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Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary

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PHONE BOX GUARDIAN SCHEME - ABSTRACT

Dumfries and Galloway is a rural, low crime area. The large area makes the region vulnerable to certain types of crime - particularly from travelling criminals.

Rural phoneboxes were being attacked regularly by professional criminals, so Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary linked up with British Telecom's Pay Phone Crime Unit to address the problem.

The partnership noted:-

- The overwhelming majority of phoneboxes signal BT when the cashbox is removed. This made it possible to track these gangs of organised criminals throughout the country
- BT had experience of collating this information and liaising with Police forces
- Agreement was reached with BT to pass information in real time to Police, based on 3 criteria
 - 1) A team of phonebox criminals is active and mobile in the country
 - 2) They were approaching Dumfries and Galloway region, and/or
 - 3) They are actively engaged in this crime

Local police asked members of the public who reside near phoneboxes to act as 'Guardians', and recruited 49 people. A telephone messaging system called 'voice connect' was used to alert the guardians at times of increased vulnerability.

Based on the 'real time' information from BT, guardians were asked to

- Raise their general level of vigilance for a short periods of time (green status)
- Keep a general watch and note suspicious or unknown person/s at 'their' kiosks (amber status), or
- If phoneboxes in the vicinity were actually *being* targeted, note all use of the boxes for an hour. (Red status).

As a result a description of the culprits (or vehicles) and direction of travel could be passed to Police Patrols

A logo was devised by Police and BT and placed in the 'protected' kiosks, and a large scale media launch was undertaken. The intention was to increase the criminal's perception of risk.

A twelve-month pilot scheme was launched on 1st February 2002. Analysis of crimes by BT compared to the previous year showed thefts down from 96 to 16 (83% reduction), Property stolen reduced from £34753.15 to £5130.40 an 85% reduction. Over a sample 4 month period April – July, vandalism, reduced BY 47%, from 505 instances to 264. These figures were against a national increase in such offences.

BT are hoping to extend the scheme nationwide.

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Phonebox Guardian Scheme

Reducing phonebox crime in Dumfries and Galloway: a crime reduction partnership with Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, British Telecom PLC and community members in Dumfries and Galloway.

Dumfries and Galloway is a rural, low population (145000) area, the major industries of which are agriculture and tourism. Apart from the scenery, people are attracted to stay in the area by the quality of life and the low crime rate. The area is served by the UK's smallest mainland Police Force, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary, with 473 serving officers.

The force prides itself with its close contacts with the local community and its developing expertise in partnership work, aided by cooperative and coterminous Health Board, Enterprise Board and (unitary) local authority¹. The Force is therefore well placed to adopt and develop problem solving as a core methodology.

Galloway Division is divided into three sections, each with a dedicated Crime Prevention Officer and team of community officers. This focus on crime and disorder reduction is one of the factors that has helped acquisitive crime in Galloway in particular reduce over the past four years. It has always been the assumption in Galloway Division that while it is comparatively easy to reduce crime in high crime areas, to reduce crime in low crime areas requires the application of evidence-based 'what works' principles.

It became apparent however that there were certain types of crime which our efforts were not impacting upon: crimes such as thefts of outboard engines from harbour areas and inshore lochs, and thefts from telephone kiosks in particular seemed to be at a high level. We recognised that because of the rural nature of the area – where one police vehicle could have an area of two or three hundred square miles to cover, set with a wide network of minor roads – we were particularly vulnerable to this type of crime². In urban areas there was a far better chance of a speedy response from police.

Telephone kiosks in particular had a special relevance to our rural areas – many of our areas are outwith the areas covered by mobile phone companies, and they could therefore be an invaluable aid when summoning help. There was also the distinct advantage that they had a single owner (British Telecom), compared to owners of items such as outboard motors!

Did we have a problem?

We contacted BT and discussed crime levels. A preliminary look at the figures showed that between April 2001 to December 2001, there were 268 theft attacks on BT public payphones in the Dumfries & Galloway area., costing £26.7k. In the same period there were 924 cases of vandalism, costing the payphone business a further £27.8k. In addition, these crimes are notoriously hard to detect.

¹ We are aware of how lucky we are in this!

² One of the authors of this report (DF) on holiday in the West Highlands was told of the 'first ever' theft in local recollection of outboard motors from dinghies on the shore of a loch. This also coincided with an extremely rare attack on an isolated phonebox in the vicinity. He drew a comparison with a similar pattern of crimes in Dumfries and Galloway.

This is a substantial number of crimes for our area, and one which could adversely affect our rural areas, particularly as BT had to consider the viability of keeping low revenue payphones in these areas. A business decision to remove a payphone could impact upon safety – indeed many of the payphones were kept operating primarily because BT felt there was a social benefit to our communities. Successful reduction of these crimes would therefore benefit the communities by maintaining local amenities, would benefit BT by reducing the cost burden, and Police by reducing recorded crime. Both BT and Police felt very strongly that we should tackle this problem.

BT indicated the already substantial measures they had put in place to upgrade security to payphones. A number of known 'MO's' were used (levering, jacking tapping, drilling, pulling and cutting.). These teams of thieves were very adept, and could 'crack' a payphone cashbox in a matter of minutes. The take averaged at least £100 per attack, and a team could easily net over £1,000 per day. Attacks tended to be clustered in time as well as space. In addition, the cost of repair after each attack was £450 at minimum, and could exceed £2000.

Substantial target hardening measures and setting up of liaison centres had reduced thefts from payphones. Each payphone signalled a message to BT when the cashbox was removed. When this coincided with their agent's schedules there was no need for action, however their checking procedures required a delay of several minutes before police could be contacted. Even when police were contacted, and especially in an area like Dumfries and Galloway, the team was well away by the time police attended. There was seldom the police staff available to mount comprehensive road checks, particularly if the network of minor roads was also to be covered.

We asked our analyst section to map out each recorded payphone theft geographically (Appendix 1). A clear pattern emerged that showed that such crimes occurred on or very near A class roads often between June and September. Payphones on minor roads were not targeted to the same extent. This suggested that speed and a fast escape were predominant considerations for the thieves.

Analysis

The victim

We identified that the main *victim* - British Telecom - had done all that could reasonably be expected in terms of target hardening, and had already reduced this type of theft considerably. Simplistic solutions such as increasing the number of times the payphones were emptied (to reduce the rewards of theft) were uneconomic. Indeed this was part of the problem; cash compartments were only emptied when there was enough cash to justify a technician's time. While some Payphones were alarmed, these tended to be in urban areas, and BT's own security solution "REDCARE" could not be applied universally due to costs (the corporate structure of the organisation meant that the service would be an additional charge which would have to be justified in terms of revenue). On the other hand the fact that BT had a system in place to identify probable attacks on payphones and had existing liaison arrangements was clearly of relevance.

As mentioned above, the fact that BT was a national company and from the Police point of view a single complainer allowed a strategy to be put in place far more easily than if there had been multiple complainers.

The Offenders

Payphones could be seen as the ultimate virtual repeat. The design of the cashboxes was extremely standardised, and BT were aware for example that techniques for breaking into payphones were shared amongst the criminal fraternity.

Long experience on the part of BT indicated that the *offenders* tended to be organised professional thieves, equipped with tools and skills to empty cashboxes of money extremely quickly. They were usually visitors to the area, a fact borne out by our own Crime management services department and indeed by the criminal's apparent lack of in-depth knowledge of the minor roads in the area and preferred choice of payphones on main trunk roads. As mentioned above they kept to the main 'A class roads' and usually 'hit' a number (a 'cluster') of payphones in the area before moving on. Arguably the fact that they were operating in an unfamiliar environment suggested they could be demotivated by a perceived increased risk of detection.

The Locations

Our analysis indicated that the *locations* (per se) of payphones in rural districts were important factors in their inherent vulnerability. The 'recommended' Police response of setting up road checks at appropriate locations away from the violated payphone was unlikely to be either an efficient means of detection or an effective deterrent, due to the low density of police, the wide areas, and the network of minor rural roads in the area.

The expertise of the offenders combined with their mobility made a powerful threat which conventional reaction-based policing could not easily overcome – and indeed had not 'traditionally' done so.

Response

(Rationale)

Whilst the traditional police response (which starts with mounting increased 'high visibility' patrols) was impractical as a sustained measure, we felt it would be possible to:-

- Use a better and more co-ordinated liaison with the *victim* – BT- to identify times and areas of increasing risk of attack, so that police had advance warning of criminal gangs moving 'up country'. This involved earlier and better data sharing, so that police could put their part of the agreement in place on a timely and targeted basis.
- Increase the number of '*capable guardians*'. Visiting the payphones in the area, we found that a large proportion of them were near residential properties. If our community members could help us watch for suspicious persons and/or vehicles *at the times of increased risk* that would increase our ability to respond effectively, and
- De-motivate *offenders* by
 - Making a clear change to the appearance of the payphone kiosks, so that they were aware that there was a real risk of their being detected. The risk had to be real in that our own (police) response had to result in an increased chance of detection, otherwise there was a danger that any

benefit would not be sustained¹. Ideally, the criminals would make the (rational) choice not to attack the payphone.

- o Media coverage on at least a regional and hopefully a national level, highlighting to criminals that there were special risks in attempting this type of crime in Dumfries and Galloway.

Methods and Execution

Coincidentally, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary had just commissioned a telephone messaging system called 'Voice-Connect Relay'. This is essentially an electronic database connected by modem to the telephone system. The operator can record a short message, select a group of pre-programmed telephone numbers to contact, and the system will telephone each one and pass on the message. Various safeguards could be programmed in so that the system could be programmed not to call individuals at particular times, or to keep dialling until the recipient 'codes in' that he or she has received the message.

Apart from the work involved in programming details into the system, Data Protection considerations required that the permission of community participants was needed to be included on the database. Certainly this was not anticipated to be a problem if the community participant agreed to join, but it added another layer of bureaucracy.

There followed a large scale exercise on the part of Police to identify potential participants, clarify that they had their own phones², explain the process in detail to them, and obtain their agreement to participate and their permission to log their details on a Police computer. This was supported subsequently by an 'information sheet', letter and reporting form sent to each Guardian (appendices 3 and 4). Approximately 50 Kiosks, were included in the scheme.

The Police Graphic artist and BT worked together to produce a logo or *motif* which could be used as an identifier to highlight the fact that particular kiosks had special measures of security (appendix 2).

Our BT partners had their own internal problems to work through. Not only were there additional agreements regarding information-sharing with Police to be put in place (easy in principle but the logistics had to be worked out), but permission had to be sought from their senior management to run the project as a pilot, and to display the logo inside identified kiosks: BT has a strict policy of not allowing advertising inside kiosks, so this was another barrier to be overcome. In the event BT came up trumps and the logos replaced BT's own notices in the identified kiosks.

In terms of actions to take, the scheme operated like this.

BT monitored the activity of phone box crime and notified ourselves of any national increase, including whether they felt there was a team operating, and if so, if it appeared to be heading our way. Because of BT's already existing security arrangements this information was not hard to collate. This gave local Police advance warning about travelling criminals targeting phoneboxes.

¹ A potential 'guardian' such as CCTV loses crime reducing effect when its presence does not trigger a response to crime or disorder (Barker M and Bridgeman C 1994)

² Theft from phoneboxes usually renders them inoperable..

Depending on the information from BT, an assessment of potential threat was agreed and on that basis the level of response was assessed as 'green', 'amber' or 'red'.

Guardians received a *green* alert when police were notified of a national increase in telephone box crime. In such circumstances, Guardians were asked to simply increase the general level of vigilance they maintain over their 'adopted' telephone box.

When criminals were thought or (more importantly) expected to be operating in our area Guardians were given an *amber* alert. Thus, when police are notified that telephone boxes in neighbouring police force areas are being attacked, Guardians are asked to raise the level of vigilance *and* to record details of vehicles and individuals they see using the box. In addition, Guardians were asked to make regular checks of 'their' telephone box to ensure that it was in order.

When Police were advised by BT that there was specific information of criminals currently engaged in attacking phoneboxes in a specific area, a *red* alert would be passed out. This was expected to be very infrequent and only activated when confirmed information was received that telephone boxes in the region were being violated at that time. The Guardians were asked to maintain active surveillance on their telephone box for a specified period *not exceeding one hour*, and to note details of any individuals visiting the telephone box during this time on the pro-formas provided and passed by phone to police Control Room without delay.

Thereafter Force Control room would co-ordinate appropriate search/ checks armed with information as to the likely direction of travel, vehicle, description, etc.

An edited copy of instructions within force is attached (appendix 5) .

This 'Routine Activity Theory' (Felson 1998) response incorporated an unusual partnership between Police, a major national company*, and individual members of the community located throughout the region.

To put all the elements in place required a considerable amount of work, and it was agreed to run a pilot between, February 2002 and July 2002 and compare phone box crime with the same period in the previous year. This would cover the most prolific period of June/July.

Launch of the scheme was announced by a major media release in local papers and radio, and Local TV. (The scheme was always aimed at reduction in crime rather than detection of offenders.)

* Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary and BT have a good history of working together to solve problems. When telephone kiosks in rural villages started to be vandalised on a regular basis our community officers worked with the local engineer and visited the village primary schools, gave inputs on vandalism and good citizenship, and tried to instil a sense of ownership. This resulted in a marked reduction in reports of vandalism and costs of repairs to the payphones. Similarly, in an urban area, the same engineer substantially reduced significant problems of youth related disturbance round payphones, non accidental damage, social disruption caused by local drug dealers using public phones as 'offices', and hoax 999 calls, by the expedient of disabling the 'ring-in' facility! Damage which had been put down to wear and tear also reduced, and revenues increased. We have not done the appropriate quantitative comparison on this as yet.

Assessment

Did it work?

- In the first six months of the scheme, there were 21 thefts in the D&G area, compared with 96 in the corresponding period in the previous year, resulting in a remarkable 83% reduction. This difference was significant (probability of null hypothesis less than 0.01% (appendix 6).

Table 1 and figure 1) refers

Table 1

	Year 1 (Feb 01-Jan 02)	Year 2 (Feb 01 - Jan 03)
Feb	25	5
Mar	22	3
Apr	9	1
May	7	1
Jun	8	1
July	4	0
Aug	15	1
Sept	2	1
Oct	2	1
Nov	1	0
Dec	0	0
Jan	1	2
TOTALS	96	21

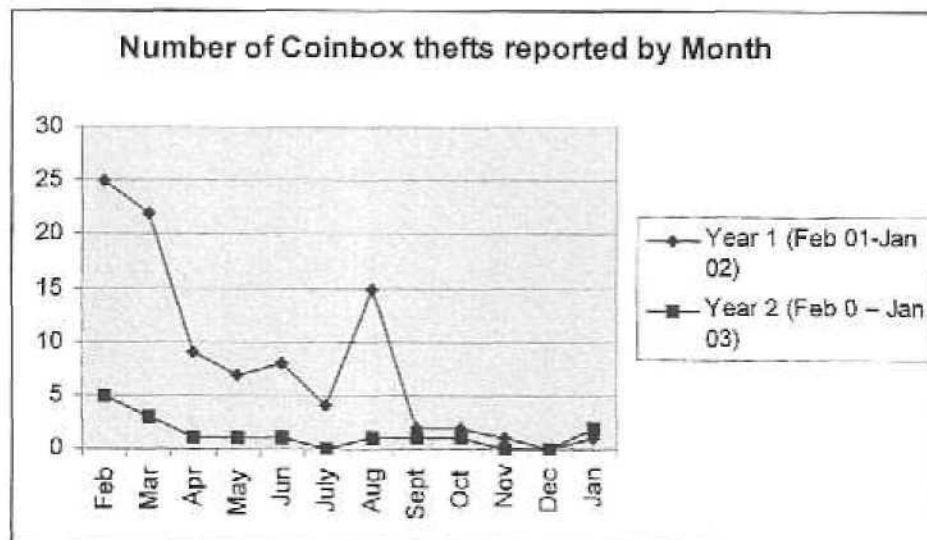


Figure 1)

- None of the attacks was in a 'protected' phonebox.
- What was also apparent was that there was a significant benefit to phoneboxes which were not in the scheme. There was clear evidence of 'diffusion of benefit'.
- There was also a significant fall of 47% in reports of criminal damage, from 505 reported between April – July 2001 2001, to 264 incidents in the same period in 2002. BT 'outsourced' the contract to repair criminal damage to another company so a full comparison was not possible. Table 2 and figure 2 refers

	Year 1 (April 01- July 01)	Year 2 (April 02 – July 02)
Apr	139	26
May	143	65
Jun	125	109
July	98	64
TOTAL	505	269

Table 2 – Criminal damage reports between April and July for the comparison years

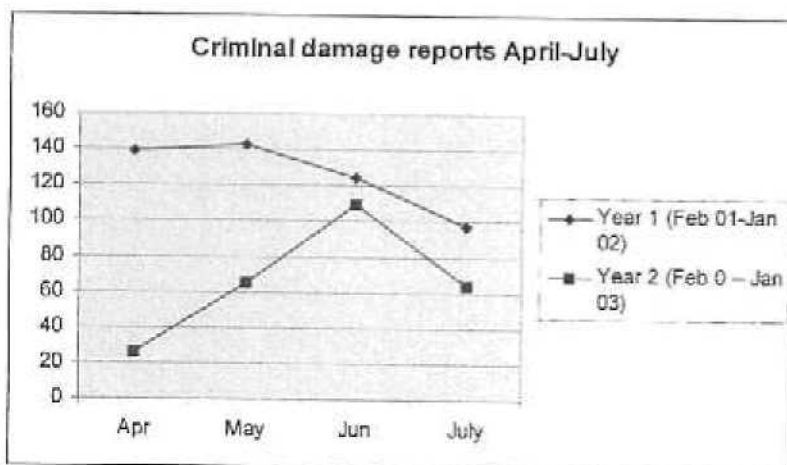


Figure 2

- In terms of cost savings, BT saved £24,000 , which included repairs to kiosks after attacks and cash 'not stolen'. Again, because of the contractual arrangements with the companies which contract to repair damaged phoneboxes there are no substantiated figures available for cost savings for repair of purely criminal damage. This difference was also significant (probability of null hypotheses less than 0.01% - Appendix 6). Table 3 and Figure 3 Refer

	Year 1 (Feb 01- Jan 02)	Year 2 (Feb 0 – Jan 03)
Feb	£8418.52	£1990.59
Mar	£8457.28	£698.28
Apr	£3451.76	£163.79
May	£2748.49	£147.65
Jun	£3057.97	£353.03
July	£1496.20	£0.00
Aug	£5506.19	£213.21
Sept	£574.18	£369.41
Oct	£470.53	£422.16
Nov	£288.66	£0.00
Dec	£0	£0.00
Jan	£193.37	£536.24
TOTALS	£34663.15	£4899.36

Table 3 - Cash costs of attacks to cashboxes

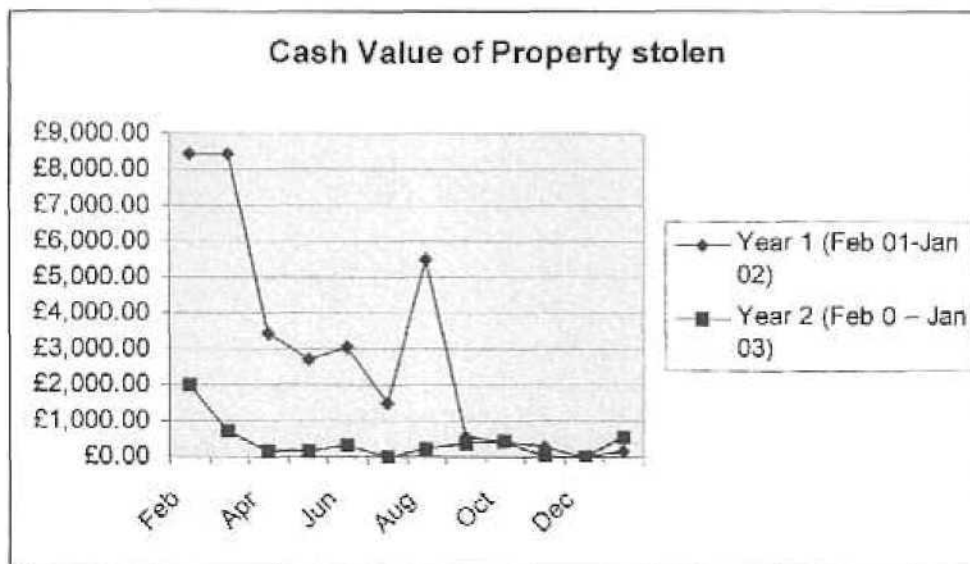


Figure 3 Graph of cash value per month over the comparison periods.

- Nationally, this type of crime *increased* during the trial period!

What was the critical reason for success?

Because all measures were applied to all 'protected' phoneboxes, we are unable to differentiate between the effect of the visible changes to the phoneboxes (the display of the logos) and the effect of the launch publicity. Experience with the effects of other

crime prevention publicity does not suggest that benefits – if any- are other than transient. Logically therefore the primary effect on the designated callboxes and the ‘diffusion of benefit’ might be interpreted either as the effect of globally applied publicity, or of criminals inferring from ‘casing’ the locations of call boxes that there was an added unknown risk. (In practice we would expect this to be the explanation if the effect sustains).

Is it sustainable?

The ideal result would be where no further effort on the part of partners need be expended. Unfortunately to keep the scheme effective requires a certain amount of ongoing effort in terms of keeping the community participants involved. Drawing on the findings reported in Barker and Bridgeman (1994) that CCTV cameras which did not trigger any response from ‘authority’ were of no benefit, we anticipated that the same could occur for our Guardians scheme. Police have therefore to undertake to keep in contact with Guardians. As it happens, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary is very much in favour of maintaining contact with the community we serve, so this is no great burden.

Similar reservations hold for the logos posted within the selected phoneboxes. If all kiosks were part of the scheme and there was no resultant response on our part we anticipate our results might slip. Publicising our successful detections is as much a part of the plan as flagging our ‘protected’ phoneboxes, and this is an ongoing process.

(Of some encouragement however is that the benefit in reduced crime does appear to be continuing beyond the trial period, at least up to the time of drawing up this report).

With these provisos, we would claim some success in sustainability.

Is it transferable?

The scheme was devised for the particular problems of policing a sparsely populated rural area, and there would appear no reason why similar areas could not adopt the scheme. Certainly, Dumfries and Galloway Constabulary’s policing model, with its emphasis on problem-solving and community liaison, lends itself to this type of scheme. In principle, we see no reason why urban areas could not adopt a similar scheme. In fact as the payphones would be overlooked by more properties, community members might be easier to recruit.

And finally

During the trial period, thefts of outboard motors also fell. Don’t ask us to explain.

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References

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- Felson M (1998). *Crime and Everyday Life*, Second edition. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.