2 AREA PLYMOUTH
REDUCTIONS ACHIEVED BY PROBLEM SOLVING POLICING

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SUMMARY:

This report describes the methods and structure of the implementation of problem solving policing within 2 Area, Plymouth. It considers recent developments that enabled the effective delivery of problem oriented policing as well as some of the challenges. Whilst the Area decided to invest in dedicated officers as problem solvers it is stressed that the ethos of problem solving was recognised as needing to be marketed and accepted by the whole Area structure. The process is one of continual evolution. Twelve months after our initial structural changes we are considering returning the dedicated officers from central supervision back to Ward policing to continue their problem solving work having served as 'ambassadors' to the ethos, the integration of multi-agency problem solving which will incorporate the use of anti social behaviour orders, the transference of the S.A.R.A. recording system from paper to business accounts within the criminal information system, and the routine cost/saving analysis for every finalised problem.

The S.A.RA. model has been strictly observed and to date more than 200 problems have been registered and tackled. Scanning is carried out by every employee in addition to members of our communities. Analysis has been greatly enhanced by the appointment of Area analysts who, whilst still developing their role and contributions, can provide quality predictive analysis. The focus of the response phase has been to work with the partners and in a significant proportion of occasions actions have not required additional police resources. Finally the assessment has utilised specified categories of success combined with costed analysis of the reduction achieved in volume of crime and demand on resources.

The report is in the form of a review which evaluates the first 65 problems that were completed. Problems are grouped in one of five categories and significant or recurring issues are highlighted. The potential and actual part played by partner agencies has been assessed as well as the outcomes. Each problem was evaluated over three time periods, adjusted to equate over the same time span, and the results amalgamated to calculate the overall results for the Area. The number of incidents, recorded on the Operational Information System, O.I.S., was found to have reduced by 82% from period one to period three (587 to 108 recorded logs.) The number of recorded crimes was reduced 58% (416 to 175 crimes).

INTRODUCTION

Early in 1999, 2 Area implemented changes in structure to take into account the problem solving concept and to embark on a process to ensure all its staff became problem solvers irrespective of role. The structural change included the formation of a team of dedicated problem solvers based within the Area Support Team, (AST.)

It had been increasingly recognised that a greater focus on problem solving activity would lead to more manageable demands on the service because underlying problems are solved, and a better service to the public whose concerns would be attended to at source. This becomes increasingly important during times of budgetary constraints.

The fundamentals of problem solving are exemplified by our Force policing style and its aims. To be successful in its achievement and in order to effectively deliver problem solving, the involvement of the whole Area structure was required, not just designated officers with special responsibility acting in isolation. To this end we can identify a range of developments over recent years within 2 Area:

■ The establishment of Area Support Teams has brought together a range of specialist officers including field intelligence, drug liaison, crime prevention, youth affairs, licensing and diversity.

■ The crime management system.

■ The establishment of Ward teams and most recently inspectors with geographic responsibility.

■ The establishment of multi agency groups via the Plymouth Community Safety Partnership, who develop, and implement strategies addressing the reduction of a number of priority crimes and issues.

■ The ownership of crime priorities by individual detective inspectors, CID sections and the recent implementation of the CID proactive week.

Definition of a problem

No single definition can be found in the literature however one that has been written and used thus far in 2 Area is:

A `problem' is any matter that places an excessive demand on police resources, often repeatedly and over a period of time, or gives rise to high levels of local public concern, fear of crime or loss of quality of *life. It will include criminal activity, disorder, traffic matters and disruption to community life.*

Many problems are not specific policing responsibilities but they become demands on our service due to the frustration on the part of those affected, lack of knowledge as to who is responsible or inactivity or unawareness on the part of another agency.

STRUCTURE

Within 2 Area it was decided to invest in dedicated problem solvers. On 1 st June 1999 ten constables were appointed. The officers were recruited through personnel procedures using vacancy advertisement and completion of written exercises.

2 Area has a structure which includes response sections and ward teams. It was decided that problem solvers, whilst being AST officers reporting to the Crime Manager and with line management through the Crime Reduction sergeant and inspector, would be based with ward teams. The work of the problem solvers is not restricted to the specific needs of their host wards.

The reasons behind this structure are:

■ To ensure each problem solver has effective working contact with ward team

colleagues and develops knowledge of the geographical area of responsibility.

- To work in support of the problems faced by the ward team and to offer a focus for the work but at the same time assisting in a team led approach.

- AST line management is intended to provide some corporacy for the approach and direction whilst encouraging local creativity and initiative. It also maintains a focus on the work of the problem solvers and offers a central prioritisation in line with the needs of the whole area. In addition it assists in their not being abstracted to support ward team shortfalls thereby diluting the opportunities for success.

- To provide a bottom up approach.

THE ROLE OF THE PROBLEM SOLVER

The problem solvers are viewed as being in a unique position to effect change. They are not normally subject to abstraction to other duties and have and will continue to develop a deep knowledge of local issues, agency and community contacts and skills in problem resolution. They have the ability to scan for problem identification using a variety of mechanisms including police I.T. systems, feedback from colleagues, local elected members and community intelligence.

Having identified a problem, or been notified of one from another source, they or the Area analysts research it in more depth. The Problem Analysis Triangle (P.A.T.) has proved to be of assistance.

Having identified the associated underlying factors problem solvers, through consultation and negotiation with colleagues and outside agencies, where appropriate, will construct an action plan for implementation involving one or more routes toward resolution.

The problem solver is not necessarily (according to route chosen - see below) the deliverer of the action plan but will monitor its implementation and review or amend as necessary.

The AST reduction managers assess / evaluate the whole process and outcomes.

Possible routes of resolution include:

1. No action
   o problem has resolved itself
   o problem is not a priority

2. Problem identified as not a policing responsibility
   o problem solver / ward team educate complainant on how to progress issue with appropriate responsible agency (experience suggests that a personal visit can be an effective remedy)
   o issue is referred to appropriate agency by problem solver / ward
   o Area Management Team (AMT) members raises issue at director level in appropriate agency /organisation

3. Action by problem solver acting alone
   o visit to complainant, advice offered, publicity, media
   o prediction
   o prevention
   o disruption
   o target hardening

4. Action by ward team
   o high visibility policing, covert operation, optical evidence gathering, other operations, enforcement, etc.
   o pervention
   o disruption

5. Action with other colleagues
   o Crime Prevention Officer, Youth Affairs Officer, Drug Liaison Officer, Licensing etc.
   o Prevention
   o disruption

6. Action requiring additional resources e.g. special operations group, C.LD, traffic etc.
   o Ward sergeant or nominee presents to weekly tasking meeting

7. Action requiring support from one or more agencies
   o problem solver initiates approach to partners supported by AST managers as appropriate

8. Action requiring a strategic response
   o A.S.T. managers raise with Plymouth Community Safety Partnership action groups
   o A.M.T liaise at strategic level within and external to Constabulary

9. Action requiring a national / central government response
   o A.S.T. managers raise through A.M.T. with H. Q. for A. C. P.O.

Irrespective of the route chosen for resolution the S.A.R.A. process is rigorously applied to each problem tackled. A number is allocated when each problem is registered enabling monitoring and assessment to take place in every case.

THE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

The problem solvers line managers wished from the outset to conduct a review of problem solving within 2 Area after the first four months of operation. It is emphasised that this is too little time to actually evaluate the full benefits of this approach as problem solving, by its very nature, will often be long term. Additionally, many of the problems addressed will have been looked at in the past and either not resolved or only partial success achieved. The review was conducted by the crime reduction AST supervisors and as such can not be construed as either independent or exhaustive. However every effort has been made to be objective and an honest and open critique has been sought from those consulted.

Examined are:

■ The structural arrangements

■ The problem solving process using scanning, analysis, response, and assessment Indicators of success

■ Identification of good practice

■ Identification of obstacles to successful problem solving

Methods used include:

■ Circulating a comprehensive questionnaire to individual problem solvers

■ Identifying the type of problems being addressed and their respective proportions

■ Significant factors involved

■ Linkage to the tasking system

■ Examining those registered problems which had been submitted on completion to AST supervisors.

■ The views of the AST supervisors based on their hands on experience over the review period.

RESULTS

To date 200 problems have been registered with problem solvers, 65 of these were have been evaluated to form this review.

Problem classification

Problems have been placed into five broad categories. Some problems were found which would fall equally into one or more categories, where this occurred the primary cause of demand on resources dictated the category chosen.

Percentage of problems within each category

- **Crime** - **42%:** includes trends in particular crimes over a beat or ward area, crimes in a specified locality, prolific or target criminals, or crime policy issues / working practices.

- **Traffic** - **6%:** includes accident hot spots or other road safety issues.

- **Community - 17%:** covers any problem raised by the community that may not be obvious on police OIS / CIS systems, or issues that affect the community as a whole rather than just one person or family.

- **Nuisance youths - 32%:** include problems where either the actions of youths are perceived to be a problem or where offences are committed by groups of young people.

- **Other - 3%:** can include anything else for example missing persons.

Agencies most appropriate for solving problems

It was found that just under one half (46%) of the problems required at least a joint approach for resolution. In almost one in five cases the police service was not the appropriate agency to resolve the problem. A multi agency approach was found to be desirable in 45% of the problems yet was achieved in only 21%.

The proportion of problems requiring an input from one or more of Plymouth City Council departments was 83 %. The proportion achieved amounted to less than half of these, 37 %. The ease of joint working and/or the willingness of council departments to participate varied. The most success in local authority joint working was made with the housing department.

Housing associations offered excellent assistance responding in all necessary cases. Problem solvers made contact with and jointly worked with many other organisations throughout the voluntary and private sector e.g. oil companies, allotment associations, licensees etc. Generally a good response was found, in 20% of cases out of the desired 28% assistance was given.

The police involvement can be determined on three levels: the problem solver acted alone (i.e. without other police assistance but with or without other agencies) in 25% of cases, the problem solver acted with ward team members on almost half of the problems (48%) and additional police resources were utilised in 22%.

Utilisation of the tasking process

The tasking facility was not appropriate for 85% of the problems. Of the 15% that were, and were presented as bids for additional resources at weekly tasking, approximately half were successful.

Success in problem resolution

Each problem has been quantitatively evaluated and classified in one of six success categories:

1. Problem entirely eliminated
2. Problem reduced
3. Problem and impact remain the same but police demand reduced
4. No change
5. Unable to classify or not a problem
6. Other success

To examine the change in recorded crime or volume of OIS logs checks were made for three time periods.

- Period one - from January 1st 1999 to the date of registration as a problem

- Period two - from the day after the date of registration to the date of finalisation (the intervention period)

- Period three - the day after the date of finalisation to the date evaluated (in most cases during mid to late November 1999.)

In order for a given problem to have been classified as a `category one success', (problem entirely eliminated) OIS or CIS records had to be found as zero for period three. If just one log or crime was recorded during that period, the problem was classified in category two, irrespective of the volume of reduction achieved (examples are given under identified good practice.) The other ways in which problems manifest themselves e.g. direct telephone calls to ward, letters from the public, community intelligence, public forum feedback etc., have not been excluded from the review but are by nature largely subjective and more problematic to evaluate.

Seventy-five percent of the problems identified were either entirely eliminated (category 1) or were substantially reduced (category 2). Nine percent of the problems could not be classified. An example of a problem falling into the 'unable to classify' category was a series of rabbit killings in the St Budeaux area which commanded considerable police time and liaison with several agencies such as RSPCA and the Forensic Science Service. The cause was identified as foxes and consequently categorised as `not a problem.' Two percent of the problems identified were allotted to the 'other success' category. An example of `other success' was a missing person on Estover Eggbuckland ward who emigrated with her family to America. The problem was thus resolved but arguably not as a result of our intervention.

Significant or recurring factors of problems tackled

During evaluation a range of recurring factors were noted. The factors, the percentage of problems with that factor and the proportion found in groupings of success categories are shown in the Appendix, Table 1.

The level of success attained varied between the identified factors. For example, the problem solvers were least successful at dealing with mental health issues and most successful with repeat callers, design issues and alcohol based problems. An example of an alcohol based problem concerned a long standing domestic violence situation between a married couple in Whitleigh. The problem solver was asked by the domestic violence unit to assist after they had explored every possible avenue in terms of enforcement and assistance for the victim.

The approach taken by the problem solver concentrated purely on the offender and resulted in a placement in a rehabilitation centre. This course of action had previously been rejected by psychiatric workers even though the need of this type of intervention was welcomed by the offender. The true extent of this intervention can only be assessed in the long term.

Successes achieved by problem type

It is not surprising that the least percentage of category one successes were crime problems (See Appendix, Table 2). Attempts to resolve specific crime trends over ward areas or beat areas were generally unsuccessful or short term in impact. This serves to illustrate that choice of problem is crucial and problem solvers are not best utilised for responding to general crime trends. However site specific crime issues had better results e.g. work with schools, shops, etc.

A pleasing amount of total success was achieved with nuisance youth problems. Our liaison with youth workers and education welfare officers has increased, as has the joint approach of problem solvers with both crime prevention officers and youth affairs officers.

The high number of community problems which resulted in no change belies the amount of valuable work invested. These type of problems generally were most difficult to quantify and results would be best assessed by a survey or other qualitative approach. It also

needs to be acknowledged that the police service have few tools to make effective interventions in community problems and mental health issues. Partner agency involvement is also frequently inadequate / ineffective in these areas.

Whilst the results for traffic issues are good they represent only a few problems. It is anticipated that more work in this area will occur now that the road safety officer is part of 2 Area AST.

OVERALL RESULTS

The method of assessing each problem over three time periods, as defined previously, has enabled the results to be amalgamated. For every problem the results found for periods two and three have been adjusted in order to equate them to the same time span as period one (in most cases at least a six month period.) Thus overall reductions have been calculated.

OIS results

■ Period one   587 recorded logs

■ Period two   216 recorded logs

■ Period three   108 recorded logs

Between periods one and three a 82% reduction in targeted logs has been achieved.

CIS results

■ Period one   416 recorded crimes

■ Period two   226 recorded crimes

■ Period three   175 recorded crimes

Between periods one and three a 58% reduction in targeted crimes has been achieved.

Generally the problem solvers have not forwarded their problems for finalisation until such time as they are happy that the problem

has ceased or the time had been reached that no more could be done. In view of this the depth of their success can be appreciated by recorded logs and crimes still depreciating during period three.

IDENTIFIED GOOD PRACTICE

As our approach to problem solving has become consolidated we now try to establish the savings made as a result of our responses or interventions into given problems.

Example 1: Burglary and criminal damage to Knowle Primary school.

During the first six months of 1999 Knowle Primary suffered 20 recorded burglaries or damage and 34 OIS logs referred to incidents at the school. Analysis revealed the nature of the problems as well as an increasing trend in recorded crime. It was predicted that without action by the end of 1999 a 660% increase in levels of recorded crime from 1997 was possible.

The response implemented included a range of good joint actions by the problem solver, other reduction officers and the school. Some of the actions included:

■ Meetings between the problem solver and head teacher Employment of a caretaker to be on site when the school closed Secureguard South West, a private security company, were employed for two random visits per night

■ The Area tasking system utilised to secure overtime for observations by Ward officers Optical evidence gathering equipment employed

■ The Good School Neighbours Scheme adopted by the school (a crime reduction initiative run by crime prevention and youth affairs officers.)

Subsequent to the intervention there was an 86 % reduction in recorded logs and a 95 % reduction in reported crimes. This was classified as a category two success in the overall problem solving results.

Based upon the pre-project yearly forecast cost against the post-intervention yearly forecast cost, the results represent a saving to the police of £4,071 and to the school £7,477 per year. If the yearly forecast for the predicted 1999 increase is considered, savings of £25,014 and £62,828 per year for the police and school respectively are estimated.

A similar S.A.R.A. was raised for another school, Whitleigh infants and junior. Here the results were as impressive, 23 logs and 11 crimes over six months reduced to zero after interventions. This was classified as a category one success.

Example 2: Jobseekers allowance giro cheque payment fraud

A run of thefts and fraudulent cashing of Jobseekers allowance giro cheques was noticed by investigating officers. Research showed that during a five month period, 97 giro cheque related crimes were investigated by police in 2 Area. Three Jobcentres reported 794 giro cheque losses during the same period.

Whilst officers always investigated these crimes they were hampered by scant details of circumstances, location, suspect, and in many cases no witness statement to formalise the complaint. A contributing factor to the volume of crimes appeared to be the relative ease with which an allegation could be made with few checks being made.

It was identified that a multi-agency approach to the problem was essential for it to be tackled successfully. The Area therefore worked closely with the Benefit Fraud Investigation Service (BFIS) and the Employment Service to design a response.

In brief, the following actions were implemented:

■ With a central theme of crime reduction, a form called a BFISI was designed which incorporates a witness statement ensuring that details of what happened to the giro cheque are recorded at the earliest opportunity. Both the claimant and the staff at the Jobcentre sign the form.

■ The claimant then takes the form to one of two police stations in Plymouth where the loss is recorded and a reference number noted on the BFISI . It is stamped and returned by the claimant to the Jobcentre where a replacement giro cheque is considered.

■ New police working practices have been introduced for the recording of giro cheque theft/fraud and claimants presenting the BFI51 are now routinely made subject of police checks. (So far twenty five arrests have been made as a direct result of this action.)

■ When the BFIS are confident a fraud has occurred they interview the claimant. Only where a series or trend is identified is the case referred to the police.

In view of one of the main factors of this problem being the dishonesty of some claimants, this new approach was designed to impress upon claimants that each theft would attract detailed scrutiny. The overriding aim is to decrease the number of false accusations of theft, thereby reducing crime figures, saving police time in investigation and saving money for the treasury. It is not dsigned to deter genuine claimants from reporting crimes.

Early results are encouraging. Figures for the five months between December 1999 and April 2000 saw the following decreases from the same period the previous year. See Appendix, Table 3.

This problem has been evaluated and costed recently, hence the results are not included in the overall results presented above.

The results from this problem are viewed optimistically. The interventions have caused significant financial savings and valuable time saved by unnecessary investigations. The number of theft or fraud investigations carried out by Plymouth officers dropped from 97 to 17 for the same time period the previous year.

Example 3: Nuisance neighbours

Over a one-month period ten OIS logs and numerous telephone calls were received at the Ward office concerning the actions of four neighbouring families. The calls related to allegations and counter allegations of assault / harassment and often involved children at the addresses. All premises were council owned.

Action taken included a joint meeting with the families and Plymouth City Council housing officers regarding breaches in tenancy agreements, mediation was accepted by all families, one family was relocated in a mutual exchange package. An excellent example of Housing playing their part in problem resolution.

The problem has ceased, no calls, logs, reported crime since 1st Sept. 99. A category one success.

Example 4: Youths causing damage on a housing estate

A new housing estate owned by a housing association became subject to extensive disruption by youths under 12 years of age. Many of the offenders lived on the estate, and much fear of providing information existed amongst the residents.

The solution involved lengthy time investment on the part of the problem solver and the housing association agreeing to hire a professional witness in order to exercise civil powers of eviction under the housing act.

The number of recorded logs reduced from 36, in the first period, to 1 in the third. A category two success and good practice improving the quality of many peoples lives.

CONCLUSIONS

This report has identified many areas of good practice and some of the barriers to successful resolutions of problems. It has shown that attempting to solve crime trends across large areas is not as successful as concentrating on site specific crime issues. Like wise successes when dealing with prolific offenders are often short term. Much value can be found in the work that falls outside the usual enforcement tools open to police officers, those resolutions requiring little or no extra police resources, or those which security / design advice can eradicate.

Whilst acknowledging the limitations of this evaluation it is the firm view of the author that problem solving within 2 Area has identified many areas of demand on our resources, has sought to address these demands and has demonstrated a significant success in achieving reductions of the demands on 2 Area policing resources. All the indications suggest that the current problem solving arrangements are delivering good value. Good practice continues to be identified and options for future development recognised.

It should be highlighted that whilst the reductions in OIS logs and recorded crimes relating to the work evaluated under the S.A.R.A process is justifiably praiseworthy, the value of the problem solvers work is much wider e.g. work carried out in relation to bilkings, silent 999 calls and policy issues concerning repeat callers.

Progression in the early stages of marketing and dissemination of our work to our partner agencies at a strategic level has been slow. Future success and development of problem solving depends on our ability in persuading partners to embrace the ethos of the work. Much has been achieved at the tactical level using the techniques of networking, reciprocating assistance and where necessary straightforward pestering. However in the long term only the commitment and drive from their senior managers will sustain any real shift to

this aspect of partnership working. The current discussions regarding a six weekly multi-agency problem solving forum is one example of the progress made.

Within 2 Area formalised training is planned in order for all officers to acknowledge their position as problem solvers and to adopt the principles in their every day work. An ideal aim for the Area is that every officer adopts the necessary shift in culture, which was epitomised by one ward sergeant when expressing his view of the benefits of problem solving:

`It has encouraged lateral and broader thinking, it moves away from the `band-aid' philosophy for solution.'*

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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APPENDICES

TABLE 1: PROBLEM TYPE DISTRIBUTION AND PROPORTIONAL OUTCOMES

FACTOR	DISTRIBUTION OF PROBLEMS (%)	PROBLEMS ELIMINATED OR REDUCED (CATEGORY 1 OR 2) (%)	PROBLEMS WITH NO CHANGE (CATEGORY 4) (%)
Design issue	34%	68%	27%
Repeat caller	12%	63%	25%
Alcohol	12%	75%	25%
Prolific offender	9%	17%	33%
Mental health	8%	0%	60%
Drugs	6%	50%	50%
Multi agency conference	3%	0%	50%

TABLE 2: PROBLEM TYPES BY SUCCESS CATEGORY

PROBLEM TYPE	SUCCESS CATEGORY			
	1	2	3	4
Crime	30%	44%	0	26%
Traffic	50%	25%	25%	0
Community	36%	18%	0	45%
Nuisance youths	52%	29%	0	19%
Other	100%	0	0	0

TABLE 3: FREQUENCY OF GIRO CHEQUE FRAUD REPORTS, PROPORTIONAL REDUCTIONS AND ESTIMATED SAVINGS

GIRO CHEQUES	1998-1999	1999-2000	% REDUCTION	POTENTIAL SAVING
Reported lost to the ES	794	488	38.5%	£24,480
Reported stolen to police	59	10	83%	£1,862
Reported fraud to police	38	7*	82%	£14,136

* 6 of these frauds are recorded from before the start of the pilot period.