

# In the neighbourhood

The Government has pledged to provide every community in the country with a neighbourhood policing team. John Dean looks at a team in Northumbria who have slashed detection rates.

Home Office staff have worked with the Association of Chief Police Officers Neighbourhood Policing Team to establish 43 Basic Command Units (BCUs).

Each BCU will implement neighbourhood policing and the Government expects half the country to have it by 2007 with full implementation by 2008.

A recent research report into National Reassurance Policing Pilots (NRPP) showed that the programme has a positive impact on crime, perceptions of crime and anti-social behaviour. In addition, feelings of safety and confidence in the police have improved, it said.

Home Office minister Andy Burnham said: 'Neighbourhood policing is much more than high visibility reassurance policing. It is about using local knowledge and intelligence from local people to target crime hotspots and the disorder issues causing most concern to local communities. Home Office research shows that only by working hand in hand with local communities can we ensure that the police do not just provide a service to the community, but are a respected and integral part of it.'

'The size of the neighbourhood which is served by this team will vary from area to area.

Typically though, we would expect it to cover one or two council wards. What is really important is that every resident will know the name of their local officer, see them on the street and will be able to contact them.'

## Case study

Neighbourhood policing may sound good on paper but can it work in practice?

Officers in Northumberland division seem to think so after detections in the area have

topped 40 per cent, with some areas hitting 50 per cent, and crime is down overall by 16 per cent.

The performance had led to the area command being identified by the Home Office's Crime Reduction and Community Safety Group as one of only six in England and Wales worth a special mention for performance in reducing and detecting crime.

Northumbria believes the key to the command's success has been the way it has introduced

Neighbourhood Policing Teams, continuing an approach which it has been implementing for some time.

Northumberland is Northumbria's largest area command, and believed to be one of the largest in England, covering 2,000 square miles, with a population of 310,000. It includes gritty former mining towns like Ashington and Blyth as well as more rural areas.

There are 629 officers and 117 police staff working through 11 sectors and 19 police stations. Each sector is run by a uniform inspector, assisted by a neighbourhood beat manager, who is a uniform sergeant, and a sector crime manager, who is a detective sergeant.

Uniform officers, including beat officers and other community support personnel, work with CID as part of a joint team, reporting to the uniform inspector. The sectors receive support from centrally-based, more specialist teams, when required.

The detection rate of 41 per cent was recorded between April and December last year, and compared with 29 per cent for the same period in 2004. Overall crime was down by 16 per cent on the same period in 2004.

Det Ch Insp Peter Farrell, based at divisional headquarters



Det Ch Insp Farrell



### Out and about in the community

in Bedlington, said in that in addition to the joint Neighbourhood Policing teams, many other factors contributed to the success, including:

- **increasing use of civilians to carry out paperwork, conduct routine follow-up investigation of straightforward crimes and take more responsibility for case management.**

Inspector Richard Yeats, sector inspector at Morpeth, said: 'By ensuring that police officers face less bureaucratic work, it means they can spend more time out in their area.'

PC Jon Gray, a neighbourhood beat officer in Morpeth, said: 'It helps a lot because you can bring someone in, complete your report then hand it over and get back out. People want to see officers in uniform in their area and this helps us achieve that, as well as do more crime prevention and detection. I am able to get out and find out what is happening in my area.'

- **thorough 13-week performance reviews for sector inspectors, during which all officers' work is assessed.**

Det Ch Insp Farrell said: 'We can identify officers performing well and find out how they are doing that, so that we can try it out elsewhere as well. If we have under-performing officers we can find out why and offer support. This is not just about statistics, though: for instance, I have an officer whose detections may seem to be down this month but I know he has been involved in a murder inquiry. The reviews take account of that.'

Insp Yeats said: 'It means that when I address my officers I am able to put out a clear message about what is required; increased detection and reduced crime.'

- **a programme to ensure all officers learn good interview techniques, witnessing real-life interviews, and providing increased scenes-of-crime training;**
- **more use of DNA technology.**

The benefits extend beyond increasing detection rates because with dropping crime levels as well, it adds up to a double impact.

Det Ch Insp Farrell said: 'Our division topped a 40 per cent detection rate but some sectors are now hitting 50 per cent. We have high expectations; our aim is for Northumberland to hit 50 per cent. But this is not just a numbers exercise; we want to be able to genuinely say to the public 'if a crime occurs in your area, if you are a victim, we will catch the person that did it'.

'What we have done is ensure our officers are responsible and accountable. We have freed them up to be out in the field more of the time and everyone is feeling the benefit.'

But amid the plaudits, no one is complacent. Det Chf Insp Farrell said: 'Our challenge for the future is to work smarter and use our intelligence better. What we are doing allows us and our partners to be more creative. Forty per cent is great; fifty per cent would be magnificent.'

'This is tough policing. It is not just a figures game, it is about quality.'

Insp Yeats points to his own sector's improving results:

between September 2005 and February this year, detection rates hit 38 per cent, when in the previous six months it was 19 per cent. In addition, crime was down five per cent compared with six per cent up last time around; added together, it makes for an 11 per cent turnaround.

Insp Yeats said: 'Neighbourhood policing means we can take targeted action which is increasing community confidence. People are reporting more information to the police and our message is that if you commit a crime in this area, we will hunt you down.'

And it is not just the officers saying that; a recent HM Inspectorate of Constabulary inspection found that Northumberland recorded about 2,500 more detections, and charged or summonsed 1,250 more offenders, than any similar BCU in England and Wales.

The inspection report concluded: 'This is a very creditable performance and HMIC congratulates the BCU for its professional approach, hard work and commitment of everyone involved.'

Divisional commander Ch Supt Graham Pears said: 'It's first and foremost down to the high quality of staff in the area command, backed up by the support of our partners in the police authority and the community. It shows what can be achieved by real partnership. We have key people in key places, delivering a high quality service to the people of Northumberland.'

'They are committed to high standards of professionalism, effective partnership work and the proactive targeting of offenders.'

'The work and commitment of the staff in Northumberland is outstanding. In two months alone I had good cause to commend 41 officers for their excellent work.'

'It's also an important factor that a large number of staff - about 70 per cent - actually live in the area command so they have a sense of ownership and accountability. They are policing the area in which they live, which is a great incentive for anyone to make sure the job gets done properly.'

One of them, PC Gray, said: 'I do feel a sense of responsibility. In all my time in the service, this is the most rewarding job I have done.'

Mike Craik, chief constable of Northumbria Police, said: 'It shows what can be achieved through our neighbourhood policing teams, focused leadership, the hard work and commitment of all staff and the trust and co-operation of local communities who continue to provide us with the information we need to pursue those responsible for crime and disorder.'

'The detection rate is going up throughout the force and, without wishing to detract in any way from Northumberland's performance, I think it's fair to say that the other area commands are hot on their heels.'

Councillor Lawrence Thompson, Haltwhistle county councillor and police authority member, said: 'It's very reassuring for the people of Northumberland. It reflects a successful team effort involving everyone within the area command, from the management team to those on the streets, and all the force's partners who are working towards the same objectives.'

