

**Inspection of Congleton and Vale Royal BCU
Cheshire Constabulary
February 2004**



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Introduction

1. Between 23 and 27 February 2004 Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary conducted the Inspection of Congleton and Vale Royal (BCU).
2. There are over 300 basic command units (BCUs) in England and Wales and no two are alike. They vary in size from a little over 100 officers to over 1,000; some serve densely populated, ethnically diverse inner cities, while others cover vast tracts of sparsely populated countryside. What they do share are some key aims and objectives, specifically to work with partner agencies on reducing crime in their areas, and do so with integrity. Scrutiny of police performance is shifting from aggregate force outcomes to the performance of individual BCUs, with the recognition that policing is essentially a locally delivered service. However, BCUs are not islands – they operate within a framework of policy and support determined by headquarters-based chief officer teams. The precise configuration of policing units and the balance of resources between HQ and BCUs varies across the 43 forces in England and Wales.
3. The focus on performance in reducing crime and disorder is likely to be relentless. Forces and police authorities, working with local authorities and other community safety partners, will need to raise their game year after year. Indeed, the statutory regime of Best Value demands 'continuous improvement' and an array of sanctions exist if authorities fail to deliver this. The Government recognises the need for additional resources in the fight against crime, and the 2002-05 comprehensive spending review (CSR) settlement is acknowledged to be the most generous the police service has received for many years. More police officers, better communications and information technology, and ever more sophisticated forensic techniques should all enhance police effectiveness. However, the potential for the service as a whole to deliver better results in crime reduction and detection cannot conceal an inescapable fact – that performance between BCUs operating in similar policing environments and with comparable resources varies to a degree that is at times remarkable.
4. Leadership by BCU commanders is probably the single most important determinant of BCU effectiveness. The responsibilities of command are significant, and some superintendents are not well supported in terms of the strength of their management teams and/or the quality and quantity of support from headquarters. Without exception, staff in pilot sites wanted their management teams to be more visible and accessible. One outcome from BCU inspections should be a better understanding of the practical manifestations of effective leadership.
5. In trying to make sense of the variations in operational performance that exist – to differing degrees – in every force, a key ingredient is *focus*. The best performers focused efforts of their staff through timely, dynamic local briefings that are supported by a well-managed intelligence system. They set targets and make sure that staff are aware of them, they communicate results and celebrate success. They define responsibilities and hold individuals to account for how they have used their time. In some BCUs this performance culture is absent, reflected in the fact that the personal development review (PDR) system of setting and monitoring individual goals is in abeyance. A nationwide rolling programme of inspections that focus upon performance and leadership is thus likely to produce an upturn in results.

Note

For consistency the term Basic Command Unit (BCU) will be used throughout this report, albeit that within Cheshire Constabulary local policing is delivered through a divisional structure.

Overview

- 1.** Cheshire Constabulary is responsible for policing the county of Cheshire including the two unitary authority areas of Warrington and Halton. Cheshire covers an area of 2,083.4 square kilometres, and has a resident population of 980,000. The county is diverse in nature, ranging from the Pennine Hills in the east, through agricultural central Cheshire, to the industrial Dee Estuary in South Wirral.
- 2.** The chief officer group (COG) heads the Force. This is led by the Chief Constable and comprises the deputy chief constable, assistant chief constable (territorial policing), assistant chief constable (operations support) and an assistant chief officer with responsibility for finance, administration, information management, property and transport, and legal services.
- 3.** Force strength currently stands at 2,214 full-time equivalent (FTE) officers and 1,128 police staff members and 180 special constables.
- 4.** The Force comprises six territorial BCUs that are known in Force as divisions. These are coterminous with local authority/district boundaries. The annual revenue budget (2003/04) for the Force is £140.8 million. The Force devolves police staff salaries, but not those of police officers, to BCUs and virement of over £3,000 at BCU level must have the approval of a chief officer.

Congleton and Vale Royal BCU

- 5.** Congleton and Vale Royal BCU was formed in 1999. Prior to adopting its current structure, Vale Royal was policed by the former Northwich BCU and Congleton Borough was policed by the Crewe and Macclesfield BCUs. Congleton and Vale Royal BCU covers two crime and disorder partnership and local authority areas – Congleton and Vale Royal. The BCU boundary is coterminous with both council areas and also covers 65 parish council areas.
- 6.** The BCU is divided into two community-policing areas (CPAs), each managed by an inspector. Each CPA has its own community action teams (CATs). The CPAs are:
 - Vale Royal CPA covering, Northwich, Winsford, Frodsham, Helsby and Tarporley; and
 - Congleton CPA, covering Congleton, Middlewich, Holmes Chapel, Sandbach and Alsager.
- 7.** Congleton and Vale Royal BCU headquarters is at Northwich which, at the time of the Inspection, was undergoing substantial renovation using funds from the premises improvement fund. When complete this will provide new accommodation for the BCU help desk and a vulnerable witness interview facility. The BCU is also policed from stations at Congleton, Winsford, Sandbach, Middlewich, Frodsham and Alsager.

8. The BCU covers 591.2 square kilometres and has a population of 212,749. It is a relatively affluent area with pockets of deprivation, notably in Winsford. Whilst much of the BCU is rural, and includes Delamere Forest and is crossed by a substantial network of footpaths and waterways, the area still has a significant chemical and industrial base.

9. The BCU has 322 police officers, of which 258 are constables. In addition, 63 police staff, including three community support officers (CSOs), and 32 special constables support these officers.

10. The BCU Commander is a superintendent. He is supported by a command team consisting of a chief inspector (operations manager), a detective chief inspector (crime manager), a resource manager and a human resources manager.

11. The process of the Inspection was tightly focused around leadership and performance, coupled with a visit to Force headquarters and pre-inspection analysis of key data and documents. These documents, data and other BCU issues were explored through an initial meeting with the BCU Commander and his command team, and then a series of interviews, meetings and focus groups during the week of the field Inspection. A total of 175 people were seen in a combination of 50 interviews and focus groups and unscheduled visits. A number of reality checks (discussions and unscheduled meetings with staff) were performed during this period, which included visits to all outlying police stations, other than Alsager. The BCU Inspection concluded with a verbal debrief to the BCU Commander and his command team, and a separate 'overview' debrief with the assistant chief constable (territorial policing) and a representative of the Cheshire Police Authority.

12. The Inspection team would like to thank the BCU Commander and all staff in Congleton and Vale Royal BCU for the co-operation and assistance afforded them during the course of the Inspection.

Part One – Leadership

The BCU Management Team

The Commander

1.1 The superintendent has twenty-three years' police service and he has been BCU Commander at Congleton and Vale Royal since February 2002. He has experience within CID and uniform early in his career and later in operational support roles and as staff officer to the Chief Constable. Prior to his current posting he was the deputy BCU commander at Warrington.

Chief Inspector (Operations Manager)

1.2 The chief inspector (operations) has twenty-five years' service and he has been in post since July 2003. Prior to this he worked in uniform operations at headquarters and with the 'taking control review' that had been instigated by the Chief Constable.

Detective Chief Inspector (Crime Manager)

1.3 The detective chief inspector has twenty-six years' service and has been in post since June 2003. He has worked in a variety of crime related roles across the Force. He is also one of the Force's senior investigating officers, having spent a large part of his career in the CID.

Divisional Resource Manager

1.4 The resource manager has been in post since November 2000 and Cheshire Constabulary has employed her since April 1996. She previously worked for the Department of Education and Employment. In 2003 she obtained an NVQ Level 4 in Business Administration.

Divisional Human Resources Manager

1.5 The human resources (HR) manager has been in post since November 2003. This post was created, as a pilot, following comments in a previous Inspection Report, which highlighted the need for more professional personnel advice at a local level. The HR manager is CIPD qualified and has previously worked in HR roles for the Local Government Ombudsman and for the Metropolitan Police Service.

Strategic Management

1.6 There are four key policing objectives for the Force for 2003/04, which seek to balance and reflect national and local priorities. These are:

- to improve the response to public calls for assistance;
- to reduce violent crime, burglary and vehicle crime and bring more offenders to justice;
- to reduce serious and fatal road traffic collisions; and
- to reduce fear by tackling disorder, nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

These key objectives are the subject of seven targets to:

- reduce recorded crime by 5%;
- reduce domestic burglary by 10%;
- reduce vehicle crime by 8%;
- increase burglary and vehicle crime detections;
- maintain high detection rates for violence;
- increase the number of offences brought to justice by 5%; and
- reduce serious and fatal traffic collisions by 5%.

1.7 Congleton and Vale Royal BCU has an annual business plan. This sets eight local objectives, which include additional priorities that were identified by the two local crime and disorder reduction partnerships (CDRPs), known locally as community safety partnerships (CSPs), as causing the most concern for local people, and internal measures decided on by the BCU command team.

1.8 The Congleton CDRP has identified five priorities for tackling crime and disorder:

- making safer communities - with a focus on town centre initiatives;
- fire safety;
- crime reduction – primarily domestic burglary, domestic violence and vehicle crime;
- reducing substance misuse; and
- road safety.

The Vale Royal CDRP identified six priorities:

- reducing crime;
- reducing anti-social behaviour;
- promoting safer communities;
- reducing offending and re-offending;
- improving road safety; and
- reducing substance misuse.

1.9 The Congleton and Vale Royal BCU business plan objectives take account of the CDRP priorities and reflect national, Force and local requirements. These are:

Objectives reflecting local and national priorities:

- to improve the response to public calls for assistance;
- to reduce violent crime, burglary and vehicle crime and bring more offenders to justice;
- to reduce serious and fatal road traffic collisions; and
- to reduce fear by tackling disorder, nuisance and anti-social behaviour.

Local measures:

- to tackle Class A drugs supply and possession;
- to reduce sickness absence;
- to tackle domestic violence; and
- to maintain stability, best practice and identify areas for improvement in BCU performance.

1.10 The local measures do not have clear targets, with the exception of the sickness absence objective (which adopts the wider Force target). There is a range of activity indicators but no outcome targets for the drugs, domestic violence and 'stability/management of change' objectives. Hence it will be difficult to say if the BCU has achieved these objectives and equally difficult to link activities to desired outcomes.

1.11 Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recognises that there has been considerable energy directed at drugs offences, domestic violence and towards the internal 'stability' objective, and a major drugs operation (Clean Sweep) is to be applauded. It is also pleasing to find that the business plan is considered to be a live document. However, greater clarity would be achieved if all objectives set out in the business plan met SMARTS criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound and stretching).

RECOMMENDATION 1

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the command team ensure that all the objectives developed for the 2004/05 BCU business plan should aim to meet SMARTS criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timebound and stretching).

1.12 The BCU also has a national intelligence model (NIM) control strategy, which reflects the objectives set out in the BCU business plan. **The control strategy is comprehensive and contains a range of strategic and tactical options; indeed in the view of the Inspection team it was overly detailed and should focus more clearly on what must be done and what is achievable. The BCU command team is urged to produce a more concise document when the strategy is next reviewed. The strategic intelligence assessment (SIA) that underpins the control strategy is also too detailed and would benefit from a tighter focus.** However the Inspection team recognise the effort and thought that has gone into developing these documents and understand that the NIM is still being developed in Cheshire.

Operational Leadership

1.13 The BCU Commander was universally highly regarded and considered to be visible, accessible and caring. He also gave very clear messages about integrity and valuing diversity. External partners also shared this view. This perception did not only apply to the BCU Commander; all other members of the BCU command team were viewed in a similar light. The Inspection team has seldom come across such consistency of approach and clear commitment to visibility. A structured programme of visits, meetings and patrol activity supported this genuine enthusiasm by command team members and was considered by the Inspection team to be a model of good practice.

1.14 It was noted that whilst at the level of inspector there was very clear functional and line management responsibility, this was not apparent across the command team and it is particularly important that these roles are clarified following the welcome introduction of a human resources manager. Whilst this had the clear benefit that there was a shared responsibility for performance the **Inspection team suggest that clearer lines of accountability should be established for command team members.**

1.15 The re-introduction of inspectors to lead uniform response blocks is to be applauded and has provided very clear operational direction and is providing an improved platform for intrusive supervision.

1.16 The BCU command team was concerned at the level of management resilience on the BCU. The Inspection team agree that this is an issue that needs to be monitored, particularly in the light of the demands of dealing with two sets of district authority partners, and due to the geographic spread of the BCU.

Organisational Culture

1.17 The day-to-day working relationship between police officers and police staff was described as positive, as was the relationship between uniform officers and colleagues in the CID. However, there were some tensions between CAT staff and uniform response officers and control room staff. These limited tensions might be addressed by greater understanding of each other's roles.

1.18 It was clear that staff realised that inappropriate conduct would not be tolerated and the Inspection team came across no direct evidence of such conduct and were given examples of inappropriate language being challenged. However, there was a limited and inconsistent understanding of cultural differences and very few officers had received recent training in this area. The BCU is to be commended for instigating some awareness raising about the cultural needs of the gypsy traveller community, of which there are significant numbers on the BCU. The BCU command team also recognise that there is need for a structured approach to training in this critical area. **The BCU command team is urged to pursue the development of diversity training, in conjunction with headquarters, as a priority.**

Business Planning

1.19 In common with other BCUs in Cheshire Constabulary, Congleton and Vale Royal BCU produces an annual business plan. This plan sets out the objectives for the following year and includes a range of performance indicators and targets. These have already been discussed at paragraph 1.9 above.

1.20 The plan consists of eight objectives and associated action plans to address them. Each action plan is assigned to a manager and contains details of key issues, performance measures and links to the community safety strategies for the BCU.

1.21 There were clear and visible displays of performance data throughout the stations visited. In addition the BCU produced a laminated booklet that was circulated to all members of staff that contained the key objectives in the business plan and an adhesive insert for inclusion in each new pocket notebook that summarised the plan. Despite this, when staff were asked about the objectives, most staff referred to the 'new' electronic briefing system and to the recent introduction of personal performance indicators and not to performance against BCU objectives. The Inspection team was surprised by the apparent lack of awareness of the overall current performance of the BCU and indeed at the limited understanding, at an operational level, of the key objectives in the business plan. The Inspection team are aware that the BCU command team is seeking to develop more innovative approaches to improve this understanding.

1.22 However, overall the communications within the BCU were impressive. There was substantial evidence of face-to-face briefings from command team members and other managers on the BCU. This included the use of the Force core briefing system. The vast majority of staff felt that communication was a two-way process and were convinced that they were being listened to. A weekly paper bulletin was also produced by the BCU and notice boards were well used, in particular the use of notice boards to display good news stories was impressive. The Force intranet system hosts a 'taking control' site that provides information about the major Force review that is being undertaken. Staff valued the information that was available on the site and also made use of the ability to give feedback to senior managers and to ask them questions through the intranet system.

1.23 Many internal communications use the Force IT network and systems. Whilst the quantity and quality of information available to staff is impressive, many staff expressed concerns as to the volume and the use of 'blanket' e-mails which resulted in many staff receiving unnecessary information.

1.24 Whilst it was not a main focus of the Inspection, the Inspection team encountered a range of stand-alone databases when examining business planning processes. **The Inspection team was concerned at the number of stand-alone databases being used on the BCU and the command team is urged to review and rationalise these systems.**

Community Policing

1.25 Local policing services are delivered through CATs. CAT members with geographical beat responsibilities perform a critical function in establishing and maintaining community confidence. Partners complimented the local emphasis and commitment of CATs to solving problems.

1.26 There are two sector inspectors who manage the CATs and provide a strategic overview. They are held to account through the recently introduced five weekly performance review process with their chief inspector, which they welcomed. The Inspection team was impressed by the way they were applying this process to their own staff. However, there are some inconsistencies about how this is being applied across the BCU.

1.27 Five sergeants manage the CATs and a total of 22 constables and three community support officers are dedicated to this function, supported by special constables.

1.28 The BCU command team has produced a CAT strategy, which defines the role of the CAT and gives guidance on deployment, including an abstraction policy. CAT officers welcome this strategy, although it was not widely understood outside the CAT teams and command team.

1.29 There was a lack of consistent understanding of the role and function of CATs amongst many other officers, particularly on response block duties, at constable and sergeant level. **The BCU command team is urged to raise awareness of the value and purpose of CAT teams across the BCU.**

1.30 The Inspection team was particularly impressed by the success of CATs in taking a robust approach to tackling Class 'A' drugs dealing. They had also been combating violent crime through liaison with the licensed trade and supervision of public houses and clubs, including the development of effective pub watch schemes. It was also clear that a great deal of energy was being put into building effective relationships with schools and young people.

1.31 The CATs also work very closely with the BCU crime and disorder unit and with partners to tackle neighbourhood level issues, particularly disorder and other quality of life matters. This was evident in enforcement activity directed at reducing disorder and in productive regular meetings with representatives of local authorities and registered social landlords. It was also clear that they strive to be accessible and recognisable, as was clear from their commitment to dealing with issues raised at town and parish council meetings, which they frequently attend.

Community Safety Partnerships

1.32 The priorities of the two community safety partnerships in Vale Royal and Congleton have been set out above at paragraph 1.8. Both partnerships have recently conducted self-assessments and recognised that their strategies need to be developed and

in particular there is a need to include outcome targets, which are largely absent from both documents.

1.33 There is also a need to further develop the performance management regimes of the partnerships. It was pleasing to note that in Congleton there was a proposal to use the new council performance management framework to support the partnership. It was also encouraging to find that both partnerships had identified key partners who were not contributing fully and were taking a robust approach to address this.

1.34 A number of encouraging partnership initiatives were identified. In particular the development of a drugs programme, which took into account the experience of an effective drugs project in Blackpool (Operation Tower). However, there was little evidence of evaluation across a range of initiatives.

1.35 The absence of rigorous evaluations was not confined to the partnerships. The Inspection team recognises that the BCU command team has identified the need to improve evaluation and assessment. **However, the BCU command team is urged to rapidly develop a framework for evaluation, assessment and monitoring, where appropriate in conjunction with partner agencies.**

1.36 An inspector heads the BCU crime and disorder unit. He is supported by and responsible for three crime reduction advisers, two anti-social behaviour co-ordinators, and a neighbourhood watch co-ordinator and schools liaison officer. Additionally it has been agreed that a business watch co-ordinator and information exchange officer will also be appointed. Partners valued the role played by this unit. The Inspection team also witnessed a number of pertinent suggestions by this team highlighting the importance of partnership working, including concrete suggestions that were acted on, in response to the tactical intelligence assessment.

1.37 The importance of the two CDRPs is recognised by all members of the command team. The feedback received from partners with regard to the personal contribution made by the BCU Commander and his team to both partnerships was highly valued.

1.38 In both boroughs the community safety partnerships were considered by partners to be the most effective of the strategic partnerships that fed into the borough local strategic partnerships.

1.39 At operational level CATs displayed a real understanding and commitment to partnership work. However, this was not reflected across the BCU, below the rank of inspector.

1.40 Over the last year the BCU has taken a very active approach, in conjunction with both local authorities and registered social landlords, to tackling anti-social behaviour. In Vale Royal four anti-social behaviour orders have been obtained and in Congleton nine have been taken out. There has also been widespread use of acceptable behaviour contracts. However, it is suggested that the approach to enforcement of ASBOs is not

sufficiently rigorous and, outside the CATs and crime and disorder unit, understanding of the legislation and procedures is limited. It was also apparent that the approach to diversion and support to reduce or prevent offending was not as well developed as it was in relation to obtaining ASBOs. Partners also expressed some frustration with the lengthy legal processes adopted by the Force prior to application for an ASBO. **The BCU command team is urged, in conjunction with partners, to develop a clearer and more inclusive anti-social behaviour strategy that places greater emphasis on reducing offending risks and on the enforcement of the conditions of ASBOs. Such a strategy should be implemented and clearly communicated to all operational staff.**

Financial Management

1.41 The Force operates with a reasonable degree of devolved financial management. The BCU revenue budget includes all police staff costs, police officer overtime, premises costs, transport costs and supplies and services but does not include police pay and allowances. Targets are set for income generation. Once the budget for the financial year is set the BCU can vire between all budget heads (unless ring fenced, e.g. rates) in accordance with the Force's scheme of financial delegation. However, if the proposed permanent virement involves new policy, or has significant implications for the following year, then the proposal has to be approved by an officer at assistant chief constable level. There is no limit set on individual virement proposals. However, those above £3,000 are subject to more detailed scrutiny by the HQ finance department.

1.42 Congleton and Vale Royal BCU budget for 2003/04 is £2,186,505. When the Inspection started the BCU was predicting an overspend of £65,200, of which at least £42,000 was anticipated to be on the police overtime budget. At the end of the Inspection a substantially changed prediction was produced, which anticipated a notably smaller overspend and following the Inspection the Inspection team was told that the actual year end overspend on overtime was £32,000.

1.43 The overtime position is a particular concern, as it will exacerbate Cheshire Constabulary's anticipated expenditure on overtime and makes it less likely that the Force can achieve its contribution to meeting the national target for reducing overtime.

1.44 A number of reasons for the overtime overspend were put forward, including a shortage of substantive sergeants and the removal of control room operators from the BCU deployment centre in December to join the new call management bureau at Warrington. However, the Inspection team was very concerned that there was little evidence of rigorous control of overtime expenditure. This was particularly evident in the responses given by authorising officers and other managers when interviewed.

1.45 In addition to its base budget, the BCU receives external grant funding of £104,792 through the BCU fund, and £129,202 from the rural policing fund (this includes money carried forward from 2002/03). The expenditure on these grants was appropriately agreed with partners and is being spent according to profile. However, it took the Inspection team a number of attempts to establish the level of funding and to

identify the spend against profile and to establish who, other than the BCU Commander, has direct responsibility for controlling these funding streams.

RECOMMENDATION 2

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team introduce a rigorous and clear approach to the management of finance, and in particular to the control of police overtime. This should include clear guidance to, and accountability for, all managers and supervisors.

Health and Safety

1.46 The Inspection team was highly impressed by the rigorous approach adopted in relation to health and safety and risk assessments. An officer has been dedicated to this role for 14 months and has made significant progress in developing appropriate systems and processes to ensure compliance with health and safety regulations and towards enhancing the working environment for all staff within the BCU. The Police Federation was actively and appropriately involved in site visits and risk assessments. **The Inspection team recognise the progress the BCU have made to incorporate health and safety into working practices. The BCU command team is aware that an exit strategy is required, as the dedication of an operational police officer to a full time health and safety officer post is not sustainable in the long term. The command team made a bid, along with the other BCUs, for police staff growth to enable this post to be civilianised. However, due to financial constraints the Police Authority was unable to support this bid. The Inspection team is aware that the BCU command team intends to make a further bid for police staff growth, but it is suggested that alternatives, which do not involve growth, should also be considered.**

Police Federation and Staff Associations

1.47 The Inspection team met with five representatives from the Police Federation; there are no UNISON or GMB representatives on the BCU. The federation representatives were highly complimentary of the visibility and accessibility of the command team. Some concerns were expressed about the rigour of the sickness absence management policy and there were also some concerns raised about the quantitative nature and application of some personal performance indicators.

Absence Management

1.48 The level of sickness absence between April and December 2003 for both police officers and police staff is outlined in Figure 1, showing a comparison within the Force.

Figure 1: Officer sickness absence compared with Force

	Congleton and Vale Royal BCU	Cheshire Constabulary
Average number of days sickness – police officers (Apr-Dec 2003)	7.0	7.3
% change compared with same period 2002	-9.5%	-11%
Predicted level for Apr 03 – Mar 04	9.3	10.0

Figure 2: Police staff absence compared with Force

	Congleton and Vale Royal BCU	Cheshire Constabulary
Average number of days sickness – police staff (Apr-Dec 2003)	7.7	7.5
% change compared with same period 2002	-44.6%	-11%
Predicted level for Apr 03- Mar 04	10.4	9.9

1.49 The reductions in sickness absence for police officers and police staff are attributable to the positive emphasis given to sickness absence by the BCU command team, and the application of the Force attendance management procedure. Management information is available to supervisors. The ‘Bradford Score’ is applied within the BCU and is linked to competency-related payments and development opportunities.

1.50 An inspector is responsible for training, absence management, health and safety and accounting for staffing levels. This officer spends a great deal of time and energy dealing with absence management and has emphasised the personal responsibility of supervisors for managing staff absence.

1.51 A daily update on sickness absence and rigorous application of Force policy, including visits to officers and return to work interviews, has contributed to the reductions in sickness absence. The Inspection team was pleased to see a well-structured BCU guide for conducting back to work interviews.

1.52 The falls in sickness absence for police officers are laudable and also reflect the improvements made across the Constabulary. The decline in absence rates for police staff is even more marked. This latter fall is attributable to a reduction in long-term sickness absence and has brought the Congleton and Vale Royal sickness absence rates into line with the Force average.

Training and Development

1.53 An HR manager has recently been appointed to the BCU. In conjunction with other colleagues, she has identified a number of areas for improvement in training and development. As a first step, a sergeant has been appointed to manage training on a day-to-day basis. Mandatory self-defence training is delivered effectively locally and a new member of police staff has been appointed to deliver this training. The BCU has also done well in coping with a high level of probationary constables (71 at the time of the Inspection).

1.54 However, the Inspection team identified a number of gaps in training and development provision; these include probationary attachments to divisional specialist units, which were not consistent. In particular a number of probationers had not had the opportunity to undertake attachments to the roads policing unit and CID. The Inspection team considers that the attachment to the prisoner handling team (PHT) is ill-timed and should occur earlier in the probationary period. The Inspection team understand that there are difficulties in dealing with the current volume of probationers and recognise that a tutor unit is not a viable option on a BCU of this type, due to the relatively small number of officers and the spread of demand across various parts of the BCU. **However, it is suggested that the six-month attachment to CATs, which is offered at the end of the probationary period, is reviewed and that consideration is given to an earlier short structured attachment. This will enable probationers to develop problem-solving skills, an understanding of partnership working and of reassurance policing (such an understanding was not evident).**

1.55 The Inspection team was particularly impressed by the corporate commitment to learning at Force level. An example of this is a series of seminars organised by the performance review department, which have involved the Office of Public Management.

Performance Development Review (PDR) - Audit

1.56 Cheshire Constabulary has a PDR process for all police officers and police staff including chief officers. The basis for the PDR is to align individual performance and development with the corporate aims and objectives of the Constabulary and Police Authority. It is also aligned to the aims and objectives of the divisional business plan and crime and disorder reduction strategies. In addition, the process is intended to provide for career development within a current post.

1.57 Force policy dictates that PDRs should be conducted annually between March and June, however in practice this was not being done consistently. The Force recognises that completing all PDRs in this time frame is not always practical, for a variety of valid reasons (such as the movement of staff and returns to duty from long-term sickness). Each PDR should contain a review of the previous year's performance, performance rating, career planning, and performance priorities for the forthcoming year (linked to corporate strategic aims and/or business action plan), and development needs.

1.58 All staff also have a performance development portfolio (PDP), to record evidence of performance. Each PDP contains notes for guidance, and sections for indexed evidence, examples of evidence and development plans.

1.59 The Inspection team examined 53 PDRs from both police officers and police staff of different ranks and grades within the BCU. The aim of the audit is to ascertain the level of compliance with Force policy and national guidelines with regard to evidence of:

- completion of a PDR within the last year – *this was found in 50 of the files;*
- completion of a PDR within the previous year – *this was found in 22 of the files;*
- completion of interim reviews – *this was found in only 14 files;*
- a clear link between personal objectives and business objectives – *this was found in 42 files;*
- measurable objectives – *this was found in 23 files;*
- the gathering of evidence by individuals and line managers in the last year – *this was found in 48 files;* and
- a review of the priorities and objectives set in the previous year within the PDR – *this was found in 33 files.*

1.60 It was pleasing to note that nearly all the PDRs examined were current, which was a clear improvement on the previous year, although it was somewhat disappointing to find that so few had been the subject of an interim review. However, most contained objectives, many of which were generic to rank or role. Nonetheless, links to corporate or local priorities were evident, albeit some of these were not sufficiently specific and less than half were measurable.

1.61 Nearly all PDRs examined contained evidence that personal development and training needs were considered as part of the process.

1.62 Whilst most police staff valued the PDR process this was not true of police officers, the majority of whom were dissatisfied with the process. In particular with the apparent, or perceived, failure to use PDRs to inform promotion or selection procedures and its limited links to training provision.

1.63 Sources of evidence found in PDPs included emails, letters of appreciation, cards, commendations and self-assessment submissions. There was also clear evidence that PDRs were being audited locally and this is welcomed and may have contributed to an improvement in the quality of the PDRs and to their timeliness.

1.64 The Inspection team found only limited evidence of supervisors reviewing PDPs regularly. Supervisors had endorsed some pieces of evidence but, in every case, PDR monthly monitor sheets had not been completed.

1.65 The impact of the newly appointed HR manager was evident and her rigorous approach to auditing PDRs and the development of a BCU PDR strategy is likely to

improve the quality of the process and enhance its credibility. This is supported by an approach, which sees the review of PDRs as a performance measure for inspectors.

1.66 With this very recent change in procedure the PDR system can be expected to assist in driving BCU performance, instilling a performance regime and, by using BCU supervisors to champion the process, increase the value of the system to all BCU staff.

1.67 Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary would encourage a continued focus on the use of the PDR system to improve performance and to support personal development.

Grievance Procedure

1.68 The purpose of the grievance procedure was understood and staff were also aware of the first contact scheme and appeared to have faith in the system.

Special Constabulary

1.69 There are 32 special constables on the BCU, of whom 28 are very active. The special constables seen by the Inspection team were positive, enthusiastic and felt fully integrated with their regular colleagues. They considered that they had the respect of most of the staff, and that the training they received at a local level was good. Their work was closely aligned to the CATs. The divisional officer was treated as a member of the command team and attended command team meetings. The special constables were also appropriately tasked through the tasking and co-ordinating process.

Community Support Officers

1.70 There are three community support officers on the BCU who appear to be in the process of being integrated into CATs. There were suggestions that their role had not initially been clear but the Inspection team is conscious that they had only been in place for seven weeks and it was understandable that their role was still developing.

Domestic Violence

1.71 Congleton and Vale Royal has the second lowest recorded level of repeat victimisation for domestic violence in its BCU family, at 13.7%, as compared with an average of 29.7%. However, in discussions with officers the issue of repeat victimisation was not raised spontaneously and did not seem to be a significant consideration for officers. **The Inspection team was concerned to find a limited understanding of the evidential opportunities that could be exploited in relation to domestic violence. Similarly there was a limited grasp of the services that were available that could be drawn on to support victims. The BCU command team is urged to address this shortcoming as a matter of priority and to audit compliance with the requirement to establish repeat victimisation rates.**

Repeat Victimisation

1.72 As noted above, the Inspection team was concerned to find that there was limited discussion of and use of tactics to reduce repeat victimisation. This was also reflected in

discussions surrounding burglary dwelling and domestic violence. However, the BCU records a very low level of repeat victimisation for burglary dwelling (the lowest rate in its family of 34 forces). **The BCU command team is urged to audit compliance with the requirement to record repeat victimisation rates for burglary dwelling and to review its approach to reducing repeat victimisation more generally.**

Part Two - Performance

Performance Management

2.1 The Inspection team did not undertake a crime audit during this Inspection.

2.2 Headquarters manage the performance data collection system for the Force and produce a performance bulletin on a monthly basis, detailing performance against targets to BCU level. The BCU also collates its own weekly data (collected by a research officer) and disseminates this through briefings, the intranet and displays on notice boards.

2.3 Detective inspectors had a clear understanding of their role and accountability for priority crime. Community policing inspectors also had a clear understanding of their contribution to both developing reassurance policing, and to tackling priority crime. Response inspectors recognised that they had a contribution to make both as line managers and in discharging specific functional responsibilities (such as oversight of the custody suite). However, they were less clear about their ability and responsibility for contributing to the achievement of BCU objectives.

Accountability Mechanisms

2.4 The ACC (territorial policing) chairs a monthly performance management meeting at which information is presented and discussed and at which BCU commanders and department heads are held to account and where good practice is shared.

2.5 The performance review department has liaison officers for each BCU and through a process of BCU visits before the performance management meeting, the quality and accuracy of data provided by BCUs is checked. The performance review department also undertakes thematic, performance and formal reviews of BCUs at the direction of chief officers.

2.6 All BCUs are also subject to a six monthly visit and review of their business plan by the assistant chief constable (territorial policing). The BCU Commander has his PDR undertaken by the assistant chief constable (territorial policing).

2.7 Specific crime and criminal justice performance and good practice issues are also addressed at fortnightly meetings with the BCU crime managers. This meeting is chaired by the assistant chief constable (territorial policing) and also attended by the heads of administration of justice and crime policy.

2.8 The BCU Commander is also a member of the Force chief officer group, which meets monthly, and attends a Chief Constable's conference, which is held every six weeks. He also sits on a number of policy boards.

2.9 Within the BCU, 'operational performance management' information is collected in line with a new corporate 'operational performance management framework'. This focuses heavily on holding inspectors and their response blocks (uniform teams on shifts)

to account. However, the bulk of this information is overly quantitative (absence levels, incidents attended, stop and search numbers, intelligence submission etc.) and the Inspection team found that the link between activity and desired outcomes was often tenuous and also found little evidence of the consistent use of supportive qualitative data. It is recognised that some indicators did include qualitative aspects, including sickness data, arrests which were counted by type and could be linked to priority crime and file quality and timeliness, and at inspector level some work was being done to develop a qualitative approach to auditing stop search and to the submission of intelligence reports.

2.10 At least every five weeks the superintendent or the chief inspector (operations) formally meets with each of the response block and CAT inspectors. These meetings are used to update the inspectors on BCU performance, revisit their PDR priorities and consider team performance in the context of current performance management information. A similar process is also being developed for all other inspectors and will be implemented shortly. This performance management approach is welcome and is likely to lead to continued improvements in performance.

2.11 Performance is also reviewed by the BCU at strategic and tactical tasking and co-ordination group meetings and is an issue at daily tasking meetings. Performance is also a standing agenda item at weekly command team meetings and at five weekly management team meetings.

2.12 There are differing views amongst inspectors about how the personal performance information should be used and although this has been discussed at management meetings the way this information is being used is inconsistent. Some inspectors were being very careful to ensure that qualitative judgements were being given due weight (for example some inspectors were recognising the benefit of appropriate use of stop and search in high crime areas and of using the powers in conjunction with an intelligence led approach). However, other inspectors were focusing heavily on the quantitative measures and paying less attention to the quality of performance and service delivery.

2.13 There is a risk that if the system is not used in a sophisticated and consistent manner, undue emphasis may be put on quantitative indicators which do not clearly link activity to desired outcomes, as expressed in the control strategy.

2.14 The Inspection team was encouraged that staff now generally accept PPIs. However, the BCU command team is urged to develop a consistent approach to performance management which ensures that due weight is given to qualitative measures and considerations, in order to ensure that activities are clearly linked to desired outcomes.

Performance

2.15 Congleton and Vale Royal BCU is in family eight, grouped with 33 other BCUs with similar social and demographic circumstances.

2.16 Performance for the period April to December 2003, compared with the BCU family, is summarised in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Performance compared with Family Group 8				
	Congleton and Vale Royal April to December 2003	% Change compared with April to December 2002	Family 8 Group average	Congleton and Vale Royal ranked position in BCU family 8
Recorded crime/1000 population	56.24	15.7%	67.4	8 th
% Recorded crime detected	29.9%	3.7 p.p.	24.6%	8 th
Domestic burglaries/ 1000 households	8.31	-22.5%	9.0	16 th
% Domestic burglaries detected	28.5%	9.4 p.p.	19.0%	4 th
Recorded violent crime/ 1000 population	10.37	57.0%	12.3	13 th
% Violent crime detected	63.6%	-4.9 p.p.	49.9%	9 th
Recorded vehicle crime/ 1000 population	7.89	-6.6%	9.9	12 th
% Vehicle crime detected	14.8%	0.7 p.p.	10.2%	7 th
Recorded robberies/ 1000 population	0.30	21.2%	0.75	6 th
% robberies detected	46.0%	17.2 p.p.	23.34%	2 nd
Serious or fatal road traffic collisions/1000 population	0.36	-8.43%	0.33	10 th

Note: This data is not validated and therefore is only provisional.

2.17 Congleton and Vale Royal BCU has had marked success in reducing domestic burglary. In the period April to December 2003 burglary dwelling has reduced by 23% compared with the same period in the previous year and there has been a 49% increase in detections. There are a number of factors, which are likely to, have contributed to this reduction. In particular the introduction of initial visits to domestic burglaries by proactive team officers has ensured a consistent and rigorous initial investigation, this will be further enhanced shortly by the Force 'safer homes' initiative (see also paragraph 2.34). The arrest of a significant number of local offenders during a large scale and protracted drugs operation 'Operation Clean Sweep' and continued use of intelligence led operations to target drug dealers and burglars will also have improved performance.

2.18 ‘Operation Clean Sweep’ is worthy of specific comment. It replicates good practice and was a covert (test purchase) operation targeted at crack cocaine and heroin dealers, largely operating in Winsford and Northwich. The operation aimed at disrupting the drugs market and reducing crime and the fear of crime. It also had a significant partnership element; not only were much of the costs covered by partnership funding but it has also been used as a vehicle for developing a more effective referral and drugs treatment programme.

2.19 The arrest phase of the operation was the largest such operation ever conducted in Cheshire and resulted in 27 of the 29 main targets being arrested, amongst the 41 initial arrests. The operation also attracted a great deal of publicity, which should have had a positive impact on public confidence.

2.20 Vehicle crime has also declined in the same period by 7% and similar factors are at play. The decline in levels of recorded crime and the improved detection rates might have been more marked if greater use had been made of forensic examination of vehicles. This has been recognised by the BCU, which is seeking to increase the proportion of vehicles examined.

2.21 The rapid development of the NIM on the BCU is also likely to have contributed to this improved performance. The restructuring of the proactive team supports this by providing a more focused operational arm.

2.22 The BCU command team recognises that the greatest threat to its generally good performance is the sharp increase in violent crime. The period April 2003 to the end of January 2004 has seen an extremely sharp rise in violent crime by 802 offences, from 1,621 offences to 2,423 offences.

2.23 Common assaults had risen from 546 to 1,122 and accounted for 72% of the increase. This rise started following a concerted drive by the BCU to fall into line with national crime recording standards (NCRS), this started in February and March of 2003, with a series of presentations and the introduction of vigorous local monitoring. Whilst it might be seen as a little unfortunate that this drive for compliance with NCRS had not started earlier, it is, nonetheless, welcome. The Inspection team believe that this, slightly belated, rigorous compliance with national standards accounts for much of the rise in recorded crime and that this rise is largely in areas of relatively less serious violence.

2.24 Another explanation was offered by the Force and the BCU, which sought to clarify why this change had not been as marked across the Force. This was that the rise coincided with a change in call handling procedures, which had remedied a parlous inability to answer telephone calls. The proposition was that victims or witnesses of less serious assaults would not persist in trying to report crimes when it was difficult to contact police, but when it became much easier they would report the offences. Whilst this explanation was plausible it was difficult to verify.

2.25 In the judgement of the Inspection team, changed recording and call handling practices cannot entirely account for the rise. The rise of 11% in ‘other woundings’ and of 17% for all other categories, other than common assault, is likely to reflect a real, albeit not steep, rise in violent crime. This increase has pushed the BCU closer to the BCU family average for recorded violent crime and it is placed 13th out of 34 in this group for the period April to December 2003, as opposed to 9th in 2002/03.

2.26 It is to the credit of the BCU command team that it has taken a pragmatic approach to rises in violent crime and has taken rigorous action to address it. Particularly notable has been ‘Operation Nightlife’, which is a high profile operation aimed at reducing violence in town centres and associated with licensed premises on Friday and Saturday nights. This is an appropriate response, as 30% of all volume and violent crime on the BCU is committed in these locations at these times. Operation Nightlife is supported by ‘Operation Yellow Card’, which is a Force response to disorder and violence in public places.

2.27 The commitment to dealing with violence is also reflected in the increase in detections per officer. The number of detections for violence has increased by 479 from 1,053 to 1,532. Despite this increased productivity, there was a slight fall in the detection rate for violence, from 65% to 63%. The Inspection team was satisfied that the BCU command team was being rigorous in pursuing all legitimate approaches to improving the detection rate for violence. The Inspection team was also impressed by the BCU CAT teams’ approach in developing more effective ‘pubwatch’ schemes.

2.28 The BCU has put considerable focused effort into reducing road traffic collisions that result in serious or fatal injuries. This effort has been rewarded by a 27% reduction in such road traffic collisions for the period April 2003 to January 2004, when compared with the same period in 2002/03.

2.29 Another operational improvement, which the Inspection team wish to acknowledge, is the greatly improved response to dealing with arrest warrants. In June 2003 there had been 156 outstanding warrants. At the time of the Inspection this had reduced to 35 and 20 of the targets of these warrants did not live in the BCU.

2.30 There was also a clear focus on ensuring that the quality of evidence and associated files continued to improve and the process for providing feedback to front line officers and their supervisors was impressive

Proactive Capability

2.31 Dedicated BCU roads policing officers and crime car personnel complement front line capacity. Traffic officers were focused upon their targets and there was evidence of several innovative driver awareness and education projects. The BCU command team had recently introduced a local roads policing strategy which reflects the national strategy and which has given a clear direction for officers on the roads policing unit. The leadership displayed by the chief inspector (operations) in developing this approach is applauded and the team sergeant and constables were clearly committed and enthusiastic.

2.32 The crime car provides a capacity to provide a rapid initial response to major incidents of crime and disorder and the unit was well led and held to account for performance. The crime car sergeant was running an excellent initiative tackling criminals who had stolen vehicles by 'hook and cane' burglaries (Operation Narked). At the time of the Inspection the team had recovered 18 high value vehicles and made eight arrests and further arrests were anticipated.

2.33 Overall proactive capability within Congleton and Vale Royal BCU is appropriate. In addition to the roads policing unit and crime car there is a proactive team, which includes three detective sergeants with responsibility for burglary dwelling, vehicle crime and drugs. A combined team of eight detective constables and five uniform constables (deployed in plain clothes) supports them. These officers are primarily proactive but also have responsibility for burglary investigation.

2.34 This team has been particularly effective in obtaining detections, in particular in having offences taken into consideration. This may be attributed to the focus and commitment of the team and good leadership. A well-developed minimum standard for the investigation of burglary has been developed and is consistently used by the proactive team but is less well understood and applied by uniform response staff. However, this gap is shortly to be filled by a Force wide 'safer homes' initiative, which will introduce a Force standard to ensure a high quality response to residential burglary. This initiative is welcome and Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary looks forward to examining its impact.

2.35 Uniform response teams are organised in five response 'blocks'. An inspector leads each team. The reintroduction of inspectors as block team leaders is recent and has been almost universally welcomed on the BCU. In the judgement of the Inspection team it has been responsible for providing greater operational clarity and direction and may account for some of the marked improvement in performance of the BCU. The enthusiasm and commitment of the inspectors, sergeants and constables that they met impressed the Inspection team.

2.36 However, uniform patrol officers are predominantly reactive, responding to calls, although there is some opportunity for proactivity. This capacity was primarily being exploited on night duty and during periods in the shift pattern where there was more than one response block on duty. **Having visited briefings and examined the tasks allocated and spoken with officers, the Inspection team suggests that the opportunities that the periods of shift overlap and night duty represent could be built on by giving greater clarity and direction when tasking officers and by providing better-developed problem and target profiles.** The leadership that is being provided by inspectors, in conjunction with the NIM process, provides a sound platform to build the proactive capacity of uniform response blocks.

2.37 CATs also provide a significant proactive capacity and the Inspection team was extremely impressed by their drive and determination and understanding of the NIM,

particularly by first line supervisors. The approach to briefing and tasking CAT officers in Congleton was particularly impressive.

2.38 The reactive investigative capacity of the BCU was stretched due to the number of abstractions of detectives, largely, but not entirely, to major investigations. However, those who remained were well led and supervised and coping with their allocated workloads. However, they had no realistic capacity for them to undertake significant proactive work.

National Intelligence Model

2.39 At the time of the Inspection the Force was considered to be 55% compliant with the NIM. If dedicated source units can be introduced across the Force by April 2004, it is hoped that the Force would then be 85% compliant, however this is unlikely. The Inspection team recognise the speed at which the NIM has been developed in Cheshire and on the BCU over the last year and applaud the energy and effort that has been put into this process. It is clear that the progress made with the NIM has led to real improvements in focus and performance.

2.40 There has been significant investment, which includes the provision of two analysts for each BCU, but at the time of the Inspection only three were fully trained across the Force. It is acknowledged that this is not the result of an unwillingness to train analysts but rather due to the limited capacity of accredited training providers and it is expected that all analysts will be fully trained within a year. The unusually high level of major incidents that have hit the Force in 2003/04 has exacerbated this shortage.

2.41 Whilst the control strategy was comprehensive it was, in the view of the Inspection team, too aspirational and would have benefited from being more concise and focused on high priority activities and options (see also paragraph 1.9 and recommendation 1 – paragraph 1.11).

2.42 Target and problem profiles are not yet fully developed. In part this is a consequence of an IT system that cannot link relevant databases and a continuing reliance on paper records and informal systems and a failure to communicate comprehensively with the intelligence unit. There were substantial falls in the number of intelligence reports submitted when the system moved from paper based forms to electronic completion of forms. However, there has been a subsequent increase in the number of intelligence reports submitted, if not consistently in their quality (and there was anecdotal evidence of a decline in quality) since the new performance regime was introduced. It is apparent that there remains room for improvement.

2.43 The problems with target and problem profiles are also a result of analysts not yet being fully trained and due to the abstraction of the researcher to provide management information.

2.44 The NIM is not yet fully understood by operational staff. This has been recognised by the crime manager and intelligence manager, who are seeking to bridge the

knowledge gap through informal briefings. However, although much energy has been put into briefing officers this has not been delivered in a fully co-ordinated manner and it is not possible to establish who has been briefed, nor has understanding been adequately tested.

2.45 It is suggested that the roll out of NIM training is reviewed and revised to ensure that all staff, at all levels, including command team members, fully understand the NIM and their role in it and how to deliver improved performance through it.

2.46 Tasking and co-ordination meetings are currently held fortnightly and are chaired by the BCU Commander. There is also a pre-tasking and co-ordination meeting chaired by the intelligence manager. The attendance at the meetings is dramatically different. The Inspection team attended both meetings. At the pre-tasking and co-ordination meeting, approximately twenty members of staff and one member from a partnership agency were in attendance. A significant number of attendees did not speak and a number were not in a position to contribute or direct resources. It was also noted that other potential key participants were not present or represented. The formal tasking and co-ordination meeting was attended by both analysts, a member of the intelligence unit, the intelligence manager, crime manager and BCU Commander. The balance of attendees was not right at both meetings.

2.47 The analysis that was presented was underdeveloped and lacked sufficient focus. Some of the recommendations were ambiguous and not sufficiently prescriptive and nor were the outcomes of tasks properly evaluated or monitored. **The Inspection team was also concerned that, despite public reassurance featuring as a key element in the BCU control strategy and despite quality of life issues being raised as problem nominations, insufficient weight was given to dealing with quality of life and anti-social behaviour issues within the NIM process and there was a poor understanding of the tactical options, in particular partnership initiatives, that could be deployed. The BCU command team is urged to develop a clearer approach to tackling these issues within the NIM.**

RECOMMENDATION 3

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary recommends that the BCU command team, in conjunction with the Force director of intelligence, review the development and production of strategic and tactical assessments and target and problem profiles to ensure that the final products are clear, concise and focused. Further, the purpose and structure of the pre-tasking meeting must be reviewed and clearly defined and, if appropriate, incorporated into the formal tasking and co-ordinating meeting. The BCU command team must ensure that tasking and co-ordination meetings are dynamic and purposeful.

2.48 Between the tasking and co-ordination meetings there is an effective daily meeting chaired by a member of the BCU command team.

2.49 The use of forensic intelligence was particularly weak. Whilst an analyst should be in post at headquarters to support the development of this information into intelligence, this post had not been filled for about six months, at the time of the Inspection (due to abstraction and illness), and crime scene investigators were not fully engaged in the process. Detective inspectors and the detective chief inspector at Congleton and Vale Royal were eager to progress this issue in order to fully exploit these opportunities.

2.50 The Inspection team welcomes the introduction of two dedicated source handlers on the BCU. This initiative had been accompanied by an appropriate reduction in the number of registered covert human intelligence sources (CHISs, formerly referred to as informants) and a sharp increase in the quality and quantity of intelligence obtained. The source handlers were productive and committed but it was apparent that national guidelines on dedicated source handling were not being fully adhered to. This is understandable in view of the substantial investment that needs to be made. The Inspection team is aware that changes in accommodation will soon address some of these shortfalls and some other changes may need to await a forthcoming Force re-organisation. In the immediate future it is possible that some limited additional investment in equipment might lead to even greater productivity and enhanced effectiveness.

Briefing

2.51 Briefing and tasking patrol staff effectively, prior to their tour of duty, is crucial in respect of addressing key crime and disorder hot spots and prolific criminals within a

policing area. Officers should be thoroughly briefed and then tasked to enable them to utilise any free time during their shift, proactively and productively.

2.52 Good practice, in relation to the environment in which officers brief, suggests that access should be controlled during briefings so that officers have the opportunity to concentrate on the information being presented to them without interference or interruption.

2.53 The briefing system is supported by information that is passed to operational officers from the intelligence unit, this uses the Force intranet and the Force has recognized that this is not sufficiently sophisticated and an improved intranet based briefing system is being developed.

2.54 At the briefings attended by the Inspection team varying styles of presentation were observed. It was also apparent that de-briefs at the end of tours of duty are rare. **The BCU command team is urged to ensure that effective de-briefing takes place at the end of each shift and it is suggested that the quality of briefings should be carefully monitored.**

2.55 The briefing rooms were suitable, fit for purpose and well-equipped and current information and intelligence was displayed.

DNA Sampling and Forensic Management

2.56 DNA samples must be taken from all detainees who are charged with a recordable offence, unless DNA has been previously taken and confirmed on the Police National Computer (PNC) database. It is essential that samples be taken where appropriate to ensure that the opportunities to gather intelligence and detect offences are maximised.

2.57 In addition, samples should not be taken where DNA has previously been confirmed since this will incur unnecessary expenditure for the Force.

2.58 The Force has identified that Congleton and Vale Royal has the highest rate of administrative errors (12.09% for April to November 2003) in the Force in relation to submission of DNA criminal justice samples from prisoners, which slows down the process and adds cost, but these errors can be rectified. It also has the second highest level of rejection of these samples (where the sample – had not been taken properly).

2.59 Congleton and Vale Royal BCU has one custody suite, which is situated at Northwich BCU headquarters. The BCU has recently introduced a system and checks to ensure accurate sampling of persons charged or reported and this led to immediate improvements. The Inspection team examined this system and, provided this focus is maintained, these improvements should be sustained.

2.60 Where DNA samples or fingerprints obtained from crime scenes lead to the positive identification of suspects, this information is communicated from headquarters to the local intelligence unit where details are recorded on an Excel spreadsheet.

2.61 Following research and analysis by a field intelligence officer (FIO), these referrals are forwarded to either the reporting officer of the original crime or, in the case of priority crime, to a dedicated proactive officer. There is a requirement for all identifications to be finalised within fourteen days. The database is used to monitor progress and completion of all enquiries and investigations.

2.62 There were 282 DNA suspect identifications in 2003, which led to 168 of these offences being detected and to a total of 269 charges, cautions or offences being taken into consideration, following identifications. This was the best performance by any BCU in Cheshire. However, there is room for improvement in the speed with which identifications are converted into arrests. This is illustrated by the failure to meet the 14-day target; of the 168 identifications, which resulted in detection, only 69 were completed within 14 days.

2.63 There is also room to improve the process from the point at which a sample is taken from the scene to it reaching the forensic science service (FSS) and in speeding up the process for taking criminal justice samples (swabs taken from prisoners) to the FSS. Although some temporary funding has been found to increase the number of collections from the BCU, this only lasts until April 2004 and at that point forensic collection will again only take place once a week, this clearly slows down the service (although a premium courier service is available for high priority cases). The Inspection team was encouraged to find that there was a pilot initiative at Crewe that seeks to replicate good practice identified in West Yorkshire (Operation Converter). This should lead to a five-day turn around time from a sample being found to it being processed and the result being made available to the Force. If this is combined with a rigorous approach to rapidly converting identifications into action, it has the prospect of substantially improving performance.

2.64 Dealing with forensic identification promptly reduces future opportunities for offending by identified criminals and it is therefore an effective way of reducing crime rates, as well as positively contributing to detection rates.

2.65 The Inspection team was disappointed to find that there was no central monitoring of turn around times for fingerprint identifications (from the BCU being informed of the identification to arrest or elimination), although the same 14 day target applied. In 2003 there were 117 fingerprint identifications in Congleton and Vale Royal and in 7% of these cases the result was not known and the Inspection team could not ascertain what the average turn around time was. This is clearly not satisfactory.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Her Majesty's Inspector recommends that the BCU command team, in conjunction with headquarters, develops a consistent and rigorous approach to minimise the time from a DNA sample or fingerprint being found at a scene to the point at which action is taken, whether by means of arrest or elimination, following a positive identification.

2.66 It would not be appropriate to end this report on a negative note and the Inspection team wish to conclude with their overriding impression of Congleton and Vale Royal, which was of a BCU that was well led and managed and of officers and police staff who were committed to the delivery of a high quality local public service.

Recommendations

Her Majesty's Inspector of Constabulary makes four recommendations.

1. That the command team ensure that all the objectives developed for the 2004/05 BCU business plan should aim to meet SMARTS criteria (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time bound and stretching).

[Para 1.11 refers]

2. That all managers and supervisors in the BCU command team introduce a rigorous and clear approach to the management of finance, and in particular to the control of police overtime. This should include clear guidance to, and accountability for, all managers and supervisors.

[Para 1.45 refers]

3. That the BCU command team, in conjunction with the Force director of intelligence, review the development and production of strategic and tactical assessments and target and problem profiles to ensure that the final products are clear, concise and focused. Further, the purpose and structure of the pre-tasking meeting must be reviewed and clearly defined and, if appropriate, incorporated into the formal tasking and co-ordinating meeting. The BCU command team must ensure that tasking and co-ordination meetings are dynamic and purposeful.

[Para 2.47 refers]

4. That the BCU command team, in conjunction with headquarters, develops a consistent and rigorous approach to minimise the time from a DNA sample or fingerprint being found at a scene to the point at which action is taken, whether by means of arrest or elimination, following a positive identification.

[Para 2.65 refers]