

Asian

A Problem Oriented Approach to address Disorder and Anti-Social Behaviour

Summary

Objective

To reduce disorder and anti-social behaviour within Central Wards by 10% between April 1999 and March 2000.

Objective to be amended to incorporate a 15% reduction in violent crime between April 1999 and March 2002.

Nature of problem

Being predominantly a seasonal holiday resort, Blackpool has suffered from a constant rise in violent crime over recent years. This problem has been compounded by a high transient population and the large numbers of visiting groups each year.

To prevent further escalation the following problem solving approach has been implemented.

Evidence used to define the problem

The problem was identified following a comprehensive consultation exercise using the following:-

- Police Crime Figures
- Local Businesses
- Figures obtained from the local Crime and Disorder Audit

The accurate analysis of this information enabled a comprehensive picture of the problem to be established.

The figures were subjected to initial analysis providing crime hot spot locations and the months/dates/times committed.

The individual hot spots were then subjected to further scrutiny to determine what, if any, contributory factors existed within them.

What became apparent was that licensed premises, eating establishments and an inadequate transport network provided the epicentre in which violent crime occurred.

A comprehensive victim profile was completed, identifying age, residency and most vulnerable groups.

Similarly, an offender profile was completed, identifying a high proportion as being under the influence of alcohol.

Response to problem

- Initial identification of policing zones to incorporate pre-determined hot spots
- High visibility police presence with these zones during relevant times
- Officers to exercise positive action and encouraged to intervene at an early stage, thus preventing escalation into more serious crimes
- Enforcement of local byelaws to prevent drinking in the street
- Extensive publicity campaign alerting the public of initiatives
- Establishment of Nightclub partnership to assist with a stronger focus towards key issues, encouraging proactive initiatives:-
 - Effective radio link scheme
 - Exclusion of problem individuals throughout town centre premises
 - Inclusion of CCTV within private premises
- The introduction of a late night transport network to assist in the dispersal of town centre revellers

Impact of response

This operation was implemented between April 1999 and March 2000 and achieved the following reductions:-

Assaults	-	- 12%
Disturbance	-	- 26%
Damage	-	- 26%
Drunken persons	-	- 23%

These reductions were realised only during the period the operation ran and were measured against the equivalent periods from the previous year

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Introduction

Blackpool is one of the countries' most established and popular seaside resorts and attracts more than 17 million visitors each year. In recent years there has been a decline in the number of families visiting the resort and an increase in the single sex parties which tend to base their entertainment around town centre licensed premises.

The popularity of Blackpool is partly due to its ability to provide entertainment for what might appear to be conflicting demands. The town is split into two separate, yet similar areas.

North is recognised as being the town centre which at night is transformed into the hear of the pub and club land. Blackpool has 95 late night clubs with a total capacity for 46,000 people. There is the possibility for 25,000 people to emerge from clubs within a quarter of a mile radius.

South is predominantly made up of amusement arcades and, of course the Pleasure Beach which alone attracts 7.8 million visitors annually.

Despite the appeal of Blackpool, it is the opinion of many that the town has been on the decline which appears to be reflected in the standards within the resort, and would certainly support the statement made by author, Bill Bryson in his publication "Notes from a Small Island":-

"Blackpool — and I don't care how many times you hear this, it never stops being amazing – attracts more visitors than Greece and has more holiday beds than Portugal. It consumes more chips per capita than anywhere else on the planet (it gets through 40 acres of potatoes a day). It has the largest concentration of rollercoasters in Europe. It has the continents second most popular tourist attraction, the 42 acre Pleasure Beach, whose 6.5 million annual visitors are exceeded in number only by those going to the Vatican. It has the most famous illuminations, and on Friday and Saturday nights it has more public toilets than anywhere else in Britain, elsewhere they are called doorways".

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The problem was initially identified following a comprehensive, multi-agency consultation period leading to the production of the Crime and Disorder Audit.

From this, it was extremely apparent that the area suffering the most from incidents of violent crime was that of Blackpool town centre.

A comprehensive consultation period took place, surveying the views and opinions of police officers, local businesses and the general public to ascertain as full a picture as possible of the problem. To ensure that the opinions of as wide a range of people as possible were sought, the figures from the community consultation of the crime and disorder audit were used. This clearly outlined the concerns of the public in relation to violent crime;

- 43% of respondents agreed and a further 39% strongly agreed that the town centre should be a priority issue, with most respondents stating that they were afraid of being in the town centre, particularly in the evenings, and that this was affecting the number of holiday makers visiting the area. Particular concern was expressed over the level of drink/drug related incidents and the number of people begging in the town centre.
- 68% of respondents strongly agreed that violent crime across the Borough needed to be a priority issue. Again, respondents felt that this was related to drug and alcohol abuse and was prevalent in the town centre. Almost all of the responses indicated either a fear of going out in the evenings or were reluctant for young people in the family to go into the town centre at night.
- 41% of all respondents indicated that they considered violent crime should be the highest priority for the strategy

Analysis

The initial analysis was carried out using police statistics, which enabled us to provide a base onto which to overlay further information, and thus enabling us to identify the most prevalent crime classifications and to subject them to initial scrutiny. We established the times and dates when offences were committed and hot spot locations.

Almost without exception all the various surveys conducted concurred with our findings. However, it became apparent that the problem was far greater than was first considered and a secondary analysis using the number of incidents attended followed. This highlighted a problem with recording systems, although it was decided that the information obtained did accurately represent the crime trends. Analysis continued, focussing on the three recognised elements behind any problem;

Victim

- The majority of victims were male aged between 18-28 years of age
- 80% of these victims lived within the Fylde area
- Most vulnerable groups include Police Officers, Doorstaff and Taxi Drivers
- 95% of these victims are in employment

Information was obtained from individual crime reports and very few repeat victims were identified. Surprisingly, a high percentage of victims lived in the surrounding areas.

Offender

- The majority of offenders are male aged between 18-28 years of age
- 82% of these were under the influence of alcohol at the time of their arrest
- 70% reside within the division

Location

A closer analysis of the pre-determined hotspots was carried out to determine what, if any, contributory factors existed within those areas

Hot Spot 1 — Promenade Area

- A quarter of a mile length of the promenade in which there are licensed premises with a capacity of 15,000 people
- A high proportion of amusement arcades and low class fast food outlets ie. burger/candyfloss stalls

- Narrow pavements
- Poor lighting
- Almost all entrances facing directly onto the promenade
- CCTV coverage of all this area



Hot Spot 2 — Talbot Square

- Licensed premises with a capacity of 10,000 people
- High concentration of late night restaurants and take-aways, which attract a large number of revellers after the pubs and clubs, have shut
- This location is served by limited, but the most used taxi ranks and demand far exceeds availability at the peak times

CCTV coverage exists within this location



Hot Spot 3 — Bank Hey Street

- Main pedestrian access route between the venues at Talbot Square and the more southerly Central Drive
- Licensed premises with a capacity to hold 1700 people
- Poor lighting with many poorly lit shop doorways and secluded areas
- Some limited takaway facilities



Hot Spot 4 — Central Drive

- Many late night takaways

Congested area

Poorly maintained



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Having analysed these 3 elements, other factors which were considered to be potentially contributory were analysed in turn;

Transportation

There are 6Th registered taxis in Blackpool (256 Hackneys and 422 Private Hire). Of the hackney cabs only 70% are willing to enter the town centre for the fear of personal violence, damage to the vehicle or purely because of the "hassle" they receive from drunken customers.

The outlying areas are also served by local private hire firms which are rarely booked for the return journeys, encouraging individuals to book from town centre offices, once again creating a further reason for groups to congregate within the hot spot locations.

It became apparent that the drivers would rather pick up groups of females or preferable couples leaving the most problematic areas, which obviously compounds the problem.

The bus and tram network in Blackpool is provided by the local authority and services the surrounding areas, with the latest public transport being 2330 hours.

Gay Community

Blackpool is popular with the gay community and has a considerable number of high profile venues. Analysis of the venues themselves and with consultation within the community verifies the police statistics that this group is no more likely to be a victim or offender of violent crime.

Licensed Premises

A detailed in the introduction, Blackpool has 95 late night clubs with a total capacity for 46,000 people. There are currently 500 registered doorstaff in Blackpool which are regulated by the doorwatch scheme which is run by the local authority.

Some town centre premises are part of the Radiolink Scheme which is run by the town centre manager, although this has not proven to be an effective tool, primarily due to the lack of interest within the trade.

Despite the obvious link between alcohol and violent crime, none of the individual premises feature as a consistent and direct contributor to violent crime. That is not to say, however, that some premises are more likely to be subject to violent crime than others. These premises were examined and it was considered that the popularity and therefore the higher number of clientele could account for the relatively minor increases in violent crime.

In analysing the *modus operandi* for offences relevant to the town centre once again there was no prominent category and as such attacks using bottles or glasses obtained from licensed premises did not appear to be an issue.

Similarly there was no evidence to support that any one of the premises or indeed individual door supervisor was responsible for an identifiable level of violent crime. This particular factor was

investigated not as a result of a mere "hunch" but as a result of considerable anecdotal evidence from members of the public as well as police officers and as such was considered in the responses

Eating Establishments

Within the hot spot locations there are numerous late night eating establishments including both sit down restaurants and what could best be described as kebab/burger takeaways. Few of these premises employ doorstaff and a considerable amount of trouble is evident either within the premises themselves or directly outside.

These premises obviously became an area of concern but what also became evident was that in most cases the premises were either next to or near a taxi rank.

Summary

To surmise the analysis, the area of violent crime that can most effectively be addressed is that which occurs during Friday and Saturday nights. The majority of this violence is drink related and consists of assault and harassment crimes. The violence throughout the night is sporadic but heightens as licensed premises close and then once again becomes apparent at taxi ranks and at the eating establishments.

The transport structure or lack of one does not easily facilitate the effective dispersal of the crowds away from the town centre and this in itself leads to frustration which manifests itself as violence. It is the combination of these factors which leads to the commission of violent crime and from which the responses were drawn.

Response

This initiative was to run over three years and as such the responses were split into short, medium and long term objectives.

Short Term

Having identified the specific hot spot locations and the most affected times within them, an initial response was provided within those areas to include;

Each zone (of which there was three), was assigned a team of officers wearing high visibility jackets to patrol the area on foot. Their brief was to identify problematic individuals and to intervene at an early stage to prevent the incident escalating into a more serious offence.

Aide memoires were produced to assist officers in relation to the powers available with regards criminal law and local bye laws preventing the drinking of alcohol in the street.

It was considered that the police perhaps had a higher than acceptable tolerance level towards the less serious offences and to address this an awareness campaign was initiated throughout the station using posters, newsletters etc. to encourage officers to take positive action when dealing with such incidents.

This operation was supported by the use of CCTV cameras to once again identify problematic individuals and relay this information to the relevant officers allowing the most appropriate action to be taken.

A high profile public awareness campaign was initiated intending to act as a deterrent to potential offenders but to provide reassurance to the remaining members of the public. This was achieved in partnership with the local authority, local licensees and the local hoteliers, and by the use of advertising space at strategic sites it was possible to convey the message before people entered the town and as they remained within the town centre.

Medium Term

The most obvious contributory factor to town centre violence is alcohol and as such members of the licensing trade have been encouraged to accept and respond to their responsibilities in relation to alcohol related violent crime.

This has led to the formulation of a Nighttime Forum, which at the moment consists of representatives of the licensed trade and a police spokes person. The objectives of the forum are to encourage initiatives within the premises in the town centre to assist in the address of violent crime, examples of such initiatives will include_-

- The implementation of an effective radio link scheme.
- The application of exclusion orders within all premises in the town centre.
- The adoption of private CCTV within premises.
- Provision of doorstaff to assist in clearing the streets and provide presence at late night hot spots ie taxi ranks etc.

Long Term

The provision of an effective transport framework would assist greatly in the dispersal of crowds from the town centre during the early hours of the morning. According to the statistics a high percentage of offenders live within the division and, consideration will be made to that fact in the devise of any structured routes.

There appears to be two possibilities that would assist in providing such a solution and these are currently being investigated:-

- Re establishing the taxi ranks at more suitable sights enabling more cabs to wait but by providing barriers to encourage orderly queues and doorstaff to ensure these conditions are adhered to.
- The favoured response is to provide a late night bus framework enabling the dispersal of larger numbers away from the hotspots along pre determined routes. Security on these buses could be once again provided by doorstaff as has been shown in other initiatives across the country

Assessment

The decision was made that the measurements for the first year were to be made against pre-determined incident classifications which best accounted for the issues in hand.

Using these classifications the following reductions were achieved:-

Assault	-	- 12%
Damage	-	- 26%
Disturbance	-	- 26%
Drunken Persons	-	- 23%

(These comparisons were made only against the periods of time when the operation ran ie. 10pm until 1am on Friday and Saturdays with the same periods the previous year).

- These figures show the initial success of the operation and were supported by the anecdotal evidence provided by the local businesses. The town has become a less hostile area.
- Although there were considerable reductions in the levels of incidents, there was an increase in crimes reported, in particular harassment and wounding
- To some degree, this was anticipated as we encouraged officers to intervene and to take more positive action. However, it highlighted the fact that solely a police response was both non sustainable and had little input towards the annual crime reductions
- The analysis process was again carried out but identified no further issues to address
- Building upon the initial success of Asian, the mid term strategy was implemented. This incorporated a strong partnership approach with the licensing trade, adopting the tactics previously mentioned. These initiatives were supplemented by a continued high visibility police presence.