

# OPERATION FALLOW

**Section B: Summary of application** - *In no more than 400 words use this space to provide a summary of your project under the stated headings (see guidance for more information).*

## **Scanning:**

Following a seemingly random attack on an innocent male, enquiries revealed that the individual had visited the Public Sex Environment of Hagg Lane for the purpose of 'cruising'. The reluctant victim outlined issues affecting cruisers in the area. He identified a seething hotbed of resentment towards the cruisers from local residents who had lost faith in the Police. Following an initial consultation process Operation Fallow was launched to address a series of issues facing the local community.

## **Analysis:**

Having engaged with a variety of different stakeholders in the area both 'legitimate and non-legitimate three key goals were identified:

1. Provide a safe environment for all this included those that wished to visit the area for nefarious activities.
2. Accurately record all incidents to gauge the quantity and volume of incidents and tailor the response and priority of future Policing Activities.
3. Publicise our approach to the whole in an effort to build tolerance and understanding among the local community. Provide confidence and reassurance to the cruising community that still wish to utilise the area and finally to bring reassurance to both parties that the Police will respond to the needs of the two diverse communities.

## **Response:**

We used a three phased approach to the problem involving a number of local partners. It was designed to accurately reflect the problem and deal with the issues in the long term.

Phase One was geared towards the gathering of intelligence and publicising our action. It was during this period that officers utilised cruising websites to engage with a section of the community that was particularly difficult to reach.

Phase Two was designed to bring reassurance and the focus was on high visibility patrols building on regeneration of the area following litter clearance and pruning back foliage from the dense copses.

## **Assessment:**

Phase Three was in essence the assessment phase. Here we reviewed the feedback from forums, community meetings and websites. We reviewed the crime intelligence generated and the level of incidents reported. What was patently clear was that:

1. We had generated a more accurate picture of the problems in the area and addressed them.
2. We had improved safety and confidence on both sides of the divide.
3. We had finally been able to engage with the cruising community and
4. Improved understanding and tolerance among the non cruising residents and site users.



**Section C: Description of project** - Describe the project in no more than 4,000 words. Please refer to the full guidance for more information on what the description should cover, in particular section 11.

## **OPERATION FALLOW**

### **A Public Sex Environment – Hagg Lane, Crosspool, Sheffield.**

#### **Background**

The area in question is a wooded copse that borders a number of suburban housing developments. The closest of which is Crosspool, which is an affluent area of South West Sheffield. The copse is used by dog walkers and, due to its semi-rural location, also attracts large numbers of walkers and horse riders. There are stables in use within 150 meters. There are also a number of well-used allotment plots bordering this area.

Hagg Lane has been used as a Public Sex Environment (PSE) for at least 40 years. The majority of the residents in Crosspool know the area well and to a large degree have a pre-conceived view of what goes on and what they think of it. The only recorded incidents within the previous 18 months were those relating to inconsiderate parking, litter and the odd incident where a member of the public had stumbled across open sexual activity. As a result the area was given a very passive low level response with irregular patrols usually in response to what was widely labelled as 'nuisance complaints'.

This view was to change after a seemingly isolated and minor public order incident with subsequent investigation in late 2006. The incident involved a member of the public claiming he had travelled to the area simply to enjoy the countryside but had then had his car hemmed in by locals in two other vehicles. He was assaulted (though his injuries were minor) and his car was damaged. Throughout, he was subjected to a barrage of homophobic abuse.

The officers involved continued to gain as much information from the complainant as possible and he eventually revealed that he had deliberately gone to the area to illicit casual sex, a process known as cruising. The complainant had withheld details of the abuse and his intentions in the area for some time due to fear of repercussions (from the Police) and a feeling that the matter would not be dealt with appropriately, again by the Police. The complainant also feared that the information would become public and cause him and his family acute embarrassment.

The incident was clearly motivated by homophobia. It also highlighted two key concerns for the Local Policing Team. Firstly, there was an issue of homophobic abuse in the Hagg Lane area and secondly there was resentment in the local community geared towards the cruisers. The problem was complex and clearly needed a structured, partnership based approach to identify and tackle the key issues. We applied the SARA model as a response.

#### **SCANNING**

From the outset we determined to consult with as many sources as possible. We consulted with the 'legitimate' users of the area and the 'non-legitimate' users. We also focussed on support groups and social networking sites to gauge public and private opinion.

Clear, specific and realistic objectives needed to be set to ensure that we were addressing the correct problem with the correct solution. Through the scanning phase of Operation Fallow (the formalised response to the issues) the exact nature of the problem was established and it showed that it was specific to this community and that the specific circumstances of this problem presented a danger that could lead on to further crime.

For the first time in decades we had begun to accurately gauge the extent of the problem.

#### **Process of gathering data:**

It was clear from the incident outlined above that modern desk-top research had a part to play in the scanning process but it could not provide a clear picture of the whole problem. While legitimate users of the cruising site (dog walkers, horse riders etc) and local residents could and would, without fear, report their issues to the council or

police. Those being the victim of homophobic abuse / assault very infrequently had the confidence or domestic support to report incidents. Hence, analysis of Police and Council systems showed a distinct skew towards reports made by legitimate users.

The solution to this process was to canvass opinion on the ground with community groups, forums, cruisers and recreational groups.

**Community groups:** Police and Sheffield Council employees canvassed opinion both in community meetings and on the local Internet chat forums.

**Recreational Groups:** Officers liaised with the riding stables, allotment society committee and local rambling committee.

**Residents and Land Owners:** Anonymous questionnaires were sent to this group of stakeholders.

**Cruisers:** The hardest group to reach – were spoken to frequently by our partners from the Sheffield Centre for Sexual Health. The Police and Councils' Gay Lesbian Bi-sexual and Trans-gender (GLBT) staff were utilised to engage with this group. In addition cruising chat forums were utilised by Police and non Police staff.

#### **Data gathered:**

Some of the desktop research results can be seen in the table below but the general flavour of the response was that there was a significant *under-reporting* of both homophobic incidents *and* nuisance issues. The early surveys we conducted suggested that incidents were occurring on a regular basis but were never reported. More worryingly, it appeared that there was deep resentment about the area and users from local landowners. This resentment / homophobia was at boiling point – leading to incidents such as that outlined above.

The feedback showed two key complainant groups, within each group there were key issues:

#### Group 1 – 'Legitimate Users'

The local residents / landowners and recreational users believed they should have the right to access this particular area of countryside without coming into contact with males using the area for sex. They felt aggrieved that these males were abusing the "facilities" of the area. They would point to the litter problem as a manifestation of this (the litter being largely associated with condoms and pornography). There was a feeling in the community that Hagg Lane was "Crosspool's dirty little secret" and this justified a general homophobic attitude to non-local users of the area.

Their attitude to the police was that the problem was being deliberately ignored. "The Police can't be bothered to do anything" and were turning a blind eye to the problem due to a skewed take on "Political Correctness". All public opinion was focused on displacing the cruising activity to somewhere else and essentially taking the law into their own hands to accomplish these ends.

#### Group 2 – 'Cruisers'

They were very reluctant to identify themselves, especially as the vast majority of the cruisers were males already involved in heterosexual relationships and it was unlikely that their presence in Hagg Lane was known by their partners / families. This was coupled with a general mistrust of the police and the fear that they were breaking the law in some respect.

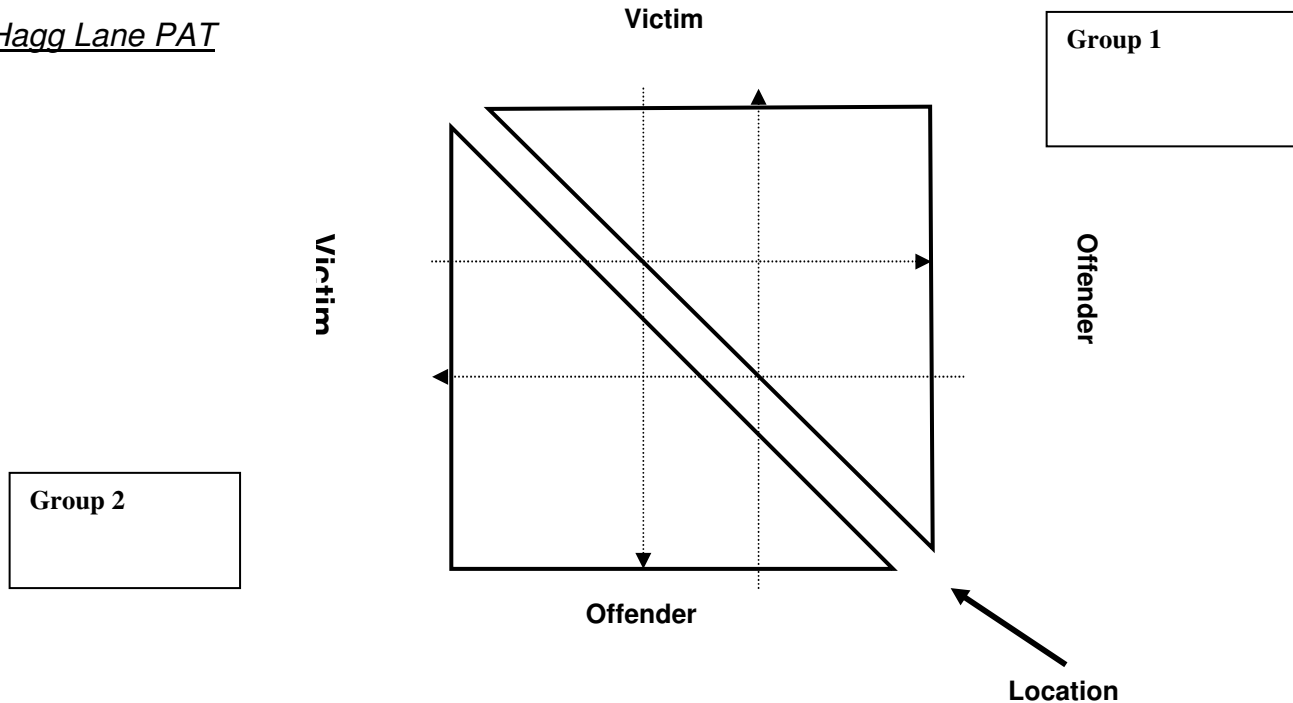
The process identified some key goals for the operation :

1. Providing a safe environment for all. – It was important not just to look to displace the problem. It had been present in the area for many years and probably represented an age-old confrontation in society. If the "problem" was here to stay then it needed to be managed to the point where all parties could tolerantly use the area in safety.
2. Accurately identifying and recording of all incidents – without the original recording the issues appeared to have been conveniently swept under the carpet. Officers approaching the analysis needed some way of measuring the extent of the issues so that they could critically assess the data. Once assessed the problem analysis triangle approach could be implemented describing the conditions involved. Our research showed that this was a complex problem (see PAT triangle below). In essence two PAT triangles existed, these could be viewed as lying adjacent to each other with the 'location' element forming a mutual hypotenuse. This was unique in that the

offender and victim axis on each triangle could be interchanged. It was possible for a victim to be an offender and vice versa all within the same analysis.

- Publicising our involvement in the area and our strategy, albeit a sanitised version, was essential to the operation's success. It would help in the process of overcoming entrenched views and keep all sides informed and involved. If the parties felt involved we could achieved their understanding and co-operation.

### Hagg Lane PAT



### **ANALYSIS**

With the assistance of Routine Activity Theory we looked more closely at the feedback we had received from the two groups and the recorded empirical evidence. Once again I stress that this process of analysis was made significantly more challenging due to the under reporting of issues and most specifically inaccessibility to the cruising group. It was in this aspect of the research that the Police relied heavily on the assistance of the sexual health outreach workers and the GLBT teams from the Council and internally. Empirical evidence could be introduced here but reliance on pre-operation data was unreliable and this was confirmed through our analysis process.

#### ***Suitable Target:***

Here the suitable target was the location itself. As outlined above the area was ideal for cruising. The specific features of the site only became apparent when we received the feedback from the sexual health outreach workers and through cruising websites:

- The area had a history as a cruising site and was well known by cruisers.
- Access to the site was excellent – it was within easy reach of the City and formed part of a circular route for effective egress from the site.
- The site was densely wooded and overgrown, giving plenty of cover and opportunity to create 'bedrooms' with spare foliage.
- Ample parking for cruisers to form the initial engagement.
- There were a number of legitimate users of the site to enhance the 'thrill of being discovered'

#### ***Absence of Capable Guardian:***

Again as outlined above the area received little if no Police presence because the issues being reported to the Police and our statutory partners appeared minor. Feedback received from all parties suggested that the Police and partners were disinterested in the issue or were not trusted to respond in the interests of the complainant. This has led to a massive under-reporting of the true issues. You can see from the tabulated data in the analysis section, that when reporting is encouraged the true picture of the problem emerged.

In 'normal' situations, the presence of legitimate site users in such numbers would usually deter activity in the way of a capable guardian. The research we had carried out showed that in fact the situation was quite the reverse. Similarly, if a cruiser were to be abused or assaulted the research suggested that due to the acts taking place, a passer-by would be unwilling to intervene and would clearly not act as a deterrent to any would be offender.

Finally as a result of the secluded location there were no surveillance systems in place and the area was not overlooked.

### ***Likely Offenders:***

By our own admissions Police presence in the area was limited, and in the absence of other capable guardians a range of offences were allowed to be committed.

It was clear that cruisers were going into the areas for sexual contact safe in the knowledge that they were unlikely to be arrested or that their activities would be passed onto their immediate families. They considered abuse to be a risk that had to be tolerated. They cruised in the area knowing that if they were abused or assaulted the Police were the last group to contact.

Similarly because of the lack of a suitable guardian, litter, illegal parking and all the other antisocial aspects of cruising would not be dealt with.

## **RESPONSE**

The operation was set out in three distinct phases and aimed to tackle the three elements of PAT in each of the first two phases:

### ***Phase One – Advertisement and Promotion:***

Our proposed actions had to be well publicised not only in the local press but also in the sort of forums that would be used by regular cruisers. This approach was unique and required an appropriately selected individual to review and update the main cruising web-sites with updates and the established South Yorkshire Police Corporate Policy. Using such a device meant that for the first time Police Officers had a direct link to a diverse hard to reach section of the community. We were able to publicise our proposed actions on chat forums.

Key to the success of the operation was the need to deliver different messages to different user groups. The approach for the cruising web-site was geared towards discouraging cruising in the area. However, given the nature of the problem we stressed the need to respect the local community and most importantly to trust Police Officers patrolling the area. Engendering trust would hopefully encourage contact.

With the local press release and local press updates we encouraged contact to report issues in the area and emphasised our robust, renewed, approach and increased high profile presence. Clearly using two different forms of media and two different messages we were aiming to reach and connect with both segments of the community and encourage participation in the problem.

Following early discussion with the gay mens outreach workers we got agreement from him and the commitment of his team to make early and repeated contact. Here we aimed to discourage use of the site and encourage reporting of incidents. Thus tackling the offender element and also the guardian issue i.e by encouraging police reporting we were stressing that the Police were taking a renewed overt interest in the problem. Throughout we stressed the importance of third party reporting of homophobic incidents.

Studies have shown that when reducing the amount of foliage from a PSE the level of activity within the PSE

diminishes. With this in mind we sought agreement from the Council Woodland Department to cut back the foliage in some of our key cruising areas. The agreement we had was ongoing and on a periodic basis they would trim back. By reducing the demand in the area we would reduce nuisance complaints in the long term.

One consistent string of complaints was focussed on litter issues and when carrying out initial inspections of the site it was clear that not only did this area of natural beauty look unpleasant, it also represented a health and safety risk. There were a number of used condoms and wipes discarded together with condom wrappers and tissues. To restore pride to the area and reduce nuisance complaints the litter had to be removed. We contacted the Streetforce Team. Again we secured agreement with Streetforce to clear the area and make regular sweeps of the site to keep litter levels down.

From the Council we secured agreement that lighting in the area would be improved, and agreement was reached to tackle the issues of inappropriate parking. This involved regular patrols by suitably briefed parking wardens.

Part of the long term strategy to reduce activity, litter and parking complaints in the PSE was to produce a poster that would advise users about the risks of overt sexual activity, litter and associated nuisance. On the poster we publicised the web-sites in use plus confidential reporting lines and the contact number for the gay-men outreach workers. The posters were placed on trees in the PSE and were regularly checked by patrolling officers in the latter stages of the operation.

### ***Phase Two – High Profile Patrols:***

Officers were deployed to the area – where possible, the same officers over and over again. This is a two fold strategy: firstly the regular police presence inevitably deterred a minority of PSE users and hence, together with other initiatives, the area became less well used; secondly it gave reassurance to both the PSE users (reducing fear of reprisal) and the local community (reduction of nuisance).

There was to be no overt taking of car registration numbers. Studies have shown that when this has been carried out in other PSE's and letters sent home to deter persistent visitors a number of men then took their own lives. Many men that use PSE's are in heterosexual relationships and their partners are oblivious to their activities. PSE users often have a lot to lose. Building trust between the PSE users and the police was therefore paramount. Officers attending the area would however, record registration plates of vehicles covertly. This information formed part of a database of users – this would assist in identifying demand fluctuations throughout the operation. They also formed part of the assessment of the success of the operation – see below analysis.

### ***Local Consultation;***

The groups identified and canvassed in the research stage were regularly updated either through the Police or through the Council.

Cruisers were constantly consulted either directly through the LGBT officers and outreach workers or indirectly through the cruising web-sites.

### ***Partnerships:***

Groundwork with all the different agencies was established early on. The operation required an analysis of the level of contribution that could be called upon if required. For example – neighbouring policing teams needed to demonstrate a unified approach if their work brought them to the area. Officers involved on the periphery needed to show an understanding of the potentially subtle and controversial issues involved.

If the operation was to be a success it was necessary to predetermine the level of support and resources available from council bodies such as Parks and Woodlands and the Streetforce (Sheffield Councils litter and graffiti removal team) and local Council departments creating a truly multi-agency approach. The engagement and long term commitment of the gay-men outreach workers and the two GLBT units was paramount.

Throughout the process agreements on commitment were made and milestones established to ensure that each partner was performing. The early establishment of agreement levels and milestones was a particular success of the

operation.

### **ANALYSIS. (Phase Three of Operation FALLOW)**

It was clear from the outset that there was an underreporting of all issues. Through a lack of confidence in the Police, cruisers were not coming forward and making complaints of abuse. Similarly, local residents were dissatisfied at the Police response to the problem because some local residents had felt it necessary to meet out their own summary justice on cruisers.

This presented a problem when assessing the effectiveness of the Operation we were starting from an uncertain base line.

There were a number of results that we were aiming to achieve;

#### **An increase in the number of reported incidents of homophobic abuse to either the Police or a third party.**

Through the first two phases of Operation Fallow confidence among cruisers grew quickly. Within weeks the Police Officer assigned to daily patrols generated a relationship with one of the cruisers which in turn generated key intelligence. Furthermore this individual was able to supply information of three incidents of abuse directed at him or some of the other cruisers. Why is this a success? Consider the first incident that gained our attention. What would have been the consequences for the victim's family and wider community if instead of a minor assault we were dealing with a murder? Thus, because we were now accurately identifying and recording incidents we can more accurately risk assess the area and more importantly, accurately gauge the true extent of the problem to tackle long term. You will note from the table below that following an initial flurry of reports incidents again trailed off. The problem had been accurately recorded and tackled.

#### **A reduction in the negative aspects of cruising**

Again this was hard to gauge because we were not fully aware of the extent of the problem. Through the marketing phase there was a marked increase in the reports received because the public felt we were engaging with them and the issue was being considered seriously. When the pro-active patrols and site clearance initiatives were put in place there was an equally marked reduction in reported incidents.

#### **Increase in the confidence of cruisers in Police.**

How do we measure a nebulous phrase such as 'confidence'? Again this is a difficult issue for us. In addition to the results outlined above we reviewed effectiveness of our actions against feedback from the Gay Men outreach worker and feedback on the cruising websites. Typically, the sort of comments we would generate were:

"Don't go onto Hagg Lane, too many cops at the mo....."

However, we would start to see messages similar to this:

"Totally different change from the cops. I can actually talk to some of them.."

#### **Reduction in litter issues.**

With the assistance of Street Force the area was quickly cleared. In the longer term, the posters in the woods together with the reduction in overall use of the area helped to reduce litter to a minimum. However, with agreement of Street Force once litter issues were identified the area was cleared.

#### **Positive feedback from the local community.**

During the scanning and analysis stages we identified specific groups within the wider community that we engaged with to measure the extent of the problem. Throughout the three phases of Operation Fallow we would revisit those groups to gauge effectiveness. What we got was an overall impression that we were responding to their needs and they were more than satisfied with performance.

### **Increased and sustained partnership involvement in the problem.**

As outlined in the response section the sustained involvement of partner agencies was key. We were able to secure agreement with all partners that tied them to the Operation in the long term.

It was clear that the Partner agencies were engaged and committed to the issue in the long term and did in fact contribute to reductions in nuisance complaints.

### **Providing a safer environment for all**

This was perhaps the most fundamental issue for the whole area. Safe access to the environment for horse-riders, dog walkers, allotment owners, ramblers and cruisers alike.

Certainly for the cruising community itself there was clear and evident proof, through engagement, that the environment 'felt' more safe for them and when we reviewed the feedback from the wider community, again there was significant support for the belief that the Hagg Lane area was a 'safe' environment. Empirically these issues are hard to measure and quantify.

### ***Summary of Recorded Incidents - per week (four week average):***

Pre Operation:

Nuisance reports: 6  
Homophobic Incidents: 0  
Other recorded crimes: 1

During Phase 1:

Nuisance reports: 12  
Homophobic Incidents: 1.2  
Other recorded crimes: 2

During Phase 2 and 3:

Nuisance reports: 4  
Homophobic Incidents: 0.3  
Other recorded crimes: 0

Beyond Phase 3 (long term trend):

Nuisance reports: 5  
Homophobic Incidents: 0.1  
Other recorded crimes: 1

Covertly recorded quantity of vehicles on daily routine patrols (not at a set time)

Phase 1 per week (six week average): 41  
Phase 2 and 3 per week (six week average): 23.

### **CONCLUSION**

What this entry will not demonstrate clearly is a noted or significant reduction in 'detection rates' or improvements in a 'performance indicator'. The aim of this operation was in essence to Police a very challenging area in a positive way that reflected all the varied competing demands placed upon us.

Paramount to our success was primarily the engagement with a group of individuals that for half a century and more had done everything they could to avoid engagement. Without question this was achieved and our work with the cruisers formed the framework for a long-term, trust-based relationship. A true pattern of abuse was identified and robustly dealt with engendering trust and confidence in the Police.

Throughout we as an organisation were acutely aware of the conflicting demands in the area and managed successfully to balance those demands. We fully engaged with the local community and through selective marketing and structured feedback to repeat callers we were able to build tolerance to the issue and confidence in Police action.

Through the partnerships we developed and the commitments we obtained the area was now being managed long-term with a co-ordinated strategy.

Finally what was truly accomplished was a sense that the cruising area was now 'safe' for all users whichever side of the divide they were from.

**Ultimately, our policing team delivered a safe, well managed Public Sex Environment sustainable for the long term.**