

THE COLLISION CARE PACK SCHEME

A partnership approach to assisting motorists involved in collisions on the road

A submission in pursuit of
The Tilley Award

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SUMMARY

'Why should road traffic accident victims be the poor relations of the criminal justice system?' ***Lord Falconer 2001***

Over 500 motorists every week are affected by road traffic collisions in this force area alone. Each year on average, 100 people lose their lives and thousands more receive serious injuries. However, every collision, even non-injury, causes a degree of trauma to the parties involved.

In 2001, the Road Policing Unit reviewed the level of service provided to motorists involved in ***all*** collisions. This revealed that whilst we performed admirably in fatal and serious injury incidents, there was a level of inconsistency in the handling of less serious collisions. These affected hundreds of members of our community weekly. The information those people received varied enormously throughout the force.

The police service already provided excellent aftercare to victims of crime, but as Lord Falconer said, the motorist appeared to be the 'poor relation'.

As with all services the cost implication needed to be considered. To assist with this, a partner was sought to join with us to produce a comprehensive after care pack to improve the service to all those involved in a collision on the road. The pack included answers to the most frequently asked questions, a step by step guide as to what to do next, a pen for details exchange and free access to a 24 hour 365 day help line number. Vehicle crime prevention was also included reaching a potential 50,000 motorists a year at no cost to the force.

The RAC became our partners generously donating the necessary sponsorship to make the idea a reality. Customer satisfaction surveys after the first year of use reveal 84% of motorists who had received a pack found it useful or very useful. Following rigorous evaluation of the pack by front line officers, the new design has been released.

The scheme is now in the process of being adopted as best practice by nearly half the police forces in England and Wales.

(398 words)

HISTORY

The primary role of the police when dealing with a collision on the road is:

- to protect the scene from further collisions,
- ensure the injured are treated,
- ensure the free flow of traffic,
- arrange vehicle recovery where appropriate and
- to investigate the cause to determine whether offences have been committed.

The service provided by this force to those involved in fatal collisions is second to none. Family Contact Officers take care of all the procedural issues that follow a death on the road and provide guidance to the family throughout the initial trauma.

In cases of life threatening injury, the police provide a good service to the families involved, often being dealt with by the specialists of the Road Policing Unit able to give experienced help and advice.

However, a problem was identified with the thousands of motorists a year that did not die or receive life-threatening injuries. These motorists had often never been in contact with the police prior to the collision and from evidence obtained from interviews with administration support staff who dealt with the follow up enquiries, many people had no idea what to do next. In cases where drivers were uninsured or offences were disclosed regarding manner of driving, the public were often bemused as to the procedures that followed.

Understandably, people are often shocked and confused at the scene of a collision even in cases where there are no injuries. At the very time an officer explains the procedures that follow, the driver is least able to take in what is being said. This results in follow up enquiry calls, not only to the officer attending but to the call centre, the Administration Support Unit and local police stations with clarification questions - purely because explanations were given verbally and not in hard copy.

Historically, officers would often write a name and number on a small card with instructions to the driver to contact the Administration Support Unit (ASU) within 10 days. Subject to the motorist not having their driving documents with them, they would be also be given a form requesting the production of documents at a police station within seven days.

In many cases, a collision is often the only time the law-abiding citizen has any contact with the police and it can be a daunting experience. Worried motorists often won't wait the ten days requested and will call the police with queries.

In a field study conducted in 2001, it was discovered that Road Policing Unit officers had the benefit of a small locally designed pre-printed leaflet to hand to drivers. It dealt with issues such as vehicle recovery, the role of the police and what number to call. However, in contrast, the majority of officers often utilised any scrap of paper to hand with which to scribble down contact details. This resulted in more follow up calls to front line staff from members of the public who wanted answers to a variety of questions. These calls which had to be returned by the officer who had attended the scene, not infrequently would take front line staff away from their duties unnecessarily.

A senior decision maker from ASU stated that it was not unusual to spend over an hour explaining to one driver how the CPS makes decisions as to whether or not to prosecute motorists involved in collisions. Another officer explained how it was not unusual to return to the station at the end of the shift to have a message left by one or both parties involved in a collision. Often it was to explain again what had been said at the scene because the driver had forgotten the information that had been verbally given at the time in all the confusion.

Anecdotal evidence from operational police officers revealed they would reasonably expect to receive a subsequent telephone enquiry from 25% of motorists involved in a collision seeking answers to procedural questions. This figure transferred onto a force wide scale meant as many as 12,500 unnecessary follow up calls were made post-collision a year.

A sustainable solution needed to be found which offered a quality consistent post collision service throughout the force. The service needed to be offered at ALL motorists regardless of where a collision occurred and irrespective of the person who dealt with you.

OBJECTIVES

Acknowledging that we were facing a problem but also a missed opportunity, we started from the position of defining our objectives;

- 1. Provide a consistent quality of service to all motorists involved in road collisions throughout the force regardless of the severity of the incident.**
- 2. Reduce the demands on the organisation by providing answers to the most frequently asked questions at the scene and where further information required, identify another service provider.**
- 3. Providing the motorist with ease of access to other services beyond the capability of the police e.g. counselling and welfare organisations, road safety groups and legal advice irrespective of whether the motorist is the victim or the offender.**
- 4. Recognise that as a Constabulary we deal with 50,000 motorists involved in collisions annually. Take the opportunity to provide 50,000 car owners with crime reduction advice at no extra cost to the force.**

Having established our objectives we then commenced the scanning element of the SARA process.

SCANNING

Scanning encompassed all aspects of the problem. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the extent and nature of the issues a field study was conducted.

An essential element of the scanning stage was the findings discovered during interviews conducted with operational staff. The views of sector police officers (B District), administration support unit staff (Northern ASU), decision makers (Northern ASU), road policing officers (Almondsbury and Radstock), family contact officers (Radstock) and front office police staff (B and D District) were sought.

Notes were made and a visit to every station across the force area to check the stocks of existing materials and the existing procedures followed.

Contact made with other forces in the region to compare level of service offered.

Police officers, ASU staff and call handlers asked to provide details of the most frequently asked questions.

What services offered by outside agencies were researched (road safety organisations, charities, motoring organisations etc).

The information gathered formed the basis of the next stage of the SARA process.

ANALYSIS

So what was the extent of the problem? Firstly the numbers affected needed to be analysed.

Total 17,500 collisions were reported in 2001 with an average of 2.3 vehicles involved in each.

Approximately 24,000 accident report cards were used in the force per year reflecting the number of collisions reported including those that had occurred outside the force area but reported locally and those that were reported to police but not found to be recordable.

The total number of drivers involved in collisions in this force area each year and those reporting collisions to our force that had occurred outside the force area was calculated to be circa. 50,000.

Should any of these number telephone for advice, the call centre staff were not fully trained police officers and their practical advice was limited to defining a reportable collision and basic details.

District staff fared little better in what they were able to hand to motorists at the scene or at the station, other than postcards with ASU telephone numbers written. The clearest message given on this card was the appeal to the motorist to refrain from telephoning police for 10 days – not the best impression to leave to a motorist who may have questions or concerns. In the absence of the postcards staff often used scraps of paper.

Police officers explained that they did receive a number of follow up calls from motorists involved in collisions and these calls were often returned at the hand over period during the end of shift or beginning of the next shift. The difficulties the public encounter in trying to route their enquiry through to the right officer or department has historically been a problem. Couple this with shift work and office opening hours this makes for a frustrating experience.

Road Policing were equipped with a small quantity of pre-printed photocopied A4 folded leaflets covering the basics of collision procedures but these were in short supply and the photocopies looked unprofessional.

Officers and police staff felt that they would like to be able to leave motorists better informed and look more professional at the scene of collisions as they were able to do at the scene of burglaries (with a comprehensive advice pack).

ASU staff spent many hours explaining procedures to motorists, in extreme circumstances this included the example of one hour spent with one driver explaining how the Crown Prosecution Service operated and who made decisions to prosecute.

No crime reduction information was routinely provided to any motorist coming into contact with the police as a result of a collision – missing the opportunity to easily reach 50,000 car drivers annually.

The Administration Support Unit had limited opening hours Monday to Friday 8-4. Motorists were involved in collisions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

When coming into contact with non-injury non-reportable collisions, officers would advise the public to exchange details before leaving the scene. Many people are confused by this and do not understand either the phraseology or what other information needs to be gathered to assist in the subsequent insurance claim.

Looking at the problem analysis triangle of Victim Offender Location, the victim in the case of a road traffic collision can equally be the offender. An example of an elderly person who collided with and killed a motorcyclist who was not wearing a helmet suffered great trauma - but as she was classed as the 'offender' did not come into the category of receiving family contact support. This was an area in which the police service is ill equipped to assist, especially in placing the driver into the hands of counselling agencies who can assist with post traumatic stress or providing legal advice.

The location of a collision should not determine the level of service you receive but analysis revealed this not to be the case (for example motorway shunts received specialist RPU response and advice but rural non injury collisions often received a substantially poor level of service).

OBJECTIVES REVISITED

Having gone half way through the SARA process the response was beginning to become clear.

We needed to improve the quality of information provided to motorists at the scene by improving our service at source. The same quality of advice needed to be given force wide and the majority of routine questions answered in the first instance, thus reducing the burden on force resources.

However, it was time to revisit the objectives. It was clear that to find a sustainable solution to the problem another objective needed to be added to the list:

Locate a suitable partner to provide additional assistance to motorists

RESPONSE

The response to the problem took the process through an interesting twist. There was clearly a need to improve the level of service given by the police to the public after collisions. It was clear that the way to do this was by providing a professional, comprehensive care pack at the scene as we did for burglary victims and other victims of crime.

At this point it became obvious that the area of services for the motorist attracted a great deal of commercial attention in the form of advertising. It was time to test the commercial viability of the care pack within the business community.

A number of tele-canvassing calls were made to a variety of companies to discover a suitable partner.

There was interest in the idea but the companies that were the most eager to provide funding were those only interested in promoting no win - no fee compensation products. They could not offer the holistic approach to dealing with all motorists in distress. They were reluctant to offer help and advice to the offender as well as the victim and suggested paying a 'commission' to the force for every personal injury claim received. This was deemed wholly inappropriate for the good name of the force.

Contact was made to other organisations to check the suitability of potential partners however only one showed interest and matched, if not exceeded, our requirements.

The motoring organisation The RAC met with the force to discuss a partnership aimed at assisting **all** motorists involved in road traffic collisions not just those with a potential claim. Following extensive negotiation the RAC offered to provide the funding for 50,000 care packs and to assist in the project management of launching the scheme. The design, packaging, content and distribution were discussed and agreed along with the provision of a 24 hour, 7 day a week help line and further support to road safety initiatives.

The help line proved to be the real strength of the response by helping to solve the problem of follow up enquiries being encountered by officers. Motorists could contact experienced collision advisors with routine collision queries to alleviate the burden on the police service and ensure that motorists were taken care of outside of the police Administrative Support Units opening hours.

There was to be no 'hard sell' of RAC products or services. The RAC undertook to ensure that all motorists would be dealt with impartially whether members or non-members of the RAC. It was agreed that if a motorist requested any additional assistance in the form of legal advice, breakdown cover etc., and the RAC were able to offer that product or service then they would respond to the request. It was made clear that the police did not support or endorse any company or product/service offered.

The RAC considered the partnership to be ideal and could clearly see the potential commercial benefits is being associated with such a scheme and the promotion of road safety. They provided £35,000 to the Avon and Somerset Community Trust fund red circled for road safety initiatives to help reduce casualties for the future. Further they sponsored for the Constabulary a mobile road safety exhibition unit and a Ford Galaxy people carrier to transport bereaved relatives after fatal collisions.

The initiative launched by the Chief Constable in June 2002 at the RAC building in Almondsbury. Media interest was high and extremely positive with headlines such as "More Support For Victims".

50,000 packs were produced and distributed to all stations forcewide and officers and police staff were briefed regarding providing a packs to all motorists involved in collisions.

INITIAL ASSESSMENT

The problems encountered during the process of designing, packaging and distributing the packs was overcome and the scheme launched.

In the early stages there was concern at the lack of calls to the help line number.

Clearly our assessment stage revealed that the number of calls filtering through were not consistent with the numbers expected and we needed to know why.

INITIAL RESPONSE

Visits to stations force wide was arranged to discover if there was a problem in the distribution chain.

It became obvious that many of the stations still retained old stocks of accident report cards and that the new stocks were buried deep in stock cupboards.

Old stocks were removed and sent for recycling and the new stocks placed in briefing rooms, front offices and report writing rooms.

ASSESSMENT

The RAC reported almost an immediate improvement in the number of calls received. In the first 6 months it was estimated that over 600 calls were received by the help line and was growing weekly.

However feedback was yet to be received from practitioners and in March 2003, 9 months into the scheme a full evaluation meeting was called.

Officers attended and offered their views on the scheme. Quotes included

"I feel so much more professional now when I attend the scene of a collision, I know I don't have to worry if I've remembered to tell them everything because all they need to know is in the pack" District PC

"Its great because the packs are sealed, you grab a load when you go out the door and you can be sure they will look neat and tidy despite being thrown about in the back of the police car during the shift" District PC

"No-one is ever short of a pen at the scene and the exchange cards mean that motorists can write their own details down to exchange with each other leaving the officer to get on with clearing the scene" RPU Constable

"I hardly get any calls now asking the usual questions, I used to get them all the time but not since these were introduced" RPU Constable

Zoe, a motorist involved in a collision described her views of the concept:-

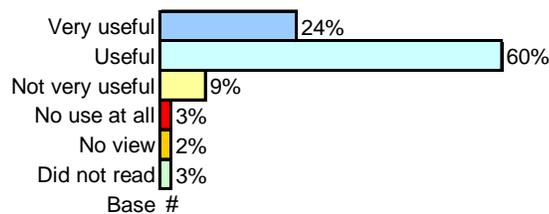
"This pack is a fantastic idea giving motorists practical advice at what I know can be a stressful and confusing time"

As well as receiving favourable responses some very constructive feedback was received on the design of the packs. Officers wanted them to be re-sealable (similar to supermarket grape bags) so that witnesses details could be added and that the motorists could keep all the paperwork in relation to their collision in the same place.

One suggested that the packaging needed to be easier to write on. Another even suggested that they wanted incorporated into the design paper easier to write on in the rain!

In a customer satisfaction survey conducted by the Corporate Development Department the responses revealed that 84% of those provided with a care pack found them either useful or very useful. 81% of motorists were either satisfied or very satisfied with the service provided by the police at the scene of the collision. Only 5% of respondents felt that they needed to be provided with more information or advice at the scene.

How useful did you find the 'Collision Care Pack'?



RESPONSE

How satisfied or dissatisfied were you with the service provided by the police at the scene of the collision?



The RAC were consulted and agreed to redesign the packs to incorporate the practitioner's suggestions. They even sourced waterproof paper from the Southern Hemisphere to overcome the problem of writing on paper in the rain

ASSESSMENT

The news of the care pack scheme began to create interest from other forces and requests were received to provide presentations throughout England and Wales. An agreement was reached that should other forces take on the idea, the Avon and Somerset Community Trust would receive further donations for road safety in the force area.

RE- ASSESSMENT (2003)

Presentations were conducted nation wide and to date, over half the forces in England and Wales are either using the scheme or in the process of signing up to the scheme as best practice.

In July 2003 the pilot scheme was extended for a further year and the new improved packs distributed.

In the first year the RAC took in excess of over 1200 calls from members of the public with post collision enquiries following the receipt of a care pack. One year on, police officers have now become accustomed to using the packs and staff continue to pass on favourable remarks about how user friendly the design now is.

It has been identified that some of the enquiries are for the details of the other driver. A data sharing protocol is being worked upon which will allow the RAC to pass on those details on behalf of the police, thus relieving us still further of post collision follow up enquiries.

THE FUTURE

The Collision Care Pack scheme now extends to half the forces in the country with thousands of motorists in England and Wales receiving better after care and more thorough information than ever before.

The funding generated by the scheme has resulted in the provision of a road safety exhibition unit with presentation equipment that has been used in many road safety presentations throughout the force.

The people carrier has relieved the force of the financial burden of hiring vehicles to transport bereaved relatives which is not only a cost saving but a real practical help in traumatic times.

It has also funded the school 'walking bus' scheme with children being provided with high visibility tabards, the provision of digital cameras for road policing officers to secure and preserve evidence at collision scenes, prizes for road safety competitions, funding for motorcycle safety courses and much, much more.

Whilst the help line and the information booklet have improved the level of service to the public, we can also say that we have utilised the opportunity to distribute crime prevention to fifty thousand car owners every year to help prevent them from becoming a victim of crime.

CONCLUSION

The partnership with the RAC has extended the boundaries of partnership initiatives between the police and the business community.

The police were able to improve their service to the community, improve the flow of information and also distribute crime reduction advice completely free of charge to tens of thousands of motorists.

Additionally the idea generated substantial sponsorship to support casualty reduction initiatives force wide through what was a simple practical idea conceived by a Constable on the 'shop floor' of the police service.

As the scheme has grown to a national level, this joint venture has built up a unique professional working relationship between the two organisations which goes from strength to strength.

As displayed on the side of our sponsored exhibition vehicle The RAC and Avon and Somerset Police are proud to be

'In partnership for safer roads'.



