

# OPERATION SAFER BRECHIN

## SUMMARY

### The Problem

Brechin is a small rural town within the county of Angus. The town falls within Eastern Division of Tayside Police, which has a co-terminous boundary with Angus Council. The population is about 8,000. Between July 2000 and August 2001 the town saw 3 murders committed within a small area. This was in addition to a number of attempted murders, serious assaults and other violent crimes. Additionally, all crimes were increasing across the board with vandalism and youth problems in particular showing a sharp increase in numbers.

Concerns were being raised by police officers, elected representatives, community groups and individuals. Intelligence sources also indicated the problem in relation to violent crime was likely to further.

The task was to tackle the rise in violent crime and anti social behaviour as well as provide much needed reassurance to the community that the issue was being taken seriously and addressed.

### Evidence Used to Define the Problem

- Police Command and Control data (CAPTOR)
- Management Information System data (PROMIS)
- Community Intelligence
- Criminal Intelligence
- Concerns by police officers, elected representatives, community groups and individuals.

### The Police Response

Preparation for the operation included

- Intelligence gathering
- Targeting of offenders
- Liaison with the, Procurator Fiscal regarding the implementation of curfews as a condition of bail
- Liaison/discussion with elected representatives and community fora
- Liaison with licensed premises and neighbourhood watch co-ordinators
- Establishment of a media strategy to increase public reassurance
- Liaison/discussion with the local secondary school
- Liaison/discussion with Community Education representatives

The operation itself incorporated

- Focussed high visibility patrols and enforcement
- Disruption of targets through regular curfew address checks
- Regular licensed premises visits
- Disruption of those gathering within the hotspot area
- Regular press releases/interviews raising awareness and seeking co-operation
- Continual updates to local Community Council, Angus Councillors and Area Forum
- Continual assessment through activity monitoring and review of statistical data
- Continuous assessment of intelligence

### **Impact of Response and Measurement**

Over the period of the operation, all violent crime had fallen. In particular there have been no further murders, attempted murders or serious assaults.

- Stark reductions in crimes of violence by 39.3%
- Reductions in levels of vandalism by 52.3%
- Satisfaction levels by local representatives and other partners (local press/Procurator Fiscal/Councillors)
- Additional reductions in other crime areas such as youth nuisance calls and dishonesty by 40.1%
- Overall crime reduction rate in the burgh by 35%, contra to the divisional trend
- Detection levels increasing from 45.5% to :56.3%, the highest of any burgh within the Force area

Direct and anecdotal comment from elected representatives **and** community groups has been very positive and supportive, noting the reduction in crimes and carrying out work in support of the Police activity.

## **Background**

The burgh of Brechin is situated in the county of Angus, near to the east coast of Scotland. It has a cathedral and as such, locals take pride in calling the town a 'city'.

The town and surrounding area has a rural setting with its population, circa 8000, employed mainly in agriculture or light engineering/manufacturing.

In addition, during the 80's and 90's many within the town were employed in the nearby US Airforce base, at RAF Edzell.

Many of its service personnel and their families lived in the area and in some respects the town relied on the income generated from the base and its employees.

During 1998, a decision was made to close the base. This undoubtedly caused a degree of hardship within the town, and the housing stock used by the service personnel was quickly vacated.

This housing stock was soon used by the Housing Authority, already under considerable pressure elsewhere, to allocate council accommodation to those from outside the immediate vicinity.

In the main, however, unemployment and population levels in the area have remained, static.

Brechin Police Office is situated close to the centre of the town. The office had a complement of fifteen police constables and two sergeants working on a variable shift pattern, based on a five shift system, three officers per shift. In overall command, was a Police Inspector who also has responsibility for the nearby larger town of Montrose.

Prior to incidents of violence, which triggered the police response outlined in this report, crime levels in the burgh were relatively low. As an aside, the last murder recorded in the town was over forty years ago.

During 2000, an upturn in vandalism and youth nuisance calls within the town became a concern for both the community and the local Police. A POP meeting was organised by Police bringing together local council departments, the Brechin High School Rector, community groups, Community Council and elected representatives.

Indiscriminate acts of vandalism to high profile targets, such as graveyards, led to an increase in the profile of this problem, which in turn led to headlines such as "YOUTHS REIGN OF TERROR", and gave the town a perceived "WILD IMAGE".

One local councillor in support of the Police was quoted as saying that the,

*"Police can't be everywhere, and given their lack of personnel they have a difficult job".*

This developing and concerning trend coincided with organisational changes within Tayside Police. In anticipation of the arrival of AIRWAVE the Force rationalised the number of Control Rooms from three to two. Eastern Division Control Room was relocated to a larger Force HQ. Fears were expressed by public and local politicians that service to their community would diminish due to centralisation of the main police/public interface.

Reports of increasing vandalism and other crime led the local community to conclude that the service they were receiving was being centralised, severely depleted and 'consequently insufficient.

(This also coincided with the centralisation of other local services in the area and the closure of acute services at a nearby hospital.)

However, a combination of effort including high profile police patrols in the 'hot spot' areas for vandalism and an increase in youth diversion work by community groups, together with a press strategy designed to highlight the work being done, gradually began to have the desired effect.

## **The Problem**

During the period August 2000 to July 2001, incidents of violence increased dramatically in Brechin resulting in three Murders, four Attempted Murders, and numerous other violent incidents, which shook the town.

The cumulative effect of each incident; perceived by the local community as common place in only major cities; caused deep anxiety in the town.

The rise in crime and disorder levels in general, especially youth nuisance calls and vandalism, coupled with this unprecedented and extraordinary scale of violence in the town further reduced public confidence in the Police.

Early arrests were made in each of these incidents and enquiry revealed that only a minority of local people from within the town itself were involved.

Intelligence assessment revealed a broad range of causal factors, including, drugs and territorial issues.

Worrying, however, was the receipt of criminal intelligence, which indicated the situation was likely to escalate.

## **The Aim**

Given the rise in general crime levels, concerns regarding vandalism, the rise in violent crime and the strong belief that this was set to continue, the Police used a problem oriented policing approach and set about devising an action plan to tackle this plethora of issues with a view to

- Prevent further instances of serious violent crime and to disrupt those involved;
- To robustly enforce public order and detect those intent on committing crime; and most importantly,
- To provide public reassurance and instil confidence and support in the police.

## **Preparing the Plan (defining the problem)**

During the period prior to implementation, intelligence was rigorously reviewed and a total of twenty individuals were targeted as being involved, to some degree, with the violent confrontations taking place in the town.

Community Intelligence input by Brechin officers was particularly extensive with a total of 177 separate submissions (about 12 submissions per officer) made during the planning period.

Crime statistics and incident information were examined utilising the Force's

Command and Control system (CAPTOR)  
and  
Management Information System (PROMIS)

The main 'Hot Spot' for violent activity was identified. (An area not covered by CCTV). In addition, it was known that many of the targets identified through intelligence either resided or socialised in this area.

Consideration was given to disrupting the targets from carrying out their routine criminal activities. To that end, it was known that a number of cases were outstanding or pending against some of those individuals. With this in mind, discussions took place with the local Procurator Fiscal with a view to implementing curfew conditions on those seeking bail from the Sheriff Court.

As a result, during the period leading to implementation eight persons were placed on curfew as part of their standard bail conditions.

Although the use of curfews as part of an offenders bail conditions is a tool regularly used by the police to curtail criminal activity, the physical carrying out of curfew address checks had never been

utilised locally before. This was seen as vital in disrupting those individuals intent on further violence.

The preparation of the action plan was carried out locally through the section Inspector, with the assistance of divisional departments such as Crime Management, and discussion with local beat officers.

## **Objectives**

A plan was therefore devised for implementation on 17 August 2001 which included the following actions

- + To prevent or detect further instances of violent crime in the designated Hot Spot
- To disrupt designated targets
- Maintain public awareness of police activity/objectives
- To carry out regular review and analysis

This was to be carried out by

- Providing a focused, highly visible police presence in the Montrose Street and surrounding area.
- Prompt positive action in relation to all criminal activity
- Target' awareness
- Curfew address checks
- Prompt positive action against persons gathering in the Hot Spot area
- Regular liaison with licensed premises in the area
- Positive media strategy
- Continual review of criminal intelligence reports and crime statistical data
- Continual updates to local Community Council and Angus Councillors

## **Financial Assistance (Force Executive approval)**

It was readily recognised that the deployment of personnel in carrying out additional high visibility patrols would be resource intensive. As a result, additional funding was sought to achieve this.

The amount applied for represented 350 hours of overtime, or £5,600. Given the scale of the problem and the task itself the application was successful with Force Executive acknowledging the need for "focused *activity, which is required in this problem area*":

### **The Launch .**

During the period leading to the launch of the operation, consultation was carried out with the local Community Council and local representatives. In addition, local licensees in the 'Hot Spot' area were approached, apprised of the operation, and the intended increased police presence in the area.

On completion of all preparatory work and intelligence assessment, Operation Safer Brechin was launched with the assistance of the local media who heralded the initiative to the local community and outlined its intentions. The public were duly invited to take an active part in the initiative and to liaise with beat officers in the 'Hot Spot' area.

The operation was structured, in separate phases, with phase one due for completion on 28 October 2001. Ownership of the operation was devolved to the section sergeants.

The operation was phased because it was felt that this would assist in assessing the overall effectiveness. It would also facilitate amendments, if and when required, to ensure optimum success.

### **Phase One**

During the period of phase one, a total of 186 hours of additional patrol work was carried out in the 'Hot Spot' with 92 separate visits to licensed premises recorded.

Officers carried out 148 random curfew checks, which resulted in nine arrests for breach of bail conditions.

A review of the data via Management Information Systems and Command and Control revealed that the police action in this area was having a positive effect. Not only in terms of crime reductions but also anecdotally from the local community. Local Community Council meetings often mentioned the additional Police presence in a positive sense.

Most importantly, no further instances of serious violence occurred.

As the completion of phase one approached, all police officers in the Brechin section were consulted. All were asked for opinions and ideas as to the way ahead. This encouraged the sense of ownership clearly developing within the section as a whole. Data from the Management Information System was also distributed to

highlight the positive effect the additional work was having.

Throughout the operation local representatives were provided with detailed updates as to its progress by the section Inspector or Sergeant who attended the Community Council and Area Forum meetings. Additionally, regular updates were provided to the community as a whole via the local press. This proved essential in increasing and thereafter maintaining both local support and public awareness. (This included the towns newspaper the 'Brechin Advertiser' and the more widely distributed 'Courier')

## **Phase Two**

Phase two of the operation commenced on 1 November 2001 with completion on 28 January 2002.

The operation continued as before, however, the focused patrols were now directed and deployed, in the main, by section sergeants. This complemented the intelligence led approach, and although resulted in a less intensive police presence in the 'Hot Spot' itself, it ensured a random, yet effective, visible presence.

This amended approach also took account of financial pressures which arose due to the length of the operation.

It was readily acknowledged that for the operation to remain a success, the resources available would require to remain fully supportive. The 15 officers available for this duty were required to work 12 hours as a matter of course. This required undoubted commitment from the officers concerned and their families. At times, officers were drafted in from the nearby town of Montrose to assist. Additionally, officers from central reserves were deployed for maximum effect.

As before, during this phase, no instances of serious violence occurred. Targets remained centre to the operation, with six being reported for curfew violation.

A high volume of criminal and community intelligence was submitted by officers in the burgh, with 209 separate submissions during the period October 2001 and January 2002.

Analysis of crime statistics and call information via the Command and Control and the Force Information Systems again revealed reductions in crime levels in respect of violence.

Notable reductions were clearly evident in all other areas, such as vandalism, dishonesties (including housebreaking) and youth nuisance calls. (The trend was continuous from phase one, the results of which are attached to this report.)

As in phase one, regular updates as to the progress of the operation were provided mainly on two fronts, namely



- to local forums (Community Council/Area Forum) direct by section inspector or sergeant; and'

as part of the media strategy, regular updates via the local press.

The primary aim of the first two phases of the operation was to prevent further instances of serious violent crime. This had been an undoubted success. The Aims and Objectives of the operation had been fully achieved, in that

- No further instances of serious violent crime had occurred.
- Targets were disrupted by use of curfew and curfew checks
- Public reassurance and confidence was heightened by the increased police presence, the continuing media strategy and the results of the operation itself.

Analysis of criminal intelligence had revealed that the underlying threat of further instances of violence had been dramatically reduced as a result of the operation.

Following review and analysis of criminal statistical data the emphasis of the operation shifted with the aim being to build on initial success in terms of crime reduction.

It was therefore decided to continue into a third phase which ended on 31 March 2002. (Phase Three)

Once again, consultation was carried out with all staff involved in the operation. All were given the opportunity to provide ideas or suggestions to assist develop the next phase.

Taking account of suggestions, offered a small team of local officers was established, on an ad hoc basis, to tackle specific crimes. The first involved crimes of Vandalism. The task of this team was to review and investigate outstanding crimes. This highlighted the team approach in the overall operation and complemented its aims.

### **Phase Three**

During Phase Three Police special activity was scaled back down, with deployment of high visibility patrols continuing but targeted further using community intelligence and regular 'Hot Spot' analysis

Action was, carried out as follows:

- Highly visible police presence maintained in Montrose Street and surrounding area

- Prompt response to all criminal activity
- Continued target awareness and collation of specific community intelligence
  - Regular liaison with licensed premises in the area
- Continuing positive media strategy
- Maintaining a continuous review process through analysis of all intelligence reports and criminal statistical data.
- Enhancing the already extensive network of neighbourhood watch areas within the town.

All outstanding or pending cases to which bail conditions applied were dealt with by the courts. Although pivotal to the earlier successes of the operation, a decision was made to remove it from the strategy. It was assessed that the desired effect had been achieved.'

During the subsequent period a further 52 hours of additional high visibility patrol work was carried out by Brechin based Officers.

Continued analysis of crime statistics and call information revealed crime levels in a variety of areas were still falling markedly.

Once again, as in the previous stages of this operation, regular updates were provided to elected representatives and local forums by the section Inspector or Sergeant in person. Regular press coverage additionally ensured that the community, as a whole, were apprised of the successes enjoyed as a result of the operation. Elected representatives were highly appreciative of the Police efforts to improve visibility and accessibility through the excellent communication links which were established.

Championing the success of the operation at the end of March 2002, the local newspaper provided an update on the initiative with the front page headline, "A SAFER CITY".

## The Results

The reductions in the levels of crime are addressed more fully, on a month to month basis, in the attached appendix. However, during the three phases of the operation marked reductions were noted in the following crimes:

<b>Violence</b>	<b>-39.3%</b>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<b>-52.3%</b>
<b>Dishonesties</b>	<b>-40.1%</b>

The above figures represent the period July 2001 to March 2002 and are compared to the equivalent period the previous year.

Comparison over the 12 month period ending March 2002 showed the following changes

**Total Incidents Reported to -5%  
Police**

<b>Total Crime</b>	<b>-35%</b>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<b>-46.7%</b>
<b>Violence</b>	<b>-33.3%</b>
<b>Dishonesties</b>	<b>-36.8%</b>
<b>Youth Nuisance</b>	<b>-21.6%</b>

In addition, the overall section detection rate increased dramatically from 45.5% to 56.3%. One of the highest rates in the Force as a whole.

**Crime  
reduction — a  
local trend?**

Throughout, every stage of the operation, the levels in crime reduction were examined further to ensure that this was not part of a divisional trend. On every occasion this analysis revealed that Brechin had in fact, 'bucked' the trend. In short, crime levels elsewhere in the Division had, in the main, risen. For example

<b>Total Incidents</b>	<b>+ 4.2%</b>
<b>Vandalism</b>	<b>+ 17.4%</b>
<b>Violence</b>	<b>- 1.1%</b>
<b>Dishonesties</b>	<b>+ 10.3%</b>

**A Success?  
(our partners  
have their say)**

It is accepted that facts and figures, no matter how visually pleasing, can only provide one side of the success of any Police operation. It is readily acknowledged that although crime figures may fall, the perception as to the levels of crime do not always mirror the successes. In the context of reassuring the public, this operation achieved success in this difficult area.

Local officers started off on the premise that they could make a difference and they did. They increased public confidence in the police and crucially make the public feel safer.

To gauge the overall success of Operation Safer Brechin a number of our partners provided the following by way of

endorsement:

*"My perception of this operation is that it was aimed at addressing the effects of a number of serious incidents over a relatively short period as well as the ongoing regular crime. **Brechin residents told me that they did not feel safe on the streets in daylight hours, never mind night time.** This was an unsatisfactory state of affairs.*

*Inspector Scobbie's rapid response to my concerns and the deployment of his staff paid dividends from the earliest days. **Locals noticed the increased police presence on the streets and told me they took considerable reassurance from it.***

*The imposition of bail curfews by the Sheriff received support from the community and sent out the right message to the criminal elements **Brechin would not tolerate violence and anti-social behaviour.***

***I have seen the benefits to my community and have received positive comments from local residents. Brechin is a safer place than before the operation. I applaud the police for their hard work and for their true partnership with the other agencies involved."***

Mrs Joy Mowatt, Councillor, (Brechin South Esk – covering Montrose Street and surrounding 'hot spot' area)

*"I had become so concerned about public disorder and violent offences in Brechin that, as a matter of course, I was prosecuting virtually all such cases in the Sheriff Court and commenting publicly to the Sheriff that there was a problem.*

***Over the last few months I have noticed a significant reduction in the numbers of such cases being reported to me. Whilst disturbances will always occur in places frequented by young people who have been drinking, the numbers in Brechin are now, by no means unusual. In addition, those offences which are being reported are generally much less serious than before."***

Mr James Craigen, Procurator Fiscal, Forfar

***"A local newspaper like the Brechin Advertiser is ideally placed to gauge public opinion and perceptions surrounding issues of concern to the man and woman on the street. Anti-social behaviour and complaints about criminal behaviour was one of the most frequently raised subjects in readers' letters before the introduction of Operation Safer Brechin.***

***It is very noticeable that the level of complaints brought to our attention has decreased considerably since Safer Brechin was launched. Indeed, many positive comments have also been passed to us about the success of the police campaign.***

***Tayside Police and officers in Brechin in particular are to be congratulated on the high profile action they took to address the fears and concerns of the population of the city. There is no doubt the operation has gone a long way towards its objectives of making Brechin a safer place".***

Mr Colin Hutchison, Editor, Brechin Advertiser.

## **Summary**

During the twelve month period to July 2001, a series of incidents caused serious concern and consternation in the town.

In short, the burgh of Brechin had never suffered such violence.

Coinciding with this was a myriad of other local concerns such as vandalism and the centralisation of local services. As a consequence, given the cumulative effect of these issues, Eastern Division was faced with a formidable task of tackling the rise in serious crime, as well as providing much needed public reassurance.

This was carried out during the eight month period of this operation by

- The deployment of high visibility patrols in delegated hot spots and regular liaison at licensed premises
- The identification of targets and the gathering of community intelligence
- The disruption of target activity through curfew bail checks

but most importantly,

- Devising a Problem Orientated Policing approach in this regard, developing a sense of ownership and a partnership response
- A positive media strategy which provided the local community with regular updates as to the progress of the operation
- Consultation with and regular updates to elected representatives and forums, such as Community Council and Area Forum
- The adoption, through consultation and ownership, of the Aims and Objectives by the section as a whole
- Liaison With the Procurator Fiscal and the courts

- Incorporating within the process a series of phases which allowed regular review, analysis and adjustment

It is clearly evident that the operation evolved and matured as a consequence of review and analysis. Although it was successful in preventing further instances of violence it was ultimately successful in tackling the many issues and primarily the fear of crime within the town itself.

The community of Brechin have followed the lead set by police and will continue to confront the problem. The establishment of a Youth Project Centre, only metres from the police station, the encouragement of youth diversion activities within the town by council and voluntary organisations are designed to sustain and support achievement to date. New policy in respect of housing, and in particular the decanting of a particular scheme will lead to its eventual demolition. The support of the High School rector in setting new standards in school are all evidence of a positive public response to the problems within the town.

Operations are, in the main, judged on results. The results of Operation Safer Brechin speak for themselves.

The final word rests with one of the officers involved from the outset.

*"I have lived and worked in Brechin for a number of years and was just as affected by the rise in crime and violence in the City as my friends and neighbours. The Community as a whole was shocked by the events which led to the Police operation. I feel proud to have been part of Operation Safer Brechin which went about tackling what seemed to me to be an insurmountable task. The Section pulled together to address this problem and systematically achieved results that I never thought possible."*

Derek Mitchell 9121







