

housing safe communities

an evaluation of recent initiatives

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London: Safe Neighbourhoods Unit

POSSIL PARK ESTATE

SECURITY SCHEME

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Introduction

This case study assessment features the work of the Possil Park Community Security Business, an initiative with a narrow focus on the security of void properties. The intention had been to focus more generally on the impact of an employment based community development scheme. The original site chosen for assessment was the Barrowfield Estate in Glasgow, where residents had established a community enterprise carrying out building work, landscaping, environmental maintenance, repairs, void security management and a range of social work projects. It had been claimed that the cost of vandalism to the local authority had dropped by nearly £250,000 following the introduction of the initiative (Ball, Knight and Plant, 1990).

In the event, by the time the parties involved in the Barrowfield initiative were contacted in late 1990, the community business had collapsed and the security business element had been taken over by Possil Park Community Security Business.

At this point, it became clear that an assessment of the Barrowfield initiative would be difficult because of residual resentment and defensiveness and that an assessment of the community business scheme on the Possil Park Estate would provide the same kind of data and show similar results.

However, after initial work on this case study, it emerged that the Possil Park scheme was more limited in scope than the Barrowfield scheme had appeared and was principally a community based dwelling security scheme.

Nevertheless, the data gathered for this case study provides useful insights into the scope for community business as a delivery mechanism for estate based initiatives and the potential benefits of community based as opposed to private and external security management.

Area description

Possil Park is an estate of public housing in north central Glasgow, described by the Sunday Post in 1986 as 'the worst slum in Scotland'. The 3100 dwellings date from 1934-36, and are contained in long three and four storey blocks faced with grey pre-cast concrete blocks.

The estate has many of the problems associated with poor public housing. Half of the economically active residents were unemployed, a high proportion of families were headed by a single parent, and there was a high proportion of children and young people — two thirds of the population is under 25 (Institute of Housing and Royal Institute of British Architects, 1989). There are signs of visible poverty among people who live there, and there are few cars on the street. A major problem for the area is its reputation. It is said that residents are discriminated against when they go for jobs and find it impossible to get house contents insurance.

The area has a reputation for drug and alcohol abuse and is often described as a no go area for the police.

In 1974 Glasgow City Council carried out a modernisation programme on the estate. Fireplaces were removed, new kitchen and bathrooms were fitted and partial central heating was installed. Staircase entrance doors were provided at ground floor level. However, the building exteriors were left untouched.

The Possil Park Housing Co-operative was set up by tenants in 1987. The Co-operative organised an improvement programme beginning in 1987 with 48 dwellings and taking over responsibility for 384 by 1991. Block facades have been given a coloured finish, sash windows have been replaced by horizontally pivoted windows and new entrance doors have been fitted to dwellings. Phone entry systems have been installed and damp and dry rot has been attended to.

The improvements stand in stark contrast to the rest of the estate which keeps its drab appearance.

Description of initiative

Possil Park Community Business stemmed from an unemployed workers' group which began in 1986. The motive was to create work for local people. With help from Strathclyde Community Business, a development agency that gives technical assistance and finance, Possil Park Community Business was formed in early 1986.

The proposal to provide a security service to oversee empty dwellings was among a number of different business ideas considered. Voids on the estate were regularly vandalised and systematically stripped of their copper and lead. Glasgow City Council was receptive to the proposal because their existing contracts with private security firms had failed to protect their empty properties. Security guards tended not to be there when trouble occurred or to look the other way'.

Possil Park Community Business offers local labour. There is a possibility, therefore, that guards will know the people involved in break-ins and can influence their behaviour through informal negotiations and peer group pressure. Guards spend time talking to people in the area, building up local knowledge and contacts, and are generally accepted as part of the local landscape. In the past, security guards who were not residents had experienced great difficulty in their relationships with residents and had, on occasion, been chased away from the estate.

Possil Park Community Business security guards work in pairs and provide around the clock patrols. If there is trouble their responsibility is to communicate with the central office over the radio and at all costs avoid physical confrontation,

This primary security role has enabled another role to be played. This has involved the development of a kind of *street warden* service where the radio can be used to call for an ambulance or a doctor or to generally help deal with residents' problems. In some instances, guards have also provided a litter removal service (which gives guards a practical task during the sometimes lengthy hours on watch).

The initial scope of the work was only in one part of Possil Park — about a quarter of the estate was covered by the service in 1986. After early success and evidence of displacement of problems to other parts of Possil, it was agreed to extend the scheme to cover the whole estate. Building on this success, the project has gone on to work in other areas of public housing, including Barrowfield, Blantyre and Castlemilk. There have also been contracts with private builders.

The project concentrates on voids and has no locus in general crime prevention activity. The project sees itself as a business pursuing defined and specified contracts, rather than having any responsibility for solving crime or other problems that exist in an areas where it works. It recognises that there are some crime problems in the estate, such as the prevalence of drug dealing, where it has no power to intervene and where such intervention could rebound on the employees.

After early development funding from Strathclyde Community Business, the project became self-sufficient after four years. On an turnover of £1 million, it now makes a profit of around £80,000. Commercial criteria lie at the heart of the operations of the project.

Implementation

The project was conceived by a number of local residents who, in collaboration with a local authority housing officer, obtained development funding from Strathclyde Community Business. This group became the board of directors for Possil Park Community Business which was initially located in a flat on the estate. The board hired a manager to run the scheme and co-opted members of the local business community onto the board. After two managers had left in relatively quick succession, a member of the board, who had previously run a paint shop, applied for the Job of manager. He was appointed and this proved a turning point in attitudes towards development of the project. The manager was determined to make a profit, and to cost contracts accordingly. On occasion, this has meant redundancies where a softer community approach might have meant staff being kept on.

The hourly charge-out *rate* for a security guard varies according to the degree of trouble in an area and what the market will bear. The top rate is currently £4.25 *per* hour with an average of £4.00. The higher the charge-out rate, the higher the rate of pay for the guard. £0.30 per hour is set aside for profit. The rates of pay for guards, up to a maximum of £2.75 per hour, are relatively high — as much as double the rate to be found in some parts of the private security industry. The payment of reasonable wages is intended to maintain a stable and reliable work force.

The relatively high wage rates mean that the hourly charge-out rate is not always strictly competitive. However, the inclusion of *street warden* type service contracts has proved attractive

to clients and made them more willing to pay the charge-out rate.

There remains close contact with the community. Aside from the policy of employing local residents as security guards, the board is made up of local people. This appears to work well. The board members, predominantly unemployed local people, manage paid staff, some of whom earn relatively good salaries, but this does not appear to lead to any resentment. According to the chair of the board, the reason that local people like the scheme is that it gives 'employment possibilities for the 90 per cent of people who live here *who* have no hope'.

The company pursued three main businesses. One was cleaning, another was painting and decorating, and the third was security.

There are over 80 people working in the Security Business (on more than one estate) in a layered hierarchy: two assistant managers, three senior supervisors, 20 worker supervisors, and 60 security guards. This kind of structure was thought necessary to provide the necessary 168 hours per week cover and the checks required to ensure quality control. Training is regarded as a high priority for staff. New premises have been obtained, and are presently being converted to help with the training of staff.

The staff of the business are recruited through local community organisations. This local knowledge provided an important screening process, and ensures that people employed to be trustworthy (regardless of earlier and spent criminal convictions). Some people working in Possil Park Community Business do have criminal convictions, and sometimes the police express anxieties about this, but the quality control procedures in the project ensure that all the staff are subject to close monitoring. The manager of the project regards it as vital that people with criminal convictions are given another chance. The experience of the project is that people in community organisations are well able to distinguish between people with criminal records who are safe and those *who* represent a high risk.

As local people, security guards have to tread a fine line between their role as employees of Possil Park Community Business and their role as part of the community. Despite the clear and designated *role* of observing and mediating but not apprehending people, there is always the risk that local people will feel resentful. For the most part this does not appear to be a problem because the service is popular. Inevitably, problems do emerge. In one instance, for example, there was a fight between security guards and the family of an apprehended person. However, incidents of this kind are very rare.

Project monitoring

The project aims to protect empty properties from break-ins and vandalism, and not to provide a general *crime* prevention service. The method that the project uses to evaluate itself, and the method that its funders use to evaluate it, is based on this narrower criterion. Indeed, the project refuses to claim any responsibility for general crime reduction.

The City Council's Housing Department has carried out an intensive monitoring of the project in two sections of Possil Park — North and East Keppoch (an area of 1293 flats) and Sunnyside (an area of 474 flats). The monitoring was carried out over a 12 month period between the beginning of June 1989 and the end of May 1990. The study concluded that the project was 'cost effective' on the grounds that the savings which had accrued to the Housing Department from reduced damage and theft were substantially greater than the costs of the two contracts (Glasgow City Council, 1990).

The Housing Department identified a number of areas in which savings had been made:

- There was reduced need for static security. Group 4 Security had previously been used to provide night watchmen in the two areas. £30,000 was saved from no longer having to use this service.
- The project prevented 37 break-ins in progress. The average cost of damage and theft associated with break-ins to empty dwellings on the estate is around £2,000. The Housing Department calculated, therefore, that about £74,000 had been saved from these prevented break-ins.
- The project fitted Sitex locking bars to 47 dwellings which tenants had left without the giving notice to quit. The Housing Department estimated on the basis of past experience that, without this temporary security measure, 50% of the properties would have been broken into. On the basis of the average costs of damage and theft noted above, the Housing Department concluded that around £46,000 had been saved through this work.
- The project identified 293 properties where void security had been compromised: emergency services had been contacted; and properties secured. The Housing Department conservatively

estimated that damage and theft in these dwellings, *if they* had not been secured, would have averaged £650 per dwelling and concluded, therefore, that £95,225 had been saved. The study calculated, therefore, that £245,225 had been saved in reduced costs of vandalism to and theft from empty dwellings. As the contract values were £98,929 for North and East Keppoch and £88,341 for Sunnyslaw — a total cost of £187,270 — the net savings *were* calculated to be £57,955.

In addition, the Housing Department estimated that an extra £6,300 had been saved through not having to pay for litter removal operations undertaken by the project.

The Housing Department's monitoring exercise contains some speculative elements, which to some extent undermine the overall assessment of the cost effectiveness of the initiative. In particular, the estimates of savings accruing from making void dwellings secure are based on an assumed level of break-ins which would have occurred if this had not been done. If these speculative savings were to be excluded from the assessment the total savings figure would fall by £134,925 (including the litter disposal savings) and mean that the initiative accrued a net cost to the Council of £76,970. However, the Housing Department's estimates were based on past experience, and it appears reasonable to conclude that the activities of the Community Security Business in making voids more secure would have had some impact on break-in levels. A more conservative approach to estimating these savings would have been more persuasive and, besides, even a modest net cost (as opposed to net saving) would appear to be a positive outcome in the light of the social benefits of fewer properties out of action and the availability of a street warden type service.

An earlier evaluation by the Housing Department (Glasgow City Council, 1987) had reached similar conclusions about the impact of the project, but on the basis of different criteria. The study compared the situation in the calendar year 1986 (the Security Business had been set up at the beginning *of the year*) with the previous financial *year* 1984/5, and identified the following areas of savings for that part of the estate (25%) then covered by the Security Business:

- In 1984/5 there was a total of 35 refurbishments required in the area due to vandalism *and* theft associated with empty dwellings. £62,000 was spent on these refurbishments. In 1986, however, only two such refurbishments *were* required, at a cost of £5,000. The Housing Department attributed all of this saving to the project.
- During 1984/5, the average length of time voids remained vacant was six months. During 1986, this average reduced to two months. Not all of this improvement could be attributed to the project since *there* were other management improvements underway. The Housing Department estimated (although no basis for the estimate was given) that around 50% of the improvement was due the project, and this translated into a total of £5,600 in increased rental income.

In addition, the project attended to 50 of the 121 empty dwellings affected by frost in 1986 (saving an estimated £36,500) and spotted a potentially serious *fire* (saving an estimated £20,000). Adding up all these figures (plus some for savings on static security but discounting the serious fire) the Housing Department estimated that the project had saved the Council £136,000 and, taking account of the contract cost of £70,000 — had accrued a net saving of £66,000.

This monitoring *exercise* is altogether more persuasive, not least because the clearest and least speculative area of savings (reduced refurbishments required as a result of fewer break-ins to voids) accounted on its own for over 80% of the contract price. It appears safe to conclude that the savings accruing to the Council as a result of the contract at least matched the contract price.

Other outcomes

The main other outcome for the local community has been the creation of 32 jobs for local people (of which 18 are in security and the remainder in the other businesses developed by the project).

There have been other benefits, noted above in relation to void periods and rental income levels, but these are relatively modest. With the exception of that part of Possil which has been rehabilitated by the Housing Co-operative, the estate remains in poor condition, is hard to let, and most people want to leave.

Project development

Possil Park Community Business has been extended to other sites in Glasgow: Castlemilk, Gorbals, Barrowfield and Blantyre, plus some land sites and private estates of Wimpey built houses.

This has been possible because the business has, in the four years of its existence, made a conscious attempt to learn from its experience and mistakes. It sees the importance of costing contracts accurately with the object of making a profit (unlike other community businesses which have failed due to inadequate margins and loose expenditure). In this, the social goals (preventing break-ins) are subsidiary to the economic goals (surviving, making money, and creating jobs). In one instance, *where* it was called into a community to rescue community security business which had failed. its first act was to cut costs and make six people redundant. Having put the finances on a firmer footing, the business was reorganised and an extra 13 people were taken on.

In the process of transferring a project from one place to another, a potentially important element may be lost. Fossil Park Community Business stemmed from the efforts of local people who enlisted the help of outsiders. In moving into new areas Fossil Park Community Business is an outside agency, enlisting the help of local people. In other words, to transfer the project to other sites, a top down rather than bottom-up approach is used. In moving into an area, two conditions must be fulfilled. Firstly, the project must gain acceptance from people involved in local community groups (which in turn helps with the recruitment and selection of staff: secondly, the project must obtain a contract, in conditions of competitive tender, from the local housing office.

Possil Park Community Business is fairly unique in being one of the few community businesses in urban Scotland to function free from subsidy (see Hurley, 1991). A key test for the organisation in the next few years will be to set whether it can retain the label 'community' while keeping up the profit margins necessary to run a business. Illustrative of this difficulty, the move out of a Fossil based flat to new premises outside the area could mean that the business comes to be regarded as just another security firm. The manager of the project is aware of this and is concerned that the project does not grow too big.

In theory, Possil Park Community Business could expand into other Scottish cities, and then into England. However, the project takes the view that its most effective role would be to develop consultancy services as an offshoot of its activity, rather than creating additional management problems in trying to run projects elsewhere. To this end, the manager of the project is asked to assist groups in other places. At present the manager is a regular attendee at meetings in Middlesbrough, trying to help a local group create a community business on Possil lines. A key issue is the extent to which other projects possess leaders of the calibre that presently run Possil Park Community Business, since the staff and board appear to have been crucial in turning it into a thriving concern.

Crime changes

Recorded crime levels

Possil Park featured in a good practice guide published in 1989 (Institute of Housing and Royal Institute of British Architects, 1989), which claimed that there were crime reductions on the estate and that this was mainly due to the activities of the Possil Park Housing Co-operative established in 1987. The report noted that, in 1987, the police had recorded 426 crimes for the estate, including 117 burglaries, 13 serious assaults and 10 robberies: and that, following the introduction of the Housing Co-operative, recorded crime had fallen by 28% and burglaries by 64%. The report did not mention whether attempted burglaries were included in the figures. Vehicular crime rates went up, although the report does not say by how much.

The police were said to have attributed the fall in crime to the introduction of the Housing Co-operative and other initiatives such as the Possil Park Community Business, the police area liaison committee and the local crime prevention panel. However, the report highlighted the role of the Housing Co-operative: The principal *prevention* measure is the existence and activity of the Co-op, although only a small proportion of the houses have been improved ... Resident attitudes toward their homes have changed. We were told that former housebreakers (now turned to theft on a larger scale from commercial properties) were firm supporters of the Co-op. They did not want their own children to be brought up in an area where crime was rife.'

There are a number of difficulties with the figures and interpretations presented in the report. Firstly, the authors do not describe the precise period over which crime rates were said to have fallen. It is only possible to surmise that crime rates in 1987 were being compared with those in 1988. Secondly, only just over 10% of the dwellings on the estate are included in the Housing Co-operative's programme, and only about 3% had actually been improved by the time the report was prepared, and it seems over-optimistic to conclude that estate-wide crime reductions principally

resulted from this programme. Thirdly, and most problematic in terms of our own investigation, there was no indication in the report of the precise area the crime figures related to.

For the purposes of this case study, detailed crime statistics for the estate (and fora control area — Milton) were supplied by Strathclyde Police. Table 24 shows recorded crime incidents, broken down by offence category, for Possil Park from 1985 to 1990. According to the police, Possil Park includes four police beats (beats 15, 16, 18 and 19) and the table is based on combined figures for these four beats. A small part of another beat (22) is in Possil Park but this has been excluded from the analysts.

	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990
Serious assault	21	27	43	22	18	27
Petty assault	130	128	152	121	132	63
Robbery/Assault with intent	69	48	50	43	42	50
Housebreaking/Attempted housebreaking	526	540	475	298	459	525
Theft and attempted theft from lockfast places"	272	334	466	306	410	452
Theft of motor vehicle	149	125	123	105	104	167
Other theft (excl. shoplifting)	350	330	394	311	283	276
Reckless/wilful tire raising	25	32	15	20	26	38
Vandalism/malicious damage	252	238	188	165	242	313
Breach of the peace	368	293	257	213	232	211
Total	2192	2095	2163	1604	1928	2119

Includes shops and business premises
Mainly from motor vehicles

It is immediately apparent that the figures in Table 24 conflict with the figures provided by the earlier study. Our figures show five times the number of recorded crimes in 1987 and, even if crime categories are excluded *which* may not have been included in the earlier analysis (ie breach of the peace, attempted burglaries and non-residential burglaries), our total is at least three times as high.

However, in line with the earlier study, our figures do show a reduction in burglary between 1987 and 1988, although less dramatic — 37% rather than 64%— and a similar (25%) reduction in total recorded crimes. But, according to our figures, the reductions in 1988 were temporary and crime levels rose again to their 1987 levels during 1989 and 1990.

Recorded crime figures for a control area (Milton) show a different trend. Total recorded crime rose by 21% in 1987 (In contrast to the 26% fall in Possil Park) and motor vehicle crime rose by 61% (in contrast to the 30% fall in Possil Park).

The temporary drop in crime in 1988 is difficult to explain. It may have been that the establishment of a small scale housing co-operative did have a broader impact on the estate but, if so, it was not sustained for very long.

Housing statistics

The monitoring exercises carried out by Glasgow City Council's Housing Department provided details of the incidence of break-ins to voids on the estate and of the costs associated with making good the damage and theft involved. The monitoring exercises were carried out for the sole purpose of assessing the impact of the Community Security Business.

The study published in 1987 (Glasgow City Council, 1987) showed that there had been a dramatic reduction in 'serious' incidents of vandalism and theft associated with voids (ie where refurbishment was subsequently required) in the quarter of the estate covered by the Community Security Business. The number of dwellings damaged in this way fell from 35 in 1984/85 to only two in 1986, and the costs of refurbishment fell correspondingly from £62,000 to £5,000. The Community Security Business was established at the beginning of 1986.

The study published in 1990 (Glasgow City Council, 1990) did not provide details of break-ins to voids over time. It did note that 37 break-ins in progress had been prevented between June 1989 and May 1990 in that half of the estate covered by the study, through the direct intervention of

security guards: however, no indication was given of the total numbers of break-ins in this (or previous) 12 month period. The study made some other Judgements about break-ins prevented during the study period, but it was not possible to identify any trends.

Assessing the evidence

The Community Security Business aims to control break-ins to thefts from and vandalism to void dwellings — a narrowly defined goal. Recorded crime statistics for the estate were obtained for the period 1985-1990 and more limited information from a previously published case study. Information on the incidence and costs of crimes committed against void dwellings was obtained from the Housing Department.

Evidence of reduced crime problems

Previously published figures (Institute of Housing and Royal Institute of British Architects, 1989) suggest that the recorded crime rate fell after 1987 and burglary rates most dramatically (by 64%).

The figures we obtained for the estate for 1985-1990 raise questions about the validity of the earlier analysis but did confirm that the crime rate fell in 1988, that this applied to most crime categories and that this fall was in contrast to trends in the control area. However, the fall was rapidly reversed in subsequent years.

The Housing Department's monitoring of those parts of the estate which were covered by the Community Security Business indicated that damage to and theft from voids had reduced. The number of voids (two) requiring repair in 1987 was very much lower than the number (35) in 1984/5 and the costs of refurbishment involved were reduced by over 90%. This apparent reduction in damage to voids may have been reflected in the recorded crime figures — for example, numbers of incidents of vandalism and malicious damage fell by 25% between 1985 and 1987 (although they rose sharply again in 1989 and 1990). (No figures of this kind were gathered for subsequent years.)

Evidence of initiative's effect and effect of individual measures

It is difficult to associate the fall in crime in 1988 with any specific measure. It seems unlikely that the Housing Co-operative could have accounted for the fall, given the very limited scope of its activity. It may be that the impact of the Community Security Business on break-ins to voids contributed to overall reductions in burglary rates (void break-ins were counted as burglaries) and reductions in vandalism and malicious damage. The business covered about 25% of the estate in 1986 and gradually increased its coverage of the estate over the next four years. By the time the reductions had taken place the Community Security Business covered about half the estate.

The police have indicated that there has been some displacement from domestic to commercial burglaries in the Possil area in recent years, but it was not possible to distinguish between them in the figures provided.

Evidence of permanence

The Community Security Business has been established for five years and has been subject to two City Council monitoring exercises during this period. At both points (four years apart) it was judged by the City Council to have had a significant impact on void security and to be highly cost effective. The main issue appears to be not whether the business can continue to achieve this kind of success, but whether the business itself can survive given the high failure rate for community businesses.

Evidence of replica

One key to the success of the initiative maybe the bottom up approach involved in its development. This places a great deal of reliance on the motivation and skills of local residents. This may not always be present and the kind of support needed (and supplied in this case by Strathclyde Community Business) may not always be available. As previously noted, Possil Park Community Security Business has extended its activities to other estates, but is concerned about the possible reactions of local residents to outsiders setting up such initiatives and about being regarded as just another private security firm.

Another key issue is *whethersocial* goals can be reconciled with business goals. Apart from the strains this can place on the operation of a community business, there is the question of whether local authorities (or others) will always be prepared to pay the premium required to ensure that the business maintains reasonable wage rates for its employees, *even* though this may guarantee the delivery of a good service. The evidence seems to suggest that the success of Rosati Park Community Security Business in these respects may be exceptional.

Notwithstanding these reservations, it does appear that community businesses can provide cost-effective delivery mechanisms for security management on estates. The City Council's experience of private security firms had been that they did not deal with the problems they were contracted for. Although the monitoring exercises carried out by the City Council on the impact of the Community Security Business may have exaggerated the extent of net savings accrued and some of the calculations involved could be challenged, it seems fair to conclude that the costs of the contracts were at least matched by the savings which followed. The provision of a street warden type service within the contracts is an attractive additional bonus.

Postscript

Recorded crime began to fall again in 1991. Compared with 1990 (see Table 24), the total number of incidents (1724) in 1991 was 7% lower and the total number of incidents (1463) in 1992 was 21% lower. (These figures exclude 'breach of the peace', figures for which were not available after 1990.) The reductions in recorded crime were mainly attributable to housebreaking — down 14% in 1991 and down 32% in 1992, compared with 1990 — and vandalism is down 14% in 1991 and down 22% in 1992, compared with 1990. The Community Security Business continues to enjoy the enthusiastic support of the housing department.

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