

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 **Holloway's Counterfeit Cancer**

Name of force/agency/CDRP: **Finsbury Park Ward Safer Neighbourhoods Team, MPS.**

Name of one contact person with position/rank (this should be one of the authors): **PC Tim Cooke.**

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Name of endorsing senior representatives(s) **Supt. Mark Terry.**

Position and rank of endorsing senior representatives(s) **Dep. BOCU Commander.**

Full address of endorsing senior representatives(s)
**Islington Police Station
2 Tolpuddle Street
Islington, London, N1 0YY**

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.

The Problem:

For almost nine years an area of North London has been beset with violence and intimidation by organized groups of men selling counterfeit cigarettes and tobacco. The Nags Head shopping area, in Holloway N7 has seen up to sixty cigarette sellers joining together into several large gangs and fighting a turf war for the more lucrative spots to sell their products.

Local residents, shoppers and businesses have all suffered harassment & intimidation by these gangs. In early 2005 local businesses were suffering from a drop in trade and the levels of violence associated with these men were escalating.

Our Analysis:

Research into the problem was co-ordinated by the Police team working in the area, the Finsbury Park Ward Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT). The problem was split into four broad topics and the responsibility for each was shared among partner organisations according to their suitability and prior knowledge of the area.

The four topics were;

- a) The individuals selling the cigarettes - the sellers were predominantly illegal immigrants, male and claimed to be Iraqi-Kurds. Little else was known of these men or the products they were selling.
- b) The individuals buying the cigarettes – in order to fully understand the problem we needed to understand how and why the market for these products developed as widely as it had.
- c) The tobacco products – where did the sellers get the cigarettes and tobacco. How did they get so many of them so cheaply in the UK?
- d) The location – what were the reasons for the problem occurring in this particular place and could we change the location to reduce or even eliminate the problem?

The Response:

Results from the analysis led the partners to agree with four areas of engagement;

- a) Reducing the visual impact of large groups of sellers in the area.
- b) Educating the buyers as to the origin, content and legality of the products being sold.
- c) Assisting the sellers by putting them in contact with outreach workers and other outside agencies.
- d) Improvements to the location so as to reduce the problem and imbue a sense of community into the area.

The Assessment:

The assessment of each of the four responses was completed in the same manner as the analysis. Each response was looked at separately and three key questions were asked of each;

- a) To what extent does the problem still exist and how effective was the response?
- b) In designing and implementing the response, what has been learned from the experience?
- c) What could we do differently in the future to improve the response?

3. Description of project

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

The Problem:

Whilst the Police are not the only agency with a responsibility for dealing with illegal street trade, the community around the Nags Head shopping area in north London, certainly felt that the police should be doing more to halt the illegal trade of cigarettes in their area. In early 2005 the newly formed Finsbury Park Ward Safer Neighbourhoods Team (SNT) responded to their requests and started developing a coordinated approach to policing this problem.

The Nags Head shopping area is the largest retail area in Holloway and attracts many thousands of visitors everyday. The area has two indoor markets, an indoor shopping mall and is surrounded by large housing estates on all sides. There are two main roads, Holloway Road and Seven Sisters Road N7 which intersect at a junction called "The Nags Head" Between these roads and the Shopping centre, the whole area is laced with passages and alleyways, unused yards and smaller connecting roads.

In the last nine years the street trade of cigarettes and tobacco has become an established, if undesirable, part of the local neighbourhood. Up to sixty individuals will stand in several large groups around the area with carrier bags full of cheap cigarettes and tobacco. These groups of mainly Kurdish men will fight each other for their space on the pavement and then proceed to harass and intimidate members of the public whilst selling their goods.

Prior to 2005 the area was patrolled by a dedicated team from Revenue and Customs who worked alongside officers from immigration and LBI Street Trading. Police involvement was largely as a result of individual calls and was at best sporadic with no coordinated approach. In late 2004 the Revenue and Customs team were reassigned to other areas and shortly afterwards the SNT took the lead in policing the area.

Analysis:

At the outset very little was known about any aspect of the problem. Much of the information known about the cigarette sellers was hearsay and very little research had been done on the area or the people living and working there.

Together with the town centre coordinator the SNT made contact with other interested agencies and organisations. Initially SNT officers, along with Transport for London (TFL), LBI Street Trading, and Immigration compiled information on the area, the sellers, their circumstances using information already at hand. The information shared on these men revealed that the problem was more extensive and highly organized than was previously assumed.

The proposed analysis required that the information could be split into four categories in order to enable a suitable division of responsibility according to each a partners existing expertise and function in the area.

The four categories were;

- The individuals selling the cigarettes;

Prior to the analysis most information about the sellers was based upon details given by the sellers themselves to either Police or Immigration. There were two organisations which brought us invaluable insight into this element of the problem. The Kurdish Information and Advocacy Centre (KIAC) were commissioned to provide outreach services to the Kurdish community in the area. KIAC works in partnership with the SNT, the Islington Drugs Alcohol Action Team (IDAAT), the Community Safety Partnership and LBI. As well as providing a range of services to the cigarette sellers, KIAC has been able to bring new insight into the organised nature of the problem and the problems faced by the sellers while living in London. The National Asylum Seekers Association also provided the partners with information on assistance available to the sellers, both financially and in terms of their housing and welfare.

- The individuals buying the cigarettes;

The Islington Primary Care Trust (IPCT) working with IDAAT and the SNT provided surveys of people living and working in the area. The surveys asked both open questions, such as peoples opinions on the problem and their attitude to smoking, along with more pointed questions about whether they had ever bought from the sellers or had they ever been intimidated or harassed by them.

- The products being sold;

Information on the source of the tobacco products was sought from Revenue and Customs, together with the Tobacco Manufacturers Association (TMA) and the Tobacco Companies Brand Enforcement Departments. Members of the public assumed that the products were the result of cross channel smuggling by the sellers, although the sellers' status in the UK actually prevented them from being able to leave the country to buy the goods.

- The location;

A study of the location was necessary to determine the reasons why the trade was prolific in this area. According to the TMA the problem was on a larger scale than anywhere else in the country. It was hoped that such a study would lead to suggestions being made that affect the trade and cause a reduction in the problem overall or even remove the problem completely.

The results of this research led to the following conclusions being drawn;

- The problem was much larger and more sophisticated than was previously presumed. The cigarette selling was driven by a need to pay back a debt owed by many of the sellers to people traffickers that had helped them to travel to the UK. Some of the sellers owed as much £15,000. Their status in the UK was such that none of them were allowed to work legitimately and the benefits system entitled them to just £30 per week. Most of the sellers therefore viewed their trade as their only means of paying their debts. The sellers had gravitated toward London to be with other Iraqi-Kurds already in the area. Indeed many of them live together in cramped conditions, sometimes six to a room. Despite selling many hundreds of pounds worth of cigarettes each week, many have no outward signs of any wealth whatsoever.
- The trade occurs at five strategic locations within the shopping area. Each location is controlled by a specific group of sellers and new sellers can pay up to £5000 to join any one group. Violence against any other sellers, council officials, Police and shopkeepers in the area is common place. At least two of the sellers have been stabbed in 2005. Each group will organise itself, with maybe only one or two men actually holding and selling the products. Others work as lookouts for police, a banker who will hold all the money for the day and then there are any number of salesmen who drum up trade by approaching people in the street.
- People living, shopping and working in the area feel harassed, intimidated and distressed by these large groups gathering around the town centre. This has led to some choosing not to shop in the area any longer. Many shopkeepers and/or their staff have been threatened by the sellers in order to hide the seller or his cigarettes from Police.
- An environmental visual audit took into account areas which had been left to decay and become the local dumping grounds for all sorts of waste and litter. Other issues studied were the amounts of street furniture and clutter on the pavements causing pedestrian 'pinch points' and reducing the straight line visibility along the streets.
- The tobacco products are sold at approximately half the normal shop price. Almost all of the tobacco and cigarettes are counterfeit and are of Chinese origin. Each group of sellers buys in bulk from a local supplier. Compared to the genuine product the cigarettes contain up to 160% more tar, 80% more nicotine, 133% more carbon monoxide and 500% more cadmium, (a carcinogen linked to lung, kidney and digestive tract disorders). Many people who admitted to smoking these products stated that the tobacco was not good quality and 'tasted different' to their usual brand.
- The use of international money transfer agencies is widespread with large sums of money being transferred to countries outside the EU. Several of the sellers are card carrying members of the PKK, a Kurdish political group that has previously been linked to terrorist attacks in Turkey and the Middle East.

The Response.

The results of the analysis showed quite clearly four separate areas in need of some positive action.

- **Reducing the visual impact of the groups in the area.**

This single topic was agreed to be the major cause of concern from people living and working in the area. It was apparent that when the men were dispersed, even just for a few minutes by a passing patrol, despite the sellers still being in the area as individuals, the impact their presence had on the area was likely to be much reduced.

Initial attempts to disperse these groups by the SNT were quickly revised. Traditional uniformed patrols did little more than cause the groups to be aware of a Police presence. The cigarette sellers posted lookouts in the area and the groups moved from location to location to avoid detection. Each member of a group had two mobile phone handsets. The second of these handsets was always on the '3' network and was set up to send a group text, taking just seconds to send an alert of Police approaching.

In March 2005 the SNT received training on mountain bikes and with the backing of residents from three local housing estates funding was made available through the local area housing office to purchase mountain bikes and equipment for each member of the SNT. This enabled officers to approach the groups a speed and patrol more effectively across the whole area.

Both uniformed and plain-clothes patrols were now combined with mobile cycle patrols. Initially this led to large seizures of cigarettes and tobacco and an increase in prosecutions for public order offences & possessing counterfeit goods. Again the gangs quickly adapted by carrying only a few packets of tobacco at a time and preferring to hide the bulk of their supply locally. Officers were also confronted with individuals volunteering to be arrested for a minor offence. It was well known to the sellers that an officer doing paperwork for an arrest would not return to the area for several hours, if at all, that day. This then left the remaining group unhindered in their trade.

To combat the need to arrest for these minor offences an arrangement was made with LBI Street Trading for officers to complete written statements of trademark offences and offences of street trading. These statements were then used by the LBI to successfully prosecute the groups while freeing officers to continue with community reassurance patrols.

The analysis also highlighted that CPS prosecutions resulted in disproportionately low penalties for street trading offences due in part to these offences being heard in Magistrates' court side by side with more serious offences. The LBI prosecutions were all heard together and prior to each hearing LBI presented community impact statements to the court in order that the Magistrate was aware of the scale of the problem.

Along with the Antisocial Behaviour Unit at Islington Police Station, SNT officers placed a request for an exclusion zone order covering the area and surrounding streets utilising legislation from the Antisocial Behaviour Act 2003. An order under part 4 of the act empowers officers to exclude from the area, members of any group causing harassment alarm or distress to members of the public, or otherwise be arrested for a breach of the order. This legislation requires a great deal of resources. A small team such as the SNT could not enforce this order alone and officers from Transport for London gave a great deal of help as well as other borough police teams.

- **Raising public awareness of the issue.**

The second area of focus, educating the public about the problem, was led by the Nags Head coordinator. Working closely with the Islington Primary Care Trust (IPCT), there have been several 'hit days' where local and national media have been involved in promoting the problem. BBC's Watchdog programme carried a broadcast surrounding the issues of the counterfeit sales at the Nags Head promoting the issues being tackled by the partnership. The IPCT have provided the personnel, throughout the last 12 months, to run a weekly quit stall inside the Nags Head shopping centre, informing the public about our concerns.

In January & February 2006 the Nags Head Coordinator organised a public awareness campaign. The campaign focused heavily on advertising on buses and bus stops, on the London underground and in the local press. The message given across was of the possible consequences of buying the illicit tobacco both in terms of the health issues and also criminal liability. The intention is that any local campaign is matched with a wider pan London

campaign to ensure that the message gets through to those living outside the borough. After various discussions with Revenue & Customs and a meeting with those responsible for publicity and Marketing in LBI, Customs have agreed to support our local campaign, and if it is a success, follow it up with a pan-London initiative. The campaign was produced in partnership with the IPCT and Revenue & Customs, who both agreed to provide match funding.

- **Giving assistance to the cigarette sellers.**

As already explained above these men are victims of circumstance. In traveling to the UK many of them have become involved with underground gangs who financed their travel. Many of the sellers state that they are forced to pay large sums of money back to organised gangs. This information is supported by KIAC. Police regularly find sellers with hundreds of pounds on them. However, they show no visible signs of wealth, with sparsely furnished accommodation and wearing the same clothes most days.

KIAC was established as a registered charity in 1991. It provides information and advice to the Kurdish community from Iraq. The organisation supports its clients by providing advice on immigration, health, housing, education, drugs and family issues. KIAC also provides advocacy on behalf of its clients to a range of services.

In early 2005 the SNT, working with IDAAT, submitted an application to LBI to assist in the funding of KIAC to enable the provision of outreach workers to target the cigarette sellers around the Nags Head. It was recognised that many of these men required access to appropriate resources in order to deter them being involved in the cigarette selling trade and may then lead to more serious anti social behavior. LBI funded the project with £6000 from their Building Safer Communities Fund and other income was sourced from Comic Relief and BBC Children in Need.

As a result KIAC now has two outreach workers working closely with up to 40 of the cigarette sellers. The funding facilitated their training in regard to LBI outreach policies and KIAC also offers drop-in sessions at its offices near by.

- **Changes to the Location.**

LBI developed the Spotlight Nags Head initiative. The campaign aim is to make lasting improvements to the local area. The Spotlight project covers all aspects of the street environment and is designed to coordinate activities across all the partner agencies involved. Through the initiative various changes have occurred to the area that has assisted in the problem of the cigarette sellers. TFL widened the footways in Seven Sisters Road to allow better pedestrian access to the area and prevented the groups of sellers from blocking the whole footway.

Street furniture, used extensively by the cigarette sellers to conceal both themselves and tobacco products, including recycling bins, railings and disused telephone boxes, were removed by LBI Street Management team. The recycling facilities were later reinstalled on a nearby housing estate where they were better situated. A team of workers now removes graffiti and fly posters. Extra collections of business waste help to keep the pavements clear of obstacles thus preventing any easy concealment. The improvements in the appearance of the area also help reduce the visual impact these men have in the community thus reducing the fear of crime.

As a part of the regeneration project for the area LBI commissioned the installation of six dedicated community safety cameras to cover the pedestrian areas around the Nags Head and in particular the identified areas for cigarette selling and other street crime. SNT officers have authority for the covert surveillance of the gangs and their operation. These cameras have provided evidence for several prosecutions that are now pending action by LBI legal.

In March 2006 an SNT led environmental visual audit led to a further commitment of £20,000 from LBI Environment & Regeneration Department towards improved street lighting and security fencing to the rear of vulnerable shop premises and around a playground of a nearby primary school.

Assessment.

Have the groups been dispersed?

Continuing patrols in the area by the SNT in the first few months of 2006 have allowed for an almost daily assessment of the situation. The presence of the cigarette sellers is still apparent throughout the area. However, the overall situation has now changed. The sellers no longer find it easy to trade in the open manner to which they had become accustomed. On an average day a group of sellers will now number just three or four individuals as opposed to the 12 to 15 that it had been. Officers carried out arrests on more than 120 occasions in 2005 for street trading

related offences and this has doubtless assisted in this reduction. With so few men trading this renders them almost invisible to the general public in such a busy shopping area.

In 2005 officers seized more than 350,000 cigarettes and in excess of 150kg of tobacco from the area. The sellers no longer offer their tobacco for sale by carrying large bundles of cigarettes and tobacco under their arms. Instead they now choose to carry just a few packets inside their pockets rather than run the risk of losing a large quantity. Also, approaching customers tends to draw attention to themselves and the sellers now appear to rely on a customer finding them rather than the other way around. This has reduced the number of complaints Police receive about harassment by these men.

... and public awareness?

Information supplied from KIAC suggests that the income these men make from the trade has fallen significantly in the last 12 months. The sellers themselves speak of the low quality of their products and openly smoke shop bought genuine cigarettes themselves, preferring them to those they sell.

Indications from the IPCT are that the public is at least better aware of the health concerns over these cigarettes and tobacco. Local supermarkets have reported an increase in tobacco sales over the year and when coupled with the fall in sales of the counterfeit products it is hoped that this is at least in part due to the public awareness campaign.

Continued surveys by police recruits from the Metropolitan Police training school at Hendon have shown a steady increase in the numbers of people aware of the issues. However, the studies are also inconclusive about whether this awareness is being translated into a refusal to purchase the counterfeit product.

Assisting the sellers.

This role was undertaken almost exclusively by KIAC. The initial uptake of a wide range of services that KIAC offers by the sellers was slow. This was countered by the introduction of two new outreach workers who proceeded to take the services to them.

In their end of year report to the LBI KIAC listed a range of provision that has been accessed over the last twelve months including legal representation, help in seeking financial assistance, and a surgery which has been attended by up to 20 individuals.

Changes to the location.

The biggest success here has been the widening of the pavement at critical points around the area. Together with the removal of street furniture, this has allowed the public to shop unhindered by people getting in their way.

Businesses in the area have also been instrumental in tackling this part of the problem. Several of the large stores in Holloway Road cleared a largely unused area to the rear of their stores that had become a dumping ground for business waste and refuse over several years which provided areas of concealment for sellers and their products. The Nags Head Market installed a waste compactor and arranged its waste bins in such a manner as to remove a previous hiding place for the cigarette sellers. A by-product of this was the improvement of fire safety and security for the stores backing onto this area as well as the market.

Conclusion.

Further progression and enhancement of the above strategies is envisaged over the next 12 months with emphasis on developing closer working practices between all the partners. Consideration is now being given to various suggestions from partners on how to progress this problem in the next 12 months.

A presentation to the Council leader and other senior council members, the local Police borough commander, and other departmental heads from across the borough took place in February 2006, where a discussion around the following proposals took place, drawing upon our experiences of the last year.

- The continued targeting of customers with an emphasis on educating them on the issues involved. The success of the campaign this year was highlighted by the sellers' admission that their sales had fallen, together with an apparent increase in sales through local shops. Attempts to develop a media strategy for all the partners to raise the public perception of the problem will also have a greater impact than current

sporadic efforts.

- LBI is to continue to lead on prosecuting for street trading and other associated offences. However due to the increased number of cases being handed to LBI Legal there must now be consideration given to dedicated officers for these roles;
- A proposal was also made that there is a single point of contact at the LBI Legal Department with a dedicated percentage of their time given to this issue. It is hoped that this contact would better enable the handling of individual cases and reduce the recent delays in prosecutions being initiated.
- The borough commander has agreed a proposal for a dedicated town centre police team. Funding from LBI for the new team has been agreed and applications are currently being sought. This dedicated team will allow a more effective policing approach than has previously been the case and free the SNT to carry out the other required duties of a community police team.
- It will fall to that team carry out research to assess the suitability of a local bylaw to prosecute more efficiently those involved in illegal street trading. Current legislation for street trading offences carries fines well below the sums being earned hourly by these sellers and has not proved an effective deterrent. Further research will be done into the possibilities of a fixed penalty notice or on-the-spot fine in order to further reduce bureaucracy.
- Consideration to be given as to whether additional resources should be targeted to establish potential links between cigarette sellers and organised crime / terrorism. Officers from the Serious Crime division of the Metropolitan Police have shown an interest in taking up this part of the future response.

A working group made up of representatives from the partners has now been established. Quarterly meetings allow for a more targeted approach and closer working practices than previously occurred. The ultimate aim of removing the illegal cigarette sellers from the area has yet to be achieved. As the solid foundation of partnership working demonstrated above continues to grow and develop it is finally a realistic possibility.