

Confidence Surveying

Recommendation(s):

- (i) To note the content of the report

Introduction

1. From October 2009 the Home Office introduced a new requirement on Forces to carry out surveys on public confidence. This report gives Members details of the requirements and their implications for the Constabulary and Authority

Background

2. The Force Consultation Unit has carried out public surveying by telephone since June 2008. These surveys have been used to understand people's perceptions of policing in Devon, Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and to measure progress against the Force target of reaching 84% agreement that 'the police and local council are dealing with the crime and anti social behaviour issues that matter in this area'. To date these surveys have not been mandatory. Approximately 1800 surveys have been carried out over each 12 month period providing the authority and Force with results accurate at Force level within approximately 2 – 3 percentage points and at BCU level within approximately 4 percentage points. Prior to June 2008, the Constabulary and Authority had carried out public surveys by post for a number of years.
3. Nationally, some Forces have carried out very similar surveys, others have surveyed the general public but on different subjects and some have done little survey work beyond the mandated victim satisfaction surveys.
4. From 1st October 2009 the Home Office have introduced a requirement for all Forces to carry out 'local confidence surveys'. The minimum technical requirement is that the surveys:
 - include the question 'How much do you agree or disagree that the police and local council are dealing with the anti-social behaviour and crime issues that matter in this area' (with a mandated preamble and response options)
 - are carried out with a random sample of the residential population aged 16 years and over in each Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) area
 - achieve a sample that provides results for each CDRP area with a confidence interval of $\pm 4\%$ and a confidence level of 95%. This equates to approximately 600 completed surveys per CDRP area)
 - the achieved sample should be broadly representative of the residential population
 - By the end of February 2010 the full sample must be achieved (i.e. 600 per CDRP area) and the results made available to the public
 - From April 2010 the sample should be divided evenly across the financial year and results made available on a quarterly basis
 - The 'confidence' result will be calculated using the percentage of people agreeing compared to the number of people disagreeing, neither agreeing or disagreeing, or not knowing.
5. Following representations from the Constabulary, the Home Office has acknowledge the 'unique position' in the Isles of Scilly and has provided an exemption from full compliance with the minimum technical requirement. This means that the achieved sample for the Isles of Scilly is not required to reach 600 but can be in proportion to its population.

6. The Home Office has provided funding to Police Authorities in order to meet the minimum technical requirement to the end of February 2010. Ongoing funding will be subject to further discussion with the Association of Police Authorities and the Association of Chief Police Officers. There has been no indication of when a decision on ongoing funding will be made, although it has been made clear that the Home Office does not expect to fully fund surveying after February.

Implications

7. Having carried out public surveying for a number of years and having identified the emerging importance of the 'confidence' question and included it in surveys, the Constabulary is in a relatively strong position compared to many other Forces. However, whilst delivering the surveys in house is a cost-effective option compared to out-sourcing, there are significant resource implications in moving from achieving 1800 surveys a year to the 6600 to be carried out under the new requirement. The requirement to achieve 6600 surveys in the first 4 –5 months of surveying is clearly particularly onerous. Agency staff are being used to fulfil this initial requirement, but there will be a need for increased permanent staffing capacity from April 2010. There will also be ongoing ICT and associated costs. Given the Home Office stance on funding, it is highly likely that the confidence surveying requirement from April 2010 will require savings to be made elsewhere.
8. As a result of the structure of local government in the area there are 9 CDRPs in Devon but only 1 each in Plymouth and Cornwall (plus 1 in the Isles of Scilly). The minimum required sample size is therefore 5400 surveys in Devon and only 600 each in Plymouth and Cornwall. When calculated as a percentage of the resident population this equates to 0.9% in Devon, 0.3% in Plymouth and 0.1% in Cornwall. Aggregating the results at Force level, in order to measure progress on the Force target would significantly skew the results to reflect the views of those living in Devon. In order to get a representative Force level result an additional 1290 survey would need to be carried out in Plymouth and 3060 surveys in Cornwall. The Consultation Unit will work towards achieving these within the funding available, although clearly the mandated surveys will take precedence.
9. The calculation of the level of agreement with the confidence question requires 'don't knows' to be included in the final calculation. At present the Constabulary and Authority exclude these (in line with the guidance on the mandatory victim satisfaction surveys). 'Don't know' responses currently make up 13% of respondents. The effect of including these would be to reduce the current level of agreement from 79.2% to 69.2%.
10. Whilst the increased surveying will provide more reliable data at Force, BCU and LPA level it will not provide reliable data at sector or neighbourhood level. However, external inspection regimes are increasingly looking for reliable neighbourhood level feedback from the public.
11. The Home Office will continue to survey and publish its own results for confidence. The Place Survey carried out by local authorities also contains a very similar question. Each survey uses different methodologies and results in very different results. There is thus a huge potential for confusion in the minds of the public. The Home Office expectation is that each of the 43 Forces provides their own explanation for these differences.
12. The lack of prescription on methodology within the minimum technical requirement means that comparisons between Forces will not be valid unless they happen to share exactly the same questionnaire design and survey and sampling methods. However, it seems unlikely that Authorities, Forces, external inspectors and the media will not seek to make such comparisons.

Contact: for further information

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