POLICE Tilley Award 2001

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The Bretch Hill lnititaive

Abstract

The Bretch Hil! Initiative incorporates a new approach to the policing of local communities, which emphasises the importance of multi-agency working and the involvement of schools in policing.

Bretch Hill is a residential area of mixed housing tenure situated in Banbury. In 1997 crime data identified a disproportionately high number of incidents on the estate. Truancy **and** exclusion levels at local schools were equally worrying.

The police response was to establish a **dedicated** beat team to police the area. The team sought to engage with the community via two broad objectives. The first was to adopt a multi-agency approach that promoted a sense of community ownership of problems. Police officers assisted in the setting up of a community association and a strategic working party was established to bring together police, local authority and the community association. A sub-group was set up to problem solve in a more direct way.

The second objective emerged from the realisation that the behaviour of children on the estate was a source of concern; furthermore that they were subject to well established "risk factors" (such as truancy and exclusion) that increase the likelihood of offending. A police office was **established** at the secondary school and a beat team officer took up the role of school police officer - the school being treated as a beat area in its own right. The officer's role is wide-ranging - "teaching"; advising staff, parents and pupils; and dealing with incidents at school - frequently utilising restorative justice.

Primary schools adopt an "open-door" policy to team members, who can enter the premises at any time.

The initiative was **evaluated** in I999. Those involved highlighted their increased confidence in dealing with the police. Crime statistics at the time showed initially encouraging reductions. Updating these in the current report to cover 1999/00 and 2000101 shows significant rises in 1999/00 followed by a regaining of lost ground (and some cases further improvement) in 2000/01. The fluctuation in crime levels illustrates the importance of maintaining momentum, particularly within a context of limited police resources.

Other lessons learnt include the need to not lose sight of crime detections, when the focus is on prevention. The key point that has **emerged** is a greater **understanding** of the **wide-ranging** benefits to be had from treating schools as beat areas in this way. In addition the use of restorative justice has had a significant impact

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Introduction

This report describes and evaluates a new approach to local policing which has been developed at Bretch *Hill,* **a housing estate in the Oxfordshire town of Banbury, which falls within the area served by Thames Valley Police.**

The report is split into four sections. Section one sets the context with data relating to Bretch Hill and outlines how it emerged and was identified as a "problem" estate. Section two describes how the new **approach** to policing the area was **devised and implemented. Section** three **looks** at **evaluation** work undertaken in relation to the initiative and Section four discusses the lessons learnt from the initiative and the way ahead.

I.   The Problem

The Bretch Hill estate is a residential area of mixed housing tenure situated between the Warwick and **Broughton** roads in **Banbury.** It is the largest social housing estate, with the highest **population** density, within the area served by Cherwell District Council. The housing stock is mainly post-war, having been built between 1949 and 1982 to accommodate overspill from London and Birmingham.

There are 3,000 dwellings on the estate, owned (in approximately equal proportions) by the council, housing associations and owner-occupiers. The majority of dwellings lie within council tax bands A and B.

Approximately I I ,200 people live on the estate. 30% of the residents are between the ages of 5 and 24, whilst 16% are over 75. Ethnic minorities make up less than 0.5% of the population.
36% of families are of lone parent status and the number of children on the "at risk" register is almost two and a half times higher than for the rest of the district. 45% of 4 to 7-year olds receive free school meals.   Over 3,200 residents receive housing benefit and council tax relief, with 2,000 of those also receiving income support[·]

In April 1997, as part of other **ongoing** work, an analysis of crime **and** incident **data presented to** the police **area management team** identified Bretch Hill as **a** "problem" estate.

It emerged that 8% of all incidents in the police area arose on Bretch Hill. Since 1993 the number of incidents recorded for the estate had risen by 36.8% (representing an additional 800 incidents). In comparison, the area as a whole had seen a 10% decrease over the same period. Among the top ten locations that called the police were Drayton School, Neithrop County Junior School and Bradley Shopping Arcade - all on Bretch Hill.

Crime figures were equally disturbing. Bretch Hill had seen a 30% increase in recorded crime between **1995** and **1996,** whereas the **area as a** whole **had** only a I% increase. The **long-term trends** for all **individual** crime categories, with the exception of house **burglary,** were **also** firmly **upwards.** Violent crime was up 7%; **motor** vehicle theft 54%; **non-residential burglary** 97% **and** criminal **damage** 21%. There were **on average 65** crimes occurring every month **on** the estate - **analysis** of crime **data** from **1995** to **1997** showed **that** 5% **of** the Bretch Hill **population had been a** victim **of** crime more than once, mostly of **burglary, autocrime and** criminal **damage.**

 15% of persons arrested on the police area lived on Bretch Hill, whereas the population of the estate made up less than I% of the total area population. Drayton School - the secondary school serving the estate had one of the poorest attendance records in the county. In 199415 over 18% of all pupils (and 25% of those aged 15 and over) at the school had an attendance record below 80%. The school had one of the highest levels of pupil exclusion in the county, combined with low levels of educational attainment - 25% of boys and nearly 20% of girls achieving no GCSE's at grades A to E.

1991 Census and Chewell Distrcit Council Economic Development Unit data, quoted in Preston, N. The Bretch Hill Initiative: An Evaluation, Kidlington, Thames Valley Police, **1999.**

2.   A New Approach

The police response to concerns surrounding the estate was to establish a dedicated beat team to police the area. The team was formally established in September 1997. A selection process took place to identify a sergeant to lead the team and the successful candidate was given autonomy to select his own team members. In the early stages the team comprised two full-time and one part-time constable posts.

The team sought from the outset to engage their community, by working with them to identify problems and by seeking to involve all those **individuals, groups and agencies** who **could** contribute towards developing solutions. Assistance was given in the setting up by residents of a community association. There were two **broad** objectives identified by the **team -** firstly to **develop partnerships** with residents and relevant agencies to solve existing and ongoing problems and secondly to seek to prevent future crime by working with children in the primary and secondary schools on the estate.

a) Partnerships

In early 1998 the Chief Executive of Cherwell District Council and the police Area Commander met with the chair of the new community association to discuss areas of concern relating to the estate. As a result the Bretch Hill Working Party was formed, bringing together representatives of the police, various local authority departments (environmental health, housing, education, leisure services) and the community association to discuss areas of concern.   Working Party members were conscious of a history on Bretch Hill **of "professionals" arriving** to **carry** out a **project** which they **considered beneficial and** then **leaving, and** of short **lived community initiatives** which **failed** through **apathy. They** were keen to **avoid** such **pitfalls via** the **establishment of** trust **and confidence** within the community. **Discussions** took **place** to **clarify** what were seen as the main **priorities** for the estate and how these could be taken forward. The **Working Party** meets **quarterly** and is **involved** in the development and monitoring of the aspects of the 1999-2002 Cherwell District Council community safety strategy that relate to Bretch Hill.

The Working Group **operates** very much at **a** strategic level, **and** it was **quickly** identified **that a** sub-**group** with a more **operational** focus was also **needed.** The **so-called "Operations** Group" - **also** multi-agency - meets every two months to discuss the ¨**nitty-gritty**¨ **- identifying** specific problems **on the** estate **and searching for problem** solving **strategies to resolve** them_

b) Schools

At an early stage the beat team identified that the behaviour of children on the estate was one of the main concerns of residents. It also emerged that a high percentage of youngsters living on the estate were subject to well established ¨risk factors" that increased the likelihood of their becoming involved in offending. These risk factors can be summarised thus:

*   parental involvement in crime
*   poor parental supervision
*   low family income
*   family conflict
*   availability of drugs
*   high child densities
*   opportunities for crime
*   peer involvement in anti-social behaviour
+   high proportion of unsupervised time spent with peers
+   absence of community organisation

Within school, risk factors include:

- lack of attachment/commitment to school, leading to truancy
- **disruptive behaviour and bullying**
- low educational **achievement**
- poor school organisation

In order to identify and work with the children most at risk, the beat team recognised the need to "build bridges" between police and schools on the estate. It was also realised that the emphasis needed to be on demonstrating to children and staff that the police were not just concerned with law enforcement in the narrow sense, but were there to help the community more broadly. The **new approach focused on both secondary and primary schools.**

i) Drayton Secondary School

Police officers have in fact been working in schools in Thames Valley since the l970's. In **secondary** schools the input is delivered by Schools Liaison Officers ("SLO's"). SLO˙ₛ work in teams of two or three on a police area, planning delivery of the **programme** by consensus as to which officer will liase with which school. In this **way** officers **only ordinarily** enter school premises to **deliver pre-arranged** talks. Other matters of crime **and** disorder are dealt with by ˝regular" officers. Such an approach did not sit **comfortably** with the **philosophy adopted by** the **Bretch** Hill **beat** team. Many of those **attending Drayton** School **also lived on** Bretch Hill **and** figures for truancy **and** exclusions from the school **suggested** that the number of **young** people **at** risk of **offending** was **higher** than anywhere else in the district. These **young people** were **therefore potential** future **"problems""** for the **beat** team.

In addition to poor exclusion and truancy figures, the school failed an OFSTED inspection in early 1998. The **beat** team **and** the school saw an **opportunity to work together to jointly problem solve. By working together improve truancy and educational achievement, both parties saw the potential for positive outcomes.**

The first major development within the partnership was the establishment of a dedicated police office within the school, in May 1998. The existing SLO moved into the office and worked there from 8.30am to 4.30pm every school day. The aim of the permanent presence was to facilitate the development of good relations with staff and pupils - the officer helped the school deal with problems of truancy and bullying, delivered the schools "input", previously the responsibility of an SLO and, if necessary, made arrests where criminal offences were detected.

Alongside developments within the school the **beat team began truancy patrols on the estate, visiting the homes of school children identified as being absent without authorisation and challenging any child found out of school during the day.**

Upon the retirement, shortly into the initiaive, of the existing SLO, the beat team put forward a proposal that the post within the school be filled by an existing beat team member and that Drayton School be treated as a beat area in its own right. It was, they suggested, a community with the same identifying features as any other community. The proposal was accepted and Drayton School now has its own beat officer. By being a member of the Bretch Hill beat team, the officer is able more effectively to identify and work with at risk youngsters both within and outside the school environment Liaison with other team members facilitates the sharing of information between home and school communities.

The police officer at Drayton School regularly helps staff to deal with a whole range of problems within the school community. Proximity allows incidents to be dealt with **appropriately and quickly.** The children recognise and know the officer, and will often "pop-in"" to his office for a chat Typically such visitors might include children who have been excluded from lessons for **poor**

behaviour, where previously they **may have** wandered the school grounds or even left the school premises.

As well as delivering sessions on the school's PHSE and other programmes, the officer works with school staff to identify at risk youngsters, **and a** number of achievement **focused activities** and schemes have been **developed** to assist in diverting these young people from crime.

Examples include:

- An Outreach programme, funded by Oxfordshire Army Cadets, to offer at risk youngsters, as well as others, a chance to undertake **adventure based activities including** residential courses in the **Peak** District

- Youth Forum - meetings between police and local youth workers to discuss **problems** and **develop** problem **solving** strategies.

- **Mentoring** schemes - the local mentoring scheme also has an office at **Drayton** School. **Working** with police, school staff and the youth service **they identify those young people** who would benefit most from the presence of a positive adult role model, and work to recruit **appropriate people** to take up this role. The police and youth service **have recently** put up **£10,000 funding** to recruit a part-time mentor recruitment co-ordinator.

The Learning Centre

More recently police and school staff have co-operated in the development of the so-called Learning Centre. Opened in January 2000 and situated on the top-floor of the school, the learning centre provides services to pupils at risk of exclusion from the school. Currently (April 2001) around 15 pupils attend full-time, with another 60 from the school attending specific sessions. The centre provides specific, tailored teaching including basic literacy and numeracy as well as vocational topics to pupils who might otherwise be excluded from the school. In this way such pupils are enabled to make the best of their strengths, which encourages them to attend school. The school police office is now located within the centre and much of the police officer's work focuses around pupils attending therein. The contiguity between the centre and the rest of the school engenders a sense of inclusion as part of the school community, whilst at the same time allowing routine teaching to continue elsewhere in the school.

ii) **Primary** Schools

Bretch Hill **and** Drayton **School** are served **principally by** three **primary** schools, which **adopt an** "open-door" policy **towards** members of the beat **team -** who **can enter the** schools **at any** time **to** join in with classes or activities. This could be anything from sitting in on a lesson and helping with classwork, to join in a game of football at break time. Specific activities in which the police have been **involved** have **included:**

- litter picks around the estate - promoting a sense of pride in the environment
- **guitar** tuition sessions at **a local** community centre
- school trips

Officers also liase with other professionals such as **educational** social workers, and furthermore have served on the governing bodies of some of the primary schools.

Most recently the team have tweaked their programme to allow more time to be spent in primary schools serving the estate and to introduce therein some of the techniques up until now employed mainly in Drayton School.

Restorative Justice

Restorative conferencing has been used by the beat team as a response to many incidents. The emphasis placed **by restorative** justice on inclusiveness **and** empowerment **complements** the policing approach on the estate. All cautions, reprimands and final warnings **involving** offenders from Bretch Hill are, wherever possible, referred by the Area Restorative Justice Unit back to beat team members to be delivered restoratively via a meeting between offender and victim. If **appropriate** members of the wider community are also **involved and** some meetings **can** involve quite **large** numbers of people from the local community.

Restorative justice is also used to good effect within schools to deal formally with issues such as criminal damage or **assault, and** also to informally resolve incidents of **inappropriate behaviour and** bullying.

3. **Evaluation**

An **evaluation** of the initiative was undertaken in 1999 by a member of the Thames Valley Police Restorative Justice Consultancy - **a headquarters based department** set at a certain "distance" from the initiative **and** thus offering **a degree** of **independence.** The **evaluation comprised** interviews with members of the **beat team,** a self-completion questionnaire distributed to other **key stakeholders,** and comparisons of statistical data.

The interviews with beat team members revealed the over-riding importance of the quality of team members as a determining factor in the success of the initiative:

> I strongly believe that this method of policing works but will be difficult to maintain unless officers are found with as much enthusiasm and commitment to the estate as has been shown by the team at present and in the past.

Members of the Working **Party and** the **Operations Group** were asked for their views as to the new **approach:**

> **It has made a tremendous difference in terms of the perceptions on the estate regarding** the fear of crime and the **role of the police.** The **beat team has built a strong relationship with local people and their community policing approach has been very successful.**
>
> **...the officers understand the problems and know the people.**

Staff and headteachers at schools involved in the initiative were also surveyed:

> I **have** much more confidence in liasing with **Thames Valley Police because I have a personal/professional relationship with team members. Moreover, because our pupils know team members, they feel comfortable in talking to them.**
>
> **Everyone** *in* this school *is* impressed by *the work of the team:* I *am* **very** impressed. **They have made a significant difference to life on the estate.**

The **evaluation** also **compared** crime rates **on** the estate **between 1997-98 and 1998-99.** This comparison **has been updated** in this report **to** indude figures for **1999-00 and the latest** figures **for** 2000-01, and is included as fig. I. The tables at fig. I. compare recorded, "all crime" levels, as well levels for a **range** of specific **offence** types, over the four **year period** within the Bretch Hill **beat area** ("JAS I "). Further **comparison** is **offered** by the inclusion of **data** for the **Banbury** sector ("JA"), North Oxfordshire **police** area ("J"), **and** the entire Thames **Valley** force **area.** The figures **reveal** some important points, showing some significant **and** sustained reductions in levels of **burglary and** vehicle theft, contrasted by an increase in theft from vehicles. Figures for **violent** crime have to be treated with caution - recording practices changed in **1998199** with several new categories of crime being recorded (e.g. common assault **and** assault on police) which contribute towards the large increases in this field. **Nevertheless even** here the increase on Bretch Hill has been less than over the police area taken as a whole.

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[2] Preston, N. *The &etch Hill Initiative: An Evaluation,* Kidlington, Thames Valley Police, 1999.

Fie. 1. Recorded Crime **1997-2001**

All Crime	1997/98	I998/99	1999/00	2000/01	%+/-
.)A51 Bretch Hill	849	749	872	842	-I
JA Banbury	4,622	4,973	5,218	5,247	+14
↓ North Oxon	8,668	12,167	13,239	12,927	+49
Thames Valley	153,457	176,390	191,877	187,987	+23

Burglary Dwelling	1997/98	I998199	1999100	2000/01	%+1-
1A51 Bretch Hill	155	65	66	48	-69
JA Banbury	486	354	332	224	-54
North Oxon	747	725	692	572	-23
Thames Valley	14,728	14,434	15,498	13,222	-10

Burglary Non-dwelling	1997198	1998/99	1999/00	2000101	%+!-
JA51 Bretch Hill	103	51	64	42	-59
JA Banbury	602	438	315	322	-47
↓ North Oxon	1,119	1,231	1,092	1,014	-9
Thames Valley	14,666	16,299	15,687	14,534	-I

Theft of Vehicle	1997198	1998199	1999100	2000/01	%+/-
JA51 Bretch Hill	78	80	65	53	-32
jA Banbury	542	477	313	301	-44
↓ North Oxon	1,040	977	964	740	-29
Thames Valley	15,157	14,528	14,492	11,479	-24

Theft from Vehicle	1997/98	1998199	1999100	2000/01	%+!-
JA5I Bretch Hill	81	67	91	118	+46
JA Banbury	681	572	649	632	-7
↓ North Oxon	1,314	1,709	1,695	1,797	+37
Thames Valley	33,150	34,528	35,972	31,377	-5

Violent Crime	1997/98	1998199	1999100	2000101	%+1-
JA51 Bretch Hill	53	106	I36	124	+233
IA Banbury	246	448	653	627	+255
↓ North Oxon	475	1,039	I,469	1,406	+296
Thames Valley	8,639	12,942	16,533	17,953	+208

Criminal Damage	1997/98	1998199	1999100	2000101	%+/-
JA51 Bretch Hill	217	214	290	273	+26
JA Banbury	763	885	1,042	1,047	+37
I North Oxon	1,461	2,155	2,591	2,707	+85
Thames Valley	24,529	25,995	28,630	29,719	+21

Theft of Pedal Cycle	1997198	1998199	1999100	2000/01	%+/-
JA51 Bretch Hill	36	20	23	24	-33
JA Banbury	192	148	131	162	-16
↓ North Oxon	412	548	506	441	+7
Thames Valley	6,962	6,774	7,992	6,000	-14

Shoplifting	1997198	1998/99	1999100	2000/01	%+/-
JA51 Bretch Hill	I5	9	7	7	-53
JA Banbury	321	348	395	523	+63
↓ North Oxon	527	662	766	968	+84
Thames Valley	8,626	8,590	9,628	I0,796	+25

Figures for all crime reduced considerably in the first year of the initiative before rising significantly in **1999100.** 2000101 has seen **overall** figures reduce again to **marginally** below the **baseline 1997198 figure.** This **overall** 1% reduction compares **favourably** with increases over thepolice area, and force area as a whole.

Fig. 2. shows figures for all crime except violent crime, thus giving a true **comparison** based on **unchanged recording practices:**

Fi!. 2. Recorded Crime 1997-2001

All Crime (except violent crime)	1997198	1998199	1999100	2000101	%+l-
JA51 Bretch Hill	796	643	736	718	-10
JA Banbury	4,376	4,525	4,565	4,620	+6
l North Oxon	8,193	11,128	11,770	11,521	+41
Thames Valley	144,818	163,448	175,344	170,034	+ 17

From this viewpoint a 10% reduction in crime emerges on Bretch Hill within an environment of generally increasing crime levels.

An important point to note is that crime figures relating to the area as a whole have to be seen within the context of Banbury as a "boom-town", on the M40 corridor and with a fast growing economy and population. The data also have to be viewed in the light of increasing strain on resources within Thames Valley Police. It is a well known fact that home counties police forces, including Thames Valley, are in the middle of a recruitment crisis due to the cost of living in the region and leading to a shortage of new recruits and a steady loss of trained officers to other forces. Although steps are in place to address such issues the result on Bretch Hill has been a reduction in the availability of resources from the initial numbers, and this may account for the increase in crime levels in 1999100. It is a credit to the team that the initial early success of the initiative has been regained in the latest set of figures, despite the reduction in resourcing. An additional officer is expected to join the team shortly.

Of note **also** are statistics **relating to Drayton School:**

Fig. 3. %age of pupilsgaining atleast5 GCSEgrades A*-C. DraytonSchool

1998	I999	2000	2001 (projected)	2002 (target)
9	20	15	20	28

Staff at Drayton School are working extremely hard to maintain and improve on results, within a highly **challenging** environment. This **year** every **pupil** in **the Learning** Centre **has been enrolled for at** least **one** exam, **and attendance at** school has i**mproved dramatically** in **individual** cases.

It is interesting to note, without wishing to **read too much into the point, the correspondence between the dip in exam results in 2000 and the increase in crime in the same year.**

4. Conclusions, lessons learnt and the way ahead

There are a number of important lessons to be learnt from the Bretch Hill initiative. Key amongst these are firstly that a strong focus on "problem" areas can contribute significantly towards a reduction in crime, and secondly that an inclusive, multi-agency approach that empowers community representatives can act as **a catalyst towards improved relations between police and** the **public.**

The difficulty of sustaining early successes over a long period of time, particularly within a context of strained resources, has been highlighted, as well as the importance that highly motivated and skilled officers play in achieving long term success.

It is also worth noting the importance of not losing sight of crime detection, which on Bretch Hill fell slightly (from 34-3 1%, All Crime) over the four year period, when the focus is somewhat more on crime prevention and reduction.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the initiative has been the new approach within schools serving the estate. Following the initial evaluation in I999, the assignment of dedicated beat team officers within schools was extended to cover the rest of Banbury. The so-called Banbury Police *Schools* **Project has recently been evaluated favourably by researchers from Oxford University,** [3] **and work is now under** *way* **to adopt the new approach to schools liaison on a forcewide basis .** [4]

Key issues which have arisen from the school work are firstly the need to avoid "over-selling" such initiatives to schools, with the **consequent danger** of unrealistically raising **expectations** of what can be achieved. For success to multiply there comes a point where schools **have** to take ownership of **developments.** Staff at **Drayton** School are **aware** of this **and are involving themselves** in training in restorative justice techniques. Secondly that **a balance** has to be struck **between secondary** and **primary** schools. In general terms the earlier **youngsters** are **involved** in **building** relations and working with the police the better, but clearly ft would be unrealistic to assign a **dedicated** police officer to **every primary and secondary** school in the country. It may **be appropriate** to focus on the **transitional** years where children move from **primary** to **secondary education -** often **a** stressful **and** therefore risk **laden** time. **Developmental** work is currently **underway** from this **perspective.**

In the final analysis the Bretch Hill initiative has **demonstrated** the **potential** of **applying** a new **approach** to the policing of "problem" areas that takes existing concepts of community policing and builds on them in a highly pragmatic and focused way. The result has been a positive impact on crime levels and consequently on the quality of life within the area.

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[3] Hudson, H. and Pring, R., The Banbury Police Schools Project, Oxford, University of Oxford, 2000.
' *See* Auger, R. Schools Programme Review (Strategic) *2000,* Kidlington, Thames Valley Police, 2000.