

Article for Town & Country and Bracknell News

Who should worry about crime in Bracknell Forest ?

When asked through surveys, many people express a fear about levels of crime & disorder within the Borough. But is this fear about the level of crime rational Does the available evidence about the number of crimes mean there is cause for concern?

The government use many ways to measure crime levels. These include, the number of crime reported to the police, the number of crimes per head of population. The British Crime Survey enables us to compare Bracknell Forest with similar sized towns in the South East. Our 'Most Similar Family Group' includes towns of not only similar size but also the make up of the population, unemployment levels etc.

The Most Similar Family Group that Bracknell is in includes Chelmsford in Essex and Dartford in Kent and we are at the better end of the scale for almost all categories of crime. Bracknell Forest also has considerably lower levels of crime than most other surrounding local authorities in Berkshire.

There are however some types of crime which Bracknell does suffer from disproportionately. These crimes include;

- **Theft From Motor Vehicles**

By the end of December last year there had been almost 700 thefts from vehicle in the Borough since April. The locations vary but many are from public and hotel car parks. A high proportion of these include satnav devices and lap top computers despite all the publicity about leaving them in cars. Recent evidence shows that it takes a criminal just a few seconds to grab something through a window they have just broken. The message remains the same, ' don't leave them anything to steal' The Safer Communities Partnership will soon publish advice about which car parks are the safest and which pose the highest risk

- **Theft of Motor Vehicles**

The number of vehicles stolen is much lower and over many years has been falling as cars become more difficult to steal. Almost 300 vehicles were stolen up to December and the majority of these cars were over 10 years old. Simple 'crook locks' or similar anti-theft devices can reduce this risk at little cost. The most popular makes to steal seem to be old Fords. In the summer months motorcycles are also popular to steal with the favourite make the Honda 125. Older vehicle may be of little value but they are the easiest for thieves to steal.

The only other way of stealing modern cars is to get hold of the keys. There has been a growing trend to burgle houses in order to get car keys so it is always worth while keeping them in a hidden place and not on a hook in the kitchen or the hall.

- **Burglary of Dwellings**

Over 300 homes were burgled up to December which is a rise on the previous year. Burglary is however one of those areas where we are considerably lower than comparable local authority areas. The majority of burglaries take place when the

occupiers are out. Methods of entry include forcing doors or window but people often help burglars by leaving the house in total darkness and leaving the shed unlocked where there is access to a range of tools. Joining a Neighbourhood Watch scheme has been shown to reduce the risk of becoming a victim of burglary.

People shouldn't worry about crime because the chances of being a victim in Bracknell Forest are low. You can however reduce those chances even further by taking a few simple steps to protect yourself and your home and car.

Further information is available from the police Crime Reduction Advisors at Bracknell police station by calling 0845 8 505 505 or the Safer Communities team at the council on 01344 351786.