

Lancashire Constabulary



Tilley Award 2003

**Operation
Boswell**

Partnership Category

Tillev Award 2003

Operation Boswell

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OPERATION BOSWELL

SUMMARY

Problem

- Alexandra and Poulton wards in the Lancashire seaside town of Morecambe have suffered massive social decline over the last twenty years.
- 70% of the population of Alexandra ward reside in poor quality rented houses of multiple occupation (HMOs) and 30% of working age inhabitants are unemployed.
- 34% of all crime in Morecambe committed in these two wards.
- October 2001 to March 2002: Morecambe had 60% of all vehicle crime in Northern Division.
- Police have implemented many operations aimed towards reducing vehicle crime with limited success.
- DVLA statistics show that there are 1700 untaxed vehicles currently in the Morecambe area
- This provides a prime indicator that can be used to target vehicles rather than the individual, which will directly affect the activity of criminals and improve the quality of life in the community.

“ Not all people who drive are criminals but virtually all criminals drive “

Analysis

- In 2001/02 there were 42 vehicle crimes per 1000 inhabitants of Poulton ward compared with the district average of 16.
- Police intelligence shows that Morecambe's 'Top 20' persistent offenders have access to vehicles.
- 395 abandoned and untaxed vehicles in Morecambe last year.
- 40% of untaxed vehicles involved in criminal activity. (DVLA)
- 57% of males who admitted traffic offences also reported criminal offending. (Home Office Research)

Objectives

- Disrupt criminal activity in Alexandra & Poulton wards.
- Reduce criminals' access to vehicles and therefore reduce their opportunity to commit crime.
- Remove abandoned, un-roadworthy & untaxed vehicles
- Provide reassurance

Response

- Multi agency high visibility targeting – Five concentrated mobile & static operations over past 12 months.
- Static roadside check sites conducting detailed examinations of vehicles & occupants by agencies.
- Robust use of multi agency powers of legislation – Immediate impact.
- Use of ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) to identify target vehicles.
- Partners - DVLA, HM Customs & Excise, Local Authority, Environment Agency, Vinci Park (Wheel clamping), Ministry of Transport Vehicle Inspectorate and AXA Insurance Direct.

Assessment

- Vehicle crime in Morecambe reduced by 10% in last year during period of operations.
- 67 vehicles used by known criminals in the area scrapped
- 21 arrests made for criminal offences – resulting from vehicle checks.
- £12 250 recovered by Customs & Excise from local criminals.
- DVLA estimate additional revenue of £70 000 due to activity.

Remove Vehicle = Reduce Opportunity = Reduce Crime

SCANNING

Over the last 10 to 15 yrs Morecambe has witnessed a significant increase in crime that has coincided with social decline in the area.

The Morecambe wards of Alexandra and Poulton have been subject to 35% of all crime committed in 2002/03 in Northern Division. The level of vehicle crime in these areas has been above the county average for the past 3 years, accounting 66% of all vehicle crime in Northern Division.

In 2001/02 there were 42 crimes per 1000 population of Poulton ward compared with the district average of 16.

Police intelligence shows that a very high proportion of both transient and local criminals reside in these two wards of Morecambe and that a high percentage of these individuals have access to vehicles on a regular basis in the commission of crime. In fact, based on the National Intelligence Model offender profile matrix, Morecambe's 20 most prolific criminals all have access to vehicles and are known to use them in committing crime.

DVLA figures suggest that there are approximately 1700 road tax evaders in the Morecambe area. Their research also suggests that a third of motorists reported for the evasion of vehicle excise duty are committing other offences.

Long term, untaxed vehicles are the seedbed of abandoned vehicles. Last year alone there were 395 abandoned vehicles reported to the Local Authority. Abandoned vehicles are highlighted in the work done by Innes (2002) at Surrey University as causing anxiety in the local population. It has been established by removing abandoned vehicles it increases public reassurance.

Vehicle Inspectorate and DVLA data also reveals that these vehicles are predominantly old vehicles, sometimes dangerous and in an unroadworthy and illegal condition. Older vehicles have a higher rate of evasion. For example, 10-year-old vehicles have a 2.9% evasion rate compared with 0.9% for 2-year-old vehicles. (1) Many have no documentation, no known keepers and are often used as pool cars amongst the criminal fraternity. Once their usefulness has expired they are moved on or abandoned.

Police have implemented many operations aimed towards reducing vehicle crime with limited success – other more innovative methods were clearly necessary to disrupt criminal activity.

“Not all people who drive are criminals but virtually all criminals drive!”

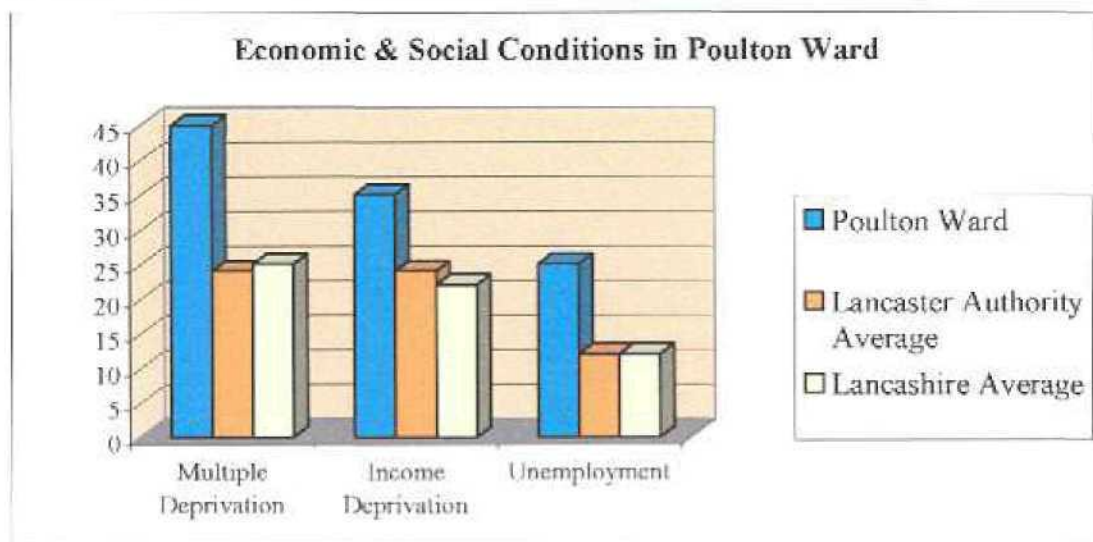
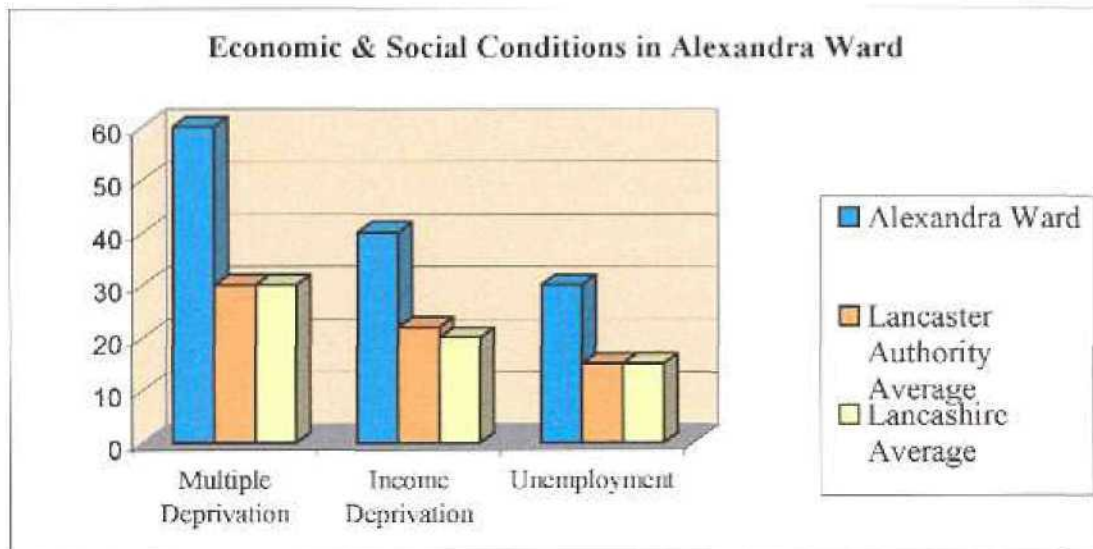
ANALYSIS

Using the problem analysis triangle: **Location-Victim-Offender**

LOCATION

From the mid-80s onwards Morecambe experienced a massive decline in its tourist industry with traditional family holiday accommodation becoming poor quality houses of multiple occupation (HMOs). Since that time landlords have encouraged disaffected families from inner city areas to take up residence in Morecambe. A high proportion of this transient population - 30% of working age inhabitants in Alexandra ward - are unemployed and claiming benefits. (2)

Morecambe is now a densely populated residential area, approximately 1100 people reside in Alexandra and Poulton wards and almost 70% of those in Alexandra ward live in houses of multi-occupancy. (2) Levels of unemployment deprivation place Poulton ward in the 5% of most-deprived wards in the country and the two wards together account for over 34% of all crime in Morecambe. (2) From speaking with local residents, police officers and local councillors it was felt that un-taxed and abandoned vehicle numbers were higher in these areas than any other in the district



VICTIM

The victims of this problem are multi-faceted:

a) Local residents

Victims of vehicle crime are local residents and visitors to the Morecambe area. Many are repeat victims and of the opinion that little or no police action is taken against offenders in the area. Public dissatisfaction in Morecambe is high and letters of complaint regularly appear in the local press regarding the unacceptable level of crime being committed.

This opinion stretches also to those people who are fortunate enough not to be victims of crime but are daily confronted by untaxed, unroadworthy vehicles parked or abandoned close to their homes, the offenders having no respect for other peoples quality of life.

During Operation Cubit (described later in this document), specifically targeting unlicensed and abandoned vehicles, the police received over 25 complaints from members of the community regarding such vehicles in a two-week period.

b) Government organisations and agencies

Government organisations and agencies in the private sector suffer from criminal activity and blatant disregard for road traffic legislation.

DVLA statistics indicate costs of up to £5000 to deal with an abandoned burnt out vehicle.

5% of the national stock of vehicles on the road evades excise duty at any one time. The HM Treasury state that if no action is taken against vehicle excise evasion it would cost in excess of £300 million annually, assuming the number of vehicles on the road and average excise duty levy increases in line with current trends. (3)

It is estimated that between 1 and 1.25 million (4-6% of the UK stock) of cars are uninsured.

“Collisions involving uninsured vehicles are estimated to cost the industry £400 million and add £15-£30 to the insurance of every driver in the UK.” (4)

The Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) suggest that as many as 10% of all cars do not have a valid MOT. Department of Transport statistics indicate that vehicles without an MOT are more likely to be involved in collisions and also contribute more to pollution. In 2001, 42% of all vehicles inspected by the VI on roadside checks were found to have some form of defect. (5)

Every household in the country is a victim one way or another: Through higher insurance premiums; through increases in vehicle excise duty; through damage to the environment, and as victims of vehicle related crime.

3. Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science 06.01.03

4. Motor Insurers Database Amendments to the Motor Vehicles 1972 Consultation paper, DTLR 2001

OFFENDER

Police intelligence shows a high proportion of offenders reside in HMOs (Homes of multi occupancy) in the Alexandra and Poulton wards of Morecambe and have access to vehicles.

34% of criminals travel within 0-4 miles of their home address to commit offences, whether it is traffic or criminal offences. (6) This has been corroborated by local intelligence analysis.

“ Police statistics clearly indicate that local offenders commit local crime “

It has been estimated by DVLA that 40% of un-taxed vehicles are involved in some form of criminality. From a policing perspective this provides a prime indicator that can be used to target individuals involved in more serious matters.

In a Home office survey carried out in 1996 research showed that offenders committing traffic offences are likely to be involved in mainstream crime;

Traffic offenders were found to be predominantly male. The age profiles were similar to those of mainstream offenders – 60% to 75% of offenders were in the age range of 18 to 32 years.

This corresponds with statistics from the Community Safety Partnership Crime & Disorder Audit 2001 that indicates Alexandra ward has the highest proportion of prolific offenders 18-24 years of age resident in this area.

57% of males who admitted traffic offences also reported criminal offending

79% of Disqualified Drivers had a criminal record

18% of car thieves were also convicted of a traffic offence

No licence and no insurance were also linked to criminal offending

(6)

Other research confirms this theory :

Some work by Police and Reducing Crime Unit found that:

33% of keepers of cars illegally parked in disabled bays have a criminal record.

20% of these vehicles were known, to have been previously used in crime. (7)

This has been supported by other work on offender behaviour, notably Canter (Surrey University). This has been referred to as social interactive theory, which means that offenders will not be prescriptive in how they abuse their position in society and will be seen to commit other types of sub-criminal behaviour as well as criminal.

6 Home Office Research Paper, Socio-demographic profile of serious traffic offenders, Gerry Rose 2000

7 Police & Reducing Crime Unit Briefing Note 1/99, Illegal Parking in Disabled Bays , Sylvia Chenery May 1999

The current Criminal Justice System allows for offenders to be convicted of numerous criminal offences of varied severity without any effective penalty being imposed.

Case Study A

This male is 24yrs old, one of Morecambe's most prolific offenders and resides in a multi-occupancy dwelling. He does not hold a driving licence although intelligence shows he has regular access to vehicles. He has 27 convictions for 48 offences, 11 of which are theft from motor vehicles. This year he was fined £69 and received a conditional discharge for 12 months, for his latest crime of stealing from vehicles.

After being arrested he was detained in custody overnight before going to court.

Estimated police cost for time spent dealing with the offender and looking after his welfare overnight: £1200 (prior to going to court.)

This highlights a costly and resource intensive policing method that achieved limited results. Case study (A) is a typical example of current systems being used to target the problem of ever increasing crime. Offenders are generally bailed from the courts and return to their criminal career within hours of arrest.

RESPONSE

Local police research showed that during 2001/02 all pre-planned operations in Northern Division were offender/location focussed and not 'vehicle' focussed.

I realised that other innovative methods were necessary to cause maximum disruption in an attempt to ultimately reduce crime.

Current traditional policing methods of dealing with criminals often fail to be impactful on their habitual lifestyles. Other innovative methods were necessary to disrupt criminals through their use of vehicles.

The analysis process indicated to me that using situational crime prevention theory, increasing the risk of criminals being caught using their vehicles would reduce their criminal opportunities and ultimately achieve a reduction in crime.

Operation Boswell

Operation Boswell was thus conceived as a way of bringing about a high profile targeted police and multi-agency approach to the problem area, using a range of hard hitting enforcement tactics designed to cause maximum disruption to criminals using vehicles.

This was to be achieved by using the powers of the police and especially robust powers of multi-agency legislation, affording immediate impact and maximum disruption.

This method involved creating strategic partnerships with external organisations to improve effectiveness and increase resources.

The operational method is to use a static roadside check site with police mobile patrols targeting suspected criminal use of vehicles. Selected vehicles are escorted to the site for a comprehensive and detailed inspection by the relevant agencies.

The check site for the majority of the operations has been situated on the inner promenade area, next to the Cenotaph on Marine Road, Morecambe. This was chosen due to its central location between the west end Alexandra ward and the town centre ward of Poulton, in order to maximize its effectiveness in targeting offenders.

In September 2002, I introduced ANPR (Automatic Number Plate Recognition) into the operational method, which has given a new perspective to operating procedures. ANPR is a proven mechanism of detecting criminal activity as well as vehicle related offences. (ANPR systems work by capturing a digital image of a vehicle registration mark as it passes a camera. This is then checked against a series of multi-agency databases to identify vehicles that are of interest to these agencies.

The ANPR is positioned a short distance along the road on the approach to the site. Officers working at the check site are used on the roadway to direct vehicle hits from the ANPR into the site for examination by the relevant agencies. Mobile patrols operate in the designated area in the same way, using specific local intelligence to target offenders, and are available should a vehicle fail to stop at the check site.

The operational method is flexible. Whilst maintaining a static check site throughout as a base, the police together with other agencies have branched out and visited various locations to deal with offenders and offences that have come to light. This is demonstrated in Case Study B.

Detailed Operational Orders have been prepared for each operation and a briefing has been held at Morecambe Police Station prior to commencement attended by all agencies. Operational methodology has been informed throughout by adherence to the IIMARCH protocol (Information, Intention, Method, Administration, Risk Assessment, Communication & Human Rights).

On conclusion of each operation a full debrief has taken place involving all participating agencies. Lessons have been learned and the operation is a living initiative with an effective ongoing assessment and review mechanism.

Operation Cubit

This was the most recent operation in March 2003, immediately following the last Operation Boswell, and was initiated as a result of the close working relationship formed with the DVLA.

Cubit was a combined police and DVLA operation specifically targeting all untaxed and abandoned vehicles in the Morecambe area that had been the subject of a complaint to the police.

The DVLA vehicle taxation enforcement unit together with their wheel-clamping contractors worked with a team of police officers. It was a concentrated two-week operation where vehicles that failed to display a current excise license, or appeared otherwise abandoned, and had been the subject of a complaint to the police, were immediately impounded without any warning. They were transported to a secure compound at AXA Direct Insurance Co. on White Lund industrial estate Morecambe and remained there pending payment of an initial £80 release fee and production of a current tax disc. Every 24 hours the release fee increases until it exceeds the market value of the vehicle. The DVLA then authorise the vehicle to be scrapped.

Implementation Difficulties

The operations have predominantly run smoothly with few disruptions or blockers.

The main problem initially was resourcing the operations. Uniformed geographic officers who were designated to work on the operations were abstracted at late notice or often had to deal with other incidents during the period of the operations.

Subsequent operations have therefore been resourced by re-rostering rest days to ensure officers can be dedicated solely to the operation and will not be abstracted.

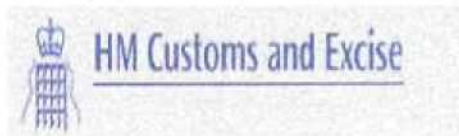
I formed partnerships with the following organisations:



Driver & Vehicle Licensing Agency
Partners in Enforcement strategy



Vinci Park (Wheel clamping – DVLA)
Wheel-clamping contractors to DVLA



HM Customs & Excise – Road Fuel Unit / Fraud Team
Partners in Enforcement strategy



Ministry of Transport Vehicle Inspectorate
Partners in Enforcement strategy- vehicle examiners



Environment Agency
Partners in Enforcement Strategy



Lancaster City Council
Assisted in Cubit Operation



AXA Insurance Direct
Assistance with use of compound for vehicle storage

ASSESSMENT

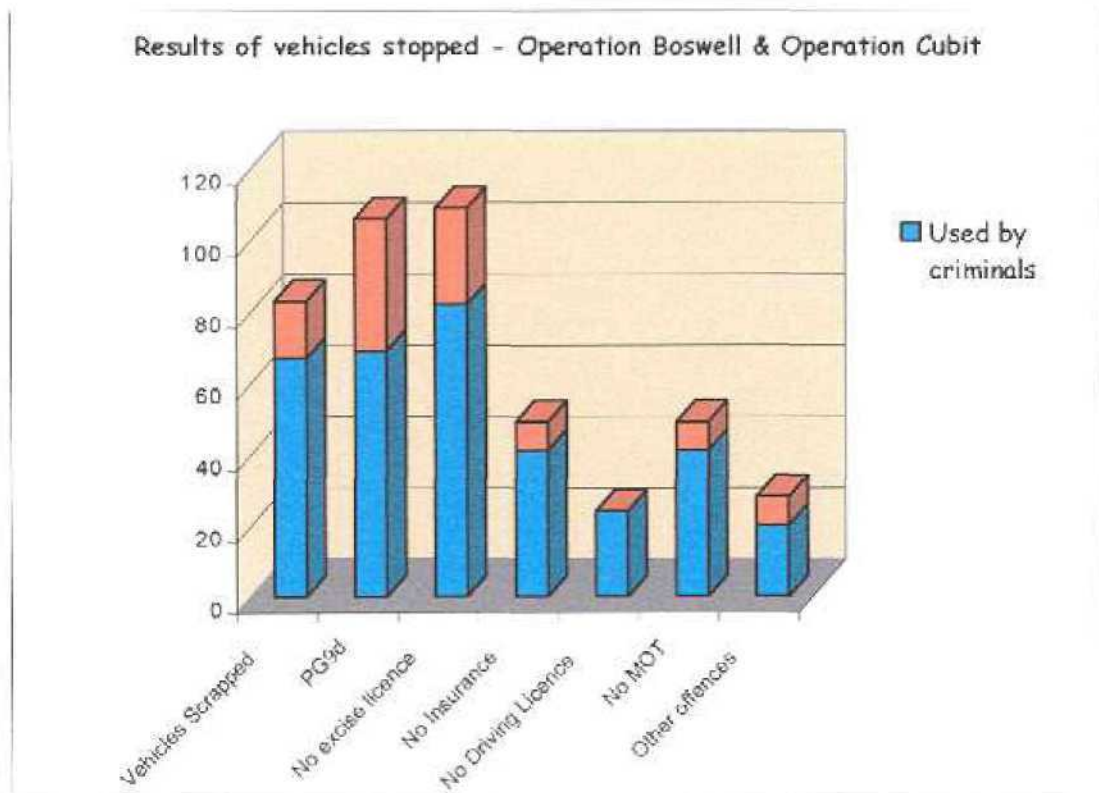
Monitoring the impact of the Response:

During the past 12 months, four Boswell operations have taken place in Morecambe, equating to 8 operational days, followed by a 10 day Cubit operation.

21 arrests were made:

Offence	Number of arrests
Burglary	1
Theft of Motor Vehicle	3
Theft of Vehicle Excise License	1
Serious Assault	2
Disqualified Driving	4
Possession of Controlled Drugs	1
Drink Driving	2
Failure to Appear Warrant	6

17 of the 21 persons arrested reside in HMOs in either the Alexandra or Poulton wards of Morecambe.



178 HORTIs ('Production of vehicle document' forms) were issued to drivers in Morecambe during March 2003. 76 of those were during Operation Boswell on 11th and 12th March.

These results confirm the findings of the analysis: a strong correlation between criminals and their use of vehicles

41% of all the vehicles stopped and 80 % of all vehicles scrapped during the operations were being used by criminals.

DVLA Taxation Enforcement

From their experience of identical operations the DVLA estimate 500 motorists in the target area will re-license their vehicles voluntarily, bringing in additional revenue of **£70000**

25 of the 109 vehicles found to have no current excise licence have now obtained one. This equates to **£4000** in revenue. (25 x £80 for a six months tax disc, 25 x £80 de-clamping fee)

Of the 84 vehicles still remaining, 76% were owned by criminals and were more than 10 years old. A high proportion of these would not have a registration document or insurance and therefore would be unable to obtain an excise licence. These vehicles will represent a high percentage of the scrapped vehicles.

Customs and Excise Road Fuel

Estimate that they have recovered **over £12,000** in lost revenue during the operations to date, effectively prosecuting one of Morecambe's target criminals on a number of occasions. (Case study B)

Case Study B

Male aged 32. Resides in rented accommodation in Poulton ward.

He has 10 previous convictions for 21 offences. For his last conviction for criminal damage he received a conditional discharge for 12 months.

Using Boswell & multi-agency approach over last year the results are as follows:

£4750 he has paid to Customs and Excise for using red diesel in his vehicles

2 x offences to be prosecuted for by the Environment Agency – each carrying **£10000 fine**)

Another good example of the pooling of powers and effectiveness made possible by a partnership approach is shown below:

Case study C:

An active burglar who lives in the Alexandra ward of Morecambe was stopped during Operation Boswell. His fuel tank was dipped and found to contain red diesel. HM Customs Road Fuel Unit fined him £500 on the spot. The offender handed over the said amount there and then.

Vehicle Inspectorate

The Vehicle Inspectorate have issued 106 'PG9' prohibition notices, to 30% of the total number of vehicles stopped, for being in a dangerous or unroadworthy condition and unsafe to continue on the road.

All these vehicles have to obtain a new valid MOT certificate, and the prohibition notice removed, before they can legally be put back on the road. 35 of these vehicles have had this done and are back on the road, whilst 71 have not and are still live. A high proportion of these may well fall into the 83 that have been disclaimed and scrapped, 80% of which were used by criminals.

Lancaster City Council

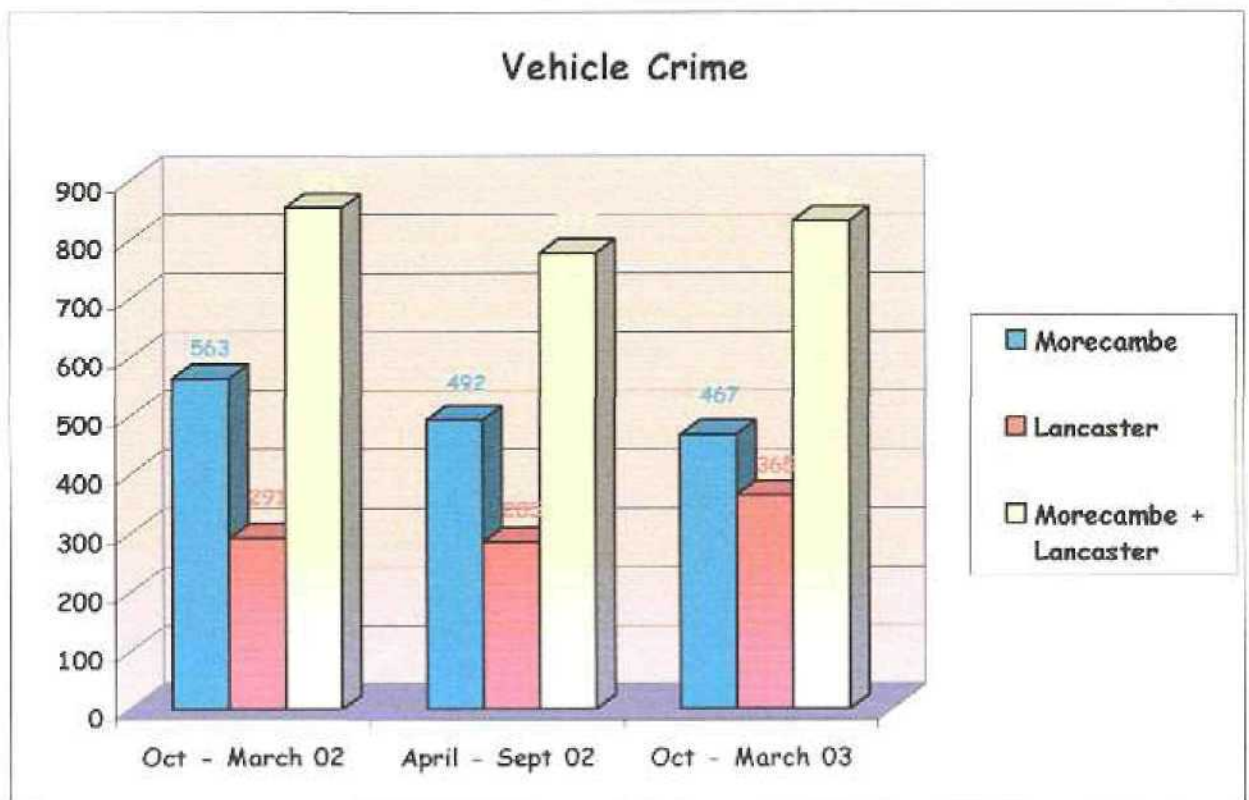
Working with the DVLA on Operation Cubit has meant that Local Authority were able to remove seven abandoned vehicles from Authority owned land immediately, without the need for the usual seven or fifteen day notices, clearly assisting them in meeting their corporate objectives.

Council members commented favourably on the operation and welcome future partnership projects to make the local community feel safe and enjoy a better quality of life.

What it meant for vehicle crime:

While Operational Boswell was 'live' in Morecambe over the past year, a clear reduction in both overall crime and a 10% reduction in vehicle crime was measured in the geographic area.

Other areas within the Division reported an increase in vehicle crime during the same period.



Community Impact

These high visibility operations conducted in areas of high crime have attracted the attention of the local community and businesses alike. Positive media coverage has heightened the level of reassurance and presented a positive image of Lancashire Constabulary working to make the residents of Lancashire feel safe, involved and reassured.

By taking a robust stance and physically removing abandoned and untaxed vehicles this encourages a positive view of the local police who are regularly criticised for ignoring minor offences.

Stuart Lee, the Northern Regional Manager for Vinci Park Services UK (who carry out wheel clamping on behalf of the DVLA) has received many phone calls from members of the public expressing their thanks regarding our work, and emphasising an improvement to their quality of life.

Costs

The operations have been of minimum cost to the police, having incurred no overtime. All of the agencies involved in the partnership provided their time and resources free of charge and both the check site and secure vehicle compound, supplied by AXA Direct Insurance, were utilised without any cost being incurred.

The assessment clearly indicates that the multi agency approach used to address the specific issue of un-roadworthy, untaxed and abandoned vehicles creates significant revenue and results for all involved, making it a cost effective method of reducing criminality.

Conclusion

The objectives of these operations have been to cause maximum disruption to the lives of criminals and therefore achieving a reduction in crime.

The removal and consequent scrapping of 67 vehicles in use by known criminals, 68% of which were used by offenders living in the target areas, has had substantial impact on local crime reduction.

Restricting access to vehicles for criminals has reduced their opportunity to offend and is demonstrated in local crime statistics.

The Future

Boswell combined with Operation Cubit has received acclaim from Northern Division Senior Management Team and is highlighted as a Best Practice Initiative on Lancashire Constabulary's POP database, acting as a template that is sufficiently robust to be transferred to any location and situation.

DVLA powers of immediate removal of abandoned, untaxed vehicles can be devolved down to local authorities or indeed the police, and this could have a considerable and sustained impact on levels and patterns of offending locally.

It is my intention to continue this initiative, developing its effectiveness and transferability through a rigorous assessment and review programme, and producing a powerful, flexible and well-researched approach to add to our crime reduction and public reassurance toolkit.

REMOVE VEHICLE = REDUCE OPPORTUNITY = REDUCE CRIME.