

Neighbourhood Risk Assessment Pilot Project

Evaluation Report

The Neighbourhood Risk Assessment project was piloted in South Derbyshire with the following brief:

“Develop a neighbourhood auditing process to enable local communities and professionals to identify areas at risk of crime and disorder and fear of crime as a result of poor environmental conditions. Implement environmental improvements as necessary.”

The pilot was run in the residential areas and crime hot-spots of Newhall and Midway, Council managed parks and Sheltered Housing complexes. For the purposes of this report, the processes in these three areas will be dealt with separately.

1. Residential crime hot-spots.

In 2002, the wards of Newhall and Midway were identified by the Crime and Disorder Partnership as hot-spots for domestic burglary and criminal damage. A number of crime reduction initiatives were developed in response including target hardening of vulnerable properties, a targeted policing operation to disrupt the local drugs market, and the development of a Local Crime Reduction Group. In March 2002, public consultation undertaken by South Derbyshire CVS, also revealed that local residents felt that public areas were in need of improvement in order to increase feelings of safety.

Two processes were developed in order to assess areas in need of environmental improvement in Newhall and Midway:

1. A residents' survey was designed using examples of national good practice. The aim of the survey was to enable local residents to assess their locality to identify areas at risk of crime as a result of poor environmental conditions. A checklist was then also designed for use by professionals in order to identify specific works required in these areas of identified high risk.
2. Beat Officers identified key geographical areas in need of improvement using their local knowledge. This process coincided with a Derbyshire County Council initiative to increase street lighting in key areas.

Residents' surveys:

Residents' surveys were distributed by hand by Local Crime Reduction Group members and other volunteers to the five streets in Newhall suffering the highest overall crime. Surveys were also distributed through Elmsleigh Tenants' Group. In total, approximately 700 surveys were distributed. 94 surveys were returned; a return rate of 13%. Unfortunately, not all returned surveys were from the identified areas which may reflect poor briefing of volunteers.

Residents' surveys were then assessed by the Crime Reduction Officer to identify areas which would be revisited for further assessment. Completed surveys were allocated red, yellow or white status according to their content and the Crime

Reduction Officer's local knowledge of crime problems. Red status indicated that areas would be visited, white status indicated that areas would not be visited and yellow that areas would be visited if subsequent surveys supported the information provided. A list of areas to visit for assessment was then drawn up.

Areas were assessed in the evening to enable consideration of the need for additional street lighting to be made. This was reasonably convenient as the pilot was carried out in December when it was dark enough in the early evening for assessments to take place.

Despite the inclusion of a deadline on the survey cover letter, completed surveys were received over a period of 6 weeks. As a result numerous visits to residential areas were necessary; a time consuming exercise for the officers involved. Initially the Crime Reduction Officer used the checklist during the assessments, but it quickly became apparent that this was not appropriate given the officer's expertise. Lists of required works were therefore drawn up from the Crime Reduction Officer's recommendations. Works were not prioritised by the steering group at this stage.

### **Beat Officers' recommendations**

Beat Officers were contacted and asked to take part in the assessment of areas within their Beats. Crucially, the Beat Officers were keen to contribute and agreed to complete checklists for areas they identified as at risk. Initially officers used the checklist as part of their assessment but found that their own knowledge negated its use. Specific consideration was given to the need for additional street lighting as this process coincided with a request from Derbyshire County Council for data on this. The Beat Officers' recommendations were then included on the list of required works. As a result of the County Council initiative, a disproportionate amount of time was spent assessing need for additional street lighting. A list of works was drawn up from the Beat Officers' recommendations. Works were not prioritised by the steering group at this stage.

### **Works:**

The steering group met to assess the compiled list of recommended works. Works were assessed to ensure that items which should be picked up by mainstream Council Services were referred on and not funded through the scheme. The remaining works were prioritised by means of cost/benefit analysis and the final list was compiled together with costings. Relevant Council Services were then engaged with to carry out the works using the allocated Risk Assessment Funding.

Despite enthusiasm for the project within these Services, a lack of available contractors resulted in considerable delay in the work being carried out and invoices raised. This resulted in a time lapse of several months between works being agreed and then undertaken. This significantly reduced the potential for positive community feedback from the scheme as residents completing surveys were not able to see the results of their recommendations for some considerable time. Initially, the steering group intended to write to those residents who had taken the time to complete the surveys to inform them of exactly what works had been undertaken. Unfortunately, due to the time lapse the group felt this would not be appropriate.

### **Critical Success Factors:**

- Use of willing and relatively reliable volunteers to deliver the residents' surveys at no cost.
- Participation and expertise of Crime Reduction Officer.
- The time of year the assessments were undertaken.
- Participation and expertise of Newhall Beat Officers.

### **Barriers:**

- The quality of completed surveys was varied. 32 of the 94 returned were allocated white status, frequently a result of insufficient information being included on the form. This may have been a result of the way in which the surveys were distributed and had residents received more support in giving their views, more useful information may have been included.
- A number of surveys were received from areas outside the identified five key streets. Again, it is likely this is a reflection of the way in which the surveys were distributed and poor briefing of volunteers.
- Surveys were received over a 6 week period and several assessment visits were necessary. This was relatively time consuming and extended the length of the overall project by some weeks.
- The checklist proved to be largely inappropriate for use by the Crime Reduction Officer or the Beat Officers.
- Council departments were not involved with the assessment part of the project and were only contacted once works had been agreed. As a result council officers did not have a sense of ownership of the project.
- The delays in getting works completed extended the length of the project by approximately 6 months. This had a detrimental effect on the project as areas were not improved as quickly as they could have been and residents were not able to see the benefits of their participation within a reasonable time frame.
- As the project coincided with a request from Derbyshire County Council for data regarding the need for additional street lighting, much more time was spent assessing this kind of improvement by the Beat Officers, than any other kind of environmental improvement. As a result, this part of the process was not entirely 'problem led'.

### **Recommendations:**

In order that the Neighbourhood Risk Assessment project (residential areas) be viable as a mainstream crime reduction initiative, a number of key issues should be addressed:

- The success of the pilot scheme was heavily dependent on the participation of the Police, and of the Crime Reduction Officer in particular. If the project were to be mainstreamed, either the long-term participation of key Police Officers would have to be secured, or training would have to be given to other relevant personnel.
- A variety of reliable distribution methods for residents' surveys should be developed to ensure accuracy of delivery and better support for residents completing the survey.
- Strict deadlines should be observed for residents' surveys. This may be easier to achieve within the context of a rolling programme as residents' comments could be incorporated into the next round of assessments.

- The success of the initiative on a longer-term basis will depend heavily on the co-operation of council officers within a number of key services. For neighbourhood risk assessment to work effectively as a mainstream activity, divisional managers will need to take ownership of the project and ensure that deadlines for implementation of works are set.
- The project should take a 'bottom up' approach to identifying necessary improvements. External initiatives should be taken advantage of, but should not drive the assessment process.

## **2. Sheltered Housing**

Sheltered Housing complexes were chosen to form part of the pilot Risk Assessment project as these are areas which have a high concentration of vulnerable people at an increased risk of fear of crime.

A similar process to that used in the assessment of residential areas was developed to assess the sheltered areas:

1. A checklist was developed for use by the Community Wardens to enable them to identify areas in need of environmental improvements.
2. Liaison with Beat Officers to identify areas surrounding Sheltered Housing complexes suffering from higher than average levels of nuisance and disorder.

### **Sheltered Housing Checklists**

Once the checklists had been developed, an input was given at a sheltered housing team meeting to outline the purpose of the project and to brief wardens on how to carry out an assessment. It was agreed that the completed checklists should be returned to the Sheltered Housing Manager who would collate the responses and then return them to the Community Drugs Officer.

18 completed checklists were received. As with the residential surveys, the Crime Reduction Officer assessed the checklists and prioritised areas to visit. Visits were set up with the assistance of the Sheltered Housing Manager and wardens were present when possible. Although the level of detail included on the returned checklists differed, all checklists were of a good enough standard for the information to be of use. This may reflect the fact that wardens were briefed on how to fill the forms in at one of their team meetings. This kind of face to face contact was lacking in the residential process, with the exception of the Elmsleigh Tenants' Group.

As with the residential assessments, areas were visited in the evening to enable consideration of the adequacy of street lighting to be made. Again, this was reasonably convenient as the pilot was carried out during December when it was dark enough for assessments to take place in the early evening.

### **Liaison with local Beat Officers**

Beat Officers, in liaison with Community Wardens, were able to prioritise Sheltered Housing schemes according to local levels of nuisance and disorder. At the time of the audits, Pinegrove sheltered scheme in Newhall ward was experiencing significant nuisance and disorder problems, and the communal room had been broken into the previous week. In order to be able to respond quickly to this problem the site was visited by the Crime Reduction Officer outside of the planned programme of visits. Recommendations for environmental changes were made and the Sheltered Housing

Manager was immediately given the go-ahead to programme the works using Risk Assessment funding.

### **Works:**

The steering group met to assess the compiled list of recommended works. Works were assessed in terms of relevance to the project and cost/benefit analysis and the final list was compiled with costings. As with works undertaken in residential areas, despite initial enthusiasm for the project, there was a delay of 6 months between works being agreed and carried out. This significantly affected the potential benefits of the project.

### **Critical Success Factors:**

- The participation and assistance of the Sheltered Housing Manager.
- That Community wardens were briefed effectively on how to complete checklists.
- Participation and expertise of Crime Reduction Officer.
- That the Crime Reduction Officer was able to visit Pinegrove scheme outside of planned visit times. This enabled the project to respond quickly to an identified problem.
- The time of year the assessments were undertaken.
- Participation and expertise of the Police Liaison Officer and Beat Officers.

### **Barriers**

- Initially, the checklists were assessed in terms of comments made by the wardens regarding street lighting, vandalism etc and visits were made. However, as the project progressed it became apparent that the criteria included on the checklist was not always relevant. For example, visits to sheltered schemes in rural areas often did reveal that street lighting was inadequate but as crime rates were generally low, it was not necessarily appropriate for the project to address this.
- Although 18 surveys were received, there are 48 sheltered schemes in the District. Therefore 63% of the schemes were not assessed and consequently there were clear gaps in the risk assessment process. It is likely that this is a result of differing attitudes of the wardens regarding the value of the project.
- It occasionally became apparent during visits that the views of the Community Wardens did not necessarily reflect those of the residents. For example at Unity Close scheme one resident was unaware of the problems which the warden had identified as significant.
- The delays in getting works completed extended the length of the project by approximately 6 months. This had a detrimental effect on the project as areas were not improved as quickly as they could have been.

### **Recommendations:**

In order that the Neighbourhood Risk Assessment project (sheltered schemes) be viable as a mainstream crime reduction initiative, a number of key issues should be addressed:

- The success of the pilot scheme was heavily dependent on the participation of the Police, and of the Crime Reduction Officer in particular. If the project were to be mainstreamed, either the long-term participation of key Police Officers would have to be secured, or training would have to be given to other relevant personnel.
- The checklist should be redesigned to take account of the overall environment of the area; including levels of crime and disorder.
- Completing checklists or environmental audits should be incorporated into the mainstream activity of sheltered wardens. This would ensure that all schemes are covered. This would also ensure that training on how to complete the forms becomes part of the wardens' induction process.
- Processes should be established to incorporate the views of residents in any responses made by wardens.
- The success of the initiative on a long-term basis would depend heavily on the continued co-operation of the Sheltered Housing Manager. For risk assessment to work effectively as a mainstream activity, deadlines for implementation of works would need to be agreed.

### **3. Newhall Parks**

Parks were identified as the third area for the Risk Assessment pilot. Two parks were selected through analysis of crime figures and calls to service. These were Eureka and Newhall Park.

#### **Parks Checklists**

Checklists were designed for use in the parks using examples of national good practice. It was initially hoped that park users could contribute to the project by completing the checklists themselves. However, as the project was conducted during the winter, few people were using the parks. Therefore The Friends of Newhall Park, The Friends of Eureka Park, the Leisure Facilities Officer and the Crime Reduction Officer completed the checklists and a list of recommendations was drawn up. This included environmental improvements, additional street lighting and the installation of vehicular barriers.

#### **Works**

- The list of works was assessed and works were prioritised. Again, despite initial enthusiasm for the project, there was a delay of 6 months between works being agreed and being carried out. This significantly affected the potential benefits of the project.

#### **Critical Success Factors**

- The participation and assistance of the Leisure Facilities Officer.
- Participation and expertise of Crime Reduction Officer.
- Participation of The Friends of Newhall Park and The Friends of Eureka Park.

## **Barriers**

- The time of year the assessments took place meant that engaging park users other than those members of the 'Friends of' groups proved difficult.
- The assessments of the Parks took place alongside audits of residential areas and sheltered housing complexes. As these processes were relatively resource intensive, the assessments of the parks was not managed as closely by the Steering Group. As a result works were a result of recommendations by a relatively small number of people and it was not always clear whether works which were funded were part of existing longer term plans for the maintenance/renovation of the parks.
- Again, delays in getting works completed extended the length of the project by approximately 6 months. This had a detrimental effect on the project as the benefits of works were not seen as quickly as they could have been.

## **Recommendations:**

In order that the Neighbourhood Risk Assessment project (parks) be viable as a mainstream crime reduction initiative, a number of key issues should be addressed:

- That the assessments of parks take place during the summer months to enable regular park users to be engaged in the process.
- That processes be developed to ensure that regular park users are continually engaged in the assessment process.

## **Conclusions:**

The effectiveness of the Neighbourhood Risk Assessment pilot should ultimately be assessed in terms of the effect works have on levels of nuisance and disorder and feelings of safety in each area over a significant length of time. It is clearly too early for any such judgements to be made. However, the processes established by the pilot project have been evaluated within this report and the following broad statements are generic and relevant to all aspects of the project:

- The success of the pilot scheme, so far as it can be measured, was dependent on input from a number of local authority and police personnel. There are considerable human resource implications of rolling the project out across the District.
- Local residents and park users should receive guidance and support when completing risk assessment surveys. Those returning surveys should be informed of the outcome of their input, whether or not works are undertaken.
- Relevant council departments, and more specifically divisional managers, need to take ownership of the project and ensure that targets for completion of works are set and achieved.

