# ST. JOHNS ROAD SHELTERED HOUSING SCHEME

### A GOVERNMENT FUNDED BURGLARY INITIATIVE

AVON AND SOMERSET CONSTABULARY, YEOVIL POLICE STATION, ENGLAND, 2002

#### SUMMARY:

During the summer of 2000, the Government announced that they would be open to bids from local policing sectors and Local Authorities with the intention to reduce the number of burglaries that were being committed. The successful bids would have to prove that their project would address issues where the rate of burglary was at least one and a half times the national average (i.e. 36 or more burglaries per 1000 households - including attempts. There was a need for 'Credible plans for tackling the problem', clear and substantial burglary reduction targets, sustainability of any proposed interventions and the commitment of all agencies involved, and where applicable, the support of local residents.

Following a period of analysis, the Yeovil Policing sector were able to prove that a number of offences had been committed within Sheltered Housing schemes, where the residents were over the age of 60. One particular scheme, known as St. Johns Road in Yeovil, was proven to be experiencing a larger frequency of offences than any other schemes. The offences were also of greater concern to the authorities, due to the Modus Operandi employed by the perpetrator. A total of six objectives were set which included reducing incidents of burglary, increasing victim services, and promote security and safety awareness, among others.

A minimum reduction of 30% would be expected within the first year, following completion of the project. Following extensive surveys of the St. Johns Road scheme and the input of a reformed burglar. A number of preventative measures were put forward to address the problems. These included: provision and fitting of additional window locks; additional fencing to the rear of the properties; closure of select pathways that cut through the scheme; additional lighting to be fitted to the rear of each property; promotion of Neighbourhood Watch; education of Wardens and residents as to the correct use of the locks; in addition to general crime reduction issues.

The grant was awarded and although the project is still in its final stages there has already been a great deal of positive feedback from local residents. Early indications suggest that success has been achieved, due to only one attempted burglary being reported since the project began. This project highlights that early multi-agency working is a priority, that the inclusion of unorthodox `experts' should be considered and that consideration must be given to the wider communities and their involvement with such projects.

### **SCANNING**

During the mid months of 2000 the Government invited local policing sectors and Local Authorities to bid for funding under `Round Three of the Burglary Initiatives'. As a result it was suggested that officers might like to analyse local crime trends with a view to submitting a bid.

The guidelines were quite broad, in that the recipients of the funding did not have to spend the money in a specific or isolated geographical area. There was also provision for the creation of 'virtual communities' thus allowing analysis to be carried out by way of age of residents, ethnic background or specific types of crime (e.g. victims of distraction burglary).

It was decided to look at offences of burglary that had been committed against elderly residents within the town of Yeovil.

Although almost any crime may be unacceptable to the majority of society, offences against the elderly seem to cause greater concern. Whenever police officers carry out a public consultation exercise, this particular type of crime seems to create the most reaction from the public. This offence also perpetuates the fear of crime, particularly within the 55+ age group.

Following extensive analysis, which will be explained later, the decision was taken to submit a bid for funding that would address a particular Sheltered Housing scheme. This was due to a number of burglaries being committed, within the scheme, where the perpetrator was forcing entry through a rear window. This was usually during the hours of darkness, and on more than one occasion the residents of the property had woken from their sleep to see the silhouette of the burglar at the foot of their bed.

The need for urgent action was fairly obvious, as there were real fears within the local police service that if these offences continued someone would suffer serious physical or mental injury, or worse still, the burglar investigation may become a murder investigation! The objectives of the project were:

- 1) To reduce burglary across the district by 5%
- 2) To enhance and develop services provided for victims
- 3) Encourage and develop NHW and the networking of such schemes
- 4) Encourage and develop awareness of crime prevention measures/ home security
- 5) Develop ways of reducing the likelihood of victims becoming repeat victims
- 6) Encourage a greater understanding of the realities of burglary within the community

A minimum reduction of 30% would be expected within the first year, following completion of the project.

### **ANALYSIS**

Prior to any formal analysis taking place, numerous Police Officers and representatives of the District Council Community Safety Group were consulted as to their own perceptions as to where they felt the funding would be best placed.

Without exception, everyone agreed that the elderly residents in Yeovil had recently been targeted by the criminal element and that there was a need for further investigation into the recorded crime figures and particularly those effecting residents over the age of 60.

As a result of some in depth research by Mr. Bob Hicks, Crime Analysis Officer (CAO), the following data was obtained.

While the total number of dwelling burglaries in Yeovil Policing Sector has fluctuated over the last few years (see Appendix 1), victimisation of the over 60 age group has increased at an alarming rate. This project is based on the complete crime years 98/99, 99/00, 00/01 for dwelling burglaries where the victim is 60 or over. There are no strong seasonal variations identified in this crime category. It is important to note that the figures for 00/01 shows that the rate of victimisation in this age group has doubled what it was in 98/99 (see Appendix 2). The number of dwelling burglaries per 1000 households per year averaged over the last 4 years it is 36.4. Expressed another way, OAP's (victims over the age of 60) comprise 19.3% of the total population (Population of OAP's \_ Overall population of Yeovil), but suffered a disproportionate 29.5% of dwelling burglaries (average rate where the victim was over 60 actual burglary rate irrespective of age) over the four year period.

Sheltered Housing Schemes in Yeovil have suffered an even more dramatic rise over the last 2 years. The number of dwelling burglaries per 1000 households per year in these schemes in 99/00 was 69 (see Appendix 3). Some of the measures proposed in this project would specifically target this victim group. The data used and calculations made require certain assumptions to be made. (See Appendix 4)

In order to utilise the most up to date crime characteristic information; the following analysis is based on ALL dwelling burglary offences in the crime year April 2000 to April 2001 where the victim was 60 or over.

The distribution of offences was strongly biased to Beat FY155 which incorporates the North East quarter of Yeovil Town.

42% of crimes occurred in this area compared to 18-19% on each of the other 3 residential beats. This concentration reflected not only a bias in the total number of dwelling burglaries in this area, but also the higher proportion of older residents. This is intimately linked to the type of housing stock which comprises mainly post-war bungalows, semi-detached houses, sheltered housing units and small groups of flats.

The favourite target was a detached or semidetached bungalow, forming 33% of the total premises types attacked across the town. These are mainly privately owned, but significant proportions are controlled by Housing Associations. Many of the properties in the area are owned by a private company, South Somerset Homes (SSH), who recently purchased the entire District Council housing stock.

The average age of the victim was 75 within a total range of 60 to 95. The largest proportion (37%) were in the 70 - 79 range, but an unexpected 31 % were over 80 years old. Unsurprisingly for this age group, 85% of the victims were retired.

Around 25% of offences happened during the night (0000 to 0800), with a further 42% occurring during the evening (1800 to 0000). Afternoons (1200 to 1800) accounted for another 29%. Bearing in mind seasonal variations in day length, closer analysis suggested that more than 75% were committed during the hours of darkness. It was noted that during early autumn a large number of burglaries were committed in the early evenings, within 1 to 2 hours of darkness falling. The times for offences had become earlier in the evening as the day length had become shorter. A disturbing consequence of this timing was that in 39% of offences, the victim was present in the dwelling at the same time as the commission of the offence. This explained the relatively high number of offences where the offender has been disturbed (7.5%). This may also have accounted for the relatively low proportion of all room searches, the burglar often preferring to target the bedrooms, or if the victim was asleep, the living areas. Just over half the searches were conducted tidily, and the dominant property types stolen were jewellery and cash.

The dominant entry site was at the rear of the dwelling (56%) and almost always at ground floor level (90%). However, access to that point was gained primarily via an equal mixture of the front and rear of the premises. The favourite entry point was a window (50%), followed by a door (39%). 70% of all offences involved forced

entry, and of these over half involved a screwdriver or jemmy type implement. 25% of all offences involved unforced entry via an open or insecure door (5% unknown entry), however, 41% involved using force on a window. In 53% of the offences that involved entry via a window, the windows were fitted with window locks that were actually secured at the time. This fact, combined with a high proportion of PVCu construction (41%) at the entry site suggested the inadequacy of the existing security provision in this area of the attacked houses. Over 90% of premises targeted had no intruder alarm system.

During discussions between the management of South Somerset Homes and the Crime Reduction Officer (CRO) questions were raised as to the Modus Operandi that was being used to enter the premises owned by the company.

An initial survey of the most vulnerable sheltered housing scheme was conducted, this being in St. Johns Road, and a number of crime reduction measures were suggested. At this time it was suggested by the senior management of SSH that the theoretical approach was valid, but to add weight to any request for funding from the company board, they would like to be able to actually demonstrate that the current security measures were inadequate.

In order to demonstrate the ease with which entry was being gained, a reformed burglar, 'John Doe' was approached with a view to attend the properties with SSH management, a local window contractor and the CRO

The 'burglar' gained access to the properties in less than 3 seconds, causing no noise or damage, much to the disbelief of all present. Long discussions took place between 'Mr. Doe' and the window contractor as to a suitable lock that could be retrospectively fitted to the windows and would provide sufficient security whilst being user friendly. A number of units were constructed with various locks fitted and the burglar was asked to try to break them open. After a number of successful experiments a suitable system was developed that met the

criteria of security, ease of use for the residents and a value for money.

The `burglar' also expressed his grave concerns to SSH as to the poor condition of fencing and inadequate lighting. These matters had already been mentioned by the CRO but the confirmation reinforced the need for urgent consideration as to the overall solution.

Following the demonstration as to the ease at which entry could be gained. The decision was taken to submit a bid to the Government for funding. Due to the fact that all necessary criteria was met under round three of the 'Burglary Initiatives' the Home Office awarded a total of £34,900 to be spent on crime reduction issues that effected elderly residents within the town.

### RESPONSE

The decision was taken to create a management committee. This included representatives of SSH, South Somerset District Council Community Safety Group (SSDC), Age Concern and the Police.

The role of the committee was to ensure that the proposed improvements could be monitored and a multi-agency approach could be taken to ensure that the correct experience and expertise was best utilised.

As well as the need for upgrading the security in sheltered housing, It was the intention of the management committee to work closely with Age Concern within other communities across the town to highlight the problems and issues to residents in private housing, who would also benefit from additional security measures. For this purpose £2000 of the funding was presented to Age Concern. The remaining money was allocated specifically for the sheltered housing in St. Johns Road.

It was eventually agreed by the management committee that the following measures would be implemented within St. Johns Road: -

### 1) The provision and fitting of additional window locks.

As could be seen from the analysis, the main point of entry to these properties had been through rear PVC windows. It was demonstrated by the 'burglar' that the locks and handles that were fitted were not sufficient to protect the property from attack. After the `burglar had carried out the tests on various locks a consultation process was arranged with the window company, the 'burglar', the scheme warden, residents and the CRO. A suitable lock was agreed that provided a much greater degree of security but allows ease of use for the elderly residents. This method of target hardening is one of the main principles of crime reduction and is also seen as a Specific Situational Measure as shown ill Table 7 of `Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme' (Tilley, Pease, Hough and Brown. 1999)

The board of SSH agreed that a total of £16,000 would be spent immediately on the upgrading of the window security locks within St. Johns Road as well as a number of their other sheltered housing schemes.

### 2) Additional fencing to the rear of the properties.

The rear of the properties were easily accessible due to the pathways that run through the residential area. There are also significant areas of open ground such as playing fields that allow ready access to unfenced gardens. Again, by looking at the Modus Operandi most regularly used, it was considered that the apparent ease of entry into the rear gardens was a major factor into why these premises were being targeted. The CRO and surveyors of SSH discussed the best form of fencing. The CRO suggested a hit and miss or palisade design. This not only allowed for greater natural surveillance of the area (Specific Situational Measure) but also made it far more difficult for any intruders to gain access. Another reason for this style of fencing was that the alleyways are relatively narrow and close boarded style fencing

would have created a very claustrophobic environment.

## 3) The closure of some pathways that cut through the scheme. This would result in an increase in the natural surveillance of the area

Following on from the previous point, the current pathways split at a Y-junction at numerous points. Having ascertained from the District Council that these paths were private property, belonging to SSH, it was suggested that they be gated at strategic junctions. This would still allow people from outside of the scheme to pass through the development, but would ensure that they used the pathways that provided the most light and natural surveillance.

It would also allow the residents, Warden and SSH staff the opportunity to challenge the presence of anyone on the 'controlled' pathways. This would increase the feeling of ownership of the project by the community and bring them together with a common purpose, thus reflecting the theories of Oscar Newmans' work in Defensible Space - People and Design in the Violent City (1972).

## 4) Additional Dusk to Dawn lighting to be fitted to the rear of each property.

Through analysis of the MO it could be seen that upwards of 75% of burglaries had been committed after 18:00hrs and throughout the hours of darkness. The installation of additional lighting was important for numerous reasons:

- It added to the feeling of well being of the residents and so helped to reduce their fears.
- It increased the perceived risk to the offender (both points are shown in Table 8 of Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme') (Tilley, Pease, Hough and Brown, 1999).

■ It increased the available natural surveillance.

The decision to fit Dusk to Dawn as opposed to Passive Infra-Red (PIR) lighting was made following the report by PC Steve Town of West Yorkshire Police, *A Brief Guide to Home Security Lighting*. (2000).

It was also raised by the 'burglar' who assisted the consultation. He was able to avoid detection of the PIR unit and stated that he had never been dissuaded by such a light. He did, however, admit to avoiding areas with Dawn to Dusk lighting.

5) The promotion of Neighbourhood Watch (NHW) within the area and therefore bring in other local residents that are not in sheltered housing.

At the time a 'Warden Watch' covered all of the sheltered housing stock of SSH, but there was a shortfall in the number of NHW schemes that operated in the area outside of the elderly residents, low community involvement being a Community Related Generator, (Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme' Page 8) (Tilley, Pease, Hough and Brown. 1999).

It was decided that the local beat officers, Crime Prevention Panel and NHW Administration should target activities in the areas adjacent to the schemes in order that the community began to interact on a regular basis, thus addressing wider locality related measures. (Table 8 Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction *Programme*). The promotion of NHW would not only gel the community in a formulated way but would also provide the community with a common theme. It would also highlight crime issues to a wider audience and increase awareness and so reducing the risk of crime displacement in the immediate area.

6) Education of the Wardens and residents as to the correct use of the locks in addition to general crime reduction issues that are especially pertinent to the elderly.

During the discussions held by the management committee it was stated that 'it is all well and good to fit the additional security features but people must be confident in using them.'

An informal training programme would be introduced where the Wardens and residents would be shown how to use the new measures. It was also suggested that the training would be a 'hands-on' approach, where the recipients would become involved in a role play type situation, e.g. Bogus Callers, therefore, reenforcing the message and increasing the likelihood that the message would be remembered. The training would be run by representatives of Age Concern and the Crime Reduction Department.

Once the committee and Home Office had agreed the measures that would be implemented, a number of consultation meetings were held with the local residents. It was decided at an early stage that any consultation with the residents must be done with some thought and consideration. The important issue was that the fear of crime should not be fuelled by people in suits meeting within the development and talking about the 'lack of security' and there was an agreed decision that promises should not be made if they could not be met.

As a result, the direct consultation with the residents, on an individual basis, was obtained from 'open sources'(e.g. SSH staff) during day to day routine contact. The main contact on the scheme was carried out through the scheme warden who had been able to discuss matters with the residents and feed the findings back to the relevant organisations.

Numerous open meetings with the residents were then held and the proposed interventions were outlined along with explanations as to why certain measures were needed. These consultations met with the full support of the residents.

### **ASSESSMENT**

By studying the data that has been made available it can be seen that there has been an urgent need for positive action to be taken. Not only to address crime against the elderly in general, but specifically in the area of St. Johns Road sheltered housing where the frequency and seriousness of the offences was at a significant high in relation to the rest of the town.

The measures taken need to ensure that further offences against the elderly, and particularly the residents of St. Johns Road, are reduced if not eradicated, but also to reduce the fear of crime that the locals are experiencing. The fear itself can sometimes be more damaging to a community than the actual crime, as rumour and gossip may fuel peoples anxiety.

Much of the work that is to be carried out on this project relates to the `Principles of Crime Reduction' (Home Office Crime Reduction College: 1992). Many of the interventions revolved around Target Hardening, Access Control, Surveillance, Environmental Design and Rule Setting. These measures are supported by the research of Tilley, Pease, Hough and Brown. (Early Lessons from the Crime Reduction Programme: 1999)

There is also the need to encourage the community to work together with a common purpose, not only within the sheltered housing schemes, but also with the communities in their immediate vicinity. This theory was outlined in the early work of Oscar Newman (*Defensible Space - People and Design in the Violent City:* 1972).

Many people involved in this project feel that one of the major lessons learnt was the input provided by 'John Doe'. Although there was an initial degree of concern from some quarters, he proved to be an invaluable `consultant' and his advice certainly assisted in the decision making process.

The saying that 'actions speak louder than words' sums up the impact that his demonstration had on the parties concerned, and it is felt that his involvement went a long way in securing the funding, both from SSH and the Home Office.

It is certainly a course of action that should be considered by Crime Reduction Officers across the country. Take advice from the 'experts'.

Although, at the time of writing this project, the erecting of fencing and lighting has just begun. There is a general feeling in the area that positive action is being taken. This has not only effected the elderly residents but also the wider community who can appreciate the wider implications and benefits of improved security.

Even after the window locks were fitted, members of SSH, Age Concern and the District Council all made comment as to the positive feedback that was being received and the fact that the residents seemed to be more at ease.

The measures taken have been well received and all members involved in the decision making process are happy that all possible measures have been considered and investigated.

### CONCLUSIONS

As previously stated, the actual erection of fencing and lighting has just begun, however the fitting of the additional window locks was completed in April 2000.

Since that time there has only been one reported burglary in the sheltered housing scheme. This was an attempt where the culprit entered the rear garden of the premises and tried to force a window, with little success!

Once the fencing is complete, access to the rear of these properties will be very difficult and it is hoped that no further reports of this type will be recorded!!

Unfortunately similar offences have continued to occur across the town at a comparable rate to previous years.

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Even though the works on the project will not be complete for another month, it is believed that there has been a genuine reduction in not only recorded crime, but also the fear of crime. This, in part, is due to the increased awareness that the elderly residents now have. They have begun to challenge callers to their homes, and have been drawn together to achieve a common goal of improved community wellbeing.

Early indications would suggest that all six of the objectives set out in the introduction will be achieved within the next six months.

Generally, the recommendations that can be made through this project would be that early multi-agency working is a priority. It allows for ideas to be considered by a wider audience and also means that a greater pool of knowledge and experience can be explored.

The inclusion of unorthodox 'experts' should be considered, as their working knowledge can prove to be invaluable.

Consideration must be given to the wider communities and their involvement with such projects. Failure to do so may actually isolate the target audience and therefore add to their feelings of living in an area where no-one really cares. It is then necessary to build relationships before significant environmental changes can be made.

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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### NOTES

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### **APPENDICES**

Appendix 1: Dwelling Burglary Yeovil Town - FY Policing Sector

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	FOUR YEAR AVERAGE	00/01	99/00	98/99	97/98		
No. of Dwelling Burglaries*	372.5	344	389	324	433		
Yeovil Population**	28316	28316	28316	28316	28316		
Yeovil Households**	11548	11548	11548	11548	11548		
No. of Dwelling Burglaries per 1000 pop. by year	13.3	12.1	13.7	11.4	15.3		
No. of Dwelling Burglaries per 1000 Households by year	32.3	29.8	33.7	28.1	37.5		

\*Crime information is taken from the Somerset East District CMU Crime recording database. The numbers given for are for offences where the victim's age is given as 60 or over. The Yeovil Police Sector beats (FY151,152,153,154,155) do not coincide with the Civil Parish / Ward boundaries. However, virtually all dwelling burglaries on FY Sector occur within the built up area of the town rather than the few peripheral villages. It is reasonable to compare population data for Yeovil Parish (consisting of the wards Yeovil Centrai, Yeovil East, Yeovil Preston, Yeovil South and Yeovil West) with the crime data based on the 5 beats.

\*\*Population and numbers of households data are taken from the 1991 census (supplied by South Somerset District Council).

**Appendix 2: Dwelling Burglary Yeovil Town of Old Age Pensioners (OAP)** 

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	FOUR YEAR AVERAGE	00/01	99/00	98/99	97/98			
No. of Dwelling Burglaries to OAP Occupied Households*	110	155	122	72	92			
Yeovil OAP Population**	5493	5493	5493	5493	5493			
Yeovil OAP Households**	3026	3026	3026	3026	3026			
No. of Dwelling Burglaries per 1000 OAP population by year	20.0	28.2	22.2	13.1	16.8			
No. of Dwelling Burglaries per 1000 OAP Households by year	36.4	51.2	40.3	23.8	30.4			

\*Crime information is taken from the Somerset East District CMU Crime recording database. The numbers given for are for offences where the victim's age is given as 60 or over. The Yeovil Police Sector beats (FY151,152,153,154,155) do not coincide with the Civil Parish / Ward boundaries. However, virtually all dwelling burglaries on FY Sector occur within the built up area of the town rather than the few peripheral villages. It is reasonable to compare population data for Yeovil Parish (consisting of the wards Yeovil Central, Yeovil East, Yeovil Preston, Yeovil South and Yeovil West) with the crime data based on the 5 beats.

<sup>\*\*</sup>Population and numbers of households data are taken from the 1991 census (supplied by South Somerset District Council).

**Appendix 3: Dwelling Burglaries South Somerset Homes Sheltered Housing Schemes** AVERAGE FOR SCHEME AREA 99/00 98/99 97/98 3 YEARS **Great Western Terrace** 2 1 1 0 Malmesbury Court 0 0 0 0 Milford Park 0 0 0 0 Monks Dale / Larkhill 3 3 5 1 Monmouth Road / Oaklands 1.33 4 0 0 Road Northbrook Road 0.66 2 0 0 Park Lode, The Park 0 0 0 0 Pearson House, Roping\_Road 0.33 0 Pembroke Close / Belvedere 3.33 8 0 Road / L de Road / Vale Road St John's Road / Blenheim 2.33 7 0 0 Road / Chatsworth Road Windermere Close 0.33 1 0 0 TOTAL 12.33 26 7 4 TOTAL NO. OF UNITS (i.e. 375 375 375 375 **DWELLINGS) IN SCHEMES** NO. OF DWELLING BURGLARIES /

Note: Shaded areas relate to Sheltered Housing within Beat FY155.

1000 HOUSEHOLDS/YEAR

Appendix 4: Rate of Burglary by Time Period							
	YEAR 1	YEAR 2	YEAR 3				
Time period	00/01	99/00	98/99				
Number of households	3026	3026	3026				
Number of domestic burglaries (including attempts)	155	122	72				
Burglary rate per thousand households	51.2	40.3	23.8				

32.88

69.33

18.66

10.66