

# English summary

## On the right track

A Survey of Sweden's Local Crime Prevention Councils

In 1996, the Swedish Government presented its national crime prevention programme entitled A Collective Responsibility [Allas vårt ansvar].<sup>1</sup> The programme's objective was to strengthen and develop crime prevention work in Sweden. Over the subsequent period, and in line with the intentions of the programme, a large number of local authorities and city district administrations have organised their local crime prevention work in bodies known as local crime prevention councils. Others have chosen to conduct crime prevention work in other collaborative forms, such as public health councils, for example, community safety and security councils or drug prevention councils. At the present time there are almost three hundred local crime prevention councils in Sweden's local authorities and in the city districts of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö.

At the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå) the Local Crime Prevention Division has the task of developing and supporting the work of the local crime prevention councils and the corresponding, alternative collaborative bodies. The division is also to work to increase the knowledge available to these local councils and to provide improved working methods.

The aim of this survey has been to examine the ways in which the local crime prevention councils have been organised and have evolved. In addition, the survey has also had the objective of identifying the types of support that the local councils need in order to be able to carry out their task.

The survey is primarily based on questionnaires distributed during the autumn of 2004, and its results build first and foremost on the replies from local councils at Sweden's local authorities and the city district administrations of Stockholm, Göteborg and Malmö. The 232 crime prevention councils that have completed the questionnaire and reported that they are conducting local crime prevention work account for 80 per cent of the local councils that are known to the National Council for Crime Prevention in 2005.

The 232 local councils studied in this report are distributed across Sweden. Slightly under half of the local crime prevention councils were established prior to the year 2000 and have made notable progress in their local crime prevention work. The survey also indicates that there are variations between the councils as regards their levels of activity and the opportunities available to them to conduct work of this kind.

### **The police and the local authorities have the greatest influence within the councils**

Two-thirds of the local crime prevention councils are placed directly under the executive board of the local authority or its leadership group. In addition,

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<sup>1</sup> Swedish Ministry of Justice (Justitiedepartementet 1996). Allas vårt ansvar. Ett nationellt brottsförebyggande program. [A collective responsibility. A national crime prevention programme.] Ds 1996:59. Stockholm. Allmänna förlaget.

the local authority is always represented on the local crime prevention councils by a municipal official and/or a politician.

The executive board of the local authority and representatives of the social services administration appear to have a substantial influence over the crime prevention work that is conducted at the local level in Sweden. The police constitute the most common non local authority body represented on the local crime prevention councils. This agency is represented on 88 per cent of the local councils.

The universities and other institutions of higher education do not play a conspicuous role in crime prevention work. In answer to a direct question as to whether the council collaborated with a university or other institution of higher education, slightly under one-fifth of the councils answered that this was the case.

Almost half of the local crime prevention councils report that they are members of a network comprising several local crime prevention councils. A similar proportion report that there is some form of centralised work being conducted at the regional level, in addition to that of the police, in order to stimulate the crime prevention work of the local authority. Altogether four out of five of the local crime prevention councils included in the study participate in some form of exchange with other local councils or are involved in some type of centralised crime prevention work at the regional level.

Almost half of the local crime prevention councils included in the study report that in 2004, the local authority or city district set aside special economic resources in addition to salary-related and administrative costs, to fund the crime prevention work of the local councils. In these cases, the amounts involved were usually 50,000 SEK (approx. 5,300 Euro) or less.

In the majority of local authorities and city districts, the person responsible for crime prevention work often devotes less than one day per week to this work. One in ten local authorities or city districts report that they have assigned a full time position to work with issues of crime prevention.

### **Alcohol and drug prevention work with young people is common**

Two-thirds of the local crime prevention councils report that they have implemented some form of practical crime prevention measure over the course of the past year. The two most common areas in which the councils have introduced measures relate to alcohol and drug prevention and to car crime in the form of thefts of and from cars.

### **Knowledge-based crime prevention work can be**

Local crime prevention councils do follow-up and evaluate implemented measures to a certain extent. Just over half of the local councils that had implemented some form of practical crime prevention measure over the course of the past year reported that they had also conducted some form of follow-up or evaluation.

Six per cent of the local councils that have followed-up or evaluated an initiative report that the results have influenced the subsequent work to a very great extent. A further fifty per cent (slightly over in fact) of the local councils felt that the results of their follow-up or evaluation had affected the subsequent work to a fairly great extent.

### **Limited resources, low levels of commitment and a lack of legitimacy are often perceived to constitute a problem**

One-third of the local councils that completed the questionnaires report that they have succeeded with the task of local crime prevention work to a fairly great or very great extent. Slightly over half of the councils felt that they had succeeded with this task to some extent.

When the local councils describe the problems they face in the course of their crime prevention work, a lack of resources and low levels of commitment are the factors mentioned most frequently. According to many of the questionnaire answers, the lack of commitment is found among both the civil population, the police and also within the local authority organisation. It seems that this leads many of the local councils to feel that they lack legitimacy in their work. Several local councils also mention that there is lack of continuity which creates problems in relation to work conducted on the basis of a more long-term perspective.

### **The local councils would like increased and more in-depth support from the National Council for Crime Prevention**

The National Council provides a number of different forms of support to the local crime prevention councils and to other actors in the field of local crime prevention. Support in the form of published materials includes guidelines documents, reports, the journal *Apropå* and various forms of crime statistics. In addition, the National Council disseminates articles and other forms of information via the Local Work section of the agency's website. The agency also organises network meetings, seminars and training in knowledge-based crime prevention work, and a large annual conference. These forms of support are relatively well known among the local crime prevention councils. But the local councils would like an increased and more in-depth support from the National Council.

### **Local councils with the longest history are those that function best**

The completed questionnaires indicate that those local councils that have been in existence for a relatively long period of time generally function better than those that were established relatively recently. Besides conducting more intensive programmes of meetings, they are more likely to have conducted surveys of problems and to have established programmes and action plans for their work. Older local crime prevention councils are also more likely to have implemented crime preventive measures over the course of the past year and they follow-up or evaluate their measures more often than younger councils. In addition, the councils that have been in existence for a longer period report that they have been successful in their task more often than their more recently established counterparts. Several of the older local crime prevention councils are located in larger towns and in cities. These councils are also those that are most active when it comes to seeking financial support.

In general, however, there appear to be substantial opportunities for development in relation to both the creation of new knowledge on functional crime prevention methods and the use of the knowledge that already exists. Many local councils are relatively newly established and will continue to need help in raising their level of competence so that local crime prevention work will be improved and conducted in a more well-planned and structured manner.

The support provided to the local councils by the National Council for Crime Prevention will therefore be developed and improved. The agency is already working to improve local crime prevention work and to increase its efficiency by providing financial and knowledge-related support to the local crime prevention councils. This work will be developed. There are also substantial opportunities for development in the area of collaborations between the local councils at the regional level.

The concluding discussion shows that local crime prevention work has evolved a great deal over the years that have passed since the presentation of the programme A Collective Responsibility.

None of the local councils report that they are working with the question of recidivist offending, which is responsible for a large proportion of what are often referred to as high volume offences. These offences have a negative effect on people in the course of their daily lives and a reduction in these crimes would constitute an important means of improving people's sense of security.

Taken together, the results of the survey presented in this report suggest that the important crime prevention work that is already being conducted at the local level can be further improved. Many of the local councils need to legitimise their activities by working with a more knowledge-based approach than they do at present. In many cases, local authorities appear to need to prioritise the work of the local crime prevention councils to a greater extent than is currently the case. Continued state support would also seem to constitute an important requirement if the local councils are to be able to conduct well-functioning crime prevention work.

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This is a summary of the Swedish report *Ett steg på väg. Kartläggning av de lokala brottsförebyggande råden*, report No. 2005:15, which can be ordered from Fritzes Kundservice, 106 47 Stockholm. Phone 46 (0) 8-598 191 90, fax 46 (0) 8-598 191 91, e-mail [order.fritzes@nj.se](mailto:order.fritzes@nj.se).

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