
Focussing on Car Crime



**An initiative by South Yorkshire Police to tackle the problem of
Offenders stealing from Ford Focus cars**



Ian Daines
Assistant Chief

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Mr R Guerette
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Dear Mr Guerette

Please find attached a nomination from South Yorkshire Police for consideration of a Goldstein Award, which is submitted by officers from the Barnsley area of the force. This project, which is centred around problem oriented policing, has already been entered into a national award in the United Kingdom and has reached the 'top ten'.

The project was successful in reducing the number of thefts of CD players from Ford Focus motor vehicles. This reduction was the highest in the United Kingdom. Through liaison with the Home Office measures have been put in place to permanently reduce break-ins into this type of vehicle by addressing the design features of the car, which the manufacturer has now changed.

I fully support this application for consideration of a Goldstein Award.

Yours sincerely

Ian Daines
Assistant Chief Constable
(Media & Personnel)

DETAILS OF OPERATION FOCUS

Summary of application

During late 2005 thefts of Compact Disc (CD) radio systems from Ford Focus cars in Barnsley area increased three fold, despite attacks on other vehicles remaining constant.

A partnership with police was formed identifying the problem and addressing it. In depth analysis found Focuses were specifically targeted because

- They can be entered by smashing the glass without the alarm activating
- The systems can be immediately removed from the fascia by inserting U clips into the body of the units
- There's a ready market for the sale of the stereos which are interchangeable with other Focus models

Ford manufacturers and dealers gave technical advice and lent a trap car to capture offenders, insurance companies gave discounts to Focus owners who took agreed steps to protect their vehicles. Glass repairers, traffic wardens and carpark attendants gave proper figures for attacks and helped advise owners. Crimestoppers was used to gain information.

'eBay' assisted by identifying persons selling units. The Crown Prosecuting Service was consulted early, to ensure best evidence, and drugs workers and the Drugs Intervention Programme was used to divert offenders from crime. The partnership identified numerous steps owners could take to protect themselves; parking where the car can be seen, preferably near CCTV, fitting passive alarms, security marking their units, putting Allen screws in the holes of units preventing extraction, and displaying stickers on the windows "Could this be a sting car?"

The Group worked with victims, offenders and hot spot locations. Finance was less than £1,000. Results included

- 200% decrease in Focus attacks
- Stolen market for the units understood, disrupted and dismantled
- All 4008 Barnsley owners received specific instruction and practical help to prevent them becoming victims
- Ford now rectifying Focus design faults
- 487 car CD stereos recovered from handlers selling on eBay
- More stolen systems than ever before being handed back to owners
- New legislation such as Anti Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) and Asset Recovery used
- 10 forces taken it as Best Practice and now using it

The programme was designed after long consultation between all parties and relied on hard facts such as interviews with prisoners, insurance claims, examination of the vehicles creating accurate profiles of suspects, crimes and possible handlers. The evaluation was similarly done in great detail, comparing crimes numbers, amount of property recovered, Ford new policy, numbers of ASBOs and impending Asset recovery.

Description of project

Scanning

Having identified a huge increase in the number of Ford Focus cars being broken into in late 2005, the main objective of this project was to use all available data to establish the extent of the problem, and then find a sustainable long term solution to deal with it.

This led to further investigation into why Ford Focus cars were being targeted, and resulted in the following outcomes; design faults in the making of the earlier models meant that the alarm would not activate if the window was broken, only if the door was opened. They were also targeted because the Radio and Compact Disc (CD) system was easily removable using U clips which the thieves carried about with them for the purpose. These fit into the body of the unit instantly releasing it from the fascia. Finally there was a ready market for these units which retail at £367 and are interchangeable with other systems in Focus models.



Analysis of drug testing of offenders showed that 83% of them took drugs and all blamed their addiction for the reason for the thefts.

In identifying the extent of the problem with thefts from Ford Focus cars, the following aims were defined:

- To reduce the number of Ford Focus cars being broken into by 100%
- To understand, disrupt and dismantle the market for stolen radio CD players by publicity and enforcement

- To educate the owners on the crime prevention measures to be taken
- To influence Ford to take practical measures to prevent attacks
- To increase the perception that offenders are being caught
- To recover 5% of stolen property returning it to the owners
- To divert offenders from crime and ensure that their addiction is addressed

Thefts from Ford Focus cars are clearly of significant concern to the community, in particular Ford Focus owners, especially when Focuses are now one of the most popular model of cars being bought in the UK. Cars are usually the second biggest investment after a house and an attack on this property always causes worry and cost.

It has a further impact on the community by way of an increased fear of crime. Smashed glass in car parks and the side of the road makes an area look rundown which then exaggerates the fear of crime and also results in health and safety concerns. Insurance Claims mean higher premiums and the car is out of action until repaired.



Repeat victimization is often interpreted as a personal attack/vendetta against the owner causing further distress, when the truth is their car has design faults which thieves exploit.

Police and agency involvement were operating under the Crime and Disorder Partnership.

The police and other appropriate agencies came together in identifying the problem. Barnsley council was involved by way of Traffic Wardens and car park attendants being fully briefed and aware of the problem feeding the police with details of crimes that were not normally recorded. They also distributed leaflets.

The partnership worked together and each agency was determined to make a difference. The problem was initially recognised in Barnsley, but liaison with other police districts established that the problem was in fact widespread across the whole

force. The police used the National Intelligence Model coupled with the data from the other agencies named to create a profile of the crimes, offenders and possible handlers.

A community analyst was used to catch all information that was relevant and comes direct from the community about the problem. The project was driven by a senior officer with intimate knowledge of all aspects of the operation and a fervent desire to ensure success.

The Home Office was involved in putting pressure on Ford manufacturers to correct the design faults, which led to appropriate involvement by Ford to correct the faults. Drug Action Teams, Youth Offending Teams and Youth Services were, and still are, involved in proactively putting offenders on the road to rehabilitation.

The Crown Prosecution Service was involved from the beginning to ensure all evidence met with set standards. Source units were utilised, every person arrested for car crime or handling was asked about any information they could provide and dedicated intelligence cells were properly resourced

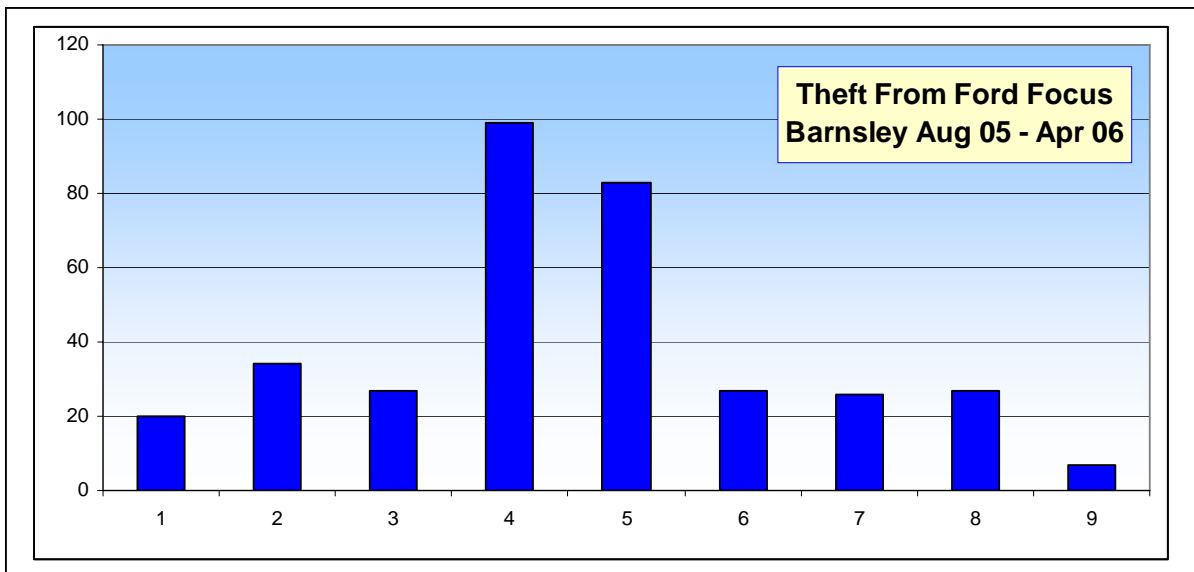
Analysis

Reliable information sources were used to analyse the problem, and as most vehicle crime is unreported data was used from Ford and 'Autowindcreens', the main companies who repair damaged Ford windows in Barnsley and from traffic wardens and carpark attendants. This provided a more accurate indication of the scale of this crime.

This information supplemented crimes initially reported to the police. Blue 8 Mapping software is used to map hot spot areas geographically across Barnsley. Detailed analysis from every source was used to identify the times, locations and victims where thefts occurred.

Liaison between Districts throughout South Yorkshire is continuous in order to maintain a 'heads up' on trends. It has now been established that thefts from Ford Focus cars is a problem across the whole of the country.

Analysis took place using the Police National Computer identifying all 4008 owners of Ford Focus cars who live in the Barnsley area.



The above graph displays the analysis of information in an easily visible format showing the extent of the problem at Barnsley District Basic Command Unit.

Having used reliable sources to analyse the nature and extent of the problem, the following conclusions were reached in terms of the causes and underlying conditions of the problem. The Ford Focus has no passive alarm so there is no activation when the glass is broken, which is why the glass is broken by the offenders because, if they forced the door, the alarm will go off. The stereo is easily detachable from the car dashboard by the use of U clips which fit into the four holes in the unit and their insertion releases the unit immediately. Interviews with those persons caught show that criminals find this crime of low risk but high return.



There is clearly a 'ready market' for disposal of the stereos and most crimes are being committed at night so there is little chance of the thief being seen and therefore caught. Such findings have allowed the police and partners to establish a tailored response.

Although a thorough analysis of the problem has now been conducted, there were inevitable gaps in our knowledge and in the information gathered. For instance the police were initially unaware that the alarm would not activate if the window was smashed. We were also unaware that the stereos were interchangeable with other units and people could update their cassette radio with a CD player. This explains the higher theft appeal.

These gaps in our knowledge have been accounted for and subsequently overcome by working together with Ford using their expert knowledge.

The Compact Disc car radios, if recovered, are difficult to trace without them being marked by a Ultra Violet (UV) pen with the post code or with a serial number. Few people know to UV mark the stereos or keep a record of the serial number so many units in the past have been left unclaimed at police stations.

Upon identifying the nature and extent of the problem, appropriate agencies were consulted and involved. Neighbourhood Watch schemes were used as a communication link using the Ringmaster system of reaching all members by sending

a message automatically by telephone. The council run Street Services removed broken glass, put up notices warning motorists of the dangers in hot spot locations and put up additional lighting.

An intelligence link was created and is still being maintained with Districts within South Yorkshire and forces around the country. The police have engaged with members of the community, as they have the most intelligence and gain the most from market closure.

Partnership involvement took place between the police, local and national media, Home Office, the Vehicle Reduction Partnership Group, Barnsley Ford dealers, Ford manufacturers, insurance companies, glass repairers, Crimestoppers, Trading Standards, and the Crown Prosecution Service. Everyone had a real intent to sort the problem out.

The council are setting up talking meters in Barnsley in car parks to warn motorists of the risks to their vehicles. The police are actively involved in removing the market place for stolen units, such as liaising with 'eBay' the online auction website. As a direct result 487 car CD players have been recovered. Letters were sent to all persons who have had units stolen to look in their handbooks for the serial number, and Ford dealerships examined all sales to get serial numbers from the cars they sold. Using the knowledge gained, which in itself was good publicity for the police and partnership, numerous systems were handed back to their owners.



Partnership agencies now meet regularly to review and evaluate all aspects of the running of the operation and to improve performance. Car clinics and forums are used for discussion with the Community seeking information about the problem and giving advice.

Response to the Problem

Following thorough analysis of the problem, the response was designed accordingly and included a full range of initiatives to target the problem. Undercover Test Purchase Officers were deployed to explore the market and discover who was stealing the units. 'eBay' was pressed for information about who locally was selling the units. Focus owners who visited Barnsley were advised by Police Community Support Officers, Traffic Wardens and carpark attendants on how to protect their cars. A sting Ford Focus car given free by the local Ford dealers was utilised to catch thieves in action.

High visibility patrols were undertaken by officers and Local Policing Teams. Fast track arrests were in place for any person on bail for attacking Focuses breaking their bail conditions bringing them before the courts within 24 hours. Early identification of potential subjects were put forward by the partnership for inclusion on the Prolific and Priority Offender Scheme. There was active involvement of the Drugs Intervention Programme carrot and stick approach to reach offenders.

Trading Standards gave Ford owners appropriate advice. Insurance companies are now considering giving discounts to Focus owners who show they have taken the practical steps we agreed on. Crimestopper details were given to the public and criminals. Anyone detained at a police station would see the freephone number as they entered the custody area and sprayed on the walls of each cell.

The partnership created a comprehensive information pack giving advice, and useful material to 4008 Ford Focus owners. We advised them to park the car where it can be easily seen by others preferably where there is CCTV coverage, purchase a passive alarm to overcome the problem of the built in alarm not activating when the window is broken, security mark their stereo with the security pen supplied in the pack, use Allen screws supplied in the pack to fill the 4 holes in the stereo to prevent easy extraction, and display the sticker supplied in the pack in the car warning the car is protected or saying 'Am I the sting car?'



There was difficulty during implementation including lack of interest by some Focus owners who had not been victimised and Ford Garages who worried about the damage it could cause to sales.

The responses yielded from the analysis results have incorporated a new way of thinking which aims to improve quality of life for the public. Communication links with appropriate agencies are continuously being progressed leading to the enhanced success for the overall problem of thefts from Ford Focuses.

We needed to identify up and coming car thieves and this was helped by direct liaison with the probation service. Another deterrent was to increase police activity in the areas catching offenders and handlers then publicising the prosecutions.

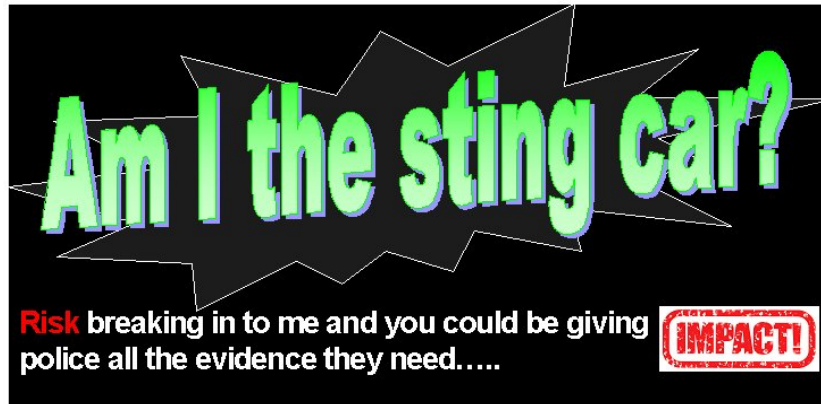
When we recovered car CD players we wrote to all persons who had reported the theft of a similar item but who did not at the time provide a serial number telling them where in their handbook they would find the number. This resulted in a large percentage of radios being returned to their owners. We have now instructed crime management staff to specifically ask for the serial number and tell the owners where they can find it.

Numerous responses were chosen to tackle the problem, these being decided by the collaboration between the police, community and partner agencies. This resulted in having sufficient resources and structure to deliver the response successfully. Strategic, tactical and co-ordinating meetings showed that a multi agency approach was essential. The partnership group that was formed, met regularly and drove action. The drive for success meant that action was taken immediately on 'hot intelligence', finance being provided from the partnership. This prompt action also generated more intelligence from the community. The object was to prevent the problem from re-emerging.

Other forces acted alone, doubling the patrols at night which resulted in resources being directed from other pressing needs and response times for attending other incidents were lengthened. We had previously gone down this road but we wanted a permanent solution to the problem, and not at the expense of other priority police work.

Our over-riding response was aimed at addressing the communities concerns with a multiple of actions which were effective, practical and at reasonable cost.

The intervention was so effective that ten other forces have now taken on the lessons in how to deal with this crime effectively. Numerous calls were received from members of the public expressing their thanks after information packs were sent to them. As a result the police and the partnership received good publicity, which shows them in a very positive light. IMPACT on crime was used as a marketing icon, a message tailored to each activity.



Six drug addicts who were stealing to pay for drugs are now receiving treatment under DIP and others will receive after-care when released from prison. Three are now in full time employment. The new legislation is being used for Inspectors to authorise drug tests to identify the persons on drugs and to get them seen by drugs workers.

Each success was publicised and ensured further information from the public by advertising the Crimestoppers free phone number. Crimestoppers information increased by 110%.

Fewer offenders returned to this crime, as we were making them change their lifestyle by DIP structured group work, peer support, and community links.

Partnership working was a key element in the development of this project. There was, and still is strong collaboration and co-ordination by the partnership, and funding is being made available from the public and private sector. Every drug addict nominal was put through DIP. There was robust tasking, co-ordination and liaison with other forces.

Ownership was shared between all interested parties, all agencies and a committed policing team. At all meetings there was a senior level attendance and a friendly and constructive relationship promoting true information sharing 'how as well as what'. Offenders went into treatment and accessed 'wrap around' services with focus being on those who needed it. The proactive work of persistent outreach workers has forced six offenders into treatment.

With regard to the handlers, action is now being taken under the new Asset Recovery System to try and seize assets. The council assisted with obtaining additional intelligence for ASBOs which were to restrict the movements and associations of offenders.

Another advantage with the partnership approach was that equipment was in many cases provided free of charge. A Ford Focus car was lent to the police by Ford to catch offenders. Leaflets were also produced free by some agencies. The original budget from the partnership was £100 which was later extended to £958. The publicity including stickers, information packs and postage cost £658, the screws that fit into the units cost £300 (but were only 3p each).



The above photograph shows the insertion of the four allen screws the top right only partially inserted ensuring the U clips no longer fit into the holes. Also shows the unit has been marked with a post code.

Ford's long term response was to ensure that the defects that led to their cars being targeted were corrected. They also held car clinics where they gave away the screws and stickers, as well as providing them when the cars were being serviced

Regular reviews were undertaken through tactical assessments and problem profiles. Robust, regular and clear analysis and assessments were completed with regular meetings to ensure the smooth running of the project. Following one such meeting, there was an agreed change to be made which would impact on the project. This change was publicising the sting car in an effort to deter further attacks.

The chosen responses have proven to be sustainable over the past months, in particular this good practice has been disseminated to ten other forces, highlighting the transferability of this new approach. Finance was made available to make the project sustainable and South Yorkshire Police are continuously building on the success of the project.

The responses have been creative in that they have used the new ASBO legislation on offenders. Asset recovery is achieved through the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002, and most notably, the project has now mainstreamed into normal police activity and proven to be an intervention yielding maximum effect. It provides the best ever consideration of victims needs, making every effort to advise them, prevent them from being a victim and, even if they do become a victim puts processes into place to ensure the serial number is obtained so that there is a good chance of recovering their CD system.

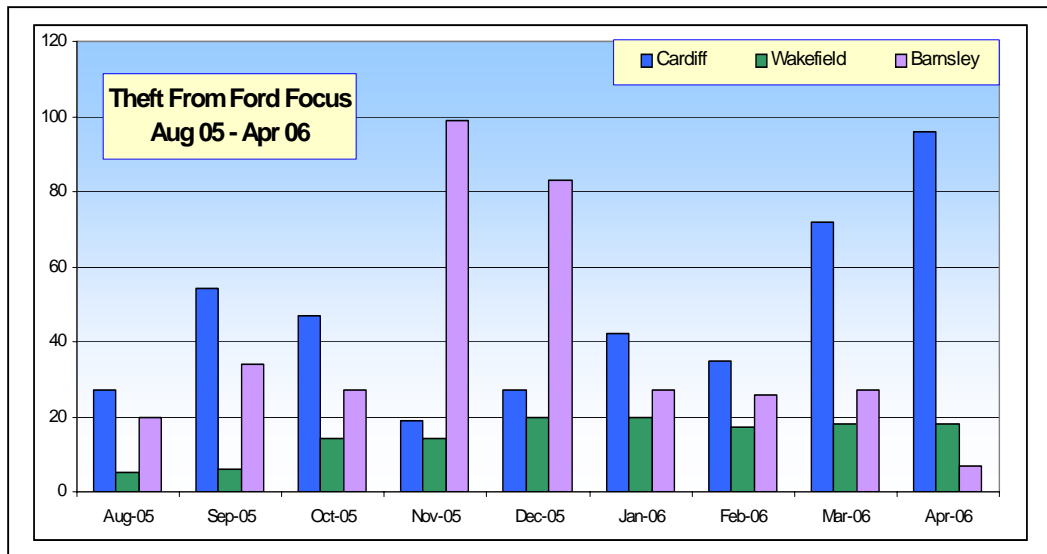
Evaluation and assessment of the Intervention

After initially identifying the problem and working through the response process we have now produced a package which includes all the analysis, all details of the agencies involved, all the action that was carried out, and all the subsequent analysis to show how effective the process was. In the package we also outline the lessons

we learnt. The sting car we used was in the end not found to be as effective as we would have hoped, however the publicity from using it was effective. On reflection we would have used it less on the ground where it tied up police resources but advertise its use more, as a deterrent.

Other forces have heard of the operation through the publicity we have given, and our dramatic effect on the figures of Ford Focus attacks, which in other areas continue to escalate.

We found two control groups, Cardiff Basic Command Unit and Wakefield Basic Command Unit, both being the most similar geographical areas with similar problems. They were also some distance away from our area. The control groups were essential as we needed to rule out other explanations for the successes achieved.



All the measures were made to reassure the public and provide excellent service to victims. We found that the public thrived on the feedback we provided and encouraged them to come forward with further information (Crimestopper information doubled). Repeat victims who felt vulnerable were reassured with the information packs.

The crime prevention officers who did Safer by Design surveys of all the hotspots and obtained the Allen screws were at the forefront of this initiative and deserve some real credit.

The evidence collected to date has shown that the chosen responses achieved exceeded what was initially intended. We vastly reduced the number of thefts from Ford Focus cars, and increased the number of arrests. The publicity and advertising for both South Yorkshire Police, all the members of the partnership and Ford has been excellent.

To measure how effective we have been we need to refer to the aims we set after the scanning stage

- **To reduce the number of Ford Focus cars being broken into by 100%:**
Doubled it measured by crime reported to police and partners

- **To understand, disrupt and dismantle the market for stolen radio CD players by publicity and enforcement:**
Largest recovery of car radios from street crime in the country, information from persons caught that market has dried up.
- **To educate the owners on the crime prevention measures to be taken:**
Wrote to every owner in the Barnsley district.
- **To influence Ford to take practical measures to prevent attacks:**
New Ford vehicles are protected in that the stereo no longer has the holes for easy extraction and standard models now have an alarm system operating when the window is smashed.
- **To increase the perception that offenders are being caught:**
20 articles in the press, 15 broadcasts on the radio and by word of mouth from persons caught measured by interviews with persons in custody. Now regarded as a hard crime because it could be a trap car and the market has dried up.
- **To recover 5% of stolen property returning it to the owners:**
Quadrupled this amount measured by huge recoveries.
- **To divert offenders from crime and ensure that their addiction is addressed and dealt with:**
Some offenders got employment all helped by drugs workers to get off drugs. In all 24 persons targeted all successfully.

The commitment of the partnership members was excellent, senior managers attended meetings and went away with clear actions to complete before the next meeting. Meetings were always well attended and focused. If someone was not able to attend a deputy was always sent.

The project used a systematic methodology breaking down every part of the problem to discover underlying causes. The partnership was used to address every part and find a sustainable solution. The principles used are now be used for every other type of crime problem at Barnsley. The responses continue to be monitored by the group, to ensure performance is maintained at a high level.

The evaluation by all members of the partnership was extensive and showed that the problem had been dissected to such an extent that it was fully understood. The underlying causes were correctly identified and the solution was more than effective. The interviews with persons arrested formed part of the process and showed that their perception of it being an easy low risk crime had changed.

The concerns about displacement have been addressed by the project being copied throughout all Districts in South Yorkshire.

Apart from the initial scepticism of some Ford Focus owners and the reluctance of Ford garages to be involved in a project which identified design faults in their vehicles, the implementation went very smoothly.

Agencies and officer information

The problem solving initiative was adopted by all members of the group, the senior officer ensuring all officers received training in Problem Orientated Policing (POP)

during its execution. All officers were encouraged to use problem solving to become more effective at addressing community concerns.

The head of the Operation ensured all officers had daily access to the Home Office and Center for Problem Orientated Policing web pages as well as Home Office Manuals. Experts in POP were drafted in to give practical advice.

The general resources in terms of personnel committed to the project consisted of an Inspector, Tasking officer, two Crime Prevention Officers, all with the clear support from the Chief Superintendent, Head of District.

Finance was acquired from the Partnership with the Council at no expense to normal policing.

This project has already been recognised as creative, effective POP project successfully tackling a particular crime problem and has been shortlisted (Top 10 out of 86 submissions) by the Tilley Awards. The judging for this takes place in July 2006.

The principles of this initiative are now being replicated within the force to tackle other crime issues and incorporated into the Forces Vehicle Crime Strategy.

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