

THE TILLEY AWARD 2000

PROJECT TITLE:

Linden Park Project

POLICE FORCE:

Sussex Police

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Linden Park Project

Ham Ward - Littlehampton
West Sussex
Sussex Police-Littlehampton Sector

Abstract

- Linden Park recreation ground is situated in Ham Ward of Littlehampton, West Sussex. It is policed by Sussex Police, Highdown Division, Littlehampton Sector. (Map Reference TQ 020 025)

The recreation ground is a large open grassed area. On two sides (east and south) it is overlooked by residential housing, but with an immediate catchment area of 600 houses. To the west is an industrial Estate and to the north is a Scout building and a St. John's Ambulance Brigade building.

The grassed area had become little more than a toilet for dogs and therefore parents were understandably reluctant to allow their children to play on it. However, because of its size, young people, ranging in ages from 7 to 17, were invariably drawn to it.

The main focus of their attention was directed to the two buildings, the Scout and St John's Ambulance properties, where persistent disruptions were caused to meetings of community groups, the children's playgroup, scouts and beavers. On one occasion a group of 8 year olds had broken up a senior citizens' Line Dancing class by rushing into the building and throwing buckets of water over the participants. Extensive damage was caused to the buildings (amounting to several thousands of pounds) to park fences and to nearby factory units.

A sense of intimidation and fear, particularly among the local elderly, was at a high level. Parents were no longer taking their children to the playgroup and use of these buildings as centres of the local community was declining. In short it was becoming a no go' area for many people. When the police were contacted, invariably the perpetrators had fled long, before their arrival, but so far had the problem deteriorated, people no longer bothered to call for the police.

Evidence of the extent of the problem and underlying issues was obtained from the police Operational Information System (O.1.5.), community beat officer's contacts with local people including those most affected by the problems and a survey of residents by the district council.

The response involved Littlehampton sector police **and special constabulary**, local residents, the Scout Group, St John's Ambulance Brigade, Arun District and Littlehampton Town Councils, Wick Football Club, business people, the local WIRE regeneration project and the forming of the Linden Park Improvement Committee.

Higher profile and more responsive policing was combined with a range of environmental improvements involving the local community. Additional facilities and activities were designed and provided to divert young people of the area from a downward spiral of criminality. The cost of these investments were born by the major partners.

The result was that over a 12 month period, calls from the area to the police, which peaked at *thirty* per month, fell away to *zero*. Damage to the buildings stopped, activities returned and at the same time clear indications from the community were of a vast improvement to their quality of life. A veiled threat of relocation by some of the users of the nearby factory units disappeared.

In December 1999 this project received the High Sheriff of West Sussex's award for community policing.

1. Project Objectives

The objectives were:

- To secure a better quality of life for residents
- Cut down or eliminate the incidents of criminal damage
- To restore the rule of law
- To reduce the fear of crime
- To find ways of diverting youths from crime - and as a direct result:-
- To reduce the calls on police resources

Having decided on the above, the task was given to the CBO and her supervising Sergeant. It was an urgent problem in that residents had started believing that this was a no go' area. Also it was one of the biggest drains on the Sector resources. It became the CBO's priority, but not that of the entire sector. The essence of COP is that the police play a role, but not the *only* role.

2. Problem Definition

Until a full search was initiated on the O.I.S_ most of the information was anecdotal. This was collected by the CBOs (by now increased to two) whilst out and around the area.

What was of interest was that a number of residents had independently come (jumped) to the conclusion that a local Off Licence licensee, had been supplying drink to under age young people: Some were quite adamant that if the off licence was dosed down, the problem would go with it.

Using the Scan, Analyse, Response and Assess model (S.A.R.A.) and paying a personal visit, proved that the opposite was true. In fact the licensee in question went on to play a leading role in the project. It was a lesson well learnt. Had we gone for the wholly anecdotal option, then :

- The problem would not have been solved
- Efforts would have been misdirected
- Possibly an innocent member of the community would have suffered.

The problem was identified as:-

- Local youths loitering with nothing to do.
- No suitable facilities for youths (because of dog fouling of the grass area)
- No apparent will or direction for anyone to get to grips with the problem
- No apparent parental supervision
- The problem was far greater than first thought.

Examples given by the Community were:

Water bombs thrown through the window
People threatened with planks of wood
Mothers and children being too scared to leave the site
Stones being thrown
Hire of hall reduced due to the youths behaviour
Day Nursery under threat of closure due to people leaving
Youths roller blading on roof and causing damage

In order to fill the gaps in our information a majority of the residents/users were approached either by personal contact or through meetings and requested to report every incident to the police. The police response level was raised, so in the short term this meant a greater call on resources.

A thorough interrogation of the O.I.S. between the period 13/11/97-2/11/97 (10 months) revealed that calls to Linden Park and two adjoining roads totalled *114 calls*. As previously stated, by this time most people had given up contacting the police, so the reality was that the incident rate was far higher

3. Dealin^a with the problem

Whilst police calls to the area were recorded in their Operational Information System (OIS), no one officer previously had an overview of the area and its problems, due to the absence of a community policing strategy on the division. However this changed at the latter end of 1997 when sector based community policing was introduced. Police beats were re-drawn to come into line with Wards and each was allocated its own community beat officer (C.B.O.) It was only after this re-structuring that the police came to realise the extent of the problem.

In the short term, whilst alternatives were considered, it was left to the police alone to step up response and patrolling. This was done for a period of about two months. Community Beat Officers visited the site sometimes on an daily basis calling in on the groups using the premises. This included visiting the nursery during the daytime and in the evenings when groups of school aged children arrived and finished their activities. This was done in particular reassure parents who felt intimidated by waiting in the dark for their children. The Community Beat Officers were additionally backed up by the Divisional Patrol Unit and the Special Constabulary.

Youths using the site were spoken to by officers and behaviour improved resulting in less calls.

These short term measures had an almost overnight effect with staff, parents and children being reassured knowing that their local officers were always close at hand. Furthermore youths at the site improved their behaviour.

Looking to the medium/long term it was decided to form a committee of all interested parties. This was **called the Linden Park Improvement Committee.**

Whilst the police were the instigators for setting up the committee, its running was then taken up by the residents and users of the area, with the police merely being a member. The response was encouraging. Representatives from the following attended.

- Littlehampton Sector police
- Littlehampton Special Constabulary
- Highdown Division Crime Reduction Officer
- Residents representative
- St. John Ambulance
- Scout group
- Local, businessmen
- Arun District Council
- Wick Football Club
- The Wire

The short to medium term objectives were to address the youth issue. What could be done?

The committee decided that as there was a play area next to the attacked premises, then the obvious solution was to utilise it. It was thought that the local residents would object, as more noise would be generated. The opposite was true. They welcomed the idea because:-

- a) They could watch their own children play from their front rooms
- b) It would save their vehicles parked outside the houses from street football damage.

It was agreed that a simple and inexpensive short term measure was to mark out the area into football pitches and tennis courts.

At this stage the Awn District Council (A.D.C.) became involved and supplied better bins for dog excreta. They also sign posted the site.

Initially the grass was cut and marked out by the C.B.O.'s in their own time. They were ably assisted by the *Off Licence Holder.*

Just these simple measures proved a success as evidenced by the fact that youngsters were seen to be playing ball games on it.

A local firm contracted to the A.D.C. became interested and undertook to carry on cutting the grass at no cost. They also pointed out to the amateurs that the lines were best painted in water proof paint. This was supplied at no cost by the Littlehampton Football, Club. Wick Football Club in turn loaned a lining machine and offered to coach any youngster interested.

One of the local businesses welded goal posts. Another firm modified them to make them portable and yet another supplied the transport.

It was deemed not enough to cater just for the youths at the scene as it were. The needs of a younger generation had to be considered. To this end the A.D.C. did a letter drop in the area asking for the views of the residents, as did the police through the Schools Liaison Officer (S.L.O.).

The Sector, through the Schools Liaison Office arranged a competition at the local Junior School, to draw what they would like the park to look like. The best entries were awarded a book token prize by the Mayor of Littlehampton. (See pages 8 - 10)

'As a result of the consultations the area was surveyed by A.D.C.'s Tourism and Leisure and the following installed:-

- Permanent Basket Ball Court
- A Half Pipe
- A Grinding Bar
- A Skateboarding/Rollerblading Ramp
- **BMX** Cycle Track

Total cost £17,500. The contributions were as follows:-

£10,000 Arun District Council

£5000 Littlehampton Town Council

£2500 Sussex Police Authority via Community Safety Department

The entire project was put in place by June 1999.

Because of dedicated C.B.O.s and the fact that they hand out business cards with their telephone extensions, plus the fact they are always on foot patrol in the area, the evaluation of the project is done on a daily basis. Indeed the entire sector now adopts this approach.

This ongoing monitoring and review identified a further difficulty. The play area, in hindsight was built too close to the industrial estate. Because the grass has not yet had a chance to grow, stones were exposed in the soil and a problem emerged of children throwing stones over the fence causing damage to factory property. Money was later raised to put in a CCTV camera, controlled by an alliance of factory owners, added to their own system and covering the area in question.

Overall, however, it had to a certain extent become self policing as ownership was assumed by the youngsters. One was overheard telling another off for trying to take away a goal post. There was a great deal of surprise expressed at the identity of the 'policeman'.

4. Success Criteria

This was one of the first projects undertaken by the (then) new 'Problem Solving' team. As such success criteria were not built in at the commencement of the project. However a realistic criterion would have been to reduce the repeat calls to the area by 50% over a 12 month period. The fact that a 100% reduction was achieved in the same period showed what good will, a partnership approach and sheer hard work by the C.B.Os could do. That was not to say that there were no ongoing problems as indicated above, but in terms of the original problem it was 100% resolved.(See page 7)

Data from the O.I.S was used to measure the effectiveness of the interventions. Additionally the closeness with which the C.B.Os worked with the local community enabled the enhanced feelings of safety to be 'picked up clearly, albeit anecdotally.

Littlehampton Sector's Community Beat Special Projects Officer was tasked to assist the local C.B.O. in collating, analysing and managing both the project, its partnership aspects and data relating to it.

5. Training and Conclusion

Highdown and its neighbouring Division were until April 1999 the pilots for the rest of Sussex in problem oriented policing as part of the Sussex Policing Strategy. Training seminars were held for all C.B.Os. and supervisors with follow up sessions from force advisers. These operated at the same time as partnership training seminars were being run by Sussex Police to introduce the Crime and Disorder Act and community safety strategies.

In fact the Crime and Disorder Act had been an enormous help, as most of the other agencies not only knew that they should be involved, but in most cases embraced the idea.

Sussex Police has ensured that each identified 'Problem' is recorded within a formal document. This record document was designed with the help and input of C.B.Os and acts as a check list of what needs to be done.

The success of this project can not only be seen in policing terms. The community was mobilised and supported by Community Beat Officers giving them the confidence and experience not only to enhance their own quality of life, but enthusiasm in arranging more community projects for themselves. The local Licensee, a founding member of the committee for example, organised a street party in the locality over the millennium. This was the largest event in the town and extended over 36 hours. It was so well managed that despite several hundred people attending - there was not one call to the police. Further events were planned for the summer.

Finally, the committee was managed so as not to be a 'talking shop.' It was made clear by the police at the beginning of the project that they were there to act as the catalyst for change. Participants were invited to enact that change themselves with the help of the police. Each member had 'actions' to complete in line with the SARA model for feedback at the next meeting. This was seen at first as a daunting task but at the conclusion the confidence it gave them, was as fulfilling as the success in the overall project.

The High Sheriff's award was presented to Sgt Mick Potter in December 1999 as being the best example of Community Oriented Problem Solving *in Sussex.* (See pages 13 - 14)

Police Officers involved:

Sgt Mick Potter C.B.O.
Sgt David Robinson C.B.O.
P.C. Jackie Harding - Ham Ward C.B.O.
P.C. John Chate - Community Beat Special Projects Officer

David Richards - Inspector
Sector Commander
Littlehampton

PROBLEM SOLVING

Calls on police per month

