

People Perception Project

Lancashire Constabulary

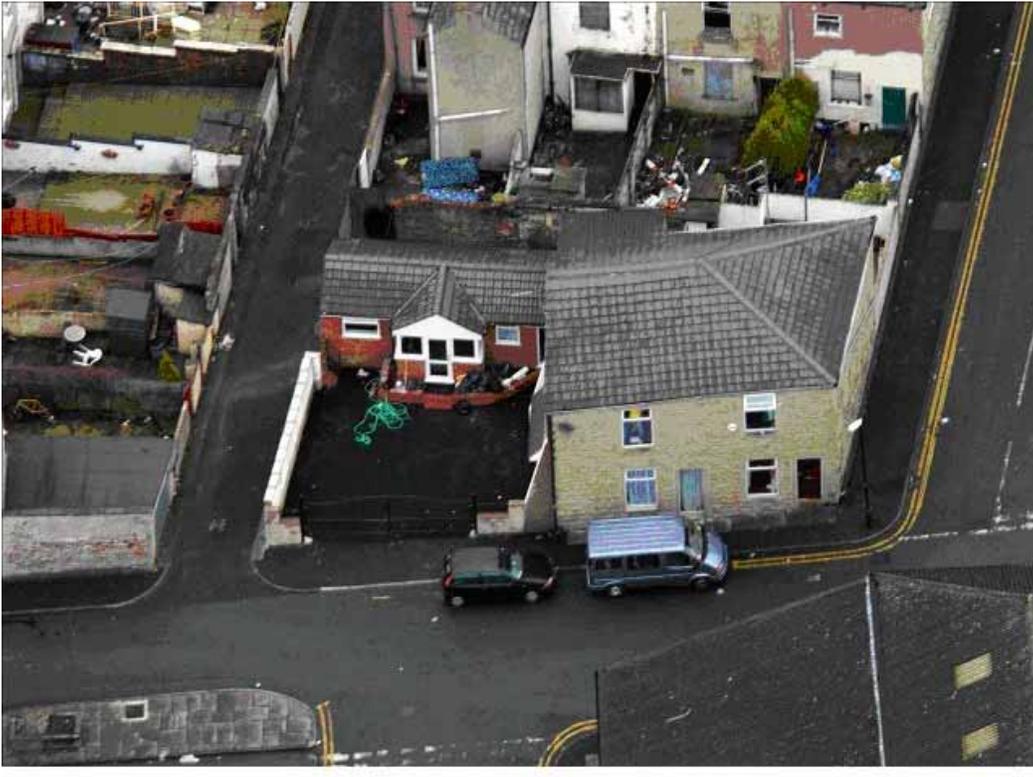
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People
Perception
Project



People Perception Project Summary

The Maudsley Street area of Accrington comprises of typical mill town housing, a dense number of terraced homes, some were unoccupied and in need of repair. This provided a playground for the local youths, who found derelict and business properties an easy target for their criminal activities.

Their crimes went largely unreported due to fears of speaking to the police or other agencies. The youths believed that the local community, which comprised largely of elderly/vulnerable residents, would not stop them because of fear of reprisals. The residents refused to speak out because of threats to 'put their windows through'.

The youths were committing acts of harassment, violence, damage, vandalism and burglary, in broad daylight or evening, because no one would challenge them. This situation came about due to the boredom of the youths involved and their belief that they could 'do what they want'.

Increasing public confidence in the police was paramount, to assist in the identification of the offenders and assist in the reduction of crime. The lead agency needed to be the police, with massive assistance from Perpetual Care, local residents and private landlords.

The main priorities of the project were to allow the law-abiding residents to live their lives in relative peace and not be in fear of crime or disorder. This meant that the offenders needed to be educated in how to behave in the community and the consequences if they did not. If they chose to continue their activities, the penalties would be imposed.

The first task was to identify the main offenders, sieve through the misconceptions and find the real targets. Once the targets have been identified, educate them of the police officers intentions if their behaviour does not improve, remove influences/friends, re-educate them, and intervene via Anti Social Behaviour Orders. Increase community cohesion by mixing young people with elderly residents to break down barriers/misunderstanding. Create a safer environment for the community by having the unoccupied properties secured immediately. Allow the community to know about the positive work by various media, such as newsletters, community e-mail and press releases.

There has been an increase in public confidence and a reduction in crime by 48 – 73%. The crime has not been displaced, the targets are no longer involved in criminal activity and the community believe that they have a voice and are being listened too.

The Public Perception

In March 2001, a private company bought a large accommodation in Peel ward, which was converted into a care home for young people. The home was to house young people referred by Social Services, due to the growing trend of reducing the number of Children Homes they run. This increased the fear in the residents because they believed that the home would be used to accommodate delinquent children that will commit crime in the area.

This concentration of young people lead to a focal point being created for local disaffected youths, an increase in anti social behaviour, low level crime (this is shown in Appendix Two), a reduction in public confidence and a feeling of disempowerment by the local residents.

Causes of the Problem and the Surrounding Factors

The Maudsley Street area is a densely populated part of Accrington, which is a mill town, in East Lancashire. The local inhabitants live in typical two up, two down terrace accommodation, constructed at the beginning of the 19th Century. The properties are closely compact, with no front garden and a small rear yard. The community consists of an ageing population.

There are a number of small business premises in the area, which are unoccupied during the evening/night. There are no green areas in the immediate vicinity, where young people can go to socialise or play sports. Therefore, the young people can only socialise close to residential properties.

Over recent times, private landlords have bought increasing amounts of the properties. This created a transient population in the area, which has had a negative effect on the community spirit and many residents became isolated and started to fear the outside world. Private landlords rarely visit their properties and are not aware of how secure their property is. Therefore, some of the properties in the area become insecure, which provide a playground for the young people. This needed to be addressed to reduce the risk to the young people and reassure the local residents.

The newly formed care home for young people (Heron House Children's Home) is on Maudsley Street, and is at the centre of this community. It is near an elderly residents sheltered accommodation and opposite small business premises. It holds up to five young people at any time, accommodates both sexes, ranging from 10 to 17 years. The home accommodates both long and short-term residences to young people, but concentrates more on long-term residents. The young people are referred to the home mainly by Social Services. The referral may come about for a range of reasons; for example, care issues at home, lack of parental control, repeat offender (therefore on bail conditions) or for the young persons own protection. They will not accept any young people that are Schedule One Offenders or may cause an immediate risk to the other young people or staff. The home is staffed 24 hours a day. This homes planning permission was granted with very limited consultation of the local community, which has led to an increased mistrust of the local council. This is very difficult to analyse, the community believed there was not enough consultation and the local council will argue that this was not the case, therefore leading to the community believing that they did not have an audible voice.

The local residents did not trust the police, council and the other members of the community.

The council was not seen as representing the local community, when the residents saw standards falling in the area they believed that their needs were being neglected. They felt misinformed and isolated. This ranged from issues surrounding planning for Heron House, control of private landlords and street cleansing

The residents would contact the police about incidents anonymously, expecting an instant response and the situation to be dealt with, without their direct involvement. Due to a lack of forthcoming witnesses, there was a limited amount of success by the police. This led to a "catch 22" situation, the offenders believed they could get away with their behaviour and the residents thought the police would not or could not help them. A self-perpetuating downward spiral of disempowerment started for the local community.

The fear of crime in the area was continually growing, because young people had an ever increasing confidence, they believed they could 'run the streets' and became very nonchalant about being seen or challenged by members of the community. An analysis of crime in the area was taken and a break down of the findings is in Appendix 2, these were also to be used as comparative figures for the assessment

When the local Community Beat Manager and Police Community Support Officer were introduced to the area, the residents would not even acknowledge the officers due to fear of reprisals if seen talking to the officers by the local young people.

Many of the residents are elderly. They were frightened of the young people. A large number of the elderly residents became 'prisoners in their own homes'. They felt vulnerable and scared of the young people.

The local residents and police service assumed that the young people from the home were the main offenders/instigators of the trouble in the area.

The residents at Heron House are also victims of the preconceived prejudices of the local community and the local police officers. When a crime or nuisance was committed in the area it was assumed, by all involved, that the offenders were from the home. Police officers would approach the homes residents in an antagonistic way, this created tension within the community. The residents at the home felt that they were being 'tarred with the same brush!' as a stereotypical young person in care. There was a lack of understanding by local residents' about identification of offenders and having evidence to prosecute.

Due to the age of the young people in the home, they are also part of the problem, as they became a focal point that others were magnetized. This is acceptable to the new residents at the home, because they are new to the area and are looking to make new friends to socialise with. However, this led to them being the victims of anti social behaviour and offences by the disaffected youths attending the area. They would be classed as vulnerable due to their age and perceived as disadvantaged due to their status and personal history, i.e. in Social Services care, etc.



Offender Profile.

There are two groups of offenders in the area. The first being the residents of Heron House Children's Home and the second being the local young people plus their associates.

Heron House – the residents at the home are there for various reasons, some of which are due to the lack of parental control at their home addresses. A minority of residents are repeat offenders in low level crime, and continue to carry on their behaviour once at the home. In addition, there is occasionally a hierarchy battle between the residents and the attracted/local young people, which can lead to criminal offences being committed. The majority of the young people at the home have very little or no criminal record, and are not offenders. Due to timescales, it is not possible to enrol residents in mainstream education, so most have home education. This means that the residents are in or around the home during the daytime.

Local Young People – the majority of the local young people are law-abiding citizens that do not get involved in any criminal activity. A very small proportion of the local young people are repeat offenders, which cause trouble in the area. They commit offences and attract other disaffected young people to the area. These people are of a similar age to the residents in Heron House and tempt the residents to go with them. This created an easy target for local residents to lay the blame with the home and blame the young people from the home for leading the local young people astray.

The troublesome young people of the area know a great deal about the local residents. They use this to their advantage, because the residents know the families of the offenders and their reputation in the local community

Some of the local young people belong to families that have a reputation of being violent and intimidating towards people when challenged. The offenders used this to increase fear in the local community. These young people used this to ensure their names would not be given to the police. The local young people spent large amounts of time excluded or truanting from school, this leads to extended time on the streets and boredom. They then start to commit offences in the area to entertain themselves. These offences ranged from anti social behaviour through to burglary. One of the main offenders lived opposite Heron House, which created the ease for the offenders from the home to mix with him. He also associated with other disaffected young people in the area, and they committed crime together at an alarming rate. Often residents would name the offenders but not be willing to make statements, or would offer hearsay evidence. This prevented positive action being taken about the offending behaviour.

Actions

The problem was tackled in various ways, the first tasks were to identify the offenders and increase the public confidence in speaking to the police.

To create a base to work from in the community this would be done in various steps.

- To attend the newly formed Residents Association and Neighbourhood Watch Scheme. To introduce the Community Beat Manager (CBM) and Police and Community Safety Officer (PCSO). This created an opportunity to offer support and reassure the community.
- Create a Newsletter to introduce the CBM and PCSO to the community and provide a flow of information to the community. With this, an Anti Social Behaviour Sheet was included, allowing residents to supply details of antisocial behaviour and offenders to the police, via a pre paid envelope.
- Use the community e-mail system to inform key contacts of the work being done in their local area by various agencies.
- To meet with the manager of Heron House Children's Home and, discuss the issues that the different parties saw in the area and develop a plan of how partnership work could be developed.
- Meet local Councillors to discuss the issues raised by residents.
- Attend the sheltered accommodation for the elderly and start building rapport and collate their concerns

A medium to long-term solution would be implemented to create a sustainable solution to the problem. This would be done as follows

- Regular attendance to the following contacts by the CBM and PCSO, to gather information, reassure, give feed back and disseminate information. At the following locations;
 1. Heron House
 2. Sheltered accommodation for the elderly
 3. Residents and Neighbourhood Watch Meetings
 4. Key Contacts developed through exposure at these meetings and whilst on high visibility patrol.
 5. Local Councillors
- Heron House would adopt a Sanctions System that could be used under their guidelines. This was a points system which could increase or decrease privileges depending on their behaviour
- Heron house would develop the possibility of outside agencies doing educational talks to the young people. This was to be organised by the Community Beat Manager following the development of problems in the home, i.e. drugs and arson reductions
- Increase "high octane" activities with young people, e.g. sport. This was suggested and implemented by Heron House.
- Residents repeatedly involved in anti social behaviour in the local community would be returned to the relevant Social Services Dept.
- Irregular visits to the home by The PCSO and CBM, to interact with the young people. This would enable the police to gather intelligence and build a rapport with them. The message to give the young was that the police would help them where possible but one that would not tolerate any unacceptable behaviour. Also the home wished to address any drug issues in the home so it was agreed that checks at a house would be done by the police drugs dog and necessary action taken against residents

- Residents from Heron House would attend the sheltered accommodation for the elderly to serve refreshments at the residents coffee mornings. This would develop an understanding between the elderly and the young and reduce fear in the elderly of the young people from Heron House.
- The Officers would carry out regular reassurance foot patrol in the area, to re-assure the community and pro-actively prevent offending by the offenders
- As a result of meeting with landlords it was decided that we would regularly check empty properties and if insecure, secured by the landlord
- The CBM would provide presentations, at the sheltered accommodation for the elderly aimed at reassuring them and informing them of action taken over their concerns and fears. Additional presentations were given on crime prevention advice at the request of the warden.

As a result of the information received from the Antisocial Behaviour Forms and from key contacts it was agreed between the community and police that several actions would be taken to address their concerns. This was seen as important to reinforce the reassurance and commitment offered to the community. These were

- Arrest offenders wherever possible
- Collate evidence to obtain Anti Social Behaviour Orders and Acceptable Behaviour Contracts wherever possible
- To remove problem residents from Heron House when necessary as per the procedures of Heron House

Assessment

The initial problem was an increase in anti social behaviour, low-level crime, a reduction in public confidence and a feeling of disempowerment by the local residents.

Has there been an increase in Public Confidence and an increase in the empowerment of the residents?

This is the most difficult area to assess. A sample of local businesses approached and asked for their thoughts on the problems in the area.

1. A public house local Landlord explained his concerns and said due to the decline in the area he was not going to renew the tenancy. He has since stated that the improvement has been sufficient to make them renew it. He stated that his customers have started returning to his public house and leave their vehicles in the car park over night because they have confidence that the police have addressed the community problems and feel safer in the local area. (The Great Eastern Public House, Arnold Street, Accrington)
2. A similar experience, a local business that was going to relocate due to the problems. However, has since stated that he is staying, since the problems have been addressed. (Friction Components, Maudsley Street, Accrington)
3. A local business has stated they now have a good relationship with the young people from Heron House. They invite them onto the premises for band practices and take them to concerts they play at (Hitchens Engraving, Maudsley Street, Accrington)

In addition to this, several local residents have written to the police expressing their thanks and explaining how addressing the problem has improved the quality of their lives. (Appendix One)

Heron House taking young people into the sheltered accommodation to serve refreshments at the coffee mornings for the elderly helped to increase public confidence. Many elderly people in the home regularly comment about this experience to the CBM and the warden. Although it is not practical for Heron House to do this on a regular basis, they will continue periodically to maintain their relationship with local residents.

The areas of the project, which have had a positive effect on this outcome, were as follows.

1. The activities completed by Young people at Heron House
2. The positive action taken by the police to address anti social behaviour and crime in the area. Although the residents frequently say that they like to see uniformed officers walking the streets, the area of the work that increased public confidence most was them seeing positive action by the police and feeling that their concerns were being addressed.
3. The media publicising actions taken, community emails and newsletters informing the residents of interventions and results.

The overall response has been that the public confidence has increased and the residents feel empowered to tackle problems in the area through the CBM, PCSO and local councillor. The CBM and PCSO are new posts with the Constabulary; therefore, it is not possible to proportion the rise of incidents reported, but it is recognised that the project has had an impact on this.

This success has produced a negative outcome regarding the Residents Association. The group's main concern was the problems that have been tackled

in this project and used the meeting to air their concerns as a community. Due to the satisfaction felt by the residents and the fact that they now feel confident in approaching the CBM, PCSO and local councillor directly, they felt no need to hold regular meetings now. This demonstrates the positive empowered feeling of the community.

To help gauge the public's perception, a survey has been completed with 39 residents in the local area. Examples of the questions asked are in appendix four with a breakdown of the results. The survey showed that:

- 80% of the residents stated that there had been a noticeable improvement in the area and 50% knew about the positive work of the project.
- Previous victims of antisocial behaviour had seen an improvement in the area.
- Newsletters are the preferred method of information being distributed in the area
- People were feeling safer living and working in the area.

Has there been a reduction in the low level crime committed in the area?

The number of reported crimes has reduced when comparing the figures of three months before the antisocial behaviour orders were obtained and the following three months.

The results were as follows

Burglary	66% reduction
Violent crime	100% reduction
Damage	73% reduction

Average reduction 80% (See Appendix 2)

Checks were done to check for other arrests in the area or people moving into the area that are known to have had an effect on crime figures in the past. One prolific offender moved on to the area after starting the interventions, there has been no increase in the crime figures. This showed the success of the operation at reducing the problem and that movement into the area was unlikely to have had an impact on the situation because the problems involving known offenders in the area.

From the Project, two areas of work have had an impact on the crime reduction.

1. Positive action against offenders by the police.
2. An increase in people from the community willing to provide witness statements
3. Procedures introduced within Heron House, e.g. voluntary drug searches by the police, implementing policies regarding re-homing persistent offenders or people who are a disruptive influence/ unacceptable behaviour.

Has there been a reduction in Anti Social Behaviour?

After looking at the causes of the problem two local young people have been highlighted as the main cause of Anti Social Behaviour. Interim anti-social behaviour orders were obtained against them.

After this, the complaints from the residents stopped regarding their behaviour and criminal offences.

Civil action against these young people was not the only action that stopped their behaviour. As the number of times one of these young people was arrested increased, an absent parent became involved and his involvement was a large factor in addressing the issue. The absent parent was initially contacted by the CBM concerning the young person's behaviour with little response. However when he saw the consequences of People Perception Project, he chose to take positive action with his offspring. He as since stated that the reality of the situation spurred him into action. He temporarily removed one offender from the area to help address the problem. Since this, the young person has returned to the area and not been involved in any other incidents.

Although this was not part of the project, it was as a direct result of the action taken by the community and the police, that the father became involved with the young person.

Conclusion.

The intervention was a success at reducing the antisocial behaviour and crime, whilst increasing public confidence and empowering the community. One area that would be looked at in further detail is the dissemination of information throughout the community. This is essential to maintain public confidence. The most effective and preferred method by the public was newsletters, where delivery is organised by the police. When community emails are dispatched, the relevant people failed to pass the information to the community, causing an uneven distribution of information across the community. Work with the Anti Social Behaviour orders completed in partnership with the local government borough solicitor. In future, it may be beneficial to contact all parents earlier in the process of obtaining anti social behaviour orders process to attempt to gain their co-operation in addressing the young people's behaviour.

Working in partnership with Heron House proved to be a distinct benefit in addressing the behaviour of the young people resident in the home. Saving time and need for progressing down the road of obtaining Anti Social Behaviour Orders on large numbers of people.

APPENDIX ONE

Sample comments letters received from residents.

Extract from letter received from Derby Street Accrington 23 February 2004.

“.....at last someone cares who will listen to us, and deal with the situation, this makes living around here so much better for peace and quiet and a decent life style”

“The AREA HAS IMPROVED TREMENDOUSLY NOW WE HAVE COMMUNITY HELP”

“Derby Street ETC: is a much more trouble free area than it used to be. THANKS TO OUR COMMUNITY POLICE HELP.”

Extract from a letter received from Hood Street Accrington

“Both myself and my wife now feel safer than we did a year ago there has been a big improvement in the area.”

“We have noticed a very big change in the area it has gone quieter and the large gangs of youths that used to hang around causing allsorts of trouble has almost dwindled away which makes it a more pleasant area to live in”

APPENDIX TWO

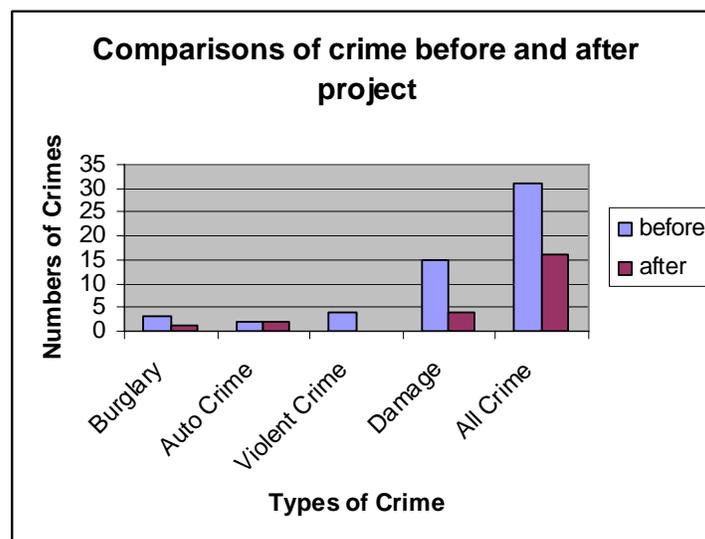
Crime figures used in finding the cause of the problem.

Figure before intervention, 1st July 2003 to 30th September 2003

	Derby Street	Hood Street	Horne Street	Arnold Street	Dowry Street	Maudsley Street	Total
Burglary	1	2	0	0	0	0	3
Auto Crime	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Violent Crime	0	3	1	0	0	0	4
Damage	0	1	4	2	1	7	15
All crime	1	9	9	2	3	7	31

Figure after intervention, 1st October 2003 to 31st December 2003

	Derby Street	Hood Street	Horne Street	Arnold Street	Dowry Street	Maudsley Street	Total
Burglary	0	0	0	0	0	1	1
Auto Crime	0	1	0	0	0	1	2
Violent Crime	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Damage	0	1	0	0	1	2	4
All crime	2	4	0	0	5	5	16



APPENDIX THREE

Examples of Newsletter and Newspapers Articles.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders

On the 9 October 2003 Hyndburn Magistrates made 2 local youths the subject of ASBOs. This was following great co-operation by a number of residents and local businesses, who were being effected by the behaviour of the youths, one of whom is only 12 years old. Many of you lived in fear of these youths, but you built up enough trust in me to provide information on the behaviour of the youths. I was then able to produce this information to the Court and interim Orders were granted. These Orders have curbed the behaviour of the youths and they no longer cause major problems in the area. They have learnt that you, as a community will not tolerate their behaviour and that you are prepared to stand up against them. You put your trust in the local police and as a result, you are experiencing a better quality of life. If you know of anyone you believe to be the root of nuisance in your area, please contact me in confidence.

Exert from "In touch" Newsletter
Issue No. 1 November 2003

Plea for help as cars are burnt out

by John Fahey

TERRIFIED residents are appealing for help after a long-running vandal nightmare which ended with two cars being wrecked.

Residents of Maudsley Street, Accrington, have been forced to put up with a catalogue of crimes in their neighbourhood, and want help from the police and council in a bid to combat the problem.

One resident, who does not want to be named for fear of reprisals, said: "We have complained several times to the police but they have just given us a special number for the council.

"These kids have been making a mess, sniffing glue and last Wednesday two cars were smashed up. One was a brand-new car that was battered to smithereens."

The resident says five or six youths - aged between 15 and 17 arrive late in the afternoon and are soon joined by about 10 friends who stay on the street until after midnight.

When they are asked to move on the residents receive an earful of abuse.

Another resident said the

juveniles had been urinating in the street and had broken her gate.

She said: "I think it's about time they put a CCTV camera up. The council has sent people to clean up but the youths soon make a mess again. People are really scared."

Ward councillor Graham Jones said: "This is an ongoing problem. It is an area that is starved of resources and the council has neglected it for more than a decade.

"The only thing flourishing seems to be offences. We are determined to stamp out bad behaviour because there are a lot of nice people in that area."

Sergeant Bob Eaton said: "The residents have had several months of relative quiet, principally due to the activities of the community beat manager and the residents' association."

He said feedback from residents has generally been good but added: "A couple of Anti-Social Behaviour Order hearings are due for juveniles who have presented us with a long-term problem."

Exert from "Accrington Observer"

APPENDIX FOUR

Neighbourhood Response Questionnaire

Lancashire Constabulary



Neighbourhood Response Questionnaire.

1.) Do You Know who your Community Beat Manager and Police Community Support Officer are?

YES NO

2.) Have you ever been effected by Anti Social Behaviour?

YES NO

3.) Did you know arrests had been made in the area regarding Anti Social Behaviour?

YES NO

4.) Have you noticed any difference in the area over the last six months?

YES NO

If "YES", what are they?

Quieter, now left alone. Don't feel intimidated.

5.) Do you think it is beneficial getting a regular newsletter, updating you about what your CBM and PCSO are doing in the area?

YES NO

Name: *Gordon Lambert.*

Address: *11 Bindshaw St East*

Email Address: *N/A.*

I would like to receive the community email

Signed: *G Lambert* Date: *10/3/04*

	Question One	Question Two	Question Three	Question Four	Question Five
Yes	47%	56%	50%	80%	88%
No	53%	44%	50%	20%	12%

Examples of comments made on the replies to the questionnaire.

“Quieter, now left alone. Don’t feel intimidated.” Lambert

“A lot quieter now-a-days. I feel much safer than six months ago” Cramp

“Quieter Children’s home doesn’t cause any problems. I feel safer than ever.” James

“Area is quieter and I feel less intimidated when I’m out and about.”