

# A SAFE ROUTE

## A CRIME REDUCTION INITIATIVE

WEST MIDLANDS POLICE, D1 ASTON NEIGHBOURHOOD TEAM, A SECTOR, ENGLAND, 2002

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### **SUMMARY:**

King Edward VI Aston School is a private grammar school situated in one of the most deprived areas of the City of Birmingham, every day over 750 pupils walk to the school and back from the local train station and bus stops. Until this project, were using a variety of unsafe routes that meant a large number would be robbed by local youths.

Local crime statistics were used to measure the impact and number of victims from that school. It must be borne in mind that a number of these pupils did not report offences. The school had banned the possession of mobile phones and some pupils were not prepared to admit they had had one stolen. Further evidence was gathered from the victims of the crimes, the school itself, and Police officers involved in the investigation and recording of the offences.

Extensive police resources had been allocated to investigate these offences, when one considers the implementation of covert surveillance operations, arrest teams, investigations, identification parades and resulting prosecutions; resources which should be kept focused on the issues within the deprived area.

A period of consultation and discussion took place with the school to ensure their full co-operation. They fully accepted the concept and agreed to involve the pupil's parents.

A Safe Route between the railway station, bus stops and the school was established and details of an agreement were drawn. Police Officers began to patrol the safe route, whilst a formal agreement was drawn up, which not only included the route but also the safe way of walking the route. Finally the Agreement was formally signed at a school assembly; details of which were fully explained to the pupils by Police Officers. A letter with a copy of the Agreement and route map was also sent to all parents.

Since its implementation there have been no Robberies on the Safe Route and Police resources have been focused on other local issues as the route is only patrolled on an adhoc basis. On the 2 Beats policed by the Aston Neighbourhood team there has been a reduction in Robbery offences of 8.4% but more importantly there have only been 4 pupils robbed in the last seven months and those have all been off the Safe Route.

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## THE PROBLEM

One of the main issues faced by officers policing Beats 1 and 5 in Aston (D1 OCU) was the large amount of robberies on pupils from King Edwards VI grammar school. The pupils were being subjected to the offences at an average rate of 3 a month and having mobile phones and other similar property stolen. The large number of pupils going to and from the school on a daily basis, using a series of inherently unsafe routes, meant that traditional policing methods to prevent the offences had not worked. Officers had attended the school and given some crime prevention advice and education regarding mobile phone theft with little or no effect.

Police were using a large number of resources to record and investigate these offences, bearing in mind the offenders were unknown therefore covert surveillance operations were required, together with arrest teams; the numbers of police hours used to apprehend offenders was very large. The vulnerability of the victims and the high profile of the school meant that resources were allocated to address this problem.

King Edward VI is a privately funded grammar school with 750 pupils who attend, in the main, from the north west of Birmingham but there are also a number of them that come from other parts of Birmingham. Most travel to school by train using Aston railway station situated about a mile from the school, others use local buses and are dropped off about a quarter of a mile away. Very few of the pupils actually live in the area adjacent to the school. All pupils would then walk to the school through various housing estates coming into contact with children attending local schools.

Aston is an inner city residential area with very high social deprivation and is currently subject to a New Deal for the Communities regeneration. Crime concern figures show that the rate of recorded crime in Aston is 18 times the national average and 2.6 times the Birmingham average. The area is recognised by

drug users as one of two inner city areas where high-grade heroin can be purchased.

In essence the main reason for the robberies was the easy availability, twice a day, of vulnerable victims presenting themselves in a high crime area with little or no concept how to minimise the risk of becoming victims of an offence.

## FIGURES

Analysis of recorded crime figures showed that on average between April and October 20013 robberies occurred on students from King Edwards VI School, when holiday periods are taken into account this figure goes up to just under 5 offences occurring per month. This extrapolation was a simple lift of robberies reported in the area.

## CONSULTATION

These figures were so concerning that a period of consultation took place in order to establish a clearer picture of what was occurring and what could be done to resolve the issue. The following were consulted:

- King Edward VI School, Aston.
- Debrief of victims of robbery.
- Debrief of reporting and Investigating Officers.
- Debrief of Operations set up to arrest Offenders.
- Debrief of Microbeat Officers.

As a result of consultation with the School it was established that they did not know the level of offences occurring against pupils at the school because they were reporting some incident without the knowledge of the school. The main reason for this was because the school had banned the use and possession of mobile phones in the school consequently the pupils did not want the school to know they had

had one stolen. In fact they were very surprised at the quantity, quality and value of the electronic equipment that was being stolen as it not only included the phones but also portable CD's, gameboys and any other state of the art electronic gadget that a boy may like to possess.

The school had previously provided bus transport to and from the most affluent neighbourhoods where the pupils came from and had since withdrawn it, forcing most pupils to use public transport, especially the train to get the school. They had made no provision to educate the pupils in how they could, more safely, make the journey.

When made fully aware of the issues the school was very willing to do everything in their power to assist with reduction of the offences. They agreed to allow their premises to be used for operations against the offenders, they also agreed to highlight the problem to the parents and for the pupils to have more intensive input from Police Officers.

When the victims were consulted we established a detailed offender profile which showed in the main that other local school children on the way to local schools were committing the offences. We were able to establish the dangerous location, which in this case was an underpass on the approach to the school. The Modus Operandi, threats and general language used clearly established that the pupils of the school were viewed as easy targets and were being victimised.

When officers were debriefed the first obvious conclusion was the massive use of resources that were being used to record, investigate and prosecute the offenders. There was little concept of prevention based in the belief that it was an impossible problem to resolve: After all there were 750 pupils presenting tempting targets; walking a series of adhoc routes, through a neighbourhood with one of the highest levels of recorded crime in the city, to get to and from school every day.

## THE SAFE ROUTE

Following this period of consultation the solution to the problem seemed simple enough, provide a route that was inherently safe, that could be easily patrolled and was the shortest to ensure all the pupils walked it too and from school. The idea was expanded to ensure the pupils also applied minimal crime prevention standards when walking the route itself.

Further discussions took place with King Edward VI Aston School, who fully supported the idea. They agreed to the basic principle of the Safe route and were happy to implement it. They further stated that they would write to each parent outlining the details of the agreement between the school and the Police; showing the route.

Details of the route and the Agreement was finally resolved and prepared for a formal presentation at a school assembly.

### The Agreement

The main thrust of the agreement is to ensure that the pupils walk a particular route so that Police can focus high visibility patrols for a minimum period to reduce robberies. But it also sought to educate the pupils to ensure that if they not only, stuck to the safe route but also walked it in large groups, not showing any of the electronic gadgets; they would not be robbed. And it sought to give responsibility to the elder boys to ensure that all the younger children became part of a group and stuck to the route.

Analyses of the offences had shown 2 main dangerous locations which became out of bounds to the pupils unless under supervision under the terms of the agreement. The Police were committed to patrol the Safe Route on an adhoc basis to ensure its implementation and to reduce the robberies. In other words if the pupils stuck to the details of the agreement they would be very unlikely to become victims of robbery without any Police presence thereby

reducing the allocation of resources even further.

The Agreement also allowed Officers to take names of those pupils that were not sticking to the route and hand their names over to the Headmaster who would then address the issues with them.

## The Route

The route was established following detailed study of the area, listening to the experience Microbeat officer's suggested route, taking into account any future developments that may be taking place in the area, and obviously the dangerous location identified. It had to be a route that was well lit; safer in terms of vehicular traffic as well as crime but more importantly short enough for it to be attractive to the pupils. It was obvious that they simply would not be prepared to walk a longer route simply to reduce the chances of them getting robbed. Another consideration was the future development that was going to be taking place area. We wanted to ensure that the route would have a degree of permanency so that it became a regular part of school life in future years. The route also maximises the future CCTV system that will be installed along its path in the next few months as part of the NDC regeneration.

A secondary route was also devised, with the same principles in mind, to cater for those pupils arriving by Bus.

On 26/11/01, at a School assembly the formal Agreement was signed between the Headmaster and the Police, followed by detailed explanation to the pupils about the Route and Agreement. Letters were also sent to every parent with copies of both explaining the reason for it.

Officers had started patrolling the Safe Route area from 1/10/01 to reduce the incidents of robbery, but also to decide on the best route and start to liaise with the pupils prior to implementation of the Agreement itself. These early patrols were also used to judge the effect

of the safe route and the effect of its future implementation.

## THE RESULTS

The results of this project have been very positive. No robberies have occurred against the pupils of King Edward VI on the Safe Route since the implementation of the project. In the 7 months since officers started patrolling only 4 pupils have been subjected to robberies on their way to school whilst out of the Safe route area. One must compare this to the previous average of 3 offences per month. As a result of the Safe Route the Aston Neighbourhood Team achieved its Key Performance Indicator for Robbery with an 8.4% reduction. This must be looked at against a 14% increase on the rest of the OCU and a 20% increase in the force.

All the evaluation for this project was done on the simple basis of recorded crime and as such it has influenced the decisions made during its course.

There are a number of other benefits that have occurred as a result of this project which have not been measured but have had an impact on the quality of life of the local residents. Firstly other local pupils from the area also use the route to get to their school and more importantly local officers have been able to focus their efforts on the needs and issues of the local community.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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