

OPERATION ASLAN

Category: Crime and Disorder Reduction
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Operation. Asian

Summary

Sergeant Stuart Noble

Blackpool is situated in the Western Division of the Lancashire Constabulary and has long been established as a seaside holiday resort. However as the British tourist trade has declined the town has enveloped a different niche in the market providing late night entertainment to the thousands of young people that visit every weekend. The centre of this market revolves around the sale and consumption of alcohol, which as the model demonstrates is intrinsically, linked, with the high levels of violent crime and disorder within the town centre.

In November 1998 an initial working group was assembled to first define the problem from which short, medium and long-term responses were identified. We are now some two years later and experiencing the rewards that the proper application of problem orientated policing afforded.

In order to define the problem, police crime recording and intelligence systems were interrogated enabling us to identify not, only the most prevalent crime and disorder categories but also the locations or hot spots of where they were occurring. This, we appreciated, did not accurately reflect the full nature of the problem (as it was suspected that a high number of incidents remained unreported) and so an extensive consultative period involving all the major stakeholders provided us with some interesting thoughts and perceptions.

Having identified the problem a series of responses was implemented ranging from the initial deployment of high visibility police officers in the hot spot locations during the relevant times to the creation of a Forum involving all stake holders from which a wide range of initiatives such as managed taxi ranks have been implemented.

Despite the initial success, which was attributable to the higher levels of officers within these areas, it was accepted that to achieve the long-term objectives that we sought, a more sustainable, partnership approach must be adopted. Considerable progress has been made in forging partnerships within the local authority, licensed trade, doorstaff and taxi drivers.

The success of these initiatives is not only measured in terms of quantitative results but the realisation of other objectives set by other stakeholders i.e. increase in trade, positive feedback from customers.

Although this operation has run for the last two years it is only within the last six months that the foundations have been securely laid enabling everyone to look forward to a safer, more prosperous Blackpool.

Description of Project

Scanning

This project was initiated following the progressive increase in incidents of disorder within the Central Wards/Town Centre of Blackpool. This was of concern to and identified as a priority issue by both the police as well as members of the local business community.

The initial objectives of the project were to reduce the levels of violent crime and disorder within specified time and location parameters. Having achieved these objectives it was realised that there were many other impacts either on members of the public and stakeholders alike and so revised success criterion needed to be established. This must somehow measure the qualitative **issues** associated with the project and so the following objectives were set;

- Reduce levels of crime and disorder within the town centre
- Increase public confidence.
- Increase public awareness of local stakeholder's commitment to public safety
- Increase numbers of locals using town centre amenities.

This initiative was prioritised over others in support of the Governments commitment to reduce violent crime and was reflected in the local Community Safety Strategy, setting an objective to reduce crime and disorder within the town centre.

Analysis

Defining the problem;

As has already been alluded to, the sources of information used to identify and analyse the problem included police crime, incident and intelligence recording systems aswell as surveys from the following sources;

| GROUP | RESULT | SOURCE |
|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|
| General Public | Reluctance to go into the town centre alone at night. Younger members of the community felt contempt toward tourists and how the town accommodates their needs in preference to the locals. | Sixth Form Survey `99 |
| Night time Businesses | Recognised that it was locals who had had too much to drink that was the problem. Felt the problem was more extensive than police data reflected | Asian Survey,99 |

| | | |
|--------------------------|---|------------------|
| Daytime Businesses | Stated that they experienced the aftermath of the night before often finding urine and vomit in shop doorways. | Aslan survey `99 |
| Emergency Services | Concurred with identified hot spots and also stated that there were a number of incidents that remained unreported to the police. | Aslan survey'99 |
| Local officers | Admitted that due to resource demand only reacted to committed incidents and that unless arrests were made incident was often not reported. | Aslan survey `99 |
| Taxi Drivers Association | Felt no support from, police or local authority. Approximately 35% of all drivers stated that they would not enter the town on Fri, Sat nights and most indicated a reluctance to collect groups of males, especially if drunk. | Aslan survey'99 |

Having collated all this information the first step of the analysis stage was to breakdown the problem defining the most prevalent incidents and subjecting these to further analysis by date, time and location.

The incidents classes, which were identified to be addressed included;

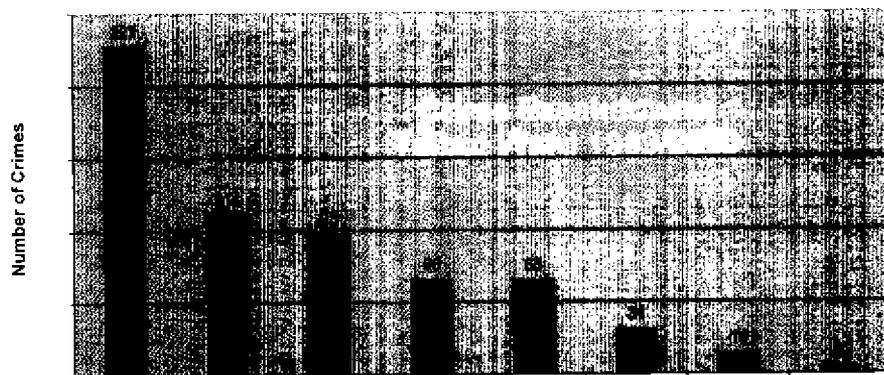
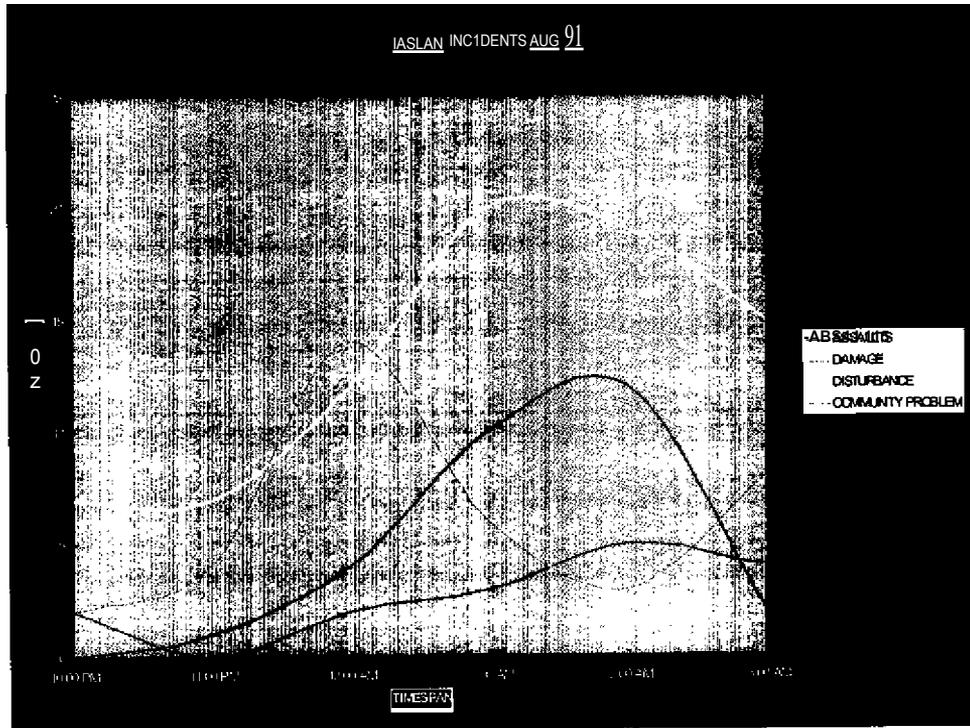
- Assaults (ranging from serious wounding to minor assaults)
- All Disturbances (public order within licensed premises and on the streets)
- Community Problem (primarily concerning drunken behaviour, urinating in the streets etc.)

What was initially quite surprising was that there appeared to be little seasonal change in the levels of violent crime and disorder although peak months were identified as being between July and October.

What was however most apparent was the days within the week on which the levels of disorder were dramatically higher, those being Friday and Saturday nights.

When subjected to further analysis by time it was found that the majority of incidents occurred between the hours of 2300 hrs and 0400 hrs.

Mapping the incidents provided a pictorial representation of the problem which when placed alongside some of the information obtained from the surveys enabled the identification of the most problematic hot spots.



Crime

These areas were then isolated and subjected to individual analysis in an attempt to identify any underlying reasons . as to why disorder was more likely to occur there; were there any common features present within them all?

These areas were broken down as follows:

Area 1; Talbot Square.



- * The heart of the town centre. Within this area is a high concentration of licensed premises with trading hours in most places continuing through to 0200 hrs.
- * Also within this area is a number of late night eating establishments, both catering for eat in and eat out customers.
- * There are four major taxi ranks all situated within close proximity of major venues.
- * The area contains limited pedestrian areas and pavement areas are narrow in relation to the numbers using them. Few of the paved areas benefit from barriers separating them from the roadside.
- * The area benefits from extensive CCTV coverage with few blackspots.
- * Lighting within this area is poor, being provided by standard light stansions.

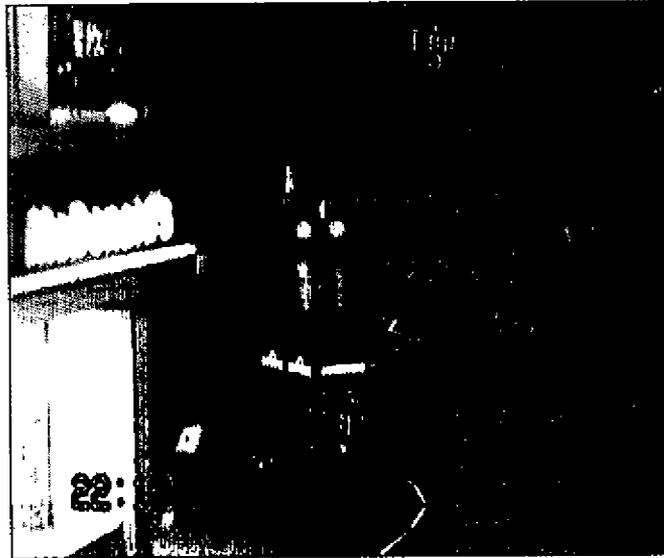
Area 2; Bank Hey St.



- * This area is the main corridor linking two major nightclubs with the heart of the town centre.
- * A pedestrianised area, which has a combination of shops and licensed premises, although at night, is solely occupied by the licensed premises.

- * Licensing hours - open until 0200hrs.
- * The lighting in this area is very poor and the many empty shop doorways are often used as open-air toilets.
- * Some smaller take-a-ways, however there is a McDonalds situated at the end, which is open until 0300hrs.
- * The area is served by two main taxi ranks each of which is situated outside the two main nightclubs in the area.

Area 3; Central Drive



- * The main arterial route into the town centre.
- * This area accommodates high percentage of low class hotels.
- * Nearer the town centre is a high concentration of independent take away bars.
- * Relatively few licensed premises other than the hotels.
- * Most amenities within walking distance of town centre.

The next area for analysis was the people involved, whether they are an offender or a victim.

Despite the high numbers of visitors to the town each weekend interrogation of the custody systems revealed that 70% of all offenders arrested for disorder offences actually lived within the Fylde area.

Once again using information available within the custody systems an offender profile was compiled revealing that, statistically, the most likely offenders would be:

- Male white aged between 18-28.
- Lives within the local area. Drunk or had drink
- Few recidivist offenders

A similar profile was completed for the victim revealing;

- Male whit aged between 18-35.

- Lives within local area.
Majority of cases unknown to offender.

When examining the offences there were no common or specific m/o's and with regards to the assaults no commonly used weapon could be identified.

What was clearly identified was that 80% of all offenders arrested for disorder offences within the town centre were recorded as having had drink or being drunk. Caution had to be applied when interpreting, what at first appears to be quite a definite statement, because what must also be considered is the composition of the group from which this group was drawn; the majority of whom would have had drink!

Transport framework.

The transport framework within all these areas is poor. There is no public transport after 2330hrs leaving only private hire and hackney cabs as a means of leaving the town. It must also be noted that many of the non-local visitors to the town arrive and leave in prearranged coaches and mini buses or are accommodated in the town centre hotels.

Summary

The problem was quite obviously the behaviour of these people but what was it that caused them to behave in this way?

From experience I knew that that in the overwhelming majority of cases the behaviour that had brought them to our attention was not the behaviour that they demonstrated 24hrs of the day 7 days a week so there must be some sort of catalyst, but what was it?

It was at this stage that an informed assumption had to be made; that it was the consumption of alcohol that was the catalyst to the disorder. That being said the solution to prevent people from becoming drunk was not a feasible one as this seems to be one of the remaining socially acceptable vices and one, which is indeed encouraged by many of the businesses in the town.

Accepting this the focus of the responses had to be directed towards reducing the opportunity for conflict and managing the environment and the people that visit the town centre.

Response

Dealing with the problem;

This is now a proven and established project, which has evolved over the previous 24 months. As such short medium and now long-term responses have been implemented.

Phase 1:

High visibility police presence:

The initial response was the provision of an extra police presence within the hotspot locations during the relevant times. Officers wearing high visibility jackets would carry out foot patrol within the set zones dealing exclusively with incidents of disorder.

Working within teams their objective was to reduce the levels of serious disorder by identifying potential incidents and interjecting at an early stage. This operation was very much intelligence led with officers receiving a daily briefing entailing historic problems within their zones as well as up to date intelligence as to the groups who would be visiting that weekend.

In many respects this style of preventative policing was foreign to many officers who often only reacted after the commission of an offence and so was facilitated by the re-education of officers through the publication of officer guides.

These publications not only impressed the policing style to be adopted but provided education as to the relevant offences.

Advertising;

An extensive advertising campaign was launched aimed at educating the public as to the specific behaviour that was unacceptable as well as alerting them of the local bye law which prevented the consumption of alcohol in the streets.

These posters were strategically placed within town centre premises as well as at the main road/rail terminals and within taxicabs.

Radio-link scheme

The extension of the already established daytime radio-link scheme to the licensed premises provided a link not only between the individual premises but also with the CCTV and indirectly with the police.

This link enabled CCTV to monitor any potentially troublesome groups/individuals and instruct the premises that they were entering in order that they be warned regarding their future conduct and that they have been recorded on camera.

Phase 2

Despite the initial success achieved during phasel, it was apparent that the project was predominately driven from within the police and as such accepted that this was not a sustainable resolve to the issues in hand.

It was therefore important that before we began implementing the second stage a stronger sense of responsibility must be impressed amongst other key partners.

The link that had been drawn between alcohol and disorder had to be impressed upon the licensing trade, as did our expectations of them with regards to their responsibility towards the problem.

Research was conducted throughout the country and it was breweries in Scotland which seemed to best example their commitment and responsibility towards safety both within and outside their premises.

The licensees AGM provided the opportunity for us to express these expectations and an input by the director of a leading Scottish brewery exemplified the financial benefits they had experienced since becoming more socially responsible.

The results of these efforts led to the creation of the Community Safety Nighttime Disorder Forum, which was represented, by the police, town centre manager, the licensed trade, local authority and local transport businesses.

The creation of this forum was the platform from which we could implement many of the proposed initiatives alongside the individual objectives of the other partners. By identifying the relevant stakeholders we now had the ability to make changes to environmental factors as well as having a source of financial support. Within six months of its inception the Forum had already supported the introduction of the following initiatives all of which are having an impact on the problem;

Taxi Rank

It was no surprise that taxi ranks were prominent throughout all the disorder hot spots. Despite there being in excess of 35000 late night revellers contained within the heart of the town centre there is a very poor transport framework with which to evacuate the town centre at the end of the night. In fact the only means of transport is by taxi, either private or hackney. However almost 40 % of the 250 hackney carriage drivers are reluctant to enter the town centre for fear of disorder or damage and instead cruise the perimeters picking up mainly females only. This, of course, compounds the problem leaving a higher concentration of frustrated, often drunk groups of males who are unable to get home.

As an experiment it was decided that an initiative to address this particular problem be implemented in the heart of the town centre, Talbot Square. Within this area lie two main ranks, one of which is located directly outside a popular take away and was the site of the majority of confrontation within that area.

After identifying a working group consisting of representatives from the police, local authority, taxi drivers association, security companies and the licensee's forum further analysis revealed;

- Too few taxis within that area to facilitate the effective dispersal of late night revellers.
- Vulnerability of taxi drivers leading to reluctance to work in that area.
- Build up of crowds leading to confrontation.
- Most problems occurring between 0100-0300 hrs.

Further consultation enabled the following responses to be implemented;

- Closure of the taxi rank directly outside the take away Burgerdome supported by the strategic placement of barriers alongside the pavement.
- Application of a managed taxi rank within Talbot Square. The intention was to apply a formal queuing system thus reducing the opportunity for conflict. The rank was constructed using barriers ensuring people followed a "snake queue" system and ran between the hours of midnight and 0300 hrs.
- The provision of door supervisors acting as marshals, directing customers to the relevant taxis as well as maintaining order within the rank.

- Taxi enforcement officer's liaised with the drivers on the night themselves ensuring the scheme ran as smoothly as possible feeding cabs onto the rank optimising the numbers that could be carried away.

The cost of the operation was met by both the local- authority and the taxi companies themselves.

Advertising

Having gained financial support for the project it was agreed that we should progress the advertising campaign. Sponsorship was gained from several town centre businesses enabling the production of more professional posters featuring two local DJ celebrities conveying the various safety messages in a less authoritative manner. These posters were placed in prominent positions in all the town centre pubs and clubs.

To support this scheme a CD was produced which was played by all the relevant premises at the end of the night alerting the revellers of the drinking bye law, the operation of CCTV cameras and general safety advice. Again this initiative was sponsored by local businesses.

High visibility jackets for doorstaff

The success of the policing operation was partly down to projecting the image that there were far more police officers than perhaps there really was. This was achieved by ensuring all officers wore high visibility jackets and due to the concise area and layout of the town centre it was almost always possible to see an officer no matter where you were.

This principle was extended to door staff and it was agreed that one supervisor on each external door would also wear a high visibility jacket. This achieved three things;

- Portrayed an image of larger numbers, thus acting as a deterrent.
- Greater supervisor safety, more easily identified on CCTV.
- Improved partnership between police and supervisors and a better understanding that we are all striving to achieve the same objectives.

Exclusion orders;

The analysis revealed that 70% of all offenders were local to the Blackpool area. It was therefore felt that the application of exclusion orders would act as a strong deterrent to disorder. The licensees then agreed amongst themselves that if an individual or group were continually causing disorder then they would be excluded not only from those premises but all the other premises party to the scheme.

Phase 3

As we approach the forthcoming summer season we aim to consolidate many of the initiatives as well as introducing others;

Expansion of taxi rank

Having considered that the pilot scheme for the taxi rank was a success it was decided by the local authority to implement and expand the scheme at other strategic sites. Finance has been granted to erect permanent barriers around the pavement in the vicinity of Burgerdome and construct a more established queuing system within Talbot Square.

Bottle Bins

Sponsorship is currently being sought from drinks manufactures to increase the number of bottle bins outside licensed premises in an attempt to raise the profile of the drinking bye law and decrease the number of bottles that can be found deposited alongside already full rubbish bins.

Private Bus service

In support of the taxi framework progress is being made by a local bus company and the licensed premises to provide late night buses to run directly from the main venues to the relevant outlying areas. This service would assist dispersing the crowds and thus reducing the opportunity for conflict.

Assessment

How successful was the approach

Due to the nature of the problem the final assessment, which evolves as the project does, was always to be measured against both objective and subjective evidence. The extensive changes made in relation to both recording practices and processes have made the provision of quantitative evidence difficult and misleading.

The below chart must not be, misinterpreted and should be seen to display the increase in pro-active dealings the police initiate with members of the public and is supported below by the proportionate **decrease** in the subsequent recording of violent crimes.

Chart demonstrating increase in incidents of disorder as dealt with by police

| | JULY | AUG | SEPT | OCT |
|------|------|-----|-----------|-----|
| 1999 | 35 | 24 | 40 | 56 |
| 2000 | 60 | 58 | 83 | 78 |

Chart displaying decrease in recorded violent crimes compared to incidents of disorder

| | JULY | AUG | SEPT | OCT |
|-------------|------|-----|------|------|
| 1999 | 86% | 79% | 40% | 21 % |
| 2000 | 53% | 34% | 25% | 20% |

The conclusion that can be drawn from this is that officers are managing to interject and deal with incidents before they escalate into the commission of a crime and that the increasing demand has not resulted in a proportionate increase in violent crime.

It became apparent the project achieved far more than the objectives set at its inception and in fact realised many more objectives that were set by other stakeholders.

Creation of Night time Forum;

This achievement on its own was hugely significant and displayed a recognition and acceptance of the problem by a cross sample of the business community. Meetings are held bi-monthly at which relevant working groups are identified to address issues that arise. Since the creation of this group **all** initiatives have been delivered embracing the partnership ethos.

Licensed premises

Members of the licensing trade would report that there is an increasing number of local memberships sought which they believe is a direct result of and in recognition to the initiatives implemented.

Taxi rank

This initiative was run as pilot for a limited period only however achieved the following successes;

- 45% reduction of incidents of crime and disorder within the vicinity of the two ranks. More noticeably 65% reduction in incidents outside Burgerdome.
- Increased sense of security felt by taxi drivers.
- Increased sense of security felt by members of the public.
- Effective dispersal of customers at end of night.

Sixth Form survey

A further survey has been commissioned by this group to ascertain the public's perceptions and whether the initiatives have had any impact on public safety. This has also provided an opportunity to identify future areas for development.

Unfortunately rising violent crime and disorder is endemic throughout the country and it must be impressed that these achievements were made despite national trends. I believe this project has become a successful and evolving process of continual analysis and assessment enabling numerous responses to be implemented.

The commitment and enthusiasm of all partners involved to not only improve upon established initiatives but to develop further would all support the infinite life span of the project.