

Gosport Taxi Marshal Scheme Evaluation February 2012



Introduction

Nationally –

Taxi Marshals are in extensive use across the country and can have a valuable contribution towards tackling violence and disorder associated with the Night Time Economy (NTE) in town centres by managing late night licensed taxi ranks. First recorded in use as part of the Safer Bristol Partnership's NightSafe initiative launched in 2003, Taxi Marshals are high visibility security staff deployed at targeted late night taxi ranks to increase safety, manage queues and maintain order.

Guidance from the Home Office Crime Reduction Toolkit and the Government Office of the South East suggests that Taxi Marshal's can be recognised good practice as an effective tool in tackling the NTE. Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) nationally that have employed Taxi Marshal's as part of their NTE plan have recorded improvements in the public's perception of their local area which may be in part due to the visible presence of control measures that have been implemented to deal with drunk and rowdy behaviour.

Locally –

Locally they have also been used successfully in Portsmouth from 2007. Gosport Borough Council (GBC) on behalf of the CSP commissioned T-Class Security to operate a Taxi Marshal scheme within Gosport town centre during the summer and Christmas periods of 2010. Due to the success of the scheme throughout 2010 it was agreed by the Community Safety Partnership that the scheme would operate again during the summer period and Christmas periods in 2011.

The aim of the Taxi Marshal scheme in Gosport is to assist in preventing crime and disorder within the town centre, and to improve the public's safety and the perception of safety within Gosport town centre.

Contextual Information

Within Gosport there have historically been high levels of violent crime linked to the NTE predominantly within the High Street. Whilst the level of offences has reduced considerably over the past three years due to the implementation of a number of tactical options including a well supported Pub Watch scheme, the robust use of licensing legislation and Section 27 by the Police and the implementation of the Street Pastors, there are still approximately two violent offences per month taking place at or near the Taxi rank in Mumby Road.¹

The number of violent incidents is not as high as the number of incidents that take place within the High Street; however the overall benefits that may be gained from the implementation of Taxi Marshals in Gosport cannot be ignored. These may go beyond potentially preventing violent crime, but may also include improved public perception of Gosport as a safe place to enjoy an evening out and there are additional benefits to be gained by their presence at the Ferry Garden location, as the Police are then more readily available during these times to focus their resources in the High Street outside the busier licensed premises.

Scheme Overview

Based on the peak times and days identified for violent crime and to coincide with the closing times of local licensed premises, two Security Industry Authority (SIA) accredited supervisors (Taxi Marshals) supplied by T-Class Security operated on Friday and Saturday's nights between 22:30 and 03:30 hours at and around the Ferry Gardens Taxi rank in Gosport.

In 2011 the summer scheme took place from Friday 29th July commencing at 22:30 hours until Sunday 4th September 2011 ceasing at 03:30 hours. This period covered the busier summer holidays with national and local statistics supporting that the peak months for violent crime are from May through to August. The scheme once again took place from Friday 2nd December at 22:30 hours until Sunday 1st January at 03:30 hours to cover the expected increase in people socialising during the Christmas and New Year periods.

The Taxi Marshals have continued to use the CCTV control room at Huhtamaki as a base to store their radios and jackets. This has meant that they are able to check in with the CCTV controllers at the beginning and end of each shift, enhancing channels of communication and the involvement of CCTV in to the scheme.

¹ Taxi Marshall Assessment February 2010

Cost of the Scheme

T-Class Security charged an hourly rate of £14 for each of the two Marshals in operation for the five hour period during the nights the scheme operated. The overall cost of providing the scheme over the summer holiday period in 2011 was £2226 + VAT. The overall cost of providing the scheme over the Christmas and New Year period in 2011 was £1485 + VAT. Therefore the total cost of running the Taxi Marshal scheme in Gosport throughout 2011 was £3711 + VAT.

To put the cost of this scheme into perspective using the Home Office's own calculations it is estimated that one violent crime cost approximately £11,848 in 2008. That is made up of anticipation costs, such as spending on security and insurance; the consequences, such as health care, victim support and loss of earnings; and the costs of responding to the crime such as policing and the criminal justice system.

Community Views

Surveys were carried out before and after both the Summer and Christmas schemes in by Hampshire County Council's (HCC's) Accredited Community Support Officers (ACSOs).

During the summer the pre-survey took place on Friday 29th July 2011 between 19:00 – 21:00 hours, the second on Friday 9th September between 19:30 – 21:30 hours. In total, 110 people responded to the questions about the scheme, 60 in the pre-survey and 50 in the post-survey.

Key Survey findings:

- ❖ Of the total people surveyed 43% were male 51% were female
- ❖ 69% were aged 19 to 45 years
- ❖ 67% of respondents were socialising, 29% were living or working nearby, and just 1% were taxi drivers
- ❖ The pre-survey indicated that 33% of those surveyed felt very or quite safe.
- ❖ The post-survey saw this increase to 54% of respondents felt very or quite safe
- ❖ 40% of those surveyed after the scheme had been operating reported that they had noticed the 'Safety Marshals' and that they felt safer as a result.

Survey Comments:

- ❖ 'It's a good idea'
- ❖ 'Very happy for them being here'
- ❖ 'I feel safe when the Marshals are there, which is not very often'
- ❖ 'Fantastic idea'
- ❖ 'Did not know we had them'
- ❖ 'Good scheme'

For the Christmas period the pre-survey took place on Friday 25th November 2011 between 19:00 – 21:00 hours, with the post-survey taking place on Friday 13th January 2012 between 19:00 – 21:00 hours. In total, 99 people responded to the questions about the scheme, 49 in the pre-survey and 50 in the post-survey.

Key Survey findings:

- ❖ Of the total people surveyed 17% were male 83% were female
- ❖ 62% were aged 19 to 45 years
- ❖ 85% of respondents were socialising, 8% were living nearby, and 4% worked nearby
- ❖ The pre-survey indicated that 47% of those surveyed felt very or quite safe.
- ❖ The post-survey saw this decrease slightly to 44% of respondents felt very or quite safe
- ❖ Also just 12% of those surveyed after the scheme had been operating reported that they had noticed the 'Safety Marshals' and that they felt safer as a result.

Licensed Driver Feedback

Feedback was sought from the Licensed Taxi Drivers who use the Ferry Gardens rank in Gosport as it was felt that they would be a useful source on the effectiveness of the Taxi Marshals ability to prevent crime and disorder at the rank. A letter was sent from the Licensing team at GBC in January 2012 asking them three questions about the scheme and if they had any additional comments. Forty-one Licensed Taxi Drivers responded to the letter and the results are as follows:

1. *How safe do you feel at the Falkland Gardens Taxi Rank after 10pm?*
 - ❖ 54% of those of those surveyed felt very or quite safe
2. *Have you seen the Taxi Marshals around the rank on the Friday or Saturday nights during the Summer and Christmas period?*
 - ❖ 98% of those that responded answered yes
3. *If yes, have you felt any safer as a result?*
 - ❖ 90% of those that responded said yes, they felt safer as a result.

Survey Comments:

- ❖ 'Not busy enough to justify cost. Better rank facilities would be more efficient and safe'
- ❖ 'Marshals must take their position seriously - not be on their phones all night'

- ❖ 'Marshalled the crowd very well - stick with it'
- ❖ 'Should be there every Friday and Saturday night'
- ❖ 'Give added safety to drivers and vulnerable customers. Must be kept on!'
- ❖ 'Brought order to the mayhem. Should be retained for busy nights'
- ❖ 'Having held a plate for 10 years - best thing that's happened for taxis in that time'

Partner Feedback

Feedback was also sought from other sources including the local Police who were on duty during the evenings that the scheme was in operation and from the Safer Neighbourhood Team.

Local patrol Sergeants who responded said that the Marshals were normally very good and there are minimal issues in the locality during the times they are operating. They also give the Police additional capacity to concentrate in other areas associated with the Night Time Economy increasing flexibility. Feedback taken from the Police's NTE report on the 17th December said: 'Taxi Marshals have worked very well on both 16th and 17th December. Police have liaised with them on both nights. They are very keen and nothing is too much trouble.'

The Town Safer Neighbourhood Sergeant fed back that the Taxi Marshals offered reassurance to the public and helped the Taxi Drivers keep the peace in the Taxi queue. One issue to note during the summer period is that because the Marshals finish their duty at the CCTV control room at 03:30 hours they are consequently leaving the Taxi Rank approximately fifteen minutes earlier than this, meaning that the Taxi Rank is still busy when they cease operating. This was not an issue during the colder nights throughout the Christmas and New Year period as the town centre got quieter earlier in the evening.

Crime Figures

Crime data has been analysed for the Town Centre & Anglesey Police beat for the six week period the scheme was operating, with comparisons made to the same six week period in 2010 and in 2009. In 2010 the Taxi Marshalling scheme operated for half of this period and did not operate at all throughout 2009.

	Town Centre & Anglesey Police Beat				
	31/07/09 - 06/09/11	30/07/10 - 05/09/11	29/07/11 - 04/09/11	% change 10 - 11	% change 09 - 11
Violence Against the Person	63	54	46	-14.81%	-26.98%

The results indicated that a decrease has been seen in Violence Against the Person offences within the Town Centre for this period compared to both of the previous two years.

Crime data has also been analysed for the Town Centre & Anglesey Police beat for the five week period that the scheme was operating over the Christmas and New Year period, with comparisons made to the same five week period in 2010 and in 2009. In 2010 the Taxi Marshalling scheme also operated for the duration of this period but did not operate at all throughout 2009.

	Town Centre & Anglesey Police Beat				
	04/12/09 - 03/01/10	03/12/10 - 02/01/11	02/12/11 - 01/01/12	% change 10/11 - 11/12	% change 09/10 - 11/12
Violence Against the Person	37	31	36	16.13%	-2.70%

The results indicated that a small decrease has been seen in Violence Against the Person offences within the Town Centre when comparing the period the Taxi Marshals were in operation in December 2011 and the same period in December 2009. However offences have actually increased when looking at December 2010 compared to December 2011.

There are many given factors that could potentially have an effect on the crime levels within a given area such as the weather, local events, Officer numbers so it is important to note that the implementation of the Taxi Marshal scheme can not be credited with this decrease however there is still a positive correlation between the periods the scheme was operating and a decrease in Violent Crime within Gosport Town Centre.

Summary

Overall the survey findings suggest that the Taxi Marshals were well generally well received by members of the public, licensed taxi drivers and the Police. There were two complaints from licensed taxi drivers to Gosport Borough Council about one of the Marshals supplied by T Class Security during the summer period due to his lack of activity. This matter was addressed with the service provider and there were no complaints received by any of the licensed taxi drivers or any members of the public during the Christmas and New Year period.

The cost of the scheme is not felt to be prohibitive but represents good value for money especially considering the overall estimated cost of one violence offence and therefore has been planned and budgeted into the Community Safety Partnerships work plan for the 2012 – 2013 financial year.

The associated crime figures for the periods that the scheme was in operation support that there is value in terms of safety for the public and licensed taxi drivers as well as being an additional tactical option for policing the NTE for the scheme to be operated once again throughout 2012.

Within Portsmouth the licensed premises fund the Taxi Marshaling by putting the cost onto the licenses when they are issued. It has been considered whether this would be a feasible option here in Gosport however feedback from Gosport Borough Council Licensing is that it would be difficult to charge for the taxi marshaling scheme through Gosport Licenses', as the problems at the rank are as much caused by people returning from Portsmouth as they are Gosport's licensed premises due to the location of the ferry. Also, in comparison to Portsmouth there are only a small number of licensed premises in the High Street where as there are a high concentration in Guildhall Walk.

Recommendations

- ❖ It is recommended that the Taxi Marshal scheme is operated again during periods of expected high demand during the 2012/2013 financial year. This will include the Queens Jubilee weekend, Summer holiday and Christmas & New Year periods.
- ❖ Operational hours and days are to be based upon analysis of the peak times of demand associated with offences linked to the NTE, this will be done in liaison with the local Town Safer Neighbourhood Sergeant.
- ❖ Pre & Post surveys are to be conducted with the public and licensed taxi drivers to assist with the evaluation of the scheme.
- ❖ Additional funding streams are to be sought to ensure the resilience of the scheme at a time when public sector budgets are decreasing.