

OPERATION ARGUS

LEWISHAM BOROUGH POLICE

METROPOLITAN POLICE SERVICE

SUBMISSION FOR THE TILLEYAWARD

Operation Argus

1 Abstract

The problem

A twin, mutually reinforcing problem existed, of relatively high volume burglaries and a reluctance to report crime. Under reporting created a loss of detection and prosecution opportunities, therefore increasing the fear of crime. A method to impact this vicious circle by reversing the lack of public confidence in the police's ability to tackle crime effectively was needed.

Evidence to define the problem

Public opinion surveys in Lewisham identified crime as one of the main 'concerns of those who live work and learn in the borough. A 1,000 strong representative groups of Lewisham residents said the issues of most concern to them.were domestic burglary, street robbery, vehicle crime and great concern was expressed in relation to racial harassment.

Community officers had tried unsuccessfully to energise local neighbourhood watch groups. Sector police Inspectors noted that often working groups did not reflect the culturally and socially diverse groups, which make up the community

Crime managers needed to communicate direct with local people in crime hotspots to encourage people in target hardening and provide information about suspects to aid detection. This would reduce the fear of crime by rebutting incorrect rumours and celebrating successes against the criminals.

Response to the problem

A sophisticated voice messaging system (Ringmaster) was adopted to communicate timely information direct to large numbers of people, about appropriate incidents in their immediate neighbourhood.

Impact of the response and measurement

Ringmaster has grown from'a caller-list of several hundred to a database of over 11,000 borough wide.

Evidence of success includes major reductions in burglary (-16%) which cannot otherwise be explained; increase intelligence; reduced Cad calls; increased judicial disposals. Latterly the system has also been used to create groups of participants linked by a common problem (such as small shop keepers) to those linked by a common interest (such as schools and youth clubs) Households of local criminals are also targeted for inclusion in the system, which has the effect of turning the fear of being detected onto them, reducing their motivation for offending.

The success of this strategy is being applied in increasingly innovative ways. The system can play a key part in local efforts to recruit officers from ethnic minority communities and increase the number of special constables.

The system, currently the subject of a 'Beacon Status' bid to the Home Office, is available for use by community partners and will be extended to cover all boroughs in south London.

Description of the project

The ringmaster system was introduced into the North of Lewisham in 1997/1998. Ringmaster is a proprietary computerised call dispatch and receipt system. It works by sending a pre-recorded voice message to participants during a period when they indicate they are likely to be available. The computer will retry each number up to three times, returning to unanswered numbers *once it has* tried all *the* other numbers *in the* group. It will leave messages on answer phones and can be used to send emails to (particularly useful to businesses)

At first it was used as a means of contacting neighbourhood watch coordinators and licensees. Originally the system utilised one telephone line only. Having identified a problem of poor communication with local communities and consequently too little participation Lewisham police soon realised the system had the potential to reach a much wider section of the community if the capacity to send messages was increased.

There followed a period of product development by the supplier 'I V Developments' in close consultation with Lewisham police. The system now has a eleven outgoing and one incoming line. Since installation in February 1999 over 100 different messages have been sent. In all 220 messages generating 65000 calls (of which 58000 have been received) have been made.

Objectives

The main aim was to reduce burglary, robbery, vehicle, hate crime and disorder by providing bespoke crime prevention advice. Encouraging the reporting of all crime and more information about suspects would increase levers for crime reduction through increased detection .

Certain areas had high levels of crime and of disorder. The community was failing to report some crime. The police lacked opportunities to communicate crime prevention advice and positive messages about crime reduction. Opportunities to engage local people in improving community safety were small and often did not achieve measurable results.

High crime areas were identified through analysis of CRIS and Cadmis. The problem of failing to engage with the community was identified by Inspectors who noted the failure of sector working parties and neighbourhood watch to sufficiently attract interest and support from the wider community. The Lewisham Police Community Consultative Group (LPCCG) frequently noted *concerns about hate crime amongst vulnerable sections of the* community which were evidently not reported to police.

Justification for prioritising these problems

The Local Policing Plans highlighted the need to work in partnership with local residents and business to reduce crime and disorder. Policing priorities included street crime, burglary and hate crime. The local authority was concerned about the extent of disorder in some areas

The problem was based on the needed to convey messages to potential victims, witnesses and people strategically placed in the community who could assist in preventing crime and identify perpetrators. This included a need to contact hard to reach groups and create networks between and within such groups so individuals feel supported and less isolated e.g. refugees .

Who identified the problem

The problem was identified by several key stakeholders in community safety. Sector police inspectors who were concerned about the lack of community representation at sector police working parties. The Lewisham Police Community Consultative recognised that under reporting of hate crimes in the borough limited the opportunities to tackle the problem. The failure of neighbourhood watch in certain areas meant crime prevention initiatives often failed to realise their potential and missed the opportunity for greater police contact. Senior police managers understood the need to contact and mobilise the wider community at both individual and group levels.

Information sources

MPS Corporate Databases ie Command And Dispatch (CAD),

Police National Computer (PNC),

CRIMINT(intelligence database),

Crime Reporting Information System (CRIS).

Divisional Crime Tasking Group (DCTG)

Local authority data

Crime Prevention Officer's visits

Identification Officer's visits

Sector Working Party's

LPCCG

Citizens Panels (1000 local residents for telephone polls on local issues)

Discussions and one to one interviews with hard to reach groups

British Crime Survey

Analysis

Analysts from both police and the local authority studied patterns of crime, victimisation and the typical profile of an offender.

- Locations targeted for inclusion within Operation Argus were based on an analysis of crime and incident data to establish 'hotspots' for crime where the greatest impact could be made. This was achieved by mapping the data into small areas of 250 square metres. These small areas often represented local neighbourhoods where most residents are aware of or experience similar problems. The fortnightly Divisional Crime and Tasking

meeting discussed the data and determined tasks. These tasks were then costed and measured to identify and share good practice. A detailed verbal review of each task was given at the following meeting

The findings that emerged from the analysis

- Neighbourhood watch and other traditional methods of communication had failed in some areas
- A small number of criminals were responsible for a large proportion of reported crime within a short half a mile of where they lived.
- Certain locations were vulnerable to repeat victimisation.
- High level of community concern about burglary, robbery and hate crime.
- A clear problem of the fear of crime.
- Problem of under reporting of crime.

Factors that determined the response to the problem

A reduction in police resources meant that capacity to meet non demand driven events was restricted. The policing style of Lewisham Division (Total Geographical Policing TGP) geared core duty officers to patrolling smaller areas enabling them to identify localised policing problems. However this could be undermined by officers need to deploy in vehicles to meet ad-hoc 'fast time' demands.

The populating of the Argus database by 'cold calling' at homes and businesses within targeted areas well suited TGP allowing officers to be directed in a specific and measurable way. TGP dictates a lack of community *beat officers* which *can give rise to limited contact with the* community. Operation Argus helped to overcome this potential problem by ensuring officers were frequently deployed on foot to engage local people in a problem orientated initiative.

How did the analysis contribute to the design of the response

The analysis enabled managers to prioritise which locations should be targeted first. Further on going analysis of crime patterns and features sourced the information given in messages sent to participants in order to reduce further offences. This analysis identified features common to the crimes such as sash windows, and the characteristics of victims and offenders.

Ownership of the approach

The operation was co-ordinated through the police crime manager at DCTG meetings. The responsibility for rescuing and directing the populating of the database rested with the respective sector Inspectors. Briefings were provided to the local authority who were invited to utilise the auto-dialling system for their own community safety messages. The Crime Prevention Officer's briefed Neighbourhood Watch Co-ordinators.

Costs

The original voice messaging system (ringmaster) cost £3,000 in 1997 with a capacity to reach only 90 people using 1 BT line per hour. The enhanced

system which has 11 outgoing lines and one incoming cost £9,170 providing the capacity to reach 1,000 people per hour. This cost includes the provision of the telephone lines. Calls which typically last for 40 seconds cost approximately 5p each. The system is administered by an Administrative Officer on an increasing basis from an initial 20 hours per week to a full time commitment as the volume of new participants, and therefore inputting time increases. Each new entry on the database takes approximately 1 minute to input.

Implementation

The plan was implemented through DCTG using uniformed officers deployed in High Visibility Mode. It was established that an average of 59% of premises visited found someone in. Of these 5% refused to join the scheme. An individual officer could be expected to recruit 18 new participants per tour of duty, providing they were exclusively deployed on this task.

An initial target to recruit at least 20% of households in crime hotspots was set. This allowed managers to plan the roll out of coverage and set achievable targets for officers each day.

Difficulties encountered and how these were dealt with

Some resistance and scepticism was encountered from officers initially. This was overcome as they saw the positive results both in terms of crime reduction and perhaps more importantly the enthusiasm of the public to embrace the idea of positive communication with police. Officers have also been impressed by the public's desire through empowerment to help make their community safer.

Review mechanism and evaluation

Fortnightly reviews of the ringmaster system took place taking into account the deployment of staff, results of recruitment, the impact of High Visibility Policing, the number of messages sent, the number of arrests and the amount of intelligence received.

As a result officers were redirected to existing and emerging crime hotspots at particular times of day and days of the week with specific measurable targets..

Evidence of the successes of the initiative includes;
major reductions in burglary in areas where the system has been introduced,
increase in police intelligence coming from ringmaster recipients;
reduction in number of Cad calls;
increase in judicial disposals

Further evidence of the effectiveness of the operation is deduced from the 80 intelligence reports received from people recruited to the ringmaster system who had previously not provided intelligence. An initial analysis of the impact of the system which has been extended to Catford since April 1999 shows a reduction in burglary for the first time in over a year.

In the financial year 1 997198 13 Divisions saw a reduction in burglary. In 1998/99 only 3 achieved further reductions, the North of Lewisham was the only one to deliver continuing reduction in excess of 10 %. Operation Argus is adjudged to be the major reason for this.

A range of messages now goes out to recipients including ;
crime prevention advice;
appeals for assistance;
rebutting unfounded criticism of police;
information about successful operations;
community messages;
observation point requests;
information about terrorism in Soho, Brick Lane and Brixton

The system can also be used to help recruit minority ethnic officers and Special Constables as well as civil staff and school crossing patrols. Work is currently underway to adapt the system to warn stooges to attend identification parades.

By transferring victim's details from the CRIS reporting database, utilising the General Query Language interface, all victims can be transferred onto ringmaster. Victims are then given the opportunity to withdraw if they so wish. However this tactic should not be used exclusively as it does not produce the significant 30% reduction achieved in the month following intense high visibility recruitment by uniformed officers in person.

A project is currently underway to extend the operation to every Borough in south London, Financial support through the Governments 'Beacon status' scheme is being sought.

Barry Norman
Detective Chief Inspector

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Barry Norman', written in a cursive style.