



**CLEVELAND
POLICE**
Putting People First

Tilley Award 2004

Title

Operation Auckland

Category: Crime and Disorder

Cleveland Police

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SUMMARY

Project title: 'Operation Auckland'

Late in 2001 a problem came to police notice, concerning prostitution on a trading estate in Thornaby, Stockton-on-Tees. A brothel had opened under the guise of a massage parlour and girls plying their trade on the street began to way-lay customers before they reached the brothel.

The brothel was closed down, however, prostitution in the area became more overt, with a large number of girls being attracted into the area. Over the following 18 months the number of prostitutes rose to about 70 with ages ranging from 14 to 38 years.

Complaints came from several sources reporting that female members of the public and local residents had been accosted; causing them to feel distressed and intimidated. There were also major concerns for all females in the area following high profile cases of prostitutes being abducted and murdered.

District Licensing Unit Officers toured the estate speaking to the girls to gain their trust. Most prostitutes said they worked to fund drugs habits. The unit compiled a paper-based record with photographs of the girls for safety purposes, with their consent. Where possible, the girls were introduced to support agencies and a partnership approach was developed.

Several operations were mounted, deploying officers, with specialist training in relevant legislation and intelligence requirements, accompanied by support agency personnel to form links and offer assistance and the press to help raise awareness of the issue. Local businesses were kept informed and also to exchange information.

All girls under 18, believed to be linked to prostitution, were regarded as victims and dealt with under an agreed joint protocol. All of the prostitutes were treated as first time offenders with regards to categorising them as "Common Prostitutes". Kerb crawlers were arrested, charged and placed before the same court to attract maximum publicity. If there was insufficient evidence to arrest, then a letter was sent to the registered keeper of the vehicle being used.

As a result of these operations, support agencies have attracted funding to provide permanent out-reach workers for the area. Sexual Exploitation of Children On the Streets (SECOS) reported some success in diverting girls away from prostitution. Police officers have gained the trust of the prostitutes, who provided intelligence that led to the arrest and successful prosecution of two men trying to form an internet-based contact service for prostitution.

M. Williams
Inspector, Community Police Team, Stockton.
(Former Inspector Operations, Stockton.)

OPERATION AUCKLAND

Scan

The police had received a number of complaints about prostitution on Bon Lea Industrial Estate, from businesses on the estate, local politicians and residents of a nearby housing estate. Some of the complaints related to members of the public being approached by the prostitutes and some female members of the public being accosted by males looking for prostitutes. There is a University Campus nearby and males, on foot and in cars, had approached a number of the female students asking if they were "open for business".

Police met with Neil Pocklington, Susan Jackson and John Lambert from Social Services, The Youth Team Manager Pat Grainger, Wendy Shepherd from Sexual Exploitation of Children On the Streets (SECOS), Liz Abbot the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) manager, Kalid Azam of the Drugs Action Team (DAT) and Mike Batty head of Community Safety, Stockton Borough Council.

Police constables Mark Hodgson and Mike Trubshaw from the District Licensing and Vice Unit went to the estate and met with the prostitutes. Contact was made with partnership members with an interest in the problem and meetings were arranged.

The objective of Operation Auckland was to apply a Multi-Agency Statement of Intent (App 1) to combat prostitution in Thornaby utilising intelligence to enforce legislation in relation to prostitution and kerb crawling, to offer public reassurance to the community, to prevent prostitutes from becoming the victims of crime and drugs, to establish and develop an intelligence database of related activity, to work in partnership to encourage education and diversionary schemes and to identify prostitutes under the age of 18 years and deal with them as victims.

Analysis

Bon Lea Industrial Estate is situated between Stockton and Thornaby and is bordered by the A66 road to the south and a railway line to the north. It measures approximately 800 metres east to west and 400 metres north to south.

Most modern industrial estates are comprised of buildings in rectangular blocks with roads running in straight lines either parallel or at right angles to each other. They are purpose built with wide-open spaces between the buildings, all of the modern security and lighting systems in place and easily patrolled due to their open design that allows for natural surveillance.

Bon Lea estate differs from this design because it was not purpose built but was a redeveloped site using original buildings within an old road system. Although some of the land plots on the estate have been cleared and new buildings erected, the majority are still the original buildings and their orientation follows the original pre-war design. There are numerous narrow roads and dark back lanes where cars and people can remain out of sight.

A massage parlour had opened on the estate and was operating as a legitimate front for a brothel. Many prostitutes started working the streets surrounding the parlour, as there was a ready supply of clients. Customers approaching the area were obviously seeking sex and the street girls were approaching them before they got to the massage parlour. Once they had engaged a client some of the girls preferred to stay on the estate to conduct their business, using any of the numerous back lanes, but others preferred to go off the estate. Many of them had their own personal favourite locations that they preferred to use.

There was a high level of concern for the safety of every female in the area, not just the prostitutes. Vicky Glass, a prostitute known to have worked on the estate, was reported missing. Her body was found in the North Yorkshire area and it was confirmed that she had been murdered. No one has ever been charged in connection with this crime. The fact that other women in the area had been mistakenly thought to be prostitutes indicated that any female in the area was a potential victim.

The girls normally operated at peak times between 9.00 p.m. and 11.00 p.m. There would never be more than a handful of girls on the estate at any one time, sometimes only one or two and most were there for only a few minutes before they made a connection. They would usually wait along the main road that goes around the western half of the estate. Cars could come to a stop, pick up the girls to and be moving again within a few seconds. The chances of catching any of the girls operating or prospective clients was very slim while engaged in normal patrols.

An intelligence-gathering phase was entered into in conjunction with statutory and non-statutory partners that included consensual production of a Library including photographs and details of girls working in the area. PC's Hodgson and Trubshaw of Stockton Police District Licensing Unit together with officers from the District Support Unit had compiled this library by touring the estate over a period of several weeks and speaking to all of the working girls in the area.

The purpose of the library was to identify as many of the prostitutes as possible for their own safety. The information gathered would also answer a number of questions posed by police and partners and either confirm or refute the accuracy of a number of theories.

This library contained photographs and personal details of 109 girls who used the area to ply their trade. A number of them fell within the scope of a protocol dealing with persons under the age of 17 years believed to be working in the sex trade. At the time the library was compiled there were 17 of these and as they were identified it became possible to divert them away from the trade toward partner agencies equipped to help them move away from prostitution and drugs.

Another benefit of the library was to identify where the girls came from. Some had said that the girls were professionals and came into the area mostly from other towns but information in the library showed this to be incorrect. Over 75% of them lived in Stockton and another 15% were from Middlesbrough, a matter of a couple of miles away. They were not professional prostitutes who would get a client then return later for another purely to make more money. The vast majority of the girls were working to pay for a drugs habit and when they had enough money they would purchase their drugs and go home.

They were also independent operators. It had been thought that some of the girls were working for pimps who controlled them and took a percentage of their money but information gathered from the library showed that there were no pimps in the area and the girls were working for themselves, retaining all of the money they earned.

A 24-hour petrol station garage in the area, sold condoms and some of the prostitutes bought them there. While at the garage they were known to solicit some of the garage's legitimate customers and also attracted some of their own clients. This drew complaints to the garage from their own customers and caused some loss of trade, as drivers were less willing to use the garage under such conditions.

PC Hodgson compiled a report in late 2003 for the information of the Stockton Management team. The report highlighted a problem in enforcement related to the use of drugs. Most of the girls said that they worked as prostitutes to fund a drugs habit for themselves and a partner, usually a boyfriend. She worked to pay for the drugs, if arrested she would usually be given a fine and she would then have to work to pay the fine. The girl is then trapped in a vicious downward spiral and there appears to be no way out.

Response

A joint protocol had been introduced in Middlesbrough in November 1997 and revised in April 2003 and was an agreement between Cleveland Police, Middlesbrough Social Services Department, Redcar & Cleveland Social Services Department and Stockton Social Services Department. This protocol held that young people below the age of 18 years who were suspected of being involved or were involved in prostitution would be dealt with in all circumstances as being at risk of significant harm. This was an effective measure when

During his time as Inspector Operations he reviewed the operation and found that some prostitutes were moving off the Industrial Estate and into nearby residential estates. He obtained an extension of the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act and expanded the operation to include the housing estate. He also transferred the responsibility for dealing with prostitutes from the District Licensing Unit to the District Support Unit.

A minimum of 8 police officers in plain clothes and uniform were deployed to tackle the problem on the estate and operated under the command of Sgt Coates. The operation was conducted by deploying two unmarked police vehicles with 2 plain-clothes officers in each vehicle. These vehicles toured the area to identify males who were using vehicles to trawl the area looking for prostitutes. Whenever these males were identified, a marked police car with two uniformed officers on board was alerted and attended the area to stop the car and deal with the driver. Two more officers, also in plain clothes, were detailed as an interviewing and charging team.

During the course of the operations, police were accompanied, at different times, by journalists from a local newspaper, members of the Social Services and outreach workers from SECOS (Sexual Exploitation of Children On the Streets). SECOS is an organisation funded by Dr. Barnardo's and operates from the neighbouring town of Middlesbrough. While they are predominantly oriented towards children they do some work with adults.

SECOS operates a small camper van as a mobile outreach bus, which it deploys four evenings per week. This was taken to the estate on a number of occasions and the working girls had the opportunity to visit the SECOS staff and talk to them. In addition to helping people in the sex trade, SECOS also put people in touch with their own drugs worker who is able to assess the working girls' needs and, where necessary, fast track them into treatment.

It eventually became normal practice for police officers to visit the bus while it was in the area, liaise with the staff and talk to the girls. Although several police officers carried out these visits over a period of time a conscious decision was taken for female officers to make these visits. It was felt that the prostitutes would feel less threatened by female officers, barriers would be less obvious and trust would grow more quickly.

Police Constables Vicky Davis and Louise Plaice of the District Support Unit, who were both involved in the operation, regularly visited the SECOS bus when it toured the estate.

The ability of the police to deal with kerb crawlers had been greatly enhanced on 1st October 2001 with the introduction of a power of arrest for that offence. If there was sufficient evidence to prosecute the driver, then he would be charged under the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 1985, relating to kerb crawling and would be fast tracked to court on a date set by the Criminal Justice Department. If there was not sufficient evidence to charge, or the vehicle left the area before it could be stopped, the details of the vehicle were obtained and a letter was sent to the registered keeper with reference to the sighting and informing them of the provisions of the Sexual Offences Act 1985.

It had been noted that fines imposed on kerb crawlers had a minimal effect if the person was a regular user of prostitutes. Obtaining the services of the local press was much more effective by using a "naming and shaming" response. This operated in conjunction with the intelligence of addresses. Media covering the locality of the offenders' home addresses were contacted and published details to ensure widest coverage (**App 6**).

Some of the girls had previously been cautioned, for prostitution, in other force areas but there was no recording system in place for these cautions that would allow for quick and convenient verification. In order to avoid any confusion it was decided that the girls would be given a clean sheet and dealt with as first time offenders. This meant that any girl arrested on suspicion of prostitution would receive two cautions under the provisions of the Street Offences Act 1959 before being classed as a common prostitute and rendered liable to being charged and put before the court.

All of the people charged in connection with offences relating to prostitution were to be put before the court on the same day. This date, 25th September 2003, was set by the Criminal Justice Department in agreement with the Crown Prosecution Service.

With the introduction of the computer age and mobile phones many of the girls are using these facilities to make contact with their clients. Some of the girls were able to make contact with prospective clients and warn them of police operations. As a result, some males parked in Stockton and walked about 200 metres across a bridge into the estate. Police on the operation stopped a number of males walking into the area and carried out stop checks on them.

There was a consultation with Stockton Borough Council Architectural Liaison Officer to explore target hardening on the industrial estate. A large amount of shrubbery was removed, street lighting was improved where necessary and installed where it was lacking.

The garage that had the problems with the prostitutes was visited and the proprietors advised to stop selling condoms. This appeared to be the item most attractive to the girls and the main reason for their attendance. As the item is no longer available at the garage, the girls have all but stopped going there and the problems have ceased.

The industrial estate had evolved within an existing built up area with a public road system, rather than being purpose built, so it was not possible to install security measures to prevent access to the estate. It was also identified that most of the girls were making contact with clients on the perimeter road, which is a public highway and impossible to cordon off. The estate contains a number of courtyards where prostitutes might be able to take clients but many of these have their own security gates as a crime reduction measure and are not available at night.

Assessment

SECOS have reported a 50% reduction in prostitutes on the estate since the operation and in their annual report for the period 2002/2003 they claim a 36% success rate in steering girls away from the trade.

The library compiled by police identified how many girls worked in the area and enabled police and partners to assess the scope of the problem more accurately. While compiling the library, information was gathered that confirmed or refuted a number of theories and intelligence gathered from the girls led to the arrests of two men trying to set up a website to supply the services of prostitutes on the Internet. Both of these males went to Crown Court and were found guilty of "conspiring to live off the earnings of prostitutes". Both men received suspended sentences and the website was closed down. One of the males faced further charges relating to computer child pornography and after pleading guilty in February 2004 he was given another suspended sentence.

Police operations within the **Bon Lea industria** estate and surrounding areas, between 29th August 2003 and 19th September 2003, resulted in 17 arrests for offences related to prostitution. All of those arrested were charged and put before Teesside Magistrates Court on 25th September 2003. As a result of the visits by Police Constables Vicky Davis and Louise Plaice a great deal of trust was generated between the working girls. SECOS staff and the police. **It was also found while talking to the working girls that they were extremely co-operative with police and countless sources of intelligence were generated. Some of this intelligence resulted in a number of arrests being made in connection with the murder of Vicky Glass but to date, no one has been charged.**

SECOS evidence shows that there has been a reduction in the number of prostitutes in the area and some success in steering girls away from the trade. The number of arrests peaked to 12 in September 2003 but this is probably due to the police operation. Arrests reduced to 2 in October and 1 in November 2003 but there have been no arrests since November for any prostitution related offences.

The problem was initially identified as a result of complaints from residents' groups, councillors and police officers' reports. The success or failure of any operation, therefore, could only be assessed by consultation with these sources and reference to partner agencies and police operation reports.

Inspector Williams attended sector consultation meetings where he met ward councillors and key residents. The matter of prostitution was discussed and the meetings concluded that there was no longer a problem in the housing estates surrounding Bon Lea Industrial Estate. Police have also spoken to residents, businesses and local politicians who all report a visible reduction in the activity of the prostitutes.

The problem of drugs and prostitution will never totally go away but Operation Auckland assisted in some reductions, introduced a number of initiatives and new ideas and helped to develop trust between partners, police and victims.

Part of the project was aimed at educating the girls and clients but there was an unexpected bonus. Police officers were educated with regard to legislation, a better understanding of the reasons why girls became prostitutes and the advantage of working in partnership with other agencies.

With further work and cooperation, this partnership approach can be developed and improved to allow all agencies to work together to tackle many problems, improve public safety and put victims in touch with agencies who can help them.

Appendix

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Appendix 1.

Multi-Agency Statement of Intent to address issues surrounding Prostitution in the Borough of Stockton

This is an agreement between the below named agencies, being members of the Safer Stockton Partnership, detailing how each individually and in partnership will combat the issues surrounding prostitution in the Borough of Stockton.

Drug Action Team (DAT)

It has been confirmed that the majority of prostitutes coming to the notice of agencies are regular drug users. In an attempt to break the vicious circle of prostituting to feed a drug habit the DAT can facilitate contact with the following services offering education, diversion, treatment and counselling:

- Hooked, The Cornerhouse, Dovecote St, Stockton – has an outreach worker for under 19's, provides a weekly treatment clinic when a sexual health nurse is also in attendance and also offers counseling and family support.
- The Fulcrum, Lawson St Health Centre, Stockton – provides treatment to users over 18 yrs for addiction.
- The Addictive Behaviour Service, Yarm Lane, Stockton – provides needle exchange facilities and treatment for addiction.
- ETC, William St, Stockton – is a structured day care service that can be accessed when in treatment providing training, counseling and assisting in finding employment.
- PANIC, Nelson Terrace, Stockton – provide a helpline, buddying service and provide family support.

North Tees Primary Care Trust (NT- PCT)

The NT- PCT as a member of DAT works in partnership to assist delivering much of that described above. NT PCT also has a responsibility to ensure family planning and sexual health services are provided. These are facilitated by:

- General practitioners
- At The Health Centres at Billingham, Stockton and Thornaby
- At the University Hospital of North Tees

Cleveland Police (Stockton District)

The police will take primacy in enforcement matters and will also provide the following:

- Intelligence gathering
- Intelligence lead policing patrols and operations
- High visibility re-assurance patrols
- Agreed protection not prosecution protocols for under 18 yrs

- Co-ordinated media strategy
- Information sharing as in agreed protocols
- Assisting Stockton Borough Council in environmental prevention and protection (planning and designing out crime/disorder)

Stockton Borough Council (SBC)(Community Protection)

The Community Protection Department of SBC will provide enforcement support by providing:

- Monitored CCTV where coverage allows
- Mobile CCTV subject to a suitable site and necessary permissions
- Patrol by Community Wardens in designated areas

Community Protection will take primacy in liaising with fellow SBC departments re solutions in environmental prevention and protection issues.

Stockton Borough Council (Health and Social Care)

The Health and Social Care Team provides a range of services to young people who are at risk of or are being sexually exploited. It offers the following:

- A Duty Service that offers a prompt response to requests for services , this may be advice, signposting services or direct support.
- A Drop-in Service that offers advice and assistance, support and services to assessed vulnerable young people.
- Group-work programmes
- Strategy Meetings that are convened and chaired by the Youth Team
- Allocated Social Workers who complete assessments of need, produce care plans which are monitored and reviewed and refer to specialist support as and when necessary.

Health and Social Care has 6 Care Management Teams who also provide a similar, if less frequent service to Young People at risk of Sexual Exploitation, they also work within families where the mother may be actively involved in prostitution.

Within Stockton, Health and Social Care also manage the Emergency Duty Team which covers the five Tees Valley authorities. Emergency Duty Social Workers operate within the agreed Teesside Protocol when providing a service to Sexually Exploited Young People.

The above statement of intent is not an exhaustive list of role and responsibilities. The issue of prostitution is fluid and this requires a flexible response. It will be appropriate at times to enlist the support of other agencies, however those individuals, representing the named agencies on this agreement, at the Safer Stockton partnership will be the key agents for action.

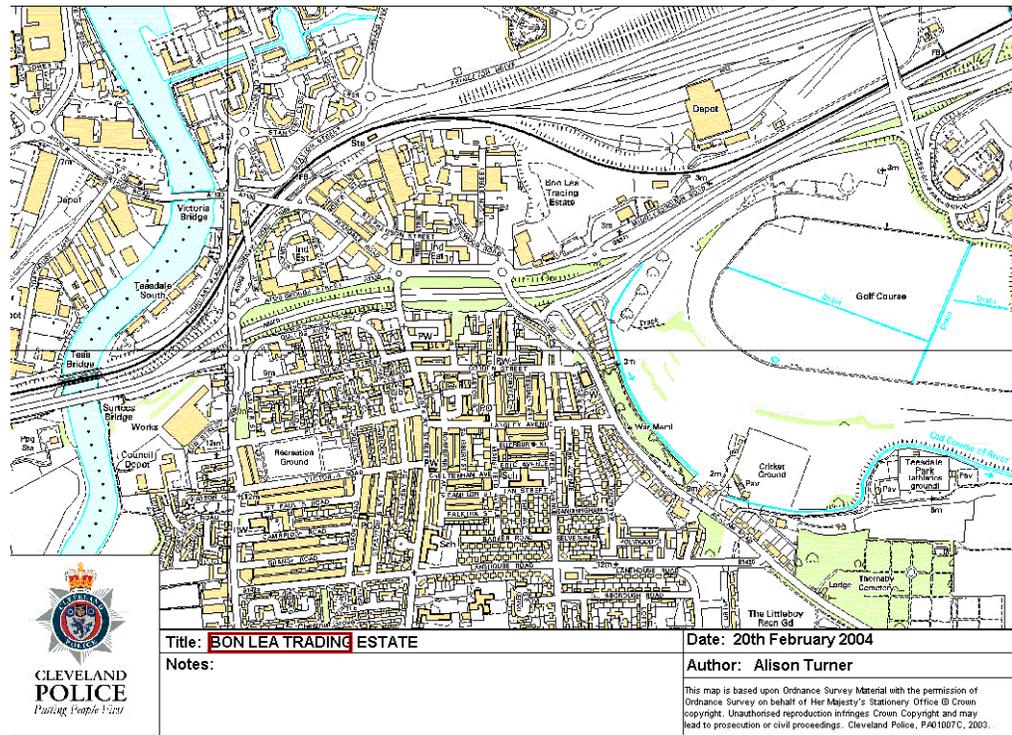
Appendix 2.



Fig 1.

The number of persons arrested escalated to a peak in September 2003. Although there have been no further operations to date there is a marked reduction in the number of prostitutes on the estate and evidence from SECOS suggests a 50% reduction.

Appendix 3



O.S. map of Bon Lea Industrial Estate

The precise location of the estate can be seen by referring to the map below

Appendix 4



Aerial photograph of Bon Lea Industrial Estate