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Reducing Burglary Initiative Project Summary

Yew Tree, Sandwell

Introduction and overview

Round 1 of the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) was built upon a strong evidence base of operational research, which had identified types of measures that can be effective in reducing burglary in local areas. A key objective of the RBI was to find out what works best where. Sixty three Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) were funded by Round 1 of the RBI. These projects were encouraged to develop innovative burglary reduction strategies. As a result, a wide range of interventions was implemented in a variety of contexts making use of different principles.

This paper presents a summary of one of these projects where activities undertaken were built along the general framework of police crackdown followed by consolidation interventions. The main/noteworthy interventions of this SDP were as follows:

- **Police Crackdown:**
 - Targeting known offenders: eviction orders, high visibility policing, bail enforcement, Anti Social Behaviour Orders
- **Consolidation:**
 - Property/appliance base security systems: property marking, micro-chip tracking system
 - Community involvement schemes: police/community radio system, increase in the number of Neighbourhood Watch schemes
 - Tackling repeat victimisation: database of identified repeat victims
 - Environmental improvements: architectural surveys locating crime hotspots, establishment of protocols for building developments and environmental work
 - Youth diversion initiatives: Garden creation scheme and football coaching and summer play scheme trips
 - Publicity through media strategy: crime prevention publicity campaign and broadcast/newspaper media approach
 - Establish costs of burglary

Between project before and after periods, there was a net fall in the number of burglaries of 39 per cent in the project area, when controlling for burglary trends in the rest of the Police Force Area¹. The project was also found to be cost effective.

1. This net reduction in burglary figure is based on the number of burglaries per month during the project before and after periods of September 1997 to March 1999 and April 1999 and December 2000. These periods are used for comparison purposes for all SDPs as they are the longest comparison periods for which data is available for all the projects (see Kodz J and Pease K (2003) 'Reducing Burglary Initiative: early findings on burglary reduction' Home Office Findings 204. London: Home Office). Over these periods the Police Force Area saw a reduction in burglary of 8 per cent and the project area saw a reduction of 47 per cent, giving a net burglary reduction in the project area of 39 per cent.

1. Intelligence

Intelligence involves gathering and analysing information on crime and disorder problems and risks and their consequences, diagnosing their causes and identifying risk factors for offending.

General context

This project took place in two economically deprived estates that encompassed 2,420 households and 6,096 inhabitants. The area was defined as a typical lower to middle income suburban ward. The target area is in appearance pleasant and made up of well maintained large modern private estates along with older local authority owned properties. However, it is geographically isolated, located between a major motorway and a canal. The ethnic characteristics of the local population in the area are mainly white together with a significant Indian population.

The crime problem

The area experienced many instances of anti-social behaviour and public order trouble; CCTV cameras had already been installed to overcome the problem. Housing on one of the estates was also very exposed to burglary due to poor levels of security, which had been a problem ever since the estate was built.

Police statistics provided pre-SDP burglary data. An average of 162 dwellings per year were victimised over the three years before project launch, including 25 repeat victims in 1998. Newly developed private houses were highly targeted and tended to be broken into from the rear.

Immediate causes and risk factors of burglary

Environment

Police evidence showed that neighbouring areas of overgrown open lands had been used to store stolen property and conceal criminal activity. Some police representatives described the area as 'a burglar's paradise'. One of the estates in particular had low fences and poorly lit footpaths, which provided easy escape and access routes to the area.

Dwellings

The most recently built estate experienced high levels of burglary. It appeared that the housing had been developed regardless of security concerns with poor quality windows and that this contributed to the burglary problem. Police modus operandi analysis indicated that the rear of the properties were vulnerable due to poorly secured windows and doors.

Offenders

Data derived from the police crackdown showed that local burglary offenders were young males of white ethnic group aged between 14 and 35, with an average age of 22. Approximately half of these apprehended offenders lived in the target area. It was believed that some of the offenders intimidated other residents which led to the under reporting of crime. All the individuals arrested had a previous history of criminal activity, mainly burglary, but also theft and handling offences.

The wider crime context – previous crime prevention initiatives

Prior to the RBI project taking place, there had been growing concern amongst the local residents and community representatives about the high crime reputation of the target areas. High visibility policing and crackdown operations had taken place on the estate in the year prior to the project. Nonetheless, burglary offences had begun to increase again prior to the RBI project start.

2. Interventions

Interventions are how the action works: the causal principles or mechanisms – both civil prevention and traditional law-enforcement – that could be applied to block, disrupt or weaken the causes of criminal events or the risk factors, and strengthen the protective factors.

Targeting known offenders and high visibility policing

Police officers were to implement a 'zero-tolerance' approach to target known offenders by the means of stop and search, searching properties, bail enforcements, eviction and anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs). The rationale behind this method was to reduce burglary by removing offenders from the estate and increase the risk of being apprehended. It also aimed to raise awareness amongst residents and offenders that the police were committed to the estate and gain the local community's confidence, thus increase the reporting of crime.

Implementation

This police crackdown was a continuation of the operations implemented prior to the launch of the RBI project. Elements of the previous crackdown scheme remained central to the RBI funded interventions that followed. Known offenders were identified through a combination of anecdotal and police evidence and by prior convictions.

Two police officers were specifically assigned to the target area. This was to avoid the possibility of other police priorities diverting staff time away from the project. It also developed the officers' knowledge of the local area, making the identification of problems quicker and simpler. Police activity was allocated according to pre-identified burglary hot-spot locations and times of the day.

Outputs

Two police officers operated within the target area for 17 to 18 months. A further 12 police constables were tasked to the area between April and June 1999. 17 offenders were targeted of which 15 were charged. Of these, 11 were in custody at various times during the project period. Two received ASBOs, one an eviction order, seven were subject to probation periods and three supervision orders.

Drawbacks

Eviction orders were believed to be problematic due to the risk of geographically displacing offenders, and thus not only displacing their criminal activity but also hindering the ability of authorities to track these individuals. There were also some problems identified with bail enforcement, as there was discrepancy in the leniency between different courts. Offenders were aware of this and may have carried out their actions accordingly.

Property marking

'SmartWater' property marking kits were used to mark residents' valuable property. Police visited all houses in the target area to help and advise in the marking process. StealthGuard² a security system was to be used alongside SmartWater kits but due to its unavailability was not utilised. Targeted households were to receive stickers that would publicise the marking of valuable property in the area. The underlying aims of this intervention were to:

- ease residents' fear of being burgled and losing valuable property
- help in the monitoring of stolen goods, their recovery and offender conviction
- act as a deterrent to burglary by increasing the fear of being caught amongst criminals

Implementation

The police involvement in SmartWater was seen as raising the profile of the police in the local area.

The plan was to place stickers on windows of targeted houses once all houses were property marked and to display publicity about the scheme in the local shops, pubs and community centres. However this did not happen during the project period.

2. StealthGuard is a security service that connects appliances via the mains supply and phone line to a BT operations centre which keeps track of the appliance's location via unique security codes. Each time a protected appliance is plugged in, it broadcasts a location request to the operations centre, but refuses to operate until it receives a response that matches its stored location. As a result, if the appliance is stolen, it will refuse to work in any location other than its home environment.

Outputs

By the end of the project 55% (1,325) of all the households in the area were covered by the property marking scheme. One item was recovered through SmartWater identification.

Drawbacks

The police force saw the intervention as very costly both in terms of police time and monetary funds. The aim of covering all households in the area was over ambitious, due to staff shortages. Analysis of crime data indicated that narrower targeting of vulnerable or victimised households could have been just as effective. Moreover, evidence suggested that offenders adapted to the SmartWater scheme. As residents, including offenders, were given information on how the kits functioned, this is likely to have educated local burglars.

Increase Community Involvement

The SDP also planned to raise public awareness of burglary prevention and increase the reporting of crime by distributing crime prevention packs, encouraging Neighbourhood Watch, using radio links and organising a community crime prevention/information event. The aims of these community involvement schemes were to:

- increase residents' awareness of crime prevention measures
- inform residents' of police activities thus encouraging greater reporting of criminal activity
- encourage community involvement building on already existing informal surveillance
- link residents with community representatives and to police officers thus facilitating the exchange of information (suspicious behaviour or burglaries occurring)
- reduce police response times to incidents through increased surveillance and
- increase feeling of involvement from residents and reduce fear of crime

Implementation

The delivery of crime prevention packs was already planned before RBI funding was secured and packs had already been distributed prior to the project start. Distribution of packs was a useful introduction to the forthcoming SmartWater intervention. Many residents would have received two visits from the police in one year, again helping to raise the profile of the police within the community. The original target of the number of Neighbourhood Watch schemes to be established was not reached due in part to a lack of enthusiasm of the

community, but also to a lack of police focus on this element of the project. Code names were used to eradicate improper use of the radios. Community enthusiasm for these was similarly low.

Outputs

Crime prevention packs were delivered to all the households in the target area. The number of Neighbourhood Watch groups increased from 14 to 15. 21 radios were distributed to Neighbourhood Watch coordinators and community representatives.

Drawbacks

The radio links were never used due to users' lack of confidence and their not knowing each other well enough to communicate in this way. Therefore the scheme was abandoned and instead the radios were diverted to local businesses.

Environmental improvements

Improvements to the area were achieved by firstly, environmental work through the construction of a 'hot spot' map of the target area as part of an 'architectural survey' of the estate. This aimed to identify escape routes, poor lighting and crime hotspots. Environmental work followed on from the initial survey. Secondly, a 'Secure by Design' scheme was set up to establish construction protocols for new private developers on the estate. The aim of these environmental interventions were to:

- identify key problems by linking victimised areas with their environmental characteristics which may generate criminal activity, and
- construct strategies to counteract crime generators by developing building-design procedures to reduce burglary in the long term.

Implementation

Analyses, mapping and surveys of hotspot areas were achieved by the local police force. Difficulties were experienced in reaching agreement between the police and the local authority planning department on how to respond to this problem. For this reason plans to remove access to paths were dropped. Instead, volunteers were used to clear alleyways of vegetation. Thorny shrubs were planted as part of a children's 'Environment Fun Day'. Evidence such as blood from scratches left on the bushes could help in forensics identification. The underlying rationale of clearing undergrowth was that it would remove easy cover for criminals, increasing sight lines for natural surveillance and decreasing opportunities for hiding stolen goods.

The 'Secure by Design' initiative meant that developers had to regularly liaise with the police while undergoing building work. However the scheme depended on the

flexibility of the police and the co-operation and interest of the developers.

Outputs

A map of the estate was drawn recognising sites of all attempted and actual burglaries in the past year along with access paths and areas covered by Neighbourhood Watch. Some recommendations were included in the guidelines for the building of a new estate; but these were not always fully complied with.

Drawbacks

As noted above, difficulties were encountered with

- reaching agreement between the police and planning authorities over the environmental improvements to be made, and
- developers complying with the guidelines to help to ensure new buildings were designed to be secure.

Youth Diversion Schemes

The project area's management intended to divert young people in the area from falling into criminal activity by setting up a youth diversion initiative that included the creation of a garden on the estate. Extra funding was made available for football coaching and a summer playscheme. The underlying principles for these schemes were that they would:

- divert local young people away from crime and
- increase young people's sense of community belonging

Implementation

Practical details of the method: The garden scheme was to get children to create their garden on the estate and it was co-funded by the SDP and a voluntary sector organisation. A community artist was employed by the project management to meet up with teenagers and discuss what could/would be featured in the garden. Extra material and staff support were provided by youth and local housing services. The garden was to be developed in two phases: phase one would see the clearing and preparation of the chosen spot and phase two the set-up of a covered feature. In addition, football coaching was organised and run by a local father. These projects were aimed at all 11 to 18 year olds on the estate.

Outputs

- Only phase one of the garden scheme was completed during the project period. 60 young people attended the first meeting, 25 were involved in the implementation of phase one.
- Weekly football coaching sessions took place during the project period. Between 20 and 40 children attended the sessions.

- A summer play scheme was set up for a duration of one month, taking place 5 times a week, involving 40 under 12s with one parent, 2 drivers, and 5 helpers.
- An after school club followed on from the summer play scheme, a local youth club reopened in 2000, a community centre youth project was getting started at the end of the SDP and the police force passed on the names of 2 offenders to another project.

Other initiatives

Three initiatives aimed at tackling repeat victimisation, a publicity campaign and establishing the costs of burglary showed only limited progress. The underlying aim of these interventions was to reduce repeat victimisation and increase the local community's (including offenders) awareness of crime prevention activity in the area.

Implementation

- Tackling repeat house burglary was part of a wider objective for the whole police force. A database was maintained to record all repeat burglary incidents. The scheme was halted after the recorded levels of burglary dropped significantly.
- Means of advertising used to publicise all SDP interventions included press releases, newspaper and newsletter articles. Particular attention was given to the fact that newspapers would only be interested in reporting on the project's activities once.
- Establishing the costs of burglaries in the target area was successful in helping to achieve further local authority funding.

3. Implementation

Implementation is what is actually done – how the practical methods that realise the principles in locally-appropriate ways, are targeted and converted into action on the ground.

Inputs of funds, effort, human resources

The total crude input costs for this SDP totalled £222,204. The most costly intervention was property-marking/tracking, as it accounted for 35% of the total of the intervention costs, whereas high visibility policing and targeting of prolific offenders (both combined) accounted for 34% of the costs. Crime prevention packs accounted for 12% of the costs and the remaining 19% for the remaining seven low cost interventions. When looking at inputs in terms of resources, personnel was the most costly and predominant element (82%), followed by equipment (17%).

Management, planning, and supervision

The local police force led the project and responsibility for the project lay with the Sector Inspector and his Deputy Sergeant. However, their time was not solely dedicated to the project, and their other duties and commitments made it difficult to devote sufficient time to the management of the project.

The deployment of the Sector Policing model meant these officers' time was dedicated to the area and this allowed the police force to be more proactive (rather than reactive) and generated creativity within the project. Managers were concerned that some performance indicators could suffer as a result of the introduction of Sector Policing. In particular, there were concerns that neighbouring estates within the police force area experienced a rise in crime due to the shift in allocating resources to the SDP area.

Staff resources

Working in partnership with other agencies proved beneficial in terms of the sharing of staff resources. However, police staff shortages reduced the number of officers working on the RBI project significantly at times.

4. Involvement in the community – partnership, mobilisation, collaboration

Professionals, like the police, often have to work through others rather than directly intervening themselves. Involvement is when those formally in charge of a crime prevention project (who could themselves be a partnership) act through an existing partnership or mobilise other agencies, companies and individuals to collaborate in playing specific, limited parts in implementing the intervention.

Partnership

The local police led the project through a wider steering group which included representatives from the local police, local authority (housing and planning), health authority, community (Neighbourhood Watch), a councillor and community artist. Meetings were thought crucial in developing strong partnership relations, as the police were keen to pass responsibilities onto agencies involved in the project. The local community health authority managed the environmental projects and the youth diversion schemes. Non-police agencies were more experienced in working with the community allowing the police to be allocated elsewhere. A good working relationship between the police and the local housing association prior to the RBI was essential for the Secure By Design scheme to work smoothly and to make progress with other initiatives.

Mobilisation and collaboration

Community activity and cohesion was already very strong in the target area. Many families had lived on the estates for generations. The initial police crackdown depended on the public's willingness to give out information on local offenders. This was achieved by focussing on developing residents' confidence in the police force by allocating two officers on the beat for the first few months of the project and offering them protection. The property marking and youth diversion schemes, and the community involvement elements of the project were also intended to alert, motivate and empower residents to act as crime preventers and to increase their confidence and faith in the police. It was hoped this would ultimately have the effect of increasing levels of reporting of crime.

5. Impact

Impact covers crime and disorder reduction achieved, cost effectiveness and wider learning points

The evaluation of the project

This project was subject to an independent impact, process and cost-effectiveness evaluation by South Bank University and collaborators in the Southern Consortium engaged to assess the Reducing Burglary Initiative of the Crime Reduction Programme in England & Wales. The following results on impact and cost effectiveness are based on the Southern Consortium's findings. The impact evaluation design involved comparing changes in recorded burglary statistics over some 3 years. This was done in a) the target area (one beat); b) buffer zone to assess the extent of geographical displacement (five beats); and c) the rest of the police Basic Command Unit (BCU) minus the target area (reference area used to outline background trends).

Crime reduction target

Burglary in the target area fell from Year -2³ to Year -1 by 4% and then fell by a further 39% (a reduction of 67 burglaries) from Year -1 to Year 1. The decrease in burglary at the start of the implementation period was particularly noticeable as 30 occurrences had been recorded in March 1999, 13 in April and 2 in May. The fall was carried onto the period Year 1 to Year 2 (29%). There was evidence of both geographic displacement and some dispersal of benefits to selected neighbouring areas. Some functional displacement was thought to have occurred. Figures for theft and handling offences went up by 19% (n=19) from Year -1 to Year 1 along with burglary non-dwelling, which went up by 90% (n=27) from Year 1 to Year 2.

3. Year -2 refers to a period two years prior to the implementation of the project's interventions (June 1997 – March 1998).
Year -1 refers to one year prior to implementation: April 1998 – March 1999,
Year 1 to the year during the implementation period: April 1999 – March 2000
Year 2 refers to one year post implementation: April 2000 – March 2001.

Cost-benefit analysis

Crude costs were modelled⁴ (£183,084), set against the national average cost of burglary⁵ (£2,300) and against the estimated total saving of 123 burglaries in the project area over 2 years in order to calculate the cost benefit ratio of 1.38. This means that for every £1 worth of resources spent on the project, a maximum of £1.38 worth of resources was saved. As such the project was deemed to be cost effective.

Replicability and learning points

Some key learning points identified by this project are:

- Experienced, enthusiastic and fully dedicated (from bid to completion) project management can achieve better results and foster positive long-term community relations
- Clearly defining the initiatives' aims and regularly monitoring them are important to ensure successful outcomes
- Crime prevention projects can displace crime issues to neighbouring areas
- Giving responsibility to agencies experienced in community work helps to gain the public's confidence
- Uniformed police interventions can be a good public relations exercise and help in achieving the public's confidence. Good community spirit and cohesion within the local area make police interventions easier
- Police 'crackdowns' can be effective in making quick gains. Benefits can be 'consolidated' in the longer-term by community-based interventions.

Acknowledgements

This project was subject to an independent impact, process and cost effectiveness evaluation conducted by the Southern Consortium⁶ of evaluators for the Reducing Burglary Initiative. This summary is based on a site report drafted by Andrew Millie, Jacque Mallender and Rebecca Kingsnorth of the Southern Consortium. The summary was drafted by James Osborn (of The Home Office, Crime and Policing Group RDS). This is one of a series of burglary reduction project case studies structured around five standard headings – 5Is: Intelligence, Intervention, Implementation, Involvement and Impact. This

4. Modelled costs are converted from crude costs to a common price base, that is GDP deflated and relating to one point in time (April 1999). They are based on the assumption that capital assets continue to hold value throughout the project life.
5. This was calculated in Brand, S. and Price, R. (2000) *The economic and social costs of crime*. Home Office Research Study 217, London: Home Office.
6. The Southern Consortium was led by South Bank University Criminal Policy Research Unit.

is a systematic framework for presenting crime reduction case studies, developed by Paul Ekblom (Crime and Policing Group, Home Office RDS) for presenting crime reduction case studies and organising good practice knowledge. For more information see www.crimereduction.gov.uk/learningzone/5lsintro.htm.

The project manager of the Yew Tree SDP was Inspector Gary Malpass. For further details about the project, Inspector Malpass' contact details are:
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