

# Community Safety

## Where we are now

Nationally crime levels have been falling since a peak in 1995. This has been reflected in East Sussex, where overall crime in the county is below the national average. However, this disguises significant differences for example, crime rates in Eastbourne are just above the national average, and Hastings are higher by over a third.

People's perceptions of crime are often greater than the reality. This is a national phenomenon and may in part be caused by disproportionate media coverage of criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. Lack of reassurance around actual crime levels is particularly significant for older people, who are statistically much less likely to be victims of crime than other age groups. Bullying among young people can have a detrimental effect on self-esteem and educational attainment. As part of the Youth Cabinet elections in 2006, over 8,000 young people stated that bullying, safety and exams were their top three concerns.

The largest numbers of crimes are committed in the categories of violent crime and criminal damage. Drug and alcohol misuse is known to be a significant cause of crime and anti-social behaviour. According to a national study (Walby 2005) domestic violence costs East Sussex £6.8 million a year, impacting not only on the victim and their dependents but on the economy, housing, health and social care. With the high proportion of rural roads and poor road networks in the county, the number of deaths and injuries through road accidents remains a concern, particularly in Wealden.

Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in the county, established in 1998, involve a wide range of partners including local authorities, Police, Fire and Health services, housing providers, voluntary and community organisations. These partnerships and other agencies such as the Probation Service and the Courts Service are working together as part of the East Sussex Safer Communities Partnership to reduce crime, disorder, anti-social behaviour and substance misuse. The East Sussex Division of Sussex Police has also pioneered Neighbourhood Policing, ensuring a visible, accessible and responsive service to the community with named officers for each town, parish and neighbourhood.

These local teams focus on working with the community and partner agencies to reduce the crime and anti-social behaviour that impact on the quality of life of people in our communities.

## The Challenges Ahead

A great deal of good work has been done so far, providing a firm foundation on which to build: the low crime levels in some areas need to be maintained, whilst high crime levels in other areas need to be reduced. Some types of crime in the county, such as criminal damage and violent crime need to be reduced further. Others, such as domestic violence and bullying need to be tackled because of the huge impact they can have on individuals and communities. However, safer communities are not just created by reducing crime and the fear of crime. We also need to reduce and tackle the factors that can lead people into criminal and anti-social behaviour such as family trauma or breakdown, unemployment, mental health problems, lack of respect for others, poor housing and poor environmental quality in urban settings. We also need to consider and reduce the possible impact our changing communities may have on social tensions, hate crime and community cohesion. Finally, we need to protect people's safety and wellbeing in times of civil emergencies, such as severe flooding.

**Our strategic priority for 2026** is to build safe communities through targeted activity, particularly in high crime areas

### Our key tasks will be to:

- Reduce crime and re-offending, particularly in crime hotspots and high crime areas
- Increase community reassurance and reduce the fear of crime
- Reduce serious and violent crime, deliberate fire setting, domestic violence and hate crimes in particular, and ensure victims are supported
- Reduce the harm caused by drugs and alcohol misuse
- Build respect in communities, reduce anti-social behaviour and reduce bullying, wherever it occurs
- Protect children and young people from harm
- Improve streets and green spaces so that places are safer
- Plan a response in case of emergencies, reducing risk and informing the public.