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Key implications

Perceptions of the policing and crime mapping 'Trailblazers'

Kathryn Ray, Rosemary Davidson, Fatima Husain, Sandra Vegeris and Kim Vowden (Policy Studies Institute) with Jacqui Karn (The Police Foundation)

Key implications

The aim of the research was to examine public perceptions of 'Trailblazer' initiatives across seven areas. These initiatives aim to increase transparency in policing and criminal justice, through enhancing or building on the national www.police.uk website. Qualitative research collected data from telephone interviews with policymakers and practitioners involved in the development and implementation of the initiatives, and from focus groups with members of the public. This enabled a detailed exploration of views, to provide feedback to the Home Office and local sites, and to inform future developments on transparency.

The findings suggest a number of implications for future policy in this area.

- There is a need to think carefully about future enhancements to www.police.uk and related initiatives. The findings suggest that more information is not always desirable and can be counter-productive. Information needs to be high quality, relevant, usable and intelligible.
- The type of enhancements that should be made to www.police.uk depend upon the purposes for which the site is to be used:
  - to aid in crime prevention, enhancements could include more frequent updates and more details about individual crimes;
  - for the public to use the site for holding the police to account, more aggregated data are required, namely trend data and comparisons of crime rates across areas.
- The findings suggest that information provision alone is unlikely to stimulate greater public engagement in police accountability, without wider activity to educate members of the public on how they might use the information to do this effectively.
- The initiatives need a 'hook' to keep people returning to them. Encouraging users to create an account and sign up for alerts, tailored to individual location and interest, would be useful for maintaining engagement.

Contents

Keywords

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The aim of the research was to examine public perceptions of 'Trailblazer' initiatives across seven police force areas. These initiatives aim to increase transparency in policing and criminal justice through enhancing or building on the national www.police.uk website. The initiatives comprised:

- Surrey Police Beat app – a smartphone application for local police communications (available to download from www.police.uk);
- Crime Reports – a more detailed crime mapping website developed by Community Safety Partners in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (www.crimereports.co.uk);
- Track My Crime – a case-tracking system for victims of crime developed by Avon and Somerset Police (www.trackmycrime.police.uk);
- 'Neighbourhood News' – a newsletter issued by Dyfed Powys Police;
- incorporating criminal justice outcomes on www.police.uk, tested in Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and West Yorkshire Police Forces prior to the national rollout in May 2012.

Methodology

The research was qualitative in approach, collecting data from 22 semi-structured telephone interviews with policymakers and practitioners involved in the development and implementation of the initiatives, and 14 focus groups (two in each area) with members of the public. This enabled a detailed exploration of public views, to provide feedback to the Home Office and local sites, and to inform future developments on transparency. The research does not quantify the overall level of public support for the initiatives.

Main findings

The research has highlighted considerable public curiosity and, to an extent, an appetite for crime and criminal justice outcome information. However, a key message from the research was that providing more information should not be an end in itself. The aim of transparency and openness must be balanced by the need for the information to be high quality, relevant, usable and intelligible.

Conveying complexity

The findings suggest that the public can respond negatively when too much information is conveyed, if it is perceived as having limited practical benefit. For some, particularly those who had not previously used www.police.uk, the availability of crime information was welcomed in principle, but the amount of information provided and level of disaggregation was felt to be too great. The traditional paper newsletter format of Neighbourhood News was viewed positively in this respect, since the information was succinct, easy to understand and available without too much effort on the part of the user. Too much information can also result in unintentional negative consequences, such as the map showing the location of neighbourhood police officers on the Surrey Police Beat app. Participants were confused as to its purpose, and felt it created a counter-productive impression of police inactivity, since the icons showing 'bobbies on the beat' were at a lower volume than was expected.

Balancing accessibility and complexity is a particular challenge when providing information on crime outcomes. While participants generally welcomed the inclusion of police and justice outcomes on www.police.uk, the summary page of outcomes hampered public understanding. This was because it was organised by type of outcome rather than by type of crime, and so did not easily allow participants to interpret the outcomes in the light of the types of offences committed. For some

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people, this presentation of the data simply confirmed their pre-existing suspicions about the 'leniency' of the criminal justice system.

Tailoring to purpose

The type of changes to the Trailblazer initiatives sought by the public depended on how they wanted to use the information. Hence future enhancements to www.police.uk need to be informed by the purpose intended. The main purpose identified by participants was for crime prevention. For the site to be used in this way, users required more frequent data (as with Crime Reports, which provided daily updates) and more detail on individual incidents, including the circumstances and ways in which an offence had been committed, to enable them to take preventative steps. None of the initiatives provided such information. For the purpose of holding the police to account, users required, instead, more aggregate data on crime trends and crime rates relative to other places, as well as information on police and court outcomes.

Promoting usage

The www.police.uk website and many of the other Trailblazer initiatives were felt to require a better 'hook' to keep people returning to them. Hence encouraging users to create an account and sign up for email alerts, as with Crime Reports, could be useful for maintaining engagement. Individually tailored alerts could inform about local crimes and their outcomes. A suggestion for the Surrey Police Beat app was to make better use of the technology to send out crime alerts tailored to an individual's GPS location. Making the tools more interactive, for example, inviting the public to submit information about crimes shown on the map, could also enhance ongoing engagement and potentially aid in crime prevention through generating collective intelligence.

The key use intended for the Trailblazers, to enable the public to use the information to hold the police and safety partners to account locally, was not well understood by the participants. They had limited awareness of ways to hold the police to account and expressed scepticism about the extent of their influence. The findings suggest that the provision of crime information alone is unlikely to stimulate public engagement in police accountability without wider activity to educate members of the public on how they might use the information to do this effectively. The forthcoming introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in

November 2012 will introduce a new element into the local dialogue between the public and community safety partners, and may provide additional opportunities for public engagement.

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1   Introduction

1.1   Background to the Trailblazer initiatives

1.1.1   Policy context

The use of computer-generated crime maps showing the location of crimes was first developed as an operational policing tool to guide the effective deployment of police resources. However, in recent years a commitment to make locally mapped crime data publicly available has been embraced by the UK Government. Several reviews have promoted the greater availability of local crime statistics.

- An independent review of crime statistics (Smith, 2006) suggested that publishing local crime statistics in an intelligible and usable form was vital to help communities to engage with and hold their neighbourhood policing teams to account. Providing mapped crime data was thought to be the best means of achieving this.
- A review of crime, justice and community involvement (Casey, 2008) recommended the publication of monthly local crime information, including crimes committed, sentences received and action being taken to tackle crime.
- A review of policing (Flanagan, 2008) called for the provision of accessible and relevant local information on crime trends, how local priorities are established and actions taken to address local crime.

The subsequent policing Green Paper (Home Office, 2008) required all police forces to provide crime information to the public through the provision of crime maps by December 2008.

The crime maps were initially published on police force websites. In order to bring these together and allow a national overview, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) developed one website for these data, www.police.uk, launched in October 2009. This allowed the public to view monthly crime data for local areas by doing a postcode or area-based search (Home Office, 2009).

As part of their commitment to transparency, the Coalition Government gave a renewed emphasis to making crime and anti-social behaviour data available for communities to use to engage with the police and to make government and public services more accountable to the public (O'Hara, 2011). In January 2011 the Government enhanced www.police.uk by publishing local maps showing crime data at street level. The provision of 'accessible, street-level crime data' is intended to facilitate meaningful public engagement with local police and other services engaged in crime reduction and community safety (Home Office, 2010).

Progress has also been made in increasing public access to local criminal justice data, one element of which has been publishing data on justice outcomes (Ministry of Justice, 2011). Since November 2011 the Open Justice website (open.justice.gov.uk) has provided information on average reoffending rates for individual prisons, and the number and type of sentences given for different offences in courts within each police force area. In July 2011 the Prime Minister also committed to provide information on 'police action and justice outcomes' on the www.police.uk website (Cameron, 2011), which was subsequently introduced in May 2012.

1.1.2   Current evidence on public use of crime maps

There is little evidence available on the public's use of crime maps and the effect on perceptions and behaviour. Evidence on the provision of crime and policing information more generally has shown that providing information can improve people's knowledge

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and confidence in the police and criminal justice system. For example, experimental studies (Chapman et al., 2002; Salisbury, 2004; Singer and Cooper, 2008) have shown that the distribution of information booklets about crime and criminal justice improved people's knowledge of sentencing and positively affected attitudes towards and confidence in the criminal justice system. Wünsch and Hohl (2009) also showed that the distribution of a policing newsletter to residents had a significant positive effect on people's confidence in the police.

Quinton (2011) conducted a similar experimental study, looking at the effects of providing crime information through online crime maps on public perceptions and confidence in the police.[1] The study showed that people generally found crime maps trustworthy and informative, particularly when presented alongside information about local policing. It also showed that the crime maps had a small positive effect on public perceptions of the local police and on perceptions of crime rates. While being exposed to the crime data made people more aware of the possibility of being a victim, this exposure did not make them more worried about being a victim of crime. The study concluded that the publication of crime maps should be supplemented with information about the work of neighbourhood police teams and locally tailored crime prevention advice.

This Quinton study was conducted prior to the launch of street-level crime mapping in 2011 and focused only on the short-term effects of receiving crime information in the context of a research interview. There is little evidence available about how people use crime maps in their everyday lives and how this might impact upon their perceptions of crime and policing. Focus group research conducted alongside the crime maps study found that people thought that members of the public had a right to information on local crime but were unlikely to use crime maps themselves (ibid., 2011). Recent data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW, formerly known as the British Crime Survey) show that the extent of use of online crime maps among the public has risen substantially since the introduction of street-level mapping on www.police.uk in January 2011; 13 per cent of the population stated that they had looked at or used a local interactive crime map in the 12 months to October–December 2011, compared with 3 per cent in the previous year. However,

there are no studies currently (August 2012) available that have sought the experiences and views of existing users of online crime maps.

1.2 The Trailblazer initiatives

In order to provide the public with access to a wider range of data on crime, policing and criminal justice, the Home Office and NPIA are undertaking work with a number of local 'Trailblazer' sites. These sites – most of which equate to police force areas – are exploring different approaches to enhancing the www.police.uk website. Collectively, the Trailblazer initiatives aim:

- to provide the public with access to more frequent crime data and more information on justice outcomes;
- to encourage more interaction between the police and the public; and
- to provide crime victims with better access to information about their case.

The initiatives comprise:

- the inclusion of criminal justice outcomes data on www.police.uk, which was tested in Lincolnshire, Leicestershire and West Yorkshire[2] Police Forces, prior to the national launch in May 2012;
- the Crime Reports website, developed by Community Safety Partners in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight, which provides an alternative crime mapping site to www.police.uk with daily updates, more accurate mapping and a greater amount of detail about the crimes mapped (www.crimereports.co.uk);
- 'Neighbourhood News',[3] a paper newsletter with summary local crime information for the neighbourhood drawn from www.police.uk, issued by Dyfed Powys Police;
- the Surrey Police Beat phone application (app), developed by Surrey Police, which allows the local community to see what neighbourhood police teams are working on and to vote on local priorities (available to download from www.police.uk); and

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1 The study was undertaken before the national website, www.police.uk, had been developed. Participants were presented with screenshots of maps showing the rate of recorded crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) incidents for their local area from the previous month.

2 West Yorkshire Police have also developed a website called 'In The Dock' (www.westyorkshire.police.yk/ITD/), which publishes detailed justice outcomes for key cases of public interest locally. In The Dock was not covered as part of this research.

3 This was not one of the original Trailblazer initiatives, but was included in the research as a point of comparison, since it comprises an information initiative that does not rely on new digital technology.

- Track My Crime, a case-tracking system for crime victims, developed by Avon and Somerset Constabulary (www.trackmycrime.police.uk).

1.3   Aims and objectives of the research

The Home Office commissioned research to explore public views of the Trailblazer initiatives. The research explores:

- public use of www.police.uk and the Trailblazer initiatives;
- public perceptions of the usefulness of the Trailblazer initiatives and their suggestions for enhancements;
- how the public can use www.police.uk and the Trailblazer initiatives to challenge and hold the police to account locally.

In order to set the public views in context, the research also examined the development, aims and implementation of the Trailblazer initiatives.

Given that the Trailblazer initiatives were at an early stage of development in most cases, the research was intended to provide early feedback to the Home Office and local sites, and to inform future national developments. It did not seek to determine whether the initiatives have had an impact in terms of greater public confidence in or engagement with the police.

1.4   Report structure

Chapter 2 of the report briefly outlines the research design and methods used for the study, and the remaining chapters then present the research findings. This begins with findings about the national crime mapping website, www.police.uk, in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 goes on to cover justice outcomes on www.police.uk, which are now available nationally. Chapter 5 discusses the findings from initiatives that use alternative methods for providing the public with crime data (the Crime Reports website and the neighbourhood newsletter). Chapter 6 covers the findings for Trailblazer initiatives that aim to inform the public about other police activity (the Surrey Police Beat app and Track My Crime). Chapter 7 then concludes by summarising the overarching themes from across the initiatives, and drawing out implications for future policy in this area.

2   Research design and methods

A qualitative research design was adopted to explore and probe in-depth views on the Trailblazer initiatives.

2.1   Staff interviews

The first stage of the research comprised a series of semi-structured telephone interviews with:

- six national representatives from the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) who were involved in the development of the Trailblazers initiative; and
- between 2 and 4 practitioners in each Trailblazer area who were involved in the implementation of the initiatives locally (16 interviews in total). These respondents were primarily from the police, but other partner organisations (Crown Prosecution Service, local authorities) were also represented where they had been involved in the local initiative.

Interviews were undertaken between November 2011 and January 2012. The interview topics included:

- the context, aims and local development of each Trailblazer initiative;
- implementation challenges;
- practitioner views on public take-up and usage of the Trailblazer developments; and
- practitioner views on the effects of the initiatives, particularly in terms of police-community engagement and accountability.

2.2   Public focus groups

The second stage of the research comprised a series of focus groups with members of the public in each of the seven Trailblazer areas. In total 14 focus groups (2 in each area) were held between December 2011 and February 2012. These included 102 members of the public; 33 of whom had previously used www.police.uk. Participants were given a demonstration of the relevant Trailblazer initiative in the group. Key themes discussed in the focus groups included:

- feelings about crime and community safety;
- sources of information about local crime;
- previous use of www.police.uk (and the Trailblazer initiative where relevant);
- views on the content, usability and usefulness of

www.police.uk and the relevant Trailblazer initiative;
- views on the potential of the initiatives for engagement with the police and holding the police to account; and
- suggestions for improvement.

Further information on how the focus groups' participants were recruited and their composition can be found in Annex A.

2.3　Data analysis

Data from the interviews and focus groups were summarised according to a set of themes, developed iteratively from the research questions and the data. These data were then compared, examining patterns, relationships and (in)consistencies across the dataset. Interpretative analysis then drew out the meanings of the findings in relation to the aims of the Trailblazer initiatives and the policy area. Fuller details of the analytical process are provided in Annex A.

2.4　Limitations

Although qualitative methods allow a detailed exploration of views, the findings can only highlight the range of views about the Trailblazer initiatives held among the public; they cannot show how widespread these views are in the population as a whole.

Sampling for the focus groups was not designed to be representative of the population, but to achieve a balance of users and non-users of the Trailblazer initiatives, in order to elicit informed views about the initiatives' effectiveness (see Annex A for more detail). However, results were affected by the fact that fewer than anticipated pre-existing users were recruited to the groups. In some cases, this was because initiatives were not yet live or were in their early days, and in other cases it proved difficult to recruit pre-existing users within the timeframe of the research. This should be borne in mind when interpreting the findings.

It should also be noted that the views of those who have no interest in receiving information about crime and policing may not be represented here, since members of the public who are willing to participate in a focus group on this topic are likely to be more interested in crime data than those who choose not to take part.

The findings relate to versions of the initiatives available at the time of the research. Key findings from the research have been fed back to the forces and have been used as part of the continual development of the Trailblazer initiatives.

3　National crime mapping website – www.police.uk

3.1　Background

Street-level information about crime and anti-social behaviour (ASB) has been available through the www.police.uk website since January 2011. The site aims to make crime and ASB data more accessible, in order to help people to engage with their local police service and hold it to account, for example, by raising issues at local police beat meetings.

The website invites users to enter their postcode, town, village or street in a search box. They are then shown details of their neighbourhood policing team, information about the next beat meeting and messages from their local police service. The key feature of the website is a street-level map, which shows the location of incidents of crime and ASB. From May 2012 the map also showed police actions taken in response to crimes committed and justice outcomes where available. The website is updated at the end of each month, showing incidents and the related outcomes recorded by the police in the preceding month.[4]

Recent data from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) show increasing use of online crime maps following the launch of www.police.uk in January 2011. During January to March 2011 the proportion of respondents who were aware of, or had looked at or used, online crime maps more than doubled from the previous quarter. The most recent CSEW results (from interviews in the 12 months to December 2011) show that one-third (33%) of people were aware of crime maps and 11 per cent had used them.[5]

3.2　Public experiences and perceptions of www.police.uk

3.2.1　Website usage

Focus groups participants fell into four groups in terms of their previous use of www.police.uk.

- Non-users: Those who had no knowledge of www.police.uk prior to being recruited for the discussions.

4　Annex B provides further details about the development of the www.police.uk website.
5　See Annex B for further detail about these usage figures.

- Single visitors: Those who had heard of the website and used it just once. These were mostly people who had accessed the website out of "curiosity", after having heard about it through the media at the time of the launch, or subsequently through work, friends, neighbours, at local meetings or directly from the police.
- Occasional users: People who had either used the site to research areas when moving house or visited the site occasionally to "keep up to date" with local issues. Sometimes participants were prompted to look at the site after hearing about a local crime through other means (for example, in the local press or a community newsletter).
- Regular users: These comprised a small group of people who used the website through their work. This group included:
  - teachers and youth workers using it to engage with young people about crime;
  - an architect to assist in the planning of new developments;
  - local business owners to be aware of security issues; and
  - staff in large organisations with a safety remit for other staff.

3.2.2   Public views on the usefulness of the website

In general, participants in the focus groups showed an interest in the data provided on the website, particularly the ability to pinpoint crimes on specific streets in their neighbourhood. Participants who were not previously aware of the website often said that they intended to check the data for their street or neighbourhood when they got home out of curiosity. However, participants were more divided in their views about the usefulness of the site. Here, it was those participants who had already used the website who tended to be more positive about having the information available and could see uses for it, while non-users and single visitors were less likely to see the site as useful, and often struggled to see its purpose.

Perceived purposes of the website

Two main uses for the website were identified:

- to help protect themselves (and their families) against crime by taking more effective crime prevention measures; and
- to help with researching areas when moving house.

It was more common for participants to have used the website to look at crime rates in different neighbourhoods when moving house, than for crime prevention. While some participants wanted to use the website for crime prevention (for example, by using it to monitor local crimes and putting in place additional security measures where necessary), it was not felt to be particularly well suited to this purpose at present due to the lack of detail given about crime incidents (see section 3.2.3 for further detail).

There was also a widespread view that the website was more useful for specialist users, such as journalists, researchers, teachers and local business owners, rather than for the general public. It was also seen as useful for Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators (and equivalent groups, such as Pub/Farm/Shop/Car Watch, Street Safe) who could use it to inform their members to take crime prevention steps.

Holding the police to account

While participants were rarely aware of the Government's transparency agenda, some expressed the view that it was important to have detailed crime information in the public domain. Some people also commented that it was important to have the information to know if the police were "doing their job". However, when asked if they might use the information to 'hold the police to account' or to engage with the police about crime and safety issues in the neighbourhood, there were mixed views about whether this was something the public should do. Many were sceptical about their ability to influence the police and were not aware of how this might be done. This was particularly the case in the focus group of younger people (aged 18–25):

> "They're not going to respond to one person saying: 'I don't like the way you do this', [...] they're not going to listen to one small person [...] it would have to be a government thing that changed it, not two or three people getting together and saying: 'We're not happy with this'. They're not going to change, they'll just look at you, laugh, and carry on doing as they please anyway."
>
> (Focus group area 3)

When it was suggested by the moderator in focus groups that the crime information could be used in local police meetings, participants occasionally agreed that it might be helpful to take the information to meetings in order to challenge the police over what they were doing about crime. However, they gave little sign that they intended

to do this, mostly because most participants tended not to attend such meetings. Generally, participants were more comfortable with the idea of their role as one of submitting information to the police about crime incidents, rather than influencing the work of the police in a wider sense. This fitted with their understanding of the website as being primarily for the purpose of crime prevention.

Views of non-users

The majority of non-users and single visitors to the website did not think that their use of the site was likely to change in the future. These people often expressed confusion about the purpose of the website and struggled to think how they might use it:

"I'm just confused about what really it does tell us. Obviously it tells us numbers, figures, but is it helpful?"

(Focus group area 1)

"It's interesting […] I don't think it's useful."

(Focus group area 2)

"What do they want this website to do?"

(Focus group area 6)

Those people who were less positive about the utility of the website often said it provided too much information. For some people, this was because they would "rather not know" about local crimes because it would make them more worried. For others, it was because they preferred to receive crime information through other channels, such as local newspapers, newsletters from the police, information from Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators or by attending police meetings. These channels were preferred because they provided summary information that had been interpreted and assessed as being relevant, rather than detailed statistics that the user was required to interpret.

Given doubts about the usefulness of the site and the lack of understanding of its purpose, participants in several focus groups questioned whether the website was a good use of public resources, especially in the current financial climate. It was suggested that additional "police on the streets" or putting money into prevention/diversionary activities (such as youth facilities) could be a better use of resources.

3.2.3 Public views on the content of the website

Street-level mapping and privacy issues

Participants were generally positive about the ability to see crimes mapped to the street level, and the balance on the website between privacy and accuracy, achieved through the use of snap points,[6] was seen to be about right for participants:

"Generally a road is good enough; I wouldn't want it to actually be like 'this house got burgled', if it was my house."

(Focus group area 6)

While concerns about individual privacy were rarely raised, some participants were concerned that the mapping might have unintended consequences, such as stigmatising certain areas and reducing house prices, or contributing in some way to higher insurance premiums. There were also concerns that the information could be used to plan crimes, such as burglaries (by targeting areas with low levels of crime).

Level of detail about crimes mapped

Although participants were content with the level of geographical detail provided, they were less happy about the level of information on the nature of offences mapped. Generally, it was felt that that there was not enough detail about how the crimes reported on the map were committed to allow them to use this information to take crime prevention measures effectively:

"In terms of the detail of what's happening […] as we look here, vehicle crime, robbery, who knows what they are? What is vehicle crime? Is it theft? Is it no insurance? Is it an untaxed car that they've found? It could be something to be careful about, make sure everything's locked and away, or it could just be that somebody up the road has not paid their insurance."

(Focus group area 7)

Crime data – which were updated monthly – were also seen by many participants to be "too old to be useful". It was suggested that the website needed to be updated more often to enable it to be used for crime prevention.

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6 Crimes are mapped to an anonymous point (called a 'snap point') that is a dot on a street that is on or near the location of the actual crime. See Annex B for further detail.

Participants in several groups also wanted to see additional information about measures taken by the police (or other partners) in response to crime, and about the eventual justice outcomes in relation to the crimes shown on the maps.[7] In these discussions, requests for information about whether crimes had been 'solved' (i.e. arrests made) and whether the offender(s) had been brought to justice were commonly interlinked:

> "It would be really good to see how many of those crimes were solved and how many of them actually went to court and people were convicted."
>
> (Focus group area 5)

Interpreting the mapped data

Concerns were raised in many of the focus groups about the potential for the public to misinterpret the mapped crime data. One concern was around the crime categories, which some people felt to be too wide. This was particularly the case with the 'ASB category', which was felt to include incidents that are "annoying rather than a crime", thus potentially resulting in a misleading picture of the extent of crime. The other category questioned was 'violent crime', which participants felt could be broken down further.

Some participants also expressed the view that local knowledge was required to make sense of the data. For example, it was noted that the presence of pubs and night clubs could lead to a high volume of incidents at certain times of the day. This could create a misleading view of the relative safety of the area for users without this local knowledge.

In all focus groups, participants expressed an interest in seeing information on comparisons of crime rates across neighbourhoods, and crime trends for the neighbourhood over time. Summary information on detection rates was also sought alongside crime rates. These types of data were felt to be more useful in providing a complete picture of crime levels in an area and assessing the performance of the local police, than individual incident volumes for one point in time.

Local information

Participants in several of the groups were pleased that the website showed the photographs and contact details of their local neighbourhood policing team. It was said that being able to "put a face to a name" might give more confidence to members of the public in contacting the police if they had information. Publicising the 101 (police non-emergency) number on the website was also thought to be helpful.

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7 The focus groups were carried out before the justice outcomes data became available on the website in May 2012.

4   Justice outcomes

Criminal justice outcomes data were made available on the www.police.uk website in May 2012. Users are able to look up not only the number and types of crime mapped at the local level, but also the action the police took in response to those crimes and, where possible, details of the court outcome. The site also provides a summary of the number of different types of police and court outcomes recorded for the previous month. The aim of this is to put crime information in a broader context and provide a fuller picture of the work of the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts. An additional aim is to make criminal justice system information more accessible and intelligible to the public, thus addressing low levels of awareness and understanding. Three police forces – Leicestershire, Lincolnshire and West Yorkshire – helped to test the development of this initiative before its national rollout.

One of the main challenges in providing this information to the public is enabling the user to make a meaningful link between a specific crime incident and its outcome. This link is complicated by constraints in IT services that support the police and the courts, and a limited understanding among the public of how the criminal justice system works, for example, the time lag before a case goes to court. Conveying complex sentencing outcomes in a format that is clear and intelligible to the public, while presenting sufficient contextual information to make sense of the outcome, is also another challenge.

4.1   Public perceptions of the justice outcomes data

4.1.1   Public views on the usefulness of the initiative

As noted in the previous chapter, across all the focus groups many participants spontaneously expressed an interest in seeing information on the follow-up to recorded crimes, both in terms of 'solved' crimes (arrests made) and criminals brought to justice. It was commonly felt to be important to have this information to provide a positive counterpoint to the crimes displayed on the map and to "complete the picture" in terms of the work of the police. When participants in the three justice outcomes Trailblazer sites were presented with the outcomes

data on the site prototype,[8] however, views were more mixed about the usefulness of the data presented. Those participants who were previous users of www.police.uk, and were more positive about the availability of mapped crime data, were more likely also to be positive about the justice outcomes data. However, participants overall felt that the outcomes data presented were less useful than the mapped crime data.

Perceived purposes of the outcomes data

While the crime data on www.police.uk were seen to have a use for participants in researching areas when moving house or for crime prevention, most focus group participants struggled to think of a use for the outcomes data. Despite showing an initial curiosity in the outcomes data, many were unconvinced that they would become regular users of it:

> "It's kind of good to know when you see things getting resolved, because they don't get reported enough [...], but I don't see in what situation in the future that I'd need to use it."
>
> (Focus group area 7)

In general, it was felt that the outcomes information would be useful for victims of crime or people who had some link to that crime (for example, if they were a witness, had reported the crime, or knew someone involved) and for specialist users (such as journalists, researchers, youth workers). Participants were less clear about how the information could be used by the general public.

Holding the justice services to account

As with the crime data on www.police.uk, some participants expressed the view that it was important that the outcomes data was in the public domain since the public had a right to know how well the police were performing:

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8   Focus groups took place before the site was live, and participants were presented with screenshots of a mock-up of the web page that showed summary police and justice outcomes for the previous month. This mock-up was identical to the outcomes summary page, which is now available on the live site, save for some minor changes to the outcomes terminology. However, the key difference is that with the live site, users can also click on individual crimes on the map and find information about the follow-up police and court actions (and, conversely, for each individual outcome, users can click to receive information on the type of crime committed). This link between individual crimes and their outcomes was not available with the site mock-up. As described later in the chapter, this was one of the key ways that the public wanted to use the site.

"I like it, see if your taxes are going to good use, to see if the police are actually doing something [...] so it is nice to see if burglaries are being resolved, people are being prosecuted for it, it is nice to know and it is comforting."

(Focus group area 3)

However, participants did not spontaneously suggest using the data to engage with the police or with criminal justice services. When prompted about the possibility of this, participants commonly expressed the view that the criminal justice system needed to be more accountable to the public:

"Bring in the justice side as well, it's about time the justice side were made as equally accountable as the police."

(Focus group area 1)

However, they tended to be unaware of how this might be achieved.

4.1.2   Public views on the content of the website

Although there was a clear appetite for data on crime outcomes, participants were generally dissatisfied with the amount of information on the site prototype and the way in which it was displayed. This was related to how participants wanted to use the data, which was in one of two ways:

- to check whether local crimes in their area were being resolved, in order to provide general reassurance that offenders were no longer "at large";
- Tracking local cases to check that "justice had been done" in the case of local crimes that they knew about – either because they were involved in some way or because it was a high-profile crime.

Whether local crimes were resolved

For the first of these uses – to check if local crimes were being resolved – participants found the information on the site to be poorly organised, hampering their interpretation of it. Rather than a list of total police/court outcomes for a given month (as shown on the summary outcomes page on both the prototype and the live site), participants wanted to see the outcome information listed by type of crime, so that they could make an assessment of whether the more serious crimes were being resolved. In general, there was most interest in seeing summary outcome data for more serious crimes and for persistent offenders:

"What the public really want to know is if the people who cause the most trouble are actually off the street."

(Focus group area 2)

As this comment suggests, the type of outcome information that participants were most interested in seeing was linked to their desire for reassurance around knowing that offenders were "off the streets". Hence participants generally said that they wanted summary information about arrests made or people charged for specific crime types, rather than convictions.[9] It was suggested by some participants that a summary display of the proportion of crimes of each type that were 'resolved' or 'unresolved'[10] would be the right level of detail and clarity required for most users.

Tracking local cases

Those people interested in using the website to check that "justice had been done" in the case of local crimes, wanted to be able to identify a crime they knew about on the map and then follow it through to its conclusion. This was not possible with the prototype site mock-ups that were used in the focus groups although it is now possible to do this with the live site.

These individuals said they were interested not only in arrests made and charges brought, but also in the eventual court outcomes. While some participants felt that this sort of information on sentences received was already sufficiently available through local media, others thought that it was preferable to have the information on the website since they felt it would be more comprehensive and accurate:

"I think for me, the past few months, there's been a lot of high-profile crime in my area, so something like this for me would be interesting, because the whole community has been affected by these crimes, but we're not always kept up to date on the convictions and the court cases, the full proceedings."

(Focus group area 3)

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9   This seems to suggest a lack of understanding of the criminal justice system, however, since someone could be arrested and charged and still out on bail.
10   Again, 'resolved' was generally used interchangeably with 'arrests made' or 'people charged', rather than with reference to convictions.

Outcome information about individual high-profile crimes is provided by a website called 'In The Dock', which has been developed in one of the justice outcomes Trailblazer sites. This site publishes information about the offence and the offender (including a photograph), the investigating officer, the prosecutor and the sentence received for key crimes of public interest locally. While 'In The Dock' was not tested in the focus groups, the type of information it provides is akin to what focus group participants expressed most interest in – detailed information about the outcomes for local high-profile crimes.[11]

4.1.3   Interpreting the data

Both the prototype and the live site present a summary page of police and justice outcomes (such as 'Under investigation', 'Offender given caution', 'Offender sent to prison') recorded within the previous month. Seeing the summary information[12] presented in this way prompted some participants to comment that the data confirmed their perceptions that too many people were "getting away" with crime since "nobody gets locked up". In particular, the number of people imprisoned as a proportion of the total number of outcomes was highlighted by participants:

"[…] this just makes it even more highlighted that they're getting away with it […] This just tells you now, oh yeah, 82 got imprisoned out of 1,395. Well, it's a little bit [...] irritating!"

(Focus group area 2)

While these views were expressed to an extent across all the groups, they were most evident amongst participants in the rural focus groups (who were also most sceptical about the usefulness of the www.police.uk website in general). For these people, the outcomes data presented in the groups was interpreted as revealing how many crimes had not been effectively brought to justice, simply confirming their pre-existing suspicions about the leniency of the system:

"For me to look on the internet and go: 'Oh look, they didn't do anything' – I already know that, there's no point [...] the amount of crimes with no outcome that's the big thing, or the outcome doesn't fit the crime."

(Focus group area 2)

These views about the criminal justice system also reflect previous evidence (Ministry of Justice, 2010), which shows that the prevailing public perception is that the criminal justice system is too lenient, partly because knowledge of crime and sentencing practice is limited.

The challenge, as practitioners pointed out, is for the justice outcomes information to be presented in such a way that it allows the public to engage with it in a more informed way, using contextual information to make sense of the sentences given. The presentation of summary outcomes, without any reference to the types of crime that the outcomes relate to, seemed to inhibit this more informed engagement with the figures.

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11 The issue of publishing photographs of offenders, however, was contentious and raised very strong feelings on both sides in all of the focus groups where it was discussed. Some participants felt that the principle of 'name and shame' was a good one, particularly for repeat offenders, perpetrators of serious crimes and paedophiles, and could aid crime prevention. Others thought that the drawbacks outweighed the positives, such as the dangers of vigilantism, family members receiving abuse, and paedophiles being "driven underground".

12 The actual data presented on the mock-ups were fictional.

5   Alternative methods of sharing crime data with the public

This chapter discusses two further methods of sharing crime data with the public. The first, Crime Reports, is an alternative crime mapping website to www.police.uk, with a number of additional features. The second, 'Neighbourhood News', presents crime data in a more traditional, newsletter format, targeted at residents who do not have access to digital technology.

5.1   Crime Reports

The Community Safety Partnership in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight launched a website, www.crimereports.co.uk, in October 2011, which provides an alternative crime mapping website to www.police.uk. The site was developed by a company in the United States and is already used by over 900 police forces there. The aims of Crime Reports, according to local practitioners, are:

● to inform members of the public so that they can better protect themselves against crime;
● to provide reassurance through the provision of accurate crime data and details of policing activity; and
● to facilitate public involvement in community safety through social media.

Key features of the site are:

● automated daily crime updates (Monday to Friday);
● mapping of crimes to their exact location rather than using snap points;[13]
● detailed crime categories;[14]
● additional incident types, such as road traffic collisions and fires;
● details about each incident, including date and time, unique identifier, postcode[15] and whether 'solved' or 'unsolved';
● automated narrative accounts of current neighbourhood problems, including actions taken;
● ability to sign up for email daily, weekly or monthly alerts about crimes occurring in an area specified by the user;
● an interactive facility allowing users to join groups and share information via a community message board.

In addition to the public-facing website, another part of the site, Command Central, is accessible to community safety partners[16] to analyse and visualise crime data. This is intended to enhance partnership working and resource deployment.

Local staff involved in the initiative reported that it was inexpensive to develop, since it was derived from a generic website that police forces upload their data to. It is also anticipated that it will save resources in the longer term, since Command Central improves the efficiency of analytical tasks for the community safety partners.

5.1.1   Public perceptions of www.crimereports.co.uk

Perceived purposes of the website

Findings from the public focus groups for the Crime Reports website were similar to those for the www.police.uk site. As with www.police.uk, participants saw the main purposes of Crime Reports as being for crime prevention and for researching areas when moving house. In addition, given that there were more people in the Crime Reports focus groups already engaged in local community safety networks (see Annex A for details), engaging with and influencing the police was also identified as a key purpose of the website. Some of these engaged participants gave examples of how they might use the information in this way, for example, in parish council meetings to monitor the work of the police, or in neighbourhood panel meetings to help to inform the process of setting local police priorities. Other participants suggested that the information could be used to lobby the police for additional patrols in certain neighbourhoods, for example, if there was a high level of anti-social behaviour (ASB). However, some participants questioned the usefulness of the website beyond a small circle of 'engaged citizens' or beyond some very specific (and occasional) purposes, such as moving house. It was suggested that most people wanted their information on crime to be summarised and interpreted for them (for example, in a local newsletter) rather than presented in a highly disaggregated form.

Public views on the content of the website

Participants, in general, welcomed the greater amount of information about local crimes captured on Crime Reports, as compared with www.police.uk. In particular,

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13 See footnote 6 for explanation of snap points
14 For example, anti-social behaviour (ASB) is broken down into nine types, and violent crime into five types.
15 Minus the last digit to protect privacy.

16 The police, local authorities, fire and rescue service and probation service.

the more frequent updates (daily) were felt to be helpful for crime prevention purposes. Participants also welcomed the more narrowly defined crime categories, particularly the way that violent crime and ASB were broken down into different types. They also welcomed the information on whether crimes had been resolved.

However, the site shared some disadvantages with www.police.uk. These included the lack of detail about specific crime incidents (such as how a burglary occurred) to enable crime prevention measures and insufficient summary charts and tables showing trends over time and comparisons across areas:

"A lot of what we get at the moment is short-term stuff, and you can't see it in perspective; again it's this seeing – is it going down? Is it going up? Or whatever, you know. So that's the other thing that we need is just some ability to measure it and track trends, we're not getting enough of that."

(Focus group area 4)

Some current users also felt that the site should work towards the provision of live information about crime incidents as they occurred in real time, in order to warn people of immediate dangers and areas to avoid.

Public views on the website's usability

Participants were less positive about the design and usability of the Crime Reports website than they were about the content. They felt that the map looked too busy and overcrowded with icons and, in general, better ways of summarising the data were desired. For example, participants wanted to be able to see at a glance, (through, for example, colour coding or filtering) the seriousness of the crimes on the map and whether they were resolved or unresolved. The site was not felt to be very user-friendly and it was suggested that it may need a user guide.

Communicating with the police

The ability to sign up to email alerts and receive regular crime updates for a specific area was a feature not widely known about among participants. However, those Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators and engaged users who received alerts were positive about this feature, particularly the ability to tailor alerts to their "local patch". It was also felt that alerts were useful for encouraging ongoing engagement with the site among the ordinary public:

"[…] not to have to visit the site, that's the key thing, send me an alert to say something's happened and then if I want to, I'll go and have a look at the site, but don't force me to remember to go and look at the site to see if anything's going on, it's the wrong way round, it doesn't work. That's from experience of running community and networking groups and things."

(Focus Group area 4)

Some non-users in the focus groups agreed that email alerts received on a smartphone would be a more attractive way of receiving local crime information than having to log on to a website. Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators also suggested that receiving alerts when crimes had been solved would be useful to cascade to their members for reassurance.

Among all participants – including those less engaged – a feedback function on the main website, for reporting information to the police about crime incidents shown on the map, was felt to be the most useful addition to the site to make it more interactive:

"They miss a really big trick by not giving you the ability to say something about it, report something, to click, say: 'Hang on, I saw that happen'."

(Focus group area 4)

If it were developed in this way, the website could become a vehicle for generating 'collective intelligence', through greater sharing of information about crimes between victims, witnesses and the police (see Muir 2012 for other examples of the use of social media for generating collective intelligence about crime).

Table 1 provides a summary of the main features of the website and the focus groups' overall assessment of them.

5.2 Neighbourhood newsletter

In October 2011 Dyfed Powys Police introduced a monthly policing newsletter, 'Neighbourhood News', available in print and online, in two rural areas. The neighbourhood newsletter aims to increase public awareness of local crime and what the police are doing to address it, thus placing crime statistics within the local context. The newsletter is intended to reach people in rural areas who cannot attend community meetings and/or do not have internet access. It is anticipated that the newsletter will serve as a prototype for other police forces across England and Wales, and the electronic version will eventually be made available on the www.police.uk website.

The newsletter comprises a double-sided A4 sheet, following a standard template each month, which consists of:

- messages from the neighbourhood policing team and from the Chief Constable of the force;
- a summary of local crime statistics taken from www.police.uk;[17]
- details of public meetings;
- contact details for the local neighbourhood policing team; and
- links to www.police.uk and the Dyfed Powys Police Force website.

The newsletter is distributed by the neighbourhood policing team during public events and copies are available in key public contact points in the community, such as libraries and dental and doctor's surgeries. At the time of the research there were no data available on the extent of public take-up of the newsletter.

5.2.1 Public perceptions of 'Neighbourhood News'

Focus group participants felt the newsletter to be a useful summary of local crime information and police activity. They were particularly interested in the summary crime statistics, and liked the message from the neighbourhood policing team, which gave some local context to the figures by providing an update on crime outcomes. There was interest in more information on the composition of the local policing team, such as names and photographs of all team members (as provided on www.police.uk).

The way in which the newsletter information could be used to engage with the police via local meetings was also clear to participants, and the cut-away section at the bottom of page one, which invited readers to take the summary crime statistics to the next public meeting, was seen as a good idea. However, participants were mostly unaware of police public meetings taking place and they felt that, in itself, the newsletter would not encourage attendance.

Compared with the other Trailblazer initiatives using digital technologies and/or new social media, the neighbourhood newsletter appeared to be more positively received by participants, as its purpose was clear and the summary content welcomed. Participants in the focus groups reported that now they knew about the newsletter they intended to read it on a regular basis. Suggestions were made for improvements to the content of the newsletter, including further tailoring messages

Table 1: Public views on key features of the Crime Reports initiative

Feature	Views
Daily updates	Very helpful, especially for crime prevention. Some wanted more frequent updating, potentially real-time updates.
More accurate location mapping (without snap points)	Not something of concern to participants. Ability to zoom in further than 1,000 metres was desired.
More detailed crime categories	Helpful; filtering map by level of seriousness of crime also desired.
More incident details	Useful, but more narrative detail about crime incidents was requested, especially the methods used for the crime. Solved/unsolved information was useful and participants would like to see this information at a glance through filtering or colour coding.
Neighbourhood activity narrative accounts	Useful, particularly the information about what the police/partners are doing. Participants thought that this could be included for other types of incident too.
Email alerts about new crime incidents for user-defined area	This was felt to be helpful so users didn't have to remember to visit the website for updates. Alerts about crimes solved (as well as new incidents reported) were requested.
Interactive facility	Not live at time of research. Views mixed about usefulness; more specialist/engaged users (for example, Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators) were more positive than ordinary members.

17 A summary of the number of incidents of each crime type in the neighbourhood for the preceding month is provided.

to the local community, such as reporting on police initiatives specific to the local area. Moreover, since most participants had not seen copies of the newsletter in the community, they suggested a range of additional outlets for distribution to improve its visibility (such as coffee shops, Post Offices, newsagents and local shops).

6 Further methods for informing the public about police activity

This chapter discusses two of the Trailblazer initiatives that use digital technologies to inform the public about other aspects of police activity, albeit with different functions and audiences. The first is the Surrey Police Beat app, which aims to inform the public about local policing priorities and activities in order to encourage engagement, and the second is the Track My Crime website, specifically tailored to victims of crime, which allows them to track the progress of their case online.

6.1 Surrey Police Beat app

Surrey Police has developed a smart phone application (app) for use by the public. The app aims to encourage a wide range of people to communicate and interact with the police by making it easier for members of the public to do this at their own convenience. The app also aims to increase transparency and police visibility by providing information on local police activity on a daily basis. The app includes:

- contact details for the neighbourhood policing team, a facility to send messages to the team, and information about local meetings;
- a local map showing the location of officers in the neighbourhood policing team and 'tweets'[18] from officers about their current activities;
- information about the current local policing priorities and an opportunity to comment on and rate priorities;
- crime data for the local area (from www.police.uk); and
- links to other social media used by Surrey Police, such as Facebook, You Tube and Flickr.

A separate version of the app is available to police officers, in developing this version of the app its usability for police officers was prioritised. For example, a pre-written, drop-down menu of messages was developed for officers to use when tweeting. Training officers to use the app only takes a few minutes. Three civilian 'tasking co-ordinators' are employed to respond to users' messages.

Launched in August 2011, the app had been downloaded 5,000 times by early 2012, and followers of the police

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18 The app gives users access to the local police Twitter account, without having to join Twitter.

Twitter feed had increased from 300 to 450 between August and November 2011. The app was originally piloted in one local authority area and a countywide rollout is now underway.

6.1.1   Public perceptions of the Surrey Police Beat app

Public views on the usefulness of the app

Overall, participants gave a cautious welcome to the development of the Surrey Police Beat app and thought that it was important that the police were using social media. However, they were uncertain about using the app in the future themselves and felt that the content needed to be improved in order to increase take-up and usage. They also thought that much of the information was better provided through other mechanisms (websites, newsletters) and felt that more thought needed to be given to the types of information that are best conveyed through a mobile app.

Perceived purposes of the app

Members of the public understood the purpose of the app to be providing new means of communication between the police and the public and making the work of the police more visible. In general, participants thought that improving communication was worthwhile, but there was less interest in having greater transparency about the work of the police. As with www.police.uk and Crime Reports, participants primarily wanted the app to inform them about local crime in order for them to take preventative measures, for example, avoiding certain areas where crimes had taken place, being more vigilant, investing in more security devices.

6.1.2   Public views on the content of the app

Information about police activity

For the purposes of crime prevention, focus group participants felt that the content of the app was inappropriate. There was felt to be too much focus in the social media tools (Twitter, You Tube, Flickr) on showcasing police-community events, instead of relaying information about crime and how to prevent it. Alerts about local crimes, tailored to postcode or current location (using GPS tracking on smartphones) were suggested instead.

Information designed to increase police visibility, such as the neighbourhood map showing 'bobbies on the

beat' was criticised because it was not seen to have a clear crime prevention focus. Indeed, participants were confused as to what the purpose was. It was also thought to present a misleading impression of police activity:

"The police are trying to be open and tell you what they're doing, but when you actually look at them, what they're doing, they don't seem to be doing a great deal."
(Focus group area 5)

The tweets from neighbourhood officers on the beat were also felt to be too generic to tell them anything very useful about police activity (for example, "tackling neighbourhood priorities in the local area"). The dislike of these generic messages appears to conflict with the police's aim of ensuring usability and take-up by police officers by providing generic, 'drop-down' messages for them to send.

Communicating and engaging with the police

Participants considered the information about police contact details useful. There was little enthusiasm, though, for using the email facility to contact the police, mainly because participants wanted to be certain that someone had received their message and to receive a more immediate response. Nonetheless, participants thought that improving communications with the police was a positive use for the app, and felt that more thought could be given to how the features of a mobile app could best be utilised for this. One suggestion was using the app to generate intelligence about crime by having a facility for users to submit information about crimes or suspicious activity that they see when on the move.

Participants were, again, unaware of the transparency agenda and showed little interest in using the information on the app to engage with the police in local meetings. The feature of the app that provided a direct means of engaging with and influencing the police – rating and commenting on local police priorities – was interesting to participants, but there was little appetite expressed for using it. This was partly because there was confusion about how local priorities were set and how their votes and comments would feed in to the process, and partly because participants did not feel sufficiently well-informed to suggest local policing priorities. Moreover, the information provided about police actions on the priorities was not felt to be detailed enough to get a real sense of what the neighbourhood team were doing, and to enable them to engage with the police about it.

It was suggested, however, that the information about crime incidents (from www.police.uk) could be used to inform and prompt the public to suggest policing priorities. It was felt that more information about how priorities were reached, and more explicit links between the local crime information and the interactive features of the app (rating and commenting), might prompt greater participation.

Table 2 provides a summary of the main features of the app and the focus groups' overall assessment of them.

6.2 Track My Crime

Track My Crime (TMC) was developed by Avon and Somerset Constabulary and launched in March 2011. It is an online service, offered to individual victims of crime as an alternative to receiving updates by telephone. It allows victims of crime to log on to a website to see updates on how the investigation of their crime is progressing. Its principal aim is to improve crime victims' experience of contact with the police, by keeping them informed about their case in a way that suits them and at their convenience. The emphasis of TMC is victim choice, it is about what will work for them. It does not completely replace face-to-face contact or telephone calls. It is also anticipated that the service will save police resources, since it is quicker for officers to put messages on TMC than to try to reach victims by telephone.

After logging on to the TMC website, the user can read updates on their case, check and amend details of their stolen or damaged property, see contact details of organisations offering support, and send a message to the local police.

Local staff reported the main challenge to be raising the level of take-up of the service. At 6 months after launch, around 11 per cent of victims were taking up the opportunity to use TMC, which was lower than anticipated. They suspected that take-up was low because TMC was not being consistently offered to crime victims by call handlers and police officers. Take-up was highest among victims of 'high-volume, low-value' property crimes, such as theft from motor vehicles and burglaries from sheds and garages.

An internal evaluation, based on a user satisfaction survey of victims, indicated that TMC users' level of satisfaction with the police was similar to that of other crime victims, while a survey of police officers found that most of those who had used TMC were positive about it. The impact on police resources was perceived to be relatively limited so far because of low take-up.

6.2.1   Public perceptions of Track My Crime

Public views on the usefulness of Track My Crime

In focus groups, participants expressed divergent views on whether they felt that the TMC service would be useful to them. Those who thought that it was useful felt that its main purpose would be to avoid "the back and forth of the phone calls" when trying to reach an officer who is

Table 2: Public views on key features of the Surrey Police Beat app

Feature	Views
Twitter feed	Tweeting considered to be useful means of communication by the police in principle, but a high volume of tweets was considered unnecessary and content was described as being 'dull'. Tweets about crimes and outcomes would be more useful than community information.
Photographs and videos	Little interest in photographs of community events. Photographs of wanted criminals and safety videos were suggested as useful alternatives.
Neighbourhood priorities	Useful to have; needs regular updating. More information on police/partner actions in relation to priorities would be useful. Lack of understanding about how priorities arrived at; more information about how votes feed in is necessary.
Events/meetings information	Useful information but on its own would not encourage meeting attendance.
Map of activity	Considered to be of limited use. Smartphone screen too small and too few icons implied little police activity. Tweets describing activities considered too generic.
Crime statistics	Generated most interest; some saw a use for crime prevention. The addition of trends over time and outcomes data would increase relevance. A link to www.police.uk from the app is needed.

not on shift. They liked the fact that they could log on to the service at their own convenience:

> "[...] I think that's quite a nice idea because [...] I'm not being hassled then. It's on my terms."
>
> (Focus group area 6)

Some participants felt that its usefulness depended upon the seriousness of the crime concerned. It was commonly said by participants that if they experienced a serious crime they would want to receive updates from an officer by phone or face to face rather than online. However, one participant who had experienced a more serious crime thought that TMC was a useful service, as an additional means of gaining information about the progress of a case, as long as it did not replace other more direct forms of contact. Generally, people wanted a range of means of communicating with the police to be open to them. Some of those who had experienced minor crimes said it would be helpful to be able to track their crime online, whereas others felt that if the crime was minor they would not want to bother tracking it at all. This was related to their generally low expectation of anything happening as a result of police investigations.

Whether participants felt they would use TMC was also related to the way that they used the internet. For example, one said that TMC would be useful to him

because he did "absolutely everything" on his phone. In contrast, others would prefer to receive messages directly by email or text instead of having to log on to a website.

Public views on the content of the Track My Crime website

Some aspects of the content of TMC were felt to be particularly useful, namely the name and contact details of the investigating team, and the inclusion of a non-urgent direct telephone number in case they wanted to call for an update. Participants' response to the email messaging facility was muted, since they were concerned about how long it would take to receive a response.

Substantive updates about progress in the case via TMC were welcomed, but automated procedural updates, especially those that relayed the status of the case as it moved through the system, were heavily criticised and gave a negative impression about police bureaucracy:

> "You might get your message and go 'Oh, they might have found something', log on [and think] 'Oh no, it's just on somebody else's desk'."
>
> (Focus group area 6)

Table 3 provides a summary of the main features of TMC and the focus groups' overall assessment of them.

Table 3: Public views on key features of the Track My Crime initiative

Feature	Views
'Status' tab (updates about the case from the police)	Some thought that receiving updates electronically was convenient and would save time for them and the police. Most were not interested in receiving automated procedural updates, only those with specific information about the investigation and the name of the investigating officer/team.
'Stolen/damaged' tab (list of victim's stolen/ damaged property)	Mixed views; a few participants thought that it could be useful, but would like to receive notification that the information had been received.
'Support and advice' tab (contact details of organisations offering support and advice)	Mixed views; some thought that this was already available elsewhere, others thought that it was useful to have the information in one place.
'Contact us' tab (allows the user to send a message to the police)	Useful as long as there is an indication of how long it will take to receive a reply. Helpful to see the name of the investigating officer and a contact number.
'Notification preferences' tab (allows the user to set preferences for email/text alerts)	Useful, but it should be possible to opt-out of alerts for routine procedural messages.

7   Discussion and conclusions

The aim of this research was to examine public experiences and views of the Trailblazer initiatives, in order to provide feedback to local sites and to inform future national policy developments. This chapter draws together the overarching themes from across the focus groups, which pertain to the Trailblazer initiatives as a whole, identifying implications for the further development of the www.police.uk website and other similar initiatives.

7.1   Overarching themes

7.1.1   Public response to the availability of mapped crime information

Focus group participants expressed a range of views about the importance of providing crime information and crime maps to the public. Some thought it important that the information was in the public domain and saw the information as a sign of greater police openness, which they welcomed. Many participants also expressed an interest in what the mapped crime data showed for their area. However, there were also concerns that spending money on initiatives such as the Trailblazers was not the best use of public money in a time of financial constraint. It was widely felt that the 'value for money' of the initiatives should be assessed, in particular in terms of their contribution to crime prevention/reduction.

7.1.2   Providing the right information for different purposes

There are some complex findings to unravel about the type of changes or enhancements to the initiatives that the public viewed as desirable. On the one hand, a commonly repeated request was for more aggregated data, which allowed areas to be compared and trends in crime to be put in context. Yet there were also requests for more detailed information, in particular around the specific nature of the mapped offences, in order to aid crime prevention, and around the outcomes for particular high-profile crimes.

These, seemingly contradictory, messages relate to different ways in which the public was interested in using the available information. A range of potential uses of the crime data were identified, including crime prevention, researching and comparing neighbourhoods for residence, and monitoring the activities of the local police. The findings from the study suggest that the information provided could be better tailored to each of these purposes.

Crime prevention

One potential benefit of the public's access to crime information highlighted in the research was the provision of more targeted and timely crime prevention messages. However, for the information to be used for crime prevention, users required more frequent data and more detail on individual incidents, including the circumstances and ways in which an offence had been committed, which would enable them to take steps to prevent such incidents from happening to them in the future. Of the Trailblazer initiatives, Crime Reports addressed this purpose most directly, by providing more frequent crime updates (daily) and more detailed information about incidents. However, even with this greater level of detail, participants still felt that the right sort of information (especially the methods used by offenders) was not being provided to enable them to take effective crime prevention steps.

Current users of Crime Reports also desired greater frequency of crime updates and potentially for the site to move towards providing real-time crime information. The provision of 'real-time' crime maps was also a recommendation from other recent research on the potential for new digital technologies to improve the operation of the criminal justice system for crime victims (Muir, 2012).

Researching an area

If using sites such as www.police.uk to research an area for residence, participants wanted more contextual information than was available on the site. Data on crime trends over time and relative to other areas were seen as especially useful for making a more informed judgement about a neighbourhood. Participants expressed concern that without the contextual information, the figures on the crime maps could be misleading.

Monitoring police performance

For using the crime maps to monitor the work of the police, and potentially to hold the police to account, participants echoed the need for information on crime trends and crime rates relative to other places. Few of the Trailblazer initiatives presented the information in this way. The absence of both comparative information (comparing crimes across areas) and trend information

meant that it was difficult for users to see how the information could be used to engage with the police and hold them to account. Information about outcomes (arrests made and sentencing) and about police interventions to prevent and reduce crime were also felt to be important for the site to be used in this way.

7.1.3   Conveying accessible information about crime and the criminal justice system

The police investigation and criminal justice systems are complex and the challenge for several of these initiatives has been to convey this information in a user-friendly way to an audience that may be unfamiliar with the processes and terminologies. A key challenge is to provide sufficient detail so that the information is useful and usable by the public, without contravening privacy obligations, making the provision of information too resource intensive for the provider, or overwhelming the public with information that does not seem to be of obvious practical use.

The amount of information conveyed

The findings suggest that there can be unintentional negative consequences when too much information is conveyed to the public if it is perceived as having limited practical benefit. One example of this was the map showing the location of the neighbourhood police team on the Surrey Police Beat app, which participants felt to have little use and created a counter-productive impression of police inactivity. Another example was the Track My Crime initiative, which makes more stages of the police investigation process visible to crime victims. Focus group participants were negative about receiving automated messages that simply relayed the status of the case as it moved through the system, since this gave a negative impression about police bureaucracy. Thus there is a balance to be struck between providing information in the interests of transparency, but without overloading users with too much information.

The quality of the information provided is also important, illustrated by the fact that members of the public were critical of anything perceived to be a 'standard' or 'generic' electronic response (for example, in the form of emails or tweets) from the police. This reveals an example where the interests of the public, as recipients of the information, and those of the police, as providers of the information, may conflict. The use of automated, 'drop down' message options was promoted by the police in the development of the Surrey Police Beat app and Track My Crime for ease of use and to save time for police officers.

Thus the discrepancy between police aims and public responses raises issues about the resource implications of expanding public engagement through social media.

The difficulty of finding the right balance, in terms of how much information to convey, was also illustrated with the Crime Reports website, which provides additional information about the crimes mapped, compared with www.police.uk. Participants in the Crime Reports focus groups welcomed some of this additional information, such as the enhanced crime categories and the information on outcomes. As a consequence of the greater amount of information, however, they found the map less user-friendly and too cluttered. The ability to filter the map by type of crime was a useful development, enabling the map to be simplified according to the user's interests. In general, participants across the groups wanted to be able to identify 'serious' crime incidents on the crime maps at a glance, and did not want maps 'cluttered' with less serious incidents (for example, anti-social behaviour). Thus there is a trade-off between the amount of information provided and its usability, and the provision of more information needs to be balanced by its relevance to the user.

This is reinforced by the finding that public reactions to the Dyfed Powys neighbourhood newsletter tended to be more positive, in terms of its utility and relevance, than responses to some of the other initiatives. It is likely that this was because the newsletter provides locally relevant crime information in a more succinct, summary form. Several participants across the groups said that they preferred to receive summary crime information that had been interpreted and assessed for relevance, rather than the more detailed information contained on www.police.uk (and similar sites), which the user is required to interpret and assess. This finding about the positive reactions to the paper newsletter is important for police forces to bear in mind, especially since not all of the public is fully internet literate.

The neighbourhood newsletter may also have been better received by the public, relative to other initiatives, because it is relatively more accessible, being available to pick up in community locations, rather than requiring the user to make the effort to visit a website. This concern with the accessibility of the information was also reinforced in some of the other focus group discussions where participants suggested that usage might be higher if the police were to 'push' the information out to the public, for example, through email alerts about local crime incidents, rather than expecting the website to 'pull' in large numbers of users.

Accessibility of information

Conveying complexity

Balancing accessibility and complexity is a particular challenge in the case of initiatives that provide information on crime outcomes.

In the case of the inclusion of justice outcomes on www.police.uk, while participants broadly welcomed the outcome data, and liked the ability to track an individual crime to its conclusions, the organisation of the summary outcomes data (by type of outcome rather than by type of crime) did not aid public understanding. This was because it did not easily allow participants to interpret the summary outcomes in the light of the types of offences committed and their individual circumstances. Focus group discussions suggested that for some people, this presentation of the data simply confirmed their pre-existing suspicions about the 'leniency' of the criminal justice system, given that the headline figures showed a small proportion of custodial sentences.

The Crime Reports website takes a different approach, incorporating police outcomes on the site by labelling mapped crime incidents as either 'solved' or 'unsolved'. This was welcomed by participants, and the terminology of 'solved/unsolved' was widely used by respondents across the focus groups, often interchangeably with terms such as 'arrests made' and 'criminals caught'. However, the idea that a crime is 'solved' if an arrest has been made is a simplification of the legal process, where a crime is not fully solved until a suspect is proven guilty. Developing more accurate terminology for conveying police outcomes (for example, 'suspect charged') may be an opportunity for sites such as this to give the public a better understanding of the system.

7.1.4   Using the information to promote local accountability

One of the key aims of the www.police.uk website and the Trailblazer initiatives is to make the workings of the police and criminal justice systems more transparent to the public, in order that the public is in a position to engage with these services in a meaningful way and to hold them to account. The focus group discussions suggested, however, that this primary purpose of the initiatives was not well understood by the public. Focus group participants had limited awareness of ways to engage in holding the police and safety partners to

account (such as local area beat meetings) and expressed scepticism about attending such meetings and the extent of their influence if they did.

Where users were invited to engage directly in influencing policing priorities via digital technology (as with the Surrey Police Beat app), participants felt that there was insufficient information made available both about how policing priorities were formed and how they could contribute to this, and about the activities that the police were undertaking in response to neighbourhood priorities.

The limited enthusiasm expressed for using the information to engage with the police and/or safety partners should not necessarily be interpreted as a failure of the Trailblazer initiatives, however. It may simply reflect the nature of the way that the public engages in crime and disorder issues, and indeed in local services more generally (see Skidmore et al., 2006). There is likely to be a small number of people with the time and interest to engage with the police regularly on these issues, while others may engage for short periods in response to specific high-profile incidents in the local neighbourhood (see Innes, 2004).

However, if the policy intent is to encourage greater engagement with policing and community safety among the general public, then it should be recognised that the provision of crime data alone is unlikely to achieve this, without wider activity to educate members of the public on how they might use the information to do this effectively. The forthcoming introduction of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) in November 2012 will introduce a new element into the local dialogue between the public and community safety partners, and may provide additional opportunities for public engagement.

7.1.5   Customer service improvements

While not a primary aim of the Trailblazer initiatives, their capacity to improve customer service quality was something highly valued by the participants. Of the initiatives, Track My Crime is the most obviously focused on service improvement, in this case for victims of crime. Participants assessed its usefulness in these terms; for example, they welcomed information about the investigator's name, who to contact directly about their case, the ability to contact the team at their own convenience, and disliked the receipt of impersonal bureaucratic messages.

The ability of the Trailblazer initiatives to improve communications with the police was also raised in several of the focus groups. One suggestion made in several groups was to make the initiatives more interactive by enabling members of the public to submit intelligence about local crime incidents to the police. Muir (2012) cites this as one of the key ways in which criminal justice services can use new digital technologies to enhance their services for victims of crime, since it can potentially facilitate the investigation of crimes.

It was notable, however, that respondents stopped short of suggesting that new digital technologies should take the place of other more traditional means of communication between the public and the police. An example was in discussions of Track My Crime, where respondents were very clear that they viewed the site as an additional means of receiving information about their case. They would not want the site to replace face to face or telephone contact, especially in the case of more serious crimes. Participants assessing the Surrey Police Beat app were also sceptical about their desire to use email as a principal means of contacting the local police rather than the telephone. Other desired additions to the www.police.uk site also suggested that participants were concerned to keep open, and to improve, a range of means of communicating with the police. For example, participants, especially in the rural area, requested information such as opening hours of police stations and out of hours telephone contact details. The names and photographs of the neighbourhood police teams on www.police.uk were also valued for putting a face to a name and making communications less impersonal.

7.2   Implications for future developments

The discussion below makes general suggestions for improvements to the www.police.uk website and the Trailblazer initiatives, and about the implications for future policy in this area, drawing on the research findings. Annex C provides a list of all the improvements suggested by focus group participants.

- There is a need to think carefully about future enhancements to www.police.uk and related initiatives. The findings suggest that more information is not always desirable and can be counter-productive. Enhancements should be tailored so that the public finds them useful and easy to use. There is a danger that initiatives will lose public support if their relevance is unclear, particularly given the current climate of austerity.

- While the Government's transparency agenda has emphasised the role of www.police.uk and the Trailblazer initiatives in promoting local accountability, this was not commonly recognised by focus group participants. A range of other purposes for the initiatives were identified, however, the principal one being crime prevention. Developing the website to suit this purpose would fit most closely with the interests of the majority of participants in this research. Making the information on the site more tailored for crime prevention purposes would also mean that the site had more practical relevance, which should help to stimulate repeat use.
- The following improvements would help to tailor the site for crime prevention:
    - increasing the frequency of crime updates to at least weekly, and examining the feasibility of working towards the provision of real-time crime information in the future;
    - providing more contextual details about the crimes mapped, including the methods used;
    - making the sites more interactive so that users can submit intelligence about crime incidents;
    - presenting mapped crime data in different ways, for example, using a time dimension to show repeat patterns in crimes.
- Other uses for the site, such as researching areas to move house or using the site to monitor the work of the police, require different types of crime information, namely trend data to allow an assessment of change over time and comparisons of crime rates across areas. These purposes require more aggregated data rather than individual incident detail.
- More information alone is unlikely to stimulate greater public engagement in holding the police to account. This would require additional initiatives to encourage engagement. Lessons could be learnt from existing initiatives that encourage community engagement in neighbourhood policing.
- Findings suggested that the initiatives needed a 'hook' to keep people returning to them. Encouraging users to create an account and sign up for email alerts could be one way of achieving this. A suggestion for mobile apps was to send out crime alerts tailored to an individual's GPS location. Given that news of a local crime often encouraged people to look at www.police.uk, alerts could be triggered by certain local crime incidents (for example, serious crimes or a crime 'spate'). Alerts about outcomes (arrests/sentences) for high-profile local crimes could also be useful to promote understanding and confidence in the police and criminal justice system.

- Care needs to be taken in the way that the criminal justice outcome data are presented on www.police.uk, given the complexity of the information and the negative views about sentencing among some sectors of the public. Organising the summary outcomes by crime type, including information on other stages of crime 'solving', and restricting the outcome data to more serious crimes are possibilities that could be explored. More explanatory and contextual information about the sentences handed down could help to challenge pre-existing assumptions.
- The findings suggest that there was a public appetite for information on local crime prevention initiatives and the steps taken by the police to solve and reduce crime and anti-social behaviour. Incorporating information from partner agencies into www.police.uk, similar to the Crime Reports website, would inform the public about the wider involvement of other local agencies in dealing with crime and disorder, and the need to hold these other agencies to account for dealing with the issues.

7.3   Conclusion

This research has highlighted considerable public curiosity and, to an extent, an appetite for crime and criminal justice outcome information. However, a key message was that providing more information should not be an end in itself. The information provided must be the right kind of information for the purposes intended, namely for crime prevention and for monitoring and assessing the work of the police and safety partners. The aim of transparency and openness must also be balanced by the need for the information to be high quality, relevant, usable and intelligible. This is necessary in order to avoid initiatives losing public support. Future developments need to make clear how the information could be used to engage with and hold the police to account, and demonstrate that the initiatives are improving the service and directed towards crime reduction and prevention.

Given that many of the initiatives studied in this research were at an early stage of development, there may be value in conducting further research on public engagement and usage at a later date, when the services have seen further development and take-up has increased. To gain greater insight into the potential of the initiatives for holding the police to account, it would also be beneficial to examine their use more directly in situations where they have been incorporated into existing engagement initiatives.

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Annex A: Research methods

Focus group sampling and recruitment

Sampling for the focus groups was purposive. It was not intended to provide a representative cross-section of the population but to capture a range of experiences and perspectives. The intention was to achieve a mix of users and non-users of the www.police.uk website and the Trailblazer initiative in each area, plus a range of other variation such as demographic characteristics (gender, age, class, ethnic group), previous contact with the police, views about the police and fear of crime. As well as obtaining a broad spread of these characteristics overall, some less commonly heard groups were over-sampled to ensure that their views were heard. This included younger people (aged 18–25), older people (aged 65+), those without internet access and ethnic minorities. Other criteria for individual focus groups included:

- recent victims of crime for the Track My Crime focus groups, since this was the target population;
- smartphone users for the Surrey Police Beat app focus groups;
- Neighbourhood Watch members and co-ordinators for one of the Crime Reports groups, since the interactive features of the site are targeted at these groups.

The recruitment was carried out by Cragg Ross Dawson, who offer a specialist fieldwork recruitment service, working to Policy Studies Institute's sample criteria. On-street public recruitment was supplemented by targeted recruitment by the police in some areas. This was intended to facilitate the recruitment of www.police.uk and, particularly, Trailblazer users. However, the latter technique was less successful than anticipated and it was not possible to recruit pre-existing Trailblazer users to the groups in most cases. In the case of the Surrey Police Beat app and the neighbourhood newsletter, participants were instead asked to use/read the app/newsletter prior to the discussion. In Avon and Somerset, the Track My Crime application was demonstrated in the focus groups. In the justice outcomes trailblazer sites, the initiative was not yet live, so it was not possible for members of the public to have previously used the initiative; again it was demonstrated in the groups. Police recruitment was most successful for the Crime Reports focus groups (local police emailed Neighbourhood Watch participants and sent an alert via Crime Reports); hence these groups contain a higher

proportion of participants who were already actively engaged with local community safety networks. Table A1 describes the composition of each group.

Table A2 shows the characteristics of the achieved sample across the groups. This shows that around one-half of the participants were women and one-half men and that there was an even spread across the age spectrum. There was also a spread across socio-economic groups, with all groups well-represented except for Group E (the lowest status group). Participants were mainly White British, with just less than one-fifth from ethnic minority groups. Ethnic minorities were over-sampled in some of the locations where there were larger minority communities.

In terms of engagement with and views on the police, most people had some exposure to the police in the previous 12 months, most commonly to report a crime or through looking at online crime maps (due to the nature of the sampling criteria). Other common types of contact were:

- contacting the police for another (unspecified) reason;
- communicating with police who door-knocked for information;
- participating in Neighbourhood Watch;
- approaching officers on foot patrol;
- attending a police public meeting.

The vast majority of participants thought that their local police did a good job. Around three-quarters said they did a "good" or "excellent" job and only seven participants said they did a "poor" or "very poor" job. Fear of crime varied. Around two-fifths of participants said they were "not very worried" about becoming a victim of crime, while a similar number said they were "fairly worried". Very few people though (only ten overall) were "very worried" about being a victim of crime.

Overall, 33 people (just less than one-third of the total) had previously used www.police.uk, and 10 participants were previous Trailblazer users. As described above, most of these Trailblazer users were users of Crime Reports in Hampshire.

Table A1: Focus groups – locations and composition

Site	No. of participants		Rural/urban	Police.uk use	Trailblazer use	Contact with the police in previous 12 months	Less frequently heard groups
	Group 1	Group 2					
Criminal justice outcomes site I	8	8	Rural	3	NA	7 had contact – Group 1 very little contact, Group 2 more contact, mostly to report a crime; 1 attended a police public meeting and other meetings that the police attend.	
Criminal justice outcomes site II	8	7	City centre	9	NA	13 had contact – mostly looking at crime maps, police door knocking for information or approaching officers on foot patrol; 1 was a member of Neighbourhood Watch.	Around one-half of participants were from ethnic minorities. Group 2: all younger people (aged 18–25)
Criminal justice outcomes site III	8	8	City centre	8	NA	11 had contact – mostly in Group 1 – included looking at crime maps and participating in Neighbourhood Watch (4).	Around a one-third were from ethnic minorities
Crime Reports	6	6	City centre	2	8	11 had contact – mostly looking at crime maps, participating in Neighbourhood Watch (6) or attending groups that the police attend (4).	
Neighbour-hood News	7	7	Small town	5	1	(No data)	Around one-half of participants were older people (aged 65+); Group 2: around one-half of participants had no IT access
Surrey Police Beat app	6	7	suburban	4	0	More contact in Group 2 – mostly attending police public meetings, police door knocking for information, looking at online crime maps, and approaching officers on foot patrol; 3 Neighbourhood Watch members.	
Track My Crime	8	8	City centre	3	3	All victims of crime in last 12 months. Most contact to report a crime, also looking at online crime maps; 2 Neighbourhood Watch members.	

Table A2: Characteristics of the achieved sample

Characteristics	No. in sample
Total participants	102
Gender	
Male	53
Female	49
Participant age	
18–30	22
31–39	16
40–49	22
50–59	18
60+	18
Unknown	6
Socio-economic status (SES)	
A	13
B	20
C1	28
C2	16
D	15
E	2
Unknown	8
Ethnic group	
White British	72
Ethnic minority	20
Unknown	10
How good a job do the local police do?	
Excellent	19
Good	53
Fair	16
Poor	6
Very poor	1
Unknown	7
How worried are you about being a victim of crime?	
Very worried	10
Fairly worried	35
Not very worried	39
Not at all worried	14
Unknown	4
Previous usage of www.police.uk	
Yes	33
No	69
Previous usage of Trailblazer initiative	
Yes	10
No	92

Data analysis

A thematic analysis method was used to analyse the data collected. This method identifies, analyses and reports patterns or themes within the data, and provides an interpretation of these patterns in relation to the research questions. The analysis was undertaken within a realist theoretical framework, reporting on the explicit experiences and meanings of the participants as reported through their interview accounts (see Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The first step of the process involved using charting methods (in Excel) to summarise the content of the staff interviews according to a set of broad topic areas deriving from the research questions. This results in a matrix output that enables the data to be summarised by case (individual members of staff) and topic. These topic summaries then informed the next stage of the analysis.

Stage two involved coding the focus group data according to a set of themes, which were developed iteratively from the research questions, the staff interview findings and from the focus group data. Coded data were then summarised across the dataset and the themes refined and developed. The penultimate stage of the analysis examined patterns, relationships and (in)consistencies within the data for each initiative and then across the Trailblazer initiatives as a whole. A final stage of interpretative analysis drew out the meanings of the findings in relation to the aims of the individual Trailblazer initiatives and in relation to the Trailblazer programme as a whole and the broader policy aims.

Annex B: Awareness and use of online crime maps

Background

Since January 2009 every police force in England and Wales has been required to publish maps on their website, giving local crime statistics and details of neighbourhood policing teams in the local area. In order to bring these together and allow a national overview, the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) developed one website for these data, (www.police.uk), launched in October 2009. In January 2011 the website was re-launched with more localised 'street-level' crime and anti-social behaviour data.

In October 2011 the website was updated with further information, including comparative force performance data on crime rates, quality of service and victim satisfaction, via a link to the Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) website. New crime categories were also added to the crime maps, including public disorder, possession of weapons, shoplifting, criminal damage, arson, theft and drug offences.

In January 2012 more developments were made to the site to provide a greater level of detail. For example, the privacy threshold was reduced from 12 to 8 postal addresses so that crimes could be mapped more accurately, and crimes that occurred in non-residential locations (such as railway stations, nightclubs, car parks, hospitals and shopping centres) could be mapped directly onto these locations (rather than onto nearby streets).[19] Also, since the end of May 2012, the www.police.uk website has started to show information about what happens after a crime has occurred, in terms of police action or the justice outcome if the case went to court.

Awareness and use of crime maps

The www.police.uk website attracted huge public interest when it was initially launched and, between 31 January and 31 December 2011, received 47 million visits. However, it is not clear from these figures how many of these are unique visits or who the site users are. The website usage figures can be compared with the figures from the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), formerly known as the British Crime Survey, which has included questions in the last three sweeps of the survey (in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2011/12)[20] about the public's awareness and use of online crime maps (see Box B1 for further detail on the questions asked).

CSEW data from 2009/10 show that 10 per cent of the population said that they were aware of online crime maps and just 3 per cent said they had looked at or used such maps. In the subsequent 2010/11 CSEW, these figures had increased slightly: 15 per cent of respondents said that they were aware of crime maps and 4 per cent said they had looked at or used them. However, the most recent CSEW results show that there has been a marked increase in awareness and usage. Findings from interviews in the 12 months to December 2011)[21] show that one-third (33%) of people were aware of crime maps and 11 per cent had used them. The 11 per cent who reported having used online crime maps equates to 4.9 million individuals across England and Wales.

Analysis of the figures by quarters (see Figure B1) suggests that it was the availability, from January 2011, of the new street-level crime maps that was responsible for the large increase in public awareness and usage. During the last quarter of 2010/11 (January to March 2011), the proportion of respondents who were aware of, or had looked at or used, online crime maps more than doubled from the previous quarter. A further increase continued in the April to June quarter, but awareness and usage then stabilised in the final two quarters of the year. It is possible that the results for 2011/12 will show further increases because of the latest re-launch of the website with justice outcomes data.

More detailed analysis (of the 2009/10 CSEW), examining the relationship between awareness and use of crime maps and personal, household and area characteristics can be found in earlier annual crime statistics publications (see Scribbins et al., 2010).

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19 Crimes are mapped to an anonymous point, called a 'snap point', which is a dot on a street that is on or near the location of the actual crime. Streets with fewer than eight postal addresses are not shown on the map to protect the privacy and anonymity of victims and alleged perpetrators. If a crime occurs in a street with fewer than eight postal addresses it will be mapped to a larger neighbouring street.

20 Figures for 2011/12 were published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on 19 July 2012.

21 This is the first full year of data since the launch of the street-level crime data on www.police.uk. These data include one quarter's (January to March 2011) data from the previously published 2010/11 figures, see Chaplin et al. (2011).

Figure B1: Awareness and use of online crime maps, 2010/11 and Crime Survey for England and Wales interviews in the 12 months to December 2011

¹ New questions were introduced
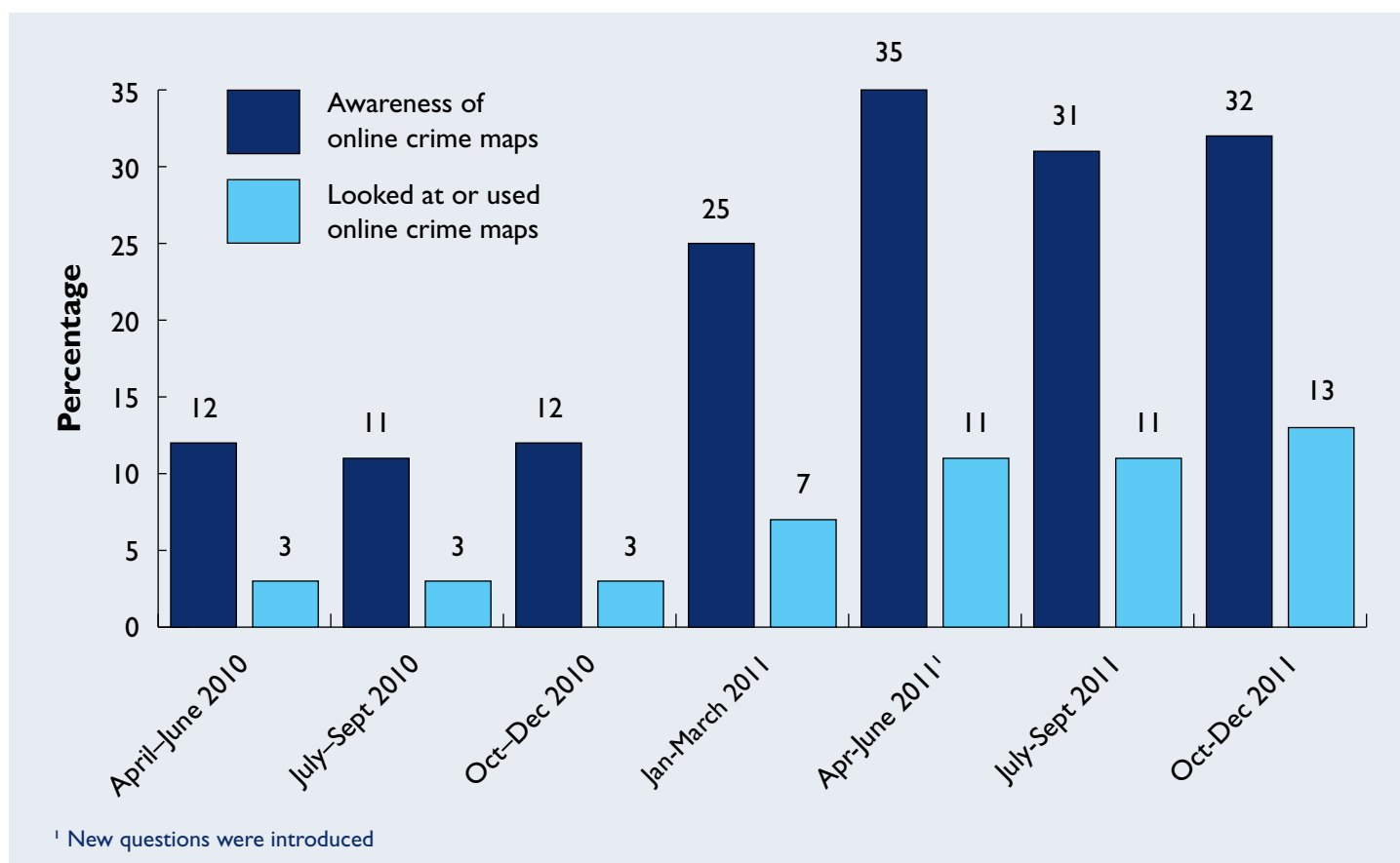
Box B1: Online crime maps – changes to Crime Survey for England and Wales questions

All police forces in England and Wales were required, from January 2009, to publish online crime maps for the public on their websites. These provided access to police recorded crime statistics at a local neighbourhood level, typically wards.

In the 2009/10 and 2010/11 surveys, CSEW respondents were asked:

- 'Since January 2009, interactive crime maps which show crime levels in different local neighbourhoods have been available on all police force websites. Before this interview, did you know that these types of online maps were available?'
- 'And in the last 12 months have you looked at or used any interactive crime maps which show crime levels in your local neighbourhood?'

From January 2011 the Government required all forces to supply street-level crime data to a central portal (www.police.uk). Two new questions were added to the CSEW from April 2011 to gauge public use of and attitudes towards these new maps:

- 'Since January 2011, maps and information which show the level of crime and anti-social behaviour on each street have been publicly available on the internet. Before this interview, did you know that this type of online information was available at street level?'
- 'And in the last 12 months have you looked at or used any crime maps or information which shows the level of crime and anti-social behaviour on each street?

Annex C: Public suggestions for improvements

www.police.uk

- More information about crime incidents, including the time or day of the week when a crime occurred, and more detail about the incident including how it was carried out.
- More frequent updating (weekly rather than monthly).
- Crime categories broken down further, particularly the anti-social behaviour category.
- Neighbourhood-level data on crime trends.
- Summary information about local police crime prevention strategies and 'diversionary' activities (such as youth initiatives) for the neighbourhood.
- Crime outcomes, in terms of arrests and sentencing outcomes.
- Links to crime prevention advice, including details of reputable local locksmiths and burglar-alarm companies.
- Requests for information from the police and 'wanted' photographs.
- Feedback facilities, for example, submitting information about an incident, reporting crime online, reporting other (non-urgent) issues, posting a question to the police, posting crime prevention tips.
- Email alerts giving detailed, up-to-date information about local crimes, along the lines of emails forwarded to residents by Neighbourhood Watch co-ordinators.
- Monthly 'bulletin boards' on the site providing some interpretation of the data, for example, summarising key issues and what the public should be aware of.
- More (or better links to) information about contacting the local police, for example, maps showing police stations and their opening hours.
- Better linkages between the national www.police.uk and local police force websites.
- More use of social media by the police, for example, live web chats, local police team blog.

Criminal justice outcomes

- Presenting the outcome data by type of crime rather than type of outcome.
- Ability to track outcomes for specific crimes that they are aware of.

- Providing more summary statistics about the proportion of crimes that are 'resolved', either by crime type or level of seriousness.
- Including illustrative examples of sentences, similar to West Yorkshire Police's 'In The Dock' facility, to help to bring meaning to the phrases used to convey sentencing outcomes on the site.

Crime Reports

- More frequent updating of information, potentially moving to real-time crime information.
- Ability to zoom in further than 1,000 metres.
- More detail on the nature of crime incidents (specifically how it was carried out).
- Interactive feature to report intelligence about a crime.
- Better summary and trend data.
- Ability to filter the map by solved/unsolved.
- A seriousness rating for crimes.
- More information about ongoing investigations.

Surrey Police Beat app

- Providing real-time alerts about traffic incidents and major road blockages to 'hook' people into the app and encourage regular use.
- Alerts about local crimes, tailored to postcode or current location, and using global positioning systems (GPS) tracking on smartphones.
- Information on local crime outcomes, including detection rates and justice outcomes.
- Regularly updated tips on crime prevention, linked to 'case study' incidents.
- Requests for information to help the police, for example, photographs of 'most wanted' criminals, CCTV footage of incidents, photos of stolen property.
- More interactive features such as discussion boards, question and answer sessions with experts on crime prevention.
- More specialist channels for communicating with the police about different issues (for example, suspicious activity forum) to encourage greater feedback from the public.
- Information on how neighbourhood policing priorities are arrived at and how public feedback is used.

Neighbourhood News

- Reports on what was discussed at police community meetings to encourage attendance.
- Feedback from readers about newsletter content.
- More detail on the composition of the neighbourhood police team, including photographs.
- Reports on initiatives that the neighbourhood policing team are working on.
- Inclusion of crime trends over time to help place incidents in perspective.
- Inclusion of follow-up information on crime solving and justice outcomes.
- For a more polished presentation, it was suggested that each issue be test-marketed before being distributed more widely.

Track My Crime

- The inclusion of information on how long it would take to receive a reply to email messages sent to the police.
- Acknowledgements of any updates made to the list of stolen/damaged property.
- An ability to opt-out of alerts for routine procedural messages, but to keep receiving them for other messages.
- A version of Track My Crime could be available to witnesses, and possibly to other members of the public, to find out more detail about the progress of an investigation.