

Public Sector Transparency Board – 19th May
Lessons learned on the publication of street level crime and ASB data

1. Introduction

Since January 2011, monthly street level crime and anti-social (ASB) behaviour data has been made available to communities, local services and developers through the Police.uk website. Kick-starting a challenging cultural change programme across policing, this has already played a transformational role in both the Government's transparency and police reform agendas and given us the most advanced nationwide transparency of crime information in the world.

With the first phase completed, work is already underway by the Home Office and National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) to take this programme further across crime, policing and justice. Now is therefore the right time to take stock of the lessons learned to date – what have we achieved, what worked well, what issues could be overcome - and use these to help other Government Departments drive forward rapid, but more importantly, sustainable developments across transparency.

Building upon an internal research project, our own personal experiences and feedback from the public, police and other local partners, this paper sets out our key lessons learned and recommendations for how these could be applied to the wider transparency agenda in the future.

2. Our challenge

Every transparency project will of course be unique, with different issues to consider, challenges to address and partners to work alongside. At the beginning of our work, the Home Office and NPIA faced the following key challenges:

- Transparency was (and continues to be) a relatively new concept within the police service. Whilst we have seen some innovative local approaches (for example West Yorkshire's Beat Crime website or Greater Manchester and West Midlands' Police use of Twitter to provide online commentary of calls to the police or reports from the court), such good practice was not widespread.
- We are dealing with particularly sensitive data against a backdrop of strict legislative controls around privacy and data protection. One of the reasons why the police service has traditionally been more closed is the operational sensitivity of crime and ASB data.
- We are handling data that is both personal (information about victims of crime) and 'live' (in that it is still moving through the criminal justice system rather than being closed, historical data). The key challenge was therefore to strike the right balance between transparency and privacy and there continues to be very differing views on where this line should be drawn.
- Whilst we were leading work to achieve one Government commitment, we were essentially managing 43 different projects. We needed to secure the buy-in of every individual Chief Constable, address the unique technical challenges and issues of every police force's IT system and manage the different data quality and accuracy issues from the various force recording systems and practices.
- We were facing very tight timescales – we had less than six months to deliver this project against a shifting policy landscape on crime statistics,

crime recording and a strong commitment to reductions in police bureaucracy.

3. What worked and what we have learnt

Police.uk has been a significant success – it was delivered to time and budget and has received over 420 million hits since launch. We have set out below the key ways in which the Home Office and NPIA achieved this. We have also set out where we didn't get things quite right and what we would do differently in the future.

- **We were alive to the sensitivity of our data set.** We were clear from the offset that there is no one size fits approach to transparency and we therefore drew an early distinction between the personal data that we were dealing with and non personal data (such as Government spend). This was enormously important in securing the support and early engagement of key partners such as the police service and the Information Commissioner's Office.
- **We established a core delivery team.** Whilst we sought advice and views from a wide range of experts, we were only able to meet our delivery timescales by identifying and prioritising our key partners – essentially those who could make or break the project. For us, these were the police service (particularly Chief Constables as Data Controllers), force data protection and privacy experts who were advising their Chiefs on whether or not the proposed safeguards were appropriate and the Information Commissioner's Office who forces relied on for guidance and reassurance.
- **We sought leadership buy-in from the start.** Even within an individual police force, we were faced with different views and opinions about the direction of the project and whether or not we were striking the right balance between privacy and transparency. We invested a lot of time upfront engaging directly with Chief Constables, communicating our key messages and establishing clear escalation routes for when issues arise.
- **We adopted a phased approach.** From the start we were clear that we would take a phased approach to transparency and are confident that this will lead to a more radical and sustainable change in the longer term. We have not tried to change an entire culture overnight but have instead established a phased programme of work. We held our line on this against quite significant pressure and as a consequence have been able to take all 43 police forces with us and build a very strong platform for going further in the future.

There were of course things that we learnt and want to build on in the future including:

- **Get all stakeholders on board from the beginning.** In particular, we did not develop strong enough relationships with the data and developer community.
- **Continue to develop a business case for change.** For the police, this will always be less about transparency and more about community engagement and accountability. As Dr O'Hara's interim report makes clear, there is a significant lack of empirical evidence on the impact of transparency locally which made it harder to give the police a strong rationale for change that met their business and operational requirements.

- **Understand the demand for this data.** We were overwhelmed by the media and public interest and activity around Police.uk on the day of launch leading to technical challenges.

4. **What we have learnt post-launch**

The interest in and use of Police.uk continues to paint a fascinating picture for transparency and local accountability and it is possible to draw some interesting conclusions from the latest analytics:

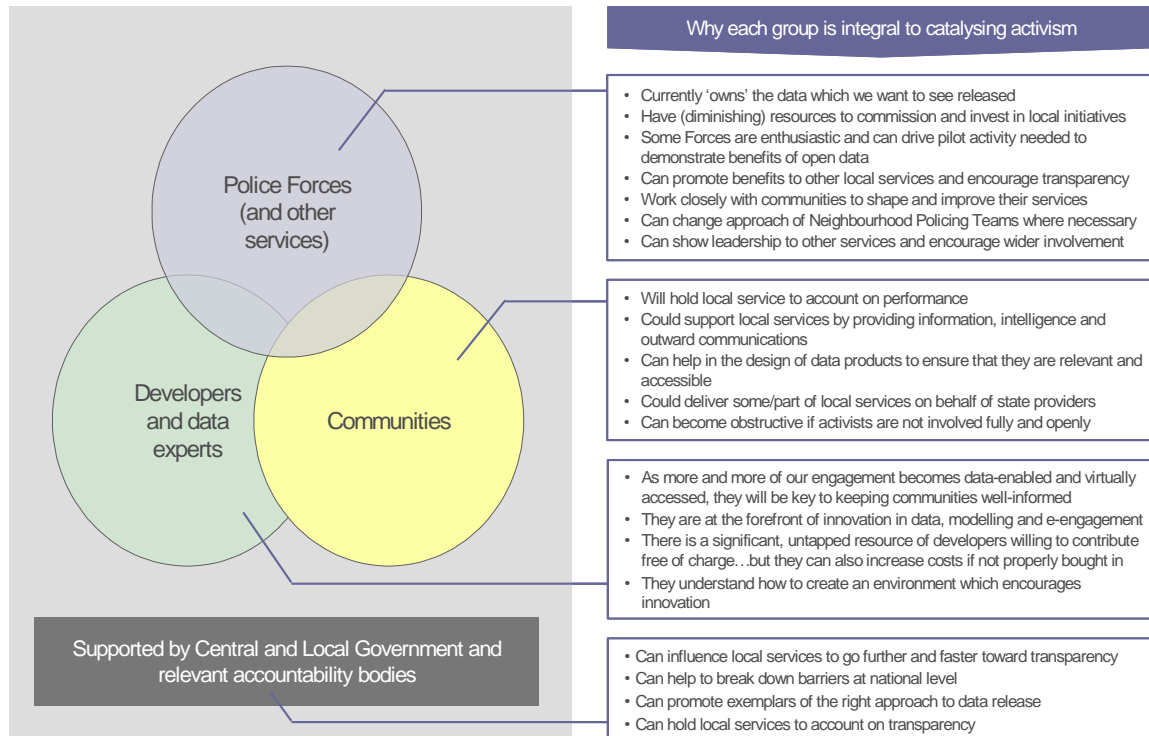
- **We've redefined the meaning of 'local'** - Police.uk received more hits on one day than the original crime mapping website (plotting neighbourhood level crime) received in its lifetime. This signifies the need for Government to reassess its approach to the 'local' (previously police force, CSP or neighbourhood) and put the hyper-local at the heart of its policy development and delivery.
- **But we also know that people like to compare and contrast** – analytics shows that the average user spends around 5 minutes 21 seconds on site. This suggests that people are not only focused on their own locality but also like to compare and contrast one area with another (perhaps those of their friends, families or where they used to live). It also shows us that people want to have their own approach and views on performance managing services. As we look to less bureaucratic management from Whitehall, understanding how the public can and will challenge services will be important.
- **People want more detail** - Whilst initial interest has inevitably subsided, we continue to achieve around 8,100 hits / hour and we have received over 3,000 pieces of individual public feedback since launch. Whilst there is no universal view, many people have asked for more specific and a wider range of information. The 'fear-factor' of street level crime data hasn't held true with fewer than expected complaints about privacy concerns (though there have been some concerns raised about house prices) – this gives us a very strong foundation to build on and use to start shifting the balance between privacy and transparency.
- **The data is being used** - we have already opened up the Application Programming interface (API) to over 450 developers and over 16 applications have been submitted. These have however mainly been alternative versions of crime maps and we haven't yet seen applications that cut across a variety of different information and data sets. We have also sparked debate amongst the developer community on the advantages and disadvantages of the data form, format and there is more to be done to bring them into the conversation.

5. **Learning for the Transparency Board**

As the transparency agenda gathers even greater momentum, it is important that the Transparency Board and the Sector Panels can offer both support and challenge to leading Departments. We have set out below some suggestions for how this can be achieved.

1. **Create a shared and constructive space.** Our collective ability to drive forward changes in transparency and accountability will be dependent upon strong, collaborative relationships between data owners, IT developers and

communities. Lack of involvement, understanding or resistance from any of these groups will prevent us from achieving the changes we want to see – all groups therefore need to be listened to and views need to be carefully balanced. Central and local government, have a key role in creating the shared constructive space in which these relationships can develop and thrive. The diagram below sets this out in more detail.



2. Recognise that transparency means different things to different people.

For some this is about giving communities a voice, for others this is about achieving efficiency savings and better links with the private sector, for others it is about building operational intelligence. For the transparency agenda to continue to gain momentum, Government needs to move from a 'push approach' (using the lever of Government commitments, legislation etc.) to a 'pull approach' (incentives, benefits and demonstrating the potential impact). The Transparency Board, through its relevant Sector Panels, should encourage Departments to develop persuasive evidence / business cases for change within their sector. Put crudely, this means demonstrating to data owners what it means for them and what they will get out of it.

3. Understand the landscape for different transparency projects and data sets. The Transparency Board has developed and communicated a set of overarching principles for transparency. We are clear however that there is no one size fits all approach and these need to more specifically reflect the challenges and context of different data sets (particularly the difference between personal and non-personal data). The Transparency Board, through its relevant Sector Panels, should develop sector specific principles which take on board the perspective of all relevant partners (for crime data,

for example, this would be the data and developer community, police service, criminal justice system, Information Commissioner etc.).

6. Our next steps

This has been an incredibly fast-paced and fascinating project and we have already used our learning and experience to shape our next steps. Our strategy going forward is about giving communities **choice**, **challenge** and the ability to **contribute** as follows:

Choice – enabling communities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choose what data they want and in what way - Make informed decisions about how they use the data e.g. which transport routes to avoid - Drive behavioural change of businesses 	Challenge – empowering communities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hold their police and local partners to account at their beat meeting - Hold their Police and Crime Commissioner to account 	Contribute – encouraging communities to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Take action themselves – for example through online reporting, prevention advice - Work within their community to tackle local issues
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The Home Office and NPIA are currently taking forward a wide range of work to drive forward this agenda. Our high level plan is set out below.

	Improving the granularity of crime data (i.e. shops, transport hubs)	Providing meaningful links Implementing improvements to trend / previous data	Introducing a more specific breakdown of crime data	
Test feasibility - Trailblazers	Intense work to set up trailblazers	Trailblazers go-live	Research and evaluation complete	
Driving channel shift	Co-design with communities, developers and police to shape future developments (focus groups, data analysis)	Pilot more frequent / temporal data through Data hub	Inclusion of wider policing and Government information	Link up of crime and justice information Community interaction i.e. online crime reporting.
	Now - June	June - August	September - November	December - February
				February +

This will continue to be underpinned by our work to:

- With NPIA and Ministry of Justice colleagues, unlock the potential for much more meaningful information from across the entire criminal justice system. This includes our work in the justice trailblazer areas where we are exploring how to map justice outcome information (for example cautions, penalty

notices for disorder and convictions) for the crimes which happen on different streets.

- Build our relationships with a wide range of experts. Again with the Ministry of Justice, we have set up the Crime and Criminal Justice Sector Panel which will bring together operational, data, developer expertise and help set out and challenge the future direction.
- Improve and enhance the credibility of Police.uk and the data, for example by addressing any anomalies, making it easier to identify commercial premises or helping users to look back through previous month's data and see how issues are being tackled.
- Increase community and developer use of street level crime and ASB data – for example through our event with commercial partners to think about how they can extend the reach and use of crime data.