BEENLEIGH CALLS FOR SERVICE PROJECT

MID-TERM PROGRESS REPORT

INTRODUCTION

On 1 September 1996, the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) and the Queensland Police Service (QPS) established a six-month pilot project called the Beenleigh Calls for Service Project (BCFS). The project focuses on increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of police service delivery in the Beenleigh Police Division.

The CJC's involvement in the BCFS project arises out of its statutory responsibility (pursuant to section 23(g) of the *Criminal Justice Act 1989*) for 'monitoring the performance of the police service with a view to ensuring that the most appropriate policing methods are being used' and is in accord with a current CJC Corporate Objective to 'monitor and enhance the professionalism, effectiveness and responsiveness of the QPS'.

This report is a mid-term assessment of the BCFS Project. It provides background information and assesses the extent to which the project's objectives have been achieved so far.

BACKGROUND AND PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Until recently, most police work could be characterised as primarily reactive or incident-driven. The greatest emphasis was placed on police providing a rapid response to individual calls for service. Incidents were generally not recognised as symptomatic of a much larger problem, as police were encouraged to view them as if they were unique or isolated events.

In the late 1970s, Professor Herman Goldstein began espousing a new way of thinking about policing that was designed to focus more directly on the problems that constituted the core of police business.[1] Using Goldstein's problem-oriented approach, police would 'go beyond individual crimes and calls for service and take on the underlying problems that created them'.[2] In that sense, Goldstein was advocating a new method of policing where responding to calls for service was seen as the first step in a process rather than as an end in itself. Goldstein also believed that the police should take a more strategic view in managing their workload and engage in pro-active activities designed to solve particular policing problems.

In 1987, the Minneapolis Police Department began a project called Repeat Calls Address Policing (RECAP).[3] The project was an experiment to test whether Goldstein's problem-oriented approach could be used to reduce police workloads. A small unit of five police officers was assigned to identify and resolve underlying problems that contributed to a high number of calls for service from particular locations and addresses.

---

1   Goldstein, H. 1990, *Problem-Oriented Policing*, McGraw Hill, New York.

2   Eck, J. & Spelman, W. 1987, *Problem-Solving: Problem-Oriented Policing in Newport News*, Police Executive Research Forum, Washington, DC.

3   Sherman, L.W. 1989, 'Repeat Calls for Service: Policing the Hot Spots' in *Police and Policing: Contemporary Issues*, ed. D.J. Kenny, Praeger, New York.

The steering committee oversees all aspects of the BCFS Project including the selection and prioritisation of targets, designing of problem-solving trials, and the development of a methodology to promote the use of problem solving throughout the South-Eastern Region.

A Project Officer (a police officer seconded from Beenleigh Police Division for the period of the pilot) is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the project, including the preparation of target profiles and the trialling of problem-solving activities aimed at reducing repeat calls.

The project is divided into four phases: scanning, analysis, response and assessment (SARA):

1)   **Scanning**
        The scanning phase helps to clarify the situation and define the boundaries. It is divided into two parts. The first involves a systematic analysis by the CJC's Research and Coordination Division of all Beenleigh Police Division calls for service to identify locations that generate numerous repeat calls; the second involves preliminary inquiries by the Project Officer to see if a problem exists and whether further action is necessary or warranted.

2)   **Analysis**
        The purpose of this phase is to learn as much as possible about the cause of the problem. Analysis is conducted by the Project Officer in cooperation with various QPS units (e.g. Regional Intelligence, Drug Squad, Criminal Investigation Branch, Juvenile Aid Branch), as well as other government departments and community agencies. This phase is designed to consider a wide range of issues such as the location of the target, possible offenders, the victim, the role of third parties, and previous police responses.

3)   **Response**
        This stage involves the formulation of tailor-made solutions to the problem/s identified by the Project Officer as the main factor/s contributing to the high volume of calls for service. It encourages the establishment of an operational plan designed to tackle the problem. The response might mean the commencement of a specific project to deal with the problem, or may involve such strategies as mediation or increased regulation.

4)   **Assessment**
        This final stage provides an opportunity to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the response to the problem. The assessment describes the degree of success, or failure, of the response in reducing the number of calls for service, and makes suggestions on how the response to the problem could have been made more effective.

The BCFS Project will be the subject of a full evaluation conducted by the CJC Research and Coordination Division. This evaluation will provide:

•   an overall assessment of the extent to which the project has achieved its objectives

•   suggestions for enhancing the design of the project

•   recommendations for implementing the project region-wide.

STRATEGY 1 — ANALYSING CALLS FOR SERVICE TO IDENTIFY REPEAT-CALL LOCATIONS

Calls for service refer to requests made by the public for the police to attend a given address or location. The BCFS Project deals exclusively with calls for service received by telephone at the Beenleigh Communications Centre. The Communications Centre serves the entire Logan Police District, which incorporates the following police divisions: Rathdowney, Canungra, Jimboomba, Beaudesert, Logan, Slacks Creek, Browns Plains, Tamborine and Beenleigh itself.

The Communications Centre processes approximately four thousand calls for service a month. About one-sixth (700) of these calls concern the Beenleigh Police Division. Figure 1 (below) shows the number of calls received for Beenleigh Police Division for the months of June to August 1996.
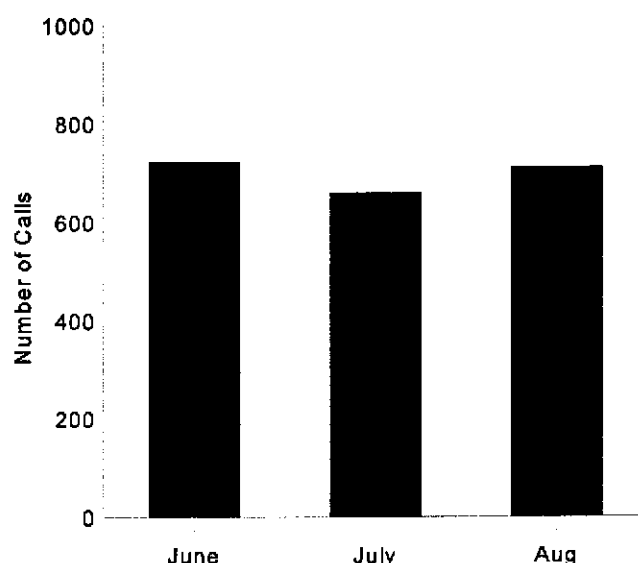
FIGURE 1 — THE NUMBER OF CALLS FOR SERVICE FOR THE BEENLEIGH POLICE DIVISION (1 JUNE–31 AUGUST 1996)

Source: BCFS database

As one of the main aims of the BCFS Project is to reduce the demands being made on police resources, a comprehensive analysis of Beenleigh's calls-for-service workload was conducted by the CJC to determine the extent to which repeat calls for service impact on the total workload of Beenleigh Police Division.

Table 2 (over the page) shows the total calls and the proportion of repeat calls in the Beenleigh Police Division over the three-month period from 1 June 1996 to 31 August 1996.

The main difficulty encountered in identifying repeat-call locations related to initial problems with an early version of the IMS. Since the IMS lacked an address-validation feature, the quality of data was not sufficient to readily identify repeat-call locations. As a result, it was necessary to transfer the Beenleigh calls-for-service records to another computer application and manually review each individual record. A newer version of the IMS containing the address-validation feature was recently installed in the Beenleigh Communications Centre, making the identification of repeat addresses less time consuming.

STRATEGY 2 — PREPARING DETAILED PROFILES OF SELECTED TARGETS

Once the repeat addresses or locations are identified, a detailed profile of the target is completed by the BCFS Project Officer and updated as required. The profile provides a complete description of the:

- owner/occupier of the location or premises (sex, occupation, contact details etc.)

- type of structure and general environment (private dwelling, public space, bush etc.)

- urgency and nature of the problem

- person/persons/agencies responsible for causing the problem

- previous police response/s to the address or location

- action that will be taken to resolve the problem and the strategies put in place to monitor their effectiveness.

Target profiles have been completed for most locations for target grouping 1. Table 4 (over the page) gives the key problems identified as contributing to the high number of calls for service from that location or address.

The types of problem-solving activities currently being trialled include:

Target 1 — Beenleigh Watch-house

• reorganisation of prisoner-escort procedures

The QPS is also considering the feasibility of trialling video conferencing for remands, mentions and bail applications.

Target 2 — Beenleigh Railway Station

• installation of CCTV surveillance cameras to view the platform area

• installation of duress alarms to enhance passenger safety

• improved lighting

• clearing of shrub overgrowth to increase visibility in and around the parking areas.

Target 3 — Beenleigh High School

• completion of a safety audit to identify areas of risk

• installation of security alarms monitored by State Government Security

• included as a patrol objective to increase surveillance by Beenleigh Police Division.

Target 4 — Bethania Railway Station

• increased patrols by Railway Squad

• installation of CCTV camera (delayed until after June 1997)

• installation of security fencing (to commence in May 1997)

• identified as a priority target for Beenleigh Police Division patrols.

Target 5 — Beenleigh BMX Track

• discussions held with property holder

• conducted on-site review of security measures and facilities.

The Project Officer reports that the trialling of various problem-solving activities is progressing well. In particular, the work under way with the three Queensland Rail targets is showing much promise. This is due in large part to Queensland Rail's commitment to upgrading security in the Beenleigh area. In addition, the South-Eastern Police Region has also shown considerable support for the project by allowing the introduction of new prisoner-escort procedures. These new procedures include a reorganisation of transport arrangements so that the Broadbeach Prisoner Van can be used to pick up Beenleigh's prisoners. Because of these new procedures, two car crews previously assigned to do escorts can be assigned to other operational duties in Beenleigh.

STRATEGY 4 — DOCUMENTING PROBLEM-SOLVING TRIALS TO PROMOTE THE USE OF BEST PRACTICE

An important component of the BCFS Project is to provide full descriptions of the problem-solving activities trialled during the project. The documentation of these trials is designed to assist other officers who are likely to be involved in problem solving. It is recognised that the requirement that descriptions be as comprehensive as possible has placed a considerable burden on the Project Officer. However, it is important that as much information as possible is captured during the pilot project to enable the development of a beat practice guide. To assist in reducing some of the work involved in documenting the project, a computerised version of the Problem Solving Workbook has been developed and will be trialled during the final two months of the project.

STRATEGY 5 — DEVELOPING A 'TASK-BASED' COSTING MODEL FOR 'FIRST-RESPONSE' POLICING TO PROMOTE THE EFFICIENT DELIVERY OF POLICING SERVICES

Objective 3 of the original project proposal is to perform a rigorous task-based cost analysis of providing 'first-response' police services — something that has not been completed before. The intention is to include items such as capital and equipment depreciation and other intangibles to realise a true estimate of the costs of providing police resources. A major problem found with IMS data when performing cost analysis is the inaccuracy of the times recorded. Four time-values are recorded when a CFS is received — time received, time acknowledged, time at scene and time resumed. There appears to be gross inaccuracies with times recorded. To overcome this, large samples of specific types of incidents (e.g. 134s) will be individually examined to negate the effects of inaccurate times and to determine the average time taken to complete a given type of job. This cost-analysis exercise is scheduled for completion by March 1996.

STRATEGY 6 — PROMOTING AN EFFECTIVE PROBLEM-SOLVING RESPONSE THROUGH INCREASED HELPFULNESS, ADVICE, MEDIATION AND FOLLOW-UP

Because of unanticipated difficulties in measuring this variable, the status of this strategy is currently under review by the BCFS Project Management Committee.

STRATEGY 8 — PROVIDING ADVICE TO STAFF THAT ENHANCES THE QUALITY AND USE OF IMS DATA

This strategy was implemented in cooperation with the QPS Information Systems Branch and the Officer in Charge of the Beenleigh Communications Centre. The strategy primarily involved the preparation of a new IMS Version 3.08 User's Guide and the delivery of a short training session on the features of the new software. Data quality was a key focus of the training session and will be monitored continuously by the Officer in Charge of the Communications Centre until the end of the project.

STRATEGY 9 — PROVIDING INFORMATION TO OTHER POLICE ABOUT THE BCFS PROJECT

Raising the profile of the BCFS Project within the QPS was seen as a major priority. However, there has been little progress towards fully implementing this strategy. During the later stages of the project, a renewed effort will be made to increase the amount of knowledge that police have about the project. The main activities to be undertaken include the preparation of a feature article for the February issue of the QPS *Vedette* and the development of a computer presentation on the project.

STRATEGY 10 — PROMOTING ACCEPTANCE OF PROBLEM SOLVING AS A POLICING STRATEGY

Before the start of the BCFS Project, a brief survey was conducted to gauge the level of acceptance of problem solving by officers stationed at the Beenleigh Police Division. The survey was designed to provide baseline data, which could be compared with data from a second survey planned at the end of the project.

The survey was distributed to 60 Beenleigh police officers in mid-August 1996, with 36 questionnaires (60%) completed and returned before the 1 September 1996 deadline. A preliminary analysis of the survey revealed that most of those surveyed (90%) had heard of the term 'problem solving'. However, only slightly more than half (57%) of Beenleigh police had ever heard of the BCFS Project. For problem solving to be accepted as an effective policing strategy, it is important that the concept be fully understood and the level of acceptance in Beenleigh be increased.

Hence, the second half of the project will feature two important initiatives:

1) to provide a one-day problem-solving seminar and workshop for South-Eastern Regional staff designed to introduce operational police to the concept of problem solving and to demonstrate the ways in which this concept may be employed to reduce repeat calls for service

2) to offer a series of informational sessions for Beenleigh police officers aimed at explaining the BCFS Project and introducing the concept of problem solving.

- completion of the task-oriented cost-analysis model

- identification of key workload reports and the design of an automatic distribution system using the QPS electronic mail network

- raising the media profile of the BCFS Project and increasing the awareness of the project through the development of presentations designed for Beenleigh police and the QPS Senior Executive

- delivery of a one-day problem-solving workshop for South-Eastern Region personnel

- commencing work on the development of a methodology of problem solving that promotes problem solving as a mainstream policing strategy in the South-Eastern Region.