

THE TILLEY AWARDS 2004

THE OLDHAM AGAINST CRIME PARTNERSHIP

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TILLEY AWARDS 2004

The formation of the Community Safety Unit as the tactical arm of the Oldham Against Crime Partnership signalled a great step forward in the fight against crime, anti social behaviour and the fear of crime in the borough and heralded a truly joined up approach to problem solving.

The Dean Street Project demonstrates what can be achieved when partner agencies work in unison with common goals and a shared vision. It is important to note that the local community are regarded as a valued member of the partnership and their contribution has been paramount to the success of the project.

The menace of anti social behaviour is one that can only be eradicated with the help of the local community, they are the ones affected by it. The courage, bravery and determination of the residents of Dean Street is a perfect example of what can be achieved when committed individuals are supported by partnership agencies and positive action.

The winning of the national Taking A Stand Awards 2003 by these residents is recognition indeed of their achievements, but also testament to the support and ongoing work of the Oldham Against Crime Partnership.

I have no hesitation in supporting this entry for the 2004 Tilley Awards and wish it every success.

David Baines
Chief Superintendent
Oldham Division
Greater Manchester Police

Martin O'Connell
Co-ordinator
Oldham Community Safety Unit

THE DEAN STREET PROJECT

FAILSWORTH

OLDHAM

SUMMARY

The Oldham Community Safety Unit was formed in the first part of 2003 with the first officers coming into post in February.

The unit is a partnership between Police, Local authority, housing providers and other agencies in the Oldham Against Crime Partnership.

The two main roles of the unit are to deal with Anti social behaviour and to reduce the level of crime across the borough.

Dean Street is an area of Failsworth, Oldham that had been suffering high levels of Anti social behaviour over a number of years. This had escalated at the beginning of 2003 and included intimidation to residents, threats of violence and actual violence, criminal damage and graffiti, Drug abuse, anti social use of motor vehicles and motor cycles and a culture of gangs from outside the area gathering in large numbers on the streets.

The lives of residents had become unbearable and the quality of life had reduced to an unacceptable level.

Environmentally, the area had deteriorated beyond recognition.

Four blocks of maisonette flats on Dean Street had been demolished 2 years previously because of levels of crime and drug abuse. Instead of improving the area, this had actually made it worse with the resultant waste land contributing to the problem and now being used by youths on motor cycles and attracting stolen motor vehicles.

A small number of residents who could stand the situation no longer started to talk to each other in a vain attempt to improve the situation. The feeling amongst them was that they had been badly let down by the authorities, both law enforcement and local Government and that they did not know where to turn.

A local Public Voice On Policing meeting was due to be held locally in March and the ladies decided to attend.

As newly appointed ASBO team leader in the Community Safety Unit, Sam McConnell attended to gauge the level of problems the unit would be facing in the coming months.

The residents began to talk!

Over the next few months' procedures were put in place to counter the problems.

These included ASBOs, acceptable behaviour contracts, injunctions under the housing act, massive programme of witness protection including home link alarms, burglar alarm packages, fireproof letter boxes etc, increased Police and community support officers patrolling the area providing high profile reassurance, involvement of housing providers in enforcing tenancy agreements, community groups and youth groups acting together to improve the local environment, fitting of alleygates to the rear of properties to cut down on anti social behaviour and rear entry burglaries and long term diversionary programmes to stop other children becoming involved in future anti social behaviour.

The Dean Street Project

The Dean Street Area of Failsworth Oldham comprises approximately 200 properties of mixed tenure including Housing associations, registered social landlords, private rented and owner-occupiers.

In the main, the properties are traditional garden terraces separated by rear alleys with small ginnels running between the rear alleys and the street.

A large area of wasteland had been created in the area by the demolition of a development of two storey maisonettes, which had been used for a number of years by drug dealers and other members of the criminal fraternity.

The demolition of these had created almost as many problems as it had solved, with the land becoming overgrown and used by youths to congregate and cause problems for local residents.

The large number of housing providers in the area meant that there was a lack of cohesion in addressing the problem and the residents felt let down by what they considered as the authorities, which included not only the housing providers, but also the local authority and in the main the Police.

The formation of the Oldham Against Crime Partnership Community Safety Unit in February 2003 was the first step in addressing problems in a truly joined up way, with a number of agencies coming together with a common aim. These included Police, Housing providers, youth services, drugs and alcohol teams, ASBO officers, community safety officers and residents organisations.

The local Public Voice On Policing meeting in the Failsworth area was attended by Sam McConnell, the newly appointed Anti Social Behaviour Co-ordinator in the Community Safety Unit, and it became obvious from comments made at the meeting that the problems being encountered in the Dean Street area needed addressing urgently.

Through the community safety unit panels set up to discuss local issues, the problem was addressed and a SARA package initiated to look at the area as part of a problem solving process.

SCANNING

The main problems identified were seen as,

Large numbers of youths gathering on waste land on Dean Street

Riding motor cycles erratically and at speed on the road and pavements

Using foul and abusive language

Urinating in the street

Abusing residents and visitors to the area.

The rear alleys in the area being used as rat runs and hiding places.

ANALYSIS

The group of youths involved numbered between 10 and 15

The group were aged between 14 and 16 years and were predominantly male

The majority of the youths were not local. The ones that did live locally were quickly identified.

Times of greatest problems were identified as weekday evenings and all times during the weekends

Lack of sense of ownership of the area and a feeling of abandonment

No support systems in place to allow residents to report problems with confidence or without fear of intimidation or reprisals.

Lack of visible Police presence to react quickly to incidents, and provide a sense of reassurance to residents.

The fear of crime especially burglary and criminal damage was extremely high with the rear of the properties seen as the most vulnerable areas.

RESPONSE

It was realised that in order to respond effectively to residents complaints, that a system of witness protection and support needed to be implemented at the outset which would allow people to supply information without fear.

From the beginning of the process a group of 5 residents, (all ladies!) had been instrumental in standing up and speaking out against the yobs and these were obviously the most vulnerable. A package of protection measures was put into place, which included,

Home link attack alarms fitted in witness's homes by community safety unit, to allow quick response to problems.

Burglar alarm packages installed in homes funded by housing providers

Target hardening of homes including better locks, fireproof letterboxes etc.

Direct response phone numbers supplied to witnesses for ASBO officers, Crime Reduction Officers, Police Officers.

Members of the ASBO team attended Police briefings to ensure that the extent of the problems likely to be faced by the residents was understood, and the appropriate level of response was achieved.

Police Community Support Officers, who had recently been introduced onto the division, were deployed exclusively in the area to raise public awareness of the Police. They made personal contact with all the witnesses and provided a visible reassurance to members of the public.

Once these measures were in place the process of dealing with the problem could then commence.

The witnesses were interviewed initially to assess the scale of the problem and start the process of evidence gathering.

The parents of known perpetrators were written to, outlining the nature of the problems and the possible consequences if the problems persisted.

Diaries were given to all witnesses to record all incidents of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity.

A briefing package was compiled for the information of Police Officers outlining the problem and containing details of the ASBO team. This was presented at Police briefings on consecutive days so that all Police officers working in the area were fully aware of the situation and actions that were taking place. What happened next, although worrying at the time was not wholly unexpected.

The problems escalated with further groups of youths appearing in the area.

These were older with some of the youths being up to 22 years of age and indeed in some cases, relatives of the original gang members.

Problems reported included;

Threatening and intimidating residents,

Criminal damage,

Drug use

Immediate action was necessary to further protect witnesses and increased target hardening measures were introduced which included CCTV cameras in homes.

The witnesses in the area were different from the majority of witnesses to crime, being known to offenders, associates and their families.

Although supported by the vast majority of people in the area, they were labelled by some members of the community as being "grasses" and informants.

It was important that the trust and support of the public was maintained and that the reassurance of things changing was publicised.

An immediate action was to obtain three interim ASBO's against the most prolific offenders and heavily publicise this.

Once the message was sent out that things were happening and that the behaviour of a small group of individuals would not be tolerated, the next step of long-term improvements could commence.

Further Actions;

Three stand alone ASBO's

Two ASBO's on conviction

One injunction obtained under section 152 Housing Act

Five Acceptable Behaviour Contracts

Numerous warning letters

Referrals to intervention initiatives such as Youth services and the Eden Project, a scheme to involve youth in diversionary activities.

Implementation of "Alleygating" scheme to close off rear alleys used by offenders

Programme of environmental improvements including community clean ups, landscaping and planting of trees and bulbs by local children

Formation of residents association

An important part of the process was effective use of the media in a co-ordinated effort to publicise activities and maintain the reassurance factor.

The local newspapers, the nightly Oldham Chronicle and the weekly Advertiser were both extremely supportive in their reporting of ASBO's and other measures taken.

A leaflet was produced by the community safety unit to publicise court actions against individuals and this was distributed across the areas where the ASBO's were in effect.

Housing providers, Police community support officers and local residents were involved in the delivery process, meaning that all stakeholders had an active part in the procedure.

Long-term sustainability is an important part of the overall improvement of the area, with a number of schemes being implemented.

Alleygates are an ideal solution to restricting access to the rear of the properties, cutting down on incidents of anti social behaviour and other crime at the rear of homes.

Consultation took place with every resident in the area through questionnaires and public meetings, and funding was secured from the property crime task force to allow the gates to be fitted at no cost to the residents.

Areas already fitting gates were contacted and best practice identified. Schemes across the North West of England were visited to look at designs and speak to practitioners and residents groups.

Members of the community were nominated as "block representatives" to act as key references and contact points for contractors and other services such as refuse collection.

Environmental improvements to the area involved consultation with groups such as housing providers, residents groups, local schools, and the local authority.

Funding of £50,000 was secured from the National Lottery Fair Share Awards funds to allow landscaping and the development of a new well-lit car parking area.

Local school children planted trees and bulbs in the newly landscaped areas to give them ownership of the schemes.

Sustained Police activity in the area with regular foot patrols of both Police Officers and Police community support officers.

Regular attendance at community meetings and community safety panel meetings.

Leaflets have been produced by the Community Safety Unit covering various aspects of anti social behaviour and the legislation that is in place to deal with it.

These are intended for a youth audience and will be distributed by members of the unit at schools and youth events to highlight what could happen if they become involved in anti social behaviour.

They are also being given to people who have been subject to ASBO's and acceptable behaviour contracts to explain to them why and what it means to them as an individual.

ASSESSMENT

The benefits to the local community of the actions taken were wide reaching and long term.

1. Massive decrease in incidents of anti-social behaviour and other related crime
2. No burglaries in the area since alleygates were fitted to the rear of the properties
3. Renewed sense of community empowerment
4. Long term environmental improvements including landscaping, car parking, and the clean up of wasteland and alleys.
5. On going youth diversionary projects set up to reduce future anti social behaviour and give local children a sense of ownership of the area. This was started by children being involved in the planting of bulbs and trees in the newly landscaped areas.
6. Renewed confidence in Police and other agencies involved in the area with long term contacts of key players made available to residents.
7. Formation of a strong community forum and residents groups designed to take ownership of future projects such as the development of a community house.
8. Overall winners of the national Take A Stand Awards set up by the Home Office Anti Social Behaviour Unit in recognition of those who tackle anti social behaviour within their communities.

The results achieved were only made possible by the determination of a small number of residents being prepared to stand up against yobs ruining their area.

The joined up approach of all agencies involved allowed them to give evidence to the Anti Social Behaviour Team in the knowledge that protection and reassurance was available from the Crime Reduction Team, Police and Police Community Support Officers.

Housing providers committed themselves to enforcing tenancy agreements to ensure that powers under the housing act were used to the full.

Local elected members supported applications for funding to carry out environmental improvements

The process of renewal in the area is ongoing and long term. The work done so far is the groundwork to allow the people who live in the Dean Street area of Failsworth to take control of their streets.

This can only be done with continued support of all the agencies involved, providing the necessary back up and legal support contained in the relevant legislation.

The formation of an active residents group supported by the Police, Community Safety Unit and housing providers is an important part of this development and allows a genuine two way discussion of perceived problems.

Residents now feel more able to share information with not only public bodies, but also with each other and no longer feel that they are isolated.

The project has been a true example of multi agency working, with all partners actively participating in the problem solving process. Each agency has been supportive of the whole process and continues to fully support the work that is ongoing in the area.

All legal actions taken have been successful and because of the comprehensive evidence gathering carried out by the Police and community safety unit, no witnesses have been required to give direct evidence in court. The successful legal actions are as a direct result of partnership working between all agencies.

After the introduction of Acceptable Behaviour Contracts, 70% of these signing them have not come to notice again and have been diverted away from further anti social behaviour.

The work of the Oldham Against Crime Partnership continues across the borough proving a very successful part of the Local Strategic Partnership

CRIME FIGURES

Comparative crime figures for the area covering Dean Street, Dalton Street, Mather Street area of Failsworth

Crime Type	02/03	03/04	Diff +/-	% Variance
Less serious wounding	11	8	-3	27%
Burglary dwelling	17	7	-10	59%
Criminal damage	48	34	-14	29%
Youths causing annoyance	97	24	-68	75%
Annoyance by motor vehicle	19	5	-14	73%

As can be seen by the figures, the overall number of incidents reported in the area dropped from 192 to 78, a percentage drop of 60%. In the key areas of youths causing annoyance and annoyance by motor vehicles this showed a drop of 73% over the same period.

CHRONOLOGY

From the beginning of the process in March 2003, events can be timetabled and show the ongoing work in the area of all agencies involved and can be summarised as follows;

March 2003

Initial Public Voice On Policing meeting

Evidence gathering started

Witness protection measures commenced, alarm packages fitted etc.

Ongoing high profile Police and Community Support Officer patrols

April 2003

Three ex-parte interim ASBO's obtained

Initial youth intervention measures initiated

May 2003

Three full ASBO's obtained against ringleaders

Public consultation re introduction of Alleygate scheme

June 2003

Two ASBO's on conviction at Magistrates court.

Public meetings held to discuss setting up of community forum and environmental improvements

July 2003

Eden Project and youth services commence providing outreach workers and activities bus to visit the Dean Street area. Still ongoing.

First Alleygates fitted in Dean Street

August 2003

Major environmental works commence to landscape wasteland

September 2003

Alleygates scheme completed.

October 2003

Six Acceptable Behaviour Contracts taken out in conjunction with Failsworth Police on younger youths on the periphery of anti social behaviour

Planting of trees and bulbs by local children on landscaped areas.

November 2003

One Acceptable Behaviour Contract delivered

December 2003

Dean Street Residents Association win first national Taking A Stand Awards awarded by the Home Office to tackle anti social behaviour.

March 2004

Four Acceptable behaviour contracts delivered.

QUOTES

“ They stood together and said enough is enough, but the key for them, the thing that made the difference was the Community Safety Team which was there with them the whole time, on their side, supporting them. The nightmare minority have now got anti social behaviour orders. These mums now feel safer and their children can play in the street. I want every local authority to have a team like I met in Oldham. They are winning back the streets for local people. They did it by working with local people”

LOUISE CASEY, HEAD OF HOME OFFICE ANTI SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR UNIT

“ This is a clear example of what can be done through strong partnership. If more people came forward like this group of mums, and stood strong against anti social behaviour we, along with the police, can help make a difference in neighbourhoods where there are problems”

ANDREW KILBURN, OLDHAM MBC CHIEF EXECUTIVE.

“I very much welcome the comments made and am delighted the government has recognised and paid tribute to the hard work and commitment of everyone involved in reducing anti social behaviour in the borough.”

DAVID BAINES, CHIEF SUPERINTENDENT OLDHAM POLICE.

“It has to be remembered that it takes a great deal of courage to do this. The trouble can escalate before it gets better and that when you need intensive support or witnesses will drop out. Things have been better for a long while, but we are not sitting on our laurels”

SAMANTHA GIBSON, LOCAL RESIDENT

“These gates are fantastic. The alleyways were used as a rat run for youths who were being chased by the Police, so it's easier for them to be caught”

KATH LUMB, LOCAL RESIDENT

APPENDICES

1. Photographs showing, a; after landscaping
b; local children planting trees during landscaping
c; alleygates fitted at the rear of Dean Street

2. Leaflet distributed in the Failsworth area showing Youths subject to Anti Social Behaviour Orders.

3. Extract from Home Office publication Crime Reduction News highlighting winners of national Taking A Stand Awards.

4. Press cuttings highlighting work carried out in the Dean Street area

5. Leaflets covering ASBO's, ABC's etc.