



Herman Goldstein Award 2003

Project Title: Operation Magpie

Category: Crime and Disorder Reduction

Superintendent Dee Collins

Contact Details

Graham Hornsby

A/Sgt Neighbourhood Task Group

Langbaugh Police Headquarters

Dawson House

11 Ridley Street

Redcar

TS10ITT

01642 326326 ext 4772

E-mail (via) bryan.tams@cleveland.pnn.police.uk

Summary

Project title 'Operation Magpie.'

The Police, Fire Brigade and the Local Authority were all experiencing increased calls to deal with dangerous abandoned 'End of Life' vehicles, which were often vandalised or set on fire during 2001.

The visual effect of this coupled with the increasing illegal and dangerous use of 'end of life' vehicles by the criminal community contributes to the 'broken windows syndrome'. A community which looks or feels neglected and dangerous, encourages criminal and anti-social behaviour.

The Local Authority was receiving increasing requests to dispose of abandoned vehicles as were the Police, and the number of deliberate vehicle fires attended by the Fire Brigade was rising rapidly.

The response to the problem was to work in partnership to quickly remove and dispose of the vehicles by the following means.

The general public were encouraged to dispose of their 'scrap' vehicles at designated sites and receive a £10 reward or free collection from home. At the same time the Local

Authority undertook to remove 'end of life' vehicles immediately and to serve the '7-day' notice period in a compound before disposal.

The Police and the D.V.L.A. targeted areas based on intelligence provided by the police and Local Authority Community Safety Wardens. End of life and excise licence expired vehicles were removed and disposed of under DVLA powers including 'community cars' being used illegally by the criminal community.

The impact has been marked. There are fewer abandoned vehicles on the streets and when they are they are rapidly removed. The Police and Fire Brigade spend far less time dealing with abandoned vehicles.

During 2002, Cleveland Fire Brigade attended 1653 deliberate vehicle fires a rise of 9% on the previous year. However in the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland it fell by 4%. During the first quarter of 2003 deliberate vehicle fires have fallen by 22% in the Redcar and Cleveland area.

The scheme has been extended across the Force area and two of the four local Unitary authorities have taken up devolved DVLA powers to allow Operation Cubit to be a continuous, daily operation and a third Authority is about to adopt the same powers.

Objective

The Police, Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and **Cleveland Fire Brigade intended** to work in partnership in order to:

- Rapidly remove and dispose of abandoned dangerous, potentially dangerous or illegally used motor vehicles in the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland.
- Reduce the number of deliberate vehicle fires in the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland.
- Improve the environment and quality of life for the residents who live within the Redcar and Cleveland area.

Scan

Station Officer George Crooks is an Arson Reduction Officer for Cleveland Fire Brigade. He was aware of a rising problem with deliberate vehicle fires across Cleveland. He approached the local authorities of Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland seeking support for reducing the problem by fuel management i.e. reducing the number of abandoned vehicles on the roads. On consulting Stewart Winter, Environmental Services Officer from Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council and Sgt Lister the Local Authority Liaison Officer, they agreed to work together to see if they could resolve the problem. The three officers quickly identified that all three partners had

an interest in addressing the problem due to the rising demands on all three services. The vehicles causing the problems were believed to fall under the following categories:

- 'End of Life' vehicles being abandoned on streets, road or land and subsequently being vandalised into a dangerous condition and in many cases being set on fire with the subsequent danger to persons and property.
- Abandoned stolen vehicles being set alight to destroy forensic evidence with the subsequent danger to persons and property
- 'End of Life' vehicles continuing to be used dangerously and illegally on the roads.

Abandoned vehicles are a magnet for anti-social behaviour, and are increasingly vandalised and often set on fire. The visual effect of this, coupled with the increasing illegal and dangerous use of 'end of life' vehicles in a community contributes to the 'broken window syndrome'. A community which looks or feels neglected and dangerous, encourages criminal and anti-social behaviour. The figures showed that the areas in which the vehicles were set on fire coincided with reports of anti-social behaviour. These vehicles contribute significantly to reducing the quality of life of residents in those communities most affected.

Analysis

Cleveland Fire Brigade attended 412 deliberate vehicle fires within the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland during 2001.

In the first eight months of 2001 Cleveland Police responded to:

- 364 'end of life' burned out vehicles. (Costs not recoverable from Insurance Companies)
- 820 'end of life' abandoned vehicles. (Costs not recoverable from Insurance Companies)
- 720 abandoned vehicles, (i.e. abandoned broken down or reported stolen. Costs recoverable from insurance companies)

A total of 1904 vehicles recovered in an 8-month period, 1184 of which were 'end of life' vehicles.

The costs of the recovery of these vehicles are as follows:

- End of Life vehicle, simple on street recovery, arranged by Local Authority £35.
- End of Life vehicles simple on street recovery arranged by the Police Recovery Scheme £65 (including administration fee to the Automobile Association)
- Burned out vehicles between £100 and £150.

1st April 2000 to 31st March 2001.

- Requests for removal of 'End of Life' vehicles received by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council - 554
- Actual removals of 'End of Life ' vehicles arranged by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council - 162
- It would appear likely that the 392 not recovered carried on being illegally used until recovered under the Police Recovery scheme.

In 1997 if you contacted a vehicle breakers yard you could expect to receive £30 on delivery of your old car. By 2001, as the value of scrap metal fell and the costs of disposal rose, not only would the breakers yard not pay you for your car, they would charge you £10 to take it off your hands.

In hindsight the effect of the above is quite obvious. Persons on low incomes or less responsible individuals simply abandon their end of life vehicles as the tax expires or they fail their MOT test. Some owners abandon their vehicles, torch them and report them stolen in order to make fraudulent insurance claims.

Police Intelligence has shown that some vehicles become used by a number of people and the term 'community vehicle' has been coined. These vehicles in effect do not have a registered keeper and it is very difficult to pursue enquiries for criminal activity or

motoring offences. The users of the vehicles are in the main uninsured, often disqualified by the courts, use them for criminal purposes and often drive them with little or no regard for other road users or pedestrians.

In the more affluent areas people generally do not abandon vehicles or if they do, they are less likely to be vandalised and the community would complain and see them removed. In communities that are already disadvantaged there are more vehicles being abandoned or illegally used.

The situation is made worse because the responsibility for removal of these vehicles lies with the Local Authority under the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978. The issue of a 7-day notice on a vehicle identifies it as an end of life vehicle and during the notice period the vehicle will often be increasingly vandalised before being set on fire. The Local Authority would then be responsible for disposing of a burned out vehicle. The costs for disposal of a burned out vehicle are approximately four times greater than that for recovery of a simple abandoned vehicle. This does not include the additional costs incurred by the emergency services such as the Police and in particular the Fire Brigade who would be called out to the blaze. Obviously the impact on the community and the inherent dangers involved with abandoned vehicles and burning vehicles are extremely grave.

The cumulative effect of abandoned vehicles, vandalised vehicles, burned out vehicles and illegally and dangerously used vehicles in communities which are already

disadvantaged high crime areas makes a bad situation worse. It is difficult to quantify. However, it is a well-established principle that a community, which looks or feels neglected and dangerous encourages criminal and anti-social behaviour. Nothing contributes more to an area appearing neglected or dangerous than abandoned and burnt out vehicles and homes.

The problem has grown dramatically in recent years. Originally the recovery costs for 'end of life' vehicles recovered under the Police Recovery Scheme were met by the recovery firms as only a small proportion were 'end of life' vehicles and they were able to recover some costs from the vehicle breakers yards. Those financial returns to the recovery firms have now fallen significantly and they are now being forced to recover the costs from the Police or Local Authority. It is self evident that recovering 'end of life' vehicles under the police recovery scheme is not a cost effective process.

On 1st April 2002 stricter disposal European Legislation came into force. This requires a full environmental disposal of vehicles and their component parts, for example fluids, oils, petrol, etc. All must be drained and disposed of by authorised operatives only. The costs of disposal have risen and the prognosis was that the problem would continue to rise.

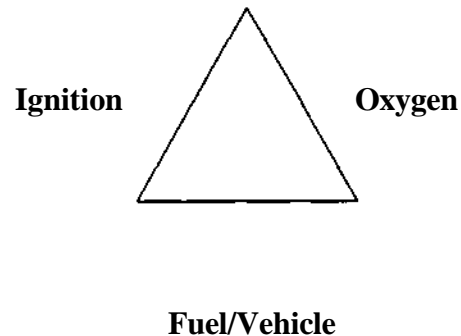
None of the above includes the other costs, which arise from the disposal of 'end of life' vehicles.

- Police and Fire Brigade attending a burning car.
- Environmental costs to the Local Authority for cleaning an area following the removal of a burned out car.
- Repairs to property damaged by a burning car.
- Harm to the community.

The three officers identified that the biggest impact on the problem would be by focusing on the 'end of life' vehicles. The current enforcement measures had already driven down the problem in respect of stolen vehicles and other officers were targeting that problem but no one was effectively addressing 'end of life' vehicles.

- The Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council Community Safety Strategy had identified arson reduction as a key priority for the Borough as it was widely believed that the Borough Council area was the 'arson capital' of the United Kingdom.
- The vehicles had no value, no legitimate owners and the '7 day' notice added to the problem rather than solving it.
- The vehicles contained or were classified as hazardous waste and it was the Local Authority's responsibility to remove them.

From the outset the problem was approached as a multi-agency problem. Following the same principles of the problem-solving triangle for crime there would not be a fire if one of the sides were removed.



In this case we could hardly remove the oxygen. Tracking the persons responsible for abandoning the vehicle or setting fire to it would be a virtually impossible. The obvious conclusion was to remove or minimise the fuel source. The key to this would be the Local Authority 'risk managing' the immediate recovery of these vehicles as the existing law relating to abandoned vehicles did not provide 'legal authority' to remove vehicles and a 'genuine owner' could sue.

Response

Operation Magpie would be one of the key tactics deployed to deliver the Community Safety Strategy for the borough by confronting unlawful and anti-social behaviour in respect of abandoned vehicles and the criminal use of them.

Phase 1. Amnesty and Reward Scheme.

From Thursday the 27th September 2001 an amnesty and reward scheme was promoted to the residents of the Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council area. Two nominated disposal sites would receive (by prior booking) end of life vehicles from the public.

A reward of £10 would be provided on proof of ownership. The operators then invoiced Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council monthly under the scheme. Owners taking advantage of this scheme would be required to present their drivers licence and certificate of insurance and the vehicle should not be dangerously unroadworthy. There had to be a pre-booked appointment and the journey had to be direct to the disposal site. Sponsorship in the sum of a £1000 was obtained from Guinness Trust Housing Association, a registered social landlord with a significant portfolio of properties in two of the council wards where the problem was most severe. The sponsorship would allow 100 vehicles to be disposed of with no cost to the Local Authority as a trial on its effectiveness.

The two operators at the disposal sites guaranteed to arrange for a full and final disposal of the surrendered vehicles and would be responsible for informing the D.V.L.A.

Clearly every vehicle recovered under this scheme potentially represented a saving of at least £35 per vehicle to the Local Authority assuming otherwise they would have been abandoned on the roadside.

In the event of an owner being unable to deliver the vehicle because it was immobilised or dangerously unroadworthy the two operators would arrange free recovery but without reward. The operators would then invoice Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council at a rate of £35 per vehicle.

Also commencing from that date the current practice of utilising the Police Recovery Scheme for 'end of life' vehicles ceased in the Redcar and Cleveland Area. If a Police Officer, Fire Officer or Local Authority employee encountered an abandoned 'end of life' vehicle, recovery would be arranged through Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. The vehicles would be recovered to a secure compound where they would serve the seven-day notice period before full and final disposal. An operating procedure (see Appendix 1) was drawn up where the police would check that identified vehicles were not reported stolen, not of police interest in connection with a crime enquiry or required for forensic examination and likely to be an 'end of life' vehicle (VEL expired over a month/ current registered keeper not known). Through the DVLA the Local Authority would obtain details of the last registered keeper and pursue them for recovery costs at the rate of £65 per vehicle.

The Police Recovery scheme for stolen and broken down vehicles where the owner was known and costs were recoverable would be unaffected.

The intention of phase one of the operation was to encourage owners of 'end of life' vehicles to dispose of them legitimately and to deter them from disposing of them illegally by pursuing them for costs. The anticipated outcome would be a reduction in the number of abandoned, set on fire or illegally used vehicles on the streets and the subsequent cost savings for the partners and the improvement of the environment for the public.

Phase 2. Operation Cubit.

Operation Magpie focussed on recovering/removing 'end of life' vehicles by encouraging owners to dispose of these legitimately and to deter others from disposing of them illegally.

The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) proactively target vehicles and their owners who do not license their vehicles to recover the millions of pounds lost each year in Vehicle Excise Duty (VED) evasions. These vehicles are often driven without insurance cover, a current Ministry of Transport Road Worthiness Certificate (MOT) and often contravene other offences under the Road Traffic Act. The costs of the existing recovery services were excessive and a two-week operation involving the DVLA would normally cost £66,000.

The three representatives from the Fire Brigade, Police and Local Authority, along with Bill Morton from Middlesbrough Borough Council met with the DVLA to discuss a multi-agency approach using their collective powers to deal with abandoned, dangerous and unlicensed vehicles - Operation Cubit.

Following negotiations with the DVLA, it was agreed to allow the Local Authority to use their own Contract Recovery Services. This reduced the cost of a two-week operation to £10,000. The four unitary Authorities of Hartlepool, Stockton, Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland contributed to the cost of a four-week operation which would operate throughout the Cleveland Police area.

Under Operation Cubit, the Police, Local Authority and the DVLA would target different areas of the four unitary Authorities based on intelligence provided by the Police and Local Authority Community Safety Wardens. Those vehicles which were abandoned, classified as 'end of life' and those that were unlicensed or not displaying a valid vehicle excise license would be identified and a rapid removal and disposal of them would take place using the appropriate legislation (Refuse Disposal Act 1978, Removal and Disposal of Vehicles Regulations 1986 or under the Road Traffic Act 1984). A particular target of this operation were those vehicles which were identified as 'community cars' with the objective being to remove these vehicles from the roads and frustrate criminal activity. In Redcar and Cleveland, this aspect of the operation was led by the Neighbourhood Task Group (NTG).

The Neighbourhood Task Group is a team of Police Officers funded by the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund (NRF). Their role is to specifically target crime and anti social behaviour within the NRF area'.

The Local Authority would pursue owners for recovery of costs incurred and the D.V.L.A would pursue recovery of unpaid vehicle excise revenue.

It was intended that it would be an ongoing policy for 'end of life' vehicles to be recovered when identified under the Local Authority Scheme and not the Police recovery scheme.

The object of phase two of the operation would be to remove the illegally used vehicles from the streets and deter persons from abandoning vehicles due to the financial penalty being incurred.

Assessment

Since its launch in October 2001 up to the 31st March 2003 the following results were obtained by Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council:

- 330 Vehicles surrendered by owners (Local Authority now paying the £10 reward)

- 302 Vehicles collected from owner's home address.
- 1792 vehicles seized "from the roadside under Operation Magpie.
- 281 vehicles recovered under Operation Cubit

In the first week of Operation Cubit in the Redcar and Cleveland area the Neighbourhood Task Group identified over 50 'community cars' used by criminals and ensured these were the first vehicles recovered each day. They set new records for vehicles recovered under Cubit in this first week i.e. 37 in a single day and 135 in the first week. A high proportion of the vehicles recovered were from deprived areas in receipt of grants from the Single Regeneration Budget. During the year 2000 Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council recovered only 156 vehicles. They are now recovering vehicles at over 9 times that rate.

During the first 4 weeks of Operation Cubit across Cleveland in April 2002 433 vehicles were actioned by the DVLA team. 277 of the vehicles were abandoned or 'community vehicles' and 170 vehicles were displaying expired vehicle excise licenses. £337,000 of additional vehicle excise licence revenue was raised. The DVLA were delighted with the co-operation from the Police and the four local authorities and they continued to run Operation Cubit for short periods at a time across the County each month. The additional 21 days of Operation Cubit resulted in a further 473 vehicles being actioned. The Police Officers are very enthusiastic about the scheme as it seriously disrupts criminal activity. In March 2003 Both Middlesbrough and Stockton Borough Councils took up devolved DVLA powers in order to deliver Operation Cubit on a daily basis heavily involving the

Community Safety Wardens, the newly appointed Police Community Support Officers and the Community Policing Teams. Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council is observing the operations at Middlesbrough with a view to taking up the powers themselves.

The effect on deliberate vehicle fires is shown on the following table

Deliberate Vehicle Fires	2000	2001	2002	2003 Jan to March
Cleveland	1290	1510	1653	341
R. & C.B.C.	327	412	396	80
Middlesbrough	527	694	638	132
Stockton	168	186	288	70
Hartlepool	197	218	331	59

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The table clearly shows that rate of deliberate vehicle fires for both Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough districts fell in 2002 from its peak in 2001. During the same period of time the deliberate vehicle fires rose in both Hartlepool and Stockton. If the current rate of deliberate vehicle fires continues in 2003 both Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough districts are in line to return to their year 2000 levels representing falls of some 22% and 24% respectively. Obviously as both Hartlepool and Stockton become fully operational with Operation Magpie it is anticipated that similar falls will occur in these areas.

No

Police officers spend much less time trying to establish ownership of abandoned vehicles and once satisfied that the vehicle is end of life they refer it to the Council who arranges a rapid removal. The Council has been able to recover over a third of their costs from owners.

Did Operation Magpie achieve its objective to reduce the number of deliberate vehicle fires in the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland?

There has been a significant fall in the number of deliberate vehicle fires particularly in both Redcar and Cleveland and Middlesbrough districts where Magpie has been running longest. There is every likelihood that this will be replicated in both Stockton and Hartlepool over the coming months.

Did Operation Magpie achieve its objective to rapidly remove and dispose of abandoned dangerous, potentially dangerous or illegally used motor vehicles in the Borough of Redcar and Cleveland?

Without doubt the objective has been achieved. The statistical evidence of this is self-evident. Abandoned and burned out vehicles are now rare sights in the area. Removals of such vehicles within four hours has been achieved and sustained. The impact on the criminal use of 'community vehicles' has been substantial and sustained. The main recovery operator for both Middlesbrough and Redcar and Cleveland Borough Councils has had to purchase a number of additional recovery vehicles and drivers to cope with the

additional work. Market forces have also resulted in a number of vehicle breakers operators advertising that they will pay £10 for vehicles brought in to them rather than charge for the service as requests for their service began to dry up, thereby helping to reduce the incentive to abandon 'end of life' vehicles.

The Way Forward

To date, Operation Magpie has developed because it is a simple and cost effective partnership addressing a significant and shared problem. It has been developed and delivered without any additional funding by simply and effectively bending mainstream funding. It has been adopted successfully in Middlesbrough and has been recently launched in Stockton and Hartlepool. It is a national problem and Operation Magpie is highly suitable for replication and as such it is a good example of the 'What Works' principle.

In some respects the scheme has been too successful as there has been some difficulty agreeing corporate operating procedures across Local Unitary Authorities, the Fire Service and the Police. The scheme requires an element of central management and independent evaluation to ensure corporate standards are adopted.

The cost recovery element of the scheme should be looked at closely to ensure maximum recovery and ensure as far as possible that the offender pays.

Co-ordinating activity of the four Local Authorities and by ultimately reducing staffing levels should ultimately reduce on costs. Sgt Lister, on behalf of Cleveland Police and Cleveland Fire Brigade is pursuing a bid under the treasury 'Invest to Safe' fund to link up Operations Magpie, Cubit and Lazer, which uses ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) tools. The potential for linking the scheme with ANPR is obvious. Offenders will be identified using vehicles without a valid excise licence, failing to notify change of ownership, driving without insurance, no drivers licence etc. There is the potential to seize vehicles under Magpie or Cubit, prosecute more offenders and pursue costs from them. This would add significantly to the deterrent effect of both Magpie and Operation Lazer and ensure sustainability through cost recovery.

Graham Hornsby A/Sgt 378

List of Appendices

1. Operation Magpie
2. Newspaper articles

OPERATION MAGPIE

Operational Guidelines.

Police Patrol Officers/Community Support Officers

- Police Officer despatched to or discovers a vehicle, which is apparently abandoned.
- Via Police Control Room. PNC enquiry. If vehicle is a reported stolen vehicle follow standard police operating procedures. Consider recovery under Police Recovery Scheme. (Costs recoverable from Owner/insurance Company).
- Vehicle not reported stolen but is causing obstruction or likely to cause danger (likely to be set on fire/vandalised) If owner is known and contactable arrange removal. If likely to be excessive time delay/ and risk to public consider recovery under Police Recovery Scheme. (Costs recoverable from owner/insurance)
- Owner not known i.e. No current keeper, local enquiries negative, and vehicle is likely to cause danger/ risk to public or other agencies (Local Authority/Fire Brigade for example) inform Police Control Room to inform Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council via the CCTV control room informing them of the potential risk/danger i.e. if not moved quickly will be vandalised/ set on fire.

Local Authority to remove under 'Operation Magpie'. The Local Authority and NOT the Police would then meet costs.

Redcar and Cleveland Borough Council. Community Safety Wardens

- A Community Safety Warden informed of or discovering a vehicle which is apparently abandoned.
- Contact the CCTV control room with details of location/circumstances.
- CCTV control room to contact Cleveland Police Control Room via agreed fax format.
- If vehicle is a stolen vehicle or used in crime Police will assume responsibility and arrange recovery under Police Recovery scheme. (Costs recoverable from owner/insurance)
- Vehicle not reported stolen but is causing obstruction or likely to cause danger (likely to be set on fire/vandalised) If owner is known and contactable the Police should contact owner and arrange removal. If likely to be excessive time delay/ and risk to public the Police to consider recovery under Police Recovery Scheme. (Costs recoverable from owner/insurance)
- Owner not known i.e. No current keeper, VEL expired and local enquiries negative and vehicle is likely to cause danger/ risk to public or other agencies (Local Authority/Fire Brigade for example). The Local Authority should consider removal of the vehicle under their own authority, which would be arranged via the CCTV control room. The power for immediate removal is based on the risk assessment of the level of danger to the Public. If there is no apparent likelihood of immediate risk to the Public/other agencies then the process should involve the affixing of the 7-day notice to the vehicle with removal not taking place until expiry of the notice.

Fire Brigade personnel

- Fire Brigade personnel discovering an apparently abandoned vehicle which is in a dangerous condition or in circumstances likely to cause danger to the public.
- Contact Fire Brigade control with location and circumstances
- Fire Brigade control room then contact Cleveland Police Control Room.
- If vehicle is a stolen vehicle or used in crime Police will assume responsibility and arrange recovery under Police Recovery scheme. (Costs recoverable from owner/insurance)
- Vehicle not reported stolen but is causing obstruction or likely to cause danger (likely to be set on fire/vandalised) If owner is known and contactable the Police should contact owner and arrange removal. If likely to be excessive time delay/ and risk to public the Police to consider recovery under Police Recovery Scheme. (Costs recoverable from owner/insurance)
- Owner not known i.e. No current keeper, VEL expired and local enquiries negative and vehicle is likely to cause danger/ risk to public or other agencies (Local Authority/Fire Brigade for example). Police Control room to contact the R. & C.B.C CCTV control room. The Local Authority should consider removal of the vehicle under their own authority, which would be arranged via the CCTV control room. The power for immediate removal is based on the risk assessment of the level of danger to the Public. If there is no apparent likelihood of immediate risk to the Public/other agencies then the process should involve the affixing of the 7-day notice to the vehicle with removal not taking place until expiry of the notice.

Cleveland Police Control Room

- Cleveland police control room is notified of an abandoned vehicle by a member of the public, patrolling officer, community safety warden or fire brigade personnel. An event will be created on Intergraph and a PNC enquiry carried out.
- Where present keeper is known and can be easily contacted this will be done in order to arrange removal of the vehicle. If owner cannot be contacted and vehicle is causing an obstruction or is likely to cause danger/risk to the public, consider recovery under police recovery scheme (costs recoverable from owner/insurance).
- Where registered keeper no longer owns the vehicle or previous keeper only details are recorded reasonable enquiries will be carried out to trace owner in order to arrange recovery. If unable to trace owner and vehicle not causing obstruction/danger consider the use of a 7-day notice. If the vehicle is likely to cause a danger to the public or other agencies inform R & CBC via the CCTV control room informing them of the potential risk/danger i.e. Likely to be vandalised/set on fire. Local Authority to remove under "operation magpie". Local Authority to meet the costs.
- Where the vehicle is a stoveh or used in crime consider recovery under police recovery scheme.
- Where necessary the appropriate marker will be placed on PNC.

ic Teesside - untaxed cars are swept on streets

APPENDIX 1

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Evening Gazette

Untaxed cars are swept off streets

May 3 2002

By The Evening Gazette

A campaign to tackle the blight of abandoned and untaxed cars has led to 100 vehicles being removed from the streets in just three days in Hartlepool.

Operation Cubit, a joint venture involving the council, the driver Licensing Authority and Cleveland Police, began earlier this week.

The cars are now stored in a secure compound and will be scrapped unless claimed.

Owners have seven days to claim them and prove they are licensed. Any that are claimed and untaxed will lead to the owner paying a fine to the DVLA, buying new road tax and paying a £35 administration charge.

A council spokesman said: "Many of these cars are said to be 'community' vehicles and are often used in crime."

A Cleveland Police spokesman said: "Similar operations elsewhere in Cleveland have resulted in the seizure of scores of vehicles which have included a Porsche and a Mercedes."

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Evening Gazette

Porsche escapes crusher

Apr 11 2002
Angus Hoy

A sports car has been spared the crusher at the eleventh hour.

The Porsche 924 was due to be "cubed" at the launch of a major operation to rid the streets of Teesside of abandoned and untaxed cars, vans and motorbikes.

But with hours to spare, the owner decided to pay up • as did the owner of a Mercedes convertible awaiting a similar fate.

Operation Cubit - a joint blitz by Middlesbrough Police, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Middlesbrough Council - will see hundreds of vehicles put beyond use In a month-long crackdown.

The move coincides with new powers enabling councils to remove abandoned vehicles after just 24 hours Instead of the current seven days and dispose of them within a week.

PC Colin Whltfeld, of Middlesbrough's community safety department, said there were thought to be around 13,000 untaxed cars and vans on Teesside, representing unpaid revenue of about £1.6m.

The abandoned vehicles were often vandalised and burned out, while others were In use, sometimes as "community cars" for the criminal fraternity.

"We have taken 73 vehicles from the streets in Middlesbrough and the owners have the choice of paying up or having their cars crushed," he said.

"The cars are stored In a secured compound at South Bank until their fate Is decided.

"The vehicles we have seized range from luxury motors to complete wrecks being worked on In the street, decent runabouts and criminal-community vehicles.

"The public see us as doing a good job - they pay their car tax and they don't see why others should get away with it. They don't like their streets littered with untaxed wrecks and they don't like watching criminals driving around In untaxed, unlicensed and untaxed cars"



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In North Yorkshire, wheel-clampers will also be out In force In a bid to claw back £3m from the owners of some 30,000 untaxed vehicles.

Vehicles seized In the blitz will be stored at a secure compound and face being crushed or sold at auction If not claimed,

The crackdown will be boosted by Stingray, the latest hi-tech weapon In their armoury. The device reads the number plates of passing vehicles and Instantly checks national records to see If they are street legal.

Stingray will be launched In North Yorkshire on Monday, April 22, and will operate across the county for a fortnight.

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vices, all Ala Cunningham, today said the plan was to spend the cash, on the Bishopsmill School site.

He said: "The Government has Invested heavily in Stockton schools. In recent years and we are delighted that they have allocated us this latest funding."

"The money will be used to refurbish the existing Bishopsmill School site, subject to the School Organisation Committee's approval of our proposal to re-organise the boroughs three residential special schools."

The council wants to build at the Norton school and then transfer pupils from the Saltergill site at Kyrkjevington, which will close.

Pupils from Bishopsmill will go to Saltergill and Westlands, Thornaby, from September while the work is carried out, if it gets the green light.

Yesterday it was confirmed Middlesbrough and Darlington would each get more than £1m from the same fund.



FAMILY CELEBRATION: Susan Whitmore celebrates her 100th birthday with her son Stan and daughter Jean

Pictura: PETER REIMANN

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Stockton-born Susan worked in a butcher's shop in Norton before marrying train driver Vincent, who sadly died 26 years ago. They married at the former a fises Church in Stockton, and had four children.

Eldest son Frank, died aged 6 in 1992 and daughter Ivy died at the age of 7 in 1997.

Susan's other two children are 72-year-old Stan, who lives in Newcastle and Jean, 69, of Redcar. She also has 11 grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren and about 20 great-great-grandchildren.

"Until October she lived by herself in Stockton," said Sun.

He said his mum loved needlework and making soft furnishings. "She was always there for us and would do anything for anyone else," added Jean.

Susan's secret to celebrating a century is - keeping busy.

Her relatives and friends are due to join her at a party at Redcar Cricket Club on Saturday.



THIS is the be of a man police are hunting following the rape of a Teesside prostitute.

Later editions or last night's Gazette reported how the vice girl, in her early 20s, was attacked at a house in central Middlesbrough at around 2am on Monday, April 1.

Detective Constable Delia Martin said: "We have had previous reports of incidents involving prostitutes, but this is the first allegation involving a male finding this description."

"All reports of rape are treated seriously regardless of what the victims do for a living or the kind of lifestyle they lead."

"The victim in this case has had quite an ordeal but she is fine and coping well with it."

The man is said to be about 30, around 6ft, and of stocky, muscular build with a tanned complexion.

He is clean-shaven with a bald head and was wearing blue jeans, a white shirt and a black leather bomber-style jacket.

He was wearing a mid gold chain, a gold watch and had rings on every finger of his right hand and possibly one ring on his left hand.

The assault is the latest violent attack on a prostitute in the town.

Vice workers say they receive reports of robberies, beatings and rapes at least once a fortnight.

Last year former Harrogate man Paul Kennedy was jailed for 15 years for a string of attacks against prostitutes.

A jury at Teesside Crown Court found him guilty of the rape and robbery of two women. Indecent assault and attempted robbery on another and robbing a fourth girl.

But with many of those working the streets to feed heroin and crack cocaine habits, the violence has done little to deter prostitutes from their dangerous trade.

Anyone with information on the attack is asked to Det Con Martin or Det Con Ted Allen on 01642 303146 or 303126 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555111.

Lisa was a happy girl, dad tells inquest Death 'a mystery'

By JOANNA DESIRA

THE reasons behind the death of a 13-year-old girl who was found hanging at her home remain a mystery, an inquest heard.

Lisa Jacklin, 13, was found in her bedroom on September 24, 2000, and later died in Middlesbrough General Hospital after falling into a coma.

An open verdict was recorded yesterday by Teesside Coroner Michael Sheffield, who said he could not be satisfied why she died.

The inquest heard Lisa, a pupil at Bydales School in Marske, was a normal healthy teenage girl.

The day she died she had been out with friends and returned home in the afternoon.

Lisa, of NewManke, was discovered hanging by her bedroom door with her dressing gown rope tied around her neck at about 7.30pm.

Lisa's dad, Chris Jacklin, 43, said: "She had no problems - she was the happiest kid you could ever wish to meet. She used to spend a lot of time in her bedroom, her computer was up there and her toys."

The court heard she kept a diary of her thoughts, but Mr Jacklin said he and his wife, Bridget, were not



MISSED:

Teesside Coroner Michael Sheffield said he could not be sure why Lisa Jacklin, left, died

parents when they refused to let her go to the places she wanted to go with her friends.

"She wanted to go to the woods on a night-time," Mr Jacklin told the inquest. "She was allowed in the day but on a night-time - it's not the place for 13-year-old kids."

Mr Jacklin added the family would talk problems through.

Home Office pathologist Dr Peter Cooper said Lisa died of a lack of oxygen to her brain caused by hanging, which resulted in the coma.

described it as containing "teenage thoughts and emotions" and added she talked about the "restrictions on her life" and "expressed love for her family".

Mr Sheffield said: "It is clear no one in her family had expected her to do anything unusual."

Recording his verdict, Mr Sheffield said that as she had left her door open, maybe she thought she would be found quickly.

"Or was she playing some kind of trick without understanding the finality and consequences?" he asked.

He explained his decision to record an open verdict.

"Even with the advantages of reading what had last been written in her book I do not consider I can be confident beyond reasonable doubt," he said.

Friends living in New Marske clubbed together to raise £1,500 to open a memorial garden in Lisa's name at Bydales School, which opened last July.

Tony Hobbs, head teacher at Bydales School, said: "Since the tragedy of Lisa's death Mr and Mrs Jacklin and the school have worked closely together to create a very special memorial garden for Lisa, which is much treasured by pupils and staff."

Porsche escapes crusher - just

By ANGUS HOY

A SPORTS car has been spared the crusher at the eleven hour.

The Porsche 924 was due to be "cubed" at the launch of a major operation to rid the streets of Teesside of abandoned and untaxed cars, vans and motorbikes.

But with hours to spare, the owner decided to pay up and did the owner of a Mercedes convertible awaiting a similar fate.

Operation Cubit - a joint blitz by Middlesbrough Police, the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency and Middlesbrough Council - will see hundreds of vehicles put beyond use in a month-long crackdown.

The move coincides with new powers enabling councils to remove abandoned vehicles after just 24 hours. Instead of the current seven days and dispose of them within a week.

PC Colin Whitfield, of Middlesbrough's community safety department, said there were thought to be around 13,000 untaxed cars and vans on Teesside, representing unpaid revenue of about £1.6m.

The abandoned vehicles were often vandalised and burned out, while others were in use, sometimes as "community can" for the criminal fraternity.

"We have taken 73 vehicles from the streets in Middlesbrough and the owners have the choice of paying up or having their cars crushed," he said.

"The cars are stored in a secured compound at South Bank until their fate is decided."

"The vehicles we have seized range from luxury motors to complete wrecks being worked on in the street, decent runabouts and criminal-community vehicles."

"The public see us as doing a good job - they pay their car tax and they don't see why others should get away with it. They don't like their streets littered with untaxed wrecks and they don't like watching criminals driving around in untaxed, uninsured and untested cars."

In North Yorkshire, wheel-clampers will also be out in force in a bid to claw



FEELING THE SQUEEZE: Car baler Andy Peel oversees another crushing at South Bank

Pictura: STEVEN BROUHO

back £3m from the owners of some 30,000 untaxed vehicles.

Vehicles seized in the blitz will be stored at a secure compound and face being crushed or sold at auction if not claimed.

The crackdown will be boosted by Stingray, the latest hi-tech weapon in

their armoury. The device reads the number plates of passing vehicles and instantly checks national records to see if they are street legal.

Stingray will be launched in North Yorkshire on Monday, April 22, and will operate across the county for a fortnight.

Steward to catch raiders

A TEESIDE store chain is putting up a "substantial" reward to catch and convict knife-wielding robbers.

Two raiders went into Bells Store in Sattersgill Avenue, Middlesbrough, at around 11pm on Tuesday and forced a security guard outside at knife-point.

One of the raiders then went back into the shop and demanded cash from the till before fleeing with more than £100.

Bells security manager Barry Hodgson said: "We are offering a substantial reward for the arrest and conviction of those responsible."

A Cleveland Police spokesman said detectives have sifted through "very good CCTV footage which has captured the whole incident inside the shop".

Officers were today also preparing to check Middlesbrough Council cameras.

One raider was Afro-Caribbean and wore a brown balaclava, a navy jumper, navy Nike tracksuit bottoms and black trainers. His white accomplice wore a blue jumper, cream cap and blue jeans. Call 01642 303134 if you can help.

Children's charity is among good causes

By JULIE MARTIN

RAISING awareness for a little-known children's charity will be at the forefront of a new Teesside mayor's year in office.

Stockton Mayor Councillor Iain O'Donnell pledged her support for the Cornelia de Lange syndrome support group at her inauguration at the Forum Theatre, Billingham, yesterday.

Her other adopted good causes are Forces charity SSAFA and Cleveland Ambulance Care.

She told the audience of councillors, council chiefs, residents and schoolchildren, she was "honoured" to be named first citizen of the borough.

She said since coming to Billingham almost 50 years ago she has witnessed many changes in the borough and was "proud" to be part of a council where "regeneration and improvement were the watch words."

She told how she hoped some of the virtues of previous mayors would remain in the robes of office and shape the way she carried out her duties.

Out-going mayor Councillor Terry Bean shared some of the experiences he had during his "fantastic" year as first citizen, including being rescued from the top of the town hall for charity.

He said the last 12 months had been a "roller-coaster" before

sparking a few chuckles when he told of some of the questions he and his wife and mayores Olwyn had been asked by youngsters including "do you live in a castle?" and "are you rich?"

During the event a motion was put forward by Councillor Stephen Smailes, Conservative group leader, who called for the role of mayor to be awarded in recognition of length of service rather than membership to a particular political party. A vote saw the motion denied.

Cornelia de Lange Syndrome is a rare condition which affects facial features as well as hands and feet and can lead to heart defects and bowel abnormalities.



NEW MAYOR: Jean O'Donnell receives the chain of office from Mayor's attendant Kevin Bowdrey at the Forum Theatre, Billingham

Pictura: IAN MONTYRE

Inquest is adjourned

AN inquest has opened into the death of retired salesman Michael Fiddes.

The 67-year-old was pronounced dead at his home in Roman Road, Middlesbrough, on April 5.

Teesside Coroner Michael Sheffield adjourned the inquest until a later date.

up for Rebecca

A YOUNG maths supremo from a Stockton school is in the running for a national award.

Rebecca Farley, 16, a pupU at Grangefield School, is one of six hopefuls shortlisted for the Vocational and Academic Achievement Award run by examining board Edexcel.

Rebecca is fast gaining a reputation as something of a maths wizard and recently recorded the highest ever score at the school in a mock GCSE paper.

Grangefield head of maths Janet Chambers said the teenager was "by far and away" the best student in the school at maths and added: "I have rarely met a pupil who can pick up new ideas so quickly and accurately."

Rebecca is predicted to get A or A* grades in all of her subjects. Including English language and literature, science, IT, RE, food technology, Spanish, French and drama.

In her spare time she helps run a local hospital radio station, is a member of the Millennium Volunteer Scheme and a keen fundraiser.

Rebecca intends telling Judges she has a "positive attitude to things both in and out of school" and refuses to give up if the going gets tough. "I always try my hardest to complete the task I am



SUM STAR:
Maths whizz Rebecca Farley, 16, of Stockton, is so good at the subject she could win a national award

Picture: IAN McINTYRE

III be!

By ANGUS HOY
Crime Reporter

THE detective J&M major anti-drugs task force has defended it again it is not making an ii

Middlesbrough's p-Task Group is voicing f. town's CID chief, Detec intendent Adrian Rober Dealer A Day campaign ring supplies.

The issue was raise group's last meeting^! reported there had Mir plaints from drug users get their gear".

It was suggested dex using alternative means such as using taxis and e drugs on buses.

Task group chairma Shepherd, of the Bamarc project, has called for a I sent to Det Supt Roberts:

carrying out and I persevere until I am successful," she said.

Grangefield maths teacher David MacDonald said: "Rebecca has a confidence and maturity far in excess of what you would expect to find in a 16-year-old."

Untaxed cars are swept off streets

A CAMPAIGN to tackle the blight of abandoned and unaxed cars has led to 100 vehicles being removed from the streets in just three days in Hartlepool.

Operation Cubit, a joint venture involving the council, the driver Licensing Authority and Cleveland Police, began earlier this week.

The cars are now stored in a secure compound and will be scrapped unless claimed.

Owners have seven days to claim them and prove they are

licensed. Any that are claimed and unaxed will lead to the owner paying a fine to the DVLA, buying new road tax and paying a £35 administration charge.

A council spokesman said: "Many of these cars are said to be 'community' vehicles and are often used in crime."

A Cleveland Police spokesman said: "Similar operations elsewhere in Cleveland have resulted in the seizure of scores of vehicles which have included a Porsche and a Mercedes."

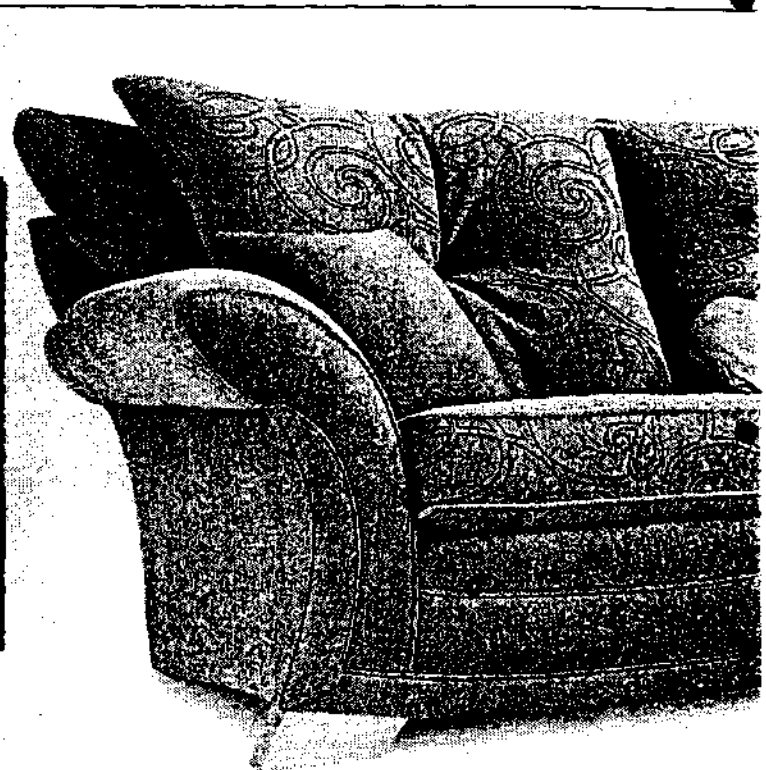
Hi-Tech help down at library

MINI information technology centres are being launched at Thornaby and Buntingham libraries.

The centres will complement the Stockton borough's main Open Technology Centre at Stockton Central Library.

A raft of improvements has recently been added to the main centre, including a state-of-the-art network system.

The work signalled the start of a programme of up-grades, made possible by Government Investment of about £250,000.



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Pay up, or the car gets crushed

RECORD numbers of untaxed cars are being seized in East Cleveland, in a joint operation between the police, DVLA and Redcar and Cleveland Council.

More than 50 vehicles, including a Porsche and a Mercedes, have been taken,

Owners can pay for release or see their vehicles crushed into cubes..

There are an estimated 13,000 untaxed cars and vans on Teesside, and the unpaid fees amount to Government revenue losses of £ 1.6m.

Operation Cubit runs for several more weeks and Cleveland Police expect to seize many more vehicles.

Sgt Dave Lister said: "We've encouraged people to dispose of old bangers legally by offering a £10 reward or free collection. But some people ignore it. Untaxed and unroadworthy vehicles are abandoned, vandalised and burned."

Langbaugh division Chief Supt John Kelly added: "The pool of untaxed cars used by criminals is growing. It's only a matter of time before someone is injured or killed by criminals in a death-trap car without tax, test or insurance."

Coun Dave McLuckie stressed: "This is an excellent scheme. These vehicles are an eyesore and danger, and we mean business."

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First published on Friday 12 April 2002:

Luxury motors seized in car tax clampdown

MORE than 70 untaxed vehicles - including a Porsche 924 and a Mercedes convertible - have been taken off the streets of a North-East town during the first seven days of a clampdown.

Owners are now being offered a choice of paying up or seeing their cars crushed.

Operation Cubit will run in the Cleveland area for several weeks and officers are hopeful scores more vehicles will be taken off the roads.

PC Colin Whitfield, of Middlesbrough community safety department, said untaxed and unregistered vehicles were often abandoned, vandalised and burned out but some also formed a transport pool for criminals.

In Cleveland alone it is thought there are about 13,000 untaxed cars and vans, which cost the Government £1.6m in lost revenue every year.

PC Whitfield said: "We have taken 73 vehicles from the streets in Middlesbrough and the owners have the choice of paying up or having their cars crushed. They are stored in a secured compound in South Bank until their fate is decided. The vehicles we have seized range from luxury motors to complete wrecks being worked on in the street, decent runabouts and criminal community vehicles."

The Mercedes was quickly claimed back. It had been parked outside a garage where it had been booked in to have an exhaust fixed.

PC Whitfield said: "The owner was very upset when the vehicle was taken away and he was keen to pay to get it back.

"But I was surprised at how many untaxed vehicles there are out there. We have received very positive comments.

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"The public pay their car tax and they don't see why others should get away with it. They don't like their streets littered with untaxed wrecks and they don't like watching criminals driving around in untaxed, uninsured and untested cars."

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First published on Tuesday 30 April 2002:

Swoop targets untaxed vehicles

A campaign to tackle the scourge of abandoned and unlicensed vehicles in Hartlepool has been hailed a success - echoing good results elsewhere on Teesside.

Operation Cubit, a joint venture involving the borough council, Cleveland Police and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), began last week and achieved its target of removing 100 vehicles in just three days.

The vehicles are being stored in a compound and will be scrapped unless claimed by their owners.

Dave Stubbs, Hartlepool Borough Council's head of direct services, said: "Many of these vehicles are used in crime.

"Abandoned cars can also become targets for arsonists and this is another serious safety issue that the campaign has tried to address.

"Abandoned vehicles are the council's responsibility and our involvement in Operation Cubit reflects the role we continue to play in promoting community safety."

A team made up of council workers, police and DVLA officials has been working across the town.

Mr Stubbs said: "A person has seven days to prove ownership and that a vehicle is licensed.

"It will then be returned, subject to the payment of a fine to the DVLA, road tax and an administration charge of £35. If, after seven days' storage, vehicles are not claimed then they will be scrapped."

A spokesman for Cleveland Police said: "Similar operations that have taken place elsewhere across Cleveland have resulted in the seizure

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of scores of vehicles, which have Included a Porsche and a Mercedes convertible.

"Many of the seized vehicles were either abandoned, vandalised or burnt out, but some formed a pool of potentially dangerous vehicles that were being used by criminals."

Hartlepool Community Safety Partnership Is aiming to build on the success of Operation Cubit by launching Operation Magpie soon.

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