

Northfields Project



WE HAVE LIFT-OFF: Police, council officials and local residents' leaders join forces to show their determination when the Northfields Project was launched back in April 1997 15a-41914

Project brings peace back to city estate



CAMPAIGNER: Insp Jim Doneghy on the estate

NORTHFIELDS PROJECT

The Northfields Project was launched in response to what had been the problems of a traditional high crime area of Leicester.

The area known locally as Northfields is in fact three local Authority owned estates, there being Northfields itself, Morton Estate and Tailby Estate. Adjacent to these areas are two small areas of owner-occupied property and a small Industrial Estate. The whole of which comprises Police beats E10 and E11.

Whilst these beats make up a small area of the Policing Unit as a whole they were responsible for 30% of the total crime on the Unit.

The offenders and victims were often neighbours. The Area had low esteem and saw itself as forgotten.

Other agencies had similar problems. The Housing Department, despite the fact that the housing stock was good, had difficulty in letting these properties. New tenants were often targeted and were driven out by harassment or by being subjected to repeated criminal acts. Bullying was rife in the area.

So what were we to do.

We decided to adopt a problem-solving approach to the concerns of the community.

We hoped by tackling some of the underlying issues of the area in partnership with

other agencies to reduce crime by 30% in comparison with the preceding two years. We also hoped that by doing so we could improve the quality of life for the residents.

To have a real impact on the causes it was necessary to allow sufficient time for sustained action. It was determined that the Project would run for 2 years from 1st April 1997 until 31st March 1999.

After the initial stages of identifying partners, gelling as a team, enthusing each other and identifying action, a number of initiatives were introduced with the holistic approach to tackle issues which affected the quality of life for the residents. Inevitably some of these were short term initiatives but the thrust has been to deliver long term solutions. A vital element of the project was the active involvement of the community members themselves.

The impact of the Project has been dramatic. Crime has reduced by 31.8% with some categories of crime being reduced by a greater amount. The plague of some communities, incidents of disorder, has shown a very real decrease and the often hidden crime of domestic violence has been tackled with revictimisation rates declining. The Local Authority Housing Department are delighted with the take up for lettings on the estate and the fact that tenants are now staying.

The Project has drawn praise from both the Home Secretary and the Prime Minister declaring the achievements as an example of excellent partnership working.

There is still work to do but a real, and I believe, substantial start has been made.

SCANNING

The area known as Northfields in fact comprises of three Local Authority owned Council Estates, Northfields itself, Morton Estate and Tail by Estate. Adjacent to the estates are two small areas of owner-occupied properties. The total number of houses in the area is 3304. Close by there is also a small light industrial estate. The whole area comprises Police Beats E10 and E11.

The area was, and had been for a number of years, seen as a high crime "problem" area. The amount of crime on these two police beats was totally out of proportion to their size, Northfields accounting for a third of all crime on the Local Policing Unit.

But it was not only recordable crime that was the problem, anti-social behaviour was rife and hostility to both the police and other agencies an everyday occurrence. The public perception was that the police were frightened to go on to the estate and whilst there is no evidence to suggest this was true I do believe officers avoided the area unless detailed to respond to an incident.

The demands on the police far outweighed resources available. We were responding to the same type of incident daily - never seeking to reduce them and if the truth was known, dealing successfully with very few. The approach could be described as reactive or fire-fighting.

A trip around the Area showed that the police were not the only agency with problems. The Local Authority housing stock was of good quality, 2/3 bedroom houses, front and rear gardens, double-glazing and central heating, good homes for the asking.

The reality however was that no-one wanted to live there. Large blocks of houses and certain streets had become almost derelict (Appendix A). New tenants were hard to find and when they did move in they would often leave very quickly, sometimes within 24 hours. This situation was nothing new. Newspaper cuttings going back over 30 years describe Northfields as "The worst area of Leicester".

It was felt, after the initial scanning of the problems of the area, that short term, single initiatives would not have a significant impact. There was a need to "bite the bullet" and look at the whole range of problems faced by the community. It was also clear that the police working on their own could achieve little. There was a need to work with others in partnership to develop co-ordinated, effective actions.

ANALYSIS

So what were the problems

Police crime data was examined to identify crime issues. The total number of response crimes on Hamilton Local Policing Unit was about 6000 per annum. In the year April 1996 to March 1997 Beats E10 and E11 accounted for 1,903, almost a third. This was totally out of proportion to their size, bearing in mind that the Policing Unit contains 4 other Local Authority estates, all of which are larger than Northfields.

In particular the offence of burglary in people's homes was a major problem. The following figures detail dwelling house burglaries for the two years preceding the commencement of the project:-

| | |
|-------------------------|-----|
| April 1995 - March 1996 | 434 |
| April 1996-March 1997 | 397 |

These figures represent a burglary rate (per 1,000 households) of 131, and 120 respectively. This is in comparison to a national rate of 27 per 1000 households. If you lived in Northfield you were four times more likely to have your house broken into.

Other categories of crime showed a similar picture.

In the years 1992-96 crime nationally in England and Wales was reduced by 10%. In Leicester the crime reduction was lower but again it showed crime during this period reduced by 4%.

Crime on the Northfields bucked this trend. In 1995 the area experienced a 27% increase compared to 1994 and a further 10% in 1996 compared to 1995. Overall between 1992-96 crime on the estate increased by 20%.

There was a similar picture with disorder incidents. Although exact figures are not available for the period 1995 to 1997 in July 1996 disorder on the estate was a nightly occurrence. Large groups of youths roamed the estate committing criminal offences, often terrifying residents.

Further research with Leicester City Council presented a similar picture.

As stated earlier the housing stock on Northfields was good. However, due to the problems on the area the letting of the properties was difficult. The average time for letting a house on the estate was about 3 months, although empty properties in certain streets where the problems were more acute took considerably longer to let, if in fact they ever were. Empty boarded up houses, graffiti scrawled on walls, and fences broken down was a poor advent for the area and depressing for residents.

This in turn brought its own problems. Although ordinary families did not want to live there certain people, i.e. criminals, did. The Council, rather than leave houses empty would let them to anyone. This resulted in drug dealers and other criminals taking up the tenancies and living in an area in which they felt comfortable and confident to continue unhindered their unlawful activities. This was a major contributory factor to the downward spiral of the Area.

Research also showed that if tenancies were taken up supporting new residents was extremely difficult. Research showed 63% of new residents left within the first 12 months of their tenancy unable to stand the pressures any longer.

Further research with the Council assisted us to obtain a more detailed profile of the estate.

This information showed a quarter of the population consisted of children between 0-14 years and a further 25% consisted of people aged between 15-29 years. Single parent households represented 9% of all households.

Using this information together with personal experiences from officers policing the estate we believed we gave confidence that the key elements which contributed to a poor quality of life for the residents of the Northfields Estate had been identified.

RESPONSE

So what were we going to do?

Firstly the community were informed of police intentions. A series of public meetings and "Road Shows" were held in the area to clearly state the hope of achieving a 30% reduction in crime and seeking the help and support of the residents.

Similar meetings were held with possible partners to seek their commitment and help. The aim was to show that by sharing information and working together a great deal could be achieved.

From these meetings came the West Humberstone Community Forum, a group of residents and agencies working together to identify not only problems but possible solutions. The three key areas the group tried to address were

Crime and Disorder

Health Issues

Young Persons

The group included representatives from Police, Social Services, employment programmes, Churches, Schools, Health Centres, Housing Department as well as residents. The Forum formed a strategy group dedicated to the improvement of the Area and the attraction of funding and resources.

From a policing perspective there were several areas we had to address as priorities. Firstly there was a need to raise the profile of the police on the Estate (Appendix B). The level of dedicated foot patrol officers was increased from two to four. Officers were carefully selected from across the policing area with specific skills. It was

recognised that the work they would be asked to do would not be everyone's "cup of tea".

A firm stance was adopted on enforcement, realising that there was a need to recover lost ground. The police approach became very much information and intelligence lead. Key criminals on the Estate were targetted. The number of search warrants executed on the search for drugs and stolen property increased dramatically.

The help of the courts was sought to remand people in custody if grounds for doing so existed. Strict conditions were obtained i.e. curfew, restrictions if criminals were granted bail. These conditions were rigorously enforced.

Several high profile operations were launched which involved arresting and stop checking campaigns, targeting key offenders but equally showing the good people, the majority, that the police were there.

Harassment and bullying was another key problem to grasp. This was one of the major destabilising effects on the Estate, the reason people refused tenancies, and when they did move in why they moved out very quickly.

All incidents were reviewed on a daily basis - no incident was too small to bother about.

There was close working with the local Council undertaking joint investigations with local housing officers meeting residents often away from the Estate to discuss the situation they found themselves in.

There was an increase in the use of covert technical equipment such as cameras to obtain evidence.

The Council showed a strong commitment with police support and employed professional witnesses to live on the Estate in key areas to gain evidence in order to pursue prosecutions when tenants were too frightened to report incidents.

There was a close working relationship with the legal department of the Council. Police helped re-write the Conditions of Tenancy for Council residents tightening up sections on criminal and anti-social behaviour. If these were breached information would be shared between agencies and disorderly tenants taken before the Civil Court to seek an injunction to restrain their behaviour or in extreme cases seeking repossession of their homes.

It was recognised at an early stage that the letting of empty property was a key problem on the Estate but that to let them to criminals or drug dealers was self-defeating.

A system was devised where prospective tenants applying for houses in the area were required to sign a consent form for the police to disclose their previous convictions to the Council.

This was put into action and information on convictions for the past 3 years was released under strict protocols. The fact that someone had convictions did not automatically exclude them but if that conviction related to a specific offence likely to cause concern or annoyance to the neighbours i.e. supplying drugs, handling stolen property etc. they would be refused a house (Appendix C).

Likewise the partnership worked to attract new tenants with a positive advertising campaign specifically aimed at people in private rented accommodation - highlighting the good houses and benefits of the area in order to attract them to become residents (Appendix D).

The Housing Department also employed specialist officers to support existing tenants to identify and address problems in the early stages rather than when they became major incidents.

The police worked with the Council to address some of the causes of crime on the Estate. Burglary in people's homes was a major problem. The burglary rate being four times the national average. Research showed most burglaries were via rear gardens particularly from empty properties. An initiative was undertaken to provide stronger fencing for the rear of houses together with stronger alley gates. The installation of security lighting was also arranged at the rear of the houses which were most vulnerable.

Funding has also been awarded for the setting up of a task force. Four local long-term unemployed people have been recruited and trained. They patrol the Estate undertaking minor external repairs to fencing, walls or pavements. They remove quickly any dumped rubbish dealing with it at an early stage before it becomes a problem. They also act as a reporting mechanism for the local Housing Department. It is hoped this initiative will continue to significantly improve the appearance of the Estate.

The community itself approached the Council to install CCTV on the Estate and there are now 5 cameras providing a watching eye over the residents.

Consultation with the community was a vital feature asking what their priorities were. The local Residents and Tenants Association, with police support, surveyed every house in the area, asking what their problems were, what changes they saw as important etc. This information has proved invaluable not only in understanding the communities served but in bidding for resources to achieve the goals of the Project.

As stated earlier, disorder on the Estate was almost a nightly occurrence. To tackle this the "Northfield Football Scheme" was launched. This was run by two local officers. It ran every day throughout the school summer holiday (July - August) to give the young people an alternative to hanging around. It took place during the day for children up to 12 years and in the evening for older youths and in fact men up to 25 years old regularly attended. Outside the holiday it ran for 3 nights per week (Appendix E). This initiative continues.

The project is supported by the local professional football club and local stores provide refreshments. The youths have been on trips to professional football clubs such as Manchester United and Aston Villa and a small group went on a football tour to Scotland.

The results of the project have been amazing, the attitude to the police has changed dramatically from negative to positive. The young people have been shown there is life off the Estate and that they can achieve success.

But disorderly youths are not the only young people on the Estate. As has been seen there was a significant number of young children on the area. Working closely with the local Health Centre a local Mother and Toddler Group was set up and is run from a police and community house situated in the heart of the area. Courses were also arranged to provide support and advice for parents having difficulties with children whether it is a baby that won't settle or a difficult teenager.

Domestic violence was another crime which had an unsettling effect on the Estate. Again close work with the local Health Centre, Tenant Association and Housing Office ensured their staff recognised the problem of violence in relationship and understood what to do if they came across this type of situation. Local officers endeavoured to ensure that if an incident was reported a local domestic violence officer would attend and speak to the victim within 24 hours. It was understood that by taking this course of action there was liable to be an increase in the number of recorded incidents but this was acceptable as the number of reports of re-victimisation could be reduced. We hoped to tackle the problem at an early stage by addressing some of the underlying issues and offering support to victims, and if necessary perpetrating endeavours to prevent it happening again.

Throughout the course of the Project a high profile media approach was developed. {Appendix F} Each initiative and development has received publicity, not only to spread word of what was being done but also to let the community of Northfields know that things had changed, that they were no longer a forgotten area but a place where positive things happened (Appendix G).

ASSESSMENT

But has it worked?

Obviously one of the main aims was to reduce recorded crime by 30% for police beats E10 and E11 during the course of the project in comparison with the preceding two years. Crime at the conclusion of the project showed a reduction of 31.8%. Some categories showed greater reductions.

| | 1995-99 | | | 2 year Totals | | | % |
|------------------------------|---------|-------|-------|---------------|-------|-------|--------|
| | 95/96 | 96/97 | 97/98 | 98/99 | 95/97 | 97/98 | |
| Dwelling House Burglary | 405 | 368 | 270 | 137 | 773 | 407 | -47% |
| Burglary Other Than Dwelling | 279 | 271 | 163 | 144 | 550 | 304 | -44% |
| Theft from Motor Vehicle | 216 | 260 | 141 | 171 | 476 | 315 | -33% |
| Theft of Motor Vehicle | 102 | 99 | 91 | 87 | 201 | 178 | -11% |
| AH Crime | 1944 | 1903 | 1452 | 1170 | 3847 | 2622 | -31.8% |

These figures are reflected in the overall burglary rate (per 1000 households) for the Area over the past 4 years.

Burglaries in people's homes (per 1000 households)

| 95/96 | 96/97 | 97/98 | 98/99 |
|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| 131 | 120 | 82 | 44 |

In relation to incidents of disorder due to a change in the technology figures for incidents for the period 1995-1997 are not available, although as stated earlier fairly major disorder was almost a nightly occurrence. What can demonstrate is that research of the Leicestershire Constabulary Insight system for the corresponding periods shows a significant decline. Research also showed that there was no evidence of displacement to other areas.

For the period 1st November 1997 to 27th March 1998 and the period 1st November 1998 to 27th March 1999 incidents of disorder show a decrease of 41 %.

| | 1.11.97 27.3.98 | 1.11.98 27.3.99 | % |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------|
| Incidents of Disorder (Insight) | 92 | 54 | - 41 % |

It is worth pointing out as well that the type of incidents the police now receive are on a much smaller scale than those received previously.

Domestic violence was also a crucial area to impact upon.

The Project was launched on the 1st June 1998 and a comparison undertaken of its first 6 months until 30th November 1998 comparing it with the same period of 1997,

Statistics showed an increase in reported offences. This was expected, and indeed hoped for, but a significant reduction of repeat victims was also achieved..

| | Incidents Reported | Repeat Victims During Period |
|------|--------------------|------------------------------|
| 1997 | 81 | 19 |
| 1998 | 95 | 4 |

There are only small numbers taken over a short period and although there is no claim to have solved the problem there has been a commitment to study difficult issues tackle them. There is still some way to go in this area.

Research from Leicester City Council shows similar improvements.

It shows that prior to the commencement of the project 63% of new tenants moved out of the area in the first year of their tenancy and this has now been reduced to 19%. Not perfect but a vast improvement.

The fact that people now stay provides stability and a sense of belonging for the Estate (Appendix H). The residents are becoming more of a community.

However, it wasn't all plain sailing!

Key people in the Project on the policing front were prone to being abstracted. Effort was put into minimising this problem but never fully resolved.

There was also a certain amount of friction between other partners particularly local residents who would, on occasions, view certain agencies as professional meddlers - again a situation which needed delicate handling.

From my own view, I felt whilst accepting that the Project needed a champion it was too police lead and I personally may have taken too much of a leading role.

The mix of agencies contacted at the beginning proved problematic with some mistakes made. Some were invited who were not needed and others missed, who later proved vital in the success of the Project.

Some agencies sent delegates to meetings who did not have the "clout" to make decisions.

Technology to assist in the Project was being developed as the Project progressed and the "Insight" system which was launched half way through would have been invaluable at the outset to assist in the identification of problems.

The Northfields is still not the perfect place to live, some problems still exist. However, the perception of residents has changed greatly. There is more confidence amongst them, they realise that they can make a difference. There has been a real empowerment. They have become a community.

The agencies and organisations have learnt that to make a real impact they need to work together in the spirit of partnership.

The 2 year Project has proved to be the catalyst for change. Inevitably there is still much to do. Working in partnership and adopting a problem solving approach as seen on the Northfields will now be expanded to the work throughout the East Area of the Leicestershire Constabulary.

AGENCY AND OFFICER INFORMATION

The Northfields Project is fully supported by the East Area Senior Management Team and the Project and its aims form part of the Area Business Plan agreed by the Chief Constable.

At the commencement of the Project the officers involved were

Inspector Jim Donaghy

PS Neil Hancock

PC Alex Walmsley

PC Kim Potter

PC Clive Jones

PC Mark Hayes

However, after the first year PC's Walmsley, Potter and Jones took up new roles in the organisation and were replaced by

PC Ian Wardle

PC Andy Cree

PC John Kennedy

Although these officers were the key personnel involved in the Project all officers at Hamilton Local Policing Unit were briefed in the aims of the initiative and recognised it as a priority.

All the beat officers involved in the Project received training in both the concept and application of Problem Orientated Policing from professor Nick Tilley of Nottingham Trent University.

The East Area as a whole piloted POP's for the Leicestershire Constabulary assisted by Andrew Leigh and Tim Read of the Crime Reduction Group based at The Home Office in London.

In its early stages the Project was supported by a computer package developed by PS Paul King which enabled officers to identify "Hot Spots" (clusters of incidents) which resulted in a police response.

A new system "Insight" has now been developed and is in use. Insight is linked directly with our command and control system and there is little doubt this tool is of major assistance to the officers in identifying problems. If this system had been in place at the commencement of the Project it would have been invaluable in the identification and analysis of problems.

The only extra funding by the police was £3000 per year to assist in various initiatives we were undertaking.

The rest came from the redistribution of our resources but fell within our existing budgets.

The CCTV system cost £75,000 and was paid for by the local Council. The upgrade of fencing and security lighting coming from funds held by the Council.

These costs have now been fully recouped by the increase of receipts from rented properties which were previously unoccupied.

Key personnel in the Leicester City Council who worked on the Project are:-

| | |
|---------------|----------------------------|
| Mike Forester | Director of Housing |
| Pat Hobbs | Deputy Director of Housing |
| Andy Keeling |) |
| Nev Senior |) Housing Department |
| Vijay Dajour |) |
| Ian Stapleton |) |
| Faizel Hajat | Legal Services |

The Tenants and Residents Association also offered unqualified support and advice. I would particularly thank:-

Diane Cank

Sharron Rossington

Carole Simpson

Terry Herbert

Adrian Waite

Without these people and their links to the community a project of this type I feel lacks credibility.

As I have said earlier we would never claim Northfields is perfect but we have demonstrated that by showing determination and a commitment to work together we can achieve long-term success which I believe is sustainable.