

Lancashire Constabulary

FRYING TONIGHT IN PEACE

*Crime & Disorder Reduction
Category*

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SUMMARY

FRYING TONIGHT IN PEACE

Situated on a line of shops on POPE Lane, Moor Nook 'Chippy' is the only chip shop on the estate and the only premises open late into the evening. The shop therefore became a meeting place for the youth of the estate as it was the only place providing heat, light and cover. The majority of the youths congregating outside the shop were already barred from the local youth club as a result of their behavior.

'Unfortunately this antisocial behavior by the youths continued outside the chip shop. Incidents of criminal damage and juvenile disorder increased in the area. The owner suffered minor damage to his premises and a drop in custom and takings due to the presence of the group who were perceived as a threat by residents

The Community Beat Manager — PC 2639 Morgan, analyzed the problem through consultation with the owner of the shop, local residents and the Council Housing office. In addition she identified the number, time and type of Police deployments to the shop establishing peak times of activity and the identities of youths involved.

Following consultation with partners, high visibility patrols by 2639 and other officers commenced. The youths involved were taken home and spoken with in front of parents. Where appropriate, warnings in relation to breach of tenancy were issued by the local council housing office to persistent offenders and their parents. Local residents were encouraged to adopt a 'zero tolerance' attitude toward the group and give witness statements for criminal activity.

By the methods employed the identified public nuisance and disorder problems were eradicated from that location. The number of police deployments was reduced to nil and there was a marked reduction in the incidents of damage.

The shop owner had peace restored, and saw his profits double. The council saw a reduction in repair costs for incidents of damage. The local residents confidence was increased, the chip shop was again a safe place to visit. The police were seen to be providing a solution which worked and which the community had been involved in. The youths involved were dealt with in a positive manner and changed their behavior to the good of all involved.

INTRODUCTION

I am PC2639 Christina Morgan of the Lancashire Constabulary, Central Division, currently based at Fulwood Police Station. I am the Community Beat Officer for the Moor Nook Estate, which consists mostly of local authority housing with some being owner occupied. It is situated in the Ribbleton area of Preston and has recently been classed as an area of high deprivation.

There is a very good community spirit on the estate and residents are fortunate to have a local community centre, which is run by trained Youth and Community Workers who organise all manner of clubs and activities. There are also several good community groups including a residents association and an estate management board, who work in conjunction with Preston Borough Council.

SCANNING

The shops complex is situated on the main thoroughfare through the estate and consists of a post office/general store, chip shop, newsagent, bookmakers and the estate management board office. There are also some vacant premises, which are tinned up. The complex itself is central to the estate and is very badly dilapidated. It is clearly visible when entering the estate from any location.

The chip shop is open until midnight and in particular provided heat, light and an unofficial youth club during cold winter evenings for the local youths. The owner was initially in the habit of allowing the youths to sit in (on a window ledge). They invariably abused his hospitality and things gradually went from bad to worse with a considerable downturn in their behaviour.

There was a huge increase in juvenile disorder/criminal damage, both in and outside the shop. The antisocial behaviour of the youths further added to the decline of the area and in particular contributed to a spiral of decline at a complex of shops already in dire need of renovation. It should be noted that this problem was not inherent to the chip shop. The chip shop was merely a focal point for the youths who were actually causing all manner of mayhem in the immediate area.

The chip shop, being the only shop open late into the evening was the shop, which was most directly affected by the problems. This in turn led to a decrease in shop takings. Residents, some of whom are elderly, were greatly intimidated by the large group of between 10-15 youths who would loiter both in/outside the shop blocking the entrance and consequently, they gave the shop a wide berth. For some of the elderly residents, the shop provided the only means of a hot meal. The owner reported seeing his passing trade customers driving by on seeing the group of youths. His takings were so bad he was considering selling up. Residents were also concerned that owner-occupiers may see a decline in their property prices, as a direct result of the ongoing problems.

ANALYSIS/PAT

I continually monitored incident logs/crime reports and obtain further information from the residents and shop owners. I established specific times of peak activity as the being in the evenings_ Police were deployed to the area nightly during the winter months, sometimes up to three times per night.

I consulted with the owners of the chip shop, post office and the estate management board, the local housing manager, councillors and community groups. I involved them and enlisted their help and commitment to combat the antisocial behaviour. I organised meetings, attended by the councillors, housing manager and chairpersons of each community group, to discuss the problems in the area, swap information and consider the way forward in solving the problems.

Location

Considering PAT, there was little I could do to change the location. There was no money in the Preston Borough Council pot to improve the shops. As a result, other independent housing authorities, submitted their proposals for redevelopment of the shops. Wyre Borough Council has recently secured funding for that redevelopment.

Victim

The victims were shop owners, potential customers and residents who were mostly intimidated, but whom I encouraged to provide statements and attend court. I also encouraged the chip shop owner to install CCTV, keep a log of the incidents occurring in and around the shop, and barr the main offenders from entering the shop.

Offender

Eventually, the offenders were identified as local youths aged between 14 -17 years. Most were suspended from school or did not attend, were already barred from the local youth club, had little or no parental guidance and had resorted to the following criminal activity in the vicinity of the shops; theft, criminal damage, arson, robbery, harassment, assault, causing traffic accidents. It was therefore apparent that this was not just a juvenile nuisance; the youths were actually committing some serious offences. If I could manage to obtain statements, the youths could then be dealt with appropriately and effectively.

I was very mindful of the cyclical effect of the problem ie, younger children observing the antisocial behaviour of their peers and considering it normal.

OBJECTIVES

I prioritised this problem, because it had a great impact on quality of life issues. It was therefore my objective to:

1. To work in partnership with the local community/councillors.
2. Restore order.
3. Increase public satisfaction/confidence.

Hopefully, my success criteria would later be measured, not only by a reduction in complaints, but also in increased public satisfaction. I chose the following responses in order to address these issues.

RESPONSE

1. High visibility policing was conducted mostly by myself I requested response patrols to pay passing attention and obtain names/addresses of loitering youths. Likewise if they were deployed to a specific incident. I did however take ownership of the problem with the assistance of the community and did so to avoid a constant drain on response patrols.
2. I then conducted home visits to youths/parents, to highlight the problem, inform them of the Harassment Act and remind them of their tenancy agreements. A letter reiterating these points followed up each visit.
3. I passed this information onto the housing manager who also sent letters to offenders' parents, again outlining the terms of tenancy agreements.
4. I then set about identifying witnesses/victims, either by word of mouth or by interrogating incident logs. I encouraged them to provide statements to enable offenders to be arrested.

The latter proved very difficult as there appeared to be an unofficial "anti grassing policy" which had been adopted by some of the residents on the estate. The rest were just highly intimidated and fearful of repercussions. It therefore proved a challenge to encourage people to supply statements and attend court. I was successful because I had gained residents' trust and proved that I was willing to try to improve the situation. Their perception of suffering repercussions was far greater than actual reality. This was later proved following arrests. If victims/witnesses made a stance against the youths, they invariably backed off

There was also an attitude of acceptance. Residents/shop owners accepted the problems as a way of life, it was normal! What could the police do? From the information gained from my analysis, and the fact that the problem had been long/on-going, I decided that a zero tolerant approach would be the best possible course of action and would have the greatest impact. Merely moving the youths on, as in the past, would neither be sustainable or successful.

RESPONSE Continued.....

Consequently, as a result of a zero tolerance stance and eventual assistance from victims, witnesses and partnerships, I did manage to secure several arrests and convictions as follows:

1. Three youths climbed onto the rear roof of the shops and proceeded to throw large bricks at the chimney pots, in competition to see who could knock one down. Some bricks were launched right over the roof, landing on the pavement directly outside the chip shop. The youths did not consider the gravity of their actions ie persons could have been injured. All three were arrested for attempt damage, charged and convicted.
2. Five youths were arrested for robbery after ambushing another group of youths from outside the area who were visiting a friend on the estate, and had attended the chip shop. The aggrieved was attacked, pulled to the floor and frisked. His jacket was dragged off him and was stolen along with his mobile telephone. I obtained victim/witness statements and with the assistance of chip shop staff I managed to identify offenders. Unfortunately, because the aggrieved could not directly identify the offenders, it was a job destined for identification parade. The aggrieved was so frightened at the thought of having to face his attackers; he decided to retract his complaint. All five offenders were released no charge.
3. Three youths were arrested for criminal damage after ripping off roof tiles from the chip shop and neighbouring premises, and smashing them to the ground. £200 worth of damage was caused and all three offenders were arrested and subsequently convicted.
4. After a night consuming alcohol outside the chip shop. Youths went to the rear of the post office situated next door and gained entry to the back yard by damaging a secure gate. They then pushed a wheelie bin up against the rear of the premises and set light to it. The bin had been positioned up against a storeroom door. Behind this was a staircase leading to the upper flat where the owners resided. The storeroom was filled with paper products. Once alight, the fire was further encouraged by alcohol. The owners were alerted to the fire by what sounded like an explosion, they looked out of the upper window to see a youth fuelling the fire with liquid from an alcohol bottle. Two youths were arrested. One was released due to lack of evidence. The second was charged and convicted of arson. He was home office tagged as an alternative to a custodial sentence.
5. When restoration of the shops was uncertain, the residents were disappointed and obviously concerned about the state of the shops. They hired the services of a local artist using £500 obtained through charity. Her remit was to design artwork which children could replicate into templates, which they could then use to spray the timings on the shops, both vacant and occupied. It took the children and youth workers six weeks to make the templates in the youth club. They then went to the shops on a practice run and sprayed some templates. At the time of the spraying, youths were hanging about causing problems for the youth workers. By the next day the artwork had been daubed with graffiti. The children were devastated. Luckily, I manage to obtain statements from residents who had witnessed the offence. One youth was arrested for criminal damage and subsequently convicted. The court considered costs of almost £1,000.

RESPONSE Continued.....

At the same time as committing the above offences, the youths were also committing the following offences which, due to lack of evidence they were never detained for:

6. Setting light to litter bins outside the shops.
7. Reaching over the chip shop counter and stealing sausages and pies.
8. Picking tiles off the window ledge inside the chip shop and cracking them.
9. Continually cracking plate glass windows at both the chip shop and the post office.
10. Bricking passing cars and buses, causing damage and injury.
11. Putting ropes across the main carriageway outside the shops causing a road traffic accident.

The above offences serve as an insight into the activities of the youths and exactly what the residents and shop owners had to contend with.

ASSESSMENT

The youths quickly realised that I was working in partnership with residents etc as I was obtaining information about their activities even when I was off duty. They eventually got the message that we were not to be deterred. That we were on a mission to increase the quality of life of the residents and restore order. The youths also realised that residents and shop owners were now willing to provide statements and attend court. As a result:

1. The number of incidents reduced as follows:

From October 1999 to May 2000 (3/4 of year) – there were 171 calls to the area, 51 relating to the chip shop.

From June 2000 to May 2001 – there were 89 calls to the area, 26 relating to the chip shop

From June 2001 to May 2002 – there were 26 calls to the area, 8 relating to the chip shop see graph. Appendix 1)

With reference to the latter figures ie the 8 calls relating to the chip shop, some of these were relevant to firework nuisance, which was prevalent in all Preston areas.

ASSESSMENT Continued.....

2. As a result, the number of police deployments also reduced with the decrease in complaints.
3. This also led to a reduction in repair costs for the shop owners and Preston Borough Council.
4. As a result of arrests and warnings, I managed to secure an Acceptable Behavioural Contract (ABC) on one youth. Preston Borough Council are now using ABC's as the first step towards Antisocial Behavioural Orders, which are both costly and time consuming to obtain. The ABC was issued with a warning that failure to abide by the conditions therein would result in a Notice Seeking Possession (NSP) of the resident's property being served. Initially conditions imposed applied to the Moor Nook estate and were successful. However, the relevant youth then offended in another area. The conditions were extended to cover offences committed throughout the whole of the Preston area and an NSP was served. This ABC is regularly reviewed. A second NSP was served on the parents of another offending youth, without a previous ABC being imposed.
5. The chip shop owner reported an increase in takings. Initially, because of the problems and the subsequent decrease in his takings, he was considering selling up rather than securing a tenancy in the new shop complex. Since the problems have diminished, the shop takings have doubled and the owner has decided not to sell. The increase in business has afforded him a second shop in another area. He was so grateful for our efforts he sent a letter to the Chief Superintendent, expressing his gratitude.
6. There has been an increase in public satisfaction/confidence. The chip shop is now a safe place to visit, especially for the elderly. Residents have also expressed their gratitude.
7. I have received favourable comments from response officers who are very busy and appreciate not having to be constantly deployed to the area.

SUSTAINABILITY/POLICE WITHDRAWAL

The area has had no beat officer since mid January of this year, as I have been conducting other duties. I do still have contact with community groups, residents and shop owners, who have reported that there are no problems. I have had occasion to drive through the area and there have been no youths loitering outside the chip shop.

Hopefully the area will continue to be almost problem free, and we have contributed to breaking the cyclical effect. Younger children are now aware of the numerous arrests and how like behaviour will be dealt with.

As I had obtained the first Acceptable Behavioural Contract imposed in the Preston area, procedures are now in place for further ABC's to be obtained and imposed in any area of Preston.

EXIT STRATEGY

1. To continue to work in partnership with the local authority, Estate management board and residents, in particular to encourage redevelopment of the shops complex, which now appears imminent.
2. To strive to incorporate crime prevention through the environmental design principles to the proposed redevelopment thus ensuring that there is no reoccurrence of the problem.

Lancashire Constabulary

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29 May 2002

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Clive House (Room 415)
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The Tilley Award 2002

As Chair of the force `Problem Oriented Policing Steering Group' I am delighted to forward Lancashire Constabulary's nominations for the Tilley Award 2002.

There has been an enthusiastic response from the force's divisions/departments in respect of this Award, therefore the Lancashire Constabulary is submitting a total of 19 applications, all of which have been quality assured.

I personally endorse each individual entry and commend each one on its own particular merit. Many of the nominations were used as case studies in the Constabulary's own Annual 'POP' Conference that took place in May of this year.

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P.R. Stephenson QPM'. The signature is stylized and includes a large flourish at the end.

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