



Tilley Awards 2004

Mirehouse Estate, Anti Social Behaviour

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SUMMARY

Mirehouse Estate, Anti Social Behaviour

In 2001 funding was sought and granted which allowed two Police officers to be dedicated to the policing of South Whitehaven Estates. One of these estates is Mirehouse, which consists mainly of local authority housing stock. There are over 1800 homes on the estate, which accommodate approximately 4000 people.

In 2001 Mirehouse was rated as the third worst estate in the Copeland Borough council area. The area Community safety strategy highlighted that youth disorder was a concern of residents. When the community officers' spoke with residents, they highlighted that one of their main concerns was youth nuisance/disorder.

The police view of anti social behavior differed greatly from that of local residents. The police response to calls to deal with youth related, anti social offences would usually involve youths being seen and warned or a negative check of the relevant area being carried out. The police had occasionally implemented 'quick fix' operations to target youths, although these did not have any long-term objectives.

Residents identified a small number of offenders who it was perceived, carried out a large proportion of the youth related disorder. No coordinated approach existed to identify and deal with persistent offenders.

Towards the end of 2001 officers adopted a coordinated approach to dealing with disorder on the estate, in partnership with other agencies, in particular the local authority, Copeland Borough Council.

This approach involved the use of a database to identify persistent offenders, joint Police and Local Authority meetings to share information and gather evidence, joint visits and the implementation of Acceptable Behavior Contracts and Anti-Social Behavior Orders.

Targeted patrolling of hot spot areas is carried out with officers using a camcorder to film youths committing anti social behavior and then presenting this evidence to parents. Those residents reporting disorder are revisited to enable the gathering of evidence and intelligence.

The approach has been highly effective in identifying persistent offenders and hot-spot areas. Of the seventeen youths who have been made subject of Acceptable Behavior Contracts only two have progressed on to be made subject of Anti Social Behavior Orders. In the last two years disorder on the Mirehouse Estate has reduced, while on every other estate in the town it has increased.

Scanning

In April 2001 two police officers were appointed to police the South Whitehaven Estates as a result of funding being secured from a Single Regeneration Bid. Within South Whitehaven there are five housing estates, one of those five is Mirehouse. The focus of the officers was to be community based, dealing with issues of greatest concern to the community and which affected their quality of life.

Community officers visited residents on the Mirehouse Estate to give them the opportunity to voice their concerns about crime and disorder. Residents highlighted that drugs related crime and youth disorder were the two largest problems on the estate.

The Copeland Community Safety Strategy had highlighted that youth related disorder was a growing concern of Copeland area residents. The Mirehouse Estate Ward profile indicated that almost a quarter of calls to the estate related to youth and community problems. This was obtained from CDRP Ward profile data.

The Mirehouse Ward was rated as the worst in Whitehaven and the third worst in the Copeland District out of a total of 27 Council wards, obtained from the 'Indices of Multiple Deprivation'

Calls to deal with disorder were very rarely effectively addressed as certain individuals and locations required repeated police attention.

The estate consisted of predominantly Local Authority housing stock.

No consistent approach existed within the local authority to deal with disorder related problems and nor was there any joint approach between the police and Local Authority.

Analysis

With the appointment of two Community Police officers to the South Whitehaven Estates, the Police at Whitehaven were presented with an opportunity to address the concerns of the residents of those estates. Both officers were funded by a Single Regeneration Bid, which tied the officers to the policing of South Whitehaven. This funding led to the officers rarely being taken away for 'response' duties allowing them to focus on the main problems within that area.

South Whitehaven consists of four housing estates Kells, Woodhouse, Greenbank and Mirehouse. The housing stock within all four estates is predominantly Local Authority owned. Of all four estates Mirehouse is regarded as the worst and in particular parts of Mirehouse West. Through its' Acorn profile Mirehouse was ranked as the third worst estate out of 27 wards within the Copeland Borough Council Area. Mirehouse West has deprived area status.

From a policing perspective Mirehouse was the towns problem estate.

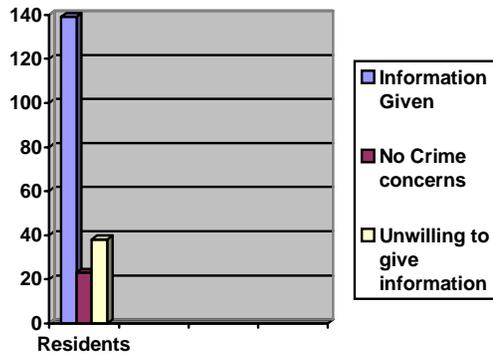
The Mirehouse estate has 1868 houses within it. From the estate's Acorn profile it could be seen that 985 residents were in the 0-14 years age bracket.

At the outset the Community officers, along with colleagues from Whitehaven Police station visited residents on each estate, to ask them what they perceived the problems to be. This was as a result of a conversation with a resident of the Mirehouse estate. This had occurred earlier in the year, when an officer was explaining to the resident that the police had done a marvelous job tackling burglary and was met with the response 'that's very nice but what are you doing about kids causing a nuisance outside my house every night.'

From this one conversation we realised that Police priorities don't always match public concern. By visiting homes and canvassing the views of 200 residents, the two main concerns raised on each of the estates were either problems with youth related disorder or problems with drugs. At the time the police priority was burglary. We found the greater concern of residents on the Mirehouse Estate related to youth disorder.

Residents were asked to name those causing the problems on the estates. On Mirehouse we were surprised to find that in many cases residents were willing to name those involved in disorder. Through this the same local youths names and locations began to constantly appear.

As an example, of 200 residents spoken to, on part of the Mirehouse West estate in 2001 the proportion of those willing to pass information is indicated in the chart below. Much of this information related to youths causing problems.



Mirehouse residents felt badly let down by the Police, through the response to youth disorder and felt that as a police priority it wasn't taken seriously.

Within Whitehaven Town around a quarter of monthly incidents, which the Police responded to relate to youth disorder or anti social behaviour. This type of incident is classified as Youth and Community problems through the Polis command and control system. Through analysis of incident logs it could be seen that almost a quarter of all Youth and Community problems within the town were being committed on the Mirehouse Estate.

By analysing police incident logs and in particular the final classification code the two common themes, which ran through them was either 'youths seen and warned' or 'area checked no youths present'.

No efforts would be made to re-contact the callers who had reported the incident in the first place.

When speaking to residents we found that the reporting of an incident, to the police was usually at a point where the resident had suffered repeatedly over a period of months and that resident was now at the end of their tether.

These final incidents could be something as simple as youths kicking a football against the side of a house; at face value this seemed unimportant. If simple investigation was carried out then the true nature of the problem could be revealed. However this was never done.

Mirehouse had two Housing Officers working on the estate dealing with issues relating to tenancy.

Breaches of tenancy could ultimately lead to eviction. Housing Officers held a considerable amount of information on residents who caused problems on the estate as in some cases residents would speak with housing officers rather than speak to the police.

No joint approach existed between the police and local authority when dealing with problems on the estate.

Response

Scanning and analysis had shown that a quarter of all disorder within Whitehaven was being committed on the Mirehouse estate.

It was possible through the use of Polis, information held by housing officers and information held by residents to identify persistent offenders and hot spot locations. Persistent offenders could have a significant impact on the quality of life of residents yet the police failed to take this seriously.

On the Mirehouse estate there appeared to be a majority of residents willing to assist the Police in reducing disorder.

With the support of the residents and a coordinated approach we could see that there was a possibility that we could tackle disorder on the estate effectively.

Partnership working began between the Local Authority and the police. The Police began to regard youth related anti social behaviour in a more serious light. Meetings between the Local Authority Housing Officers and the Police regularly take place to identify persistent offenders and hot spot locations. In the case of housing officers they are able to feed in the information they gain when carrying out tenancy enforcement.

Information from the Police had to be gathered in a far more effective manner. Polis incident logs relating to disorder on the estate were monitored enabling officers to identify likely persistent offenders and likely hotspot locations.

All residents who report youth related disorder to the police are re-contacted, enabling the officers to gain further information and evidence to identify persistent offenders. In the majority of cases this normally reveals that a person has been suffering from the effects of anti social behavior for several months. The call to the Police being generated by an incident that could be regarded as the 'last straw.' In some cases this visit led to sufficient evidence being obtained to arrest offenders for harassment.

In identified hot spot areas the Police would visit all residents and explain to them that they were proactively targeting disorder in that area. As part of the approach residents were asked to name those involved.

Proactive targeting of hotspot areas through patrolling, also involved officers filming youths involved in anti social behaviour with a camcorder. The youths would then be taken home to their parents and the evidence would be played to them.

Housing officers and the Police would then discuss information and evidence they had gathered. This exchange of information would take place at regular meetings. In the majority of cases both parties would have the same names of individuals involved in persistent disorder. From this information exchange a joint course of action would be decided upon.

Initially this would be a joint visit by the Housing Officer and Police at the offenders address. Housing officers would remind the offenders' parents of their obligations with regards to their tenancy. At the same time the Police officer would inform the parents and the youth concerned that they had been identified as a person involved in persistent disorder and as a result they could leave themselves liable to arrest or becoming subject of an anti social behavior order application

After the first visit if a youth came to the attention of the Housing Officers or Police again then the Police would go and revisit all individuals who had complained of the youth in the first instance, with a view to obtaining evidence to prosecute. Residents who had passed information to housing officers would also be contacted.

If sufficient evidence were obtained to justify arrest then this would be carried out. In most cases arrests were made under the provisions of the harassment act. After arrest and prior to being released on bail for referral to the Youth Offending Team youths and parents would be given the opportunity to sign an Acceptable Behavior Contract. Housing Officers would also be present at the signing of the contract. When the contract was signed Housing Officers would also serve a Notice Of Seeking Possession (NOSP) on the parent of the youth.

The NOSP is the first stage of the eviction process.

Referral to the Youth Offending Team would ensure that other interventions could be put in place in an attempt to prevent further offending.

The youth and the parent were informed that any breach of the Acceptable Behaviour Contract would lead to further evidence gathering and arrest but could also lead to application being made for an Anti Social Behaviour Order.

In cases where evidence could be gained of an individual's involvement in anti social behaviour or youth related disorder but there was insufficient evidence to justify arrest then a similar process was carried out but at the offender's home address.

The housing Officer and Police Officer would visit the home of the offender. The offender and parent would be given the opportunity to enter into an Acceptable Behaviour Contract. The Housing officer would serve a NOSP on the parent of the offender. The consequences of further offending were outlined to the parents and the youth.

Home visits are always carried out on Friday afternoons. This gives parents a full weekend to think about the consequences of the NOSP before they can visit the housing office the following Monday morning, to seek advice.

On signing the ABC youths and parents were also informed that a referral would be made to the youth service Connexions. As with referrals to the Youth Offending Team this was to enable other interventions to be initiated in an attempt to stop the youths offending.

Acceptable Behaviour Contracts would be entered in to for a period of six months. Minor breaches of a contract would lead to a joint visit from the Housing Officer and Police. Serious breaches of a contract would lead to further arrest or application for an Anti Social Behaviour Order.

Assessment

In tackling youth related disorder on the Mirehouse Estate the Police were addressing a problem that was of greatest concern to that Community. Residents identified the problem therefore the Police were dealing with what the residents wanted them to. Dealing with the wrong 'thing' had been highlighted in the analysis. Through the Police, residents have been able to take action against local youths who have persistently caused them problems.

This has been most evident when residents have willingly named youths involved in anti social behaviour, either through re-contacting them after complaints have been made or through proactively gathering information and evidence on persistent offenders. .

By taking a more serious view of youth related nuisance and disorder the Police have become more efficient and effective when dealing with calls to this type of incident occurring on the estate.

The identification of persistent offenders and hot spot areas through partnership working and information sharing is far more effective and has allowed offending to be addressed through a coordinated approach, which had not previously existed.

At the outset we suspected from the scanning and analysis, that we would be dealing with a small number of individuals, who were persistent offenders, along with their 'followers' who would be on the periphery of any disorder.

Targeted patrolling and the use of the camcorder, has been effective when dealing with the persistent offenders 'followers'. Being filmed committing lower level anti social behaviour and then taken home by Police Officers and having that evidence shown to parents in their own homes has acted as a great deterrent.

Through the regular joint meetings, hot spot areas are monitored and dealt with more effectively, by tackling the persistent offenders who are active in those areas.

Between 1 January 2002 and the 31 December 2003 seventeen offenders have been identified through Housing Officer and Police information, as being persistently involved in disorder. These youths have been dealt with in the joint approach between the Housing Officers and the Police, which is outlined in the response.

Of those seventeen all were from the Mirehouse Estate and were aged between 10-15 years.

All seventeen signed Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, which ran for six months.

Four breached the Acceptable Behaviour Contracts.

Two of these four were signed to further contracts and did not breach these.

The other two who breached their contracts were made subject of Anti Social Behaviour Orders after applications were made to Whitehaven Magistrates Court. Once again in making these applications the support and evidence provided by residents was outstanding.

One, Anti-social behaviour Order was made against a twelve-year-old girl to run for an indefinite period.

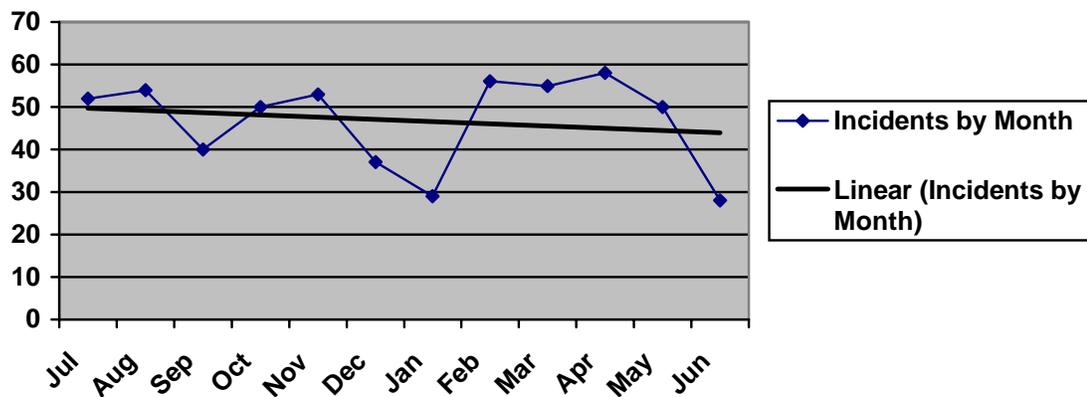
The other Anti Social Behaviour Order was made against a twelve-year-old boy. This was set to run for a period of five years.

Since the granting of both orders in June 2002 both youths have only come to the attention of the Police on one occasion each.

Fifteen sets of parents were issued with Notice Of Seeking Possession. None have gone on to be evicted. Two sets of parents lived in houses, which had been purchased from the Local Authority so no NOSP could be served.

The chart below gives a monthly break down of the number of incidents of Youth and Community Problems from Polis for the period 1 July 2002 and 30 June 2003.

Joint agency interventions were implemented in January 2002 and were firmly established by July 2002 when the chart below starts.



Although on a monthly basis there are peaks and troughs in the number of incidents occurring on the estate the general trend shows a reduction. The peaks in the chart above indicate months where persistent offenders have been identified and then dealt with.

Mirehouse is the only estate within Whitehaven town where a downward trend is being shown in youth disorder or youth related anti social behaviour problems. If a quarter of the incidents occurring within the town were burglary related then as the Police we would do something about it. As youth related incidents are taken at face value then as a service we tend not to deal with them effectively.

When we adopted this approach on the Mirehouse Estate we looked at schemes run by other Forces to address similar problems. The main difference is, that we didn't adopt an approach of sending out letters to parents and there is no database kept of youth's details. This was mainly because we knew we would only be dealing with a small number of individuals.

By using the threat of eviction, arrest, ABC, ASBO and referral to Connexions and the Youth Offending Team, in the last two years the seventeen persistent offenders have not gone on to re offend once they have been effectively dealt with.

Through the threat of eviction parents have had to take control of unruly children.

We have tried to adopt this approach on other estates within the town, but it has not been as successful as it has on Mirehouse. This has mainly been due to the reluctance of residents of other estates to become involved, as they haven't seen youth related disorder as major problem.

Residents of the Mirehouse Estate had been plagued by disorder for years and therefore wanted to do something about it. Through partnership working and a coordinated approach they have been able to achieve this.

Mirehouse is now rated seventh in the Acorn Estates profile.

This approach continues but as the problem is reduced, we are finding that we are dealing with less persistent offenders and identifying less hot spot areas on the estate.

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