

Lancashire Constabulary



**Tilley Award 2003**

# Burglary Reduction Initiative

Partnership Category

Lancashire Constabulary and  
The Lancaster and District Community Safety  
Partnership

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The Lancaster and District Community Safety Partnership**

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## Burglary Reduction Initiative

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## BURGLARY REDUCTION INITIATIVE

### SUMMARY

The reduction of domestic burglaries is an intrinsic part of both the Lancaster and District Community Safety Partnership and the Northern Division Policing Plan. There is a stated aim to reduce domestic burglaries by 12.5% by 2005 and to reduce the number of repeat victims.

Working in partnership to achieve this aim, an assessment was undertaken to look for realistic opportunities to reduce this type of crime in a way that was achievable, cost effective and sustainable.

Hear say evidence suggested that there was an increased risk of becoming a victim of burglary if a council tenant and the research on reported burglaries for April 2000 to March 2001 bore this out.

A joint analysis by the Lancaster Crime Prevention Officer and The Principal Housing Officer for Lancaster City Council, used police recorded offences and Council Housing management data, to identify the level of the problem and to indicate areas where a partnership project could offer maximum impact.

Of the 57,000 homes in the Lancaster City Council district, council housing accounts for 8% of the total housing (4,500 domestic properties). At the time of the initial assessment of reported offences, 10.4% of all domestic burglaries were committed in local authority houses. For the same period 26.2% of all criminal damage to dwellings was committed against Council properties. This meant that the domestic accommodation owned by Lancaster City Council was proportionally more than twice as likely to sustain the offences of burglary and criminal damage than other domestic properties in the district.

It was clear also through discussions with the Crime Prevention Officer and Principal Management Officer (Council Housing Services) that the provision of information about the type and frequency of crime being committed on their estates would benefit the Lancaster City Council Housing Services. This information could greatly assist Council Housing Area Teams to tackle issues on their estates and would potentially create opportunities to better manage resources.

It was agreed between the Crime Prevention Department at Lancaster Police Station and the Principal Management Officer (Council Housing Services) for the City Council that details of all domestic burglaries and criminal damage committed against local authority housing would be forwarded to the Council Housing Department. This would be undertaken using police recorded crime information and management information supplied by Lancaster City Council.

New processes were agreed as to the response that the City Council would undertake following the receipt of the information and a 'practice note' produced as part of the procedure manual for Council Housing staff. The 'practice note' detailing a specific process for dealing with both property repairs, increased security measures and assistance for the victims of crime.

Twelve months after this response had been implemented, an identical evaluation took place to assess whether the process had been effective. It showed that the domestic burglary rates for March 2001 to April 2002 had decreased by 22.2% on the previous twelve month period. The criminal damage figure had also decreased from 26.2% to 22.8%. With each offence costing on average £1,000 for the cost of repairs and property damaged or stolen, there has been significant savings in both the cost of repairs undertaken by the City Council and fewer victims of crime.

This submission demonstrates how the effective use of the Lancaster and District Crime and Disorder Partnership has resulted in producing a cost effective and sustainable solution for the reduction of crime in the District.

# BURGLARY REDUCTION INITIATIVE

## SCANNING

The Lancaster and District Community Safety Partnership is committed to the reduction of crime and disorder in the Lancaster City Council area. As a response to the reduction of burglary in the district, analysis was undertaken to consider realistic and sustainable solutions to identified problems.

Burglary was identified as a high priority for residents through the crime and disorder audit. Hear say evidence suggested that there was an increased risk of becoming a victim of burglary if a council tenant and the research on reported burglaries for **April 2000 to March 2001** bore this out. It was also suggested that this type of property would be more likely to become a target for criminal damage.

There was anecdotal evidence that in a number of instances, burglaries had been committed against properties that had previously sustained criminal damage which had not been reported to Housing Managers. These properties were therefore more vulnerable to crime as there had been no opportunity to rectify the damage and undertake repairs. Opportunities for the Housing Authority to offer support to victims were being lost, although there was a will as a landlord for Lancaster City Council to offer reassurance and support to their tenants.

Estate Managers were uninformed about the kind of crime being committed on their estates and the frequency of these crimes and Area Housing Teams felt that a lack of 'real' data would greatly assist them in tackling issues on the estates that they managed and would also help them to better manage resources.

There were no specific processes in place to address the current situation although a considerable amount of partnership working was undertaken by Lancaster Police and Lancaster City Council. It could even have been considered that there were assumptions made as to what the response should be to any reported crime problems against domestic dwellings on the City Council owned estates.

## **ANALYSIS**

The total number of domestic dwellings in the district is 57,000 of which the number of Local authority owned dwellings is 4,500. Therefore, Council homes account for 8% of all properties in the District.

The first issue was to find out the actual extent of the problem. This was done by meeting with the Principal Housing Officer for Council Housing, Mr Chris Hanna.

The areas for consideration were identified and a 'pooling' of available information for the period April 2000 to March 2001. Information utilised included recorded crime information held by Lancashire Constabulary and housing management information from Lancaster City Council.

The Housing department supplied full details of their housing stock to the police in order that the address details could be accurately compared. This was the first time that a true assessment of the crime problem affecting council homes had been undertaken. Prior to this an assumption was often made by the Officer attending the scene or taking details about the offence as to whether or not an address was a council property. This was because there are a number of privately owned dwellings on council estates. It could therefore not be assumed that any address on a particular road was a council owned home.

### **Reported Burglary and Damage**

For the period assessed, 10.4% of all domestic burglaries occurred in local authority housing. This meant that the number of recorded burglaries committed against this type of dwelling was proportionally twice that against other dwellings in the City Council area (full detail at Appendix 1).

Criminal damage against homes owned by Lancaster City Council also indicated that 26.2% of all dwelling damage was committed against local authority housing. There also appeared to be a number of repeat addresses, where a burglary had been committed through previously damaged doors or windows. Owing to the fact that this damage was not always reported to the Housing office and remedial work undertaken, the risk of burglary appeared to be increased.

The Ryelands Estate was identified as having a greater reported burglary problem, this being located mainly on three roads on the estate. The total number of reported burglaries on this estate accounted for 30% of all burglaries committed against Council owned dwellings. Criminal damage accounted for 42% (Appendix 2). This particular estate was just about to have a full refurbishment undertaken which could reduce the opportunities for burglary in this area. There was also other ongoing work being undertaken on the estate to tackle crime and disorder problems. These including tenant support and youth and community initiatives.

## Types of Housing and 'Modus Operandi'

From discussions with Estate Managers and the Principal Housing Manager, no one specific type of property was identified over another, although a greater number of offences were against houses rather than flats or maisonettes.

Owing the fact that the majority of Council owned property is of a similar design and therefore experiences similar types of crime being committed against them it was considered that a package could be developed to address problems affecting residents on council estates in the Lancaster City Council area. The 'modus operandi' used against the Council homes was shown to fall into two main methods which would increase the opportunity for a targeted approach to the problem.

The most common method of entry was either the rear of the property (53% of offences), often through weak panelled rear doors or windows which had no additional locks fitted to them (31%).

One concern identified through the process was that in a quarter of all reported offences, entry to the property had been gained through insecure access. This being either an insecure door or window (Appendix 3).

## Cost of Crime

The total cost of crime is very difficult to assess, because the overall effect on the victim is not measurable. However, the average cost of property stolen during the period assessed was estimated at £450 per property. The total cost of property reported stolen for the assessed period 2000/2001 was £35,137. The most common items stolen were electrical items.

It was difficult to correctly assess the cost of repairs required as result of committed offences due the under reporting to the Council Housing Department. It was however estimated by the Council Housing Principal Officer, that on average the Authority would spend £500 per property. In 2000 / 2001, this amounted to a total of £45,000.

## Offenders

Detected offences were considered for the reported crimes. In the vast majority of cases the offenders lived close by to where they were committing their crimes. On the North Lancaster Council Estates, 86% of offenders were shown as living locally to where the offences had been committed.

By utilising the problem analysis approach the significant factors to be considered were identified as the following;

*Location Local Authority Dwellings*

*Victim Local Authority Tenants*

*Offender Offenders living close by to offences (may also be Council Tenants)*

## **Old Processes**

There were currently no methods available for the Police to inform Lancaster City Council about reported offences committed against their properties.

Previously, the Police would be reliant on information held within the Police Officer's report of the crime to try and identify whether or not a dwelling was Council owned. This was both very time consuming as each individual crime report would have to be interrogated and was not reliable. The information was not reliable because of many properties on predominantly Council Estates being in private ownership and a number of individual properties being in Council ownership.



## **RESPONSE**

It was decided jointly between the Crime Prevention Department and Lancaster City Council that the response must reflect the identified problem in a way that utilised the 'S. M. A.R.T.' process.

The ultimate aim was reduce the number of domestic burglaries being committed against domestic properties owned by Lancaster City Council. It was clear from the beginning of this initiative that could only be achieved by employing a number of methods. This was because the analysis produced information that identified a number of types of issues to resolve.

The next stage in the process was to develop preventative methods - looking at things that could reduce the likelihood of the burglary and damage occurring in future.

To help develop a range of methods, the '**Routine Activity Theory**' (RAT) was used. This particular method was chosen because it can be used as a practical tool. (Theory developed by Clarke,R.V. and M. Felson [1993] Routine Activity and Rational Choice)

The 'Routine Activity Theory' argues that three things happen at the same time and in the same place when a crime occurs;

- © *A suitable target is available*
- © *The lack of a capable guardian*
- © *A likely and motivated offender*

In the terms of this analysis the suitable targets identified were the location of the dwellings and the property within ( e.g. items potentially easy to 'sell on', such as electrical items).

The lack of a capable guardian was combination of weak doors, poor security, locks and lighting. Also possibly a lack of informal guardians such as neighbours, who may not be likely to report offences (this of course is hear say) Although in some instances homes had been left insecure.

In the main, the likely and motivated offender had been identified as leaving very close by to where the offences were being committed. The offender would therefore know where the weaknesses lay in terms of security.

## ***LOCATION***

Through previous work with between the Lancaster Crime Prevention Department and the Council Housing Department, there was an existing minimum security standard agreed for the refurbishment of council owned dwellings. This was reviewed and considered as an accepted standard within this particular burglary reduction programme. The standard included fencing and gates to reduce access at the side and rear of properties, security lighting, specified types of doors and door locks and window locks.

Personal experience of visiting a considerable number of Council owned properties during my employment as a Crime Prevention Officer with Lancashire Constabulary has led me to realise that there were great similarities in security flaws in these dwellings. Following a survey of this type of housing, the recommendations for situational security improvements would therefore generally be the same. This was often because of the type of existing security and fittings to these dwellings.

It was agreed that the agreed minimum security standard would be used as a guide for improved target hardening ( enhancements to security). The target hardening would include, fencing to restrict access, security lighting, replacing or strengthening doors, improved or additional door and window locks.

The package to be implemented was after the individual need of the victim had been assessed.

## ***VICTIM***

It was apparent that a number of burglaries had been committed because the property had been left insecure. It was therefore deemed necessary to ensure that regular reminders are made to Council tenants about home security.

Lancaster City Council produces a quarterly newsletter for all their tenants. This was identified as an ideal medium for disseminating regular crime prevention information and advice. The advice offered to tenants covers current crime problems and the relevant crime prevention advice. Advice may cover such things as property marking, securing sheds and garages, ensuring that properties look occupied when they are not and distraction burglary advice. The two Police Crime Prevention Officers also regularly attend tenants and residents forum to discuss crime and crime prevention issues and further encourage residents to leave their homes secure and use existing locking facilities.

Consideration was given to Data Protection in releasing a type of data to the City Council. Although the properties against which crime has been committed are in the ownership of Lancaster City Council, the tenants would have the right to object to information about their reported crime being forwarded to the Housing Authority.

To satisfy data protection, the initiative was publicised and explained in the Council Housing newsletter and any tenant who did not wish to participate was invited to indicate this in writing. No one person objected and to date no complaint has been received from any individual.

The Newsletter provided an opportunity to distribute a crime prevention advice pack to all 4,500 Council tenants at the beginning of the initiative. The pack included crime prevention advice and an ultra violet property-marking pen. The City Council have continued to supply each new tenant with a 'Pack' as part of the welcome package when they take up a tenancy with Lancaster City Council.

The newsletter also provided an opportunity for a crime prevention advice pack and ultra violet marking pen to be distributed to each of the 4,500 domestic Council properties. With the understanding that it was mainly electrical items stolen, it was felt to be very important to encourage the tenants to security mark their property.

## Offenders

It had been identified that in the majority of cases, offenders live very close by to where the offences have been committed.

Existing procedures within the local authority mean that convicted offenders will be served with a notice of the Authorities intention of seeking possession of the property and could lead to eviction. The intention being that this has some deterrence value.

Additionally it was hoped that publicising the fact that this sharing of information and the response was occurring would send out other deterrence messages to the local offenders that the properties should not be considered the easiest target for burglary. There was also the potential that more residents on the Council Estates may have taken advantage of the ultra violet marking pen supplied and security marked their property.

## New Processes

Prior to the process beginning, an agreement was made with Lancaster City Council as to how they would progress following receipt of the information.

The City Council would provide updated management information about Council owned properties on a regular basis.

A 'practice note' has been produced as part of the procedure manual for Council Housing staff in the following format;

- The Principal Housing Officer will receive the specified information detailing burglaries and damage. The information is then forwarded to each Area Housing Manager and to the Principal Technical Officer for information and action.
- When the information is received each Area Housing Office will make contact with the resident at the address and offer an appointment with the Estate manager to discuss the matter. A standard letter is available to Housing staff which must be sent within 3 days of the information being received by the Area Office. In cases of a repeat burglary or criminal damage to Council property, the Estate Manager should carry out a visit within 5 days of receiving the information.

- Estate Managers will liaise with their local technical Officers and Housing Assistants to ensure that repairs have been logged and followed through.
- If required, the Estate Manager and resident can agree an action plan and look at using practical supports from the victim support package and repairs.
- Following an assessment of need, victims will be offered additional or changed locks, security chains, door viewer, panic life-line alarm, mobile telephone, video camera, toughened glass, security light, disposable camera, Dictaphone, letter box cover, arson proof letter boxes. The package will always be tailored to meet the specific requirements of the victim.

The purpose of this response is to ensure that damage to properties is rectified as soon as possible and that crime victims identified to the Housing Department. This was felt by the Housing Department to be a measure which may help people to remain in their homes rather in some instances to consider re-housing.

The victim support package is specifically seen as an important way of helping people to come to terms with a traumatic event. It was also considered that it would assist the Area Teams and Estate Managers to manage their estates better, let properties and reduce the number of requests for re-housing due to crime.

# ASSESSMENT

The process of providing information about reported burglary and criminal damage began in April 2001. It was decided that for the purposes of allowing a realistic analysis the project would operate for a full twelve-month period before being assessed.

The evaluation mirrored the initial assessment of the problem in order to identify the areas that were achieving and any difficulties encountered.

The evaluation considered a comparison of burglary rates for 2000/2001 and 2001/2002; a comparison of criminal damage figures for 2000/2001 and 2001/2002; the cost effectiveness of the project and feedback from Council Housing staff and from Council tenants.

## **Burglary**

A comparison of domestic burglary figures for 1<sup>st</sup> April 2001 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2002 shows a 22.2% reduction in burglary being committed against council homes in the Lancaster City Council area compared to the previous twelve- month period.

The number of properties subject to repeat offences also decreased by 42% (from seven to four).

## **Criminal Damage**

In the period 2000/2001, it was noted that 26.2% of all dwelling damage took place in local authority housing, for the same period the following year this also decreased to 22.8%.

## **Cost Effectiveness**

The impact of a reduction in the burglary and damage offences meant that there was a reduction in the expenditure incurred by the local authority in terms of repairs amounting to approximately £10,000 over a twelve month period.

The project is very cost effective from a policing point of view - the information sharing process amounts to approximately half an hours work per week for the administrative officer in the Crime Prevention Department to undertake. This amounts to an estimated £260 per year for the data analysis, assessment and transfer to the Principal Housing Officer via e-mail.

The management information provided by Lancaster City Council Housing Department allows for the ease of provision of accurate information from Police crime recording systems.

## **Feedback from Council Housing Staff**

Council Officers feel that there are many benefits gained with this process that are additional to the reduction in offences committed.

These are summarised as follows;

- It helps to keep Estate Managers informed about the kind of crimes being committed on their estates and the frequency of these crimes.
- Estate Managers can easily identify and make contact with the victims of the crimes.
- Area Teams can identify crime 'hot-spots' and have real data to hand to help tackle issues on the estates.
- Area Teams can measure resources being used to tackle burglary and criminal damage to properties (such as repairs and victim support packages)
- Area Teams and individual Estate Managers are better equipped to monitor progress.

## **Feedback From Council Tenants**

Council tenants have reported through their Estate Managers that the contact and subsequent additional support provided to the victims of crime is very much appreciated.

Comments have been received that many of the tenants are delighted with the response given to the Council tenants following crime or criminal damage at their properties. One victim in particular stated that she felt very much more secure in her home when additional security work had been completed, even to the effect that she was happy to remain on the estate, when shortly after being burgled, her immediate reaction was to want to move away.

### ***Case Study***

Throughout 2000, several reported complaints of criminal damage to a block of bungalows were received from the elderly occupants on the Ridge Estate, Lancaster. The elderly people were also being subject to verbal abuse from the young people who were using the rear of the bungalows as a thoroughfare and were suspected of causing the damage to both the dwellings and other property such as rubbish bins and clothes on the washing lines.

Work undertaken between the Crime Prevention Officer (Jan Brown) and the Estate Manager resulted in security lighting being installed at the rear of the properties and the access to the rear areas being restricted by means of the installation of a 1.8 metre fence.

This target hardening process was successful and ended the problems that the elderly residents were suffering. The feedback from tenants was overwhelming with comments being made as to the difference it had made to the lives, they felt very secure and could now enjoy their back gardens without fear.

## Additional Benefits

The burglary reduction process has also encouraged other working partnerships between Lancaster Police and Lancaster City Council.

Any victim of domestic violence who is a local authority tenant receives a visit from myself as a Crime Prevention Officer. Following the agreement of the victim, a report including recommendations for security improvements is forwarded to the relevant Estate Manager for their action. This process can assist with the tenant remaining in their own homes, with the additional peace of mind of better security to the property.

Two Council areas have been identified as being repeat areas for distraction burglary. These are situated in South Lancaster and the rural village of Hornby. The properties are bungalows for the elderly and their occupants very vulnerable to this type of offence.

A distraction burglary project has been funded through the Lancaster and District Community Safety Partnership to provide distraction burglary kits. The kits are being fitted by Lancaster University Student Volunteers. As a further response to address burglary and repeat victims, there is now an agreement to install distraction burglary kits at the properties in the two identified locations.

Estate managers will assist with the dissemination of warning leaflets to residents in identified 'hot spot' areas. This proves to be a fast and effective method of circulating advice.

## Sustainability

The process of information sharing will continue, as it has been agreed through the relevant parties that the information is useful and relevant. Discussions are being undertaken with other social housing providers such as Northern Counties Housing Association, for a similar process to begin.

The project has enhanced and benefited the already good relationship between Lancaster Police and Lancaster City Council.

This burglary reduction initiative demonstrates how the effective use of the Crime and Disorder Partnership of then Northern Division of Lancashire Constabulary and Lancaster City Council has resulted in producing cost effective and sustainable solutions for the reduction of crime in the District.