

A Co-ordinated Approach to Crime and Disorder Problems in Blackburn Town Centre

Summary

Blackburn Town Centre was scanned on the implementation of the Crime and Disorder Act and was identified as a "Hot Spot" accounting for 20 per cent of all crime in the Borough. Consequently, a Crime and Disorder Sub-group was formed to address the factors contributing to identified problems.

Consultation with the users of the town centre highlighted concerns about the safety of young people using late-night pubs and clubs, drunkenness, harassment by groups of young people, car crime, aggressive begging and shoplifting. Peoples' sense of safety when using public transport, using the train station and the lighting of routes from car parks were key issues of concern.

The creation of a safe, vibrant and economical successful town centre is a central aim for continuing regeneration. Safe evening parking, CCTV and other schemes were already progressed so a strategy was adopted to strengthen the community safety impact of both existing and planned initiatives.

The sub-group provided a focus for co-ordinating activity and was chaired by the local authority Town Centre manager, Paul Isherwood. To achieve its overall target objectives the group focused on the following issues:-
Reducing the level of: -

- Stealing from motor vehicles
- Theft of motor vehicles
- Shoplifting
- Drink related disorders
- Youth Nuisance

The police re-organised town centre policing to create a dedicated town centre team of eight officers and a Sergeant covering the busiest locations. Officers were selected to give a wide variety of policing experience and had a remit to address shoplifting, vehicle crime, begging and robbery.

Partnerships were also entered into with the local authority and licensees to institute a door supervisors' registration scheme and constant liaison via a "Pubwatch" group.

The local authority and the town centre stores invested in better radio equipment and updating of the base station. The scheme was renamed the "Blackburn with Darwen Security Link" and an exclusion scheme was instituted.

CCTV expansion was planned and funding from the Home Office secured £197,200 for implementation.

Legislative provisions from the new Crime and Disorder Act were fully exploited. The first Anti-Social Behaviour Order for Lancashire was obtained and the work of the new Youth Offending Team and Drugs Arrest Referral Team was incorporated..

In the first twelve months of the strategy, Town Centre crime has been reduced by 18% and disorder by 14% overall. Concentrated target areas, for example, all crime and stealing from vehicles, on locations T1 and T2 have seen major reductions of over 20% and 55% respectively.

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Description of Project

**A Co-ordinated
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Scanning

Scanning of all areas in Blackburn with Darwen took place as part of the Borough Crime and Disorder Audit but it was clear, and always predictable, that Blackburn town centre had the highest levels of both crime and disorder. Specifically, bulk crimes such as stealing from motor vehicles and shoplifting were highlighted. In terms of image, problems were identified with the high incidence of robbery, stealing from the person and begging.

Local Authority aims were, to present Blackburn as an enjoyable place to visit to boost the evening economy. Licensing authorities reflected this in granting licences to public houses empowering later closing times. This was in turn reflected, however, in high incidences of drink related assaults and disorder.

Blackburn town centre, from a policing point of view, was part of a larger geographic area termed Area Five. Area Five had responsibility for staffing two response vehicles on a round-the-clock basis covering a huge geographic area. Five teams of officers, each headed by a Sergeant came under the overall command of an Inspector. Each officer had geographic responsibility for a small part of Area Five and each Sergeant had responsibility for the areas covered by his officers. The exception to this was the town centre area where a Sergeant had overall responsibility but officers with geographic commitment were attached to the five area teams.

The town centre was divided for policing purposes into five "Incident Locations"

T1 - Essentially the shopping centre but includes the multi-storey car park above it and also includes a large and busy nightclub premises known as "Utopia".

T2 - The busy commercial area around the shopping centre, including the markets, Police Station, Bus and Train Stations.

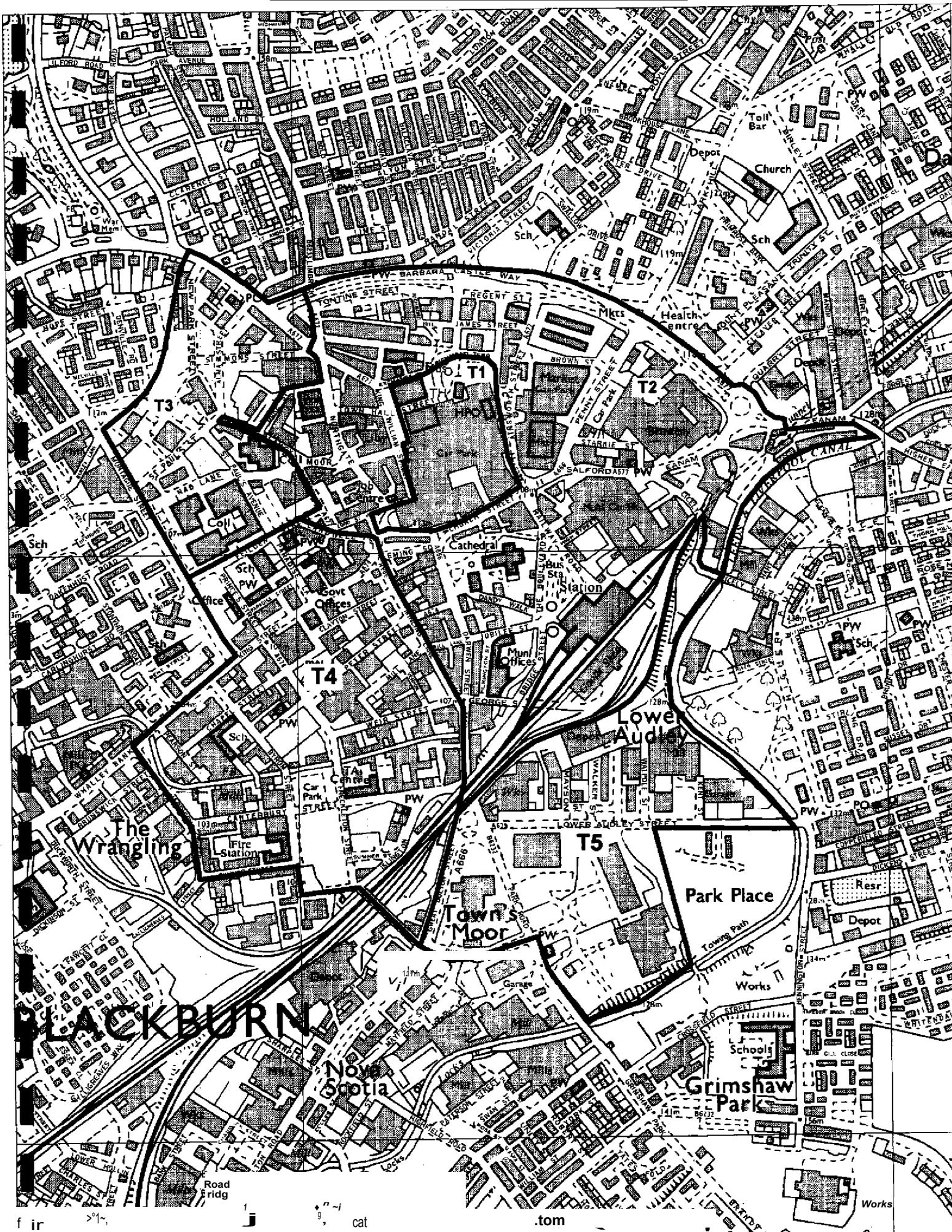
T3 - The area around Blackburn College, including major unattended car parks.

T4 - Commercial and light industrial premises and including homeless hostels and a new bail hostel for sex offenders.

T5 - The relatively recently built "out of town" shopping area including Asda, an ice arena and several large superstores, all with extensive car parking.

The makeup of the town centre has historically revolved around the shopping centre and on King William Street with its Town Hall, Banks and major stores. This showed in the crime figures with T1 and T2 incident locations easily outstripping other areas in the high incidence of crime and incidents.

Blackburn Town Centre Incident Locations



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The development of the town centre over very recent times has seen the expansion of "out of town" shopping stores at Grimshaw Park, with evening economy, retail and fast food facilities, associated with which are large car parks and high autocrime. Projected developments will move the centre of geography inexorably in this direction, with new works within the Railway Station, Darwen Street and Lower Audley Street. The impending pedestrianisation of Church Street will assist in pedestrian movement and further help to push the "centre" in this direction.

Analysis

Analysis of figures obtained during the Crime and Disorder Audit showed two distinct areas of concern. Those associated with daytime shopping (shoplifting, begging, vehicle crime) and those associated with the evening economy (assaults and disorder). Extensive public consultation included hard to reach groups, a MORI survey and an exhibition in the shopping precinct provided more detailed information. Other information such as store stock loss was obtained from our partners.

Co-ordination of overall resources in the town centre was clearly lacking.

The result of this analysis was a decision to prioritise the targetting of bulk crime and disorder areas and the major concerns of the community, as follows:-

POLICING

Initially, it was appreciated that policing arrangements within the town centre area were not having the necessary effect on rising crime and disorder. Officers appointed town centre geographic responsibility were used to cover response vehicles almost continually. Team leaders were also quick to use officers geographically oriented to the town centre to solve problems in other parts of Area Five, which were that supervisor's geographic responsibility.

VEHICLE CRIME - High vehicle crime incidence was detected in Richmond Terrace during the early evening. This is an area associated with offices. It is regularly used during the evening for car parking by people using town centre facilities. The area is vulnerable during the evening with offices closed and no CCTV coverage.

Blackburn Shopping Centre car park showed the highest level of recorded vehicle crime. Analysis showed these offences to be most prevalent during the afternoon and narrowed this down to mainly market days on Wednesdays and Fridays. Further analysis showed most of the vehicles attacked were Citroen Saxo cars, entered by pushing a sharp implement, such as a screwdriver, through the doorskin. The upshot was that a red Saxo parked immediately below the Town Hall tower block on a Wednesday afternoon was the most likely to be broken into.

Morrison's car park also was shown to suffer most on market day and a central area of the ground floor of the three floor car park was the worst affected. The only significance of this area of the car park was that it was WELL lit, but was the most easily accessible from outside the complex.

Intelligence suggested that a small number of prolific offenders were responsible. One in particular was intimated as responsible for the majority of offences and this was borne out to a degree by M.O. similarities.

SHOPLIFTING - Was a difficult area to analyse because the activity/type of shoplifting, the efficacy of the security measures in that store (CCTV, store detectives etc.) and store layout and design are all interrelated. Hence the high numbers of shoplifting offences seen in T.J.Hughes and Morrisons who have effective security staff.

Intelligence suggested a number of active thieves, often working together, were at work on a daily basis within this area, quite obviously attracted by the numbers of shops and relative ease with which they were able to commit offences.

BEGGING - An offence not easy to quantify, many complaints were being received of the number of beggars and, more worryingly, this highlighted a rising incidence of aggressive begging. The main locations were those most frequented by passing shoppers, King William Street near to cash machines and the shopping centre, Market Avenue/Ainsworth Street which is a funnel for pedestrians into and out of the markets, and the bus station.

ASSAULTSIDISORDER - It will easily be appreciated that weekend evenings were the major problem, but more in depth analysis highlighted a worrying trend of assaults at Utopia night club and these premises also showed as a "hot spot" of drink related disorder.

Response

POLICING

Policing arrangements were reorganised to provide a team of eight officers headed by a Sergeant with a remit to address daytime problems in the busiest incident locations T1 and T2:-

1. The reduction of offences of shoplifting by 6%
2. The reduction of offences of robbery and stealing from the person by 6%
3. Eradication of begging.
4. The reduction of offences of stealing from vehicles by 20%

High profile, high impact crime operations Operation Tango and Operation Exile were implemented to make the initial inroads into reduction of bulk crime and disorder.

CRIME AND DISORDER

The Crime, Disorder and Road Safety Audit and was followed by the Crime, Disorder and Road Safety Reduction Strategy which was produced in May 1999. The newly formed town centre sub-group prioritised their response by concentrating on:-

1) Crime

- Vehicle crime.
- Shoplifting and its links to drug dependency.
- Vandalism
- Extension and upgrading of CCTV systems.

2) Evening Economy

- Visitors environment.
- Vehicle/ pedestrian conflict
- Exclusion of those who misbehave.
- Communication links between relevant agencies.
- Review of Licensing policy

3) Image

- Perception of conflict between youths and other visitors.
- Begging.
- Homelessness and social exclusion among young people.

The group showed much support for the police initiatives in relation to vehicle crime, shoplifting, the "Pubwatch" initiative and begging.

Assistance in raising awareness of vehicle security was implemented by provision of signs on car parks, a continuing drive to move the shopping centre car park towards ACPO secured car park status and the targeting of increased referrals of drug users via the drug referral scheme already operating. One specific set of signs read 'CCTV in operation' when this was not in fact the case. Crime was reduced to zero for several months in that area.

The group assisted and mainly financed the reorganisation of the Security Link scheme and its interdependency on the "Pubwatch" system.

Magistrate members had great influence in reducing the incidence of begging and were of assistance with a heightened awareness in relation to vehicle crime offences. Much improved communication regarding licensing matters between the police, magistrates and local authority have resulted from observations made by the group and their efforts continue to address difficulties in licensing matters.

Youth nuisance was targeted, by using youth workers to consult with young people and this has resulted in reducing generally the incidence of disorderly groups. Longer term, the group is supporting moves to finance and conduct a Youth Cafe, after success with a similar enterprise in Edinburgh.

VEHICLE CRIME

Richmond Terrace - Observations were conducted using a static observation post. On the second day of the observations, a prolific offender already suspected was seen to break a car window and was arrested. Another suspected offender was also startled by the appearance of the police and, unconnected with the arrest, ran off. No offences were committed in this location for some months.

Shopping Centre Car Park - A Citroen Saxo was loaned by a local Citroen garage, although they did not have a red one available! This was positioned on the car park in the precise location predicted by analysis and observations maintained by pro-active detectives, but no offences were committed. The offender suspected, however, was disturbed the following week by officers in that place and ran off leaving his screwdriver behind. He was later arrested and made subject to bail conditions not to enter town centre car parks. These conditions remained extant until this offender was sentenced to a term of imprisonment and vehicle crime fell to its current level.

Morrisons - This location should have been the easiest to address. W.M.Morrison and Son were the owners of and were responsible for the car park. Simple crime prevention measures, warning notices, high visibility security patrols, alteration of an unplanned walk-through and, ideally, CCTV coverage, could have eliminated these offences almost totally. Morrisons head office, however, did not support these measures, although the store management were sympathetic. Offences on this car park are still committed but are much more sporadic than previously.

Pressure is now increasing on Morrisons from the police, local authority and latterly the town centre crime and disorder partnership to implement some crime prevention measures on the car park.

Generally, one extremely prolific criminal funding a heroin addiction was responsible for committing much of the vehicle crime. Only much later did we learn that several criminals were targeting the same areas for the same reasons. Steps taken displaced all of these criminals for some time, contributing to the overall reduction.

Currently, evidence provided has secured Home Office funding made available for extension of the CCTV system to cover the shopping centre car park and Richmond Terrace.

BEGGING

It was noted that the 19th Century legislation, which caters for offences of begging states that an arrested offender should be taken immediately before a Justice of the Peace.

Liaison was undertaken with custody officers, CPS and magistrates. It was decided that this should be interpreted as meaning an appearance before the next available Court and, consequently, the offence did not attract bail.

A structured problem oriented policing operation was then undertaken using plain-clothes officers to gather evidence of begging. Arrested offenders were then detained to appear before the next available Court and this usually meant detention overnight. The deterrent effect was such that officers engaged on the operation were unable to find any beggars at all after two days.

A period followed during which things gradually returned to normal. A further, similar operation was conducted which again quickly eliminated begging but this initiative was then continued, patrolling town centre officers being instructed that a "zero tolerance" stance was to be adopted in relation to this offence. The long term effect has been to eliminate begging as a factor in Blackburn town centre.

A notable side effect was that the incidence of robbery and stealing from the person reduced with begging. After relaxing the operation, robberies also escalated. The continuing "zero tolerance" stance in relation to begging has had the effect that stealing from the person has been reduced alongside the elimination of the beggars.

SHOPLIFTING

This was the most difficult area to address. It was realised immediately that crime figures were not a reliable guide to what was happening where. Premises with a high incidence of reported shoplifting were simply those with effective security measures who caught more offenders.

Criminal intelligence showed a number of professional shoplifters frequenting Blackburn town centre daily. They were known to most shops and all patrolling officers but little was being done to disrupt their activities. The "Shoplink" scheme, introduced in 1995 was suffering from a lack of Police support and was seriously lacking in motivation and direction.

With the inception of the Crime and Disorder Act came powers to apply for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. It was realised at an early stage that these orders could be used to expel criminal elements from the town centre but the nuts and bolts of how this could be done effectively was rather more ethereal. A solid base was needed on which to build a structure to support ASBOs and it was decided that the "Shopwatch" scheme could be used to provide this.

The Tilley Award 2000

Initial enquiries showed that the "Shopwatch" members had no co-ordination and subscriptions to the scheme were being collected by a communications company for commercial gain, hence no funds. The equipment provided by a "Safer Cities" grant in 1995 was missing and no one had sufficient involvement to make decisions or give direction for the future.

A meeting of members was arranged at which a general mandate was given to the police to try to resolve some of the issues involved. Enquiries showed that the radio base station originally purchased had been replaced by a model capable of supporting a "Pubwatch" scheme, superimposed later. The company responsible had substituted it with one of their own which had the necessary capability, their argument then was that they were collecting all subscriptions as rent. As well as this, they were collecting subscriptions for the more recently instituted Darwen scheme, part of the same police division and the same unitary authority area.

The markets officer volunteered as the licensee for the radio system, funded by the local authority. The original base station was recovered and adapted to be compatible, financed by the local authority regeneration budget. This, and licensing requirements, meant that the shopwatch and pubwatch systems had to be conducted concurrently and the Darwen scheme had also to be included. The consequence of this was the launch of the "Blackburn with Darwen Security Link" scheme which involved all organisations and which, after taking responsibility for subscription collection in 2000 has become self-financing.

The next difficulty was in instituting a system which would support applications for Anti-Social Behaviour Orders.

During 1999, the town centre police team compiled evidence relating to the behaviour of a juvenile who was thought to be the centre's worst offender. The main thrust of this evidence was this youth's flagrant disregard of an exclusion notice served on him by the management company responsible for the shopping centre. Lancashire's first Anti-Social Behaviour Order was granted as a result, prohibiting this youth from entering within a geographic area which included the shopping centre and its immediate environs.

Liaison with the local authority during the course of this application resulted in the adoption of an "Anti-Social Behaviour Report" form, initially produced by the Council's Housing Department, and agreed by their solicitors as suitable for exhibiting as evidence in support of future ASBO applications.

The success in using breaches of the shopping centre exclusion to support this first application was the result of documentation and evidencing of such breaches. Accordingly, the local authority funded design and production of signs for display in premises which formed part of the Security Link scheme. The difference in reasons for exclusion meant that the "Pubwatch" signs had to be noticeably different from the shop signs but so similar in design as to convey the joint approach being undertaken. Consequently, shops are red and pubs are blue.

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A steering committee was formed under the chairmanship of the shopping centre manager and including representatives of Blackburn and Darwen members. This group decided on the persons they felt were the most prolific shoplifting offenders and these persons were made subject to exclusions from all premises showing the Security Link logo. The scheme is open to any premises or organisation anywhere in Blackburn or Darwen, with or without a radio.

Any instances of Anti-Social Behaviour are reported to the Police on the agreed forms and are then passed to the Cathedral Verger who acts as the scheme's collator. These forms have been used as the basis for three pending applications for ASBOs.

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The effect of this appears, subjectively, to have motivated the Security Link members to discuss and promote ideas for crime prevention and intelligence about known, active criminals. The Radio Communications Agency recently monitored the scheme's transmissions and declared it to be "the most pro-active radio scheme they have monitored"

Criminal Intelligence has shown many of these persons to have been deterred from committing crime in Blackburn, albeit they may well be travelling to other towns. Those who remain have generally avoided the Security Link premises and the few who have not done so are currently subject of ASBO applications.

ASSAULTS/ DISORDER

Initial moves to reduce violence and disorder were headlined by Operation Exile, a high profile calming operation aimed at reducing the incidence of drink related disorder in the town centre. This was conducted using Special Constables, Support Unit personnel, Mounted Branch and Air Support Unit and had a noticeable effect on reducing the usual level of disorder.

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Once this initial effect had been achieved, moves were made to address more specific problems, the most obvious was the targeting of the root causes of assaults and disorder at Utopia night club. It was realised that the root of this problem was the door supervision at the club. It appeared that many of the assaults reported were, in fact, perpetrated by the door staff and many public disorder problems were caused by customers, disgruntled by their treatment.

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Meetings were arranged with the company, the security firm, local authority licensing officers and the **Police**. Initial monitoring measures showed the problem to be continuing and uniformed and CID staff were used to thoroughly investigate reports of assaults. Although little was forthcoming in relation to prosecutions, First Leisure realised the scale of the problem and dispensed with the services of the security company. This, in turn, presented similar difficulties and the replacement firm also departed, along with the management of the club. A new regime, working closely with the Police has reduced this problem considerably.

The Tilley Award 2000

As part of the "Blackburn with Darwen Security Link" initiative, the "Pubwatch" group also instituted an exclusion system. This worked in tandem with the shops system, using blue instead of red signs. Licensees report the threat of such exclusion to be highly effective in combating drink related disorder.

OPERATION TANGO

Operation Tango was a drive to reduce crime levels within Blackburn generally. The operation used available resources, Support Unit, Road Safety Unit, Pro-active CID, Intelligence Unit and Area officers to target hot spot areas and individuals using information provided by analysts and Intelligence Unit. This was done by targeted high visibility patrols and by tasking packages prepared from available intelligence and also incorporated regular releases of information through the local media and use of the Constabulary Website.



Although the operation was conducted throughout all three geographic areas, part of the ethos being to dispel parochialism between the area teams, the highest levels of crime were apparent

in the town centre and this actually received most attention and attracted the best results, showing a 40.9% reduction in crime within, and above, the shopping centre and a 21.3% reduction in the shopping area around the precinct. The commercial area on the outskirts of the town centre saw a 31 % decrease in reported crime.

Assessment

The initiatives and strategy outlined in this document have clearly been summarised but they were underpinned by the efforts of all the organisations involved. It is difficult to see how any group working alone could have achieved such success. Due to the brevity of this document some assessment of initiatives has been reported alongside the relevant response, however, the key assessment criteria/ results are:-

Qualitative Assessment

- 4- Action plans were adopted using inputs, outputs and outcomes to provide a framework for measurement. These were essential to driving activity. Copies are attached.
- 4- A formal basis was seen as essential for everyone to 'sign up' to actions.
- 4- A co-ordinator was appointed for each action plan. A key decision was taken to share responsibilities amongst partner agencies in an attempt to develop a wider perspective.
- 4- Some of the targets set were clearly not measurable and may have been over ambitious. Nonetheless they have focused and directed activity whilst the sub-group and partnerships mature.
- 4- Maximising 'secured by design' initiatives have proved difficult, particularly as they may appear costly business options.

High visibility policing, targeting and disrupting prolific offenders, CCTV, security link, pubwatch and door registration have proved very effective.

The initiatives such as the false CCTV posters have demonstrated the need to look for cost effective and innovative solutions. Similar posters are being developed in relation to anti-social behaviour.

- 4- The major difference in town centre policing is as a result of a rejuvenation of the old shop radio scheme. The local authority and the town centre stores invested in better radio equipment and updating of the base station. The scheme was renamed the "Blackburn with Darwen Security Link" and was made available to all organisations. It now has over 80 members including the markets, shopping centre and Blackburn Cathedral.

In November 1999, the 'security link' instituted an exclusion scheme which excluded those seen as the most prolific offenders. The "Pubwatch" scheme uses an identical system with different coloured signs. This system has been reinforced by "Anti-Social Behaviour Report" forms circulated to all members. These have been agreed by the Council Solicitor as being suitable to be exhibited in support of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders. One application has been granted and three others are currently pending, at case conference stage.

The result of these measures has been a dramatic reduction in levels of disorder, robberies and vehicle crime, startlingly better liaison with other agencies and subjectively greater feelings of security for visitors and town centre workers alike.

Objective setting was led by the Constabulary corporate objectives and then by local divisional police targets set using approved Home Office techniques. From a qualitative point of view, the increasing of public confidence/satisfaction were also set as objectives. The feelings of the town centre community can be adduced from the report of C.B.Hillier-Parker in January 2000. (copy attached) The eradication of begging, a target set specifically for the town centre, is likewise reflected therein.

Store Detectives working on either a formal or informal "quota" system will never reduce the numbers of detected shoplifting offences. Motivation and organisation of the Security Link has had the effect of encouraging more arrests and, by extension, more reported shoplifting, however, the subjective view of shoplifting in the town centre is that the problem is much reduced in terms of the presence of professional thieves, even if 'reported' crime numbers are relatively unaffected. It should also be remembered that professional thieves will be responsible for many different types of offence and deterring their visits to Blackburn town centre will have had a reduction effect in terms of other offences as well.

Quantitative Assessment

The quantitative results speak for themselves with a reduction in overall crime of 18% and Disorder by 14% (with Juvenile Nuisance down 12%).

	1998/9 T1-T2	1999/0 T1-T2	% change T1-T2
Overall Crime	185	152	18%
Disorder	145	125	14%
Robbery	15	8	47%
Stealing from person	15	8	44%
Burglary other	185	165	12%
Harassment	120	105	12%

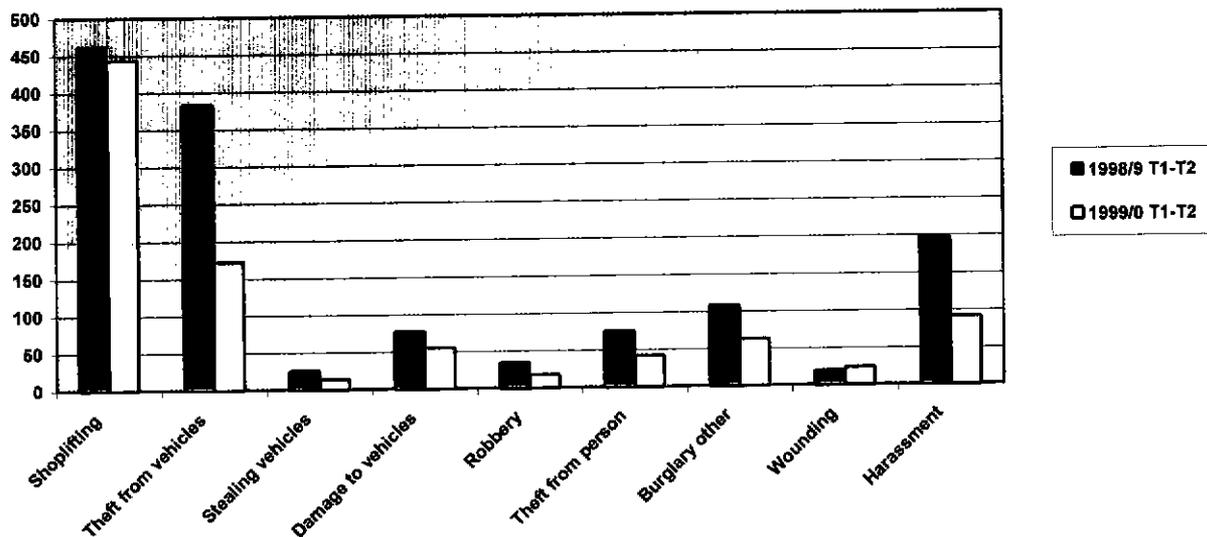
Begging was an area, which was difficult to assess, quantitatively, as the outcome was seen as qualitative. However, during the total two months of the drive to reduce begging, there were 11 arrests for this offence and several reported for summons, whereas there have only been eight arrests in the following nine months to date, only one of whom was a Blackburn town centre "regular".

Again, Divisional targets were to reduce crime across the whole Town Centre by 6% (achieved 18%) , to reduce disorder by 3% (achieved 14%) and road casualties by 3%. (achieved 22.5% in the Borough)

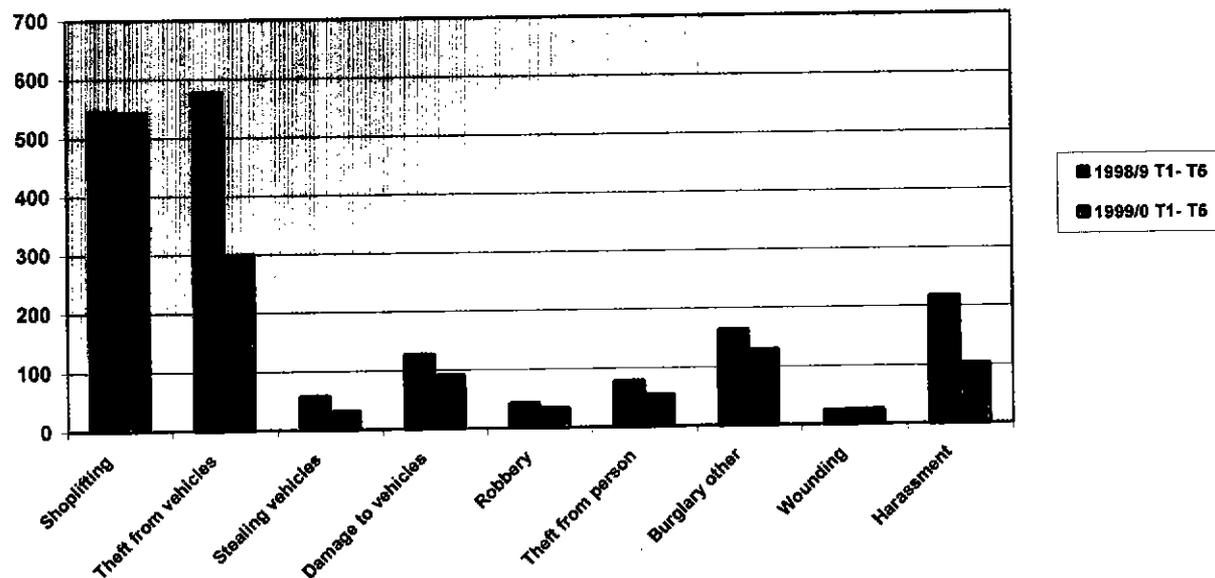
In relation to the town centre (T1 & T2), specific area targets were set to address the identified main problem areas, to reduce stealing from motor vehicles by 20% (achieved 55%), to reduce robberies and stealing from the person by 6% (achieved 47% and 44%) and shoplifting by 6% (achieved only 4%). All crime, on these areas, was reduced by over 20%, and disorder by 12%

	1999/0 T1-T2	1998/9 T1-T5	% Change
Shoplifting	465	440	-5%
Theft from vehicles	385	305	-20%
Stealing vehicles	32	45	41%
Damage to vehicles	82	62	-24%
Robbery	42	34	-19%
Theft from person	85	85	0%
Burglary other	120	55	-55%
Wounding	35	26	-26%
Harassment	215	105	-51%

Blackburn Town Centre Crime - Locations T1 & T2

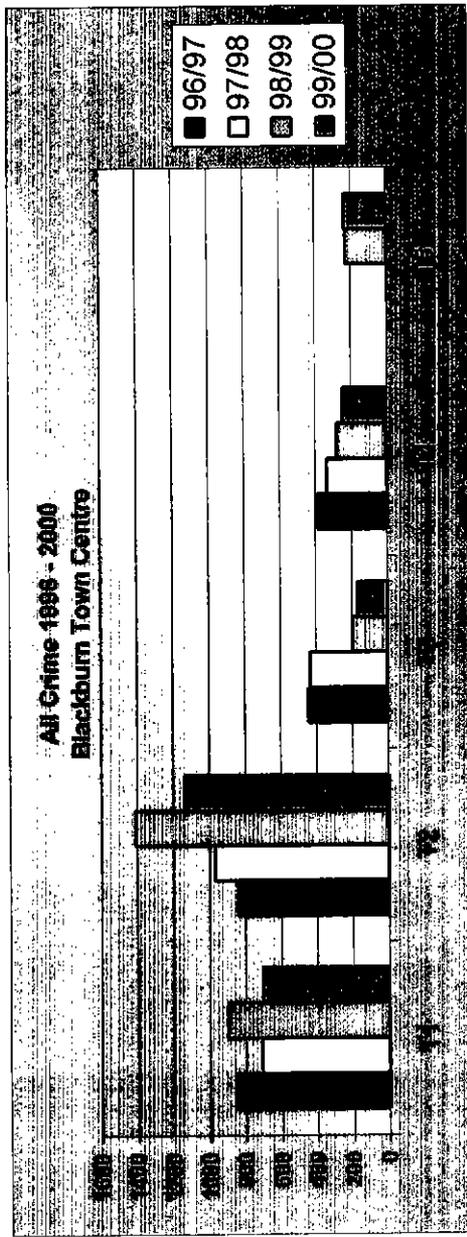


Blackburn Town Centre Crime - Locations T1-T5



The Tilley Award 2000

Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
853	711	900	703	
838	968	1407	1134	
442	433	194	166	
387	336	280	245	
0	0	228	234	



Year	1997	1998	1999	2000
321	258	129	24	
272	299	282	164	
126	143	75	62	
152	122	93	52	
0	0	0	59	34





"Our Town Centre Partners"

Blackburn Cathedral

Blackburn Chamber of Trade

Blackburn College

Blackburn Shopping Centre Management

Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council

Borough Solicitor
Community Leisure and Cultural Services
Community Safety Department
CVS, Highways, Licensing Department
Markets Manager & Markets Officer
Millennium Volunteers
Town Centre Manager, Regeneration
Trading Standards Department

Blackburn with Darwen Youth Offending Team

Crimestoppers

Drugs Arrest Referral

Editor, Lancashire Evening Telegraph

Lancashire Constabulary

Magistrates, Chair of the Bench and Deputy Chair of the Licensing Committee

The Blackburn Partnership

Town Centre Licensees and Breweries

Town Centre Stores

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