
Improving the impact analysis of specialist policing activities: A drug law enforcement case study

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September 2013

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Acknowledgements

ICPR is grateful to the PFA for funding this independent study. The views expressed in this report are the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the funder.

The work would not have been possible without the sponsorship of Detective Chief Inspector [###]. We are greatly appreciative for his invaluable advice, support and help throughout the lifetime of this project.

Special thanks are also extended to [###], Lead Intelligence Analyst (Operations) at the PFA and her team (especially [###]) for the provision of various datasets and advice on their interpretation and analysis, without which the research would not have been possible.

Finally, we are grateful to those who agreed to be interviewed in order to inform this research, especially members of the Neighbourhood Policing Team whose area served as the focus of this research.

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September 2013

Policy implications

The findings from this independent study demonstrate how the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by one English police force area (PFA) can be enhanced using a number of existing data sources (with the potential for others to also be used, subject to some adaptations). However, while the PFA routinely collates a wide range of data, different systems and reporting requirements mean it does not always record these in a consistent manner, or in a way that enables them to be readily retrieved or extracted in order to inform an assessment of the impact of different policing activities.

On the basis of the administrative data assembled and analysed as part of this research, there was no evidence to indicate that a specialist drug law enforcement operation examined as a case study contributed directly towards reducing calls for service incidents (both general and anti-social behaviour-related), or recorded crimes within a geographically defined target area over a 12-month follow-up period, relative to the scale of reduction observed elsewhere. The most persuasive evidence of a positive benefit related to the falls observed in levels of recorded 'acquisitive' crime within the target area.

The study illustrated the utility of integrating qualitative insights – in this instance using data gathered via a structured de-briefing process and in-depth interviews with stakeholders – in order to better understand the circumstances surrounding the execution and impact of these specialist policing activities. It also underlined the importance of a focus on both intended and unintended consequences when undertaking any form of impact analysis.

There is a case for undertaking broader strategic assessments in future which periodically consider the collective or cumulative impact of specialist policing activities over time (rather than a focus on these operations in isolation). Doing so may assist in more readily identifying those tactics and investigative approaches with the greatest impact on reducing crime.

A key challenge for the PFA relates to the difficulties of generating a corpus of local 'what works' knowledge around specialist forms of policing. There would appear to be considerable scope to develop this capacity in order to provide both officers and analysts with advice, guidance and best practice gleaned from local routine impact analysis, structured de-briefings and other sources (e.g. research evidence published by the College of Policing). In light of these findings it would seem timely for the PFA to review its processes for enhancing its organisational memory of best practice around specialist policing activities.

Key findings

Background

This independent research study by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR), Birkbeck, University of London, sought to scope the availability and potential utility of using a range of different routinely collected data sources to inform and enhance the impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by one English police force area (PFA). It did this by using administrative and interview data to provide the PFA with an independent assessment of the impact of these activities, using a recent drug law enforcement operation as a case study example (referred to hereafter as Operation Example). This targeted individuals operating from a commercial and neighbouring residential properties implicated in an established 'semi-open' retail-level market for Class A drugs (heroin and crack cocaine), with warrants being executed from 22nd June 2011.

Aims

The research sought to answer two key questions:

- How can the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA be enhanced using a range of existing data sources?
- What do these data sources tell us about the impact of previous specialist policing activities by the PFA (using a recent drug law enforcement operation as a case study)?

Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to answer these questions. The main approaches involved:

- secondary analysis of administrative data covering a 24-month period (CEDAR - Crime Evaluation Data Analysis and Recording, $N=1,032,361$; NDTMS - National Drug Treatment Monitoring System, $N=932$);
- semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders, including members of the local Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) ($N=8$); and
- observations (of tasking and co-ordination meetings, pre and post-operation debriefings, and observing warrants being executed).

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The main data source for the study related to information derived from the handling of emergency ('999') and non-emergency ('101') calls for service (CFS), incident management, crime recording and initial investigations contained within CEDAR. There were three (mutually exclusive) levels of analyses undertaken when considering impacts using these administrative data: (i) within a pre-defined radius of 300 metres of the commercial business property which served as the main focus of the 'strike' (referred to hereafter as the target area); (ii) the Local Policing Area (LPA); and (iii) across the wider Police Force Area (PFA). When examining CFS incidents and crime reports, there were four units of analyses considered: (i) all CFS incidents ($N=1,032,361$); (ii) all recorded crimes ($N=311,555$); (iii) all recorded 'acquisitive' offences (i.e. those thought to be linked or 'related' to substance misuse) ($N=182,905$); and (iv) all CFS incidents relating to anti-social behaviour (ASB) ($N=123,728$).

Results

The resolution phase of Operation Example involved 90 officers and led to the execution of 13 warrants. It resulted in arrests for conspiracy (4), supply (5) and being concerned in the supply of Class A drugs (4) offences. Charges were brought against nine of the arrestees (no further action was taken against the remaining four suspects), with all but one entering a guilty plea. Sentencing outcomes were available for six of the nine defendants. Three received custodial sentences totalling seven years. The perceived leniency of the sentences imposed by the courts as a result of Operation Example meant some officers were less inclined to promote or communicate these outcomes to the local community.

Aspects of the operation that were considered to have gone particularly well related to its planning, the involvement of key partner agencies (early and regular engagement with the Crown Prosecution Service) and the degree of community reassurance that followed (leafleting the local community about the operation, deploying targeted/high visibility patrols and introducing a local business watch scheme). The two most significant problems identified related to the planning process (other operational demands in parallel reduced the planning time available for Operation Example) and the involvement of partnership agencies (delays with the local council installing closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras post-operation).

Anecdotally, there was perceived to have been no adverse impact on the availability of Class A drugs following the operation, or their quality. There were also reports of some unintended consequences, as previously peripheral players within the market began to occupy more

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prominent roles. The separation of two local markets for Class A (heroin and cocaine) and B (cannabis) drugs, which had previously existed, was thought to be less obvious following enforcement activity.

On the basis of the administrative data considered, there was no evidence to indicate that Operation Example contributed directly towards reducing CFS incidents (both general and ASB-related) or recorded crimes within the target area over a 12-month follow-up period, relative to the scale of reduction observed across the wider LPA and PFA. The most persuasive evidence of a positive benefit from the operation related to the falls observed in levels of recorded acquisitive crime within the target area. We think these reductions were unlikely to be accounted for by an increase in numbers presenting for treatment at local drug services (which fell by 25 per cent in the 12 months after the operation).

Discussion

The findings from this study have shown how the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA can be enhanced using a number of existing data sources. Although highlighting the potential utility of using other datasets for informing future impact analysis (subject to some adaptations), the results point to a need for the PFA to scope and review aspects of existing data collection processes and systems, with a view to identifying how they can be better integrated and made more accessible, so as to maximise their utility for the purposes of informing future assessments of impact.

Existing approaches used by the PFA when undertaking impact analysis tend to be tactical in focus and largely quantitative in nature. This study has illustrated the importance and value of integrating qualitative insights, including those from individuals and groups outside the organisation. While such an approach may not be achievable in every instance, it should be advocated and encouraged by senior officers whenever possible. This would require analysts to be more proactive however; not only in engaging police personnel across a range of departments, but also other stakeholders in external agencies in order to undertake a more rounded assessment of impacts and outcomes.

Finally, this research points to a need for the PFA to review its processes for enhancing its organisational memory of best practice around specialist policing activities. This could include scoping the feasibility of establishing a function within the PFA tasked with generating a corpus of local 'what works' knowledge in this area of police work.

1. Background

This independent research study by the Institute for Criminal Policy Research (ICPR), School of Law, Birkbeck, University of London, scoped the availability and potential utility of using a range of different routinely collected data sources to inform and enhance the impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by one English police force area (PFA). It did this by using administrative and interview data to provide the PFA with an independent assessment of the impact of these activities, using a recent drug law enforcement operation as a case study example (referred to hereafter as Operation Example). This targeted individuals operating from a commercial and neighbouring residential properties implicated in an established ‘semi-open’¹ retail-level market for Class A drugs (heroin and crack cocaine), with warrants being executed from 22nd June 2011.

Following its assessment during 2008 of the impact of law enforcement activities on organised forms of criminality, Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) concluded that *“despite evidence of impressive results achieved by a few individual forces and some collaborative efforts, the national response overall is blighted by...under-investment in intelligence gathering, analysis and proactive capability”* (2008: 2).

As part of a national mapping exercise to inform this work, HMIC had estimated that involvement in the illicit drugs trade was the main criminal activity for 60 per cent of the 2,800 organised crime groups (OCGs) known to be operating in England and Wales in late 2007. An equivalent number of all identified OCGs were considered to be ‘polymorphous’ (Rubin, 2012) and involved in multiple criminal enterprises. One in ten of these known OCGs also had an international dimension.

Whilst the British evidence base to support the use of demand reduction strategies like drug treatment as an effective crime reduction strategy is both persuasive and growing (e.g. Gossop et al., 2006; McIntosh et al., 2007; Millar et al., 2008; National Treatment Agency, 2012), it is far more limited and equivocal when it comes to establishing the impact of enforcement orientated supply reduction approaches (Webster, Hough and Clancy, 2001;

¹ In contrast to overtly ‘open’ or ‘closed’ forms, May and Hough (2004: 550–553) describe ‘semi-open’ drug markets as typically operating off-street (and out of direct public view), where sellers will generally ‘do business’ without a prior introduction, provided the buyer ‘looks the part’.

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Best et al., 2001; Parker and Egginton, 2004; McKeganey et al., 2009; Hales and Hobbs, 2010; McKeganey and McGallagly, 2013). This is despite the latter accounting for the lion's share of 'drug-related' expenditure in Britain and elsewhere (Degenhardt, Hallam and Bewley-Taylor, 2009; Ritter, McLeod and Shanahan, 2013).

The UK Drug Policy Commission had previously identified the need for a greater emphasis on conceptualising, describing and mapping more accurately the nature and extent of local, regional and national drug market structures. Its report also repeated persistent calls to establish the long-term effectiveness, cost-effectiveness and value for money offered by the range of interventions in tackling illicit drug markets - especially drug law enforcement approaches (McSweeney, Turnbull and Hough, 2008).

More recently the National Intelligence Requirement for Organised Crime (2009/10) had considered how UK law enforcement agencies should best tackle these threats and proposed a number of key indicators for measuring performance. In relation to drug law enforcement these included developing a better understanding of:

- the nature and scale of the market at national, regional and local levels;
- the types of criminal involved and their *modus operandi*;
- criminal finances and facilitators; and
- the impact of law enforcement.

At an international level, the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) and the European Commission have facilitated two technical conferences supported by expert working groups on the development of key indicators at national and international levels with a view to improving understanding and measurement of different aspects of the drug market, drug supply reduction and drug-related crime (Council of the European Union, 2013). The latest EU Drugs Strategy (2013-2020) also priorities the need for more "*effective policies in the field of drug supply reduction, by reinforcing policy evaluation and analysis to improve the understanding of drug-markets, drug-related crimes and the effectiveness of drug-related law enforcement responses*" (2012: 6).

However, in light of the unprecedented cuts to public sector budgets, police forces across England now anticipate a significant reduction in the resources (in terms of both time and money) that will be allocated towards tackling illicit drugs (Beck, 2011). This has brought into

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sharper focus the need to ensure that the available resources are deployed as effectively as possible in order to maximise their impact:

"We encourage Police [and Crime] Commissioners to ensure they are fully informed about the relative effectiveness of different forms of drug-related policing, including cannabis warnings and other forms of diversion work, and to carefully consider the issue of how police time is best prioritised between different kinds of drug-related offences, whether simple possession, acquisitive crime, supply or trafficking" (Home Affairs Select Committee, 2012: 61).

It is against this backdrop that our independent research sought to provide the PFA with guidance on how to enhance existing efforts aimed at assessing the effectiveness of these activities and to better inform the appropriate allocation of increasingly scarce resources in future. The research therefore concerned itself with answering two key questions:

- How can the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA be enhanced using a range of existing data sources?
- What do these data sources tell us about the impact of previous specialist policing activities by the PFA (using a recent drug law enforcement operation as a case study example)?

2. Methods

Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to answer these questions. The main approaches involved:

- secondary analysis of administrative data;
- semi-structured interviews; and
- observations.

Secondary analysis of administrative data

In order to assess the impact of Operation Example, secondary analysis of anonymised extracts from the local crime recording and data analysis system (CEDAR - Crime Evaluation Data Analysis and Recording) was undertaken in order to map trends in reported incidents and recorded crimes over time. A key consideration, in terms of assessing impact, was to ensure that, as much as possible, there were data being consistently collected on meaningful measures of impact before, during and after the operation in the selected target area and elsewhere (see definitions below). This approach was used to determine whether changes within the target area mirrored or were different to those observed across the Local Policing Area (LPA) and the wider Police Force Area (PFA) during the same period. Furthermore, the longer the time period available pre and post Operation Example (e.g. to monitor seasonal fluctuations in crime patterns) the greater the robustness of the findings were likely to be.

The main data source for the study related to information derived from the handling of emergency ('999') and non-emergency ('101') calls for assistance (CFS), incident management, crime recording and initial investigations contained within CEDAR (N=1,032,361), covering the period 12 months pre and post Example (i.e. between 22 June 2010 and 22 June 2012).

There were three levels of analyses undertaken when considering impacts using these administrative data: (i) within a pre-defined radius of 300 metres of the commercial business property which served as the main focus of the 'strike' (referred to hereafter as the target

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area)²; (ii) the LPA; and (iii) across the wider PFA. This approach was undertaken to enable us to test whether any changes observed in the target area were mirrored locally and regionally over the same period. As Bowers and Johnson have argued *“one advantage of the nested approach [i.e. comparing changes between target and LPA levels] is that due to their proximity to the action area, it is likely that the areas will share some characteristics with each other...a second advantage may be that looking at changes in the wider area might increase reliability; for instance, by choosing a larger control area, analyses are less likely to be plagued by unstable random fluctuations in crime levels”* (2003: 283). The three levels were analysed independently of each other: in other words figures relating to CFS incidents and recorded crime within the LPA did not include data for the target area. Similarly the information presented for the PFA will not include numbers for either the LPA or target area.

When examining CFS incidents and crime reports, there were four units of analyses considered: (i) all CFS incidents ($N=1,032,361$); (ii) all recorded crimes ($N=311,555$); (iii) all recorded ‘acquisitive’ offences (i.e. those thought to be linked or ‘related’ to substance misuse)³ ($N=182,905$); and (iv) all CFS incidents relating to anti-social behaviour (ASB) ($N=123,728$).

We also assessed the potential impact of Operation Example on drug treatment commencements. The focus was on four structured treatment services reporting to the national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS)⁴ and located within two miles of the commercial business property which served as the main focus of the police operation⁵. Trends in treatment commencements reported to NDTMS in the 12 months pre and post the operation were examined in aggregate across the four services, and compared with the trends observed across the wider drug action team (DAT) area over the same period.

² The use of a 300-metre radius was agreed in consultation with the PFA. This was deemed more appropriate than the 500-metre radius developed by Webster and colleagues (2001) in their assessment of the Metropolitan Police Service’s Operation Crackdown.

³ Our ‘acquisitive’ offences corresponded with the ‘trigger’ offences covered by the 2005 Drugs Act and include offences committed in violation of the Theft Act (1968), Misuse of Drugs Act (1971), Fraud Act (2006), Criminal Attempts Act (1981) and/or Vagrancy Act (1824). An arrest for any of these offences can result in an oral swab test being administered in custody for recent Class A drug use. While ‘trigger’ offences are restricted to specified Class A drugs only (i.e. heroin and/or cocaine), the CEDAR data provided did not systematically distinguish between drug type or Class. For this reason our acquisitive offences include all reported and recorded drug offences, regardless of type or Class.

⁴ We are grateful to Malcolm Roxburgh from the National Treatment Agency and Andrew Jones from the National Drug Evidence Centre, at the University of Manchester, for providing us with these treatment assessment data.

⁵ The four services were identified by entering the postal code for the commercial business property into the ‘Talk to Frank’ website, using its ‘find support near you’ function (<http://www.talktofrank.com/>).

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Semi-structured interviews and observations

These administrative data were supplemented with information gathered via semi-structured interviews and observations. These were used to provide background and context to better understand the circumstances surrounding both the execution and impact of Operation Example, and the nature of the crime problem locally in the period pre and post.

The semi-structured interviews were completed in January 2012 (nearly six months after warrants had been executed as part of the operation). The respondents included representatives from the local Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT) which served the target area, and included an Inspector, a Sergeant, one Police Constable and three Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). A local Councillor and one service manager of a local community facility were also interviewed.

Observations supplemented these data and occurred as a result of attending tasking and co-ordination meetings, pre and post-operation de-briefings, and observing the warrants being actioned against the commercial business and residential properties.

Throughout the work the lead author had regular contact with both the Responsible Officer from the PFA and the Force Lead Analyst to discuss aspects of the research and the emerging results from it.

Data analysis

All administrative data were provided and initially managed in MS Excel (2010). These data were subsequently analysed using PASW Statistics (v18).

When examining incident and crime trends pre and post Operation Example, in addition to descriptive statistics, odds ratios (OR) were calculated to measure the proportional change observed in the LPA or PFA, relative to that observed for the target area (Welsh and Farrington 2009: 727). An OR greater than 1.00 indicates a desirable effect from an intervention, and an OR less than 1.00 indicates an undesirable effect. In addition 95 per cent confidence intervals for these ORs are also reported (95% CI)⁶. The formula for calculating an OR is set out in Table 1, below.

⁶ In other words this is a range within which there is a 95 per cent probability that the true value lies.

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Table 1: Formula for calculating odds ratios

	Number of incidents/crimes before	Number of incidents/crimes after	OR= (a*d)/(b*c)
Target area	a	b	
LPA or PFA	c	d	

The analysis of these data was also replicated and supplemented using the weighted displacement quotient (WDQ) produced by Bowers and Johnson (2003)⁷. WDQs were produced in order to compare the number of incidents/crimes between the target area, the LPA and the PFA overall, in the 12 months pre and post Operation Example, and assess how these had changed over time. The WDQ can detect any change due to displacement from the target area to the wider LPA, or indicate if the LPA experienced benefits as a consequence of its proximity to the target area.

In terms of the qualitative material gathered, with participant consent, all interview data were recorded, fully transcribed and manually coded to identify key themes and issues.

⁷ The WDQ was calculated using a free online tool – the *Spatial Evaluation of Police Tactics in Context (SPETIC)* template - available at: <http://jratcliffe.net/ware/wdq.htm> [accessed 13.05.2013] (Ratcliffe and Breen, 2008)

3. Results

3.1 About the operation and lessons learned

Operation Example was focussed on a number of individuals operating from a commercial (betting shop) and neighbouring residential properties implicated in an established 'semi-open' retail-level market for Class A drugs (heroin and crack cocaine). Warrants were executed under Example on 22nd June 2011. With a view to generating cost savings, Example was run in conjunction with a parallel operation against an established organised cannabis market within the same LPA (but which were located 2.5 miles apart). Warrants for that operation were actioned on 10th May 2011 and involved over 200 officers.

ASB associated with the Class A drug market which Example sought to dismantle had long been a concern for local residents and businesses. The perceived inaction in tackling this was considered to have fostered a sense of ambivalence, undermined community engagement and confidence, and led to an under-reporting of incidents to the police:

"It felt very matter of fact that everyone knew that the guy in the [betting shop] was dealing. You know, it was an issue, but people glossed over that, and it was the other issues that were around it that were really impacting on them...Like there's a school next door but nobody really notices...there was open drug-taking and people drinking...I think it was just disrespect to the children really, and the families".

"They were getting people urinating by the entranceway, and you know, it was just really unpleasant...It all just felt like the whole of that area had been taken away from the community, and you know, it wasn't just about the drugs, it was that feeling of, the PCSOs just didn't do anything with them. But you can't actually arrest someone for standing around".

Execution and sentencing outcomes

Prior to the resolution phase of the operation, for evidential and intelligence purposes, there had been 14 test purchases made by plain-clothes officers from four separate sellers of 1.7 grams of heroin ($N=3$ purchases) and 3.6 grams of crack cocaine ($N=12$ purchases) (one purchase was of heroin and crack in combination). The average purity of these purchases was 14 per cent for heroin and 35 per cent for crack. These purity rates were consistent with police seizures nationally during January to March 2011, which averaged 16 per cent for heroin and 31 per cent for crack cocaine (Coleman, 2011: 30).

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The resolution phase of Example involved 90 officers and led to the execution of 13 warrants from 22nd June 2011. This resulted in arrests for conspiracy (4), supply (5) and being concerned in the supply of Class A drugs (4) offences. Charges were brought against nine of the arrestees (no further action was taken against the remaining four suspects), with all but one entering a guilty plea. Sentencing outcomes were available for six of the nine defendants. These ranged from:

- community orders (12 months) (x2);
- a suspended sentence order (12 months) and community service (100 hours) (x1);
and
- custody (with sentences of seven months, 2 years 8 months and four years being imposed) (x3).

The perceived leniency of the sentences imposed by the courts as a result of Example (relative to those secured as a consequence of the parallel operation against the established cannabis market in the same LPA) meant some officers were less inclined to promote or communicate these outcomes to the local community. There was some concern expressed that disposals of this sort served to undermine not only the confidence of police officers in the justice process, but the public too:

“We didn’t yell to the community about it, because they all would have gone, ‘oh, that was a complete waste of time’, because that’s what I thought!”.

“They [the public] think ‘why bother ringing the Police again’, or telling them what they’re doing”.

De-briefing: lessons learned

A subsequent structured de-briefing in October 2011, facilitated by two PCs and attended by 11 PFA personnel (ranging from the LPA Commander to the intelligence analyst), aimed to identify what aspects from the operation went well and which did not.

Aspects of the operation that were considered to have gone particularly well related to its planning, involvement of key partner agencies and the degree of community reassurance that followed. In terms of planning, maintenance of confidentiality was deemed essential to success. Early and regular engagement with the Crown Prosecution Service had helped develop what was described as *“an excellent working relationship”*. The community reassurance strategy post-operation was viewed as a success and well executed. This

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included leafleting the local community about the operation, deploying targeted/high visibility patrols and introducing a local business watch scheme.

The two most significant problems identified during the structured de-brief related to the planning process and the involvement of partnership agencies. With regards the former, other demands in parallel meant that there was insufficient planning time for Operation Example. The sheer volume of exhibits seized and the analysis required of them (e.g. mobile phones) was considerable. The initial impact of Operation Example was deemed to have been diluted because of delays with the local council installing closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras in the immediate area after the operation, as part of a community reassurance phase. The covert nature of Operation Example meant that many partner agencies could not be briefed in advance. This would have prevented them from developing appropriate service responses and/or initiating legal processes (e.g. housing associations instigating eviction proceedings, where appropriate). There had, for instance, been limited engagement with local drug services:

“The one group we didn’t engage with were the drug teams”.

Interview data: lessons learned

Semi-structured interviews conducted after the structured briefing also sought stakeholder views on the positive and negative aspects of the operation. One challenge for the NPT was to manage day-to-day issues and concerns within the target area, without compromising the viability of the on-going investigation. The prior involvement of personnel from the NPT - which was unusual for operations of this sort - was seen as having been particularly valuable since it enabled senior officers to identify and plan for a wider range of potential pitfalls, particularly in the immediate aftermath, and to consider possible solutions.

Operation Example was considered to have provided the impetus and catalyst to implement a broader strategy involving a range of agencies aimed at improving quality of life in the target area. Though some problems were encountered (e.g. a lack of engagement from a private sector provider, sub-contracted by the council to undertake parking enforcement) the operation was widely seen as an exemplar of effective partnership working:

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“To a certain extent I suppose, the execution of the drug warrant...gave the impetus for that to happen...It was just really fortunate in terms of the timing, because it just gave me a huge platform to stand on and go, ‘right, the Police have done all of this’, in terms of agencies ‘this, this and this needs to happen’. And actually because there was kind of a public support, and then of course the council support, everything kind of followed, and it was really easy to engage people afterwards”.

“[The operation] is a really good example of what we kind of work together to do. And I think the police have been so co-operative on that”.

Interviews also explored views on the impact that the operation may have had on the local drugs market. Anecdotally, there was perceived to have been no adverse impact on the availability of Class A drugs following Example, or their quality:

“There is such widespread Class A drug dealing that you didn’t need another organised group to come into that specific location in order for those that are using to be able to then source Class A drugs, because there was always somebody just round that corner, or somebody round that corner, or somebody round that corner. And they’re all known to each other, so it wasn’t a kind of, there wasn’t a vacuum left that then had to be filled, because it was just filled elsewhere...They all went round the corner to a different dealer...because it is just so readily available, which is rubbish isn’t it”.

“I think it was just easy to come by. More people were dealing in a wider area. And the network between that community is so strong that they all know who the users are anyway, so they can go out and target the users who they think they can get the easy money off I think. Quality of drugs I think hadn’t changed”.

A number of interviewees highlighted the possibility of some unintended consequences, as previously peripheral players within the market began to occupy more prominent roles. The separation of the two local markets for Class A and B drugs, which had existed prior to the parallel operations, was thought to be less obvious following these enforcement activities:

“The thing in relation to the dealing since then is that unfortunately when we did have the main dealers in [the betting shop] they operated, they managed the whole market round [that area], and they had control over that. Since we’ve taken them, the bigger players, out we’ve now got all the smaller peripheral people in who ship the drugs out. I think that’s the users who have been brought in to do that, which is why we’re getting more people dealing throughout the area now unfortunately”.

“The only difference is that now both heroin, crack cocaine, and cannabis, so Class A and B, are all freely available for people all round the community. Whereas in the past it was more, it seemed to be more a case of if you wanted Class A they knew they’d go to [the betting shop], if you wanted cannabis then you’d go to [neighbouring market location], east end of [the LPA]”.

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3.2 Impact on calls for assistance (CFS) incidents

Between 22 June 2010 and 22 June 2012 there were over one million CFS incidents handled by the PFA. These incidents were recorded as being related to:

- public safety/welfare (38.4%) (most commonly reports of ‘suspicious circumstances’ and ‘concern for safety’);
- crime (21.2%) (theft – ‘shoplifting’ and ‘other’, ‘violence against the person’, ‘other notifiable offences’ (including weapons) and ‘criminal damage’);
- administration (15.2%) (‘messages’ and ‘contact record’);
- transport (13.2%) (‘highway disruption’ and ‘road-related offences’); and
- anti-social behaviour (12.0%) (‘rowdy/inconsiderate behaviour’ and ‘nuisance neighbours’).

A breakdown of these CFS incidents, by area, over the two-year period examined is provided in Table 2, below.

Table 2: Nature of CFS incidents across the PFA, 22nd June 2010 – 22nd June 2012 (N=1,032,361)

	Public safety/welfare	Crime	Administration	Transport	Anti-social behaviour
Target	42.7%	22.9%	12.8%	6.5%	15.1%
LPA	39.2%	24.6%	13.2%	10.5%	12.5%
PFA	38.3%	20.9%	15.4%	13.5%	11.9%
Total	38.4%	21.2%	15.2%	13.2%	12.0%

Compared with the 12-month period prior to Operation Example, there was no significant change in the number of CFS incidents handled by the PFA during the following year across the target area (from 734 to 733 incidents) and LPA (from 48,068 to 48,003 incidents) ($\chi^2(1)=0.000$, $p=1.000$). The total number of incidents reported in the combined target area and LPA fell by 0.1 per cent over this period. When compared with the target area, CFS incidents across the PFA fell by one per cent (from 468,997 to 465,826 incidents) ($OR=0.99$, $95\% CI=0.89-1.10$).

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Since there was no difference in the number of incidents observed between the target area and LPA ($OR=1.00$, $95\% CI=0.90-1.10$), it was not necessary to calculate any displacement effects via WDQ.

Figure 1, below, illustrates monthly trends in CFS incidents broken down by the target area, LPA and the PFA over a two-year period. These showed a marked spike in activity within the target area from late January 2011 up until Operation Example, at which point the number of such incidents had doubled (from 40 to 81). They continued to rise until late July 2011, by which time the number of CFS incidents had increased by 123 per cent relative to activity levels in January 2011 (from 40 to 89 incidents). This represented the peak for CFS incidents during the two-year period examined. There was then a 48 per cent fall in the number of reported incidents, up to 22nd October 2011 (from 89 to 46).

These trends were anticipated by members of the NPT. The spike in calls during the period immediately leading up to the operation may have been in response to police and council requests to local residents to report such incidents in order to gather evidence in support of an application for a dispersal order:

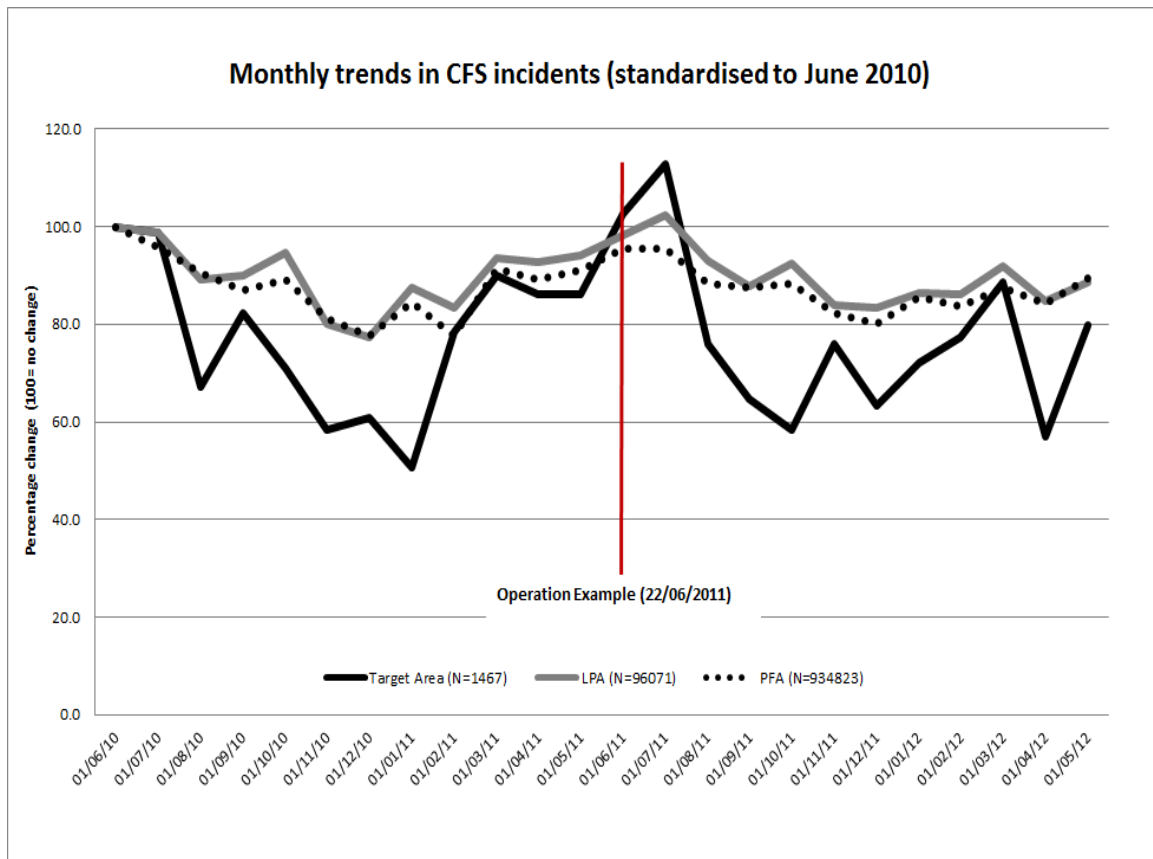
“We did a big campaign in the Spring of last year telling people to start reporting things to the Police, because we were trying to get the evidence for the dispersal order, and obviously unbeknown to us they were working on the other thing [Operation Example]. So building up that kind of awareness, ‘here’s the number, here’s the number, here’s the number’, and then when the big operation happened I think that gave people the confidence that something was being done”.

So rather than reflecting a rise in CFS incidents due to increasing crime, the increases that were observed within the target area after the warrants had been executed may in fact have been attributable to a greater willingness of members of the public to report such incidents in the aftermath of Operation Example:

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"I really shocked myself because the number of reports in that three-month period after we had done the drugs warrant doubled, and I was like, 'oh no, that doesn't show a really good message', until I went into the detail of it. And about 80% of those additional reports, randomly one was from a member of the public to thank the Police for the action that they'd taken, which has never happened in the history of Police in [the area], ever. But about 80% of them were from the local residents, or the business owners, reporting issues, which they had never done before. So actually, randomly, a doubling of calls to us, it was a measure of success because we hadn't been able to engage with the community before that, and they actually started to pick up the phone and ring us".

Figure 1: Monthly trends in CFS incidents across the PFA, 22nd June 2010 – 22nd June 2012 (standardised to June 2010)



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3.3 Impact on recorded crimes

Over the two-year period considered, the CEDAR extracts provided showed there to have been 311,555 recorded crimes registered by the PFA. Relative to the 12-month period prior to Operation Example, there was a 13.7 per cent fall in the number of recorded crimes across the target area in the 12 months that followed (from 197 to 170 crimes). This compared with a 21.1 per cent reduction within the LPA (from 21,344 to 16,839 recorded crimes) and a 15.8 per cent fall observed throughout the PFA (from 148,200 to 124,805).

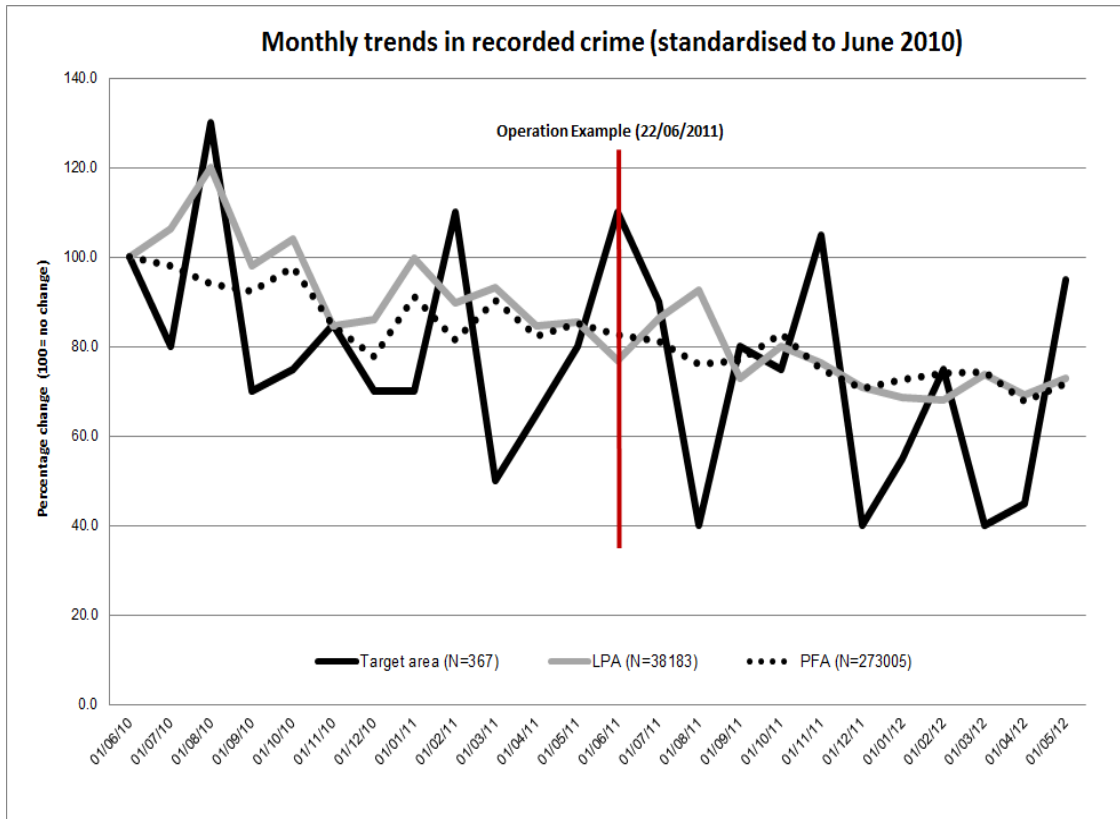
These data demonstrated that recorded crime had decreased by nine per cent within the LPA ($OR=0.91$, $95\% CI=0.74-1.12$) and three per cent across the wider PFA ($OR=0.97$, $95\% CI=0.79-1.19$), when compared to the target area. Displacement effects via WDQ were not calculated as there appeared to be no direct effect from Operation Example, relative to performance across the LPA ($\chi^2(1)=0.727$, $p=0.394$).

Recorded crime incidents fell in the target area by 63 per cent in the two months following the operation (from 22 recorded offences to eight), but rose by 163 per cent between August and November 2011 (to 21 offences) before falling again (by 62 per cent) in the space of four weeks (between November and December 2011). The results are set out below, in Figure 2. Data from interviews with members of the NPT and others (in January 2012) implied that some regression to pre-operation crime levels may have been inevitable, as resources were diverted to other areas, activities and priorities as recorded crime began falling in the aftermath of the operation.

“The sustainability in terms of that pretty much being down to us, and driving it initially, there’s no way that we can keep up the level that we did for that initial three months”.

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Figure 2: Monthly trends in recorded crime across the PFA, 22nd June 2010 – 22nd June 2012 (standardised to June 2010)



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3.4 Impact on recorded acquisitive crime

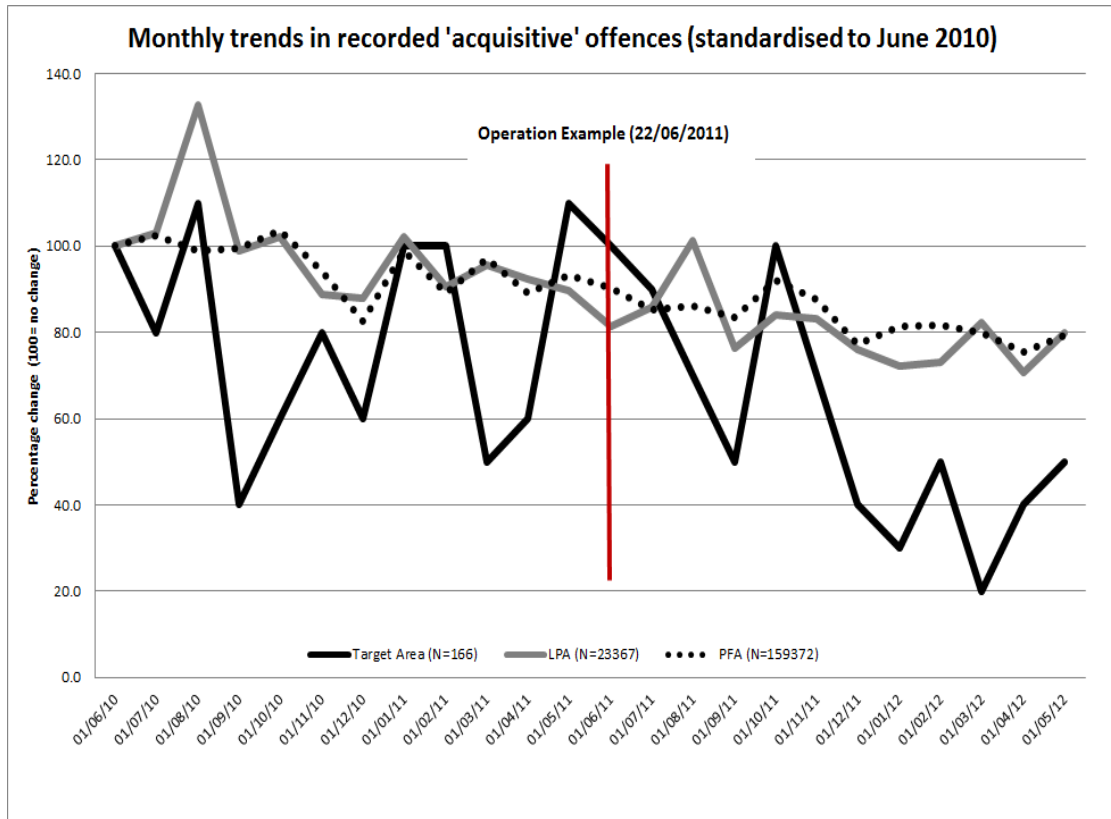
Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of a positive benefit from Operation Example relates to the falls observed in levels of recorded acquisitive crime. Compared to the 12-month period prior to the operation, the target area saw the number of acquisitive offences fall by 25.3 per cent over the course of the following year (from 95 to 71 offences). By contrast, offences of this nature reduced at a slower rate elsewhere: by 18.4 per cent within the LPA (from 12,864 to 10,503 recorded acquisitive crimes) and 12.9 per cent throughout the wider PFA (from 85,191 to 74,181 offences).

These CEDAR data showed that when comparing the 12 months pre and post Operation Example, recorded acquisitive crime had increased by nine per cent within the LPA ($OR=1.09$, $95\% CI=0.80-1.48$) and 16 per cent across the wider PFA ($OR=1.16$, $95\% CI=0.85-1.58$), relative to the target area over the same period. Furthermore, a WDQ of 59.6 is indicative of a diffusion of benefit to the buffering LPA, beyond the direct effects observed within the target area.

However, as illustrated in Figure 3, the fall in recorded acquisitive crimes within the target area pre-dated Operation Example, and continued until September 2011 (from 11 offences in May 2011 to five offences), before rising back to pre-operation levels in October 2011 (10 offences) and falling again thereafter (reaching a low of two acquisitive offences reported in March 2012).

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Figure 3: Monthly trends in recorded acquisitive crimes across the PFA, 22nd June 2010 – 22nd June 2012 (standardised to June 2010)



Interview data pointed to at least two possible explanations that could account for this fall in acquisitive crime across the target area: (i) displacement and/or (ii) treatment effects. There was anecdotal evidence to suggest that there had been some displacement of those associated with offending from within the target area to other locations across the LPA:

“I usually seem them outside the court, you know, in the town centre. Yeah, that’s where I normally see them now”.

As set out in 3.6 below, this reduction in acquisitive offending is unlikely to be accounted for by an increase in numbers presenting for structured drug treatment. Those substance misusers associated with the target area and its related ASB, for instance, were considered to be a small refractory group resistant to change and intervention:

“With some of the users specifically that were also street drinkers outside the shops, I mean, several of them have just said that they never wanted any help, and they’d be quite happy to shoplift for the rest of their lives to get the drugs, however hard they’re pushed. So it’s like, what’d you do?”

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“It’s still the same people that we deal with day in, day out, in terms of that kind of big wheel that just keeps on turning. Not very many people step off”.

There were also concerns raised about the appropriateness of community-based treatment orders for some, and inconsistencies in the enforcement of these community penalties for those identified via the criminal justice system as in need of treatment post-sentence:

“One of the most common things was for dealers to say that they’re Class A drug users, get a DRR [drug rehabilitation requirement], and obviously they get negative tests all the time, because they’re not a drug user anyway”.

“The only real engagement we have with them is all the drug testing programmes once they’ve been convicted and they’re put on drug rehabilitation orders is the fact that they breach them week in and week out. And then we arrest them and they’re given the same conditions, and it’s just a never-ending circle, and they’re still in the community committing crime”.

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3.5 Impact on CFS with anti-social behaviour (ASB) related incidents

CEDAR recorded details of 123,728 ASB-related CFS incidents across the PFA area between 22 June 2010 and 22 June 2012. The extent to which trends in different forms of ASB can be described over this period are limited by the fact that classification codes for recording these events appeared to have changed from the end of February 2011. After this period over four-fifths of ASB-related CFSs were recorded as either 'community' (45.6%, $n=33,328$) or 'personal' (41.0%, $n=29,919$) in nature. Prior to this point none of the 14 ASB categories were labelled in this way and half the ASB-related CFS incidents recorded referred to 'rowdy/inconsiderate behaviour' (49.9%, $n=25,283$).

Taking the 12 months prior to Operation Example as a reference point, there was a 14.3 per cent fall in these incidents in the target area during the following year (from 119 ASB-related CFS incidents to 102). However, this rate of reduction was lower than that observed for the LPA (24.5 per cent, from 6,848 to 5,171 incidents) and PFA (31.2 per cent, from 66,053 to 45,435 incidents) over the same period.

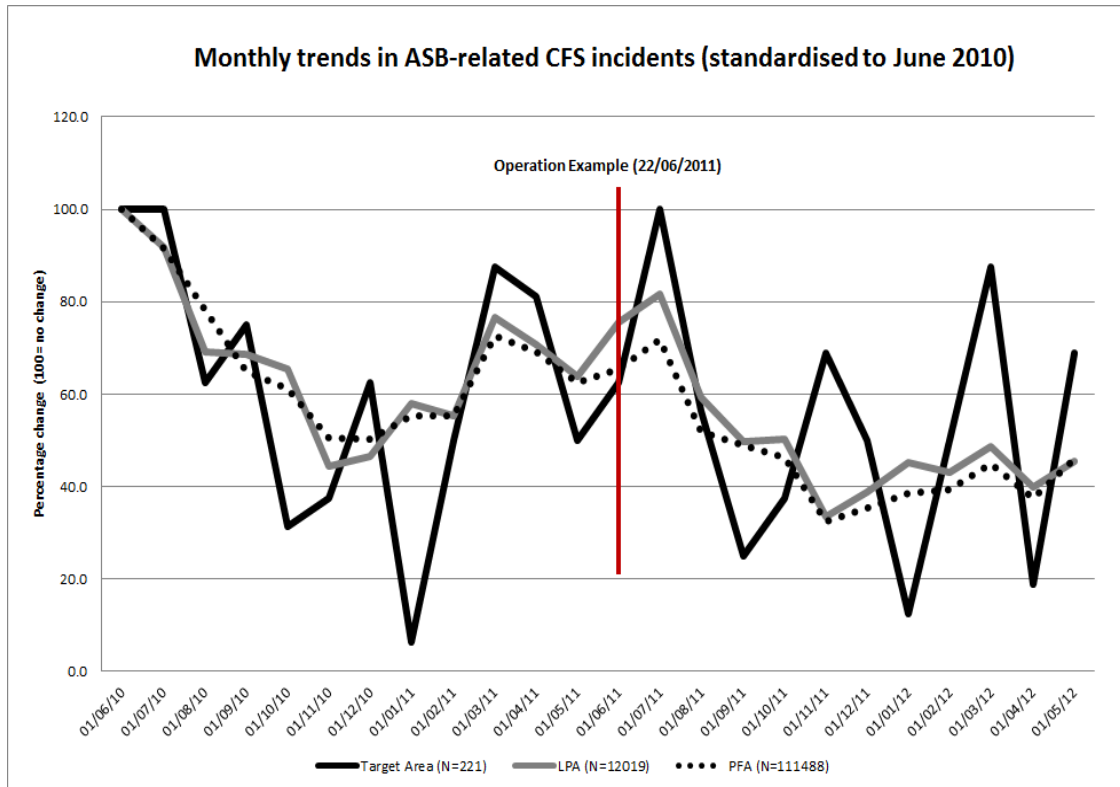
When compared with the target area, these ASB-related incidents within the LPA fell by 12 per cent ($OR=0.88$, 95% $CI=0.67-1.15$) and across the wider PFA by 20 per cent ($OR=0.80$, 95% $CI=0.61-1.04$) in the 12 months post Operation Example.

Since there was no evidence of an effect or association between the target area and LPA ($\chi^2(1)=0.867$, $p=0.352$), it was not necessary to calculate any displacement effects via WDQ.

ASB-related CFS incidents had in fact started to rise in the target area prior to Operation Example (from May 2011) and continued to do so until the month after the strike, when ASB peaked at 16 incidents. They fell to a low of two incidents in January 2012, but increased again above pre-Operation Example levels during March and May 2012 (14 and 11 ASB-related CFS incidents respectively).

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Figure 4: Monthly trends in ASB-related CFS incidents across the PFA, 22nd June 2010 – 22nd June 2012 (standardised to June 2010)



As noted in 3.2, above, these increases (which pre-dated the operation) may to some extent be a consequence of police and council requests to report such incidents in order to support an application for a dispersal order. There were also reports that the continued rise post-Example may have been the consequence of a greater willingness by members of the public to report such incidents in the aftermath of the operation.

The increases in ASB-related CFSs from the end of January 2012 did however coincide with a six-month dispersal order, which had been introduced at the time of the Operation, expiring.

“We’re just getting to the point at the end of this month (January 2012) where that dispersal order runs out. So we’re going to have to kind of look at some different tactical options I think for keeping the area as it has been, because...people are aware that that dispersal order is ending”.

There were reports too of ASB incidents rising as a consequence of alcohol consumption by young people within the target area during this period:

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"I mean, unfortunately on Friday and Saturday nights, some of the shop owners have mentioned that there is a little bit of ASB that goes on then, but we're not there to see it unfortunately... Anecdotally, the Friday and Saturday night crowd I think are a different crowd than the street drinking people who were there before, and I think they're quite a lot younger".

It appeared that six months after the operation forms of ASB continued to serve as a barrier for some residents in engaging with local services and amenities:

"We see a lot of people but I think the less confident person would be unlikely to get to me because they've got a lot of barriers to get through. They've got people smoking on the street, they've got violence, they've got people drinking, just right outside my entrance. So they would have to really be confident to get through that...We're still wary of the shops...so it hasn't completely gone...Definitely less people hanging around, but still not just a pleasant environment...It's a very deprived community...there's lots of litter, there's lots of swearing, there's lots of people hanging out there, and it's still not a very pleasant place most of the time to walk past".

Although ASB problems had not been entirely eradicated, there was a sense that at least some residents were grateful for the action that had been taken:

"They didn't sort of disappear altogether, but there's certainly less of a presence of groups of people. And there certainly was a feeling in the community that something had been done, that was really nice, you know, that something had been done. That was very positive...There was an outcome...locally everyone knew, so it was great that there was some sort of boundaries in put in place by local law enforcement".

"You don't really get the groups of people hanging out by the shops anymore, and when you sort of walk around [the area] you'll get all the residents sort of saying to you, 'oh it's so nice to go down the shops now. Like we don't feel like we're going to get harassed' and things like that".

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3.6 Impact on numbers assessed for drug treatment

The potential impact of Operation Example on engagement with drug treatment was also examined (as measured by numbers being assessed for treatment). Triangulating data in this way could prove particularly useful for exploring whether there was a correlation between the reductions in acquisitive crime reported above, and an increase in drug treatment commencements locally. The focus was on four structured treatment services reporting to the national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS) and located within two miles of the commercial business property which served as the main focus of the police operation.

Trends in assessments for structured treatment reported to NDTMS in the 12 months pre and post the operation were examined in aggregate across the four services, and compared with the trends observed across the wider drug action team (DAT) area over the same period. During this time, the number of individuals assessed by the four services fell by 25 per cent (from 534 in the 12 months prior to Operation Example to 398 assessments post). This was consistent with the 34 per cent reduction in the number of assessments for treatment observed across the wider DAT area during this time.

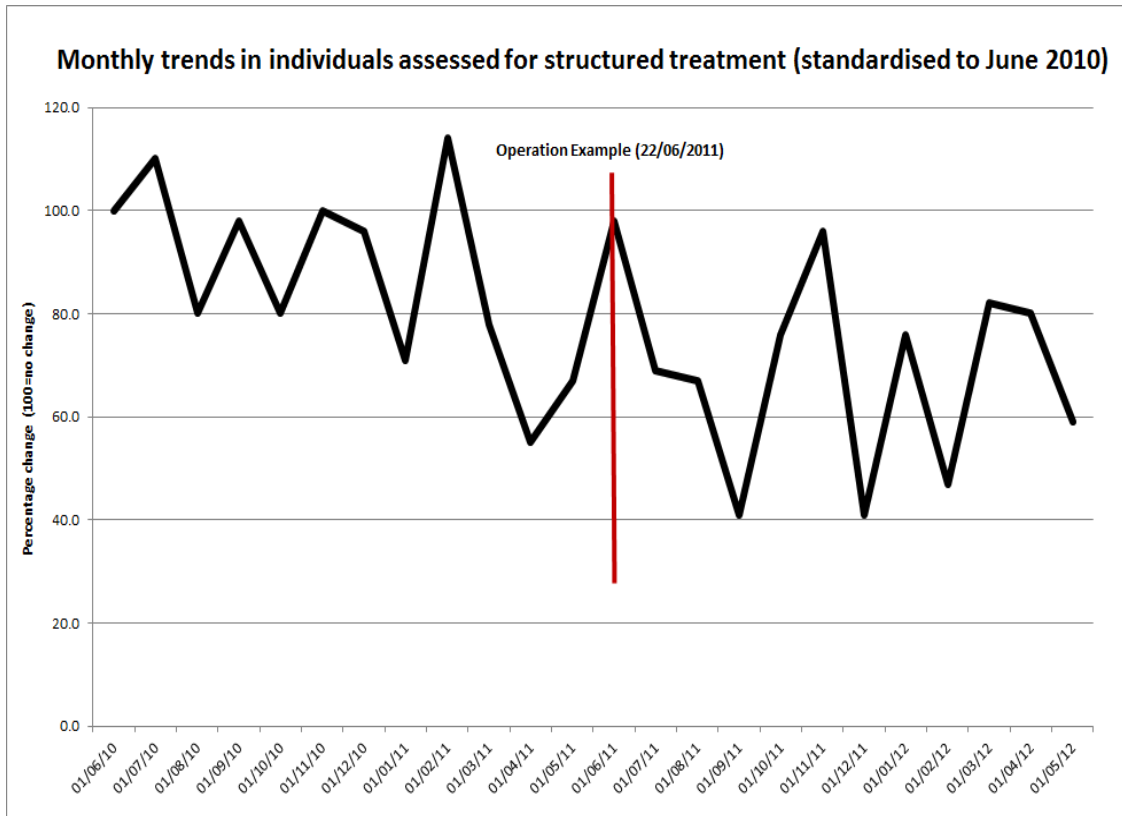
As illustrated in Figure 5, the number of individuals assessed for support by the four structured treatment services peaked in February 2011 ($n=114$), before falling in April ($n=55$). They rose again after this point and continued to do so during the time in which Operation Example had been carried out (reaching 98 during June). There is little to suggest the operation exerted a major influence on assessment rates during this period: only one in four (11 of the 44) assessments completed during June 2011 for access to the main substitute prescribing service occurred on or after the 22nd June 2011. In the period following Operation Example the number of individuals assessed for treatment by the four closest services to the target area continued to fall to a low during September 2011 ($n=41$), before rising again.

Feedback from another local (Tier 2) provider not required to report to NDTMS also confirmed that admissions to their service had remained unchanged in the period after the operation:

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“We provide the Tier 2 open access service and after looking over our reports I can see no major difference from the year before or the months previous and following, except that the number of client visits to our needle exchange were slightly lower around June-July and increased in August, but not by a considerable amount” (Project Manager, via email 17/01/2012).

Figure 5: Monthly trends in individuals assessed for treatment by four services within two miles of the target area, 1st June 2010 – 31st May 2012 (standardised to June 2010) (N=932)



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3.7 Data sources scoped but not used

There were a number of primary and secondary data sources held by the PFA and other partner agencies that could potentially have been used to provide useful proxy measures for assessing the impact of specialist policing activities as they relate to drug law enforcement. Our discussions with the PFA throughout the project focussed on using data:

- that had been collated by custody staff as part of the test on arrest process (covering drug spend, sources of finance, number of dealers used and time taken to acquire drugs);
- on test purchases (to monitor changes in drug prices and purity); and
- relating to drug-related calls made to CrimeStoppers.

We explored the possibility of using data that had been collated by Reliance custody staff as part of the test on arrest process. As set out in Figure 6 below, this involved civilian custody staff asking eligible arrestees identified as recent users of heroin and/or cocaine questions about their spending on illicit drugs, sources of finance, number of dealers used and time taken to purchase drugs. There was however a high rate of refusal to answer these questions on drug market activity. For example, between September and November 2009, 108 arrestees provided information on these issues when invited to do so by custody staff. This is equivalent to 8.9 per cent of the 1,210 people tested in custody suites by the PFA during this period.

Leaving aside issues of coverage, reliability and validity⁸, these data could not be readily utilised for the research since they lacked key details of the date these questions were asked and information on location/setting⁹.

⁸ A counter argument is that even partial information on drug market activity (from no more than nine per cent of the participants in it) is better than none. It is also unclear whether a drug interventions programme (DIP) assessor posing these questions as part of the *Required Assessment* process might have yielded a higher and more accurate rate of response. Attempts to initiate this change as part of the study met with limited success.

⁹ There may however be scope to link these data to other police systems, via the use of custody reference numbers.

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Figure 6: Excerpt from DT3 forms completed by Reliance custody staff

Custody Reference Number	<input style="width: 95%;" type="text"/>																								
<p>The next few questions are to help us to understand more about drug use. You can refuse to answer any of these questions if you wish to. This will not affect your bail or the charges against you in any way.</p>																									
(A) Amount spent per day £ <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">Heroin</td><td style="width: 80%;"><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>Crack</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>Cocaine</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>Other</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> </table>	Heroin	<input type="text"/>	Crack	<input type="text"/>	Cocaine	<input type="text"/>	Other	<input type="text"/>	Total Amount per day spent on Drugs <input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>	(B) Have you injected in the last year? <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">Yes</td><td style="width: 80%;"><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> </table>	Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text"/>											
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(iii) On average, how long has it taken you to score (in past week or two)?.....hrs																									
(D) How many different dealers do you buy from (1,2,3 etc)?.....																									
(E) (i) What are your main sources of Income <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">1 Paid Work</td><td style="width: 80%;"><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>2 Benefits</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>3 Shop theft</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>4 Robbery</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>5 Deception</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>6 Selling</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>7 Sex Work</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>8 Begging</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>9 Burglary</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>10 Veh Crime</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>11 Hand S/G</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>12 Other (Describe)</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> </table>	1 Paid Work	<input type="text"/>	2 Benefits	<input type="text"/>	3 Shop theft	<input type="text"/>	4 Robbery	<input type="text"/>	5 Deception	<input type="text"/>	6 Selling	<input type="text"/>	7 Sex Work	<input type="text"/>	8 Begging	<input type="text"/>	9 Burglary	<input type="text"/>	10 Veh Crime	<input type="text"/>	11 Hand S/G	<input type="text"/>	12 Other (Describe)	<input type="text"/>	(ii) Which of these would you say is your single biggest source of income? <input style="width: 80%;" type="text"/>
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(F) Are you currently receiving any Drug Treatment? <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr><td style="width: 20%;">Yes</td><td style="width: 80%;"><input type="text"/></td></tr> <tr><td>No</td><td><input type="text"/></td></tr> </table>			Yes	<input type="text"/>	No	<input type="text"/>																			
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Attempts were made to obtain data on drug samples submitted for forensic analysis following test purchases or routine seizures in order to monitor changes in drug prices and/or purity. However, these data could not be sourced for the relevant PFA department to inform this work. In addition, there were some uncertainties about whether the number of samples tested over this two-year period would have been of a sufficient volume across both the target area and LPA to meaningful measures trends over time.

The scope for using data relating to drug-related calls made to CrimeStoppers was also examined¹⁰. As set out in Table 3, CrimeStoppers routinely collates data on actionable information received from calls made to them by members of the public, and categorises the nature of that call i.e. whether ‘drug-related’¹¹. The extent to which these calls resulted in an arrest was also recorded.

¹⁰ We are grateful to [###] from CrimeStoppers for her advice on the nature and extent of these data.

¹¹ What constitutes a ‘drug-related’ call may have been subject to considerable variation.

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Table 3: Actionable calls made to CrimeStoppers and subsequent arrests in five PFA locations (for a random sample month in 2009)

Sample month in 2009	Area A	Area B	Area C	Area D	Area E
All actionable information (calls)	60	51	35	35	59
Actionable information (calls) – ‘drug-related’	26	27	19	21	29
All arrests resulting from actionable calls	5	2	2	1	2
Arrests resulting from actionable calls – ‘drug-related’	3	0	0	1	2

Accessing source data which had been generated by Crimestoppers (relating to any information recorded following a call) was not possible due to guarantees of anonymity to the caller. There were also uncertainties about the extent to which the data contained within the information packages could be readily manipulated to attribute activity to within 300 metres of the target area, rather than the LPA more broadly.

As a result of these uncertainties none of the three data sources referred to above were used to inform this particular piece of research. It seemed though that minor adaptations to them (e.g. via the inclusion of specific or proxy location variables) could render them more useful for the purposes of future impact analysis.

4. Discussion

This independent research sought to provide the PFA with guidance on how to enhance existing efforts aimed at assessing the effectiveness of specialist policing activities. The research therefore concerned itself with answering two key questions:

- How can the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA be improved upon using a range of existing data sources?
- What do these data sources tell us about the impact of previous specialist policing activities by the PFA (using a recent drug law enforcement operation as a case study example)?

Enhancing routine impact analysis

The research has demonstrated how the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA can be readily enhanced using a range of existing data sources. This study involved secondary analysis of anonymised extracts from routinely collected administrative data (stored on CEDAR) in order to map trends in reported incidents and recorded crimes over time. Deploying a 24-month period for data capture proved useful in accounting for any short-term impacts and allowing for natural/seasonal fluctuations one might expect to observe when analysing trends, especially within narrowly defined geographical areas, like our 300-metre target area. The obvious 'trade-off' associated with using this approach is that any results on impact would not become available for analysis until at least 12 months after the resolution phase of any given activities. This lag may be considered too long a period to have to wait for such results. However, we think the findings illustrated in Figure 2, above, aptly illustrate the potential pitfalls of measuring change over a shorter follow-up period.

Another advantage of using these administrative data was the flexibility they provided for analysing both incidents (CFS, ASB) and crime types (any recorded offences, acquisitive crime) at different area levels (target, LPA and PFA).

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The size of the target area - 300 metres in this instance - was negotiated in consultation with the PFA. Future work is likely to require the use of target areas whose size and radius better reflect the stated outcomes, aims, objectives and purpose of the operation(s) or activities under consideration. While the nested approach used here (i.e. comparing crime trends between a target area embedded within a larger LPA) has been shown to have considerable utility for this kind of exercise (Bowers and Johnson, 2003: 283), future work should give greater consideration to the identification of 'control areas' within individual PFAs to serve as a comparison (where this is possible).

We have also demonstrated the utility of using national drug treatment monitoring system (NDTMS) data to assess trends in demand for drug treatment during periods pre and post drug law enforcement activities. Replicating this work as a regular feature of impact analysis may however require data sharing agreements to be drawn up between either local drug action teams (DATs), or analysts at Public Health England.

The structured de-briefing process was shown to be an important – if under-utilised – mechanism for reflective learning and identifying best practice around specialist policing activities. Gauging the nature and extent of any unintended consequences should perhaps be a greater focus for subsequent impact analysis, informed using data from both administrative systems and structured de-briefings.

Though not drawn upon to inform this particular piece of work, a number of existing data sources collated by the PFA appeared to have considerable promise in terms of their potential utility for informing future impact analysis. These would however require some (minor) adaptations in order to render them useful for such a purpose i.e. via the inclusion of specific or proxy location variables. For example, in addition to adding value for intelligence purposes, refining aspects of the data collection process which had been operated by civilian custody staff as part of the test on arrest process should offer valuable insights into reported expenditure on illicit drugs, sources of finance, number of dealers used and time taken to purchase drugs pre and post drug law enforcement activities.

Finally, future impact analysis might benefit from taking a broader view by assessing the collective impact of specialist policing activities, such as drug law enforcement, over a period of time rather than focus on individual operations in isolation. This could also make use of data collected via OCG disruption assessment forms to better assess which tactics deployed against different OCGs and/or criminal activities are associated with the greatest impacts.

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Assessing the impact of a recent drug law enforcement operation

This study used administrative (CEDAR) and interview data to monitor the impacts of one specific drug law enforcement initiative undertaken by the PFA. The resolution phase of Operation Example involved 90 officers and led to the execution of 13 warrants. This resulted in arrests for conspiracy (4), supply (5) and being concerned in the supply of Class A drugs (4) offences. Charges were brought against nine of the arrestees (no further action was taken against the remaining four suspects), with all but one entering a guilty plea. Sentencing outcomes were available for six of the nine defendants. Three received custodial sentences totalling seven years. The perceived leniency of the sentences imposed by the courts as a result of Operation Example meant some officers were less inclined to promote or communicate these outcomes to the local community.

Aspects of the operation that were considered to have gone particularly well related to its planning, involvement of key partner agencies (early and regular engagement with the Crown Prosecution Service) and the degree of community reassurance that followed (leafleting the local community about the operation, deploying targeted/high visibility patrols and introducing a local business watch scheme). The two most significant problems identified related to the planning process (other operational demands in parallel reduced the planning time available for Operation Example) and the involvement of partnership agencies (delays with the local council installing closed-circuit television (CCTV) cameras post-operation).

Anecdotally, there was perceived to have been no adverse impact on the availability of Class A drugs following the operation, or their quality. There were also reports of some unintended consequences, as previously peripheral players within the market began to occupy more prominent roles. The separation of two local markets for Class A (heroin and cocaine) and B (cannabis) drugs, which had previously existed, was considered to be less obvious following this enforcement activity.

There was limited evidence to indicate a positive impact from Operation Example across four of the five outcome domains considered using administrative data. Comparing the 12 months prior to and following the resolution phase of the operation, the total number of CFS incidents reported in the combined target area and LPA fell by 0.1 per cent over this period. When compared with the target area, CFS incidents across the PFA fell by one per cent. Rates of recorded crime had decreased by nine per cent within the LPA and three per cent across the wider PFA, when compared to the target area. Similarly, ASB-related CFS incidents within the LPA fell by 12 per cent and across the wider PFA by 20 per cent in the

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12 months post Operation Example, relative to outcomes observed across the target area. Since there were no differences in the number of CFS incidents, recorded crimes and ASB-related CFS incidents observed between the target area and LPA, measures of displacement effects were not calculated.

Perhaps the most persuasive evidence of a positive benefit from Operation Example related to the falls observed in levels of recorded acquisitive crime. When comparing the 12 months pre and post, recorded acquisitive offending had increased by nine per cent within the LPA and 16 per cent across the wider PFA, relative to the target area over the same period. There was also evidence of a diffusion of benefit to the buffering LPA, beyond the direct effects observed within the target area.

This reduction in acquisitive offending was unlikely to be accounted for by an increase in numbers presenting for structured drug treatment. The number of individuals assessed by four services situated within two miles of the target area fell by 25 per cent (from 534 in the 12 months prior to Operation Example to 398 assessments post). This is consistent with the 34 per cent reduction in the number of assessments for treatment observed across the wider DAT area during this time. Feedback from another local (Tier 2) provider not required to report to NDTMS also confirmed that admissions to their service had remained unchanged in the period after the operation.

Conclusions

On the basis of the administrative data considered as part of this independent study, there was no evidence to indicate that Operation Example contributed directly towards reducing CFS incidents (both general and ASB-related) or recorded crimes within the target area over a 12-month follow-up period, relative to the scale of reduction observed across the wider LPA and PFA.

The most persuasive evidence of a positive benefit from the operation related to the falls observed in levels of recorded 'acquisitive' crime within the target area. We think these reductions were unlikely to be accounted for by an increase in numbers presenting for treatment at local drug services (which fell by 25 per cent in the 12 months after the operation).

While the PFA routinely collates a wide range of data, different systems and reporting requirements mean it does not always record these in a consistent manner, or in a way that

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enables them to be readily retrieved for the purposes of mounting an impact analysis. A notable omission from the current study was data on drug samples submitted for forensic analysis following test purchases or routine seizures, though these data undoubtedly exist in some form within the organisation. This points to a need for the PFA to scope and review aspects of existing data collection processes and systems, with a view to identifying how they can be better integrated and made more accessible, so as to maximise their utility.

Existing approaches used by the PFA when undertaking impact analysis tend to be tactical in focus and largely quantitative in nature. This study has illustrated the importance and value of integrating qualitative insights – in this instance using data gathered via a structured de-briefing process and in-depth interviews with stakeholders – in order to better understand and contextualise the circumstances surrounding both the execution and impact of Operation Example, and the nature of the crime problem locally in the period pre and post. These interviews, for instance, proved particularly insightful when interpreting trends in CFS incidents and drawing attention to the potential influence of police and council requests for information and assistance prior to the operation, and a greater potential willingness by members of the public to report incidents after it. They have also underlined the importance of considering both intended and unintended consequences of specialist policing activities when undertaking any form of impact analysis.

The qualitative insights from this research also underscored the need to ensure that operational objectives take account of broader non-criminal justice outcomes (where appropriate) and that these are effectively communicated to all involved in an investigation. Engaging relevant partnership agencies in establishing and setting these objectives (again, where appropriate) may also be a useful means of facilitating access to external datasets in order to measure impacts in a broader and more holistic way.

While such an approach may not be achievable in every instance, it should be advocated and encouraged by senior officers whenever possible. This would require analysts to be more proactive however; not only in engaging police personnel across a range of departments, but also other stakeholders in external agencies in order to undertake a more rounded assessment of impacts and outcomes. In addition to efforts already being made at a more strategic or senior level across the PFA, interaction of this sort may assist in developing relationships with partner agencies ‘on the ground’, and perhaps better facilitate the identification and potential for sharing of non-police data for the purposes of informing future impact analysis. This is particularly true where considerations of ‘success’ are not restricted to crime or enforcement-related outcomes. Our own experience of attempting to

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secure aggregate-level treatment data for this study underlines for us the difficulties of being able to identify appropriate 'gate-keepers' to these data, in order for these negotiations to begin.

The findings from this independent study have shown how the routine impact analysis of specialist policing activities undertaken by the PFA can be enhanced using a number of existing data sources. As well as highlighting the potential utility of using other datasets for informing future impact analysis (subject to some adaptations), we think there is a case to be made for undertaking broader strategic assessments in future which periodically consider the collective or cumulative impact of specialist policing activities over time (rather than a focus on these operations in isolation). Doing so may assist in more readily identifying those tactics and investigative approaches which are associated with the greatest impacts in reducing crime.

A key challenge for the PFA relates to the issue of 'organisational memory' and the difficulty of generating a corpus of local 'what works' knowledge around specialist policing activities. At present, existing best practice knowledge resides with a small number of officers who have direct experience of running these types of operation. For instance, while a structured de-briefing took place following Operation Example, no mechanism exists whereby the learning from it can be disseminated Force-wide, or appropriately deposited in order to inform subsequent enforcement activities. There would appear to be considerable scope to develop a single point of contact function within the organisation which provides both officers and analysts with advice, guidance and best practice gleaned from local routine impact analysis and structured de-briefings. This could also collate emerging national and international evidence from the College of Policing and the newly formed What Works Centre for Crime Reduction. In light of these findings it would seem timely for the PFA to review its processes for enhancing organisational memory of best practice around specialist policing activities.

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