

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Report on Serious Acquisitive Crime Figures
Committee: Customers and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel
Date: 12 March 2012
Cabinet Member: Councillor Jordan
CMT Member: Director for People
Author: Sarah Hopkins – Community Safety Partnership Manager
Contact: Tel 305542
Email: sarah.hopkins@plymouth.gov.uk
Ref: SH/C&COSP/Mar 12
Key Decision: No
Part: I

Executive Summary:

At its last meeting held on 24 October 2011, the Customer and Communities Scrutiny Panel were provided with a report on crime figures, having noted that burglary was up. The panel were also provided with neighbourhood specific information. Following which, the panel requested a further update for this meeting.

Since the last report to this panel, although we remain off target, it appears that partnership efforts and interventions overall seem to be having a positive impact on curbing levels of serious acquisitive crime and bringing us closer to meeting the target, for example:

- Mutley/Greenbank has seen a fall in domestic burglaries. Between 16 October 2011 and 8 February 2012, 17.2% fewer burglaries were reported compared to the same period the previous year. Also the detection rate has also improved in the same period, rising from 13.7% to 24.5%.
- Between 1st April 2011 and 20 February 2012 numbers of 'theft from vehicles' is now only showing a rise of 1.1% (+9) on the same period the year before. This represents a significant improvement on the position reported in October 2011 which at that point was showing a year to date increase of 19.7% on the same period the year before.
- As at end of January 2012, we have held a stable position in our most similar family group for 'theft of motor vehicles' as third best, and are currently showing a reduction of -9.8% (-35)
- Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'Serious Acquisitive Crime', has improved to second best (of 15) from third place.
- Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'Domestic Burglary' has improved to third best (of 15) from fourth place.
- Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'Theft of Vehicles' has improved to second best (of 15) from fourth place.

Partners are continuing with efforts to drive these crimes down across the city and keep a 'foot on the pedal'. It should be recognised however that in the current socio-economic climate, efforts will need to continue for some time to maintain or further reduce current levels of serious acquisitive crime.

It should be noted that throughout this report citywide figures (the latest available at the time of writing this report) are accurate up to the 20 February 2012. Figures broken down to specific neighbourhoods are accurate up until 8 February 2012.

Home Office figures released in January 2011 showed Devon and Cornwall as the third safest force

area in England and Wales, showing 53 crimes per 1000 population, compared to 76 nationally.

This report lists the activities and interventions that are in place to specifically address serious acquisitive crime, in particular dwelling burglary and theft from motor vehicles.

Corporate Plan 2012 – 2015:

City Priority – Reduce Inequalities.

**Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications:
Including finance, human, IT and land**

None.

Other Implications: e.g. Community Safety, Health and Safety, Risk Management and Equality, Diversity and Community Cohesion:

Key community safety issues are discussed.

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

This report is for information.

Alternative options considered and reasons for recommended action:

N/A

Background papers:

None

Sign off:

Fin		Leg		HR		Corp Prop		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member:											

1.0 BACKGROUND:

1.1 At its meeting held on 12 September 2011, the Customer and Communities Scrutiny Panel requested a report on crime figures for this meeting, having noted that burglary was up. The panel also requested neighbourhood specific information. This was provided for the meeting held on 24 October 2011. Following this, the panel requested a further update for this meeting

1.2 Home Office figures released in January 2011¹ showed Devon and Cornwall as the third safest force area in England and Wales, showing 53 crimes per 1000 population, compared to 76 nationally.

1.3 It should be noted that throughout this report citywide figures (the latest available at the time of writing this report) are accurate up to the 20 February 2012. Figures broken down to specific neighbourhoods are accurate up until 8 February 2012.

1.4 Between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 levels of overall crime in Plymouth have increased by 3% (+547 crimes), compared to the same period the year before, and this is largely attributable to increases in levels of 'serious acquisitive crime', especially levels of 'dwelling burglary' and 'theft from motor vehicle' and 'acquisitive crime', which includes 'non-domestic burglary' and 'other theft'. However, this represents only a 0.6% increase on the position reported to the panel in October 2011, which was showing a 2.4% increase. Currently six priority neighbourhoods have recorded an increase in overall crime; these are Mutley/Greenbank, Whiteleigh, East End, Devonport, Honicknowle and Morice Town.

1.5 It should be noted that levels of crime are very fluid and sometimes subject to seasonal increases/decreases, and offender activity. Therefore, this report should be viewed as a 'snapshot' at the time of writing it. A verbal update will be provided at the Customer and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel of any updates or significant changes.

1.6 The focus of this report is on serious acquisitive crime which is currently not on target. Work continues to address this, and those activities are covered in this report.

2.0 WHAT HAS BEEN DONE SINCE THE LAST REPORT TO THE PANEL

2.1 Since the last report, a great deal of work has been done to continue to address levels of serious acquisitive crime, much of which is done, or commissioned, by the Council-led multi-agency group, including the following:

- A surgery has been held for Neighbourhood Liaison Officers in the Stonehouse, East End, Mount Gould, Mutley/Greenbank and Stoke neighbourhoods to support them with providing information and advice to disseminate to those communities most affected by serious acquisitive crime.
- Community Safety Staff and Plympton Police Cadets held an Awareness Day at Sainsbury's Supermarket, Marsh Mills in November 2011 and engaged with over 300 people and gave out advice and information on serious acquisitive crime
- Increased use of the Police CCTV Partnership Van across the city including hotspots of serious acquisitive crime as a deterrent for offenders and reassurance for the public. Further, staff are being trained in how to operate the van and it is hoped to expand on previous levels of usage.
- As part of the pre-Christmas 'Focus Day' held on 1 December 2012 in the City Centre, the key focus of the event was raising public awareness about, and providing advice and information to the on domestic burglary and theft from motor vehicles.
- A letter has been sent out by Plymouth Police to all those currently listed on the PPO/IOM scheme, reaffirming the fact that those individuals were under additional scrutiny and should not be tempted to offend, especially over the festive period.

¹ <http://neighbourhoodpolicing.devon-cornwall.police.uk/BCU-1663/Sector-1772/NB-1773/Pages/NewsArticle.aspx?ID=18>

- A Nationwide 'Day of Action' targeting metal thefts was held on 28 October 2011. Across Plymouth activity took place in conjunction with British Transport Police, Trading Standards and the relevant licensing Authority, with visits paid to five scrap metal merchants. Four yards were searched and one owner received a warning for keeping incorrect records.

3.0 WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT SERIOUS ACQUISITIVE CRIME

3.1 Between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 levels of serious acquisitive² crime rose by 10.6% (244 more offences) more than for the same period the year before. However, this represents an improvement on the position as reported to the panel in October 2011 which, at that point, was showing a year to date increase of 16% on the same period the year before. This also shows that we are curbing the increase and bringing us closer to meeting our target. In the main, the increases reported above remain attributable to two main crime types which are dwelling burglary and theft from motor vehicles. Additionally, as at end of January 2012 (the latest available) Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for 'Serious Acquisitive Crime', has improved to second best (of 15) from third place since the last report to this panel.

3.2 Between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 numbers of 'dwelling burglary' have risen by 27.5% (+212). With regards dwelling burglary, the biggest increases are in Stonehouse (+37), Mutley/Greenbank (+32), East End (+26) and Mount Gould (+17) areas, which are all neighbourhoods that fall within South and Central local policing area. Recent analysis and offender profiling has shown that the rise in burglary is not solely down to prolific offenders but to a larger number of individuals committing a small number of individual offences. The 'Offender Profile' which, whilst limited to offenders who have been arrested by police and as such represents a relatively small proportion of offenders, shows that of these, the large majority are young males between the ages of 18 and 29 approx 75% or whom are unemployed. As at end of January 2012, Plymouth's position in its family group of similar cities for Domestic Burglary has improved to third best (of 15) from fourth place since the last report to this panel.

3.3 Since we last reported to the panel, Mutley/Green Bank has experienced a fall in domestic burglaries. Between 16 October 2011 and 8 February 2012, 17.2% fewer burglaries were reported in Mutley/Greenbank compared to the same period last year. The detection rate has also improved in the same period, rising from 13.7% to 24.5%. This area has also been the principle focus for Council-led multi-agency work and for this crime type.

3.4 The type of burglary currently being committed matches previous historical trends with volume offences, particularly in Mutley/Greenbank, which are mainly break-ins into insecure premises, and are likely to be committed by opportunist thieves. An initial rise in domestic burglary in the Mutley/Greenbank area occurred whilst students were on their summer break in 2011.

3.5 We know that burglary tends to be committed by offenders to fuel drug habits. Plymouth City Council invests through the Community Safety Partnership a considerable sum into a drug treatment contract with Public Health to particularly target known offenders with drug habits and ensure they are fast-tracked into drug treatment. We are currently re-examining this contract to ensure that it is meeting current demands.

3.6 Between 1 April 2011 and 20 February 2012 numbers of 'theft from vehicles' has risen by 1.1% (+9). However, this represents a significant improvement on the position in October 2011 which at that point was showing a year to date increase of 19.7% on the same period the year before. The biggest increases in numbers have been recorded in Mutley/Greenbank (+35) and Honicknowle (+19). Plymouth's position has improved from fourth place to second best (of 15) in its family group of similar cities.

² Domestic Burglary, Theft of/ unauthorised taking of Motor Vehicle, Theft From Motor Vehicle, Personal Robbery, Business Robbery, Aggravated Domestic Burglary, Aggravated Theft of Motor Vehicle.

3.7 The problem profile commissioned in 2011 confirmed that theft from motor vehicle has included theft of metal objects (e.g. from vans) being stolen, whilst the majority are opportunist 'smash and grab' offences and the most targeted individual item stolen continues to be Sat Navs.

3.8 As at end of January 2012, we have held a stable position in our most similar family group for 'theft of motor vehicles' as third best (of 15), and are currently showing a reduction of -9.8% (-35). Levels of robbery have increased, but this equates to very small numbers, and we continue to monitor these closely and take necessary action when appropriate.

3.9 In the run up to Christmas the police apprehended a number of individuals involved in serious acquisitive crime and obtained successful convictions at Court. A number of these individuals were recent prison releases and were actively managed and targeted by the IOM unit in the City. It is felt such activity has impacted significantly on levels of acquisitive crime as a whole across the City.

4.0 WHAT WE ARE CONTINUING TO DO

4.1 As previously stated in this report, and recognising the current socio-economic climate, partners remain committed to continuing with efforts over a sustained period of time, in order to maintain or further reduce current levels of serious acquisitive crime. Current activities include:

- Working on a multi-agency response to the findings of the Offender Profile, and development of an action plan to widen activities to lower-level offenders.
- The Serious Acquisitive Crime Task and Finish Group, chaired by Plymouth City Council, is a multi-agency group which continues to meet and has an action plan in place. This is now also attended and supported by the Chair of Devon and Cornwall Crimestoppers, Steve Pearce, one of Plymouth's former BCU Commanders.
- The Police and Integrated Offender Management Scheme continue to link offending trends with current prolific offenders and targeting them and their offending activity.
- The Police are continuing with a programme of Operation Vocal (overt engagement campaign) with an emphasis in the south central policing area, which is a proactive and direct engagement within the community to raise awareness of community safety issues and provides advice on crime prevention – particularly burglary and vehicle crime.
- The police are continuing with a programme of 'covert' operations and activities, including the use of various 'bait' tactics.
- The Police, Community Safety Partnership and Crimestoppers have launched a radio campaign with Heart FM to run 252 awareness raising commercials in 2-week blocks during January, February and March 2012 at peak times. This has previously proved to be extremely effective.

4.2 Other work currently being considered, including:

- The Offender Profile referred to above suggests a 'cohort' of offenders that agencies need to work with, so interventions are being explored that will target and support young, unemployed males both away from re-offending or becoming offenders.
- Consideration is being given to inviting a colleague from the Local Government Association for a 'support and challenge' session on our current activities on serious acquisitive crime.
- The targeted use of "Smartwater" as a means of 'putting off' offenders from offending, and forensically linking offenders to the scene of the crime/stolen goods in order to increase brought to justice outcomes for serious acquisitive crime (particularly dwelling burglary and theft of/from vehicles).
- A profile of victims of serious acquisitive crime to be commissioned.

Recommendation:

- That Customer and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel note this report.