



BUSINESS AS USUAL: THE SMALL BUSINESS AND CRIME INITIATIVE

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Summary

The Small Business and Crime Initiative adopted a problem-solving approach to reducing crime against small businesses in two areas in Leicester, comprising in all some 1,400 businesses. It was funded by the NatWest Charitable Trust, planned and steered by a small group including the Head of the Police Research Group, led by Morgan Harris Burrows, managed by Crime Concern, had a staff of three local appointees for most of its duration, and was evaluated by Nottingham Trent University. This PRG paper sets out the key findings and highlights the implications for practice.

The Small Business and Crime Initiative (SBCI)

An initial commercial crime survey attempted to conduct face-to-face interviews at all business premises which could be identified in the two areas. The survey found the businesses to be at very high risk of victimisation; for example 75% of businesses had suffered one or more crime in the previous year. It also found repeat victimisation to be a very significant problem; for example 17% of the businesses suffered 69% of all incidents.

On the basis of the survey results, it was decided to concentrate on three main groups:

- chronically victimised businesses - those suffering ten or more incidents in a year;
- victims of commercial burglary; and
- businesses experiencing high rates of customer theft, abuse and fraud.

Measures were implemented in relation to each of these problems:

- all chronically victimised businesses identified in the initial survey were contacted and offered advice, as were others referred by the police during the initiative;

- systems for rapid police referral of burglary victims were developed, advice was then given on ways of reducing the risk of repeats, and proactive aids to detection were installed where repeat incidents appeared to be especially likely; and
- efforts were made to supply advice packs to those experiencing customer theft and fraud, and to stimulate the development of co-operating groups of businesses where there were clusters suffering similar problems.

Implementation difficulties were addressed through regular meetings of the local multi-agency advisory group. Commercial burglary problems were monitored through regular police provision of data on local rates and a comparison with those in previous years.

A second sweep of the local commercial victimisation survey was conducted at the end of the project, two years after the first. Comparison of the findings of the two sweeps comprised the main source of data on crime pattern changes following the work of the SBCI. In relation to commercial burglary, however, use was also made of recorded crime figures on non-domestic burglary.

Findings

The main impact findings were as follows:

- Crime against businesses declined substantially overall with a 33% drop in the number of incidents
- Crime-related concerns reduced markedly amongst business workers; fewer businesses defined local problems as serious or very serious.
- There were marked falls (41%) in commercial burglary.
- There were smaller falls in abuse and fraud (19% and 17% respectively) but an increase in shop theft.

- Criminal damage and transport-related losses fell steeply, though these were not specifically targeted in the initiative. Transport losses, for example, fell from £611,000 to £148,000.
- The fall in commercial burglary in the compact central division in Leicester matched that for the specific beats in which the initiative operated, suggesting that there might have been some diffusion of benefits.
- While chronic victimisation continued to be a problem, chronic victims in sweep 1 experienced falls of between 51% and 86% in incident experience.
- Most of those experiencing high rates of crime at the second sweep had not experienced the problem previously - there was a shifting population of the heavily victimised.
- There was some circumstantial evidence that the new repeatedly victimised premises were similar and close to those which had been found repeatedly victimised in the first but not the second sweep.

The evidence does not suggest that the work of the initiative with individual businesses - visiting them to help them reduce their risks - played a significant part in effecting the overall drops in crime. The initiative, however, may have reduced business crime by raising consciousness about business-crime risks and crime-prevention possibilities in the local area.

Points for action

- Commercial crime rates are extremely high by household standards, and warrant sustained preventive attention. Well funded and publicised business crime initiatives are a very useful way of encouraging businesses to take action, and advising them on what is likely to be effective.
- Repeat victimisation is a particular feature of commercial crime and should be a focus of preventive strategies. Forces should ensure their recording systems can accurately identify repeat victims and should respond quickly to prevent them becoming chronically victimised.
- Where highly victimised premises are identified, it is advisable to target nearby similar ones to try to pre-empt crime migration to them.
- Proactive use of forensic science techniques should be considered in any targeted efforts to catch repeat offenders.

Related PRG Papers

CPU Paper 27: *Making Crime Prevention Pay: Initiatives from Business*

CPU Paper 45: *The Prevention of Crime against Small Businesses: the Safer Cities Experience*

CDP Paper 76: *Shop Theft: Improving the Police Response*