

Title of the project: **THE CLARENCES FOCUS GROUP**

Name of force/agency/CDRP/CSP: **CLEVELAND POLICE**

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## Summary of application

Billingham South Electoral Ward is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in the Tees Valley area in terms of the deprivation index. The Clarences, comprising High Clarence and Port Clarence, form part of this ward where the community is very close-knit with a reluctance to engage with 'authority agencies'.

Scanning identified that, in the Billingham Policing area, 21% of burglaries, 15% of criminal damage offences and 6% of incidents of anti-social behaviour, occurred in The Clarences, which contained less than 4% of the population and households, so tying up a large amount of resources.

As a result of so much activity being concentrated in such a relatively small area and following consultation with other partners, including Cleveland Fire Brigade, a multi agency focus group was convened in July 2005. The primary aims were to:

- Utilise stakeholder agencies' skills and knowledge in order to engage with the community as a whole but especially young people.
- Reduce crime and disorder, including fire calls.
- Raise awareness regarding environment issues.
- Improve the quality of life for the residents of The Clarences.

Following consultation meetings with Police and Partner Agencies, the residents of The Clarences identified their main priorities as:

- Reduce anti-social behaviour, burglaries, criminal damage and the number of void properties.
- Increase organised activities for young people
- Improved street cleansing.

The groups' citizen focused approach resulted in:

- Enforcement initiatives,
- A fire safety campaign,
- Family nature walks,
- A school environment week,
- Provisions of extra rubbish skips,
- Youth worker interventions and facilities.

Between July 2005 and February 2006, when the Focus Group met, burglaries reduced by 50%, criminal damage reduced by 31% and disorder reduced by 6.9%.

Between March 2006 and February 2007 the Focus Group did not meet, but the youth activities, police and fire brigade involvement continued. Compared to the same period the previous year, burglaries reduced by 30%, criminal damage by 16% and disorder by 28.6%.

The savings, with regards to resources attending incidents, costs of repairs due to damage and property stolen, is evident from the figures. However the real success can be measured in human terms, by the amount of engagement the community has with "Authority Agencies". The community as a whole, appreciated the fact that the group worked together to genuinely improve their quality of life and they continue to engage with the agencies.

## **Description of project**

### **Introduction**

The Borough of Stockton on Tees has a total population of 185,890, residing in 75,130 households, with 26 Electoral Wards. Stockton itself has 13 Wards with 7 other Wards making up the town of Thornaby and 6 Wards making up the town of Billingham.

The total population of Billingham is 39,220 with 16,206 households, and relies heavily on the petrochemical industry for employment, with a large number of sites at Seal Sands on the North bank of the River Tees.

The Billingham South Electoral Ward has two distinct population centres, 'The Clarences' and Old Billingham, which are over a mile apart. The Ward as a whole is ranked 12<sup>th</sup> worst out of 112 Wards in the Tees Valley area with regards to deprivation and 'The Clarences' itself, as opposed to the whole Ward, is recognised as being a Neighbourhood Regeneration Area.

'The Clarences', originally comprising of Port Clarence, High Clarence and Haverton Hill, is situated on the North bank of the River Tees at the opposite end of the famous Transporter Bridge from Middlesbrough, and the population benefited from a thriving ship-building industry on its very doorstep. The shipyards closed in the 1960's, the population migrated, much of the housing was levelled, and what remains today is actually just High Clarence with a population of 1,452 and 600 households.

Out of the population of 1,452, which makes up only 3.7% of the total population of Billingham, 72% are over the age of 16 years, 46% of those have no qualifications and only 26.83% are in full-time employment. Of the 600 households, which make up only 3.7% of the total households in Billingham, 58% are rented, with 48.09% being rented from the Local Authority through Tristar Homes.

In the months leading up to July, 2005, Stockton Borough Council attempted to introduce a new Community Wardens Scheme to the area. Within a matter of days; elements of the Community became hostile to the Officers, which climaxed in a marked warden vehicle being attacked and damaged beyond repair.

Hostility was evident and the confidence of the Wardens was low, attempts by Stockton Borough Council Enforcement Officers to make an impact met with closed doors and resistance to change. Fire setting was reaching epidemic proportions, fly-tipping, litter and general detritus levels were above those of comparable neighbourhoods throughout the Borough.

### **SCANNING**

The Cleveland Police intelligence systems showed that between 1<sup>st</sup> January 2005 and 30<sup>th</sup> June 2005, 21% of all burglary offences reported in the Billingham area, and 15% of criminal damage offences were committed in 'The Clarences' along with 6% of all calls relating to disorder and anti-social behaviour.

We consulted with Cleveland Fire Brigade, who operates a sophisticated intelligence gathering and mapping system that is utilised by its local managers to understand the risk profile in the community and detect early, any significant changes or emerging risks so that resources can be targeted to the area to reduce and mitigate the risk.

They confirmed that, 'The Clarences' area was suffering from significant rates of fires across several categories, the majority of which were Arson. Fire crews were also being subjected to high levels of anti-social behaviour whilst tackling these fires.

The Station Manager at Billingham Fire Station profiled the incidents attended by the Fire Brigade. They had been called out to 23 deliberate ignition fires in the area.

Open discussion evenings were held in The Clarences Community Centre over a period of a fortnight, to which the whole community was invited. The event was attended by representatives from the Police, Stockton Borough Council Crime and Community Safety Department, Stockton Borough Council Education Department & Youth Services, North Tees Primary Care Trust, Safe in Tees Valley Care for Your Area, Tristar Homes (Stockton Borough Council's Housing Department) and Stockton Borough Council Transport Department.

## **ANALYSIS**

The general area of the Estate showed classic signs of vandalism, graffiti, fly-tipping and criminal damage. Observations by fire crews, either at incidents or when driving through the Estate, confirmed that local youths were involved.

The time of day when fires were lit identified core times of early evening for the majority of fires, indicating local youths were to blame. This mirrored the core times for the criminal damage and disorder incidents reported to the Police.

The numbers of property and car fires gave the Billingham Fire Station Manager cause for concern and the Fire Brigade agreed that a significant programme of prevention work was necessary.

On liaising with the Stockton Borough Council Community Safety Department, they confirmed that, during the same time period, the Cleansing Services and Community Safety teams had had minimal success in improving litter, mainly nuisance vehicle and waste disposing, either on the land within Port Clarence or by deposit and deliberate fire setting. It was evident from complaints they had received that, a large part of the community was frustrated by the condition of the area and desperately wanted to impact on the problem but felt reluctant to engage with officials.

In February 2005, the results of the open discussion evenings were collated and circulated to the relevant agencies and the priorities identified by the residents were:

- Reduce anti-social behaviour
- Reduce Burglary offences
- Reduce Criminal Damage offences
- More access to organised activities for young people
- Improve street cleansing
- Reduce the number of void properties

One area of concern, identified by the Agencies and Departments that attended the events, was the fact that the problems that were being highlighted in the discussions regarding incidents of anti-social behaviour, disorder, criminal damage and housing, were not regularly reported to the Authorities.

Cleveland Police, Cleveland Fire Brigade and Stockton Borough Council Community Safety Department all realised that the problem, including environmental issues, was complex and diverse and could not be dealt with by any single body. It was therefore agreed that, to achieve a long term solution to the problems in 'The Clarences' and improve the quality of life for the residents in the community, a multi-agency approach was necessary.

## **RESPONSE**

Approaches were made to Safe in Tees Valley to facilitate a multi-agency group to look at the problems and identify individual agency responses.

On the 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2005, the first meeting of the Clarences Multi-Agency Group took place at Billingham Fire Station and the stakeholder agencies and partners who attended were:

- Cleveland Police

- Cleveland Fire Brigade
- Stockton Borough Council Enforcement
- Stockton Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Team
- Stockton Borough Council Housing (Tristar Homes)
- Safe in Tees Valley

The group agreed that the specific objectives would be:

- To reduce burglary offences
- To reduce criminal damage offences
- To reduce incidents of anti-social behaviour
- To reduce the number of deliberate fires
- To reduce the number of void properties
- To increase organised activities for young people
- To improve street cleansing
- To increase partner agency working and community reassurance

These objectives correlated directly with the priorities identified by the local residents and also focused all the initial stakeholder partners to work together in tackling the objectives that were pertinent to the individual agencies.

The agencies and partners recognised that there was no extra funding readily available for buying in any further resources, however, they all agreed that, for a period covering the next six months, they would concentrate their current resources in 'The Clarences'.

The existing information sharing protocols which were in place between the stakeholder partners were deemed to be fit for purpose and adopted.

It was recognised by the parties in attendance that enforcement by Police and Enforcement Officers was only a small part of the answer and it was jointly agreed that engaging with the community through a process of voluntary compliance, education and advice, with enforcement as the ultimate sanction, was the most appropriate way to proceed.

The initial stakeholders also recognised that, in order to make specific plans and agree actions to achieve the set objectives, the following partner agencies would need to be approached and fully involved.

- Care for your Area
- High Clarence Primary School
- Youth Services
- Justice Support
- The Clarences Partnership
- Cornerhouse
- The Environment Agency.

The group met on a fortnightly basis and, over the ensuing weeks, all of the above partner agencies were contacted and sent representatives to the meetings. As a result of the discussions that took place and the plans that were made, The Wildlife Trust and the Clarences Community Farm also became involved, and a number of initiatives and interventions began operating concurrently.

The Fire Brigade initiated Home Fire Safety Checks, which entailed them targeting and attending every 'Tristar' household in 'The Clarences'. They spoke with the occupants and, with their consent, the homes were inspected and, as a result of obtaining external private funding, the Officers fitted free smoke alarms where required, provided fused extension sockets and gave general advice regarding fire safety and fire setting.

When an occupant would not allow the Fire Brigade entry to the house to carry out the check, the Tristar representative was informed at the Focus Group meetings and they would visit the

occupants and speak to them. Tristar also initiated a review of their lease agreement with a view to having a clause included which meant the tenant had to give access to the Fire Brigade for the safety check.

Where the occupants were willing to part with them, chip pans, which are one of the main causes of home fires, were replaced with deep fat fryers provided by the Fire Brigade. If the occupants insisted on keeping their chip pan, fire blankets were provided as a preventative measure.

To assist with public reassurance, the Fire Brigade also ensured that their fire crews regularly drove through 'The Clarences' and carried out Arson Audit Inspections on the estate to identify refuse that required moving.

Cleveland Police supported the Fire Brigade by attending any fires to show a 'united' approach and deter anti-social behaviour towards the fire crews.

The Stockton Borough Council Enforcement Officers carried out a 'notice drop' to residents with regards to local waste carriers, fly-tipping and the removal of rubbish. The Officers then commenced a 'hands on' clean up operation using cleansing vans loaned from the Council Refuse Section and invited the residents to join them in removing dumped and accumulated rubbish from gardens and open spaces.

Residents' tolerance levels were now decreasing with all the activity and input from the partner agencies and they complained about a former petrol station, which was now a vehicle dismantling premise in the heart of the community. Enforcement Officers and Environment Agency Officers visited the premises and a series of waste management and improvement measures, such as fencing, followed, providing a much needed clear up.

The Enforcement Officers then concentrated on the local waste carriers who were suspected of fly-tipping and, supported by uniformed Police Officers, they carried out roadside vehicle checks, which allowed a direct but informative approach to changing their behaviour. A joint intelligence meeting took place between Enforcement Officers and the Environment Agency, which highlighted the source and movement of waste and targeted education of the residents.

To assist in tackling the problem of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage offences, Enforcement Officers worked with the Police and the Trading Standards Department to carry out test purchases of alcohol at the local store. Although it was envisaged that there would be little success in the way of prosecutions, due to the fact that strangers attempting to buy alcohol would arouse suspicion, it was intended to focus the mind of the licensee by the fact that we were giving the area some attention.

Tristar Homes, as well as supporting the Fire Brigade in relation to the Home Safety Checks, were issuing warning letters to any tenants who were identified by the Police as being involved in, or had children involved in, anti-social behaviour in the area.

They also identified a property where under-age drinking was taking place, which resulted in eviction proceedings being instigated, and they identified three vacant properties where there was evidence that prospective tenants were being 'persuaded' not to take up residency. This was due to the fact that the previous resident, who had close and extended family still living in the area, had committed suicide in the middle of the three premises. As a result, and in view of the amount of work required on the properties, it was decided that they would approach Stockton Borough Council with the intention of having the properties demolished.

The Stockton Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Team were working closely with the Youth Services, Justice Support and the Police, to identify young people where youth interventions could be appropriate, as well as negotiating Agreed Behaviour Contracts where necessary.

The Cleveland Police local intelligence Officers and uniformed officers supported the above two partner agencies by sharing information, as appropriate and allowed by the information sharing protocols.

It was recognised by all the partners that, the key to achieving long-term sustainable solutions was educating, engaging with and involving the young people in the area.

With this in mind, the Youth Services and Cornerhouse organisation arranged for a POD to be placed in the area next to the Community Centre. A POD is basically a secured metal container that is equipped with computer systems, television, DVD, videos, compact discs and drink making facilities. Youth workers attended on an evening and supervised the young people in the POD using the equipment and also organised sporting activities outside the POD.

The local Neighbourhood Police Officer, Police Community Support Officer and Fire Officers attended for short periods during these sessions to engage with the young people.

The Clarences Partnership was very supportive of the initiatives and the workers in the Community Centre organised daily sessions on an evening to coincide with the use of the POD.

A typical weekly programme was.

- Monday - After school club, 3.30 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. for 8 – 13 year olds.  
Tea-time session, a drink and dessert 4.30 p.m. to 5.30 p.m. for 8 – 18 year olds.  
Girls group 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. for 13 – 18 year olds.  
Funky Junk Arts and Crafts – 5.30 p.m. to 7 p.m. for all ages  
A Way Out 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 13 – 19 year olds.
- Tuesday - Drama Class 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 8 – 18 year olds
- Wednesday - Cornerhouse Activity Session, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. for 8 – 13 year old  
Youth Drop In 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 13 – 19 year olds  
Fashion Garments 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. for all ages
- Thursday - Funky Junk Arts and Crafts 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. for all ages
- Friday - Youth drop in 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. for 13 – 19 year olds.

As a result of these extra activities and youth worker inputs there was a marked increase in the number of young people attending the Community Centre.

In addition, the local Neighbourhood Police Officer and Police Community Support Officer arranged and took part in a two day 'murder mystery' event, which also included inputs from the Scientific Support Department, C.I.D. and Dog Section, which was attended by 30 local youngsters.

The Head Teacher from the High Clarence Primary School was involved in the meetings and, as part of an exit strategy for the partners with regards to the concentrated resources, an Environment Week was organised to take place in the school during the week before the half-term holiday in February 2006.

Running alongside this week in the school, we involved The Clarences Community Farm staff and the Wildlife Trust.

The Clarences Community Farm is literally a farm based in the middle of the community with farm animals, where the residents are encouraged to attend and become involved in looking after them.

Seal Sands is a wildlife conservation area that lies immediately to the north east of 'The Clarences' and an approach was made to the Wildlife Trust to become involved, which they were more than willing to do.

As a result of this, the Focus Group partners agreed to continue meeting until the end of February to support these activities.

The programme for the Environment Week involved most of the partner agencies and also involved activities immediately beforehand and also into the actual half-term week.

The programme was as follows:

Saturday: 10.30 am to 3.30 pm. Youth session aimed at 11 to 19 year olds, tidying the courtyard  
beds, making and erecting trellis, trimming and thinning external hedges in and around the Community Centre courtyard. (Clarences Community Farm).

Monday: School 9.30 a.m. to 10.30 a.m. Personal safety and property marking (Cleveland Police Crime Prevention)  
School 11.00 am to 11.50 am Anti-social behaviour (Stockton Borough Council Anti-Social Behaviour Team).  
School 1.15 pm to 2.30 pm Teacher led student work in relation to Anti-social behaviour and personal safety (Cleveland Police Crime Prevention and Stockton Borough Council Anti-social Behaviour Team).  
5 pm to 7 pm Environmentally themed Funky Junk session looking at the seasons aimed at 8 to 18 year olds.

Tuesday: School 9.30 am to 10.30 am. Citizenship (Cleveland Police Neighbourhood Safety Team)  
School 11.00 am to 11.50 am ('Freda the Frog' and Junior Warden Scheme (Stockton Borough Council Enforcement Officers and Care For Your Area).  
School 1.15 pm to 2.30 pm 'Freda the Frog' and Junior Warden Scheme (Stockton Borough Council Enforcement Officers and Care For Your Area).

Wednesday: 6 pm to 8 pm Environmentally themed youth session, birds of prey session and bat box making workshop (Wildlife Trust) aimed at 13 – 18 year olds.

Thursday: School 9.30 am to 10.30 am Road Safety (Cleveland Police and Justice Support Programme)  
School 11.00 am to 11.50 am Lifestyles and Anti-Social Behaviour (Justice Support Programme)  
School 1.15 pm to 2.30 pm Game (Justice Support Programme)

Friday: School 9.30 am to 10.30 am Water Voles, Geology, Environment and Education.  
Fire Talk (Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and Fire Brigade).  
School 11.00 am to 11.50 am Water Voles, Geology, Environment and Education, Fire Talk (Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and Fire Brigade).



School 1.15 pm to 2.30 pm Water Voles, Geology, Environment and Education, Fire Talk  
(Wildlife Trust, Environment Agency and Fire Brigade).

Saturday: 11.00 am to 3.00 p.m. Nature reserve walk, a guided walk through the nature reserve to include a wildlife watching activity starting and ending at the community centre with hot refreshments provided, aimed at Families (Wildlife Trust).

Tuesday: 10.30 am to 3.30 pm Building a pond, fencing and hedging at the community farm in partnership with nature trust, aimed at 13 – 18 year olds (The Clarences Community Farm).

### **ASSESSMENT**

The Focus Group met for the last time on 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2006 and the partner agencies reported that, during the period that the Focus Group had been meeting and while they had all had been involved in the youth activities and engaging more with the community as a whole, the following results had been achieved.

Cleveland Police: Burglaries had reduced by 50%, criminal damage offences had reduced by 31% and disorder incidents had reduced by 6.9%.

Cleveland Fire Brigade: The number of deliberate ignition fire calls had dropped to 8, a reduction of 65% and, of the 350 Tristar Homes, 322 (92%) had accepted home fire safety checks.

Tristar Homes: Due to a general improvement in the area and the willingness of tenants to move in, the number of void properties had dropped to 9, a reduction of 35%, and the 3 properties that were identified as being almost unlettable had been demolished.

Enforcement Officers: Due to their work in liaison with Care For Your Area, the Police, the Environment Agency and, more importantly, the community, in excess of 100 tonnes of combustible material was removed, an illegal waste collection site was closed down and 14 untaxed, dangerous and abandoned vehicles were removed. Educating the residents led to a reduction in those prepared to offer waste from their homes to the local waste carriers who slowly became regulated and, in the main, compliant.

Hostility from the community towards the Enforcement Officers reduced, the vision of a cleaner safer area was promoted and communication opened up between them.

With this support and input from the Enforcement Officers and through 'Care For Your Area' providing extra waste skips regularly, a change in mindset was being achieved, not only did the residents participate and engage they began to provide information regarding environmental issues.

As a result of information being given by the community and intelligence from the Police and Fire Brigade, an illegal waste collection site was identified and joint action by Enforcement Officers and The Environment Agency led to its closure.

Youth Services: The introduction of the POD in the area and the extra, more varied activities, for the different age groups saw an increase in the number of local youngsters and teenagers using the Community Centre. Project work was carried out with the youth groups in the Community Centre focusing on fires and the dangers thereof and the youth group's environment work tied in neatly with the Environment Week in the school.

The Head Teacher of the school reported that, the pupils had enjoyed the presentations and picked up the key messages about behaviour and caring for the environment, and they had

produced a folder of work in relation to the week. The fact that the young people of the area, including children in the first years of primary school, were involved and educated in tackling the issues and priorities that the community themselves had highlighted, resulted in them taking important preventative and environmental messages in to the home and to their parents which appear to have been heeded and acted upon.

Between March 2006 and February 2007, when the Focus Group was not meeting but youth activities and partner working continued, in comparison to the similar period the previous 12 months, burglaries reduced by 30%, criminal damage offences reduced by 16%, disorder incidents reduced by 28.6%, and deliberate fire calls reduced by 34%.

The local Neighbourhood Police Officer continues to be involved in the running of a Saturday youth football team and Wednesday evening football sessions at an `all weather` facility in Middlesbrough. Cleveland Fire Brigade broadened their home fire safety checks and have now visited over 90% of all the homes in `The Clarences`. The community continue to engage with the Enforcement Officers and Anti-Social Behaviour Team, resulting in abandoned vehicles continually being seized and a drop in disorder calls to the police, and the community centre workers continue to facilitate events for all age groups that are well attended.

This initiative proved in this case that, if the partner agencies concentrate their efforts for a relatively short period in a given area and engage the community, without `throwing` extra funding at the problems, so making an initial improvement to the area, when the concentrated resources are removed the community will take on board the pride they are given for their own estate.