

## OPERATION SAGA

### SUMMARY

The adjacent areas of Walsgrave Triangle and Cross Point, Walsgrave, Coventry are the responsibility of the Eastern Sector M3 Operational Command Unit. The area is classified as Beat 54 and is policed by a beat manager and 8 constables working in line with the Force strategic principles in relation to sector policing.

The area comprises solely of business and retail premises. The site has developed over time and companies have moved in to the area, as industrial development sites became available. The growth in retail outlets centred within a particular locality has resulted in large retail companies such as Big W, Toys R Us, Asda and Showcase Cinemas being well established on site.

The area provides immediate access to the motorway network including the M6 and M69, as well as arterial routes such as the A46 and A444. This results in a high volume of visitors in vehicles being attracted to the site. Three hotels have been built in close proximity to cater for largely corporate and conference based clientele. This is in addition to the employees of the companies located in the area and visitors to the nearby Walsgrave Hospital who take advantage of a park and ride scheme within the confines of the site.

There had not previously been a co-ordinated approach in terms of planning and design. The fragmented and disparate nature of resident commercial interests has limited the opportunities for the creation of a community identity although a local business action group has been established.

The high numbers of vehicles using the sites and its geography have contributed to a significant problem in relation to vehicle crime and in particular thefts from motor vehicles. This has been consistently identified through Level 1 Tasking and Co-ordination.

The absence of a co-ordinated problem solving strategy had previously failed to address the challenges posed by the area and to exploit the potential opportunities in tackling the problems of vehicle crime.

Operation SAGA was developed as a mechanism to deliver a multi-dimensional police and partnership solution. The distinct elements of victims, offenders and the location were considered and a series of tactical responses were developed which were aimed at reducing both crime and victims and creating an environment where partnerships could flourish and local businesses were empowered to assist in tackling the issues.

## **PROJECT OUTLINE**

Two specific objectives were identified as being desirable following the implementation of Operation SAGA, these were:

### **Project Objectives**

- 1. To reduce vehicle crime by 7 % in line with targets set by the local policing plan in 2002/03 and the Local Crime and Disorder Partnership crime and disorder strategy.***
- 2. To achieve sustainable crime reduction by working together with partners in local businesses.***

### **PROBLEM DEFINITION**

In defining the problem the SARA approach was utilised and this revealed the following:

#### **SCANNING**

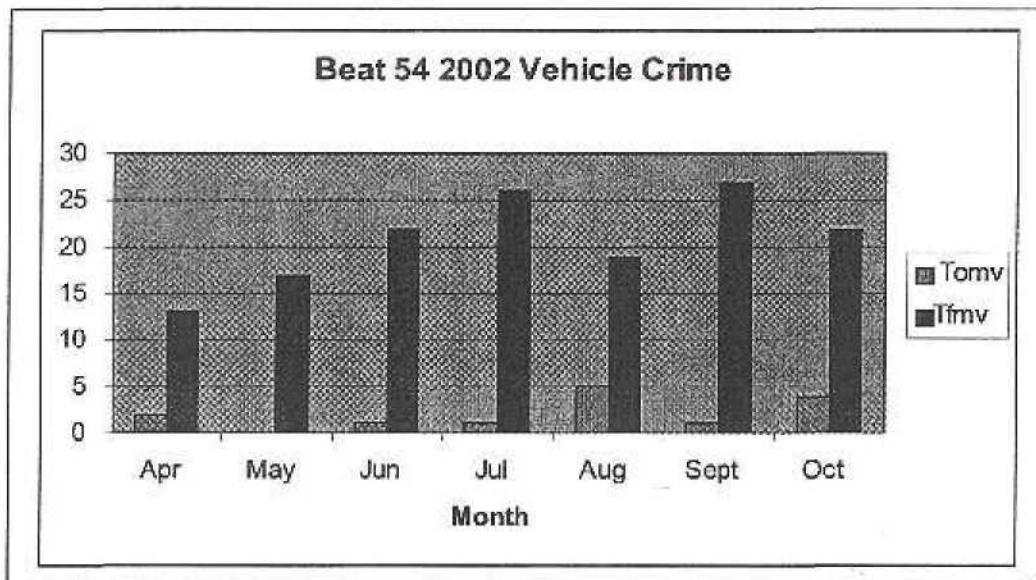
It became apparent that the problem of high vehicle crime in the areas of Walsgrave Triangle and Cross Point had been evident for a number of months. The NIM Level 1 Tasking and Co-ordination Process had consistently highlighted this location as a crime hotspot. The local Walsgrave Business Action Group had also raised their concerns as to the problems of vehicle crime on successive monthly meetings. A review of previous police responses was seen to involve mainly reactive responses limited to the provision of high visibility patrols as a tactical option.

#### **ANALYSIS**

The following data sources were used in the analysis process:

- Weekly 'Tasking and Co-ordination Group Level 1 Tactical Assessment'
- Force data systems such as CRIMES and FFLINTS
- Force Intelligence Management System
- Analyst predictive assessments
- Consultation with the Walsgrave Business Action Group
- Information and intelligence generated from weekly information sharing briefings during the operation.

A breakdown of vehicle crime in the area over a key period displays the following results:



Analysis also provided the following information:

#### **Victim**

The victims of vehicle crime in the Walsgrave Triangle and Cross Point areas fall into a number of distinct categories; all are non-resident in the area and transient in nature:

- Customers to retail outlets and leisure facilities
- Customers using the local hotels for conferences or access to the motorway network
- Staff of a nearby NHS Trust hospital using a park and ride facility located on the Walsgrave Triangle site
- Staff of local companies resident on the site itself

Differing categories of victim created differing problems, which needed to be considered within the overall problem solving approach:

Customers visiting the retail and leisure facilities were largely local to the Coventry area. They would often park their cars and return with some shopping items which would be left on display before then visiting an alternate store or leisure facility.

Hotel Customers mainly used the facilities as part of their employment. They often proved difficult to engage with as their vehicles and contents i.e. Laptop computers were often owned by another party. The victim response therefore was often diluted and considered to be more of an inconvenience than personal loss.

Staff using the park and ride facility provided by the NHS Trust provided a victim group that was easier to reach as they were a 'captive audience' at key times when they arrived and left from work.

Staff of local companies were also identified as an easier to reach group in relation to crime reduction advice and target hardening.

### **Offender**

It became apparent that there was little in relation to NIM Level 1 intelligence, which identified local criminals as being active in this area. Arrests that were made pointed to the fact that offenders were from outside Coventry and travelled from areas such as Chelmsley Wood in Birmingham or from other force areas. These criminals targeted hotel/retail sites close to key road networks. Their apparent cross OCU/Force activity presented local sector officers with particular problems in targeting offenders. It was believed that groups engaging in this type of crime travelled to similar sites in Leicestershire and Staffordshire.

The absence of meaningful NIM Level 2 intelligence was evident as the remit of agencies such as the National Crime Squad appeared not to include 'low level' criminal activity. This placed the onus upon local officers to engage with adjoining and other Forces with a view to obtaining intelligence products.

Criminal activity was evident across the 24-hour period but the majority of offences taking place during the evening and overnight. This aspect of criminal behaviour was linked to the periods when the largest numbers of vehicles were available. This could coincide with conferences at Hotels or during periods when the leisure facilities such as the cinema and restaurants were most busy.

Property stolen varied from laptop computers and car stereos to bags and items left on open view. Thefts of vehicles were relatively few in numbers.

### **Location**

As has been mentioned the site in question has evolved over time. This has precluded the application of an overall 'secure by design' approach as evident in other sites such as the Fort Shopping Complex in Birmingham. This resulted in various commercial and retail premises being built each with differing aims and objectives. The almost immediate access to key road networks made the site easily accessible for retail customers and business transport. This feature also made it a prime target for travelling criminals.





## RESPONSE

In providing an appropriate problem solving response the following action was taken:

- To produce a longer-term sustainable outcome it was essential that the local police and business community worked together in partnership. The co-operation of senior management from the police Operational Command Unit and key managers at a regional or national level from the most vulnerable sites was sought.
- A meeting was held which involved a presentation, which highlighted the problem of vehicle crime in the area. Further discussions produced an agreement, which addressed the expectations of all concerned and provided a framework for further action.
- The existing police 24-hour shift pattern presented problems of continuity and so a part time officer was utilised as a dedicated link between police and the local business community.
- The NIM Level 1 Tasking and Co-ordination process remained a key driver in relation to the continued use of a Hotspot management plan owned by the local beat manager. This ensured that a weekly review of intelligence and tactical options was undertaken.

In more specific terms:

### Victim

A proactive crime prevention campaign was established. It was necessary to overcome reluctance on the part of some retailers to be 'labelled' as more vulnerable than others were. This was achieved by adopting the proven Crimestoppers SMART campaign across the whole site. Staff at hotels and other sites such as the Showcase Cinemas were tasked to deliver crime prevention information at key times.



An example of Crimestoppers publicity material used for Operation SAGA

A media strategy involved the use of local press and radio coverage, which highlighted the police/business operation and reinforcing the crime prevention message.

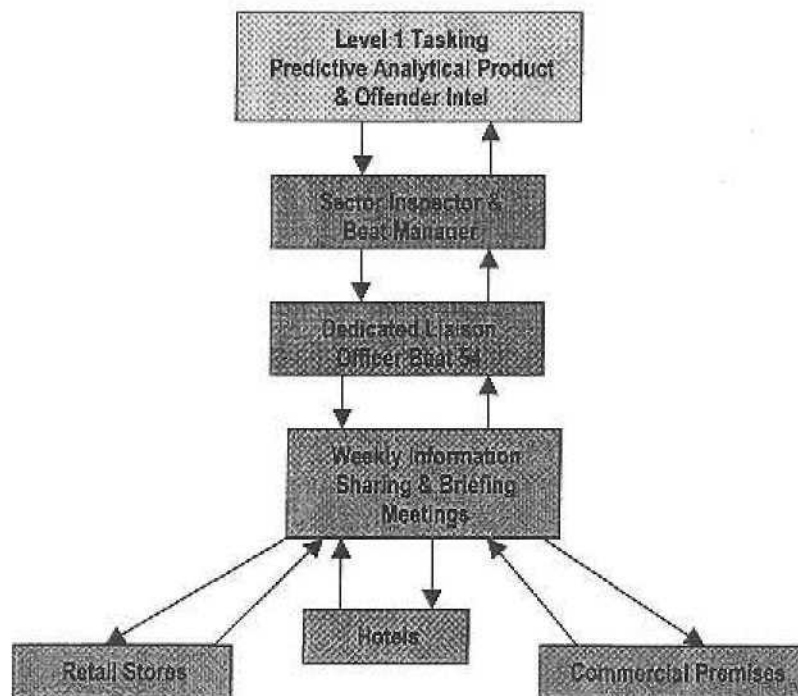
Local officers were tasked to patrol the car parks and 'ticket' vehicles in which bags or other valuables had been left on open display. These tickets simply highlighted the potential vulnerability of the owners to criminal activity.



## Offender

In an effort to impact on offender behaviour it was decided that disruption and deterring their activity were key tactical options to be pursued. To maximise the effectiveness of police and business activity in this area, the following was established:

- The dedicated officer was provided with weekly intelligence products from the NIM Level 1 Tasking and Co-ordination process. This identified suspects and included predictive analysis as to key times, locations, and most vulnerable vehicle types.
- Weekly briefings were held between the police and key businesses at a local hotel. An information sharing protocol was developed which allowed the sharing of live intelligence information. This enabled security and staff to be deployed at the most effective times with a purpose alongside police patrols. This proved to be highly effective and the process appeared as follows:



- Regular liaison was maintained with neighbouring OCU's and Forces to gather any NIM Level 2 intelligence information, which could assist in identifying travelling criminals. This had tangible links to an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) initiative, which will be referred too shortly.
- Agreement was reached between the sector and local CID that detective officers would interview any offenders arrested for vehicle crime.

## **Location**

A series of measures were implemented which aimed to overcome some of the difficulties linked to the location and to maximise the limited opportunities available. These included:

- The local Walsgrave Business Action Group was consulted as to the provision of funding to restore some CCTV capability for the site. Agreement was reached that one of the larger companies with an existing system would be willing to provide a monitoring facility. The group agreed to provide shared funding to provide a camera system at the entrance and exit points of the site.
- To reinforce the benefits of the CCTV proposal, local police secured the assistance of the Dedicated Observation Team, Community Safety Bureau and Road Policing Unit and pioneered the use of a static ANPR system, which was known as Operation ZOBO. This initiative involved the placing of police cameras at the entrance and exit points of the site and the recording of all incoming and outgoing vehicles. The resulting tapes were then examined electronically via the ANPR database and hits included stolen and suspect vehicles being identified as actively using the site. This resulting intelligence was a valuable tool to influence subsequent police resource deployment. The benefits of this system were presented to the Business Action Group and served to convince them that spending money in this area was indeed advantageous.
- The recording of vehicle crime offences on the site was also subject of a specific initiative. A revised supplementary crime report was devised which provided a checklist of key investigative steps and questions for officers attending the scenes of vehicle crime. This also included a requirement that officers identify via a site plan exactly where the offence had taken place. This proved invaluable in identifying the most vulnerable areas.
- For the duration of the Operation, the facility to report vehicle crime by telephone was withdrawn. This ensured officer attendance and compliance with the minimum standards of investigation for vehicle crime.
- The local Crime Reduction Officer was actively employed in promoting the 'Secure by Design' concept. A number of Hotels and businesses are now actively pursuing this award.
- A 'phone alert' scheme was introduced which afforded local businesses to ring each other to alert nominated on duty staff of suspicious vehicles or persons present on the site.

## **ASSESSMENT**

In assessing Operation SAGA the following was taken into account:

- Was the problem clearly defined?

The problem of vehicle crime was clearly evident and identified. Steps were taken to consider the problem in relation to victims, offenders and the unique nature of the location itself.

- Were efforts focussed in areas where success could be realistically measured?

Efforts were focussed in reducing crime within a key performance indicator. In addition efforts were also focussed in improving co-operation and participation from



the business community and this could be measured against previous levels of activity.

- Was it possible to clearly identify what was actually done?

The various elements within Operation SAGA were recorded and identified via a Hotspot Management Plan. This was owned at a local level and subject of weekly review via the NIM Level 1 TCG process.

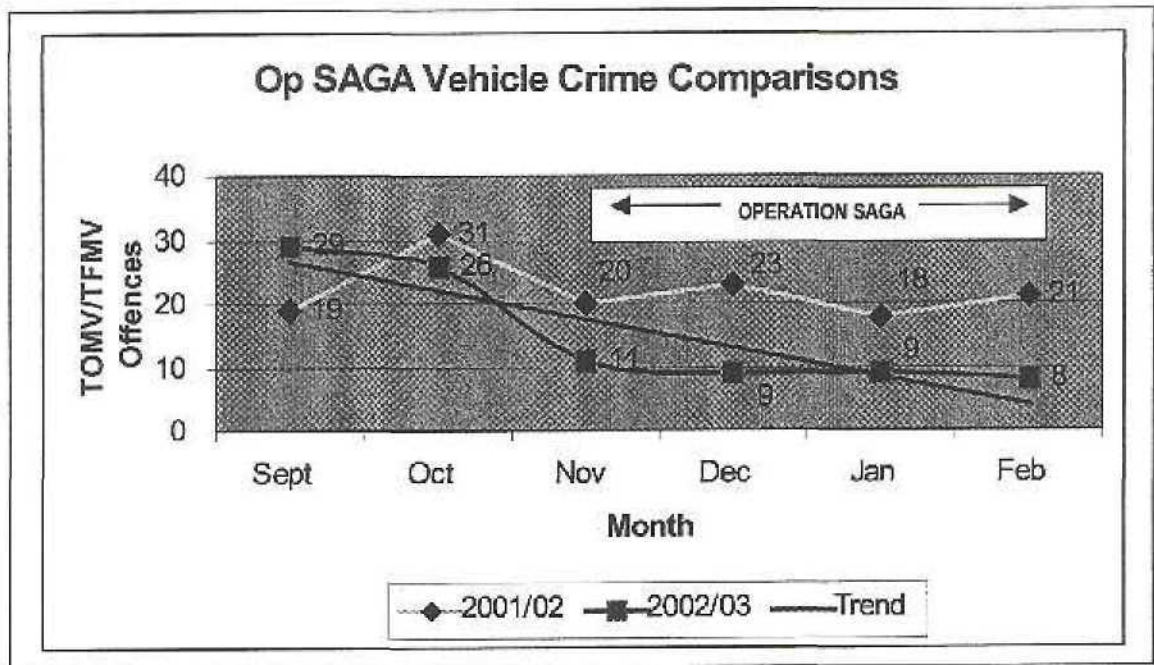
- Was there any displacement of criminal activity?

The nature of the site attracted a specific type of offender. It has been mentioned that it was strongly suspected that these were not predominantly local to the area but instead, travelled from similar sites across the region. As a result the levels of vehicle crime in areas adjacent to Walsgrave Triangle and Cross Point remained unaffected.

- Were the intended outcomes largely successful?

In reviewing the success or other wise of Operation SAGA it is necessary to consider what the final outcomes were.

In terms of crime reduction the outcomes exceeded expectations. The aim was to reduce vehicle crime by 7% in line with the Local Policing Plan. In reality Operation SAGA reduced vehicle crime by 55% exceeding the target by almost 8 times.



In relation to the second aim of the project which was to achieve sustainable crime reduction by working in partnership with local businesses the following observations can be made:

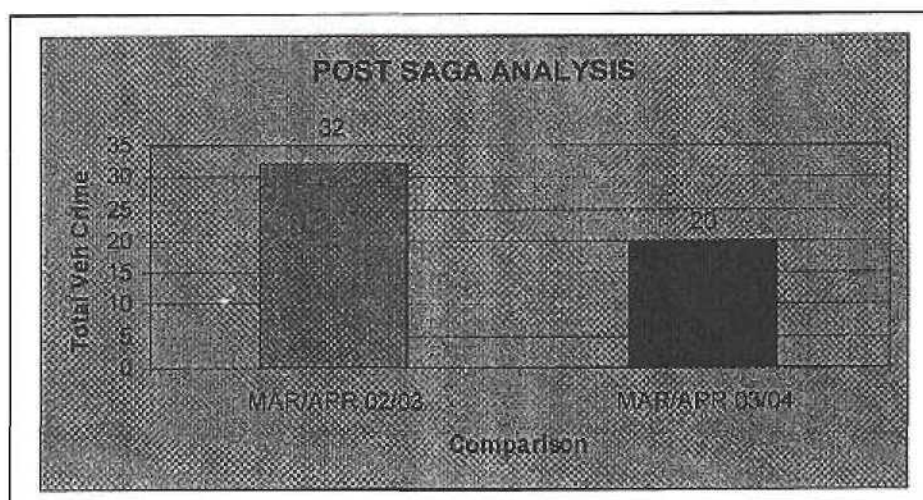
- Operation SAGA produced meaningful dialogue and partnership action between the police and local business community.
- It produced systems and processes, which encouraged local businesses to take greater ownership of crime reduction issues. The use of a single, part time police officer as liaison and the provision of intelligence information to assist deployment of internal security and staff greatly reduced the previous reactive high visibility policing responses.
- The proven use of technology through ANPR is to be developed and a 'live' ANPR feed from Walsgrave Triangle to the local Operations Centre is being considered. This would provide real time intelligence as to stolen or suspected vehicles entering the site.
- The tactical options used during SAGA are now recorded as good practice. The nature of the site inevitably means that problems will re-occur. It could be argued that both police and business are now in a far better position to respond quickly and effectively to any issues that may emerge.
- The focus on crime prevention has resulted in a number of businesses improving their own security arrangements and seeking 'Secure by Design' status.

#### **FUTURE ACTIVITY**

The lessons from Operation SAGA have highlighted the benefits of adopting a comprehensive problem solving approach. It is hoped that many of the positive results will be continued over the coming months. Due to the nature of the site the use of a dedicated microbeat officer continues. This allows for continuity in terms of partner relationships and the ability to respond effectively to managerial changes within the various businesses.

The nature of the sites will mean that criminal groups will target the location at varying times. Systems are now in place that will allow for the swift re-introduction of weekly information sharing/intelligence briefings should they be necessary.

Since Operation SAGA in its comprehensive form came to an end a comparative analysis of vehicle crime figures revealed that a high level of sustained reduction was evident as follows:





Crime prevention is now considered to be a significant issue. It is no longer implemented in isolation within individual locations but rather in a more holistic manner. This takes account of wider issues such as the nature of the victims, and the need to take account of the business implications of highlighting individual areas of vulnerability.

The future development of ANPR remains an exciting opportunity and may go some way to address a persistent problem, which was encountered. This is the difficulty in local officers in dealing with travelling criminals who transcend local and force boundaries. Their activity in low level crime rather than drugs or armed criminality often results in them falling outside the interest of national agencies. This gap in intelligence and enforcement is an area where the police are vulnerable.

## **CONCLUSION**

Operation SAGA demonstrates a commitment to the use of a problem solving approach to deal with high levels of vehicle crime within an area exhibiting unique and specific issues. The lack of a problem solving approach had previously resulted in a high level of police resources reacting in a simplistic manner to criminal activity. There had been no real engagement with the business community or ownership on their part for the problems that existed in the area.

The plans implemented within SAGA produced significant crime reduction success. They also provided the catalyst for improved partnership activity and local involvement. It could be argued that both police and business are now better equipped to respond and deal with vehicle crime as a result.

**Inspector Scott McKenna BA (Hon's)**  
**Sector Inspector**  
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