

POLICING VULNERABILITY? THE IMPACTS AND IMPLICATIONS OF NO COLD CALLING ZONES IN ANGUS

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INTRODUCTION

Doorstep crime is an increasingly prevalent issue within neighbourhoods around the UK (Doorstoppers, 2011). There were 12,612 cases of distraction theft in 2005, but crimes committed by cold callers are hard to quantify because nine out of ten go unreported due to the intimidation and embarrassment associated with being the victim of a doorstep fraud (Doorstoppers, 2011).

Angus Council introduced No Cold Calling Zones (henceforth NCCZs) in 2007 as a way of combating increasing numbers of cold callers. These zones aim to give power to the residents that live within them to say 'no' to cold callers and report suspicious persons. However, this initiative raises questions about the broader changes to perceptions of vulnerability and the governance of crime. Two studies were undertaken; one which used a qualitative methodology and investigated the impact and implications of NCCZs on two communities in Angus, while the second was a quantitative study undertaken across the majority of NCCZ's in Angus.

A number of interesting findings are explored in this report:

- The spatially ambiguous nature of NCCZs with different agencies and communities understanding 'cold calling' in different ways;
- The ambiguity surrounding whether charities could/should cold call or not;¹
- The qualitative study found that although NCCZs appear to reduce the vulnerability experienced by residents, they also increased the anxiety ('fear of crime') of some.² Comparatively, the quantitative study illustrated that NCCZs had greatly reduced fear of crime amongst the majority of residents.³
- NCCZs did appear to increase the empowerment felt by those living within them;
- NCCZs helped increase the multiagency interaction between the police, trading standards and other allied health and social services professionals.

METHODOLOGY

Four focus groups were carried out in two locations in Angus. These had a total of 24 participants, ranging in numbers between three and 11 participants per focus group. Five semi-structured interviews were carried out with professionals involved with the instigation of NCCZs, and an E-mail interview was carried out with the Direct Selling Association.

The quantitative study yielded 762 responses from 3525 questionnaires, a 21.6% response rate, and covered 1912 households across 73 of 95 NCCZ's in Angus. Questionnaires were distributed by neighbourhood coordinators and posted back in prepaid envelopes.

¹ A pilot survey found that whilst 99% of residents sampled wanted to control who called at their door, 50% indicated they wanted to allow charities to be able to call

² This phenomenon is explored extensively in the criminal justice literature. See for instance Hinkle and Weisburd (2008) and Scarborough *et al.* (2010).

³ The proportion of respondents who were very or fairly worried by crime at home before NCCZs were introduced was 31.2%, but this fell to 13.1% after their introduction.

KEY FINDINGS

Understandings of cold calling varies There were clear variations between different police officers in their understanding of cold calling as a problem. The police officers more closely involved with the instigation of NCCZs interpreted cold calling as a far greater problem than the newer community police officer, which is perhaps a reflection of individual officer autonomy, with different police officers emphasising different community engagement projects. This highlights the geography of crime control and emphasises the impact 'the individual' can have on the success of a scheme.

There was some confusion amongst focus group participants with regards to what exactly a NCCZ is, with some believing the term could only be applied when an offence has been committed, while others think it should apply to anyone who comes uninvited to the door. There was considerable support for doorstep signage.⁴

NCCZs have been successful at deterring cold callers Participants, both of the interviews and focus groups, unanimously believed that NCCZs are an effective response to cold calling, with residents talking about the success of NCCZs as the reduction in the feeling of vulnerability and an increased feeling of safety.⁵

Confusion about NCCZs and Charities Although most residents were clear that they did not want companies cold calling at their house, they were split over whether charities should be allowed to cold call or not. Some communities allow charities to cold call while others do not. All participants involved with the enforcement of NCCZs noted the confusion over charities cold calling – something which trading standards believe they solved by issuing two separate signs, depending on whether residents wanted charities to cold call or not. However, during fieldwork it was clear that residents did not understand the difference in signage. Thus, a confusing picture emerges in relation to NCCZ and charities, with residents unclear of whether charities are allowed to doorstep collect or not.⁶

NCCZs – Protecting the Vulnerable? A key aim of introducing NCCZs in Angus was to enhance quality of life of its citizens by reducing the fear of crime amongst the vulnerable. Participants in both Brechin and Arbroath are positive about NCCZs, believing they have discouraged many cold callers from operating and have therefore reduced the feeling of vulnerability. In contrast, however, a policewoman noted that NCCZs enhance the fear of crime in low crime communities, creating unnecessary moral panic. This may have been geographically restricted to her beat however, as the wider quantitative study did not corroborate this, reflecting the importance of the individual practitioner and perhaps highlighting training deficiencies. NCCZs are therefore an apparent contradiction, at once both reducing the vulnerability of residents while increasing the fear of crime among some.⁷

NCCZs and Empowerment Participants in this neighbourhood believe that NCCZ have given them the power to say 'no' to cold callers. By granting a particular area the status of a NCCZ, the police are giving residents within that area a greater legitimacy to prevent cold calling. In addition, it appears as if the NCCZ signage has been significant in giving residents the strength to back up the fact that their community has this new status. Giving the community the capacity to cope is therefore an important aspect of the police's work in relation to NCCZ.

NCCZs and Multiagency Working Overall, NCCZs in Angus have provided opportunities for enforcement agencies to forge relationships between each other as well as with other healthcare and community professionals. It is advantageous for an organisation like Trading Standards to prove their broader multiagency usability and NCCZs have helped increase the awareness of the role of trading standards amongst the public. However, this project has uncovered some issues in relation to a lack of compatibility between trading standards and the police when it comes to having a clear protocol for reporting cold calling incidence. There is no official data sharing protocol between trading standards and the police (one has been drafted but not implemented), thus no one is sure exactly how many incidents of cold calling there have been.

⁴ The quantitative survey found 80% wanted these signs, indicating that residents wanted their right to privacy to be honoured

⁵ 82.3% reported a decrease in unwanted doorstep callers

⁶ Since this project concluded, the Professional Fundraising Regulatory Association (PFRA) are now acknowledging the existence of NCCZs.

⁷ Since the project, additional seminars and information dissemination to residents was undertaken in response to the findings.

The Impact of NCCZs on Business The primary aim of NCCZs is to stop unwanted cold calling and to cut the associated doorstep crime. However, there is a risk that genuine businesses that utilise cold calling in their attempt to drive sales will suffer because of the introduction of NCCZs. Despite not being the target of NCCZs, the Direct Selling Association (DSA), which represents companies who utilise doorstep selling, are on the whole not supportive of NCCZs. They believe they are unenforceable and believe that the businesses they represent should be able to conduct fair, non-pressurised selling on the doorstep when other businesses already sell in the home (e.g. through the internet)⁸.

CONCLUSIONS

A key theme to emerge from this research is the spatially ambiguous nature of NCCZs in Angus. In order to tackle cold calling, it is important that those involved have a common understanding of what the problem entails. Indeed, having such divergent understanding of what cold calling is from within the same police force is problematic. In terms of NCCZs in Angus, it is important that community officers who have beat areas which encapsulate NCCZs, interpret the issue of cold calling in a similar manner, so that residents in these places get coherent messages with regards of ways to deal with the problem. Without doing this, residents begin to 'adapt' NCCZs and the scheme begins to change. A lack of consistency is detrimental to all those involved – the residents, enforcement agencies, businesses and charities.

In terms of charities cold calling, it would be better if, after consulting with the various communities, stakeholders and charities within Angus, a decision was made at a local authority level as to whether charities are allowed to undertake doorstep collections in Angus. This would remove part of the ambiguity involved with NCCZs, helping to make these areas more regionally uniform and reduce resident vulnerability in the process.

A key aim of NCCZs is to reduce the vulnerability of people living in them by empowering residents to govern crime control in their area. The qualitative study suggested that despite the majority of participants feeling less vulnerable because of a reduction in cold callers, there has been an increase in the fear of crime amongst some residents since NCCZs were introduced. This was not a finding in the quantitative study where the overall proportion who expressed worry about crime both at home and in their street decreased.⁹ This apparent contradiction, with the reduction of vulnerability on one hand and the increased fear of crime for some on the other, underlines, not only the potentially ambiguous nature of NCCZs, but also some critiques of the wider community safety agenda (Hinkle and Weisburd, 2008). In addition, this work has to be facilitated by commitment nationally from Trading Standards and the Association of Chief Police Officers in Scotland (ACPOS) to facilitate such collaborative working (see final recommendation).

Multiagency working lies at the heart of much of the recent changes to policing and it is therefore important that trading standards and the police liaise with each other in order to standardise the way that cold calling incidences are reported between the two organisations. In order to address this and the points made above, there are a number of recommendations to emerge from this project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

A joint partnership-training day and dissemination of findings This should involve the community police officers, the allied health professionals, trading standards and representatives from the Direct Selling Association, the public fundraising regulatory authority (who regulate charities) and residents from NCCZs. The workshop should aim to address the ambiguous nature of NCCZs by clarifying the position of NCCZs and charities cold calling; the balance between protecting the vulnerable and increasing fear of crime; understanding how different people assess cold calling; improving multi-agency working and coming up with a workable solution for the companies represented by the Direct Selling Association.

⁸ In April 2010, the Energy retailers association (ERA) agreed to recognise NCCZs and doorstep signage. The quantitative study from Angus formed part of the Trading Standards Institute (TSI) evidence in support of this legislation.

⁹ Those very or fairly worried by crime in their street before NCCZs were introduced was 27.6%, which fell to 17.4% after NCCZs were introduced.

Production of a NCCZ ‘good practice guide’ addressing the key points from training day Based on the outcomes from the partnership-training day, a ‘good practice guide’ should help remove some of the ambiguity that currently surrounds NCCZs. This can be issued to all residents of NCCZs and partnership agencies.

Standardising trading standards and police reporting of cold calling The current reporting of cold calling is haphazard, with some people going to the police while others go to trading standards. These two organisations do not have a standardised route of intelligence sharing for cold callers, which leads to under reporting in some incidences and double counting in others.

Engaging with Business community Although this has begun to happen with the ‘big 6’ energy companies, it is important that the enforcement agencies liaise with local and direct selling businesses about the implications NCCZs will have. It is only by including them in the planning stages that they will begin to understand the rationale behind the schemes.

Develop ways to introduce NCCZs into communities that are not Neighbourhood Watches Some neighbourhoods are particularly hard to reach and unwilling to engage with schemes such as NCCZs. These are often the communities which are considered security-poor, high in crime and with a transient population and would therefore benefit most from the introduction of NCCZ. It would therefore be useful to examine ways of engaging neighbourhoods which are not Neighbourhood Watches in the NCCZ scheme.

Start logging detailed crime data It would be useful to start recording detailed crime information on two NCCZ case study areas and two non-NCCZ case study areas in Angus. By logging police call outs and recording incidences of cold calling across these communities over a period of months, the success of NCCZs could be measured statistically.

National facilitation of Collaborative working Data recording and intelligence sharing have been a matter of consultation for over 4 years between SCOTSS (Society of Chief Trading Standards Officers in Scotland) and ACPOS with no practical outcome to date. These protocols can only be agreed at Scottish national level and the lack of progress illustrates how local innovation can be stunted by bureaucracy, information technology and multiple priorities and agendas. Progress locally in multi-agency collaborative working can only come to fruition where this is facilitated by collaborative working at a national level, establishing a framework of interaction between agencies. Additional hurdles, such as the lack of intelligence officers for Trading Standards within Scotland produces unnecessary additional hurdles - in this case holding back and damaging a promising initiative.

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