

# Reflections

A series of insights from our day to day practice

## DOING DATA DIFFERENTLY

Sometimes a change in methodology can yield surprisingly rich data and break new ground. Here **Jonny Donaghy** and **Michael McCafferty** of Causeway Coast and Glens Policing and Community Safety Partnership, and **Brenda Kent** of CENI reflect on how a different approach brought benefits.

### Causeway Coast and Glens PCSP

Policing and Community Safety Partnerships, or PCSPs, are local bodies made up of Councillors and independent people from each council area who work to make the community safer.

PCSP duties are set out by legislation and include consulting the community and identifying and prioritising particular issues of concern.

Each PCSP produces plans and strategies for community safety based on local research.



Causeway Coast and Glens PCSP survey poster

## Jonny and Michael: What we wanted to know

At Causeway Coast and Glens PCSP we regularly commission research into local perceptions.

In previous years we have consulted by commissioning 20 to 25 focus groups, usually organised through community organisations. The groups tended to be in towns and villages, and we realised we had a rural info gap.

So this time we wanted to hear more from the people who live in the open countryside or in settlements of under 1,000 residents.

**Our intention was to reach the people not previously engaged and make sure findings were not skewed by the views of those who spoke loudest or most often.**

We felt that 30 focus groups would give the reach and validity we sought and asked CENI to come up with a plan.

## Brenda: Why we suggested a rethink

Before we started we needed to know what a representative sample would look like. We needed 380 people to deliver a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error.

We also needed representative proportions for gender, age, disability and so on to cover the area from Ballykelly to Cushendall, Bushmills

to Kilrea and all between. We looked at the likelihood of getting solid data using focus groups alone, and we read academic research around rural crime. **Then we suggested a rethink.** Physical remoteness, reduced access to community groups, non 9-5 farm days and the well documented self-managing sufficiency of rural communities meant that getting people together and asking them to share their thoughts with each other - and an outside researcher who was working for 'the government' - was probably not going to achieve the numbers or open honesty we needed.



Causeway Coast and Glens, Policing with the Community Safety Partnerships (PCSP) board members

Instead we suggested gathering anonymous data from individuals in their own homes and work places, then triangulating the findings against a smaller number of community group interviews and community surveys.

We identified over 130 community, church, cultural and sporting organisations in the target area with Facebook accounts. We sent them all a survey link and offered a hard copy version too. We got 382 replies, with near perfect profile match on all S75 elements and great geographic reach.

We visited the farming community, at livestock markets and we engaged them in conversations around the survey questions. We did the same with businesses and shoppers in two small but very different villages.

We also phoned or spoke face-to-face with eleven community organisations and managers of rural businesses.

Although we provided the CCG PCSP with analysable data that can be interrogated for spatial and demographic differences, we strove not to lose the narrative. We built open questions into the survey that we content analysed and which also provided quotes to illustrate the statistics. The farmer, village and community group engagement provided further illustration as well as check points against which to interpret the survey findings.

## **Jonny and Michael: benefits of the new approach**

Moving to a survey was a bit daunting because we did not know if it would get to people who are hard to reach or reflect a variety of views. CENI worked through farmers' groups, rural health projects and social media and got a really good sample.

**A big benefit is that the survey produced data that can be tested, plotted on a map, compared across areas and age groups, and even revisited in three or four years to see what has changed.** We could not do this when we had predominately qualitative data from focus groups.

When CENI presented the findings to the Causeway Coast and Glens PCSP, they rang true with all our rural members. **There is a big difference between saying you know what people think and having the solid stats to prove it.** What we have now is solid evidence and ground-breaking rural research that we can share with other areas.



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## **Information**

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