

Achieving A Sustainable Reduction in Youth Crime & Disorder

SUMMARY

Youths aged 10-17 years old and 20-30 in number were responsible for burglaries, damage, assaults, intimidation and harassment in Haslingden town centre as identified by local Beat Manager PC Gordon McGeechan and Sergeant Colin Hudson.

The youths' activity, some of it fuelled by alcohol, was attracting numerous complaints from Councillors, residents and business.

The solution, as determined by the two officers, was to improve facilities for young people; introduce diversionary activities; reduce the availability of alcohol and use the Crime & Disorder Act 1998 to curb offending and anti social behaviour.

Four ASBOS were taken out against the ringleaders with Acceptable Behaviour Contracts taken out against others.

Evening and holiday diversion activities were introduced in a major project with Youth & Community Services and Youthworks, entitled 'Breakout From The Boredom'.

Test purchasing was carried out and two pubs and two off licences were prosecuted for supplying alcohol to young persons.

A partnership with Groundwork Rossendale was also initiated, it's aim to improve youth facilities for the area.

Anti-social behaviour and youth nuisance halved and all crime fell by 39%. The behaviour of youths has improved and the feedback from local councillors, shopkeepers and residents has been very positive.

SCANNING

In October 2000, Sergeant Colin Hudson was transferred to Rossendale West and given geographic responsibility for Haslingden. It soon became evident to him that the area had higher than average youth related crime and anti social behaviour problems. Working together with Constable Gordon McGeechan, who was to become the Community Beat Officer for the area, he commenced a POP to address the problems.

The town centre and its surrounds were a major problem area for youth related crime and anti-social behaviour.

The actual scanning process included the following:

- **Analysis of Statistics**
- **Complaints from Retailers**
- **Complaints from Residents**
- **Complaints from Councillors**
- **Complaints from Town Centre Users**
- **Observations Police Officers**

PROBLEM ANALYSIS TRIANGLE

Haslingden is a small predominantly working class town. It has a population of several thousands and there are three local authority or private housing association estates in close proximity to the town centre. The town centre itself comprises of a small retail area with several public houses and social clubs and a small park. There is also a youth club adjacent to the town centre, however the opening hours are limited. Apart from this, facilities within the area for the local youths are virtually non existent.

Haslingden High School is the main school which services the town and that is situated about half a mile from the town centre.

It was noticed that large numbers of youths from the area were gathering within the town centre, mainly during the evenings but also during the day at weekends and during holiday periods. This wasn't because of facilities or activities taking place, but merely as a place to gather.

However they weren't gathering peacefully and were regularly becoming involved in crime and anti social behaviour.

Some examples of their conduct were that they were causing damage to properties, committing burglaries in business premises, they were also carrying out assaults and generally intimidating and harassing business proprietors, residents and people visiting the area.

The violence being used had reached serious levels. For instance they had started harassing male drinkers leaving town centre pubs late at night with physical and verbal taunts. If they received a reaction to this, which they frequently did, then they would launch into a gang attack and on two occasions used weapons on the victims including a knife which was protruding between the fingers of the attackers fist and was used to punch the victim in the face; and a piece of wood with nails protruding, which they had taken from a nearby skip.

Some of them were also visiting Haslingden High School on a regular basis, going onto the school premises as trespassers, assaulting pupils and giving verbal threats and abuse to staff and generally disrupting the business of the school.

Despite being arrested for various offences and put before the courts the gangs activities continued unabated.

ADDITIONAL ANALYSIS

Analysis indicated that between 20 to 30 youths were regularly involved, mostly between the ages of 10 and 17 years. Some were more active than others and some had adopted the role of ringleaders and instigators of the majority of the gang activities. Younger children were becoming involved with the gang and were being influenced by the ringleaders.

Alcohol was also a factor and on many occasions gang members were under the influence when they carried out their offending. We also had information that some members were taking drugs.

A lot of thought was given to the problems and following analysis it was decided that amongst the gang there were four main ringleaders and these youths were the most prolific offenders and certainly had the most influence on the gangs activities. They were all male and were as follows:

Jordan PILKINGTON	17 years
Philip SOURBUTTS	16 years
Steven DERBYSHIRE	14 years
Ryan BRESLIN	14 years

It was felt that if these four could be dealt with effectively it would take away their influence on the rest of the youths, who in the main were hangers on and would go a long way to eradicating a lot of the problems.

The root causes of the problems were analysed and it was decided that there were certain areas which the officers could begin working on immediately. These were:

1. Combine with other agencies and groups with a view to improving facilities and activities to constructively occupy the time of the youths, thereby reducing the opportunities to offend.
2. Reduce the apparent ready availability of alcohol to young persons, which was recognised as a contributory factor in a large proportion of the incidents they were involved in.
3. To use the new legislation of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, designed to impose restraints on offenders to curb offending and anti social behaviour patterns.

It was hoped that by using a combination of these measures we could disrupt some of the mechanisms which had combined to cause the problems in the first place.

RESPONSES

YOUTH DIVERSION AND SUMMER SCHEME YEAR ONE

The responses commenced in February 2001 when the officers called a meeting of local agencies who it was felt should have an input with youth provision and activities.

From that meeting the main partners became Lancashire County Council Youth and Community Services, Rossendale Youthworks, an agency which deals with local youth issues and the Police. Working together they established an itinerary of events for the holidays, and the scheme became known as Breakout From the Boredom of Summer, catering for up to 12 youths.

The scheme was jointly funded by the three participating agencies together with a contribution from Lancashire Partnership Against Crime. The main aims of the scheme were to give the youths of the area some constructive activities to occupy their time as an alternative to hanging about the streets and an incentive to improve their behaviour.

Prior to this scheme the area was completely devoid of such activities. It was also hoped that with the police being part of the activities we could gain their confidence and they may begin to work with us rather than against us.

The youths invited onto the original scheme were all from Haslingden including some of the identified ringleaders and others who were on the periphery of the problems. The age criterion for the scheme was 14 to 16 years. Clear guidelines were given to the youths attending the scheme and they were asked to sign contracts regarding conduct prior to attending.

As a result of the inaugural meeting the police also assisted the local Borough Council and Youth and Community Services with setting up a youth disco on Friday evenings in Haslingden Municipal Hall which is regularly attended by 400 youths. The disco was scheduled between 7.00pm and 9.30pm on a Friday because analysis indicated this was the peak period for youth crime and nuisance in the target area.

ASSESSMENT SUMMER SCHEME YEAR ONE

Although there was a lot of success from the first year with the more moderate members of the gang improving their general behaviour and gaining some benefit from the activities, it was having little effect on curbing the behaviour patterns of the hard core ringleaders.

The majority of the activities were attended by PC McGeechan in conjunction with trained youth workers. This gave them the chance to work directly with the youths on a one to one basis and an opportunity to influence their behaviour and outlook on life. The youths were asked to evaluate the activities at the conclusion of the scheme and some of the comments were:

Sailing

"Dingies. MINT. Better than doing drugs".

National football museum, Preston

"Match of the Day thing was good, and football game. Talked openly with Gordon".

Raft building

"Good. Learnt how to do a raft, control it and learnt how to do knots. Learnt to work as a group".

We also received feedback from teaching staff at Haslingden High School. We were informed that the behaviour and work ethic of some of the group after the holiday activities was greatly improved on their return to school compared to prior to the scheme.

Lessons learnt from the first year were that the age group that were targeted were probably too old and some of them had ingrained behaviour patterns that the staff had little chance of influencing by use of this method. This would form part of the planning ethos for year two of the activities.

SUMMER SCHEME YEAR TWO

RESPONSE

The second year of the programme had amendments to the criteria based on our assessment of the first year's programme. The age of referral was reduced to 11 to 14 years and the geographical remit was extended to Rawtenstall and Haslingden, where it was previously for the 14 to 16 age group and for Haslingden only.

The programme criteria was for the police in conjunction with Youth and Community Staff to work with 12 young people who were bordering on the fringes of anti social and criminal behaviour.

The main objective of the programme was to be pro-active instead of re-active in addressing the behaviour of young people vulnerable to becoming involved in crime and anti social behaviour.

The referral procedure was from the youth service, police, education, welfare and schools within the catchment area. After much discussion, the young people it was felt would most benefit from the scheme were selected.

The activities (*See Appendix C*) were selected with emphasis on local activities, which would be accessible to the youths at the conclusion of the programme.

ASSESSMENT OF SUMMER SCHEME YEAR TWO

The first two weeks although testing, proved that the youths selected had been done so for the right reasons.

A trip to one of the activities during this initial period was problematic due to the youths not staying in their allocated groups, running off and pushing in on queues without any regard for other people. Such behaviour was addressed at the time it happened and debriefs with the youths were held at the end of each session.

Serious breaches of the behaviour contracts were dealt with by way of exclusion from other activities.

By the third and fourth week, the behaviour began to improve. This was achieved by the young people assessing the consequences of their behaviour, and reflecting on how this affected other people around them. It was found that the youths began to involve themselves in more meaningful conversations with each other and the staff.

It was noted during an activity in the final week when the youths were allowed to go off in individual groups. They were observed by staff queuing in a civilised manner and engaging in conversation with the other members of the public around them.

The officers also noted that the behaviour of the youths within their communities had improved immensely.

It was decided to extend the scheme to the term break in October 2002, and in order to qualify for a two day outward bound residential trip, the youths had to maintain an acceptable level of behaviour within their communities.

Most of the youths achieved this, although one youth decided that he no longer wanted to be part of the scheme. Even though this youth excluded himself from the activities, it was still noted by the police that his behaviour had improved dramatically as compared to the pre summer programme period.

USE OF THE CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1988

EVIDENCE GATHERING

Due to the behaviour of a group of teenage youths who were gathering within the town centre of Haslingden, a decision was made to utilise the legislation outlined in the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. In October 2001, Police Constable 2417 Gordon McGeechan was appointed as the Community Beat Manager for Haslingden.

One of his first tasks was to target the ringleaders of this group of teenagers, who were causing the majority of crime and disorder problems in Haslingden town centre.

Within a short space of time evidence was gathered of the acts of Anti Social Behaviour, which the ringleaders of this group involved themselves in and from this Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, also known as ABCs, were drafted. The ringleaders were then invited to Rawtenstall Police Station to sign the contracts along with their parents and solicitors.

Only one of the youths attended out of the four who were invited and he flatly refused to sign. His belief was that the police in Rossendale would not go for an Anti Social Behaviour Order on him.

PC McGeechan and officers stationed at Rawtenstall Police Office who worked within the Haslingden area, targeted the ringleaders and their associates and made them fully aware of the intention to seek Anti Social Behaviour Orders, commonly known as ASBOs, against them. They were also given a warning to curb their behaviour while they had the opportunity.

Unfortunately they continued to commit crime and act in an anti social manner within the town centre of Haslingden. This made the evidence gathering process fairly simple.

By using police computer files, such as the Crime Recognising System (CRS 2), their arrest and detention records and their subsequent Criminal Justice Department records, and police intelligence systems, literally hundreds of incidents were uncovered involving this group, where they were the main instigators of Crime and Disorder.

The incidents were cross-referenced to show a pattern of their Criminal and Anti Social Behaviour.

PC McGeechan contacted Haslingden High School, where the ringleaders frequently attended during lunch breaks. The school had reported numerous incidents to the police regarding this group's behaviour, which at times caused serious public order problems.

With the schools assistance, PC McGeechan was able to provide a comprehensive log, to the court, of incidents that they became involved in on a daily basis.

PC McGeechan also contacted the local community, including retailers and licensed premises, and made them aware of the intentions of their Community Beat Manager to seek ASBOs against this group. This was done on a personal level by PC McGeechan and with the assistance of the local media.

The local community played a valuable part in gathering evidence against these youths and reporting incidents to PC McGeechan. It was very evident that if it were not for this relationship between the community and PC McGeechan, valuable evidence would have been lost.

One of the main issues which the police service has had to face up to in recent years, is the unwillingness of the public to give information to the police about persons causing them a problem, whether it be intimidation, verbal abuse, damage, violence or threats of violence. This was mainly due to fear of reprisals from these individuals, which is something the police service has had to adapt itself to.

The fact that the courts will allow the inclusion of hearsay in ASBO trials, not only provided the police with a tool to use against persistent offenders, but also gave the public a voice again to speak out against these individuals and their behaviour.

The ringleaders of the group were unaware that the police were working, closely with the above partners and also the wider community, to bring them to justice.

The case against three of the ringleaders was heard at Burnley Magistrates Court on February 24, 2002. The ASBOs went unchallenged by the defendants' legal team, and the court was satisfied that ASBOs were necessary to protect the public of Haslingden. The court ordered that the three defendants be served with ASBOs, for a period of five years, due to the severity of their offending.

PC McGeechan and PS Colin Hudson, who compiled the file of evidence, were commended for bringing these youths before the court and for the hard work and time spent preparing the file.

The legal team representing the youths appealed against the term of the order at Burnley Crown Court in May 2002, but the judge fully upheld the decision of the Magistrates Court.

In October 2002 the fourth ringleader, who had continued to commit Crime and acts of Anti Social Behaviour, against members of the public in Haslingden, also received an ASBO for a term of two years, which again went unchallenged.

PROHIBITIONS AGAINST THE FIRST THREE RINGLEADERS

Due to the severity of the offending by the defendants, the court decided that the following Prohibitions should apply to the group.

- ❖ Not to cause harassment, alarm of distress.
- ❖ Entering Haslingden town centre between 6pm and 6am. This area was delineated on a map that was provided to the court and the offenders.

- ❖ Entering the grounds of Haslingden High School. This also excluded them from a large part of the surrounding area, which was mainly housing. Again maps were provided.
- ❖ Being drunk or consuming alcohol in public until they attain the age of 18 years.
- ❖ Taking drugs.
- ❖ Associating together in a public place. This prohibition in particular was a major blow to the group who had grown together, as well as offended together.
- ❖ Being in a group numbering greater than 4 persons in the Haslingden area. Again maps were provided.

ASSESSMENT

Three out of the four youths have breached their ASBOs on several occasions. The breaches have all been dealt with by way of criminal trial at Magistrates Court, who have imposed custodial sentences on the youths.

As a result these three youths have spent very little time on the streets since their ASBOs were drafted and two are currently serving a lengthy sentence for a serious assault and a breach of their ASBOs.

This has had an impact on Crime and Disorder within Haslingden town centre. It has also sent out a positive message to other youths within Haslingden that the police will not tolerate Anti Social Behaviour, and will deal firmly with persistent offenders.

PUBLIC OPINION

Key contacts within the community such as local councillors and retailers both believe that problems within the town centre have diminished since this group have received their Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

There is no better measure of how well the ASBOs have worked than praise from the local community. Letters of appreciation have been received from local councillors, and other local people during the whole process of the application. Here are a few comments from local people.

"PC McGeechan is working on community based projects aimed at improving the situation for the youth in the area. Lets make October the month we give PC McGeechan our full support." Alan Schofield, local councillor.

"May I thank Gordon McGeechan for working in partnership with us in trying to solve crime and disorder issues in Rossendale's parks and open spaces." Gillian Smith, Assistant Parks Officer.

The granting of the ASBO also received a substantial amount of coverage from the media within the area and in particular the local press who gave the ASBO's front-page headlines along with quotes from local people, and photographs of the offenders.

OFFENDERS' OPINION

The three youths who received the orders initially have expressed regret that they had not signed their ABCs when they had the opportunity. They have since vowed to try and keep out of trouble, although this is proving more difficult than they expected.

EFFECTS ON ASSOCIATES

The effects the ASBOs has fed through to other youths within Haslingden town centre and the surrounding areas, such as Helmshore and Rising Bridge.

ASBOs and the subsequent sentences for breaching those orders has had a significant effect on the behaviour of the other youths within this group.

TEST PURCHASING OPERATION

It was recognised that central to a lot of the crime and disorder problems on the street was the fact that the youths involved were frequently drinking alcohol which tended to exacerbate their anti social behaviour.

The officers had a number of premises they suspected might be supplying alcohol to young persons, which comprised of seven off licences and four pubs. Some of the premises had previously received either formal cautions or verbal warnings re selling alcohol to young persons but it was suspected some were still supplying.

A test purchasing operation was organised using the fifteen-year-old daughter of a colleague. The operation was a carefully controlled exercise carried out under strict criteria. The young person supported by a team of three police officers enters licensed premises and attempts to purchase alcohol. If alcohol is sold to the young person the officers in attendance complete the evidence gathering procedure and report the offenders.

ASSESSMENT

As a result two off licences and two public houses sold alcohol to the young person and all four were subsequently convicted at court. The local press were informed and were present at court to give maximum coverage in the local media. The Divisional Licensing Officer is now applying for revocation of the licences of two of the premises which had been given previous warnings.

As a result of disrupting these outlets it is now noticeable that there is less alcohol on the streets in the possession of young persons and drink related crime and anti social behaviour incidents involving young persons have dropped considerably.

See *Appendix A* (the graph shows the six month period of juvenile drink related incidents within the target area, as compared to the two six months periods before).

ROSSENDALE YOUTH PROVISION STRATEGY

The officers also recognise the need to improve facilities for young persons within Rossendale, an area which has been sadly neglected in the past.

Working in conjunction with the Borough Council, Lancashire County Council, Rossendale Youth Works and Ground Work Rossendale, a total of 27 sites across the Borough have been identified with a view to development or improvement of existing facilities specifically for young persons.

The scheme is entitled Rossendale Youth Provision Strategy and has reached the stage of a comprehensive seventy-two page document which is shortly to be circulated amongst potential funders.

It is proposed that the first facility, which will reach fruition from the provision strategy, will be an indoor wheeled leisure area which will also be adaptable for other activities. A suitable building has been identified for the purpose.

It is not possible to assess this initiative as it is still in the initial response stage.

The officers have also contributed to the recently published Youth and Childrens Provision in Rossendale Directory, which covers all agencies and groups who are involved with youth in the area.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

See *Appendix B* (the graph shows the reduction in all Crime, Juvenile Nuisance and Anti Social Behaviour for the years 2000, 2001 and 2002).

Reductions of 30% and 48% in all Crime, reductions of 38% and 43% for Juvenile Nuisance and reductions of 49% and 51% for Anti Social Behaviour with the previous two years in some way help measure the success of the initiatives (which have been outlined in the POP).

To finally assess the results we have achieved in this POP we have analysed the constituent parts in an attempt to measure the effectiveness of each response. However we have found no objective way of doing this. Subjectively we feel that each response has played a considerable part in the overall reductions we have achieved.

The officers have also considered whether other factors have influenced the reductions and have concluded that two other factors have contributed namely the introduction of CCTV within the target area and also the reintroduction of Community Policing.

However the officers are satisfied that without the measures that they have introduced the problems to a large extent would still exist.

Using a problem solving approach has not only helped reduce Crime and Disorder in the local community but also helped galvanise the local people, local businesses and local councillors in assisting the police service in solving youth related problems.