

Tilley Award 2006

Application form

Please ensure that you have read the guidance before completing this form. By making an application to the awards, entrants are agreeing to abide by the conditions laid out in the Guidance. Please complete the following form in full and within the word limit. Failure to do so could result in disqualification from the competition.

Completed application forms should be e-mailed to Tricia Perkins; patricia.perkins@homeoffice.gsi.gov.uk

All entries must be received by noon on Friday 28th April 2006. No entries will be accepted after this time/date. Any queries on the application process should be directed to Tricia Perkins on 0207 035 0262. Any queries regarding other aspects of the awards should be directed to Michael Wilkinson on 0207 035 0247 or Lindsey Poole on 0207 035 0234.

Please tick box to indicate whether the entry should be considered for the main award, the criminal damage award or both;

Main award

Criminal Damage Award

Both Awards

1. Details of application

Title of the project Queen Street, Crack Houses

Name of force/agency/CDRP: Cumbria Constabulary

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors): PS Mark Wear QPM

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Full postal address: Whitehaven Police Station, Scotch Street, Whitehaven, Cumbria, CA28 7NN

Telephone number: 01900 602422

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Name of endorsing senior representative Mr Neil Rhodes

Position and rank of endorsing senior representatives(s) Assistant Chief Constable

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s)

Cumbria Constabulary

Carleton Hall

Penrith

Cumbria Constabulary CA10 2AU

2. Summary of application

In no more than 400 words please use this space to describe your project. Include details of the problem that was addressed a description of the initiative, the main intervention principles and what they were designed to achieve, the main outcomes of project particularly in relation to the problem, evidence was used in designing the programme and how the project is evaluated.

Upper Queen Street is situated on the outer edge of Whitehaven town centre. During the summer of 2005 an increase in the number of crime and disorder related incidents, which the police and the local housing provider were being called to deal with could be seen.

Prior to the summer of 2005 the area had been relatively crime and disorder free.

The area consists of two and three storey blocks of terraced flats. The flats were initially owned by Copeland Borough Council but are now owned either privately or by the Registered Social Landlord, Copeland Homes

Analysis of the incidents revealed that they were associated to two properties on the Street. Both properties were directly opposite each other, one being on the second floor and one being on the third floor of the blocks of flats. Both flats were single bedroom and were occupied by single males.

The types of incidents associated with both flats could range from verbal abuse being directed at residents, gangs of up to ten people fighting in the street, damage being caused to doors and windows and alcohol related disorder.

Further analysis of incidents reported to both the police and Copeland Homes revealed that incidents occurring at both properties were being associated to one individual, who was not a tenant. This individual was a known drug user who attracted other drug users to the area.

To deal with the problems associated to the street, partnership working between Copeland Homes, the police and local residents was implemented.

The measures put in place to deal with the problem included the targeting of known drug users, execution of drugs warrants, the use of 'crack house' closure powers to deal with two problem flats, the use of Housing Act injunction powers to exclude the main offender from the area and support packages offered to vulnerable tenants.

Partnership working has resulted in the problem being effectively dealt with which has restored the quality of life of residents in the area.

3. Description of project

Describe the project following the guidance given in no more than 4000 words

Scanning

Upper Queen Street is situated on the outer edge of Whitehaven town centre. During the summer of 2005 an increase in the number of disorder related incidents, which the police and the local housing provider were being called to deal with could be seen.

Analysis

Whitehaven town centre is predominantly made up of retail premises and therefore contains the towns' main shopping area. CCTV covers the town centre area, this coverage does not extend to Queen Street.

To the North of the town centre there are a number of streets, which have been developed as residential areas. These areas consist of two and three storey blocks of terraced flats. The flats were initially owned by Copeland Borough Council but are now owned either privately or by the Registered Social Landlord, Copeland Homes.

Copeland Homes took over the properties from the Borough Council in the summer of 2004. The properties within the flats complexes consist of one and two bedroom flats. Either elderly or retired residents predominantly occupy the flats.

Upper Queen Street is a short stretch of road, which runs at right angles to two of the main roads on the outskirts of the town centre. This part of the street contains fifty flats with the blocks being on both sides of the road. The blocks are three storeys high. There is also a sheltered housing development on the road which contains a further six flats.

Access to the rear of the flats is gained via archways in the centre of each block. These archways also lead to car parking spaces.

Over recent years the area has been relatively crime and disorder free.

In 2002 this area of Upper Queen Street had experienced significant problems of disorder as a result of a number of homeless youths being given tenancies in the blocks of flats. At the time the Council and the Police had worked together to resolve the problem, through the removal of tenants from the area who were causing problems.

To prevent the problem re occurring the council had introduced a 'local lettings policy' with the condition that flats in this part of the town including those on Upper Queen Street would only be occupied by residents who were over forty years of age.

This had resulted in the area being a desirable place to live for both private tenants and those renting from the Borough Council and more recently from Copeland Homes.

On taking over the management of the flats from the Borough Council, Copeland Homes had adopted the local lettings policy introduced by the Borough council.

In the summer of 2005 the police started to get called on a regular basis to deal with incidents of crime and disorder, which was occurring on Upper Queen Street. The area is just outside the view of the town CCTV system

Analysis of these incidents revealed that they were associated to two properties on the Street. Both properties were directly opposite each other, one being on the second floor and one being on the third floor of the blocks of flats. Both flats were single bedroom and were occupied by single males over the age of 40.

Flat one is on the third floor of the block and is occupied by AF. AF is unemployed and through police involvement is known to be a low-level drug abuser.

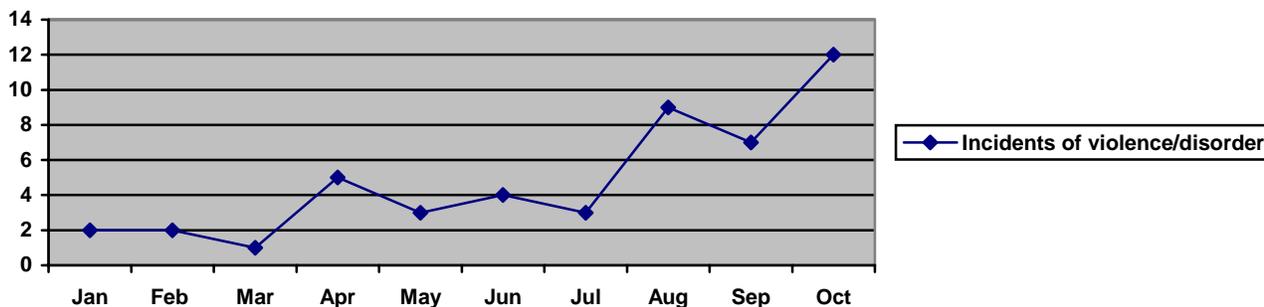
Flat two is on the second floor of the block and is occupied by MG. MG was previously homeless before he took over the tenancy of the flat. He is 47 years old and is known to be an alcoholic.

When representatives of Copeland Homes were contacted it was found that they were also receiving complaints about disorder associated with the flats, these complaints, were being made, by the residents group for the local area, known as the 'Barry's Corner, Management Group.' Barry's Corner is a local name given to a part of Upper Queen Street.

In the block where AF lived, Copeland Homes had attempted to let a vacant property. The tenant remained in the property for approximately two hours prior to leaving due to the high level of disorder he experienced during this short space of time. Being unable to let the property meant that Copeland Homes were losing £300 per month in rent.

The types of disorder associated with both flats could range from verbal abuse being directed at residents, gangs of up to ten people fighting in the street, damage being caused to doors and windows and alcohol related disorder. Repairing damage caused to properties in the area had cost Copeland Homes in excess of £1500 between July and October 2005.

Analysis of complaints made to the police and to Copeland Homes in relation to violence and disorder revealed that between January and June 2005 incidents occurring on Upper Queen Street were negligible. From July 2005 an increase of incidents occurring the street could be seen. Responding to this area of town was causing an unnecessary draw on Police resources. This is reflected in the chart below.



Further analysis of incidents reported to both the police and Copeland Homes revealed that incidents occurring at both properties were being associated to one individual, TC.

TC is an active criminal in the West Cumbria area. He is 35 years old and is involved in incidents of minor crime, such as shoplifting, and disorder. TC was not a tenant in the area. Through police intelligence it was known that he befriended vulnerable people and would use their homes as his own, he would also steal from them. He is a known drug user, the police had intelligence, which suggested he dealt drugs at street level and he was also an associate of the resident of flat one.

Copeland Homes had considered dealing with the problem by evicting their tenants. They were however reluctant to do this as a previous eviction had cost almost £15,000 and had taken two years to obtain. Eviction was therefore regarded as a last resort.

From evidence provided by Copeland Homes and by the Barry's Corner residents group it was believed that TC had befriended and was living with the occupier of flat two. Representatives from Copeland Homes had spoken to the occupier of flat two but he had denied that TC was living with him.

Problem Definition

From the scanning and analysis the problem could be defined as one of crime and anti social behaviour associated with either the occupants or visitors to the two flats on Upper Queen Street. The problem was seriously affecting the quality of life of residents in the area.

The objective was therefore set as reducing/irradiating the crime and disorder in the area by dealing with the occupants and visitors to both flats.

Response

Police Covert Human Intelligence Sources (CHIS) were tasked with gathering information on the activity, which was occurring in the area. This intelligence gathering was targeted towards TC. The intelligence that was provided allowed the police to identify nine known drug users plus their associates who were visiting both flats. The information provided identified that the common link between all of the visitors was TC, who would migrate between both properties. This information gathering was carried out during September 2005.

Residents especially those who were members of the Barry's Corner management group were issued with nuisance neighbour diaries by Copeland Homes. Residents were encouraged to record all incidents, as it had become apparent, when meeting with residents that they were only contacting the police or Housing Officers when serious incidents were occurring, for example people fighting in the street.

Using the Intelligence gathered by CHIS and the evidence gathered by the residents, analysts from the police were able to build an association chart of those visiting the properties. This split the nine known visitors and their associates in to two separate groups. An older group of individuals who would visit flat. This group were known as active drug abusers within the town. The second were teenagers who were visiting and using flat two.

The common link to both groups and both flats was TC.

At the beginning of October 2005 a stop search operation was mounted in the area of Upper Queen Street. This saw a number of known drug users being searched in the area and two arrests being made for the possession of amphetamine. By walking the area the officers involved were also able to gather evidence of drugs paraphernalia being left lying about in the area, for example used syringes being left in communal and waste disposal areas. In

Evidence gathered from CHIS and during the stop and search operation was used to obtain Magistrates Court warrants under the Misuse of Drugs Act. These were executed at both flat one and flat two.

In flat one the police recovered a small amount of amphetamine and cannabis. Evidence that the amphetamine was being prepared for injection was also found. This included citric acid, spoons for cooking the citric and amphetamine on and used needles. On forcing entry to the flat one person was found injecting himself with amphetamine. Three people were arrested at this flat for possessing controlled drugs.

In flat two the police found evidence that amphetamine was being prepared for injection. No controlled drugs were found in this flat.

TC was not present at either flat. While at flat two the police took the opportunity to speak to the occupier MG. He confirmed that TC was living with him. He had taken over control of the flat and was bringing his associates to the flat to abuse drugs. In return he was supplying MG with large amounts of alcohol.

As a result of the evidence gathered during the response the police, Copeland Homes and representatives from the Barry's Corner management group met to decide on the best course of action to deal with the problems on Upper Queen Street. It was decided that fast action was required to restore a reasonable quality of life to residents in the area.

As an initial step it was agreed that the police would apply to the Court to have both properties closed using 'crack house' Closure powers provided by the anti social behaviour act. This allows properties to be closed where class A drugs are used, supplied or produced and where the use, supply or production is associated with serious nuisance or disorder.

Evidence of serious nuisance or disorder had been provided to the police and Housing officers through the complaints made by residents.

No class A drugs had been found at either flat. Amphetamine in its powdered form is a class B drug, however when prepared for injection it becomes a class A drug. It was decided that we would present a case to the court that as a result of needles, spoons and other drug paraphernalia found in the flats along with the powdered amphetamine that this satisfied the test for class A drug misuse.

Prior to the service of Closure Orders at both flats discussion took place as to what to do with the occupiers, as we did not want to be seen to be 'throwing them out on to the streets.' It was agreed that the occupier of flat one was non vulnerable and therefore any action taken against him was brought about through his own fault. The tenant of this property was therefore to be offered 28 days emergency accommodation.

In the case of the occupier of flat two it was agreed that because of his alcoholism he was vulnerable and would therefore be moved to a new flat away from the town centre. This resident would also be offered a housing support package to ensure problems did not re occur.

Closure Orders were served at the property in mid November with the full Closures being granted Whitehaven Magistrates Court the day after the notices were served. The police solicitor successfully argued that the misuse of amphetamine satisfied the test for use of class A drugs. The serious nuisance and disorder test was satisfied through the complaints made by residents.

The occupier of flat one refused to accept the offer of further accommodation; he terminated his tenancy and moved from the area.

The occupier of flat two was moved to a flat outside the town centre, he accepted the offer of help from Copeland Homes. This resulted in a support package being put in place, which ensured he was claiming the correct benefits, had furniture in his flat and had sufficient food amongst other interventions. He would not accept any help to deal with his alcoholism.

At the outset it was identified that TC preyed on vulnerable people. Further evidence of this was gathered during the response. To prevent further problems with him Copeland homes applied to the local County Court to have TC made subject of a Housing Act Injunction to curb his behaviour.

This injunction was granted and excludes TC from the area of Upper Queen Street, excludes him from entering any property managed by Copeland Homes and prevents him from acting in manner, which would cause people harassment alarm or distress.

Assessment

Through the partnership working of Copeland Homes, residents and the police problems, which were identified in the area, were resolved.

It would have been very easy for the police to treat this as 'another drugs operation' and although no doubt arrests would have been made and drugs recovered, this would not have dealt with the underlying cause of the problem on Upper Queen Street. A drugs operation would not have offered long-term respite to residents or restored their quality of life.

Removal of both tenants from the area as quickly as possible was the correct course of action. It would have been impossible to deal with all visitors going to both flats.

Problems with the tenant of flat one have not re occurred at his new home. This tenant terminated his tenancy with Copeland homes thereby negating the need to implement eviction proceedings. This potentially saved Copeland Homes £15,000.

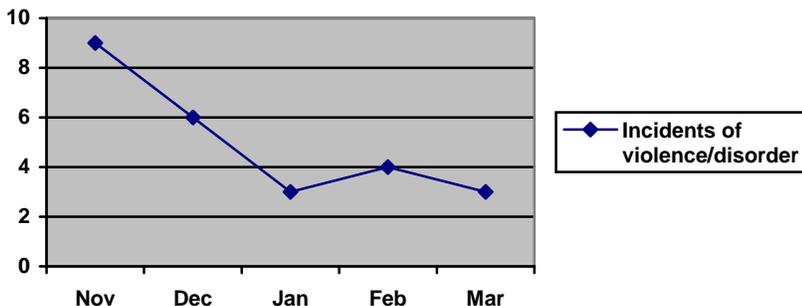
No problems or issues have arisen as a result of the re housing of the tenant from flat two.

The action taken by the partners has produced a reduction in incidents of disorder reported on Upper Queen Street. This has meant that the police have no longer had to respond to the area and as there has been no displacement of the problem there has been any need to respond to incidents involving individuals from Queen Street.

The policing operation including the closures cost approximately £5000, it was viewed that this was 'good value' especially as it has stopped police having to respond to incidents in the area.

Incidents of damage in the area have been eradicated Copeland Homes have therefore saved money by not having to carry out further repairs to their properties.

A reduction in incidents since the action has been taken is reflected in the chart below.



The relief of residents when Closure Orders were served was evident when they came out on to the street in dressing gowns to clap and cheer the police and Housing Officers as both properties were being boarded up.

The argument of amphetamine satisfying the test of a class A drug was successfully presented to the court.

The benefit of using anti social behaviour legislation in the form of a 'crack house' closure and a Housing Act Injunction meant that hearsay evidence could be used. This in effect meant that the police and Housing Officers gave evidence in both cases on behalf of residents. No residents had to attend either court case, which was a great relief to them.

In normal circumstances Copeland homes would have employed a solicitor to obtain their Injunction. This would have been done at a cost of £1,500. On this occasion however the local Housing Officer presented the case to the Court. By doing this, the action cost Copeland Homes £150, to lodge the paperwork with the County Court, there were no other legal costs incurred.

In the case of TC he has not caused problems in the Whitehaven area since being made subject of the Injunction. He has also not caused problems in the area where he currently lives.

The actions taken led to considerable coverage in the local media which residents saw as positive as it highlighted the fact that they were willing to work in partnership with the police and landlord to address problems in their area.

After the actions were taken the words of one resident highlighted the extent of the problem and the relief that the action had provided, 'For months we've been living in hell, noise, fighting and needles dumped in the street. People have been afraid to go out. Now, we've got our 'street' back'