

Community Safety

Community Safety is one of the eight key issues in the Kent Thameside Community Strategy and supports the Council's priority themes of Citizenship and Community. The Dartford Community Safety Strategy 2002-2005 with its annual Action Plan is one of a number of plans being developed and delivered to improve the quality of life for residents in Dartford. It sets out key themes and specific actions, with Lead Officers, to address issues of concern informed by an annual Community Safety Survey sent to all residents, now in its third year. Amongst the most prevalent problems identified through the survey are nuisance and anti-social behaviour. There is also a perception about levels of crime that can lead people to feel they are more at risk than is actually the case.

To address these and other issues, the Council, with its partners in the Dartford Community Safety Partnership (DCSP) has taken an holistic approach to dealing with not only current problems but looking at prevention in the longer term.

An Anti Social Behaviour Coordinator has been appointed using Home Office funding to investigate allegations of anti social behaviour and harassment, to collate evidence to support appropriate action and to provide assistance to witnesses. The post is hosted by the Council and has helped to improve multi-agency working to tackle this problem including identifying areas for diversionary work, such as;

- The Positive Futures Community Football Scheme with Charlton Athletic and detached youth work to be carried out by the YMCA in Stone and Temple Hill
- Taking an innovative approach to tackling substance misuse through community development.

The DCSP has already had success by obtaining three Anti Social Behaviour Orders and four Acceptable Behaviour Agreements. The multi-agency Anti Social Behaviour Group, which is chaired by the Coordinator has achieved an 80% improvement in the behaviour in 11 of the 26 cases taken on since 2002.

There are five Police Community Support Officers now out on patrol in the Borough with three of these funded by the Council jointly with the Home Office. Another is currently receiving training and the remaining post is being recruited to. They are employed and trained by the Police and have been allocated to specific locations across the Borough to tackle low level crime and disorder and provide reassurance and increase visibility for the local communities. The scheme is at an early stage but positive outcomes, in particular a reduction in crime and anti social behaviour and a reduction in the fear of crime, are expected.

Installation of CCTV cameras and increased monitoring hours have supported the DCSP in reducing crime including the threat and the public perception of crime and in turn have reduced the potential for anti social behaviour. In 2001, the Home Office approved Dartford's bid for 14 cameras in East Dartford covering the A226, Temple Hill and Alamein Gardens to add to the original 23 cameras installed in Dartford Town Centre in 1996. As part of the development of the bids a new radio scheme to link the night time traders in the Town Centre with the CCTV control room has been introduced and over 50 retailers have signed up to the 'Shop Watch' day time radio scheme. This allows greater information sharing so that businesses can work together along with others, such as Kent Police, to reduce crime and fear of crime within the Town Centre. The scheme is promoted and coordinated by a dedicated Intelligence Manager and has led to major successes in crime protection, including commendations from the Police. The improved communication links and effective security provided by these schemes were also recognised in 2003 when Dartford Town Centre received the 'Safer Shopping Award' from the Home Office.

The radio scheme has been extended to the local shopping centre at Temple Hill and compliments the security works undertaken there through the Home Offices 'Small Traders in Deprived Areas' programme. The Council has also commissioned two additional cameras at Alamein Gardens, one at Temple Hill Square and two at Hesketh Park, from its own resources, plus a deployable camera system which is under test at the current time.