

Operation Jacket, Avon and Somerset Constabulary re: Criminal Damage

Scanning:

Portishead is a relatively wealthy town that still prides itself on Victorian values. Crime is low and confidence in Policing is consequently high. In particular, the local Beat Team had had significant impact upon anti-social behaviour in the town and had achieved a 28% reduction in 2006. During the late summer of 2006 there was a marked increase in graffiti. The graffiti took the form of 'tags' as opposed to 'artwork' and concerns were raised by numerous sources. Graffiti was highlighted as the single-most important local concern and costs exceeded £30K. There was a feeling of 'If it looks bad – then it probably is'.

Analysis:

Graffiti has historically been under-reported and the Police have been ineffective at catching offenders. To successfully analyse the problem we needed to encourage reporting. By tasking Officers to seek out victims and through contact with community organisations including Neighbourhood Watch, the Local Action Team, Portishead Town Council, the Chamber of Commerce and Secondary School we were able to acquire an accurate picture. A high-profile media campaign also encouraged residents to report graffiti.

Graffiti was recorded and photographed and from that we were able to systematically analyse the trends. Using the Problem Analysis Triangle we established key facts and reliable suppositions. This information was crucial to the subsequent investigation.

Response:

We focussed on intelligence gathering, innovative investigation techniques and partnership working. The investigation relied upon continued accurate offence-recording; the use of covert surveillance and research of the internet and monitoring social networking sites used by the young people. Technical problems hampered the covert surveillance and a close liaison with the Council prompted changing the street-lighting to enable enhanced footage of the main offender and lead to the subsequent arrest. Research on the internet trapped another offender. These 2 offenders probably accounted for in excess of 300 attacks and 80% of the entire graffiti.

Assessment:

Central to the success of Operation Jacket was accurate reporting of offences, without which, the *analysis* stage would have had limited effect and could have adversely affected the necessary response. Timely and effective use of the media was key to maintaining confidence in the ability of the Police to deal with the problem. Use of the internet proved extremely effective but relied upon lateral thinking and knowledge of current street culture. Better forethought as to the likely results that could be yielded from covert surveillance could have brought an earlier resolution to the investigation.