

Lancashire Constabulary
Eastern Division



The Tilley Award 2003
Crime and Disorder Reduction Category

Operation ETON

Tackling Street Prostitution

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OPERATION ETON

Summary

The Bank Top Area of Blackburn has historically had a Red Light Area, However in the late 1990's a reduction in Police enforcement coupled with a rise in young women entering prostitution to support drug problems saw levels of prostitution rise. Finally a change in the local traffic system pushed the women into a residential area. This gave Blackburn Police a range of complex problems to address arising from the anii-social aspects of street prostitution. Early heavy handed enforcement responses failed to make any impact and in April 2002 Operation Eton was established to develop a long term POPs solution.

The initial analysis took the form of o survey of all street sex workers in Blackburn which revealed that all but one of the 35 women spoken to were working to support heroin and crack cocaine addiction, Over 90% had been the victim of serious crime such as rape, cssault or robbery. Surveys of local residents groups identified problems with discarded condoms and needles, soliciting of innocent women by male kerb crawlers and a rising ^zear of crime,

Operaiion Eton identified partners in Drugs Action Team, Needle Exchange, East Lanes Drug Services, Local Authority, Social Services, Housing Associations and Residents Groups.

The objectives of the Operation were defined as:

- o Reduction of Street Prostitution in residential areas
- o Reduction of Kerb Crawling
- o Safety of Street Sex Workers
- o Development of Multi-Agency approach to drug problems
- o Development of full intelligence profile of Red Light Area

The Police response was to give ownership for the problem to the Town Centre Policing Team who undertook an open enforcement strategy dealing with soliciting and kerb crawling whilst developing a full intelligence profile.

Radio commercials, press articles and local letter drops were used to inform the community and deter kerb crawling.

The Partners set up a Sex Workers Outreach project known as "The Works Van" offering harm minimisation, and signposting services. A Multi-agency group was set up to deal with youth prostitution.

In 2003 a second survey was conducted combined with an assessment of the previous years results. This showed a massive reduction in prostitution in residential areas, that women were aware of Police enforcement strategies and were changing their behaviour. Violent crime in the area had decreased and four women had left prostitution through this work.

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1. Scanning

The Bank Top Area of Blackburn has a red light area that has existed for many years. In the late 1990's changes in the Policing priorities and increases in women turning to prostitution to support heroin and crack cocaine addiction produced an increase in the levels of street prostitution in Blackburn. Historically there had been many short-term responses to the problem ranging from containment to "crack downs" which had no impact. Changes in the local road scheme in 2001 pushed the main red light area away from a semi-industrial location into a residential location. This led to a rapid rise in complaints to the Police.

Prostitution had been overlooked by other agencies and whilst offenders committing burglary and street crime were receiving fast track treatment for drug problems women funding drugs habits through sex work received no support. Other complex problems of child protection and youth prostitution also received no attention. This was trapping women into prostitution and with no deterrence from Police enforcement the problem grew rapidly as new women entered the oldest profession.

The residents complained not only about soliciting by women but equally about the activities of male clients in vehicles – kerb crawlers – approaching innocent women and rising traffic levels in the evening period. In January 2001 an innocent woman walking home in the evening was approached by a kerb crawler, who believed her to be a prostitute, abducted and raped.

Whilst Police initially resorted to old tactics such as short-term crack downs, these were ineffective and the problem was taken on by the Town Centre Team, led by PS Phil Davies to seek a POPs based long term approach to this complex issue.

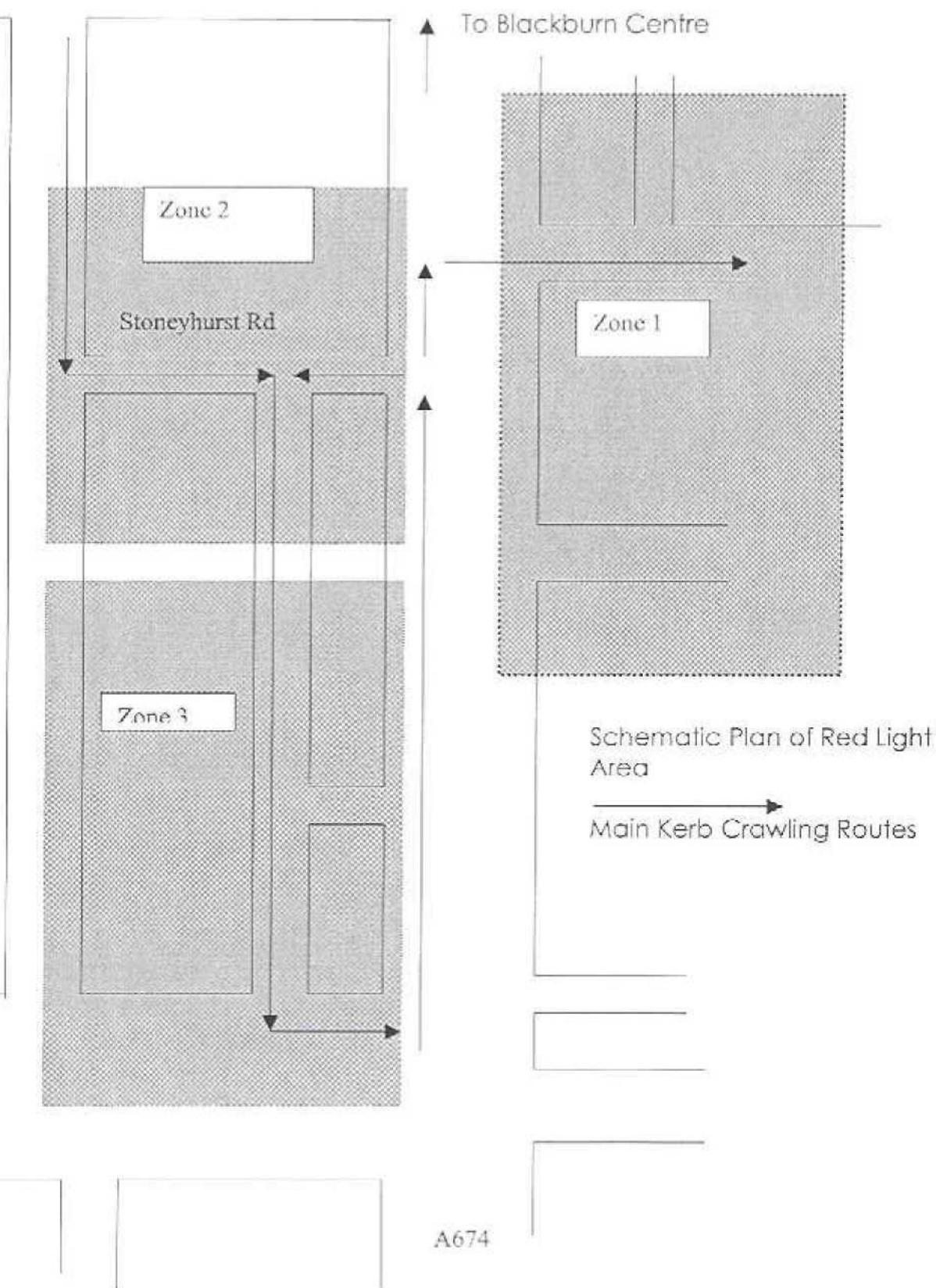
2. Analysis

Analysis of a problem that had received little attention for several years was difficult. There were some women who had been involved in prostitution for years who although known to Police had not been the subject of any arrest or intelligence reports. There was almost no information on the profile of male clients.

The following areas were examined initially:

- o Police Crime reports where prostitution is a factor
- o Police Intelligence Reports where prostitution is

survey women were asked their own views on why they used this area. They said that not only was there more business there, presumably because the local traffic system forced all circulating traffic down this road, but that they felt safer working there because of improved street lighting and paradoxically the presence of the local residents.



2.2 Victims/Offenders

This is the area where application of the Problem Analysis Triangle is most difficult for prostitution. The Local Residents are victims and the initial motivation for the Police Action was to address their concerns. However street sex workers themselves are both victims and offenders. All women under 18 involved in prostitution should be treated as victims of abuse and many of the older women are also victimised by male clients and pimps. The male clients are offenders but from a public health position they and their sexual partners are victims. For these reasons the various groups involved are treated in a single category, although each are the subject of differing responses.

2.2.a. Street Sex Workers

During the 2002 Survey 31 women were interviewed. A full profile was developed by intelligence analysts covering a range of factors such as age, earnings, links with other agencies, children, partners and victim of crime. This survey was later used by other agencies to support funding applications.

The key points were:

- i. Age range from 16 to 42
- ii. Average Earnings £500 per week
- iii. 30 supporting drug habits – crack/heroin
- iv. 80% had been victims of serious crime but only two offences reported to the Police
- v. A group of Young Sex Workers aged 16 – 21 who associated together and were mainly resident at a local YWCA. This group had been in all been in care and had the worst drug habits.
- vi. A high proportion had been victims of sexual abuse as children.
- vii. Approx 50% also committed property crime, mainly shoplifting.
- viii. Only two resident outside Eastern Division

- ix. There was no evidence of Pimping at this stage, however as the operation progressed Police uncovered more evidence of Pimping.

2.2.b. Kerb Crawlers/Clients

Although limited information was available early on initial results of enforcement were that this group were largely unknown to the Police. Blackburn has a mixed ethnic population with a large Asian Heritage Community and this was reflected in the profile of kerb crawlers.

Typically the offenders had no previous convictions, were aged between 30 and 50 and resident in Blackburn and the surrounding towns. They were relatively affluent, a factor judged by the vehicles they used. Although data was difficult to gather Officers dealing with them report that many were married.

There is a smaller client group who visit on foot who tend to be less affluent and included men who had visited local licensed premises and members of the Asylum Seeking Community.

In 2002 there were three robberies reported by clients of Street Sex Workers. One estimates that very few such offences are reported to the Police.

2.2.c. Residents

Zone 2 is exclusively Housing Association property with a high proportion of elderly residents.

Zone 3 borders an area of owner occupied property and traditional terraced housing.

Generally it was seen as a blight on the area and stigmatised Bank Top as a Red Light area. One owner occupier complained about being unable to sell his property as result.

Although only one local resident was the subject of a crime report related to this problem this was an innocent woman who had been abducted and raped by a male who believed she was a prostitute.

We contacted residents groups who reported the anti-social aspects of prostitution such as women being approached for sex, high traffic levels in the evenings, discarded condoms and needles, moral impact on children and noise nuisance at night.

3. Response

The Objectives of the Operation arising from the analysis were defined as:

- Reduction of Street prostitution in Residential Areas
- Reduction of Kerb Crawling
- Safety of Sex Workers
- Development of Multi-Agency Response to Drug problems
- Development of Intelligence Profile of Red Light Area

These were selected based on the following criteria:

- i. Public Expectation of action against anti-social behaviour
- ii. Vulnerability of Street Sex Workers as victims of serious crime.
- iii. The need to develop exit routes and provide support for women involved in street sex work.

- iv. To be able adopt an intelligence led approach to future problems and support any future investigation of serious crime arising from the Red Light Area

Although the response at this stage was Police led partners were consulted for their views. The Police Officer , PC Maxine Monks seconded to the Crime Reduction partnership at Blackburn with Darwen Borough Council became the central point of contact for all partners.

Responses can be broken down into Police and Other Agencies but these were developed in harmony to complement each other.

3.1 Police Responses

3.1.a Resources

Initially enforcement was passed to uniformed response officers but it was quickly realised that it was difficult to co-ordinate a coherent consistent strategy when officers were drawn as available from a pool of 100 uniformed officers.

A Team of dedicated officers from Blackburn Town Centre Team was identified to undertake enforcement. The advantages are that this team could develop local knowledge, develop the trust of Street Sex Workers and rapidly adapt to any required changes in strategy.

One point raised in the survey was that women were confused about Police Enforcement, persecuted during occasional Crack Downs and ignored at other times. Consistency was essential if they were to modify their behaviour to achieve the objectives of the operation

This Team also deals with retail crime and often with the same women by day for shoplifting and at night for prostitution.

The funding for this was supplemented by £2,500 from safer streets funding and £7,000 from Drugs Action Team.

3.1.b Enforcement Strategy

At the outset a variety of options were considered. Police action in relation to offences of soliciting is dictated by HOC 109/1959 which refers to "prostitutes cautions" and HOC 20/2000 which introduced policy for young prostitutes under 18 years old. There is however considerable scope for local interpretation. Our response evolved over the course of the next year with a constant assessment of action undertaken to find an effective local solution.

Anti-Social Behaviour Orders/Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

This was considered and had been tried in nearby Preston who adopted an approach of applying for ASBO's for their most frequent prostitutes. Preston were not granted the ASBO's and we now feel that it is not an effective response for two main reasons:

1. Women will still continue to offend to support drug habits and there must be some response to deal with underlying drug problems
2. There is a high turnover of women. Blackburn dealt with 77 women in the first year of Eton but only 35 were active at any time and about 12 per night.

One of the Preston ASBO candidates moved to Blackburn where she was offered drugs treatment which she successfully undertook and is no longer involved in sex work.

Caution Plus

This is an approach where women arrested for soliciting would not be charged but cautioned subject to an interview with a drugs worker from Arrest Referral Scheme. It

would be necessary to release a person on Police bail as all arrests are out of hours. Implementation of this scheme was difficult and not found to be suitable for all women.

The final version of this system is less formal but more effective. Women arrested or receiving a street caution who express a clear desire to deal with drugs issues are referred to the Arrest Referral Office. The officer in the case will then recommend a non-financial penalty on the Court File. We have recorded our best success through this method that targets intervention at those who are expressing a desire to change their lives.

Zonal Enforcement

Originally we considered a Tolerance Zone but the geography of Blackburn prevents this which is not in any case supported by ACPO Policy.

Most complaints occurred in the Stoneyhurst Rd area of Zone 2 so this was adopted as a Zone of Zero Tolerance. Police would prefer charges of loitering for any woman who had two street cautions and use much lower levels of evidence before arrest.

Bail

It had always been local practice to apply conditional bail when a woman was charged with soliciting preventing her from entering the red light area. This was modified to prevent them only entering Zone 2, and only then if they were arrested in that Zone. This gives a major incentive not to work in that area.

Open Policy

The arrest strategy was made available to all women and the partner agencies so the women could modify their practices accordingly. The full policy operates Zero Tolerance to anyone working outside the evening period

and includes a statement that the Police do not approve of prostitution.

Intelligence Profile

All women are photographed as part of the cautioning process and a digital camera was provided by Drugs Action Team for this purpose. We maintain a full register and profile of all women. This has already been of valuable assistance in several investigations.

Officers are directed to identify new women and progress them through the cautioning process quickly to deny them any comfort period on first entering prostitution. This of course in combined with offers of assistance, information on services and the discretion to deal with individuals appropriately.

Kerb Crawling Offenders

As a group they are regarded as being relatively easy to deter. This factor is used to make best use of Police resources and maximise the deterrent impact.

Press Articles

The Local paper, The Lancashire Evening Telegraph was approached and readily agreed to run a full feature piece on the problem. This included information on high levels of Police Enforcement and produced an immediate reduction in levels of kerb crawling.

The Telegraph are also used in a name and shame strategy where details of kerb crawler cases appearing at Court receive prominent publicity.

This also provides reassurance to Local Residents.

Radio Publicity

The Drugs Action Team provide funding for publicity on local commercial radio station Rock FM in December 2002. The three week campaign ran during the evening period and supported by Police Enforcement saw reductions in levels of kerb crawling. This reached a wide target audience and sent a out a positive message about the approach to kerb crawling in Blackburn.

The enforcement strategy adopted is as follows:

1. Offender seen repeatedly driving around red light area
 - a. Intelligence report created
 - b. Warning letter sent to registered keeper
2. Offender with previous intelligence seen in red light area
 - a. observations kept to provide sufficient evidence of persistence for prosecution
 - b. Offender arrested, interviewed and disposed of according Caution Policy.

In practice 75% of all kerb crawlers are entitled to Adult caution which would rise to 90% if this were based on previous convictions alone. The use of letters has to be carefully supervised due to the risk of litigation.

Further considerations have been to withdraw the cautions and send all offenders to Court or use powers under Powers of Criminal Courts (Sentencing) Act 2000 to confiscate vehicles and disqualify offenders from driving. However at the present is not felt that the extra Police time involved would be justified by the results.

Enforcement Figures

	2001/2002	2002/2003
Intelligence reports	10	195
Soliciting Cautions	53	84
Soliciting Arrests	Nil	40
Kerb Crawling Arrests	11	71
Dedicated Patrol Hours	200	962

3.2. Partners Response

3.2.a The Works Van

After a variety of methods of reaching street sex workers with chaotic drugs habits failed it was clear that Outreach Work was the only effective option. A vehicle was purchased which is staffed by personnel from several Drugs Agencies, East Lancs Drugs Services and Needle Exchange.

The Works van operates frequently but not regularly to reduce risk of dependence on its services and prevent negative reaction from the community.

There are always three persons on this and its remit is:

1. **Harm Minimisation** – Supply of needles and condoms. To support this the Police have undertaken not to use the possession of condoms in evidence.
2. **Rape Alarms** – All women are issued with rape alarm
3. **Signposting Services** – Increasing awareness and offering assistance with treatment and services available
4. **Dangerous Punters List** – This is run by the van and allows the women to share information on dangerous punters. Information is fed back to Police and Police can pass warnings to the women

There was a real suspicion amongst the Drugs Agencies about the Police and it took time to develop this relationship. In the early stages we agreed no enforcement would take place when the Works van was operating. It was also found necessary to have the vehicle "blocked" on the Police National Computer to prevent stop checks by non-Eton personnel.

3.2.b Multi-Agency Forum

This involves all agencies, Housing Associations and residents groups to discuss issues surrounding the problem.

3.2.c Youth Prostitution Group

This is a small group where Police and Social Services and Youth Offending Team can develop joint strategies for dealing with women under 18. Particular problems have been found with 17 year olds who have many convictions and cannot easily be treated as vulnerable. The Groups has addressed problems involving young girls missing from home who are suspected of involvement in prostitution. Specific intervention strategies are involved involving Selhal Housing who operate a Hostel in Blackburn which accepts young women leaving care and with drug problems.

This is a key method of reducing the number of vulnerable new entrants to prostitution.

3.2.d Long Term Response

At the conclusion of the first year of the project we have issued a Tender Document for provision of these services over the next three years with annual funding of £35,000.

This is the result of the assessment of the project's successes in the previous year identifying clear long-term aims and is an example of where throughout the Operation the assessment has been fed back into the responses to achieve the objectives.

At the time of writing the tenders are being evaluated and the Works Van is running under interim arrangements.

4. Assessment

4.1 Numbers involved

A second survey of street sex workers was conducted in January 2003. This identified 35 active women, only 17 of whom featured in the 2002 survey.

Between April 2002 and January 2003, 62 women had been identified as involved in street sex work by Police.

We are aware of four that have left prostitution as a direct result of the operation and the above figures suggest a deterrent effect discouraging new entrants from becoming established. However this must be treated with some caution at this early stage as the women are by nature chaotic and there is evidence that some will leave prostitution only to return months or years later.

Overall the survey findings indicate that after the first year we have regained some control and the strategies are achieving success.

4.2 Prostitution in residential areas

The survey showed a high degree of awareness amongst women of Police Enforcement Policies and that they were modifying their behaviour accordingly. Indeed the

remaining Zones are becoming over crowded with women competing for space.

This is dependent on continuing Police presence. A brief respite of three weeks in April 2003 saw women returning to Stoneyhurst Rd

Complaints from the residential around Zone 2 have reduced overall and feedback from residents is positive. There has been some increase in complaints on the border of Zone 3. However the geographic area available in Zones 1 and 3 is probably not large enough and overall reductions in residential areas will only drop when the numbers of active women reduces further.

The data from police incident logs was heavily distorted by one complainant and increased by logs generated from our own enforcement. This was discarded as a performance indicator and sightings by Eton patrols in a defined time period used as a more reliable indicator. This showed a major reduction throughout the year.

4.3 Reduction of Kerb Crawling

In 2002/03 there were 71 arrests for Kerb Crawling and 150 warning letters. Press and Radio campaigns had positive impact. This is a difficult area to quantify and we are trying to arrange for automated traffic counting equipment which would provide an accurate count of evening vehicle flows.

Internet Message boards where Kerb Crawlers share information on red light areas regularly warn punters away from Blackburn. One recent message asked for information on Blackburn Girls received the response:

“Blackburn – Just Don't go there, the Police are doing serious under cover work – you'll end up in the paper”

4.4 Safety of Prostitutes

Survey results showed that the women felt significantly safer and actually liked the Police presence even though this meant higher levels of enforcement. The Works Van was also received positively. There was one complaint of assault on a sex worker which resulted in arrest. One further complaint of rape/ assault was not dealt with correctly when reported but later followed up by the Eton Team.

One High Risk Sex Offender was identified and suspected to be grooming a woman prior to a planned violent assault. He was relocated away from the area. This incident demonstrated the value of exchange of information between Police, Works Van and Sex Workers.

Future evaluation of this area will be by studying response to the question "Have you been a victim of violent crime in the last month?"

Improving Police response to complaints by Sex Workers is an area which requires further work, although they all felt more confident of approaching the Eton Team or Partner agencies.

4.5 Multi-Agency Approach

This is now well established and will be self sustaining over the next three years.

4.6 Intelligence Profile

Police have a full intelligence profile which is now developing into Source recruitment. The information acquired has already been used in two major investigations.

The issue for the future is the Force-wide storage of this information which is being addressed.

Conclusions

The Police response is now established and will continue long term managed by the Town Centre Team who have developed specialist skills.

The Partners' Response is now assured of funding for three years and has a firmly established relationship with both their client group and the Police.

There is an ongoing assessment of the Operation which is fed back into the multi-agency forum. Police are committed to annual survey of street sex workers and sharing this information.

We have a sustainable long-term approach which addresses all aspects of the problem and is achieving results.

PS1346 Phil Davies
Blackburn Town Centre Team
May 2003