

MINUTES OF CHILTERN & SOUTH BUCKS POLICING ISSUES FORUM

Wednesday 22nd November 2023, via MS Teams

In attendance:

Chiltern & S Bucks Policing Issues Forum: Andy Garnett (in the Chair), Robert Gibson
Thames Valley Police (TVP): Inspector James Ellis
Resident participants.


Presentation by Inspector James Ellis, TVP Neighbourhood Inspector, South Buckinghamshire Policing Area

Insp Ellis introduced himself as 'department head' of Neighbourhood Policing in South Buckinghamshire LPA. This is sometimes mistaken as the entirety of policing, but is one tier of it, specialising in engagement with the wider community.

Presentation available on website:

<https://www.csb-forum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/PIF-Nov23.pdf>

Operation Grotto will be starting and running through December. This will cover the entirety of South Bucks, and is part of a national campaign focusing on neighbourhood policing, and specifically neighbourhood crime. Working with local Detective Inspectors we've worked out a number of different tactics and agreed areas that are suffering unusually high levels of burglary. We're looking to intensify the policing in those hotspots.



**Winter Crime Initiative:
Operation Grotto**

- December will see a month-long policing intensification on Neighbourhood Crime; defined by the Home Office as domestic burglary, vehicle-related crime, theft from the person and robbery.
- Street-level Burglary "hotspots" will receive intensive prevention activity from police and partner agencies, calendared across the month. Including:
 - Door-to-Door visits with personalised crime prevention conversations
 - Partnership hubs sited within the street, for extra support
 - Neighbourhood Watch representatives advising on coordination and TV Alerts
 - Crime Prevention Street Surveys & Visual Audits
- Bespoke letter for far-reaching advice on home security; delivered in hotspots and broadcast across other channels
- Shoppers at retail centres will be provided with home security, fraud protection, and personal safety devices from our Police Cadet units.
- Local officers from the Priority Crime Team are conducting ANPR operations on arterial routes between Burglary hotspots; completing Detect & Deter enforcement work.


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Neighbourhood crime definition as per the Home Office: domestic burglary, vehicle-related crime, theft from the person and robbery.

Recognizing the needs of our particular community, burglaries are by far the main priority, not least because we're doing quite well on robbery and knife-enabled offences. Broadly, we are plateauing at a reduced level of burglary offending compared to 12 months ago. From the neighbourhood policing perspective, this is very much to do with crime prevention. Under Op Grotto we shall inform the public, by going door to door, and through 'street surgeries'. We will advise residents about the specifics of burglary offending that's taking place locally, how they might best secure their own home, and part of the door-to-door aspect will be a visual inspection of the perimeter of the house. A comprehensive letter will be going out to each household.

Neighbourhood crime doesn't just end with burglary and vehicle-related crime. There has been a recent focus on retail crime and shoplifting. By going out into our shopping districts and delivering home security advice, we can be on hand also to deal with real-time crime.

Priority Crime Team: another tier of policing, sort of cross between CID and uniformed teams, dealing with priority crimes. Some very successful operations recently, including on drugs and particularly County Lines (see slide, with quantities of drugs seized). For specific neighbourhoods, details are within your quarterly updates, available on the Forum website.



**THAMES VALLEY
POLICE**

Quarterly results on County Drugs Lines in South Buckinghamshire

- 3 Drugs Warrants in the past month
- 12 Arrests (11 Males over 18, 1 Female over 18)
- 3 positive vehicle stop checks
- Seizures: Crack Cocaine: 400 wraps, Crack Cocaine: 300g, Heroin: 193 wraps, Heroin: 39g, Cocaine: 90g, Cannabis plants: 16, Cannabis resin: 2539g, Cannabis bud: 8853g, Other drugs: 30 wraps, Phones: 16, Weapons: 7, Imitation firearm, selection of knives and Baseball bat, Cash: £13,080, Persons engaged and Safeguarded: 2, At least 2 lines seized and numerous lines disrupted.
- A variety of community engagement activities around County lines and Exploitation including visits and awareness raising/ engagement in partnership at numerous schools and colleges, Taxi ranks, Train stations, Hotels and B&Bs, Shopping centres, Community hubs, Garages, Fast food outlets.
- Partnership activity including High visibility patrols, park sweeps, community engagement and crime prevention events, youth engagement work, contextual safeguarding activities and assessments, local authority joint working, proactive Patrols, Train station operations including Police dogs and specialist units, work with Police Cadets and lots of joint working with The Children's Society raising awareness around Criminal exploitation through promotion of the #Lookcloser campaign.

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Significant drive on **knife-enabled crime** under national initiative Operation Sceptre, and South Buckinghamshire policing area has sustained a 30% reduction in knife enabled crime over the course of the last year. Tactics have included limiting accessibility of knives themselves, raising awareness, schools interventions, looking to change the narrative and culture of carrying a knife. Feedback from Thames Valley Police centre has recognised us as the example of good practice under Op Sceptre.

Other ongoing projects: **White Ribbon campaign** against violence against women and girls, including visits to nearly all traveller sites within South Buckinghamshire. Part of long-term goal of building trust within all our Communities.

Pony and trap/sulki racing: causes an impact on the wider community. Part of the work that we're doing within the traveller sites is looking to start a negotiation/mediation process whereby we might be able to reduce the impact.

Dynamics of local policing. At present South Buckinghamshire is a local policing area (LPA). We are now moving to Local Command Units, of bigger scale, and with a command structure headed by a Chief Superintendent.



Local Policing Structures: Buckinghamshire LCU

- Buckinghamshire Local Command Unit is the first phase of a force-wide restructure. Some changes have begun and a full “going live” is expected by April 2024.
- From January 2024, Constables in their second year of their probationary period will be seconded to Neighbourhood Policing teams; supplementing numbers and operational capability.
- Neighbourhood Teams are being re-aligned to Community Board areas; ensuring quarterly reports are wholly relevant, and simplifying coordination between the two.
- Each team will broadly comprise of a Sergeant, 8 Constables, and a commensurate number of PCSOs.
- Each team’s area of geographic responsibility will consider population density, with some teams covering multiple Community Board areas, whilst others, only one.
- A dedicated Town Centre team, of the same staffing structure, will be formed; tackling such issues as Shoplifting, Aggressive Begging, Vagrancy, Street Drinking/Drug Use, and Night-time Economy Crime.

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Buckinghamshire's LCU Commander has been named as Emma Burrows, previously this area's LPA Commander, so very well versed with local issues and a very strong advocate of this Forum.

Buckinghamshire LCU will exactly mirror the land footprint of Buckinghamshire Council, meaning we shall be better aligned to working in partnership, and there will be some restructuring of neighbourhood area teams to align with Community Boards.

Neighbourhood policing teams will receive additional resource, though team strength and dedicated activities may vary according to local needs and demand profiles, especially in our more dense population hubs.

Q&A:

Q: Within the Ivers we are plagued by a lot of **vehicle crime** - abandoned cars, illegal parking, obstructions, uninsured vehicles (reportedly the 15th most likely place in the country for Police to find an uninsured vehicle on the road). With a very narrow high street and old fashioned layout, bad parking can cause the whole traffic flow to seize up. Sometimes a vehicle left badly parked can cause a problem for a whole day, including potential obstruction for emergency vehicles. Via TVP website, for Police action the option seems to be to call 999, which seems overkill. A focus on vehicle crime in this locality is needed.

A: On obstruction, recognise that reporting via the website can be problematic - having tested it myself, I find that one option sends you to the Council, the other option tells you to dial 999; where else can you go?

Similar issues in other locations in South Buckinghamshire. Often caused by antisocial parking by drivers accessing local retail, including food outlets. Long-term solution can't come through Police. Our only tool is enforcement, and manpower doesn't allow for officers to be positioned on every High Street. In correspondence on this matter with Joy Morrissey MP, I detailed options including possible opportunities through design. The Council holds the mandate on parking enforcement so can work in partnership. Obstruction case law states that an actual and genuine obstruction to somebody needs to be occurring, hence for example a potential obstruction to an emergency vehicle wouldn't qualify. Neighbourhood officers are conversant with the legislation and they are issuing obstruction notices where they can. A vehicle parked in a specific very dangerous position can be lifted.

Iver IS relatively well-served by the Roads Policing Unit, all of whose vehicles are equipped with ANPR (automatic number plate readers), which is part of the source for numbers of uninsured drivers. This data-led intelligence is leading to further focus led primarily by Roads Policing who have the mandate when it comes to road safety and driving enforcement issues; recognising a local issue, our neighbourhood team will try and support.

As regards reporting to the Police, but not via 999, there is the opportunity to report illegal or dangerous parking as a form of antisocial behaviour. See

<https://www.thamesvalley.police.uk/advice/advice-and-information/asb/asb/antisocial-behaviour/nuisance-parking/> If possible, add image to the report on the portal.

Q: Could we not **call our neighbourhood Sergeant directly**?

A: Yes, encouraging robust communication channels between local Community Boards including Board Coordinator and Chair with their local neighbourhood Sergeant. That would equally apply to Councillors.

A (in response to question later on): also, where a very local concern doesn't make it to the top 3 priorities for the area, would recommend problem solving with the local Sergeant.

Q: Crime Stats show across the board that the biggest category in terms of reporting is **violence and sexual crime** (Police.UK data, reflected also on Forum's website). Is this also the highest in terms of time spent by your teams?

A: Generically, TVP spends a significant percentage of its time (probably around 40%) on predominantly domestic related incidents, including violence and domestic violence. One of my roles is oversight of custody suites across the county, and my experience is that easily 40% of the individuals that are brought through our custody suites would pertain to domestic related incidents and offences. Part of our mandate is violence against women and girls (though recognising that it's not necessarily just a female party that is a victim within domestic situations); in dealing with domestic related violence the propensity is for officers to be prioritizing those calls.

Each of these incidents may then require understanding of the circumstances, so gathering of evidence, the need to obtain the suspect's account, and a disposal decision, ie outcome - all of which can be quite laborious.

Q: **Drugs** always appear low in terms of numbers, but are they a gateway to or causation of crimes in other categories, especially acquisitive crime?

A: Speaking from experience (rather than from an academic standpoint), then yes, there can be a causal link. But consider also that the numbers of drug offences reflected in Police statistics are only those notified to or dealt with by Police. By its nature, much drug offending goes unreported and therefore recorded numbers are often much lower than for other types of crime, for which there is often an identifiable victim.

Q: Will changes to align with **Community Boards** affect TVP's frequency of engagement with Community Boards and their meetings? And what is the intended timeline for changes to be communicated?

Changes in the local policing structure have already started, with South Buckinghamshire amalgamating with Aylesbury in order to create South Buckinghamshire LCU. Local level changes to bring Neighbourhood structures into line with Community Board areas will come later in the process, somewhere in the region of April 2024. Will require considerable work re management structures, working hours, shift patterns, necessity of ensuring staff are comfortable with process.

Re Community Board attendance, where a specific issue requires Police input, we will always be available to Community Boards, with attendance by local Sergeant, myself if an issue requires escalation, or another member of staff or subject expert, as appropriate.

It should be remembered that our first service is to be out in the public. So I would encourage real-time dialogue between CBs and respective Sergeants, rather than dialogue being dictated by timings of CB meetings. If an issue comes up let's have that dialogue, and if unresolved by the time the next CB comes around then let's have a representative there to discuss the matter with the community more broadly.

Additionally, we have the Policing Issues Forum, which organises dedicated time for interaction on specific policing issues, as opposed to CBs which deal with a broader range of community aspects. My personal opinion: why would CBs not interact and feed into this Forum?

Q; re **Shoplifting**. Was the subject of the PCC's presentation at recent TVP Neighbourhood Policing conference. He introduced a Budgens manager who spoke about the impact of shoplifting. She made it clear that shoplifting is not a victimless crime, making a very strong case about the impact on staff and owners. They feel unsafe, daunted by approaching suspected shoplifters that may turn aggressive, concerned also about confronting the wrong people who then raise complaints. Can cause considerable mental stress. Apparently innocent products can be used to cut drugs, so gangs increasingly involved. What can be done? The PCC said it was a clear case of needing to understand the problems and approach them in 'problem solving mode'.

A: We have to look at means by which we can address the crux of the issue via a longer term approach. The PCC's initiative is looking at a redesign and revitalisation of the ShopWatch scheme, harnessing technology to 'target harden' business premises. This is probably where the best chance of 'designing out' the problem lies.

Neighbourhood Policing is not the sole provision against retail crime. We do our best to deal with local crime patterns as they occur; eg holding our 'Have Your Say' engagements outside retail shops can act as a small visible deterrent.

Q: With increased numbers of personnel, can we get **more 'walk-around' officers**?

A: Being out in the community is always my preference. We have had some well-documented challenges recently (eg abstractions). But these are working through, and our focus will be towards community engagement. Recent increase in information-led targetted presence has contributed to the downturn in both violent and knife enabled offences. 'Hotspotting' policing does work.

Q: **What is the benefit to you of the Forum?** What tweaks can be achieved to your everyday work from the setting of priorities by the Forum and feedback via the surveys?

A: Importantly, this process offers me the opportunity to implement upwards. I sit on a number of strategic meetings where I am helping inform policing Commanders. They are making decisions on resourcing, provision, funding, where activities are going to be driven. If I have the Community's priorities set, then I can be the mouthpiece of the community in reminding Commanders of what's going on. So at the highest of levels locally that is influencing how policy is being driven, and what operations are being formed.

Is it going to change day to day behaviour? Knowing that a category is a community priority will influence the way that neighbourhood policing will be carried out. But we won't start ignoring certain crime types. A recent example is Operation Hoover, targeting theft from motor vehicles particularly of trades persons. There was a team ripping holes in the side of vans, taking out work tools. We've managed to take an active crime group out and they are facing criminal prosecution. That was recognised and mandated by community concerns, even though the crime category didn't make the 'top 3'.

The Forum's presentation of data also helps with identifying seasonal changes, ensuring we are well positioned to deal with predicted seasonal trends and trying to 'flatten those curves'.

At a practitioner level, the priorities are placed on a page, giving a daily reminder on day-to-day duties. If an officer has some time available, they can go and offer some speeding awareness, or presence at a parade of shops suffering reports of ASB or drug use.

So the community can support us, to help enable us to be that enforcement arm and deliver preventative work.

Presentation on Survey Results by Robert Gibson

Presentation available on website.

https://www.csb-forum.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/CSBForum_survey_Nov23.pdf

Includes:

- purpose of consultation and survey, and use of residents' responses.
- Engagement - reduced in this survey.
- top choices: Burglary, Speeding, Anti-Social Behaviour, Drugs (same top 4 as previous 2 surveys, ASB and Drugs switched position from last survey).
- Breakdown of residents' responses by Community Board area.
- crime stats from POLICE.UK
- Speeding, including report on Community Speedwatch meeting at Great Missenden with PCC.
- 'Other' responses..

Priority Setting Discussion

It was agreed that the focus areas were pretty clearly defined by the survey results. Burglary and Speeding were the clear first two choices. Drugs retained as a focus area.

CHOICES MADE: BURGLARY, SPEEDING, DRUGS.

Robert Gibson
12th February 2024