

Reducing Burglary Initiative Project Summary

Fordbridge, Solihull

Introduction and overview

Round 1 of the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) was built upon a strong evidence base of operational research, which had identified types of measures that can be effective in reducing burglary in local areas. A key objective of the RBI was to find out what works best where. Sixty three Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) were funded by Round 1 of the RBI. These projects were encouraged to develop innovative burglary reduction strategies. As a result, a wide range of interventions was implemented in a variety of contexts making use of different principles.

This paper presents a summary of one of these SDPs where the main intervention methods implemented were:

- Target hardening vulnerable properties
- Installation of alley gates
- Installation of electronic entry systems for multi-dwelling properties
- Improvements to street lighting
- Provision of access to leisure facilities for young people – in the ‘open’ environment and in organised leisure facilities.
- Outreach work with local young people.

Between project before and after periods, there was a net fall in the number of burglaries of 12 per cent in the project area, when controlling for burglary trends in the rest of the Police Force Area¹. The project was also found to be cost effective.

1. Intelligence

Intelligence involves gathering and analysing information on crime problems and their consequences, and diagnosing their causes.

General context

The project area is located within a large conurbation. The borough as a whole is an affluent area; however, the wards of the project area suffer from significant social and economic difficulties. Unemployment levels in the target area reached 9.7 per cent in 1997 in comparison to 5.5% in the conurbation as a whole and 4.4% in the borough. There is also a high concentration of lone parent families. At the time of the 1991 Census, 40 per cent of children lived in non-earning households or in households with one parent working part-time (1991 Census). The total population was 9,344 residents in the four wards, of whom fewer than

4 per cent were minority ethnic groups and a third were aged 18 to 35. Of the 3,600 households in the target area, less than half were owner occupied, with the majority rented from the local authority. High-density housing estates characterised the area but it also comprised terraced housing, purpose-built bungalows for elderly residents and multi-dwelling properties.

1. This net reduction in burglary figure is based on the number of burglaries per month during the project before and after periods of September 1997 to March 1999 and April 1999 and December 2000. These periods are used for comparison purposes for all SDPs as they are the longest comparison periods for which data is available for all the projects (see Kodz J and Pease K (2003) ‘Reducing Burglary Initiative: early findings on burglary reduction’ Home Office Findings 204. London: Home Office). Over these periods the Police Force Area saw a reduction in burglary of 14 per cent and the project area saw a reduction of 26 per cent, giving a net burglary reduction in the project area of 12 per cent.

The crime problem

Anecdotal evidence reinforced the view that the area had become a crime hotspot. Data gathered by the Police Force shows that in the year prior to the Reducing Burglary Initiative the burglary rate was 316 burglaries per 3,557 households (or 89 per 1,000 households) – over three times the national average (27 per 1,000 households).

The **wider crime and disorder** context included vehicle crime, nuisance-related incidents and young men loitering who in some cases caused some residents to feel terrorised. Within the community, there was also some fear of reprisals if crimes were reported to the police. Police officers suggested that youths growing up in the area were at high risk of drifting into crime. Many offenders were young men known to local police officers.

Police identified that the most common **modus operandi** for burglars to commit crime was via the rear of the properties where they gained access through poorly secured windows and doors.

Significant consequences of the crime problem

National average material and social costs of domestic burglary were estimated as nearly £2,300 per household in 2000². Local Housing Department data relating to expenditure due to repairs after crime was committed showed that burglary was a major problem.

Immediate causes and risk factors of burglary

Environment

Characteristics of the environment contributing to the burglary problem centred on the poorly lit network of alleyways and open lands. These features provided easy escape routes reducing the chances of burglars being apprehended, and made it difficult for the police to surround the area when a crime was perpetrated.

Target enclosures

Dwellings: modus operandi information from the police indicated that the rear of the properties were vulnerable due to poorly secured windows and doors. **Gardens:** some residents had raised their fences at the back of their properties and installed barbed wire on top of them. These pre-existing measures indicated the vulnerability of the original garden enclosure.

Readiness to offend – motivating factors in current life circumstances of offenders

Many offenders were young men known to local police offices who believed that their crime habit was driven by **drug abuse**. Police **consultation with local young people** indicated that reasons for engaging in criminal and anti-social behaviour were **boredom and a lack of affordable**

sports facilities. Young people also complained that they were not being listened to – i.e. they were denied some combination of **esteem, respect, appreciation and involvement**.

2. Intervention

A crime reduction **project** centres on one or more **interventions**. Interventions are how the action **works**. They can be described on both practical and analytical levels, both kinds of information being necessary for intelligent replication of good practice. Further details explaining how the intervention should be described are provided at the end of this case study.

As noted above, there were six key strands to the interventions introduced in this RBI project area. Details of the individual intervention **methods** and the **principles** behind them are outlined in the following sections. Overall, the intention was to exploit the evidence that approaches combining opportunity reduction methods with attempts to reduce offenders' motivation and criminality may work better than one-sided efforts; and to act at a number of different levels (dwelling, potential offender, area, offender network, community). Those who worked on the project believed that a major factor in its success was that it attacked the burglary problem from different angles. It is unlikely that they would wish to hold up one particular initiative as more important than another. Many of the interventions built on work that predated the SDP – e.g. The Youth Leisure Facilities initiative was a continuation of a scheme held during the summer holidays in 1998.

Target hardening vulnerable properties

Method 1 aimed to improve the security of vulnerable dwellings in particular bungalows occupied by elderly residents by the principle of **strengthening existing target enclosures**: by increasing the security of doors and windows of the bungalows. This involved installing 123 locks/bolts to uPVC doors; 284 lockable handles to uPVC windows; 158 security tapes to uPVC glazing units; 11 restrictors to uPVC doors; 132 Dusk-to-Dawn lights; 115 locks for timber-framed windows; 50 bolts for timber-framed doors; 80 padlocks for timber-framed gates and 50 door chains.

The intended mechanisms acted at individual dwelling level and included:

- physically blocking burglars' entry.
- deterring them (and aiding surveillance from householders and neighbours) due to greater risk of noise, time to break in and harder to escape.
- discouraging them through greater effort to break in, requirement of more tools and skills, and less reward due to time and effort to carry loot over walls etc.

2. This was calculated in Brand, S. and Price, R. (2000) *The economic and social costs of crime*. Home Office Research Study 217, London: Home Office.

There were no major obstacles to implementation, possibly because the intervention was a continuation of an existing scheme. Project personnel therefore had specific experience and knowledge of how to implement the chosen activities. Also, the different tasks involved were distributed between agencies in a manner which maximised the specialist knowledge available within the local community Focus Group, a multi-agency group formed in June 1998 which became the steering group for the SDP in March 1999.

Installation of alleygates

Method 2 used the principle of **creating a new target enclosure** by installing gates to close off alleyways used by offenders to approach the rear of dwellings. The mechanisms of this intervention acted at residential area level and included:

- blocking offenders' access and escape networks.
- increasing the perceived effort and risk of burglary.
- aiding crime preventers by improving scope for police containment of an area once a crime was committed.

Practical details of the construction, installation and operation of the alleygates worth noting include:

1. Following the first three installations, it became clear the gates were inappropriate. They quickly became rusty and unsightly, could be 'kicked in' relatively easily and residents found them very noisy. A revision of the gate specifications took place, which led to delays and an increase in the unit cost. In fact, only 25 of the estimated 40 gates could have been purchased with the original budget following the design revision, had additional local authority funding not been made available to cover the shortfall.
2. The local authority owned about half the alleyways identified for gating. The remaining alleyways were either 'rights of way' or privately owned. Installing gates in the alleyways owned by the authorities required applications to the Magistrates' Court, which proved to be a long process. The closing of private alleyways was mainly a question of persuading relevant home owners.

Installation of electronic entry systems on multiple-occupation dwellings

Method 3 involved fitting electronic access systems and 'burglar-proof' doors at the collective entry of multiple-occupation dwellings and on individual flats. The underlying principle of this intervention was increasing control of access to target enclosures. Mechanisms acted

at dwelling, flat and residential area levels and included:

- blocking entry of building and individual flats
- reducing the perceived vulnerability of multiple-dwelling properties and individual flats.
- increasing the perceived risk and effort and reduce perceived reward of burgling them.
- reducing attractiveness to burglars of the neighbourhood as a whole – as it contains fewer vulnerable enclosures.
- empowering residents to act as crime preventers

Practical details of the entry systems/doors worth noting are:

- At the time of the bid, the local Housing Department was installing electronic coded access entry systems to all three-storey blocks in the north of the borough. Due to positive experiences from the previous installations and from similar exercises elsewhere, it was decided to extend the scheme to include two-storey blocks, using an identical system.
- The Fire Service was consulted prior to the installation as special techniques were required to break through them in case of an emergency. This may have helped to avoid any objections from local residents.

Improvements to street lighting

Method 4 aimed to improve lighting in areas identified as crime-vulnerable. Street light columns were to be installed in poorly-lit alleyways and streets. The principle of this method was to **facilitate surveillance**; mechanisms included:

- deterring burglars by increasing the perceived risk of burglary – of being spotted, identified, arrested and convicted.
- empowering surveillance by crime preventers including residents, passers-by and police patrols.

The electricity board made the lighting operational. However, reorganisational difficulties within the electricity board meant that the lighting did not become fully operational until February 2000, five months after the eight columns had gone up.

Facilities for young people and access to leisure facilities

Method 5a was provision of a safe and attractive meeting area for local young people. It set out to resurface a basketball court and to fit the area with extra equipment such as basketball nets, litter bin, shelter, seats, lighting and a 'five-a-side' pitch.

Method 5b aimed to improve and develop youth leisure activities by providing free access to the local leisure centre during off-peak night hours (7pm till 10pm).

The first intervention principle was to **reduce young people's readiness to offend by changing their current life circumstances through access to leisure facilities**. Potential mechanisms acted at individual/group potential offender and area levels, and included:

- attracting the young people away from the burgled dwellings and (Method 5b) off the streets and into organised leisure facilities.
- occupying their time (with Method 5b, at key times of the day and night) by legitimate and interesting activities (socialising and sport) instead of boredom, loitering and antisocial behaviour.

The second common intervention principle was to reduce young people's criminality in the medium to longer-term by the mechanisms of:

- reducing recruitment into crime by keeping them out of criminal networks (obviously acting at the network level)
- more generally reducing the likelihood of their embarkation on a criminal career (acting at the individual potential offender level), and
- encouraging better individual and collective relations with the community which could lead to positive role-modelling by leisure-facility leaders and residents in general.

The scheme suffered some problems, however. These were:

1. The high numbers of young people using the facilities led to some tension between the youths and regular adult users. Also, cultural differences between youth workers and staff at the leisure centre were at times accentuated due to staff shortages and the presence of a small group of youths causing trouble both inside and outside the centre. However, the emphasis was on working with these individuals rather than excluding them. For example, they were given the opportunity to choose and help arrange certain activities, such as a disco.
2. Continued funding was also an issue - however, £30,000 was made available locally and through the government scheme 'Kick Start' (£20,000), as it was felt that the scheme would continue to be a useful intervention for the local community.

Street walking initiative

Method 6 involved establishing contact between the community and local youths via a street walking initiative, whereby outreach youth workers would walk the streets and converse and listen to young people, serving as a complement to the general development of detached youth work in the area.

The first intervention principle was to **reduce young people's readiness to offend by changing their current life circumstances**. Potential mechanisms acted at individual/group offender and area levels, and included:

- providing information and support to help individual young people solve their immediate personal problems and achieve desired goals through legitimate means and
- by this and more general interaction, building trust and communication with young people individually and collectively, in order to develop influence as positive role models, leading to the second principle.

The second intervention principle was to reduce young people's criminality in the medium to longer-term by the mechanisms of:

- helping young people recognise their rights and responsibilities in the community.
by persuasion and role modelling, reducing their recruitment into criminal networks and embarkation on criminal careers.

The street walking sessions were reported to have received a good response from local youths, although interest receded over the winter months. A reconditioned van was made available for transport and this was put to good use on cold and wet nights when groups of youths would welcome a dry space to meet and talk. The workers also spent some time 'surveying' school gates during the daytime to try to identify regular groupings that they could work with; however, no such groups were identified.

At one point, the team was met by a great deal of suspicion from young people and were thought to be police. Later it became clear that this was related to an undercover police operation in the area. The youth workers felt that in the short term, this situation hindered constructive work and they chose not to focus on this particular part of the project area until some time had passed.

3. Implementation

Implementation is what is actually done – how the practical methods that realise the principles in locally-appropriate ways are targeted and converted into action on the ground.

Aiming the action at the right social levels, and targeting people and properties

The intervention methods were variously directed at certain levels as described under the sections above. These included vulnerable residents, in particular older people; vulnerable multi dwelling properties, and young males likely to become involved in crime. In all cases this is targeting of 'at risk' people and properties – 'secondary' prevention.

Inputs of funds, effort, human resources

The crude costs³ of the project were £150,932, of which nearly half was spent on equipment (mainly alleygating). A third of the crude inputs were used for personnel purposes. The modelled costs of the SDP fell to £78,457 when taking into account inflation and the lifetime of the capital assets. Human resources centred on police and local authorities who jointly led the project and a multi-agency steering group was set up. Other workers were bought in commercially or supplied by local government for installing the gates and fencing.

Management ability

The management of the SDP can be described as inclusive. Members of the group reported that they believed the SDP worked well because people felt they had ownership of the project. Indeed, shared ownership of the decision-making process was regarded as a key element in the management of this project, and no single person filled the role of project manager in that sense. However, on occasions when the project failed to progress, the group had senior representatives who could step in and take direct action.

Outputs achieved

- **Target hardening vulnerable properties:** 156 OAP bungalows received target hardening, distributed over 21 residential streets.
- **Alleygating:** 44 alley gates were installed, distributed over 19 residential locations.
- **Street lighting:** 8 street light columns were put up, distributed over six residential streets.
- **Target hardening – installation of burglar-proof entry-systems in multi-dwelling properties:** Four two-storey blocks, each containing four flats, were fitted with electronic door entry systems. 'Burglar-proof' doors were fitted to the flats of three caretakers in high rise blocks.
- **Establish safe youth meeting areas:** A meeting area was identified and developed. Approximately 100 youths were using it weekly. Between 50 and 75 of these used the area daily.
- **Increase and improve youth leisure facilities:** Free off-peak access for young people to the leisure centre two evenings a week was negotiated. Approximately 200 young people used the facilities weekly.
- **'Street walking' by outreach youth workers to establish contact with young people:** This initiative started with a 3-week activity programme and continued with 'street walking' sessions on a weekly basis. In excess of 100 young people were contacted.

3. Modelled costs are converted from crude costs to a common price base, that is GDP deflated and relating to one point in time (April 1999). They are based on the assumption that capital assets continue to hold value throughout the project life.

4. Involvement

Professionals, like the police, often have to work through others rather than directly intervening themselves. Involvement refers to when those formally in charge of a crime prevention project (who could themselves be a partnership) act through an existing partnership or mobilise other agencies, companies and individuals to collaborate in implementing the intervention.

Partnership

The police and the local authority decided to set up a multi-agency Focus Group chaired by the local police superintendent and the local Head of Housing. Members of the group included local authority Heads of Departments and local authority personnel, senior police officers, local elected representatives and members of the community. No issues regarding partnership work arose and collaboration was thought to have worked well due to their previous partnership work on different initiatives in the borough. Previous experience of partnership work was believed to have positively affected the outcome of the project.

Mobilisation

The local community Focus Group included members of the community. However, all practical work was done by the local police, Housing and Environmental Services. An important feature of the project was that local residents were involved in the decision making relating to the design and planning of the interventions. For instance the target hardening installations were agreed with local residents and authorities. As noted above, the fire service approved the installation of electronic entry systems.

5. Impact

Impact covers crime and disorder reduction achieved, cost effectiveness and wider learning points.

The evaluation of the project

This project was subject to an independent impact, process and cost-effectiveness evaluation by South Bank University and collaborators in the Southern Consortium engaged to assess the Burglary Reduction Initiative of the Crime Reduction Programme in England & Wales. The following results on impact and cost effectiveness are based on the Southern Consortium's findings. The impact evaluation design involved comparing changes in recorded burglary statistics over some 3 years. This was done in a) the target areas; b) 6 other beats from the Operational Command Unit (OCU) used as the buffer zone to assess the extent of geographical displacement; and c) the rest of the OCU (reference area used to indicate the background). The target area was one police beat which was coterminous with an electoral ward.

The overall aim of the SDP was to reduce burglary in the target area to a figure 'no higher than the national average', which at the time of the bid was 27 per 1000 households per annum for England and Wales. Outcomes

in terms of burglary were a reduction by 43% in the target area (n=119) between the year prior to the project and the first year of the project, by 19% in the reference area (n=402) and by 34% in the buffer area (n=204).

Analysis of the aggregate data suggests that the overall downward trend noted in the target area was the same as in the buffer and reference areas, but was much more marked. Although one of the steepest decreases in burglary dwelling in the project area occurred shortly before the SDP commenced, the SDP seems to have ensured that it never returned to pre-implementation levels.

Intervention specific outcomes

Analysis of disaggregate crime data at specific addresses subject to the various types of interventions revealed a slight decline in burglary at the addresses covered by the alley-gating intervention. However, the decline may have been greater than this analysis suggests due to possible under-reporting of burglaries prior to the intervention. Only small numbers of burglaries took place prior to the project at addresses affected by the lighting improvements and installation of door entry systems, but both showed a decrease in burglaries following the interventions. Within the project area it is not possible to identify the impact of the leisure facilities and outreach work with young people, as these interventions would have affected the whole SDP area.

Other impacts

It is plausible that some burglary offending was displaced from the target area to the buffer as a result of project implementation. It is also possible that small increases in theft and handling offences and in robbery were the product of functional displacement from domestic burglary.

Also other crime reduction and community regeneration projects were taking place during the SDP timescale. These may have contributed to the burglary reductions outlined above. They included a development of detached youth work, 'On Track', a government scheme aimed to prevent crime by supporting families and children, a Drug Arrest Referral Scheme and funding made available to two local secondary schools through the Excellence in Cities initiative.

Cost-benefit analysis

The project estimated that 117 burglaries had been saved during the implementation period in the target area relative to the expectations from the wider reference area. Using the estimates of burglaries savings multiplied by the average national cost estimate per burglary (£2,300) and set against the modelled costs⁴ of the SDP, it was concluded that the project was cost beneficial as for every £1 spent a saving of £3.24 worth of resources were saved. Diffusion of benefits increases this figure, yet slight functional displacement undermines it.

4. Modelled costs are converted from crude costs to a common price base, that is GDP deflated and relating to one point in time (April 1999). They are based on the assumption that capital assets continue to hold value throughout the project life.

Replication and learning points

Key learning points from this project are:

- strong multi-agency orientation and a willingness to involve different professions and listen to their views appears to have promoted creative thinking and equal partnerships, as well as a feeling that the local community owned the project
- involvement of senior representatives from police and council was important in driving the project forward, as more junior personnel would not have had the authority, or been able to call in the resources, needed to keep the project on track, and
- using people with extensive local knowledge to identify the problems and needs of the local area – this provided an important qualitative background to the crime data, and helped in the selection of interventions appropriate to the area
- tackling the burglary problem from different angles using innovation interventions.

A further learning point from this project was that incorporating disaggregate analysis of the burglary situation while planning an intervention, can aid more informed choices about where to use resources.

Acknowledgements

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The project manager of the Fordbridge SDP was Superintendent Paul Scarrott, West Midlands Police and John King, Head of Housing Management, Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. For further details about the project, Superintendent Paul Scarrott's contact details are:

- Superintendent Paul Scarrott, West Midlands Police, Police Station, Homer Road, Solihull, B91 3QL. Direct tel. 0121 712 6022. Switchboard: 0845 113 5000 ext 6001. Email: solihull@west-midlands.police.uk

5. The Southern Consortium was led by South Bank University Criminal Policy Research Unit.