

Goldstein Awards 2009 Submission Form**Application basics**

Title of the project: **Merseyside Gun Crime Initiative – Operation Noble**

Key problem that the project is addressing: Reducing the criminal use of firearms in Merseyside

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Summary – Merseyside Police Gun Crime Initiative - Operation Noble

Scanning:

Between 1995-2000, on average, 30 firearm discharges per year occurred in Merseyside. In 2001 these started to accelerate and since 2004 have consistently been over 100 a year, with the financial year 2007/8 showing the highest number at 130. 91% of discharges and 93% of homicides occur in 3 policing areas (Liverpool North, Liverpool South and Knowsley) and public perception surveys shows increasing concern in these areas. Objectives include reduction of criminal discharges, reduction of injuries and maintenance of public confidence.

Analysis:

Analysis showed the use of firearms revolved around the Routine Activity of the victims and offenders. Those involved with the shootings in the Liverpool North area showed an average age of 22 years, all were prolific offenders (average 25 prior offences), and showed a similar profile notably theft, drug, court/prison/ police offences, violence, and drug offences. A small number had also been involved with firearms. In essence they lived chaotic lifestyles, which involved violence and drugs. Of the 44 victims researched (those shot at or whose houses shot at), 91% were male (3 of the 4 females injured were bystanders), 84% were white European, and the mean age was 28 years. Nearly all were resident in the hot-spot areas with 20% previously being arrested for firearms offences and 27% monitored under the MAPPA process. In essence their lifestyle brought them into contact with offenders and offences. The location of firearms discharges were concentrated around residential areas where offenders and victims socialised, conducted criminal activity (e.g. drug dealing), or resided. In essence the firearm acted as the facilitator to support criminal behavior where other threats of types of violence would have been used in the past.

Response:

The response is targeted in the hot-spot areas on high-risk offenders, locations and potential victims. The 3 main approaches to reduce offending and prevent others becoming involved were:

Enforcement – Numerous innovative interventions to increase the effort and risk to current offenders.

Rehabilitate – Numerous interventions using a wide variety of partners to rehabilitate recidivist offenders.

Prevention – Preventative work to reduce the provocation to the next generation of offenders.

Assessment:

Discharges reduced by 35% in the financial year 2008/09 (from 130 to 84). Fatal injuries reduced by 50% (from 6 to 3), and injury related discharges by 71% (from 42 to 30). Public surveys found that 86% of those who lived in the hot-spot areas agreed that the Police were tackling gun crime.

State number of words: 400

Description – Operation Noble

Scanning:

For the past 13 years a small proportion of criminals have used firearms on Merseyside, although in recent years this has become more prevalent and the ramifications have become more serious. Between 1995 – 2000 there was an average of 30 discharges per annum. However in 2001 this started to rise significantly and since 2004 has risen to over 100, with financial year 2007/8 recording the highest on record at 130.

The criminal use of firearms has also changed in nature. Reports have shown that as well as being used to commit robbery (which rarely results in a discharge), young men are carrying weapons to enforce street rivalry and confrontations, whether in relation to drug disputes, or merely status issues (such as someone showing them disrespect). Similarly the show of such firearms is now increasingly resulting in more discharges, which are also becoming more violent in nature with fatalities rising from 1 to 6 in the past 3 years.

Similarly the media has reflected this change with more sensationalist headlines such as “Rush hour gun terror” and the concern that innocent bystanders will be caught in these incidents. This concern was realised with the killing of 11-year-old Rhys Jones, in August 2007 who was shot when caught up in an incident between rival gangs in Croxteth. This massive media attention was associated with the Government announcement in September 2007 for a renewed effort to prevent gun crime and violence amongst young people focusing on the areas of London, Liverpool, Manchester and Birmingham.

Although offences have occurred throughout the Merseyside area, different areas are disproportionately affected. Between 2005-08, 56% of discharges and 57% of homicides occurred in the Liverpool North area, whilst 91% of discharges and 93% of homicides occurred in 3 of the 6 Police Basic Command Units (BCU's), (Liverpool North & South and Knowsley). It is these three policing areas, which continue to show the most significant problems, and during 2007/8 accounted for 120 of the 130 discharge incidents as the table shows below.

	A	B	C	D	E (L'pool North)	F	Total
2005/6	0 (1 early 2005)	11	14	3	78	17	123
2006/7	0	7	16	4	66	22	115
2007/8	0	8	25	2	66	29	130

Although injuries are increasing the majority of discharges result in damage (68%) where the offender has used the gun as a warning by shooting at a person's property to warn them of more violent consequences. Injuries and fatalities account for 40 (32%) of these incidents.

Although there are differences across the 3 areas in relation to the most common day and time for discharges the most common time is between 9pm and 6am (41%), 4pm – 6am (31%) and 8am -4pm (19%). Most common days are Saturday and Sunday (38%). Therefore although overnight during the weekend is the most common time for an incident, times and days are spread over the week.

The Merseyside Police and partner agencies set out a number of objectives, which include a reduction of criminal discharges, a reduction of injuries and the maintenance of public confidence in public agencies.

Analysis:

The use of these firearms is for a number of reasons. For instance during 2007 the people killed included a known local gang member, a completely innocent person caught in between two gang factions, a person shot in an apparent domestic incident and a person killed as a result of a possible drug dispute. Violence has always been a tactic used in organised crime to settle disputes. The use of firearms as an adjunct of that violence has become increasingly

more popular and as the prevalence of firearms has increased so has their use in lower level and more disorganised crime. The analysts distinguished between the: chaotic use of firearms (when the gun was used as a warning between rival individuals or groups), organised (to support criminal activity such as drug trafficking), domestic (where the firearm was available to deal with a relationship issue), as well as other miscellaneous issues.

This understanding of the offender's lifestyle also came from liaison with families and through interviewing the offenders themselves. Indeed what came out of these interviews was that young men received a sense of order and belonging from this activity, as well as status amongst their peers and the opportunity to challenge authority. As one Liverpool 14 year old said, "I want to be in a gang, because without crime, we're just poor." Further insight was provided during a meeting with the females (mothers, wives, girlfriends) who had a significant role in the offender's life. This showed the rivalry between the young men even though they had grown up knowing each other and going to the same schools. Such violent interaction often appeared senseless and futile but these women said it was deeply ingrained in these areas.

A further critical point was all of the named individuals had previously come to the attention of the authorities and had been threatened with action, which had never come to fruition. For example offenders had previously been warned with imprisonment but when after reappearing in front of the court they had been given a community punishment.

The availability of firearms appeared to make it used as a weapon where other types of violence or force would have been used in the past. Although there were a wide variety of firearms used shotguns were the most prevalent being used in 34% of cases, and handguns used in 25% of incidents. Firearms appear to be coming from numerous sources, such as the activation of blank firing weapons, or weapons stolen from legally held supplies. Similarly there is intelligence to suggest firearms are being sourced from the same countries which export illicit drugs as an addition to drug consignments.

Using the problem analysis triangle further analysis explored the offender, victim and location characteristics.

Offender

Subjects implicated in the offending in the Liverpool North area were analysed. These had an average age of 22 years, all were recidivists (average 25 prior offences), who showed a similar profile notably theft, drug, court/prison/police offences, violence, and drug offences. A small number had also been involved with firearms. In essence they lived chaotic lifestyles, which involved violence and drug supply. It also transpired that of the 58 identified as suspects throughout the Merseyside area, 13 had been a victim of shooting (one was a repeat victim) and three were stabbed (again one was a repeat victim). In essence their lifestyle brought them in contact with other offenders and the line between victim and offender was often blurred.

Victims

Of the 44 victims researched (those shot at or houses shot at), 84% were white European, the mean age was 28 years and 91% were males (3 of the 4 females injured were bystanders.) Nearly all were resident in the hot-spot areas. 20% had previously been arrested for firearms offences and 27% monitored under the MAPPA process. A number of the victims were completely blameless being caught in the cross-fire of different factions.

Merseyside Police and the CDRP were very keen to understand what the general public felt about gun crime and engaged in a survey consisting of 754 street interviews between July and August 2008. These interviews were balanced for age, gender and ethnicity to represent the general public of Merseyside as well as those living in the hot-spot areas for gun crime. In terms of the general population knife crime was said to be the key concern (20%) followed by burglary (16%) and gun crime (11%), although 76% went on to say that gun crime was a very or fairly big problem. Also 48% of the population felt it was more of a problem than 12 months previously; a perception they said was driven primarily by the media. In relation to the hot-spot areas most concern was around gang related crime (17%), followed by burglary (16%) and gun crime (13%), followed by knife crime (12%). 20% of people interviewed, or their families, had had experience of gun crime and 33% were worried about being a victim.

Location

Liverpool (which comprises two of the Policing areas) continues to be the most deprived local authority area in England (Index Multiple Deprivation) with 56% of its population living in the most 10% deprived nationally. Indeed

Liverpool and the third BCU area of Knowsley local authority areas are ranked 1st and 5th in prevalence of Lower Super Output Areas (LSOA) in relation to deprivation. We have previously shown that illegal gun activity is specifically focused in these 3 policing areas, however by drilling down it can be seen that discharges are disproportionately seen in 5 neighbourhood policing areas. In fact during 2007, 4 of these neighbourhoods, situated in the Liverpool North area, accounted for 46% of all Force discharges and 96% of the discharges in the BCU.

The areas in which these discharges are taking place are residential locations. In fact there are repeat locations in these hot spots with particular streets and addresses being responsible for repeat discharges. In essence the risky locations are where the people who use firearms either conduct their business (deal drugs), live, socialise, or defend their territory.

In essence the analysis pointed to the conclusion that the people involved in the criminal use of firearms within Merseyside were those who were often prolific criminals and who often used violence in their day to day activity to enforce their particular will. The increased availability of firearms made these a new facilitator for a different type of violent crime. The fact that analysis of weather conditions, showing that 80% took place on clear or cloudy days with the rest occurring in rain, drizzle, overcast or light fog again points to routine activity theory with the most offences taking place whilst most people are active on the streets.

Response:

It is accepted there are deep-rooted issues in the areas that these incidents are occurring, in relation to poverty, education and health which clearly require longer-term solutions, and there is an agreed 10- year strategy to look at this.

However, in the short to medium term there is a considerable amount of work that can be done when the analysis supports Routine Activity Theory in that firearms are being used as an accessory in the everyday lifestyle of people who are engaged in criminal behavior. Such activity can cause an escalating problem with other criminals purchasing or renting firearms to protect themselves or retaliate. Focusing on high risk offenders and victims (as often their profile is very similar) to reduce their choice of a gun as a facilitator in their routine activity is a fruitful way forward and can prevent injuries and fear in innocent pedestrians and residents in the same area.

As such, in line with the National Intelligence Model, activity was focused on these high-risk offenders / victims who are resident in these high risk locations as well as an attempt to reduce the supply of facilitators (firearms). We felt that the analysis lent itself to a Situational Crime Prevention approach (SCP) and utilised rational choice perspective to increase the effort and risk for offenders as well as reducing the provocation for others to become involved.

As outlined earlier many of the young people involved had been previously warned about their behavior in different contexts and had experience of the authorities not carrying through their threats, and or promises. As such it was an express intention of the police and the multi agency groups that they would deal with all individuals consistently and carry through any action they had previously discussed.

To co-ordinate such a project a governing body was formed which gave the Deputy Chief Constable the overall strategic lead for gun crime and the responsibility of co-ordinating a pan Merseyside meeting called the Gun & Gang Multi-Agency Governance Group (MAGG). Chief Executives and representatives of the 5 Merseyside Local Authorities, Leaders of Probation, CPS, Prisons, Criminal Justice Board, Fire and Rescue Service, Merseyside Police Authority, and Government Office North West attend this meeting. In addition, the Local Authority for each hotspot area (Liverpool and Knowsley) holds their own multi agency meetings to monitor enforcement, prevention and rehabilitation interventions. Finally a Detective Chief Superintendent has been placed in command of a dedicated police unit (Matrix) to deal primarily with reactive investigation of discharges, covert operations, proactive intelligence gathering and disruption. A co-ordination unit was established within Matrix to co-ordinate all activity across the three most affected BCUs and partner agencies. The Detective Chief Superintendent also chairs a weekly gun crime coordination meeting, when intelligence, pre-cursor incidents and ongoing factional disputes are discussed and control / disruption measures are put into place to manage the risk and prevent discharges occurring. He also chairs a weekly Joint Agency Group (JAG), attended by police, probation, youth offending service, children's services and the CPS, where the top 40 gun crime nominals ('impact players') from the three BCUs are discussed and 7 day risk management plans put in place for each one to manage and control the threat.

The specific responses in line with Rational Choice Perspective, have focused around enforcement, rehabilitation and prevention, as detailed below:

Enforcement:

This area is co-ordinated by the Detective Chief Superintendent Merseyside Police and the tactics are to increase the effort and risk to the offender as well as reduce his rewards. In this way aggressive tactics are used to disrupt the criminal element associated with gun crime in the priority geographic areas. Subjects known as 'impact players' are identified through specific factors, called discriminators, which consider if the subject has: had involvement with firearms; previously a victim of gun crime and been unco-operative with the Police; family members involved with gun crime; the family address has been subject to firearms discharge; good grade intelligence linking them to firearms; or they have been subject of an Osman warning. Once identified the 'impact players' are served with a written notice, which warns them that unless they cease their involvement in gun related criminality they will be subjected to focused intervention. They are then given a graded status ('Gold', 'Silver' or 'Bronze'), which is reviewed weekly, a risk management plan that is reviewed weekly, and a plan owner. On top of this consistent use is made of 'home visits' and, dependent on their status, these visits could be every day or once a week. A further controversial intervention, which was undertaken after legal advice, was to designate each of these individuals in terms of search powers (Section 60 powers). This had previously only been done in designated locations and allowed subjects to be legally searched at any time they were seen on the street. All interventions are transparent and if the person engages with the programme and shows desistance to firearms then the interventions quickly decline. Other interventions include:

- Seeking of ASBO's to prevent them from frequenting geographical locations or contacting named individuals who form part of their network.
- Eviction if causing disorder in their neighbourhood, or not adhering to tenancy agreement.
- Implementation of Child Protection measures if it can be shown a member of the family is at risk of harm.
- Enforcement of the law for all offences involving 'impact players', however minor.
- Seeking of tight bail conditions for any offences dealt with coupled with robust policing of conditions.
- A firearms response to disrupt individuals or groups who form an immediate gun threat (includes road side checks, search, licensed premises visits and deployment of ANPR checks),
- An immediate and staggered response to smother any further activity in a tightly defined geographic location following an unlawful discharge of a firearm.
- Crown Prosecution Service provides a specialist lawyer to provide legal advice on cases involving gun and gang related crime and any arrested individual previously highlighted receives focused attention.

Rehabilitation:

This area of the MAGG strategy is co-ordinated by the Chief Probation Officer. The main tactic used here is to support the 'impact player' to gain employment or engage in other legitimate activity. Subjects are visited in prison prior to their release and informed of the attention and support they will be receiving on release. Attempts are made to settle them outside Liverpool or if this is not possible away from their peer group to provide a greater opportunity for success. Since the process has started 13 gun crime nominals have been given employment, education, or training opportunities. Two of these were found to become reintegrated with criminal activity and as such their status changed and the enforcement activity resumed. As such 11 continue to work with the partnership and the type of work or training they tend to choose often involves different parts of the building trade such as scaffolding, plastering, or joinery. Many of these individuals are illiterate and undergo a basic skills course prior to their training.

A particularly good example of how this can work involves a male of 29 years who had served 4 years of an 8-year sentence for shooting someone. He had 19 previous convictions for firearms offences, dishonesty and drug offences. He was reported to be difficult to supervise in prison and was regularly involved in fights and unruly behaviour, not being thought suitable for rehabilitation. He was served with a gun crime notice on being released from prison and graded as a 'gold' response, being visited daily by the Police. Police officers gave him a consistent and clear message that the reason he was receiving the focussed attention was due to his involvement with firearms, he was told that if he chose to change his lifestyle he would be supported by police and partner agencies with employment, education and training opportunities. After 4 weeks he said he was ready to look for employment opportunities and with support from Connexions and the Probation service he was found voluntary work in a sports shop, and he now assists the Youth Offending Service (where he talks to young people about the reality of prison). He is now enrolled to train as a sports coach in September. There is no intelligence that he is associating with previous offenders or

engaged with criminal activity.

Prevention:

This area of the MAGG strategy is co-ordinated by the Chief Executive Officer from Knowsley Borough Council. Efforts are made to highlight 'at risk' groups in the younger age group to reduce the provocation to become involved and are a longer-term approach. The following initiatives are examples:

A football league was introduced by the Matrix police team involving 22 schools from the high risk areas. The theme of the tournament was 'join a team, not a gang' and whilst the teams were playing, local youth groups staffed exhibition stands highlighting to the youths what diversionary activity is available in the community. This was supplemented by an anti gun and gang themed play which was shown to all these schools. The play, commissioned and financed by the partner agencies, was written by a local playwright and was performed at Liverpool Football Club to 1800 children. The play highlighted the difficult moral choices the children have to make. Feedback has been excellent and plans are in place to show it to all the children attending these schools. An education pack is also being developed for delivery to the schools across Merseyside, which is based on the play and is mapped against the GCSE English Curriculum.

On a more short term basis all the areas run evening operations whereby any young children inappropriately on the street after dark in vulnerable locations are taken to a place of safety where children's services /safeguarding teams and the police are present; Parents are contacted to collect their children and child safeguarding referrals are made where relevant.

We have also worked with partners to place children most at risk in secure accommodation when intelligence indicates that their lives are under threat. When twin brothers aged 16 were targeted and one shot outside an off-licence in November 2008 for allegedly dealing drugs on another's patch, a multi agency case conference was called which resulted in a secure accommodation panel meeting the same day. The children were 'out of parental control and heavily involved in criminality', yet they were victims in this case. The case was taken to court and the twins placed in secure accommodation for their own safety, where they received support and an education plan from children's social care.

Assessment:

During 2008/09 close monitoring went on to check implementation of the plan and monitor the level of activity conducted. There was a significant amount of work done with increases in the execution of firearms related search warrants (from 298 in 2007/8 to 804 in 2008/9); people arrested in relation to firearm related offences; and people charged with firearms offences. With the assistance of the dedicated CPS lawyer, sentences increased from 84 years 2 months in 2007/8 to 417 years in 2008/9. The force also recovered 334 firearms during the 2008/09 year.

As the example showed earlier there were life changing interventions made by people working on this project, however the main aim was to reduce firearm discharges overall. As the table shows below during 2008/09 there were 84 firearm discharges, a reduction on the previous year of 35%. This was also the lowest number of discharges since 2002/3 when there were 81 discharges.

	2005/06	2006/07	2007/08	2008/09
Discharges	123	113	130	84
Damage	83	77	82	51
Injury	39	31	42	30
Homicide	1	5	6	3

In terms of public perception 86% of those who lived in the hot-spot area agreed that the Police were tackling gun crime (compared with 58% of those residents living in non hot-spot areas).

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