

PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING COMPETITION

THE M.A.N.E.R.S. PROJECT

The Multi Agency Nuisance Eradication Scheme

" a partnership, problem solving initiative aimed at reducing repeat nuisance complaints "

BACKGROUND

Research has shown that roughly 25 % of a police officers time is spent on attending nuisance calls. On most occasions, the incident involves some sort of anti social behaviour by young people, usually in a group. The historical police remedy for dealing with such complaints has been to move the group on with a warning. The type of behaviour normally displayed by the group, is not regarded by the police as worthy of more assertive action, much to the frustration of the complainant whose quality of life has been disturbed, and expect the police to be more positive. And so the circle of complaint and police ineffectiveness goes on and on, causing a continual drain on limited resources. The objectives of the M.A.N.E.R.S. project are, to obtain intelligence on the people involved in nuisance, to identify hot spots where nuisance is likely to be repeated and who the main offenders will be, to take positive action against repeat offenders and to put in place diversionary schemes to educate and give young people an alternative to causing nuisance. The ultimate aim is to reduce the instance of repeat nuisance calls to the police, thereby improving the quality of life of members of the public and enabling the police to use their resources more effectively.

SCANNING

Nuisance is one heading of the Lancashire Constabulary incident class table which is divided into 9 parts ranging from suspicious incidents, to straying animals and incidents on bridges over motorways. Constant interrogation of nuisance complaints is carried out to help rationalise the extent of the problem. The particular category of nuisance which has been targeted for action is juvenile nuisance as this is the area where we can realistically achieve the objectives and aim which the M.A.N.E.R.S. project hopes to accomplish.

Nuisance problems are widespread amongst British police forces and also affect police agencies overseas, as evidenced by a request for information about the M.A.N.E.R.S. project from the police in Jerusalem, Israel. What the police have to get across is the message that nuisance is not entirely owned by the police alone to deal with. Nuisance has never been tackled effectively because historically, it has been given a low priority in policing plans or has not even been considered for inclusion. Many incidents of nuisance are not reported to the police as they have previously been seen as ineffective. Key Performance indicators have always leaned towards crime detection, as perceived effectiveness in this sphere is easy to evaluate, even though dealing with crime only accounts for 30 % of an officers workload

The public collectively, are relatively unconcerned about crime until it affects them on a personal level. Nuisance, however is high on their agenda of subjects which they expect their local police to prioritise and tackle. The majority of letters of complaint from the local Member of Parliament are about nuisance and most days there are articles in national and local newspapers highlighting the problem and demanding police action. A major baseline survey was carried out amongst the residents of Burnley by an independent agency in 1997 and high amongst the social concerns of those people surveyed was, " *teenagers, hanging around and gangs of young people* ". Nearly a third of all respondents were, " very concerned " about this issue.

The Lancashire Constabulary recognised the need to take action and instigated a force objective, " *To reduce the number of general nuisance incidents which require repeated police action* ".

Divisions were expected to tackle the issue in their own way and no force targets were set, however in Burnley a target of reducing repeat nuisance calls by 5% was demanded and officers of the Community Support department were set up as plan managers.

Since the project was initiated, many forces in England and Wales, some Scottish and the Channel Islands police have asked for details and presentations have been given to councillors, youth workers and other police officers from various forces.

ANALYSIS

Nuisance behaviour was analysed following the model and framework provided by the problem analysis triangle.

FEATURES OF THE OFFENDERS

The first stage was to look at the features of the offenders, namely the young people. When one is asked to describe the phenomenon of a "gang", the picture which usually evolves is of a group of young males, yet surprisingly many young girls are involved and in some locations, provide the attraction for the boys and are the reason behind why they are likely to gather in areas where they are not resident. Indeed many boys are prepared to travel considerable distances in order to congregate with females of the same age. The police had scant information about individuals, but by consulting youth and outreach workers and officers who have attended complaints, a profile began to emerge which showed that there was about a 50 / 50 boy girl composition of the groups and the main ages ranged from about 10 to 18 years of age. There are usually at least 2 older leaders of the group and most of the members attend the same school. They tend to shy away from the organised activities provided by youth clubs and associated organisations.

Most of the young people have not been in trouble with the authorities before. It has become apparent that some of the parents of the young people are totally unaware of what they get up to. Because of the travelling involved to get to the location, in some cases the problems caused by the gang subside after last buses have left the area.

Quite a few of the young people are able to drive and have access to cars and other vehicles. The boys tend to show off their perceived driving skills to the girls, usually in urban areas on well used roads and this is another source of complaint from the public.

Alcohol is openly consumed by members of the group and some of those drinking it are clearly under age and a lot of them smoke as well. In the majority of locations, there has been no legislation to control the consumption of alcohol by people who are under age and this has been another source of frustration for the public. When the police have confronted the group about drinking in public they have been impotent due to a lack of powers to deal with the problem. Recent legislation will help confront this situation in the future. Alcohol is normally obtained by older members making purchases in off licences and then passing the drinks on to younger individuals within the group.

Young people tend to congregate in areas which afford some sort of protection from the elements. Shop doorways are ideal and indeed areas around shops tend to be attractive due to the ability to purchase cigarettes, alcohol and sweets or food. There is normally a source of light and there is frequent use of the location by the general public. Unfortunately these locations tend to be close to residential property.

FEATURES OF THE LOCATION

As discussed previously, young people tend to congregate in areas close to shops and food centres. Bus and train shelters are another magnet because of the protection they provide from the elements. The size of some of the groups can be intimidating for those people, especially the elderly who want to visit shops. People have a preconceived idea that the group is causing or will cause damage, assaults or other problems, even though the young people may not be doing anything to fuel that belief other than their mere presence. The public have a real fear that a large group is out to create trouble and the young people cannot understand why people feel threatened, because in their eyes they are doing nothing wrong. The gangs also tend to meet in parks with play facilities which are intended for use by young children. Parents become reluctant to allow their children to play in the park for fear of the usually mistaken belief that they may come into contact with broken bottles, syringe needles and used condoms, even though in the majority of cases these items are not present. The areas in parks where the gang meets, tend to be either unlit or have poor lighting adding fuel to the conception of a menacing, threatening gang. Local authorities provide recreational facilities for children up to the age of 12, normally in the form of play areas in public parks and then usually legislate to prevent older children from using the area, normally in the form of a local bye law.

When the groups meet in these play areas, the public invariably complain to the police and officers are dispatched to deal with the problem even though the young people may not be doing anything to warrant enforcement or disruption action by the police.

What recreational and social facilities are provided by local authorities for the 12 to 18 age group ? The sony answer is, not many. There are occasional youth clubs and similar organised activities but that is not what the young people want. They do not want to make kites or draw pictures. Our studies have shown that what they want is a place to meet away from locations where complaints are likely to arise, that has lighting and is safe from attack by rival groups. It should provide some sort of protection from the weather and they should be unsupervised to let them do their own thing.

FEATURES OF THE VICTIMS

The public have an expectation that when they call on the police with a complaint or for help, that they will be visited by a police officer who will do everything possible to help them. This belief is historical because that is what used to happen in the days before crime desks, help desks and value for money policing. It comes as a shock then to the member of the public, when they see police cars driving past the gang of youths without stopping to deal with the problems they are causing or when they are told bluntly, "*Your complaint is a low priority. We 'll get someone there when we can* " and sometimes no one turns up at all. There are real public education issues involved when it comes to our levels of service delivery and the expectations of the public. It is a sorry situation where a citizen can have a shed or vehicle broken into and receive no physical contact from the police but if that same victim were to make a complaint about a neighbours young children playing football in the street a police officer will turn up to deal with the complaint.

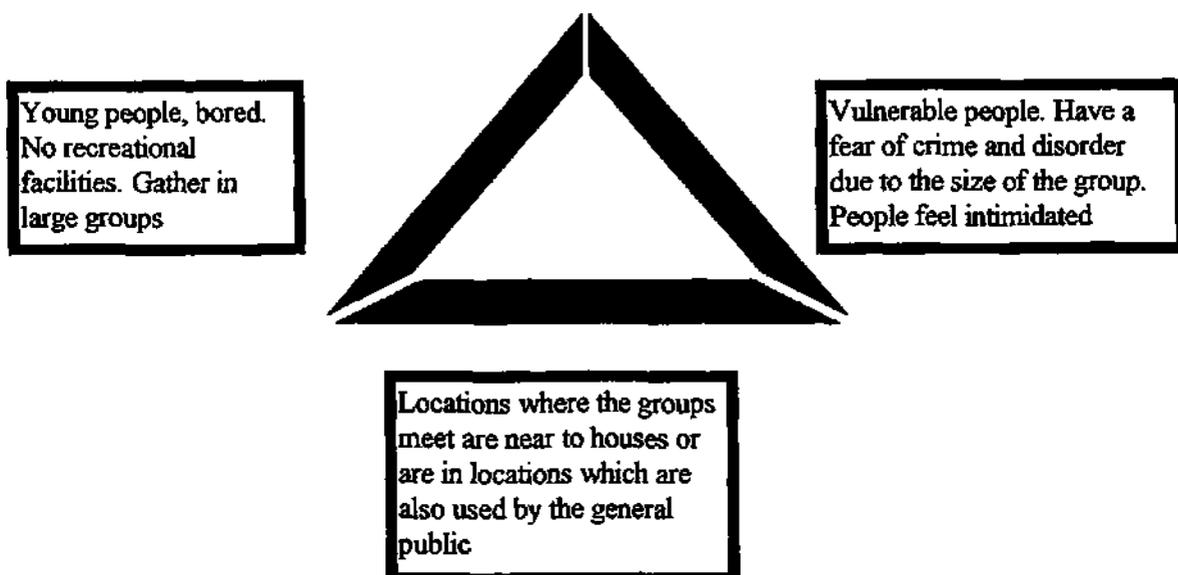
When the police attend public meetings, the complaints of ineffectiveness against the service usually revolve around quality of life issues such as dogs fouling footpaths, children playing football or people cycling on pavements. It is very rare for complaints to be based on crime or the fear of crime.

Victims of anti social behaviour all possess an element of vulnerability and if that did not exist then their tolerance of the behaviour of the young people would undoubtedly disappear. Some people are vulnerable because they are elderly, or live alone are perceived as being weak by the bullies who prey on them. These are people of either sex. One woman was vulnerable because her husband worked shifts and was not at home when the youths were gathering outside her house. It is not only the elderly or middle aged who are prone to complain about the behaviour of the gang. Young men and woman who have their motor vehicles parked outside their houses are vulnerable because of the belief that their cars will be damaged by the youths even though they may not be the case.

Surprisingly, there is a high level of tolerance to nuisance amongst the Asian communities. The children spend most of their day at school, then afterwards up to another two hours at the mosque.

After about 7 p.m. the children let their hair down and there can be many hundreds congregating and playing outside in a relatively small number of streets. The parents and neighbours are remarkably tolerant of the behaviour and if any problems arise they are dealt with by elders within the community. It is very rare for the police to receive complaints about anti social behaviour by young people from the Asian community

SUMMARY OF THE SITUATION



RESPONSE

It is obvious that the manner in which the police have chosen to deal with repeat nuisance in the past has been both short term and ineffective. The problems still exist and will continue to be a serious drain on police resources unless a more coordinated approach is taken and other agencies realise that they also have a big part to play in tackling anti social behaviour. It is not possible to eradicate the problem completely, however an integrated approach by the police and their partners can reduce nuisance complaints substantially.

The scene has now been set for the implementation of the M.A.N.E.R-S. project. A partnership approach to tackling repeat nuisance involving many outside agencies and partners as well as some internal departments within the police force. The components of the scheme are continually changing but here are a few of the current initiatives which are being used to tackle repeat nuisance.

NUISANCE REGISTER

This is probably the most important tool which can be utilised in the battle to combat repeat nuisance calls. How many times do officers attend incidents where they move groups of youths on only for a different officer to do the same thing on the next occasion. The problem continues and there is no intelligence as to who are the ringleaders or main people involved. Here at Burnley, if an officer attends such an incident, then he or she obtains names addresses, dates of birth etc. and they are fed back to the POP PCs for inputting on a nuisance database.

If the same name appears twice then the parents of the youth involved will receive a standard letter from the Superintendent telling them that the police have had to speak to their child and warning them of the consequences should similar behaviour be witnessed in the future. When a parent receives such a letter that is usually enough to stop the behaviour from the young person as most parents honestly do not know what their children get up to and are shocked to think that they have been involved with the police. The computer system which we use shows us repeat offenders, hot spots and the top ten nuisance targets for the division. Details of these top ten are made available to all uniform officers in order that they may take more punitive action if a future nuisance occurs. At the same time the community officers are given details of all those people who live in their area who have transgressed more than twice. It is then up to the community officer to decide what course of action to take next. It could mean a visit to the youth in the presence of parents or using the previous incidents as evidence it could mean that the officer will report the youth for an offence and legal proceeding would follow.

CAMCORDER CAMPAIGN

This initiative was introduced after we were able to get funding for two camcorders. Posters were designed and they were displayed all over the town telling adults about the campaign and asking them if they know what their children are doing or where they are. Basically, we hire inconspicuous vehicles, usually old vans and use them as a base for an officer inside to film the behaviour of individuals or groups. When nuisance behaviour is captured on film, then a uniform member or members of the team will be directed to the individuals) and details will be taken. The youth will then be taken home and they and their parents will be shown the film on their own TV in their own home. We do not prosecute for any offences unless it is absolutely necessary. The parents are given a copy of a letter from the Superintendent telling them about the other things we could be dealing with if we didn't have to tackle the problems being caused by their child. At the same time they are given leaflets on alcohol abuse if alcohol consumption was evident. Details are then put on the nuisance register.

SPECIAL CONSTABULARY

The Specials are the ones who have been given responsibility for tackling repeat nuisance. They have their own marked car which has been provided by a partnership organisation and are directed towards preventative patrol as well as targeting problem areas. They use the camcorders and have also been used to target off licences selling alcohol to youngsters. The majority of nuisance register forms are submitted by special constables.

SHELTER INITIATIVE

In one area of Burnley we were experiencing many repeat calls about a gang of youths who congregated in a residential area causing problems on a nightly basis. On one occasion 13 of them were arrested. We asked them why they were congregating and they told us that all they wanted was a safe, dry place to meet without interference from adults. Accordingly, we next asked them to design a structure for themselves which they did using the services of the borough architect. Funding was sought from a variety of sources and eventually the youth shelter which they had designed was built and has been in regular use since. The partnership has given them a place to congregate lawfully with the blessing of the local community. This initiative has attracted national and international interest and has been shortlisted for a top award. Further shelters will be built at other locations in the town in the future.

DRUNKENNESS

If this aspect of social behaviour can be targetted effectively it will have a knock on effect on repeat nuisance calls. The majority of calls are about drunken, under age youths or groups of teenagers sitting around drinking in public. Through the newspaper column which we write each week, we ask for details of those off licences who are selling alcohol to children and then we keep observations. We invariably catch the shopkeeper selling to youngsters and then use the children as witnesses in the prosecution case. Recently, 10 off licences have been caught selling alcohol to children and 3 have been prosecuted.

We also promote the use of the Proof of Age cards by the holders of justices off licences. Prior to instigating this part of the initiative we write to all the off licences informing them of our intentions and warning them of the consequences of selling alcohol to children

PUBLICITY

This is a very important aspect of the strategy. All the public reads and hears about in the newspapers is the negative side of policing e.g. burglaries rise, youths causing problems and the police are doing nothing etc. We have to sell ourselves as an organisation and tell people about all the good work which is being carried out by their local police force. Tell them about the things which they can expect the police to deal with and more importantly, about those the things that are not our problem but which we are invariably called upon to tackle, e.g. street lights out, dogs barking etc. At the same time, give advice about who the public can contact to deal with those problems. We write a weekly column called THE BOROUGH BEAT in the local newspaper and in it we try and keep the public informed about the problems we are trying to tackle and the areas we are going to target. We also ask parents to keep their children away from certain areas where operations are planned and also use it to ask for help and assistance especially in returning found or stolen property to its rightful owners..

RO.B.O.T.

Stands for, The Relief of Boredom Of Teenagers and it is an ex ambulance which has been refurbished as a mobile drop in centre for teenagers. It is staffed by dedicated youth workers and will go to an area which is experiencing nuisance problems. The police provide the youth workers with a weekly list of the nuisance hot spots and targets. They give the young people advice on a variety of subjects including alcohol and drug abuse as well as offering them hot drinks, music and a break from the monotony of inactivity due to a lack of local resources for young people. The project is applying for charity status. The police were involved in the initial setting up of the project and obtaining funding.

Basically what it does is move the group away from the area where they are causing problems to a sterile location where they can gather without causing complaint.

S.P.L-A.S.H.

Stands for Sports and Leisure Activities in the Summer Holidays. It is an annual event whereby local organisations, businesses and groups provide funding, volunteers and resources for young people in Burnley to undertake sporting and leisure activities for a three week period during the summer when they would normally be off school and prone to congregate in groups due to boredom. The scheme is always heavily oversubscribed and is extremely popular. As a diversion from nuisance, it is an excellent scheme. We collate and compile a brochure of events as our commitment to the project

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE

Many officers do not know what the organisation expects of them when they are confronted with certain circumstances and each officer may approach a situation in a different manner. Some may feel that they have dealt with the situation quite properly whereas other officers or more importantly the community, may feel that it could have been dealt with in a better or more effective manner. We have tried to introduce a level of uniformity when dealing with nuisance and to that end have produced a handbook where we tell the officers what is expected of them when they deal with such incidents.

TRUANCY

In association with the local educational welfare officers, the community department does plain clothes trawls of the town centre and the housing estates in an effort to locate truants. Details of suspected truants are taken and dealt with by the EWO at a later date. No one is detained or returned to school. All we do is get the details from the children and pass them on for further action by the Education Department.

GRAFFITI

Is removed by offenders undergoing community service orders as a result of court convictions. We provided them with funding for a special machine to remove graffiti and all we do now is contact them and direct them to a location for treatment.

SAFER ESTATES AGREEMENT

This has been drawn up in liaison with the local authority and under its auspices we will release details of convictions or incidents involving council tenants where anti social activity has been displayed with a view to eviction proceedings taking place. It forces council tenants to keep their unruly children in order or risk losing their home and becoming intentionally homeless. 5 families are facing action for eviction as a result of the community department disclosing information. We prioritise five cases for action and concentrate on those cases until one is finalised and replaced by another. Monthly meetings are held with the legal department of the borough council to ensure uniformity and that the cases are proceeding in the correct manner.

MOBILE POLICE STATION

The latest addition to the plan has seen us taking a mobile police station with community officers out into those areas of the town where nuisance problems have been experienced. The station is staffed by community officers, traffic wardens, crime prevention-officers and people from other organisations such as the Benefits Agency. The officers carry out uniform foot patrol duties in specific beats and revisit victims of unsolved domestic burglaries as well as the vulnerable elderly. The intention is to provide reassurance, collect further intelligence and go some way to restoring public confidence in the police.

GANG-BUSTER

An officer will be working with the youth services during the summer months with the intention of disrupting loutish behaviour, gathering intelligence on group members and diverting them away from anti social conduct by using some of the component parts of M.A.N.E.R.S such as the shelter, R.O.B.O.T. and S.P.L.A.S.H.

ALLEY GATES

In certain areas of Burnley, we have been able to seal off the alleyway which runs between rows of terraced houses by using locked gates in order that the only persons with access to those areas are the residents and essential services. The aim is to prevent the opportunity to commit crime or disorder by persons who are not resident in the houses.

ASSESSMENT

When the project was initially tried out in Burnley in its first year 1996 / 97, the intention was to reduce repeat nuisance calls by 5 %, the actual figure achieved was a 26 % reduction. During 1997 / 98 there has been a further 6 % drop in repeat nuisance calls thereby allowing officers more time to deal with other matters.

The Harle Syke area of Burnley was where we built the youth shelter and prior to its erection, this was the scene of major nuisance and disorder caused by a group of young people. Since the shelter was opened, there has been a 29 % reduction in nuisance on that police beat and a 50 % drop in nuisance on the surrounding streets. Vandalism costs in play parks in the areas surrounding the shelter have fallen from £ 595. 50p to £ 76.90p since it has been open, a cost reduction of 87 %

As you can see, here at Burnley we realised at an early stage that nuisance is not just a police problem. Many different agencies have responsibilities for dealing with nuisance and through a multi agency and partnership approach we believe that we have shifted some of the burden away from the police towards others who can tackle it more effectively. M.A.N.E.R.S. has given officers the ability to utilise one or more of its problem solving components to effectively tackle nuisance and their effects.

James Masterman

