



North Wales Police
Heddlu Gogledd Cymru

Constable Alastair Ward-Smith
Tilley Award submission
2004

**Tilley Award submission
Operation Lifeboat**

Force

North Wales Police

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Summary

Scanning the Problem

For a significant period, certain locations in North Wales had suffered from gatherings of people who would drive their vehicles in an anti-social manner. A long-term, easily enforceable solution was required. The problem was particularly acute in the Wrexham town centre area, with young people travelling great distances to attend weekend meetings. Existing enforcement methods had been tried, but had stalled.

Analysis

Much of the anti-social behaviour was being engaged in by a group that are commonly termed 'boy racers'. They predominately consist of young males who had purchased cars specially adapted to increase the levels of noise generated by them; specifically exhaust and sound systems. This group appeared to have been heavily influenced by media images promoting aggressive driving. There was a lack of venues where these groups could legitimately gather and show their vehicles. This led to a number of public venues being unofficially adopted as meeting places. The effect of this was to perpetuate anti-social driving.

Local businesses were suffering, as the main venue was a public car park linked to commercial premises. Business managers perceived that the gatherings were having an adverse affect, as they were driving customers away. The force had embarked on its 'Dyna Ddigon' initiative to challenge anti-social behaviour and urgent action was required.

Misuse of motor vehicles had for many years been a constant source of complaint in the Wrexham area. The town centre has attracted with regularity, especially at the weekends, young people in high powered, noisy vehicles. Whilst only a small proportion had repeatedly exhibited a poor standard of driving, there was a constant stream of complaints made to the police by local people and Members of Parliament about the apparent lack of effectiveness of the force in successfully dealing with this problem on a long-term basis.

Response

Constable Alastair Ward-Smith identified that the wording of the Police Reform Act 2002 (Section 59) would potentially offer a remedy to the situation. Originally intended to deal with the problem of off-road motorcycling, Section 59 would permit the seizure of vehicles in a variety of other situations. Knowledge of the scope of the legislation nationally was not great and an innovative approach was required to ensure that a progressive cultural change could commence, applicable to both offenders and the police. After conducting specific operations in Wrexham that received widespread positive publicity, the problem in Wrexham began to rapidly diminish, to the delight of the business community and public.

With the support of his supervisor Constable Ward-Smith refined the processes involved, making Operation Lifeboat more efficient and effective.

Assessment of the intervention

What has been achieved in a short space of time is – through a somewhat lateral interpretation of legislation – the introduction of a dynamic force process. It has proven popular for officers to engage in, it is easy to administer, it helps solve a previously difficult to tackle problem successfully, it has potential for further development and it is making a positive difference to communities in North Wales. The HMIC has described this as the definitive example of 'best practice' in this area and the work has been praised by the Welsh Secretary.

Operation Lifeboat – background information

In July 2003, North Wales Police launched its long-term initiative to challenge anti-social behaviour. Entitled 'Dyna Ddigon,' this phrase translates loosely into English as 'That's Enough.'

The Dyna Ddigon initiative was introduced because of the existence of a sub-culture of criminal and disruptive behaviour in certain North Wales communities. This culture has been a continued cause of public concern and has hindered the positive work of the force in preventing and detecting crime.

The 'Dyna Ddigon' initiative has a number of distinct aims:

- To galvanise public distaste for the 'yob culture'.
- To inculcate abhorrence of petty crime & anti-social behaviour.
- To make public areas welcoming and safe at all times of the day.
- To support other public bodies in promoting civic pride.
- To protect young people from conflict and confrontation.

It is in this context that Operation Lifeboat was born. The force Operational Support Division was engaged from the outset, complementing the work of Territorial Divisions and devising innovative practices within the framework of current legislation. Constable Alastair Ward-Smith determined that police powers to deal with a specific anti-social problem involving vehicles were misunderstood and therefore under used on both a force-wide and national basis.

Enforcement activity had traditionally involved the sporadic use of unmarked police vehicles, augmented by marked Traffic Department vehicles. They performed high-visibility patrols of the town centre, stopping individuals if offences became apparent. Too often, the prosecution of offences such as careless or inconsiderate driving were considered inappropriate. This was due to factors such as the fairly low level of seriousness of the offences and the length of time involved in processing the driver followed by the submission of a prosecution file. The likely end result was out of proportion to the effort required, exacerbated by the potential for causing officers to be diverted from their normal duties to appear at court hearings. The process was cumbersome and officers were only willing to engage in it in the most serious circumstances. The deterrent effect was therefore becoming diluted.

Vehicles were being driven to Wrexham to perform repetitive circuits of the town centre, with meeting places being established in local retail parks. Young people from surrounding counties were driving to the town, attracted by the large gatherings at the meetings. A culture developed where drivers would deliberately drive inappropriately in sight of police, in order to be stopped and issued with a form requiring production of their driving documents at a police station. These forms were being looked on as 'trophies' – the more that could be obtained in one night through repeated encounters with the police, the better.

The result was that the situation perpetuated, with little ground being gained on the part of the police. Even the installation of CCTV in the town centre did not eradicate the problem. The calls received about bad driving and the consequent level of attention gathering points warranted were proving an awkward distraction for local police officers.

Scanning

The increased public interest in motor vehicles, combined with a lack of suitable venues to permit the *legitimate* meeting, showing and driving of the vehicles in a safe environment, has led to the “Boy Racer” ethos. This effectively comprises of groups of drivers who are denoted by a particular type or make of vehicle, their home area or gender. They form gangs who will meet in areas such as retail and town centre car parks, or any area large enough to accommodate them. They have set up numerous web sites with which to advertise and promote themselves and contact each other.

Groups of people were travelling from around North Wales and the wider country to venues. Whilst many were not offending, those that did continued to attract adverse comment and did nothing to assist the efforts of the force in alleviating public fear of crime and disorder.

The Wrexham problem had become well documented over the years and was a common feature of town life. The gathering places were obvious, as were the types of individuals involved – predominantly young males (below age 25) in high-powered or cheaply available vehicles.

A new car-parking facility had been constructed in Wrexham as part of a retail development (The Border Retail Park). This had been quickly established as the favourite new meeting place by the problem group.

The Border Retail Park has a large car park bordered on one side by five retail outlets and a Burger King fast food restaurant on the other. This is linked to a Tesco supermarket car park and petrol station. By July 2003, North Wales Police was receiving complaints from members of the public and the retailers regarding the gathering of vehicles, mainly in the early evening and occasionally during the day. This was substantiated by officers’ own observations.

Press coverage regarding the problem continued, with adverse publicity unfairly focussing on the North Wales Police speed reduction campaign, as press opinion was that other issues were apparently going unattended. The complaints centred on the large numbers gathering on the car park, driving at high speed, executing wheel spins, handbrake turns and doughnut manoeuvres. There was damage caused to walls and the road surface and this was happening well before the businesses closed for the day at 8pm, scaring away customers and causing a drop in business. The members of staff were intimidated when leaving work, finding their own vehicles either blocked in or circulated by vehicles driven at apparent high speed.

The intimidation was so extreme against those members of staff who were perceived to make complaints to the police that they were targeted during the day and had to call for Police assistance so they could leave work at night. This resulted in a harassment order against one driver in particular.

Also of consideration was the likelihood for young people to be involved in collisions – the age group below 25 years being the most ‘at risk’. Research has shown that behaviours, particularly with regard to speed, become learned early on. A way of asserting a cultural change, both public and organisational, was needed. Operation Lifeboat was the means to achieve this.

Objectives

The objectives arrived at acknowledged the local problem, whilst also assuming a global perspective:

- To reduce the problem of anti-social driving within the Wrexham town centre area.
- To create a cultural change within the problem group through intelligent enforcement.
- To implement and evaluate contemporary legislation in a creative way, commensurate with the Dyna Ddigon initiative.
- The long-term objective was to establish an effective enforcement tool across the force area, to successfully impact upon incidents of anti-social driving.

Analysis - defining the problem

Reported incidents at the Wrexham gathering site were low in number. For example, the period 1st July 2002 to the 23rd March 2003 showed that only 1 incident of dangerous or careless driving had been reported to police, whereas there had been 211 such incidents within the town centre geographic area for the same period. It was obvious that the offences were coming to notice when committed by individuals driving *elsewhere* than in the car park. When amongst their peers it was unlikely they would ever be so reported.

The way incidents were recorded by police also meant that analysis of the problem was more difficult. There were a number of different incident classifications that could be applied to this type of behaviour and commonality in recording at both the incident generation and result stages was unlikely. For this reason, local knowledge and the level of complaints received either by letter or verbally at public meetings, had to be the primary sources of initial supporting information.

As part of its Dyna Ddigon campaign, North Wales Police performed a detailed community survey in three of its pilot site areas during July 2003 – Wrexham, Holyhead and Colwyn Bay. The results of the survey showed that vehicle related nuisance was a problem that affected 61% of respondents in the Wrexham area, with a similar figure being obtained for Colwyn Bay. The Holyhead figure was 51%. In Wrexham only three types of behaviour affected more of the respondents than vehicle related nuisance out of a possible 13 categories. These were litter & rubbish (75%), rowdy behaviour (65%) and noise (62%). It is possible to draw parallels between these behaviours and that activity that was on-going in the retail park itself.

With the support of Inspector Ian Jones, PC Ward-Smith acted as a liaison between North Wales Police, the managers of the retail outlets and the representative of the owner of the park. Their perception was that the problem was out of control. Methods initially discussed ancillary to robust police enforcement of the law included alterations to the car park such as gates to close it at night. This was awkward due to the shared access to the Burger King drive through, and existence of speed control bumps. The proposal was well received by the owner although time and finances were issues, but it was agreed for future consideration. Complainants, public and the press wanted to see immediate action.

Response

PC Ward-Smith knew from his experience that education methods had so far been ineffective. Enforcement against offenders was therefore the activity best suited to deal with the problem. Powers had been conferred by the Government in 2002 under Section 59 of the Police Reform Act, but were unused. The general perception of the police nationally was that this piece of legislation was created solely to deal with off-road motor cycling.

PC Ward-Smith carefully examined the legislation and it became apparent to him that it offered great freedom to operate against precisely the problem caused by those attending the retail park car park; it simply required lateral thinking to use available powers in this way.

A warning could be given to a driver for an offence of careless and inconsiderate driving, on or off a road, covering all aspects of anti-social driving that were taking place. This included playing loud music and in conjunction with it, anything that caused alarm, harassment or distress to members of the public. This warning was valid for twelve months. Should the behaviour be repeated then the driver's vehicle could be seized and a recovery charge of £105 plus £12 per day storage costs levied against him or her.

Operation Lifeboat began with a local press campaign advertising the legislation and the fact that the Police would begin enforcing it. The recovery firms involved in the process were also advised on the legislation and how to return the vehicles upon payment.

The purpose of the first operation was to watch and evaluate the true extent of the problem. With the assistance of one of the retail outlets a covert observation point was set up in a shop window by PC Ward-Smith in company with a loggist, using a video camera at closing time. It was to run for three hours. For this to be done, the officer had to obtain authority to conduct surveillance (a 'RIPA' authority) allowing for covert intelligence gathering. As part of this initial operation any anti-social driving was communicated to two interceptor patrol cars that would then stop the offending driver and warn him or her as per the legislation. The warning and seizure notices described the exact wording to be given, obtained from the legislation, but added a section so that details of the offender could be recorded. As the warnings were valid for twelve months, for this method of enforcement to be effective PC Ward-Smith created a database. This was fully registered to ensure its legitimacy and all warnings were input onto it.

The initial operation revealed in excess of 80 different vehicles entering the car park during that time. It was apparent that they would leave in groups for short periods and re-enter. The methods used on the first occasion the operation was run were found to be awkward due to the risk of the officers' presence being compromised. This risked reprisals against the premises. Ensuring sufficient view to record number plates was also found to be difficult. The tracking of vehicles, once they left the car park, to enable the interceptor vehicles to stop them was also hard as they could not park too close to the area or they would be visible.

The initial result was that out of twelve persons requiring a warning because of their behaviour, six were actually warned during the three hour period and their details entered onto the database. It was known that a further operation would be required due to the 'two strikes and you're out' nature of the legislation. The main lesson learned from the first operation was this: **simplify it!**

The very next evening, an officer who had been involved in the operation recognised a motorcycle that was seen pulling a 'wheelie' as one where the rider had been warned the previous night. The person was stopped and found to be the same rider who was on the database. The motorbike was seized and it made headline news the next day. (Appendix A). This was the first seizure in Wales and one of the very first in both England and Wales. It started to become apparent that this could turn into something larger than specific operations concentrating simply on problem areas.

A second operation was carried out on the Border Retail Park two weeks later. This time, two officers sat on the car park in a van next to Burger King for two hours. Information was passed to CCTV and interceptor cars. They were able to co-ordinate with each other to find

and stop those that needed warning. This resulted in further warnings and the first seizure of a motor car in the North Wales area. Again, this received substantial press coverage. Subsequent checks of the car park in the following days revealed that the gatherings had ceased and response from the retail outlets was that the problem had disappeared.

PC Ward-Smith started to receive enquiries from other stations in his home division, from other divisions and also from bordering forces. All were asking about the methods that had been applied to combat the problem. In combination with other areas, the same operation was performed utilising CCTV to watch the offences being committed where possible, with information being passed on to interceptor cars.

PC Ward-Smith advised other divisions and West Mercia Police officers in the border town of Oswestry how to run similar operations. Police officers were requesting copies of the warning and seizure forms so that whilst on patrol any offences coming under this legislation could be dealt with. Consequently, the database began to grow over the following months. It was also found to be an effective tool for use against complaints where a member of the public would call and report an incident of anti-social driving, but want no further involvement. Officers would locate the vehicle on the road or at an address and issue a warning – this was the strength of the legislation which had not previously been recognised. Officers were willing to use it because of its simplicity and because at long last, a persistent problem could be strongly and immediately dealt with. The deterrent effect against offenders was huge.

PC Ward-Smith was starting to work with other Police departments and external organisations, such as local councils, to incorporate Operation Lifeboat into additional activities to tackle anti-social behaviour. He was required to brief Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary about what had been achieved and how. After examining the information they determined it would be cited as the definitive example of "best practice" for this type of activity. The Welsh Secretary, Mr Peter Hain MP, has received a personal briefing on Operation Lifeboat and has also praised it.

As of Monday, 22nd March 2004, the database contains 155 warnings with 21 seizures showing a low 13.5 % rate of re-offending.

As well as achieving such a low re-offending rate, Operation Lifeboat has proven cost effective. Each encounter with a driver to administer a first warning rarely takes longer than five minutes. Using a calculation of one unit (a 15 minute period of pay for a Constable at a mid pay-scale point) per warning, the cost to North Wales Police is £3.24. A seizure normally takes half-an-hour to perform. This amounts to £6.48. A warning and a consequent seizure therefore total approximately £9.72. There have been few other costs involved – no I.T. needed to be purchased, the forms used were of low cost to produce, and maintenance of the database is not labour intensive. Contrast this with the amount of time required to process a driver for a careless driving offence: interviews of the driver, laying of information to enable summons to be obtained, service of the summons, preparation of the case file, court abstractions in the event of not-guilty pleas – all add to the cost burden in each case.

The Future

The situation that now existed within North Wales Police was the effectiveness and simplicity of the legislation required consolidation.. The three Territorial Divisions were keeping their own databases but the management of it had been haphazard. In Eastern Division the database was accessible via the area control room. When a driver was stopped, the database could easily be checked to see if that person was on it.

Another problem was the lack of knowledge of the legislation, its enforcement and the availability of the database. There was a need to bring everything together under one umbrella and make the methods employed uniform across the force, combined with education of officers so they could employ the powers effectively.

To this end a single database is being created for the force area using the new technology provided by the Record Management System (RMS) that is currently being set up by North Wales Police.

A ticket booklet (Appendix B) has been designed using the original warning and seizure notices incorporating them into an easy to use and carry book, with the legislation and procedural information being printed on the inside cover for officers to refer to. These have carbonated sheets for copies to be distributed to the offender, database, intelligence unit and file as necessary. These notices have been distributed to other police forces, who have expressed their intention to adopt them.

The next step is a Force wide re-launch of the scheme to further heighten the availability of the legislation and awareness of Police Officers across the Force. This will bring in the media, such as press, radio and Internet sites that are used by car enthusiasts and anti-social drivers, to maximise awareness of what is being done.

Other outside agencies such as councils, representatives of the car enthusiasts and even organisations that attract the anti-social driving element are being liased with. It is necessary to look to the future, to explore the potential for change of the design of current, potential or intended meeting areas, to restrict the possibility of anti-social driving and the organisation of improper events.

What has been achieved in a short space of time is – through a somewhat lateral interpretation of legislation – the introduction of a dynamic force process. It has proven popular for officers to engage in, it is easy to administer, it helps solve a previously difficult to tackle problem successfully, it has potential for further development and it is making a positive difference to communities in North Wales.

Constable Alastair Ward-Smith

North Wales Police

Boy racers' cars will be confiscated

By STEVE BARNALL

WREXHAM has been handed a final warning to stop its street racing and car racing activities - or more cars and trucks will be taken away.

The town's police chief, David Jones, said that the town's streets are being used as a race track and that the noise and danger to the public is intolerable.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

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Final warning to town's boy racer maniacs WE'LL TAKE YOUR CARS

By MATT WARNER

BOY racers who terrorise the streets of Wrexham have been given a final police warning - we'll take your cars.

Police began their crackdown on the street drivers this weekend by formally warning five of them to stop racing.

The warning was issued to the five of them at a meeting in North Wales.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

Mr Jones said that the town's streets are being used as a race track and that the noise and danger to the public is intolerable.

Car taken from boy racer

Traffic police have seized the first car driven by a boy racer in North Wales.

The car was taken from a 17-year-old boy who was caught racing it on the streets of Wrexham.

The boy was fined and his car was impounded.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

BIKE SEIZED

AN operation to crack down on boy racers in Wrexham's busy town centre has resulted in police seizing a motorcycle.

On Friday, June 15, police officers from the British Traffic Department and 50 other officers carried out a joint operation to crack down on boy racers in the town centre.

The operation resulted in the seizure of a motorcycle and the arrest of a 17-year-old boy.

The boy was fined and his motorcycle was impounded.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

Police strike first blow in war on boy racers

By STEVE BARNALL

Police have struck the first blow in their war on boy racers by seizing a motorcycle and arresting a 17-year-old boy.

The boy was caught racing his motorcycle on the streets of Wrexham.

The boy was fined and his motorcycle was impounded.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

Danger biker's vehicle is seized

A dangerous biker's vehicle has been seized by police officers in Wrexham.

The biker was caught racing his motorcycle on the streets of Wrexham.

The biker was fined and his motorcycle was impounded.

Police officers have been patrolling the streets since the start of the summer and have seized several cars and trucks.

Subject's Copy I/CAD No.

WARNING NOTICE - SECTION 59 POLICE REFORM ACT 2002

Select as appropriate
*"You are/have been driving in a
Careless
Inconsiderate manner
Contrary to section 3 of the Road Traffic Act 1988*

Or
*You are/have been driving on
Common Land
Moorland
Land, which is not part of a road
A footpath
Bridleway*

Restricted byway
Contrary to section 34 of the Road Traffic Act 1988

**THEN ADD IN EITHER CASE
IN A MANNER WHICH
Is causing
Has been causing
Is likely to cause**

*Alarm, distress or annoyance to members of the public.
I must warn you that if you continue to drive the vehicle in
the Way or if you drive the vehicle in the same way on any
other Occasion, I can seize the vehicle under section 59 of
the Police Reform Act 2002."*

Signature Officer
Date Time
Location
Name DOB
Address
Self Defined Ethnic Background
Vehicle
Signature Offender

**POLICE (RETENTION AND DISPOSAL OF MOTOR VEHICLES)
REGULATIONS 2002**

Notice of Seizure of a Motor Vehicle

TO
*(Insert name of person who appears to be the owner of the motor
vehicle)*

A MOTOR VEHICLE
(Insert make, model and registration number of vehicle)

WAS SEIZED FROM
(Insert where motor vehicle was seized from)

AND IS NOW BEING KEPT AT
(Insert where motor vehicle is being kept)

CHARGES ARE PAYABLE for this vehicle (subject to regulation
5(3)*), which is: -

- a) £105 in respect of the vehicle's removal; **And**
- b) £12 for each period of 24 hours or a part thereof during
which the vehicle is impounded

**AND THE VEHICLE MAY BE RETAINED UNTIL SUCH
CHARGES ARE PAID.**

You are REQUIRED to claim the vehicle on or before.
*(Insert date that is NOT LESS THAN 21 DAYS from the date this
notice is given** to the person)*

**AND UNLESS THE MOTOR VEHICLE IS CLAIMED ON OR
BEFORE THIS DATE THE POLICE INTEND TO DISPOSE OF IT.**