

# TACKLING VEHICLE CRIME IN PORTSMOUTH, ENGLAND OPERATION COBRA

HAMPSHIRE CONSTABULARY, PORTSMOUTH BASIC COMMAND  
UNIT, 2004

---

- THE PROBLEM:** From April 2002 to March 2003, vehicle crime in Portsmouth, England increased 16 percent. Strategies in place, much of it focused on offender detection and generic crime prevention, were not working. A Crime Reduction Officer/Analyst reviewed 9 months of data (in the past only several weeks were reviewed at a time to determine patterns) uncovering more robust patterns: 1989 to 1998 vehicles were the most at risk, items stolen did not have property markings so resale was easy, vehicle crime concentrated in many repeat locations, in fact 49 percent of vehicle crimes occurred in just 167 of Portsmouth's 1,600 streets.
- ANALYSIS:** The Crime Reduction Officer/Analyst identified eight underlying conditions contributing to the high level of vehicle crimes. These conditions if turned around could significantly reduce vehicle crime in Portsmouth.
- RESPONSE:** Engaging a wide variety of partners, including the media, the group developed Operation Cobra. It relied on a graded or tiered approach to reducing auto theft; different strategies were applied depending upon the level of vehicle crime on a street. Streets with 5 to 7 vehicle crimes used a victim-focused strategy (such as customized warnings and property marking). Those with 8 to 10 vehicle crimes focused on victims but incorporated environmental and situational changes to the location. Streets with 11 or more vehicle crimes focused on victim and location but also adopted an offender-focused strategy making greater use of forensics and intelligence gathering.
- ASSESSMENT:** In the first 9 months of Operation Cobra, the number of vehicles stolen among 1989 and 1998 vehicles declined 25 percent; there was a 33 percent reduction in thefts from vehicles; a 37 percent reduction in vehicle crime in streets that had experienced 19 or more vehicle crimes from April 2002 to December 2002; and a 58 percent reduction in vehicle crime in streets experiencing between 5 and 10 vehicle crimes from April 2002 to December 2002. Overall, after 9 months, vehicle crime in Portsmouth fell by 31 percent from 3,235 vehicles to 2,235 vehicles. Similar reductions were not experienced elsewhere in Hampshire.

## JUDGE'S COMMENTARY

Portsmouth's vehicle crime reduction effort effectively illustrates many of problem-oriented policing most important principles.

First, specifically identifying the problem and then analyzing it is key to tailoring more effective responses. When Portsmouth first attempted to reduce the vehicle crime problem no specific scanning or analysis was conducted and the agency relied on rather generic reduction responses. Rather than a reduction in the problem, the problem increased. It is at this point that the Department tried to pinpoint the problem (through scanning) and undertake an analysis. The scanning and analysis revealed different dimensions to the problem than originally thought opening the way for analysis-based, tailored responses, which are more likely to succeed in reducing the problem.

Second, knowledge of crime theory is important because it offers some shortcuts within analysis. For instance, knowing that crime tends to concentrate, the Crime Reduction Officer knew to look for patterns by offender, place, target/victim. Among the patterns, Portsmouth found that a small number of streets accounted for much of the vehicle crime and that only certain years of cars were most at risk. Aware of research about reducing repeat victimization led the Crime Reduction Officer to recommend a tiered (graded) response based on the intensity of the problem in a street or hot spot and his knowledge of situational crime prevention (the companion of problem-oriented policing) provided a framework to craft

responses that might reduce crime in certain types of locations.

Lastly, adequate baseline measures that describe the problem's dimensions make it easier to measure impact once responses are implemented. The thoroughness of the scanning and the analysis here provided many quantitative measures from which Portsmouth could assess impact and persuasively claim the reduction was due primarily to the Department, the City and the Partners efforts.

## Introduction

Portsmouth, England, one of Europe's most densely populated cities, is in the county of Hampshire. More than 185,000 people live in Portsmouth and it is also home to the British Royal Navy. The City draws 5 million visitors a year to its beaches and tourist attractions. Portsmouth is one of Hampshire Constabulary's ten policing districts with 350 police officers assigned to the City.

Experiencing high levels of vehicle crime the City of Portsmouth developed a crime and disorder strategy as part of the National Vehicle Crime Reduction Target beginning in April, 2002 (See Appendix A, table 1).<sup>1</sup> The City set a three-year reduction target of 17 percent, 6 percent for 2002/2003, 6 percent for 2003/2004, and 5 percent for 2004/2005.<sup>2</sup> A number of strategies were already in place, including:

- targeting known offenders,
- applying "designing out crime" principles through the planning process,

- introducing Neighborhood Wardens in two areas of the city<sup>3</sup>
- seeking drug rehabilitation for vehicle crime offenders with drug histories,
- multi-agency coordinating through the “Communities Against Drugs” initiative using CCTV system and developing Secured Car Parks<sup>4</sup>,
- utilizing traffic wardens<sup>5</sup> and the Abandoned Vehicle Unit,
- Crime Concern<sup>6</sup> and Auto Glass prevention scheme,
- enlisting youth crime prevention workers, and
- signing up the Fire Service to deliver anti-vehicle arson education.

The City identified some additional steps to help meet the targets:

- identifying what works elsewhere,
- conducting analysis to identify areas requiring additional CCTV coverage,
- identifying areas in the heart of Portsmouth in need of situational improvements,
- increasing use of court orders to deter offenders, and
- increasing the number of Secured Car Parks

After the first 9 months of the strategy, vehicle crime rose. It became clear that the 6 percent target reduction would not be met, in fact, it was projected that there would be an 18.8 percent increase for the year end 2002/2003. The problem required a new strategy.

Targets are quite important within the UK government. While there are 43 separate and independent Police Forces in England and Wales there is a high degree of central government direction and control of Forces both through funding and through a performance management culture driven by the setting of performance targets for all activities that the central government considers to be a priority. There is constant monitoring and reporting of how the local constabularies and governments do against these targets. The Police in England work closely with partners in other local agencies and with stakeholders in communities. The Crime and Disorder Act puts a statutory duty for reducing crime and disorder not just on Police Authorities but on Local Authorities (city and town councils), as well as health authorities. As a result, for major crime and disorder issues joint efforts are more easily adopted, everyone is expected to meet targets.

The Hampshire Constabulary appointed Chief Inspector of Territorial Operations Julie Earle as the single performance champion accountable for Hampshire’s vehicle crime reduction results. The constabulary also appointed a dedicated Crime Reduction Officer, Alan Edmunds, to review the problem and coordinate daily activity. They were tasked to apply a problem-oriented policing approach to the problem (SARA - scanning, analysis, response, and assessment).

## **SCANNING**

The Crime Reduction Officer reviewed information and data. He looked at police vehicle crime reports for April

through December 2002, and examined data from other sources including the Crime and Disorder audit, Fire and Rescue federal database, Crime Stoppers, drug intelligence information, data from other city agencies (Engineering and Design, Leisure and Tourism, Trading Standards<sup>7</sup>, CCTV Office, Housing Service, Marketing and Tourism), and information from informal interviews with residents, Neighborhood Watch participants, hotel personnel, and motor vehicle companies.

The vehicle crime data showed robust patterns related to victims/targets, locations, and offenders. Portsmouth has very few homes with private garages, there is little off street parking of any kind and only one secured car park within the City. These circumstances make Portsmouth rife for high levels of vehicle crime.

Patterns found within Victim/Target for Thefts from Vehicle data: Based on analysis of 2335 thefts from vehicle

Nearly half of the victims had their vehicles' victimized near their home addresses. The breakdown of the targets within the vehicles was as shown in table 2, Appendix A.

The primary methods of break-in included window smashing, bent door, breached lock, or the vehicle was unlocked.

Patterns found within Auto Theft Victim/Target data: Analysis of 900 stolen vehicles.

- 865 of the 900 stolen vehicles were manufactured between the years 1986 and 2000,
- 453 of the 900 stolen vehicles were manufactured between 1989 and 1997, representing 50 percent of the stolen vehicle problem,
- Of the 35 vehicles stolen that were manufactured between 2001 and 2002, almost all were mopeds,
- Three vehicle makes/models accounted for 25 percent of overall problem (226 vehicle crimes) -- Ford Escort (98 stolen), Vauxhall Astra (68 stolen), Ford Fiesta (60 stolen) (See table 3, Appendix A).
- Slightly more than half of the victims were between the ages of 20 and 39,
- Most vehicles were stolen from near the victim's address,
- There was a pattern of stolen vehicle movement between two of the economically deprived areas of town,
- Stolen vehicles had not been immobilized.<sup>8</sup>

Patterns within Location data: Based on an analysis of all 3,235 vehicle crimes:

- 22 percent of crimes occurred in 712 streets (one crime per street),
- 29 percent of crimes occurred in 346 streets (two to four crimes per street),
- 39 percent of crimes occurred in 155 streets (five to eighteen crimes per street), and

- 10 percent of crimes occurred in 12 streets (nineteen to thirty-eight crimes per street)

Adding the last two bulleted numbers shows that 49 percent of vehicle crime occurred in just 175 of Portsmouth’s 1,600 streets.

Within many of these streets vehicle crime was often concentrated even further, to particular lots or particular parts of streets, these are referred to as hot dots. Certain types of locations (within these streets) had higher levels of theft, such as hospitals, doctors’ offices, cinemas, sports clubs, shopping areas, theatre, cafes, and tourist attractions. At these locations motorists stop for short periods of time or are preoccupied with the activity they are about to undertake. Also certain high risk events during the year accounted for vehicle crime increases: Portsmouth and Southsea Show (August); tourist season (June – September); University graduation (July); Great South Fun Run (variable); firework display (November); Christmas (December).

Patterns found within Arrested Offenders Population: Based on the arrest of 236 offenders implicated in 436 vehicle crimes.

- Of those arrested, the offenders are predominantly between 17 and 23 years of age,
- Of the offenders identified, the “taking of vehicle” offences appeared to attract the younger offenders, between 15 and 20 year olds,
- Of the offenders, the repeat offenders travelled across

Portsmouth, others committed crime more local to their home,

- 44 of the offenders (18%) had a provable drug history, and
- offenders used legitimate outlets to dispose of stolen goods.

## ANALYSIS

The Crime Reduction Officer found that the patterns pointed to a number of underlying conditions that caused the high level of vehicle crime (See table 4, Appendix A).

## Response

The patterns uncovered during analysis revealed the underlying conditions that required change, these underlying conditions suggested strategies that could turn the problem around (See table 5, Appendix A).

The responses required partners to implement the responses. The Portsmouth City Council could leverage partnerships with the Engineering and Design Service, Leisure Services, Trading Standards, and Housing Services. In addition, additional partners were recruited including the Media (Portsmouth newspaper and local radio), resident groups (Residents Association Consortium, Neighborhood Watch), and local businesses such as motor traders and hoteliers.

The new vehicle crime strategy was named *Operation COBRA*. COBRA shifted the emphasis from a more traditional, predominantly offender-based strategy to one addressing all aspects of the problem triangle (victims, offenders, and locations). COBRA

sought long-term not just short-term reduction in vehicle crime.

The Crime Reduction Officer went beyond the hot spots and street concentrations uncovered he initially found and built a database to draw data about individual streets and parking lots using a rolling 12-month data set. This more exacting data within hotspots allowed the police to monitor hot spots and apply one of three levels of responses, called a tiered response consisting of Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 depending upon what occurred at the hot spot (See table 6, Appendix A).<sup>9</sup>

The team tasked partners (and brought new ones in as needed) to each aspect of the strategy (See table 7, Appendix A).

Three months of preparation led up to the launch of Operation Cobra in April 2003. During this preparation phase the City:

- adopted, branded, and publicized the corporate operation name: Operation Cobra
- secured the full support of the editor of the local daily newspaper editor for the operation over the entire 12 months that cobra was intended to run
- established a victim help line
- published city council and police articles about the upcoming operation
- held road shows involving police, and organized residents
- briefed resident groups

- broadcast news about the operation on radio and television
- placed posters in police stations, residential areas, and Local Authority foyers.
- briefed all operational staff
- distributed sample operation cobra crime reduction packets to police and support staff (UV marker pen and labels, key ring, mobile phone and vehicle marking cards, warning notices – to place on cars, and window stickers) accompanied by a letter explaining COBRA. The same was done for 220 neighborhood watch coordinators.
- supplied police with ultra violet “key fob” readers to help in property marking efforts

The City agreed to fund £30,000 (approximately \$50,000 U.S.) for purchases including:

- COBRA packets,
- customized street warning signs,
- parking meter signs – picture style,
- auto lock “seconds” immobilisers for distribution/sale to target groups,
- ultra violet reader on a key chain, and
- infomercials on the local radio stations.

The Lord Mayor of Portsmouth officially launched Operation COBRA

April 3, 2003 emphasizing four key elements:

1. Maximising forensic and intelligence gathering.
2. Funnelling intelligence to a Tasking and Coordinating Group to direct offender based work, and initiate localized, site specific Problem Resolution in Multi-agency Environment (PRIME) Projects (problem-solving).
3. Using a three-tier Vehicle Crime Reduction Strategy, the level of vehicle crime by location determined whether efforts are directed at potential victims, offenders, or the location.
4. Utilizing a high profile media campaign to send and reinforce messages to potential victims and would be offenders.

The Group adopted 5 specific objectives for Operation COBRA for April 2003 through March 2004:

Objective 1: increase awareness about the public's role in reducing car crime and the City's commitment to it.

Objective 2: reduce the number of stolen vehicles manufactured between 1989 and 1997 by 15 percent from the prior year.

Objective 3: reduce the number of thefts from motor vehicles by 15 percent compared to the prior year.

Objective 4: reduce vehicle crime by 15 percent at the locations having 19 or more vehicle crimes (between

April and December 2002) from the comparable period the prior year.

Objective 5: reduce vehicle crime by 15 percent at locations where there are 5 or more crimes per location from the comparable period the prior year.

The organizational chart for Operation Cobra implementation is located in Appendix B.

Some specific examples illustrate how Operation Cobra worked.

The **Southsea Show** attracts visitors from all over the UK, many with vehicles. In previous years vehicle crime has risen around the location of the show. Under Operation Cobra, local radio infomercials were broadcast to heighten awareness. A group of volunteers (Specials and regular officers) formed COBRA bicycle patrols. These were liveried and carried Operation COBRA packets and worked in conjunction with event security to welcome visitors and give crime reduction advice. This idea originated in Belgium and was identified by the UK Home Office Crime Reduction College as good practice. This initiative was well received by the public, organizers and the Tourism manager. Vehicle crime halved compared to the preceding year at this location.

**Kensington Road** was identified as a Level 2 area (focus on location). The road experienced

a combination of vehicle vandalism and thefts from vehicles. Analysis showed that the crimes occurred in a very small area along the long road. Further analysis showed that loitering, drunk youths in the area were linked to the problem. The Community Beat Officer worked with Trading Standards, residents, Licensees and the Anti Social Behavior Team to cut off the supply of alcohol to the youths there. As a result, there was a significant reduction in vehicle crime there.

Portsmouth City Council **Victory Car Park** experienced 26 crimes in a nine-month period. Residents parked all day whilst they used a Hovercraft service to the Isle of Wight. Despite two CCTV cameras at the site crime continued. The Operation Cobra group installed warning notices and distributed COBRA packets at the Hover Station. Overgrown bushes provided cover for thieves throughout the car parking lot (car park). The Council Parking Manager coordinated the removal of bushes, replacing them with decorative railings at a cost of £12000 (approximately \$22,000 U.S.). Vehicle crime was reduced by 75 percent from the prior year.

During the period April to December 2003, the Crime Reduction Officer identified 250 streets with 5 or more vehicle related crimes. These became the subject of focused problem

solving activity at the appropriate level, such as the examples above show.

## **ASSESSMENT**

The Crime Reduction Officer and the Chief Inspector monitored different measures during Operation Cobra to see if the Objectives set out by the Group were being met.

**Objective 1:** increase awareness about the public's role in reducing car crime and the City's commitment to it.

### *Objective 1 Results Achieved:*

- 70 newspaper articles published in local papers, some of the articles were as long as three newspaper pages (see Appendix 3 for examples). A public opinion research survey (conducted by the MORI firm) found that in January 2004 38 percent of Portsmouth was aware of Operation COBRA, and 68 percent of those who were aware learned about from their local newspaper.
- 20 "Property Marking Road Shows" focusing on items stolen from cars. The Shows were joint efforts with resident association members.
- 5,500 crime reduction COBRA packs provided to hot spot parkers.
- 1000 COBRA packs given to the general public.
- 650 mobile phones marked by Neighbourhood Wardens with the distributed UV markers.

- 10 immobilisers issued to target group.
- 247 picture signs put on parking meters.
- 350 street warning signs erected by Portsmouth City Council staff.
- 280 infomercials (of forty seconds in length) broadcast on local radio at high risk times.
- 1 new Secured Car Park achieved in a hot spot area.
- 175 calls made to Portsmouth's Crime Stoppers, an increase of 52 percent.
- 297 vehicle crime offences 'cleared up' by 198 offenders. Thirty-four of them were specifically targeted for arrest by as a result of Operation Cobra. Sixteen of the offenders were linked with drug use.

**Objective 2:** reduce the number of stolen vehicles manufactured between 1989 and 1997 by 15 percent from the prior year.

*Objective 2 Results Achieved:*  
Reduction of 25 percent (reduction from 418 crimes to 314 crimes).

**Objective 3:** reduce the number of thefts from motor vehicles by 15 percent compared to the prior year.

*Objective 3 Results Achieved:*  
Reduction of 33 percent (reduction from 2,335 crimes to 1,550).

**Objective 4:** reduce vehicle crime by 15 percent at the locations having

19 or more vehicle crimes (between April and December 2002) from the comparable period the prior year.

*Objective 4 Results Achieved:*  
Reduction of 37 percent (reduction from 325 crimes to 202 crimes).

**Objective 5:** reduce vehicle crime by 15 percent at locations where there are 5 or more crimes per location from the comparable period the prior year.

*Objective 5 Results Achieved:*  
Reduction of 58 percent (reduction from 1,598 crimes to 937 crimes).

While monitoring these measures, the Tasking and Coordinating Team made adjustments. For instance, Community Beat Officers' workload increased too much by taking on the Level 1 streets. To ease their workload, the Beat Officers added a partner in their problem solving efforts, the COBRA coordinator. Also, now, when a street is identified as needing a Victim approach, the Constabulary contacts a previous victim or Neighbourhood Watch or an area resident. They are asked to take crime prevention packets to neighbours in the hot-spot and mark property at local meetings there.

As noted in the beginning of this report, by the end of the first year of the Portsmouth Crime and Disorder Strategy for 2002/2005 its 6 percent vehicle crime reduction target was unmet; in fact the vehicle crime problem increased 16 percent. In the second year of the strategy following extensive scanning and analysis Operation COBRA was

launched, and after just nine months a 31 percent reduction in vehicle crime was achieved compared to the previous year. This reduction was sufficient to more than recover the performance of the previous year and put Portsmouth Crime and Disorder Partnership squarely back on track to achieve the three year Strategy targets.

Several factors led to Operation Cobra's success:

- having a performance champion driving operations and accountable for results,
- having a dedicated Crime Reduction Officer to coordinate,
- adopting of a problem solving approach,
- having the commitment of partners,
- creating a user-friendly, comprehensive database of vehicle crime information capable of informing problem-solving work,
- focusing activity where the greatest reduction opportunities exist,
- identifying crime reduction potential of victim and location focus,
- developing a communications strategy that included local media at the planning stage (and gaining the newspaper editor's commitment to support the operation throughout the 12 months.
- designing a brand identity (all signs, newspaper articles, posters, etc. relating to operation COBRA had a common, visually distinctive logo). The logo

became synonymous with vehicle crime reduction and was aimed at both potential victims and offenders.

## **IN CONCLUSION**

Whilst COBRA was always intended to be a year-long Operation, the principles of Operation COBRA are now firmly embedded into the long term strategy to tackle vehicle crime in Portsmouth, and in fact the principles used are now being replicated within Portsmouth to tackle residential burglary offences. The Portsmouth Crime and Disorder Partnership have allocated funds from the Safer Communities Budget to continue the vehicle crime reduction work in 2004 to 2005. Portsmouth Council for Community Service volunteered to manage (volunteer) COBRA bike riders for Summer 2004. The Operation has also been incorporated into the Hampshire Police 'Safer Vehicles Strategy' that was launched across Hampshire Constabulary in Spring 2004.

The cost to society of each vehicle crime is estimated by the British Home Office at £1,000 (approximately \$1,800 U.S.). In the first nine months of Operation COBRA, in comparison with the same nine-month period in the previous year, the number of vehicle crimes in Portsmouth fell from 3235 to 2235, representing a cost saving of £1,000,000 (approximately \$1.8 million U.S.). The true worth of this problem solving approach, however, is in its value to the people of Portsmouth, where one thousand fewer people experienced the misery and inconvenience of being victims of vehicle crime.

It is worthy of note that the crime reduction success of Operation COBRA has continued beyond the nine month period examined in this report. At the end of the FY 2003- 2004, the vehicle crime total for Portsmouth was 3,008 compared with last year's year-end total of 4,228, representing a 29 percent reduction overall. Portsmouth is one of ten policing areas (or Basic Command Units) within Hampshire Constabulary, the vehicle crime reduction total for the 2003/04 was 1,400 offences, *Portsmouth* officers and agency partners.

*contribution to that reduction was 1,220 of those offences.*

The success of Operation COBRA is attributable to the use of the Problem Resolution in Multi-agency Environment model (PRIME – the Hampshire's Constabulary name for Problem-Oriented Policing). It produced long term sustainable reduction. The success of COBRA has been invaluable in demonstrating the effectiveness of the problem-solving approach to police

## APPENDIX A: Tables

**Table 1**

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>Vehicle crime total</b>	<b>Taking of vehicle</b>	<b>Theft from vehicle</b>	<b>Rate per 1000 population</b>
1999/2000	4012	1320	2692	21.42
2000/2001	3520	1174	2346	18.79
2001/2002	3631	1173	2458	19.41

**Table 2**

<b>Number of crimes</b>	<b>Property stolen</b>
742	Car stereo systems
761	Handbags, briefcases, luggage, purses
682	Car parts – wheel trims, wheels, other
336	Mobile phones
180	Valuables – cash and jewellery
170	Power tools, tools
128	Electronic items – lap tops, televisions

**Table 3**

<b>Total Number</b>	<b>Vehicle</b>
98	Ford Escort
60	Ford Fiesta
68	Vauxhall Astra

**Table 4**

<b>Patterns within Targets</b>	<b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b>
<p><u>Taking of vehicles</u></p> <p>Cars made from 1989 to 1997.</p> <p>Ford Escort, Ford Fiesta, and Vauxhill Astra.</p> <p>Vehicles manufactured since 2000 have electronic immobilizers, which has reduced the incidence of theft among these vehicles.</p>	<p>These cars lack “built-in” security features. Typically, owners of these cars cannot afford additional money for security. (UC #1)</p> <p>These cars are small, fast and easy to steal.</p> <p>When a theft of these cars occurs it is typically because the keys were stolen.</p>
<p><u>Theft from vehicles</u></p> <p>Radios/CD systems in older vehicles in older vehicles are prime targets.</p> <p>Mobile phones are also frequently stolen from the cars.</p>	<p>Thieves can easily remove these items from cars. Radios/CD systems are not properly marked at the time of purchase, during installation or subsequently and become suitable targets and are easy to resell. (UC #2)</p> <p>Modern radio/CD systems are integrated with the vehicle and have security systems that make the items inoperable if removed.</p> <p>Small items such as these are often overlooked especially when stopping for short periods of times or when the parker is in a hurry. (UC #3)</p>
<b>Patterns within Victimization</b>	<b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b>
<p>Both residents and visitors to the city are victims. The largest victim group is between 20 and 30 years of age.</p>	<p>The absence of care by victims and lack of awareness of elevated risk on certain streets and in certain places leaves victims vulnerable. (UC #4)</p>
<b>Patterns within Locations</b>	<b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b>

<p>Some street locations experience highly disproportionate levels of vehicle crime. Within an identified street (hot spots) it is possible to identify smaller hot dots where risk was concentrated even further. Identifying hot spots using longer-term data provides greater focus.</p> <p>Overgrown bushes and trees, poor lighting, and easy access routes were a contributing factor in sample areas.</p> <p>Crime was found to be higher in the streets surrounding Secured Car Parks. There was no advertising for the Secured Car Parks.</p>	<p>This indicates that crime is concentrated and manageable, and dispels the theory that it is “all over the area” and hard to prevent. Previously, hot spots were identified using only 3 months data, which did not provide sufficient incidents to show such strong patterns. (UC # 5)</p> <p>Lack of knowledge of crime issues by those responsible for landscape and grounds maintenance at locations.</p> <p>Poorly advertised Secured Car Parks</p>
<b>Patterns within Offenders</b>	<b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b>
<p>Vehicles are taken for short journeys and abandoned, in particular in the economically distressed areas (SRB areas). Some offenders burn the vehicles in residential areas exposing children living and playing there to additional harms. Interviews suggested that a small group of prolific offenders are responsible for a large proportion of thefts from vehicles.</p> <p>Peer pressure, local crime culture and a small number of prolific offenders with a provable drug history are at the core of the problem.</p> <p>There has been no team responsible for targeting vehicle offenders or detecting offenders through forensic means.</p>	<p>Local culture, peer pressure, drug related. Vehicles taken for excitement rather than gain. In the past, the Police lacked focus in their interventions and didn't collect enough forensic evidence because of limited staffing. (UC #7)</p>
<b>Patterns within Social Environment</b>	<b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b>
<p>The public was not engaged in reducing vehicle crime. Neighborhood Watch had not been an effective partner in it. In the highest crime areas there is an atmosphere of fear and</p>	<p>Public apathy contributes to a lack of surveillance and guardianship over the problem and assists in allowing a stolen goods market.</p>

<p>concern. The public fear of vehicle crime is high but the expectation of the police is low. There is a market for stolen goods in the area and a general view that goods are easily disposed of within the community.</p>	
<p><b>Patterns within the Police Culture</b></p>	<p><b>Underlying Condition (UC)</b></p>
<p>A perception within the Constabulary that vehicle crime is not a priority, that it is a problem spread throughout the city, and is opportunistic and therefore unmanageable.</p> <p>Crime Reduction Officers typically concentrated on general responsibilities rather than specifics. Crime reduction was mainly focused on detection effort and was based on weekly identification of hot spots (based on three months data).</p> <p>The Constabulary had not treated vehicle crime as a priority when it provided information to local media.</p>	<p>Apathy by the police and public, lack of focus on the specifics of the problem, poor media reporting, and unfocused crime reduction activities left vehicle crime reduction efforts to chance. (UC #8)</p>

**Table 5**

<u>Underlying Condition</u>	<u>Response</u>
A lack of appreciation of risk by potential victims in hot dot areas	Personal letters to householders/businesses in hot dots, Street signs and talking parking meters alerting people to the specific problem.
Property left on view particularly when parking for short periods of time	Raise awareness amongst those at risk, extensive media campaign and posters in the “hot dot” places where motorists stop for short periods of time.
An absence of inbuilt security on 1989 to 1997 registered vehicles	Offering owners of high risk vehicles in high risk locations mechanical vehicle immobilisers at discounted cost.
Lack of knowledge of crime generators by those responsible for maintenance at locations	Working with contractors (maintenance workers and lot owners) to increase understanding of the ways situational crime prevention techniques can reduce crime.

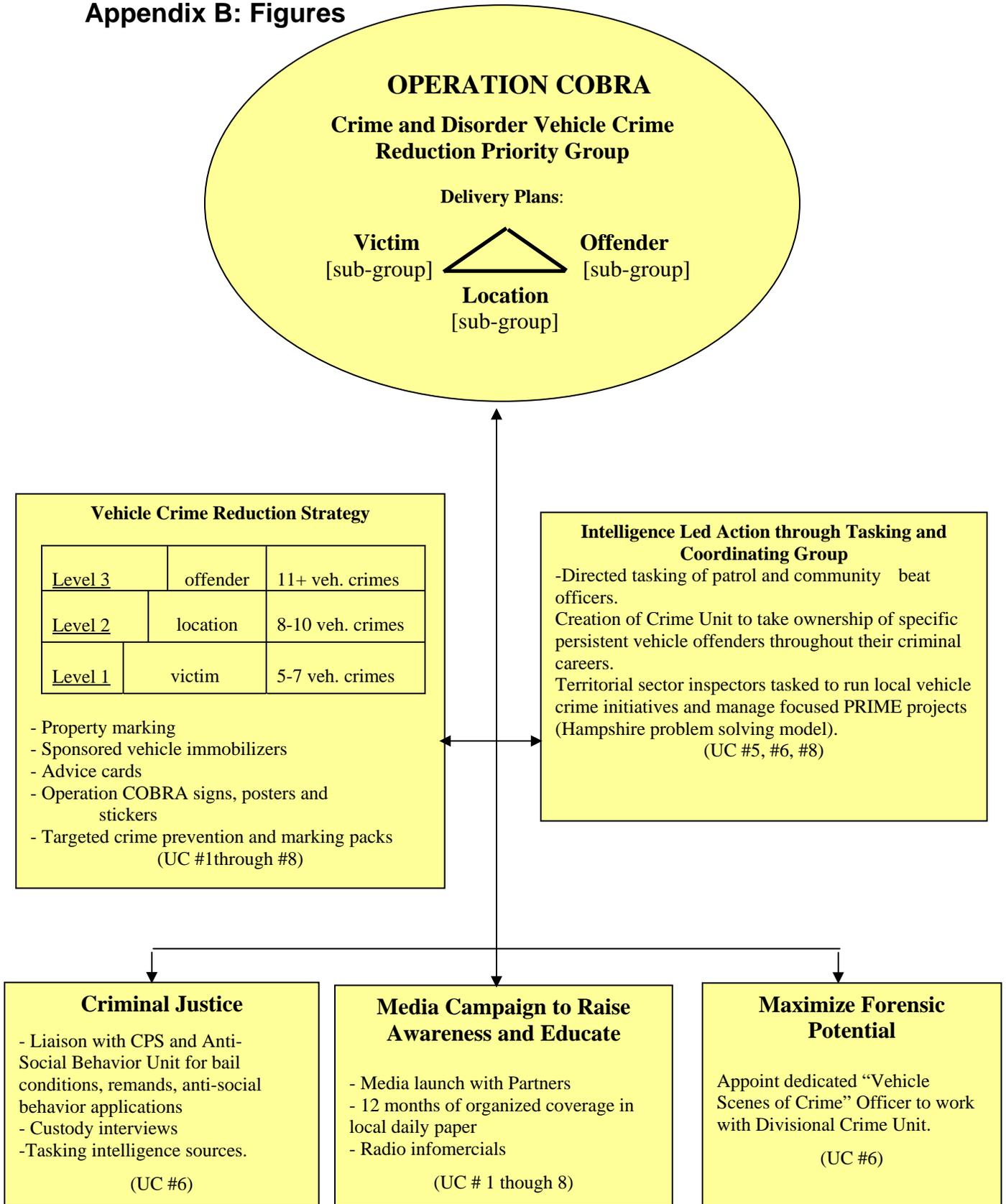
**Table 6**

<p><u>Level 1 Response</u></p> <p><b>If 5 to7 vehicle crimes occur in rolling 12-month period on a street, focus is on victim</b></p>	<p><u>Level 2 Response</u></p> <p><b>If 8 to10 vehicle crimes occur in rolling 12-month period on a street, focus is on location</b></p>	<p><u>Level 3 Response</u></p> <p><b>If 11 or more vehicle crimes occur in rolling 12-month period on a street, focus is on offender</b></p>
<p>Identify target area and empower local residents to tackle problem. Beat Officer will provide Operation Cobra crime reduction packets<sup>10</sup>, and support specific action to tackle issue.</p> <p>Display customised warning messages on laminated posters in premises within high risk area. (Shop windows, doctors’ offices, as appropriate).</p> <p>Distribute/sell physical immobilisers to target group.</p> <p>Display partnership metal street signs warning:  <i>“Thieves take chances you give them – secure your vehicle and remove your valuables. Make Portsmouth safer”.</i></p>	<p>Continued Level 1 victim care/empowerment.</p> <p>Crime Reduction survey of location.</p> <p>Appropriate partnership inspection where crime generators identified for action.</p> <p>Environmental/situational changes agreed, implemented, and monitored</p>	<p>Continued Level 1 and 2 actions.</p> <p>Referral to Tasking and Coordinating Group through crime analyst. Sector Inspector tasked to take ownership for comprehensive problem solving (PRIME) initiative.</p>

**Table 7**

Activity	Partners
Property marking at point of sale (UC #2)	Halfords, Sextons Security, Les Smith Accessories, Road Radio.
Security products discounted (UC #1)	Trading Standards vetted businesses – Sextons, Autolock.
Focused Property Marking Road Shows (UC #1, #7, #8)	Residents Association Consortium, ASDA, Sainsbury, Gunwharf Secured Car Park, Portsmouth City Council.
Picture warning signs (jointly designed to respond to the needs of foreign visitors) erected on 247 Council parking meters (UC #3, #4, #5)	Police, Portsmouth City Council Parking Office, Department of Leisure and Tourism.
Talking parking meters developed by Portsmouth City Council and installed in 295 machines. (UC #4, #7)	Police, Portsmouth City Council Parking Office.
COBRA crime reduction message (jointly designed) on all Residents' Parking Permits (UC #1, #2, #3, #4)	As above.
Rigorous name and shame policy on offenders (UC #6, #7, #8)	Newspaper Editor, Police.
Series of radio infomercials throughout year to coincide with identified seasonal risks.(UC #1, #2, #3, #4)	Radio station, Police.
COBRA pedal cycles with liveried regular and Special Constabulary officers, providing crime reduction advice/materials at key events mirroring successful project in Belgium. (UC #1, #2, #3, #4, #5)	Police, Special Constabulary, event organizers.
Second hand shops scanning all incoming property for ultra violet markings and mark all outgoing property (UC #7)	Cash converters (pawn shops).

## Appendix B: Figures



## **Report Co-Authors:**

Julie Earle  
Chief Inspector Territorial Operations  
Portsmouth BCU

Alan Edmunds  
Crime Reduction Officer  
Portsmouth BCU

## **Agency and Officer Information**

1. Operation COBRA was adopted across the Portsmouth Basic Command Unit and involved officers from all departments and levels. The methodology is now being transferred to tackle other crimes within Portsmouth, and Operation COBRA has been incorporated as good practice into the Hampshire Police 'Safer Vehicles' Strategy which has recently been launched across the whole Force area.
2. Problem Resolution in Multi-agency Environments [PRIME] the Hampshire Constabulary's name for Problem Oriented Policing is established as a policing style within the Constabulary. PRIME seminars have been held at a Force level. More detailed PRIME training has been provided to Community Beat Officers. Each Basic Command Unit has a trained PRIME Coordinator Sergeant; part of the functions of this position is to provide local training to police officers of all ranks and to partners in other agencies, authorities and amongst the voluntary sector workers.
3. Problem Solving is an integral part of the Hampshire Constabulary Policing style. There are no additional incentives for engaging in problem solving, it is part of the culture and there is an expectation that officers will routinely use a problem solving approach in order to deliver long-term sustainable solutions.
4. PRIME training support booklets are available to all officers. Each officer in the Force is issued information explaining the SARA problem solving model, and the use of the Problem Analysis Triangle (PAT) triangle.
5. No problems encountered with the model.
6. Financial Budget

£30,000 from the Basic Command Unit (BCU) Devolved Budget was devoted to financing the COBRA operation. The majority of this budget was spent on COBRA crime prevention packets, ultra violet key ring scanners, and a wide variety of



---

<sup>1</sup> In the UK, the fiscal year begins April 1<sup>st</sup> and ends March 31<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>2</sup> Performance targets were set at 3 levels. The national government sought a 30 percent reduction in vehicle crimes over 5 years, the Hampshire Constabulary sought a 10 percent reduction in one year, and the Portsmouth Policing area sought a 6 percent reduction in the first year of its 3-year reduction target of 17 percent.

<sup>3</sup> In the UK, neighborhood wardens keep an eye on boarded up properties, report suspicious behavior to the police, deal with minor incidents of anti-social behavior, monitor racial harassment and intimidation and report it to the police, and act as a source of communication between local communities and the police.

<sup>4</sup> Secured Car Parks are parking lots and parking garages that have “designed out crime” using effective crime prevention and security standards.

<sup>5</sup> In the UK, traffic wardens are civilians who help the police by keeping the traffic flowing and issuing fixed penalty notices for parking and other traffic offences.

<sup>6</sup> Crime Concern is a private charitable agency that mobilizes citizens and groups to reduce crime in the UK.

<sup>7</sup> Trading Standards is a consumer protection agency.

<sup>8</sup> There are typically two types of immobilizers in the UK. One is a passive system that deactivates parts of the vehicle’s operating system, the other is a mechanical device placed across the vehicle’s steering wheel to prevent it from turning.

<sup>9</sup> The Crime Reduction Officer was familiar with the evaluations the Home Office completed showing the success of tiered (sometimes referred to as graded) response in reducing repeat victimization based on the level of victimization.

<sup>10</sup> The COBRA packets contain a UV marker pen and labels, key ring with UV reader, mobile phone and vehicle marking cards, warning notices – to place on cars, and window stickers.