



Community engagement in policing:

**case-study evaluation of a demonstration project in
Northumbria**

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Contents

Summary	iii
Introduction	1
Section 1: Process evaluation	4
Section 2: Impact evaluation	18
Assessment – is it a useful role?	29

List of boxes

Box 1: Key phases of activity	3
Box 2: Process evaluation themes	4
Box 3: Transfer of skills to local community members	7
Box 4: Capacity – key insights	8
Box 5: ‘Participatory appraisal’ methodology	9
Box 6: Approaches and methods – key insights	11
Box 7: Partnership working – key insights	13
Box 8: Leadership, vision and priorities – key insights	15
Box 9: Culture and performance management – key insights	17
Box 10: Examples of effective partnership working and problem-solving	22

Summary

Some key learning from the Northumbria demonstration project

- Community profiling is a useful technique to help agencies identify groups that are not currently engaged by the police service.
- Mapping existing community engagement and community networks can give a project early impetus and help to avoid duplication.
- Early involvement of partner organisations and existing community networks helps achieve 'buy-in' and ownership by allowing the community to shape future engagement.
- Police authority employees can be perceived by the public as impartial and provide a 'gateway' for the force to communities who have not previously engaged.
- An authority employee from a non-policing background can build capacity in neighbourhood policing teams by bringing an alternative outlook and skills set.
- Participatory appraisal methods, including action planning, allowed community members and partner organisations in two rural communities to share with the police ownership for identifying solutions to local problems.
- It was important to manage community expectations and make clear that the action planning process involved prioritising and using existing resources more effectively.
- Parish councils were significant partners in both rural areas and it was possible to lever in resources from a range of partner organisations.
- A post holder with a remit for community engagement should have a skills set compatible with a police authority's long-term vision for engagement.

Five key outcomes from the Northumbria demonstration project

- Bringing a community development approach to community beat officers, helping them to view community engagement in non-traditional policing terms.
- Making beat officers more accessible and increasing communication and the flow of intelligence between the police and members of two rural communities.
- Empowering local community members to take some ownership for identifying problems in their local area.
- Introducing an action planning process to rural communities, involving beat officers, partners, and community members identifying, prioritising, and developing realistic solutions to local problems.
- Developing a practical tool ('beat pack') to transfer learning on implementing a community development engagement model to other areas of the force.

Introduction

The Invest-to-Save Budget-funded Community Engagement in Policing Project included three 'demonstration projects' in three different police authorities – Cheshire, Merseyside and Northumbria. The projects provided the authorities with a staff member for a fixed period of eighteen months. Each role was to test a different way of engaging with communities. The Northumbria project involved attempting to create an ongoing dialogue with a 'hard-to-reach' community. A summary of key learning from all three projects is available at <http://police.homeoffice.gov.uk>

Context of the project – structural changes in Northumbria police authority

There was a context of change in Northumbria police authority during the life of the demonstration project. Not long into the project, the original sponsor, a senior policy officer, moved to a new job. The policy officer involved in the original project bid also moved positions. A new senior policy officer took on the role of project sponsor. This was not long after the post holder was appointed.

During the demonstration project, senior members of the authority staff were involved in changing the internal structure of the authority. In particular, the committee system was altered to correspond with the Association of Police Authorities' model authority structure. This resulted in a new committee, responsible for community engagement, being formed part-way through the demonstration project.

Demonstration project aims and objectives

The overall aim of the demonstration project in Northumbria was to create an ongoing dialogue and relationship with an identified 'hard to reach' community. Several key objectives were intended to help the project achieve this aim.

- Use community profiling to identify communities not traditionally engaged.
- Use a variety of accessible engagement tools.
- Drive a more effective contribution from communities in identifying local problems.
- Actively involve communities in providing solutions to these problems.
- Implement an engagement process that leads to local service improvements.
- Increase public satisfaction with the police service.
- Articulate better the outcomes of these processes to communities.
- Implement an engagement process that informs strategic decision-making and organisational development.
- Implement a more strategic framework to secure community involvement.

Evaluation methods and sources of data

The evaluation of the Northumbria demonstration project covered both processes and outputs/outcomes. The Office for Public Management (OPM) was responsible for the process evaluation; Home Office Research Development and Statistics (RDS) were responsible for evaluating the impact of the project. Section 1 of this report summarises the key lessons from the process evaluation; Section 2 assesses the impact of the project against its original aim and objectives.

From the outset, the Home Office encouraged a developmental or learning approach to the project design and its evaluation. The evaluators were encouraged to work with the demonstration sites closely, to capture useful insights as they occurred, to share these across

the three demonstration sites, and feed them into the work of the National Practitioner Panel for community engagement in policing. This ongoing tracking of learning formed the basis of the process evaluation. Data were collected through:

- regular conversations with the post holder;
- regular site visits to act as participant-observer at key project events;
- depth-interviews with key stakeholders in the project – including the post holder, police authority staff, and key members of the force involved in the project;
- a focus group with authority members after observing an authority Community Engagement Committee meeting; and
- interviews with key partner agency representatives and members of the public who contributed to or were affected by the project.

The impact evaluation was also designed to be a collaborative process. An evaluation ‘workshop’ was held at Northumbria police authority to allow stakeholders to contribute ideas to the evaluation plan. The workshop was attended by the post holder, an authority member, members of police authority staff most involved in the project, the head of the force Community Engagement Department, and members of the Northumberland area command team. It was facilitated by OPM.

At the workshop, the project objectives were refined and outcome measures were suggested. These measures were finalised and agreed in subsequent meetings involving the post holder, RDS and OPM. It was agreed that the evaluation would be flexible and able to respond to both changes in the direction of the project and in available resources. The collaborative workshop approach was vital in building trust between the Home Office and the demonstration site and ensuring ‘buy-in’ to the evaluation process.

It was agreed the learning generated by the evaluation should be useful to both the Home Office and the demonstration sites. One of the programme goals for the Home Office was that the lessons learnt from the demonstration projects should be transferable to other authorities and forces, with a minimum need for complex and costly monitoring.

Data for the impact evaluation came from several sources:

- depth-interviews with key stakeholders in the project, including the post holder, police authority staff, and key members of the force involved in the project;
- a focus group with authority members after observing an authority Community Engagement Committee meeting;
- observations at key project events;
- interviews with key partner agency representatives and community members who contributed to or were affected by the project; and
- ‘activity reports’ and project updates produced by the post holder detailing specific community engagement activities undertaken as part of the project.

The interviews and focus groups informed both the process and impact evaluations. The process evaluation also relied on the ongoing observations and perceptions of the evaluator, meaning it is more impressionistic than the impact assessment.

The post holder and the demonstration project activity

The post holder brought a new set of skills to the authority. He came from a community development background and had wide experience of working in the local authority sector.

The post holder had a strong commitment to participatory methods of community organising, intended to maximise the contribution and ownership of the engagement process by communities. The post holder had less experience in relation to strategic policy.

Box 1 Key phases of activity in the Northumbria demonstration project

Phase 1

- Appointment of post holder.
- Audit of existing community engagement activities in the Northumbria Police Authority area to identify activities, gaps, and barriers to engagement.
- Outline design of appropriate models to pilot approaches.
- Project planning, agreement of local project objectives and overall evaluation criteria.
- Implement early stages of community engagement activity in two local rural areas – Wooler and Chevington.

Phase 2

- Use of geodemographic data and community profiling tools to evaluate and target community engagement activities and methods to both communities.
- Community problems and priorities identified using postcard surveys and door-to-door surveys carried out by trained community members.
- Development of a partnership-based community engagement model in Wooler, focusing on community networks and organisations, and using participatory appraisal methods.
- Development of a householder community engagement model in Chevington, initially using public consultation meetings and gradually introducing participatory methods.
- Recruitment of stakeholders and community members to both projects to take part in beat meetings, action planning, and problem-solving activities.
- Development of police and community action plans, including monthly targets, to address issues raised in both areas.

Phase 3

- Implementation, monitoring and revision of action plans through continued beat meetings.
- Specific Wooler actions included:
 - improved marketing of the community beat team – via posters and newsletters;
 - implementation of non-emergency voicemail and e-mail services;
 - structured and monitored 'micro-beat' engagement for individual beat officers;
 - implementation of non-emergency voicemail and e-mail services;
 - increased opening of Wooler police station, subject to operational demands;
 - 'post boxes' in rural areas providing direct confidential access to beat officers;
 - development of joint work with local parish councils; and
 - targeted speeding enforcement by beat team.
- Chevington actions include the following:
 - improved marketing of the community beat team via posters and newsletters;
 - implementation of non-emergency voicemail and e-mail services;
 - establishment of a neighbourhood watch scheme;
 - fireworks awareness and enforcement campaign;
 - local speeding enforcement campaigns;
 - local Christmas crime prevention work; and
 - work with the local school around bullying and youth disorder.
- Maximising existing police resources and working with local partners to lever in new resources.
- Develop exit strategy and initiate transfer of responsibilities to beat teams, partners, and local communities.

Section 1: Process evaluation

For the process evaluation, OPM explored how the post holder, and the activities he initiated or undertook, affected the authority's and the constabulary's ability to engage with local communities. The involvement of partner agencies was also explored.

Priority themes for the evaluation were the impact of the demonstration project on the authority's capacity to engage local communities, and the processes and tools used. However, capacity and process development do not operate outside a context; other dimensions of organisational performance and behaviours needed to be considered. These dimensions can be broken down into a number of interconnected themes, which provide the structure of this section.

Box 2 Process evaluation themes

- **Capacity:** how did the post holder (the demonstration project) strengthen organisational capacity to engage communities?
- **Approaches:** how did the post holder widen the range of community engagement approaches, and how was this implemented?
- **Partnering:** how did the post holder connect with the constabulary, and with other partner agencies, to strengthen community engagement?
- **Vision and priorities:** how did the community engagement activities initiated or undertaken by the post holder inform organisational priorities and strategies?
- **Leadership:** how did the post holder gain endorsement from members and senior management?
- **Culture:** how did the post holder affect the wider organisational culture, and did the culture of the organisation enable the post holder to operate effectively?
- **Performance management:** how did the post holder influence performance management approaches to ensure that community engagement activities are assessed and recognised within the wider performance of the organisation?

Capacity to engage

What was community engagement like in Northumbria before the project?

In the early stages of the project, an assessment was made of existing community engagement activity in the authority area. Discussions with the authority highlighted some examples of partnership and consultation activities with existing groups and forums. Outreach initiatives in schools were also being trialled. Mechanisms for engagement tended to be fairly formal, with some co-ordinated activity but little sustained resource for specific projects.

At the start of the project, the authority was undergoing an organisational review, with citizen-focus and community engagement at its heart. The demonstration project was seen as a key component of this, and police authority members were supportive of the general principle of engaging communities. In particular, developing structures and systems for involvement in rural areas was seen as important.

Northumbria Police Authority had three principal mechanisms for community engagement.

- Traditional, area-based Police Community Consultative Groups – known in Northumbria as Police and Community Forums.

- An extensive consultation exercise called Your Views Count. Leaflets with a questionnaire are sent to all households in Northumbria and can also be downloaded from the authority's website.
- A biennial residents' survey, carried out by an independent research contractor. This provides strategic information to inform force and local policing plans, business plans and crime and disorder strategies. The survey is comparable to some British Crime Survey measures and explores whether the police service in Northumbria meets the needs of residents.

Assessing the reach of existing engagement by 'community profiling'

In the early stages of the project, the post holder mapped existing community engagement activity to assess its scale and reach. This was done in conjunction with a range of local partner agencies.

Later in the project, the post holder used MOSAIC, a geodemographic profiling tool developed by Experian, to profile the population of Northumbria. This profile was compared to responses to the 2004 Your Views Count exercise, for which there were approximately 25,000 replies. It was found that some Asian communities, and communities where benefits were the primary source of income, were under-represented in the survey responses. Middle income and older respondents were found to be over-represented. This type of activity allows police authorities to identify gaps in existing engagement and build capacity to fill these.

The engagement audit also highlighted the difficulties associated with engaging Northumbria's outlying communities. Although not under-represented in the survey consultation, it was acknowledged that many rural communities have little direct contact with the authority or force, as it is not always possible or desirable for members of outlying communities to attend public forums that may be some distance away. This, and support from the Home Office for development of the project in a non-urban environment, led to the selection of two pilot sites in rural areas.

The areas chosen for the demonstration project pilot sites are shown below.

- Wooler – a rural community in north Northumberland. The project looked at both remote farmers and other rural dwellers and market town residents. Wooler used to have a police station, but this facility was not open to the public when the project started. The area has a larger market town within its sphere of influence (Berwick) but is geographically the most isolated part of Northumbria.
- Chevington – a fairly poor semi-rural/coalfield area incorporating the villages of Hadston, Togston and Red Row, which has suffered from a gradual local service withdrawal.

A lack of facilities for young people was a problem in both areas.

Forming structures and strategies

Ways of working locally were embedded successfully, using a number of strategies. The post holder ensured that links were forged early on with relevant partner agencies and community organisations in both sites through detailed communication and discussion on the ground. Proposed project methods were explained to, and checked with, stakeholders, to achieve understanding and buy-in. Police authority members were involved in both project areas to differing degrees. In particular, in the Chevington pilot, the local police authority member was closely involved, attending most meetings, and these links enabled this person to advise and comment on the project locally, as well as bring back learning for the authority itself.

The post holder was seen by stakeholders and community members as professional and independent and not having his own agenda, which helped to keep an appropriate distance between the police and the public. He also acted where appropriate as a 'gateway' to facilitate contact between the police and community in areas where, traditionally, there has not been much contact. This role is potentially transferable to any such community.

Particularly towards the end of the pilot projects, some strategies were set in place for supporting work locally; for example, provision of part-time administrative support for one beat meeting and the scheduling of another to coincide with the parish council meeting to maximise attendance. Links were also made to existing processes where possible, such as youth projects and work and Neighbourhood Watch (NW) schemes (although differential support structures for the two sites caused some difficulties in this respect).

Making strategic links

Connections between the work of the project and the force and authority were identified and sometimes made as a result of facilitated discussions through the project evaluation. The post holder was proactive in trying to create links internally and trying to become involved in reviews and projects with aspects in common to the project work.

Some explicit strategies were used to relate the work of the post holder to that of the authority overall. Within the authority itself, these included attempts to make links to existing and relevant internal work such as Best Value Reviews. Some learning from the project influenced a Best Value Review of neighbourhood policing.

Training and transfer of skills

Considerable attention was given to working with police officers locally to transfer skills and knowledge about working with the community. The post holder was involved in co-ordinating activity in the two pilot areas and working together with local forces in order to embed processes on the ground.

Practical skills transfer in areas such as the following were evident during the life of the project:

- facilitation;
- listening skills;
- open questioning;
- action planning processes;
- partnership; and
- working with local press and media.

Area command officers were also aware, during the life of the project, of the specific techniques such as community profiling used by the post holder in identifying excluded groups to work with, and communication methods such as leaflets, phone book stickers, key rings, and fridge magnets.

Box 3 Transfer of skills to local community members

Training and skills transfer for local communities also took place. Communities worked together to identify and prioritise actions and activities. Members of communities attending meetings got to know one another and learned how to work together and with partners productively and positively. Appropriate and measured facilitation from the post holder modelled this type of behaviour in participants. More specific skill transfer and training took place in Chevington. The post holder developed a training session and materials for community members in interviewing skills; the session also covered health and safety issues. This prepared residents to act as interviewers for a community survey. This training was based on some principles and materials used by market research interviewers.

The post holder also paid considerable attention to embedding activity after the close of the project. The models used during the projects were simplified and written up for local officers and teams to use as a 'beat pack' in their localities, intended as an incentive to carry activity through. This pack included advice and resources on the following areas:

- introduction to consultation;
- developing an action plan;
- establishing a police and community forum;
- identifying local policing priorities;
- press publicity and marketing; and
- community profiling.

The beat pack can be accessed at <http://www.neighbourhoodpolicing.co.uk/>

The post holder's capacity-building role helped to give people who were initially sceptical the confidence and authority to learn new techniques and take some of them on board. It was helpful that particular beat officers were clearly 'community minded' in their approach, and this, combined with the enthusiasm of the post holder, acted to make local ways of working more outwardly focused. In particular, it appeared that the focus on increased public reassurance in response to demand added a new 'community partnership' dimension to the local officers' roles. This was borne out in a change of approach from certain officers – for example, officers who at the beginning of the projects had not wanted their photographs taken for publicity were now much more keen to be identified and identifiable to their local communities. It is clear that the post holder's efforts in changing mindsets and established ways of working brought benefits to both previously committed and less committed officers.

However, a clear and tangible transfer of skills to officers and the community took place only during the life of a particular project, with the encouragement of a facilitator. Specific tasks such as interviewing were prepared for and undertaken but transfer of more fundamental skills to the project, such as chairing community meetings, was not applied substantially to the community but rather to police officers. It remains to be seen, and is relatively difficult to evaluate, whether skills will be used and embedded within the community beyond the life of the demonstration project pilots. Less tangible and shorter-term benefits may ebb away to a certain degree with the post holder's departure, which highlights the need for sustainable structures in police authorities.

Limitations to capacity building

The Home Office and Association of Police Authorities (APA) hoped that the demonstration projects would increase the engagement capacity of the authorities themselves and help to shape their future strategic direction. It was hoped that the demonstration sites would adopt

an 'action learning' approach, feeding learning into organisational development as the projects developed.

Given the changing landscape the project was operating in – the implementation of neighbourhood policing, the review of the Crime and Disorder Act (including the role of Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships (CDRPs) in community engagement), and the uncertainty regarding police force restructuring – Northumbria Police Authority decided to wait until the learning from all three demonstration projects was available before considering how this could shape the authority's future role.

As the project developed, the police authority was able to consider more closely the additional value of the post holder's work in relation to mainstream police authority business. Although the post holder's skills were invaluable to establishing and maintaining relationships with the two rural communities chosen for the pilot, and relevant local partners, the authority needed to consider the long-term sustainability of this particular role and felt that more value may be added by a higher-level strategic role. The police authority planned to consider how the benefits of a practitioner community development approach can be best aligned with a more strategic policy development role once the learning from all three projects was available.

There was perhaps a perception in the authority that, as the post holder's work was locally based and reflected his background in community development, he was less interested in contributing to strategic organisational development. In the pilot areas, however, the force and community contacts recognised the post holder as a professional and competent facilitator and influencer. It is possible that the police authority's preference for a more strategic oversight role in relation to community engagement conflicted with the post holder's own vision, and this may have resulted in the post holder feeling the project was having limited influence on wider police authority business.

Limitations to developing capacity locally

Although it is too early to be sure, there may be issues with police officers facilitating the community meetings and acting as though they are independent, if they are not seen as such by sections of the community. However, there does not appear to be enough of an impetus or incentive for community members to adopt this role at present.

There is also a question mark over the capacity of some beat teams to take on what is seen by some as extra activity, such as marketing and communication, without central support and help.

Box 4 Capacity: key insights

- Community profiling is a useful technique to highlight groups that an authority is not engaging with effectively.
- Mapping of existing community engagement and community networks can give a project a head start and avoid duplication.
- Early involvement of partners and existing community networks helps gain their 'buy-in' to a project and allows them to help shape it. This can increase the sense of community ownership.
- An authority employee can be seen as impartial and act as a 'gateway' to communities who have not usually engaged with the police.
- An authority employee can bring a different outlook and skills set to bear on police officers and build capacity both within beat teams and local communities.

What approaches and methods were used?

The approaches used in the pilot areas were initially different – Wooler was conceived as ‘partner’-based, Chevington as ‘householder’-based. In both areas, the post holder planned to use ‘participatory appraisal’ techniques, as well as other engagement mechanisms.

Box 5 ‘Participatory appraisal’ methodology

The following explanation of participatory appraisal is adapted from PEANuT (participatory evaluation and appraisal in Newcastle-upon-Tyne), a group based at Northumbria University (http://northumbria.ac.uk/sd/academic/sas/sas_research/pa/).

What is participatory appraisal?

Participatory appraisal is a community-based approach to consultation that gives precedence to the views and attitudes of local people as experts within their own communities. Local people can plan and carry out actions to effect change within their communities. The approach transcends more conventional methods by using visual and flexible tools such as maps, spider diagrams, and charts. The process is interactive, enabling people from all backgrounds and with varying abilities to participate.

How does it work?

Participatory appraisal has three elements: research, education, and collective action. Research is carried out by members of the community on issues they have identified as relevant to them. Collective education follows as the participants contribute and disseminate information. The participatory nature of this approach enables participants to take ownership of ideas and solutions. The wider community can gain a sense of empowerment through collective action and the experiences of having their views taken seriously and acted upon.

Wooler

The Wooler project focused on existing neighbourhood community networks. An integrated engagement cycle was established, linked to a representative (pre-existing) neighbourhood forum. The forum brought together parish representatives, local councillors, police authority members, local organisations and stakeholders. It meets quarterly and is open to the public. The forum’s work was augmented through developing a wider range of engagement activities around it. The ‘beat’ action plan was the central element in the engagement cycle, and was based on community priorities identified through a range of participatory appraisal research, consultation, and wider engagement methods.

Techniques for community engagement

- Questionnaires distributed to the community by beat managers through local schools, parishes, voluntary organisations and businesses.
- Follow-up surveys using postcards.
- Participatory appraisal tools used in groups such as Y and H forms, graffiti walls, action planning matrices, and planning for real techniques/mapping.
- Structured interviews.
- Encouraging feedback/community intelligence through suggestion boxes in stations and post offices.
- Establishing e-mail and voicemail links to police (set up as a result of the project through action planning).

Following the initial consultation exercise, the post holder used MOSAIC to profile the community and assess whether questionnaire respondents were representative of the

community. The results of the profiling suggested that they were. This showed the value of distributing questionnaires to and via a range of organisations and community groups.

Information and feedback from police, marketing

A variety of methods were used to publicise the work in Wooler and to feed back actions and successes to the wider community.

- Quarterly beat forum meetings (with chair and minuter from the community).
- Quarterly newsletters.
- Newsletters and updates made available on the police authority website.
- Stakeholder feedback via other local media, such as newsletters, parish councils, schools, churches and voluntary organisation networks.
- Other marketing initiatives (key rings, bumper stickers, fridge magnets etc.).

Chevington

The Chevington model focused on residents in the villages of Hadston, Red Row and Togston. An integrated cycle of engagement has been developed, linked to a monthly public 'beat' meeting where local issues are discussed and prioritised and actions or solutions identified. A monthly newsletter updates local people on the outcomes of the meeting or any subsequent action taken.

Techniques for community engagement

- Questionnaires, distributed to householders at beginning of project.
- Participatory appraisal tools used in groups, such as graffiti walls, action planning matrices and planning for real techniques/mapping.
- Interviewer-administered survey midway through project (using community members as interviewers, as response rate to initial community consultations was low).
- Establishing e-mail and voicemail links to police (set up as a result of the project through action planning).

Information and feedback from police, marketing

- Monthly beat meetings.
- Monthly community newsletter.
- Newsletters and updates made available on the police authority website.
- Other marketing initiatives (key rings, phone book stickers, fridge magnets etc.).

Action plans in both areas focused on such issues as anti-social behaviour, young people, traffic, access to and visibility of the police. Where possible and practical, issues were addressed in both areas across the project life – for example, local e-mail and voicemail contacts in both areas. Partnering with local agencies took place to address issues which the police could not influence in isolation, for example envirocrime and youth activities.

The contrasting approaches in the two areas – partner-led and householder-led involvement respectively – were helpful in highlighting the different results. Partner-led involvement in Wooler was a success more quickly but did not necessarily involve a range of new voices. Community-led involvement in Chevington was more resource-intensive and perhaps taxing at first, with fewer quick and obvious wins, but reaped rewards in terms of gathering otherwise unheard community intelligence; relationships and trust were developed in the medium-to-long term.

Strategically, the co-location of the post holder with research, marketing and communication staff in the police authority meant that good logistical support was provided for project materials for both demonstration sites – newsletters for example.

Limitations to the approaches

The approaches were fairly straightforward for the post holder to use, in collaboration with local Community Beat Teams (CBTs), once relations with partners and communities had been established. However, activity may have to be scaled down when forums and beat meetings are facilitated by local police officers alone without additional support. Although it is early days, it will be interesting to see whether and how activity is sustained in localities.

Another issue was that communities raised specific concerns at public meetings that required a longer-term or partnership solution; for example, dealing with issues regarding street scene, envirocrime (graffiti and vandalism) or youth disorder. It could be said that the raising of these issues was helpful for the projects, as they highlighted the need to work in partnership with a wider range of authorities. However, these incidences caused frustration at the time among the police and sometimes other participants. It may have required a neutral facilitator, or a person experienced in other areas of public service delivery, such as the post holder, to see the way forward at times like these.

This tendency for people to raise nuisance and quality of life issues (in particular at Chevington) may have been related to the frequency of meetings (every month), the nature of the areas (relatively low crime rates) and the fact that concerns were actually being seen to be dealt with, which may not have been participants' experience before. There appears to be a broad lesson for statutory agencies here about engaging with individual householders on a fairly regular basis, that expectations are raised with opportunities for consultation and dialogue on any level, and citizens express and explore issues that appear to have a chance of being addressed. Framing engagement in terms of what individual agencies can solve and influence is important, while being clear about what can be negotiated on and dealt with in partnership with other organisations.

Box 6 Approaches and methods: key insights

- Identifying and harnessing existing community networks helped the pilot project in Wooler to quickly gain and maintain momentum.
- The partner-led model of engagement was easier to establish and facilitate and outcomes were achieved more quickly.
- The community-based model of engagement was more resource-intensive to develop, but engaged more people not previously involved with the police.
- The post holder's local authority background was useful in establishing partner networks to tackle multi-agency issues.
- It was important to manage expectations and make clear that the pilot projects were intended to prioritise, as opposed to provide extra, policing resources.

Partnership working

A partnering approach was adopted from the start in Wooler, where relationship building was critical to the project's success. Early contacts were made and relationships established with key stakeholders in the police, statutory and voluntary sectors, and businesses such as land owners and farmers.

The post holder spent a great deal of time talking to Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnerships in the early stages of the project, on the back of the police commitment to support the work in designated rural areas. Mapping work to establish further partner/stakeholder contacts was carried out and then discussed with the police and the CDRPs.

Although strong local relationships were already established with certain partners through work with local authorities and CDRPs, the project widened their scope to include, for example, schools, churches, and parish councils that local forces had not necessarily considered working in close partnership with.

A partnership approach needed to be adopted in Chevington, where initial community priorities related to the local shopping centre, graffiti and vandalism, youth disorder, and council and police visibility and contact – all issues which needed addressing through a partnership approach, beyond the community and local CBT exclusively. Significant extra community resources beyond those of the beat team and authority have been levered in to address community priorities. Key partners and 'givers' included a local land and development trust, local businesses and shopkeepers, local authority community wardens, community facilities and the parish council, local youth projects, schools and a residents' association. Agencies and organisations appeared to act through a mixture of altruism and goodwill, a desire to work with the community and respond to community needs and pressures and, lastly, the need to be seen to react.

In both locations, it was clear that the parish council was a significant partner, and that it was important to maintain and/or develop appropriate local connections with other community groups and local services and acknowledge existing local decision-making and involvement mechanisms.

Barriers and problems with partnering

Partnership work in the two pilot project areas appeared to work well, on the whole. Where there were issues, they appeared to be related to the decision not to take a partnering approach in Chevington but rather to work almost exclusively with local communities. Early work that did not involve partner agencies was not effective or swift in tackling issues which arose until partners were brought into the decision-making and meeting structure.

However, it may not have been clear which partners should be involved until priority issues were identified through community consultation and involvement. Partner involvement from the outset might also have had the unintended effect of quietening or diluting community voices.

Working with parish councils in rural areas does not necessarily create links with the wider community, if the parish consultative structures in themselves are not representative or engaging. Pre-work to determine the extent to which parish structures are linked to the wider community, including mapping and profiling, is an important first step. This was done in the pilot areas, but it takes resources, time and effort to sustain and would be a potential resource implication for local beat teams to adopt locally in the future.

In both projects, during their lives, links into existing partnering initiatives and activities were not as effective as they could have been in leveraging in resources for the medium and long term. For example, in Chevington partnership working with the local (district) authority appeared to be in its infancy when the demonstration site project ended. This is indicative of the time it takes to set up and develop effective working relations with partner organisations and ensure that plans and priorities are streamlined and co-ordinated.

Links were made with CDRPs, but other local partnership initiatives, such as the local council's community strategy, did not appear to be so well linked in. Many issues of concern mentioned above were not exclusively the responsibility of the local police and, as such, might have been better addressed by linking to community strategy priorities and processes earlier on. For example, issues around the environment and youth activities might be better addressed at a borough level rather than very locally, where resources are more scarce.

Box 7 Partnership working: key insights

- Mapping work was useful in the two pilot areas in establishing the extent of existing partnership arrangements and the extent to which partner agencies were engaging communities.
- It was possible to lever in significant extra resources from partners, particularly in the Chevington pilot project.
- Parish councils were significant local partners in both rural areas.
- Effective partnership networks to deal with problem-solving in the medium to long term took a longer time to establish.

Leadership, vision and priorities

During the life of the project, the structure of Northumbria Police Authority was being changed, to correspond to model for authorities suggested by the Association of Police Authorities. The existing 'community affairs' committee was reconstituted as the 'community engagement' committee. Some authority members seemed to be aware of the need for these changes, assessing some community affairs activity within the authority, such as police community forums, as too formal and procedural and not necessarily reaching out to some community groups and sectors.

There was an impression, though, that the changes in structure and working procedures being introduced were taking time – the process of organisational change was not easy. This was another reason for the authority not adopting an action learning approach in relation to the demonstration project. Senior authority staff felt that this was already an unsettling period for the authority members and any strategic learning from the demonstration project should be considered after structural changes to the authority's working structure were implemented.

The police service in Northumbria was rated by authority members and officers as having been at the forefront of change and improvement in engagement with local communities, with the early introduction and adoption of community beat managers and a focus on problem-oriented policing. There had already been some specific examples of effective practice in engagement in force activity, with a mobile unit being used in Northumbria to visit small and isolated communities. There was a sense, however, that the authority should not be complacent in relation to this, especially as engagement on strategic priorities and direction was not necessarily happening in parallel with these service-level developments.

Within the authority, the demonstration project was seen initially to be an important part of a development in ways of working with communities and localities and the authority's approach to and involvement in neighbourhood policing. During the project there was a Best Value Review of communications, looking at what communities wanted, led by community needs and priorities. The work of this review was felt to be important, as a key role of the authority was to ensure engagement with communities and meet their stated needs wherever possible. However, it was recognised that there was a difference between the police authority engaging in all policing matters and focusing on issues around strategic delivery and monitoring, for example providing a framework for support, delivering initial consultation, providing benchmarking data, identifying issues and so on.

There was recognition at the outset that the demonstration project could provide important learning for the next stages of community engagement in Northumbria. However, as the project developed there was a clear sense among members and officers that the locality approach to problem-solving and priority setting, although useful from a force perspective, was not appropriate for a police authority to adopt. Staff and members felt that it was too resource-intensive and that they should be involved more at a strategic overview level. The recognition that the police authority needed to operate more strategically meant there was little evidence that the 'hands-on' nature of the project was able to influence strategic decisions and priorities.

The importance of police forces and authorities finding ways of engaging for themselves, but also linking with partners who engage at local and more strategic levels, was recognised by authority members through the life of the projects and in discussions with evaluators. They recognised that testing and modelling approaches were evolutionary, but that learning could be shared effectively between, for example, rural and urban areas, and applied to existing and new police authority engagement mechanisms. The importance of existing mechanisms

and structures such as police consultative committees and parish councils was stressed in looking at any new developments.

During the project, the police service in Northumbria undertook a Best Value Review of neighbourhood policing. The report highlighted that the authority's role in relation to community engagement was not clear to many in the force. This may have helped inform authority thinking around their future role, confirming initial thoughts that they should operate at the strategic overview level.

Box 8 Leadership, vision and priorities: key insights

- If a police authority is undergoing structural change this may impact on attempts to focus on long-term strategic policy development.
- Police authority members in Northumbria felt that the authority's future role should be at a strategic overview level, with limited engagement by authority staff at a local level.
- Roles and responsibilities in relation to engagement need to be clearly defined between the authority and force.

Culture and performance management

Early learning from the project did not appear to be considered by any of Northumbria Police Authority's committees. The Community Affairs Committee agendas were primarily concerned with traditional authority engagement – Police and Community Forums and custody visits. The Community Engagement Committee was instituted around the time of the final phase of the project and findings were tabled at the first meeting.

The police authority's committees operate in a manner which allows members to debate written updates provided before the meetings. Police authority staff usually do not provide verbal updates. This approach to business was different from the post holder's previous experiences of community development in a local authority context and, consequently, the working styles of the post holder and the authority were not wholly compatible.

It is not possible to quantify the extent to which the incompatibility of working styles between post holder and authority limited the impact of the demonstration project. It is possible that the working culture in Northumbria Police Authority did not naturally lend itself to a dynamic, action learning approach. The authority's systematic, strategic approach to business clearly prompted the decision to assess the learning from all three demonstration projects before seeing how this might impact on the future direction of its community engagement role.

Performance management

From an authority perspective, it is not clear how data arising from localities as a result of these projects were incorporated into strategy and management of policing from the centre. Members commented in discussions with the evaluators on the importance of responding to public need in all areas, and recognising the 'joined up' nature of community concerns as well as solutions. However, they questioned whether it was the role of the authority to work on very local issues, rather than identifying trends and priorities from the community more broadly. They felt that the authority did have a role in recommending change in structures and processes so that issues were fed into local CDRPs in a systematic way, and information gathered from these partnerships used to 'drive and inform policing in future years'; this was seen as work in progress to some extent. Involvement of all authority members in CDRP meetings was thought to be key.

Key performance indicators

Beat officers in Wooler and Chevington felt that they received credit from their immediate supervisors for the community-facing work they undertook. However, they also felt there was a lack of recognition for the role in the wider organisation and that engagement work needed to be afforded more 'status'. They perceived that key performance indicators (KPIs) drove activity to a large extent and were concentrated on volume crime and detections. This did not accord with the priorities of local people. They also felt it was not always evident to senior managers how much work was put into engagement that may benefit communities or partner agencies, as opposed to impacting on force targets.

Some officers also felt that it would be difficult to expand community engagement work much further without some KPIs dedicated to it. They felt this was an important issue for the implementation of neighbourhood policing – as did senior managers. Senior managers were more likely to see the ultimate 'dove tailing' of increased levels of community intelligence brought about through engagement and reductions in volume crime KPIs.

Work is underway to mainstream some changes made locally, such as the rewriting of job descriptions and roles for beat officers. The Community Engagement Department in the force

are also proposing to produce KPIs for community engagement as a result of the Best Value review of neighbourhood policing. In the meantime, whether officers in the pilot areas continue to display outward-facing policing behaviour will be down to the support and commitment of commanding officers and sector inspectors in Basic Command Units.

Box 9 Culture and performance management: key insights

- The working styles of the post holder and the police authority were not wholly compatible. This may have affected the project's impact at a strategic level.
- The authority perceived a role for itself in ensuring issues are fed into CDRPs in a systematic way. Independent members need to be better integrated with CDRPs.
- Some beat officers felt there was a lack of recognition of their role at the organisational level. Officers at all levels felt the organisation was driven by volume crime KPIs and that KPIs for community engagement needed to be developed for the level of engagement required by neighbourhood policing.
- Senior officers were most likely to perceive the link between increased intelligence via community engagement and volume crime KPIs.

Section 2: Impact evaluation

The impact evaluation considers both outcomes and outputs from the demonstration project. Outcomes are things that have happened as a consequence of the post holder and the role. Outputs are more specific products resulting from the project – such as the ‘beat pack’ produced for police officers to use.

Assessment of evidence against aim and objectives

The objectives of the demonstration project are listed in turn and evaluation evidence presented to assess the performance of the demonstration project against these. An assessment is made at the end of this section on whether the project achieved its overall aim of creating an ongoing dialogue and relationship with an identified hard-to-reach community.

Objective: Systematic engagement based on community profiling

The post holder undertook a community profiling exercise during the first phase of the project, using existing knowledge from local partner agencies. This identified several communities that would benefit from the type of engagement proposed by the project. The authority decided to focus on creating a dialogue with isolated rural communities for the demonstration project. Other communities identified during the profiling work were:

- Black and minority ethnic communities;
- lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities;
- victims of domestic violence; and
- travellers.

The authority is now aware of these other gaps in provision and also has the opportunity to work with these groups in the period after the demonstration project.

The MOSAIC community profiling software was applied to the sample of the Your Views Count consultation exercise. It revealed under-representation of specific groups. The authority is now aware of these gaps and can target these groups with other forms of engagement.

Senior members of the authority staff were not ultimately convinced of the utility of the community profiling software. This was partly because it was originally developed for commercial purposes. Northumbria feels that the cost of the software licence would not represent value for money for the authority beyond the life of the demonstration project. It feels profiling communities using the local knowledge of local partner agencies and community groups is more cost-effective.

Objective: Use of a variety of accessible engagement tools

The demonstration project had a very clear impact in relation to this objective. The post holder used accessible engagement tools at three distinct stages of the project – initial consultation, action planning, and ongoing engagement. Tools and methods were tailored to the communities involved and used only if fit for purpose. Methods could be used at any or every stage, if appropriate.

- **Initial consultation** – the demonstration projects involved finding out what local people’s problems and priorities were, so that police and partner resources could be (re)allocated to deal with them. In Wooler, initial consultation was mainly survey-based, with questionnaires distributed via a number of channels – including schools and churches. In

Chevington, initial engagement was via monthly beat meetings, held in a local community centre. During the project, consultation was broadened to include a community survey, administered by members of the community recruited at the meetings.

- **Action planning** – an action planning process was eventually adopted in both areas. This took place at public meetings – at the Crime and Disorder Reduction Forum in Wooler and at the monthly beat meetings in Chevington. The action planning involved highlighted problems being written on flip charts and the community, partners, and the police all suggesting solutions and actions that they could respectively take.
- **Ongoing engagement** – regular public meetings were sustained in both areas throughout the project. Newsletters were also developed in both areas, to act as a wider feedback mechanism. Extra ways to contact the police were also developed and implemented by both beat teams. In Wooler, the police station opened to the public on certain days of the week. A dedicated voicemail number and e-mail address were adopted for the local station, so that local people could leave non-urgent information without going through a central call handling system. Similar voicemail and e-mail services were also set up in Chevington.

The post holder tested in a policing context ‘participatory appraisal’ methods, which have been used more widely in fields such as international development, regeneration and health (see Box 5 in Section 1). These methods were successful in promoting an active contribution from the community and facilitated a degree of community ownership over the engagement process. In particular, community members in Chevington were trained to administer questionnaires to other community members (see Box 3 in Section 1).

Objective: Drive a more effective contribution from communities in identifying local problems and issues

In Wooler local priorities and problems were identified mainly by representatives of the community; in Chevington the contribution was more directly from householders.

Wooler

In Wooler the project was successful in broadening the range of community representatives and partners engaging with the police around local problems. The post holder identified a range of partners and community organisations to undertake and distribute initial consultation questionnaires around priorities and problems. The responses received were used to inform the first multi-agency action planning event.

One member of the beat team expressed surprise at the priorities that emerged from the consultation. They expected community priorities to be those most traditionally targeted by the police – volume and property crimes, such as burglary. The priorities, problems and issues highlighted were in fact:

- contacting the police;
- police visibility;
- youth disorder;
- traffic and parking; and
- information and communication (eventually grouped with visibility).

Chevington

In Chevington there were fewer existing community networks and less initial involvement from partners. The principal method used to find out community priorities and problems was a monthly beat meeting, held in the community centre in Hadston. The attendance at this

meeting was initially constant, at between ten and fifteen local residents. These people were mostly aged 40 and over.

The priorities, issues and problems raised by the residents in Chevington were broadly similar to those raised in Wooler – being able to contact the police was a major concern, as was speeding and youth disorder. The latter was linked to ‘envirocrime’ issues like vandalism and graffiti.

The principal concern in Chevington was that the priorities and problems raised at the beat meetings were not representative of the community, as the same people were attending each meeting. The post holder attempted to counter problems of representation by training regular attendees to administer a survey to other community members. The beat team were involved in this, persuading previous contacts they had in the Residents’ Association and the (defunct) Neighbourhood Watch scheme to become involved. The surveys conducted by the residents’ group raised the same issues as those highlighted by meeting attendees. They also highlighted the shopping precinct in Hadston as a focus for future problem-solving activity.

One member of the beat team felt that the pilot project was a way to revive the principles of NW without using the label – which he felt had become ‘stigmatised’ to some extent. Residents had expressed an interest in reviving the NW at an early meeting. Instead, the activity associated with it was subsumed in the wider project via mechanisms such as action planning. In this way, there was no need to have a separate meeting devoted to NW.

Objective: Secure local community involvement in providing solutions to problems

Securing local community involvement in policing is acknowledged to be difficult, especially in areas where there is a history of poor relations with the police and levels of community capacity are low.¹ Implementing effective problem-solving can also be difficult in a policing context.² The two rural areas covered by the demonstration project were themselves differing contexts, so impact on this objective is presented for each area.

Wooler

In Wooler the model of engagement was intended to be partner-based – community involvement was to be secured via representatives of agencies such as parish councils. There was a pre-existing crime and disorder forum with which the project was able to align itself. The meetings appeared to function effectively as a problem-solving forum, with a range of agency representatives contributing ideas. Due to the relatively low levels of crime and disorder in the Wooler area, there were fewer problems highlighted than in Chevington.

The post holder introduced ‘action planning’ to the forum. This process involves all stakeholders ‘brainstorming’ solutions to problems and allocating realistic actions to agencies and individuals. The ‘plan’ is recorded and subsequently monitored and revised. The beat team were very happy with the first action planning event. There were a total of 35 participants – more than had been expected. A commanding officer said they were surprised by the level of interest and engagement throughout the project.

Participants at the event suggested a wide range of solutions to the key problems and priorities identified during the consultation. Although some representatives of statutory partners appeared to feel many suggestions were unrealistic, they were generally not

¹ See for example Grinc, R. (1994) ‘Angels in marble’: Problems in stimulating community involvement in community policing. *Crime and Delinquency*, 40 (3), p.437-468.

² See for example Skogan, W. *et al.* (1999) *On the beat – police and community problem-solving* (Boulder, Colorado, Westview Press); and Cordner, G. *et al.* (2005) Problem-oriented policing in practice. *Criminology and Public Policy*, 4 (2), p.155-180.

defensive about what was already occurring and were mostly prepared to consider new ideas. Beat team officers were initially reluctant to adopt some visibility ideas – such as having their pictures on posters – but were persuaded as the project developed.

There were a few concerns about the action planning process, however.

- Although a wide cross-section of the community was involved in identifying priorities and problems, the group of ‘partners’ at the meeting was less representative. In particular, no young people attended to help suggest solutions to the youth disorder issue.
- For one issue – parking – it was clear that the relevant partner agency representatives were not present. It was questionable as to whether a community safety forum was the best place to deal with this issue.

The beat team were also concerned about what expectations the event might raise and whether these would be unrealistic. However, a commanding officer said the post holder helped in this respect. It was felt that some participants had come to the meeting expecting to present a ‘wish list’ to the police; the post holder made it very clear when facilitating that there were no new resources involved – the meeting was about how to make best use of existing resources.

Despite the concerns mentioned above, the action planning process in Wooler appeared to be a success. The actual process itself worked well, with meeting attendees forming smaller groups to suggest plans of action to tackle each issue. Participants were matched to most relevant issues where possible and appropriate. Commanding officers felt it was ‘user-friendly’. Partner representatives were also positive about the process, saying that it had “given [them] a voice”.

There were several practical outcomes from the action planning process, including a response to one of the key problems highlighted: speeding. Parish councillors lobbied the district council to ask for special flashing light signs for villages.

Youth nuisance was another priority highlighted during the process. The beat team in Wooler managed to secure the use of a mobile skateboard track. Funds and equipment were also obtained to allow local youngsters to make a short film about safety issues.

It was intended as part of the project to pilot the use of volunteers to keep the police station in Wooler open for longer hours. Community members had agreed to be involved. It was not in the end possible, as chief officers in Northumbria decided to wait for Home Office guidance on using volunteers. Several concerns were raised in relation to the idea, principally:

- security – the police station in Wooler is an old building and not equipped with modern features like a hardened glass screen for the front counter; and
- data protection – protocols would have to exist for what information would be available to the volunteers, as rural communities are often tight-knit.

However, the use of volunteers has been recommended in the Best Value review of neighbourhood policing in Northumbria and the force Community Engagement Department have indicated that a pilot is likely to go ahead in Wooler during 2006.

Chevington

Whilst not an area of chronic socio-economic deprivation, Chevington is recognised by the area command to have more problems with crime and disorder than Wooler. Senior managers in the Northumberland command also highlighted the fact that there was less pre-existing community capacity in Chevington. Support for the police was less strong than in

Wooler and officers highlighted previous attempts at community engagement (such as a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and a project initiated by Help The Aged) that had not been sustained. All felt that Chevington was a more difficult area in which to secure and sustain public involvement.

It was evident that the project in Chevington took longer to gain momentum. Early observations at meetings suggested that – as is often the case – community attendees had come with the expectation that their role would be to highlight problems for the police to take action on. When the action planning process was introduced, however, there was a marked change in the level of community participation in suggesting solutions to problems, as well as highlighting problems that existed.

The beat team felt that they had made a good start at getting the community to participate and had developed a hard core of meeting attendees that were prepared to give up their time. One member of the beat team did express concern that this group of people were not necessarily representative of the community as a whole and the team felt it was important to try and ensure representation.

The beat team were generally prepared to consider any type of action in response to problems. One suggestion for direct community participation – community members operating speed gun equipment – was not adopted. Beat team members also said they did not favour citizen patrol, as this might lead to inappropriate action.

Box 10 Examples of effective partnership working and problem-solving in Chevington

- Gaming machines ('one armed bandits') were attracting children to loiter near the fish and chip shop in the precinct in Hadston. The beat team and local residents negotiated with the shop owner to get the machines removed.
- Chewing gum was removed from the pavement in the shopping precinct in Hadston, helping to improve the general look of the area. Graffiti removal packs were also handed out to local people and shopkeepers.
- Speeding was identified as a priority and targeted by the police. Police staged a focused operation over a period of days. This resulted in several tickets being issued.
- Multi-agency working on provision of extra youth services – The Grainger Trust provided 'multi-sports' nights; a local man organised boxing training in the community centre; Red Row junior school undertook a project highlighting physical problems in the area; a 'youth providers' meeting' was arranged so partners could co-ordinate their work and highlight gaps in provision.
- The Grainger Trust agreed to 'project manage' a new community park.
- The Residents' Association distributed material to publicise the beat team and their contact details – including fridge magnets, key rings, and stickers.
- Parish council emergency contact cards were provided to all households, with grid references for the villages.

Objective: Provide better feedback to communities

The key aim of the Northumbria demonstration project was to create a two-way, ongoing dialogue between the police and a community. This involves the police providing feedback to communities both generally and in specific relation to their involvement. In order to achieve this, it was felt that the profile of the beat teams in Wooler and Chevington needed to be raised. The new ways of contacting the police introduced as part of the project also needed to be publicised.

The post holder implemented a number of ideas intended to increase public awareness of the project and of the beat team officers in each area, including:

- newsletters, distributed by parish councils;
- a web presence for the projects on the police authority website; and
- fridge magnets, phone book stickers, and key rings.

The post holder was able to overcome initial reluctance from some officers to having their photographs and contact details publicised. One community beat manager has shown commitment to the project by allowing key partners and members of the community to have a mobile telephone number that will be answered on or off duty.

One member of the beat team in Chevington expressed disappointment that, despite the name and photograph of the Community Beat Manager in Chevington being widely publicised, the survey conducted by local residents suggested that a majority of respondents said they did not know who their local beat officer was. It is possible that there was not enough time between the publicity and the survey for there to have been an impact. It is also possible that there is a section of the community who are not concerned about the identity of their local officer and are unaware of the project.

In Chevington, the beat team sensed that, prior to the project, local people felt uninformed about policing in the area. It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to undertake a detailed study of the impact of the newsletters in Wooler and Chevington. The beat teams in both areas felt that the newsletters were more likely to be effective due to their 'professional' appearance. The newsletters were numbered, well designed and printed as opposed to photocopied.

In Chevington, the parish have set up a new newsletter, which will incorporate the Chevington beat newsletter developed during the pilot. The principal feedback channel to the wider community is therefore being sustained beyond the demonstration project by aligning the work with local partners. The position in Wooler is less clear. The beat team there felt that a key difficulty with sustaining the project would be in finding resources for printing. This would now have to be met from the area command budget, as opposed to the demonstration project budget, unless funding could be secured from the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership.

As well as feedback focused at the wider community via newsletters, the local action meetings in both Wooler and Chevington allowed for direct feedback from beat teams to community attendees. Observations at meetings in both areas suggested that the police were as forthcoming as possible with this feedback and progress against the action plans was provided at each meeting. The post holder and the beat teams hoped that the hard core of meeting attendees would disseminate feedback to their wider circle of friends, family and contacts. It is also beyond the scope of this evaluation to judge with any certainty how widely this community dissemination of feedback occurred.

In Wooler, the Market Towns Initiative, a key partner in the project, provided funding for electronic computer information points in shops windows on the high street. Again, it was beyond the scope of the evaluation to assess the impact of these.

Objective: Engagement process that leads to local service improvements

Service improvements in the pilot areas related to three key areas: contact, accessibility and visibility; capacity to engage; and partnership working.

Contact, accessibility and visibility

In both areas, the service improvements most emphasised related to new channels of communication between the public and the police – particularly the voicemail and e-mail services.

Beat team officers in both Wooler and Chevington said they had received more intelligence from the community since the voicemail and e-mail were set up. They felt the public was much more likely to report non-urgent incidents and information by these methods, as opposed to coming in person and perhaps finding the police station shut, or having to go via a central call centre. This was particularly successful in Chevington, where the intelligence provided by the community to police prior to the pilot was minimal. Beat officers said their contact with the community via these methods was now 'almost daily'.

Another advantage of the new methods of communication is that the police can easily provide community members with feedback on specific problems and issues, on a one-to-one basis. Beat officers in Wooler highlighted how the new forms of contact also saved time and resources. Being able to receive and leave non-urgent messages freed up officers' time to devote to other community-oriented activities.

In Wooler, the police station was reopened to the public on certain days of the week as a result of the project. This reintroduced a service and provided reassurance for people who preferred to report an incident directly to an officer.

Also in Wooler, beat team officers adopted 'micro-beats' as a way of working and engaging with the public. Officers had individual plans and targets for engagement, including being in certain places at certain times and visiting local shops on a regular basis. Other simple ideas for increased visibility, suggested by the community, were also adopted. For example, officers started to park their vehicles at the front of the police station in Wooler, instead of at the rear.

Capacity to engage

The post holder and the demonstration project has had a clear impact on the willingness and ability of beat teams to engage with partners and the wider community. Most beat team members felt this was the case. Although some officers felt that, to some extent, the project 'formalised' what they already did; others acknowledged that the post holder had shown them different ways to approach community engagement.

There was some evidence of attitude change during the project. Observations and informal interviews at the first action planning event in Wooler cast a degree of doubt on the commitment of beat officers to the new approach. A commanding officer mentioned that there is often reluctance to adopt new approaches – especially if it is thought that it may involve significant extra work. By the end of the project it was clear that beat teams in both areas felt the project had been a success and were fully committed to sustaining it as fully as they felt they could.

The project attempted to raise the profile of the beat teams in the two pilot areas by a number of means, including printing officers' photographs and contact details on newsletters and posters. The post holder also passed on specific engagement skills – such as effective facilitation and alternative approaches to involving communities and partners. By the end of the project, beat teams were aware of the impact that the withdrawal of the post holder would have and were planning and implementing a gradual transfer of roles and responsibilities.

It is possible that the project will have a wider effect on policing services in Northumbria if lessons from the pilot areas are transferred to other command areas. Senior command officers and the central Community Engagement Department believed practice from the project could be rolled out to other areas and that some more general learning on engagement would be transferable to non-rural areas.

Partnership working

Another improvement in service that can be recognised as prompted by the demonstration project is the increase and improvement in the quality of partnership working in the two pilot areas.

In Wooler, the post holder broadened the scope of partnership working, making the beat team aware of the value of working with local schools, churches and other smaller networks, as well as more usual partners such as local authorities.

In Chevington, the monthly beat meeting gave partnership working a base and forum. It also attracted contributions from partners that had not previously been heavily involved, such as the Grainger Trust. The project emphasised the importance of the parish council as a partner.

Objective: Increased public satisfaction with the police service

It was beyond the scope of the evaluation to robustly measure any changes in public satisfaction as a result of the two pilot projects.

There was anecdotal evidence to suggest the project had an impact. Interviews with members of the public, partner agency representatives, and police officers in both Wooler and Chevington all suggested that the demonstration project had a positive impact on public satisfaction with the police.

Police officers in both areas emphasised increased contact as a major factor in their perception that satisfaction had increased. They felt the public appreciated the new ways in which they could contact the police. One officer highlighted that prior to the project local people could only telephone the police via a central call centre. This was frustrating, as the person answering the phone had no knowledge of the local area. In Wooler, there is a police station, but it is not open either twenty-four hours a day or seven days a week.

Parish councillors at the crime and disorder forum in Wooler were also very positive about the project, saying that it had “given [them] a voice”. The beat team and the inspector for north Northumberland emphasised that as a relatively low crime area, satisfaction with the local policing service was already high in Wooler. The project could have been expected to have more of an impact on public satisfaction in Chevington.

Objective: Engagement process that informs strategic decision-making and organisational development

The evidence relating to this aim can be separated into strategic impacts on both the police authority and the police force.

Impact on the police authority

The demonstration projects were initially designed to benefit police authorities, though it soon became clear that there could also be positive benefits for the respective forces.

The strategic benefits for Northumbria police authority during the life of the demonstration project have been relatively modest. However, this is largely because the authority chose to wait for the evaluation of the project (and those of the other two demonstration projects) before deciding how to bring the learning to bear on organisational development.

There are several possible reasons that may have impacted Northumbria police authority's reluctance to adopt an action-learning approach to the demonstration project in relation to strategic organisational development.

- There was a wider context of change in the authority during the demonstration project, including reform of the committee structure.
- The working culture of the authority was systematic and fairly traditional, making an action learning approach less likely.
- Authority staff felt that other developments in the police reform agenda, particularly proposed force restructuring, had left the authority with little time to focus on wider strategic development.

The key strategic learning for the police authority came out of the nature of the models tested. Both staff and members felt strongly that the work undertaken by the post holder was too local and resource-intensive for the police authority. They felt that in the future the authority should not attempt to engage at this level, but should have more of a strategic overview. So, for example, although it was recognised that learning from projects designed specifically to engage with excluded (rural) communities could be applied to reaching other excluded communities identified by profiling work, the authority felt this would be best taken forward (at the local level) by the force. Whilst there was recognition of the strategic value of the role in relation to profiling and monitoring, enabling, and promoting effective practice, the authority again felt that it is not best placed to undertake this type of role.

Towards the end of the project, a new police authority committee was formed to deal with community engagement. Observations at the Community Engagement Committee's first meeting suggested that authority members in Northumbria are still very committed to existing forms of engagement – principally Police Community Consultative Groups, known in Northumbria as Police and Community Forums. Minutes from the forum meetings suggested that, although attendances had recently risen in some areas, they were still relatively low for an area command-based meeting. It was also evident that, in common with many traditional forum meetings, local problems, as opposed to strategic issues were discussed.

It is not clear if the demonstration project will have a longer-term impact on the strategic community engagement role of Northumbria police authority. The post holder's view was that the more local, or parish-based engagement could be extended in line with the expansion of neighbourhood policing teams in Northumbria. Persistent local problems and issues, that may require a higher level or co-ordinated response, could be fed from these meetings up to the area-based forums. These forums could be re-engineered to focus principally on strategic issues. The Best Value review of neighbourhood policing undertaken in Northumbria also recommends a re-engineering of Police and Community Forums.

Impact on the police force

The demonstration project can be seen to have had a more immediate impact on strategic decision-making and organisational development in the force.

Senior officers in the Northumberland area command believe the beat teams in Wooler and Chevington have benefited from the 'fresh pair of eyes' brought by the post holder. This has exposed them to a different way of viewing and approaching community engagement and provided specific engagement skills.

Ongoing assessment of the pilot project in Wooler by the sector inspector persuaded him to roll out the model of engagement in the neighbouring areas of Rothbury and Seahouses. This decision was backed by the Chief Inspector, the Superintendent and the area Commander.

The Rothbury model was operational before the end of the demonstration project; an initial forum was held in Seahouses during the final fortnight of the project.

At a force level, senior officers in both the Northumberland area command and the Community Engagement Department believed some of the learning from the project would be transferable to other (not necessarily rural) areas and were committed to feeding it in to the service's Best Value review of neighbourhood policing. An example of this is the use of volunteers, which is likely to be piloted in Wooler as originally planned during the project.

Objective: Implement a more strategic framework to secure community participation

At a local level, the demonstration project was successful in developing two different models for engaging communities in policing. The models were based on strategic profiling to identify communities not previously engaged with the police, and strategic mapping of existing engagement and community networks in the two areas.

The post holder introduced a wide range of new and tailored engagement tools to the two areas; in particular, participatory appraisal methods and action planning were found to be useful ways for systematically involving communities in identifying, considering and tackling local problems, in partnership with the police and other agencies.

The project also introduced new skills and approaches to the beat teams in both areas. Officers have benefited from a fresh approach to partnership working and a framework is in place for this to continue in both areas. The Wooler model has already been rolled out to two other rural areas of the Northumberland command.

Will the pilot projects be sustained?

Officers in both beat teams said they were committed to sustaining the models of local engagement trialled during the demonstration project. Crucially, continuing the work also had strong support at sector Inspector level and was also viewed positively by the area Commander.

It is not clear whether the models will be sustained at quite the same level as during the pilot period. In Wooler, the beat team feel they can easily keep the basic model running, including working with micro-beats and individual engagement targets. They are committed to continuing the action planning at periodic multi-agency forums. The Wooler forum benefited from a strong and committed chair drawn from the community, so the process may well be sustained.

A key issue in Wooler is whether the initial consultation exercise that ideally would take place at least every year will be scaled down. The sector Inspector ensured postcard-style questionnaires were 'stockpiled' before the end of the project. It is not clear whether, without the support and guidance of the post holder, officers will administer these to as wide a range of agencies and groups, or be as proactive in persuading partners to participate in the distribution and collection process. The danger is that future consultations on priorities and problems will not reflect such a wide cross-section of community views.

Another key issue is resources for publishing newsletters and publicity materials. These mainly came from the demonstration project budget. Officers felt the 'professional' look of these products gave them more impact. If the beat team are to maintain or increase their profile in this way, resources would in future have to be found from the command budget.

In Chevington, the risk of the project not being sustained to the same level is perhaps greater, as the model was more resource-intensive. The beat team has arranged for the beat meeting

to be co-ordinated with the parish council meeting; the former taking place half an hour prior to the latter, at the same venue. The beat newsletter has also been incorporated into a new parish council newsletter, ensuring it will be sustained.

The biggest risk in Chevington is to the action planning process. The beat team, as opposed to a member of the community, has undertaken to assume the role of meeting facilitator. There was a sense that this may not result in as great a degree of 'facilitation'. It is possible that, rather than move to the 'next level' with the community assuming greater responsibility and ownership of the process, the model will revert to what it was before the action planning was introduced – with the community playing a relatively passive role and just identifying problems for the beat team, or partner agencies, to attempt to deal with.

Did the demonstration project achieve its overall aim?

The stated aim of the demonstration project in Northumbria was to create an ongoing dialogue and relationship with an identified hard-to-reach community.

The project was extremely successful in creating a dialogue with communities in two very distinct rural areas. In one, the post holder broadened and enhanced an existing community network. In the other he acted as a gateway for the force to a community that had become largely disengaged. The engagement methods used during the project were particularly successful in creating an effective dialogue. New channels of communication between the police and citizens allowed for both increased reporting and more efficient and effective feedback. Participatory methods, such as action planning, allowed citizens to actively contribute to the identification and resolution of problems in their communities and to feel a degree of ownership over the process.

It was not possible for the evaluation to assess whether the dialogue and relationships will be sustained after the life of the demonstration project. It is possible that, in the absence of support provided by the post holder, the models of engagement will be sustained in a slightly less intensive way.

The role of the authority in facilitating this type of dialogue will not be sustained. If this type of dialogue were to continue, it would rely on the force to adopt the model more widely and adapt it for use with other communities and in different types of area.

The authority wishes to create an ongoing dialogue at a more strategic level, probably by the re-engineering of existing Police and Community Forum meetings. It is not yet clear how this will be achieved.

Assessment – is it a useful role?

This role was intended to create an ongoing dialogue with a hard-to-reach community, which it did very successfully. Key aspects of the role in this respect were the post holder's perceived impartiality, associated with being an employee of the police authority, which allowed him to act as a 'gateway' to a specific community for the force, and a community development skills set, which exposed police officers to different ways of working and built capacity within both beat teams and communities. Officers felt that, in one area in particular, the engagement project may not have got off the ground without the post holder's initial support.

There were some concerns over the intensity of resources required to set up and run the pilot projects and also the time taken to transfer 'ownership' and skills. These issues could probably be resolved if the role were developed and refined. Also, the work left behind practical tools that will help transfer learning from the project to other areas and sectors. The enabling aspect of the role is transferable to work with any group not previously included in engagement.

Stakeholders in the force were divided as to whether the role had to be based in the police authority. There were clear advantages to this though. The 'brokering' aspect between communities and uniformed officers is one. Many stakeholders also felt that the image and profile of the authority were enhanced as a result of the work.

Is it a strategic role?

Police authorities have traditionally been responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place for obtaining the views of communities on policing matters and to obtain their co-operation in preventing crime. More widely, police authorities are supposed to ensure an 'efficient and effective' police service. It is not possible or realistic for authorities to engage directly with all citizens and communities on local service issues – often the force are best placed to do this. Authorities can ensure the force is discharging these engagement responsibilities effectively. This role could assist police authorities' strategic monitoring and enabling role in the following ways.

- Periodic community profiling to highlight gaps in the provision of community engagement and groups that may require more targeted engagement.
- Providing force personnel with alternative approaches and perspectives on how to engage with the community.
- Providing force personnel with specific effective practice tools and templates.
- Making the force aware of more general effective practice in community engagement.
- Providing the force with an accessible community engagement 'champion', who officers can contact to 'bounce ideas off'.
- Brokering relationships and building trust between the force and communities and groups it has not engaged with effectively in the past.

Having a post holder with a skills set that includes community development and engagement skills also means the authority retains the capacity to engage directly with a specific group or community if it feels the force are unable or unwilling to do so.

Finally, this role may be useful in providing a 'missing link' between very local community engagement around problems and more high level engagement on strategic priorities. In the course of initiating and enabling local engagement, an authority member of staff becomes aware of what is happening at a local level and how local structures may be linked to and help

to inform more strategic engagement. Police authority members can also be involved in the process in some capacity.

Members and staff at Northumbria police authority appreciated the value of the role, but felt that it did not fit with how the authority saw itself working in the long term. The enabling aspects of the role, in particular, were seen as too operational, and the authority would not wish its staff to be working at a local level in this way. The role may be more appropriate for authorities who see themselves as having a role at more than one level, or who view 'hands-on' working by authority staff as contributing to long-term strategic objectives for the service as a whole.