

HEREFORDSHIRE BUSINESS CRIME SURVEY 2004

Following the 2001 British Chambers of Commerce (BCC) Business Crime Survey, the Herefordshire and Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce, did a follow-up business crime survey in 2003. However only combined results for Herefordshire and Worcestershire are available. Therefore Herefordshire Community Safety and Drugs Partnership commissioned a survey for Herefordshire which was done by the Herefordshire Partnership Research Team. Summary results are given in this article.

A self-completion questionnaire was mailed to 2,910 businesses in summer 2004 with 718 respondents.

The survey aimed to identify the main concerns and issues affecting the business community in Herefordshire to help inform new strategies against business crime. Questions were asked about recent experiences of crime, crime reporting, impact on business and crime prevention advice received. Other questions were concerned with the nature of the business – industrial sector, size, type of location and length of trading.

There were some differences in the business profile of respondents in Herefordshire compared with the national Chamber of Commerce survey:

- 22% of respondents to the Herefordshire survey were from the agriculture, forestry and fishing sector (largest proportion of respondents from this sector), compared with just 2% of respondents to the national survey.
- 59% of respondents indicated that their business employed between 1 and 9 people compared with 45% for Herefordshire and Worcestershire combined and 42% in the national survey.
- 75% of Herefordshire respondents had been in business for over 10 years, 62% of respondents nationally had been trading for over 11 years.
- 41% of Herefordshire respondents businesses were located in a rural or village location compared with 21% nationally.

Business Crime in Herefordshire

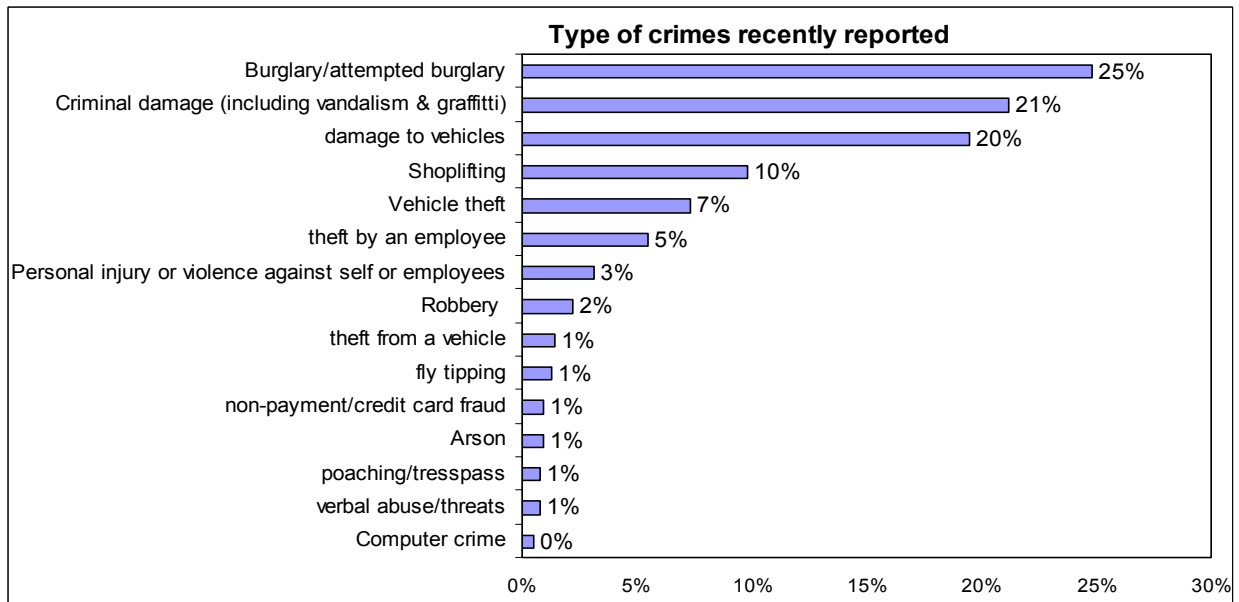
61% of businesses reported having experienced a crime in the previous 12 month period. Notably:

- 59% of respondents from the agricultural, fishing and forestry sector had been a victim of crime.
- 48% of micro businesses (1-4 employees) had experienced a crime.
- 51% of those based in rural areas or villages were victims of business crime
- Generally, the longer businesses had been trading the more likely they were to experience business crime (30% of those trading for under 12 months had been a victim compared with 63% of those trading for over 10 years).

Crimes experienced in the last 12 live months

Of the total number of crimes reported in the survey, damage to vehicles, burglary (or attempted burglary) and criminal damage accounted for over 60% of crimes against businesses. See Chart 1. Other incidences included 'indecent exposure', fly tipping, and "suspicious people". The national survey reported the most common experience of crime as being damage to vehicles with 32% of businesses reporting incidents of this nature in the last twelve months.

Chart 1: Crimes experienced (base: 641 individual types of crimes detailed)



Number of instances of crime experienced

Of those who had experienced crimes against their business in the previous 12 months, over half (57%) had suffered a crime once or twice and almost a third (31%) had suffered between 3 to 5 incidents.

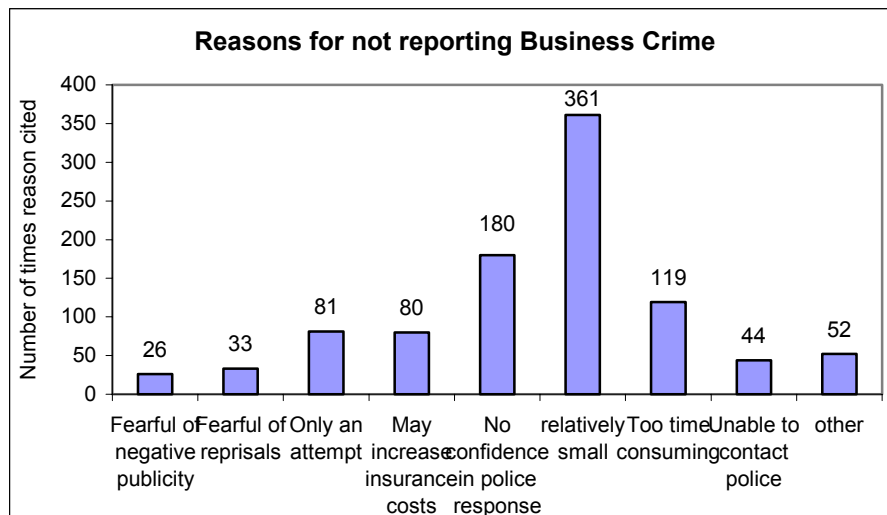
Reporting of Crime

Whilst 35% of those who had been a victim of one or more crimes in the last 12 months stated that they had reported **all** crimes against their business, almost a fifth (19%) stated that they had reported less than 20% of crimes and almost a third (30%) had not reported any of the crimes.

Reasons for not reporting crime

The most frequent reason for not reporting crimes was due to the relative size of the loss, (37% of reasons given were related to the size of loss or damage). Almost one fifth of responses (19%) cited a lack of confidence in the police. Other reasons for not reporting crime included a lack of confidence in the judicial system itself and the perception that culprits would not be dealt with if they could even be found.

Chart 2: Reasons for not reporting a crime (base: 924 individual reasons)

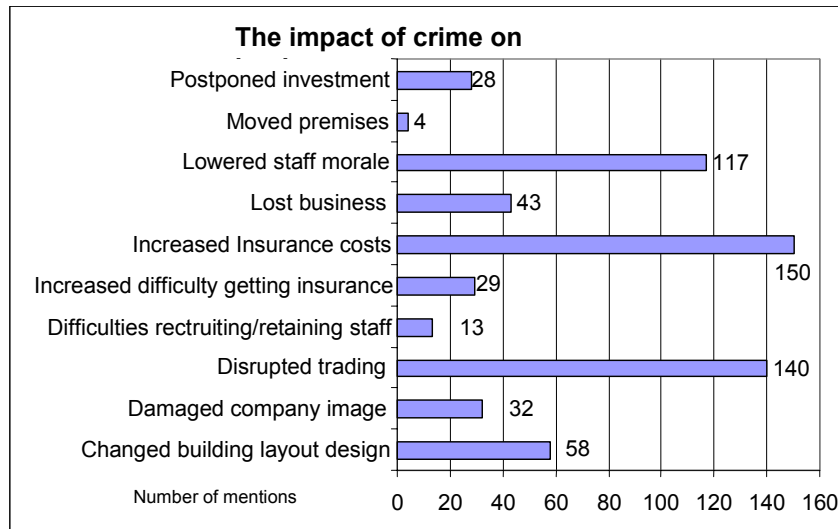


Impact of crime

Two thirds (36%) of businesses within the agricultural sector cited increased insurance costs as the main impact of crime in the last 12 months, whilst all other sectors with the exception of the public sector, found the largest impact of crime was in the disruption to their businesses. In the public sector the main impact was the effect on staff morale. See Chart 3. Smaller businesses were more likely to be affected by increased insurance costs while those employing over 50 staff felt that the effects on staff morale was the biggest impact on their businesses. The only exception to the 3 main impacts of crime on business was among the micro businesses (1-4 staff) where over a fifth (22%) suffered lost business as a result of crimes.

Chart 3: Impact of crime on business

(base: 605 recorded impacts on the business as a results of a crime)



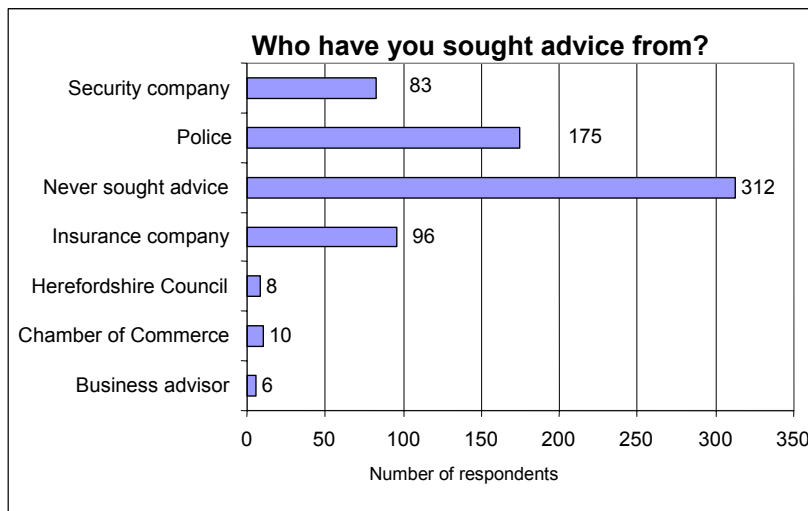
How much of a problem is crime against business?

Over three quarters of respondents (77%) felt that business crime was a problem for businesses, 11% considered it a serious problem. Business crime was most likely to be considered a serious problem by those in the transport sector (27%) and those based on Industrial estates (20%). These were the only two areas where a significantly different proportion of responses considered crime to be a serious problem, all other sub-groups considered crime to be a problem but smaller proportions indicated that it was a serious problem.

Crime Reduction advice

Almost half of respondents (43%) had never sought advice in relation to security for their business. For those who did seek advice, it was generally from either the police, insurance company or from a security company – see Chart 4. Businesses that are least likely to seek advice are those in rural or village locations (48%), the financial sector (70%) and micro businesses (53%).

Chart 4: Types of agencies from whom crime reduction advice was sought (base: 763)



SAFE Business Accreditation

The Safe Business Initiative is a comprehensive guide to risk management in business communities produced by West Mercia Constabulary. The step-by-step risk management process is designed to support businesses in providing a safe and secure environment for customers and employees. More information can be obtained from the West Mercia Constabulary website www.westmercia.police.uk.

Only 10 respondents to this survey indicated that their business had achieved SAFE Business Accreditation.

Measures to tackle business crime

The survey included a “free text” question inviting respondents to suggest measures to tackle business crime. Of the total 350 comments made the over-riding theme relates to a need for a greater police presence. Of the 186 comments with reference to the police 102 refer to a need for higher visibility policing and a further 25 generally felt that there is also a need to increase police profile out of normal hours, i.e at weekends and night time, especially around Industrial estates and business areas.

The idea of Community Police Officers in order to provide a higher police profile is welcomed, not just those patrolling the streets but also to become a part of the more rural community as has been the case in the past. This is also the case in the market towns; comments were made which covered problems with part-time policing in most of these areas.

A number of respondents expressed disappointment in the Justice System and the way in which criminals are dealt with. Some comments included suggestions on the way criminals should be punished from the extreme views of stocks and hanging to methods of imposing fines or making the criminal work to pay for the crimes committed.

For a full copy of the report contact the Research Team (01432) 260442 or e-mail: researchteam@herefordshire.gov.uk