Approaches to intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction
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Approaches to intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction

Summary of the Findings

This report provides the practice lessons from two intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction operations - Operation Igneous, undertaken by Kent County Constabulary and Operation Gallant, undertaken by Surrey Police. Both operations have been associated with reductions in vehicle crime.

Intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approaches involve generating tactics and interventions on the basis of analysis of available data. It involves a proactive response to emerging crime problems.

There are a number of organisational factors that facilitate the effective use of intelligence-led tactics including a tasking and co-ordination process in which crime patterns are reviewed on a regular basis and resources allocated accordingly (as recommended by the National Intelligence Model); a performance management ethos in which crime trends are compared to expected targets; support from management in a Basic Command Unit (BCU); data systems that allow vehicle crime patterns, including locations, to be analysed and an analyst dedicated to undertaking such work. See Annex A for a checklist of relevant factors.

In planning such an operation, it is important to allow sufficient time to prepare and to promote the approach internally. A small team should be formed for the duration of the operation to ensure preparatory work is completed. The planning stage should also involve a detailed analysis of the vehicle crime problem in the area. This will be used to inform the interventions and tactics undertaken locally.

A menu of tactics has been developed by the Operation Igneous team and tested by Operation Gallant. The extent to which each tactic is appropriate will depend on the local vehicle crime context.

When run across a BCU area, intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approaches can be resource intensive and the extent to which these prove cost-effective will depend largely on the degree to which vehicle crime is reduced as a result.

Introduction

In 2000, the Home Office funded Kent County Constabulary to undertake an intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction initiative, under the auspices of the Crime Reduction Programme’s Targeted Policing Initiative. Codenamed Operation Igneous, the project developed a semi-automated system for identifying emerging vehicle crime patterns and trends. It also developed a ‘menu’ of tactics to address different aspects of vehicle crime problems. In 2003, the Home Office Police Standards Unit funded Surrey Police to replicate Operation Igneous in the West Surrey BCU. Codenamed Operation Gallant, West Surrey implemented the intelligence-led vehicle crime approach between February and April 2003.

This report provides the key process lessons from implementing Operation Gallant and draws on the lessons from Operation Igneous. Most of the examples described here are drawn from Operation Gallant as this was the subject of an independent evaluation (Brown et al. 2004). Together, Operation Igneous and Operation Gallant provide a valuable insight into how to implement an intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approach within a BCU.

As a result of applying the intelligence-led approach, both Operation Gallant and Operation Igneous reported success in terms of crime reduction. For example, Operation Igneous reported a 14 per cent reduction in
vehicle crime over a two-year period. During the three months of implementing Operation Gallant, thefts of vehicles declined by 17 per cent, while thefts from vehicles remained unchanged. Overall, Operation Gallant achieved a seven per cent reduction in vehicle crime over the three months and since the completion of the evaluation has reported further declines in vehicle crime.

What is intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction?

By an ‘intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction’ approach, we mean generating tactics and interventions based on the analysis of available information. This information can take many forms, including local crime reports, police incident data, police offender records and Police National Computer data. It also includes analysis of intelligence reports submitted by police officers in the course of their routine work. This may include sightings of known offenders, stop and search reports and information from ‘human intelligence sources’. The key aspect of the intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approach is how the available information is analysed and used to target resources. There is no preference for particular methods of crime reduction. The key is to find the appropriate mix of tactics that will best address the local problem, as it is currently understood, in the most cost-effective manner.

In the case of Operation Gallant, the intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approach involved the activity of officers from across a BCU. A crime analyst, dedicated solely to examining vehicle crime patterns and trends, developed a detailed picture of vehicle crime in the area, including analyses of time, location, vehicle type and known offenders. As a result of this strategic analysis, a number of interventions were planned, drawing heavily upon the Operation Igneous tactical menu. The most significant, in terms of resources devoted to the operation, involved a programme of prolific offender targeting and crime prevention advice targeted towards the owners of high-risk vehicles. Examples of intelligence-led tactics are shown in Table 1 on page 6.

The vehicle crime analyst produced intelligence reports on a daily basis and these were used as part of the daily tasking and co-ordination meetings at which officers would be assigned particular activities. The use of intelligence in this way was well received by officers, who felt it provided a focus to their work. Within West Surrey, Operation Gallant was implemented by two Borough Policing Teams (which provide the generic policing function on a geographic basis), the Targeted Patrol Team (which provides the immediate response service across the BCU) and the Neighbourhood Specialist Officers (who provide a community beat policing function). Officers from each team were provided with tasks in accordance with their function. For example, the Targeted Patrol Team would be given the names of prolific offenders to target in their ‘down-time’, while Neighbourhood Specialist Officers would promote the crime prevention work being undertaken, as well as patrolling in emerging hot-spot areas.

Summing up what is meant by ‘intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction’, it is an approach that calls for the proactive targeting of resources based on a careful analysis of available data. This is considered preferable to reactive policing in which vehicle crime offences may be addressed as ‘one-off’ incidents, rather than as part of a ‘bigger picture’. In a sense, this definition is similar to that of Problem Oriented Policing (POP), although there are some important distinctions. For example, the intelligence-led approach centralises the problem analysis on the analyst who devolves this to officers to act upon. POP implies that problem analysis is a routine element of policing undertaken by all officers. In practice, the intelligence-led approach tends to generate a police-focused approach, while POP implies greater multi-agency involvement. See Tilley (2003) for a discussion on the differences between ‘problem-oriented’ and ‘intelligence-led’ approaches.

Organisational factors

There are a number of organisational factors that facilitate the extent to which an intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approach will be appropriate for a BCU. In the absence of these factors as a starting point, a project may struggle to implement the approach to a degree necessary to achieve crime reduction results.

Size of the problem

The approach can be resource-intensive (see later) and means that it is most justifiable in areas that have the greatest vehicle crime problem. Furthermore, analysis of vehicle crime patterns and trends often becomes easier as the size of the problem increases. This is because statistical analysis (i.e. identifying hot-spots) becomes more robust as the number of incidents examined increases. Conversely, in areas with low levels of vehicle crime, it can be difficult to make recommendations for tactical options based on small numbers (often one or two incidents). At times, this was an issue with Operation Gallant, as computer software would generate ‘hot-spot’ maps based on a handful of crime incidents, but it would be difficult to justify focusing police resources on the ‘hot-spot’ given the scale of the problem.
While the intelligence-led approach may theoretically be best suited to high crime areas, it can also work in relatively low crime areas. The West Surrey area, where Operation Gallant was implemented had a low level of vehicle crime. The BCU was in the bottom quartile nationally for both thefts of and thefts from vehicles. For the year to March 2003, West Surrey had a rate of vehicle crime of nine offences per 1,000 head of population, compared with a national rate of 19 per 1,000. Despite a low starting point, Operation Gallant still achieved reductions in vehicle crime by following the intelligence-led approach.

Tasking and co-ordination process

Initiatives like Operation Igneous and Operation Gallant, which generate activity on the basis of crime analysis, are likely to work best in BCUs that have an established tasking and co-ordination process. Areas that have adopted the National Intelligence Model approach (NCIS, 2000) are more likely to have the framework necessary for delivering the project. In particular, daily briefings for officers will help to disseminate the latest analysis and to generate actions based on it, while weekly/fortnightly tasking and co-ordination meetings will help to maintain a focus of effort on the problem. This National Intelligence Model provides the framework for turning crime analysis into activity and for reviewing progress. Both Operation Igneous and Operation Gallant were implemented within a policing structure that used the National Intelligence Model on a routine basis to allocate resources.

Performance management ethos

The intelligence-led vehicle crime approach has been shown to work in environments that have performance targets for levels of vehicle crime. These provide a benchmark for regularly comparing actual with desired levels of crime. They also provide a motivation for doing something about a problem found to be on the increase. In West Surrey a threshold was set for levels of crime and the BCU management were expected to maintain levels of crime below that level. In Kent, each BCU was measured on its performance on a regular basis and was expected to show how it was addressing emerging crime problems identified by the crime analysis Early Warning System (see below for description of the Early Warning System).

Support of the management team

Key to the success of the initiative will be support from the BCU management. This will include ensuring that vehicle crime is a BCU priority for the life of the operation and giving a consistent message about the importance of the operation.

Data systems

The intelligence-led approach will work best where there are data systems to support the operation. Information from the previous day’s crime reports should be available to the analyst and these should ideally be in a format that allows the data to be downloaded into other software for further analysis.

Vehicle crime analyst

In ideal circumstances, the BCU will have an analyst devoted to vehicle crime analysis. The benefit of this is that they are likely to have an understanding of the uses and limitations of data related to vehicle crime. They are also less likely to be abstracted to work on other crime issues (e.g. burglary or street robbery). This is important, given the fact that the approach relies on a regular supply of vehicle crime-related information. In Operation Gallant, the dedicated vehicle crime analyst was an essential member of the team. As well as producing the initial overview of vehicle crime in West Surrey, he analysed vehicle crime on a daily basis and produced a range of analytical reports that were disseminated to officers.

The planning process

Prior to the implementation of an intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction initiative, there is likely to be a number of actions that need to be taken. Getting these right will pay dividends when the initiative commences.

Allowing plenty of time

One of the key success factors will be to ensure that enough time has been allowed to plan the initiative. There are likely to be a considerable number of tasks that need to be completed before it ‘goes live’. These include, among others:

- Analysing data
- Producing a project plan
- Ordering equipment
- Promoting and gaining support for the initiative internally
- Agreeing budgets
- Agreeing operational orders
- Producing a media strategy

In Operation Gallant, the planning process commenced in November 2002. With Christmas in the intervening period, this left little time for detailed planning of the operation, prior to the launch at the start of February 2003. In the event, the operation was successfully implemented with minimal planning time, although it was felt that there had been insufficient time to promote adequately the objectives of the operation among officers in the BCU, prior to the launch.
Officers on Operation Gallant felt that three to four months should be allowed for the planning of the three-month initiative, while six months’ planning time was felt necessary for a two-year project like Operation Igneous.

Analysing the problem

Data analysis lies at the heart of the intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction approach, so it follows that this will be an important aspect of the planning stage. In BCUs with high levels of vehicle crime, this may involve developing an Early Warning System (EWS) that highlights emerging problems, following the model developed by Operation Igneous. This will involve analysis of vehicle crime data for previous years (up to five years) in order to estimate the trends and seasonal patterns. This can be used to predict the level of vehicle crime that might be expected and to compare this to the actual level. Actual vehicle crime patterns that exceed the expected may then be used as the basis for initiating action. It is important to note that, even with a semi-automated EWS, analyst time is still required each day to run the analysis and to produce a short report for daily briefings. This approach was reported to have been successful in Operation Igneous. It allowed emerging patterns of vehicle crime within small areas to be identified. These would be followed up with police activity. In particular, raising awareness of an emerging theft problem among owners of similar vehicles was felt to have been an effective tactic, implemented on the basis of crime analysis.

Regardless of whether the long-term trend analysis required for an EWS is possible, detailed analysis should be taken on at least the previous 12 months’ vehicle crime data. Analyses that should be considered include:

- Make, model and age of vehicle
- Time of theft (month of year, day of week, time of day)
- Location of theft (sector, beat, street, postcode, address)
- Location of recovered vehicles
- Condition of recovered vehicles
- Modus operandi employed
- Items stolen from vehicles
- Location of known vehicle crime offenders
- Number and location of offences associated with known offenders
- Repeat victimisation associated with theft addresses

Wherever possible, separate analyses should be undertaken for thefts of and thefts from vehicles. Where thefts of vehicles are concerned, separate analysis should be undertaken for temporary/permanent thefts. Analysis of thefts of vehicles should also take into account vehicles stolen in burglaries and vehicle arsons, neither of which are likely to be recorded as stolen vehicles in police crime reports.

Data quality is often poor with vehicle crime reports and may need a great deal of cleaning before they can be used. Common issues include:

- Spelling mistakes associated with makes and models in free text fields
- Poor location of theft information (e.g. a public car park known by six different names)
- Estimating the age from registration numbers made difficult by incomplete entries, or by personalised number plates
- Free text descriptions of property stolen
- Incomplete vehicle recovery records

Once data for previous years have been cleaned, it becomes a much more manageable exercise to clean the latest information on an on-going basis. The process of analysing vehicle crime in West Surrey was assisted by the fact that the vehicle crime analyst had been collecting and cleaning relevant vehicle crime data on a daily basis for the previous year. This made the process of analysing the problem that much easier, especially where dealing with free text fields.

Setting up a core team

A small implementation team should be established to take the work forward. An experienced project manager should head the team. This project manager is likely to be best placed with an inspector, or chief inspector based in the BCU headquarters. The team should include an analyst and two or three officers whose time can be ring-fenced to develop the project. Given the importance of publicity, a press officer should also be included in the team. This team will probably need to be devoted to the initiative on a full-time basis in the month leading up to the launch. This project team should meet at least on a weekly basis during the planning phase and should be tasked to undertake defined actions prior to the next meeting. These tasks should be minuted after each meeting. This will help ensure the project remains on track and is launched on time.

Brief management in advance

Prior to the launch of the initiative, it will be important to brief the BCU management team about the objectives and scope of the operation. This will ensure that, when launched, the initiative is recognised as being supported by the management team, who will be able to field questions from their staff about it.

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1. For example, a study of vehicle records by Brown and Billing (1996) found six different spellings of Renault – Rebault, Renalut, Ranalt, Renualt, Renaukt and Renult.
Analysing vehicle crime

The crime analyst should undertake analysis of vehicle crime patterns and trends on a daily basis. This will provide information for daily briefing sessions provided to officers at the start of their shift, along with recommendations for tactical deployment. These reports should be concise, consisting of only the most salient points.

One of the problems with undertaking analysis on a daily basis is that it is sometimes difficult to ‘see the wood for the trees’. Sometimes it is necessary to step back and take a longer view. Therefore, on a regular basis (i.e. monthly) there would be benefit in examining crime patterns over the last three to six months in order to discern emerging patterns that may not present themselves when analysed on a daily or weekly basis.

W here possible, the effectiveness of action taken by officers should be analysed and fed back to those implementing the initiative. Successful tactics will serve to bolster support for the approach among officers, while unsuccessful tactics will assist managers in making decisions about whether to persist with a particular approach.

The menu of tactics

The selection of approaches to tackling a specific problem should be data-driven. There should be evidence of a particular problem that would be addressed by taking a particular course of action. Table 1 shows a menu of tactics, developed with reference to Operation Igneous and Operation Gallant.

See Table 1 page 6

The following paragraphs summarise the experience of the operations in deploying each of the tactics.

Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR)

ANPR, which uses a camera to read number plates and then checks against available databases, is becoming an increasingly used policing tool. An evaluation of ANPR by Gains et al. (2003) estimated that a police constable operating as part of an ANPR-enabled intercept team would expect to recover 11 stolen vehicles annually. During the course of Operation Gallant, three stolen vehicles were identified by an ANPR system. A development of this approach may be to link the ANPR system with the membership database of a local vehicle watch scheme in which cars are not expected on the road between certain hours (see Honess and Maguire, 1993). Use of an ANPR could then detect a stolen vehicle even before the theft was reported. It should also be noted that ANPR is often resource intensive, requiring an operator of the system and a police response vehicle to stop cars that are identified by the ANPR.

Crime prevention methods

Crime prevention approaches that disseminate information and security products can help to reduce the risk of theft associated with particular vehicle models. Operation Gallant ran a series of crime prevention road shows at locations around West Surrey. In advance of the road shows the owners of particularly high-risk models were identified through a PNC V O D S (Vehicle Online Descriptive Search) check, which selected all registered keepers of the high-risk vehicles registered within specific postcode areas. These were sent a letter with crime prevention advice and were invited to the road show, where they could purchase discounted security devices.

The direct mailing of crime prevention advice to owners of high-risk vehicles was effective in improving awareness of the risks and in increasing the level of preventative action taken by registered keepers. However, there are a number of issues that need to be taken into account when undertaking an exercise of this kind:

- The selection of registered keepers in specific postcode areas is a facility that may not be available at the BCU level. It may require a specific request made to PNC Hendon to create the list required.
- The unit of analysis in the list created by PNC is the vehicle, rather than the registered keeper. This means that registered keepers with more than one vehicle of a particular type will appear more than once on a list. This is particularly an issue for businesses with fleets of vehicles registered within the identified area. Therefore, duplicate registered keepers need to be ‘weeded’ from the list to prevent multiple letters being sent to the same address.
- The PNC list will contain inaccuracies due to registered keepers changing address, or vehicles being sold, without DVLA being informed. The level of these inaccuracies will vary from area to area. In Operation Gallant, the current keeper was found to be inaccurate in approximately three per cent of records. This can be expected to improve with the introduction of continuous registration by DVLA.
### Table 1: Menu of tactics deployed in intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction initiatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of problem</th>
<th>Tactic</th>
<th>Expected result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stolen vehicles are driven at specific times and in specific locations. Or</td>
<td>Detection of offender while in possession of stolen vehicle. Or</td>
<td>Vehicle crime offenders apprehended for other motoring-related offences.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are outstanding warrants for vehicle crime offenders who are known to own a vehicle, or who may be anticipated to commit other motoring offences.</td>
<td>Automatic number plate recognition</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insecure vehicles at high risk of theft.</td>
<td>Crime prevention methods</td>
<td>Fewer insecure vehicles are available to steal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valuable items left on display in parked cars are stolen. the is less to steal.</td>
<td>Displayed property campaigns</td>
<td>Fewer items left on display reduces the extent of thefts from vehicles because</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance fraud thought to account for a major element of reports of stolen vehicles.</td>
<td>Investigation model and investigators’ guide</td>
<td>Increased questioning of vehicle theft victims identifies possible fraudulent claims that require further investigation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low detection rates mean few offences are associated with an offender.</td>
<td>Offender profiling</td>
<td>Improved profiling allows inferences to be made about who may have committed a crime. Can also be used to produce short list of offences ‘taken into consideration’ (TICs).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary thefts result in stolen vehicles being recovered from common locations.</td>
<td>Profiling dump-sites</td>
<td>Situational crime prevention measures taken at dump-sites reduce the ease with which vehicles can be abandoned.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A significant proportion of vehicle crime offences are associated with a small number of offenders.</td>
<td>Prolific offender targeting</td>
<td>Increased police attention targeted towards prolific offenders results in increased levels of detection and increased use of custodial sentences. Alternatively, increased police attention deters offenders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local residents (including offenders) are unaware of increased police activity.</td>
<td>Publicity</td>
<td>Offenders deterred from offending by increased perceived risk of detection. Public reassurance may also be improved by knowledge that the police are doing something about the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle crime occurring in very specific locations.</td>
<td>Site surveys</td>
<td>Situational crime prevention measures increase effort or risk associated with vehicle crime in specific location.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is an emerging trend for certain models of vehicle in specific locations to be stolen and unrecovered.</td>
<td>Tracking devices</td>
<td>Police track stolen vehicle to those involved in the thefts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stolen vehicles are sold for their parts to local motor salvage yards.</td>
<td>Visits to motor salvage yards.</td>
<td>Stolen vehicles/vehicle parts recovered at motor salvage yard and address of the vendor obtained. Enforcement action should close unregistered yards and encourage registered operators to maintain appropriate records.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Crime prevention road shows that support the direct mail approach are most likely to be effective when promoted through additional local publicity, such as mobilising local Neighbourhood Watch groups to spread the word. The road shows also work best when located in areas that have a continuous throughput of traffic, such as in public car parks and in lay-bys on busy roads.

**Displayed property campaigns**

Displayed property campaigns highlight to the owner that they have left goods on display in their car. This can be achieved either by noting the vehicle registration number and subsequently writing to the registered keeper, or by placing a sticker on the windscreen of those who have left property on display. One concern in relation to the latter approach is that it identifies suitable theft targets for potential offenders. One solution to this is to place a sticker on all windscreenes in an area, which look identical when read from the outside, but which have different messages (either raising awareness of items left on display, or a ‘well done’ for leaving nothing on display) when read from inside the vehicle. Another option might be to place the car crime prevention advice within a Fixed Penalty Notice envelope. It should be noted that both approaches can create a negative reaction from a small number of motorists (e.g. about it being an infringement of civil liberties or waste of police time) and a method of dealing with these in advance should be considered.

**Investigation model and investigation guide**

The investigation model and investigation guide were developed by Kent County Constabulary to improve officer awareness of stolen and rung vehicles (a process where a stolen vehicle is given a new identity) and to assist in identifying insurance fraud. Central to this approach is an extended crime report for thefts of vehicles. The additional information allows decisions to be made about the likelihood that a crime report is bogus and can be used to trigger further investigation. In Kent, this was reported to have led to a significant reduction in fraudulent vehicle crime reports.

**Offender profiling**

Offender profiling can involve sophisticated statistical analysis that attempts to link offenders with offences. Alternatively, it can simply involve ‘eye-balling’ the available data to match it with known offenders. In both cases, the approach relies on good modus operandi data in crime reports, which is often missing or of poor quality. This was found to be problematic for both Operation Igneous and Operation Gallant. The main use made of this method is for clearing up offences by presenting a list of similar offences to an offender who wishes other offences to be taken into consideration when appearing in court.

**Profiling dump-sites**

Profiling dump-sites can help to identify why certain locations are prone to stolen vehicles being abandoned there. Subsequently, this can assist with designing out the problem through situational crime prevention measures. This was an approach that proved useful in Operation Igneous and allowed recommendations to be made on how to change the local environment to prevent it from becoming a dump-site.

**Prolific offender targeting**

Prolific offender targeting was a key aspect of Operation Gallant. The initial crime analysis identified ten individuals who had been prolific vehicle crime offenders in 2002. These were subsequently targeted for enforcement activity. During the course of the operation, new individuals were added to the ‘top ten’ as those already on the list were remanded in custody. During the course of Operation Gallant, 17 targeted offenders were arrested a total of 75 times for 78 offences (three arrests involved more than one offence). On average, each offender was arrested four times over the 12-week period.

It should be noted that prolific offender targeting is a resource-intensive tactic that is usually only sustainable over the short term. It involves identifying the most active offenders at any one time and then developing approaches to increasing police contact with them. The purpose of this is to increase the actual and perceived risk of detection among those targeted. Developing a list of the most active offenders is likely to require a degree of judgement. While previous cleared up offences can be used as a starting point, low detection rates can mean that the sample is skewed towards individuals who are not necessarily the most prolific at the current time. This means that police process data (i.e. detections) should be supplemented with available local intelligence in drawing up a suitable list of prolific offenders to target. While Operation Gallant used crime analysis as the basis for most of those targeted, a few were targeted on the basis that they were associates of the prolific offenders who had recently moved into the area.

The approaches taken to target offenders will vary according to local circumstances, but may include:

- Tasking officers to submit intelligence on specific individuals
- Increased checks on conformity to bail conditions
- Use of covert surveillance on prolific offenders
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- Increased use of stop and search powers
- Increased requests for remands in custody for prolific offenders who are charged

As well as applying these methods Operation Gallant included a specific, short-term operation aimed at key offenders within hot-spot areas for ten days during the period. Hot-spot areas were chosen based on the available intelligence, ‘spotters’ in unmarked vehicles were tasked with going to these areas to gather intelligence and identify at-risk vehicles, or suspicious behaviour of known offenders. The marked vehicles and the ‘K9’ unit (response vehicle with a dog cage installed) would then be directed by this intelligence and be highly focused towards the offenders.

Publicity

Effective use of publicity is a low-cost method for increasing the impact of crime reduction activity. This should focus on publicising what the initiative is going to consist of and then publicising what has been implemented and what has been achieved. This kind of publicity has been found to be more effective than simply broadcasting crime prevention messages to the public (see Laycock, 1992 and Sallybanks, 2001). As such, the planning process for an initiative should incorporate a media strategy that drip-feeds a number of stories to the press over the course of the operation. Consideration should also be given to direct mailing offenders with press releases in order to increase their perceived risk of detection associated with the initiative.

Site surveys

Site surveys refer to surveys undertaken in hot-spot areas, where vehicle crime is most prolific. These areas must be sufficiently small to allow meaningful examination, with a view to identifying potential situational crime prevention measures.

Visits to motor salvage yards

Under the Vehicles (Crime) Act (2001) motor salvage operators have to pass a “fit and proper” test before they will be registered by local authorities and then hold a record of who sold that vehicle to them. The police have the power to visit business premises without a warrant and inspect these records and the vehicles with which they are associated. Motor salvage operators that trade without being registered with their local authority do so illegally (in contravention of section 1(1) of the 2001 Act) and police should initiate enforcement action. The purpose of the new powers is to drive criminals out of the motor salvage industry and help prevent stolen vehicles being given new identities (a process known as “ringing”) or broken for their parts.

Inspections undertaken by the Operation Gallant team yielded little of value, largely because the breakers concerned were not dealing directly with the public and were registered (i.e. the operators had passed the “fit and proper” test). This suggests that inspections are best undertaken when there is intelligence to show that a breakers yard has been involved in acquiring stolen vehicles or is unregistered.

Resource implications

As with any approach, the cost of the initiative will depend on how much time is involved, whether this is costed as overtime or as an ordinary part of day-to-day activity, how much additional equipment is required and for how long it is run. However, it is important to note that previous intelligence-led vehicle crime reduction initiatives have proven resource-intensive. For example, analysis of Operation Gallant estimated that the three-month operation had involved a total of 4,575 hours and cost £185,000. While this was 18 per cent higher than the value of the vehicle crime prevented over the three months, it was felt that if evaluated over the longer post-implementation period, it would have broken even or shown savings.

If operated by officers from across a BCU, costs can quickly escalate – especially if overtime is required to complete the work. Careful consideration therefore needs to be paid to the costs associated with each tactic and the likely benefits that will accrue from it. Furthermore, a longer planning period can help to reduce the need to rely on overtime, as officer rest-days can be managed more effectively.
References


Annex A: Checklist of factors affecting success of initiative

From analysis of Operation Gallant, there would appear to be a number of factors that influenced the success of the initiative. These can be divided into organisational factors that influence the way the local BCU is organised and managed and implementation factors that influence the way the initiative itself is organised and managed.

Organisational factors

- Commitment from the BCU management to devote resources towards vehicle crime, rather than towards other local problems, such as domestic burglary.
- A performance management ethos that places an emphasis on measurement of outcomes.
- A BCU centralised Intelligence Unit that can generate reports on a daily basis about the current crime trends and offenders considered to be associated with the crime.
- A tasking and co-ordination process to manage the direction of an operation on a regular basis.
- Vehicle crime analyst to produce regular reports on current vehicle crime patterns and trends.
- Data systems that collect appropriate data and which an analyst can properly interrogate.

Implementation factors

- A detailed analysis of the local vehicle crime problem upon which to develop suitable interventions.
- Selection of interventions that are known to ‘work’.
- A project manager, whose time is ring-fenced for the duration of the operation, to oversee the initiative.
- Sufficient time to plan the initiative in detail.
- A small implementation team that meets on a regular basis to ensure delegated tasks are completed.
- Sufficient resources to purchase necessary equipment (such as crime prevention materials).
- ‘Buy-in’ from operational staff tasked with implementing specific interventions.

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