

Hazardous Horses

**'Reducing the nuisance and danger caused by horses
in public places in Gateshead'**

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ProjectSummary

A `Problem Solving Approach' by
Inspector Cameron Mann

Project Summary

Numerous. horses can be found tethered in public places around Gateshead and frequent 'horse related incidents' have highlighted a range of public nuisance and public safety issues including:

- horses straying in public places and onto roads
- road traffic accidents and 'near misses'
- personal injuries from horse bites and kicks
- damage to fences, allotments and other private property
- damage to school and public playing fields by horses / horse faeces
- ill-treatment of horses by youths
- neglect of horses by owners

In February 2001 the police and local authority formed a partnership to examine these issues and seek solutions with a 'Problem Solving' approach. A joint analysis identified the illegal tethering of horses on council land to secure free grazing as the underlying problem. A further factor was the 'abusive' effect of tethering on the horse(s). In a long history of failed solutions a lack of enforcement was considered a critical factor.

The partnership agreed to:

- develop and implement an effective enforcement campaign
- identify and develop suitable enclosed sites for horses
- implement a horse registration scheme
- implement the use of grazing licences
- develop a media / education strategy

The combination of solutions to the 'horse problem' offered sustainable success in the long term. Other organisations such as the 125PCA, Property Protection Services (PPS), and Gateshead YOT were included as partners as the project developed. Local horse owners refused to participate and this proved a 'set back' in developing the registration scheme, grazing licences and the preparation of suitable land.

Property Protection Services (PP5) were contracted to issue legal notices in the press and on council land stating their intention to impound horses if they were not moved to a legitimate site.

In December 2001 a media and enforcement campaign was implemented. Local horse owners immediately sought a meeting with the partnership and agreed to participate in the project. Suitable land for horses was identified and the registration scheme and grazing licences are now being developed. Six horses have been impounded to date.

Since the enforcement campaign the number of horses illegally tethered on council land has reduced from over 200 to less than 10. There have been no horse related injuries or road traffic collisions. The number of horse related incidents reported to the police have fallen from 85 per month to less than 20.

(387 words)

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Introduction

The Metropolitan Borough of Gateshead has a long history of problems associated with some residents tethering horses on open land around the borough. These horses are subject to numerous complaints to the council and police by local residents and the police routinely attend a wide variety of horse related incidents as part of their daily duties.

This document outlines the 'Problem Solving' approach taken by the council and police in reducing the nuisance and danger caused by horses in public places in Gateshead.

Scanning

In February 2001 Gateshead East Area Command (GEAC) initiated a partnership with Gateshead Metropolitan Borough Council (GMBC) to consider 'Hazardous Horses'.

The police felt routinely deflected from their primary responsibilities to act as 'horse wardens' and sought clarification about GMBC's responsibilities in this respect.

Northumbria Police Legal Services Department indicated that GMBC could be held liable for injuries or damages caused by horses tethered on their land. Similarly, Northumbria Police could be held liable for injuries or damages caused by horses they had captured and re-tethered. The council had a history of failed solutions to the 'horse problem' and had accepted they were unable to make an effective impact. GMBC had powers available to seize illegally tethered or straying horses but had no capacity to do so. This legal advice offered some leverage to influence GMBC in looking at the problem afresh.

The first meeting with GMBC explored issues of liability and was followed up by a letter from the Area Commander setting out the position clearly for 'the record' (see Appendix 1). The response of GMBC was to engage in a 'Problem Solving' partnership with GEAC.

The local authority boundary encompassed the neighbouring police BCU, Gateshead West Area Command (*GWAC*). Most problems occurred in the urban east of the borough so GEAC agreed to represent the interests of GWAC on the partnership. Other potential partners were identified at an early stage and added to the project as it progressed.

The RSPCA were consulted for advice and data.. A company specialising in 'Equine Management' were consulted to advise on enforcement options and details of other initiatives: Gateshead Youth Offending Team were consulted for advice and support. Residents, Neighbourhood Watch and Community Forums were consulted, with a particular emphasis on the acknowledged 'hotspots', to gather data, intelligence and ideas. A group representing local horse owners, the Gateshead Horse Owners Association (GHOA)¹, was contacted but declined to participate. The Crown Prosecution Service advised the partnership on legislation and prosecution policy.

A range of data was examined in February 2001 to establish the scope of the problems associated with horses tethered on open land around the borough. A joint analysis by GMBC (Leisure Services) and GEAC (Community Policing) identified the following:

- 85 horse related incidents per month on average (Police incident log data 2000)
- 6 horse related RTCs per year (Police accident stats 2000)
- 1 horse related 'near miss'/potential RTC per month (Police incident log data 2000)
- 1 horse related injury per month (Police incident log data 2000)
- 2 horse related fatal RTCs (Northumbria Police 2000 / Durham Police 1998)
- 250+ horses illegally tethered on council land (GMBC surveys 2000)

1. This association is a loose affiliation of horse owners that have regular meetings but are not a formally constituted club. The group represents about 150 horse owners/200 horses. Members own between 1 and 12 horses. Most tether their horses illegally on GMBC land. This group represents about 75% of owners responsible for abusing GMBC land. The group has a history of non co-operation and hostility towards GMSC and GEAC.

- 1 hour on average to deal with a horse related incident, invariably involving two police officers; a time equivalent of one full-time officer and 1.6% of GEAC workload (Police incident log data 2000)
- higher levels of reported horse cruelty/neglect in Gateshead compared to the rest of the region - a time equivalent of 40% of a full-time RSPCA Inspector (RSPCA stats 2000)
- numerous and frequent complaints from residents to a variety of council departments by a number of methods (community safety dept/leisure services/housing offices/residents associations/community forums)
- hotspots at Windy Nook/Learn Lane/Felling (GEAC CPAS see Appendix 2)
- most incidents and complaints occurred between March and August (trend relates -to lack of available grazing and water/breaking loose from tether to search)
- 98% of horse related incidents and complaints involved horses illegally tethered on council land

Some useful 'scanning' of similar problems and projects elsewhere in the UK indicated the following:²

- serious or fatal injuries are likely to be sustained by motorists in collision with horses; so each RTC/'near miss' has serious/fatal potential
- local 'horse wardens' are subject to threats and assault and the post is unsustainable
- local 'horse pounds' are regularly targeted and attacked/damaged (inc. arson)
- the horse owners are the problem rather than the horses

2. Schemes in South Wales, London and the Midlands were examined and their critical failure/success factors were considered.

- the horse owners are hard to identify'
- marked reductions in problem areas can be achieved through targeted enforcement

The scanning and analysis continued throughout 2001 as the project developed with 2001 data forming a 'baseline' against which the partnership could measure the impact of their responses. Three data-sets were prepared to illustrate the GEAC, GWAC and GMBC/borough-wide 'picture'.

Analysis

The nature and scope of the problem was defined as follows:

- loose horses straying in public places and onto roads (85% of all incidents)
- horse related road traffic accidents and 'near misses'
- horse related personal injuries/aggressive horses (bites/kicks/charging)
- horse related damage to fences/allotments and other private property
- horse related damage to public and school playing areas (faeces/grazing damage)
- ill-treatment of horses by youths (stone throwing/'loosing' tether)
- neglect of horses by owners (lack of food/water/shelter/care/medical attention)

The underlying cause of these problems was the illegal tethering of horses on GMBC land by their owners to secure free grazing (ie. 98% of horse related incidents reported to the police were linked by this common feature). This practise exposed residents, motorists, property and horses to unacceptably high levels of risk.

3. Individuals associated with a horse claim to be looking after it for 'a friend' who they will not name. Owners feed and water horses early in the morning/late at night to avoid detection. Many horses change ownership regularly. Without an admission or registration it is impossible to identify the true owner.

Expert advice (RSPCA, Vets, Animal Psychologist) identified tethering as having an adverse effect on the animals. Horses naturally flee danger, seek food/water when hungry/thirsty and seek shelter in adverse weather conditions; tethering restricts this instinctive behaviour and 'stresses' the horse.

The following were identified as having an 'abusive' effect on the horses resulting in aggressive behaviour and breaking loose from the tether:

- **owners feeding/watering their animals in the early morning or late evening (to avoid detection) leaving the horse without food/water for many hours**
- **allowing foals to roam freely to access their mother's milk frequently straying into roads (and "mothers' breaking loose to search)**
- **tethering stallions and mares close together leading to regular attacks by stallions on mares**
- **no available shelter causing hardship in adverse weather conditions**

One expert described the effect of tethering as 'brutalising' the horse. The practice is not illegal but some equestrian groups are currently lobbying parliament to legislate against the practise.

Key issues perpetuating the current problems were:

- **'anonymous'/irresponsible horse owners**
- **the open nature of favoured sites**
- **the effects of tethering on the horse(s)**
- **tolerance by GMBC/lack of enforcement**

Response - Preparation

An education and enforcement campaign was designed to incorporate the learning points' from elsewhere in the UK. The key features of the campaign were:

- a database to record intelligence about horses/ownership
- personal visits to identified horse owners by a community officer to warn them of their liabilities and responsibilities (with a Tenancy Enforcement Officer in the case of council tenants)
- a media campaign to gain public support and educate horse owners`
- issue of legal notices in the press and on GMBC land indicating an intent to seize and impound illegally tethered horses
- the seizure and impoundment of (carefully targeted) illegally tethered horses on GMBC land^s
- the stabling of impounded horses elsewhere in the UK at a secret location to avoid reprisals
- allowing owners to re-claim their horse after covering the cost of **impoundment**^s
- the relocation of unclaimed horses to a sanctuary or sale at auction`

4. The campaign would highlight the scope and nature of the problems caused by irresponsible horse owners and demonstrate the need for enforcement. Advice on standards for 'horse husbandry' (esp. tethering policy) would be issued by the RSPCA. The campaign would ensure public opinion supported the partnership approach.

5. The campaign would target key individuals believed to be persistent offenders and who owned a number of horses. The most expensive horses would be targeted to maximise collateral damage. This policy would also offer the best chance of recovering costs.

6. The horse is **impounded** for 31 days during which the owner can reclaim it. The horse is examined and treated by a vet and stabled to a high standard. The costs associated with seizure and impoundment average £900 per horse.

7. To avoid any suggestion of horses being sold for slaughter, those in **poor condition would be** relocated to a sanctuary whilst any valuable horses would be sold at auction to offset costs.

- a robust prosecution policy by the police and local authority re. horses straying onto a highway/causing RTCs/causing personal injury or damage/causing a nuisance^s/breach of tenancy agreements

The aim of the campaign was to force horse owners to remove their horses from GMBC land to a suitable and enclosed site. The drawback for the horse owner was paying for a facility they previously enjoyed freely at the council's expense. It was recognised that some horses might be displaced onto private land without permission and this would be monitored closely by the partnership. It was hoped that some owners who kept numerous horses would sell them on at auction and desist breeding from them, however, the 'Foot and Mouth' crisis was at its height and all auctions were suspended.

A 'menu' of other solutions were developed to match the range of associated problems identified at the analysis stage:

- identify and develop suitable enclosed sites on GMBC land (safe un-tethered grazing with shelters available and owners able to regularly supervise/feed/water their horses)
- introduce 'grazing licences' for suitable GMBC land at a nominal cost to horse owners
- develop a horse registration scheme to deal quickly and effectively with 'strays' and ensure adequate standards of 'horse husbandry'
- develop a horse related intervention scheme at Gateshead YOT to educate local youths and foster a respect for horses

These ideas offered some long term and sustainable solutions to the 'hazardous horse' problem.

8. Specific legislation exists to cover most eventualities, however, the common law offence of Public Nuisance provides the best means of prosecuting the range of anti-social behaviours by the irresponsible horse owner and carries a power of arrest enabling a police officer to detain and identify the suspected owner.

Response - Implementation

While the partnership developed the medium/long term responses some short term responses were implemented in April 2001:

- intelligence gathering on horse owners⁹
- risk assessment with health and safety advice to police officers attending horse related incidents"

Property Protection Services (PPS) were consulted and agreed to undertake the enforcement campaign at a cost of £15,200 for an 18 month contract." Two sites in East Gateshead were identified as suitable for the purposes of grazing 40-60 horses but required development at a one-off cost of £40,000.¹² A cost/benefit analysis placed these sums in the context of an ongoing £49,000 cost to the partnership.¹³

A substantial period of time elapsed as sources for funding were explored and discounted. The Northumbria Police Grant Pool Fund was identified in June 2001 as the most hopeful source of funding but the partnership bid was unsuccessful.

9. Police officers/council CCTV operators/neighbourhood watch co-ordinators were briefed to obtain information that could identify horse owners and which horses *they* owned. The intelligence was entered onto a database to build a picture of who owned horses, their routines, vehicles and variety of places used for tethering etc

10. Police Officers are not trained or equipped to capture horses and re-tether them. GEAC considered a policy of non-attendance at horse related incidents, however, the risk to public safety identified mitigated against this.

11. PPS Quote: Month 1-4, regular site checks/legal notice £3000. Months 5-12, monitor sites re-issue legal notices £3,200. Months 1-18 impound 6 horses £7,500. Months 13-18 continued monitoring of sites £1,500. TOTAL £15,200.

12. Cost to clear two sites and fence to a required height/standard = £20,000 per site.

13. Costs: police = aprox £35,000 employable cost of 1 PC; RSPCA = £12,000 40% employable cost of 1 Inspector, GMBC £2,000 dealing with complaints. The costs within the community were considered substantial but difficult to quantify ie. personal injury/RTCs/damage etc. GMBC had the greatest 'ownership' of the problem but the lowest costs/least financial incentive.

It was hoped that the idea of working with the GHOA to develop GMBC land with grazing licenses and a registration scheme would entice them into the partnership but despite continued attempts to engage them in dialogue they declined. With a lack of co-operation from horse owners it proved difficult to argue for funding for these ideas and a voluntary registration scheme would have proved impossible.¹⁴ The partnership continued to develop these ideas but decided not to seek funding for these plans until the horse owners participated.

After a further period of disappointment in securing funding GMBC agreed to fund the enforcement campaign from its Leisure Services budget. In October 2001 GMBC finalised its contract with PP5 who began issuing legal notices in the local press and on GMBC land on 1st December 2001 for a six week period. From 17th January 2002 PPS were entitled to seize and impound illegally tethered horses on GMBC land.

The intended media campaign quickly encountered a setback as some GMBC councillors expressed concern about publicity and blocked the initial press releases. Some councillors had received aggressive 'representations' from horse owning constituents about the campaign and one had been threatened. As the issuing of legal notices progressed media interest was aroused and the rest of the partners decided to respond positively to requests for interviews and information leading to a number of articles in the local press and culminating in two 3 minute reports on the Tyne Tees Television regional news programme on Monday 7th January 2002. The key areas for publicity identified by the partnership were all covered in the media resulting in a fair balance between 'enforcement' and 'education'.

14. A compulsory horse registration scheme might have been possible with the passing of a bylaw but was discounted due to its adverse effect on the numerous legitimate and responsible horse owners in the borough and the relevant remedies/penalties were already available but not utilised.

Early feedback indicated a good level of public support for the project, however, various partners received information that the GHOA were planning a large scale protest with horses in Gateshead Town Centre on Thursday 17th January.

After the Tyne Tees broadcast the GHOA quickly arranged a meeting with GMBC scheduled for Monday 14th January. At the meeting they were very positive about obtaining suitable land with grazing licenses but reticent about a registration scheme. The GHOA confirmed their plans to demonstrate, commenting - 'we could bring Gateshead to a stand-still' and 'ride horses through the Civic Centre'. The representatives agreed to 'suspend' their plans as they felt they had secured some major concessions from GMBC; however, they were careful to distance themselves from some horse owners who might wish to protest. GEAC considered this would pose a considerable threat to public safety and began to plan a substantial operation to prevent such a gathering.¹⁵ Continuing analysis showed a marked increase in horses being tethered on GMBC land at identified 'hotspots' and this was considered an aggressive response by some horse owners to the campaign.

On 17th January GEAC mounted 'Operation Hazard' to prevent the unlawful procession or gathering of horses in Gateshead. This demonstrated the on-going partnership / 'problem solving' approach by involving - 1 R5PCA Inspector / 4 GMBC security staff / 2 charity workers from a horse sanctuary / 10 community beat mangers / 6 mounted branch officers / 8 tactical support unit officers / 7 traffic officers / 6 metro unit officers / 2 evidence gatherers / 2 technical support officers / 1 public order tactical advisor / 2 firearms tactical advisors / 5 five traffic wardens.

15. Northumbria Police had not received notification about the gathering/procession as required by the Public Order Act 1986, so it would have been illegal. Just a small number of horses being brought into Gateshead town centre would cause considerable danger. Many tethered horses are untrained, undisciplined and aggressive; additionally, horses have a herding instinct and if one were to 'bolt' the rest would follow.

Early morning 'spotters' checked all known 'hotspots' across the borough for activity and were amazed to find that not a single horse was tethered on GMBC land. The rest of the day passed without incident. The scale and scope of this operation demonstrated the commitment of the partnership to tackling this social problem.

Assessment

A range of targets were set for the first year of the project as follows (see Appendices 3,4,5 & 6):

- reduce the number of horses illegally tethered on *GMBC* land by 50% (PP5 surveys)
- reduce horse related incidents by 50% (police incident log data)
- reduce reports of straying horses by 50% (police incident log data)

These would be reviewed in December 2002 with new and/or additional targets being set for years two and three_

All GMBC and PP5 surveys had found in the region of 250 horses illegally tethered on GMBC land in 2000 and 2001 so 200 was used as a baseline figure. Weekly surveys by PPS would be averaged for the month to provide a figure that could be compared against the baseline. The surveys would be conducted on a monthly basis after the first four months. The surveys would include all known 'hotspots' and also include any new locations identified by the partnership (new incidents/intelligence etc.). The scope of these methods would ensure any displacement was accounted for.

Horse related incidents reported to the police were divided between 'horses straying' and 'horse related' so both aspects of the problem could be measured. Of 762 incidents in Gateshead in 2001. 113 were 'horse related' (14.8%) and 649 were 'horses straying' (85.2%) (see Appendix 6 & 7). A monthly breakdown of both categories was produced for 2001 as a baseline for each of the three data-sets.

Four other targets were **considered** but discounted as follows:

- reduce horse **related** RTCs by %¹⁶
- reduce horse related complaints to GMBC by %¹⁷
- reduce horse related reports *to* RSPCA *by* %¹⁸
- reduce horse related **personal** injury incidents by %¹⁹

A further **three** targets remain under consideration **dependant on the co-operation of** the GHOA:

- implement a voluntary horse registration scheme
- develop 2 GMBC sites for the safe grazing of horses
- implement the **use** of grazing licenses

On 25th February 2002 the GHOA met with **the partnership and agreed to implement a voluntary horse registration scheme. Under the scheme four committee members would be available on a 24 hour call-out basis to deal with 'horse related' incidents referred by the council or police. The organisers would hold registration details of participants who would 'tag' their horse(s) with a numbered disc.**

16. Only 3 horse related RTCs occurred in 2000 and none in 2001 so no meaningful target could be set against this baseline. However, the issue would be closely monitored.

17. Complaints received by a variety of departments were not collated together or comprehensively recorded. It *was not possible to quantify the* numbers received *or reorganise* the receiving and recording of complaints at GMBC. This would have been a key indicator of project success had systems allowed accurate measurement.

18. Joint RSPCA *and* GEAC analysis *showed* duplication *of* reporting and *the* RSPCA *were* unable to extract clear data from their computer system to enable accurate measurement.

19. Only 12 horse related personal injuries were reported in 2000 and 6 in 2001 so no meaningful target could be set against this baseline. However, the issue would be closely monitored:

The scheme offered the benefit of an organised voluntary response to incidents and overcame the reluctance of horse owners to provide the 'authorities' with their details. The main drawback was the likelihood of a police officer having to attend an incident to identify a horse and refer it to the scheme. The organisers would be responsible for 'policing' the scheme.

Targets would be set for the scheme²⁰ with the offer of GMBC land/grazing licenses dependant upon the scheme's success. Funding for development of the sites is actively being sought in the meantime. The problem solving approach offered the benefits of legitimate and safe low-cost grazing for horses dependant on the owners' co-operation with the registration scheme. Additionally, the partnership could now influence horse owners through the GHOA.

Since 17th January 2002 the vast majority of illegally tethered horses have been relocated to safe, privately owned locations. There have been no 'near-misses'/RTCs, damage or personal injuries reported. Six horses have been impounded; one from the garden of a vacant council house where its presence was preventing a family moving into the premises. The number of illegally tethered horses remains low but other schemes have experienced regular 'tests' by horses being placed at the most popular grazing sites. Any such 'test' of the partnership's resolve will be met with further enforcement action and GMBC have budgeted to extend its contract with PPS2¹

20. Response times/number of incidents attended/number of complaints successfully concluded etc.

21. At a significantly reduced rate and subject to satisfactory performance

The lifting of 'Foot and Mouth' restrictions in the region have allowed auctions to resume. Many owners have sold their horses at auction and those owning several horses have sold some of their stock further reducing horse numbers in the borough. There have been no incidents of breeding horses on GMBC land since the enforcement campaign.

Gateshead YOT have developed a horse based intervention scheme that has proved successful with 12 young people completing the courses in 2001.

Due to the substantial reduction in horse related incidents there has been only one prosecution of a horse owner since the new 'prosecution policy' was adopted on 17th January. All horse related incidents are monitored by the GEAC and *GWAC* Community Policing Sergeants on a daily basis and the few incidents that occur result in follow-up enquiries to identify owners leading to a personal visit.

Viewing figures for the Tyne Tees Television programmes showed an audience of over 700,000 across the region had watched the reports. With the readership of the local papers a further 370,000 local people received a range of 'enforcement' and 'education' messages. The campaign gained further television and press coverage when it impounded two horses in April reaching a further 1,000,000 people in the area.

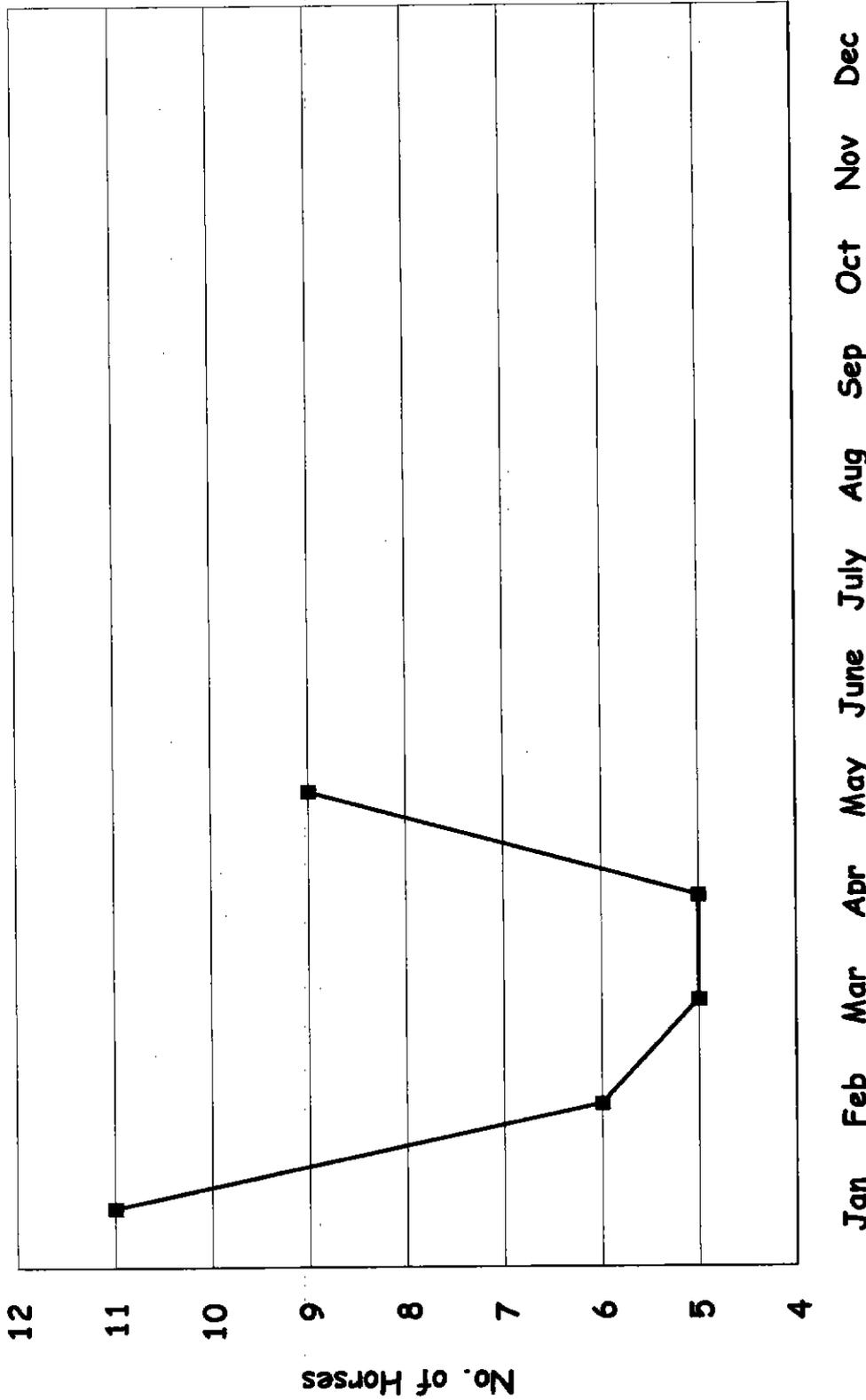
All the targets set have been achieved and exceeded.

Conclusion

The approach of the partnership was based on a detailed analysis using a range of analytical tools including SARA and PAT. Other schemes were examined to distil key learning points'. An innovative enforcement campaign was developed to incorporate the identified 'best practise' whilst recognising the unique features of the Gateshead 'problem'. When tested by the horse owners, the partnership demonstrated a strong resolve to complete its 'mission'. The problem solving approach brought horse owners into the partnership and lead to them becoming 'stakeholders' in the process. A 'menu' of innovative solutions were developed to ensure long-term sustainability. A media campaign was managed despite some differences within the partnership and over two million people in the region received the intended enforcement and education 'messages'.

(3999 words)

GMBC - Tethered Horses



2002

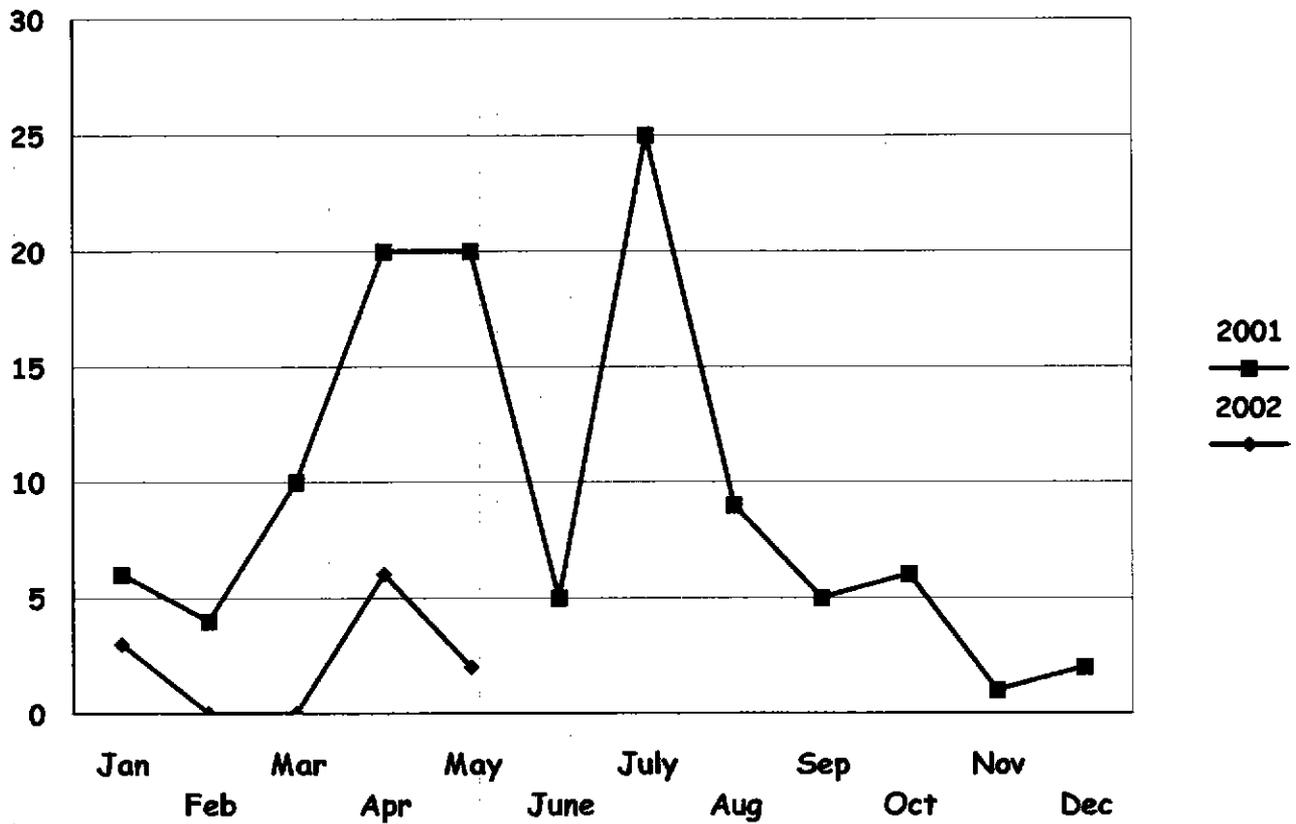


Appendix 3

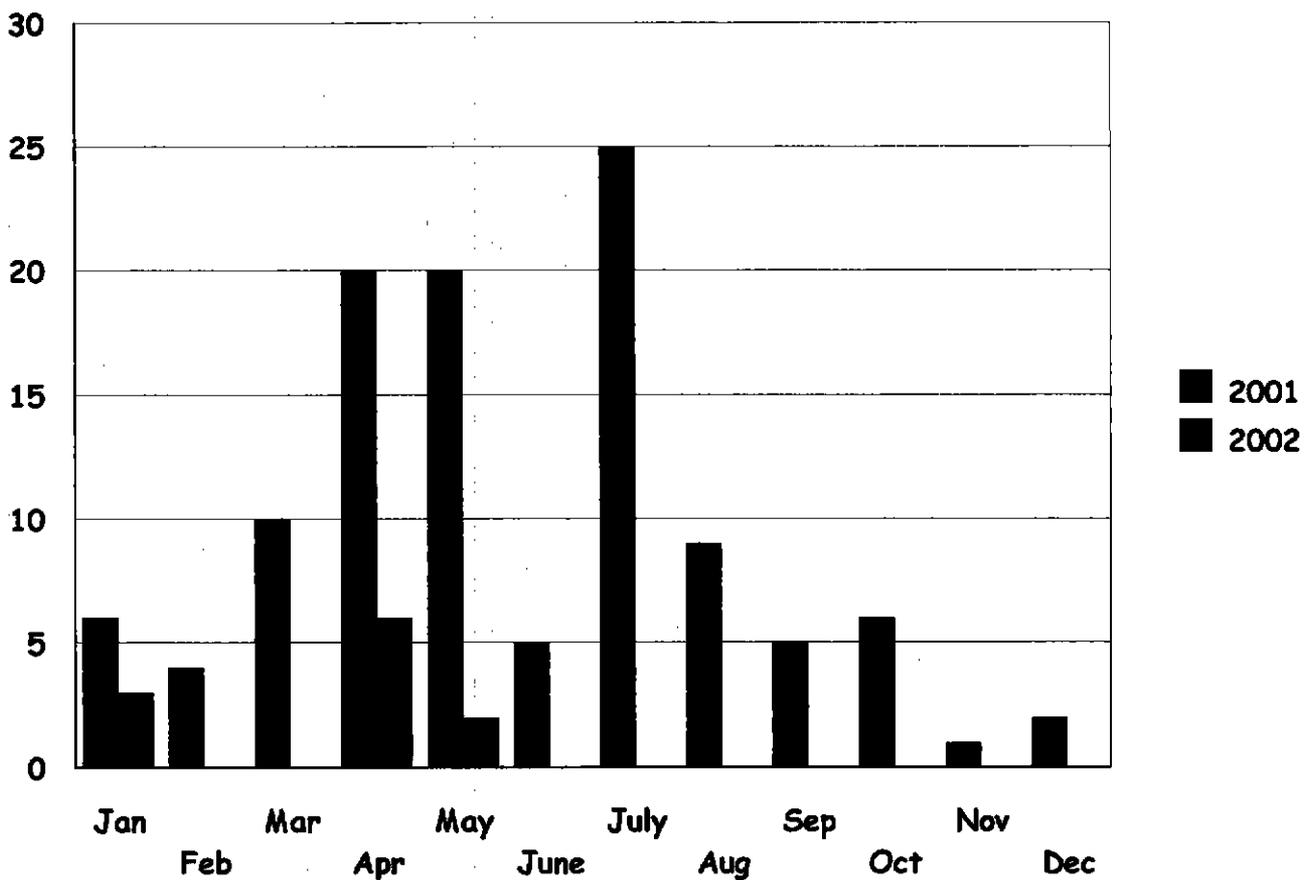
2001 Baseline = 200

GMBC - Horse Related Incidents

Appendix 4

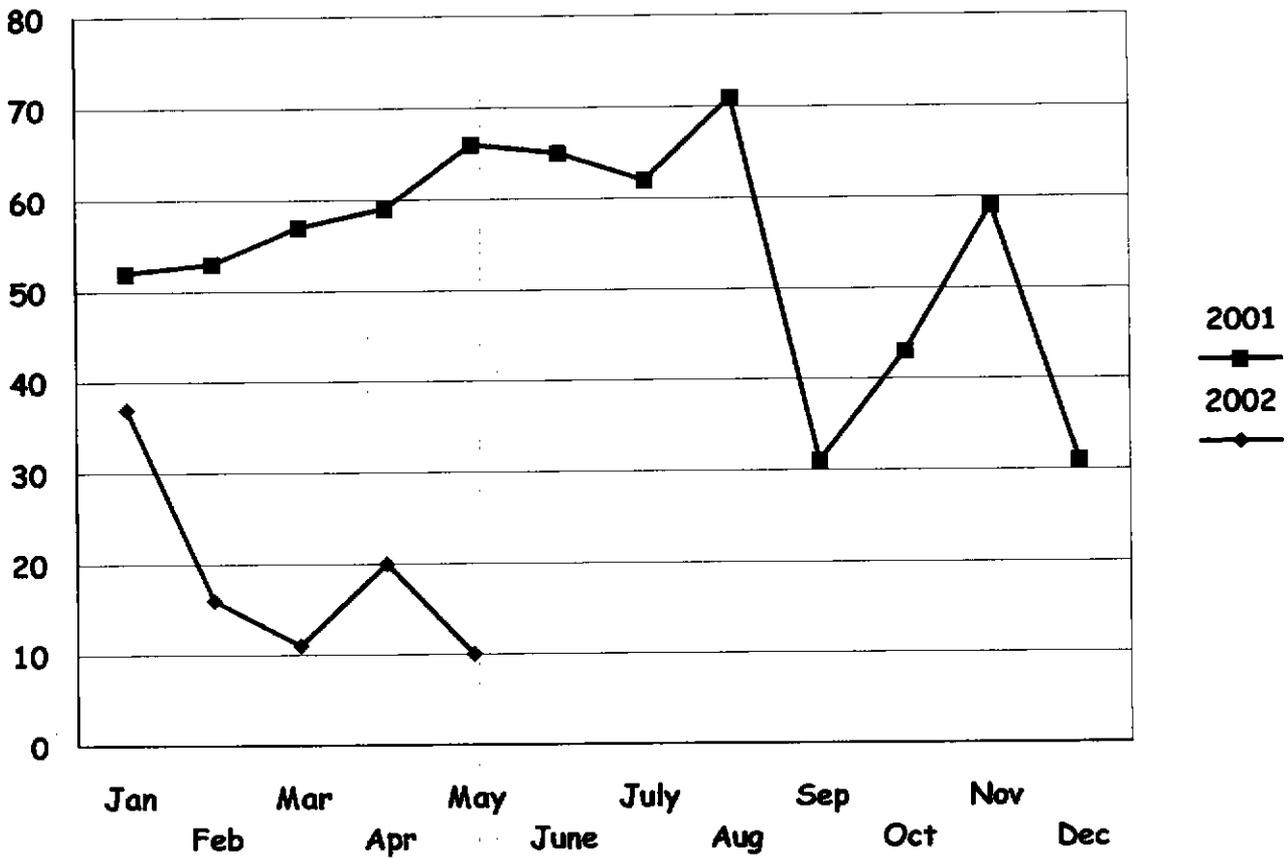


GMBC - Horse Related Incidents

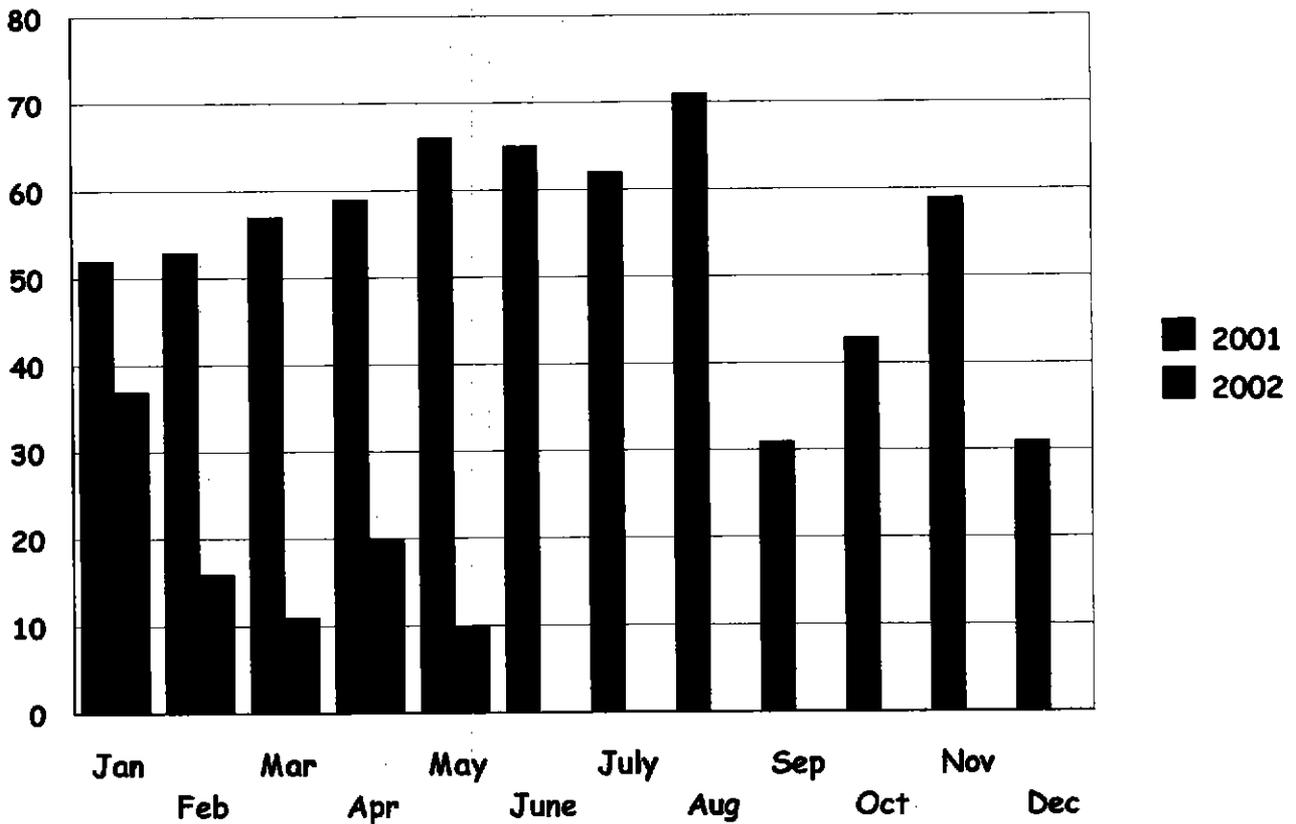


GMBC - Horse Straying Incidents

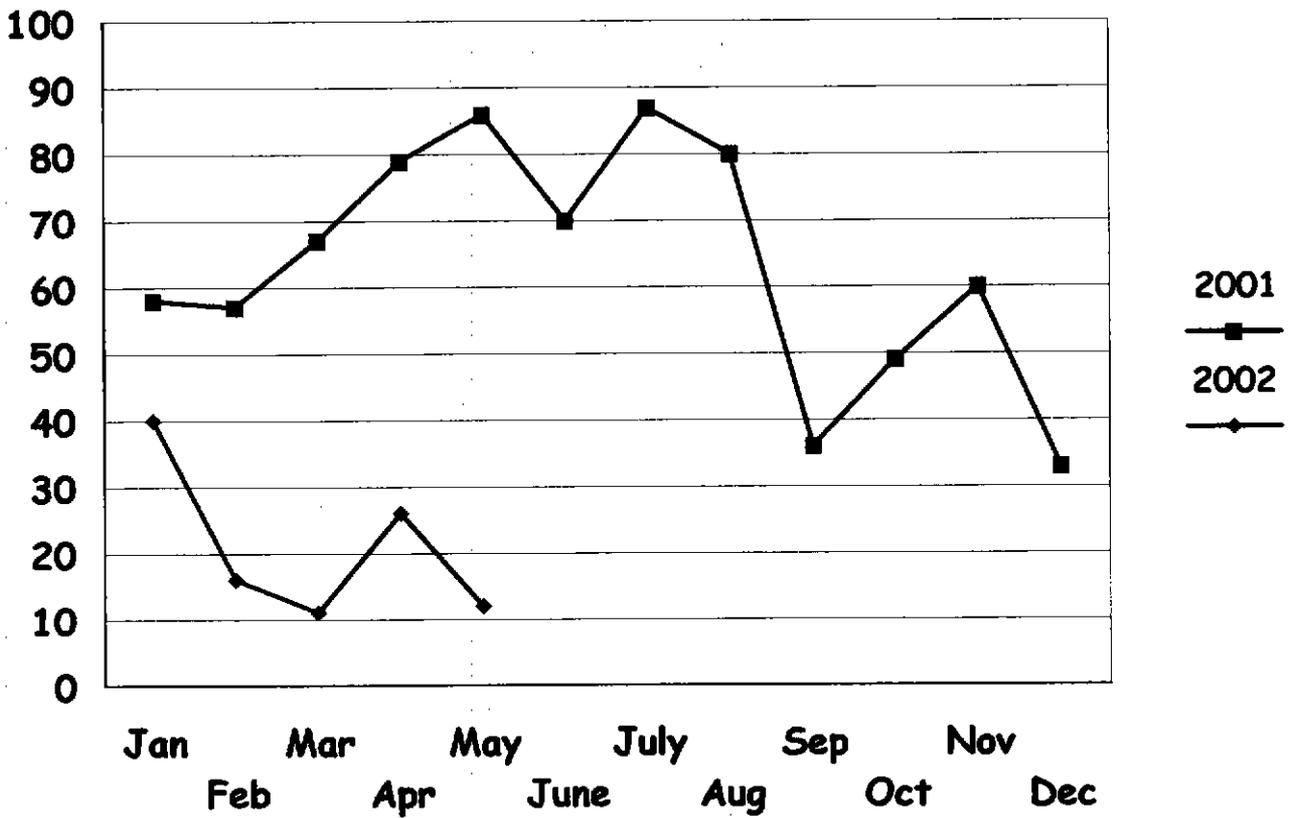
Appendix 5



GMBC - Horse Straying Incidents



GMBC - Total Incidents



GMBC - Total Incidents

