

# Changes to the Crime Survey for England and Wales

13 June 2017

## Background

The Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) is a face-to-face victimisation survey in which people resident in households in England and Wales are asked about their experiences of a range of crimes in the 12 months prior to the interview. Respondents to the survey are also asked about their attitudes towards different crime-related issues, such as the police and the criminal justice system and perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour.

In the context of public sector financial constraints, the future level of funding for the CSEW will be reduced with effect from October 2017. Therefore we have drawn up a range of proposals to reduce the cost of the CSEW in 2017/18 and future years. Full details and information on the likely impacts of the different solutions are set out in this document.

We are now seeking user feedback on the potential options in order to inform our decision on how best to achieve the required cost savings.

## Proposals

It is proposed that all the following questions will be removed from the CSEW questionnaire from October 2017:

- All questions in the 'Performance of the Criminal Justice System' module, excepting those related to the performance of the police.
- All questions in the 'Experiences of the Criminal Justice System' module
- All questions in the 'Attitudes to the Criminal Justice System' module
- Questions relating to victims' experiences of the court system and use of victim services from the 'Victimisation' module.

A full list of the affected questions is available in Annex A that accompanies this consultation document.

However, removing these questions alone will not yield sufficient savings. Therefore we need to find additional reductions in the survey to make up the shortfall and are seeking users views on possible options.

Three approaches have been identified for making the required cost savings from the CSEW in 2017/18 and future years. These are:

- Removing other questions from the survey

The principal aim of the CSEW is to ask respondents about their experiences of a range of crimes in order to produce estimates of the trends in those crimes over time. However, it also asks questions on other crime-related issues such as anti-social behaviour, attitudes toward

the police, drug use and perceptions of the risk of crime. Removing these additional questions would generate cost savings by reducing the average interview length.

- Reducing the response rate

Over the last ten years, the CSEW has maintained a relatively high response rate of between 72% and 75% (with the exception of 2014/15 when a 70% response rate was recorded). Maintaining such a high response rate is only possible through interviewers making repeated visits, particularly to households who are difficult to contact. Making less effort to achieve such a high response rate will generate savings. We estimate that dropping the response rate to 69% will be sufficient to make up the funding shortfall.

- Reducing the sample size

The achieved sample size is currently 35,000 households per year. Making a small reduction (of around 1,800) in the sample size will generate sufficient cost savings by reducing the amount of fieldwork required.

Table 1 below outlines the potential cost saving options that have been identified; these are all based on combinations of the approaches listed above.

Table 1: Potential options for cost savings required from the CSEW in 2017/18

Option	Description
Option A	Reduce CSEW response rate to 69% from October 2017 (for 6 months of 2017/18).
Option B	Reduce 2017/18 CSEW sample size by 1,800 households (to 33,200).
Option C	Remove additional questions from CSEW to reduce survey to core questions required to produce quarterly crime estimates (for 6 months of 2017/18).
Option D	Reduce target CSEW response rate to 71% from October 2017 (for 6 months of 2017/18). Reduce 2017/18 CSEW sample size by 600 households (to 34,400).

## Likely Impact of Changes

### Removing questions related to the criminal justice system

Removing the questions listed in the 'Proposals' section above will impact on some outputs published as part of the quarterly Crime Statistics releases:

- [Crime in England and Wales: Annual supplementary tables](#) – withdrawal of 'Table S17 - Percentage of incidents in which victims were satisfied with the police by CJS factors' and 'Table S25 - Confidence in the criminal justice system'.
- [Perceptions Criminal Justice System \(CSEW Open Data Table\)](#) – removal of data relating to respondents' confidence in the effectiveness and fairness of the criminal justice system.

## Reducing the CSEW Response Rate

A high response rate is often seen as a key measure of the quality of a survey and may play an important part in reducing the risk of non-response bias in survey results. Non-response bias is the bias introduced when people who refuse to take part in a survey (non-respondents) systematically differ from respondents, particularly in terms of their experience of crime.

While the CSEW has successfully maintained a high response rate it is difficult to determine the extent to which this has reduced possible non-response bias. A [non-response link study](#) using 2011 Census and CSEW data was published in 2015. This analysis evaluated non-response by comparing census results for both CSEW responders and non-responders and found that non-response bias had only a small impact on CSEW estimates. [A similar study carried out on the Labour Force Survey](#) (LFS) also found only a small impact on estimates from non-response bias, despite falling response rates. The CSEW also uses calibration weighting to adjust for differential non-response, which further reduces the risk of non-response bias.

A reduction in the target response rate of the CSEW to 71% (Option D) is a similar level to the response rate actually achieved by the survey over the last two years. A reduction to 69% (Option A) would however result in a lower response rate than previously recorded in the history of the survey. It should also be noted that the actual achieved response rate may be up to 5 percentage points lower than the target rate based on recent results.

## Reducing the CSEW Sample Size

The current CSEW sample is designed to yield interviews with a nationally representative sample of 35,000 households in based on England and Wales each year. It is a key element in the precision of the estimates resulting from the CSEW.

Being based on a sample survey, CSEW estimates have a margin of error associated with them and we typically show this with confidence intervals around the estimates. At the 95 per cent confidence level, over many repeats of a survey under the same conditions, one would expect that the confidence interval around the survey estimate would contain the true population value 95 times out of 100. The larger the sample the narrower the confidence intervals and thus a reduction in sample size will impact on the precision of the estimates. Table 2 below shows the confidence intervals around the CSEW estimates for selected crime types in the year ending March 2016 and estimates of how these confidence intervals may change if the sample size were to be reduced.

Table 2: Confidence intervals around CSEW estimates of incidents of crime, year ending March 2016 and estimated intervals for proposed reductions in sample size, selected offences

	Estimate	95% C.I. (Actual)	95% C.I. (Sample size reduced by 600)	95% C.I. (Sample size reduced by 1,800)
				<i>Thousands</i>
Violence	1,268	±148	±149	±151
Robbery	154	±43	±43	±44
Theft from the person	363	±56	±56	±57
Domestic burglary	701	±69	±69	±70
Criminal damage	1,209	±92	±92	±94
<b>All CSEW personal crime</b>	<b>2,548</b>	<b>±187</b>	<b>±189</b>	<b>±192</b>
<b>All CSEW household crime</b>	<b>3,785</b>	<b>±162</b>	<b>±163</b>	<b>±166</b>

As well as having an impact on our ability to determine whether small year on year changes in estimates are statistically significant, a smaller sample will reduce the number of cases available for sub-group or sub-national analysis. With the exception of the City of London police force area (PFA, which for the purpose of analysis is merged with the Metropolitan PFA), the sample is also designed to yield a minimum of 650 interviews with adults (aged 16 years and over) in each one of the 42 territorial PFAs. Any reduction in the national sample size would by definition require a reduction in the minimum number of interviews achieved in each PFA. Although the impact in a single PFA would be relatively small (for example, a national sample size reduction of 1,800 would on average reduce the PFA sample size by approximately 40 interviews) this would have more impact on some PFAs than others. Large forces such as the Metropolitan Police have much larger samples (around 3,500 in the year ending March 2016) than forces such as Surrey, Norfolk and Cambridgeshire where sample sizes fall around the minimum level each year.

As the sample size for the survey of children aged 10 to 15, currently around 3,100 annual interviews, would also be reduced as it is directly linked to the achieved sample size of the main section of the CSEW.

## How to Respond

This consultation opens on 13 June 2017 and will run for 6 weeks closing on 23 July 2017. To respond please complete the online survey. If you are unable to complete the online survey, please send your responses to the questions below to [crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk](mailto:crimestatistics@ons.gov.uk).

## Questions

- What are your views on the proposed cost-savings?
- Of the proposed cost-saving options, which would you prefer ONS to adopt?
  - Option A: reduce target response rate (to 69%)
  - Option B: reduce sample size (by 1,800 interviews)

- Option C: remove additional questions from CSEW to reduce survey to core questions required to produce quarterly crime estimates
  - Option D: mixed approach – reduce target response rate (to 71%) and reduce sample size (by 600 interviews)
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- Is there a particular reason for your stated preference?
  - What impact would these potential options have on your use of CSEW data?
  - Do you have any other comments?

## After the consultation

We will review all of the consultation responses and use these to inform our final recommendation on the best option for making the required cost savings from the CSEW. We will publish a summary of the comments and approach chosen approximately 6 to 8 weeks after the consultation closes.

## Getting in Touch

If you have any queries or comments about the consultation process, please email Simeon Bowen at [ons.communications@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ons.communications@ons.gsi.gov.uk) or call 0845 601 3034.

You can also write to us at the following address:

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To promote greater transparency in our decision making, we will publish all responses in full. With your permission we may also attribute comments to the person providing them when we report the outcomes of this consultation. We will not publish personal contact details, but will give the name of the responding organisation where relevant. If you have any questions relating to confidentiality and data protection please email [ons.communications@ons.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:ons.communications@ons.gsi.gov.uk).

The information you send us may be passed to other parts of Government. Your response might be made available if required under a Freedom of Information request.

## Accessibility

All material relating to this consultation can be provided in braille, large print or audio formats on request. British Sign Language interpreters can also be requested for any supporting events.

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