Street-level crime maps launched online

New online crime maps for England and Wales have been launched, allowing users to see which offences have been reported in their local streets. The maps will record reports of different categories of crime and anti-social behaviour

Home Secretary Theresa May said people had lost confidence in national crime figures, and the maps would give real facts and make police more accountable.

The public can search for information on crime and anti-social behaviour by entering a street name or postcode.

The website, **www.police.uk**, was launched at midnight.

Some BBC News website readers have reported being unable to access the crime maps, although the Home Office has said there is not a fault.

A spokesman for charity Victim Support said it was important that victims of crime had consented to whether information about their crime was released.

Meanwhile Ms May said she expected the public reaction to be "positive" and denied the information could increase fear or drive down house prices in some areas.

Visitors to the website, which cost £300,000 to develop, will be able to find out which crimes have taken place on or near their street within the last month and which officers are responsible for their area.

Information on crime is broken down into six categories - burglary, robbery, vehicle crime, violence, other crime and anti-social behaviour. Sex crimes have been included in the "other" category, along with crimes such as theft and shoplifting, to help prevent victims from being identified.

Local police appeals and details of police community meetings will also be published alongside the maps.

The website provides more detail, down to street-level, than existing online crime maps provided by forces in England and Wales.

Crime trends will also be established as the site develops and could be extended to include details on the outcomes of court cases, or a system for individual victims to track the progress of their case online.

The government said the site was an important part of its "transparency agenda", making the data available in an open format so that communities could use it to "help people engage with the police in a meaningful way".

Ms May said: "I think people are going to welcome the fact they can really see what's happening with crime in their area, not just on their street but in their neighbourhood.

"I think they will feel a greater connection with the police, with much more information about where they can go to, and who they can work with."

She said the project would help tackle crime "over time".

System 'confusing'

On house prices the home secretary said they were not affected by "the existence of a map on a website".

"This is giving people a real tool, real power to see that something is being done about crime in their area. This doesn't make them frightened, it actually makes them feel a part of what is happening.

"This will give them the real facts and figures. This will make the police more accountable. It gives people a real tool to hold the police to account."

Policing Minister Nick Herbert also insisted that the more detailed information would not increase the fear of crime, adding: "We can't sweep crime under the carpet."

Streets with fewer than 12 houses will only be included in a wider geographic area to prevent identification of victims.

Victim Support said victims' privacy should be protected, but that enough information should be given to the public "for them to be able to hold the police and criminal justice system to account".

"Victims and witnesses of crime often tell us that the criminal justice system can be confusing and unwieldy. This recommendation to publish fuller information has the potential to bring greater transparency to the workings of the criminal justice system for victims, witnesses and the public."

Mark Easton BBC