

Lancashire Constabulary

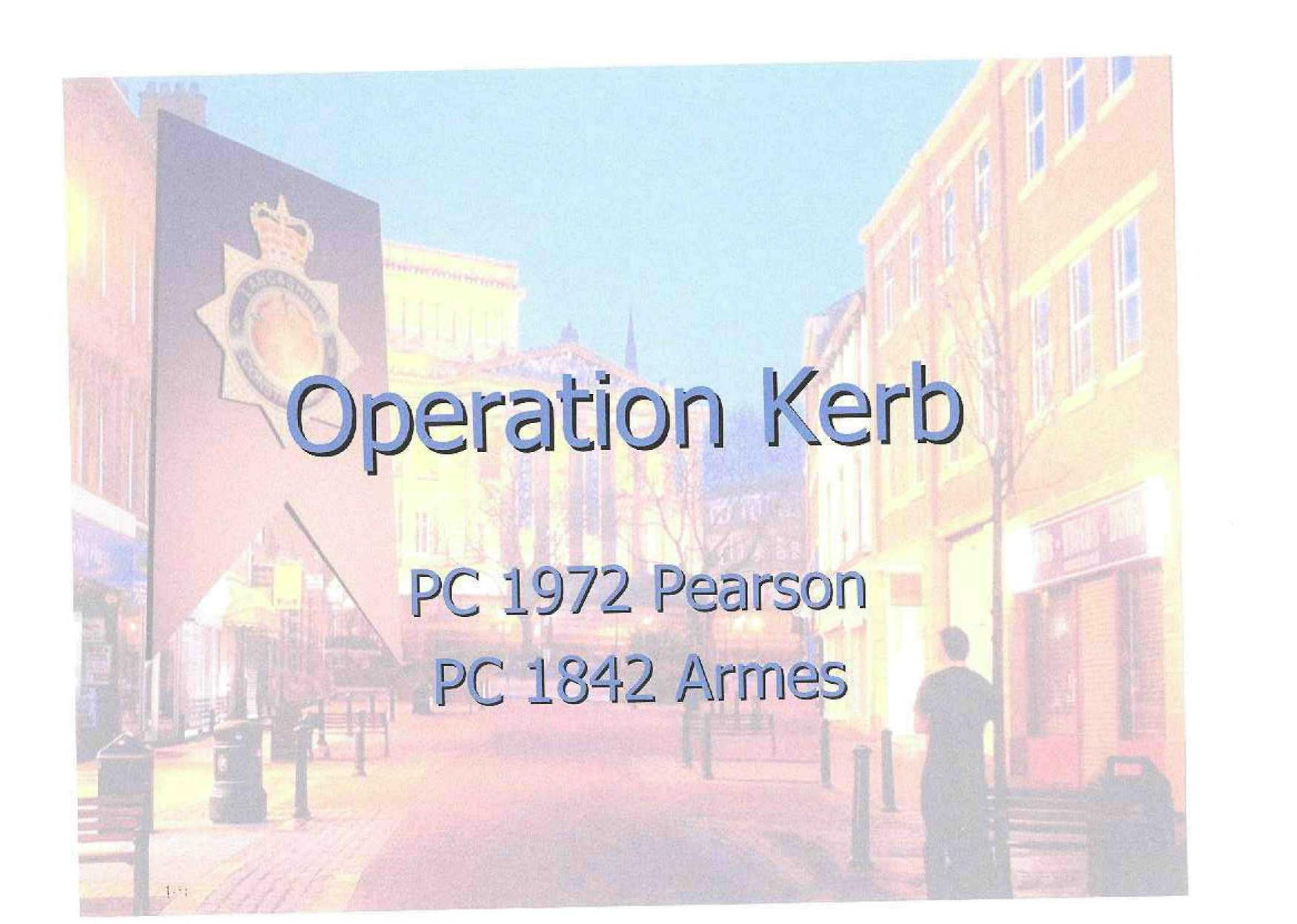


OPERATION KERB

*Crime & Disorder Reduction
Category*

PC 1972 Gareth Pearson / PC 11842 Steve Armes
Central Division
Lawson Street
Preston
PR1 2RJ
Tel: 01772 203203
Fax: 01772 209282
E-mail: Steve.Armes@lancashire.pnn.police.uk

Endorsed By: Chief Constable Paul Stephenson

A photograph of a city street at night. On the left, a large building facade features a prominent police crest with a crown and a shield. The street is illuminated by warm streetlights, and a person is visible in the distance on the right. The overall scene is a quiet urban setting.

Operation Kerb

PC 1972 Pearson

PC 1842 Armes

OPERATION KERB - Summary

Street prostitution and nuisance created by kerb crawlers soliciting women from their vehicles created a highly visible problem in and around the Deepdale and Ribbleton areas of Preston affecting the quality of life for local residents and businesses. The prostitutes themselves are predominantly drug users and their dependence on drugs has meant that both they and their clients are likely to fall victim to or commit crime. In addition a combination of intravenous drug use and sexual activity raises genuine health concerns for the whole community.

Evidence showed that Preston had developed a reputation both locally and nationally as an area with a thriving red light district. It was important then to fully assess the scope and nature of the problem utilising a number of measurable and qualitative indicators, in order to develop a range of responses which would be effective in reducing/eliminating the problem.

A range of indicators was used which included incident logging, reported crime and consultation with the community and partners. Letters of complaint and community contact expressed genuine concern and vulnerability amongst the affected communities, this concern was reinforced by the local media. The prostitute caution register was updated and a street survey was conducted to assess the number of women actively involved in street prostitution, areas they frequented, drug habits and the numbers of vehicles visiting the area. An Internet site dedicated to kerb crawlers was also discovered and then regularly monitored.

Analysis of the problem showed that no one response alone would be enough and that a combination of tactics regularly developed and evaluated would be required. In partnership with the local council, Streetlink, Drug and Alcohol Referral Services and others, the following responses were developed:

- Street design was looked at to limit the movements of visiting vehicles.
- Enforcement on the prostitutes and kerb crawlers.
- Multi-agency partnership responses.
- Acceptable Behaviour Contracts were introduced to offer offenders the opportunity to address their behaviour.
- Anti-Social Behaviour Orders were applied for on offenders who re-offended.
- Letter developed and sent to registered keepers of vehicles visiting the area.
- Internet Site was monitored and used as a vehicle for discussion.
- Media campaign promoting positive action.

Significant results were achieved when compared with the original benchmarks.

- Reports/complaints involving a prostitute down by 46%
- Number of prostitutes on the street down by 71%
- 91% of kerb crawlers who received letters did not return to the area.

The project continues to develop and evolve in response to changing circumstances.

SCANNING

The Problem

The current problems roots can be traced back to around 1997 when a small number of young women started to openly loiter and solicit for the purposes of prostitution. At this early stage it became clear that women involved in these activities were doing so to fund an addiction to drugs with heroin being the preferred drug of choice.

At the time street prostitution was a new phenomenon to the Preston area and the police themselves had very little experience in these matters. The women quickly learnt that offences of street prostitution were not as rigorously enforced as perhaps offences of dishonesty such as theft and shoplifting and in the event of prosecution the penalties upon conviction were less severe and there was no risk of a custodial sentence.

The number of street prostitutes gradually increased and combined with the effects of limited police enforcement and competition for 'clients' the geographical location in which the women operated spread from the predominantly industrial areas into the more residential areas.

With the increased presence of street prostitutes there was inevitably an increase in traffic caused by men kerb crawling in motor vehicles aiming to procure the services of the prostitutes. It also meant that members of the public living and working in the area became aware of the problem and as a consequence complaints to the police increased.

The presence of street prostitution also brings with it other associated problems in terms of acquisitive and violent crime. Crime reported by prostitutes is largely property related, however, there are also reports of serious violent and sexual crimes. In one recent incident a kerb crawler very seriously injured a street prostitute in an attack. He repeatedly struck her about the head with a claw hammer in the belief that he had caught a sexually transmitted disease from her. He was arrested and convicted and the prostitute in question, even after such a vicious attack, was seen soon after once again openly soliciting for the purposes of prostitution.

Street prostitution clearly represents many legitimate health and welfare concerns for the prostitutes themselves, their clients and the wider community through the combination of intravenous drug use and sexual activity. As a response to these issues 'Streelink' was formed as a multi-agency response to the presence of 'sex workers' on the streets of Preston. Streelink provides outreach workers in areas in which street-based sex workers operate in Preston. The workers provide befriending, advice, information and harm reduction services, a weekly drop-in at a Women's Centre and referrals to, and advocacy with other services.

Street prostitution is not something that women will seek to enter into lightly. Their addiction to drugs brings with it a high financial burden and the prostitutes become embroiled in a 'chaotic' lifestyle. The majority of street prostitutes have built up large rent arrears and therefore being unable to secure accommodation end up in abusive relationships where they are not only funding their own habit but that of their partners as well. Combined with this is the increased use of Crack Cocaine, which only serves to increase the financial burden on themselves.

ANALYSIS

Identification of the Problem

Street prostitution in Preston had become so blatant and visible in certain areas that no sophisticated analysis was needed to show that a problem existed. A variety of criteria were used to understand the root causes, the underlying conditions and the nature and extent of the problem.

Complaints

Specific information was obtained in relation to:

- Geographic location
- Time of day
- Day of week
- Nature of complaint
- Extent of problem
- Fears/Concerns

Consultation with communities

The problem, if anything, seemed even more acute. There was also a degree of apathy and acceptance believing that nothing could be done to improve the situation and that the police were unlikely to take their concerns seriously.

Interrogation of Data Recording Systems

A number of Police recording systems were interrogated which gave some indication of the extent of the reported incidents relating to 'prostitute' issues

- CRS – Incident logging
- Indepol – Crime recording
- Custody Records
- Intelligence reports

Partnerships

Other organisations and agencies were identified to provide additional information and perhaps an overview of the issues from a different perspective.

Community Safety Department – Preston City Council

The local council was approached for information on their understanding of the issues affecting the problem area and any proposed solutions.

Streetlink

Its aims and objectives are focused more directly at help and guidance of individuals involved in 'street sex work' and so provides us with a valuable insight into the issues and problems facing the prostitutes themselves.

Media

The initial sensational reporting of the problem brought the problem to the attention of a wider audience doing little to improve the situation, but rather leading to an increase in 'sight seers' and offenders frequenting the area from further a field.

Internet Site – Preston Punters

The discovery of an internet site purely dedicated to Preston and its surrounding area for users of 'sexual services' with particular reference to street prostitutes and the 'Preston Red Light district (RLD)' demonstrated just how wide demand for these services had become. The site itself offers a forum in which users post messages in relation to particular areas, prostitutes, preferences and risks including health concerns and police activity (**Appendix D**). The site is also used to advertise services available and also provides reports and reviews by users of individual prostitutes.

Police Street Survey

Police officers made direct approaches to the prostitutes and monitored motor vehicles in the problem area. Information was gathered on locations used and the times of the day and night throughout both weekdays and the weekend during which the prostitutes and kerb crawlers operated.

Prostitute Register

This had not been updated for some time and did not contain details of convicted prostitutes active in the area.

Kerb Crawler Register

This was already in existence, but prior to the power of arrest had seen very little use.

Nominals

Identification of the individuals involved and their dependency on drugs.

Results of the analysis

Location:

Split between Sectors B and D of Central division (**Appendix A**).

Sector B - Industrial and commercial premises and some residential.

Sector B - One of the roads in Sector B is a major route into the city.

Sector D - Made up of entirely residential premises and within five minutes walk of the city centre.

Both areas are established with kerb crawlers who drive around in a very defined route.

Times:

Weekdays - 5pm until the early hours (peak period 7pm-9pm).

Weekends - 7pm until the early hours (peak period 10pm-2am, pub & club closing).

Weekends - Significant increase in males on foot looking to procure prostitute services.

Reports/Complaints

CRS incident logging system showed 249 reported incidents for the year 2001 specifically involving prostitutes. Lone females living or working in the area were particularly vulnerable and there was a genuine fear of being approached and solicited. Drugs paraphernalia, such as used syringes, and spent condoms were commonly found often in sensitive areas like health centre car parks, places of worship and in residential areas where children played. All contributed to a diminishing quality of life.

Nominals

Approximately 90 known prostitutes were known to have been active in the area with as many as 70 regularly. It was not uncommon to find up to and in excess of 12 on the streets at any one time. All prostitutes surveyed stated they were working to fund an addiction to heroin with many also using crack cocaine. The effects of crack cocaine only last minutes and have a fixed street price of £20 per rock leading to habits well in excess of £80 per day. The resultant financial burden on the addict could only be addressed by increased activity on the streets causing soliciting to become more blatant and proactive. There were reported incidents of prostitutes jumping into stationary vehicles at traffic lights and junctions uninvited.

Vehicles

The numbers of vehicles visiting the area purely to solicit women was difficult to quantify, but officers were amazed at the volume of traffic in a quiet residential side street not normally used as a thoroughfare. At this time the weight of vehicular traffic was more easily likened to peak time commuter levels than a quiet side street.

Crime

Prostitutes and their 'clients' were vulnerable to crime in terms of physical and sexual assaults, robbery, theft and even blackmail. Many incidents went unreported since the men were unwilling to state the circumstances leading them to become victims of crime, and the prostitutes fell victim to criminal associates known to them. Members of the public were also vulnerable as evidenced by one particular incident involving an aggrieved suffering from Downs Syndrome. The aggrieved was subject of a robbery during which he was bitten by a known prostitute and intravenous drug user resulting in the aggrieved needing regular blood tests for the next two years.

Pimping and child prostitution

An area of main concern identified was that of 'pimping' by organised criminals and the phenomenon of child prostitution. In both cases there was no evidence found that Preston suffered from either of these problems.

Root Cause

Undoubtedly it is the prostitutes' dependence on drugs. The majority of prostitutes are convicted criminals who historically favoured shoplifting as a means of funding their addiction. However, shoplifting is now carefully policed by store detectives using CCTV and security tagging, resulting in offenders receiving custodial sentences. Prostitution offers drug users an alternative means of funding their addiction which has often seen only sporadic enforcement by the police and little punishments by the courts.

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

As the problem itself is multi-faceted then the objectives of the project are widespread and reflect this:

- Public Reassurance/Satisfaction – Addressing the fear of crime and the apathy towards the police.
- Reduce crime
- Reduce levels of street prostitution
- Elimination of street prostitution from residential areas
- Reduce levels of kerb crawlers
- Education of kerb crawlers
- Address drug misuse through use of partnerships
- Increase personal safety of prostitutes
- Promote safe sexual practices through partnerships
- Health screening for prostitutes
- Prevent the emergence of organised 'pimping' thereby preventing members of the criminal fraternity living off the immoral earnings of others
- Prevent phenomenon of child prostitution
- Continually review and tailor approaches to any changing circumstances

SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Comparison of figures for numbers of complaints/reports involving known prostitutes.
- Comparison of figures for numbers of prostitutes working on the street.
- Management of geographic location with particular emphasis on residential areas.
- Analysis and evaluation of kerb crawler letters database.
- Analysis and evaluation of all tactics and initiatives.

RESPONSE

Dealing with the Problem

Best Practice

Other police forces, such as Cleveland and Greater Manchester, were contacted with a view to establishing a 'best practice' approach to the problem.

Prostitute Register

Fully updated showing details of both convicted common prostitutes and prostitutes who had received either one or two on street cautions in the proceeding twelve-month period.

Communities Against Drugs

Funding was secured from C.A.D. monies towards the cost of police enforcement and the provision of drug referral services to be delivered at the time of arrest at Preston custody office by Drug and Alcohol Referral Services.

Drug and Alcohol Referral Scheme

A member of staff from the Alcohol and Drug referral services was in custody at selected times to provide advice and support for any prostitute arrested.

Street Design

Working in partnership with Preston City Council community safety dept. a scheme to implement traffic diversion measures was introduced on two of the residential streets affected by the problem and commonly used as part of a circuit by kerb crawlers. The roads were physically blocked with paving, kerbs and bollards disrupting the natural circuit of the kerb crawlers (**Appendix A**).

Media

The local and regional media were fully briefed at the commencement of the initial period of enforcement which helped ensure that reporting was more balanced and accurate, avoiding sensationalism and promoting public reassurance.

The use of a radio media campaign, based on the success achieved at Cleveland Police, was considered. Our colleagues at Blackburn, however, pursued this tactic. They commissioned our local radio station, Rock FM, to deliver a strong crime prevention message to kerb crawlers. This initiative served both Blackburn and our own purposes equally well and it was decided not to pursue a duplicate campaign.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

Developed for use with any persons arrested as part of the enforcement campaign. The contracts (A.B.C.s) although without legal implications gave offenders the opportunity to enter into a contract to address offending behaviour without the need to resort to more rigorous legal remedies. Contracts were developed, for both prostitution and kerb crawling, each with their own prohibitions.

Anti-Social Behaviour Contacts

ASBO applications were taken out against seven of the prostitutes who had regularly and blatantly breached the ABC's. These are currently on appeal at the High Court.

Training Package

Developed for delivery to all police personnel involved in the operation to ensure a high quality input and to regulate police activity. Certain guidelines, procedures and documentation were introduced to assist in evidence gathering and to ensure best practice and uniformity (**Appendix B**).

Street Link

Meetings were held with the Street Link forum and notice was given of the impending police operation. Certain areas of concern and potential conflict were discussed and agreement on common ground was reached.

Condoms

Condoms supplied to street prostitutes by the Street Link outreach workers were not to be used as evidence in proceedings against prostitutes. It was vital to ensure that the women were encouraged to adopt and maintain safe sexual working practices.

Residential Areas

Co-operation was sought with Street Link to encourage their contacts through outreach and the Women's Centre to educate women not to operate in residential areas.

Women's Centre

Situated on New Hall Lane and open on weekday evenings, this is a vital contact for Street Link. A working understanding was reached that no women would be targeted or kept under observation in the immediate vicinity of the centre, so as not to discourage attendance. It was however stressed that the premises should not be seen as a place of refuge for persons wanted in relation to other matters.

Magistrates Court

An arrangement was made with Preston Magistrates Court, Preston Custody Office and the Crown Prosecution Service to have a dedicated session for Operation Kerb defendants on the Friday afternoon session each week, aimed at improving potential for maximising reporting possibilities.

Letters

Following contact with other forces using this tactic, a letter was developed which would be sent to the registered keeper of any vehicle seen frequenting the problem area. The letter takes the format of an educational address to the keeper explaining the police activity and the problems affecting the area, whilst not making specific allegations. A duty log was created thus enabling evidence gathering for vehicles sighted on numerous occasions in the problem area (**Appendix C**).

Enforcement

Enforcement in the problem area followed distinct phases with each phase being assessed for its validity and effectiveness.

Phase One

Plain Clothed officers targeting prostitutes and kerb crawlers. Action was taken once evidence was obtained of women getting into a motor vehicle and moving off.

Prostitute – Arrested (if applicable), charge, DNA taken and offer of ABC.

Kerb Crawler – Arrested, interviewed, caution/charge, DNA taken and offer of ABC. Letter sent to any vehicle seen frequenting the problem area.

Phase Two

Plain clothed officers targeting prostitutes for loitering and soliciting. A zero tolerance approach was implemented and any women present were arrested. A duty log was created to assist in evidence gathering for prostitutes loitering (**Appendix C**). The aim was to ensure a prolonged period when there was little or no presence of the prostitutes openly working on the street.

Prostitute – Arrested (if applicable), charge, DNA taken and offer of ABC. Introduction of bail conditions not to enter the problem area and observe a curfew. Breaches of bail rigorously enforced.

Kerb Crawler – Any men caught soliciting were arrested. Letter sent to any vehicle seen frequenting the problem area.

Phase Three

Enforcement was targeted purely at residential areas and any new area where street activity was identified preventing displacement to new geographic locations.

Letters were sent to vehicles seen frequenting the area. All recipients of letters were entered on a database enabling repeat offenders to be identified. Actions against repeat offenders will involve a high visibility stop, on street warning and an INTEL entry. Subsequent offending will lead to arrest. Additional measures may include the seizure of vehicles used in the commission of an offence, naming and shaming and ASBO applications.

Internet Site

The Site was regularly monitored so as to provide first hand information from the actual 'service' users in relation to current trends, i.e. times, locations, areas of interest and active individuals. This enabled us to focus our enforcement strategy accurately.

The site was also used as a vehicle to promote discussion on certain issues including police activity and strategies in use at the time. This was achieved by posting topics or replies on the forum message board relating to experiences of the 'punter' in the 'Preston RLD' (**Appendix D**).

Other Tactics

There has been a number of other tactics that have been considered and assessed without actually being implemented. Certain tactics may still be of use in the future whereas certain others have been deemed inappropriate to our circumstances (**Appendix E**).

ASSESSMENT

Assessing Our Approach

TACTICAL ASSESSMENT

Alcohol and Drug Referral Scheme

The notion that all arrested persons coming into custody were given the opportunity then and there to meet with a drugs worker from Alcohol and Drug Referral services seemed a common sense approach to introducing users to their services. In reality however this proved to be misguided and there was actually no take up of the services on offer.

Letters

These gave an insight into the numbers of vehicles frequenting the area and also where they had travelled from (**Appendix F**). To date 425 letters have been sent out. Of this figure there have been only 37 repeat offenders, equivalent to 8.7%.

Media

Compared to the sensationalist reporting at the outset of the operation where the problem was branded 'Streets of Shame', the reporting is now far more balanced (**Appendix G**) and reflected police activity in the area as was evident in the article 'Kerb It!' 31st December 2002 (**Appendix H**).

ABC's

All kerb crawlers arrested signed up to an ABC and there has not been one recorded breach of contract at the time of writing.

In respect of prostitutes a significant proportion declined to enter into the contract and in any event without exception all contracts were breached and those who declined also continued with their offending behaviour.

Evidence of an unwillingness to enter into a contract or indeed a breach was found to be good evidence in making the case for the Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

ASBO's

Although initially unsuccessful at court, out of the 7 applications only 2 of the prostitutes continue to work in the area although less frequently.

Enforcement

Phase One: Proved time consuming and labour intensive in terms of evidence gathering, although once kerb crawlers were actually arrested they did not return.

Phase Two: The aim to ensure a prolonged period of little or no presence of prostitutes on the street was successfully achieved. This had an impact on the kerb crawlers who when driving around the area found a lack of prostitutes. This enforcement could only be maintained for a relatively short period of time, however, when the prostitutes returned there were less of them and their behaviour was a lot less blatant and proactive.

Phase Three: Zero tolerance in residential areas proved very successful with there now being little or no prostitutes working in these areas.

Results

Reports/Complaints

Number of reports/complaints for year 2001 involving a prostitute = 249

Number of reports/complaints for year 2002 involving a prostitute = 133

This figure represents a reduction in prostitute related complaints of 46%

Geographic Location

There have been 2 specific goals in relation to the geographic location in which street prostitution occurs:

- 1) Eradicate street prostitution from residential areas.
- 2) Prevent displacement to neighbouring residential areas.

Both of the aforementioned goals were successfully achieved with the net result that there has been no displacement or growth of the problem area, and the problem is no longer prevalent in the residential areas.

Street Survey

At the outset of the operation there were approximately 70 prostitutes regularly active. Currently there are approximately 20 prostitutes regularly active, a reduction of 71%.

At the outset of the operation on a weekday evening between 5pm and 9pm you would have seen 10 to 12 prostitutes at any one time. Currently you will see 2 to 3 prostitutes and it would not be unusual to pass through the area and not see any.

Crime

Although the Operation was not strictly tailored to address crime issues other than sexual offences it is worth analysing the effect on the crime figures in general for the area. Such analysis may then give some insight into the relationship between reductions in the levels of street prostitution and the improved levels of public reassurance with reported crime (**Appendix J**).

Street Link

The Street Link multi agency approach continues to provide quality contact with the workingwomen through both their sessions at the women's centre and outreach work. Street Links own annual report gives a full insight into their work and achievements (**Appendix I**).

The police now enjoy a very honest and constructive working relationship with Street Link, which has also seen the open exchange of information in relation to safety issues, and 'Dodgy Punters'.

Public Reassurance

No specific test of public reassurance was devised at the outset of the operation or indeed since. However several indicators can be viewed which gives an insight into any perceived improvement. Such indicators include reported incidents, letters of complaint, feed back from the community and local media coverage.

All indicators suggest there has been an improved level of public reassurance and a recognition that the negative impact of street prostitution has diminished.

Internet Site

An insight into the current state of the Preston 'street scene' can be seen in a post from December 2002 entitled: -

Preston RLD –Alas –has it gone forever? (Appendix D)

Child Prostitution

There remains no evidence or intelligence to suggest the presence of child prostitution the streets of Preston.

Organised Crime and Pimping

There has been no evidence or intelligence to suggest the emergence of the involvement of organised criminals in street prostitution. There are however still women involved in street prostitution who support both their own and their partners drug habits.

Value for money

It was recognised at an early stage that the operation needed to be sustainable without dependence on high levels of staffing and the need for additional funding.

Funding of £26,673 from C.A.D. enabled the initial staffing of the Alcohol and Drug Referral interventions and the overtime incurred during the initial phases of zero tolerance enforcement. In addition the CAD funding was also utilised to provide legal services in relation to the obtaining of the initial ASBO's. Having successfully made an initial impact it has been possible to vary the responses used, thereby reducing costs and maintaining the progress made.

The streetlink agencies are self-funded by their own operational bidding processes and to date have been very successful at maintaining and acquiring additional funding streams.

Conclusion

The operation during its first 12 month period has proved to be a huge success as can be seen from the reductions in reported incidents and the number of active street prostitutes. There is however, a need to guard against complacency as when so many young women find themselves addicted to class A drugs, the lure of street prostitution to fund their addiction will always be strong. The current situation that we have now reached is far more manageable both in terms of policing and delivering support services to the workingwomen.

The intended use of certain tactics under development including the Special Constabulary (**Appendix E**) will ensure that the management of the problem is in safe hands with an increasingly limited role for front line policing.