



# TARGETING NEW OFFICERS TO IMPLEMENT PROBLEM ORIENTED POLICING

## Tilley Awards 2003

Category: Organisational support in police forces

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## SUMMARY

In 2001 the Police at Whitehaven began to implement the principles of Problem Oriented Policing, [P.O.P] enabling them to be more effective and efficient in the service that they delivered. Initially P.O.P was to be implemented by the towns' Community Team, with the intention of cascading P.O.P philosophies to other officers within the station.

When the Community Officers began to try to influence others within the station, to adopt a problem oriented approach, by showing the benefits of P.O.P, they came up against varying degrees of resistance. There was reluctance to change from a reactive style of Policing. There was also a degree of cynicism from the majority of officers.

Due to this resistance, new ways forward were sought, and a decision was made to focus on new officers who would be easier to influence and therefore more receptive to P.O.P philosophies. Eventually Probationer Constables were 'targeted,' during the first five weeks of their operational career.

Instead of ten weeks of reactive Policing during the accompanied patrol phase, training was split into five weeks of P.O.P and five weeks of reactive Policing. There were concerns that this approach may have a negative impact on the number of core skills a probationer could attain by the end of their ten-week accompanied phase. This was not the case.

A 'hands on approach' to training was adopted. As with all forms of training, learning while doing, is accepted as best practice.

The intentions:-

- **To promote the ethos of P.O.P**
- **Give new officers practical experience of P.O.P methods at the earliest opportunity**
- **Give practical experience of Policing methods, which could not be achieved by carrying out reactive police work**

The results of the project have shown that P.O.P has been promoted within the station and is now being utilised as part of everyday Policing within the town. Officers' trained under this system now use P.O.P to address problems as they arise.

By moving away from ten weeks of purely reactive Policing, during the tutored phase of training, to five involving P.O.P then five of reactive Police work, there has been a significant improvement in the numbers of core skills achieved by a Probationer Constable. There has also been an improvement in standards overall.

Due to the initial success in the way training in P.O.P has developed Probationer Constables, the project has continued.

## SCANNING

Whitehaven Police Station is situated within the Western Area of Cumbria Constabulary. Whitehaven town is served by approximately thirty-five uniformed officers' split in to three 'borough shifts.' Included in this number is a five-officer Community Team.

The Community Team was developed in April 2001, to provide a Problem Oriented and Intelligence Led Policing approach to issues as they arose. It was intended that this approach would be adopted and implemented to support the 'Borough shifts' within the town, thereby placing a problem solving philosophy at the heart of policing the town.

By December 2001 the Community Officers' were carrying out work on twelve separate P.O.P initiatives. These dealt with a wide variety of community related issues. Despite 'selling' the P.O.P approach, by demonstrating the benefits it had, there was a great reluctance to change. The majority of officers within the station were unwilling to become involved in anything other than reactive Police work.

Three of the officers' within the Community Team were Tutor Constables. This resulted in occasional 'attachments' of Probationer Constables so that they could gain the necessary competencies relating to community issues that are required for their Personal Development Profiles [PDP]

The current style of Probationer training concentrates on a purely reactive approach from day one of an officer's career. No training is given in a problem solving approach. This caused attachments to the Community Team to be divisive and was seen as a chance to have core skills 'signed off' and not as a chance to learn.

In the early part of 2002 an HMIC report made a number of recommendations regarding Probationer training. One recommendation indicated that Forces' should look towards the implementation of 'tutor units' to train Probationer Constables at the start of their operational career. At the time of the HMIC report, the Area Training Officer raised a number of concerns regarding the standard of Probationer training within the station.

## **ANALYSIS**

As we began to look at why a P.O.P approach was not being adopted within the station, by the majority of officers', notional evidence was gathered which indicated these reasons. New initiatives to Policing, not just P.O.P, were generally met within the Service with a mixture of suspicion and cynicism.

### **We're all Problem Solvers at Whitehaven! Aren't we?**

The P.O.P approach to Policing began to be implemented mid 2001. Initially, this was done by the Community Team, as the Area and the Force began to move towards a Community based Problem Solving approach in its' policing response. The Western Area Commander supported and encouraged the use of P.O.P. by all officers.

Officers' from the Community Team at Whitehaven researched the methods and philosophies of P.O.P by using the Internet to look at initiatives carried out by other Police Forces worldwide. It could be seen that P.O.P had been around for several years and used by Forces worldwide to good effect. In particular we began to look at the experience and practices adopted by Lancashire and Cleveland Constabularies.

By adopting the best practice of these Forces', the officers, with partnership agencies, began to implement P.O.P to address problems as they arose within the town. In doing this it was thought that as the P.O.P related initiatives began to show signs of success, there would be a diffusion of benefits for other officers within the station. It was also thought that with training, the majority of officers would begin to implement the problem solving approach in their daily work. It soon became apparent that this was a misplaced belief.

Borough shifts within the town carried out a purely reactive style of Policing. There was little or no emphasis whatsoever placed on P.O.P or Community related Police work.

### **Resistance to change**

Although we expected the majority of officers to adopt the methods of P.O.P in daily Policing, it would have been wrong to think this could have been achieved overnight. Some thought P.O.P could be implemented without training, which was a very naïve approach. If we did not train officers,' how could we expect them to implement problem-solving methods.

No training was available within the Force, we therefore looked to best practice adopted by other Forces' throughout the Country who had delivered training to their Officers. A simple training package was formatted to meet local needs. We began to try to implement this training within the station, using local problems to emphasise the benefits a P.O.P approach would bring, thereby reducing the need for a responsive style, giving officers more time to concentrate on problem solving.

One Simple example used in the training to emphasise the benefits was:-

### **Scanning**

Numerous complaints about disorder and under age drinking were being generated from the area of Castle Park in Whitehaven.

### **Analysis**

- Incidents occurred mainly on a Friday and Saturday night.
- Incidents tended to occur during the early evening.
- The ages of those involved ranged from ten to eighteen years.
- Alcohol was a factor.
- Two off-licenses were situated close to the Park.
- The park had CCTV coverage, this was found to be ineffective due to the position of trees.
- Shrubs and bushes gave cover from view from those outside the Park.

### **Response**

- A high profile Operation was initiated as a short-term measure to detect offenders and deter youths from misusing the park.
- Awareness of the problem was raised with the two licensees.
- Work with the local Council saw trees and shrubs being cut back to give improved CCTV coverage and improved view from outside the park.
- The Council provided CCTV signs.

### **Assessment**

- The numbers of incidents and complaints were reduced.

With this simple example we could show how P.O.P would work for us and the benefits it could bring. Despite this there was still reluctance and resistance by the borough shifts to employ the methods of P.O.P.

### **Why do we resist change?**

When we asked this question of Officers, the common themes which ran through most answers could be summarised in the following responses:-

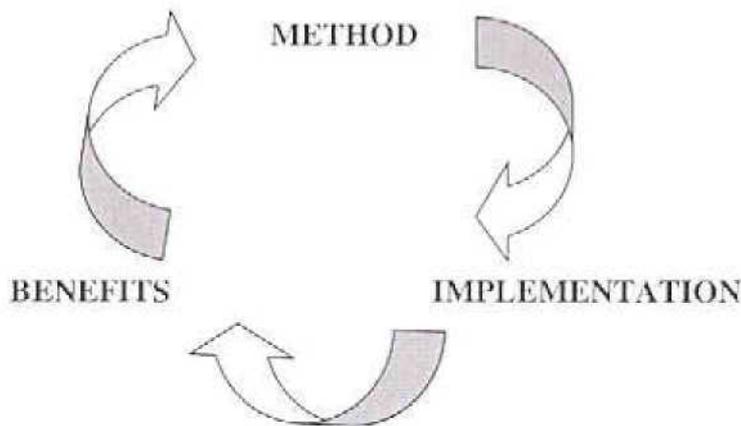
- "It (P.O.P) is no different to what we do now"
- "It's just government jargon"
- "It won't work"
- "It (Policing) is not broken so why fix it"
- "P.O.P will go away when whoever thought of it gets promoted"

From these responses it was realised that there would be great difficulty in changing the negative mindset of Officers who resisted change. In the past they had seen numerous Policing Initiatives fall by the wayside for a variety of reasons that generally resulted in the Police Service reverting to it's reactive/responsive role.

In P.O.P we had tried and tested methods of policing which had been ongoing for several years, not just in the UK but also worldwide. We had local examples of the benefits of P.O.P and despite these factors we still experienced the resistance to any other type of policing being used, other than the 'Fire Brigade' style we had become accustomed to.

### **How can we implement it if we have not been trained?**

Although simple training in the methods of P.O.P had been offered to raise awareness there was still resistance to accept it. This left a cycle that had to be broken. If we didn't train Officers then they would not be able to implement the methods of P.O.P, leading to no benefits.



When analysing the best methods of training, it was found that the evidence of best learning was to learn while doing. We then began to look at ways of introducing a 'hands on' training approach this method of learning also impacts on the need to remove Officers from front line policing.

### **Probationer Attachments and Development**

The current system of Probationer Training is based upon a Probationers development over a two-year period.

The operational phase of the police work is carried out at a tutor station over a period of approximately 18 months. During this time, the Probationer initially spends a ten-week period in company with a tutor. At the end of the ten-week period there is an assessment, measured against core skills achieved. A minimum of 80% of these skills has to be attained. At the end of two years, an assessment of the same skills is made. At this stage 100% have to be attained. Additional skills are also assessed at this point and 80% of these skills have to be attained.

During the 18 months of operational policing, a Probationer would carry out a number of attachments including:- Mobile Support Group, Criminal Investigation Department, Intelligence Units, Interview Teams and Dog Section. They would also have three, two-week foundation courses. Therefore it was no surprise that attachments to the Community Team were driven by the need to have community based skills “signed off” within the PDP, as they could not be achieved by carrying out reactive policing. These attachments were purely divisive.

Although the area moved towards a Problem Solving Policing philosophy, which was community based, Probationer Constables did not receive any form of training in P.O.P. Therefore new Officers were learning nothing other than reactive policing methods, from a majority of Officers who were interested in nothing other than reactive policing.

From the Scanning and Analysis, which was carried out, it was realised that the chain, which led a majority of Officers refusing to accept change, had to be broken.

In implementing changes, it was apparent that it would be difficult, in the majority of cases, to change the mindset of those Officers who had become accustomed to reactive policing methods.

Therefore a solution was sought whereby the mindset of those who had not experienced reactive policing would be influenced and encouraged to adopt a P.O.P approach.

## **RESPONSE**

The obvious people to target were Probationers Constables at the early stages of their policing careers and this generated the following intentions:-

- **To promote the ethos of P.O.P**
- **Give new officers practical experience of P.O.P methods at the earliest opportunity**
- **Give practical experience of policing methods, which could not be experienced by carrying out reactive policing**

Although it was accepted that Probationers were the Officers to target, we immediately met with resistance when it was suggested that they should spend time attached to the Community Team.

### **The First Probationer**

In September 2001 a Probationer completed a five-week attachment to the Community Team to address issues of youth disorder on a local skate park, by using a Problem Solving approach. The Officer worked on this initiative and on other initiatives that were being implemented at the time. After the attachment the Officer continued to work on the P.O.P initiative whilst working as part of the borough shift. The project successfully addressed the problem and the Officer began to work on other P.O.P initiatives as part of normal policing.

This was one Officer who had carried out an attachment, and factors such as self-motivation and enthusiasm no doubt played a part in the success. It did show that with 'hands on' training an Officer could learn the P.O.P principles and then apply them on what would normally be a reactive shift.

This attachment also confirmed to us that the Officers to 'target' and who would be likely to employ the principles of P.O.P were those at the early stage of their police career. They would be easier to influence and more likely to employ P.O.P principles.

### **We have shown that it works in principle – now can we change it?**

Initially the answer to this question was - no. Once again we met with resistance mainly from other Supervisors who felt that Probationers should learn reactive policing from day one of their careers. P.O.P was seen as something to 'specialise' in later.

A solution to this problem was presented with the publication of an HMIC Report regarding probationer training. This contained a number of recommendations, the main one which impacted upon the start of this project was the recommendation for Forces to initiate Tutor Units to improve probationer training.

## Focus on new officers

The report appeared to present an ideal solution to solve the problem of resistance to focusing on new officers. We had identified the officers to 'target' and were now presented with a stronger case for breaking from normal tutoring methods.

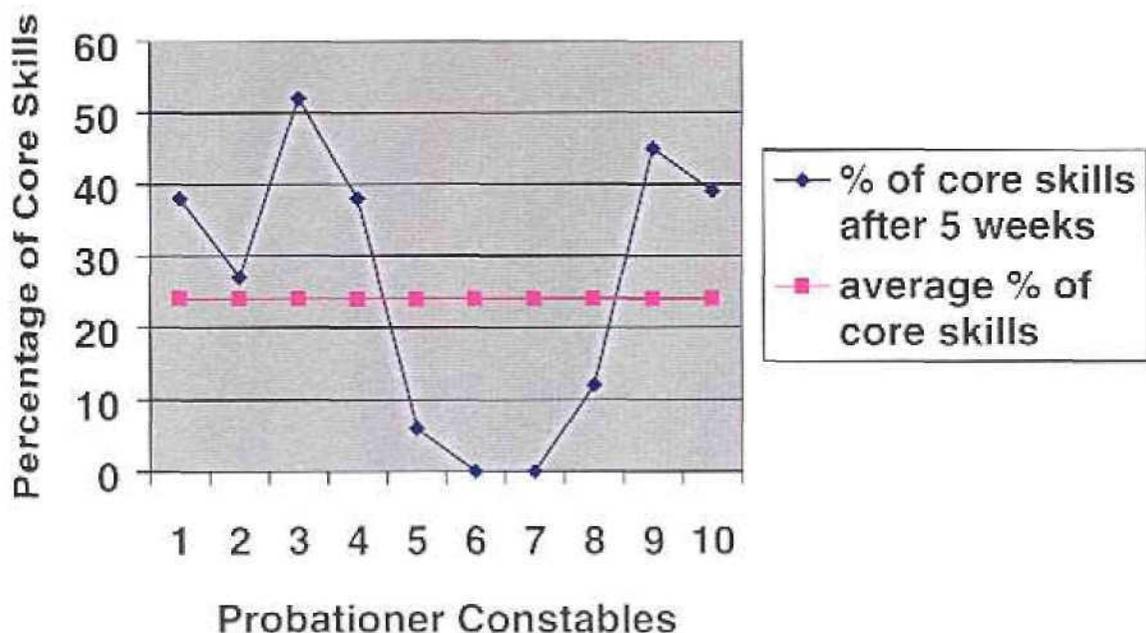
Three of the Officers within the Community Team were Tutor Constables. Whitehaven did not receive any more than three probationers in one intake. The idea of Probationers spending their first weeks of policing as part of the Community Team was 'sold' to the local management team and it was agreed that a trial would take place.

Probationers, during their ten-week accompanied phase of training would spend the first five weeks of this period with the Community Team prior to spending the second five weeks attached to their respective shift, in a reactive role.

The Area Training Officer was involved in setting up the processes for the new methods, which were to be adopted. The training officer had identified that as well as introducing the methods of P.O.P to Probationer Constables, there would also be an opportunity to improve the overall standards in the early stages of development. The P.O.P approach would not only give an insight in to a different style of Policing but would still allow core skills to still be attained.

The trial commenced in April 2002. To measure the success of the new P.O.P approach the percentage of 'core skills' achieved by ten Probationer Constables tutored at Whitehaven immediately prior to the start of the project were obtained.

The chart below gives the percentage of core skills achieved by those ten probationers prior to the trial, these were used as a control sample [for baseline comparison.]



New Officers attended the station and at day one of their operational career were introduced to a community-based style of P.O.P. The officers worked on 'live' problems thereby gaining a knowledge and understanding of P.O.P philosophies through a 'hands on' approach to learning thereby developing new skills.

Although in five weeks we could not expect probationers to immediately implement their newfound knowledge, they were encouraged to adopt a pro-active problem solving approach as opposed to a reactive response.

The five weeks of tutoring in P.O.P methods focussed on encouraging Probationer Constables to look for:-

- **The underlying conditions which generated problems**
- **When those conditions were identified, employ P.O.P methods to address them**

## ASSESSMENT

### The first ten

By August 2002, ten Probationers had been trained in the new system, by spending the first weeks of their operational career with the Community Unit concentrating on Problem Oriented Policing. The second five weeks were spent with their responsive shifts.

Prior to this, an initial assessment of the project was carried out after five probationers had worked with the team. The initial assessment appeared to produce good results and ensured that the project continued.

By carrying out this initial assessment two concerns were immediately discounted

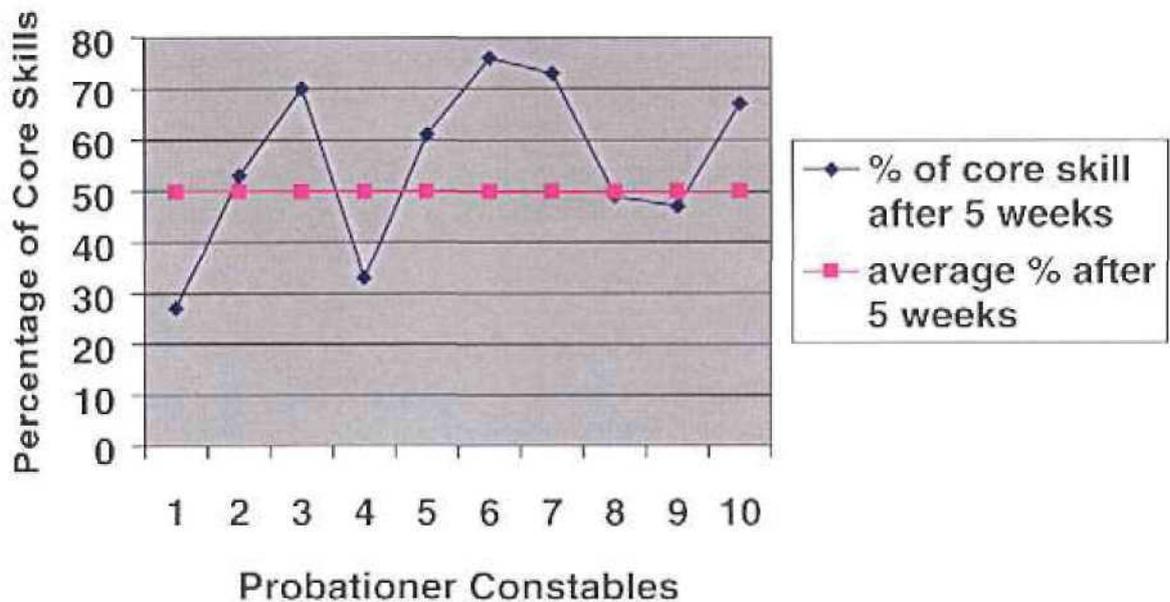
- **Probationer development will be hindered**
- **Core skills will not be attained**

Both concerns were closely linked, as a failure to attain the core skills would hinder development. This was found not to be the case. As the Community Team worked through the Problem Solving solution from start to finish. Many of the initial short term measures involved high profile policing operations, therefore probationers were still able to attain the skills required for arresting, interviewing etc. These skills were being learned in a different environment to that of reactive policing.

The Probationers worked alongside their tutors who were addressing current problems through the P.O.P approach. These included violent crime, burglary, retail theft and youth disorder. The P.O.P approach was sold as an alternative to reactive policing by encouraging probationers to look for the underlying reasons that created the problems they reacted to, then look for workable solutions to solve them.

A second assessment was carried out at the end of October that produced some surprising results.

The two intentions outlined in the Response focused on new Officers learning the methods of P.O.P and the benefits this brings at the earliest stage in their careers. Some thought that this would be at the expense of the core skills. This was certainly not the case as the chart below indicates.



By comparing the control sample of the ten probationers trained at the Station prior to this project, those probationers trained in P.O.P from the outset have doubled the percentage of core skills attained at the five-week review. This is in comparison with officers trained through reactive policing methods.

Increasing the core skills of probationers at this point was never the intention of this project. But this has occurred as a natural consequence of training officers to use P.O.P.

Mrs Graves, the Area Training Officer, also noticed the following:-

- A wider range of events were being experienced within the initial five weeks
- Probationers are more aware of the principals of P.O.P and are more willing to use them
- An improved assessment of the Probationers is given at the five week stage
- The quality of evidence contained within the PDP has improved

## **Nine out of ten Probationers say they prefer it**

The ten Probationers who were assessed as a result of this project were given the opportunity to improve through the benefits of learning under the P.O.P and reactive policing environment.

Of the ten, one preferred to be purely reactive. The other nine accepted the principals of P.O.P, could see the benefits P.O.P created, and to varying degrees said that they were likely to utilise P.O.P philosophies in their future careers.

The successful results achieved ensured that the project continued, and all new Probationers Constables who are trained at Whitehaven Police Station are tutored in this manner.

## **Reaping the benefits**

It would be easy to say that Probationers will use P.O.P philosophies and leave it at that. However, we now have evidence of those trained under this method of learning now beginning to implement P.O.P to address community issues such as retail theft, youth disorder and violent crime.

The Probationer, who carried out the initial attachment, has since gone on to receive a Good Policing Award, as recognition of the results achieved through her Problem Oriented approach to policing in Whitehaven. Rewarding success has been one of the ways that the Area Commander has promoted P.O.P.

The following P.O.P approach has been adopted by one of the Probationers to address a problem of retail theft:-

### **Scanning**

An increase in the number of thefts from shops

### **Analysis**

Revealed the increase related to theft of handbags from within the towns' supermarkets.

### **Response**

High profile patrols, work with storeowners to raise awareness through a poster campaign, target offenders

### **Analysis**

Reduction in incidents

As a result of the project the following **Success Factors** have been identified:-

- **Targeting the right audience for the training (probationers)**
- **Learning whilst doing, the hands on approach**
- **The Community Team working the same shift system enabling each probationer to see differing approaches to a multitude of problems**

### **Realising Limitations**

The project worked well and has been successful, therefore it continues. It has changed the method of tutoring within the Station to the benefit of probationers. This is through improved results and to the benefit of the community as P.O.P is increasingly being implemented to address its concerns.

It is impossible to say what will happen in years to come, and whether those probationers who have experienced P.O.P will continue to use its' principles or revert back to reactive policing methods.

Over the next few years the force is committed to the implementation of Local Policing Teams and will recruit several hundred new officers as a consequence. We have shown that there is potential to build on this projects' success and turn a minority of officers using P.O.P philosophies into the majority, by influencing officers at the earliest point in their careers. It remains to be seen, whether the successes of this project will now be adopted on a broader scale.

### **Inspector Slater – Whitehaven Police said:-**

“The Officers tutored by the unit demonstrate different policing skills and it is those Officers we will recruit for our Local Policing Teams”

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