Home Office Research Study 287

The Reducing Burglary Initiative: design, development and delivery

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The views expressed in this report are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the Home Office (nor do they reflect Government policy).

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Therefore –

Research Development and Statistics Directorate exists to improve policy making, decision taking and practice in support of the Home Office purpose and aims, to provide the public and Parliament with information necessary for informed debate and to publish information for future use.

Foreword

Launched in early 1999, the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) was one of the largest elements of the Home Office's Crime Reduction Programme. Over three years and three phases, £25 million pounds of grant funding was dispensed to over 240 projects covering approximately two million households.

Reports examining the impact, cost-effectiveness and operation of RBI projects evaluated under the first phase of the initiative have already been published. This report specifically focuses on those factors that influenced the quality of project delivery. Central to this is considering how the well the RBI's objectives were supported by the design of the initiative and the way it was administered. Importantly, this report also examines how that design was refined over subsequent phases of the RBI as a result of early feedback and research activity.

A key strength of the RBI was the willingness of policy managers to respond to emerging lessons. This has led to ongoing improvements in funding and support arrangements for burglary reduction. This report provides a detailed analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the RBI, and clear recommendations to guide the development of similar crime reduction activity in the future, both here and in other jurisdictions.

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Executive summary

In October 1998 the then Home Secretary launched the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) as a key part of the wider Crime Reduction Programme. The RBI was primarily a vehicle for stimulating domestic burglary reduction activity in communities most at risk of burglary across England and Wales. It was rolled out in three 'phases' between 1998 and 2002, with roughly £25 million dispensed in project grants.

Grants were distributed on the basis of competitive-bidding, with invitations to bid being sent to all Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs). Funding was conditional on applicants being able to demonstrate that they had an area or community suffering from a burglary rate of at least twice the national average[1]. Applicants were also expected to demonstrate that they had developed suitable proposals for reducing burglary based on a sound analysis of the local burglary problem.

The key objectives of the RBI can be summarised as follows:

- To sponsor and facilitate the development of innovative burglary reduction practices.
- To extend the evidence base of what works and what is cost-effective in burglary reduction, in particular through evaluating the effectiveness of innovative practices.
- To reduce burglary nationally by significantly increasing the volume of burglary reduction activity in the most victimised communities.
- To reduce burglary cost-effectively and to generate savings through reducing its associated costs.

The first phase of the RBI, launched in late 1998, funded 63 'Strategic Development Projects' (SDPs), which were encouraged to pilot innovative crime reduction work. A condition of their funding was that they were also subject to an independent evaluation of the impact and cost-effectiveness of their work.

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1   Under Phase III of the RBI this qualifying criterion was lowered to one and half times the national average.

Aims of this report

This report is based on an evaluation of 20 Phase I projects funded in the West Midlands, South West, South East, London and Wales conducted by an evaluation consortium led by South Bank University, together with a Home Office evaluation of nearly 100 Phase II projects across England and Wales. This so-called 'Southern evaluation consortium' was one of three evaluation consortia contracted to evaluate Phase I projects, with a further 42 projects being evaluated by consortia covering the 'North' and the 'Midlands' respectively. Separate reports are being prepared on the impact and cost-effectiveness of the RBI by each of these three consortia. In contrast, this report is concerned with the processes involved in putting the initiative into place and in running RBI projects. The aim of the report is to assess the adequacy of the programme design, as put into operation, and to provide policy makers, policy advisers and researchers, with lessons for guiding future crime reduction programme design and development.

Research design and methods

This report is based on a synthesis of two separate research exercises. This synthesis has been undertaken in part to provide a longitudinal perspective on the development of the RBI. The RBI was designed as a multi-phase initiative, with an expectation that Phases II and III would be refined on the basis of lessons learnt under Phase I.

The independent Phase I evaluation of SDPs consisted of three inter-related evaluations concerned with process, outcome and cost-effectiveness. The process findings, which form the basis of this report, were based on semi-structured interviews of key project participants (repeated at regular intervals in some cases), non-participant observation of project activities, and attendance at project committee meetings. The evaluation of Phase II projects was solely focused on process issues and involved semi-structured interviews with project managers and the administration of a semi-structured questionnaire sent to all Phase II project managers.

Key findings

The RBI generated a considerable quantity of crime reduction activity, funding over 240 projects over a period of three years. Projects experienced mixed fortunes in terms of implementing their planned activities, and some clearly under-achieved in terms of impact.

However, Kodz and Pease (2003) concluded that evaluated Phase I projects had a positive impact overall, with estimated net reductions in domestic burglary of over 20 per cent observed in some areas.

Many aspects of the programme's design were strong and it adapted well to changing circumstances. For instance, a responsive policy team in the central Home Office ensured that positive and substantive refinements were made to the RBI as it progressed. In particular, a range of improvements were made to the bidding framework, whilst more structured support arrangements were also established for projects. Other aspects of the RBI were less successful. Some of these problems stemmed from factors relating to the overall design and development of the Crime Reduction Programme, which the middle-managers tasked with implementing the RBI were unable to control. It is beyond the scope of this report to consider these wider factors, though they are extensively reviewed in Homel *et al.* (in press, a).

Sponsoring innovation

There was clear evidence of innovative practice under Phases II and III of the RBI. However, ambitions for the programme to significantly extend the existing crime reduction evidence base, were poorly served by a design that provided evaluated projects under Phase I with insufficient resource and time to support innovation. Piloting innovation could involve complex developmental processes, and embedding innovative practice in the work of existing agencies invariably took time. The unrealistic ambitions invested in the Phase I SDPs also partly arose because the capacity of SDP participants was over-estimated, and the process for selecting projects was a poor vehicle for identifying suitable sites for hosting innovation. Timescales for bid submissions were short and resulted in bidders being more inclined to suggest 'off the shelf' solutions or ideas that extended existing initiatives.

Extending the evidence base

With projects receiving insufficient support, adopting a 'hands off' model for evaluating innovative project work had drawbacks. A more supportive model, where evaluators worked with projects to get new practices up and running before making an assessment of whether they worked, would have been more productive.

With limited lessons on innovation, the research exercise was still able to provide a national outcome evaluation of a wide variety of existing practices. A number of design weaknesses limited the success of the evaluation in delivering this outcome. These weaknesses

principally derived from a failure to account sufficiently for the wider programme context within which the evaluation would take place. Evaluation and programme designs needed to be developed together at the appropriate strategic level to ensure that the objectives, and processes for achieving those objectives, were compatible and consistent. As Homel *et al.* (in press, a) document, whilst this joint planning was present at the start of the Crime Reduction Programme, it was not maintained.

Projects were ill-prepared for the high level of evaluation demands that were placed upon them. Time spent responding to these demands added to existing project delays, and occasionally led to tensions between evaluation and project personnel. The effort required to resolve these tensions and to access evaluation data in turn used up valuable research resources. Evaluation requirements needed to be better communicated by the Home Office at the earliest opportunity to ensure that project participants made an informed commitment to co-operate with the evaluation process.

In spite of these problems in meeting the evaluation objectives, the RBI substantially benefited over time from a productive relationship between Home Office policy and research staff charged with the ongoing management of the initiative. This relationship led to significant improvements to the design and administration of the initiative under Phases II and III, most notably through adaptations to the criteria and process for bidding for grant funds.

Reducing burglary through increasing burglary reduction activity

The RBI was undeniably successful in achieving this aim. Central and Regional Home Office staff effectively administered a process that saw funds distributed to 247 projects which, between them, encompassed over two million households. Nevertheless, there were difficulties associated with the competitive bidding process that was used to encourage and fund burglary reduction work.

The time provided for projects to develop and submit bids was often seen as insufficient. The difficulties experienced under the RBI, though, were not primarily related to the presence of a bid submission deadline per se, but to unrealistic expectations around the readiness of projects to deliver a programme of work within a tight timeframe after a bid had been approved. This lack of realism related partly to initial shortcomings in the assessment of bids, and partly to a general lack of appreciation of the extent of development work typically required to turn a paper bid into effective action.

The adoption of competitive bidding may also have weakened the realism of submitted bids. In order to secure funds, some applicants under-costed and over-promised. Though many projects were subsequently able to make up for any funding shortfall, through levering in significant amounts of local resource, other projects clearly struggled to meet their original objectives with the resources available.

Competitive bidding may also have been an inappropriate model for targeting funding at high crime areas. A more proactive identification of areas in need, and in particular the provision of directed support to areas where expertise in developing these sorts of projects was limited, may have been preferable. Nonetheless, development seminars held mid-way through the Phase II and III project bidding processes, together with processes for providing feedback on bids, were beneficial in helping applicants improve the quality of final bids. These arrangements could be usefully replicated and refined in any future bid-based programmes.

Under Phase I of the RBI, limited consultancy support was made available to projects whilst they were developing their bids. A significant improvement under Phase II was that dedicated consultancy support was available right through the project-funding period. By Phase II, there also appeared to have been improvements in the support provided through crime reduction teams in Regional Government Offices. Ongoing problems were experienced, though, in the specification, co-ordination, and communication of consultant and Regional Government Office roles. Moreover, there were clear variations in the performance of different regional offices and different individual consultants, though some of this variability appears to have stemmed from differences in capacity relative to local demand. Progressive enhancements to Regional Office capacities, with the appointment of Regional Directors mid-way through the RBI, and the subsequent creation of regional research teams, will hopefully have alleviated some of this variability.

Support structures were important under the RBI because, at the project level, there was a general shortage of staff, in particular those with technical and analytic skills. On a positive note the range of skills acquired was often considerable, as project managers in particular had to master a complex variety of roles. However, many RBI projects had difficulties in retaining staff, with staff frequently leaving before short-term employment contracts expired. As handover arrangements were frequently weak or non-existent, staff turnover was invariably disruptive. Even where staff stayed in post, seconded staff were often subject to frequent and/or lengthy abstractions from post which adversely affected progress. The departure of staff resulted in projects losing hard-won skills which often caused further delays, and sometimes the abandonment of project work.

Projects under the RBI faced a complex range of development tasks, many of which were unanticipated by both programme and project managers. A key quality that was therefore associated with the successful development and implementation of project work was adaptability. Whilst it was important for projects to systematically develop a plan of work based on a rigorous problem-analysis, it was also important for projects to have the capability to adapt intelligently to changing circumstances. Such informed refinement was best served through the presence of appropriate project monitoring systems. The extent and quality of project monitoring, though, was highly variable and this in part reflected a lack of practitioner skills in this area.

An aspect of project work that frequently required adaptation and refinement was the balance achieved between the scope and dosage of project activity. Achieving an effective balance was critical to success. Project managers also needed to consider the likely extent of impact associated with any investment of project resources. Under the RBI, projects sometimes over-concentrated their resources on activities which logically had a low probability of impacting on burglary.

A critical part of ensuring that a project successfully introduced a suitable level of activity, was accurately estimating the likely demand for project services. However, many projects clearly struggled to do this well. In particular, predicting the likely reaction of communities to planned project work proved challenging. Many RBI projects went to great lengths to consult and engage with local people. Other projects ran into difficulties because they based their work on assumptions about what groups of residents needed. Work is more likely to be successful if projects proceed, not only on the basis of what communities need, but on the basis of what communities want.

There was a clear tension though – and a need for a balance – between developing project work on the basis of a systematic problem-analysis, and developing it on the basis of community engagement. Whilst many RBI projects clearly benefited from broadening the scope of their work in response to local demands, others ran the risk of over-extending their work on the basis of such demands and consequently losing a clear focus.

Reducing burglary cost-effectively

RBI projects were effective at levering in significant amounts of local resources to supplement central grant funding. Phase I evaluators also concluded that some RBI projects were highly cost-effective, though the picture overall was quite mixed (see Bowles and Pradiptyo, 2004). This is perhaps unsurprising in view of the implementation problems experienced by some projects. Moreover, a number of programme-level and process issues were likely to have had a bearing on cost-effectiveness.

One key factor was the effectiveness of the programme in delivering an appropriate level of resources to projects. Projects were more likely to be effective if the centre allocated them a suitably sized grant, proportionate to the scale of their problem and to the existing capacity of their organisation. In this respect, the adoption of a more flexible funding formula under Phase II of the programme, with grants being based on recent levels of burglary, was a welcome advance (although without relating this to organisational capacity there was still scope for inappropriate resource allocation).

The cost-effectiveness of projects was impeded by a widespread lack of financial management, procurement, and contract development skills amongst the pool of RBI practitioners. In particular, managers often struggled to negotiate complex procurement processes, and develop suitably tight contracts, to secure sufficient value for money in the delivery of project services. These problems were less severe where projects were well supported by local agencies, who could lend both expertise and often a ready supply of recommended contractors.

Aspects of the central Home Office design also potentially undermined the cost-effectiveness of some projects when it came to the procurement of services. Short project timetables limited the opportunity to 'shop around' for contractors or spend time on developing more efficient contracts. Moreover, the limited and short-term purchasing-power of projects may have diminished their control over, and the level of services provided by, contractors.

Policy implications

Detailed recommendations are provided in the final chapter of this report. Many of the key messages from this research are consistent with findings emerging from other evaluations commissioned under the Crime Reduction Programme, and it has to be acknowledged that substantive steps are being taken to address many of the issues highlighted in these reports. For instance, the limitations associated with competitive bidding and short project timescales are hopefully being remedied through major changes to how the Home Office funds crime reduction work. In particular, with the introduction of the Building Safer Communities Fund[2] in 2003, several existing funding streams are being consolidated with the aim of allowing CDRPs to take a more holistic and structured approach to funding crime reduction work.

2   Details of the Building Safer Communities fund can be found at:
http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/activecommunities58.htm

A number of Home Office initiatives are also seeking to make improvements to the provision and targeting of support to local crime reduction practitioners, with the development of comprehensive needs assessment systems and more robust support and performance management arrangements. This includes work on developing more effective knowledge management systems to capture and disseminate evidence on 'what works' and good practice. However, there are still areas where more learning and development is required, notably in understanding how best to secure and maximise the sustainability of crime reduction work. To date, many assumptions about the cost-effectiveness and longevity of project impacts have not been tested.

1.   Introduction

On 1 October 1998 the then Home Secretary launched the Reducing Burglary Initiative (RBI) as part of a much broader Crime Reduction Programme. The programme was hugely ambitious not only in its scale – nothing equivalent had ever been attempted in a Western country – but in its commitment to evidence-led policy. Its formal aims were:

- the long-term and sustained reduction in crime, through implementing 'what works' and by promoting innovation;
- achieving improvements to the crime reduction knowledge base; and
- generating savings through the reduction of crime and improved programme efficiency and effectiveness.

The Crime Reduction Programme's emphasis on properly evidenced policy led to a level of investment in evaluative research which British criminal policy had never before seen. The RBI was the first major initiative in the programme and it led to three large-scale evaluations.

The Reducing Burglary Initiative

The RBI was envisaged as a multi-phased programme of 'pump-priming' grants to the newly established Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs).[3] The initiative ran from 1999 until 2002, with three funding phases or 'rounds' during this period, and with approximately £25 million[4] dispensed in project grants.

- Phase I of the RBI was launched in late 1998. CDRPs were invited to put forward action plans for tackling local burglary problems. Each project was expected to cover between 3,000 and 5,000 households and to have at least twice the average national burglary rate of 27 per 1,000 households over a sustained period.[5] By April 1999, 63 projects had each been awarded around £60,000 to fund their proposals. In most cases the funding was for one year, exceptionally for two.

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3   The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act required local authority districts or counties to set up CDRPs in partnership with the local police, probation service and other local agencies.

4   This figure excludes evaluation costs and other overheads.

5   Under all three RBI phases applicants had to demonstrate that their proposed project area had an *average* burglary rate – based on burglary figures for the past three years – that met the qualifying criteria.

- Phase II was launched in October 1999. Applications had to be based on project areas suffering at least twice the average national burglary rate. Grants were approved in early 2000, with 161 projects being funded. Funding was again intended to be for one year.
- Phase III was launched in April 2000. Although there was initially no deadline for submitting bids, January 2001 became a final cut-off point for any applications. The funding criteria were also relaxed, with project areas qualifying for funds if they had at least one and half times the average national burglary rate. Twenty-three projects were funded under this round and, in contrast to previous phases, funding was not confined to 12 months.

The original aim was that the 63 projects funded under Phase I would be subject to detailed evaluation, and that the lessons learnt would be applied to the design and management of subsequent phases. These so called 'Strategic Development Projects' (SDPs) were expected to co-operate with an independent evaluation of their impact on burglary and their cost-effectiveness. In November 1999, three consortia were awarded contracts to evaluate 21 projects each in the South of England, the Midlands and the North respectively.[6] The overall purpose of the three evaluations was to identify best practice and value for money, so that the most effective and cost-effective approaches could be recommended to other areas.

These evaluations have generated a very substantial output: 60 site reports, describing each project in detail and covering its effectiveness and cost-effectiveness; a summary report, drawing together the lessons that can be learnt about different approaches to burglary reduction; and various 'thematic reports', drawing on the experience of subgroups of projects that shared specific approaches to burglary reduction.

At the start of 2000 the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics directorate (RDS) also developed a system to monitor the progress of Phase II projects. Subsequently, with assistance from the consultants contracted to provide project support under Phase II, RDS undertook a more detailed exercise aimed at capturing lessons on the process of implementation. This was conducted towards the end of formal Phase II project funding in early 2002.

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6   The territory covered by the 'Southern Consortium', led by South Bank University, actually included the West Midlands and South Wales. The 'Midlands Consortium', led by Keele University, covered the East Midlands and the East of England. The 'Northern Consortium', led by Liverpool University, covered the remainder of the country.

Aims of this report

This report stands back from questions about the impact of particular projects, to consider questions about the RBI itself. It is concerned with the processes involved in putting the RBI into place. The aim of the report is to assess the adequacy of the programme design, as put into operation, and to provide policy makers – and researchers providing policy advice – with lessons for similar programmes in the future. The report's more specific objectives are:

- To examine how the central programme design facilitated the achievement of programme objectives, in particular how it impacted on local project delivery.
- To learn lessons from the way that local agencies, including CDRPs, delivered their individual projects.
- To examine how the Home Office adapted and refined the programme over time and in particular how it developed structures to support projects in delivering their work.

In pursuing these objectives the report takes a longitudinal perspective of the RBI, bringing together evaluation data from the 20 Phase I projects[7] evaluated by the Southern Consortium with the RDS process evaluation of Phase II.[8]

The scope of the report does not extend to the original formulation of the programme design, or to the programme's setting within the wider Crime Reduction Programme. These issues are extensively considered by Homel *et al.* (in press, a; b). The report is instead concerned with how this design was interpreted and refined both by local practitioners, and by Home Office managers charged with translating the original design into action.

The report also does not address how RBI projects undertook the problem-analysis which formed the basis of their bids for grant monies in the first place. This has already been discussed in Curtin *et al.* (2001), whilst the more general challenges of developing work using a problem-solving framework have been well addressed in Read and Tilley (2000) and Bullock and Tilley (2003a). Instead, the report focuses on the practical challenges faced by projects in converting project proposals into effective programmes of work.

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7 Although there were nominally 21 funded projects in the Southern Consortium area, 2 of these were effectively part of the same scheme and were therefore evaluated as a single project.
8 A limited number of Phase III projects were also included in this analysis.

Previous research

There is a well-established body of research examining the implementation and development of project-based crime prevention work. Whilst much of this literature has centred on the evaluation of specific one-off case studies, or has focused on the broader issue of partnership working, there have also been a number of reports examining project implementation within the context of wider Home Office programmes. Key findings have included:

- Bottoms (1991) and Liddle and Bottoms (1991) evaluated the first Home Office pilot crime prevention programme – the 'Five Towns Initiative.' They concluded that the programme developed some useful structures for facilitating crime prevention work. However, they also identified a number of weaknesses, in particular a lack of practitioner capacity for identifying crime problems and evaluating project work.
- Other Home Office-sponsored crime reduction programmes have suffered from what Sutton (1996) has described as a relative 'vacuum' of crime prevention knowledge. Against this background, commentators have criticised the Home Office for providing practitioners 'on the ground' with inadequate administrative and technical support (Bottoms 1991; Liddle and Bottoms, 1991; Sutton, 1996).
- Previous projects have been conducted in the context of tight financial control – exerted by the centre – and restrictive timescales for planning and implementation. For instance under the Safer Cities programme (the follow-up to the Five Towns Initiative), any expenditure over £500 had to be approved with the Home Office, and three-year project grants were split into annual pots that had to be spent within the allotted financial year (Ekblom *et al.*, 1992).
- These constraints have been criticised for undermining programme objectives, in particular through restricting the extent to which projects could properly analyse their crime problems and develop well-targeted, locally-tailored responses (Sutton 1996; Hamilton-Smith, 1999).
- Commentators have also argued that these constraints – when combined with a lack of crime prevention skills at the local level – often resulted in practitioners basing their work on an intuitive and uncritical understanding of local crime problems, and picking 'pre-packaged' solutions 'off the shelf' (Ekblom, 1988; Saulsbury and Bowling, 1991). Moreover, the dominance of the police and police data in crime prevention work, combined with the limited time and short-term funding provided by central government, was also seen as naturally biasing projects towards situational crime prevention approaches (Tilley, 1993; Gilling, 1994; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a).

- However, some of the negative aspects of central programme management have arguably been tempered by the Home Office's historically limited role and capacity to manage service delivery. For instance, under Safer Cities, Tilley, (1993) has argued that the centre exerted relatively weak control over the direction taken by local projects. Moreover Sutton, (1996) has asserted that the broad-partnership basis of local crime prevention projects led – under Safer Cities – to more balanced (and less police-centred) programmes of crime prevention work than many commentators anticipated.
- Partnership working has been a central tenet in crime prevention work and a frequent precondition for central government funding. However, the variable effectiveness of such working has long been recognised (Hope and Murphy, 1983; Bottoms, 1991; Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a; 1994b; Jacobson, 2003a & 2003b), and in particular, partners have frequently struggled to consult and involve communities in project-based work.
- Limited local capacity and inadequate central support did lead to implementation problems under Safer Cities, with, for instance, burglary-based initiatives having variable performance (Tilley and Webb, 1994). Nonetheless, Ekblom *et al.*, (1992) in his assessment of Safer Cities' overall performance in reducing burglary concluded that the programme had achieved a positive impact. Importantly, Ekblom *et al.*, also concluded that the programme's impact on burglary was greatest (and more cost-effective) when:

  - crime prevention investment was focused on the most highly victimised areas and/or populations.
  - investment was more concentrated in terms of there being a higher expenditure per household across a targeted area.
  - burglary reduction interventions were part of a wider programme of crime reduction work within an area.

In spite of experiencing some problems, the Five Towns Initiative and the subsequent Safer Cities programme were judged to be relatively successful, and with the establishment of statutory CDRPs in 1998 the framework for delivering crime reduction work through local multi-agency partnerships was adopted more widely.

For the Crime Reduction Programme, and the RBI in particular, it was the intention that money would be invested in crime reduction utilising this new statutory infrastructure (thus hopefully grounding the RBI in robust and effective partnerships). The RBI was also intended to improve upon previous programmes by adopting an evidence-based policy approach,

with activity being informed by the existing burglary reduction evidence base. Moreover, the initiative itself was designed to promote learning, with lessons from the innovative work sponsored and evaluated in Phase I informing activity in the subsequent phases. Finally, the designers of the RBI clearly aspired to remedy past weaknesses in the targeting and formulation of burglary reduction work. RBI funding was to be contingent on projects proving that they had correctly targeted their proposals at high-risk populations, and demonstrating that these proposals were in turn based on a thorough problem-analysis.

Research methodology – the Southern Consortium Phase I evaluation

The Phase I evaluation was carried out independently by the Southern Consortium[9] and was split into three inter-related parts, these being: process, outcome and cost-effectiveness. All 20 SDPs funded in the Southern Consortium area were included in the evaluation. Both the outcome and cost-effectiveness aspects are largely dealt with elsewhere (Bowles and Pradiptyo, 2004; Millie and Hough, 2004). This study focuses on the process evaluation, but draws on the rest of the evaluative work. The method adopted was in essence a 'realist' approach, combining the process, outcome and cost-effectiveness evaluations to piece together evidence of impact. This research strategy, which was based on that advocated by Tilley (1993) and employed by Brown (1995), involved:

- identifying the theory or rationale underlying each strategy;
- gathering information on whether and how the strategy was implemented;
- identifying significant features of the context in which it was operating;
- assessing the impact of the programme, for example in terms of burglaries reduced; and
- assembling measures of cost-effectiveness.

Process evaluation

Researchers were allocated to each of the 20 Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) and tasked with gathering as much information as possible about the SDP site (and adjoining buffer and reference areas) before each project began, at its inception, and during the first year of its operation. The information gathered included: socio-demographic data; details of other policing strategies and policies; the extent and quality of inter-agency relationships; the existence of other government initiatives in the area (e.g. successful Single Regeneration Budget bids); and any other relevant initiatives/operations.

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9   The Southern Consortium consisted of South Bank University, Matrix MHA Research and Consultancy, University of Bristol, Cardiff University, and University of Kent at Canterbury.

Researchers mapped the individual interventions proposed in each SDP bid and examined what, if any, progress was made on a monthly basis and who was involved in its delivery. They also described the circumstances surrounding good or slow progress and how some initiatives came to be abandoned.

Semi-structured interviews were held, where possible, with project managers at regular intervals during the evaluation period. Additional interviews were held with relevant police and local authority personnel, as well as with other partnership representatives and steering group members. For some projects this included interviews with members of the local community, and other statutory and voluntary group representatives. Wherever possible, project steering group meetings were attended by researchers. Additionally, researchers took on a non-participant observation role, observing actual implementation on the ground.

Finally, each researcher worked with SDP managers to identify and cost the inputs to each initiative within the overall SDP project. The interviews that were carried out with project participants in order to map costs provided further opportunity to identify process issues that may hinder or aid implementation.

Research methodology – the Phase II evaluation

The Phase II process evaluation elicited accounts of project implementation using two key research approaches: the use of semi-structured interviews and a postal questionnaire. In each case these were targeted at project managers, though the varied nature of project management arrangements meant that in some projects two or more key participants responded collectively. Both the interview schedule and the questionnaire were designed to explore issues around the development and implementation of a project, including project management and the provision of support from Home Office-contracted consultants and from Regional Government Offices. In addition, interviewers also had access to the following project documentation:

- Original project plans and problem-analysis.
- Consultant reports compiled on each project during the early project set-up period.
- Any available performance data drawn from the Phase II monitoring system.

Interview administration

The interviews were administered by a team of researchers from RDS and by consultants from NACRO and Crime Concern (who were contracted to provide support to RBI projects). A condition of consultancy involvement was that they could not interview project managers in cases where they had personally provided that project with support. Furthermore, questions on the performance of the support consultants and Regional Government Offices were not administered by consultant interviewers, but separately through a self-completion questionnaire which was posted directly back to RDS.

Site selection

As the focus of the evaluation centred on generating qualitative data on project lessons, the approach taken to selecting projects for interview was based on maximising the number of projects covered, whilst ensuring that a representative range of projects was achieved. In particular, the sample was constructed to ensure that both urban and rural, small and large grant-funded projects, together with a representative number of projects from each region, were selected. A number of projects were also included because they contained particularly interesting or innovative crime reduction interventions. For this reason, three projects from Phase III of the initiative were also selected.

The self-completed questionnaire was sent to all the remaining Phase II projects and sections of the questionnaire were also sent to projects selected for interview. In addition to general questions, the questionnaire included sections relevant to only certain projects or certain respondents. This aspect of the questionnaire design means that the reported sample population varies for different sets of questions.

Sampling and response rate

Questionnaires were only sent to projects once RDS researchers had been able to confirm a name and address for the relevant project manager(s). This led to the production of a sample frame of 126 projects out of a total of 161 Phase II projects. Follow-up contact with selected managers revealed that in 16 cases individuals actively managed more than one project. Consequently, 110 project managers were actually approached as part of this research.

Table 1.1:	Phase II evaluation response rate		
	Total	Returns	Non-response
Interview Sample	52	42 *	10 (19%)
Questionnaire Sample	58	29	29 (50%)
Total	110	71	39 (35%)

* The 42 interview sample returns also included a number of additional questionnaire returns. 25 of the 42 projects managers returned questionnaire sections.

Of the 110 project managers that formed the final sample frame, 52 were approached for interviewing (as well as being sent certain questionnaire sections), and the remaining 58 were sent the full questionnaire. Response rates are shown in Table 1.1.

It has proven difficult to quantify the causes of non-response in the questionnaire sample. In particular, as no reliable indicator(s) of project 'health' were available for the total population of Phase II projects, it was difficult to identify whether a failure to return the questionnaire was indicative of a weak project. However, whilst this possibility should be borne in mind, actual respondents in fact provided no shortage of information on implementation difficulties. Moreover, a number of alternative ways of examining the representativeness of the sample are discussed below.

Evaluating 'multi-project managers'

In dealing with respondents who managed more than one RBI project the decision was taken to ask respondents to focus on one particular project. However, it was generally not practical for respondents to answer more generic questions on issues such as project management as if they related to just one of the projects they managed. Even when answering project-specific questions respondents frequently referred to other projects under their management to illustrate a particular point or issue. Consequently, although 71 Phase II project managers were successfully approached, findings in this report are actually drawn from 87 Phase II projects (in addition to the further three Phase III projects). Therefore, in considering the representativeness of the sample the full set of 87 projects are examined.

Representativenss of the Phase II sample

It was possible to assess the representativeness of the sample against certain population characteristics. In Table 1.2 the regional distribution of the sample is compared to the distribution of all Phase II projects. The mean grant for the sample and total population is

also shown. Tests were undertaken to determine whether these sample characteristics were significantly different to that of the general population. These showed that in terms of both regional distribution[10] and in terms of the mean level of grant funding[11], there was no statistically significant difference between the sample and the total population. We can therefore have some confidence that the sample – at least in respect of these characteristics – is fairly representative of Phase II projects as a whole. However, whilst across most regions the sample covered in excess of 50 per cent of funded Phase II projects, there was comparatively low coverage of projects in the North East region[12].

Table 1.2:   Comparisons of Phase II sample and population

Government Regions (and Wales)	Total no. of projects	No. in sample	% in sample
East	8	8	100%
East Midlands	12	8	67%
London	25	13	52%
North East	15	4	27%
North West	20	11	55%
South East	5	2	40%
South West	11	8	73%
Wales	2	1	50%
West Midlands	29	19	65%
Yorkshire and Humber	34	13	38%
Total	*161*	*87*	*54%*
Mean Av. Grant for All Projects*			**£60,432**
Mean Av. Grant for Sample			**£68,656**

* In producing these mean average figures five outlying values were removed from both sample and total populations.

Phase II questionnaire and interview analysis

Phase II questionnaire responses were analysed in SPSS. Semi-structured responses were translated into structured values using a coding framework. Phase II interviews were fully transcribed. Key themes were identified from an initial reading of transcripts and a

10 Chi square was used to assess the representativeness of the regional distribution of projects in the sample against the distribution in the total population. To undertake this test three regions (East, South East and Wales) had to be merged to produce the minimal level of cell frequencies required.

11 A paired-sample t test was used to compare the mean average grant of the sample with the mean grant of the total population.

12 The low coverage in the North East was primarily due to logistical constraints related to the research rather than higher levels of non-response.

framework of 'themed headings' was developed. The transcripts were then summarised on an Excel database with each row of summarised contents being accompanied by up to six coded 'theme' headings to allow for the cross-referencing of themes.

Referencing projects

All projects referenced in this report have been anonymised. All anonymised projects are given a unique number and are additionally prefixed with the relevant funding phase (i.e. Phase 1-12, Phase 2-53 etc.).

The shape of this report

The remainder of this report is organised as follows: Chapter 2 assesses how far the overall approach underlying the RBI – of providing central funding for locally planned approaches to reducing crime – worked in the terms that it had set for itself. Chapter 3 considers the issues facing projects designed to reduce burglary from the time a proposal has been submitted for funding to the start of actual implementation. Chapter 4 discusses the implementation lessons to be learned from the evaluation of projects funded under RBI Phases I and II. Chapter 5 summarises the report's main findings and draws conclusions.

2. The design and development of the Reducing Burglary Initiative

Mike Hough, Carol Hedderman and Niall Hamilton-Smith

Introduction

Community safety partnerships have been established for over a decade in some local authority areas. However, the statutory obligation on local authorities, the police and other local agencies to establish Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) had only very recently been imposed when the RBI programme was launched in late 1998. The Crime and Disorder Act that established CDRPs was enacted in the summer of that year, requiring partnerships to publish their first round of triennial crime reduction strategies in April 1999 (Home Office, 1998).

The RBI was the first strand of the Crime Reduction Programme (CRP) to be set up and implemented. It was a new initiative and it is to be expected that problems would have been encountered – many of which were apparent only with the benefit of hindsight. The Home Office was asking partnerships that were often untested and sometimes barely formed to bid for money to mount innovative burglary prevention projects. These encountered more than their fair share of implementation difficulties. Table 2.1 summarises progress in implementing the 20 Strategic Development Projects (SDPs) that were evaluated by the Southern Consortium. By March 2001, when central funding was due to end, only 52 (43%) of the 122 interventions originally proposed across the 20 SDPs had actually been implemented as planned. A further 37 (30%) interventions had been partially implemented.

To take an optimistic perspective, Table 2.1 shows a pot that is at least half full. A large number of projects were established rapidly, and a proportion of these demonstrably reduced local burglary rates – as documented in Millie and Hough (2004). But to learn fully from the RBI, it is also worth examining why the pot is half empty. The reasons for patchy implementation are many and complex. They are to be found partly in the capacity of the recently formed CDRPs to develop proposals that were both practical and innovative. There were also problems relating to the capacity of partnerships to manage projects effectively. These issues are considered in some depth in Chapters 3 and 4. In this chapter, the focus is on the design and implementation of the RBI at central governmental level.

The point of the following discussion is not to criticise those who had the task of setting up and running the programme but to ensure that those running future initiatives can learn from the experience. Unless the problems encountered are fully documented there is a danger that these hard-learned lessons will not be disseminated. The discussion below falls into three parts. First

ways in which the design of the programme served to limit the overall impact of the RBI projects are considered. How successful the RBI programme has been in improving the knowledge base about 'what works' in tackling burglary is then examined. Finally, changes made to the programme's design and operation for Phase II of the initiative are discussed.

Table 2.1:	Levels of implementation in 20 SDPs in Southern England and Wales				
SDP	Number planned	Completed	Partially completed	May have been done anyway	Total attempted
Phase 1-18*	5	1	1	0	2
Phase 1-1	5	2	2	0	4
Phase 1-11	9	3	6	2	9
Phase 1-20	8	3	0	0	3
Phase 1-6	6	1	2	1	3
Phase 1-16	7	3	4	1	7
Phase 1-12	5	4	1	1	5
Force A	**45**	**17**	**16**	**5**	**33**
Phase 1-2	6	3	3	3	6
Phase 1-13	7	4	1	1	5
Force B	**13**	**7**	**4**	**4**	**11**
Phase 1-10	12	2	4	3	6
Phase 1-17	7	7	0	7	7
Phase 1-4	1	1	0	0	1
Phase 1-9	5	2	1	1	3
Phase 1- 19	4	4	0	0	4
Phase 1-5	1	0	1	1	1
Phase 1-8	9	2	3	2	5
Phase 1-14	10	4	6	1	10
Force C	**49**	**22**	**15**	**15**	**37**
Phase 1-3	5	4	1	0	5
Phase 1-15	3	2	1	0	3F
Force D	**8**	**6**	**2**	**0**	**8**
Phase 1-7	7	0	0	0	0
Force E	**7**	**0**	**0**	**0**	**0**
Total	**122**	**52**	**37**	**24**	**89**

* Individual SDP projects are anonymised throughout this report. Each SDP is given the standard prefix of 'Phase 1' followed by a unique identifier.

Did the programme design limit the impact of the RBI on crime?

Leaving aside for the time being issues about improvements in the crime reduction knowledge base, the RBI aimed to achieve long-term and sustained crime reduction, through implementing 'what works' and promoting innovation, whilst generating savings through the reduction of crime and improved programme efficiency and effectiveness. These objectives were clearly met to some extent, though several aspects of the programme design impeded this. The key relevant features of RBI Phase 1 were that:

- bidding was competitive;
- timescales for submitting bids were tight;
- at £60,000 per SDP project the grant was small;
- timescales for implementing the projects were tight;
- the projects were required to be innovative, and additional to existing plans;
- they were to be grounded in proper problem analysis; and
- the Home Office offered some consultancy support.

Individually, these features are understandable, given the pressure on government departments to deliver results within politically acceptable timeframes and to stretch money as far as possible. In combination, however, they seemed to generate a sense of resentment amongst grant recipients that the Home Office wanted too much, too quickly, for too little.

Competitive bidding
Competitive bidding schemes initially promised to provide central government with useful levers with which to control the work programmes of CDRPs. Enthusiasm for bidding was originally intense. The motivation stemmed less from the money itself than from the kudos attached to winning grants to mount projects that were recognised to be path-breaking. The decision to roll out RBI Phase II in advance of results from Phase I meant that some Phase I grantees felt 'conned' when they saw Phase II applicants securing larger sums of money with fewer strings attached, and without the burden of being evaluated.

Under Phase II however, there were still negative consequences associated with competitive bidding. Most notably, some bidders under-bid or under-costed their work plans in an effort to secure funding. Typically, bidders pared down to the minimum their proposals for staff resources and administration. However, as one project manager ruefully reflected, there was limited point in his maximising his capital budget through purchasing more locks and bolts, if he then didn't have the personnel to install them (Phase 2-40).

Tight timescales for bidding

The time allowed for preparing bids in Phase I had more direct consequences on the quality of projects. Bids were due back six weeks after the invitation to bid was issued, with the Christmas period intervening. The invitations were addressed to Chief Constables and Local Authority Chief Executives, but the bids concerned areas of 3,000 to 5,000 households. Thus those involved in putting bids together tended to be local managers such as Sector Inspectors, Sergeants and local Housing Officers. Often the invitation to bid reached them only a few days before the deadline, so that some proposals were assembled hurriedly. There was insufficient analysis of the local problem and minimal checking of the project plan's viability, particularly whether it had been properly costed[13].

A further problem was that most of the selected projects succumbed to the temptation of strengthening their bids by offering to 'do a bit of everything' – some target hardening, some extra policing, some property marking. Little consideration seems to have been given to whether the scale on which these activities were to be carried out would be sufficient to have any impact.

Finally, under Phase I, the timing of the invitation to bid arrived at a bad moment for those responsible for co-ordinating partnership work. In November 1998 these were – or should have been – fully stretched in finalising their local crime audits, to feed into the crime reduction strategies which had to be published by April 1999.

The size of the grant

In terms of local government or police expenditure, £60,000 is a small amount. As a result some areas were deterred from bidding – especially as the money had demanding conditions attached to it, relating to timescales and compliance with evaluators' demands. This meant that the pool of bids from which the successful candidates were selected was small. Some of those whose bids succeeded came to feel that the effort involved was disproportionate to the rewards.

In so far as the programme was intended to help cement relationships within CDRPs, the sum of money was insufficient to generate interest and enthusiasm across a range of agencies. In many cases, the projects were effectively single-agency ones, as £60,000 was too small a sum to divide up between two or three partner agencies. A smaller number of larger grants might well have resulted in a greater level of collaboration.

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13 Bullock *et al.* (2002) report similar negative consequences resulting from tight bidding timescales under the CRP's Targeted Policing Initiative.

The Home Office recognised that there would be advantages in increasing the size of grants in RBI Phase II, but as noted above, this at least initially, dented the enthusiasm and commitment of those who bid under Phase I. Subsequently, recognising the difficulties generated by these comparatively small Phase I grants, the Home Office did 'top up' the grants of the majority of Phase I projects.

Project timescales

Very few Phase I projects managed to begin implementation on time (April 1999) and most took longer to implement than anticipated. The experience of Phase II projects was similar, with over 70 per cent of surveyed managers reporting initial delays. For both phases the expectation that projects would start implementation quickly after securing funds was unrealistic; they often still had a significant amount of development work to complete after their bids had been approved[14]. This meant that the original timescales for spending the grants slipped. With a limited period within which to spend their grant (12-24 months) even if projects started on time they rarely put enough time into planning and development, and very few set out to build in sustainability from the start.

When Phase I projects' end-dates began to loom, it was hard to secure continuity of funding. By their completion dates many projects had only just begun to deliver convincing outputs and outcomes; they found it difficult to make a case for fresh funds that was both persuasive and timely. It has been noted elsewhere that none of the SDPs had been designed to redirect cash savings arising from prevention to further preventive effort (Tilley *et al.*, 1999). Restrictive timescales also made it hard to develop less resource-dependent types of sustainability. For instance, one Phase II project manager argued that she did not have sufficient time to reach the point where the project had made enough of an impact locally to engender the level of community ownership that would in turn facilitate sustainability (Phase 2- 49).

Sustainability was also limited by staffing problems which were themselves exacerbated by short timescales. Many of those who had initiated projects had in any case moved on[15]. Late starting projects were then often further delayed, frequently for up to three months or more, while they recruited project staff. Amongst those who were employed specifically to fill RBI posts, the more competent and experienced took the earliest opportunity to move on before their funding dried up, often several months before a project finished.

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14 Matassa and Newburn (2003), in their evaluation of projects funded under the Targeted Policing Initiative, also found a lack of appreciation of the extent of development required before projects were ready to start implementation.

15 Most organisations tend to reward their staff more for initiating projects than for finishing them off, and the agencies involved in RBI Phase 1 were no exception.

The experience of Phase II managers commonly pointed to two problems associated with short-term projects. First, short-term employment contracts often failed to attract staff with the required skills. Though staff often had the potential to acquire these skills, the time available in which to do so was, of course, limited. Second, short-term projects also had a high rate of staff turnover. Precisely because the projects were short-term, such turnover was particularly disruptive. With a limited window of opportunity to complete project work, the departure of a key member of staff could lead to projects failing to meet their targets or even abandoning a whole area of work.

This aspect of programme design also conflicted at times with the underlying programme aim to be cost-effective. Leaving the obvious cost-inefficiencies of the issues raised above aside, the aspiration to deliver a programme of work within a short time-period was often directly hampered by the mesh of financial and procurement regulations to which local delivery agencies were subject. In particular, slow and rigorous procurement procedures frustrated managers seeking to get projects up and running quickly. Though through dint of effort many managers did let contracts relatively quickly, it is debatable whether some of the contracts represented good value for money. As one Phase II manager argued, a short timeframe limits the opportunity to shop around and get the best procurement 'deals' (Phase 2-48). In this case, the manager had been able to use a project extension period to develop a contract with the local community service workshops, which as it did not include any labour costs, was considerably cheaper than any private sector options. However, it took time to develop this contract, as unlike many specialist private sector contractors, the service workshops had to develop their capacity to undertake the work.

The total time available to run the RBI was prescribed by the terms under which the Treasury provided funds to the Home Office to run the CRP. Nevertheless, there was scope within this timetable for providing projects with more development and implementation time by shortening the period between the final submission of bids and the formal announcement of funding decisions. In practice, having given applicants a very tight timetable for submitting their bids, it subsequently took several months for funding decisions to come through. These delays were frustrating for practitioners who were anxious to keep the momentum of their projects going, and not unreasonably led to charges of double-standards on the part of the Home Office. However, these delays did not stem from the regional or central administration of the bidding process, but from the time taken to clear bids, and agree funding announcements with senior officials within the Home Office and other departments.

The requirement for innovative projects additional to existing plans

Whilst it is understandable that the Home Office wanted to avoid double-funding projects that were going ahead anyway, it might have been better in hindsight to allow the money to be used to enhance projects that were already planned. This would have at least increased the chances that projects enjoyed local support and priority. In practice, some areas simply ignored the injunction only to put forward proposals for work that was additional to their mainstream plans, including work that they had planned to do in any case. Interviews with project personnel across the Southern Consortium sites suggested that one in five of the original 121 initiatives listed in project plans might have gone ahead without SDP funding – although in some cases the scale or speed of implementation may have improved because of the extra funding.

More problematically, those areas that put forward genuinely innovative proposals often had to drop or extensively delay them. Neither the Home Office nor the areas themselves had reckoned with the fact that innovation in its nature creates unexpected problems. The programme's strict timetable ensured that new ideas failed to flourish[16]. Innovation, economy and rapid results are unlikely bedfellows. Ironically, with the mainstreaming of the RBI under Phases II and III, the environment for innovation became more benign. A higher level of available funding, the ability to run larger projects covering larger areas (in part due to the lowering of the qualifying burglary rate), and importantly, the increase in experience amongst the pool of available practitioners (who sometimes acquired a more imaginative and holistic view of their burglary problem over time[17]), resulted in a greater number of more innovative proposals being implemented.

Grounding proposals in proper problem-analysis

The burglary reduction initiative involved inviting local practitioners to put forward plans on the grounds that they knew their areas best, could identify the underlying problem, identify a workable solution and put it into practice. As several site reports make clear, and has been previously documented (Tilley *et al.*, 1999) this is not a safe assumption. Local managers often lack the time, resources and capacity to investigate the problem systematically and in detail. More often than not, it was practical policing knowledge that was deployed in problem-analysis, rather than the results of structured and systematic examination of data. Many of the statistics used to justify the bids turned out on inspection to contain errors; one

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16 This is consistent with earlier research which has observed that restrictive timescales in crime prevention work can push projects towards focusing on established practices rather than piloting innovation (Saulsbury and Bowling, 1991: Ekblom, 1988).
17 This accords with Sutton's (1996) earlier findings on the development of more diverse crime reduction approaches under Safer Cities.

CDRP actually misidentified the ward to which their burglary statistics referred, and constructed a persuasive – but totally erroneous – explanation for the supposedly high burglary rates (Tilley *et al.*, 1999).

The impact of consultancy support

One fairly novel feature of RBI Phase 1 was that the Home Office provided consultancy support to CDRPs. After 125 outline bids had been submitted, 66 shortlisted CDRPs were each visited by one of four Home Office consultants[18], to help develop fuller project proposals. The consultants were each accompanied by a Home Office researcher who audited the claims made about burglary rates in the outline bids, and checked that the CDRP had the capacity to provide crime data to evaluation teams.

The consultants probably helped to ensure that the proposals were supported by *some* structured analysis of the local burglary problem; they probably also ensured some consistency in the quality of proposals. More important, perhaps, the simple fact of the visit signified the importance attached by central government to RBI Phase 1. However, the original plan – that consultancy support would be available throughout the life of the project – was abandoned when responsibility for administering the grants was moved to Government Regional Offices[19]. As will be discussed later in the chapter, it was during implementation, particularly at the start of a project, that some sort of consultancy support would have been of most value.

How successful was the RBI programme in improving the knowledge base?

As part of the crime reduction programme, a central feature of the RBI was that lessons learnt in early stages of its life would be fed back to subsequent projects. This was an ambitious expectation, but not an unreasonable one in view of the level of investment in the evaluations – of around £3 million[20] – a sum not far short of the value of grants disbursed to projects in RBI Phase 1. Whilst the evaluations have considerably extended understanding about the funding, management and implementation of local crime reduction programmes, they have not fully met original expectations – of identifying and ranking cost-effective interventions in a way that would guide future funding.

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18 One of whom is a co-author of this report.
19 It was thought that there would have been too many 'fingers in the pie' if advisors from both the Home Office and Government Offices were involved. However, the latter largely restricted their involvement to monitoring expenditure – with some notable exceptions.
20 In reality the evaluations were not especially intensive, at £18,000 per site per year.

Arguably it is as important – or more important – to know how to implement programmes as it is to know *what* programmes to implement. Nevertheless, the hope was that the evaluations would shed rather more light than they have on "best buys" in burglary reduction, and on preventive approaches to avoid. The reasons are partly to do with lack of control over the content of SDPs, partly to do with implementation difficulties, partly to do with data problems, and partly to do with the limitations of social research methods when trying to unravel cause and effect in volatile and complex settings. Importantly, limitations in evaluation capacity – and problems with design of the evaluation – further weakened the productivity of the evaluation exercise.

Lack of control over SDP content
The strategy of inviting CDRPs to prepare bids meant that the range and nature of strategies that could be evaluated was placed partly beyond the control of the Home Office. Inevitably – and unsurprisingly, as they were encouraged to justify their chosen approach – several SDPs went for strategies that are already fairly well-evidenced, such as the target-hardening of at-risk properties. Few went for more innovative strategies, and even fewer implemented them[21]. Where projects included strategies that clearly demanded evaluation, the evaluators had no control over the 'dosage' or duration of the intervention.

A different approach to evidence-building would be to identify the most important knowledge gaps, to design experiments to plug the gaps and then to seek local sites to host the initiatives. In return for funding, the local sites would cede control over the content, intensity and duration of an initiative to the Home Office; where necessary, these variables could be experimentally manipulated. As Millie and Hough (2004) makes clear, an understanding of the importance of these concepts to evaluation was rare and the ability to deliver them even more so. This approach has been successfully employed to test out the impact of a range of other initiatives such as Electronic Monitoring (Mair and Mortimer, 1997) and Drug Treatment and Testing Orders (Turnbull *et al.*, 2000). Such an approach has a better chance of yielding projects actually worth evaluating whilst it also reduces the risk of implementation failure (discussed below), although it does not eliminate this entirely, as Turnbull *et al.* (2000) have shown. Such an approach appears to be efficient when evaluating initiatives which involve relatively simple interventions, and/or where it is relatively easy for the Home Office to prescribe what action is going to be taken on the ground. However, the RBI consisted of complex interventions that were intended to be highly tailored to local problem contexts. The

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21 The vast majority of the RBI research budget went on evaluating projects under Phase I. However, as we have noted, innovative practices took firmer hold under Phases II and III where evaluation resources were more limited. Consequently, many relatively innovative projects under these later rounds were not subject to a formal evaluation.

RBI also involved action being administered through partnerships of local agencies limiting the Home Office's influence over what action was taken. The suitability of such an evaluation approach to the RBI is therefore open to question.

Implementation failure

If projects are not properly or fully implemented, evaluations cannot say anything about the potential value of the un-implemented elements. The extent of implementation failure meant that the RBI evaluations had a narrower range of strategies to examine than anyone originally envisaged. Faced with significant implementation problems, the evaluators described and explained what was – or was not – happening in the SDPs in their various interim and final reports, and drew the problems to the attention of the Home Office and Government Regional Office staff. However, this did not alter the fact that the 'raw material' for knowledge-building was more limited than expected.

The risks that implementation failure poses to knowledge-building can be reduced in two ways. The first is to take the 'action research' path[22], whereby the evaluators – or linked consultants – are involved in:

- designing, together with the agency, a strategy tailored to fit local conditions;
- monitoring implementation;
- feeding back to the agencies under evaluation research findings as they emerge; and
- helping them to adjust the strategy to maximise impact.

Action research offers the best chance of assessing whether a strategy can work *under optimal circumstances*. There are inevitably limits to the generalisability of the results of action research, because the same strategy in other settings will lack the diagnostic and consultancy support – and visibility – that evaluated schemes enjoy. However, the value of knowing that a strategy *can work* – coupled with learning about likely snagging points – should make action research an attractive option. A good example of a successful action research programme can be found in the campaign to reduce crime on the New York underground (Kelling and Coles, 1996).

The second approach is to be more selective about projects that receive full evaluation. To some extent this was done by the three RBI consortia; the intensity of evaluation was

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22 An alternative term for this type of research is 'formative evaluation'. A detailed consideration of using this approach in evaluating pilot projects was recently published by the Strategy Unit (2003).

reduced in those sites that were dogged by implementation problems. It would sometimes make sense to embark on an evaluation *only* when it was clear that there was a reasonable prospect that the strategy would be properly implemented – though for this to work it would be essential to be able to get hold of historical 'baseline' data. As is discussed below, this could be something of a gamble.

Data problems

Unusually for a programme that distributed money through competitive bidding, Home Office researchers made checks in advance that recorded crime figures would be available for the target area and the surrounding areas. In particular, they sought to confirm that data could be provided readily, and that no boundary changes had occurred in the two years prior to implementation or were planned for the future.

On both counts these checks, though quite thorough, proved ineffective. The evaluations encountered significant problems in getting crime data from SDPs. In the Southern Consortium's evaluation it emerged that figures that could readily be provided had flaws, and those that were more reliable could only be collated with some difficulty[23]. So many problems were encountered in obtaining crime data locally from individual projects that it was eventually decided to get all crime statistics from forces' central statistics departments. This triggered prolonged negotiations with some forces over data protection, which were only resolved after advice from the Office of the Data Protection Registrar[24] was obtained. These difficulties seem to have stemmed in part from a reluctance in some headquarters police departments to undertake work that had nominally been committed to, without consulting them, at BCU level. They also stemmed from uncertainty regarding the implications of the newly implemented provisions of the 1998 Data Protection Act[25]. Thereafter, the data often took months to arrive and had to be sent back on a number of occasions because of errors or omissions. These problems were sufficiently serious to jeopardise the evaluation timetable.

As for boundaries that were stable over time, many forces were in the process of realigning beat boundaries with those of wards and districts, to ensure that as CDRP partners, the police and local authorities shared the same administrative boundaries. Whatever their protestations to the auditors (which were probably made in good faith), they were unlikely

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23 For example, some London sites could provide good data on crime allegations, but could not readily assemble verified statistics.
24 Now known as the 'Office of the Information Commissioner.'
25 Within the police service a more recent and potentially encouraging development has been for Force data protection officers to pool expertise and resources via the ACPO data protection sub-committee.

to call a halt to this process simply to help out an evaluation that had been imposed on them. Thus at least four out of the 20 sites evaluated by the Southern Consortium changed their boundaries shortly before or after projects had started. The resultant problems for comparing areas' crime rates before and after project interventions are obvious.

Problems were not restricted to crime statistics. The cost-effectiveness analysis required detailed estimates of staff time and other resources committed to SDPs, including all levered-in resources. Many projects found this a taxing and unwelcome discipline, and some simply had no records of time spent on their SDP. For example, one SDP included a period of high visibility policing; the evaluation team was assured that 1,000 extra police hours had been conducted, but repeated requests for information about when this took place were not met. Similarly, an SDP with a target-hardening scheme failed to provide crucial information about the dates when properties had been secured until after the formal end of the evaluation.

Problems of attribution: cause and effect

Criminological evaluations are easiest when crime rates are fairly stable, and fairly similar in adjacent areas, and there are few new policy initiatives. In these circumstances it is straightforward to identify changes in crime rates that can be attributed to an intervention. A drop in crime rates in the target area that coincides with the intervention under evaluation is quite good evidence of cause and effect. The evidence is stronger if it can be shown that there was no fall in comparable areas. And it is stronger still if the evaluator can plausibly document the mechanism whereby the intervention triggered the fall (Pawson and Tilley 1996). In practice, the RBI projects were implemented in situations which were complex and volatile:

- local burglary rates were not at all consistent over time, often showing wild variation *before* the initiative as well as after;
- burglary rates in most areas of thcountry were falling throughout Phase I of RBI;
- by their nature as high crime areas, the SDP sites were often exposed to other initiatives targeting crime or other aspects of social deprivation; so too were adjacent areas; and
- most SDPs included more than one approach to reducing burglary and some had several strands.

Limitations of the evaluation design

It has been seen that the emerging design of Phase I, together with various contextual factors against which the Phase unfolded, restricted the successful pursual of evaluation

objectives. To some extent this may be seen as part of a general drift away from the evaluation objectives of the wider CRP documented by Homel *et al.* (in press, a). However, there were also clear limitations in the Home Office's evaluation design, and in its adaptation of that design to emerging contingencies. In particular there was an inherent tension between the objective to evaluate innovative project work and to undertake a broader national evaluation exercise that would identify the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a wide range of interventions. Whereas the first objective recommended an intensive case-study based evaluation approach, a more standardised and lighter-touch evaluation better suited a broader national evaluation. In practice, it seems that the evaluation, in attempting to meet all of these objectives, failed to fully meet any of them.

A case-study approach was adopted where the evaluators' relationship to projects was one of 'independence', with evaluators undertaking a 'hands off' assessment of projects rather than actively contributing to project development. However, in the absence of any other effective support for SDPs in developing their work, this independent approach left projects struggling to introduce innovation within the time and resource constraints of Phase I.

The subsequent and rapid 'drop off' of innovation among SDP projects left evaluators with the task of either assessing fairly conventional burglary reduction interventions or reporting on implementation difficulties. Nevertheless, there was clearly some value in a national evaluation of existing practices, including how they fared in a wide variety of contexts. However, a number of factors hindered the full achievement of this outcome.

- The scale and intensity of the case-study approach necessitated dividing up the 63 SDP projects between three separate evaluation consortia, each of whom were encouraged to develop their own evaluation methodologies. This led to the production of three distinct sets of evaluation reports which impeded attempts to produce a coherent and consistent national evaluation 'result'.
- Unanticipated implementation delays in SDPs, combined with the subsequent response of giving projects extra time to complete their work, led to a mismatch between project and evaluation timescales. In the majority of cases the evaluation of SDP activity wound down *before* SDPs had actually finished. This lack of synchrony had implications not only in terms of the ability of evaluators to assess the overall impact of projects, but also in terms of their ability to assess the effectiveness of interventions that were introduced later in the project timetable, or took longer to develop. Frequently, it would appear that it was 'social crime prevention' initiatives (such as offender – or community based – work) that took longer to introduce. Consequently, there is a danger that evaluation lessons – in

terms of 'what worked' within the evaluation period – were biased towards situational crime prevention measures (such as target hardening houses)[26].

● There was insufficient preparation time available to develop, refine and communicate evaluation methodologies ahead of projects beginning their work. Greater preparation time would have been particularly valuable for the cost-effectiveness element of the evaluation, as there was little precedent on how to undertake this sort of work in a crime reduction setting. This lack of experience led to delays in determining and specifying the data required, and led in turn to projects being asked to reconstruct the costs of their activities retrospectively. This retrospective collection, combined with ongoing uncertainty and debate regarding the suitability of the developing CEA methodology, resulted in the production of cost estimates that were of uncertain accuracy, and in particular were often collected on the basis of differing assumptions. This consequently made comparative analyses across projects problematic (see Stockdale and Whithead, 2003, for a more detailed critique of the cost-effectiveness evaluation under the CRP).

Refining the RBI: the development of Phase II

The RBI was a multi-phase programme, with three phases of funding being introduced between 1998 and 2001. An advantage of a multi-phase approach to project funding is that it allows for refinements to be made to the programme on the basis of lessons that are learnt after each phase. This section of the chapter considers the changes that were introduced under Phase II. It starts by examining changes made to the application and funding systems and then proceeds to examine the development of project support systems.

An evidence-led policy programme?

The design of the RBI was determined by a range of influences and factors, many of which were beyond the control of those Home Office policy officials directly responsible for the running of the programme. However, one very positive influence on the ongoing development of the RBI was that a close working relationship was maintained between the central policy and research teams. A consequence of these links was that, in spite of the limited availability of Phase I evaluation evidence during subsequent phases of the RBI, the available research evidence was readily utilised to refine the design of the programme.

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26 This potential bias in short-term evaluations was previously highlighted by Gilling (1994).

Indeed, the influence of prior research was evident in the design of the programme from the outset. Most notably, the programme's strategy for targeting resources accorded with the findings of research that had demonstrated that focusing on high crime areas was the most effective and most cost-effective strategy for targeting crime reduction resources (Ekblom *et al.,* 1992). Also, the emphasis on RBI projects undertaking a rigorous problem-analysis as a condition of funding was directly informed by an accumulation of applied research into problem-solving as an effective driver of crime reduction practice (Goldstein, 1979, 1990; Clarke and Goldstein, 2002; Leigh *et al.,* 1996, 1998).

Of course, evidence-driven policy is now a commonplace aspiration, but the degree to which this was embraced under the RBI at the time was unusual. This can be best seen in the response to the first research publication that came out of the Crime Reduction Programme (Tilley *et al.* 1999). This was a report that, drawing on early lessons from Phase I of the RBI, made a number of recommendations for the refinement of the design of the programme. Under Phase II and III of the RBI all of these recommendations were followed. The three most important of these, and how they were put into action under Phase II, are discussed below.

Changes to the application procedure

It was recommended that more time should be given for applicants to develop their bids. Under Phase II there were in fact a number of improvements made to the bidding process. Not only was the time given for the preparation of bids extended, but the process itself was also structured in such a way to offer applications more encouragement and support.

Unlike Phase I, where applicants had to invest significant resources in making formal bids whose success was uncertain, Phase II split the application process into two stages. Before submitting a full bid, applicants were invited to submit an 'expression of interest' outlining the size and shape of the local burglary problem and some initial ideas about tackling the problem. On the basis of these outline proposals, Home Office officials told applicants whether the burglary problem in their area was on a scale that qualified for funding. Applicants could then develop a fuller bid in the knowledge that they stood a reasonable chance of success.

Importantly, Phase II applicants were also provided with a degree of support in developing their bids which helped maximise the chance of their proposals being funded. On the one hand applicants were able to access the services of support consultants who were available to offer advice on analysing their crime problems and develop viable proposals for tackling

it. On the other hand, often fairly extensive feedback was provided on the first submitted draft of final applications, and projects were given the opportunity to go away and respond to this feedback and refine their bids as required. Feedback was provided through a structured process involving bids being scrutinised by Regional Government Offices, central Home Office policy staff, and research staff within RDS. Although these additional forms of support were, as we shall see, not without their limitations, they undoubtedly helped improve the quality of final bid submissions, ensuring in turn that the large majority of bids were successful.

Potential bidders were also invited to one of a series of regionally-based seminars designed to help them develop viable proposals and guide them through the practicalities of submitting a bid. These events included presentations from the Phase I consultants providing advice on effective problem solving and project development. Attendees were also encouraged to network with each other to share learning and good practice. Finally, they were also made aware of the consultancy support that was available to them under Phase II. Though the seminars were generally well received, many of the people who developed bids then moved on before projects started. As a result, some key bits of information, in particular about the availability of consultants, were not always passed on.

Overall, the amendments made to the bidding process were positively received. For instance, some practitioners who put in bids under both Phase I and II remarked on the process being simpler and less bureaucratic the second time around. However, a few applicants still found the form-filling and the attendant rules and criteria confusing and time consuming, not least because many of them dealt with making bids to a variety of funding sources, each of which came with its own set of procedures. There were a further five inter-related difficulties associated with the Phase II bidding process that were commonly raised by managers.

- Information about the opportunity to bid still took too long to 'trickle down' through the hierarchy to those in a position to develop bids.
- Many Phase II managers complained that tight bidding timescales restricted their ability to sufficiently develop their bids, and in particular to consult with communities[27].
- There was still too little time to develop implementation plans, leaving managers struggling to develop their bids after the award of a grant.

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27 However, when programme managers responded by essentially abolishing bid deadlines for phase III of the RBI, ironically, very few bids were then submitted. Only when a deadline was subsequently re-imposed towards the end of the available RBI funding period was a quantity of bids forthcoming.

● Unrealistic costings and plans for implementation were not identified as such by the Home Office[28].

● It took too long – sometimes several months – to notify applicants of the outcome of their bid. This was seen as unreasonable, given the very tight timetable for bidding that has been imposed on them. The delay also created problems where applicants had engaged the enthusiasm of partner agencies or local communities.

Changes to the application criteria and funding formula

Two further recommendations that were adopted from Tilley *et al.* (1999) under Phase II, related to the application criteria and the funding formula.

Applications could relate to any form of burglary problem and not simply – as under Phase I – high densities of burglaries in a substantial, single, geographic area. This allowed bidders to construct bids around what was termed under the RBI 'virtual communities' – though these will be referred to as 'disaggregated populations' in this report[29]. Examples of bids based around such disaggregated populations include:

● Houses in multiple occupancy or populations facing high burglary risks such as students.

● Vulnerable populations such as the elderly living in sheltered accommodation.

● Small hot spots of burglary spread out across a wider geographic area.

As long as a bidder was able to quantify the size of the problem population and produce a burglary rate for that population that met the qualification rate, then they could apply for funding.

The broadening of the criteria under Phase II in this way had a number of major advantages. First, it more closely accorded with the principles of problem-solving in that it allowed applicants to put in bids based around any identifiable problem group rather than simply restricting them to basing bids on possibly arbitrary geographic areas. Second, it allowed some applicants to put in bids who had previously been unable to find a geographic area that met the Phase I criteria. Applications could consist of multiple hot spots

28 This is perhaps not entirely surprising as assessors (which included research staff) had limited experience in judging the robustness and realism of these sorts of bids, and had very little in the way of relevant past precedent to help guide them.

29 The term 'virtual communities' was defined by Rheingold in his book of that title. http://www.rheingold.com/vc/book/. The term is not employed here because under the RBI the areas referred to as 'virtual communities' were little more than non-geographically based populations which only occasionally displayed any communal characteristics or identity.

or multiple concentrations of high risk population groups which, while they might not all individually possess the required burglary rate, would often qualify in combination.

The level of funding was also changed from £60,000 per project under Phase I to a figure that was based on the number of burglaries experienced in the targeted area or group over the last three years. This figure was a £100 per burglary, ensuring that investment was more proportionate to the scale of the problem. However, determining funding on the basis of area crime rates still masked potentially significant differences between areas with ostensibly similar crime problems. Projects located in more difficult operational contexts could in effect face substantially higher unit costs in delivering their work. Contextual factors could include for instance the quality of housing infrastructure[30], the level of vulnerability of victims, and the extent to which the community facilitated project work.

While these changes to the bidding process certainly had significant benefits, they also created some problems, examined in the next two chapters. These arose in part because the recommendations which led to them were based on preliminary research rushed out of Phase I of the RBI. Consequently, the full practical implications of adopting these recommendations could not be assessed. This again highlights the difficulty associated with the rolling out of Phase II ahead of the availability of Phase I evaluation results.

One problem that will be mentioned here relates to the issue of economies of scale. The funding regime in Phase II resulted, on the one hand, in several projects covering substantial populations with single project grants running to several million pounds. On the other hand, it also meant that several very small projects were funded, with grants of £10,000 or less. However, many of these small project managers found that the effort required to plan and deliver their projects was effectively nearly as great as delivering a larger project. Several managers commented that they would not bid for such small amounts again and clearly did not feel that their projects were cost-effective, at least at delivering standard interventions such as target hardening. 'At the end of the day setting up certain of the [project] functions takes as much time whether you have got £10,000 or £100,000' (Phase 2-57). Furthermore, as one manager stated, when it came to purchasing equipment or other services, unit costs could be far higher for smaller projects that lacked the discount purchasing power that a larger budget could command.

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30 One example of this from Phase II of the RBI was Phase 2-58 whose plans to install locks on the doors of burgled households had to be significantly scaled back when it became apparent that the door frames were of too poor a quality to support the locks without strengthening.

Refining the RBI: project support and monitoring systems

Under Phase II, improvements were also made to project support and monitoring structures. The temporary and poorly resourced consultancy support offered under Phase I was replaced by a team of full-time consultants drawn jointly from the National Association for the Care and Rehabilitation of Offenders (NACRO) and from Crime Concern. The consultants provided help not only in bid preparation but also during project implementation. Also under Phase II the role of the Crime Reduction Teams in the Regional Government Offices was broadened, and they administered a project monitoring system that had been collaboratively developed with Home Office researchers and the consultants[31]. A number of key issues can be identified relating to the performance and organisation of these support and monitoring structures.

Weak communication of roles

There was insufficient demarcation and clarity about the roles of the support consultants and the regional offices. The situation was complicated by the fact that different Regional Government Offices clearly had different ideas about the extent of their role (see Homel *et al.*, in press, a; b). Some were notably more proactive in offering support around areas such as partnership working and financial management, whilst other offices undertook a more narrow, administrative role.

Variances in regional office roles were not necessarily problematic where good lines of communication existed between regional offices and support consultants. But here too there were marked variations. Whilst in some regions there was a relatively close co-ordination of work, in other regions contact between regional offices and consultants was infrequent and sporadic. In particular, some regional offices did little to promote or facilitate the work of the consultants, leaving project managers uncertain about the availability or scope of support.

Availability and consistency of support

The availability and consistency of support was important for project managers. This was problematic against the background of a programme marked by high levels of staff turnover in some regional offices, and to a lesser extent amongst support consultants. For instance, projects which had more consistent and more frequent contact with regional offices were

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31 Phase I evaluators also helped with the development of the monitoring system with researchers from the Midlands consortium helping to pilot arrangements for collecting data on project activity, while the Northern consortium helped with the design and development of crime data collection arrangements.

significantly more likely to rank a regional office's performance highly, with having a consistent point of contact being particularly important[32].

Another issue was whether support was available when it was most needed. This seems to have been a particular issue with the support consultants, with many project managers feeling that training and support were either delivered too late, or at the wrong point in a project's lifespan. There seem to have been a number of factors contributing to this problem. Project managers overwhelmingly identified the bid development and early project period as being most important for them in terms of needing support. However, the consultancy team was only contracted to offer support mid-way through the bid development process. Whilst some of the team were experienced consultants, others were new to their role and needed more time to acquire the relevant set of skills that would help them best support the projects.

Under-use of support consultants

On average, surveyed project managers called in support consultants for three days per project, though 36 per cent of projects used them for one day or less. However, this represents a significant under-use of available support, as projects were entitled to up to 15 days of assistance. According to the 'end of programme' report prepared by the support team manager (Cholerton, 2002), not one Phase II project requested more than seven days support. It is difficult to firmly identify or weight the factors that may have led to this situation, though clearly the communication, timing, and availability problems mentioned above, together with possible dissatisfaction with some of the support that was provided, may all have contributed to this situation.

Rating of performance by project managers

Project managers were asked to give a performance rating for the roles undertaken by the support consultants and regional offices. They were also asked to identify those roles that they considered were, in the event, of most importance to their projects. Table 2.2 shows the average performance rating given for the five most important roles for both the regional office and support consultants as identified by projects, together with the five roles which were given the lowest performance rating. The higher rating of regional office performance should be treated with some caution, as it should also be observed that most managers viewed the role of the regional offices as being based around a more limited set of administrative tasks.

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32 The correlation coefficient and significance level for 'consistency of contact' was 0.376, and 0.009 respectively (Spearman's Rho, 2-tailed).

Table 2.2 shows dissatisfaction with a number of key roles. In particular assistance with: procurement and financial management, community consultation and publicity, the supply and identification of training for project staff, and with helping projects take their work forward at the end of RBI funding, all received poor performance ratings. As will be seen in the next two chapters, these poor ratings are closely aligned to the difficulties most commonly experienced by projects in developing and implementing their work.

Variability in performance

The mean average ratings in table 2.2 disguise the fact that both support consultants and regional offices displayed marked variations in performance, as judged by project managers. As already discussed, support consultants possessed a widely varying range of skills and experience, and whilst some projects were able to develop a relationship with a single consultant, others had to cope with a turnover in support staff.

Differences in staff capacities, and in particular, overall levels of staffing, would also seem to be a major cause of variability in regional office performance as well. Differences in the rating of regional performance by project managers were particularly distinct and showed marked regional patterns. Project manager ratings of regional performance were aggregated into three broad performance ratings (top, middle and low performer). After removing regions for which there was a low number of respondents (less than five managers) there were still marked variations. For instance, whilst 80 per cent of managers in one region rated the regional office as a 'top performer', in another region not a single respondent placed their regional office in this category.

Whilst differences in capacities seem to have been critical here, variations in how regions defined and interpreted their role in relation to RBI projects also appears to have been important. For instance, some regions were fairly rigid in how they tried to keep projects to their original project plans and budgets. Conversely other regions were more permissive, for instance allowing greater flexibility for projects to move funds between budget headings, and in some cases allowing projects to claim grant money on the basis of projected rather than actual expenditure[33]. It therefore appears that some regional offices were clearly better at ameliorating the more constricting aspects of the RBI programme design.

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33 The original RBI funding rules stated that projects could only claim money on the basis of invoiced expenditure. However, after complaints that this disadvantaged projects that did not have the resources to spend money up front, regions were given the option by the centre to allow claims based on forecasted expenditure.

Table 2.2: Performance and roles of Support Consultants and Regional Government Offices

Five most important Consultant roles*	Mean Rating**
1. Coming up with creative solutions to identified problems	2.6
2. Identifying relevant best practice	2.4
3. Intervention development	2.3
4. Community consultation	3.1
5. Project monitoring	2.7
Five most important Regional Office roles*	
1. Providing advice on project change requests	1.9
2. Providing timely decisions on project change requests	2.0
3. Providing information on the RBI bidding process	2.0
4. Project monitoring	2.4
5. Managing finances	2.2
Five lowest rated Consultant roles (performance)	
Contracting services (procurement)	4.5
Managing finances	3.8
Publicity/media skills	3.5
Supplying/identifying training	3.4
Acting as negotiator/mediator	3.4
Five lowest rated Regional Office roles (performance)	
Exit strategy/sustainability	2.9
Linking you up to relevant sources of help and expertise	2.9
Project planning	2.7
Supplying or ID'ing training	2.6
Project management	2.6
Mean Consultant Performance Rating across all roles*	**3.1**
Mean Regional Office Performance Rating across all roles*	**2.4**

*   Five most important performed roles based on ranking by project managers
**   Rated between '1' and '5' ,where '1' is 'Excellent', '3' is reasonable, and '5' is 'Very Poor'
*** Mean rating is calculated from a wider set of roles than shown here

Knowledge and performance management

Variability of performance can, of course, be minimised through the use of effective knowledge and performance management systems. Both the support consultants and

regional offices discussed progress and shared knowledge through their own separate cycles of regular meetings. However, neither system was robust enough to fully offset marked variances in skills, capacities and performance. In the case of regional offices, the effectiveness of arrangements seems to have been hampered through a lack of clarity over lines of accountability, and the division of roles between the centre and the regions. These issues, as they relate to the Crime Reduction Programme as a whole, are discussed in detail in Homel *et al.* (in press, a; b).

Additional support

Of course, practitioners also had recourse to existing information sources on effective practice, notably in the form of Home Office publications (whether research-based publications or practitioner-focused guides). A web-based information source on effective burglary reduction practice was also developed by the Home Office during the RBI. However, this burglary 'toolkit' was not available until October 2000, several months after Phase II had been launched. Nevertheless, both Home Office publications and the online burglary toolkit were assessed favourably by an albeit limited sub-sample of Phase II respondents[34]. The majority of respondents (94% and 86% respectively) rated these information sources as 'excellent' or 'good', though it should be noted that whereas 95 per cent had utilised Home Office publications, only 55 per cent had made use of the toolkit. This may in part reflect the fact that not all respondents had easy access to the internet, and in particular many police officers had very restricted access within the workplace.

The targeting of support

A further issue is whether the level of support offered by the consultants and regional offices was suitably tailored to the different levels of need exhibited by projects. The support consultants do appear to have targeted their resources effectively towards the more needy projects. Projects reporting high levels of difficulties drew on more support from the consultants than other projects and gave comparable performance ratings for the roles the consultants performed. However, some struggling managers were clearly less happy with the roles that the consultants *didn't* perform. The remit of the support consultants was centred around the provision of advice and training. Some managers expressed frustration that they could not draw on the consultants to provide more direct support at critical 'pinch' points in their project's development (for instance assisting with a public consultation exercise or analytical tasks).

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34 From the Phase II sample, 48 were asked questions on these additional forms of guidance, and of these 40 provided respones.

Regional office's appear to have been less able to tailor their support to varying need. Across a range of project performance variables there was a strong, significant relationship between projects – which had experienced difficulties in these areas and/or had skills deficits – and the ranking of regional performance[35]. However, it would appear that there was also a marked regional pattern in the distribution of projects rating themselves as having difficulties, and in turn rating regional support as poor. For instance, the three regions where projects rated themselves as having the lowest levels of available skills are the same three regions where the rating of regional office performance was also lowest. What this suggests is that regional offices, faced with a higher proportion of projects experiencing difficulties, may have needed additional resourcing or assistance to improve their capacity to respond effectively.

Project monitoring and the benefits of the development day

The monitoring system developed under Phase II of the RBI was designed to co-ordinate the input and roles of the support consultants, regional offices, and the centre in order to avoid excessive information demands being placed on projects. Central to this system was a 'development day' – held after the award of project funding – when the support consultants visited a project, usually accompanied by a regional office official. The purpose of the day was to agree project targets and reporting procedures for submitting a progress report to the relevant regional office on a quarterly basis.

These development days were broadly viewed as useful by those involved. They were seen as beneficial not only in terms of their formal function, but also for a number of unanticipated reasons. In many cases, the days provided the first face-to-face contact between consultants and projects. Also, as in Phase I, many of the people who had developed the bids had then moved on, and new project managers found the development day useful in assisting them with getting to grips with the project plan. More generally, several managers felt that the day provided a natural transition between the preparation of the bid and starting the actual project. As several months had usually passed since the submission of bids, the day often injected momentum into the project development process.

Project monitoring and problems of infrastructure

In spite of this positive start, the ongoing project monitoring system rapidly ran into difficulties. The system aimed to reduce the information demands placed on projects, but achieving this required a complex co-ordination of roles behind the scenes, and the

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35 The correlation coefficient and significance level for project managers' overall ranking of available project skills (both skills possessed by them and other project participants) and their combined rating of regional office support was .536, .000 (Kendals Taub, 1-tailed).

maintenance of capacity in the three main partners to administer and support this system. However, in the event, this infrastructure was not robust enough to facilitate the consistent and full adoption of the proposed monitoring arrangements.

Turnover in both project and regional office staff, combined with a significant rise in competing work demands within the regional offices, made the maintenance of the system, and in particular the maintenance of the skills and knowledge under-pinning it, highly problematic. The centre in turn did not have the capacity to compensate for these difficulties. As a result project monitoring was adopted on a fragmented and inconsistent basis. Though some project managers appreciated the benefits for them of systematically monitoring their work, others clearly struggled – in the absence of adequate levels of support – to make sense and appropriate use of the monitoring tools provided.

Summary

The RBI was an ambitious and complex initiative. In total, across the three phases of the initiative, 247 projects were funded. Early findings from Phase I evaluations suggests that the RBI made a positive contribution to a broader national reduction in burglary (Kodz and Pease, 2003). However, as the first major strand of the Crime Reduction Programme to be rolled out, perhaps inevitably the RBI also encountered a range of difficulties. These included a competitive bidding process that created unanticipated problems, shortcomings in the support provided for funded projects, and some general limitations in the RBI's knowledge management systems. More positively, programme managers were responsive to many of these difficulties, and design changes to the subsequent RBI funding phases alleviated at least some of them.

Whilst the RBI may have succeeded in generating a reasonable quantity of effective crime reduction activity, under Phase I the initiative was notably less successful at meeting its other objectives for promoting innovation and for enhancing the burglary reduction evidence base. The level of support, funding and time provided to Phase I projects was insufficient to facilitate the development of innovative practice. Furthermore, the evaluation programme was poorly designed to deliver on its main objectives, and was impeded by the overall design of the RBI which was not best structured to support evaluation activity. Whilst, the 'hands off' approach to evaluation that was adopted generated ample lessons on project implementation, it was insufficiently robust to generate strong or detailed evidence about 'what works' or what was cost-effective.

The remainder of this report will examine in more detail issues arising with the development and implementation of RBI projects on the ground.

3. From paper to action: setting up local burglary reduction projects

Andrew Millie, Ian Hearnden and Niall Hamilton-Smith

Introduction

This chapter examines the issues facing Phase I and II RBI projects in translating their paper bids into effective action on the ground. Extensive coverage has already been given to the theme of developing RBI project bids as part of a bidding process, and to developing crime reduction plans more generally (see for instance Tilley *et al.*, 1999, Curtin *et al.*, 2001). This chapter does not intend to retread this ground in any detail. Rather, our aim is to concentrate on what we would contend is a more neglected area of project development. As bid documents for RBI projects were frequently hurried to meet deadlines, or were written by people other than those given the responsibility of project management, the period from bid to action proved to be key in the development of projects. This chapter starts by examining the extent and implications of project change in what we shall call the 'post-bid period'[36]. It then explores the underlying reasons for changes, conceptualising change as a series of project development tasks that typically had to be worked through. Finally, the chapter examines how experience of change may have been affected by differences in the context within which projects were developed.

Change and delay: the path to action

It would be naïve to assume that any prototype project could roll off the 'bidding line' and move straight into delivering services on the ground. Under the RBI it was found that further project development could be broken down into two distinct types of activity:

- Tasks associated with revisiting and revising the project bid.
- Development tasks that all projects had to go through in preparing for action – such as recruiting staff and purchasing equipment.

Whilst all RBI projects had to some extent worked through the second sort of development tasks, the extent to which projects had to revisit and revise their bids was not so well anticipated. This is apparent from the 20 strategic development projects (SDPs) evaluated by

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36 In referring to the 'post-bid' period, we mean the period immediately after confirmation of funding was given to successful applicants. From this point projects were theoretically capable of starting to spend their grant money.

the Southern Consortium. Nineteen were implemented in a different form, or in a different intensity to that originally planned, and one was not implemented at all. Under Phase II of the RBI just under 60 per cent of surveyed project managers claimed that their original project bids were subject to some change prior to any implementation activity.

These changes were not necessarily the result of weak bids nor did it follow that the projects were unsuccessful[37]. For instance, bids were often revisited because several months elapsed from their submission to their approval. Thus, project participants felt their initial analysis needed updating. Even if the need to revisit a bid was due to the weak construction of that bid, this did not preclude the project going on to implement effective interventions on the basis of sound revisions.

Delays

One unavoidable implication of these changes was delay, which was widespread under both phases of the RBI. Projects under Phase I were due to start in April 1999. Of the 20 evaluated by the Southern Consortium, only five did so. Seventy-eight per cent of Phase II project managers said that they experienced some delay in getting their projects up and running after funding was announced – with the mean average delay being estimated at just over five months. Many Phase II project managers observed that delays were to some extent inevitable, in that most projects required a development period ahead of implementing work on the ground. As one project manager commented, 'I think really if a project like this were going to be run again there should be a six month lead-in'.

The implications of delay were not uniform. A positive response, as noted in Chapter Two, is that most Regional Government Offices demonstrated flexibility in allowing delayed projects the extra time to complete their programme of work. Unfortunately, a similar flexibility to continue projects was not always available locally, with staff in particular often departing before work was complete. This contributed in turn to a proportion of projects failing to meet their targets and/or failing to spend their full allocated grant budget. For instance, in Phase II of the RBI, 46 per cent of project managers said that they underspent on their budget.

Strict adherence to timetables

Many project managers felt pressured to keep their project on track in terms of the original programme timetable. This was not necessarily a correct perception on their part. For instance the manager in Phase 2-68 described feeling obliged to start spending and to start implementing, with the result that he felt that the project development process was rushed.

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37 For details of the effectiveness of interventions see Millie and Hough (2004).

Budget profiles typically failed to account for the likely need to delay significant grant expenditure during the early project development period. In view of the importance of the range of linked tasks underlying this development stage, any rushing or curtailing of these tasks was bound to have detrimental consequences.

Staff changes

The departure of staff who had been central to the development of project bids could also result in change or delay. A typical example from Phase I is Phase 1-8. This project was due to start in April 1999 but drifted during its early months because of a change in police management. The two police personnel who had original responsibility moved posts and had no further involvement. The project was passed onto a police inspector in November 1999. However, it took some time for him to become familiar with the project as a whole, resulting in no police contribution until February 2000. The Phase 2-72 project was effectively 'lost' when the police officer who had developed the project left without any handover arrangements being in place. It was only 'rediscovered' when, a year later, the Regional Government Office asked why no money had been spent.

Staff turnover and insufficient handover were common problems throughout the RBI, and will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter. Some bids were developed by 'bid specialists' who passed on the task of managing the project to a new member of staff after the grant was secured. In other cases, personnel who won bid monies were then promoted and 'moved on' as a result of their success.

Managing projects can require different skills from those required for submitting a bid. As a result, it can sometimes be to the advantage of projects to have different people responsible for each stage of project development. However, the experience of the SDPs evaluated by the Southern Consortium suggested that this was not always the case. While a change in management did not necessarily result in a shift in project focus, it invariably led to a drift in implementation.

Tasks associated with revisiting and revising the project bid

To recap, there were two types of development task associated with RBI projects once the grant had been awarded. The first covers tasks associated with refining or revising the project bid itself. Many of these were tasks that people had assumed would have been substantially completed as part of the bid writing and submission process. These tasks were:

- checking realism;
- costing;
- checking that the original focus was sensible;
- verifying commitment;
- verifying capacity; and
- consulting with the community/estimating demand.

Checking realism

Project managers sometimes had to address at the start of the funded project period problems relating to parts of the 'paper' bid being unrealistic or assumptions being untested. For instance, Phase 1-14 had to drop one of its interventions as suitable equipment proved to be unavailable. It had intended to use a microchip tracking system known as 'Stealthguard' to trace stolen goods. However, following funding approval, the project managers discovered the system was at that time still in development. A different example from Phase II is provided by Phase 2-58. Here, plans to fund the fitting of locks on residential doors within the target area proved unrealistic when it was found that the door frames were too weak to properly support the locks.

A lack of realism in paper bids was noted as a problem by the Phase 1-18 project manager who believed that this was at least partly due to a 'very rushed' bidding process and that he had received little guidance on how to put an application together. He also considered that the general feeling, with regard to bidding, was one of 'let's get the money and then work out how to spend it'.

Costing

Realism was also sometimes lacking in the estimation of costs put into bids, a process hindered by the insufficient bidding time available. Cost errors could be significant. For instance the Phase 2-46 project manager found that security doors – that the project had estimated at £300 a unit – in fact cost double that amount, leading to this part of the project being abandoned.

Some projects deliberately under-costed administration in an effort to be competitive. In other projects, the amount of administration required – and with it the associated costs – came as a unwelcome surprise. Other unexpected costs typically included the need for further crime analysis to facilitate the targeting of interventions and identifying and appointing a contractor to undertake work.

Under Phase I of the RBI, a fixed grant of £60,000 allowed little room for manoeuvre when it came to costing work. As a result, some projects had to change focus due to their initial expectations being unrealistic. Once it was realised how comparatively little could be done with this amount, some SDPs shrank somewhat in coverage. For example, Phase 1-8 changed form an estate-wide focus to concentrating on a single street.

However, most of the Phase I SDPs evaluated by the Southern Consortium were able to lever in other finances to support such extra costs. Of the 20 sites evaluated, the most robust cost data were collected for eight projects. For these, non-Home Office funding supported nearly four-fifths of the SDP crude costs (Bowles and Pradiptyo, 2004).

Checking that the original focus was sensible

Bids sometimes contained interventions that were found to be unsuitable after funding was awarded. Conversely, on other occasions the target area itself was deemed ill-suited to the proposed interventions. Most projects under the RBI had to work with the funded target area and did not have the flexibility to change this post-bid. Exceptionally under Phase I however, some projects were allowed to effectively extend their activities beyond the target area. For example, project Phase 1-4 was expanded from its original focus. This project was entirely concentrated on improvements in police intelligence-gathering and analysis. As the same approach could be used across a larger area, for little extra cost, it was decided to extend the scheme from its original target area to cover the rest of the police Basic Command Unit (BCU). A similar pragmatic decision was made once implementation began in Phase 1-5. Again this was a single intervention project, this time based on a drugs arrest referral scheme for burglary offenders. As the project progressed, it was discovered that the scheme could not gain enough clients from either the original target area or the original burglary focus. The local health service provider was also not prepared to prioritise type of offence over need for treatment. So it was decided to extend eligibility to all offenders from anywhere within the city. Although funding was for a burglary project, in this instance it was entirely sensible to expand coverage to other offence types.

Verifying commitment

In some bids, such as Phase 2-66 and Phase 2-40, the commitment and role of many agencies named as partners in the bid proved to be little more than untested assumptions. Even where some initial commitment had been made by agencies named in the bid, much remained to be done in the post-bid period to firm up that commitment and clearly communicate and clarify the role of each participant. This situation was exacerbated by the

long delay between bid submissions and the approval of funding, with the strength of initial commitments naturally weakening over time.

In the post-bid period, there was a frequent need to more clearly delineate roles and responsibilities at both an intra- and inter-agency level. For example, Phase 1-19 was funded on the basis of a formal agreement between the police, the local authority and the relevant Regional Government Office. However, it became apparent that agreement from the local authority was based on an understanding that the police were fully funding the project, with support from the Government Office. The police believed that the local authority was committing tangible resources to the project's management. It took a while for these conflicting expectations to be resolved. From Home Office funds being made available in April 1999, there was no tangible implementation until November 1999 and only in December 1999 did the local authority commit staff resources and actively support the project.

Verifying capacity

A related issue is the capacity of participating agencies. Assumptions about the capacity to deliver sometimes proved to be ill-founded. For example, in Phase 3-3, in excess of £80,000 had been allocated to the Youth Offending Team to work with young offenders. However, the team did not have the capacity to undertake this work within their existing level of staffing. The option of recruiting another member of staff was discounted when it became clear that, by the time such a recruitment process had been completed, there would be insufficient project time left to actually deliver the work. In Phase 2-70, an intervention to install police alarms had to be abandoned when it became clear that the police had no additional capacity to respond to any increased demand in alarm calls.

Consulting with the community/estimating demand

Throughout the RBI programme, applicants were encouraged to consult with relevant communities when formulating their bid. However, the timetable for bidding rarely afforded projects the opportunity to do this in the bid application stage.

RBI project participants frequently found consulting with communities to be problematic and time-consuming. For instance, projects were often at a loss about how to identify and contact the 'community'. Even when contact was made, nurturing and expanding these contacts took time and considerable persistence. For instance, in Phase 2-75, after an initial community meeting attracted just seven attendees, the project manager tried to generate interest through time-consuming and relatively unproductive door-knocking and letter-writing.

Gaining contacts through existing community organisations later proved more useful, with community meetings subsequently having between 65 to 85 attendees.

Projects, such as Phase 2-66, admitted that in constructing their bid they had to make assumptions about community need and receptiveness. However, these assumptions were sometimes misplaced. For example, the experience of the community consultation carried out in project Phase 1-8 led to a complete change of project emphasis. The original hope was to implement a programme of high visibility policing (HVP). However, this was identified by residents as an unwanted intrusion. Police/resident relations were not good and the tenant perception of policing was generally poor. It was thought that HVP would not be possible until some trust between the two groups had been established. Knowledge of how the community will react to a particular strategy is important so as to ensure successful implementation.

Projects that failed to consult the community therefore risked basing their work on mis-assumptions about there being a demand for their services. But projects leaving such consultation until after the bid application stage could also feel constrained to restrict consultation to seeking input and approval for a pre-determined programme of work. For instance, Phase 2-64 spent nearly six months undertaking a public consultation exercise. However, the manager did not feel that the exercise contributed a great deal as it merely served to confirm that the community was happy with the services on offer.

Development tasks that all projects had to go through

Whilst many RBI projects were delayed through having to revise or refine the project bid, there were also a number of development tasks that all projects would face after confirmation of funding. These tasks were:

- recruitment of staff;
- training of staff;
- setting up implementation procedures;
- acquiring equipment and premises;
- managing procurement and financial processes; and
- developing innovative practices.

Recruitment of staff

If projects had to formally recruit staff through advertising and holding interviews for posts, then the time required to complete this process was often substantial, typically taking three to four months. Job specifications and adverts had to be developed. Moreover, if projects were recruiting staff under local authority rules and procedures, then vacancies often had to be advertised internally first within the local authority.

Delays could often become extended if problems arose with the recruitment process, or if staff were required with skills that were in short supply. For example, Phase 1-18 planned to run an intervention using 'rangers' to support the local police and act as a visible contact point on local estates. Problems in recruiting a company to provide the rangers meant that implementation did not begin until eight months after the start of the project. This was despite the tenders being sought from established security companies. For the Phase 3-1 project it took nearly a year for the project to fill its full complement of specialist posts. Whilst generally, projects recruiting staff through temporary secondments had the potential to get staff in post quicker, this advantage did not always materialise.

A further problem was staff availability. Most projects at the set-up stage required a considerably greater investment of staff time than was needed once implementation was properly under way. For instance in Phase 2-69 the project took up to 50 per cent of the part-time manager's time at the start of the project, but only about five hours a week thereafter. The problem for some projects was that they had not anticipated the changing level of staffing required at different stages of the projects. However, in many cases – in a testament to the dedication of those involved – serious delay was only avoided by project staff working well beyond the bounds of their scheduled working day during peak project periods.

Training of staff

Once staff were recruited, further time was needed for training. However, the majority of Phase II project managers thought training was largely 'on the job'. This often consisted of little more than relying on their existing skills and learning as they went along. Some managers were more fortunate in having access to informal mentoring from partners, or benefiting from a formal handover period. Others under Phase II were able to draw on the experience and advice available from similar projects that had been run under Phase I.

As was discussed in Chapter 2, formal training from the support consultants was not always available, or was not always accessed, by projects during the start-up period. Moreover, some felt that the training that was provided was too generic, and that grounded training

that was more directly applicable to the context within which they were to be working would be more valuable. Many clearly felt as well that a structured acquisition of required skills at the start of the project would have been helpful. Many managers lacked experience in their new role, and seconded or part-time managers rarely seem to have received in-house training to prepare them for their new position. For instance, the police manager of Phase 2-72 observed that the police service was often at fault in promoting officers on the basis of their potential to fulfil a more senior role, but not actually giving them training ahead of time to undertake it:

We do need much more training in basic management, of having strategic awareness, setting your priorities and also, you know, not being deflected from what your priorities are.

This was a view shared by the police inspector who managed the Phase 1-10 who felt that, in the absence of in-house training, police-based project managers would have benefited from some standard guidance on all aspects of project management.

Setting up implementation procedures

The apparent simplicity of many project interventions – such as fitting locks to doors – belied the frequent complexity of the supporting procedures required to administer them. For example, an initiative that sought to target-harden burgled dwellings may have needed to go through the following:

- procedures were needed for identifying victims;
- if victim details were coming from the police and were being given to a third party, then procedures were often needed to be in place to ensure compliance with data protection legislation;
- procedures then needed to be in place for determining who contacted the victims and how, and then who assessed their security needs; and
- in turn, consideration was required as to how these needs were to be communicated to whoever was physically undertaking the target hardening.

An intervention such as alley-gating[38] often required an even more intensive process of development before the substantive work could be done. Procedures may have been needed for instance for – piloting prototype gates, consulting and gaining the consent of

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38 'Alley-gating' refers to a situational crime prevention intervention usually employed in areas of terraced housing where offenders exploit alleyways that run along the backs of rows of houses to gain access to properties. The intervention typically entails blocking access to these alleys with locked gates and giving keys to each household that backs onto the alley.

residents and/or landlords, enquiring about and obtaining planning permissions, for distributing and replacing keys, and for ongoing maintenance.

Acquiring equipment and premises

A related aspect of developing procedures was the acquisition of necessary equipment and premises. This not only related to procuring equipment for interventions such as locks and bolts, but also the purchasing of core equipment for administration such as computers and phones. Moreover, many projects needed to find and equip office or other building space for their activities.

Managing procurement and financial processes

Phase II project managers observed that skills relating to procurement and financial management were often in short supply. From the outset, it took some time to become accustomed to the processes and bureaucracy surrounding the spending and claiming of grant monies. The project grant-holder would typically be a participating agency's finance/resource department, thus adding an extra tier of complexity to financial management. In particular, many police financial departments were unused to handling VAT and paying for services 'up front'.

The often unusual and ad hoc activities of these types of projects sometimes created difficulties for financial officers used to dealing with a narrower and more predictable range of expenditure. For example, the Phase 2-64 project manager wanted to purchase a pair of curtains for a victim who could not afford them – and who was therefore providing offenders with an easy target in terms of displaying non-occupancy. However, the manager found it hard to convince his financial resource unit that he was not misusing funds.

The majority of projects also had to act through the procurement framework of a participating agency. Whilst better supported projects were often able to directly hand over much of this work to finance or procurement officers within these larger parent organisations, in other cases managers had to largely learn the rules and procedures for themselves. The procurement process generated a number of common challenges for such managers.

● Drawing up a work specification – 'invitations to tender' normally detail 'what' and 'how much' work is wanted from the contractor. However, managers generally found it difficult to forecast how much of a service they would need at the start of their projects.

- Drawing up an invitation to tender – the technical and procedural aspects of this were often time-consuming.
- Identifying suitable prospective tenders – often managers did not have the option of simply contracting on a single-tender basis, but identifying suitable tenders could prove difficult. A strategy that helped circumvent this was to utilise the existing contractor contacts found in partner agencies. Nevertheless, in some projects choice was still often limited. This had obvious implications when it came to ensuring value for money from the contractor, and generally exerting financial control.
- Drawing up a suitable contract – some projects were locked into contracts that were insufficiently watertight, leaving them poorly placed to ensure that the contractor delivered what was required.

Innovation

The Home Office brief for SDPs was for them to be designed with innovation and evaluation in mind (Tilley *et al.,* 1999). Those that followed this brief had to be flexible as new ideas were tried and tested. If some proved impractical or ineffective, then good projects made changes on the basis of what they had learnt. Planning for innovation should also allow for a certain degree of failure. For example, in Phase 1-14 whilst problems were encountered in implementing some of the ten interventions contained in the original bids, the project adapted to the problems encountered by developing a number of new and subsidiary interventions. For instance, plans in the original bid for reducing offending through high visibility policing and the eviction of persistent offenders, were extended during the course of the project to include the use of comparatively new Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and an initiative to tighten up bail enforcement.

Where interventions were based on the deployment of innovative equipment, the development and acquisition of such equipment was invariably time-consuming and – as in the earlier 'Stealthguard' example – promised technological innovations were not always developed soon enough to be of use. Furthermore, whether innovation centred on equipment or operational practices, establishing effective procedures to guide that innovation could be problematic. For instance, the Phase 2-65 project manager wished to make use of an innovative tracking device. However, to purchase this equipment the project had to go through the Force's internal purchasing department. It then transpired that central Force policies in the use of tracking devices only covered their use in relation to tracking vehicles. The project consequently faced having to get these policies amended. As the project manager observed:

If you put funding in at the ground level, it means the divisions themselves have the opportunity to develop new ideas and it's increasingly difficult for the centre to control and manage these ideas.

Projects with a head start

There are obvious advantages in projects being built on existing capacity and expertise. Nearly 60 per cent of sampled project managers under Phase II claimed that their project was built upon a pre-existing partnership group. However, the skills, experience and capacities of these groups, and the extent to which they offered their projects substantive support, varied markedly. Even in the absence of partnership, skilled project managers could link their projects into the work and capacities of other organisations and existing projects. Being able to do this was dependent on the manager having enough local grounding to know what the local opportunities were in the first place. With many projects being managed by new and relatively inexperienced staff, this was not always the case. Projects founded on existing structures and capacities benefited from:

- Building on pre-existing skills and experience together with available knowledge of best practice.
- Good relations and trust between organisations and with the community.
- Pooled resources, including administration, premises, and training.
- Needing less time to get the project 'up and running'.

Project Phase 1-17 was able to start promptly simply because it was an extension of an existing scheme. Similarly, Phase 1-14 could start promptly because it had already conducted a pilot in the three months leading up to the scheme.

There are also disadvantages associated with building on pre-existing partnerships or projects. There is a frequently observed tendency for such projects to simply 'roll out' or 'take off the shelf' (Ekblom, 1998) existing interventions that are not properly tailored or adapted to the new problem or area being dealt with. This is not inevitable, with Phase 2-60 benefiting from the infrastructure and knowledge of having operated a similar set of interventions before, but then utilising the RBI money to improve and adapt them to the RBI targeted area.

Conversely, prior associations can also come with difficulties. Project Phase 2-48 was obliged to deliver its interventions through those agencies which formed an active local partnership. However, the manager felt that one partner was relatively ineffective and that their role would have been better performed by someone else.

Summary

Projects under the RBI were born into a wide variety of contexts. Some enjoyed a significant head start, whilst others faced far more challenges prior to any effective delivery. However, with the notable exception of accounting for the relative size of the burglary problem from Phase II onwards, the RBI programme made no differentiation between the advantaged and disadvantaged. Projects were allocated funds through a standard grant formula, and had to spend their funds over the same amount of time. Whilst, under Phase II consultancy support was available for all projects, limits on the type and amount of help that consultants could provide meant that this support was often insufficient to fully redress the range of challenges faced by the more 'disadvantaged' projects.

This chapter examined how projects translated their paper bids into effective action on the ground. Key considerations were tasks associated with revisiting and revising the project bid and development tasks that all projects had to go through. Whilst some of these tasks could have been anticipated, those associated with revision of bids were less easy to foresee. For many projects this contributed to sizeable delays that had repercussions to effective and timely implementation.

4.

Action and Reaction: delivering local burglary reduction projects

Ian Hearnden, Andrew Millie, Niall Hamilton-Smith and Jane Willis

This chapter examines the implementation issues faced by projects once work on the ground was under way. First, brief findings on levels of implementation are presented. Project management and staffing – and how varying arrangements impacted on performance – are then examined. Next some of the key generic issues that confronted project managers in developing and steering the ongoing implementation process are discussed. Finally, the chapter looks at how projects monitored their own performance, focusing in particular on their financial management.

Implementation levels

Under Phase I of the RBI, 20projects were evaluated by the Southern Consortium. Table 4.1 combines all interventions planned by these 20 projects, with interventions grouped into six main crime prevention categories, devised by the Home Office. For each category, the number of interventions planned is compared to the number implemented[39].

Table 4.1: Interventions planned and implementation levels achieved

	Planned (122)	Achieved (89)
'Stakeholder' (community-based) schemes	36	23
Enforcement	33	21
Target-specific situational crime prevention	18	17
Offender-based schemes	13	7
Area-wide situational crime prevention	11	10
Property marking	6	6
Other[40]	5	5

Of 122 planned interventions, 89 (73%) were implemented to varying degrees. Location-specific and area-wide situational measures were most likely to be carried out, and property marking was achieved by the six schemes that planned it. Stakeholding and enforcement

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39 For fuller information on the composition of each category, and a detailed discussion of implementation assessment, see Millie and Hough (2004).

40 Victim support programmes; improvements to management; improved inter-agency working.

accounted for over half of all planned interventions but proved harder to implement. One of the 20 sites failed to implement any interventions at all.

Impact appeared greater, and more sustained, when packages of interventions were implemented, aiming at both short- and long-term improvements. This, however, was dependent on the measures in the package complementing rather than conflicting with each other (see Millie and Hough, 2004, for a fuller account).

Project management

Table 4.1 demonstrates a clear gap between what projects intended to implement and what was achieved. The skills and attributes of project managers were found to be especially important in determining implementation success. In terms of generic skills, Hedderman and Williams (2001) have documented the attributes associated with the successful RBI manager. Dogged determination, resilience, flexibility, imagination, diplomacy and an ability to communicate and motivate were just some of the factors noted.

The specialist skills required by project managers could be wide-ranging and complex. However, the varied experiences of RBI project managers show that the task of defining the role of effective management, and the skills required, is not straightforward. In some instances, the manager position referred to someone charged with the day-to-day management of activity on the ground, but who was not responsible for the strategic direction of the project (a role which may have resided with a wider partnership steering group). In other cases the manager's role was largely strategic, with details of daily activity being left to key workers in participating agencies. There was no clear evidence that one structure was better than another, beyond the obvious point that any arrangement needed to suit the skills and experience of the key participants and needed to fit in with existing organisational and partnership structures.

However, projects were not always able to balance staff skills in this way to adequately meet project needs. This is illustrated in Table 4.2 which lists the ten principal skills rated by Phase II managers as being in short supply. These are skills where managers rated their own competence as 'weak', but where they also rated the availability of that same skill from elsewhere as poor[41]. Managers were only asked to rate those skills that they considered were required in the running of their projects.

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41 As managers were asked to make this assessment at the end of the Phase II funding period, their rating of skill availability was liable to be more optimistic than if the question had been asked at the outset.

Table 4.2:   *Principal skills rated by Phase II managers (ten most frequently rated)*

Rated Skill	Skill rated as 'weak', 'available but scarce' or 'not available' (%)
Managing public/voluntary involvement	26
Contracting for project services	21
Thinking through technical/design issues	20
Analysing crime problems using crime data	16
Monitoring progress of interventions	13
Managing project finances	13
Dealing with data protection/legal issues	12
Identifying crime problems and hot spots	12
Forecasting resource requirements	11
Evaluating impact of interventions	11

N = 76 (average response per item = 47)

Thus, although many project managers had some experience in contract development and management, and others were able to turn for support to finance departments in partner agencies, over 20 per cent of projects surveyed here clearly lacked the skills or support to undertake this role. These skills deficits align closely to the major project issues raised by interviewed project managers. But before considering these specific project challenges, we will first examine more generic issues relating to project staffing which may have impacted on the availability of relevant skills and project progress more generally.

Background of the project manager

The majority of the SDP sites evaluated by the Southern Consortium were managed by police officers. As Table 4.3 shows, in a sample of surveyed projects, the police continued to be the major source for RBI managers under Phase II.

Table 4.3:   Phase II project manager background

	No.	%
Police	16	50
Local Authority	6	19
Probation Service	2	6
Regeneration/Community project	4	13
Private Sector/Other	4	13
TOTAL	**32**	**100**
Missing	*12*	

As Crawford has previously noted (1997) police dominance in this context is unsurprising in view of the centrality of crime reduction to their professional role, and in view of the comparative flexibility of police personnel. Previous commentators (Tilley, 1993; Gilling, 1994) have questioned whether the management of projects by police officers might lead to them developing in a way that reflects ideological and organisational values prevalent in the police service. However, the findings from Phase II of the RBI largely support Sutton's (1996) earlier work on the 'Safer Cities' programme which found no evidence of bias in the general direction or orientation of projects resulting from police management. As we discuss later, there were, however, other common implications associated with the appointment of police managers.

Recruitment and employment status of managers

The general quality of project management could be affected by the recruitment process and the time which managers were able to dedicate to the role. Table 4.4 shows that under Phase II there was no dominant method of recruitment, though the majority of managers were appointed to perform the role on a full-time basis.

In many cases projects attracted highly motivated and skilled individuals to act as managers. Where managers were inexperienced they usually had to acquire the necessary skills as they went along as systematic training or induction packages for new managers were exceptionally rare.

Table 4.4:   Recruitment and employment status of Phase II project managers

How did you become a manager?	No.	%	Full or part-time manager?	No.	%
Volunteered	11	27	Full-time	25	39
Applied	14	34	Part-time	29	45
Co-opted/Tasked	13	32	In addition to main job	10	16
Other	3	7			
TOTAL	**41**	**100**	**TOTAL**	**64**	**100**
Missing	2		Missing	2	

Managers were more likely to be motivated and positive about their position if they saw the post as a natural continuation of their existing work. For example, in one case the opportunity to lead a Phase II project (Phase 2-42) suited the manager who had previously managed an SDP under Phase I.

Prior to the project, I had just finished another RBI and was ready for the next step. This project came at the right time. I saw it as an extension of the previous work – it was a joy and I succeeded in it and it was ideal for me.

Such enthusiasm was not shared by all. For example, the manager of Phase 2-46 applied for the post even though the advert 'didn't appeal'. The manager of Phase 3-1 project that he took the post on as a favour. However, evidence from Phase II shows no simple association between the method of recruitment and the satisfaction – or the performance – of an appointed manager. Rather, interviews with managers suggest that more influential factors were:

- whether the chosen recruitment method was implemented effectively and equitably; and
- a general shortage of suitable candidates.

Effective management also depended on managers being sufficiently available to perform the role. For example, both the Phase 1-18 and Phase 1-11 SDPs suffered because other demands on both project managers left them unable to devote enough time to the project. The Phase 1-18 project benefited towards the end from greater involvement from a sector inspector. In Phase 1-11, the lack of sufficient time meant the SDP received relatively little police support at a managerial level; instead, it was practically managed by the project's steering group. As members of this group were not aware of all the objectives defined in the original

proposal, some implementation was delayed – for example, attempts to boost the participation of residents from minority ethnic groups were only made 18 months after the SDP started.

As Table 4.4 shows, the majority of managers were either part-time, or undertook their role in addition to their normal full-time duties. Consistent with Laycock and Webb's (2003) findings from the Targeted Policing Initiative, RBI managers who fell under this last category often struggled to find sufficient time to devote to project work. However, regardless of employment status, most Phase II managers claimed to have undertaken other non-project work duties during time set aside for their project management role. Moreover, three-quarters of Phase II respondents rated such abstractions as problematic in terms of hindering the progress of their project.

A full-time manager may not be preferable for all projects. Project size, the complexity and number of interventions being delivered, and the degree and strength of support afforded managers all had a bearing on whether a full-time manager was necessary. However, it was evident from the RBI evaluations that the time required for management needed to be suitably ring-fenced and that project management should not simply be added on to existing full-time duties.

Most managers found their post rewarding in terms of their direct work with communities and with other agencies. However, a lack of formal recognition and reward within their own organisation was sometimes a source of discontent. As the manager of Phase 2-30 remarked:

Once the king is dead, you know it's the next king…Things are quickly forgotten about in the police service, one's achievements are quickly forgotten about.

Appropriate level of seniority

Effective management also depends on appropriate levels of seniority. When crises arise, it is important to react quickly as well as authoritatively. This has implications for deciding upon the ideal level of seniority of a project manager. Most Phase I projects evaluated by the Southern Consortium were police-led. Within the police, inspectors and superintendents are better placed to direct others. This can work well, as it did for Phase 1-17. Here, a superintendent shared the role of chair of the project's focus group with the head of the local authority housing department. Both had good local connections, and were in a position to drive the project forward as they were able to initiate direct action at the highest level.

Where it was not possible to ring-fence senior officers' time, they were more likely to be redeployed to other duties at short notice. Senior police detectives were particularly at risk of sudden re-deployment. In these circumstances, junior-ranking officers could be more appropriate candidates for ring-fencing, on condition that they possessed, or had the potential to develop, the required managerial skills.

Availability of senior support

If project management was to be undertaken by sergeants, PCs or similar, support from senior management was a definite advantage. A problem for some RBI projects was that senior support offered at the project bid stage did not materialise into practical support during implementation. Whilst some managers were, through skill and perseverance, able to compensate for a lack of senior support, for less experienced managers such support was more critical. For example, the management team of the Phase 1-9 SDP was quite capable of implementing a programme of situational crime prevention. However, other options were restricted by having little knowledge of intelligence-led operations or of partnership working. The project was run at a relatively low level in the police, by a sergeant and two constables, with minimal involvement from more senior officers. Their lack of senior support meant that any lessons learnt from this project were likely to be isolated within the small group of officers directly involved.

Senior support also provided projects with a better chance of obtaining and retaining resources in the face of competing organisational priorities. For instance, the Phase 2-30 project was intended to benefit from the part-time input of two police officers. However, the realisation of this commitment was largely left to the officers themselves who proved reluctant to get involved. In the absence of proactive senior support the project manager, a police officer himself, felt unable to resolve this situation.

The issue of managers' seniority may also have an effect on the speed with which partner agencies begin implementation. In Phase 1-19, some council officers showed an initial reluctance to deal directly with a police officer of 'only' sergeant rank. They seemed surprised that someone at this level would have full responsibility for such a project. A police officer of higher rank could have made the initial approach. This may have averted delays without diminishing the authority of the project leader.

Project partnership and steerage

The robustness and effectiveness of partnership and broader management arrangements was critical for project implementation. The engine of partnership working and of project management was invariably a steering group or committee.

Steering groups

Of the 20 Phase I SDPs evaluated by the Southern Consortium, 15 involved some degree of multi-agency work. This required clarity from the outset about who was to fulfil which role. To achieve this, many projects established a steering group. These can work at a number of levels. At a strategic level a group may be constituted by senior representatives of participating agencies whose role may typically encompass:

- Developing the aims and objectives of the project and agreeing how these will be met and by whom.
- Providing steerage through linking and harmonising the work of the project with other partnership and agency work in the locality.
- Providing strategic support in order to resolve disagreements which may arise at an inter- or intra-agency level.
- Supporting agency workers on the project and ring-fencing their time.
- Acting as the accountable body, supervising the progress of the project in meeting its targets and objectives and supervising its financial management.
- Strategically facilitating continuity and sustainability – for instance smoothing over staff departures and ensuring that replacement staff and handover arrangements are in place.

At a less senior level, steering groups typically develop more detailed local proposals and implementation procedures, timetables and budget projections, and provide a forum for steering the operational management of the project. Phase II projects possessed a broad variety of steering group or committee arrangements – although a quarter of surveyed projects had no committees of any type, the majority had at least one committee overseeing project work. The exact structure and remit of project committees varied widely, but there was no simple association between different structures and project performance. What seems to have been important is that the structures that were present were adequate for the type of project in question, and operated effectively. Steering group effectiveness depended upon a number of factors:

1. The nature of the project – Most projects set out to implement a raft of interventions. Seventeen out of the 20 Southern Consortium Phase I SDPs planned programmes of work that fell into at least three of the Home Office categories shown in Table 4.1. As a result, input was needed from a variety of agencies. Phase 1-3, for example, had a steering group which was attended by members of the police, the local authority and a range of local statutory and voluntary organisations. In addition, there was a subgroup that met monthly. In contrast, the Phase 1-9 project team consisted of only one sergeant and two constables. Nonetheless, all had considerable crime prevention experience and were used to working closely together. As much of the project was police-based, it was not felt necessary to set up a multi-agency steering group.

2. The appropriate division of responsibility for each aspect of the project – For the Phase 1-14 SDP, a steering group was formed as a forum for the discussion of progress with the SDP, and to formulate recommendations for future action. The police were keen to pass responsibility for some of the interventions to other agencies that they could easily work with. Both youth diversion and environmental elements of the project were managed by non-police agencies, as it was recognised that they had more relevant experience and skills at managing community projects. This also freed the SDP managers to concentrate on other aspects of the project.

3. Devising a membership based on local knowledge – The Crime and Disorder Act 1998 established partnerships between the police and other statutory agencies. Simply bolting SDP business on to other partnership meetings, however, proved to be insufficient. In Phase 1-1 the most serious hindrance to effective project management was probably the failure of the 'Burglary Analysis Group' (BAG) to act as a proper steering group. Part of the problem may have been the lack of clarity over the precise role of the BAG: it was expected to act as a steering group for the SDP, but it also had responsibility for burglary issues across the entire borough.

   Steering groups need to include individuals with access to detailed knowledge of the project area to ensure that work is tailored to the local context. The Phase 1-1 steering group, with its broader geographic remit, lacked sufficient knowledge of the project area. This led in turn to the implementation of a range of 'off the peg' interventions that were poorly adapted to the characteristics of the target area.

4. Members having the commitment and time to contribute – One precondition of successful steering groups is that members must be committed to their role, and have the time to attend the meetings with the frequency required by the project timetable (Liddle and Gelsthorpe, 1994a). This was a problem for the Phase 1-16 SDP. The local probation service – who were seen as central to this initiative – were not represented at a steering group meeting until six months after the start.

5. Members having the 'correct' level of authority – As with project management, care needed to be exercised when deciding the appropriate level of authority for those on a steering group. Too senior, and the individuals were potentially unable to undertake work directly. On the other hand, if group members had no direct resources available, and little likelihood of accessing any, implementation was likely to stall.

The planning and maintenance of partnership

The task of establishing an effective steering group is closely linked with the broader task of planning, establishing and maintaining a partnership to support and deliver a project more generally. The issues are covered in detail in Jacobson (2003a and 2003b). However, Jacobson's main findings regarding partnership working under Phase I of the RBI are:

● Projects were more effective at planning their work when they based this on a rigorous consultation with partners, both at an inter- and intra-agency level. This not only assisted projects in developing a better picture of the problem context on the ground, but also helped them establish whether project partners had the commitment and capacity to support proposed interventions.

● Maintaining effective partnership working on an ongoing basis depended on that work being monitored in a systematic and transparent manner. RBI projects often struggled to do this, with managers sometimes having no clear overview of how partners were pursuing their commitments.

● The accountability of partners was best secured when they were answerable to the project management group, and if there were clear lines of responsibility for project work *within* their own individual organisations. Partnership goals needed to be incorporated within the aims and objectives of participating agencies.

● In line with the findings of past research (for instance Crawford and Jones, 1995) Jacobson found that partnership work was often marked by strained relations and variable levels of commitment. Whilst these difficulties often had a variety of

causes (for example through a lack of ownership of project work), they were less likely to occur when projects ensured that partners were engaged openly from an early stage of the project planning process.

As discussed in Chapter Three, whilst most projects were committed to working in partnership in principle, many struggled to translate this into practice. Programme-level attempts to ensure that projects were partnership-based, such as demanding that project bids were countersigned by the relevant senior officers from the police and local authority, and channelling invitations to bid through CDRPs, did not always guarantee that projects were supported by effective partnerships.

Project staffing

Appropriate staff recruitment was often problematic under the RBI. In particular, many projects failed to anticipate or miscalculated the amount of administration required. Ostensibly simple physical interventions such as target hardening households often needed a large amount of administrative support if they were to operate effectively. A third of surveyed Phase II project managers noted that their project lacked sufficient administrative support.

In line with findings from earlier research (Read and Tilley, 2000), projects also suffered from a lack of ongoing analytical support. This was often necessary so that projects could update their initial problem-analysis, to assist them in developing some interventions further, or monitor the impact of their work. For example, the Phase 1-15 SDP crime prevention officer stated that there was little information available on the characteristics of burglars – specifically a breakdown of offending histories, where offenders lived or their patterns of drug use. While he was able to manually check for patterns, this was via a database that would only support fairly rudimentary analysis. There was no dedicated crime analyst on site, the nearest being at police headquarters. The analyst that was available was not able to provide the thorough crime examination required.

The suitable deployment of available staff was also important. In Phase 1-9, for example, the gating of alleyways could only proceed once owners had given written permission. Rather than employ police officers, the project used a Neighbourhood Watch volunteer and a number of Special Constables to track down owners and to send out follow-up letters to obtain agreement. As well as reducing costs, this allowed police officers to focus on other duties that made better use of their specialist skills. An example of less suitable task allocation was in the Phase 1-7 SDP. Here, the police took the lead in developing an

education package for parents. This was aimed at providing support and improving parenting skills, but doubts were voiced about the suitability of the police to take this forward, and the intervention was subsequently dropped.

The background, skills and outlook of workers on the ground can also affect how project work develops. In Phase 2-37 the manager had originally intended that a project-run 'home security' shop would have a significant community outreach and educational role. However, the staffing of the shop with a recently retired police detective led to a change of focus which centred on targeting handlers of stolen goods. The project manager felt that this change was due to this particular individual's background and skills which were ill-suited to the community-centred role that was originally envisaged.

The swift appointment of appropriate staff was often important, as it could subsequently take time for new staff to acclimatise to their role. The Phase 1-5 SDP demonstrates that this can be a particular issue if the post involved is newly created and involves working not just in partnership with another agency but on their premises – see Box 4.1.

Box 4.1:   *Acclimatisation of staff to a new role in unfamiliar surroundings*

The Phase 1-5 project aimed to identify offenders held in custody who funded a drug habit by committing residential burglary, with the objective of referring these individuals to drug treatment programmes. Custody Officers would refer appropriate arrestees to a drug worker funded by the city's Health Care Trust Addiction Services Team. The worker would then aim to refer the drug user to the Community Drug Team or another relevant agency or service.

The first two workers had no previous experience of this type of scheme. Their expectations proved to be out of line with the reality of the job. Initially the project was targeted solely at arrestees in custody for burglary and who lived and offended in a certain part of the city. As nurses, the workers found it hard to prioritise between individuals on this basis. They were also concerned about maintaining client confidentiality, particularly in communications with the police. There were additional discussions of Health and Safety issues over working conditions in the custody blocks.

Partly due to these difficulties, both workers left after six months. Their replacements had very different backgrounds. One was an ex-prison officer, one an occupational therapist and one was a psychology graduate. However, all three had some experience of working within the criminal justice system, and came to the job with open expectations.

Staff turnover and handover arrangements

Retaining staff for the duration of projects was often problematic. Turnover was often damaging, not only because key staff took skills and knowledge with them, but they also sometimes took goodwill and key working relationships with them as well. More damagingly, the departure of specialist staff could result in that programme of work ceasing altogether, as happened with a landlord accreditation scheme in Phase 2-39. Consistent with Liddle and Gelsthorpe's earlier findings (1994a), RBI projects frequently suffered from an over-reliance on key individuals.

Staff turnover seems to have been most marked among project managers. Half of the 20 Southern Consortium Phase I projects changed manager during the implementation period and one changed manager twice. Under Phase II, 21 per cent of surveyed managers (n=75) said that their projects had undergone at least one change of management.

As noted in prior research (see for instance Johnson *et al.*, 1993), police staff, in particular, were subject to being moved with little notice, typically when officers were transferred to other duties. For example, in the Phase 1-10 SDP, the sector inspector – the third project manager during the SDP's lifespan – remarked that '…the organisation we're in creates an environment where people start something and leave halfway through'. Though, as we have seen, such moves were sometimes indicative of the management role not being suitably supported and ring-fenced, they could also conversely derive from managers receiving recognition for good work. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some managers were promoted as a result of their success in submitting an RBI bid. Whilst this was beneficial for the individuals concerned, such promotions also acted as a potential threat to project delivery, as they invariably entailed a move to another area of policing.

A high turnover of senior staff also seems to have been a difficulty. As one Phase II manager observed:

We've been very fortunate that we've had the same DCI for the period of three years…I think I've gone through three chief superintendents in that time. Each one a new broom to sweep clean. Officers at the sector level have changed and we've got to build programmes that actually cater for these personnel changes, which is extremely, extremely difficult to do. (Phase 2-19)

Moreover, even if new senior staff were prepared to consider maintaining an involvement in the work of a project, it took managers effort and time to facilitate this transition. As the manager of Phase 2-48 complained, he grew tired of 'constantly having to resell and re-educate new partners about the project'.

Disruption caused by staff departures could be minimised if contingency arrangements were in place. However, only six out of 23 of surveyed Phase II project managers, who identified a need for handover arrangements, judged those arrangements to be sufficient. For example, when the replacement manager of Phase 3-2 came into post, several weeks after his predecessor's departure, it took him some time to physically find the project's relevant budgetary and financial information. In contrast, in Phase 2-56 good information systems were in place, and the outgoing and incoming staff overlapped by two weeks. Importantly, the departing individual remained available to provide advice and assistance on an ongoing consultancy basis.

Project development and change

Staff turnover was just one of a range of contingencies that projects typically had to cope with. Whilst projects needed to be well planned and include interventions that were systematically developed from a rigorous problem-analysis, it was equally important that they were able to adapt to any emerging contingencies. Revision stemmed from:

- a change in the capacities and priorities of participating organisations;
- a project's initial approach being ill-suited to the evolving problem context; or
- a project appearing ineffective in reducing crime.

For example, Phase 1-5 soon widened its referral criteria when it became clear that its arrest referral workers could not work effectively under the original system as it was not generating sufficient referrals. The result was a shift away from targeting those living or burgling in certain areas of the city, towards a project that aimed to refer into treatment all offenders throughout the city.

The need to amend interventions did not necessarily mean that the original problem-analysis was flawed, or that the interventions were poorly designed. Problem analyses are in themselves *interpretations* or *hypotheses*, which attempt to make sense of a given crime problem and the context within which that problem is located. In implementing their interventions, projects were in effect testing their interpretations of the nature of the crime problem and what was needed to tackle it. Inevitably, such testing could expose false assumptions. Consequently, successful projects did not view problem-analysis and intervention development as one-off tasks, but rather as ongoing processes which required monitoring and updating.

The report on the impact of the RBI in the Southern Consortium area (Millie and Hough, 2004), examines in more detail some of the issues and adaptations arising with particular types of intervention. Here, a number of more generic, inter-related issues are discussed which emerged as common factors in the development and adaptation of RBI project work. These are:

- project scope and dosage;
- forecasting demand for project services;
- community consultation and involvement; and
- narrowing focus: hotspots and disaggregated populations.

Project scope and dosage

In developing their projects, participants often faced hard decisions and trade-offs in terms of determining the appropriate scope and dosage of project activities. By *scope* the range of a project's activities is referred to whether in terms of the issues covered or the activities implemented. Project *dosage* is discussed in more detail in Millie and Hough (2004), but includes:

- 'coverage' (the spread of planned interventions – typically the proportion of a geographic area that a project intends to cover);
- 'intensity' (the numbers involved, for instance the number of households within a geographic area provided with security equipment); and
- 'duration' (the time period covered by an intervention).

Evidence would suggest that scope and dosage are important factors in delivering effective crime reduction. Millie and Hough associate greater levels of impact with projects that employed a mixed and complementary package of interventions. They also highlight the importance of achieving an appropriate balance between coverage, intensity and duration in determining the level of dosage.

Ideally, a project would seek a balance between dosage and scope which delivers the optimal burglary reduction performance. For instance, concentrating interventions in too small an area might restrict the scale of any crime reduction gains. Conversely, covering too large an area – or over-stretching the scope of a project – could limit the intensity or duration of work, and thus result in a 'diluted' crime reduction effort which in turn limits any gains. However, it would be over-simplistic to presuppose that an ideal balance can be specified between these factors which can be applied to any area or type of project. In

determining an appropriate balance, practitioners needed to consider contextual factors such as the particular characteristics of the problem being addressed and the resources available to address it.

In reality, RBI projects faced a range of constraints and evolving issues. For example, most project managers with a limited budget were well aware of the need to make difficult decisions about how they could make those funds 'work hardest'. If enough money was available to target harden 200 houses in an area of 5,000 properties, projects needed to consider whether the money would be better spent if it focused on a specific part of the estate, a particular type of property (e.g. houses of multiple occupation), or a certain group of people (e.g. previous victims). Many SDPs nevertheless struggled to make these decisions on an informed basis. Critical to making informed decisions were the inter-linked tasks of forecasting the likely demand for project work and consulting communities on proposed project activities.

Forecasting demand for project services

One problem raised by managers was that demand for services was less than anticipated. For instance, the manager of Phase 2-67 described how their target hardening service was under-utilised as fewer households within the target area were burgled than had been expected at the project planning stage. Other reasons for misjudging demand for services were a failure to consult adequately with communities, and managers finding it difficult to estimate likely demand on the basis of pre-existing crime trends. It would seem that errors in forecasting demand on this basis could emerge in a number of ways:

- Demand may be less due to over-estimates of projected crime, based on figures for the preceding year. Figures in this pre-project year were often at a peak in terms of short-term historic trends, and tended to fall back to a lower level during the first year of project implementation. RBI evaluators have put forward different explanations for this commonly observed pattern[42], but the practical implications were that some projects faced a shortfall of fresh victims to work with.
- In a successful project, levels of victimisation will fall at different points and not simply at the end of the schedule of work. Levels of demand should therefore be assessed post- as well as pre-implementation.
- Some projects, such as one large Phase III project, launched their work during periods of the year when seasonal patterns meant that levels of burglary were at a low point. This was problematic if a project was hoping to maximise its profile at the outset with a high rate of initial activity.

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42 For a fuller discussion of interpreting such statistical patterns see Ekblom and Pease (1995).

Shortcomings in estimating demand also stemmed from the likely market for stolen goods. Phase I projects had a supposed emphasis on innovation. This led to a number of projects such as Phase 1-11 and Phase 1-9 purchasing expensive surveillance or 'tracker' equipment with the aim of catching burglars in the act. The difficulty of operating this type of equipment effectively is that success depended on there being a realistic probability of offenders attempting to burgle the premises in which either surveillance or tracker equipment is installed. As such equipment was expensive, projects could only typically purchase a small quantity and could therefore only target a small handful of properties. Predicting the highest risk households also proved difficult. For instance, in Phase 1-9, the units were used in houses of recent burglary victims – in line with repeat victimisation theory which states that recent victims are likely to further victimised (Pease, 1998). However, no burglaries occurred during the 12 months following implementation at any of the locations at which the units were placed.

One Phase III project invested in four tracker units and placed them in portable electronic items. However, during the project only one of these items was stolen. By the time the police had located this item it had already been sold on, reportedly within 20 minutes of the offence (Erol *et al.*, in preparation) and no offenders were arrested. The effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of this sort of approach under the RBI was highly doubtful[43].

Where demand had been over-estimated some projects adapted their original implementation plans to boost take-up of services. For example, target hardening services were extended from victims to households that were *judged* to be vulnerable. Another adaptation, such as occurred in Phase 2-73 was to offer target hardening to victims on a back-dated basis (i.e. households victimised before the start of the scheme). Findings from the evaluation of SDP projects in the Midlands (Hope *et al.*, 2004) suggest that such adaptations could well be positive. They argue that in the face of insufficient demand from victims, adopting a broader approach to target hardening may be more effective.

Community consultation and involvement
Accurately estimating demand for project services required insight into the needs and wishes of the targeted community. The Home Office strongly encouraged community consultation as a necessary part of project development. This emphasis was an encouraging contrast to a lot of project work in the past which had been criticised for 'implanting' pre-packaged programmes into distinctive community contexts (Rosenbaum, 1987). Projects

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43 Whilst there may be other benefits that could justify its adoption (such as a long-term accumulation of intelligence, or having a deterrent value), these benefits were not evident in the projects studied here.

often found this both problematic and time-consuming. However, such consultation was often needed to ensure that proposed interventions were 'suitable' for the communities being targeted. For example, the Phase 1-8 SDP's plans for a high visibility policing operation were shelved after consultation showed that such an operation would be unlikely to have the support of the community due to historic mistrust of the police.

Consultation could, however, provide projects with the opportunity to convince a community that it would in fact benefit from receiving, or actively *engaging* with, a particular intervention. Encouraging communities to participate in projects could not only generate practical benefits in terms of an input of community time and effort, but their involvement could also enhance credibility. For example, the steering group for Phase 1-19 functioned less as a decision-making body than a forum where residents were able to actively participate in the implementation process. This 'worked' in that street representatives[44] contributed much time and effort by attending regular meetings and visiting target households with information on the scheme and advice on crime prevention.

One barrier to community consultation, as noted by the manager of Phase 2-26 was that it could be difficult for projects to identify and engage with 'a community' when in fact their project area covered a population that was highly heterogeneous, transient, and sometimes divided. Managers often found that there was no single route into a given group, although some projects successfully utilised a wide range of existing contacts and networks – often via 'snowballing' methods - to generate awareness and ownership. A commonly expressed desire of managers was to avoid simply consulting with the 'usual suspects' of community representatives.

Other projects favoured holding one-off community events, sometimes offering prizes to attract attendees. The project manager of Phase 2-73 provided a 'comments book' at their community event so that residents, who might not have had the confidence to speak in a public meeting, could express their concerns.

Moving from consultation to getting communities practically involved in the delivery of interventions generated a further set of challenges. Harnessing the momentum of pre-existing community groups was often productive. The manager of Phase 2-75 found that partner agencies were more likely to respond to residents' complaints and concerns if the residents in turn showed a willingness to take some ownership of the problem. For instance, the council agreed to lend additional resources to tackle the problem of litter on the basis of joint 'clear-up' days in which community members also participated.

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44 It is however always an issue how representative such individuals are.

However, projects often found that involving community volunteers in the delivery of interventions on a more routine basis was more problematic. Even if volunteers could be found who were willing to make a more sustained contribution, identifying volunteers who were *suitable* for work that sometimes included visiting vulnerable victims was more difficult. Even if suitable volunteers were found, other considerations could impede their use. For instance, the manager of Phase 2-69 described how her plans to use volunteers to deliver crime prevention advice to burglary victims had to be abandoned when they realised that organisational rules on lone working on this basis, and data protection concerns, made volunteers unsuitable for this work.

More generally, projects appear to have fared better in terms of securing more lasting resident involvement (whether that input was based around practical action or consultation) when they 'piggy-backed' their RBI project onto existing community groups which had a broader remit, such as area regeneration.

Involving different community groups in the development and implementation of a project can be beneficial. However, the Southern Consortium Phase I projects illustrated a tension between the aspiration to involve communities and the desire to implement tightly focused crime reduction projects. In some sites a balance was needed between remaining true to this original focus and taking into account the views of the local community. Phase 1-11 provides an example of how increased community involvement may in fact limit the impact of a project on burglary reduction (see Box 4.2).

Deviation from the original project plan was occasionally unavoidable, but sometimes welcomed by the local community. In Phase 1-10 it was always intended that the project would develop as local problems were identified through community consultation. The project aimed to 'engage, consult and empower the community to work in partnership in the reduction of crime and anti-social behaviour'. This meant that, while the proposal mentioned interventions it might employ, it did not specify which ones would definitely be followed. This process informed the resulting strategies and the precise target area.

The manager of Phase 2-49 saw his project as having a broader strategic role than reducing burglary, with a reduction in burglary creating a 'window of opportunity' for stimulating community capacity building. The manager of Phase 2-73 similarly saw the role of the project as contributing to a 'safer and better' estate. In developing the role of the project's community outreach worker, this broader focus was seen not only as desirable, but also practically necessary. This is because the outreach worker could not build any credible relationship with the community if he or she had to restrict their focus to burglary.

Consequently, the outreach worker dealt with a range of broader crime and disorder, social and environmental issues.

> **Box 4.2:   The effect of resident involvement on the focus of an SDP**
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> A main aim of the Phase 1-11 SDP was to encourage more community involvement in crime reduction. As a result, police/council representatives were joined on the project's monthly steering group meetings by up to 15 local residents. Initially, meetings focused on recent residential burglaries. However, they soon developed into a forum for residents to raise other issues they were concerned about, such as street lighting, traffic management and other environmental improvements. The council acted upon most of these issues. This in turn generated more interest among locals who increasingly felt that their views and opinions were listened to. The SDP management noticed these trends relatively early during the course of the project and, as a consequence, were content to see discussions diverge from the principal objective of burglary.
>
> However, insufficient attention was paid to the pattern of domestic burglary. For example, it was unclear whether most occurred during the hours of darkness. Thus the scope of new street lighting in terms of reducing burglary may have been limited. Similarly, a reduction in burglary was not a major motive for the traffic management scheme. Overall, the level of burglary dwelling was only marginally lower post-implementation than it was before.

Narrowing focus: hotspots and disaggregated populations

One way of deciding where to focus activity was by targeting burglary hotspots or sub-populations that were thought to be vulnerable and were spread across a larger area. Even where projects were able to get funding for larger areas, they still often chose to subsequently concentrate their resources on smaller hotspots, or sub-populations within these areas. Such approaches could have many advantages. For instance, the characteristics of some hotspots can lead to them becoming enduring crime 'generators' accounting for a large proportion of local crime (Sherman *et al.*, 1989). Concentrating project resources in these areas could be an efficient way of maximising impact.

However, a concentration of resources on hotspots or disaggregated populations could also generate resentment in the wider community. For instance concentration on hotspots could lead to one street being offered free security assistance whilst the next street was not. In an

attempt to combat this, Phase 2-49 sought to manage community expectations by producing two versions of its project information leaflet. One version, targeted at residents living in a crime hotspot, advertised the availability of free project services. The second version offered a more generic description of the project, giving general crime prevention messages and publicising the fact that improvements were happening in the area.

The identification of hotspots or disaggregated populations was also dependent on accurate information from the outset. For instance, one Phase III project which sought to tackle student victimisation, proceeded on the basis of robust problem-analysis which teased out many of the characteristics that made local students particularly vulnerable. For other projects, the required level of analytic support was often unavailable, or was not available beyond the initial stage of bid development. For example, both Phase 2-46 and Phase 2-39 were unable to update the original hotspot analyses, thus leaving them uncertain as to their work's continued effectiveness.

However, even in the case of the Phase III project focusing on students, where skilled analytical support was available, the task of updating information on their disaggregated populations of students was complicated by the characteristics of this population group. Producing a one-off analysis of the aggregate characteristics of hotspots or disaggregated populations to inform a project bid was one thing, but updating this information and putting it into practice can prove less straightforward. For instance, the project was able to identify the population and risk levels of its target 'community' at the project bid stage using council tax exemption records from the previous financial year. However, the highly transient nature of student households made it difficult to accurately update which households were student ones during the project, and the additional difficulty of actually making contact with residents meant that clarifying the status of such households was time-consuming[45].

Monitoring and evaluation

The availability of relevant, accurate, and timely information on the progress of implementation and on financial expenditure is critical to effective project implementation. The proper collection and use of such monitoring information is an essential component of effective practice (see Chapman and Hough, 1998), and was a prerequisite for projects funded under the RBI.

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45 This is unsurprising, for as Hakim (1993) and Ahmed and Sheldon (1993) have previously observed, data tends to be more incomplete and unreliable when one moves away from the traditional client groups and arbitrary administrative boundaries that form the operational focus of official agencies.

The Phase 1-5 illustrates the benefits robust monitoring can offer. The project used a database recommended by the Drug Prevention Advisory Service (DPAS), tailored for the needs of arrest referral schemes. This provided data for the evaluation and for completing the drug misuse database monitoring form for the Home Office.

Monitoring assists practitioners in deciding the adequate levels of resource for an intervention. It also enables evaluators to examine whether or not an intervention is having an impact. If not, monitoring will highlight the need to take stock of the intervention and adjust the project plan accordingly. However, practitioners in some sites appeared to regard monitoring as an optional extra. Where monitoring was carried out, it was often applied to implementation retrospectively rather than reflexively. Many projects also appeared ill-prepared for evaluation, and had not been adequately primed by programme designers as to what evaluation would involve. As a result, many Phase I projects evaluated by the Southern Consortium failed to keep adequate monitoring data. A more detailed discussion of these issues is provided in Jacobson (2003a). However, three distinct monitoring difficulties can be identified here:

1. A lack of monitoring coupled with poor implementation – In Phase 1-18, none of the three interventions that suffered from implementation failure were ever discussed at the monthly project meetings. Some residents and housing managers who attended these meetings were unaware that these interventions even existed as part of the project. Without such consideration, implementation failure was virtually inevitable.

2. A lack of monitoring following full implementation – Some projects achieved high levels of implementation, but were unable to supply sufficient details to determine the effect on burglary levels. For example, the Phase 1-15 SDP fully implemented a programme of target hardening. However, it was unclear to evaluators which individual properties upgraded their security. Therefore the question of whether the intervention reduced burglary remained untestable as no efforts were made to monitor the impact in relation to burglaries avoided.

3. Inconsistent monitoring following full implementation – the Phase 1-9 SDP involved a comprehensive programme of alley-gating. However, there was no routine procedure for checking that the gates were being kept locked as intended. Some residents left gates propped open with bricks to save them from having to unlock them each time. Contingency plans did not appear to have been made in the event of this happening.

There must be clarity about who will collate monitored information. Simple lines of communication must be established between those monitoring information and those who can act upon it. The desired results are a project that is evidence-based, and with a greater accountability of those responsible for the individual components within

Financial management and control

Many project managers also had difficulties in monitoring their projects' expenditure and in undertaking a financial management role more generally. The skills required to perform these tasks were clearly new for many managers. Issues included:

1. Retaining control of expenditure – Managers who either had insufficient control, or lines of communication with partner agencies or contractors, could find that expenditure was being made on their behalf without prior consent. For example, in Phase 2-71 once funding had been announced, partner agencies had started spending against the awarded grant without consultation with the manager. Similar problems could also arise with contractors if sufficiently robust and transparent systems for approving expenditure were not in place.

   The difficulties experienced by some organisations in 'housing' the system for spending and claiming RBI grant money into their existing financial systems could also lead to problems. Budgetary control was often complicated by the fact that it frequently rested with more than one partner agency or at different levels within a single agency.

2. Ensuring the timely submission of invoices – Project managers often found it difficult to get partner organisations or contractors to submit invoices on a routine and regular basis. For instance, larger contractors often begrudged spending time drawing up regular invoices for small bits of project work. However, irregular and sporadic invoice submissions weakened systems for financial control and accountability.

3. Exerting quality control over contractors – Limited purchasing power in turn restricted the financial control that managers could exert over contractors. This appears to have led in some circumstances to weak contracts being entered into that did not best serve the objectives of the project. For instance, in Phase 2-70 the contractor hired to install alley gates ceased to do so mid-way through the installation process in order to meet demand from a more established and more lucrative client.

Control could also be weakened by projects appointing contractors on the overly-simplistic criteria that they provided the cheapest quote. For example, Phase 2-73 had an objective to target harden victims to prevent repeat incidents. It has been recommended that, for maximum effect, such crime prevention measures need to be in place within 24 hours of victimisation (Bridgeman and Taylor-Brown, 1996). However, in this case, the contractor's desire to minimise costs led to a typical installation time of seven working days. This was due to the contractor waiting for enough victim referrals to build up so several 'jobs' could be completed on the same day, thus cutting down travel costs.

Many projects found it difficult to identify suitably skilled contractors. A lack of candidates could impede a project's ability to develop a robust contract and to exert suitable control. However, by working closely with partner agencies, additional candidates could be identified (see also Jacobson, 2003a).

4. Formulating and re-profiling budgets – Managers encountered difficulties in developing budget profiles which identified likely periods of peak resource demand. When circumstances changed and managers were forced to re-profile their project targets and budget, they often found it difficult to re-estimate figures appropriately. For instance, in Phase 2-57, target hardening work was scaled back when unit costs exceeded initial projections. However, the manager's adjustment to this proved over-cautious as the demand for target hardening proved less than expected, and the project subsequently underspent on its budget.

RBI managers faced the complex task of accurately profiling budgets on the basis of realistic estimates of demand. Change could not only affect levels of demand, but also the organisational capacity or costs associated with the delivery of interventions. Managers often had only a short period within which to make appropriate adjustments which again highlights the need for robust financial monitoring systems which can be adjusted in response to changes in circumstance.

Summary

There was a clear gap between what many RBI projects intended to implement and what was achieved. Several factors played a part in determining implementation success.

The task of defining the role of effective project management, and the skills required, was not straightforward. However, ring-fencing the time available for managers to concentrate on project delivery was important. Other aspects to consider when deciding upon project management were the seniority of the manager and the availability of senior support for the manager within the organisation. Promotion of managers in recognition of successful bid submission or project work was a common threat to delivery.

The effectiveness and robustness of partnership arrangements was often critical for project implementation. Partnership working was usually founded upon a steering group or committee. These worked best when responsibility for the various aspects of a project were divided appropriately; when members possessed detailed knowledge of the local area, coupled with sufficient authority, commitment and time to devote to implementation.

The recruitment of appropriate staff was often difficult under the RBI. Whilst the swift appointment of staff was important, it could take time for them to acclimatise to their role. Retaining staff for the duration of projects was also problematic, and handover arrangements were frequently inadequate. Additionally, many projects failed to anticipate the amount of administration that their project would require. Projects also often suffered from a lack of analytical support which negatively impacted on their ability to amend and update their problem-analysis and interventions during the implementation period.

It was important for projects to adapt to emerging contingencies. Successful adaptation should not be based on an unthinking reaction to events, but on an informed and reflexive review of progress. This required projects to monitor their progress systematically. However, many Phase I projects evaluated by the Southern Consortium failed to keep adequate monitoring data. Monitoring of financial expenditure was also an issue, with some managers experiencing difficulty in retaining control of expenditure, and securing value for money from contractors. Other common challenges included: forecasting demand for project services; undertaking community consultation and involvement; balancing project scope against intervention dosage; and effectively targeting hotspots and disaggregated populations.

The complexity of tasks and challenges confronting RBI project staff was often considerable. Many managers demonstrated determination and creativity in acquiring the skills required to overcome these challenges. Moreover, in terms of their own personal development, many found project work stimulating. However, a more timely and substantial investment in addressing shortages in skills and capacity would have reduced the extent of the implementation problems experienced.

5.   Conclusions and discussion

The Reducing Burglary Initiative was an ambitious multi-stage programme that successfully targeted and delivered approximately £25 million of investment to some of the most victimised and vulnerable communities in England and Wales. This investment in turn stimulated a significant amount of crime reduction activity, much of which undoubtedly contributed to large falls in burglary rates.

Whilst, many aspects of the programme's design were strong and it adapted well to changing circumstances, some aspects of the initiative were less successful. The initiative had four principal objectives:

- To sponsor and facilitate the development of innovative burglary reduction practices.
- To extend the evidence base of what works and what is cost-effective in burglary reduction, in particular through evaluating the effectiveness of innovative practices.
- To reduce burglary nationally by significantly increasing the volume of burglary reduction activity in the most victimised communities.
- To reduce burglary cost-effectively.

Sponsoring innovation

There was clear evidence of innovative practice under Phases II and III of the RBI. However, ambitions for the programme to significantly extend the existing crime reduction evidence base, were poorly served by a design that provided evaluated projects under Phase I with insufficient resource and time to support innovation. Piloting innovation could involve complex developmental processes, and embedding innovative practice in the work of existing agencies invariably took time.

The unrealistic ambitions invested in the Phase I 'Strategic Development Projects' (SDPs) in part arose because the capacity of SDP participants was over-estimated. The method adopted for selecting projects (competitive bidding) was ill-suited to securing suitable sites for piloting innovative crime reduction work. Proficiency at writing bids did not always translate into an ability for areas to successfully host an innovative programme of work.

In the event, many SDP projects struggled with the tasks associated with developing and implementing their projects, and faced with limited funds and time, projects unsurprisingly responded by focusing on delivering what was most practically achievable. Consequently, the more innovative proposals tended to be dropped as projects concentrated on implementing work that was tried and tested and simpler to manage.

Recommendation In sponsoring innovative practice, programme managers need to provide more support, resource, and time to pilot projects. Furthermore, in selecting such projects, programme managers should consider developing supplementary approaches – beyond a simple reliance on written bids – for assessing the capacity and motivation of participants in pilot sites.

A recent discussion paper published by the Strategy Unit (Mulgan and Albury, 2003) considers in more detail how policy might be better framed to support innovative practice.

Extending the evidence base

The evaluation model adopted under the RBI was one whereby the evaluators' relationship to projects was one of 'independence', with evaluators undertaking a 'hands off' assessment of projects rather than actively contributing to project development. In the absence of any other effective support for SDPs in developing their work, this approach left projects struggling to introduce innovation within the time and resource constraints of Phase I.

The subsequent and rapid 'drop off' of innovation among SDP projects left evaluators with the task of either assessing fairly conventional burglary reduction interventions or reporting on implementation difficulties.

Recommendation Adopting a 'hands off' model for evaluating innovative project work is often inappropriate. A more supportive 'action research' model, where evaluators – or linked consultants – work with projects to develop the project strategy and feed back evaluation findings as they emerge to project participants, is likely to be more productive.

Though the evaluations generated valuable lessons on implementation, their findings otherwise tended to confirm the effectiveness of well-established – and already well-evidenced – crime reduction practices. There was clearly some value in a national evaluation of existing practices, including how they fared in a wide variety of contexts. However, a number of design weaknesses limited the success of the evaluation in

delivering this outcome. These weaknesses principally derived from a failure to account sufficiently for the wider programme context within which the evaluation would take place. Moreover, the evaluation design failed to effectively adapt to subsequent programme developments.

Recommendation Evaluation and programme designs need to be developed together at the appropriate strategic level to ensure that the objectives, and processes for achieving those objectives, are compatible and consistent. Moreover, this joint planning needs to include a thorough risk identification and management process.

Projects were ill-prepared for the high level of evaluation demands that were placed upon them. Time spent responding to these demands added to existing project delays, and occasionally led to tensions between evaluation and project personnel. The effort required to resolve these tensions, and access evaluation data, in turn used up valuable research resources.

Particular problems were experienced in accessing crime data, with access frequently being blocked until data protection concerns were resolved. Some of these problems may have been unavoidable as agencies during this period were struggling to get to grips with the newly introduced provisions of the Data Protection Act 1998. However, at least some of these difficulties stemmed from the fact that crime data usually had to be provided from central police departments, yet commitments to supply crime data were invariably made by police personnel operating at a local level without consulting these central departments.

Recommendation Projects need to be properly informed about what to expect from external evaluations. Programme managers need to ensure that any commitments entered into as part of a project funding process are cleared with all the people who will be called upon to fulfil those commitments.

In spite of these problems in meeting the evaluation objectives set for the programme, the RBI substantially benefited over time from a productive relationship between the Home Office policy and research staff charged with the ongoing management of the initiative. This relationship led to significant improvements to the design and administration of the initiative under Phases II and III, most notably through adaptations to the criteria and process for bidding for grant funds. Available evidence emerging out of the RBI has also been responsively taken up to feed into policy initiatives developed after the RBI.

Reducing burglary through increasing burglary reduction activity

Funding criteria and bidding process

There were a number of shortcomings associated with the model for selecting and funding projects under Phase I. In particular, the limited and fixed amount of grant provided was insufficient to support the objectives outlined for these projects, and took no account of the widely different sizes of the burglary problem in the project areas.

The time provided for projects to develop and submit bids (little more than a month stretched across the Christmas period under Phase I) was also widely seen as insufficient. One aspect of this problem was that the method of distributing 'invitations to tender' for project funds, which involved predominantly sending invites to CDRPs, often resulted in invites not reaching the critical practitioners who were best placed to bid until it was too late.

Recommendation In sending out 'invitations to tender', government departments need to disseminate invitations more widely. In particular, they should not rely on sending invites to a single senior point within key organisations, but should proactively seek to reach key ground-level practitioners direct.

The removal of any bid deadline under Phase III – a response to complaints about the short deadline under the previous two phases – ironically led to an initial situation where hardly any bids were being submitted. It would appear therefore that deadlines may be required to stimulate submissions. However, the difficulties experienced under the RBI were not related to the presence of a deadline *per se*, but to unrealistic expectations around the readiness of projects to deliver a programme of work within a tight timeframe after a bid had been approved. This lack of realism partly related to initial shortcomings in the assessment of bids, and partly to a general lack of appreciation of the extent of development work typically required to turn a paper bid into effective action on the ground.

Recommendation There is always going to be a limit on the amount of resources that local practitioners are going to be prepared to invest on projects at the bidding stage. Programme managers should therefore consider building in an explicit development period into the programme timetable for projects *after* they have received grant funding.

The adoption of competitive bidding may also have weakened the realism of submitted bids. In order to secure funds, some applicants under-costed and over-promised. Though many projects were subsequently able to make up for any funding shortfall through levering in significant amounts of local resource, other projects clearly struggled to meet their original project objectives with the resources available.

Recommendation If similar bidding processes are run in the future, consideration should be given as to how applicants can be better encouraged to provide accurate and comprehensive estimates of likely project cost.

Competitive bidding may also have been an inappropriate funding model for best delivering on the objective to target money on those areas most in need. On the one hand, the funding criteria did ensure that funded projects were based around high crime areas or groups. Moreover once bids were made, few eligible areas were actually turned down for funding, and the programme was relatively effective at helping applicants develop sub-standard bids. On the other hand, it is possible that the competitive bidding framework – with its demands for areas to produce detailed and well-evidenced proposals – deterred applications from areas that had less experience or capacity to construct such bids. However, some limited work was done by Regional Government Offices and the Support Consultants to proactively identify high crime areas and encourage them to bid.

Recommendation Although some targeted support was provided, the model for targeting funding at high crime areas would have benefited from a greater emphasis on proactively identifying areas in need, and in particular through the greater provision of directed support to areas – who had limited experience in project work – to develop project proposals.

Recommendation Development seminars held mid-way through the Phase II and III project bidding processes, together with processes for providing feedback on bids, were beneficial in helping applicants improve the quality of final bids. These arrangements could be usefully replicated and refined in any future bid-based programmes.

Project support structures

Under Phase I of the RBI, limited consultancy support was available to projects whilst they were developing their bids. However, this support was not available during the critical project development stage after funding was approved. A significant improvement under Phase II was that dedicated consultancy support was available right through the project-funding period. However, the scale of the support provided necessitated the setting up of new teams within the external organisations contracted to undertake the work. Many of the support consultants had to be recruited after the contract had been awarded, and there was therefore insufficient time available to fully train up these new staff to provide a consistently high level of support from the outset.

In addition to enhancements in consultancy support available under Phase II, there also appear to have been improvements in the support provided through crime reduction teams in Regional Government Offices. However, there were ongoing problems experienced in the specification and co-ordination of consultant and Regional Government Office roles. This detracted from the effective targeting of support. Moreover, there were clear differences in the performance of different regional offices and different individual consultants. Some of the variations in performance between regional offices were differences in the capacity of these offices relative to local demand.

The Home Office needed to be more active in clearly specifying and co-ordinating the roles of the support consultants and the regional offices. It also needed to undertake more extensive performance management of both support consultants and regional offices. This needed to include an assessment – and an appropriate response to – regional office capacity relative to levels of regional demand.

Variations in the quality of support offered by support consultants was to some degree mitigated by the establishment of a knowledge management system within the support teams. This internal system was clearly enhanced in those areas where good and regular information exchange arrangements were in place with the regional offices. However, there was scope for further refinement, in particular:

Recommendation Project support could have been enhanced if more systematic and regular arrangements were in place to feed in emerging lessons from Phase I evaluations.

Project manager ratings for support consultants and regional offices in performing what managers considered to be their core roles, were reasonably positive. However, there were a number of skill areas for which support was frequently rated as insufficient or poor. These centred around assistance with procurement, financial management, consulting communities, developing exit strategies and organising publicity.

A more general criticism of both consultants and regional offices was that they were not proactive enough in helping projects identify and meet their training needs. Practitioners often felt that they were only able to identify their training needs 'after the event'. The majority of training needs related to skills required during the initial project development period, yet training was often only provided later.

Recommendation Programme managers should not wait for project staff to come forward with their own training needs. Rather, a more proactive process is required for identifying and

responding to training needs in a timely fashion. Managers should plan for peak training need to occur at the very early stages of a project's lifespan.

Staffing and management

Support structures were important under the RBI, because at the project level there was a general shortage of staff, and in particular a shortage of staff with certain skills, such as project management and analytic skills. Though many new staff clearly had excellent potential for development, they rarely received the sort of targeted and systematic training that would have realised this potential at the earliest opportunity. For most staff, skills had to be acquired 'on the job'. Within the context of the RBI, a more timely and substantial investment in addressing shortages in skills and capacity may have reduced the extent of the implementation problems experienced. However, it has to be recognised that such an investment ideally needs to take place within the context of more stable project staffing.

Recommendation Better processes were required for identifying those key project staff who needed to acquire new skills quickly to facilitate project delivery. In particular, a substantive and coherent training package should have been targeted at new project managers at the earliest opportunity. Current common skills shortages include project and financial management, procurement, evaluation and community consultation skills.

On a positive note, the range of skills acquired was often considerable, as project managers in particular had to master a complex variety of roles. This bodes well for future crime reduction work if such staff are suitably utilised, appreciated and retained. However, many RBI projects had difficulties in retaining staff, and staff turnover was frequently disruptive. Moreover, even where staff stayed in post, seconded staff were often subject to frequent and/or lengthy abstractions from post which adversely affected project progress.

Recommendation At the local level, there needs to be a firmer commitment to ring-fencing project staff time. This requires managers of seconded project staff making an informed commitment to supporting the project, and ensuring that staff contributions are adequately written into their formal job description.

Under Phase I in particular, the frequently low priority given by local agencies to resourcing RBI projects cannot be seen as surprising in view of the low level of central support provided relative to the Centre's expectations of what these projects would deliver. The size of the grants provided (£60,000 under Phase I) were not sufficient to realistically attract the level of local agency 'buy-in' and senior support expected by the Home Office.

Where staff were employed under formal contracts, the short-term nature of most of these contracts often made it difficult to attract and retain suitably qualified staff. Recruiting staff was a frequent source of project delay, and the secondment of staff proved a less problematic way to fill project posts in this context. Unsurprisingly, staff on short-term contracts also often left to take up new posts before their contracts expired. However, staff in permanent positions also frequently failed to see projects through. Ironically, it was often some of the most skilled and dynamic staff who departed, either on the basis of being promoted, or because senior managers wanted them to address the next emerging priority. Their departure, not only resulted in projects losing hard-won skills, but also often caused further delays, and sometimes the abandonment of project work.

Recommendation Locally, projects need to make appropriate handover arrangements to minimise the disruption caused by staff turnover. These should ideally include a period of overlap between departing and replacement staff.

Recommendation Programme and project managers also need to consider ways in which staff can be incentivised to stay the full course of the project. This partly requires a more delivery-centred approach to staff management where, instead of staff being rewarded for short-term goal-orientated success (such as the development of a successful bid or policy proposal), staff are expected to 'see through' a piece of work to its completion (i.e. to oversee the development and successful implementation of that bid or policy), and are valued and rewarded accordingly.

Recommendation Managers also need to think of creative ways to retain staff on short-term contracts. Possibilities may include providing grace periods or bonus payments to staff who stay out their contracts.

The importance of what might be termed a 'continuity of responsibility' was evident in those RBI projects that did enjoy consistent staffing. Moreover, one of the most positive features of the RBI as a whole, was that many of the regional and central Home Office staff responsible for the day-to-day management of the initiative, remained in post through the majority of the three years of the programme.

RBI projects were managed through a wide variety of structures. The majority had some form of committee involved in steering the work of the project, though it did not always prove necessary to have a committee directly involved in the practical management of project delivery.

Recommendation It is desirable for projects to be strategically linked – and accountable to – their local Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP). Whilst CDRPs were often too broad-focused to be the appropriate forum for managing the delivery of RBI project work, they were well-placed to provide more strategic steerage, to co-ordinate project work with wider local activities, and to facilitate project continuity and sustainability.

However, in practice, the extent to which RBI projects were appropriately linked into their local CDRP varied, with some projects having no formal ties with CDRPs. This appears to have been, in part, a reflection of the fact that there were marked variations in the level of development of CDRPs nationally at the time.

Project development and adaptation

Projects under the RBI faced a complex range of development tasks, many of which were unanticipated by both programme and project managers alike. Though the centre was responsive and flexible to the subsequent delays experienced by projects – extending in the majority of cases deadlines for spending grant monies – a significant number of projects were still unable to fully spend their grant.

A key quality that was associated with the successful development and implementation of project work was adaptability. Whilst it was important for projects to systematically develop a plan of work based on a rigorous problem-analysis, it was also important for projects to have the capability to adapt intelligently to changing circumstances. Moreover, problem analyses and proposed interventions can never be seen as definitive, and implementation difficulties may often reflect the fact that the analyses or chosen interventions are incorrect or out of date.

Recommendation Projects should not see problem analyses and implementation development as one-off processes, but as a part of a continuous cycle of refinement informed by appropriate project monitoring systems.

Projects that systematically monitored their work were more likely to be able to adapt appropriately to change. However, the extent and quality of project monitoring was highly variable and this in part reflected a lack of practitioner skills in this area. Under Phase II of the RBI this frequently hampered attempts to introduce a centrally designed, but locally tailored, monitoring system.

Recommendation There is a need to continue to develop monitoring skills among practitioners, so that project monitoring systems – even if there is some element of central prescription – are still essentially locally owned and tailored. Imposing central monitoring systems in the absence of such skills is not ideal, as their primary value is the contribution they can make to project management and development.

An aspect of project work that frequently required adaptation and refinement was the balance achieved between the scope and dosage of project activity. Achieving an effective balance was critical to success.

Recommendation Both central programme – and local project – managers need to consider the scope of their work relative to the resources available and the characteristics of the problem they are seeking to address. Diluting limited resources over too large an area, or over too broad a range of activities may restrict impact. Conversely, over-concentrating resources on a small area may be inefficient, or inappropriate if the 'dynamic' of the problem being addressed extends beyond this area.

Recommendation Project managers also need to consider the likely extent of impact associated with any investment of project resources. Under the RBI, projects sometimes over-concentrated their resources on activities that, logically, had a low probability of impacting on burglary even if they worked successfully. For instance, some projects focused on the use of covert tracker technology that – even if it worked at an optimum level – could not realistically be expected to lead to the identification of more than one or two burglary offenders.

RBI project activity was mostly dependent on the 'take-up' of services offered by projects, and on communities appropriately using the equipment or services that were provided. Consequently, a critical part of ensuring that a project successfully introduced a suitable level of activity, was accurately estimating the likely demand for project services. However, many projects struggled to do this well.

Poor forecasting was often due to projects exaggerating the likely number of crime victims during the project period by carrying forward the number of victims in the immediate pre-project year. A more substantial challenge was predicting the likely reaction of communities to planned project work. Many RBI projects went to great lengths to consult and engage with communities. Conversely, other projects ran into difficulties because they based their work on assumptions about what a particular community needed:

Recommendation Projects need to have suitable support to help them make more accurate estimates of demand and to help them consult and engage with communities. Project work is more likely to be successful if projects proceed not only on the basis of what communities need but on the basis of what communities *want.*

More generally, some of the areas in which RBI projects were located were characterised by highly fragmented and transient population groups. In such contexts, the challenges of working with 'communities' were considerable, particularly as such areas often consisted of multiple communities each with their own widely varying priorities and concerns.

There is a clear tension – and a need for a balance – between developing project work on the basis of a systematic problem-analysis, and developing it on the basis of community engagement. Whilst many RBI projects clearly benefited from broadening the scope of their work in response to community demands, others ran the risk of over-extending their scope and consequently losing a clear focus.

Engaging communities in delivering project work could be equally challenging. However, for some projects there were clear benefits, notably in terms of generating wider agency recognition and support for project work. Conversely, there were some notable limitations with this sort of engagement. It was, for instance, often difficult to use community volunteers to assist on crime-based project work, in particular to work directly with victims of crime.

Reducing burglary cost-effectively

RBI projects were notably effective at levering in significant amounts of local resources to supplement central grant funding. Phase I evaluators also concluded that some RBI projects were highly cost-effective, though only a minority of evaluated projects were actually judged to be so. These findings need to be treated with some caution, though, in view of the methodological difficulties experienced with the cost-effectiveness element of the evaluations. The varying cost-effectiveness of different types of project activities are considered in detail in Bowles and Pradiptyo (2004). However, the mixed picture – in terms of the cost-effectiveness of evaluated projects – presented by these authors is perhaps unsurprising in view of many of the implementation problems that have been described here. There are, moreover, a number of programme-level and process issues that are likely to have had a bearing on cost-effectiveness.

One key factor was the effectiveness of the programme in delivering an appropriate level of resources to projects. As we have seen, projects were more likely to be successful if local

managers achieved an effective balance between the scope and dosage of their activities. The central determination of grants also had a bearing here, as projects were obviously more likely to be effective if the centre allocated them a suitably sized grant, proportionate to the scale of their problem and to their existing organisational capacity. In this respect, the adoption of a more flexible funding formula under Phase II of the programme, with grants being based on recent levels of burglary, was a welcome advance.

This flexibility could have been profitably refined further. The extent to which particular project's were ready to take forward a programme of work varied significantly, yet the programme funding conditions took no account of this.

Recommendation Programme managers, in establishing the conditions of funding for individual projects (including the funding timetable), should account for the pre-existing capacity of local project areas. In particular, they should carefully weight the particularities of the problem-context and the level of pre-existing capacity to deliver project work.

Recommendation Any funding process should seek to actively secure the integration of project proposals into existing local partnerships/work programmes as far as is practical.

The cost-effectiveness of projects was also impeded by a widespread lack of financial management, procurement and contract development skills amongst the pool of RBI practitioners. In particular, project managers often struggled to negotiate complex procurement processes, and develop suitably tight contracts, to secure sufficient value for money in the delivery of project services. These problems were less severe where projects were well supported by local agencies, who could lend both expertise and also often a ready supply of recommended contractors.

Aspects of the central programme design also potentially undermined the cost-effectiveness of projects when it came to the procurement of services. Short project timetables limited the extent that projects could 'shop around' for contractors or spend time on developing more efficient contracts. Moreover, the limited and short-term purchasing-power of projects may have diminished their control over, and the level of services provided by, contractors.

Recommendation Project managers require a greater level of support when it comes to financially managing their projects. This can in part be provided by a greater central investment in providing consultancy support and training, but also through local agencies lending both expertise and access to contractors of proven quality.

Another factor – related to the design of the programme from Phase II onwards – which may, ironically, have limited cost-effectiveness in some cases, was the flexible approach taken to defining geographic or disaggregated populations. Whist the ability to tightly tailor project funding to the most victimised groups may generally have been beneficial in cost-effectiveness terms, this flexibility also allowed a limited sub-set of very small projects to be funded. It would appear that these projects may have been inefficient in terms of economies of scale, as they often required a similar level of management as much larger projects. However, it would be simplistic to recommend that such projects should not be funded, as there are clearly other considerations which may recommend providing support.

Any ineffectiveness of scale attendant on small RBI projects may of course have been evened out over time if any successful project impacts were sustained or if the project stimulated a long-term improvement in local organisational capacity to undertake crime reduction work. This leads to the wider issue of whether, more generally under the RBI, crime reduction impacts and/or organisational capacity were sustained. This issue has a critical bearing on cost-effectiveness estimates which have to date been based on fairly untested assumptions regarding the likely longevity of project impacts. This area requires further research, but there are a number of programme features that one might evidently wish to revise to maximise the likelihood that sustainability is achieved.

In particular, project managers frequently cited short project timetables as a barrier to achieving long-term change in project areas, with some managers feeling that there was insufficient time to generate sufficient community awareness and ownership of project work to achieve some sort of self-supporting continuity beyond the period of grant funding.

Recommendation Programme managers should seek to facilitate sustainability through ensuring that there is enough time in the programme for project development and implementation. Although ideally, projects should be funded for longer periods, a quicker process for confirming project funding would have provided RBI practitioners with valuable extra time for planning. Managers should also ensure that project work is tied in to pre-existing and complementary partnership structures and programmes of work.

Recommendation Projects felt weakly supported when it came to building in sustainability into their work – suggesting that more assistance is provided in future with the development of project exit strategies.

Discussion

The RBI, and the CRP more widely, was intended to be an evidence-based policy programme. This presupposed not only that the design of the RBI would be informed by pre-existing evidence, but also that the Initiative would be refined as it went along through the application of emerging evaluation lessons.

In terms of utilising pre-existing evidence, the RBI overall does appear to have made good use of evidence on both 'what works' in crime reduction and, importantly, on the sort of local tailoring required to translate such approaches into effective action in specific contexts. Furthermore, although full formal evaluation lessons were not available during the Initiative's lifespan to help refine subsequent funding rounds, as had been hoped, what lessons were available were utilised effectively.

Although, good use seems to have been made of 'what works' at the local level in crime reduction, less use appears to have been made of pre-existing evidence on what works *at the centre* – in terms of creating funding and support structures that best facilitate local activity. Moreover, prior evidence highlighting shortcomings in local skills and capacities to support crime reduction activity also appears to have been under-utilised (see also Bullock and Tilley, 2003a). This failure to take full cognisance of available evidence suggests that the original design of the RBI was not fully informed by an appropriately robust risk assessment process.

Again, these issues take us beyond the direct management of the RBI, to the wider design and management of the CRP. Here, the CRP review findings (Homel *et al.*, in press, a; b) tie in well with the findings presented in this report, providing insights into wider programme design and management issues that impinged on the RBI. In particular the review highlights that insufficient resource was invested in the programme delivery process. Insufficient technical and strategic support to facilitate local delivery existed against a backdrop of staff shortages and skills deficits. In keeping with the findings here, the review also points to a general lack of project management, financial and procurement skills amongst practitioners.

Weaknesses in identifying these challenges to delivery, were accompanied by a lack of realism about what could be practically delivered within the time and resource constraints set by the programme. In particular, projections for activity and spend in the first year of the CRP took insufficient account of the time required to establish effective delivery structures and processes, leading to a widespread (and in the context of the RBI often unwarranted) impression that projects were struggling to deliver. In short, more time and resources needed to be invested in local, regional and central delivery structures.

The CRP review also highlights the need for more effective knowledge management under the CRP. It argues that the research elements of the programme were undermined by a shift in emphasis, from the CRP being primarily a research-based programme, towards it being more narrowly concerned with meeting Public Service Agreement targets for achieving reductions in key target crimes. Under the RBI, the review claims that this shift was evident in the rapid launch of Phase II less than a year after the launch of Phase I, and long before Phase I evaluation lessons were available to substantively inform (as was originally conceived) the development of Phase II. However, this shift in emphasis can hardly be seen as unreasonable, and the original conception for more substantive national burglary reduction activity to be rolled out only when formal evaluation lessons were available seems ill-conceived and unrealistic in retrospect, particularly as it was clear from the outset that all RBI 'Phases' had to be completed within the three-year CRP timetable.

In spite of these limitations, it is appropriate to finish on a positive note. Strengths in the management of the Initiative, (in particular benefits derived from the continuity of its management within the Home Office) combined with the determination and energy of a large number of practitioners, mitigated many of the limitations associated with the design of the RBI and the wider CRP. These positive characteristics in turn helped deliver substantial levels of effective burglary reduction activity.

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