message.
- Tackling ‘signal crime’, i.e. crimes or incidents of anti-social behaviour, or neglected environment, can help to reduce fear of crime, as they remove the signal to a community that they are at risk in a particular area, which they will then want to avoid. Neighbourhood policing will often focus on reducing signal crimes, as this improves perception of community safety.
- A successful arrest by police may actually increase crime figures if the person arrested has offended more than once, or confesses to a series of crimes.
- The wider environment, including the current economic downturn, has an impact on the perception of safety - small businesses close, there are empty premises and the area becomes neglected and run-down, contributing to a feeling of being at risk. Therefore, the need to disseminate a reassurance message becomes even more important in a recession, as well as robust implementation of enforcement policies

**Recommendation 13: That the Council recognises the importance of its enforcement policies in reducing fear of crime and underlining its commitment to a law abiding society, and devotes sufficient resources to ensure it is effective**

- Fear of crime is clearly bad, but ‘awareness’ of crime is positive, in that it leads to people taking appropriate action to keep themselves and their possessions safe. So there is an element of personal responsibility linked to fear of crime.
- The Crown Prosecution Service can be seen to fail to deal with offences appropriately, where they can be said to be minor, yet still public order offences – so there is little deterrent for offenders. (This supports the evidence from both Merton Seniors Forum and the Student Parliament, who commented on the need for magistrates’ courts to deal appropriately with minor offences, in order to send a strong message that such offences will not be tolerated).

5.5.3 Sgt. Harman outlined a number of strategies which the Safer Neighbourhood Teams use to identify and evaluate concerns about crime. Local public attitude surveys are conducted monthly, using a random sample of the population and circulating forms through the postal system. The surveys contain 20 questions, which include 6 relating to policing. But, unlike the Annual Residents Survey, the findings are not broken down by ward and the sample surveyed is much smaller. It was suggested that an exchange of data from local surveys would facilitate a more coordinated approach to tackling fear of crime locally.

**Recommendation 14: That an exchange of data between members of the Merton Partnership, such as local public surveys, would facilitate a coordinated approach to tackling fear of crime in the local area.**

5.5.4 There is now a move towards conducting street-by-street surveys – of 10 properties in each road and covering the whole borough, asking the same questions used in the public attitude surveys as follows:-

- confidence in local policing (% who say their local police are doing an excellent/good job)
  - feeling safe walking alone in their local area during the day
  - feeling safe walking alone in their local area after dark
  - agreeing that the local police understand the issues that affect their community
  - agreeing that the local police are dealing with the things that matter to people in this community
  - worried about anti-social behaviour in this area
- There was some discussion on the benefits of CCTV, which both older people and students had mixed views on. Although CCTV may help to reassure people locally, generally it may not contribute greatly to reducing fear of crime, although the quality of imaging has improved

considerably and cameras on buses work well in keeping good order. Nevertheless, for the Police, using CCTV images in court cases involving minor offences is very time-consuming and therefore disproportionately bureaucratic, unless the offences are severe.

- Dispersal zones may offer little benefit, as the problem can simply move elsewhere, even just outside the zone boundary. It would be better to arrest perpetrators of minor disorder offences, rather than move them on – the Offences Against the Person Act 1861 and the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 provide adequate legislative powers to deal with all offences from minor disorder to murder. However, dispersal zones may be effective for short periods of time to deal with a specific problem arising locally. Dispersal zones, such as the one which was established for Mitcham Town Centre, are time limited for six months (the Borough Commander advised that the police are in favour of such zones, provided that the requirement to use the powers to disperse needs to be used sufficiently often. If not, then the dispersal zone will lapse).
- The problem of people drinking on the streets is not really a major issue in Merton, which is an unusual borough in that it has no hospital, night club or prison within its boundaries, unlike neighbouring boroughs. Therefore, quite often people are meeting socially in the borough, before moving on to another location.
- Patterns of policing vary – for example, police focus will shift to covering local parks and open spaces as the evenings get lighter during Spring and Summer months.
- Young people can be the subject of robbery due to use of mobile phones etc – but there can be a smaller gap between fear of crime and the actual crime levels among young people, who often know who the offender is. In other words, the fear of crime may sometimes not be too disproportionate to the reality for young people.
- Specifically for Morden Town Centre, it was suggested that the general street scene needs improving - e.g. through possible widening of the pavement area on one side of the high street and introducing planting and trees to the sidewalk to give a 'boulevard' feel to the street, as it stretches down to Morden Hall Park. Buses and black cabs should be able to stop outside the tube station, but the bus stand could be moved elsewhere, to allow more pedestrian circulation and space. It is expected that the ongoing work to develop a regeneration strategy for Morden Town Centre (and also Mitcham Town Centre) will lead to an improved street scene and greater perceptions of a safe and welcoming public environment for residents and visitors to the borough.
- The planned introduction of 'Community Safe' was outlined – this will be introduced in all 20 wards and residents will be invited to subscribe to an on-line police news facility – where positive news stories can be shared and updates on crime and alerts can be found – a 'warn and inform' system.

## **5.6 Local Communication – *My Merton*, circulation of flyer**

- 5.6.1 Unfortunately, few views on fear of crime were received as a result of the local communication channels used for the review. However, one resident did contact the Scrutiny Team to give comments on how being disabled can add to a person's fear of anti-social behaviour when leaving the house and walking along the street. The fears of disabled people are understandable in terms of how disability can impact on a person's levels of social inclusion as well as physical safety on a daily basis. Almost every aspect of day-to-day life can be affected by disability, such as the ability to travel. Some issues around access to services and employment for disabled people have been picked up through other scrutiny work<sup>16</sup>, so disability has not therefore been focused on specifically in this review (although an equalities impact assessment has been undertaken as part of the review process, which analyses the impact of the review on age, gender(including transgender), race/ethnicity/nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religion/belief and socio-economic status).
- 5.6.2 The Commission Chair met with Merton's Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Engagement, Councillor Tariq Ahmad, in March 2009 to discuss the key findings of the review and share thoughts on ways of reducing fear of crime in the borough. It was agreed that a lot of good and effective work is already being undertaken at local level to provide residents with positive messages about partnerships working together for the benefit of the local area. Action in Merton (AIM) is one new initiative aimed at making Merton a safer, cleaner and healthier place for all, through local partners including the Council, Safer Merton, the Metropolitan Police, the London Fire Brigade and the local Primary Care Trust working together to help build confidence in local public services and in the people providing those services.
- 5.6.3 It is therefore clear that there are numerous methods of reassurance to tackle fear of crime and disorder, but the reassuring messages are not reaching every section of the local community. The good work being done therefore needs to continue – but it also needs to be promoted more strongly and more widely, particularly to reach residents in the east of the borough. This will contribute to 'bridging the gap' between the more affluent west of Merton and the relatively deprived east of the borough, which is a key element of Merton's Sustainable Community Strategy and Local Area Agreement.
- 5.6.4 Local initiatives to tackle fear of crime have been highlighted throughout this report and have formed the basis of several recommendations, but it is worth listing together here some of the key areas for continuing action :-

- ✓ Continue to improve street lighting in the borough

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<sup>16</sup> Scrutiny Review of Merton As An Employer of Disabled People' 2006; Scrutiny Review of Implementation of The Disability Discrimination Act, 1995

- ✓ Highlight the positive benefits of CCTV
- ✓ Continue to raise the visibility of the police in the local areas and develop awareness of the positive achievements in reducing crime and disorder locally
- ✓ Widen the use of police reassurance mapping, including the areas covered by the Reassurance Bus
- ✓ Promote the introduction of the 'Community Safe' initiative, and the benefits of signing up to the website
- ✓ Encourage ward councillors to take the initiative for tackling local concerns about crime and disorder, in line with their enhanced role as 'local champions' and through working with local people to resolve local issues, possibly using the new 'Councillor Call for Action' powers<sup>17</sup>
- ✓ Target reassurance resources more to the eastern side of the borough, in light of evidence of the correlation between social deprivation and heightened fear of crime
- ✓ Develop the links between transport police and the local police
- ✓ Expand the sharing of positive messages about crime reduction – through widening circulation of police newsletters and promoting the work of the Safer Neighbourhood Teams and Police through regular articles in *My Merton* magazine
- ✓ Continue to tackle visible signs of neglect in the streets, such as fly-tipping, graffiti, vandalism, litter and abandoned cars, etc
- ✓ Promote more widely the benefits of the 'Action in Merton' initiative by taking it to new areas.

5.6.5 During discussion of what is already being done to reduce fear of crime and reassure local residents, some other possible initiatives were also suggested:-

- Ensure that calls using phone line alert facilities for the public to report concerns about crime or anti-social behaviour e.g. through the Safer Neighbourhood Teams, are dealt with promptly
- Provide a more calming environment in public areas, including stations, by playing classical music
- Widen the use of 'street pastors', currently working in Mitcham, providing the opportunity to work with local youth otherwise at risk to gang culture
- Use the local press to give positive messages, to counterbalance press headlines about crime which can alarm the wider public.

5.6.6 Apart from the short term actions recommended already, there are longer term initiatives under way in Merton which should be able to contribute to reducing fear of crime in the borough. It is important to ensure that a focus on creating a welcoming and reassuring local environment is at the forefront of such initiatives, and the following recommendations highlight this:

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<sup>17</sup> The Police and Justice Act, 2006/Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Act, 2007– 'Councillor Call for Action'



**Recommendation 15: That work continues to deliver the core elements of Merton’s Local Development Framework, particularly around “designing out crime” e.g. for new housing estates.**

**Recommendation 16: That the services to be offered through facilities in the borough, such as the Intergenerational Centre in Mitcham and the new lottery funded facilities at Pollards Hill Library opening shortly, actively promote a better understanding between age groups across the whole spectrum of the borough’s population.**

**Recommendation 17: That proposals for the regeneration of Mitcham and Morden Town Centres are used as mechanisms to design welcoming environments for a mix of every age and class, with pedestrian-friendly street scenes, creating a perception of safety and well-being.**

## **6. CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS**

- 6.1 The recommendations in this report largely focus on the need to inform local people about the initiatives which are currently in place and being taken forward already to reduce fear of crime and disorder in the borough and increase reassurance about public safety and personal well-being. Many of the concerns raised by older residents and young people are already being addressed, such as expanding use of CCTV and improving street lighting. However, many local people are not aware of actions being taken to reassure the public about their safety and well-being. The challenge is to try and break down the public's entrenched, but outdated, perceptions about levels of crime and disorder, which are largely at odds with the reality.
- 6.2 Apart from the need to identify funding for community TV in the borough (see Recommendation 3), most of the other recommended actions are not likely to require high levels of resourcing, since much good practice is already being implemented.
- 6.3 From the evidence given by older people and local students, fears and concerns about crime, anti-social behaviour and personal safety can impact on people's daily activities, particularly after dark. However, a key message from the review is that responsibility for reducing fear of crime rests not just with the Police, but requires collaboration through the Council and local partners working together, including improving communication channels.
- 6.4 This report will be presented to Merton's executive body, the Cabinet, for approval and agreement to implement the recommendations through development of an action plan. The Overview & Scrutiny Commission will then have a continuing role in monitoring progress towards implementing the agreed actions within the timeframe set.

**Background Reading:-**

Tackling Fear of Crime and Disorder in the Community (The Home Office Fear of Crime Team, January 2005)

Engaging Communities in Fighting Crime (Louise Casey, June 2008)

The Review of Policing (Sir Ronnie Flanagan, February 2008)

From the neighbourhood to the national: Policing our communities together" (Policing Green Paper, July 2008)

The Police & Justice Act, 2006

Survey of Fear of Crime Amongst Older People (Age Concern, October 2002)

**Other scrutiny reviews used as background information:-**

- Who's Afraid of Crime? (Durham County Council, April 2005)
- Crime and the Fear of Crime with North Lincolnshire (North Lincolnshire Council, May 2004)
- Community Safety Review (Torbay Council, March 2007)
- Reducing the Fear of Crime in Older People (Buckinghamshire County Council, May 2004)
- Scrutiny Review of Reducing Fear of Crime (L B Harrow, March 2006)

Appendix A

**Overview and Scrutiny Review Scoping Template**  
**Overview and Scrutiny Commission**

<b>Title of Review</b>	<b>The Fear of Crime in Merton</b>
<b>Task group members</b>	Whole Commission membership, but lead members: Councillor Peter Southgate and Rod Scott
<b>Outline purpose of review</b>	To examine and evaluate the level of fear of crime, with a view to identifying simple actions to reduce fear of crime, in so far as that fear inhibits residents from living their lives as freely as they would wish.  To identify what drives fear of crime in Merton and whether the disparity between the fear of crime and the actual level of crime is significant.
<b>Expected timescale (possible no. of meetings?)</b>	4-6 months
<b>Terms of reference</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To evaluate the extent of fear of crime in the borough, as measured by the Annual Residents Survey (ARS), and compare it with actual crime levels;</li> <li>• To determine the principal drivers of fear of crime;</li> <li>• To identify which measures are effective in controlling fear of crime;</li> <li>• To review national data against local data to look for trends and identify whether fear of crime in Merton is above/below the London average.</li> </ul>
<b>Key areas of enquiry</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Crime and Disorder powers under relevant legislation</li> <li>b) National crime and fear of crime statistics (changes/trends)</li> <li>c) Safer Neighbourhood Teams/Neighbourhood Watch and wardens</li> <li>d) ARS</li> <li>e) Use of CCTV in the borough and how it can help address fear of crime if publicised</li> <li>f) Community engagement</li> </ol>

	<p>g) Communications – how this helps/hinders fear of crime (in Council and partnership context)</p> <p>h) Other Community Safety Initiatives</p> <p>i) Effect of national economic downturn on crime</p>
<b>How review could be publicised</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ 'My Merton' magazine</li> <li>□ The Council's website</li> <li>□ Local press</li> <li>□ Scrutiny webpage</li> </ul>
<b>Possible witnesses</b> (for written or oral evidence) e.g. Council officers, individual residents, community groups, partner organisations, other interested stakeholders, other external organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Police (Borough Commander)</li> <li>• Police Community Support Officers</li> <li>• Safer Merton (the CDRP) – incl. fear of crime studies</li> <li>• Youth Offending Team</li> <li>• Young People</li> <li>• Residents Associations</li> <li>• Ethnic minority group leaders</li> <li>• Merton Seniors Forum</li> <li>• Victims of crime/Victim Support</li> <li>• Local press</li> <li>• Stronger Merton</li> <li>• Neighbourhood Watch/Wardens/Safer Neighbourhoods</li> <li>• CCTV Manager</li> <li>• Cllr Chellew and Lewis (re gangs)</li> </ul>
<b>Potential barriers</b>	Time to undertake the review comprehensively is likely to be a challenge. The conflicting national picture
<b>Expected outcomes</b> (all linked to Merton's vision and strategic objectives)	<p>To provide an opportunity to scrutinise the work of a key partner organisation in the Merton Partnership (the Police);</p> <p>To highlight levels of real crime and demonstrate the disparity with perception of crime in the borough</p> <p>To recommend ways to ensure that local residents are reassured about crime and reduce the overall fear of crime in Merton.</p>
<b>Possible sources of information</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer Merton</li> <li>• Safer Neighbourhood Teams</li> <li>• Police statistics</li> <li>• ARS</li> <li>• Best Practice from other authorities (e.g. L B Ealing)</li> </ul>
<b>Scrutiny Team lead</b>	Barbara Jarvis, Acting Scrutiny Manager
<b>Relevant Review Officer(s)</b>	Annalise Elliott, Safer Merton Manager

**Request for document translation**

**Scrutiny review of the fear of crime in Merton**

If you need any part of this document explained in your language, please tick box and contact us either by writing or by phone using our details below.

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- Bengali** এই ডকুমেন্ট কোনে কোনে আপনার নিজ ভাষায় বুঝতে চাইলে, দয়া করে ব্যক্তিগত (করে) টিক টিক নিজ এক চিঠি লিখে বা কোন করে আমাদের সাথে যোগাযোগ করুন। নিচে যোগাযোগের বিবরণ দেওয়া হয়েছে।
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