Community Safety Research 2021

Project 3: evidence-informed planning

MainStreet Consulting

April 2021

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Introduction

As part of a wider programme of research projects, the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) commissioned MainStreet to explore the use of evidence in community safety and consider what evidence-informed planning could look like in Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) of the future, including identifying barriers and opportunities to embed these kinds of practices.

This high-level exploration of 'championing evidence' ran concurrently with the other research initiatives in February and March 2021, informed mainly by three strands of activity:
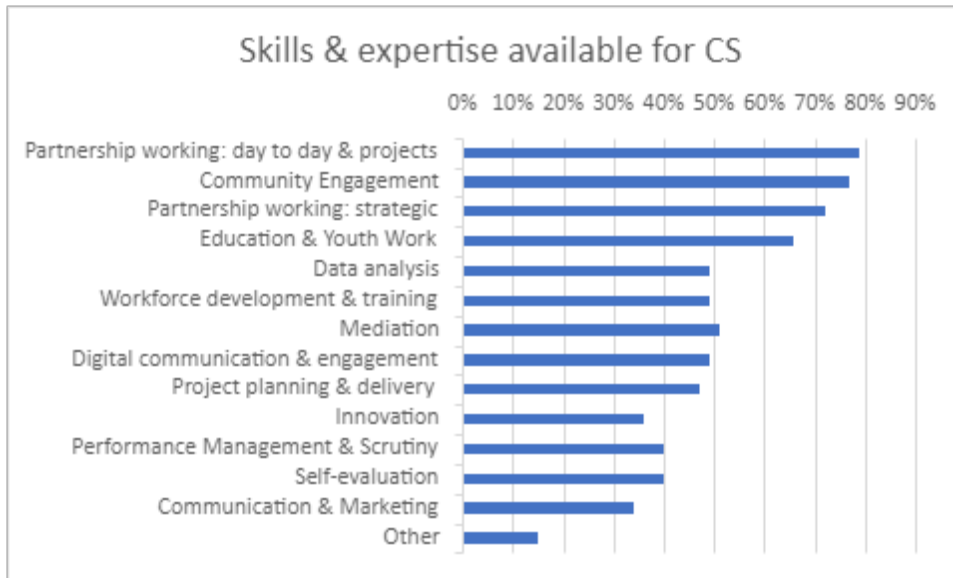
1. a rapid literature review, identifying findings and recommendations for community safety policy, partnership working, modern public servant skills, data & evidence
2. a questionnaire issued to SCSN members and partners, and other selected stakeholders with an interest in community safety
3. detailed focus group sessions and follow-up sessions with 25 colleagues - CSP lead officers, relevant partners (Police Scotland and Fire & Rescue Service) and academics.

Survey responses

The questionnaire issued to SCSN members and relevant partners was completed by 50 colleagues across Scotland (45% of the distribution list); this included 18 local authority areas (56%) covering a spread of remote rural, islands, major urban and mixed rural/small towns/large towns areas.

Of 16 questions in that survey, six touched on the use of data and evidence in community safety activities. The key responses were:
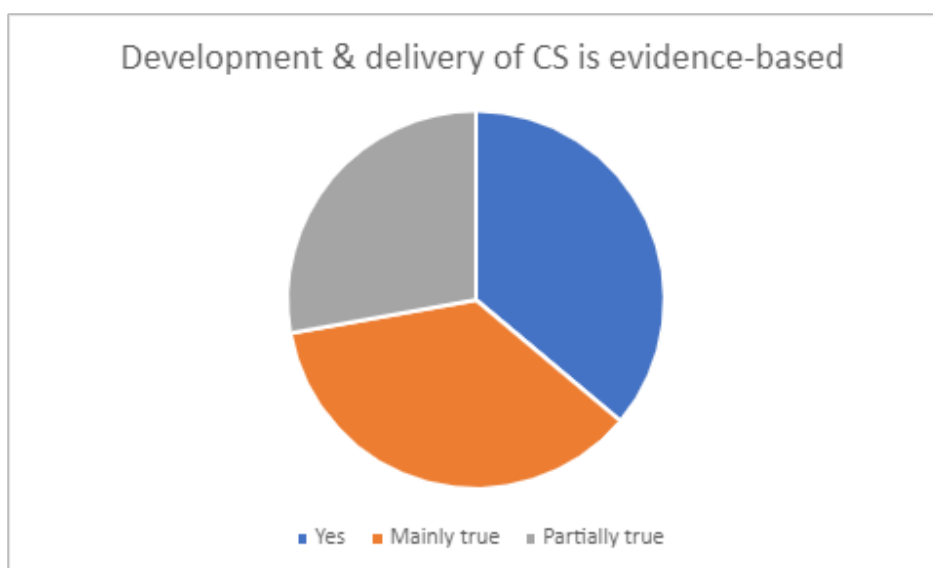
- 77% of respondents believe that the use of data and evidence to plan and support community safety has increased in importance over the last 10 years

- when asked how community safety issues get identified and prioritised, 58% believe that's informed by analysis of data

- 49% believe that they have data analysis skills and expertise available for community safety locally

SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

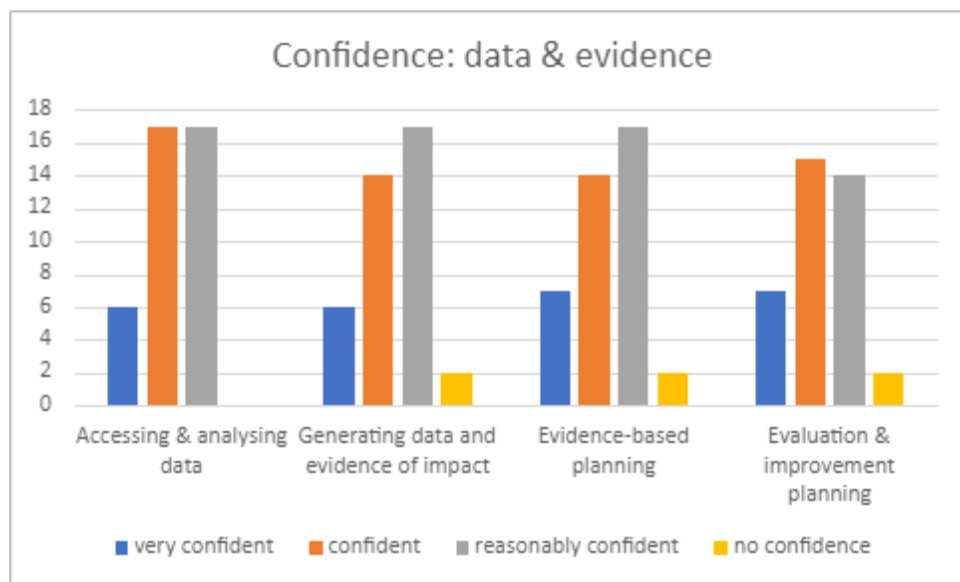On the development and delivery of community safety activity locally:

- o 70% state that it is fully or mostly evidence-based

- o 70% that it is planned and assessed with reference to quantitative data (e.g., crime statistics, health data etc)

- o 52% that it is planned and assessed using qualitative data (e.g., structured community engagement, focus groups, case studies, questionnaires etc)

SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

When asked how confident respondents are about certain elements of delivering community safety in future:

- o 85% are very to reasonably confident about accessing & analysing data

- o 79% are very to reasonably confident about generating data and evidencing impact

- o 81% are very to reasonably confident about evidence-based planning.

SCSN Community Safety survey, February 2021

When prompted on 'barriers, challenges' to successful delivery:

- o 89% referenced access to and analysis of data to inform community safety

- o 100% said that Information sharing is a challenge.

It is notable that there is a slight disconnect between the questionnaire evidence as referenced and the more detailed focus group conversations mentioned below. Questionnaire responses suggest broadly that colleagues know that data and evidence is important, more so than ever, and a majority of CSPs and partners are 'on the case' with it. Yet, follow-up discussions were more inclined to cite challenges and stalled progress.

Focus groups and follow-up conversations

In late February and early March, the project team ran a series of focus groups and follow-up one to one conversations with a range of Community Safety leads, partners and other selected stakeholders with an interest in community safety.

The main themes in relation to data and championing evidence are summarised below. Often these were prompted by findings from the survey:

Data analyst resource

The availability or otherwise of data analyst resource was a big theme across all the conversations.

- all participants agreed on the desirability and value of dedicated analyst support; that is, using up to date data to develop insight to inform development of local, community safety approaches

- but not all partnerships have access to dedicated or even shared resources. From the conversations and focus groups, only a fifth had dedicated access, a further third can call on resources from a wider service (or from partners like Police Scotland) and the remainder have very little capacity at all. This is reflected in the survey data, where under half reported having data analysis skills and expertise locally

- anecdotally, one interviewee said that there has been a very significant reduction in the number of partnership analysts – "now just a handful, compared to around 20 a few years ago". There is a sense that Police Scotland has also reduced its data analytical capacity over the past five years or so

- (this aligns with previous research. In 2012/13, SCSN reported that there were 23 partnership analysts split between 19 local authority areas: 80% of urban CSPs had a partnership analyst compared to 50% of rural and small town CSPs)

- the implication is that colleagues are, as one participant said, "basing decisions on what people think rather than what they know for sure"

- those with access (and explicitly reference was made in focus groups to Aberdeenshire, Fife, Scottish Borders and the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar) are clear on the value derived for evidenced-based priorities and subsequent evaluation of impact. Fife colleagues noted plans to use Microsoft Power BI for aggregating and manipulating different data sets for use in community safety domains.

There was discussion at the focus groups on the need for this to be addressed locally or nationally; perhaps even as an area for more SCSCN involvement. There was certainly some appetite for the Network to help make the link between national data and CSPs accessing, interpreting and using the data locally.

Data and information sharing

The consistent view among interviewees is that information sharing generally has stalled, is increasingly patchy, and inconsistent across partnerships.

- CSP leads and partners are aware of and can nominally access a range of data for their areas. At a granular level, it was noted by participants that between them, data is being produced on a range of possibly useful bases to community safety (Anti-social behaviour or ASB, CCTV, fire or electrical faults, traffic and roads, asset use, community group activities, employment etc)

- but it is still largely retained by those generating information as custom and practice, not because of sensitivity. Even when it is shared, it is still siloed – requiring aggregation and manipulation to generate meaningful insight. This applies across local authority departments as well as partners

- Police Scotland as a key partner on information exchange was subject to several conversations:
  - some of that was around perceived centralisation of services, including on data analysis and a belief that previously local requests are run through HQ
  - CSP leads believe that there is a disproportionate focus on data that is shared through the Scottish Police Authority reporting and governance arrangements (i.e., official statistics on drugs deaths in Scotland or Hate Crime data etc) which require moderation
  - recognition that data itself has been a challenge for Police Scotland, with ongoing work on consolidating regional crime systems beyond national criminal sets
  - these developments have made access to STORM or the Vulnerable Persons Database less straightforward and compelling for local trends in community safety. (Indeed some CSP leads mentioned that they are increasingly reliant on alternative sources for ASB and environmental incivility for example)
  - (COVID-19 lockdowns have also impacted sharing - making it difficult to access STORM and Scottish Crime Stats systems physically)

- interviewees say that successes are attributable to personal relationships between partners - built up over years locally - rather than anything structured or systemic. But where turnover of staff is high in areas (and possibly expected in national agencies), deep-rooted knowledge sharing is made more difficult.

- however, there are examples of good practice in partnerships:
  o Colleagues in Fife, Dumfries & Galloway and the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar mentioned that data sharing protocol within their respective Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), which cover those CSPs, are due to be refreshed in the coming year.
  o The Scottish Borders has built on its data sharing protocols and used CPP resources to establish two Community Action Teams – joint Council and Police Scotland initiatives focussing on issues such as ASB, street safety and theft. Data sharing and analysis is a core part, including capturing evidence to gauge its success.

Where colleagues across partnerships are sharing data, the purpose does seem to be to generate evidence for interventions or resource allocation.

Data protection & GDPR

Some of the participants suggested that the perceived stalling on data & information sharing has resulted from uncertainties around GDPR: a proxy for increased risk aversion on data protection.

This appears especially acute for community safety professionals who noted aspirations in the Scottish public sector as a whole to do more community engagement and early intervention work.

In the focus groups and one to one conversations, colleagues referenced tension between those objectives and possible confusion over data protection constraints citing:

- the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service doing 'Safe & Well' visits but not necessarily being able to actively inform other non-statutory services of low-level household risks
- SEPA being able to quickly share community wide flooding or water safety trends
- Social Work colleagues sharing insights on vulnerable individuals and wider community ASB harms
- accessing information on people using medical oxygen at home (currently around 6000 people nationally) for its multiple risk factors.

The 'Delivery Findings report' from the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland makes this point too: "*concerns around data privacy have also created*

barriers to the sharing of available data, even where there is a clear public good argument".

However, many participants did say that although there is some uncertainty because of GDPR, it is perhaps being used as an excuse not to access and share data. There was a strong sense, post COVID lockdowns, that this was an area that required attention.

This is a problem that SCSN could help address, certainly in agreeing protocols. There is likely no need for amendments to legislation but an authoritative legal view on these issues may address the perception that data sharing risks running counter to the guidance.

<u>*Evidence-informed early intervention and prevention*</u>

Participants in the focus groups were clear that 'early intervention and prevention' was a key part of the community safety approach (following the Christie Commission in 2011, and a conscious shift from enforcement) in Scotland and that evidence-informed planning should underpin that. Several interviewees also noted that it is referenced heavily in iterations of the (outcomes-based) National Performance Framework.

This is a theme picked up in several recent reports. For example, [What Works Scotland's 2018 CPP Officials Survey](#) has a section on 'Using evidence' in which respondents state that "*research and evidence mobilisation skills are not as widespread and highly rated as other skills*" and that they were keen to develop those further.

The Alliance For Useful Evidence (with Carnegie UK) issued a report "[The Scottish approach to evidence](#)" earlier in 2016. Among several observations on evidence for early intervention and prevention, it noted that "*Gathering robust and unambiguous evidence on prevention is challenging, not least because prevention is a strategy with an emphasis on intervening early to stop long-term issues developing/worsening. Change can be slow, and it requires a long-term programme of evidence-gathering, beyond electoral cycles*".

These points about long-term investment and cross-sectoral collaboration were referenced several times as constraints and frustrations in focus groups and conversations with CSP leads.

However, colleagues did cite several examples of intelligence-led prevention activity:

- the Naloxone spray (overdose prevention) initiative in Glasgow in 2020/21 is based on a range of cross-partner data insights, aggregating and interrogating data not only on areas of drug overdoses and deaths but importantly on Scottish Ambulance Service response times. Police equipped with the spray are located in those specific places

- the Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's Islands water safety plan (and SMART signs) initiative was driven by data analysis and close working with community safety partners including the Coastguard and RNLI. Staff there noted that 86% of accidents involved tourists – so signs were rolled out in relevant languages and with QR codes now. There are now efforts to get water safety onto the school curriculum locally too. While directly relevant to Western Isles, they are being used elsewhere in Scotland

- the community safety team in North Ayrshire is working across Police Scotland, the Violence Reduction Unit, Community Justice Scotland and voluntary sector partners to capture and share data on mental health and homelessness to inform new interventions on community safety and anti-social behaviour reduction

- the community safety team in Fife is clear that they interrogate historic and recent data ("what we have done") to identify trends ("where the problems are likely to be"), and this informs live workforce planning e.g. dog fouling in winter, post-Christmas fly-tipping

- In Angus, staff are excited about the "early screening group" drawn from across the community safety teams. Work is ongoing on consent for information sharing but view there is that "the news will always be when information is not shared rather than shared"

- note too that the SFRS is developing its predictive analytics capability including around its 'safe & well' approaches. Initial evaluation suggests success in predicting where accidents and fires will happen

- Police Scotland are working with the Scottish Government's Chief Data Officer on AI development within policing.

A final point raised in some discussions was the value and use of academic research by CSPs, and especially on early intervention and prevention. Several CSP leads said they would like to forge better links with academic institutions to explore community safety data and insights – mainly citing time as an inhibitor but also limited awareness of "what's available" Interestingly, this was also referenced in the What Works Scotland report of 2018: less than 20% of wider CPP professionals obtain evidence from academic institutions (page 30).

Again, there is an appetite among CSP leads and other partners for sustained, continuous knowledge sharing in these areas, facilitated by SCSN.

Use of Citizen Data

The effective use and sharing of data 'about people', or 'citizen data' has the potential to bring huge benefits to society as a whole including improving public service delivery through evidence-based planning. This data can include:

- unique identifiers (e.g. NHS or passport number)
- shared identifiers (e.g. name, date of birth, address)
- biometric data (e.g. DNA, fingerprints)
- data generated or observed through interaction with services or devices, such as social media and location data.

Initial discussions with CSP leads and partners suggested an inconsistent appreciation and use of citizen data within community safety practice currently. References were made only to the latter categories. All participants mentioned emerging social media monitoring activity:

o in Glasgow on anticipated crowd gatherings and subsequent responsive environmental incivility – or in more traditional wider oversight of location data through CCTV. (There was a suggestion in the focus groups that CCTV could be better organised in future, perhaps at national level rather than lots of procurement of systems locally)

o the communications team in the Scottish Borders Council are starting to monitor social media for environmental complaints by area too – and using this with the Community Action Team where it impacts on possible ASB or environmental crime.

o a small group of Fife residents created a Facebook page which unites and encourages like-minded individuals and groups to record their activities around litter picking – in conjunction with the Safer Communities Team who support their activities by supplying litter picking equipment and arranging for uplift of bags based on location stats etc

There was recognition that social media (mainly Facebook and Twitter in these conversations) is where citizens will *be* these days and where they will get much of their information. Participants in the focus groups were clear that social media is not only a tool for information and signposting but also for community engagement and empowerment – and that this is an area of relative

weakness (again, perhaps a function of reduced capacity) for community safety partnerships.

Overall, several consultees stated that there is no obvious place to go currently for useful, trusted data sets (or 'just information') that can be used, integrated or repurposed legally by community safety teams. Some interviewees suggested that this is because:

- the https://statistics.gov.scot/home site is not seen as sufficiently 'user-friendly'
- community and citizen data are fragmented across councils, H&SCPs, Police Scotland, SFRS, Travel and retail organisations etc
- even within local government, data is often kept 'siloed'.

Several consultees mentioned that, where available, larger data sets about an area are not always easy to understand or use and usually prepared for academic research use. More widely, there were comments made by some colleagues that the language around data needs review: more of a focus needed on 'information', 'insight', 'qualitative data', 'personal stories' and so on. There is lots of data created, used and shared by all community partners (including statutory bodies) – it is a two-way process - but its informal, qualitative nature means that it is not necessarily seen as such.

All participants expressed enthusiasm for more work to be done in this area.

Data culture and behaviour

There was one other consistent theme on data and evidence from the discussions: a widespread sense that elected councillor engagement on data and evidence for community safety in its widest sense is inconsistent.

Several colleagues noted that interest lies in environmental incivility (mainly in fly-tipping, dog-fouling and possible ASB activity) and limited interest in wider data sets. There is an emerging frustration that there has been insufficient scrutiny for community safety recently.

Colleagues gave several reasons for their limited use of and engagement with this data:

- relevance: councillor inboxes tend to reflect tangible environmental crime
- interest: consultees cited an absence of 'easy to use tools' to present information on the wide range of community safety metrics
- a narrow view of data: when prompted, interviewees defaulted to numbers, statistics rather than a wider definition of information that could include qualitative information, testimonies, feedback, videos etc.

Data recommendations

How does SCSN and its members and partners facilitate better generation, capture, transfer, repurposing or sharing of data/information for communities' benefit?

Improving awareness and accessibility of what data is available and able to be shared

What *appears* to be needed by CSPs is local authority level information on services and assets and there is widespread agreement that much of this is difficult to source.

All tiers of government need to consider the accessibility of their data beyond commitments to open data, not only allowing access to data but in actively making it easy to do so. Existing data sets needs to be clearly signposted and combined with clear explanations. Equally, SCSN and partners (at local authority level) need to raise awareness of relevant resources.

This theme is picked up in the July 2020 'Delivery Findings report' from the Infrastructure Commission for Scotland: *"There is currently no co-ordination of many data sets out-with the public sector, creating duplication of effort; and public sector data is not always in an appropriate format or regularly updated"*.

Data sharing protocols

A recurring theme is the relative immaturity of data sharing protocols and agreements across all of the communities. At best, partners are effecting workarounds in sharing data; at worst, people are using GDPR and data protection concerns to avoid data sharing.

Many stakeholders agreed that this is one area that needs attention post-COVID19: determining definitive guidance (and tools) on what data can be shared safely and how between all parties.

SCSN could play a role in securing definitive guidance for CSPs and teams on this perceived challenge.

Strengthen data skills

There is a danger in thinking of using data as a something that requires data analyst skills whereas what might more accurately be needed is capacity to use information in relation to good leadership and management. It would be useful to have data analysts to assist, but the complex context within which community safety operates requires an emphasis on interpretation of data and seeing the significance of what can be achieved (the 'so what' question).

Nevertheless, SCSN could be commissioning or coordinating opportunities to develop or enhance data skills.

There are several free resources available to the sector e.g. the Open Knowledge Foundation's school of data and statistics, and simple data analysis courses taught by academics on Coursera and other MOOCs.

Community organisations (where registered as charities at least) can recruit volunteer data analysts or IT specialists, including via a Scottish Government scheme launched in 2019:
https://blogs.gov.scot/digital/2020/02/03/launch-of-2020-analytical-exchange-programme/

The SCSN itself commissioned a report on experiences of community safety (https://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/research-experiences-of-community-safety/) from Robyn Bailey, a Social Researcher for the Scottish Government through the Analytical Exchange Programme.

The Datalab is Scotland's innovation centre for data and AI. It has a considerable skills and talent offer, as set out https://www.thedatalab.com/skills-talent/. One proposition might be development of specific content for smaller, community focused organisations and their use/re-use of meaningful data.

In addition, the SCVO has guidance on digital transformation more widely – https://scvo.org/support/digital

This may also involve a rolling programme of good practice (or 'good thinking' as Dr Julie Berg calls it) for members. For example, asking Chris Fitzpatrick to speak about SFRS work on predictive analytics at learning events, or Albert King from the Scottish Government to explain the AI activity being explored by Police Scotland.

Involving communities more in data generation & sharing processes

Since Local Place Plans, Local Outcome Improvement Plans etc are tools for community planning, empowerment and addressing inequality, community activities, existing assets and networks should be actively sourced from all community partners and made available in accessible formats for use/re-use by whole communities.

Encouraging better engagement with data

Key stakeholders (SCSN, Scottish Government, COSLA, CSPs, CPPs) need to consider incentives for communities and local organisations to engage better

with data, creating cultures that support and encourage use and sharing of meaningful data.

Make the case for dedicated data analysts across the partnerships

Given that only half of partnerships have access to either dedicated or pooled data analysis support – and yet all see the value – SCSN could make the case in its work for a restoration of these roles. It should certainly reconstitute the SCSN data analyst forum (notably, this was one of the key issues raised in the 2018 *Emerging landscape & opportunities* report: "…it was felt the SCSN could play a stronger role in …re-establishing the Partnership Analyst Forum to address any local, data sharing issues".

Since that time, SCSN *has* included data and partnership analysts in a range of other networks including the regional meetings. But, more innovatively, could SCSN be a useful hub itself for some pooled resource - perhaps employing a full-time data analyst or two to work for all its members on evidence-informed planning?

A data hub for community safety

One idea that possibly incorporates much of the data infrastructure equation is the proposition put forward by a few stakeholders: the establishment of a data hub where local data can be collated, interpreted and transformed into reliable trusted intelligence for use in partnerships - proving the concept of data driven decision making.

Again, help could/should be sought from the Scottish Government, COSLA, Scottish Futures Trust, Police Scotland and members themselves to fund or otherwise resource in kind. That could also involve organisations like the DataLab.

An additional proposition from some of the data professionals is that such a pilot could leverage existing information specialists in local community libraries or universities. Local, community data (of whatever type) could therefore be better captured and curated for use in decision-making.

APPENDIX A - Interviewees

- Dr Julie Berg, Senior Lecturer, Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, University of Glasgow
- Katie Brown, Equally Safe lead, COSLA
- Stewart Christie, Inspiring Scotland
- Frank Creighton, Social & Community Services Policy Officer, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar
- Linda Cunningham, Community Safety Officer, South Lanarkshire Council
- Ann Fehily, Group Manager for Community Safety and Regulatory Services, Glasgow City Council
- Chris Fitzpatrick, Scottish Fire & Rescue Services
- Kirstie Freeman, Fife Council
- Ian Hanley, Community Safety, Inverclyde Council
- Colin Heggie, Police Scotland
- Diane Kane, Team Leader - Community Safety Team, East Dunbartonshire Council
- Jess McBeath, Online Harms & Digital Citizenship Consultant
- Shirley McLaren, Community Protection Support Unit, City of Edinburgh Council
- Gordon McLean, CORRA
- Erin Murray, Research & Policy Officer, Customer & Communities, Scottish Borders Council
- Carolanne Robertson, Community Safety, Renfrewshire Council
- Roddy Ross, Community Safety, Perth & Kinross Council
- Tricia Spacey, Fife Council
- Nicola Swan, Evaluation Support Scotland
- Liz Watson, Partnership & Strategy Officer, Safer Communities Team, Fife Council
- Judi Young, Retained & Volunteer Support Watch Commander (Angus), SFRS

APPENDIX B – Community data sets

Several datasets are available for use in developing local, community data. Example dataset types and sample sources are given below, Few were cited by interviewees, even when prompted.

Standard Data

Structured data approaches - top-down data generated for official rather than community value: e.g.

- https://www.ons.gov.uk/help/localstatistics
- http://geoportal.statistics.gov.uk/
- https://census.ukdataservice.ac.uk/use-data/guides/boundary-data
- https://statistics.gov.scot/home
- https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/stats-at-a-glance/council-area-profiles
- https://www.isdscotland.org/
- https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/Local-Authorities
- https://www.trusselltrust.org/news-and-blog/latest-stats/end-year-stats/

Locality or community-level Data

Derived from audits, indicators and specified assets in specific areas. Serve as snapshots on longer term trends: e.g.

- https://www.edinburgh.gov.uk/downloads/file/26928/north-east-locality-improvement-plan
- https://www2.gov.scot/Resource/0042/00427488.doc
- https://scotland.shinyapps.io/ScotPHO_profiles_tool/
- https://www.usp.scot/

Consultation:
- https://nextdoor.co.uk/
- https://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/online-community/
- https://www.localhalo.com/
- https://hivebrite.com/

Listening in, community 'chatter', sentiment analysis:
- https://www.getg5.com/sentiment-analysis-alert-problems-in-your-communities/