Scottish Community Safety Network

Elected Member Survey June/July 2020

Introduction

Following the lockdown in late March 2020 due to the Covid19 pandemic, the Scottish Community Safety Network (SCSN) got in touch with all Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) to detail our offer of support at this time and find out from them how they were coping under the strain of COVID-19 and what the impact of the pandemic had been on community safety so far. The results from this initial survey can be found at:

https://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/2020/04/16/preliminary-report-of-covid-19-community-safety-partnerships-survey/

We know from conversations with COSLA and Elected Members (EM's) that EM's are playing a crucial role supporting citizens, communities and partners at this time and have an understanding of the matters affecting communities. For these reasons we wanted to gather views from Scotland's EM's who are engaged in matters of community safety, policing and justice to understand their experiences.

We were looking to understand what these EM's were seeing as the key community safety issues for the communities they work with and what would be helpful to address them; and we wanted to understand what issues or opportunities this group of EM's saw as restrictions begin to be eased. We also wanted to start thinking about the renewal stage and how community safety can 'build back better'.

Between June 19th and July 21st SCSN invited EMs with a remit in community safety, justice or policing across Scotland to participate in an online survey. The purpose of this was to understand how these EM's have contributed to the Covid-19 pandemic response, explore their experiences and identify important community safety issues during difficult times. The survey was distributed through SurveyMonkey to 59 EMs working in community safety, justice and policing and a total of 11 completed or partially completed responses were received. Whilst clearly not representative of elected members views overall, their answers give some insight into the views of the 11 elected members that responded.

EM's from the following council areas responded to the survey:

- Aberdeen City
- Aberdeenshire
- Argyll and Bute
- Clackmannanshire
- East Ayrshire
- Midlothian
- North Lanarkshire
- Perth and Kinross
- South Ayrshire
- Stirling

The majority of questions were open ended where those who responded were free to write openly about their experiences and perspectives. We have shared the insights from the 11 EMs that responded to the survey and have pulled out some key themes and messages. NVIVO (text data analysis software) was used to do content analysis of the open-ended questions and code answers into categories. You will find Word Clouds throughout this report that show the prominent issues that these 11 EM's were seeing. Also included are quotes that highlight the experience of these EM's in their own words.

We've also highlighted some areas for further research, some implications for community safety in the future and how local and national community safety partners might want to use this and the rest of our survey bundle which includes community safety lead officer experiences and the experiences of Community Council Chairs.

Survey Results

SCSN asked: *What have been the main issues for your communities during the pandemic regarding community safety? This could include, for example, violence against women and girls, hate crime, scammers, antisocial behaviour, home safety (falls and other unintentional injuries, fire safety), theft etc.*

Key points:

- Concerns around domestic violence and antisocial behaviour were the most frequent responses.
- Criminal behaviour such as scammers, speeding and non-compliance with Covid-19 legislation were also community safety risks identified by EM's.

"Scammers and, more recently, anti-social behaviour mainly by youths"

EM's said:

"My residents wanting normality of services like grass cutting, too soon into the pandemic"

"Compliance with emergency legislation"

"Domestic violence and anti-social behaviour"

"Access to support for looked after children and young adults"

"Support for chaotic families"

"Increase in speeding, antisocial behaviour, drug offences"

emergency
women
families · chaotic
violence
adults · antisocial
behaviour
cutting compliance access scammers anti social drug
children covid support ended
domestic

SCSN asked: *Thinking about the emergency Coronavirus legislation, have you seen any impact of the legislation on the work that you do or the communities you represent?*

Key points:

- Lockdown and travel restrictions impacted delivering support to vulnerable citizens, increases in mental ill-health and loneliness.
- Information sharing and confusion around policy and legislation was mentioned by EM's especially due to rapidly changing guidelines and not knowing who is responsible for enforcement.
- Each EM listed unique experiences of legislative impact in their area such as those included below.

"I've seen an increase in mental health issues, loneliness, isolation"

EM's said:

"Difficult to get information about what was happening at first"

"Difficulties in carrying out and delivering support required"

"Confusion around who is responsible for enforcement"

SCSN asked: *Is there anything that you think has helped or would help to support your communities with these issues at this time?*

Key points:

- Responses to this question indicated that police responses have helped the most, in particular prompt, informed responses and increased police presence in communities.
- Community responses have played a key role in minimising community safety risks.
- Partnership working and effective sharing of public communication was cited as being a helpful support mechanism.

EM's said:

"Signposting and awareness"

"Dissemination of information. Making people aware of why changes are being made. Some groups really need everything spelt out to them in very plain English"

"Increased willingness from Police Scotland to enforce legislation"

"Lots of public information releases has helped. A prompt police response and ongoing monitoring has helped contain the anti social behaviour"

"Partnership working"

"...there has been an increased presence of police in some of the bigger communities which is helpful"
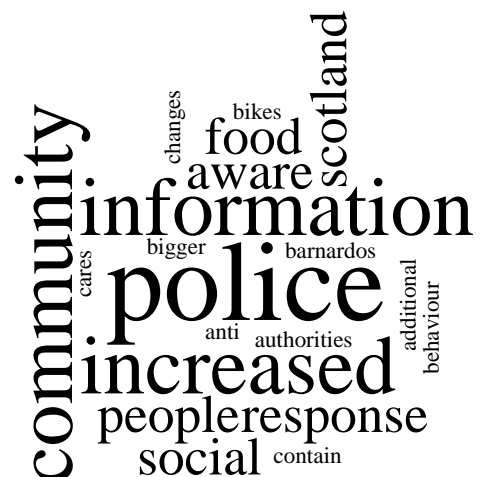
SCSN asked: *In relation to the previous question, do you have any reflections on what has gone well? Any suggestions for what could have been better?*

Key points:

- Coordinated responses and community engagement worked particularly well.
- Partnership working and collaborative approaches were mentioned by most of the EMs that responded as approaches that helped to mitigate and respond to community safety issues during the early stages of the pandemic.

EM's said:

"People have pulled together to collaborate"

"Community engagement has been amazing. More dialogue around things like procurement and GDPR, would have been very useful in helping partners to be even more effective and would have saved money"

"Police have worked well to engage with community rather than a heavy-handed approach, NLC have done everything humanly possible to assist residents especially those shielding and also businesses re grants etc. Staff assisted in other departments to cover for colleagues who were ill or shielding - also true with Police and Fire services"

The table below shows what the EM's that responded felt (1) has helped / gone well and (2) would have helped when thinking about responses to Covid-19 in light of Community Safety.

Has helped	Would have helped
• Community food initiatives, Council food hub for shielded/vulnerable people, • Direct payments to welfare • COSLA guidance on VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) • Partnership working • People have pulled together to collaborate • Community engagement • Helplines and coordinated support • Police engaging with community rather than a heavy-handed approach	• More community support officers • Dissemination of information • Making people aware of *why* changes are being made. • Additional funding for third sector partners • Increased willingness from Police Scotland to enforce legislation

SCSN asked: *Has your 'normal' role changed as a result of Covid19 pandemic? Please provide some details about the way in which your role has changed during this time. This could include your scrutiny role, your decision-making role or the interaction you have with your communities and the way you work with communities.*

Key points:

- Meetings being conducted online and digital communication was the most widely reported change in role for EM's.
- Scrutiny of local decision making was reported as more difficult and more limited with the involvement of fewer people overall.
- Some EM's felt they were not involved in making local decisions in the way that they would normally be.
- Different ways of working for EM's include email, using Zoom and Teams, texts and phone calls.

"Home working has changed the approach to scrutiny, now happening on a limited basis. Decision making being done by a smaller group of elected members

EM's said:

"Working remotely and using technology has been very effective"

"Council committees were suspended with exception of Planning. Leadership Sounding board established but all decision making is by Council officers. Virtual full Council meetings are only noting decisions not making decisions"

"I helped with the shielding programme checking shielded groups were safe and managing, in the earlier months. I have felt less involved in recent weeks, felt any powers as a councillor have been taken away. The public don't understand this and equally now feel they are not represented"

SCSN asked: *Partnerships and communities have stepped up during this time. We've heard examples of different working practices in the public sector, a different relationship between the public sector and communities and lots of volunteering and community spirit. We'd like to hear about what you've seen during this time. Please*

provide some details if you can - we are looking to develop some stories to capture and share this learning and influence practice.

Key points:

- Support provided to communities has generally been excellent due to close partnership working and liaison between organisations.
- Potential gaps in support for children and carers was outlined by one EM.
- Volunteering and community responses have played a key role in mitigating community safety issues during Covid-19.

"The number of volunteers has been outstanding, almost overwhelming"

EM's said:

"Sauchie Community Group, in my Ward area, have been marvellous. They've pulled together a mass of ideas to support the community, and entertain them online. As a Council, I believe we've provided a massive amount of excellent support to communities. However, I believe we've not done enough for looked after children and their Carers. There are real gaps there"

"The close liaison between police, fire and council"

"Communication, I think could have been better. Personally tried to help the community, small things baking, checking some people were ok"

"I feel people have not been very tolerant, judgemental with the curtain twitchers acting as police. Some random acts of kindness are there and so very much hope that continues when this is all over"

SCSN asked: *How confident / reassured have you been in the action from organisations involved in the community safety response to the pandemic? This could involve reflecting on things like information briefings, communication, partnership working, flexibility of response, funding etc.*

Please note that these results are the *opinions* of Elected Members, and the number of responses make up a very small proportion of the total number of Elected Members. Therefor the results below are clearly not representative of all Elected Members. It is also worth mentioning that this question covers the *whole* of the Covid-19 response from organisations and doesn't unpick the reasons for the ratings. The below key points summarise the opinions of the 11 Elected Member who responded.

Key points:

- Of the 11 EM's who responded high levels of confidence were reported in the Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (particularly SFRS locally), and Local Authorities.
- High confidence was also found in Community Planning Partnerships, Community Safety Partnerships, Community Justice Partnerships, local third sector organisations, COSLA and Police Scotland (local). Fewer high confidence votes were received for the Scottish Government, but they received few low confidence votes from the 11 EM's.
- The EMs that responded had high confidence in civil society[1] receiving no low confidence votes and almost half of the high confidence ratings from EM's.
- National Third Sector organisations did not receive any high confidence votes, only medium but a small proportion of low confidence. This would be in line with expectations - EMs are perhaps more likely to have contact with local third sector organisations rather than national ones.

SCSN asked: At the time of asking The Scottish Government had recently published its 'roadmap' for easing restrictions. *We asked: As the restrictions begin to ease are you anticipating any particular community safety issues to emerge as a concern?*

Key points:

- EM's highlighted a number of community safety issues that could be impacted by economic impact of Covid-19: a rise in people claiming welfare and Universal Credit, an increase in people experiencing mental-ill health.
- Community safety concerns include domestic violence, anti-social behaviour, hate crime, not adhering to social distancing, fly-tipping and organised crime.

"Finance in the short to medium term and coping with mental health issues"

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[1] Civil Society: a community of citizens linked by common interests and collective activity.

EM's said:

"A Compliance with social distancing, fly-tipping. Significant rise of people needing welfare support. Universal credit claims have doubled on pre-covid levels in Perth and Kinross. Economic recovery and welfare support will be vital to maintaining safer communities. Crime has dropped significantly during lockdown maintaining that as shops and premises re-open and movement restrictions are relaxed will be a challenge"

"Managing numbers of people travelling around country without seeing rise in infections"

"I think too many people think it is all okay and we are back to normal. You can see that with social distancing, people being too close to one another, not wearing masks properly. Managing distancing when out and about"

SCSN asked: *Earlier in the survey we touched on the ways in which communities and public services have stepped up during this time including different working practices, different relationship with communities, etc. Are there any of these that you think should be prioritised for the 'renewal' phase?*

Key points:

- Learning from community groups could be key to success in the renewal phase
- Many examples of innovation exist across localities and learning from best practice could minimise future community safety risks through empowering individuals and communities.
- Providing support to retail, communities, older people and wider community should be priorities.

EM's said:

"I think we need to do more to support retail - local shops. There have been innovative ways to function, in some shops, BBQ, in my view took the lead. Home schooling, involvement with on line learning, TEAMs, committees operating, like planning gave a sense of normality. I felt I wanted to do more to help but my offers were not taken up. I think the emergency powers given to council officers have removed councillors from the process and the public don't understand this"

"Some community groups and individuals have demonstrated agility and effectiveness, Letham4all, Muirton Community Foodshare and the Give or take community larder network are doing really important work to ensure people do not go hungry in areas of severe and multiple deprivation"

"Befriending services for elderly and housebound should continue as they looked forward to a chat on phone or even a chat from the distance as shopping delivered. People actually got to know neighbours as often out at work and never see each other / hope sense of community continues"

SCSN asked: *Are there any issues you think SCSN should be prioritising for research or support in the future?*

Key points:

- Only four respondents answered this question.
- Research into how Covid-19 has disproportionately impacted minority groups and vulnerable groups including commercial sexual exploitation and prostitution.
- Utilise YouTube to share videos providing information and updates at a local level.
- A focus on preventative work.

Concluding Remarks

Adapting to new ways of living and working since Covid-19 has been a challenging time for everyone. The impact of the pandemic on community safety issues is continually emerging with potentially huge impact in the medium to long term, primarily emerging from the predicted economic stress. The responses to this, and the

other SCSN surveys, highlight areas of concern within the community safety sector, but also share examples of effective ways of working together.

Reponses to the survey outline the vast policy landscape that community safety operates within, such as antisocial behaviour, speeding, hate crime, organised crime, online crime and scammers, as well as new community safety concerns around citizen behaviour and non-compliance with Covid-19 legislation. An overarching theme was the effectiveness of collective action and community responses when overcoming some of the immediate community safety issues related to Covid-19. For example, the role of volunteering to ensure elderly residents receive their prescriptions, or the role of existing community enterprises and local third sector services.

Partnership working and interagency communication was another strong theme throughout, with respondents sharing how strong partnerships and close working practices have the best outcomes for people and communities. It is striking how many examples of innovative work practices and community responses can be found within the arena of community safety.

This survey has helped provide an insight into how some of Scotland's EM's working in community safety, justice and policing have experienced the Covid-19 pandemic. It sheds light on the insight and experience EM's have in working in communities during the Covid19 pandemic.

Community safety partners may wish to undertake some local reflective exercises with local EMs to explore community safety during the Covid19 pandemic. We hope the SCSN survey helps give some early, if limited, insight and could be used as a guide for some of these local and more detailed conversations to continue.