Neighbourhood Policing in the Thames Valley:
Briefing Paper for Andrew Smith MP

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Overview

In March 2008 we fully rolled out, ahead of the April 2008 deadline, neighbourhood policing across the entire Thames Valley Police area (Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Berkshire). All 265 neighbourhoods have now gone ‘live’. The next challenge for us, which forms a key part of our Strategic Plan for the next three years, is to embed the neighbourhood management approach and to make sure that increasing our responsiveness and community engagement is part of everything that we do.

This heralds a real step-change in the way that we interact with our communities, and is supported by lots of work to map our communities, to understand the issues that affect them, and to involve them in the solutions.

So far the feedback from areas which have had dedicated neighbourhood policing teams for a while is that they make a real difference, and many Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) in particular have forged close links with their communities.

About Neighbourhood Policing in Oxford

Oxford City Local Policing Area (LPA) is coterminous with the boundaries of Oxford City Council.

There are six Neighbourhood Inspectors who have geographical responsibility for the neighbourhood teams. The Inspectors’ areas of responsibility are coterminous with the six Oxford City Council Area Committees.

Oxford City is divided into 22 neighbourhoods, which are graded as either Priority, Enhanced, or Capable. The grading relates to a matrix which determines the level of resources allocated to each neighbourhood. Oxford has five Priority neighbourhoods, (Blackbird Leys, Greater Leys, Rose Hill, Barton and Oxford City Centre), 12 Enhanced neighbourhoods, and five Capable neighbourhoods.

Oxford City currently has 48 Police Community Support Officers (PCSO) which will rise to 59 in total from summer 2008. Ten of these are part-funded by Oxford City Council and four are part-funded by Oxford University.

There are 24 Neighbourhood Specialist Officers (NSO). These are fully warranted police officers who have dedicated neighbourhood roles and receive specialist training and have a supervisory role for the PCSOs as well as patrol. In addition, 16
Neighbourhood Officers and nine members of the Special Constabulary support the neighbourhood policing teams. There are also response and specialist units which can be called up for additional support when needed.

**Neighbourhood Action Groups**

There are twelve Neighbourhood Action Groups (NAGs) that have been set up in Oxford. They are a multi-agency and community group set up to identify and resolve key issues in their neighbourhood. Each NAG sets its priorities through consultation as to what issues were of most concern to the community, and works towards solving the problems. Public consultation includes methods such as:

- Public Meetings
- Surgeries at community buildings
- Police exhibitions / presence at local events
- Questionnaires
- Street briefings
- One to one engagement – door stop interviews

The first Neighbourhood Action Group to be set up in Oxford was in Blackbird Leys and Greater Leys. It is made up of residents, Housing Officers, Parish Council representatives, Police, City and County Councillors, the Area Committee Co-ordinator, Neighbourhood Watch, Youth Service, a Secondary School representative, Oxford City Council Crime and Nuisance Action Team (CaNACT) and Oxford City Council Street Wardens and Park Rangers.

PCSOs and Street Wardens have been used to very good effect to scan for problems, assess the nature of the problem, and involve residents in the solutions. A good example is Blackbird Leys where drug dealing was identified as a neighbourhood priority. Hundreds of residents were visited in an identified locality and asked a series of questions:

- What is the drug-dealing problem?
- Where is it occurring?
- When is it occurring?
- Why is it occurring?
- Who is drug dealing?
- How is drug dealing occurring?

The results of this detailed one-to-one survey showed that the perception of drug dealing was much worse than the reality. The NAG therefore increased its focus on tackling the perception of drug dealing.

Appendix 1 gives a detailed Case Study of the work of another Priority area NAG, for Barton, Risinghurst and Sandhills, in reducing anti-social behaviour.

**Neighbourhood Priorities in Oxford**

Neighbourhood Priorities across Oxford fall into five categories:
• Environmental (i.e. litter and fly tipping)
• Road traffic related (i.e. Speeding or parking)
• Anti-social behaviour
• Drug dealing
• Criminal damage or vandalism.

Benefits of Neighbourhood Policing

Neighbourhood policing can and is making a difference. The NAG are having success in focussing on small geographical areas and are working closely with Oxford City Council’s Crime and Nuisance Action Team (CaNACT). CaANACT has Neighbourhood Action Officers (NAO) whose boundaries are coterminous with Area Committees. In addition, each NAG area has an anti-social behaviour case-working group that focus on individuals and individual premises. These case-working groups ensure effective and appropriate use of ASBOs, ABCs (Acceptable Behaviour Contracts) and injunctions in support of neighbourhood priorities.

Neighbourhood Policing in Oxford is linked with targeted police operations. It is no coincidence that with the arrival of dedicated neighbourhood police teams, crime has fallen. Ring-fenced neighbourhood police teams working in conjunction with targeted police operations is proving to have significant and positive results (see Appendix 2 on crime statistics for Priority neighbourhoods).

• In Oxfordshire residential burglaries are now at their lowest since 1989
• Car crime (theft of vehicle and theft from vehicle) is now at its lowest since the mid 1980’s

We have found there are several key elements to success: Visibility, Engagement, Problem-solving, and Communication. The Neighbourhood Specialist Officers, PCSO, Oxford City Council Street Wardens, and Park Rangers provide a huge increase in visibility that is reassuring to local people and increases their feeling of safety. Communication is also important using various media including local newspapers, radio and television.

The Oxford Safer Communities Partnership (OSCP) website includes dedicated neighbourhood policing pages for each NAG and is a very useful resource (www.saferoxford.org.uk/neighbourhood).
Appendix 1: Case Study

The following case study will focus on the reduction of anti social behaviour as selected as a priority for the Barton, Sandhills and Risinghurst Neighbourhood Action Group (NAG). This case study looks at the range of actions that Thames Valley Police together with its partner agencies have been undertaking to combat the problem and thus alleviate concerns of local residents.

Background

On 17th June 2006 a Public Consultation exercise was undertaken at the ‘Barton Bash’, Oxford. The Barton Bash is a community event attended by many different agencies and community groups and held at the local community centre. There were a wide range of programmes on offer from dance groups and DJ’s, to advice shops and raffles. The event attracted a wide range of age groups and across the socio economic spectrum of residents who live in the local area. The event was very well supported by the local community and was a very successful local event having been established during previous years. Due to the popularity of previous events and engagement by the local community it was felt that this event would be an ideal opportunity to hold a public consultation exercise in line with neighbourhood policing.

The local PCSO’s and Street Wardens undertook a consultation exercise at the event and the results identified three key priorities that the Neighbourhood Action Group could focus on over the following period. The top identified priorities were:

1) Anti Social Behaviour around Underhill Circus
2) Use of Mini Motorcycles
3) Drug dealing and its use

Setting Actions

The period following the consultation exercise saw a range of actions set and implemented. The main aim was to prevent anti social behaviour and also identify and deal with any perpetrators. The first step of the process was to identify what was happening, when it was happening, by whom, and why the area of the shops was attracting this type of behaviour.

Prior to the consultation there were already agreed plans for a regeneration of the shops area, however, this work was not due for completion for at least 15 months at the time of the consultation. The intention of the shop area regeneration was to make the shops a more accommodating area for the local residents and to design an area that would not promote anti social behaviour.

In the short term there needed to be a quicker response to the identified top priority of anti social behaviour. The immediate action undertaken was an increase in high visibility patrols by Police Officers, PCSO’s and Street Wardens. Additionally, the local shops were also visited and local licensees advised about the sale of alcohol to the young people.
A medium term strategy of educating local people of the Alcohol Free Zone was initiated and this included placing increased signage around the local area. There were a number of different forms of youth engagement, this included youth provision over the summer of 2006 for a 5-day football course funded by Oxford City Council. Other play schemes also took place over the summer and these successfully reduced the number of young people who were enticed to ‘hang out’ at the shops area. Additional to the schemes mentioned above and as a pre cursor to the main regeneration scheme, a local artist was funded to re render a wall at the shops area. The local artist was tasked with involving local young people to design and assist with the creation of the wall so to instil a sense of community in the young people.

**Successful results and positive community feedback**

All of the above actions and projects together with NAG actions to reduce the local usage of mini motorcycles, and formulating a more robust manner of dealing with drugs in the local area has meant that collectively the whole area has improved, and the quality of life for the local residents has also improved.

We know this because during February 2007 the NAG in the Barton area completed a Community Satisfaction Survey and the results of which were very positive. One hundred residents were randomly surveyed and the majority of residents stated that there had been an improvement in the tackling of anti social behaviour. For example, 45% of residents said that things had got better and there was a reduction in teenagers hanging around the streets over the previous 6 months, only 2% said that the situation had got a lot worse. 34% of those surveyed stated that general vandalism had decreased; only 1% said it had got worse.

Overall there were very few residents who stated that problems had become worse. There was also a general trend stating that there were now fewer drug problems in the area and a strong trend stating that the previous problems with mini motorcycles had now improved. These results prompted the local daily paper (Oxford Mail) to publish a very positive article spread over two pages.

**Neighbourhood Policing in action**

The introduction of Neighbourhood Policing has meant that the personnel for the local neighbourhood team has increased from 1 Police Officer and 2 PCSO’S in mid 2006 to now having 3 Police Officers and 4 Police Community Support Officers entirely dedicated to the Barton, Sandhills and Risinghurst NAG area by September 2007.

During the second half of 2007 the NAG has targeted the identified priorities even further and many ASBOs have been issued and many Anti social Behaviour Contracts (ABCs) have been signed. Many of the prolific offenders have been targeted and arrested and some of the main protagonists are in prison. The area will soon benefit even further with the imminent opening of a Police Base right in the heart of the Barton estate within the Community Centre, metres from the Underhill Circus shops area. This will mean that visibility will be increased further and abstractions of Thames Valley Police personnel and or Oxford Council’s Street Wardens away from the area will be reduced to minimal levels.
## Appendix 2: Local Crime Statistics

**Stats for Rose Hill neighbourhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April to December 2006</th>
<th>April to December 2007</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All crime</td>
<td>427</td>
<td>267</td>
<td>-37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary dwelling</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against the person</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>-13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal damage</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle crime (theft of, theft from and vehicle interference)</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-50%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**Stats for Blackbird Leys neighbourhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April to December 2006</th>
<th>April to December 2007</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All crime</td>
<td>953</td>
<td>879</td>
<td>-8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary dwelling</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against the person</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>230</td>
<td>-16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal damage</td>
<td>229</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>-14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle crime (theft of, theft from and vehicle interference)</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>-3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Stats for Barton neighbourhood**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>April to December 2006</th>
<th>April to December 2007</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All crime</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>383</td>
<td>-20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Burglary dwelling</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>-67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence against the person</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>-18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal damage</td>
<td>123</td>
<td>97</td>
<td>-21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vehicle crime (theft of, theft from and vehicle interference)</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>-19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N.B. Minutes and notes following the Parliament debate on Neighbourhood Policing on Wednesday 19\(^{th}\) March can be found via the following weblink:

[http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080319/hallindx/80319-x.htm](http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmhansrd/cm080319/hallindx/80319-x.htm)