

Evaluating the value of Crimestoppers to Police Scotland

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Background

Crimestoppers is a charity which allows individuals to give information anonymously about crime. Since it was established in 1988 the charity has received over 1.4 million pieces of actionable information, leading to the arrest or charge of more than 122,000 individuals, recovery of £126 million of stolen property, and seizing of illegal drugs with a street value of £298 million. On average, across the UK, 20 people are arrested each day, and one person is charged with murder every ten days as a result of Crimestoppers information. No evaluation of the Crimestoppers service had ever been undertaken in Scotland. The recent reform of Scottish policing was accompanied by a need to ensure Police Scotland receives the best service from the agencies it uses to assist in the investigation of crime, of which Crimestoppers is one. We carried out a study, with funding from SIPR, evaluating the interaction between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland, determining whether there is an effective flow of information from the public into the police intelligence system via Crimestoppers and assessing the benefit of this information to the police.

Key Findings

Number of contacts: Total Crimestoppers contacts for 2011-12 and 2012-13 were compared among the eight legacy Scottish police forces and three English forces (Figure 1). Although the Metropolitan Police Service received the highest number of contacts, when the data was normalised by head of population, five of the eight Scottish forces received higher contact volumes than all three English forces. In Scotland, the lowest normalised number of contacts were received in the Northern region, and the highest in the Lothian & Borders and Fife regions, suggesting that the latter are regions where the public have the most information and/or are most willing to contact Crimestoppers.

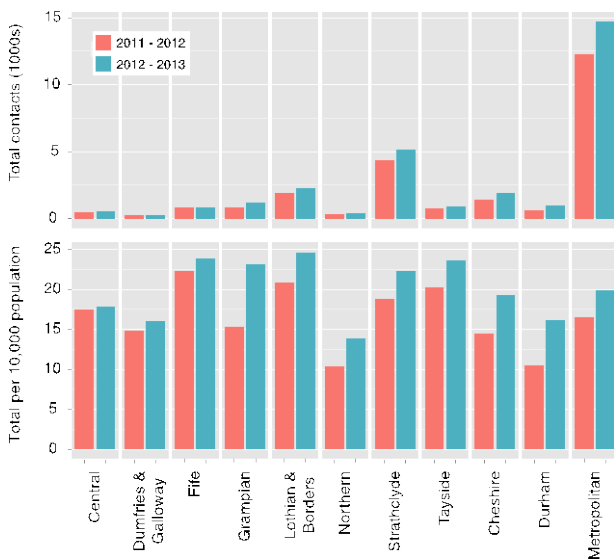


Figure 1. Total contacts per force as raw counts (top) and normalised by population (bottom).

Recorded crime across Scotland: Scottish Government statistics show that motor vehicle and miscellaneous offences (common assault, drunkenness, breach of the peace) represent the bulk of recorded incidents across Scotland, whilst non-sexual crimes of violence (homicide, attempted murder, serious assault, robbery) and sexual offences make up the smallest proportion (Figure 2). Detection rates are low for crimes of dishonesty, fire-raising and vandalism, but high for non-sexual crimes of violence and 'Other crimes', including drugs offences.

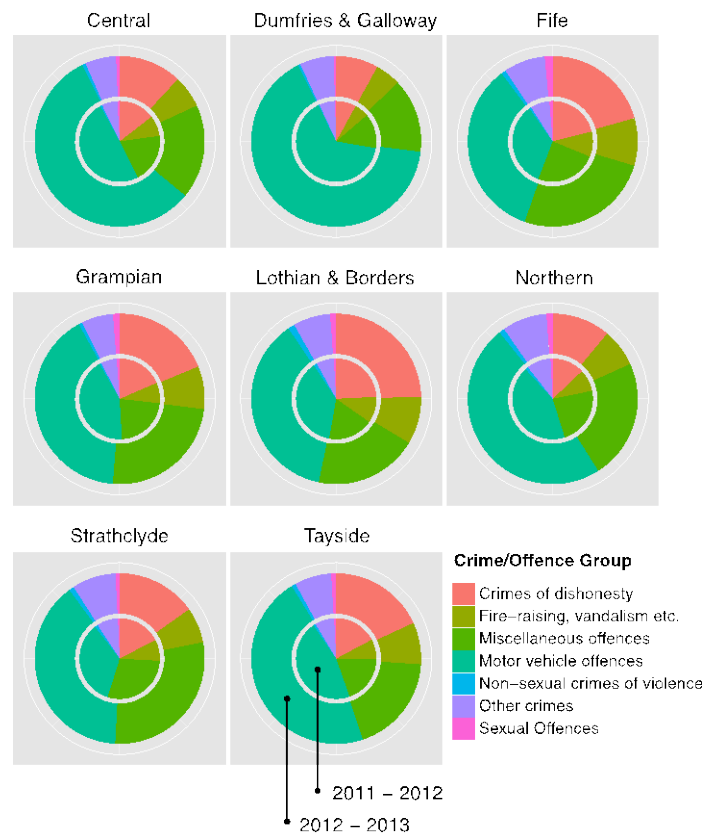


Figure 2. Crime type composition of recorded incidents across Scotland.

Crimestoppers contacts by crime type: Drugs offences make up the largest proportion of Crimestoppers reports across Scotland, with sexual offences and non-sexual crimes of violence also representing a higher proportion of reports than they do reported crimes (Figure 3). This suggests Crimestoppers is particularly good at generating intelligence relating to these types of offences, perhaps due to more effective campaigning or because the public are more willing to come forward with information about these crimes.

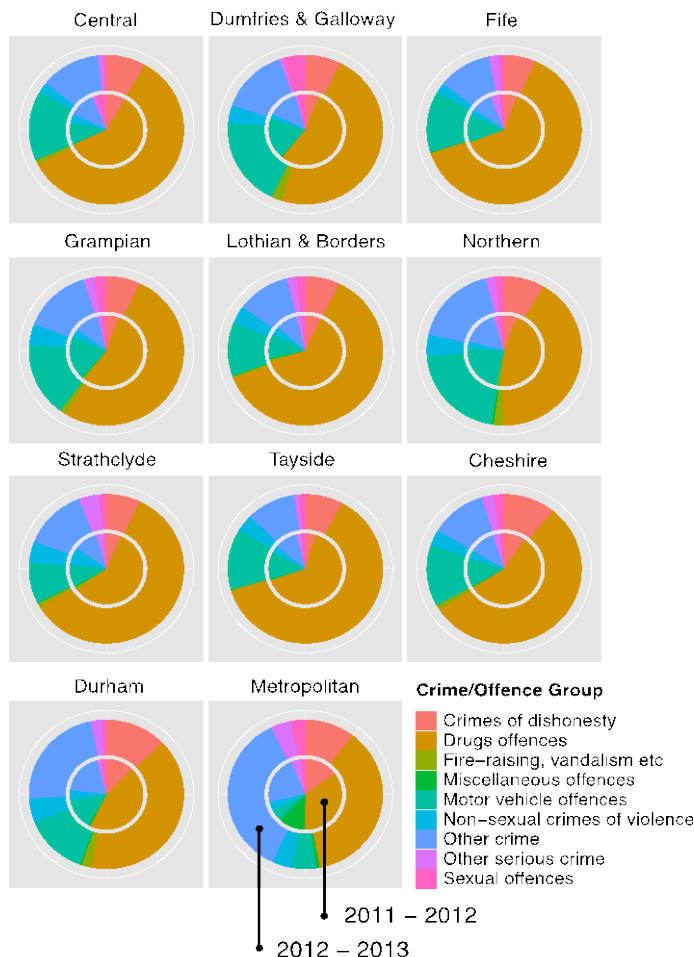


Figure 3. Crime type composition of Crimestoppers contacts

Positive outcomes: The largest number of Crimestoppers reports that prove actionable relate to drugs offences, although under 20% of these are converted into arrests/charges. Conversion rates for most crime types were higher in 2011-12 than 2012-13, consistent with indications that returns statistics sent to Crimestoppers for 2012-13 were incomplete, due to the timing of force reform. Among forces, Dumfries & Galloway and Northern achieve the highest conversion rates, and Fife, Grampian and Tayside the lowest, although this may simply reflect variation in the accuracy of returns data.

Value of items recovered: Across Scotland, seized drugs represent the majority of recoveries resulting from Crimestoppers intelligence (Table 1), and the bulk of recoveries were made by two forces; Strathclyde (over £2 million across two years) and Lothian & Borders (over £0.5 million). Police Scotland's contribution to the running costs of Crimestoppers' call bureau in 2013-14 amounts to just under 3 pence per head of the Scottish population. Crimestoppers intelligence led to recoveries to the value of 22 pence per person in 2011-12 and 37 pence per person in 2012-13, suggesting the benefit of Crimestoppers in terms of the financial value of recoveries substantially outweighs the cost to Police Scotland.

Table 1. Value (£K) of drugs seizures and recovered items

Force	Drugs seizures		Recovered items	
	2011-12	2012-13	2011-12	2012-13
Central	7.3	1.4	0	0
D & G	4.6	4.1	0.3	0
Fife	27.7	132.0	0	0
Grampian	0.5	1.7	0	0
L& B	274.6	158.8	111.3	17.4
Northern	0	0.4	0	0
Strathclyde	634.2	1,438.8	63.6	173.7
Tayside	7.6	7.7	0	0
Scotland	956.7	1,745.0	175.2	191.2

Conclusions and Recommendations

Our study showed that Crimestoppers provides clear benefits to Police Scotland, and also suggested this benefit is likely to be underestimated. Several recommendations were made, identifying ways the value of Crimestoppers to Police Scotland can be maximised.

Recommendation 1: Returns

Development of standardised procedures for the collection of Crimestoppers returns across Police Scotland; this is being considered based on existing localised good practice.

Recommendation 2: Positive Outcomes

On-going communication between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland to ensure the most reliable and detailed definitions of positive outcomes are in use.

Recommendation 3: Malicious callers

Maintenance of communication between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland to ensure the most effective resolution of this issue.

Recommendation 4: Crime targeting

Cooperation between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland using figures on recorded crime to target the public for intelligence on specific crime types.

Recommendation 5: Enhanced collaboration between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland

Development of a closer working relationship between Crimestoppers and Police Scotland to target specific areas with high crime rates. In particular ensuring the Crimestoppers message is disseminated widely throughout communities, especially prior to specific targeted campaigns.

Recommendation 6: Targeting research

Continued partnership between both Crimestoppers and Police Scotland and relevant academic researchers, to facilitate further development of research examining the value of the interaction between Crimestoppers and police forces across the UK.