

Reducing Burglary Initiative Project Summary

Rochdale

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 delivery mechanisms.

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

- Raising awareness of crime prevention through a publicity campaign
- Improving household security (target hardening) of victims of burglary
- Homewatch schemes to increase community involvement
- An arrest drug referral system.

Between project before and after periods, there was a net fall in the number of burglaries of 37 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 SDP area was situated outside a Rochdale town centre and was identified as one of the most deprived ten per cent of all wards in England. The area comprises 3,300 households with a total population of 9,200. It is made up of two areas adjacent to each other, which are distinct in their characteristics. One of these sub-areas (1) consists of three dense housing estates, where a fifth of the dwellings are flats, and the other (sub-area 2) is predominantly made up of residential terraced housing (57 per cent), with semi-detached housing interspersed. In total 60 per cent of all these dwellings are owner occupied and 19 per cent rented from the local authority. Both areas have a strong minority ethnic community, accounting for 36 per cent of the population. These

residents are mainly Asian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani, and for many English is not their first language (1991 Census).

The crime problem

The project area was characterised by social disintegration and a high turn over of residents which were believed to be affecting burglary, youth nuisance, car crime and general harassment. Indeed, one of the two sub-areas was described as being a 'no go area' after dark.

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 10 per cent and the project area saw a reduction of 47 per cent, giving a net burglary reduction in the project area of 37 per cent.

The SDP area had had a long history of high rates of domestic burglary. In the year prior to the project start, the burglary rate in the target area was five times higher than the national rate. Burglary had been slowly escalating over the previous four years. In the two years prior to the project 753 dwellings were burgled (31.4 per month). In sub-area 1, the burglaries were concentrated in one of the three housing estates, where the outlying area was industrial units. In sub-area 2, the burglaries were more evenly spread across the area.

New residents were particularly vulnerable to burglary. Half of all burglaries were perpetrated via a rear ground floor window. Local crime data and anecdotal evidence suggested that offenders were local residents.

Crime preventers and promoters – community involvement and existing crime prevention activity in the project area

The project areas had displayed mixed reactions from different sections of the community to the police and other official agencies, such as the local authority. Some sections of the community, mainly youths, had a distrust and hostility towards the police, while other residents wanted a more high visibility enforcement role from police officers. Furthermore, tenants and residents association activity had declined as a result of falling occupancy rates and the high turnover of residents.

However, a range of local initiatives in the area was already being implemented. Prior to the RBI project, two Single Regeneration Budget operations had been launched on the periphery of the SDP. This target hardened 184 households and developed community sustainability improvement schemes. There have also been police force area wide policing operations that have included the SDP area. Other schemes, aimed at regenerating the local area, engaging with local residents and organising community events, were also running at the time of the RBI project. These included Education Action Zone, Neighbourhood Renewal, Sure Start and lottery funded initiatives. As such, efforts were already being made to strengthen community cohesion and reduce burglary.

The area also had a long history of successful partnership experience, in particular links formed when Safer Cities was in operation ensured that inter-agency structures were already in place between the major agencies. Staff were also practised in multi-agency working and the key personnel in the SDP had worked successfully together in a similar role for several years.

Crime pattern analysis

The bid authors demonstrated a good grasp of the burglary problem in their area. Analysis was carried out, but as the authors openly admitted, some of the data used were far from reliable or out-of-date (1991 Census data).

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.

The original bid aimed to reduce repeat burglary by 10% by instigating four interventions namely, *crime prevention* through a publicity campaign, *target hardening* those repeat victims of burglary, Homewatch schemes to enhance *community involvement* and an *arrest drug referral scheme* to help tackle reoffending.

Burglary hotspots were identified through crime pattern analysis to be the focus of partnership efforts in the SDP. An important part of the strategy was aimed at victims and repeat victims. The project team believed in the importance of a quick response to victims whereby advice and practical assistance could be introduced to try to ensure the safety of the victim. The emphasis upon victims and repeat victims demonstrates a tightly focused approach to the burglary problem. The key strands of the interventions are set out below.

Raising awareness of the domestic burglary problem and provide good crime prevention and security advice to all residents in the SDP area

This intervention entailed delivering a crime prevention leaflet to every household in the SDP (in the three main languages). This leaflet contained an introduction to the RBI and simple practical advice on crime prevention and domestic security. It also contained telephone numbers for an advice line with interpreters available offering both Urdu and Bengali. Another aim of the initiative was to visit every household within the identified burglary hotspot areas, in order to provide practical assistance and crime prevention advice. All residents in the hotspot area were offered a security survey of their home, property marking or photographing other items, and the provision of personal attack alarms for vulnerable populations (defined as the elderly or women living alone). The theory underlying this intervention is the necessity of security surveys as a prerequisite to target hardening. The idea was that targeting of resources would follow careful crime pattern analysis of incidents of domestic burglary.

Specific advice and practical assistance to victims of domestic burglary

The objectives of this strategy were to:

- send out a letter to all victims of burglary in the SDP
- plan a timetable of visits to burglary victims within seven days of the incident, in order to deliver crime prevention and domestic security advice and encourage the development of a Homewatch scheme.

- provide victims with the opportunity to have any items of property marked with their postcode using permanent methods and to record the serial/model numbers of items. Those items, which were not suitable for marking, would be photographed using a digital camera, with images being stored on the RBI database, and
- give the offer of a free personal attack alarm to those deemed especially vulnerable to burglary (the elderly or women living alone).

These interventions were additionally bolstered by interpreter facilities due to the high ethnic minority population whose first language is not English. The theory underlying the interventions is that:

- burglaries are occurring due to inadequate security measures in properties and/or poor crime prevention habits, and
- victims of burglary will be motivated to accept the upgraded security and crime prevention message on offer.

The increased vulnerability of victims and repeat victims was fully recognised by the SDP, hence the efforts to offer advice and practical assistance within either a maximum of seven days after the incident for victims or a three day period for repeat victims.

Work more intensively with repeat victims of domestic burglary

The project team established a database, which automatically flagged up repeat victims of domestic burglary in the SDP area. Victim Support or one of their specialist contractors would carry out installation of the upgraded security measures for these repeat victims. The specific targeting of repeat victims takes on board earlier academic insights into the increased vulnerabilities of this group. The aim was that within three days of a repeated burglary incident, the property would be surveyed in order to judge if any remedial target hardening needed to be installed.

Promote homewatch

A further strand of the project aimed to promote Homewatch in the area. There was no set target for the number of schemes to be established. Within each area where Homewatch was set up, A4 sized street signs were erected announcing that 'This is a Homewatch Area' and the Police Homewatch co-ordinator recommended that one Homewatch meeting should be held each year. The theory behind this intervention is that Homewatch can have positive outcomes, such as increasing community involvement, surveillance and reporting of burglary incidents, as well as deterring burglars.

Make the link between drug misuse and burglary

The Arrest Referral Scheme for illicit drug users formed part of a wider scheme operating across the Police Force Area. The aim is that burglary arrestees, who are deemed appropriate, are informed about the Arrest Referral Scheme. This leads to an initial needs assessment interview and questionnaire being completed (being later sent to a regional database for profiling drug offenders). This is the full extent of the contact made with the detainee by the community drug team as regards the referral system. The Local Health Authority provides treatment for drug users, on a voluntary basis.

The theory underlying this intervention is that there is a high correlation between committing domestic burglary and misuse of illicit drugs, and the burglary is committed in order to fund the drug habit. The referral scheme is also reliant on the view that burglary suspects admit to drug use and are open to reasoned argument on health grounds that addiction is a poor life strategy.

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.

This section details the outputs of the interventions, implementation problems and how these were overcome and management issues.

Raising awareness and provision of crime prevention advice

All households in the whole SDP area received crime prevention information. However, the resources available did not allow blanket visiting of all households, and therefore, as noted above, burglary hotspots were identified to target this initiative. In sub-area 1, there were clear concentrations of burglary incidents, particularly on one estate. However, the appropriateness of this strategy in sub-area 2, where burglaries were fairly evenly dispersed across the neighbourhood, is more open to question. The operation was led by police officers. A total of 400 houses were visited. This was scaled down from the number of visits initially planned due to the strain the volume of work was placing on personnel.

Victims and repeat victims of burglary

The visits to victims offering target hardening and crime prevention advice were achieved, within the specified time limits after the burglary incident. This was considered to be the most effective intervention within the SDP. The database of repeat victims was also established. Fitting of any security measures was carried out by the local Victim Support who then billed the SDP for the costs. Equipment was provided free of charge to households. However, security installations could mean significant expense on

specialist items for some repeatedly victimised residents in order to prevent further victimisation. At times it was felt necessary to introduce a level of added security that would deter even the most resolute burglar.

Due to the high number of Asian, Bangladeshi and Pakistani residents an interpretation facility was set up. It was thought this would overcome problems residents may have had with understanding the crime prevention advice and the services funded by the RBI project. However, this facility was only taken up on one occasion. It is only possible to speculate as to why the take up rate was so low. It might well be the case that those residents were perfectly able to understand the literature without any further assistance from the project, alternatively, they may not have been motivated to make further enquiries. It may well have been that translation was undertaken by family members.

Homewatch

Homewatch meetings were held initially to inform residents about the scheme. In addition, local authority housing officers, and other housing association staff provided information on Homewatch when visiting residents, thereby promoting the scheme to the full.

In total seven Homewatch schemes were established across the SDP, five were already in existence prior to the RBI project. It should be noted however, that all of the new Homewatch schemes were in sub-area 1 (made up of three housing estates) and none were in sub-area 2, which was predominantly terraced and semi-detached housing. The explanation for this lies in the contrasting nature of the areas and the degree of community integration found therein. Sub-area 1 is a more compact community due to the density of the three housing association estates, which are mainly surrounded by industrial land. This area also has the advantage of a successful lottery funded community integration project.

Arrest referral scheme

Uptake of the arrest referral scheme in the SDP was low; only six individuals are recorded as being offered the option of a referral to drug treatment. The original intention was for the scheme to be compulsory, however, it was soon discovered that the police force had no legal basis to insist that offenders misusing illicit drugs attend such schemes. Consequently, it proceeded only on a voluntary basis. The intervention also suffered delays due to legal and staffing difficulties and eventually got underway six months later than planned. The main reason for this was that an arrest referral worker was not in place until November 1999.

Project management

The project was jointly led by the police (full-time Police Constable) along with a local authority Community Safety Officer and was based on an existing strong partnership between the police, the local council authority, and housing

and victim support agencies. Joint full-time devoted leadership as well as the presence of active agencies in the area made management and staff guidance comfortable. This was believed to be key in the success of the project.

There was no incompatibility between the style of management and the project organisation. The co-ordinator was proactive in getting things done within the strict time limits set by the bid document. Scrupulous financial records of all SDP transactions were also kept. Larger undertakings such as the arrest referral strategy required more planning and a larger team, but this was part of police force wide operations.

Management ability

Management of the project was effective due to the commitment of staff to the project. There was also a long history of successful partnership working, along with a familiarity with the SDP area. Although there was a change in project manager during the project, the new manager carefully studied the aims and objectives of the project from the bid document and followed the structure set down in the bid by the author. The changeover was facilitated by an overlap period of nine days when the new manager shadowed the previous project manager. This meant that the close working relationships and existing work practices were maintained.

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

As noted above, a culture of meaningful partnership working had already been established in the area, with links being forged in 1996 through the Safer Cities Initiative. A steering group involving senior management had been established during Safer Cities. This meant there was a pre-existing commitment to partnership working at all levels, i.e. both project workers and senior management. There was also a sustainable and recognisable presence of project staff, rather than staff being simply parachuted in from outside. The lead partner in the project was the police force, with the local authority, Victim Support and a housing association all playing important roles. All of the fitting of the target hardening work was carried out by Victim Support volunteers, the housing association provided two translators and later, two community inclusion workers. Co-ordination between housing authorities, police and local residents was also believed efficient as burglary activity could be better detected and tackled.

Community involvement

Previous poor relations between some sections of the community and local agencies, in particular the police and local authority were detailed above. Following the SDP, agencies report a more receptive attitude to those working in the area, although in sub-area 1 it can still be difficult to gain the trust of the local community.

The project saw the translation of the crime prevention awareness raising campaign into three languages as very important. It was also found that 'non uniformed' police officers were more successful in delivering a prevention message in distrusting communities. Using uniformed police officers runs the risk of animosity from the local community, which makes selling a crime prevention message more difficult. The attempt to establish Homewatch schemes perhaps underestimated the lack of community cohesion. With existing community integration at a low level in sub-area 2, it was possibly unrealistic to expect such schemes to be taken up. To some extent this intervention was rescued by the work the housing association were doing in sub-area 1, in terms of promoting the scheme and further laying the ground work for such a scheme to be successful in the first place.

5. Impact

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

Burglary outcomes

This project was subject to an independent impact, process and cost-effectiveness evaluation by Liverpool University and collaborators in the Northern 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 Northern Consortium's findings.

In the two years prior to the project 753 burglaries were committed (monthly mean of burglaries of 31.4), it fell to 398 (16.6 per month), two years after it began. Therefore, the original target of 10 per cent reduction was overwhelmingly achieved as the project reduced gross burglary by 355 or 47.1% (34.8% net, taking into account burglary trends in a reference area). The SDP thus saved 262 offences. Based on the modelled costs² (£39,332), the medium saving in burglary (262 offences) and national average cost of burglary (£2,300)³, it was possible according to the cost benefit ratio (13.84, i.e. £13.84 saved per every £1 spent) to presume that the SDP was extremely cost effective.

2. 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.

3. 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.

Intervention Specific Outcomes

The target hardening intervention included both the security survey and the provision of physical equipment to victims and repeat victims, and is likely to have had the greatest impact in reducing burglary in the area. The publicity campaign would have had maximum impact earlier on in the project, although community involvement (via Homewatch schemes) was being continually publicised to local residents by two community inclusion workers. The fourth intervention, the drug referral scheme only had a small take up. It is also difficult to disentangle its specificity to the SDP from the larger force-wide rollout plan that encapsulated all offenders in custody regardless of status or offence type.

Longer term impacts were highlighted regarding community involvement as its score was very high not just in tackling burglary but also in fostering further community integration.

Acknowledgements

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Mike Farrell, Terri Byrn and PC Ian White were involved in the initial implementation of the project. For further details about the SDP, the project team can be contacted at:

- Mr Mike Farrell, Community Safety Leader, Community Safety Unit, Oldham Business Centre, Cromwell Street, Oldham, OL1 1BB (tel. 0161 615 5207) email: ce.mike.farrell@oldham.gov.uk.
- Mrs Terri Byrne, Crime Reductin Advisor (Greater Manchester Police), seconded to Arson Reduction and Fire Investigation Team, Greater Manchester Fire Service, Chadderton Fire Station, Broadway, Oldham, OL9 0JX (tel. 0161 909 8661) email: terri.byrne@gmp.police.uk
- PC Ian White, Technical Support Officer, Rochdale Operational Policing Unit, Rochdale Police Station, The Holme, Esplanade, Rochdale, OL16 1AG (tel. 0161 856 8493) email: ian.white@gmp.police.uk

4. The Northern Consortium was led by the University of Liverpool Environmental Criminology Research Unit.