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**Routes to Speed Safety: Understanding and measuring the contribution of Community Speed Watch**

**Final report, February 2024, Project lead: Dr Leanne Savigar-Shaw**

***Executive Summary***

* *Background*

Community Speed Watch (CSW) is an approach to tackling speed in local communities where volunteers, supported by their local police force, monitor vehicular speed and report offending vehicles. Research suggests CSW could have positive impacts on driver speed and community cohesion, however, as an approach it is not well-informed by evidence due to a limited amount of research. Despite this, it is being advanced in some areas with the use of cameras, rather than people, to monitor vehicular speed, referred to here as CSW+. This project aimed to explore the use and effectiveness of CSW and CSW+ in reducing speeds, empowering communities and influencing perceptions of legitimacy/safety.

* *Methodology*

A mixed-methods, exploratory evaluation design was used: 1) Seven focus groups and eight interviews were undertaken with 32 individuals including CSW volunteers, CSW co-ordinators, parish/town councillors and police staff, referred to as stakeholders. 2) 30 online questionnaires were completed by community members living in areas where CSW activity takes place. 3) 102 online questionnaires were completed by drivers that had been identified exceeding the speed limit via CSW activity. 4) 10 interviews were undertaken with drivers who had been identified exceeding the speed limit via CSW activity. 5) Vehicle speed data were analysed from four CSW+ cameras across three geographical areas (areas A, B, and D) as well as data from traditional CSW activity collected by CSW volunteers using speed radar guns within three geographical areas (areas A and C).

* *Results*

In interviews/focus groups, stakeholders described CSW as allowing community members to become empowered to do something about a perceived issue within their local community. Volunteers described an importance to evidencing where there *is* a problem of speeding. For some volunteers, CSW was perceived to have a positive impact on driver speeds, but there was also an emphasis on drivers who continue to exceed the speed limit and a recognition that CSW does not deter all speeding. Volunteers subsequently wanted police enforcement activity to complement their own and wished to receive more information about the outcome of their activity. Current relationships and information sharing were inconsistent across CSW groups/geographies. Stakeholders expressed the need for stronger relationships with the police, highways departments and other CSW groups. Finally, stakeholders discussed a potential value of CSW+ cameras but also identified limitations in its use.

Community questionnaires showed the majority of participants considered CSW to have a positive impact on their community, agreed that CSW plays an important role in tackling speed, makes them feel safer in their community and would like more CSW activity to take place. A strong majority claimed that the presence of CSW/CSW+ makes them drive slower but there was less support for letters, with almost half of participants agreeing that warning letters are too lenient.

Similar to the community questionnaire, results from the offender questionnaire found that a majority agreed that CSW is a useful way of tackling speed, plays an important role in tackling speed and CSW teams do a good job of keeping communities safe. Offenders showed greater support for warning letters then general community members. Most participants agreed that warning letters are an appropriate response to speeding and suggested that the warning letter made them want to change their behaviour, as would seeing CSW activity in the future.

In interviews with offenders, drivers reflected on a lack of visible roads policing and claimed they could self-appraise appropriate speeds. Some drivers described CSW activity in a way which undermined its validity and future success. Some rationalised their being caught by criticising the positioning/timing of activity as well as the technology (speed radar guns/cameras) used. Despite this, offenders described changes to speeds following their experience with CSW, although some claimed that would only be short-term or temporary. Mixed perceptions were expressed on the value of warning letters, with some suggesting they had educational and emotional value but others were negative about their lack of impact/meaning. Nevertheless, offenders called for greater CSW activity that was appropriately positioned, unpredictable in nature and communicated to drivers more clearly or frequently. CSW cameras were considered safer than having volunteers at the roadside in risky hotspots but as being limited in their usefulness unless followed up with outcomes appropriate to the speed observed.

Analyses of speed data were undertaken to consider the impact of CSW on driver speed. However, there was a limited availability of speed data prior to the implementation of CSW activity, reducing the possibility for comparative analysis of pre- and during-CSW activity speeds. Although the speed data analysis appears to show some overall benefit to CSW on driver speeds, therefore, that cannot be attributable to CSW activity alone and must be considered in light of data limitations.

Longitudinal trends in speeds in area A with the use of traditional CSW showed a reduction in the percentage of vehicles identified exceeding the speed limit across a one and two-year period, albeit fluctuating over time. Speed data collected over the duration of a phased implementation of CSW cameras showed the percentage of drivers exceeding the speed limit at 36mph or over decreased considerably, with the lowest percentage of offending vehicles observed where CSW+ was used with signage and local promotional material (compared to the cameras with no signage and camera with signage only). The percentage of vehicles driving within the speed limit increased considerably, and the number of vehicles responsible for excessive speeds (above 45mph), reduced with the implementation of CSW+ including signage/promotional material.

Speed data in area B suggested there were reductions in the percentage of vehicles driving 31mph or over in a 20mph zone over the first 9 weeks of the introduction of CSW cameras, with most of that impact observed within the first four weeks. Speed data in area C showed longer-term fluctuation in speeds of drivers identified by CSW+ travelling at 31mph and over, suggesting there may be an initial benefit to CSW+ that then starts to fluctuate and tail off somewhat.

Case study analysis of area D suggested letters distributed as an outcome of CSW are beneficial. Of 14 vehicles identified exceeding the speed limit, the half that received a letter reduced their *average speed* in the four months after receiving that letter compared to the previous five months. For those that did *not* receive a letter, average speed reduced less, or even increased. Additionally, for those who did not receive a letter, there was a considerably smaller reduction in average *top speed* over that same time period than for those who did receive a letter. Although not statistically significant, the majority of vehicles (5 out of 7) who received a letter wereless likely to be seen exceeding the speed limit (as a proportion of all times that vehicle was seen driving past CSW+ cameras) after receiving a CSW+ letter. In contrast, those who did not receive a letter did statistically significantly *increase* the number of times they were seen exceeding the speed limit.

* *Discussion and areas for consideration*

Ensuring consistency in communication has emerged as a key area of improvement. Firstly, it is important to (re)consider and clearly verbalise the aims of CSW activity and impact expectations to volunteers. Additionally, explaining the information that can and cannot be shared, and being consistent with sharing it, is important for retaining the relationship between police and volunteers. Facilitating communication between CSW groups has the potential to reduce repeat learning and act as a network of support for volunteers. Additionally, advising groups on communication strategies when engaging with broader communities may be beneficial for public perceptions of CSW. Also, facilitating communication with highways departments, where appropriate, could be useful to realising the wider road safety measures that CSW groups consider necessary.

Given resource limitations, forces sometimes restrict the number of offending vehicles they respond to, e.g., sending 10 letters per CSW session or CSW-camera week. Any cap on the number of distributed letters must be carefully considered, particularly with CSW cameras where a large number of vehicles may be identified exceeding the speed limit. Speed data suggested that *not sending* a letter can be detrimental to road safety. It would be preferable for forces to adequately resource letter distribution to all drivers identified exceeding a specific limit (e.g., 10% +2mph). A consistent approach is likely to have benefits for perceived distributive and outcome fairness.

Forces must consider practical resource implications of CSW and make efforts to provide a consistent supporting function across groups to support perceived validity and legitimacy of the practice.

Providing communications and de-escalation training for volunteers could be invaluable for minimising any negative impact of volunteer behaviour or messaging on organisational reputation.

Careful consideration must be given to the implementation of CSW+ cameras. CSW+ cameras have the advantage of enabling placement in areas that may be dangerous for volunteers to stand and identifying vehicles travelling too fast or in too quick succession for volunteers to respond to. However, participants expressed concerns that cameras lack flexibility and drivers can become desensitised or slow down only as long as needed to avoid detection because they know their placement. It is likely that CSW+ cameras could complement, rather than replace, traditional CSW activity and should be used with a communications strategy.

With traditional CSW, activity undertaken at least once a week (where possible) in varied locations over time is likely to be particularly valuable.

Activity in areas used by vulnerable road users or where visibility of the volunteers would be high, was associated with legitimate practice and should be meaningfully implemented moving forward. Activity should also be guided by data (i.e., areas where frequent high speeds are recorded). This should be combined with appropriate signage and wider communication to communities to ensure that they are aware of the reasoning behind activity placement.

Seeking views of the broader community can help to validate CSW activity and enhance community cohesion by acting as a response to community concerns. Educational engagement with the community, whether through social media or other community correspondence such as a newsletter, could be valuable. Here, appropriate wording of messages is essential.

Finally, evaluation of activity is paramount to inform perceptions of the ‘success’ of CSW and more research is needed to understand the effectiveness of CSW, whatever form it takes.